

# liberator



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# COMMENTARY

## REMAIN MEANS REMAIN

The Witney result showed the Liberal Democrats have rediscovered their long hidden ability to assemble vast numbers of activists and flood a by-election in a constituency that promises a decent result.

Apart from the peculiarity of Eastleigh (Lib Dem defences are very rare beasts), and the almost equally strange Oldham East, one has to go back to Henley in 2008 to find the last by-election where activists poured in with even a faint hope of victory.

Witney did not just see the resurrection of the old Lib Dem ability to fight a by-election hard but also of the flakiness of the Tory vote when they are in power. To the extent this happened at all during the Coalition, the Lib Dems obviously could not benefit. We may now see the revival of the old pattern of Lib Dems scoring respectable second places in Tory shires and suburbs in the south.

What was different about Witney was that it was a Remain stronghold being contested by Lib Dems who not merely supported the Remain campaign but have since the referendum explicitly stated that they want the UK to stay in the European Union, or to re-join were it to have left.

Given the Witney result it seems reasonable to suppose that this message went down well with Remain supporters who previously voted Tory as well as, obviously, with the thousands around the country who have joined the Lib Dems since Tim Farron nailed the party so firmly to the 48% after the 23 June disaster.

The party must now follow the logic of this both to continue to win support from disgruntled Remain supporters of other parties and to consolidate its own new members who have joined because of this issue.

It cannot be repeated too often that 48% of the electorate is an ample pool in which the Lib Dems can swim. It is about twice as large as any vote the party has achieved in modern times. It is a group of angry, frightened, voters looking for a political home and a voice to speak for them and defend them and so is more likely to provide a core vote than, say, are people temporarily offended by the condition of their local paving stones.

Some of the 48% will of course be committed supporters of other parties, but even taking them out of the equation there is a vast number of people to whom the Lib Dems can pitch.

They should not be diverted from this by some misguided belief that the party can appeal to 'everyone' and that therefore they need to go chasing after the 52% as well. If some Leave voters wish to support the Lib Dems all well and good (though it's hard to understand why) but it would be lunacy to try to win

their support too while as a result simultaneously losing the party's standing among Remain voters.

There may come a time when the party has to choose between different types of Brexits and it will have to make up its mind then how to limit the damage of leaving the EU as far as possible.

But for now, as David Grace discusses in this issue, the Lib Dems must oppose any parliamentary vote to invoke Article 50 and, Michael Meadowcroft suggests here too, should not feel constrained by a referendum that gave a narrow Leave majority on the basis of lies, scaremongering and mendacity.

## WHOSE MOMENTUM?

The death of political parties has been predicted for decades and along with the Lib Dems' pitiful support during the Coalition other parties' membership totals had nosedived too far from when they were routinely counted in millions.

Surging Lib Dem membership since the 2015 general election and the referendum is reasonably easily explained, but what of Labour now boasting 500,000 members, most of whom appear to have joined to support a leader who is commonly held to be unelectable?

Jeremy Corbyn probably is indeed unelectable as prime minister because of simple mathematics. Labour needs some 100 more seats for a small majority. If it won every seat it could from the SNP and other parties (itself highly improbable) it would still need about 55 gains from the Conservatives and it's hard to think of any Labour figure less equipped to appeal to floating Tories than Corbyn.

It's Labour's own business why it has twice made such an eccentric choice, but not all the new members who supported Corbyn are Trotskyists, though some are.

As Tony Greaves' analysis in this *Liberator* finds, there are plenty of people in Labour, even in Momentum, who should be in the Lib Dems.

Labour's disgraceful support for the Snoopers' Charter ought to be warning enough to anyone there with liberal sympathies that they are in the wrong party, and Labour's authoritarian streak is as strong under Corbyn as it was under Blair and Brown.

Disillusioned Labour supporters may be another fruitful source of Lib Dem support, so it would be unwise to insult them all straight off.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## DESPERATE MEASURES

The social security motion at conference saw two rare things - a real debate on a policy paper rather than a yawn-filled rubber-stamping, and a successful amendment.

This was a policy paper that appeared to have been written by people who have failed to grasp that, post-Coalition, there is no longer any need for the party to compromise with the Conservatives.

All the usual argument were advanced against amendments - the public won't understand, the media will misrepresents this, even (the usual last refuge of the desperate in a conference debate) "a lot of people have worked very hard on this paper". Peers were rather obviously texted to hasten in to oppose amendments.

But an amendment was successfully passed that called for the scrapping of the benefit sanction system, something the original paper merely wished to water down somewhat.

An unsuccessful amendment to retain the benefit cap led to the revelation that the policy working group had actually wanted to keep the cap within their proposals.

This was averted by outbreak of good sense on the Federal Policy Committee, which could see the damage that lining up with Iain Duncan Smith's thinking would do.

A new desperate last throw was also used by the movers against the successful amendment - that they had taken enormous amounts of evidence and that therefore their conclusions were evidence-based and thus, by implication, unchallengeable by those who shouldn't worry their silly little heads about weighty matters but instead leave these to their betters.

This approach assumes 'evidence' is neutral. Evidence is rarely clear cut, its usefulness depends on how it is interrogated and what values and objectives are used in that process.

## BEAVERING AWAY

A stately home owned by a Ukip supporter sworn to exterminate beavers might not be the most obvious setting for a Liberal Democrat event.

Yet the joint Western Counties and Devon and Cornwall regions conference is due in November in Woodlands Castle, near Taunton.

Sadly, no one bothered to check with venue the Taunton local party. Had they done so they might have learnt that its owner Sir Benjamin Slade festooned his estate boundary with Ukip posters at election time and, according to that bible of country matters the Daily Telegraph, posted a £1,000 'dead or alive' reward for beavers he claims are ruining trees on his estate.

The creatures have been successfully reintroduced to the west country and 'Liberal Democrats - we finance beaver killers' is thought unlikely to be an election-

winning slogan.

A lively debate about the choice of venue was taken down from the Western Counties Facebook page for unexplained reasons after some comments suggested people would have a problem attending due both to the association with Ukip and the proposed beaver massacre.

Perhaps though party officers skilled in catching beavers will have noted the fundraising opportunity.

As for the conference itself, Nick Clegg is to be the main guest speaker. The programme appropriately warns delegates "Remember, last year's conference was a sell-out."

## IN FOR A LONG WAIT

The huge influx of new members after the 2015 general election and the referendum means there are now large numbers of new Lib Dems who not unnaturally expect to be able to participate in candidate selections. They would no doubt be aggrieved were they excluded until they had been members for a year.

Yet they might be so excluded because of a rule introduced to counter entryism after cases in the 2000s when significant numbers of members of ethnic minorities in certain seats awoke to find themselves - without their knowledge or consent - signed up into the Lib Dems by unscrupulous would-be candidates from the communities in question.

In other cases people had been knowingly signed up, but only on the basis that they were associated with an applicant for selection rather than because of any commitment to, or interest in, the party. Back in the 1980s there was the bizarre capture of Deptford Liberals by a religious cult, and small local parties can be vulnerable to this kind of hostile takeover.

That rule though does not sit easily with a sudden enormous increase in genuine members and so a debate arose in the English Lib Dems over whether or not to let new members vote in Parliamentary selections.

The English party organisation suspended the 'one year' rule but the English Candidates Committee then tried to reverse this decision.

A motion on this is now due to go to the English council with an improbable left and right combination in support of the change.

As to preventing actual entryism there could perhaps be an approach based on the risk that this has happened, or is about to happen, rather than a blanket policy.

For example, there could be a rule requiring an intervention and investigation where there had been a sudden spike in membership immediately ahead of a selection.

## TITHING THEM OVER

Despite the general perception that all peers walk around in coronets, most Lib Dems ones are not of great means and thus the 'tithe' from their £300 daily allowance to fund party operations in the House of Lords is a source of contention.

When Nick Clegg accidentally let all the 'Cranbourne' money - which finances opposition whips' offices in the Lords - go without replacement in the Coalition negotiations the peers were left to pass the hat round to keep the show on the road.

This was set at £200 a month - small change to some peers but a lot of money for others, in particular those based outside London who unlike MPs receive no allowance for accommodation while in the capital.

About 70 peers pay this full amount but some pay less because they must cover their own expenses, or London living costs or cannot afford it.

Some were thus unamused by a proposal that this tithing should continue another year unchanged even after restoration of the Cranbourne money following the party's ejection from government.

A further contentious matter is what to do with the 'surplus' once the needs of the whips office and Lords party have been met.

This has been used to support Lib Dem election candidates but there is a view that there shouldn't be a surplus, as most peers support the party financially or otherwise anyway and if any money is left over the tithe should be reduced.

Meanwhile, Dick Newby has been elected as leader of the Lords group, defeating former MEP Robin Teverson. Opinions differ on whether Newby was the establishment candidate (though Teverson wasn't).

In a surprise outbreak of democracy the peers were allowed to elect their own chief whip, instead of this post being appointed by Newby. They chose Ben Stoneham over Judith Jolly by 57 votes to 39

## THERE WON'T ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND

The notoriously bureaucratic English party may have its days numbered after the party governance motion passed at the Brighton conference noted: "The current perception of a disconnect between the roles of the regions and the English party causes problems in effective working" that the English party "is disproportionately large compared to its Scottish and Welsh counterparts and is too focused on Westminster; as a result it is not well placed to reflect the views of members in the English regions".

Among other pleasantries directed at the English party were "action is urgently required to redress the specific democratic deficit in the English state party and the regions distancing members from their work" and the observation "federal conference is currently the only available forum for party members in England to directly express their views regarding the English state party".

Short of saying: "The English party should be dissolved and put out of its misery" it could hardly be clearer.

But the motion proposed no specific remedies and there has been a problem since merger in 1988 of

angry noises emerging from Scotland and Wales whenever it is suggested that the English party is pointless and the English regions should be elevated to the equivalent of state parties.

Thus, the English party therefore decided to set up a committee to examine itself and consider its future.

Margaret Joachim, chair of the controversial regional parties committee, which has not distinguished itself in handing disciplinary cases, volunteered to chair this committee but even the regional party chairs realised this might look like a stitch-up and have decided to search elsewhere.

The English party has caused further difficulties by suggesting that someone has "a quiet word" with Federal Conference Committee chair Andrew Wiseman about holding an English consultation session at York next March instead of applying formally to FCC like anyone else wanting such a facility.

FCC was also less than impressed to find that the review committee has no budget and so would presumably not pay for the room for the session.

According to English party chair Steve Jarvis the committee has no budget because it because it hasn't asked for one, a peculiar state of affairs.

