

liberator



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- 🌟 Farron and gay sex - Liz Barker
- 🌟 The end of targeting? - Michael Meadowcroft

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COMMENTARY

HANGING ON TO A CABLE

There is rarely unanimity on the conduct and effectiveness of an election campaign, but one has to search hard to find anyone who thinks the Liberal Democrat one in June's general election was anything short of catastrophic.

It is equally rare for the party's poll rating to go backwards during a campaign - since the higher profile usually inflates this - and rarer still for a leader's ratings to lag those of the party.

Lag they did though as the party banged on about a second EU referendum and, when it became painfully evident that this was not catching the public's attention or sympathy, banged on about it some more.

It never became clear what it would be a second referendum on - the negotiated Brexit terms versus staying in, the terms versus leaving with no deal, or perhaps all three with an STV vote between them?

Saying that the party accepted the referendum result while wanting another referendum succeeded in convincing neither Remain nor Leave supporters.

The campaign also lacked agility. In the mid-1990s Paddy Ashdown proved that arguing for increased tax could be popular, with the 'penny for education' campaign.

This time the party wanted a penny tax rise for the NHS, a policy of potentially considerable popularity had anyone heard it. It also had perfectly sensible economic policies but instead it talked about a second referendum as though trapped in the recitation of a mantra.

That was the macro problem. At local level there were complaints about both the quality of direct mail from party headquarters and its failure to engage those who understood what was happening on the ground - see George Turner's article about losing Vauxhall in this issue.

All this was made worse by Tim Farron's evasions over gay sex. Only the most devout care whether something is 'sinful' as such, but most would take 'sinful' to mean 'I do not approve', and whatever contortions Farron tied himself in only made matters worse. He had two years to sort out a defensible position on something that would obviously be a campaign issue. While other failings can be blamed partly on the wider political situation, this one was all his own.

The small increase in seats came entirely in those held until 2015 and the number of places that can plausibly be called targets is now tiny and the vote share a pitiful 7.4%.

It would be ridiculous to blame Farron entirely for this, since the party is still struggling to recover from Nick Clegg's inept handling of the Coalition and the breach of trust over tuition fees.

One of Farron's selling points was that he bore little direct responsibility for the coalition's deeds, having been party president of most of the period concerned. That though was little help; he was still having to defend errors that arose from Nick Clegg's lack of experience and refusal to take advice from anyone who did have it.

Farron's assumed uncontested successor, as Liberator went to press, was Vince Cable.

Cable was in the thick of the Coalition and will, or ought to have, thought about how he will defend the inevitable attacks on its unpopular measures.

He was the only viable candidate with Ed Davey, Norman Lamb and Jo Swinson having ruled themselves out, though there were some frankly silly attempts to persuade Layla Moran to stand. Moran, a new MP who may soon have to defend a very marginal seat, sensibly and commendably refused to entertain this.

Cable's answers to Liberator's leader's questionnaire in this issue throw some light on where he wants to take the party. Even if age means he is not leader for long, he does at least have the public clout to get heard.

One place he probably cannot take it, even if he wants to, is into a progressive alliance. There has been a lot of talk about deals involving the Lib Dems, Labour and the Greens.

This is a waste of time and effort with the exception of local deals between the Lib Dems and the Greens.

If Labour hired a hot air balloon trailing a banner reading 'no deals over seats' it could hardly make its distaste for progressive alliances clearer. It even expelled activists in South West Surrey for wishing to stand down for the National Health Action Party - never mind the Lib Dems - and refused to reciprocate where the Greens stood down for Labour.

It may be tempting to view voters as giant blocs to be moved around by parties stitching up deals against the Tories, but outcomes are uncertain and Labour - the most significant component - won't get involved.

We anyway know from the mid-1990s how inter-party co-operation works. Parties stand normally but privately agree to soft pedal in selected seats, as happened in tacit deals between Ashdown and Blair. This route might be profitable.

All the deals in the world though will count for little if the Lib Dems have nothing to say about the main issues that interest voters.

RADICAL BULLETIN

DEADLY SIN

In the middle of the afternoon of 14 June something happened that precipitated Tim Farron's resignation as Liberal Democrat leader.

The move took most people by surprise and the timing was appalling coming as Grenfell Tower still burnt and with dozens, possibly hundreds, of people unaccounted for.

Was this a deeply cynical attempt to 'bury bad news' while the country's eyes were on the tragedy in Kensington, a cock-up, or simply that Farron had reached the end of his tether after criticism over a lacklustre general election campaign and having resolved to go soon, did so there and then?

Myths soon got around that a delegation of peers had turned up in Farron's office to demand that he went.

That though never made much sense. The peers allegedly involved were mostly either sworn enemies of Farron over his perceived stance on gay rights, or his involvement in Lord Rennard's defenestration, or had never supported him anyway.

Leaders do not resign because their enemies tell them to go; they resign when those they respect and trust tell them their time is up - in Farron's case its even possible that some spiritual adviser was involved.

Farron is understood in the preceding days to have spoken to all the MPs except Norman Lamb, who was unavailable, all of whom supported him staying on. Peers were less supportive, but their opinions were also less important.

The most probable explanation is that a steady build up of unfavourable factors, and a dose of self-awareness, led Farron to conclude that he could not fight another general election, and that the parliamentary arithmetic made it evident one might come soon.

There was also a problem in Westmoreland. Farron had made this seat safe enough that he withstood the 2015 wipe out, but Liberator has been told that in his absence on leader's duties the local organisation had suffered.

Alarming reports began to circulate in May from people doing phone canvassing for Westmoreland, and during the campaign peers, and other senior figures, were banned from saying anything about prospects there - whether favourable or not.

