

liberator



- 🔦 Lacking the guts to ditch Trident - David Grace
- 🔦 Taking back control - Tony Greaves
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COMMENTARY

COMING APART

Liberal Democrats lack experience in fighting Labour, so what will they do now Labour appears to be giving up serious politics under Jeremy Corbyn?

The lack of experience is historical. Prior to the SDP's formation Liberals and Labour were rarely in serious contention, but during the Alliance there was an over-ambitious and ultimately failed bid to replace Labour.

After that, Paddy Ashdown was quite openly Labour's ally in 1997 and 2001 and, as Tim Razzall's autobiography (*Liberator* 371) revealed, informal anti-Tory co-operation survived into the 2005 election despite Iraq.

Nick Clegg made half-hearted denunciations of the previous Labour government during the Coalition, but that was about it.

The legacy of all this is that strong Lib Dem presences in Labour areas are somewhat random. They exist where people happen to have organised and campaigned effectively rather than being common - like the Lib Dem presence in the suburban south east or rural south west.

So can the Lib Dems take the opportunity now offered by Labour's existential crisis?

Lib Dems of all people ought to know not to read too much into by-elections, but Labour's loss of Copeland was the first time since 1960 that a government has gained a seat without complicating factors.

Corbyn's response was the delusional claim that Copeland showed a rejection of the establishment. People do not oppose the establishment by supporting an incumbent Tory government.

Some 18 months since becoming leader the country is none the wiser about what Corbyn would do. He says he is against austerity but says nothing about what he would put in its place or how it would work - his politics barely extend beyond waving slogans on placards.

Worse is Corbyn's dishonesty over Brexit. Who knows what the outcome of the referendum might have been had Labour had fought full throttle for Remain (as, to be fair, many of its local parties did) instead of the half-hearted exhibition Corbyn put on. As it was, he indulged in a sham of being pro-Remain and then called for triggering Article 50 immediately afterwards.

Since then Labour has colluded with Theresa May to deliver a hard Brexit, alienating Remain supporters while doubtless leaving all but the most credulous Brexit supporters unconvinced. In so many ways, Corbyn truly is the Tories' best friend.

Former Labour MP Chris Mullin has noted in his memories that even in 2010 he wondered if Labour's historic mission was over, leaving the party with little future.

That is a question that can be put with greater force now. Under Corbyn, what credible political purpose does Labour serve?

The question isn't so much whether a significant slice of Labour's membership and support will defect to the Lib Dems out of disgust with Corbyn's shabby manoeuvres on Brexit, but whether the Lib Dems are in a position to organise useful activity for them in areas where a sudden influx of new members will encounter a small Lib Dem local party not used to serious campaigning.

Even in places where there is Lib Dem activity to join, this influx of new members looks rather different from the people who comprised such surges in earlier years.

They are above all motivated by an international issue. They might incidentally dislike their local council or be aggrieved by potholes, but are unlikely to be inspired by such traditional Lib Dem campaigning and its been rare for Lib Dem local parties to campaign on issues beyond their patch.

It's easy to imagine how people angered by Brexit and inspired by opposing it might become bored and alienated by the usual fare of Focus leaflets.

Perhaps its time to elevate these from the pavements to wider horizons.

BAD HABITS DIE HARD

For reasons that doubtless seemed sensible at the time, the two big debates at York will be on Trident and faith schools.

Both will be the subject of motions that in effect say: "We wish there was less of them, but abolishing either would be a bit complicated and might upset some people, so having espied a convenient fence we will sit on it in the hope that the public's attention will be elsewhere and nobody much will notice us anyway".

On Trident the intellectual case for scrapping it has force. The case for renewal is wrong, but coherent. The case for having half a deterrent idle in a dock is less impressive.

The 'part-time submarine' would offer protection against neither terrorism nor cyber warfare - the most probable threats - while consuming enormous sums of money that might otherwise go into cash-starved conventional forces that could address these dangers.

Yet again the Lib Dems have lacked the guts to oppose Trident renewal, despite the weight of argument that the British 'independent' deterrent is a military and economic nonsense, and yet again a working group has been sent away to construct a fence on which the party can precariously balance.

Much the same has happened with faith schools - a ringing cry that the party is neither in favour of them nor against.

RADICAL BULLETIN

HOLDER OF A POSITION

An unpleasant and complicated dispute has engulfed Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats just as it should be fully engaged with Tim Farron's diversity drive.

It goes back to the 2015 election for chair, in which Ruwan Uduwera-Perera defeated Ashburn Holder by one vote in a contest marked by disputes over whether the correct time had been permitted for the return of postal votes.

Holder then walked away, his supporters say because he was unhappy with the election's conduct and with what he felt was EMLD's excessive focus on alleged racism to the detriment of working with non-BME party members.

He was though asked back and joined the executive, becoming general secretary. Matters proceeded until former Lewisham councillor Duwayne Brooks posted a video on Facebook which appeared to show police officers abusing two young black men.

A comment made by Holder about his view of police officers in general gave deep offence to Uduwera-Perera, a founder of the National Black Police Association, and led to an online altercation between them.

Holder, who fought Ilford South at the 2015 general election, was then told last October he was suspended.

Whether the cause was the intemperate language in this exchange or some other reason remains unclear, as Holder's supporters say he has not been told the nature of the charge and those officers responsible for his suspension say party headquarters has forbidden them to discuss the matter.

Holder thus complains that he does not know what he is accused of, and that the full EMLD executive was not involved in this decision.

EMLD's annual general meeting on 18 February was marked by extraordinary scenes in which treasurer Jonathan Hunt decided members needed to know what had happened and began to describe the suspension.

Observers say Hunt was told to be quiet by Uduwera-Perera and vice-chairs James Jennings and Marisha Ray, who then all walked out amid the ensuing uproar with the meeting's formal business not having been conducted.

Those who walked out say are understood to feel they are under an instruction from party headquarters not to permit discussion of Holder's suspension, and that since Hunt insisted on speaking they did not want to remain present or for the meeting to continue.

Some feel that if a complaint is being handled by party HQ it is for them to keep all concerned informed and that EMLD is facing unfair accusations of keeping people in the dark when it is not its job to shed light.

The Watford imbroglio took place before the (presumably) aghast gaze of Toby Keynes, chair

of the party's review body for specified associated organisations such as EMLD.

The party now plans a disciplinary hearing in late March, five months after Holder was - or possibly was not - suspended.

Uduwera-Perera told *Liberator*: "I honestly cannot comment about matters relating to an ongoing inquiry by the party. I can say though that this is not a 'spat' between any members of EMLD, but a matter concerning the party. The processes, procedures and practices being followed are those of the party and not EMLD."

SITTING ON A FENCE

Smoke could be seen coming out of the ears of several leading foreign affairs specialists in the Lib Dems in February after the Federal Conference Committee rejected a motion for spring conference in York calling for the immediate recognition of the State of Palestine and an end to trade with illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.

This was rejected despite the motion being supported by a number of leading members and being due to be proposed by foreign affairs spokesman Tom Brake.

Exactly the same thing had happened to a motion along the same lines submitted for last autumn's conference in Brighton.

Officers of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine (LDFP), who had produced the original text, were urged to liaise with counterparts in the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel (LDFI) to find some compromise wording, though it is hard to see quite how that could be possible as LDFI has told LDFP that calls for the recognition of Palestine and a boycott of settlement products were totally unacceptable to it.

Instead, on the eve of the FCC meeting for spring conference, LDFI tabled a counter-motion, which among other things somewhat late in the day congratulated David Lloyd George for his role in the creation of the modern state of Israel.

Brake hosted a meeting with representatives of LDFP and LDFI to try to broker a joint motion but when LDFI was asked to suggest a date for a follow-up meeting it said none was possible before the deadline for spring conference.

Bournemouth next September is now the last chance for a motion on Palestinian recognition to get debated at a Lib Dem conference during the double anniversary of the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and the 50th anniversary of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

If two positions are irreconcilable, would it not be better to put them before conference and let it decide which the party should back, rather than endlessly pushing the issue under the carpet in the hope of a

compromise that is unlikely to exist?

IS THERE A DOCTOR AT THE SINK?

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is at a loss. It has been awarded for the worst motion submitted for York, but does not know where to head to for the six months until autumn conference.

It goes to the 10 - perhaps rather wisely unnamed - members who proposed a motion for spring conference that read: "We must as a policy have a policy that every department of government must have experts on the department ruling it."

What is more there should be "people who know what they are doing to be the ones running those departments".

Finishing on a rousing call to have things run by those appointed for merit rather than the 'old school network', the motion noted: "You do not want a doctor to fix the kitchen sink or a plumber to do heart surgery". Wise words no doubt, though they left Federal Conference Committee unmoved.

THE COMPANY ONE KEEPS

The Lib Dems have narrowly avoided ending up in alliance with Italy's dubious populist Five Star movement.

Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in Europe (ALDE) decided to stand for president of the European Parliament but realised the liberal bloc alone did not bring sufficient votes.

He therefore entered talks with Five Star and announced its 14 MEPs would be leaving a Ukip-aligned group and joining ALDE.

This was news to ALDE's appalled members. Verhofstadt's manoeuvre was backed by few, among them Sophie in t'Velt of the Dutch party D66 - which said it would expel her if she persisted - and a guarded tweet of support from the sole Lib Dem MEP Catherine Bearder. The Lib Dem Federal International Relations Committee by contrast went ballistic.

The whole thing was hurriedly shelved, and it then turned out most of Five Star's MEP did not want to be in ALDE anyway. They have now crawled back to Ukip, which set conditions for their re-admittance.

Verhofstadt's new year drink party for ALDE is understood to have been embarrassingly ill-attended.

DOES THE FACE FIT?

When is a Lib Dem Facebook group not a Lib Dem one? The Facebook group for new members ('newbies') is purely unofficial but functions as though it had some formal status and invites anyone found mentioning they have joined the party to also join the group.

So far so good, but the group has a website that gives the impression of being a formal party group and uses endorsements by senior party figures.

There is surely going to be a problem sooner or later with an unofficial group acting in a quasi-official role for the party without any oversight.

That though is not as problematic as the Facebook group for Lib Dem policy, which is also unofficial despite appearances.

Among its members is one Graham Williamson, leader of a small and strange organisation called the National Liberal Party, on whose website he openly admits to having been a senior figure in the National Front, though says he has changed his politics.

EVEN MORE UNITED

Few quite understood the purpose of More United when Paddy Ashdown launched it last summer. It proposed to allow its members to vote to support the candidate that best reflected its policies at elections. Being dominated by 'remain' supporters its backing for the Lib Dems in Richmond was straightforward.

At Stoke Central though MU endorsed Labour, despite its candidate having switched (presumably on Jeremy Corbyn's orders) from trenchant remainer to loud Brexit supporter, and Lib Dem Zulfikar Ali being the only pro-Remain candidate of significance.

This stance did indeed 'more unite' most Lib Dems against Ashdown, some of whom noted that if his lordship campaigned for MU's choice in Stoke he would be liable for expulsion.

There is an old precedent. In 1983 senior Liberals could be seen reaching for their smelling salts as party council debated a London region motion noting that David Steel was liable for expulsion for having backed the SDP Alliance candidate against a Liberal in Hackney South.

Steel survived, but he was an incumbent leader. Ashdown isn't.

THROUGH YOUR LETTERBOX

The row about hardline unionism in the Scottish Liberal Democrats (Liberator 382) continues with attendees at a recent Kickstart event being bemused to hear leader Willie Rennie announce that he wouldn't deliver any leaflets that failed to include an anti-independence piece.

Not a pro-EU and pro-UK, but very specifically anti-independence. Given the strong feelings this arouses north of the border, is Rennie about to rest his weary feet?

Maybe he could form an alliance with the now rabidly pro-unionist remnant of the SDP that has emerged in Scotland.

SITUATION VACANT

Has someone at Lib Dem HQ had a bet they can get into Private Eye's Pseudos Corner column?

A recent advert for a 'director of people' says the lucky winner will be "charged with taking members on a journey through the party, making sure that members are welcomed, encouraged and upskilled" and will "oversee delivery of mass fundraising".

Key responsibilities will include "improve the membership experience so that party members can clearly articulate the benefits to being a member" and to "work with senior political figures, including the party leader, to ensure that the people agenda is represented at senior decision making levels".

Let's just hope whoever wrote this guff is not let loose on composing election leaflets.