## GOOD RIDDANCE

Having inexplicably and undeservedly been awarded a peerage by Nick Clegg in 2013, Baroness Manzoor left the Lib Dems this summer (Liberator 380) and has now joined the Tories, where sits on their front bench next to Norman Tebbit and will no doubt find better advancement now the Lib Dems are not in government. Lib Dem peers have been told by Tories that Manzoor unsuccessfully sought a Tory peerage even before Clegg doled one out to her.

The whole thing raises serious questions about Clegg's judgement - why did he waste a valuable peerage on someone with no previous known link to, or sympathy with, the party and whose loyalty to it was so shallow that she defected within three years? No doubt there was an element of "she's diverse, she'll make us look better".

Time surely to restore the peers panel so that party members get to say who most peerages go to?

## LONG MARCHER

London Liberal Democrats booked their conference into Hammersmith's Polish Centre, partly as a gesture of support after the building was attacked by pro-Bexit thugs last summer.

They were thus less than amused by a suggestion from former MP Simon Hughes that the event should be called off and replaced by a protest march from Hammersmith to Heathrow against the proposed third runway there.

Since this is a distance of about 15 miles, Hughes seems likely to find himself short of fellow marchers.

# OUT ON A PACK OF LIES

The Liberal Democrats should lead the movement to overturn the referendum result because Leave won on the basis on demonstrable miss-selling, says Michael Meadowcroft

The miss-selling of payment protection insurance, and of investments, resulted in compensation for the victims and heavy fines for the perpetrators.

Miss-selling of the Leave case in the referendum resulted in rewards for those who did it and severe penalties for the victim - Britain's key role in Europe. No continued assertion by the prime minister that the result was legitimate, nor statements by parliamentarians who should know better, that "the people have spoken" can hide the fact that the case for Leave was miss-sold and that as a direct consequence, and given the narrow result, enough electors focussed their votes on opposing immigration, rather than on the case for or against remaining within the EU, to invalidate the result.

No-one who was involved in the later stages of the campaign, and who was on the receiving end of anti-immigrant comments that parroted the "76 million Turks on the doorstep" lie of the Leave campaign, can be in any doubt as to the dubious status of the eventual vote.

The cynical manipulation of the campaign was only possible because the act governing the conduct of the referendum was defective. Had this act replicated the provisions that apply to elections, particularly the Representation of the People Act 1983, the wholesale misrepresentations would not have been possible. In particular, a version of Section 106, under which the Liberal Democrat candidate in Oldham East and Saddleworth at the 2010 general election successfully prosecuted his successful Labour opponent who was unseated and banned from public office for three years, would have inhibited the Leave campaign's lies and misrepresentations.

The counter accusation, that the Remain campaign also misrepresented facts is not in the same league. Certainly, some of George Osborne's attempts to frighten voters were over the top but, unlike Leave, they contained forecasts, rather than the Leave campaign's "facts" that were rejected by independent, respected bodies such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Office for Budget Responsibility.

The legitimacy of a constitutional change of the magnitude of leaving the EU triggered by a simple majority of referendum voters, however small, requires careful examination. Without safeguards such as a threshold, as applied in 1978 with the referendum on Scottish self-government when a yes vote almost identical as the referendum vote did not reach the required 40% of the electorate, the need for the 23 June vote to be above reproach is palpable.

## PERVERSE WEAKNESS

The exclusion of 16 and 17 year olds from the register, despite their being included in the Scottish independence referendum less than two years

earlier, was perverse and another weakness of the act governing the vote. There are two million votes in these two years - more than the majority for Leave. David Cameron's poisoned legacy is not just the huge misjudgement of the decision to call a referendum but also the complacency with which he and his government drafted the laws governing it, compounded by the curious failure of both Houses of Parliament to amend the bill.

On the content of the Remain campaign generally, the typical Conservative emphasis on economics failed to make any significant impression on electors, particularly older voters whom the opinion polls showed to be significantly more inclined to vote for Leave than were their younger compatriots. I have never believed that older electors cannot be persuaded, but in March, on the receipt of the first Britain Stronger in Europe leaflet, I wrote to the campaign pointing out that the contents were all worthy but that it was vital to lift the spirits with hope and vision.

I went on to set out the arguments that I have always found effective:

- ☛ We have had the longest period of peace in Western Europe in human history - not least thanks to the EU and its predecessors.
- ☛ Do not believe war could not happen again in Europe - remember the former Yugoslavia next door when the disappearance of the federal level caused a number of the individual republics to go to war with each other.
- ☛ We have not had military conscription in Britain for 55 years - I do not want my grandchildren to be called up in preparation for a possible war.
- ☛ It is an astonishing achievement to draw together 28 countries, three of which were in the Soviet Union - with missiles pointing at us; others were in the Soviet Bloc.
- ☛ The EU has been the guarantee of democracy in countries, such as Spain and Portugal, which were fascist dictatorships within living memory; and also Greece, which was under a military junta until 1976.
- ☛ Anyone seriously worried about sovereignty ought to argue for leaving NATO, under whose Charter we would have no alternative but to intervene in Latvia if Russia were to interfere there as it has in Ukraine. It will be the same situation if the Syrian regime were to attack Turkey. Both scenarios are far from being far fetched.
- ☛ Increasingly major problems, such as climate change, terrorism etc, go way beyond national boundaries. We cannot hope to solve them unless on a continental basis.



I had no reply.

Miss-selling in the financial world arose out of the failure of banks and other lenders to explain fully what PPI covered. Giving recompense to those harmed by such miss-selling was not suggesting that these individuals were fools or that it was their own fault. It was rather

the failure of those responsible for the miss-selling to explain the complex arguments. Similarly, to state that a significant number of Leave voters voted as they did on the basis of lies and misrepresentations is not to suggest that they were gullible but that it was rather the failure of the Leave campaign to explain complex issues accurately and truthfully. The case was blatantly miss-sold, and the consequences should be the same as in the financial sphere. To state that the electors have made their decision and that it must be respected is to fly in face of the facts, with fundamentally damaging effects on the status of the UK within the EU.

The two key statements that continued to be shamelessly exploited by the Leave campaign despite independent and respected bodies denouncing them, were, first, the lie that the UK was paying £350m per week to the EU. This figure, shown to be blatantly incorrect, was seized on by the three newspapers which were entirely one-sided cheerleaders for a Leave vote, the Daily Mail, The Sun and the Daily Express and repeated ad nauseam. It was even suggested that this sum would be spent on the NHS if the UK left the EU. Unsurprisingly there has been no sign of this transaction since the vote, indeed, it has been directly contradicted by the government.

The second statement was even more cynical, given the widespread concern about immigration. This was that there were 76m Turks waiting at the door to enter Britain. This too became lodged like shrapnel in the heads of a significant number of voters disaffected with the political process. The prospect of Turkey joining the EU is far distant, indeed, with the present Turkish president and government becoming more Islamic, plus its extreme response to the attempted coup, it is probably further away than when the process first started. In any case the entry of every proposed new country can be vetoed by the UK or any other existing EU member.

## **BLATANT DECEIT**

The third blatant deceit is even more outrageous. On the eve-of-poll large numbers of voters received an individually addressed leaflet through the Royal Mail which was deliberately designed to appear to come from the Electoral Commission or from the official returning officer, whereas, in fact, it came from the Leave campaign. It was headed "Official information about the Referendum on 23 June 2016", with the next line reading "Referendum Communication." It proceeds to describe the leaflet as "This document" and presents "The Facts" as if they were objective items of information, even though it leads with the £350m per week lie and follows with the queue of countries purporting to be waiting to join. Only on the last page,

*"To state that the electors have made their decision and that it must be respected is to fly in face of the facts"*

and in extremely small type, was its provenance acknowledged.

From the evidence of such miss-selling of the Leave case, enough electors are likely to have voted for Leave on a false prospectus to render the result at the very least unsafe. The result was extremely narrow, requiring only a 2% change

in the voting to reverse the result. It is worth noting that in the Daily Mirror of 16 May Nigel Farage said that if the Remain vote won on a vote of 52 to 48 he would demand a second referendum.

Petitions are not usually a significant expression of opinion but within days the remarkable figure of four million voters had signed a petition asking for a second referendum, this time with a threshold to be required for it to be regarded as effective. The Liberal Democrats, with their 60-year consistent advocacy of Britain to be a full partner in a united Europe, can legitimately put themselves at the head of this huge army of people who agree with the party's stance - if the party is prepared to accept the case for rejecting the referendum result as unsafe. It is an immense and unusual opportunity that the party's poor poll rating desperately needs.

In the two day debate on the Referendum in the House of Lords on 5 and 6 July, 21 peers spoke in favour of rejecting the result. These included Lord Armstrong, the former Cabinet Secretary. Three other senior peers, Michael Heseltine, Roy Hattersley and Dick Taverne are on record as regarding the result as illegitimate. Parliament's moral authority in rejecting the attempt to repeal the 1972 European Communities Act, and in voting on the initiating of Article 50, will be greatly enhanced if the illegitimacy of the referendum result is widely accepted.

Equally, Tim Farron's and the Liberal Democrats' commitment to a second referendum on the outcome of the negotiations, with the option of a vote to remain, will be considerably assisted if the powerful factual case for rejecting the result of the 23 June referendum as being seriously miss-sold, and therefore flawed, is widely promoted.

Will the party yet again reject an opportunity which is both completely in tune with the party's philosophy and policy and is electorally popular?

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87.

# BRICKING IT OVER BREXIT

The Liberal Democrats say they want to stay in the EU, so will their MPs commit to vote against invoking Article 50, or cave in to populist pressure, asks David Grace

Last week I just asked myself, “What are Liberal Democrat MPs for?” The context for my query was of course about Brexit, what else in this post-factual, post-referendum annus horribilis? Given that we are now all dans le merde up to the cou, as my old history teacher used to put it, it is very hard to devise a rational response to the Tories’ tortured tergiversations, but that’s the job of our MPs.

All Liberals campaigned for the UK to stay in the European Union (I draw a veil over ex-MP Paul Keetch). Unfortunately few of us did it often enough or loud enough until the last year. For decades we fought European elections as if they were about domestic issues. Even when we did speak up for Europe, it was generally in an apologetic tone and with a conditional voice, supporting “a reformed European Union” without ever explaining what needed reforming or how it should be reformed.

We fought Eurosceptic passion with dry statistics. Professional pollsters and politicians who swallowed their advice failed to talk about peace in Europe at all and the environment rarely. Who can forget Clegg’s underwhelming response to the Farage debate question about how the EU would look in 10 years’ time: “About the same as now”? Last January journalists asked Vince Cable if he welcomed the European Commission’s report recommending property taxes just as he had.