They were also banned from discussing Sheffield Hallam, from which campaign staff had to be shifted at the last minute into Westmoreland, presumably on the basis that losing a former leader's seat is less embarrassing than losing the current one.

Farron's majority tumbled from more than 9,000 to only 777. Had he stayed, he would thus at the next election have been forced into the position Jeremy Thorpe was in February 1974 of trying to run a national campaign while rarely able to leave a remote

rural area. It worked for Thorpe, but could never work in an era of 24 hour news.

There was though increasing pressure on Farron arising from his inability to gain any traction with the public - despite his campaigning skills having been one of his big plus points - and the campaign's utter failure to shift onto some other ground than the second referendum when it became plain that was not working.

During the campaign, polling is believed to have shown Farron's popularity running behind that of the party - which was anyway bad enough - with his dissembling on gay sex exacerbating this.

He never managed to reconcile whatever it is that his religious faith tells him on this subject with the party's stance, despite having two years in which to work out a position.

Thus, the only issues the public identified as Lib Dem were Europe, legalising cannabis and that its leader was anti-gay. Since very few people are both pro-cannabis legalisation and anti-gay, this was hardly helpful.

On 10 June the Federal Board met and had on its agenda the constitutional requirement for a leadership election after a general election.

This is normally a formality but this time there were fears that a second general election could come before a leadership election could be arranged with some challenge to Farron expected (if not from anyone specific).

Board members have their own agendas and accounts of what was said range from the meeting telling party president Sal Brinton to tell Farron he should go, through to - the majority recollection - a technical discussion about the leadership election. One version though has it that a board member criticised Farron's campaign performance and that in the ensuing embarrassed silence no one defended him.

At lunchtime on 14 June, Liberal Democrat peers began to assemble for their first group meeting since the general election.

An hour earlier Farron has announced an election for deputy leader, a post needed now the parliamentary party was slightly larger, though one few had noticed was empty.

The peers began their meeting about 1.30pm and it lasted an hour and heard, without much comment passed, that Brian Paddick would stand down as shadow home secretary.

Paddick tweeted a few hours later that this was because of "concerns about the leader's views on various issues that were highlighted during GE17", a statement universally taken to refer to Farron's evasions over the sinfulness or otherwise of gay sex.

The day before, prominent LGBT campaigner Baroness Barker has tweeted a link to a media article

that called on Farron to go and Lord Lester later responded to Paddick's tweet expressing the hope "we get a better leader". Farron though would be unlikely to care what known critics like Barker and Paddick thought.

During the peers' meeting a number of people raised concerns about the general election campaign and Farron's inability to establish himself with the public.

Lords leader Dick Newby promised to convey peers' concerns to Farron but no one present who *Liberator* has spoken to had the impression that Newby had been asked to give Farron any ultimatum.

Yet by 6.30 that evening Farron made his extraordinary resignation speech. In language that might have been commonplace in Gladstone's era, but sounds odd now, he said he could not reconcile his Christian faith with being party leader and that the only thing that could have persuaded him to leave the job he loved was "something so amazing, so divine, it demands my heart, my life, my all".

This appeared to mean that Farron went of his own volition as a matter of faith and that having earlier contrived to give the impression the party did not welcome gays had now compounded this error by implying it did not welcome Christians either.

He could surely have taken a more dignified way out, something like: "I tried my best, sadly it was not good enough"

The election result was poor in terms of vote share, second places, and the impact made but the small increase in seats (and very nearly four more) meant it was not impossible for the leader in place to survive.

There was a time when Farron would have been assumed to want to. During the 2010-15 parliament he could hardly have made his desire to be leader more obvious had he walked around with a neon sign announcing the fact.

He avoided being a minister - and so got little Coalition blood on his hands - safely tucked away as party president and thus able to run for leader as the candidate who represented the most substantial break with the recent past.

All this came backed by an enviable record as a campaigner, and what turned out to be a misplaced assumption that Farron's burning ambition to be leader meant he must have already thought about how to square any conflicts between his political positions and religious ones.

It almost immediately became painfully obvious that he had not, with a toe curling interview on Channel 4 News (*Liberator* 373) in which Farron could not give a cogent answer about his attitude towards gay sex. Despite both offers of help and angry pressure from LGBT activists - and warnings that he would have to resolve the issue before a general election - he never did resolve it.

All manner of theories about conspiracies involving gays, peers, disgruntled Clegg supporters and others have done the rounds.

None seem very convincing as constituting anything that could have persuaded Farron to leave against his will.

It may be that translating his constituency and internal party campaigning talents to the national stage was simply beyond Farron's ability and eventually, rather to his credit, he realised this and resigned.

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• How tuition fees turned and bit the party – Gareth Epps

• Is the coalition really localist? – Chris White

• Mad hatters and the Tea Party – Dennis Graf

Issue 343 - January 2011

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A flashback to *Liberator* 343, you saw it here first!

ACCIDENT WARD

There are serious questions about the fiasco in Bradford East, which saw former MP David Ward removed as candidate at the eleventh hour in a constitutionally dubious process and then run as an independent against an imposed 'official' Lib Dem candidate.

Ward is best known nationally for his controversially strong support for the Palestinians, at times using language which others have claimed is anti-Semitic.

He might have thought these disputes had been investigated, pronounced upon and laid to rest during the 2010-15 parliament.

Indeed, Tim Farron told the *Jewish News* last October that Ward had "served his time" after a suspension for controversial remarks, and *Liberator* understands that chief whip Tom Brake phoned Ward to congratulate him on his candidacy only a week before Farron removed him.

Ward lost his seat in 2015 but was an approved candidate and selected in the usual way without incident by Bradford East last summer, when the consistency was among those urged to select early.