ON THE FENCE WITH A PART-TIME SUBMARINE

Liberal Democrats look set to yet again show they lack the guts to scrap the waste of money that is Trident, says David Grace

Times are hard. Your spending exceeds your income. The house needs rewiring, the roof is full of holes, the car is very old and the engine needs repairing, the fence and the front gate need fixing.

So what's your priority then? Of course, fit the front door with a toxic substance that will kill yourself and all your neighbours if anyone tries to break in (by the way, no-one is trying to). Well, you've got to insure against that possibility, haven't you? Pity you won't be able to fix the house, the fence and the car but nobody's going to mess with you.

Crazy, isn't it? But that is precisely the view of the Conservatives, most of the Labour Party and, yes, the leadership of the Liberal Democrats when it comes to renewing Trident.

The UK's Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) 2015 identifies the main risks to our security as "terrorist attacks at home and abroad, cyber-attacks against the UK or its interests and international military conflict between states and/or non-state actors where the UK's national interest requires our involvement."

The review does not claim that our nuclear deterrent offers any response to any of these risks. How could it? As the commander of British forces in the first Gulf War, Major-General Patrick Cordingley put it: "Strategic nuclear weapons have no military use."

BLAIRITE NONSENSE

As one former prime minister admitted, "Its utility is non-existent in military terms". That was Tony Blair, but he wanted to keep our nukes because getting rid of them would be "too big a downgrading of our status as a nation".

This status argument is often cited by supporters of Trident and its proposed successor. In particular they say we would lose our place on the UN Security Council (UNSC). The view of Sir Michael Quinlan, former permanent under-secretary of defence and the foremost nuclear deterrence expert was that this was nonsense.

Not all nuclear-weapon-states are on the UNSC nor have all members always had nukes. The big powers do not want to open the debate about UNSC membership which would lead to demands for representatives from Africa and other continents. In any case, how does having nukes make us so important? For a start, let's dismiss the nonsense that our deterrent is independent. I give you our esteemed foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, writing in the Telegraph: "We should be under absolutely no illusion that this is, in any sense, an independent deterrent".

Johnson goes on to explain that the warhead is a

copy of an American design built at Aldermaston under contract to Lockheed Martin. The missiles belong to the USA; we lease them, and they go back to Georgia for maintenance. Even repairs at Devonport are carried out by Haliburton. The arming, fusing and firing of the missiles depend on American software, the fire control hardware is made and repaired in America. The guidance system is American and depends upon GPS and giro navigation which are American. Perhaps more important than the techy stuff, "it is frankly inconceivable that the UK would use nuclear weapons without the USA" – Blair again. Some status, huh? As Johnson neatly summed up the guidance dependence: "If you do not invest in your own satellites, you end up as a satellite power, which is effectively what we are?"

Why then do all these well-informed and powerful people (and our own leadership, which may be neither) want to support renewing Trident? Prepare yourself for the usual parade of establishment figures trotting out at the Liberal Democrat Spring Conference in York to tell us how we need our nukes in a dangerous world.

You can summarise the line simply: "Oh my God, Putin! Oh my God, Trump! We need nukes." Granted the premise that the world is a more dangerous place than a few years ago, no-one feels obliged to show why the conclusion follows. The Ministry of Defence publishes no scenario in which nukes help. Putin invades Ukraine or Estonia. Do we fire our missiles then?

It's not just that Trident or the Successor programme is no answer, the resources it will gobble up prevent us from pursuing the alternative of rebuilding our conventional defences.

The Successor programme was originally costed at £100bn. CND now estimates £205bn. Centre Forum said it will be 10% of the annual defence budget, but 35% of the procurement budget. If you doubt these figures read the reports of the Commons Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and the National Audit Office (NAO).

Large defence projects typically overrun by as much as 40%. Much of the expenditure will be in dollars while the pound continues to fall. As we have seen, our deterrent depends greatly on American designs which are even now being developed. Do not imagine that American defence decisions will pay much heed to British requirements.

A senior MoD officer, Jon Thompson, confessed to the PAC that the Successor programme keeps him awake at night as it is the "single biggest financial risk we face". By the way, most of the work on the programme is carried out by monopoly suppliers Rolls Royce and BAE Systems, so don't expect competition to keep

prices down.

What could we do with the money saved if we decided not to build a successor to Trident? Many people would like to spend it on health and education but I accept the need for effective defence while I reject the incredible idea that nuclear deterrence provides it.

Our current conventional forces are not credible because they have been starved of funds, particularly by our own coalition government. The army is now around 80,000 people, the smallest it has been since the Napoleonic Wars. We have fewer main battle tanks than Switzerland. The Chilcot report noted that in the Iraq War our forces had “wholly inadequate kit”, ranging from boots and bullet-proof jackets to armoured vehicles.

Today our military bases in the UK are dilapidated; the NAO warns that there is a significant risk that the minimum service levels provided by Capita (yes, them again) are putting our defence capability at risk. Power cables at Portsmouth Naval Base are more than 80 years old and may jeopardise the operation of our ships. Incidentally, the navy now has 13 frigates and six destroyers, the latter with engines which cannot operate continuously in warm waters (compared with 60 vessels in 1975). We could not now mount the fleet which was sent to the Falkland Islands in 1982.

The army’s Vehicle Support site at Ashworth cannot keep vehicles ready for deployment; the RAF base at Brize Norton had to shut down refuelling of aircraft because the equipment was not safe. The BBC’s defence correspondent Mark Urban points out that Britain’s long-range strike capability now consists of only six bombers. Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has spelt out in his paper *Mind the Gap* that the rising costs of Successor will lead to cuts in air, maritime and land systems.

WHITE ELEPHANT

Is it any wonder that many professional servicemen and women regard Trident as a white elephant? Even many American defence experts cannot understand why Britain wants to renew Trident, except of course admirals whose own costs will be subsidised by us and American defence contractors who will happily welcome our cash.

When supporters of Trident fail to provide a scenario when it will be useful, they usually fall back on the mantra, “Ah, but the future is uncertain”, which they deliver with a knowing look and a tap on the nose suggesting that they know more about it than you.

Indeed it is uncertain and has been since Adam and Eve left the garden of Eden. The Successor programme, the new Dreadnought submarines, are scheduled to come into use in the 2030s and to last for decades afterwards. A particular uncertainty for that

“The working group whose report comes to party conference was picked to ensure that some such muddle would emerge again and the inner group of policy wonks who drafted the report without first consulting the rest of the group have fulfilled that expectation”

future period is whether nuclear submarines will remain undetectable and safe.

Former defence secretary Des Browne questions that assumption. The development of cyber warfare poses the threat that an enemy could prevent the missiles from firing or change their intended targets. The development of underwater drones, currently underway by China and the USA, makes the chances of finding a submarine much greater. Both these developments undermine the basic concept of the Trident or Dreadnought fleet.

I don’t know how far these technologies will have

advanced by 2030 but it seems a rash bet to commit a huge proportion of our defence budget on a system which may be out of date before it even comes into service.

Since 2006 the Liberal Democrats have held three working groups looking at Trident and the question has figured in five conference debates.

Our current position is the ‘contingency posture’, an attempt at a compromise between the full Trident monty and no nukes. It has attracted little or no support and nor should it.

The working group whose report comes to party conference in March was picked to ensure that some such muddle would emerge again and the inner group of policy wonks who drafted the report without first consulting the rest of the group have fulfilled that expectation. The report is entitled *Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* and concludes that the best way to do this is to renew Trident.

It would be comical if it were not so dangerous. I tried to amend it but was inevitably outvoted. I refused to have my name associated with it. The real motivation behind this report is not to take a rational position on nuclear deterrence, it is not to frighten the horses.

In so far as the party has a strategy, it is to pick up the votes of disgruntled Labour supporters and pro-European Tory voters. Experts on policy positioning, the very people who led us down to 8% in the polls and eight MPs, think that telling the truth about nuclear weapons will put off those potential fair-weather friends.

I believe Liberal Democrats can do better. To quote Sir Michael Quinlan in 2006 again: “You should get rid of it but you’re the same as the other parties. You haven’t got the guts!”. Have we?

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

TAKING BACK CONTROL

Divisions exposed by the referendum have long been there and dealing with the problems of the 'left behind' means tackling unequal power relationships, says Tony Greaves

Most people agreed that the referendum result showed a country that was starkly divided. But divided how? People have identified lots of different categories of division, though most of them are binary (as we now say) since that's how a referendum works and that's how we are now supposed to think.

So we have Remainers and Leavers (remoaners and loathers) who have to be categorised in other ways that 'explain' that voting divide. Young and old, graduates and the uneducated, metropolitans and provincials, Scotland and England, south and north, cities and small towns, cosmopolitan towns and whites-only places, liberals and conservatives, the white working class and the metro-elite, migrants and natives. All lazily summed up as the Global Get-Onners and the Left Behind.

Just to list these overlapping and conflicting divisions shows how shallow such analysis really is. It's also a rather illiberal way of looking at things. People are more complex than this and the days of clearly defined social classes are over. It's all a way for the geographically ignorant Bubble-based media and party hacks to make (not much) sense of a world that is diverse beyond their understanding.

Of course, all such insights have an academic interest and may lead to useful policy proposals.

But for Liberals with our political philosophy based on the central importance of the individual, not the category, it is surely to the personal level that we should look for the sources of societal unrest. And here I am writing about economic and governmental relationships, not the post-modern issues of identity which are important but, for Liberals, not central to the questions of personal power and influence.

There are three areas where individuals and family groups of all diversities are often under the control of other people in ways that lead them to feel helpless.

ONE-SIDED RELATIONSHIP

Employment for many people is a one-sided relationship: the concept of the employment 'contract' has always been flawed. At worse it is the imposition of terms and conditions by the employer, take it or leave it. The idea of a negotiation between equals at an individual level is for the privileged. This is why employment law exists and why employment contracts, terms and conditions have been heavily regulated. It is why trade unions were set up and grew in strength. Yet the changes in trade union and employment legislation in the past 30 years have resulted in a significant change in the balance of power in favour of employers and against individual employees.

The growth of the flexible labour market in all its forms has made things worse. Zero-hour contracts,

part-time contracts, temporary contracts (often two or even three being juggled by one worker), agency labour (including gangmaster teams), bogus self-employment (the old 'lump' writ large), genuine self-employment following redundancy, massive cuts in public sector staff. The fragmentation of the labour force and the accompanying shrinking of trade union membership and activity have gone together.

The old world was very far from perfect. But the mills provided lifetime jobs and often a house (sometimes even, as in Saltaire, lots of community facilities). The 'new' pit villages in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire provided lifetime jobs for the men and modern National Coal Board-owned housing estates for their families (and indeed the Miners Welfare). Lots of working class men and in many areas women too had specialist lifetime skills that gave their lives security and status. There were strong social structures, not always benign but usually supportive, and extended families for support. And local services were at a human scale (bobby on the beat, street sweeper with his bin on wheels, parks staff, meals on wheels, doctors and district nurses who were there for decades, teachers who had taught your mum and dad).

The dramatic growth of the private rented housing sector has taken place at a time when security of tenure has become a joke, with 'assured shorthold tenancies' on a six-month basis becoming the norm. Like the employer-employee 'contract', the landlord-tenant relationship is fundamentally one-sided. Individual tenants are at the mercy of landlords who can effectively charge as much as the market will bear (bearing in mind the prevailing local level of housing benefit). As with employment law, there is a large amount of regulation, notably of the condition of housing, but it's been relaxed considerable in the past 30-40 years with the deregulation of rents and the removal of effective security of tenure beyond the short term. For most of the last century the proportion of housing in the private rented sector fell. It is now rising again.

Again, there are many people renting in the luxury sector who are capable of looking after themselves. That is not the case in the vast majority of older 'cheaper' privately rented housing, including the scandal of former right-to-buy houses and flats on present and former council estates.

Tenants are often afraid to report defects to landlords or 'complain' to local authorities for fear of eviction. The councils have reduced their housing standards staff in the face of austerity cutbacks in their funding.

By contrast most owner-occupiers control the housing in which they live (some leaseholders have problems). Council housing grew in quantity between the wars and up to the 1980s as a replacement for the private sector, and in spite of some problems caused by the

imposition of centralised design ‘solutions’ by central government was in general a huge success. The landlords were accountable public bodies and, while many were not perfect (!), the new estates transformed the quality of life for millions of families and gave them financial and physical security.

Most funding streams for new developments, together with the Labour Government bullying and bribing councils to carry out large-scale stock transfers, have resulted in much social housing (as it is now unfortunately called) being taken under the ownership of housing associations.