Was he pleased? Was he grateful? Was he grudging? No, he was dismissive: “We don’t need Brussels to tell us what to do”. The commission only produced the report because the European Council, including the British prime minister, asked them to. These are only two examples but over the years while Ukip and Bill Cash and Daniel Hannan spread their lies, most MPs were either silent or half-hearted in their public remarks on the EU and worse in private.

I wish we could exempt all Liberal Democrat MPs from this charge but I fear we can’t. David Laws’s view set out clearly in his book *Coalition* is that we should have talked less about Europe.

## UNEQUIVOCAL PROMISE

After the referendum Tim Farron pledged publicly: “The Liberal Democrats will fight the next election on a clear and unequivocal promise to restore British prosperity and role in the world, with the United Kingdom in the European Union, not out”.

In September he anticipated party conference’s debate by calling for a further referendum on the results of negotiation after Article 50 has been invoked. Two weeks later Theresa May promised to invoke Article 50 before the end of March. The effect of

that promise, together with other meat thrown to the Tory hordes, was to reduce the value of the pound so much further that the UK dropped from fifth largest world economy to sixth during the Conservative party conference.

Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty sets out the procedure for leaving the EU, beginning: “Any member state may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.” “Its own constitutional requirements. Aye, there’s the rub. The UK has no codified constitution, just statutes, conventions, text books and Vernon Bogdanor.

The European Union Referendum Act came into force in December 2015 having received the support of Liberal Democrat MPs who had spent the previous five years blocking it. The Act did not specify the consequences of the vote, unlike for example the AV referendum which bound the government to legislate. Parliamentary sovereignty remains the principle but then the question arises whether a parliamentary decision is needed to invoke Article 50.

The government says not. The government asserts that the prime minister can exercise the ancient royal prerogative without bothering parliament. The divisional court has heard the People’s Challenge, an application for judicial review instructing the government that parliament needs not only a debate but to enact a new statute before Article 50 can be invoked. The argument is that invoking Article 50 inevitably removes rights which citizens have acquired under the European Communities Act 1972 and subsequent legislation. The royal prerogative cannot be used to repeal legislation.

The case would seem to depend upon whether Article 50 can be revoked or not. If not, Brexit follows inevitably. If it can be revoked then invoking it is only the beginning of the process. Lawyers disagree. The wording of Article 50 suggests but does not state explicitly that revocation is not possible. On the other hand, Article 68 of the Vienna Convention on the Interpretation of Treaties provides: “A notification or instrument ... may be revoked at any time before it takes effect.”

Donald Tusk, president of the European Council, has said publicly that Article 50 could be revoked. In practice, this may all be moot. Surprisingly the government has not used the possible revocation argument in court and both sides agree that Article 50 cannot be revoked.

This will also have surprised the Lord Chief Justice who considered the question very important. He does have the option of referring the question to the European Court of Justice but I doubt he will exercise it. Imagine if it was the ECJ which decided whether Theresa May could act without asking parliament!



What larks, Brexiters!

There is an entirely separate argument about the role of parliament concerning an agreement following negotiations after invoking Article 50. This gets even more complicated and the man who holds the solution is speaker John Bercow. Former Liberal Democrat MEP Andrew Duff points out that the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 would require the government to lay the document before both Houses of Parliament. MPs and peers would have 21 days in which to table a negative resolution. If no-one does – oh, give me a break, that won't happen, will it? There is, however, an exception to this procedure (hang in there, double negative coming). Under section 25(2) of the 2010 Act the procedure only applies to measures which are not “a regulation, rule, measure, decision or similar instrument made under [the EU] treaty (other than one that amends or replaces the treaty (in whole or in part))”.

Got that? If it's something like an EU regulation etc, parliament cannot vote on it. That's to prevent Westminster voting on every damn regulation. But, if it's an instrument replacing a treaty, which surely a post-Article 50 agreement would be, the parliament gets to vote. It's Bercow's job to rule what such an agreement is – usual bit of EU legislation or treaty replacement. Bear in mind that parliament could only say yes or no anyway. You can't amend an agreement which 27 other countries have already agreed with your government.

There you have it. Parliament may or may not get to vote on invoking Article 50, by a debate forced by MPs or by a new statute ordered by the court. Parliament may or may not get to vote on a final agreement (on which Liberal Democrats want a referendum which would require legislation, but eight votes may not cut it) depending on Bercow.

So why do I ask, “What are Liberal Democrat MPs for?” Firstly, they actually voted for that cursed referendum. Secondly, our foreign affairs spokesperson and chief whip, Tom Brake, argues that they will have to vote in favour of invoking Article 50 if Theresa asks them.

## SLAP IN THE FACE

I believe the argument for voting in favour of something we have all opposed and which will damage the country irretrievably runs like this: “It would be a slap in the face for my constituents”. So, Tom, here are the arguments for voting against Article 50.

### ☛ Constitutional and principled

The referendum was advisory and does not mandate MPs. There's this thing called parliamentary sovereignty. As Edmund Burke so famously said: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

*“While Ukip and Bill Cash and Daniel Hannan spread their lies, most MPs were either silent or half-hearted in their public remarks on the EU and worse in private”*

### ☛ Party Profile and consistency

LibDems are well-known for their support of British membership of the EU. To support invoking Article 50 will impress nobody. We have spent a long time warning of the terrible consequences of Brexit, which are only now beginning to become apparent to the electorate. If we believe what we say, how can we possibly support invoking Article 50? Will the 48% only be supported

in parliament by the SNP and Caroline Lucas and perhaps odd rebels like Ken Clarke? What will the thousands of new members who joined after the referendum think of us, will they renew their membership or decide it was a waste of time?

### ☛ Face-saving and tactical

If our MPs don't have the balls to vote on principle, there is a contingent reason for opposing invoking Article 50. Move an amendment instructing the government to negotiate to stay in the single market. If it's defeated, vote against the main motion. You never know you might actually get some Tory MPs voting with you and you can explain to your constituents your excellent reason.

### ☛ Party position and meaning what you say

Refuse to vote for invoking Article 50 unless the government first legislates for a referendum on the outcome of negotiations. Of course I'm just a old hack and I don't understand the pressures these parliamentarians live with. Perhaps they should show their wisdom and maturity by following the supposed advice of Confucius: “If you're going to be raped anyway, lie down and enjoy it.” That worked well in coalition, didn't it?

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

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# BREXITEERS IN A NOSTALGIA CULT

Those who think the UK can easily dictate trade terms behave like members of a cargo cult, says Jennie Rigg

I'm sure that readers will be familiar with the concept of the cargo cult, wherein a primitive society has been visited by colonising industrialists, and for decades thereafter spends the summer building (for example) airport runways and air traffic control towers out of reeds in the hopes of enticing the bountiful cargo-carrying planes to return. If you are not familiar with such, don't worry, you can observe it happening in good old Blighty at this very moment.

How else can one explain some Brexiteers' excitement over ideas such as reintroducing blue passports or rebuilding the Royal Yacht Britannia? There may well need to be new passports post-Brexit, but why is it so exciting and totemic that we can make them blue? And while there might be a smidgen of a point to a new passport design, there is absolutely no practical purpose to the Royal Yacht Britannia. It's a massive waste of time, money, and effort.

The tranche of Brexiteers who are enthusiastic about such things, of course, are enthusiastic because, as Richard Gadsden said, they "think that bringing back the trappings of Empire will bring back the economic power of Empire."

When a quarter of the globe was pink, the sun never set on the British Empire, Britannia ruled the waves, and you were allowed to put up "no dogs no blacks no Irish" signs in your shop, the world was a better place.

Not if you were black, or Irish, or a woman, or LGBT+, obviously; but for proper people, British people, well, white heterosexual cisgender British men anyway, the world was a better place. And the times when a quarter of the globe was pink, the sun never set on the British Empire, Britannia ruled the waves, and you were allowed to put up such signs in your shop might not have all been at the same time, or even overlapping, and they might not have lasted very long. Try pointing that out to a Cargo Cultist though; they get very cross indeed. That image of Britain is an article of faith to them.

Cultists are looking at history through rose-tinted glasses if they are even looking at all. When we joined the EEC (as it was then) we were The Sick Man of Europe. We were consistently underperforming economically. Our productivity was atrocious. Our industrial relations were worse. We joined, at least in part, to make that better. To shore up our economy, which was falling apart because our Empire was falling apart. Prior to that we'd had a couple of centuries of looting and destroying our colonies for raw materials, industries, and workforce to prop up our economy. Prior to that we were just another bunch of bolshy Europeans going round invading everywhere.

As a world economic power, Britain has never really gone it alone. The rush towards Hard Brexit makes it increasingly look like we're going to have to go it alone in the future.

To a Cultist none of that matters. All we need to do is build the totemic boat out of reeds and mud, because the Royal Yacht "was a thing 'we' used to have when I was young and the world wasn't scary and my knees didn't hurt". If we put the mud and reeds together in just the right way suddenly all the grumpy old baby boomers who voted for Brexit will be thrusting young pups full of vim and vigour, with working knees and a thirst for trade, and everyone else will want to trade with us because we're Britain and we're Great.

Back in the real world, those of us watching the pound crash, like we said it would, and Europe saying "well you can't have the single market without the four freedoms" like we said they would, and the Commonwealth not falling over itself to fill the gap, like we said it wouldn't, are a bit sick of being told we're talking Britain down and being called Remoaners, as though the Brexiteers hadn't spent the years between 1973 and 2016 moaning incessantly about Europe.

Cultists blithely assert that we've always been a trading nation, but wishing for trade deals does not make them happen. Facile arguments like "we buy more from them than they do from us, therefore we are in a position of power" do not a fabulous negotiating position make. I buy more from Sainsbury's than Sainsbury's buys from me, and I am under no illusion whether I or Sainsbury's have the greater economic power. When we are "free from the shackles of Europe", the rest of the English-speaking world will see Ireland, not us, as their English-speaking gateway to the richest trading bloc on the planet.

If we're going to make a success of this we need to try to get the Brexiteers to stop thinking like Cults and start to actually do something instead of just asserting that "Brexit means Brexit and we can't possibly say any more than that because we'd be showing our hand."

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Jennie Rigg is a member of Calderdale Liberal Democrats

# BREXIT MEETS THE FAR RIGHT'S MARCH

## The Brexit vote can be seen as a part of a wave of rightist populism across Europe, says Tom Clifford

It's not just Donald Trump. As odious as he is, and as strange as this may sound, he is not the worst.

Prague. 2010. A neo-nazi rally on a bright Saturday afternoon in February.