Yet when the former Tory minister Eric Pickles said in parliament just before the election that the Lib Dems should not have a candidate who made anti-Semitic statements, Farron instantly ordered Ward to go.

This opens two immediate questions. If Ward had really made anti-Semitic (as opposed to anti-Israeli government) statements, why was he an approved candidate? And if he hadn't, why did Farron act at the behest of Pickles when no-one else was known to have

made any recent complaint?

The local party knows of no objections to Ward's candidacy beyond a couple of abstentions during the selection process.

Farron's cave in to Pickles came without any consultation with the local party over removing Ward.

Since the leader rightly has no power to remove candidates it is unclear - even in Bradford - how Ward was removed, but it would appear some party committees were hurriedly leant on.

To make matters worse, the local party was then suspended without being given reasons - presumably because some individual members were helping Ward's campaign - though others worked for official candidate Mark Jewell.

Ward held his deposit with 7.8% of the vote while Jewell scored a humiliating 1.8%. The local party is now trying to get back on its feet.

ORDER OF THE BATH

Bath was a slightly surprising re-gain at the general election, but nearly wasn't because of a messy controversy in the local party involving secret recordings, allegations of racism and the resignation of its original candidate after the election was called.

It originally held a selection between Wera Hobhouse, now its MP, Chris Lucas and Jay Risbridger.

Lucas is black and had long been supported by national party figures who wanted more ethnic minority candidates in winnable seats.

Candidates of any kind have though to convince local party members they can win the seat and Liberator has been told that both Hobhouse and Lucas were unimpressive in the original July 2016 hustings. As a result Risbridger - a local councillor and former Green party member - was selected.

This annoyed diversity campaigners both inside and outside Bath, and then local members rapidly became disenchanted with Risbridger's ability to campaign.

The sequence of events becomes murky, but in a lengthy message sent to the local media - and seen by Liberator - Risbridger has said: "My decision to resign as the Lib Dem parliamentary candidate for Bath was not voluntary; it was forced on me following a long campaign by the national party president, Sal Brinton and diversity campaigners to remove me as the prospective candidate. Their intention was to elect a Liberal Democrat BAME MP and they were determined that should happen by any means."

He said that Ruwan Uduwera-Pereira, chair of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats, had "complained to the national party compliance department that I had made an inappropriate comment at the selection meeting, to the effect that the result was a victory for white men".

Risbridger denies making such a comment but others say he did but later said it had been a joking aside.

Whatever the truth of this, Risbridger claimed local councillor Lisa Brett secretly recorded remarks he made during a conversation with her and then claimed he made other inappropriate comments.

His letter then goes on to state that a party investigation was held where Risbridger was asked about a comment where he said: of Lucas "I felt he would be much better placed to be in somewhere like Bristol, for instance, where there was a very diverse

community and it would make sense, whereas here it would look like we were imposing something on, for the benefit of the rest of the country's diversity."

Risbridger explained this comment in his letter by saying: "I told [regional party officer Dave] Browne that during the meeting with Lisa Brett the main thrust of my argument was that for many local party members and Lib Dem voters in Bath there was a strong desire for a local candidate whatever their ethnicity. I did not think this demonstrated any disagreement with our party's fundamental values rather it is a matter of strategy, as I believe we need to ensure all candidates including diversity candidates have good local roots, if we want to get them selected and elected."

After this, Risbridger says he was warned by the region to be careful with his language when discussing diversity but no further action was taken.

In April though, a recording - it is not precisely clear who made it or how or when - surfaced of Risbridger making comments that could be interpreted as questionable, though this time digitally enhanced for broadcast (again, it is unclear enhanced by whom) and that this had found its way to another party and so was likely to before long appear in the media.

Faced with a potential scandal in a target seat after the election had been called, regional officials told Risbridger he had to go and a fresh selection was held, again contested by Lucas and Hobhouse.

The latter had been assiduous in making herself known to Bath's many new members outside of the dysfunctional local party establishment, and was duly selected.

DIRTY POSTCARDS

Mark Williams' loss of Ceredigion by 104 to Plaid Cymru was one of the narrowest Lib Dem defeats and also means that - for the first time since the dawn of party politics - there is no Lib Dem/ Liberal MP in Wales.

By all accounts the local party had been allowed to become poorly organised and a generally lacklustre campaigning machine.

Things were not though helped by a Facebook advert concocted in party HQ which claimed Plaid Cymru was in favour of a hard Brexit.

The rather lame justification for this was that its leader Lianne Wood had once said she wanted 'access' to the single market rather than membership.

Williams was annoyed by this obvious distortion and was forced to issue an apology.

One can but guess at his anger on discovering afterwards that postcards bearing the same untruth were on their way to his constituents from Great George Street, where in the general confusion no one had checked this.

GIFT HORSE'S MOUTH

Questions will surely arise about how, with Connect designed to give Lib Dem HQ gurus a 'real-time picture' of the state of play in key seats, and constituency polling now established in the campaigning lexicon, the party still managed to win Twickenham by 9,762 while losing neighbouring Richmond Park by 45 votes; and was putting resources into North Cornwall (lost by 7,200) rather than St Ives (lost by 312).

Rumour has it that a donor had agreed to fund a programme of tracker polling in target seats, but it was never completed - leaving the donation partly unclaimed. With pollsters, donor and campaigns department all apparently perplexed by this, the question arises – who was in charge of the decision concerned?

A TOAST TO VICTORY

‘Candidateitis’ - the irrational belief that one is going to win a hopeless seat - reaches epidemic proportions at election times.

And so it proved in the constituencies of Kensington and of Chelsea and Fulham, among the least likely in London to yield Lib Dem victories, which is why the large number of new activists there were asked to help target seats.