Originally conceived as locally controlled human-scale schemes, housing associations have grown and grown and most of their property is now controlled by a relatively few bodies which are effectively large non-profit-making housing companies. Often there is less control for tenants though they still have public sector levels of security of tenancy, themselves now in decline.

As jobs and housing for life (or at least for rearing families) have become increasingly rare, and social change has resulted in the fragmentation and repeated reorganisation of families during people’s lifetimes (in terms of both partners and extended family support) people have had to cope with more and more interactions with state and other bureaucracies.

For instance, systems of benefits and employment support that were set up with the best of intentions result in people being trapped in ever more complex regulations and the threat of sanctions at the hands of officials driven by malign targets.

At the same time national austerity drives have resulted in huge cuts to funding of local authorities and other service-providing bodies, now including supposedly protected sectors such as the NHS, schools and the police. This results in people’s reasonable expectations being blocked and local services such as libraries and bus services closing down, not to mention social care and physical support, with no apparent means of affecting the outcomes.

The bodies simply say: “Sorry but it’s all due to government cuts in our funding”, and the old local democracy in which elected persons assessed one provision against another falls by the wayside.

More democratic decay has followed the progressive increase in size of local authorities with amalgamations into huge unitary councils and elected mayors imposed for impossibly large and often arbitrary city regions and now even far-flung counties. Bureaucracies such as the NHS see a procession of reorganisations taking place in obscurity and with again no real means by which 99.9% of citizens can exercise any influence or control of any kind.

All this means there are fewer local councillors. Council offices and call-in centres are being closed down and replaced by digital services in which process is all and discussion impossible, and the numbers of people operating on the ground (neighbourhood police, information centres, parks attendants, town centre staff, care workers, vicars) are shrinking year by year. The people in the system that individuals know and can talk to about things get fewer and fewer and the organisations physically more and more remote. And proper local newspapers are becoming a thing of the past.

This kind of picture, of the increasing powerlessness of individual people, is true in many varying ways in all kinds of areas. Big cities, large and smaller towns, industrial and rural villages.

SCALE OF DECAY

The scale of the decay of protections and the dismantling of local democracy varies from place to place, from industry to industry and community to community. But the direction of change is all-pervasive. And while the systems were the systems, and only changed radically as a result of decisions made by the people running them, local and national politicians and departments, and the occasional upheaval (notably the two world wars and some really big changes such as the NHS, big planning decisions such as the new towns, slum clearance and redevelopment...) individual people were able to relate to the new circumstances in ways that gave them a real feeling of control over their own individual lives and those of their families.

Now a lot more young people can escape as individuals and pursue their lives through the education system and beyond. In lots of working class areas, smaller towns and rural communities, a majority of the most successful students have always gone away to pursue their careers and lives. What has happened in the past 60 years is that the number of young people able to do this has progressively increased. The grammar schools of the 1950s liberated perhaps 5% of such pupils. Now it may be around a third to a half in some places. The left behind really are left behind.

Of course everyone now has access to electronic wizardry that, it is pretended, liberates their lives. But it’s becoming ever more clear that the big internet companies are about control rather than liberation. And from the back streets of Liverpool to the African steppes the new devices show people how their more successful peers are supposedly living – even if it’s not all true. Inequality has increased in many ways: the real change is that it is much more obvious to everyone.

It seems to me that if Liberals and the Liberal Democrats have a new role to play in line with our historic mission, it is to tackle these unequal power relationships. To develop policies and build a political movement which sets out to tackle and reform these fundamental inequalities; to work with people to gain the real freedoms within communities which are at the heart of our party constitution.

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

SELLING BRITAIN BY THE POUND

There is much talk about trade deals with the USA and China saving the UK economy after Brexit. Beware, both would be dangerous, says Dave Raval

There's been a lot of talk recently of how leaving the EU single market will allow us to strike trade deals with other countries, like the USA, China and Australia. But look into the detail: in many cases, these are actually the last things we'd want. Let me explain why.

Firstly, most people mistakenly think that trade deals are about customs tariffs. And they were - in the 19th and for some of the 20th centuries. But not so much today. I run a UK business and we export to the USA. The customs fee levied by the USA on our products is nil. Zero. Zip. Nada. Nothing. Sure, that's not true for all products, but it is for the majority of direct sales. The truth is that we already live in a very low tariff world, at least between western nations.

Trade deals these days are much more about product and standards harmonisation. You know, so a car made in Sunderland can drive in Germany without having local officials say it needs to meet special German rules, an architect from Bath can work in Milan without having to pass local qualifications, a Polish government contract has to be offered in a way that a company in Wales has an equal chance of winning it and so forth.

This, by the way, is why trade deals take so many years, decades sometimes, as everyone has to agree to common standards across a huge array of different products and services.

So do we want a trade deal with the USA? We came close to it, via the EU/US TTIP, last year. But it fell not least because the public in the UK, France and Germany was aghast.

Have you seen US food safety standards, or animal welfare - much lower than ours, and they wanted to sell us that food.

Have you seen the way that US private companies dominate their healthcare system - they wanted those companies to provide much more of ours too.

RACE TO THE BOTTOM

Do you fear US environmental standards will decline under Trump? Trade deals can risk a race to the bottom on standards and, even if that's resisted, the lack of a level playing field means that UK exporters (who have to pay carbon taxes or put schemes in place to reduce pollution and waste) will be at a cost disadvantage to US competition.

Perhaps most worryingly, have you seen how US corporations wanted to be able to sue EU governments, like they already can in other places where the US has a trade agreement? The system is called 'investor-state dispute settlement', and companies like ExxonMobil and Philip Morris have already

won millions in compensation for decisions made by democratically-elected governments; you know, like how plain cigarette packaging reduces their sales so they should be compensated. Do we really want to tie the hands of future UK governments when it comes to enforcing their democratic mandate? How is that 'taking back control'?

Moreover, it's worth thinking why the USA might want a trade deal with us. Obama said we were at the back of the queue, but that was because he wanted a deal with the EU. Now Trump seems to indicate we're at the front.

Why? Well I am not going to second guess anything that Trump believes in, but one clue might be to look at our balance of trade with the USA. Amazingly, we have a surplus with them - we sell more to the USA than the other way around. That's particularly surprising, since overall in the world, the UK has a deficit with almost everyone of any size.

Now let's also remember that Trump has said that it's "America First". Do you think, if we sign a trade deal, that he's going to rush back to the mid-West industrial belt and proclaim the joyous news that his first trade deal will be to allow us to sell even more to the USA? Somehow, I doubt it; I suspect his motivations are at least in part to reduce the deficit with the UK.

Now that's not all bad, trade can be a virtuous circle. But you have to question the wisdom of the UK government of pursuing this as their first objective. It may make sense politically to help to hold the Conservative party together, but it doesn't make sense for UK plc nor our citizens.

In short, when the UK public sees whatever deal Liam Fox puts together with Trump, they will want to run a mile. We need to move away from the lazy journalism that has predominated recently, suggesting that a US-UK trade deal is something we would all love, and start to expose it for what it really is.

Well what about China? That's another place that is high on the prime minister's hit list. It's quite a different case. Firstly, we do have tariffs with them, yes, and for good reasons.

Remember Port Talbot, the Welsh steelworks? My company buys steel made there. Port Talbot was threatened with closure in 2016 because we allowed China to dump cheap (below cost) steel into Europe. There was an outcry, and the EU was blamed for not being tough enough! Well fair cop, the EU wasn't (our Government was part of the reason, by blocking any increases in barriers) but then the EU changed and raised barriers to prevent the dumping of cheap steel. Better late than never. And, surprise surprise (not),

Port Talbot is now making a profit and no one is talking about closing it down any more.

There was a pension shortfall, but now that the steel works are profitable again, both sides found the will to find an agreement on pensions. Pensions were never really the top issue actually, it was that Welsh steel cost more to make than dumped Chinese steel.

This is encapsulated in the argument as to whether China is a 'market economy' (as opposed to one where the government interferes a lot, for example by building lots of factories which cause overcapacity, or by interfering in the price of something to protect local jobs, or through currency manipulation).

Both the EU and the USA regularly sue China for exporting products below cost, on anything from washing machines, to plywood, to steel. There is likely to be a long-drawn battle about all of this at the World Trade Organisation court in Geneva, starting this year and probably lasting years.

Of course, there are two sides to this argument. One could argue that super cheap washing machines are good for the UK as our consumers will have more money to spend on something else. David Cameron and George Osborne made these types of arguments about China when they were in power. On the other hand, if washing machines are being sold at below cost, thanks to Chinese government intervention, then it's going to be very hard for UK manufacturers to survive - our government is unlikely to lend a helping hand - and our industry will decline. This type of argument is as old as trade itself. But however economic experts might argue about the pros and cons of each, we know that ordinary voters at the moment are in no mood to sacrifice local jobs to foreigners.

Then of course, many of the issues I talked about with regard to the USA also apply to China: food safety standards, animal welfare, environmental and pollution legislation, for example. We won't do a very good job of tackling climate change by insisting our industry increases its costs to reduce pollution, but then allow Chinese companies to export the same goods to us, without bothering. That's just called carbon exporting.

BASIS OF POWER

We should also be careful not to over-estimate how much power our Government will have in its dealings with large countries like the USA and China. Trade deals are negotiated on the basis of power, and the size of the market opportunities are key. All other things being equal, the potential upside for companies in a small market to access a large market are much bigger than the other way around.

But the large markets know that, and their governments play tough. Of course the EU, with 500m consumers, is the world's largest market. The UK is a little over 10% of that. So we will always be much weaker in negotiating alone with China or the USA than if we negotiated together with the other 27 members of the EU. The flip side is that we'll probably be faster. But at what cost? Switzerland, a

“When the UK public sees whatever deal Liam Fox puts together with Trump, they will want to run a mile”

non-EU member, signed a trade deal with China in 2013. Switzerland, a small country, was a rule-taker: they had to reduce tariffs immediately while China can wait 15 years to reciprocate. The deal was also only in sectors that China wanted – not, for example, in financial services, which the

Swiss are strong at. This compares unfavourably to trade deals signed by the EU, where the deals are comprehensive in scope, covering trade in both goods and services.

Finally, Australia. Yes, I'd be happy to have a trade deal with them. Their population is about double the size of Belgium. So yes please, not huge but nice to have. But not at the expense of losing deals with 27 countries in Europe.

And this is the madness. Being a member of the single market in Europe brings decades of product and regulation harmonisation that really works very well. And it's free trade. Yet we're being told we need to swap it... for this? What a terrible deal. Don't be hood-winked, these sorts of trade deals are unlikely to be in the interest of the UK public. They will probably mainly benefit multinational corporations who can increase their profits by lowering standards and having more power over democratically-elected governments. They will probably also increase our balance of trade deficit. We should be vigilant; Theresa May is under pressure to sign trade deals with major powers to show the success of Brexit. The British people need to wake up from their ignorance and realise that their jobs, livelihoods and public services are at stake.

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A VOTE FOR A DELUSION

Leave voters who think they have made Britain a global player again are in for a shock, says Paul Hindley

In May 1945, after almost six years of struggle, Britain triumphed on the continent. The Second World War in Europe was over. Nazi Germany had been defeated in part due to Britain's tenacity to keep the flame of freedom burning when it had faded across Europe. Alongside the United States, Britain's armies had fought their way right into the heart of Hitler's Reich. The future for Britain seemed truly great.

The future however was not to be great for Britain, it was to be very difficult. Britain had entered into the Second World War as a leading superpower; arguably the most powerful country in the world.

By 1945, it had fallen behind the rising superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. Britain's economy was in tatters, austerity ridden and dependent on loans from the Americans. Britain's industry and major cities had literally been reduced to rubble. The empire which had dominated much of the world since the days of Napoleon was beginning to collapse. Even Winston Churchill was decisively rejected by his people.

Since 1945 Britain and its establishment have been looking back to the past. To a lost golden age of global leadership, economic might, cultural influence and military supremacy. To our 'finest hour'. This nostalgia has informed many on the right of politics, who believe that one day Britain will be great again.

However the mentality on continental Europe has been the opposite. The Europeans were made to look forward because their past was so terrible to look back on. The need to preserve peace and to ensure vital economic links between the nations of Europe is what forged the EU. The hope therefore being that a Third World War would not be ignited on the continent of Europe as had happened twice in the 20th century.