About 100 of their supporters turned up, waving red, white and black swastikas. After five minutes into the event I was covering for a newspaper, I uttered a criticism, too crude to print here, on their claims of superiority. I was overheard, threatened and spat at. At that point my photographer advised me, again in rather crude terms, to beat a retreat. We both fled, chased by thugs. My photographer had an intimate knowledge of the backstreets, and it was this that allowed us to eventually lose our pursuers. Or so we thought.

Ironically, though the protest was held in the Czech capital, most of those attending came from outside Prague, many from Brno and were not well acquainted with the street geography.

Once we found sanctuary and got our wits together, we both realised our actions paralleled those who had run through the same streets in the 1930s and 40s followed by those of a similar persuasion. At the time I dismissed it as one those odd occurrences. Six years later, I am not so sure. Odd occurrences seem to be happening too frequently and seem increasingly normal.

The pope before this one was a member of the Hitler Youth. The present pope, much hailed for a social conscience, was part of a high-ranking clerical team that in 1976 gave the green light to the Argentine military to seize power, heralding the Dirty War.

Yes, there is an argument, deeply flawed in legal terms, that it was long ago and times were different. But as recently as six years ago, the pope seemed, to use the lexicon of faith, unrepentant. Walking the streets of Buenos Aires it is not uncommon to come across plaques inlaid into the pavements commemorating a short life. Neighbourhood committees have remembered those who fell to the junta (1976-83) in a way that shames the church's acquiescence to the generals. The pope, in a previous incarnation as Francis Bergoglio, twice refused to appear in court to answer questions about his role in the Dirty War. His replies to questions when he did appear in 2010 were evasive, especially over the issue of stolen babies, a subject which continues to haunt Argentina.

Austria may soon have a far-right president or could just manage to swerve, at the last moment, from that outcome. Either way, the far right will be a political force in that country. Hungary has a far-right government that has adopted a series of laws that are "a threat to the right to freedom of

expression" according to Amnesty International. Little Luxembourg called for the country to be kicked out of the European Union for treating asylum seekers "worse than wild animals". Other, more powerful countries, remained deafeningly silent.

The far right are making inroads in eastern Europe and Germany and the end of Chancellor's Angela Merkel's Bismarkian presence on the European stage seems to loom over the horizon. Oh, and France's fifth republic is giving every indication that National Front leader Marine Le Pen could take up residence in the Elysee Palace or at least be a serious contender.

Should it happen, that, not Brexit, not the euro, will spell the end of the EU. Even if she doesn't win, the gravitational pull from the black hole of fascist policies in France will warp the political landscape. One consequence of this will be to ensure Brexit is a bloodbath to scare the French from taking, or even considering, a similar route.

Britain must be seen to not get a good deal from Europe but the ways these things go it will probably end up with vitriol being exchanged across the English channel unmatched in ferocity since the Fashoda incident in 1898.

In Britain we have just seen a Tory party conference seriously consider asking firms to reveal the number of foreigners they have on their payroll. In other times, the British would have scoffed at such a suggestion. That a British government would now toy with an approach to policing and social order that has as its core the hideous 'Thre papiere, bitte' philosophy is as chilling as it is heartbreaking.

Headlines on some UK newspapers scream condemnation at those deemed "unpatriotic remoaners" demanding they be "Sent to the tower".

Two words, fifth columnists, have re-entered the political lexicon.

Xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-semitism have entered the mainstream as a result of toxic and divisive campaigning by those advocating Brexit.

The person who said this is not by any means of the left. Lady Warsi is a Tory peer and former party co-chair. The political climate and a surge in "respectable racism" was nurturing the far right, she said.

Six years ago, I was frightened but exhilarated that I had outrun fascists. The exhilaration has gone.

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Tom Clifford is a journalist based in Beijing. He has written for the Japan Times, the Irish Times, the Irish Independent, the South China Morning Post and is a former news editor of the Prague Post



# LABOUR GAINS MOMENTUM

The joke is that difference between Corbyn supporters and Jehovah's Witnesses is that the latter knock on doors, but Momentum could become either a formidable campaign machine or collapse in typical Labour in-fighting, says Tony Greaves

What is happening to Labour? Commentators and opponents on the Right just say it's a take-over by the 'hard left' (whatever that means) resulting in a civil war as the 'moderates', 'centrists' and 'social democrats' revolt, people who they used to call dangerous but half-hearted socialists and well-meaning idiots, and but now men and women of deep principle standing for all that is best in the Labour tradition.

To these 'moderates, centrists and social democrats' we can add the 'pragmatic socialists' who would like to march with Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell were it not for that dratted nuisance of having to seek election by the British people. Meanwhile the Labour Party had half a million members and supporters voting in its latest leadership election, an astonishing number at a time when parties are supposed to be dying.

The supposedly unelectable Corbyn won 62% of their votes against the pragmatic socialist Owen Smith, with individual members backing him by 168,000 to 117,000. And this after the Labour MPs had passed a vote of no confidence in Corbyn by 172 votes to 40. (Labour peers would probably have been unanimous). Plus the disreputable moves by the old Labour fixers to stop scores of thousands of genuine members from voting, to discourage Corbyn voters from buying a vote by increasing the fee from £3 to £25, and to systematically but erratically remove many thousands of names from the lists.

Corbyn and McDonnell have now cobbled together a shadow team but the Parliamentary Labour Party is still dysfunctional. Rebel MPs and their allies are not going to give up. In early August the New Statesman ran a piece by their Labour right wing political editor George Eaton headed "Jeremy Corbyn's contest with Owen Smith is the start of a struggle with no obvious end". He quoted an unnamed Labour MP as saying "We only need to get lucky once. He needs to get lucky every time."

## DESPAIR AND ANIMOSITY

And that is how they think. Wander the corridors or tearooms of the Palace of Westminster and spot little groups of miserable looking Labour MPs and peers shaking their heads and muttering in quiet corners. Consumed by what Guardian columnist Zoe Williams called their "despair and animosity", they are wondering when the next futile chance will come.

We may agree with them that Corbyn, McDonnell and Co. are not good at challenging Mrs May's awful

government or in chasing the polls and winning elections. But what this summer's failed coup has shown is that when it comes to internal Labour politics the incompetents are people like Hilary Benn, Angela Eagle and the promoters of Owen Smith. And the longer the 'struggle' goes on, the harder it will be. The Corbynites are relentlessly taking over. If much of this is shrouded from the national commentariat, that is because their vision is distorted by their residence in the Westminster bubble.

So how is it being done? And what are the consequences for Liberal Democrats? In particular what are Labour going to do with all their new members; are they a threat to us locally? Indeed are they really a huge new wave of Trotskyite infiltrators or – as one Liberal Democrat describes them in his town in a West Midlands shire – "in their 20s and early 30s...vaguely left-wing idealists, compassionate, small 'l' liberals really...mostly pro EU." The Channel 4 programme *Dispatches* went to look for Trots at local Momentum meetings and found a couple of speakers from the Alliance of Workers Liberty (true Trots, originally a splinter from the International Socialists, once called Socialist Organiser, publishers of *Solidarity*, said to have around 200 members – you get the idea). But *Dispatches* got it wrong – these people are not infiltrating the Labour Party, they are entryists into Momentum itself. Whatever Momentum may be, it's not just a gang of Trots.

It's always a bit daft to try to tag present-day left-wing groups with labels from early 20th century Russia (though some of them are happy enough to bewilder us by doing it themselves). But if Momentum's strategy has any echoes from those far-off days in distant places, it's more Leninist than Trotskyite.

Far from being an anti-leadership group stirring up permanent revolution and discord within the party, Jon Lansman and his colleagues in Momentum's leadership are close associates of Corbyn and McDonnell. Like Lenin's people in the years before he was struck down poorly, they are setting out to take over their party from the grassroots - not challenging the leadership but working on its behalf. The Corbynite grip on the Labour party nationally is fragile – the NEC is split almost down the middle, and that only after Momentum got its people elected in the last elections for members' representatives.

But Corbyn, astonishingly, the most unlikely messiah, has mobilised a huge number of new fans. They are enthused by what they see as his honesty, his disdain for the shoddy compromises of real world

politics, his stands against inequality and poverty, war-mongering, capitalist greed, jingoism and racism. For so many of them, saying what is right trumps getting votes. Those of us who try to live daily in the murkier world of grubby compromise without losing either our principles or our seats may shrug our shoulders. But we can't ignore it.

There's a joke going round: "What's the difference between Corbynites and Jehovah's Witnesses?" The answer – "The Witnesses knock on doors!" Liberal Democrats chuckle about the recent council by-election in Mosborough ward in Sheffield when Momentum held a local meeting on polling day and 50 people spent their time phoning members of the Labour Party to vote for Corbyn. The Liberals spent the day knocking up voters and gained the seat from Labour.

Council by-elections often reflect local circumstances but taken as a series are often revealing – "real votes in real polls" as we used to say. They should show up any big rise in the number of Labour bodies on the streets. In the eight weeks up to 13 October there were 43 contests for principal authorities (excluding a few where Labour either intervened or withdrew). In these elections the Labour vote was down on average by 4.5% compared with the last time each seat was contested.

Labour has more than 350 members in Plasnewydd ward in Cardiff. On 20 September Liberal Democrat Robin Rea gained the ward from Labour in a by-election with a 348 vote majority (1,258 to 910). At the end of September Liberal Democrat Karen Ward won a by-election in the small rural ward of Glaven Valley in North Norfolk. She got 429 votes; Labour got 23. A local Labour blogger estimated "this figure will be very close to the number of people in Glaven Valley who signed up...to vote in the Labour party Leadership election." I wonder how many of them also voted for Karen.

## **POLITICALLY PROMISCUOUS.**

I know several people who signed up to vote for Corbyn who voted for me in the council election in May. Teignmouth Labour party is reported to be "the only really active branch in the CLP with lots of new members including a lot of ex-Greens" (a pattern from many places, it seems). The recent by-election in Teignmouth Central ward saw a Liberal Democrat win with 491 votes; Labour got 72. We live in strange times and I guess that at the moment a lot of the new Labour members are politically quite promiscuous.

Even so, there are reports of very big increases in Labour membership figures in surprising and possibly alarming places (Southport, Winchester (1,000+ members), Cheltenham (850), Portsmouth (1,000+) and in some of them lots of new members are going to meetings.