Yet an email sent round for Chelsea & Fulham candidate Louise Rowntree on the eve of poll expressed the hope that local activists would “make history” with a full programme of campaigning the constituency on polling day, rounded off with an ‘election pint’ at 7pm - three hours before polls closed.

This provoked protests to party HQ by more sensible local members and was then slightly amended to inviting those who would “like to keep campaigning after 7pm” to go to Richmond Park, which was lost by only 45 votes.

Both Rowntree and Kensington candidate Annabel Mullins sent daily emails to their members telling them they were winning, although horrified regional officers found both local parties canvassed without recording data and made no use of Freepost.

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

Where do we get them from? Susan King managed to be approved as a candidate and selected for Telford despite holding the view that “feminising hormones in the water supply” are affecting sexuality.

She told a local newspaper: “There are a lot of feminising hormones getting into the environment and that has to be taken into consideration. It’s affecting people’s sexuality basically.”

This process allegedly manifests itself in phthalates, used in plastics manufacture, and so “children’s toys are affected”.

So is almost everything else, according to King, who appears obsessed by the subject: “Everything that’s getting into the environment is disrupting the way industrialisation has changed our living conditions, residues of all sorts of feminising hormones in the water supply from pharmaceutical etc which is affecting gender of fish stock etc.”

A party statement said King accepted her remarks were wrong and added ominously “an internal post-election candidate review will take place after polling day where her eligibility to stand for the party in future will be reviewed”.

DON’T BET ON IT

When concern about a snap election first surfaced, various Lib Dem constituencies were asked to select early, and Liberator 379 noted that in among the obvious places were some inexplicable anomalies.

And what was the political talent spotting of those responsible like? Not much. The 2017 results concerned yielded: Leyton & Wanstead (third, 6.8%); Poplar & Limehouse (third, 6.7%); Birmingham Edgbaston (third, 3.6%); Esher & Walton (third, 17.3%) and Canterbury (third, 8.0%).

Of those, Canterbury was worse than in 2015 and only Esher & Walton registered any significant progress, while in the other three the improvement was so minimal as to scarcely matter. Why the rush?

VOTE OFTEN

Paddy Ashdown’s obsessional enthusiasm early in his leadership for computers led the late MP Richard Wainwright to dub him a ‘modemcrat’.

Since retiring as an MP Ashdown has made a name for himself as an author of military history.

He now appears to have branched into fiction. The Lib Dem Federal Board was, to say the least, surprised to receive a paper from Ashdown which railed at the party’s democratic structures and its now one-member, one-vote conference.

Scrap it all, he said - and replace it with a 38 Degrees-style direct democracy organisation, free of values, in which anyone can join, free of charge, vote on a key matter and then not so much leave as merely log out.

Sadly for Ashdown the FB was unimpressed, with one member opining: “A pile of horse manure would be a more cogent and realistic statement.”

OFF THE FENCE?

Will the Lib Dem conference in September finally get a chance to debate the Middle East? A torrent of inventive excuses has been found to keep the subject of the agenda for years - most of which boil down to seeking a compromise that cannot be found.

The Federal Conference Committee rejected a motion for spring conference in York (Liberator 383) calling for the immediate recognition of the State of Palestine and an end to trade with illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, despite this having been proposed by foreign affairs spokesman Tom Brake.

Officers of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine (LDFP), who had produced the original text, were urged to find compromise wording with counterparts in the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel (LDFI), though LDFI has said recognition of Palestine and a boycott of settlement products were totally unacceptable to it.

In June a joint meeting between representatives of LDFP and LDFI took place with Brake as chair.

Since they could still not reach agreement, Brake said he would press ahead with a motion that demands immediate and unconditional recognition of Palestine.

It does not however mention occupation, settlement building and settlement trade, though LDFP gained assurances that it could table amendments on these.

Will those who don’t want this debated find some means to block it yet again, and what exactly are they afraid of?

SO, WHY DO YOU WANT THIS JOB SIR VINCE?

Liberator has sent a questionnaire to Liberal Democrat leadership contenders ever since 1988. This time, at least at going to press, Vince Cable was the only announced candidate and it seemed highly unlikely that anyone else would stand

A coronation impends, for the first time since Jo Grimond became Liberal leader in 1956 the post will go uncontested, which is either a tribute to Cable's talents or an indictment of the capacity of the parliamentary party, or both.

Its common for people to want to put very specific policy questions to would-be leaders but we've tried to get Cable (and anyone else had they stood) to think about what the party is for and what it should do to dig itself out of the political hole in which it at present resides.

The next leader inherits a mixed position - record membership but also a record low in vote share and a haul of parliamentary seats that would have looked indifferent even before the breakthrough of 1997.

They also inherit a position where the party has one very distinct position recognised by the public - being in favour of the European Union - but little else and not very much sign of the sort of intellectual flowering that helped to sustain it in previous hard times.

These are the questions. We hope you find Cable's answers illuminating, the more so if you do get a chance to vote on the next leader.

I THE GENERAL ELECTION HAS EXPOSED THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CORE VOTE AT ONLY 7.4% OF THE ELECTORATE. THE PARTY CLEARLY CANNOT 'WIN EVERYWHERE', WHERE SHOULD IT LOOK FOR SUPPORT?

The situation is even more challenging than the question supposes, because, even with our vote dipping in 2017, we were still – thanks to the combined efforts of superb candidates, dedicated local teams and expert support from party HQ – able to pull in tactical votes and support from people who would not view themselves as core Liberal Democrat voters. So I do not underestimate the challenge we face.

Yet at the same time there is a huge pool of liberally minded democrats in the country, millions of whom share our values even though they do not view themselves as Liberal Democrat supporters or voters. It is with this group – who, just like us, want to see a country engaged with its European neighbours, cutting inequality, delivering high-quality public services, engaged in protecting the environment, cherishing civil

liberties and promoting human rights across the globe – that we must start.