The truth is that national sovereignty has been under attack for many years, but not from the EU. Financial instability, international crime, global inequality, corporate power, the internet and the threat of climate change are eroding the sovereignty of all nations. The irony is that the EU as a collective of 28 nation states is one of the few effective mechanisms to counteract the negative aspects of globalisation. However despite this, the nostalgic notions of regaining Britain's 'independence' and "taking back control" ultimately propelled the Leave campaign to victory in the EU Referendum last year.

POST-IMPERIAL DELUSION

Theresa May's hard Brexit vision of a 'Global Britain' has more than a subtle ring of the British Empire about it. It plays into the post-imperial delusion that Britain is still a global power (or could be once again). This nostalgic sense of British exceptionalism has helped to create hard Brexit Britain. Many Leave voters blamed Britain's woes on Europe, immigration

and globalisation. Some echoed the belief that Britain would be great again without the EU.

Global Britain relies on May's government forging new trade deals with countries around the world, namely America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and India. An informal empire of global trade, global business and global leadership. With many potential trade partners having gained independence from Global Britain MK I, it is unlikely that they will make Global Britain MK II particularly easy for the former mother country.

Global Britain is a nonsense that belongs in the 19th century. While Britain may no longer be a superpower; the EU is an economic superpower. Its economy is bigger than China's even without the UK.

If we were going into trade talks with China there would be no illusion over who would held the upper hand. However in trade talks with Europe, the British government is deluded enough to think it can blackmail a superpower by threatening to turn Britain into a tax haven. This is the same kind of delusional exceptionalism which led Britain into the disastrous Suez Crisis in 1956, a national humiliation which ended Britain's global power status once and for all.

There is no current precedent for a tax haven the size of Britain. Britain's population and economy dwarfs all tax havens. Britain is neither an ultra-efficient, hi-tech city state like Hong Kong or Singapore, nor a small offshore island like the Isle of Man, the Cayman Islands or the Virgin Islands.

Will even a Conservative government slash corporate taxes at a time when the NHS is stretched to breaking point? Left behind communities that voted Leave did not do so in the expectation of seeing a right-wing libertarian Brexit that serves the global corporate elites.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of modern trade deals. Reducing tariff barriers is only one aspect of trade deals. Much of the negotiation focuses on establishing common standards as the foundation for trading goods between nations.

Brexit supporters emphasise the need to free Britain from the European Court of Justice. However, modern trade deals need a legal framework to enforce the common trading standards between the nations involved. Global Britain's post-Brexit trade deals would require similar international legal frameworks.

VULGAR HASTE

Even before Global Britain has got off the ground, May has shown the fundamental weakness in her strategy through her relationship with Donald Trump. The vulgar haste that the prime minister showed in rushing to meet the new president and offer him a state visit showed Britain to be in a desperate position. Trump literally wrote the book on how to conduct a ruthless business deal. Britain starts from a position of weakness and now the whole world knows it.

Trump is no liberal-minded free trader as shown through his mantra of "America first". That same slogan was used by protectionists and isolationists during the 1940s. There are notable risks with doing a trade deal with Trump. America's trading standards could come into conflict with

European trading standards and this would complicate any deal with the EU. Britain's bargaining power will be severely weakened outside the EU and this could result in an unfavourable deal that jeopardises the NHS.

It is utterly shameful the degree to which Theresa May has decided to bow down to demagogues and dictators around the world, all in the pursuit of those elusive post-Brexit trade deals.

Britain is in danger of becoming the client state of an American demagogue. The British establishment continues to venerate the so-called 'special relationship'. America has many special relationships around the world with countries such as Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, South Korea and Japan. We are not America's closest ally. We are one of several close allies to the US. We must not be deluded enough to think otherwise.

Britain in the 21st century will never be truly global. We need to let go of the post-imperial delusions that imply that we must be so. The imperial golden age has long since faded. It wasn't particularly golden for women, the working classes, ethnic minorities or LGBT people. We do not hear similar delusions from other European countries who were former colonial empires. There's no talk of the Global Netherlands, Global Spain or Global Germany, the latter for obvious historical reasons. Even France understands the vital role that it can play as a leader of Europe. Only superpowers like America and China can be global

"We could stand as equals with Germany, France and Italy. Hard Brexit has cast us adrift from Europe and from reality"

in the 21st century. Sadly, the Leave vote was not a vote to make Britain into a global superpower; it was a vote to walk away from a superpower and Britain's potential global influence.

It used to be said that "Britain has lost an empire, but not yet found a role".

But our membership of the EU offered us a leadership

role across the continent. Now we don't even have that anymore. Britain isn't global, we have limited standing in the world outside the EU. America's being run by a demagogue and many Commonwealth countries are illiberal, undemocratic and have appalling human rights records. With America we will always be the junior partner, but with Europe we could stand as equals with Germany, France and Italy. Hard Brexit has cast us adrift from Europe and from reality.

A victory of 52% to 48% is a marginal victory; it is no landslide. Hard Brexit has no democratic mandate. There is no mandate to leave the single market, Euratom or potentially even the European Convention on Human Rights.

The only way Britain can still be great after Brexit is to remain in the European Single Market. An EFTA-style soft Brexit (the so-called Norway model) is the only form of Brexit that is viable for our economy and for our standing in the world. Even this soft Brexit is inferior to our current membership of the EU.

Hopefully, one day Britain will be in a position where it can choose to re-join the EU. Only then will Britain be able to recognise the responsibility it has to be a leader of Europe. But this will not happen until Britain relinquishes its post-imperial delusions of global grandeur.

Paul Hindley is a council member of the Social Liberal Forum

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THE TINKERBELL APPROACH TO POLITICS

Liberals must take head-on the idea that complex problems can be solved by clapping our hands and shouting slogans, says Roger Hayes

Do you remember the scene in Peter Pan, after Captain Hook poisons Tinkerbell?

Her light flickering and fading and Peter pleads with the audience, “We must do something or she’ll die. Clap your hands! Clap your hands and shout, I believe in fairies!”

I remember going with my sister when we were small children and clapping and shouting for all we were worth. And do you know what? It worked. Miraculously, Tinkerbell’s light came back and she lived. With our simple enthusiasm and innocent belief, we saved her life. Now, 60 years later, seemingly half the world is transfixed by childish beliefs that all our complex problems can be solved by clapping our hands and shouting slogans.

This young century has already seen many momentous events, but three have shaken our world. All were foreseeable and avoidable, indeed some of us did foresee them and argued for their avoidance. Sadly, our global masters had other ideas and we now find ourselves in the nightmarish grip of an alt-right universe. Common sense and common decency have been replaced with hate and fear and foolish wishful thinking. Our inter-dependent worldwide society finds itself caught in some fanciful ‘duck-and-cover’ exercise as if there is one simple cause, needing the application of one simple solution. And anyone who disagrees is shouted at and bullied for “denying the will of the people”.

The modern equivalent of believing in fairies seems to be, wearing a silly hat and shouting about hating foreigners. Then Trump and Putin and May will bravely ride to our aid like the poor defenceless children they believe us to be (and sadly so many behave like) and after this awfully big adventure, all will be great again.

Liberal Democrats have a unique take on the catastrophes so dramatically changing our world for the worst. We have been proved right before and if we are bold and hold our nerve history will prove us right again.

The options have never been more compelling; more potentially rewarding, or disastrous if missed. I firmly believe the next few years will either herald the dawn of the liberal millennium or the autocratic apocalypse – choose sides.

I’m sure you know the three great events to which I referred.

The first was the horrendous, illegal, Iraq war. From the lies about WMD; to the deceit that a ‘war on terrorism’ could even be waged let alone won; the proven conceit of Blair and Bush that led directly to the death of hundreds of thousands of innocent

people and the ruination of the lives of millions more; and spawned the rise of Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and their vile corruption of Islam to perpetrate worldwide terrorism.

INCENDIARY MIX

The fame-hungry, jingoistic Tories in both Labour and Conservatives parties, proved just the incendiary mix needed to set a fire that may yet prove impossible to extinguish. Only the Liberal Democrats stood out against that wicked war and, 15 years later, only the Liberal Democrats offer a credible analysis, a consistent opposition and a meaningful alternative to the continuing calamity.

The second was that in 2007-08 a handful of sharp minds foresaw the scale and scandal of the global financial crash. Clear thinking Lib Dems have consistently offered an alternative economic plan to combat an uncertain future. But know-it-all Tories and know-nothing Labour have between them failed to act and failed to regulate, letting discredited bankers off the hook and all the while hoping they’ll get away with more of the same helpless platitudes. As the multi-millionaire bankers laugh all the way to their offshore tax havens, the rest of us have been thrown into endless austerity, punishing young and elderly alike, and forcing one essential public service after another into life-threatening crisis.

And now, the current spectre threatening everyone’s future forever, is the daily post-truth madness of brainless Brexit. Once again, the voice in the wilderness, the only clear and sane opposition, is the Liberal Democrats.

This latest crisis is likely to result in the worst of all worlds with repercussions lasting for generations. A fudged compromise of befuddled thinking that will please no-one with the potential not just to wreck the fragile recovery of the British economy, but to drag down many others with it.

These shenanigans create a firestorm sucking in resources, draining the government’s ability to cope and adds fuel to reignite those earlier crises reinforcing the maddening belief that everything is still wrong and that ‘experts’ and foreigners are once again to blame.

It is jaw-dropping therefore to see the official opposition completely give up. They have joined in this gutless chorus of, “respect the will of the British people”. We must all now vote to leave the EU – the people have spoken. Have they buggery.

The 17,410,742 had any number of reasons to vote Leave. However, even had they all spoken with a single voice, the undeniable fact is they do not constitute ‘the people’

- ☛ there are 64 million in the UK so 17.4m is about 27%
- ☛ of those who voted, only a narrow majority voted to leave;
- ☛ the vast majority of young people (75%), and many more among those denied a vote, see the world far more positively;
- ☛ one-off Brexit voters are losing interest and Ukip is collapsing;
- ☛ the case for a second referendum is gaining traction;

we must continue to campaign and demonstrate strength of feeling.

We were consistently lied to by the Leave campaign and continue to be so. Some have even shamelessly admitted as much. The Remain campaign was dreadfully mishandled, but that does not excuse the blatant whoppers perpetrated by the Europhobes. We must continue to challenge the enemies of truth:

- ☛ alt-right lies – Farage, Gove and cronies will say whatever nonsense they think the great mass of the people will swallow and then thrash around hurling insults when we don't believe them;
- ☛ right-wing press barons – Dacre, Murdoch, et al are the puppet-masters in this macabre ballet, feeding lines to their political stooges and serving up their unsubstantiated fake news;
- ☛ possibly the worst offenders, because they really ought to know better, is the mainstream media, including the BBC, endlessly giving voice to this nonsense.

FEARING THE TRUTH

Only the guilty fear the truth. We must debate and challenge wrong-headed thinking wherever we find it. It might seem elitist to talk things through with people, but I have to believe that most people are good and want to do the right thing.

It can never be the role of liberals to stand meekly by, or follow the herd. When recently confronted by a Leaver who told me, "The people have spoken, you want to thwart our democratic decision", my reaction was, "Damn right I do." Democracy isn't a one-off deal. I want to challenge everything people think. There will never be a day when our work is done, when we can put our feet up having ticked everything off the list.

I have spent my entire adult life arguing that things could be better, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so. But regardless of the outcome of any one campaign we keep putting the arguments, keep trying to persuade and convince. And always the best way of making an impact is to find others to take up the charge, share the burden and further the cause. The European debate has been a recruiting sergeant like no other for us and if the quality of those stepping up where you are is as good as it is for us in Kingston, then you will make a real difference. Gradually, we can become the real opposition and from there we can go on to return open and tolerant power to the people.

A core vote is now essential, and building it will take time. For a while, that may mean saving our deposit in seats like Copeland and Stoke Central is the best we can hope for as we haul our way back. Our sensational run in council by-elections shows what is possible and the magnificent Sarah Olney will be seen as the

turning of the tide for years to come.

But let's not kid ourselves, however well we do, there is unlikely to be a sea-change at the next general election.

So please, no more doubting our ability, no more pale imitations. I find it embarrassing that More United backed a Brexit supporter in Stoke where Labour ran a Ukip-lookalike campaign to grubbily save its skin. Open Britain are just as bad, hailing Blair as the born-again leader – good grief has it come to this?

We can have nothing to do with Blair's attempts at rehabilitation. We cannot be seduced or distracted by these groups that seek to appeal to everyone but will ultimately let everyone down. They are the antithesis of building a core vote. This is the saviour myth – no one is coming to save us. We must do it for ourselves.