Peter Chegwyn says new Labour members in Gosport will "attend picnics in the park and discussion evenings but no sign of them doing the legwork". Adrian Sanders reports that in Torbay Labour has over 500 members, very active on social media, keen

*"We may scorn their present reluctance to knock on doors on dark wet evenings. We will write them off at our peril"*

on protests and marches, less so on electioneering. In a more traditional Labour stronghold in Lambeth numbers are up from 800 to 2,300, two-thirds of them Corbynites. In some stronger Labour areas like Chesterfield the internal thrashing is already taking place - in Bristol 200 members and

three councillors have been suspended. Particularly in some cities, their 'new' members include old-fashioned leftwing returners, well schooled in Labour party infighting.

The battles for control of local parties have started. Yet there is no doubt a lot of the new members are people we would welcome. In many ways they seem to be the 2016 version of the influx of new members to the SDP in 1981 – the so-called 'credit card' members. Now it's the 'click and like' generation, paying online and doing their politics on their iPads. I guess it's true of many of our new members too, and those of the Tories. The trick will be to get them out into the real world.

What Corbyn and McDonnell have to do is to get enough of them to annual meetings and candidate selection meetings to secure their leader-inspired bottom-up revolution. The Leninist take-over.

And this is where Momentum comes in. They claim to have more than 150 local groups already and a quick look at their website makes it clear that in Labour Party terms they are setting up a 'party within a party'. But with their leadership backing it seems unlikely they can be proscribed. The bigger they get (over 20,000 members so far) the harder that will be.

Yet their parallel event at the Labour Conference called The World Transformed was perfectly designed to appeal to the new members – more a political fete ("a festival of politics art and culture") than a traditional political meeting. Whether all these enthusiastic and idealistic but not ideological people can be meshed with the old party fixers to transform local Labour parties into a new Corbynite movement remains to be seen. It will surely be both messy and patchy.

But there are clear and present dangers. Labour's recent petition and action day against grammar schools was a genuine political campaign of the kind that the Liberal Democrats have forgotten how to do outside elections. A local Labour party in Sussex is reported to have set up a mother and toddler group that has now taken to campaigning against Southern Rail. McDonnell and Momentum are setting up what they call campaign academies to train new members and turn them into political activists.

We may scorn their present reluctance to knock on doors on dark wet evenings. We will write them off at our peril.

The brave new Labour party will result in lots of blood on the carpet (they are the Labour party for goodness sake and too many of them hate each other too much!) But in some places we are likely to find they are energised by enthusiastic new campaigners. Let us be ready for them.

# DON'T MISS THIS CHANCE

## George Potter explains why the Radical Association has been formed to try to turn the Liberal Democrats into a campaigning party that can take advantage of political opportunities

The Radical Association was formed in early September by a small group of party members as a response to frustration at the state of the Liberal Democrats and a genuine fear that the party will fail to miss a once in a generation opportunity to seize a leading role in British politics.

In a nutshell, we believe that the future for the Liberal Democrats lies in promoting a distinctive, radical and liberal identity for the party – one which offers a clear, alternative vision for our country's future – and we exist to empower and organise grassroots party members to achieve this.

Undoubtedly, we are not the first to have had this idea, nor the first to have formed a grouping within the party to push for more radical policies. For instance, both the Social Liberal Forum and Liberal Reform have a similar interest in more distinctive policies, albeit from opposite ideological viewpoints.

However, unlike those organisations, the Radical Association has a different approach. Rather than modelling ourselves as a think-tank that produces interesting publications and hosts interesting discussions at conference fringe events, we have modelled ourselves as a campaigning organisation first and foremost.

Our aim is not to produce interesting reports that will never be acted on, or to have interesting discussions with like-minded people which never make the transition to party policy.

Instead our aim is to organise grassroots members and activists to influence the direction of the Liberal Democrats so that party policy has the radical edge necessary to provide real answers to the problems facing society and so that the party's strategy and campaigning are fit for purpose in the modern political environment.

### UNAMBIGUOUSLY BEIGE

For too long the Liberal Democrats have been, as one party member has put it, “ambiguously liberal and unambiguously beige”. Even before Nick Clegg became leader, the party was too often seen as the party of splitting the difference and embracing this was too often something which the party leadership actively welcomed as a substitute for a coherent strategy.

For instance, it's incredibly telling that, even now, opinion polls show little difference between Remain and Leave voters when it comes to the question of which party is considered best on Europe. That this is the case despite the party's ardent pro-Europeanism is a symptom of how ineffective the party is at getting across what it stands for loudly and regularly enough

for it to sink in with the voting public.

Of course, matters have not been helped by a sequence of events where it took three months from the referendum result - including the party's Brexit spokesperson signing up to the Open Britain organisation which has given up on free movement and the single market - to finally arrive at a coherent party position on the issue.

That it took the party so long, let alone to get round to communicating it to the public, is symptomatic of a much wider problem at the heart of the party – especially when one considers that having voted Remain has been identified as the single best indicator of someone being a small-l liberal,

It is far too often the case that party policy ends up being wishy-washy compromises which please no-one or well intentioned gimmicks that everyone agrees with but which no one cares passionately about – such as the party's recent call for a coffee cup tax to help protect the environment.

Coupled with the hyper-localism of the way in which some local parties campaign in the absence of clear central direction, at worst the party can seem like nothing more than a confederation of residents associations – inoffensive but uninspiring without any clear identity for people to either like or dislike.

And if we are not prepared to proudly stand up for our values, even if this risks upsetting large chunks of the population who don't share our values, then what are the Liberal Democrats even for?

More than anything else, this is why it's vital that party members organise and work together to push for radical and distinctive policies.

If the Liberal Democrats ever aspire to being a major political party, one which forms governments in its own right and shapes the national debates, we need to look back to the party's proud history of radicalism and offer a radical alternative to the way things are now.

For it is only by coming up with policies which make us stand out from other parties and demonstrate our core values that we'll be able to build up a substantial core vote of the 20 to 25% of the population who David Howarth and Mark Pack have identified as naturally sharing the party's liberal values (Liberator 380). And unless we build up a core vote the party will always be vulnerable to a mass collapse in support, as happened in 2015, and will always struggle to win elections.

Of course, policy is far from the only issue where the party is failing.

There is a lack of a distinctive core theme of messages which tell people what the party is fundamentally about. There is a lack of strategic direction or joined up communication. And the party too often seems to be



lagging behind the times both in terms of campaigning methods and messages. Rather than leading, the party is too often left to play catch-up to the other parties with even the Conservatives now out-classing us in the way in which they campaign.

## **DOG MESS, POTHoles, DUSTBINS**

When we look at the party at a local level the situation in many places is not much better: local party websites that are rarely updated with ageing designs. Moribund campaigning organisations abound and far too many local party executives dominated by people who are hostile to innovation. Campaigning techniques which revolve around delivering the same old leaflets complaining about dog mess, potholes and dustbins without ever giving an indication of the party's fundamental values.

None of these are insurmountable problems but they are made worse by party structures which are difficult to understand, lack transparency and which seem to often be dominated by an establishment which is unwilling to listen to ordinary party members, let alone let them have a say in the party's direction.

This, in fact, is a large part of the reason why the party struggles with a lack of diversity. When those with new ideas and different perspectives are automatically shut out then it's not surprising when those most likely to stick around are those who look and think most like those who are already in charge.

Yet right now the party has a huge and unique opportunity. Politics is in a state of flux with Labour being deeply divided and severe splits in the Conservatives over Europe are only just around the corner.

When the kaleidoscope is being shaken in the way it is right now there is huge potential for a party like the Liberal Democrats to make major inroads. Especially when the party is blessed by being largely united, having recently seen a surge in membership and with a potential core vote of people who are outward looking, pro-European, left of centre and pro-

environment yet who find no party willing to speak up for their values.

If we are able to fix the party's problems, if we are able to adopt distinctive policies and an attractive core message, and then communicate it effectively, there is every chance that within a generation we could have emerged as a major political force capable of winning power nationally in our own right.

But for that to happen a great deal of institutional change is required. The party's culture, the way it campaigns and the way it treats grassroots members all need to change in order to unlock its potential.

And to achieve this kind of change, organisation is required. Liberal Democrat members who believe the party needs a radical, distinctive and pro-EU identity will need to work together at all levels of the party to make this happen.

They need to work together to shape party policy so it offers a coherent and distinctive vision for our country's future. In the medium-term they need to campaign to elect like-minded members to key party committees to guide the party in the right strategic direction and ensure that internal party democracy is more than just fine words. They need to modernise the party's campaigning infrastructure from top to bottom and make it easier for members, especially those from under represented backgrounds, to not just become involved in campaigning but to lead it.

Above all, members need to mobilise to transform the Liberal Democrats into the mass political movement we know it can be. A movement that offers a clear vision of a prosperous future for Britain where no one is left behind and where prosperity, internationalism, freedom and social justice walk hand-in-hand.

This is the vision with the Radical Association has been set up to fight for. Our mission is to provide the structure necessary for members who share our vision to work together to make it a reality.

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George Potter is a member of the Liberator Collective  
[www.radicalassociation.org](http://www.radicalassociation.org)

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# THE SQUIB STAYS DAMP

## Elizabeth McWilliams can't help feeling that the party's governance review has not lived up to expectations

For some time this august organ has been among those highlighting the need for reform of the Liberal Democrats' internal structures.

In fact, *Liberator's* pressure on this front dates back to at least 1982 when it published 'Not The Annual Report', highlighting among other things impenetrable structures and a ruling executive body which was far from strategic and had too many undynamic placemen elected to it.

Has the much-vaunted governance review headed by Sal Brinton, lasting a full two years and with wave after wave of consultation announcing the need for large scale change, fixed the big problems?

On a number of fronts, 'no'. It has chosen tinkering over radical reform. The still-punchdrunk party generally ignored the final constitutional amendments at conference, save for an unsuccessful revolt that achieved the unlikely alliance between Joe Otten and Duncan Brack and an inconclusive debate on tackling the white elephant of the English party.

Party elections, reduced in frequency to mitigate the increased cost caused by OMOV, will now be subject to a complex set of diversity quotas that will make STV elections almost impossible to run, much less understand.

With the exception of age, diversity was not a significant issue in any case; and age is specifically excluded from the new system, seemingly to spite the Young Liberals. The three-year term means that towards the end of the terms of office a large number of casual vacancies will somehow have to be filled: the effect this will have on policymaking at pre-manifesto stage will have to be seen.

The renamed Federal Board has been given licence to interfere in the workings of other parts of the party. But is this increased power real? For years the old Federal Executive has been used as a sort of waste disposal unit, dealing with the messes other parts of the party can't deal with. There is nowhere else for those to go - the other new committees are essentially formalised versions of existing structures.