There will always be extra votes we can win from our campaigning and casework in local communities – and, of course, thanks to tactical voting in first-past-the-post contests. But the fightback started by Tim Farron, which I aim to continue, must focus on winning over more liberals to the Liberal Democrats for good.

2 TIM FARRON RULED OUT COALITIONS, DEALS AND PACTS. IF THE PARTY DECIDES NOT TO SEEK INFLUENCE THROUGH THESE CHANNELS, WHAT IS IT FOR?

The Liberal Democrats are the only party promoting Liberal Democracy. We are here to win hearts and votes for our campaigns to improve people's life chances, strengthen our communities and protect our future, most immediately through the closest possible relationship with the UK's European neighbours.

No other party offers a Liberal Democrat future. Jeremy Corbyn's stance on Brexit, among many other issues, makes him a completely unsuitable partner. Nor could we support Theresa May's Tories and prop up a government driving the country headlong towards a hard and disastrous Brexit (with Corbyn's full support).

That said, we have long looked forward to a new politics featuring less tribalism and more cooperation across party boundaries; we rightly advocate an electoral system in which this behaviour would become the norm, not the exception. We made a real difference during our time in government, and the Coalition delivered far better achievements than the Conservative governments which have followed.

We frequently work alongside others in local government and devolved assemblies to the benefit of local people. In last month's election, several local parties – including my own in Twickenham – reached agreements with the Greens, to our mutual benefit. Now, in a hung parliament in which the outcome of most votes cannot be foreseen, naturally we are open to discussions with other MPs over any chances to deliver what we fought for in the election. To paraphrase the preamble to our party's constitution, where there is a real chance to help create a fair, free and open society



in which no one is enslaved by poverty, ignorance and conformity by working with others then of course we must grasp it.

3 IF YOU WERE IN THE SAME POSITION AS NICK CLEGG WAS OVER TUITION FEES (A PLEDGE MADE THEN BROKEN) HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THE PROBLEM?

We should not make pledges which we may not be able to keep. If and when the opportunity comes again to form a coalition including the Liberal Democrats, clearly we cannot be expected to deliver every policy in our manifesto – in this scenario, we won't have won the election, after all – but the pledge that all our candidates made in 2010 was an unconditional promise to vote against an increase in tuition fees regardless of circumstances. Breaking that pledge damaged us deeply, and we have yet to recover. We should not repeat that mistake.

4 THE RECENT GENERAL ELECTION WAS FOUGHT ALMOST ENTIRELY ON THE SECOND BREXIT REFERENDUM. WOULD YOU HAVE EMPHASISED SOMETHING DIFFERENT OR ADDITIONAL, AND IF SO WHAT?

I do not believe we should regret making the Brexit issue central to our campaign. Along with climate change, it is a paramount challenge, and the way in which government and Parliament handles it will determine what sort of country we bequeath to future generations.

The Liberal Democrat message did not cut through, however – partly because of the timing of the election, before the Brexit negotiations had begun, which meant that in fact the campaign hardly featured any serious debate over the details and impacts of Brexit. On top of this, the Labour Party cleverly managed to put itself over as simultaneously pro-Brexit and anti-Brexit, a stance which is now beginning to trip them up.

Clearly we need to do better in the future. I believe that the lesson we need to draw is that the party needs to powerfully and clearly articulate a positive vision for the future – one in which policy mechanisms such as referendums or tax rises have their place, but where they are not supported for their own sake but as the means to liberal ends, which we communicate with passion and verve. A fairer, freer and greener society is our aim, and our policies are the means to it.

5 WOULD YOU REGARD YOUR ELECTION AS LEADER AS A MANDATE TO TAKE THE PARTY IN A PARTICULAR DIRECTION, AND IF SO WHAT?

I will be setting out my vision for the party in my manifesto, to be published after the close of nominations. I see the over-riding priority of the next leader as to rebuild the party as an effective

political force, in elections, in campaigns on particular issues and in local councils, devolved assemblies and Parliament. We need not only to make the case for our beliefs – for the UK remaining in the EU, for the need to build an economy which delivers prosperity for all its citizens, for high-quality health, education and social care, for a political system which values the views of everyone – but to make the case for the party as an effective vehicle to deliver those goals. That’s the direction we need to go in – and by working with all my colleagues in local parties, in councils, in the party structure and Parliament, I hope to take us there.

6 THE COMBINED TORY AND LABOUR VOTE IS AT ITS HIGHEST FOR DECADES. HOW WOULD YOU CHALLENGE THIS AND WHAT IDEAS WOULD YOU WANT TO GET ACROSS TO THE ELECTORATE?

The answer to this question is essentially the same as my answers above, particularly to questions 1, 4 and 5. I do not believe that the election’s apparent return to two-party politics is permanent – particularly as the divisions over Brexit within the Labour Party become more clear – but we have to fight to demonstrate our relevance. I believe I have the experience and profile to act as an effective advocate for the party and for Liberalism.

7 WHAT POLICIES SHOULD THE PARTY PUT FORWARD IN THE NEXT MANIFESTO TO ADDRESS THE INTERGENERATIONAL DIVIDE AND HOW SHOULD IT PROPOSE TO TAX THE WEALTH OF RICH PEOPLE AND CORPORATIONS?

Generational inequity represents a great social injustice. Young people seek the same standards of living and the same opportunities as older generations and can rightfully feel cheated when they do not get it. Young people were among the worst affected by the economic downturn – and will suffer more from the impacts of Brexit, limiting their aspirations and harming their future.