I may not live to see the benefits, but there should be no more short-termism, no attempts at short-cuts. Consistent, coherent, values-based messaging and evidence-based liberal policy, promoted through pluralist campaigns supported by our parliamentarians and countrywide activists. Our direct, community campaigning can help grow the 48% into the 52% and more. We will then be able to say it's so because we will have made it so. The alternative is to watch the herd of wrong-headed MPs chiselling chilling slogans at St Stephen's gate: Community, Identity, Stability – Strength through joy – Big Sister is watching you (and reading your emails).

Now must be our time. We have waited long enough, we cannot wait any longer. We must create a new narrative; giving confidence to the fair-minded, decent majority to speak up, say what they believe and stand up for what is right. Together we can build and spread popular liberalism to replace popular hate.

Labour may be failing miserably, but the Tories are doing really quite well, scoring regularly at an open goal. Ukip may be disappearing into irrelevance, but the Lib Dem fight back is patchy – some great by-election results and a growing membership but still much to do and a long way to travel.

So, if you are fed up of this maddening, dangerous world, then do something about it – write in – stand up – speak out – and find others to join in. This should be a young people's revolution shaping the future. There should be student campaign kits for schools, colleges and universities; young workers campaign kits for apprentices, graduates and interns; campaign kits for farmers, for doctors, for shop workers, for air traffic controllers, for homeworkers and home-makers, for the unemployed and for the retired. Everyone has a role to play and voice to be heard.

Liberals lead. So decide today, make it different – make it better – make it count – make it yours – make it real – make it last – make me proud.

Roger Hayes is a former Liberal Democrat leader of Kingston-upon-Thames Council

THE FORGOTTEN SOUTH SEEKS A VOICE

Not everyone in the south is rich, and its poorer inhabitants were once an important part of the Lib Dem vote - don't write them off after the referendum, urges Matthew Huntbach

Growing up on a council estate in Sussex in the 1970s, neither of the two main political parties seemed to know or care about people like my family. The Conservative Party then, as now, was the party of wealthy people, its politicians then as now had little idea about the challenges one faces if one does not have large amounts of money and high-level contacts.

The Labour Party then seemed to be largely concerned with the northern working class, people working in heavy industry with strong trade unions, and to have little idea about the challenges if you were working in the sort of small company that predominated in the south, where it is much more difficult to have effective trade unions.

While the idea of Labour as the party of the working class had not gone it was certainly weak. Some people in the area would vote Labour because they felt that Labour was the party that would speak up for people like them. Many, however, felt there was little difference between Labour and Conservative, and would end up voting Conservative not because they thought the Conservatives had any interest or concern about people like us, but because they felt Labour was no better.

POWERFUL APPEAL

Another reason why southern working-class people would vote Conservative is conservatism. It is often forgotten how powerful is the appeal of keeping things the same. It has a particularly powerful appeal to those who feel their life is uncertain, who worry about the future.

This is rational. If you feel you know how to manage your life because you are familiar with how things around you work, but politics is run by people who have little knowledge or concern for you, you may prefer politicians who at least are not going to change things much. You will be worried about politicians who seem to be mainly concerned with making changes that to you will lead to a world where you have less control over your life because it is not the world you are familiar with.

There were plenty of Labour MPs from working-class backgrounds in the 1970s, but in almost all cases they were northerners (in Sussex by that term we would include the Midlands). With the electoral system meaning there were almost no Labour MPs representing the south outside London, northern accents were heard in politics, but southern working class accents (quite distinct from what northerners tend to regard as 'southern' which is what southerners would call 'posh') were never heard. They still aren't.

What has happened since then is that the collapse of heavily unionised industry, the move of the Labour Party away from being purely the political voice of the Trade Union movement, and the growth of politics as a profession, has led to the disconnection with all party politics that we in the southern working class felt then becoming more predominant elsewhere.

Going to university, I experienced another off-putting aspect of the Labour Party, the sort of intellectual socialist type, whose left-wing political idealism seemed to be more about striking a pose, than the reasons I might have supported Labour.

Such people often had as little idea as Conservatives about the challenges that real working-class people faced. There was always some feeling that the Labour Party had aspects like this in the south, where it had less of the trade union background. Again, that feeling now seems to have become more universal.

It was in the 1970s that the Liberal Party had started to expand, in the south-east as well as its traditional stronghold in the south-west. The disconnection between the southern working class and the Labour Party was shown by the way the 1974 general election resulted in the Liberal Party becoming the second placed party to the Conservative in much of the south. The connection of the Labour with northern-based trade unionism was a strong theme in that election, it had little appeal to working-class southerners. Behind the growth of the Liberal Party in the south-east, however, was also a new style of campaigning termed 'community politics'.

It was a combination of having experienced a little of the Liberal Party's community politics approach in my home county, and the arrogance and disconnectedness from people like me of those at university who called themselves socialists, that led me to join the Liberals.

The Liberal Party seemed to me to be down-to-earth, and I saw a huge potential in the community politics approach to get working class people in the south to break away from their alienation with politics and to challenge the dominance of the Conservatives.

Another major aspect that led me to support the Liberal Party was its support for proportional representation. This would end the situation whereby the southern working class were rendered invisible by the way the distortion of first-past-the-post meant almost every Parliamentary seat in the south went to the Conservatives.

To me, community politics would work for disadvantaged people in the south in a way that trade union based politics could not where most people work in jobs where it is difficult to have effective trade unions. Community politics involved everyone,

not just predominantly male workers in heavy industry (as the trade union movement still seemed to be about in the 1970s).

The basis of community politics was to get people to think about political issues by not being politics as it is conventionally seen. Start with issues of immediate concern, fairly small issues that may seem trivial to outsiders, but which mean a lot to locals. Use discussion of these issues to introduce wider themes, and develop a better understanding of how things work in the world. Get people to be actively involved in discussion of these issues. This was revolutionary compared to the conventional model of politics as being about national parties building a national image and selling it to voters as passive consumers.

The classic image of a 'southerner' is a wealthy person living in a big house with a top job in London, applies to a much smaller proportion of the south than tends to be supposed. It was starting at the other end of the scale that enabled the Liberals to build up strength in the south, winning particularly in the less affluent parts which had little in the way of a Labour Party to compete with.

I bring this up now because this aspect of the foundation of the Liberal Democrats seems in danger of being forgotten. Indeed, I have sometimes been struck by discussions in the party in which the sort of ward that once would have been considered a prime target for the party is now written off as the sort of ward not worth bothering with: it is, instead, abandoned to Ukip to be the main challenger to the political establishment.

A glance at the EU referendum results show that it is quite often places that were once the core of Liberal Democrat strength in the south where the Leave vote was highest. Does that mean that we as "the party of the 48%" as some would have it, are right to abandon these areas?

I do not think so. As I have said, the reason the Liberals were successful in these places, the feeling that the Labour Party was as remote from their interests as the Conservatives, now applies across the north as well as the south.

Much of the discussion about the referendum result has a tendency to talk about a north-south divide, when it is actually a class divide. As ever, the working class in the south are invisible, left out of the discussion. The idea that the south consists mainly of 'liberal elite' types who voted Remain is wrong.

Despite their history as the party of the working class in the south, Liberal Democrats have generally disliked talking in terms of class. To me, this is as foolish as tackling racial inequality by never talking about race. In the 1970s it did at least seem that class division was shrinking and we were becoming a more equal country. The election of the Thatcher government reversed this, and class inequality has grown. How strange it is that this should be accompanied by the suggestion that talking about social class in politics is somehow outdated?

“Liberal Democrats have generally disliked talking in terms of class. To me, this is as foolish as tackling racial inequality by never talking about race”

I do not believe that people who voted Leave in the referendum because they feel they lack control over their lives - and I think that applies to most Leave voters - should be abandoned by the Liberal Democrats. After all, isn't control over one's life a core aspect of what liberalism should be about?

We need to do for these people what we did in the past: offer them a new hope,

and show we are on their side. An aspect of that is actively showing them how membership of the EU is not the source of their woe.

EXTREME FREE MARKETEERS

Indeed, it is clear to me that the EU referendum was pushed and the Leave campaign funded by extreme free marketeers to cover up the reality: that for most people their politics has delivered the opposite of what they claimed it would do. Membership of the EU was cynically held up to blame for people's feeling of loss of control that in reality stems from the privatisation and shift of control to international big business that flows from Thatcherism and has been a core aspect of every government since 1979.

The Leave campaign worked on the feelings that make people small-c conservatives, while not acknowledging that the destruction of so much that people remember with affection, and have been fooled into thinking that leaving the EU will revive, comes down to Thatcherism.

Thatcherism has not delivered the home-owning shareholding democracy that was promised. Quite obviously, owning shares, directly or indirectly through pension funds and the like gives us no real control over the way things are run. We are now seeing home ownership decline, and without the alternative of low-cost council housing available to ordinary people.

Again, the view of the south that tends to come in political discussions, of people happily living in large houses, ignores the reality of poorer people, who are suffering greatly from house costs rising beyond their reach.

As I said, I grew up on a council estate, and living in a council house gave immense freedom to my family that the current generation of parents with children do not have. Lack of secure housing and having to pay huge amounts in mortgage or rent for private accommodation is a severe restriction on freedom.

Talking to people in the south now reveals to me, as it always did, that there are far fewer who are as committed to the Conservative Party than voting figures might suggest. The Labour Party is as irrelevant to them as ever. Tragically, it seems to me that too many in the Liberal Democrats want the party to go down a route that makes them irrelevant as well.

Matthew Huntbach is a former Liberal Democrat councillor in Lewisham

FRANCE HOLDS ITS BREATH

Can Marine Le Pen be kept from the French presidency? Marianne Magnin explains the role French liberals have chosen to play in least predictable presidential election for many years

Unlike the UK, France is regulated by a constitution, which stands above treaties, laws and regulations. Since 1789, France has gone through five republics, two monarchies, two empires and one dictatorship. More than 200 years of trials, coups and failures have shaped the current 15th constitution. The fifth republic is an unusual hybrid parliamentary and presidential regime. Established as a classic parliamentary regime back in 1958, De Gaulle, informed by the governmental instability of the past then pushed for a strong presidential system through the 1962 referendum.

This regime dictates that the president is directly elected via the so-called universal suffrage, and that there is a strong separation of powers in favour of the president insofar as he/she appoints on his/her own terms the prime minister, can directly consult the people and has the authority to dissolve the lower chamber amongst other powers.

The President resides at Élysée Palace and the prime minister at the Matignon Palace, both legacies of France pre-revolutionary times.

Like in the UK, there are two chambers to pass legislation and scrutinise policies and the government's actions: the National Assembly, equivalent to the House of Commons, and the Senate, equivalent to the House of Lords, though there are no life peers.

The 348 senators are appointed by the 'Grands Électeurs' (mostly regional and mayoral delegates), with half the house renewed every three years for six years.

The president and assembly are elected every five years, back to back. There has only been one occasion when the president dissolved the assembly before its term and lost his majority: Chirac did so in 1997 and had to appoint socialist Lionel Jospin as his prime minister – a period known as cohabitation.

The 577 deputies (equivalent to MPs) are directly elected according to the majority vote with no proportionality. However there are two rounds, whereby unless a candidate gathers more than 25% of the registered votes, the candidates having obtained 12.5 % (usually two candidates, but three or four are possible) reach the second round.

A further difference with the UK system is that French citizens residing abroad are represented by 11 deputies. The UK is part of the third constituency Northern Europe, which also covers the Republic of Ireland, Nordic countries, Denmark and the Baltic states. 2017 will be the second time French residents in the UK can vote to elect their parliamentary

representative. The next general elections are taking place from end of April to mid June 2017.

The parties landscape is more fragmented than in the UK. The number of presidential candidates was respectively 16, 12 and 10 in 2002, 2007 and 2012 whilst the 2017 list is not finalised.

The partisan spectrum between PS and LR has historically been pro-Europe. There are some nuances however as to the level, speed and nature of integration.

Due to the lack of proportionality echoing the UK context, the executive and parliamentary powers have so far been monopolised by the main left (PS) and right parties (LR) with some regular alternation.

Semi-proportionality was introduced to local and European elections, but not to the two flagship presidential and parliamentary elections. This blocked situation, in addition to the electoral map contouring in a similarly unrepresentative way, unmet promises and scandals tainting the political establishment, has led to the increasing disenchantment of citizens towards their political institutions.