One or two of the self-promoting tendency have declared they will stand for the Board - but will they really allow it to set out party strategy? Doubtful: its key power will be the set of appointments to the committees for finance, diversity, candidates and campaigns. Things the FE should have been doing but did not - such as implementing the Morrissey recommendations and delivering the missing-in-action 'Morrissey 2' - are hardly likely now to get done. A beefed-up constitutional requirement for the Board to do something on strategy is still likely to be honoured as much in the brief as the observance, especially when the party has a leader less in tune with the membership than Tim Farron.

One change that may in due course help is bringing candidate selection rules under a federal umbrella. Yet this has hardly been enhanced by the shambolic rushed selection of short-term candidates for a snap election. Returning officers interpreted key rules inconsistently; some local parties ran unconstitutional processes before being forced to restart the process; and the result is a very mixed calibre of candidates in some seats that should be winnable and, in normal circumstances, relatively safe. Many of those selected will feel they will be a shoo-in when reselection comes. As these people are essentially the backbone of the Lib Dem parliamentary party for the 2020s and beyond, the control freakery of the snap selection and the examples of local ill-feeling will have to be addressed by the new body that will be held accountable for something Brinton essentially imposed on them.

Party democracy will hardly be enhanced with no more directly-elected places available (and fewer in the case of the Board). At the very least, some of the less accountable bodies will have to produce reports to conference. Brinton's accusation that 'the same old faces' get elected may or may not change.

On which subject, the English party. Several regions are so dissatisfied that they have voted to become state parties - a grindingly tedious constitutional process not being helped by the party establishment. An amendment at Brighton proposed to abolish it and devolve power to the English regions as state parties; this was predictably opposed by the Scottish Lib Dem hierarchy who did not appreciate the comparison. Messily it was partly voted down; the resulting motion called for the Scottish and Welsh Parties to reform and castigated the English party but set out no solution. In an effort at self-preservation the English party has now started an internal review - I have not seen an open membership selection or any real publicity about this. But despite a huge amount of rhetoric this was a ball the Governance Review chose simply to drop.

Disciplinary matters - for so long a running sore within the party - are now being reviewed under the heavyweight watch of Ken McDonald. However they are matters treated separately within each state party.

So, much ado about nothing really; the actual outcomes of the governance review do not remotely match the much-vaunted need to tackle the big, structural problems.

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Elizabeth McWilliams is a Liberal Democrat member in Yorkshire

# WHY THE RADICAL MIDDLE MUST THINK

## David Boyle explains the need for the new Radix thinktank

Political parties need to think if they are going to succeed. If they don't, their slogans get stale, their policies get increasingly symbolic and they begin to lack conviction. They find they are going through the motions and wonder why the whole business is so thankless.

I don't get it, they say. Why don't people understand? Why don't they see!

The answer is because they are now campaigning on empty. It is thankless because people sense it.

None of the main political parties are exempt from this rule of thumb. The Conservative Party seems peculiarly wedded to worn out doctrines, which may be – though it isn't clear yet – practically a return to mercantilism. The Labour Party under Corbyn seems to prefer a return to the days of nationalisation, for example as a solution to the collapse of Southern Rail.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly when the Lib Dems stopped thinking. It certainly isn't Tim Farron's fault. Nick Clegg was too busy, trapped in the 24-hour news cycle to do much thinking. Ming Campbell and Charles Kennedy before him gestured towards new thinking. Paddy Ashdown, who was a fierce thinker, even commissioned Ralf Dahrendorf – much missed – to run a commission. Somehow between then (1994) and now (2016), they stopped trying to be themselves intellectually.

There was Centre Forum, of course, but the fate of the last Liberal thinktank rather exemplified the problem. It was too closely aligned with the party to raise the kind of funding it needed, and therefore found itself trying to appear safe and not particularly Liberal.

That is the problem with setting up thinktanks now: they can no longer afford to be party-aligned. IPPR has been struggling to escape their Labour links for decades. Yet some kind of core beliefs are important.

So, when Joe Zammit-Lucia, Nick Silver and I started talking about a new thinktank, we needed a strategy to overcome this paradox. As a result, when Radix was born this summer – with Nick Tyrone as director – we agreed that any new thinktank must be resolutely all-party. Radix has Nick Clegg, Stephen Kinnock and Andrew Lansley on the board, and a number of others from outside the political world.

But we have to stand for something and we are trying to reinterpret the idea of the centre ground, borrowing an idea from the American political radical Mark Satin, author of a book called *Radical Middle*.

Satin's Radical Centre is aware that the great challenge for political parties is to see the world clearly, as it really is – that politics needs urgent reinvention.

It implies a core irony. We live in a period of unprecedented new thinking, an exciting era of fizzing ideas, practical ones, in every area of public life – some using new technologies; more involving social

innovation that shapes the institutions of the future.

The only place where these ideas and debates do not penetrate is into the political establishment at Westminster, for whom the business of government means the study and the manipulation of nudges, prods and signals to herd the great British population this way and that, according to the will of the great bureaucracies of state. It is this moment of creativity, and period of great peril, that Radix was designed to address.

But we do need to be clear what the term 'radical centre' means. It is centrist in the sense that it rejects the conventional right and the conventional left. It is centrist in the sense that it denies that the real issues are expressible in those terms.

It is emphatically not centrist in the sense of compromise between the deadeningly conventional issues of Right and Left. It is not centrist in implication of eking out a middle path as lowest common denominator (the Third Way was not radical, but represented a capitulation to the existing power structures). We explicitly deny that the conventional issues of Right and Left need compromise; quite the reverse, we believe they are aspects of each other.

The radical centre is radical in the sense that – beyond the great gulf of Westminster – there is major change needed and that it will come, like it or not. In that sense, Radix is a bold project to kickstart the thinking that we need, before change is forced upon us by urgent circumstance.

We are now tiptoeing into the political world. We held events at the three main party conferences (and I don't mean Ukip). We have produced reports criticising the way quantitative easing has been designed (and appear to have influenced Theresa May's speech). We have produced reports on the future of trade unions and on older women in the workforce. We have also published a book about the future of liberalism, *The Death of Liberal Democracy?* (note the question mark).

We are cross-party but aware that, if radicalism is going to emerge in the centre ground of politics, we urgently need to do some more thinking.

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David Boyle is policy director of Radix and a former editor of Liberal Democrat News.  
[www.radix.org.uk](http://www.radix.org.uk)



# THE SEX CONUNDRUM

When politicians or pundits pontificate on sex work they make sweeping assumptions unsupported by the evidence, says Belinda Brooks-Gordon, who is seeking to revamp Liberal Democrat policy

Long before speculation about a snap general election began, work had started to develop truly liberal, distinctive, radical, and workable policy on sex work that would give power to the least empowered. A conference motion from the party grassroots *Towards Safer Sex Work* (2014) was passed calling for an update of past policy to deal with the issue of sex work in the 21st Century.

Like so many other social, sexual and commercial transactions which have transformed in the past two decades, relationships in sex work have changed much since the last policy paper *Confronting Prostitution* (1994).

There has been a shift to more work online with chatlines and webcam work; there is less street sex work; and a shift to people using commercial sexual activity as a means to supplement income from other types of work or study; there is more male sex work; and more transgender sex work.

Paradoxically, legislation has become more punitive despite attempts by Liberal Democrats to hold back the forces of authoritarianism. It is definitely time for an update so the working group reviewed party policy looking broadly at the issues around sex work as well as those specifically set out in the *Towards Safer Sex Work* motion to produce proposals in a consultation paper on which members were asked to respond at conference and now online.

The consultation should have been the first to go conference in autumn 2015 and full motion to spring conference 2016. We were told, however, that the first full policy paper following electoral wipeout and the election of a new leader should not be one on sex work. This was based on the assumption that with only with eight MPs the press were actually going to read our policy motions. Since then, the EU referendum has provided a useful lens through which to understand how past legislation ended up in such a messy state and help us to avoid the same dangerous pitfalls.

## PUNITIVE DIRECTION

During the period from 1999 the Labour government reviewed sexual offences starting with a seminar at the Home Office. Many of us thought, not unreasonably, that this would be a genuine review. We were wrong, and indications of the punitive direction of policy travel could be seen in the 2003 Green Paper *Protecting the Public* and the White Paper *Paying the Price* (2004). It was the first full review of prostitution laws for 50 years since Wolfenden yet it never asked the question whether the behaviours involved in the sale and purchase of sexual services ought to be province of the criminal law, or whether it was likely

to be a disproportionate response or even counter-productive.

Idiosyncratic attention was given to the research evidence and ministers seemed fixated by what had happened in Sweden and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Police and Crime Act 2009 expanded the range of activities for which people were criminalised.

What had happened in Sweden? A law criminalising the purchase of sexual services, the *Sexköpslagen*, was passed in 1998. It was first proposed in late 1992 just as the campaign for the EU referendum was getting under way in Sweden. The law of criminalising clients in Sweden arose as a response to Sweden's entry into the EU (in 1995) and prostitution thus emerged as an argument for staying out of the EU!

Throughout their time in office it was hard for Labour ministers to understand just how febrile the atmosphere in Sweden had been during the referendum period and how a false public discourse had created scapegoats on which a disastrous policy was then directed.

Quite how criminalising clients would make sex workers safer was unclear but it was never questioned as the corrosive atmosphere continued in Sweden as it defended and exported its *Sexköpslagen* laws while it was engaged in another referendum, this time on whether or not to adopt the euro. Indeed, so tense were things that a government minister Anna Lindh was stabbed to death, just four days before the 2003 election.

The parallels between the political speeches and dialogue on sex work in both Sweden and England were apparent: the crude stereotypes, the intolerance of unconventional lifestyles, and the assumed victimhood without asking the presumed 'victim' what they needed or wanted. Never was JS Mill's observation "Power holds a smooth tongue and whomever it oppresses it pretends to do so for their own good" more apt.

In England and Wales in the course of the 1990s there was an assumption that all women migrating from abroad were victims of unscrupulous traffickers, trafficked into prostitution by false promises.

We see from a number of court cases against sex workers was that what followed was that police resources were taken up with the de facto criminalisation of those in sex work while the small but significant number who targeted or were violent to sex workers were not investigated.

During the Coalition government there was an improvement from the Home Office offering stability and sense in its *Review of Effective Practice in Responding to Prostitution* (foreword by Lynne Featherstone) in 2011 which put forward

essential measures: safety for sex workers should be mainstreamed; language support to be available for migrant sex workers; violence against sex workers should be a hate crime; and that police resources should be targeted against the grooming of young women in care homes.