Tackling generational inequity must be an important element in our programme. For too many, the dream of owning a home remains just a dream because the country has not built enough houses. The rental market is weighted against tenants. We must address both. I agreed with the policies in our manifesto to reverse housing benefit cuts and to raise the minimum wage for young people, but this is only a start. I aim to work through the Federal Policy Committee and the membership at least to focus on this area as a matter

of urgency. The FPC has already agreed to schedule a policy paper on taxation, to be debated at a future conference, and I look forward to participating in its discussions on the issue.

On wealth inequality, I opposed the Conservatives’ tax cuts for the rich, for example through inheritance tax. As a minister, I pressed for action against corporate tax avoidance and evasion. The sums of tax avoided by some large companies is a scandal that must be addressed. A liberal society is one in which everyone makes a fair contribution. We are still a long way from that.

Vince Cable - the biography

Sir Vince Cable was re-elected as MP for Twickenham in June, having served as the constituency’s MP from 1997 to 2015. During the coalition government he was secretary of state for business, innovation and skills. He has also served as the party’s treasury spokesman (2003–10) and deputy leader (2006–10).

Employment before Parliament included the Government of Kenya, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Glasgow University, Chatham House and chief economist at Shell. In the 1970s he was a Labour councillor in Glasgow; in 1982 he joined the Social Democratic Party and stood for election to Parliament in 1983, 1987 and 1992.

WAGES OF SIN

Liz Barker tried to convince Tim Farron that his lack of clarity on gay rights would be damaging - she didn't realise how damaging

My only meeting with Tim Farron took place in 2015. Following the Channel 4 News car crash in which he repeatedly refused to say whether he thinks gay sex is a sin and falsely presented his voting record on the Equality Act and same sex marriage, I wrote to Tim setting out in detail why his stance was damaging to the party and to him.

I was pleased to be invited by his staff to talk because I rarely criticise other members publicly, and I think it is courteous to speak privately first if possible.

I explained that, while Cathy Newman's motivation for her question was probably malicious, his failure to answer was deeply hurtful to LGBT+ people, their families and allies, many of whom are Christian.

Tim told me repeatedly what Christians think, and when I pointed out that I come from a religious family and have spent a lifetime appeasing people's beliefs, he told me again.

He pointed out, quite correctly, that evangelical Christians regard all sex outside of heterosexual marriage as sinful. I argued that evangelical Christians would not deny heterosexual couples the right to marry, but they would discriminate against longstanding monogamous LGBT couples.

I also questioned whether evangelical Christians write to unmarried heterosexuals, whom they have never met, accusing them of immorality, depravity and criminality. I suspect they don't, but they do write to me. I explained that religion has often been used to justify great hurt and damage. Many LGBT people still suffer, and some of us cannot stand by when evangelicals try to pray the gay away from members of their congregation. Nor can we remain silent when 25% of young homeless people are LGBT and many of them were kicked onto the streets by religious families.

We talked about the fact - and it is a fact - that Tim has never acted in a homophobic manner. He has been supportive of LGBT+ party members and during his time as leader we adopted the most progressive policy of any UK party on trans rights. Commendable as those actions are, they did nothing to counteract the enduring public impression that fundamentally he does not believe in LGBT + equality.

Disquiet among members was reinforced by Tim's denial that he voted against the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) regulations 2007, which prevent LGBT+ people being denied goods and services, and his claim that his vote for the Same Sex Marriage Bill to receive a second reading signified support when in fact he abstained on the subsequent substantive vote.

During our meeting I said that it was a matter of public record and that he had supported evangelical opposition to LGBT equality and that it would be better to explain why he couldn't support equality when other Christian parliamentarians could. He

declined to do so for two years, hence a question of faith became a matter of trust.

My final advice was that even if Liberal Democrats said nothing publicly, our enemies would not let this go and he needed to sort out a tenable position. Maybe the general election 'grid', if one existed, had planned that the first two weeks would see the party impaled on the subject of gay sex, while Tories and Labour said of course it wasn't a sin and got their key issues across. Repeatedly on the doorstep voters cited this as a reason not to vote Liberal Democrat and quietly party members, some of them active Christians, questioned whether our leader could hold such views.

The election campaign was abysmal. For the third time we had no credible message, no effective targeting. Everywhere I went people stared endlessly at screens giving the impression that, whatever data we might have had, there was little reliable intelligence. Seats were saved or won despite, not because of, the national campaign.

Post-election analysis of the poor Liberal Democrat performance included focus group research which showed Tim's anti-gay views were the one thing which was known about him, but it was only one reason why he was not seen as credible leader of the opposition.

I had a feeling that this might be used to distract attention from the many poor judgements throughout the campaign (and judging by Tim's resignation statement I was spot on). So, without discussion with any one (sorry to disappoint Lib Dem Voice conspiracy theorists) I tweeted a couple of articles. I did so because previous Liberal Democrat election analyses, which were nothing but whitewashes, have led to this dire campaign in which we got our lowest vote share since 1959. We cannot go on like this.

We need new leadership which can articulate effectively our values, economic sagacity and a message of hope to younger generations. The people whose handling of campaign messaging and resources has been incompetent must go.

The Tories will learn the lessons of defeat quickly and come right back in the local elections. We need to reacquire the intelligence and judgement which won us elections pre-Clegg and modernise them with digital skills tailored to each seat we fight.

Liz Barker is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

STABBED IN THE BACK

The Labour surge might have prevented the Liberal Democrats winning Vauxhall anyway, but Lib Dem HQ's errors ensured defeat, says candidate George Turner

If anywhere should have provided fertile ground for the Liberal Democrat's unashamedly pro-European message in the 2017 general election, it was Vauxhall.