This distrust translates into absenteeism, sanctioning votes (against the outgoing representative) and, even more concerning for democracy, into extremist votes. The later symptom explains the steady growth of Front National and far left figureheads such as Mélançon, whereby the vote is no longer part of a rational choice informing the democratic game but instead driven by the wish to oust the system at all price.

It is a recent trend for French parties to organise open primaries for the presidential elections. A hard lesson was learnt back in 2002 when a fragmented left led by Lionel Jospin did not reach the second round, leaving Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen to fight it.

BANANA REPUBLIC

Chirac may have won with a banana republic score (82%), but only because of the 'front républicain' reflex, when a vast majority of voters decided to protect the Republic from the far right despite their possible personal leanings towards left. The PS organised its first primary five years ago. This term, LR and EELV have followed the same path.

The two large parties PS and LR have seen a radicalisation of the primary votes.

MoDem, always protecting its independence (at the cost of many less elected mandates) did not partake in LR primaries, but very early on expressed its support and campaigned in favour of Alain Juppé for the LR nomination, seen as the best candidate to rally the nation around the need for reforms. MoDem leader

UK party	French equivalent	2017 party leader	Presidents
Socialist Workers Party	Front de Gauche (FG)	Jean-Luc. Mélanchon	
Labour	Parti Socialiste (PS)	Benoît Hamon	F Hollande (2012-2017) F Mitterrand (1981-1995)
Green Party	Europe Écologie -Les Verts (EELV)	Yannick Jadot	
Liberals Democrats	Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem)	Francois Bayrou	
Conservatives	UDI (Union des Démocrates et Indépendants) Les Républicains (LR) = defunct UMP / RPR	Jean-Christophe Lagarde (UDI) Francois Fillon (LR)	N Sarkozy (2007-2012) J Chirac (1995-2007)

François Bayrou said that if Juppé were to win the LR primaries, he would renounce his candidacy and support Juppé. MoDem was later joined by UDI in supporting Juppé. MoDem announced end of February that the party was entering into an alliance with a new political force, En Marche.

No primaries were organised by the Front National, with their undisputed leader Marine Le Pen solidly anchored as the legitimate candidate despite three legal cases against her name.

The results of the primaries revealed that voters want a big change in their lives, they want big change for France.

All parties promise to shake up France. There is no doubt that this air of revolt against the status quo and a growing political disenfranchisement translates into a volatile and emotionally charged campaign.

While the French electorate shows an inclination towards extremes (the FN is leading the polls with 26% of voters intending to support Le Pen), they also want new faces.

The epitome of a new entrant is Emmanuel Macron, who claims not to belong to either left or right, and is of a liberal centrist stripe. Macron used to be Hollande's minister of economy until he resigned in August 2016 and later announced that he would run for the presidency. His movement En Marche (EM) was launched in April 2016, aggregating curious, disappointed and hopeful alike voters. It is no coincidence if the book published by Macron to present himself and the outline of his vision is called 'Révolution'. His rallies are better attended than those of the LR and PS.

A second unfamiliar face is Benoît Hamon, who emerged as the winner of the PS primaries at the expense of Hollande (who did not even dare to compete, with a dissatisfaction rate as high as 80% in February 2017) and Valls.

Two major events have recently changed the French political landscape. It would appear that the old ways of political practices are no longer de rigueur. Opinions get disrupted as fast as it takes to tweet.

The first hit LR at full strength with 'Penelopegate'. A famous French investigation-based journal, Le Canard Enchaîné, released some highly disruptive information about Fillon, questioning the reality of the work delivered by his wife Penelope and two of his children, who were employed by him out of his MP allowance as his parliamentary assistants for nearly €1m. It is not illegal for MPs to employ family members. The journal's challenge was twofold: the reality of the work carried out and the level of remuneration two to three times the average emolument. The probe continues apace. Typical of France, but for how long, the candidate is denying any wrongdoing, blaming a 'constitutional coup' and

clinging to his position in a strategy designed to consolidate hard-core supporters. As of 19 February, 65% of French voters were against Fillon's candidacy. Despite expected to be indicted mid March, Fillon has announced that he is placing his faith in people's vote

to judge him. The latest polls show 20% in favour of Fillon.

The second suspense broke loose on 22 February: would Bayrou run or not and if not, which other candidate would MoDem support while protecting social-liberalism?

CRITICAL POINT

This was a critical point bearing in mind how close three Le Pen's main challengers (Fillon, Macron, Hamon) were in mid-February, all within 15-20% of intended vote in the first run-off round. Bayrou offered an alliance with Macron on four conditions: breaking the bipartisan rotation between the PS and LR, transparency and ethics in political practices, proportionality reform and proper remuneration of workers.

MoDem's votes - as modest as they might be - seem to have tipped the balance in favour of Macron (24.5%), now seen as the most likely opponent to Le Pen (26%) in the second round.

The final question was to know if the PS could build an alliance before the first round: Hamon did manage to reach an agreement with Jodot (greens coalition), but not with Mélanchon (far-left populist), thus showing his inability to rally in time around him and bring back under the PS umbrella those voters seduced by extremes.

The landscape might get a bit clearer, but never has it been so uncertain so close to French general polling days. Will Macron's bubble burst under the need for him to be more specific about his programme and therefore antagonise some of his far-reaching supporters? Will his team of mostly inexperienced volunteers be equipped for transforming expressions of interest into hard votes?

Will Le Pen make a faux-pas and lose her grip? Will the EU Parliament be able to challenge her immunity in the context of the on-going probes?

Ultimately, in the likely scenario of Le Pen getting through the second round, will voters replicate 2002's republican vote and kick out Marine Le Pen as they did with her father Jean-Marie?

What will be the absentee rate, which might be the real threat to the democratic exercise?

These elections will be a major test for democracy and its buffers, a test for France's political and societal heritage of liberty, equality and fraternity built over the last 220 years. A test for Europe, who will either be equipped to reform itself around France-Germany heavy-weight pair, or implode.

Marianne Magnin is Mouvement Démocrate's candidate for next French parliamentary elections for the Northern Europe constituency and a member of Westminster & City of London Liberal Democrats

DOWN THEIR THROATS AT PUBLIC EXPENSE

Imagine if schools were aligned to political parties, then consider the folly of faith schools, suggests Chris Ward

It seems odd that we will be having a debate on the role of faith schools in 2017.

To many of us who endured a religious education, particularly a harmful one, the answer is simple – they should have absolutely no role whatsoever.

We are told by those who support faith schools that they provide parental choice. Parents who find themselves having to travel long distances to get their children to school because their local institutions won't take their unbaptised child might beg to differ.

Although the motion at Lib Dem conference seeks to address this somewhat, it doesn't change the fact that faith schools are notoriously more picky about the beliefs of the children they educate than they are about the beliefs of the taxpayers that fund them.

The absurdity of having one entire school moulded around a single train of belief is seemingly only obvious when you apply the example elsewhere. Imagine that your town was filled with Labour schools and Tory schools – after all, don't parents with deeply-held political beliefs have the right to choice as well?

But what if you are a Liberal Democrat parent? You could take the hit and travel to the nearest Liberal Democrat school many miles away. You might compromise and say you're happy for your child to attend one of the Labour/Tory schools, but there is of course a risk they won't take your child, because inexplicably they hold the right to discriminate on the grounds of belief.

You could join Labour or the Tories, perhaps telling the headteacher you've been an avid activist for years. Sceptical, the headteacher asks for proof of how many conferences you've attended, how much campaigning you've done, and wants to see your child's membership card.

ABSOLUTELY RIDICULOUS

Of course, you could opt instead to insist that it is absolutely ridiculous to have schools that indoctrinate a belief instead of allowing children to come to their own conclusions. That, in faith schools terms, is the secularist approach and it's one that many humanists like myself fully endorse.

Of course, the problems with faith schools don't stop at the admissions policies. The moment your child manages to get through the gates, there are other challenges – ones you are perhaps not aware of as a child.

On my first day at my Catholic primary school, I learnt a new word: 'gay'. It was the slur of choice from other children and it was to my horror that, once learning the definition (one of the quieter kids informed me), it accurately described the feelings I had.

It is one thing to grow up not understanding your

sexuality and finding it a repellent feature, but it was quite another when a teacher shouted at a student for saying it. They weren't told off for being homophobic, they were told off for having the audacity to call somebody else something so unnatural, repugnant and godless. Homosexuality, as I was soon to learn, was a sin for which I was bound for Hell.

It really is quite difficult to overstate the psychological impact of both the children and the adults around you saying that what you are is going to end up facing eternal torture.

As a child, adults are supposed to be the people who make you feel safe – especially teachers. They're the people you confide in when you're upset, they're the people who pick you up when you are down but, most importantly in this case, they are the absolute authority on what is right or wrong.

The thing I was, was unequivocally wrong, and it led me on a long path for years of suppressing the way I felt, trying my utmost to find girls attractive and regularly leaving me crying myself to sleep when these feelings didn't go away. This approach to education was not a simple enactment of my parents' wishes for religious values – it was quite simply harmful.

It's very easy to dismiss this as a product of its time. I'm 33 years old now, so my schooling was entirely under the cruel light of Section 28. But we still see examples of it happening today. Not only are government-funded initiatives in place specifically tackling homophobia in faith schools, but we see time and time again the established churches wielding their considerable power to ensure their institutions don't have to teach children about sexual orientation in sex and relationships education (or indeed, teach them sex and relationships at all if they run an academy or a free school).

In 2012, prior to the impending introduction of the same sex marriage Bill, Catholic schools urged their students to respond unfavourably to the consultation and to sign the anti-equal marriage campaign's petition, with children at one south London school being shown a presentation on religious opposition to equal marriage. This is not education, it is plain-and-simple indoctrination, and it is being done with taxpayers' money.

But perhaps one of the most shocking experiences I ever had at secondary school was when we were shown a propaganda video of an ultrasound abortion occurring.

This wasn't in biology, it was in religious education. We were told beforehand that the video was mind-blowing; that it convinced the previously pro-choice camera man to become a full 'lifer' afterwards. To those who expected it to be quite something, it didn't disappoint, as our class of young teenagers was forced

to watch a foetus ripped apart limb by limb. This video was not shown to us with the intention of educating us; and frankly it trivialises it to simply call it indoctrination. It was nothing less than psychological child abuse.

It's very easy to suggest that no school is perfect and that many secular schools will have problems too. That's a particularly weak deflection. In faith schools, there is no impetus among the staff to report violations or things people would consider harmful, because frankly they are largely all of the same faith. The figures we have on violations that do happen probably do not even begin to touch the magnitude of the problem.

MISOGYNISTIC MANUAL

Secular schools do not base their beliefs on a misogynistic manual that preaches dangerous and harmful rules on sexuality. Secular schools are not commanded from on-high to insist that their students involve themselves in a particular strand of political thinking. Secular schools do not show graphic videos of abortions to children.

The motion at conference, despite clearly being the product of good intentions, fails by seeking to please everybody and results in pleasing nobody. It is a bizarre compromise between two very different strands of thought and the amendment I and others are hoping to put seeks to address that.

It is very important that children of all faiths have the opportunity to grow up together, to realise that their differences are little and that they are all of one community. It is important for children to explore and enjoy their own beliefs (or non-belief) without the interfering and threatening influence of religious instruction from adults who receive their salaries from the public purse.

Finally, it is absolutely vital that children learn right and wrong from the concepts of empathy, altruism and generosity, not simply from the threat of burning in the afterlife. Our amendment seeks to make it Lib Dem policy to end religious instruction in schools and I hope members will give it their support.

There is, of course, a much more abstract and simplistic reason faith schools should have absolutely no role in modern education.

There are many answers to the question: what should your child get out of the education system? But as an engineer and as someone who subscribes to evidence-based thinking and scientific reasoning, my number one answer is this – it must teach you to challenge. It must ensure you go out into world with an enhanced level of critical thinking, so you can confront ideas that are wrong or deliberately misleading.

If 'fake news' is the new in-vogue international evil, the next generation must be equipped to deal with it. All these qualities are absolute polar opposites to the intended outcome of religion, which is to insist upon your silent subservient obedience with disagreement or deviation punishable by eternal damnation and torture.

Religion is incompatible with education and it is time

“This is not education, it is plain-and-simple indoctrination, and it is being done with taxpayers’ money”

we stopped letting them run our schools, indoctrinating our children and harming those who are unfortunate enough to not be born in God's favoured image.

Chris Ward is secretary of the LGBT Humanists and was a Liberal Democrat councillor in Guildford



Reader Jennie Rigg's dog Spike lies back to consider the contents of the latest Liberator to arrive.