Mostly when people, especially politicians or paid pundits, pontificate on sex work they make sweeping assumptions unsupported by the evidence. The breathtaking ignorance so confidently displayed contributed to a public discourse that bears little relationship to the real interactions that sex workers have with each other, their work, their clients, the services upon which they rely or the peer-reviewed evidence. It would be good if our policy is able to change that.

Along with testimony and evidence we have taken from those in a wide range of commercial sexual activities, there has been a lot of academic work from peer-reviewed literature reviewed.

The working group listened intently to those in sex work and has learned of the difficulties they face in accessing the credit or other financial services that some of us take for granted, explicitly because of their work. There is discrimination faced by sex workers especially from insurance and financial services.

## **MORAL RISK**

A feminist porn film maker explained that to insure the film set, against for example a spotlight falling on an actor, the premiums are four times that of other film makers. This expense, we learned, is not because of actuarial or statistical risk but a presumed, and uncalculated, 'moral' risk that the insurers associate with sex work. We learned too of levels of predation at same sex chemsex parties that must be addressed. Above all, we focussed much attention to the detail and balance of human rights and we have been impressed by the Amnesty analysis of rights in their sex work policy.

Cross-cultural comparisons have shown us that anti-prostitution laws have never contributed to the

improvement of women's position in society. It is both curious and shocking therefore that the Women's Equality Party is in favour of repressive legislation. This too is arguably another throwback to Sweden, where in the 1990s a group of prominent feminists who called themselves the Stödstrumporna or 'support stockings' threatened to form a political party unless other parties gave better representation to women. This was one of the triggers that led to Swedish Sexköpslagen policy. It is a tragedy that this laudable aim propelled legislation against some of the least franchised in society.

There has never been a more apposite time to develop decent policy in this area. With many so new members, it is more important than ever that they have a say on policy, if we can understand how other parties got sex work policy wrong, and if we listen to sex workers and the evidence, then we might just be able to get it right.

The working party did not arrive at the propositions and questions in the consultation paper because we were looking at how they would measure up in a coalition negotiation, or in the fear that the public wouldn't like it, or that the public would not vote for a genuinely liberal party (although interestingly, representative surveys show that public opinion has always been pretty sanguine about sex work. What the public abhor is politician hypocrisy about it). Rather, we measured the research and evidence against the benchmarks of individual empowerment fairness, compassion, and universal human rights.

So now it is down to party members. It is exciting to facilitate a consultation on such a quintessentially liberal issue and I hope members will share their views, thoughts and ideas and respond to the online consultation paper so that we can develop a policy on sex work that will be fit for the 21st Century.

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Belinda Brooks-Gordon is assistant dean for equalities at Birkbeck College, a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee and a former councillor in Cambridgeshire.

[www.libdems.org.uk/sex\\_work\\_survey](http://www.libdems.org.uk/sex_work_survey)

## **Cause Celebre**

***A Biography of Revel John Rudd by Lin Mehmel and Patrick Streeter***

***There are not many men who are mentioned on seven pages of Christine Keeler's memoirs and who rotted in a South African jail for making love across the racial divide.***

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**Politics Between  
the Extremes**  
by Nick Clegg  
The Bodley Head  
2016 £ 20

In this memoir Nick Clegg tells of his experience as deputy prime minister during the Tory/Liberal Democrat Coalition that governed the UK from 2010-15. He also endeavours to explain why the party which he had led for eight years was all but obliterated from the Westminster scene in the subsequent general election, which saw its number of MPs reduced from 57 to eight. As with all such tomes it is a mixture of self-exculpation, criticism of others, the importunity of adverse advents and a reassertion that fortunes will be reversed for the better in due course.

Admissions of personal blame are minimised, while the actions of opponents, particularly those from within the Coalition partners are accentuated. No change there then from the usual manner of such ponderings.

The book has been extensively reviewed across the media. I believe this coverage is due to the volatile nature of contemporary politics which was heralded by the formation of the first peace-time Coalition for three-quarters of a century. The situation has become even more frenetic. The media is anxious to seize on any clues as to both the causes and effects of post-2015 politics. There are any number of tantalising quandaries that require answering. Among them, for example, is the meaning of Theresa May's claim that "Brexit means Brexit". Perhaps, it was hoped, Clegg's account might help to illuminate their enquiries - such expectations will be dashed.

Clegg reiterates the apparent reasons for the present state of public affairs both in Britain and among the western democracies in general. As is now commonplace he recites the litany of globalisation, party fragmentation, migration, growing inequalities of gender, ethnicity, region and in wealth - all of which have fed the rise of populisms from both the ultra-Right and ultra-Left that have burst forth in the UK. But he adds little that is new.

The book is very repetitious, verbose (on page 218 I counted two consecutive sentences of 116 and 113

words each) and mere assertion. For the most part it records what befell Clegg and his Lib Dem ministers in the Coalition. The Tories ran rings round them, and George Osborne in particular. They allowed the Conservatives to claim credit for Lib Dem originated policies that proved popular, usually got the smaller share of policy trade-offs, and were allowed to sink by themselves when they attempted to usher in voting reform. Clegg records one notable victory over the then education secretary, Michael Gove, over the introduction of free school meals.

The fundamental problem was that Clegg concentrated too much on being deputy prime minister and too little on being leader of the Lib Dems. He focused his energies on immediate and short-term issues and failed utterly to develop any wider strategy that would address both making the best of staying in Coalition and in preparing for the next Election.

In 2012 I identified the problem in *Liberator* 355 describing Clegg as "a cork bobbing on the waves", being battered and buffeted as he himself here shows all too clearly was the case. Given the obvious lack of strategy, I urged consideration of withdrawing from Coalition in the year before the election due in 2015, supporting a minority Tory administration to see out the parliamentary term on a confidence and maintenance basis, and developing distinctive Lib Dem policies for its manifesto. I also predicted this would not happen, a prediction that was all too easy to make. As the precedents of both Callaghan and Brown show, risking the certainty of present power - however weak - for the uncertainty of a better, stronger future is a gamble those in office are very disinclined to make. Clegg was no exception.

There is a now a new factor

for such reluctance, namely the enormous rise in the army of Whitehall special advisers (Spads). They have no incentive whatsoever to put their hugely overpaid jobs at risk and would have fiercely opposed any such prospect. The growth of Spads was phenomenal (although Cameron had earlier promised to reduce them) and a glaring feature of the Coalition. Clegg also increased his staff of Spads as the going got tougher that only exacerbated his underlying problem. As it was, preparing the election campaign was delegated to Paddy Ashdown and Ryan Coatsworth that led to the disaster which ensued.

What lessons can be drawn about Coalition-making in the future? First, more time should be taken in drawing-up the inter-party agreement as to how the government will go about its business and what are its main policies. This is common practice in other multi-party states in Europe.

Secondly, consideration should be given to the much 'sniffed-at' Coalition power-sharing practice in the devolved Assembly in Northern Ireland. At Stormont, the formula divides up power between ministries, so that each one is exclusively run by a single party. At least that way the public knows which party is responsible for the conduct of policy in each sector.

Clegg's wishful and concluding assertion that the centre will triumphantly reassert itself is not convincing. Merely to espouse moderation means that your position is dictated by the extremes. Clegg's election mantra in 2015 was "A strong economy and a fair society" - a real tub thumper to get the blood racing! He also appealed for the electorate to vote 'Coalition' which was not an option on the ballot paper. Clegg says little of interest about international affairs: globalisation



# REVIEWS

in general terms plus Brussels tittle-tattle about Brexit. The banality explicit in the book's title says it all.

Trevor Smith

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## **The Making of Modern Liberalism** **by Alan Ryan** **Princeton University Press 2014**

Why do we read books on Liberal philosophy? Primarily, I suspect, for reassurance, to give a gloss to our more mundane thinking. Alan Ryan has been at the forefront of interpreting Liberal thought, particularly that of John Stuart Mill, since the late 1960s. Those who read political philosophy at university will almost certainly have encountered him in this context. It is good to have a representative collection of his work.

Many of these focus on Mill, and while he is undoubtedly Ryan's hero, reassurance is always tempered by some unexpected quirk – Mill supported capital punishment for instance, though one should not judge the past with the expectations of our own day. Reverting to Ryan on that, however, I wasn't quite convinced that he had made his point.

As might be expected, the essays range from the general to the specific, from Hobbes and Locke, through Mill, to Isaiah Berlin, Bertrand Russell and Popper. (I would have loved to have known what Conrad Russell thought of the piece on his father). There is something of the interface between Liberalism and Socialism. Coming from Princeton, American Liberalism is considered, notably Dewey, too whom we never pay enough attention, and Rawls.

An easier read than one might expect, and likely to become a staple on university reading lists for some time, it will not be lost on modern Liberals to flick through it and devour a few of the essays that take their fancy. Once started, you might find you can't put the book down.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Liberalism, The Life of an Idea** **by Edmund Fawcett**

## **Princeton University Press 2014 paperback 2015 \$24.95**

This is a brilliant book; if you have one book on Liberalism in your library, for the time being, this should be it. I apologise for not reviewing it earlier – I read it ages ago; a number of books on the subject came out around the same time – all awaiting review. I suppose I feel the need to write something more serious about them, which constantly gets shelved.

What is so good about this book? First of all, it is Fawcett's enthusiasm for his subject. Second is his honesty – it is a history of Liberalism, warts and all. We all tend to gloss over those bits of a favoured subject that we don't like, or make excuses for them. Fawcett faces most of these head on. In particular, he tackles the problem between Liberalism and liberal democracy – a political philosophy, and the out-turn of its shared strivings, some of which Liberals might not always recognise as 'liberal'.

The book has generally been well received, and since I concur with much of its analysis, I'll cite what it is from the preface, which opens "This is a book about a god that succeeded, though a rather neurotic god that frets..."

Fawcett does not think of Liberalism before 1815, in a Euro-Atlantic context. There are proto-Liberalisms, indeed some of the canons of Liberal thought will have been written, but as a political philosophy it mainly post-dates the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars.

I broadly agree with this, whatever the inconsistencies. Fawcett's story of Liberalism is then divided into four phases. 1830-1880 a time of youthful self-definition, rise to power and large successes. 1880-1945 during which Liberalism matured and struck a historic compromise with democracy. 1945-1989 – after near collapse a period of achievement and vindication, – triumph, with the failure of Soviet Communism, but post-1989 a return to self-doubt.

Let's not quibble with these – though I think there is near failure 1914-1945. Insofar as I am a working Liberal politician, I would

say there is always self-doubt. Liberalism has never claimed a monopoly of political wisdom, indeed I take this as strength, and necessary to the compromise with democracy. If nothing else, the recent referendum on European Union membership reminds us that we are not necessarily democrats.