In the run up to the EU referendum, Kate Hoey rejected the mainstream leave campaign to join Nigel Farage.

Her divisive campaign was comprehensively rejected in her constituency. Vauxhall ended up with one of the highest Remain votes in the country. Afterwards, her constituency Labour party censured her for failing to condemn Farage's racist 'breaking point' poster.

We started 23,000 votes behind and in fourth place behind the Greens, but in the early days of the campaign it certainly felt that we might pull off something extraordinary in Vauxhall. As soon as the election was called, emails started flooding in from people asking if they could help.

From a party that had been looking to target a couple of wards for the 2018 council elections, we transformed into a full campaign team within a week, reaching parts of the borough that had not seen any Lib Dem activity in over a decade. In total more than 300 people contacted us to volunteer.

Our first leaflet cut straight to the point. Hoey's face merged with Farage's on a purple background. Hoey Out! Vauxhall Deserves Better. The image captured the public imagination, appearing in hundreds of windows across the constituency and was splashed over the media.

Hoey's campaign was taken by surprise by the strength of feeling against her. Most of her local party abandoned her, choosing to campaign in neighbouring boroughs. Some even joined us. She was left with a rag bag of activists: Hoey loyalists, and a few relics from the Militant tendency. Again and again we got the same response on the doorstep: I have voted Labour my entire life but I could never vote for Hoey again now.

On the ground we crushed Labour, out-delivering and out-door knocking them in every part of the constituency, but in the end it wasn't enough. On 8 June we were still 20,000 behind.

TIDAL WAVE

All our data at the beginning of the campaign showed that we were significantly ahead of Labour, and yet on polling day we finished 30 points behind. The data was not wrong. There was a genuine, large and late swing towards Labour. In the relatively short period of the election campaign, tens of thousands of people in Vauxhall, and millions across the country, switched their vote from Liberal Democrat to Labour.

We kept our deposit in only 57 of the 262 seats won by Labour in 2017. In seats like Burnley, Redcar and Cardiff Central, which we held until 2015, we were pushed into third. In Bristol North West we finished fourth behind the Greens.

In this bloodbath our heavy defeat in Vauxhall looks sadly like success. We went from fourth place to second. Our increase in vote share of 13.7% was one of the largest for any Lib Dem campaign, and by far the largest in a Labour-facing seat; the second highest was 2.5%. Our loss in Vauxhall had little to do with our local campaign, we were wiped out by the national swing to Labour. That swing was precipitated as much as anything by the outrageously poor campaign run by the Tories.

In what now seems the distant past Theresa May represented a new era of compassionate conservatism. As she stood on the steps of Downing Street for the first time as prime minister, she spoke directly to the many inequalities that exist and her desire to create "a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us". She appeared to not only understand the difficulties that many people faced, but care.

That combination of compassion and competence at a time when Labour were in chaos was compelling. But the election exposed a different side of the prime minister. In public, she crumbled under the spotlight of scrutiny. She appeared cold, distant, evasive and weak.

The collapse of May as a credible and competent leader exposed the underlying weakness in the Conservative political proposition. Since 2010 the public and all political parties had accepted the argument that the budget deficit was unsustainable and some cuts to public spending were unavoidable.

By 2017, we had reached the point where austerity was leading to a fundamental downgrading in the quality of core public services. School heads started talking about laying off teachers. Hospitals were short staffed and waiting times were shooting up. The Tory policy platform offered no hope, just more austerity, taking meals away from children and homes away from their grandparents.

Into this mess entered Jeremy Corbyn with a leaked manifesto and public opinion started to shift dramatically. For the first time there was a major political party offering a clear and credible way out of the dismal spiral of tax cuts followed by more cuts to services.

As Labour's poll rating increased people started to believe there could be a Labour government. Voters began to think that their decision was about much more than who was going to be their local MP, it was about what kind of government they wanted.

At that point Brexit dropped off the agenda. No matter what voters thought about a hard Brexit, in

a general election you only get to tick one box, and in this election the public saw they had a chance to stop the thing that was hurting them today. Brexit was a problem for tomorrow.

In Vauxhall this dynamic was devastating to our local campaign and we felt it on the doorstep. The conversations we were having turned. "I am torn", people told us. "I can't stand Kate Hoey, but I have to vote Labour to kick out the Tories." As the national polls became closer, we started to get squeezed out.

On the last day of campaigning, the team in Vauxhall received a visit from Sir Bob Geldof. In our campaign HQ, he gave a speech to a packed room of activists and journalists.

Despite coming on a mission to help, his message wasn't entirely helpful (particularly when it appeared in the papers the next day): "I think the Lib Dems missed an open goal. It's a lousy campaign. Where are they? It seems to be fairly invisible really.... I wish you'd called me earlier. The day the election was announced I called Lib Dem HQ and I said I'm here if you want me. And we haven't heard from you guys once. I'd have gone to any seat in the country to help you."

Yet the Liberal Democrats had a great message in this campaign. We had an anti-austerity manifesto that was credible. We are on the right side of history on Brexit.

POORLY ORGANISED AND MANAGED

But Sir Bob was right. We had missed an opportunity. The national campaign was poorly organised, poorly managed and poorly executed. Without a doubt that cost us seats and votes.

In Vauxhall we were informed about the fact that we had been designated as a target seat by means of a press release from HQ. That set the tone of our engagement with Great George Street. Despite being one of only 20 or so targets around the country we rarely heard from the national party (other than when they wanted us to raise money for them, when I was receiving calls twice a day). Decisions that affected our seat were taken without consultation, or even communication. Conversations I have had with other candidates in target seats reveal a similar pattern.