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GOODBYE USELESS LAYER

The review initiated by conference should recommend scrapping the English party and the creation of sub-regional bodies, says Chris White

Since the referendum, thousands of people have joined the Liberal Democrats. Most did so online and believe they joined a political party covering the United Kingdom.

Very few who joined in England will have realised that they joined the Liberal Democrats in England (the English Party as we often loosely call it) and that their ability to influence its workings are essentially still a process of indirect elections.

The vote for a review at autumn conference last year was a milestone. A challenge proposed from the grassroots to the very basis of the English Party.

Even with an increase in members we have more structures than are sensible for our size, and more at a distance from party political activity on the ground.

The original English Party had a conference, usually one day tacked onto the federal conference.

There was a problem in finding English issues – most were either UK-wide, or, if they affected England but not Scotland, affected Wales as well. Truly English issues did not go much further than the position of the Church of England, something not debated frequently.

The regional chairs meeting, which ran the English party outside conference, was just that: a meeting of regional chairs. They were accountable, to some degree, to the Council for the Regions of England, an essentially toothless sounding body.

It would be a simple matter to go back to those innocent post-merger days. Regional chairs should again with real legitimacy speak for the party in England and two of their number should occupy the English party slots on the Federal Board.

Regions should take over the English party functions which appropriately belong at a lower level. Current pooled arrangements like the Joint States Candidates Committee would continue, but with regional party representatives occupying the slots currently occupied by the English party.

The disciplinary functions of the English party have manifestly failed and it seems appropriate for a party-wide agency to take these over – like an HR department, ultimately answerable to the party president.

Membership would become a federal issue with the Scottish and Welsh Parties permanently opting out.

But does this mean that regional parties would be treated as equivalent to Scotland or Wales?

We have created a semantic problem for ourselves. English regions can in theory become 'state parties'. So if one did so it would have all the apparent powers of Scottish Liberal Democrats.

This is clearly nonsense on stilts – and offensive nonsense. Scotland is a nation. No English region can equate to that and we should remove this potential embarrassment to Scottish and Welsh colleagues.

Does any of this help with campaigning? Potentially.

With the English structure devolved more clearly to regions one can hope that the massive problems with candidate approval and selection before the 2015 general election can at least be challenged by the grassroots membership.

Improvement is not a given, but if regions had greater powers and responsibilities then the quantity and quality of candidates standing for regional executives should improve.

But there needs to be more. We have very large regional units between the top level and ground level political activity. There is therefore, in many areas, nothing between a local party and a region 50 or more miles away.

For a party that believes in devolution we seem very muddled about the concept. Local parties are allowed huge leeway over the Liberal Democrat brand (there are truly horrible election leaflets out there) and remain the first port of call for disciplinary matters and diversity monitoring, which they are acutely ill-equipped to do.

PPERA compliance monitoring is dealt with nationally level, giving HQ staff absurdly huge spans of control over local party agents and treasurers.

Regional conferences debate policy with no plug-in to where policy is actually made (federal conference). Training is provided often at federal conferences that most members can't attend rather than at cheaper regional or sub-regional conferences.

Meanwhile there are, in many parts of the country, elections for councils which cover areas entirely unrelated to local parties – especially county council and metro mayor elections. Regions don't get involved in sub-regional elections and local parties often show indifference or a level of incomprehension.

There is a real case for a new campaigning structure below the level of the regional party. This does not need to be a new level of bureaucracy, nor a new set of officers or elections. Much of the East of England, for example, has largely informal county co-ordinating committees, which provide cohesion and communication between neighbours, agree county manifestos, manage the approvals process and facilitate locally-based training.

If we are to be successful – and comprehensible to our new members – our structures need to mirror more closely what is actually out there.

Local government elections are going to be more significant for the Lib Dem fightback than parliamentary elections for the foreseeable future. It might just make sense for the party's hierarchy and organisation to reflect local government boundaries and tiers.

Chris White is a Liberal Democrat county councillor in Hertfordshire



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WHAT IF LABOUR LASHED UP LIKE THIS?

Peter Wrigley thinks a right-wing government is being cut too much slack as it ruins the economy over Brexit

The UK is in the bizarre position of having a government pursuing what many believe to be the most profoundly mistaken policy of the post-war era, leaving the European Union.

Yet that same government is riding high in the polls and winning huge majorities in the Commons, with three quarters or more of the official opposition voting for its policies.

I can't help wondering what the political atmosphere would be like if it were a Labour government which had:

- called a referendum which was important to its own members on the 'lunatic left' but not among the top priorities of the electorate at large;
- failed to include in the legislation for the referendum any rules to ensure an honest campaign or the usual threshold higher than a simple majority for a decision on a constitutional matter to be valid;
- tried desperately to avoid any parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the result, which most experts (and indeed the majority of MPs) regarded as likely to be highly damaging both to Britain's economy and our international reputation;
- seen its supporting newspapers attack the senior judiciary as "enemies of the people";
- caused important sections to the finance industry, a big cash-cow for the Treasury, to relocate in other countries, with more predicted to follow;
- described any critics of its activities as "enemies of democracy";
- caused a 12% depreciation of the value of the pound, with probably more to follow;
- invited what most of its opponents would regard as a 'rogue leader' (Fidel Castro of Cuba, perhaps, or Salvador Allende of Chile) on a state visit;
- had the Speaker of the House of Commons, one of its own, publicly oppose this action;
- had its prime-minister publicly snubbed by fellow European leaders;
- endangered the peace settlement in Ireland;
- caused the potential break-up of the UK itself;
- had its policy described as 'Alice in Wonderland' by its leading elder statesman;
- and all the above with the NHS and care system in crisis: a critical housing shortage, and the young unable to afford to buy what was available; the government's "fixing" of the public finances, promised in the first parliament,

postponed to a third; deplorably low productivity; and a record and continuing deficit on the balance of external payments.

Actually, for once history can give us a clue. Way back in the 1960s Harold Wilson's Labour government seemed to have its back to the wall, although its troubles could reasonably be described as "a little local difficulty" compared with the present super-shambles.

In 1967 Labour had devalued the pound from \$2.80 to \$2.40 (just over 14% - it's now down to \$1.25: so much for the 'strength' of the British economy), Wilson was upsetting the Americans by refusing to join in the Vietnam War and there were a few strikes. Two newspaper barons, Hugh Cudlipp and Cecil King, arranged a meeting with Lord Mountbatten, a relative of the royal family and mentor of Prince Charles, and others, to suggest that chaos was round the corner, the government was about to disintegrate and that:

"The people would be looking to somebody like Lord Mountbatten as the titular head of a new administration, somebody renowned as a leader of men, who would be capable, backed by the best brains and administrators in the land, to restore public confidence."

To his credit Mountbatten recognised the meeting as potentially treasonable and walked away.

I am not recommending a similar attempt at a coup today, or suggesting that the current press barons might be capable of organising one. Even if our MPs are too supine to do their duty we must put up with them until the end of the parliament.

But the incident does illustrate the lengths the establishment are prepared to go to frustrate even a moderately left-wing government compared to the sycophantic support of the present one, seemingly in hock to its 'loony right' however demonstrably misguided and damaging its policies.

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SPEAKING FOR SERFS

Millions of people are oppressed by leasehold, so why won't the Liberal Democrats peak up for them, asks Roger Jenking

Leasehold has unfortunately strengthened rather than weakened its grip in recent years.

Freeholders are stronger and leaseholders are both weaker and more numerous. More restrictions have been introduced, fees established for tribunals, ludicrous formulae have been used in the calculation of the cost of lease extensions and more dwellings are built on a leasehold basis. Free standing houses are being built for lease as well as new flats. It's reckoned that 7,000 of the former have been constructed in the last 15 months.

Leasehold is sometimes referred to as semi-feudal. This is not an accurate description. It is fully feudal and its equivalent in the employment field is serfdom. Despite paying a capital sum for their dwellings, leaseholders are referred to in law as tenants. When they hand over this sum, many imagine that they are owners of the land on which their building stands. They are not. Typically, they only purchase the right to 'quiet enjoyment' of the flat.

At the end the lease, the occupants can quite literally be evicted - and this has happened recently, if rarely. Extending the lease is, not surprisingly, made as expensive as possible by the freeholder.

Short leases - that is less than 80 years - can lead to reduced values for sellers and difficulties in obtaining mortgages for prospective buyers. There may be all sorts of restrictions ranging from sub-letting and structural changes to keeping pets. In the meantime freeholders impose ground rents, which are fantastically good value at the expense of the leaseholders. Those of the latter who have not acquired the 'right to manage' may be fleeced by companies which are owned by or have cosy relations with the freeholders.

In law is possible to buy the freehold or to convert to a common hold system, arrangements which is near universal outside England and Wales. The former is difficult and expensive, needing to majorities in each development and even each block within a development. It is protracted and complicated. Meanwhile conversions to commonhold, theoretically possible under the weak as water 2002 Act, are measured in single figures.

About 6m people live with leases. Even if new leasehold houses do not proliferate, the proportion of flats to houses will. This means that the number of lease victims will increase.

Meanwhile don't think of freeholders as sweet old couples relying on their possession of leases a modest income. This is not the whole picture. There are corporate freeholders and all fantastically rich.

Now, given this, is not leasehold reform, or even abolition, on the agenda of political parties? The Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have no proposals. The Greens, Liberals and - shamefully - Ukip have, the last, no doubt, seeing it as low hanging

political fruit. Of course, leasehold reform would dovetail perfectly with Theresa May's intention to spread prosperity from the privileged to battlers. But all but the naïve would class that as rhetoric. Little can be expected from the government.

Labour has a shamefully undeveloped housing policy. What there is majors on supply and affordability. Successive spokespersons have shown little interest, indeed the last commissioned the chief executive of Taylor Wimpey to produce a housing report. His firm is in the van of the new leasehold house tendency and has been criticised its excessive ground rents.

There is an All Party Bi-Cameral Committee on leasehold. It now has 48 participants. For several months there was no Liberal Democrat on it. Thankfully Baroness Hamwee is now a member. For about the same period I have prodded then Lib Dem housing spokesperson, Baroness Bakewell to urge parliamentarians to join the committee.

I was particularly anxious that she approach radicals - and I mentioned Tony Greaves. I also urged her to consider thoroughgoing policies on the issue. I'm not a Lib Dem member and I realise that party policy does not start and end with parliamentary spokespersons, however I thought that it would be a start. I'm not sure that the baroness relished my electronic prodding and I don't think that I had any influence.

But I can't think of any ideological or even pragmatic reason for what I think is Lib Dem apathy. There are millions of leasehold victims in the electorate, a large multiple of the number of freeholders.

I do not fool myself that many would vote Liberal Democrat or for any other party purely on the issue. But some would - and it could well be a consideration for many. Liberal Democrats and Labour are not trying to outbid each other on the extent of leasehold reform and I'm not sure why not. Sometimes complexity is cited, but why not simplify and reform at the same time?

Recently Labour say they might cap ground rent and stop new leasehold houses. Some Tories agree. Only the Lib Dems seem to be saying nothing.

Housing supply and affordability have to be the prime housing issues but there are other urgent ones, of which leasehold is the prime example. We've had feudal for one and a half millennia. It hasn't worked.

Roger Jenking is a member of the Liberal party

Black and British: a forgotten history
by David Olusoga
Macmillan 2016 £25

This is an account of the history of black people in Britain based on evidence-based research from original records and genetic and genealogical research. The black presence did not begin with the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948; Olusoga demonstrates that there was a black presence in Britain beginning in Roman times and being renewed when the age of exploration began in the Tudor era. The author emphasises that the history of black people in Britain is inextricably linked with the development of the slave trade and the continuation of slavery in the United States on which parts of British industry were dependent.

There were several waves of black people in Britain with a considerable population in Georgian times where case law effectively outlawed slavery, and there was an influx of black loyalists who had joined the British Army in return for being offered freedom during the American Revolutionary War.

Olusoga shows that the abolitionist campaign in Britain was conducted by both black and white campaigners. However, the black population was overwhelmingly male and decreased through intermarriage. There were black Victorians and Edwardians.

Racist ideas grew in Victorian Britain and practices such as blackface minstrelsy began although the latter was not initially as racist as it subsequently became, being used to promote anti-slavery and lampoon stereotyping initially.