Given his four periods, Fawcett also gives us four ideas, having said in the preface to the paperback edition that his story did not start with Liberty.

Instead we have acknowledgement of the inescapable ethical and material conflict within society, distrust of power, faith in human progress and respect for people whatever they think and whoever they are.

This last, Fawcett underlines as a democratic seed in an otherwise undemocratic creed. He thus, neatly encapsulates Liberalism as a search for an ethically acceptable order of human progress among civic equals without recourse to undue power.

A final four – in space as well as time, Fawcett seeks to define his Liberalism among the political thought and deed of France and Germany, as well as the Anglo-Saxon world, thus introducing to a richer inheritance.

You have to draw a line somewhere, so again, let's not quibble. The central difficulty that Fawcett doesn't quite grasp is that whatever its appearance as the dominant ideology of the West, liberal democracy does not mean Liberals empowered to achieve their goals.

It is interacting with other ideologies, Conservatism, Socialism, in the main, and they will determine much of the political agenda. Neoliberalism is a case in point; one does not dispute the Liberal credentials of Hayek or Friedman, nor that Keynesian orthodoxy had run its course (beyond, probably, as Keynes might have envisaged it), but their ideas came to fruit in illiberal hands. Margaret Thatcher may have been an economic liberal, but she was a political Conservative. That incoherence would, in turn, cause Neoliberalism to run its course, though short-term political minds may not have fully woken up to that as yet. However, that Fawcett dirties Liberalism with liberal democracy greatly enhance

our understanding of both and the interplay between them. Incidentally, in his preface to the paperback edition, Fawcett tells us that it was Neoliberals calling foul for his treatment of them. Neoliberalism is Liberal ideas in Conservative hands – often pretty nasty ones at that.

Returning to the construct of liberal democracy, there is a dialogue in a healthy body politic, the sum total of political wisdom does not rest in any one part of it, but while there have been, and are liberals across, at least the mainstream political parties, there is a need for political Liberalism to be a strong part of that dialogue.

This has been absent, or at best muted in the UK for more than the last century, and the results have finally come home to roost in a populism that has to be understood and dealt with. There is certainly room for Fawcett in your library. Read, learn and take the fight forward.

Stewart Rayment.

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## **Cause Celebre: a Biography of Revil John Rudd by Lin Mehmel and Patrick Streeter Matching Press 2016 £9.99**

A biography of who? It turns out that Rudd was rather a colourful character. He appears on seven occasions in the diaries of Christine Keeler linked to the Profumo scandal, and was later jailed in South Africa for having sex across the racial divide under apartheid laws.

While in prison his renown was sufficient to receive food parcels from Jacqueline Kennedy.

From his fame in 1950s society in London he ended his days growing old disgracefully in the Karoo desert.

Streeter will be known to some Liberator readers as a former Liberal Democrat councillor in Tower Hamlets. He has certainly chosen a subject who lived a full and unusual life.

Enquiries to: [sptstreeter@aol.com](mailto:sptstreeter@aol.com)  
Mark Smulian

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## **Show Me the Money: A study of the efficacy of donations and spending on Lib Dem seats at the 2015 UK General Election**

**by Dr Seth Thevoz**  
**Available on:**  
**[www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)**

The headlines from a recent report about Lib Dem spending at the last general election are about as damning as they could be. The openDemocracyUK organisation, which published the report from Seth Thevoz, claims: “The more Lib Dems spent on a seat, the more votes they lost”. The author himself suggests that, “the Liberal Democrats squandered thousands on no-hope Clegg loyalists whilst cutting out incumbent MPs who went on to narrowly miss-out”.

The report is particularly critical of how very significant sums of money were spent on market research, but with very ineffective messaging after it. These parts of it chime strongly with that commissioned by the party itself after the 2015 general election.

But the idea that could be suggested from the headline about winning votes being inversely proportional to raising funds is palpably absurd and the report does not really provide justification for openDemocracyUK’s headline.

There is no doubt that very impressive sums of money were raised in some seats that were almost impossible to win after five years of coalition with the Conservatives, and with many Labour leaning voters assuming that Nick Clegg wanted the same outcome again. The report considers that the £173,000 raised by Lynne Featherstone to try and defend her Hornsey & Wood Green constituency was “wasted”. It may have been impossible to hold it in the circumstances of 2015, but it would be a wholly wrong conclusion to say that raising and spending more money resulted in a big decline in her vote from 2010.

When we held only one ward out of 10 in the constituency and Lynne was uncertain about continuing as the candidate after 2001, I advised on the fundraising and campaigning strategy which led to us winning five of the ten wards

and gaining the parliamentary seat in 2005. It was spending much more money, and spending it effectively, that won us the seat then, and the rule generally remains that the more you do, the more votes you win.

One of the problems for anyone trying to study the relationship of campaign spending and electoral outcomes is that you cannot control on the basis of ‘all other things being equal’. Several of the eight seats that we did retain were won without much fundraising. But this was at least partly because almost all, if not all, of them were not really targeted by our opponents. It is not clear to me if the SNP were really targeting Orkney & Shetland (which they nearly won) and I know that Labour backed off targeting Nick Clegg in Sheffield Hallam when they saw the scale of resource that went with defending the leader’s seat this time.

What is clear is that it was not particularly lack of money that was to blame for the 2015 result being our worst since 1970. The party’s fundraising team did well and the overall spend on the national Lib Dem campaign declared to the Electoral Commission was very similar in 2005, 2010 and 2015. But the number of seats we won in these three elections was respectively 62, 57 and 8. Looking crudely at the national spend in 2015, the Electoral Commission figures appear to show that the Conservatives spent nationally £47,242 for every seat that they won (330), Labour spent £52,112 on average for each seat they won (232) whilst we spent on average £441,250 for each seat that we won (8).

What matters most in all these things are that lessons are learned. The disappointing Oldham West by-election result showed that the very significant investment there produced a result no better than that in the general election. But the much better investment in Witney produced the best result for us in the constituency since 1983 (albeit in a by-election). Who knows what a little more careful investment in Witney over the summer could have produced?

Chris Rennard



## Monday

One of the more encouraging developments of recent weeks is the number of Labour members who, despairing of their own party's chances of ever returning to power, have elected to join the Liberal Democrats. Many of them, I am pleased to report, are now housed in a re-education camp here on the Bonkers Hall Estate. (For those who know this part of the world, it is to be found at Boggy Corner.)

There they spend their days poring over the works of L.T. Hobhouse, priming the week's production of the Bonkers Patent Exploding Focus (For Use in Marginal Wards) and recanting of their former allegiance in public sessions of self-criticism. Conditions may fairly be described as Spartan, though I was pleased that the recent Red Cross inspection was not wholly critical. Walking by the camp this morning I came across some Well-Behaved Orphans throwing food parcels over the barbed-wire fence. I thought that a Very Kind Gesture.

## Tuesday

To Londond for a meeting of Public School Alumni for Comprehensive Education. It is not an organisation for which I greatly care, but many of my fellow Liberal Democrats are staunch members. The speaker explains that if bright children from working-class backgrounds are able to compete with the products of Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference establishments then the British Way of Doing Things will indeed be under threat. The tone of the dinner is celebratory, as several of the group's members occupy senior positions in the new Cabinet.

And who should I find myself sitting between but Freddie and Fiona? It seems they are now working for an educational think-tank. ("If you want to know what needs to be done in our schools you should ask someone who has studied PPE at Oxford not an experienced headteacher, obviously." "Obviously.") I ask them if they attended a comprehensive. "Our parents were great believers in state education" explains one, "but we were so musical..."

## Wednesday

A fraught day at the Hall. First Cook tells me that she has received a better offer from Channel 4 and proposes handing in her notice. I am obliged to up her wages considerably to ensure a continuing supply of her delicious cakes. Then my housekeeper confides that the new washing machine she has bought is proving less than satisfactory. It transpires she was sold it by a little Goan fellow and it has never worked properly since it was delivered. Having a shrewd idea who the man was, I have myself put through to a certain office on the Eastern side of Leicester and have it out with him.

I need a pint of Smithson & Greaves after that, I can tell you, but when I arrive at the Bonkers' Arms I find the place in uproar. A party of clowns from the circus that has just pitched its tents on the village green is huddled in the snug – it seems they came for a quiet drink and found the locals rather on the scary side. I am obliged to act as peacemaker.

Afterwards I get talking to the clowns. Did you know it is very much a family trade? As one put it to me: "My father was a famous clown. Those are big

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shoes to fill."

## Thursday

I spend the day at the offices of the High Leicestershire Radical, the newspaper which publishes my weekly column and of which I happen to be sole owner and proprietor. There I learn some worrying news about my chief investigative reporter, an intrepid Arab fellow known to one and all at the paper as the 'fake sheikh': he confides that he really is a sheikh. How the Press Council will view my

employing a fake fake sheikh I hate to think.

## Friday

You join me upon a windswept cliff overlooking the Bristol Channel. It is here at Hinkley Point that Britain's latest power station is soon to be constructed. Under an agreement devised by our own Ed Davey, a constant stream of lorries will arrive bearing high-denomination banknotes. These will then be burnt by the plant's Chinese owners to generate electricity and we shall pay them more than generously for so doing. It is clear the Wise Woman of Wing did not negotiate that deal.

And so on to a deserted stretch of moorland road above Porlock Hill where I lay a simple floral arrangement in memory of Rinka. Whatever the ins and outs of the Thorpe Affair, the bitch was blameless.

## Saturday

When the world's cares burden me or I find the pettiness of party politics too grating, I take myself off to Oakham Zoo. There I have a word with the Head Keeper and am let into the gorilla enclosure to share a banana or too with the leading silverback. It is a pleasure to be able to discuss current affairs with someone who has no axe to grind and is able to offer his own unique perspective. More than once, I have offered to have a word with Clegg about a peerage, but Guy has always declined on the grounds that the House of Lords is "a jungle".

## Sunday

The pews at St Asquith's are packed – packed with clowns, jugglers, strongmen, lion tamers, beautiful ladies more often to be found riding horses and daring young men taking a morning off from the flying trapeze. Yes, my coming to the aid of the clowns in the Bonkers' Arms the other day Went Down Well. In contrast, the Revd Hughes could have chosen a more tactful text upon which to preach his sermon. He gives it both barrels with Zephaniah 1:8 – "And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel."

Fortunately, circus folk are not ones to bear grudges and my party is well received in the big top this evening. I am particularly taken with one charming young lady who is able to gallop around the ring at great speed while facing backwards. Afterwards, I suggest that she try to get herself selected for a promising Westminster seat as soon as possible.

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