Olusoga demolishes the mythology generated by Enoch Powell about non-white people not assimilating or becoming British. Large numbers of black people in the West Indies and Africa rushed to enlist in the armed forces in both world wars despite discouragement by army hierarchy which largely placed them in labour battalions on the Western Front leading to conflict with the colonial office, which was concerned about the effect rejection would have in the colonies. Olusoga also covers the temporary large increase in the black population during the Second World War with the arrival of black GIs, who were generally welcomed by



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the public who sided with them in conflicts with white Americans.

However, the British black population increased considerably after the arrival of the Empire Windrush particularly after 1954 with a less noticed more recent wave from Africa since the 1980s.

A large proportion of the book covers the slave trade and the abolition of both it and the institution of slavery in Britain and the United States. It is balanced in its coverage acknowledging that Britain did not instigate the slave trade and came into it slowly, and that Royal Navy having at one time protected it but played a leading role in eradicating it.

Although the author correctly points out that Black British history is a global story of Britain's interaction with black people on three continents the book tends to devote too much space to the slave trade at the expense the black community in Britain. There are some omissions in his account probably the biggest one being there is no mention of Able Seaman William Hall who was the first black person to win the Victoria Cross in 1854.

Andrew Hudson

Adam Smith
by Jonathan Conlin
Reaktion Books, 2016

I sometimes feel that I mention Adam Smith too often, yet constantly have recourse to him, most lately in opposition to the academisation of a local school. Smith, you will recall, recognised that the market could not be relied upon for education, nor health care. The trouble is that this is neglected in Smith's selective hijacking by that curious amalgam of political Conservatism and economic Liberalism, Thatcherism,

and worse, the misunderstanding of that by the Orange Bookers within the Liberal Democrats.

Why Thatcherism continues to hold our body politic in thrall escapes me; as Keynes knew full well, economic ideas have their time, and it passes; new ideas are needed to meet the challenges of today.

That said, a grounding in the masters of economic thought is one of the keys, and hence Smith. I frequently hear it said among Liberals that Robert Falkner's *A Conservative Economist? The Political Liberalism of Adam Smith Revisited* (1997), is an excellent guide to the basic arguments, and perhaps the Liberal Democrat History Group should consider a revised edition.

While Falkner will stand the activist and undergraduate in good stead, Conlin has brought us a meatier work, within a couple of hundred pages, to explore the life and work of Smith – his relationship with Quesnay and the French Physiocrats, conflict with Rousseau etc. which would bear fruit in *The Wealth of Nations*.

As did Smith, he returns to *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and through this its context in recent political philosophy, concluding, as one might expect, that the head and the heart are as important as the invisible hand, indeed, it's guide.

This might well be the best brief account of Adam Smith and his thought around at this time, and an attractive edition at that – I was constantly entertained by the illustrations, taken from Smith's time, which have a wit of their own.

Stewart Rayment

John Adams and the fear of American Oligarchy

by Luke Mayville Princeton 2016

American oligarchy – that was a question in the back of our minds throughout the fiasco of the US presidential election and the primaries that preceded it. One fears this most among the Republicans, the party of corporate America, but the Democrats are scarcely any better.

When Obama first won the presidency, casting back to Gore - who like Hilary Clinton, won the popular vote - I said to my admittedly somewhat left Democrat friends that there must be root and branch reform of the American electoral system. Most of all, a cap on election spending (which might ideally be allotted solely from the public purse).

Is Trump an oligarch? We shall soon see. He certainly comes from the mould, and whatever he said while campaigning, the body politic is what he has to work with to achieve his ends. I don't hold out much hope for the aspirations, nastiness aside, of those who voted for him on the basis of what has gone down so far.

Was this the dirtiest election in American history? Probably, though the Adams-Jefferson contest of 1800 may be a close runner. Former allies, even friends, in the revolutionary wars and Continental Congress were torn asunder. How much of this was their people rather than the men themselves remains an open question, but it wasn't until their retirements that they would open up a dialogue on their respective ideologies.

Jefferson, in short, had confidence in the new republic to live up to its ideals. Adams thought this naïve, and already saw the dangers of wealth, the remaining pillar of distinction after the demise of the British, as creating oligarchic conditions that were ostensibly alien to the new America.

Whereas Tocqueville, writing shortly after, seems to vindicate Jefferson in Americans' love of equality and the depreciation of wealth, a couple of centuries on, Adams was clearly right.

Why wasn't this seen at the time? Semantics maybe. I see Adams, Jefferson and those around them splitting hairs over what is a personal application of the meaning of the ancient Greek

political concept aristokratia, rule of the best, and whether this was a natural condition or not. This is not the application of common sense. For at least the previous century and beyond, the term obviously meant something else, much closer to our understanding; we might wonder then, why intelligent men harked back to the ancient Greek, where all could see the term corrupting, even in Plato and Aristotle.

One might excuse Jefferson, himself an aristocrat in either sense of the word. Adams should have known better, especially since the Greeks had already furnished him with the word he was looking for oligarkhia, rule of the few, oligarchy. Since Mayville's argument is that this was Adam's main contention, it appears to me that he lost his argument through his choice of words.

As a political scientist, Adams makes the interesting distinction that the value of wealth in politics is not simply in the ability to purchase, but in its attractiveness. One cannot understand the objection stateside to something as mild as Obamacare, yet millions of Americans who would obviously benefit from clearly see it as an infringement of their liberties. Reinforcing Adams' point here, a Democrat friend explained that whilseone might not be rich, in American society one aspires to be so, and thus would be against anything perceived to denigrate the right of the rich to do as they like with their money, rather than acknowledge its social consequences.

Adams compounded this with an apparent obsession with distinction – titles and honours, which he saw as a bulwark against oligarchy – civic dignity; but the man in the street saw this as a harking back to aristocracy as they commonly understood it. The arguments put forward by Adams, thus dubbed His Rotundity, were all too sophisticated.

Stewart Rayment

Dragon Tales: Dragons in Snow by Judy Hayman Practical Inspiration 2016 £5.99

Judy Hayman's dragons have

reappeared for their fifth adventure; well most of them have fled south for the winter, leaving the original family to forage and frolic with the otters. How will those that remain face up to a savage winter? Will they? This is the most gripping of Hayman's Dragon Tales yet, so much so that the chief critic demanded that it read again when finished. More so than any of the earlier books, there is a growing strength in Hayman's writing.

Judy has stood in the Liberal interest on a number of occasions, notably achieving a second place in East Lothian before ending up as convenor of the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Email Judy at judy@haymana.plus.com to obtain copies and put in a reservation in your public library.

The previous books in the series are: Dragon Tales - Quest for a Cave; Dragon Tales - Quest for a Friend; Dragon Tales - Quest for Adventure. Dragon Tales -The Runaway.

So that's some of your Christmas present problems solved.

Stewart Rayment

Ottoline and the Purple Fox

by Chris Riddell Macmillan Children's Books 2016 £10.99

After Ottoline went to sea, she appeared to have sunk without a trace, though I speculated that Ada Goth might be an ancestor. If that was the case, Ottoline doesn't seem to be aware of it. She picks up a copy of Goth Girl and the Ghost of a Mouse, in Fourth Street Books, a new bookshop (you don't see many of those around, so make sure you support your local independent bookstore, or you won't have any soon). Yes, Ottoline returns for another adventure, wherein the Purple Fox is a completely different adversary to the Yellow Cat (the obvious apart). And who is the Lamp-post Poet? One senses further adventure... as the poster in the window of Fourth Street Books says, 'It's not a book it's a doorway'.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

I was resting my eyes in the Lords; when I opened them, there was the prime minister In Our House. What immortal rind! And she was staring at me. I wasn't having that so I stared right back. When that didn't work I went through my full gamut of faces: the lovesick Friesian; the angry walrus; Roy Jenkins on the lavatory.

That, I thought, had done the trick when she hurried out, but her place was taken by a Cabinet colleague. It was clear that a more organised approach was needed, so I took a party of Liberal Democrat peers (you may have noticed we are not exactly short of them) off to the tearoom for a spot of training in Hard Stares and pulling the aforementioned faces (though the Jenkins is not one for novices). I am proud to announce that, after I had left for home, one of my pupils made a junior minister cry.

Tuesday

It was the autumn of 1945 and I was relaxing at the Hall after being released from my war work (still hush hush, I am afraid) when there came a telephone call from Whitehall. It transpired that a strange orange hairy creature was haunting the Outer Hebrides and ravishing the local womenfolk. "That's a Scotsman," I replied shortly and replaced the receiver. However, they called back and when it became apparent that there was More To It, I undertook to travel to Lewis and Harris to investigate.

Upon reaching Stornoway I quickly deduced that the creature in question was an escaped orangutan. I also discovered that it had fathered a child with a local woman – an orange, wizened little thing with a strange shock of hair. The local church, which I found Rather Hard Work (all those elders) was taking a dim view. I did begin arrangements for the orangutan to be shipped to a zoo on the mainland, but the general view on the Long Island was that it was doing good work weaving tweed and should be allowed to stay.

As to the woman, I helped her travel to New York. I later heard she had married a tycoon with the unfortunate name of 'Trump', who adopted her child. I thought that would be the last of it, but by now you will all know what happened next.

I was dining with an American lawyer the other evening. He told me that there is no constitutional necessity for the President of the United States to be human on both sides, but if word gets out that he was born in the Outer Hebrides then it will cause An Awful Fuss.

Wednesday

The Conservative Party, like the KGB, is always scouting for talent at Oxbridge and our leading public schools. What is not widely known, is that they sometimes recruit at an even tenderer age. Years ago a drunken Tory confessed to me that his party has talent spotters at prep schools. What they look for goodness only knows – a winning way with the ablative plural, perhaps, or particularly clean knees.

The children they recruit there are put into the deepest cover, becoming schoolboy and student Socialists before joining left-wing groupuscules and eventually finding their way into the Labour Party. Some are elected to Westminster, where they advocate ridiculous policies guaranteed to boost the Conservative vote. Such deep-cover agents are not unusual – I expect my readers could name a few themselves – but to the best of my knowledge

Lord Bonkers' Diary

Jeremy Corbyn is the first Conservative to lead the Labour Party. It's Terribly Clever, but is it cricket?

Thursday

When I saw Theresa May holding hands with Trump (of whose genesis I was writing only the other day) I was filled with foreboding. For I am old enough to remember 1938 and Neville Chamberlain flying off to Munich to meet Hitler. During a lull in the talks, the pair of them were photographed strolling hand-in-hand through a meadow in

the Bavarian Alps.

When Chamberlain came back to London in triumph, that picture appeared on the front page of all the papers; but things turned sour and it was to haunt him for the brief years that were left to him. Why was there no one at Mrs May's elbow to remind her of this?

Friday

Home from Stoke-on-Trent where I have been helping in the by-election. I have nothing against the good people of Copeland, but a chap doesn't want to glow in the dark, what? Besides, I had promised Cook I would buy a replacement pie dish for the Wedgwood one that good broken on the night we celebrated Sarah Olney's victory in the Richmond Park by-election.

I am afraid that Ukip's candidate was something of a dud: no one believed his claims to have been the first Briton in space (as every schoolboy used to know, it was Raymond Baxter). Let me, however, give the Labour Party the benefit of my long experience. I recall we Liberal Democrats got terribly excited when we held Eastleigh after poor Huhne was dragged off to Dartmoor. Yet, as I pointed out at the time, the Tories and Ukipers helpfully split the reactionary vote between them. Not only that: the Tory candidate was so bad that she was sent off to Patagonia halfway through the campaign. I was saddened, but not surprised, when we lost the seat at the following general election. The parallels with the result in Stoke-on-Trent are all too clear.

Saturday

Defence cuts have hit hard in recent years, but I remember the Sixties (the Nineteen Sixties let me hastily add!) when, if the balloon had gone up, repelling the invader will have been left in the hands of a comedian and his small companions. Dodd's Army, they called it – even at the time I wondered if it would be enough. Of course, if you look in the official histories you will find no mention of this scheme.

Sunday

One hears a lot of nonsense about the European Union demanding that bananas should be straight. Have the people who promulgate this untruth never heard of the Rutland banana? It can be found growing wild by the road in the humid south of Rutland, but the best specimens are those nurtured by Meadowcroft in his glass houses here at the Hall.

This fruit is twisted like a corkscrew can indeed be used for removing a stubborn cork from the neck of a bottle of Dom Foster. Not only that: it can be used to pick locks. Which is why I am able to save the day at St Asquith's this morning when the choir and congregation finds itself locked out. (I generally bring a snack along in cast the Revd Hughes Goes On A Bit.

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