Part of the national campaign was to flood each target constituency WITH direct mail, produced by Lib Dem HQ on behalf of the national campaign. On day one we told Great George Street in no uncertain terms that the last thing we needed was anti-Corbyn literature going through the doors of voters in Vauxhall. To win we needed to convince tens of thousands of Labour voters to change their vote to us in a one-time deal to kick out Hoey. That would just be made harder if we were perceived to be anti-Labour.

Our advice was almost completely ignored. Voters in Vauxhall received a stream of literature, sent out by Lib Dem HQ featuring Comrade Corbyn in a silly hat.

"What most unforgivable about the behaviour of Lib Dem HQ was not that they made mistakes, but their refusal to listen to the people on the ground"

As the polls swung towards Labour that message became more and more damaging. The vilification of the Labour leader cost us volunteers and voters. When we complained we were told there was nothing we could do about it.

In other constituencies the failings of the Great George Street leaflet shower was even more devastating.

What most unforgivable with regard to the behaviour of Lib Dem HQ was not that they made mistakes, but their refusal to listen to the people

on the ground. Had they done so they might have been able to cope better with this fast moving campaign.

If this election taught us anything, it is that we are returning to a time when the big political ideas matter. Being the nice Lib Dems with nice candidates just ain't going get us anywhere. To cut though we need a clear, coherent and consistent political message.

For us that means continuing to campaign hard on Brexit.

The Labour party position on this vital issue is dishonest. The idea that we can keep the exact same benefits of single market membership, without paying the entry fee, without accepting the rules of the market or the terms of membership is a fantasy worthy of Ukip.

But it is a fantasy that cannot last forever. As negotiations progress, the electorate and our politicians will begin to be confronted with some harsh choices. If the Europeans insisted on free movement of people as a quid pro quo for access to the single market what choice would Jeremy Corbyn make? It will not be long before the many people who voted Labour in 2017 realise how much they are about to be stitched-up by the developing Labour/Tory coalition on this issue.

Beyond Brexit we must set out a bold vision for a more secure economy underpinned by well funded public services, a strong social safety net and access to good quality affordable housing. The message from the public in this election is that they are prepared to pay for a government that will provide a brighter future.

Given the mess that Parliament finds itself in, we could be returning to the polls within a year.

Could we win Vauxhall, or other Labour facing seats? Although this election has taught me to hold off on making any predictions, the current volatility of the electorate tells me we could be back to our former strength sooner than we think. But to take advantage of the opportunities presented to us, local campaigns need to be backed by a competent national campaigning organisation.

Great George Street has now run two dreadful election campaigns. The party simply can't afford a third.

George Turner was the Liberal Democrat candidate in Vauxhall in 2017

IN THE GUTTER, SEEING STARS

The Liberal Democrats totally misread Labour and saw their worst ever election result. Tony Greaves says the fightback must be based around working out the liberal approach to people's problems

I've been actively involved in 15 general elections including three as a candidate and eight as an agent, starting with organising teams from Manchester University to help in the old Cheadle constituency in 1964. This means I am also old enough to remember Millicent Martin rounding off each edition of TW3 with a spirited rendering of "That Was The Week That Was, it's over let it go". It's tempting to sing out the same sentiment about this awful election. That was the vote that was, let's move on.

It's not quite as simple as that since we need to take stock. Overall it's the worst general election result for the Liberal Democrats, the Alliance or the Liberal Party for a long time (anyone for 1951?) Perhaps for ever.

Yes, we won 12 seats, more than in nine of the 20 postwar elections. But never have we lost 375 deposits, not even in the infamous 1950 debacle (when the threshold was 12.5%) and never (except in 2015) have we seen a standard vote in a non-target seat of just 2-3%.

In most seats the Liberal Democrats were simply not relevant. We even became less relevant as the long, dreadful seven-week campaign went on. As the start we were creeping up at around 11%. The more we said and did, the more that slipped backwards.

So it's time for some realism. I will forgive the party press office for their ridiculous statement on the morning after that "It has been a good night for the Liberal Democrats", that "we hoped to hold our ground", but instead have "increased our numbers". Well, thank goodness for those isolated eccentric gains because in England we did not "hold our ground". We lost half the seats we were defending. We fell back in many more so there are now less than 20 seats where we are (on the numbers) even remotely credible challengers.

The hard fact is that in most places hardly anyone voted Liberal Democrat. By 2010, before the Coalition washed it all away, we were building up a countrywide core vote – including white collar public sector workers, students and some other young people particularly footloose professionals, environmentalists, civil libertarians, defenders of public services, some of the ethnic minority voters we had attracted after the Iraq invasion still with us, people with an international outlook (who have now become passionate Remainers). During the Coalition we systematically, one by one, pissed off all of these groups except the last. To these

core groups we had added some of the many core local votes we had built up – though how many stuck with us at general elections had always varied according to local circumstances, and many had already deserted as a lot of our council strongholds came tumbling down and councillors bit the dust by the hundreds.

EVAPORATING VOTES

Most of those votes, in most places, evaporated in 2015. At this new election we pinned our hopes on the anti-Brexit brigade. At the start of the campaign many of them were considering a Liberal Democrat vote at least where it seemed tactically sensible. One of the curiosities of this election is that in the end most of the anti-Brexit voters cast their ballot for Labour led by Jeremy Corbyn, a lifetime anti-EU campaigner. Lots of habitual Liberal Democrats (and even members) voted tactically for Labour. In only a handful of places does it seem to have happened in reverse as no-hope third placed Labour candidates saw their votes rise beyond their dreams, even to jump into second over Liberal Democrats who thought they were challenging to win.

There was more than just Brexit afoot. Last October I wrote in *Liberator* 381 about Momentum and all the new Corbyn-inspired Labour members – and whether they would get their act together. I wrote: "Whether all these enthusiastic and idealistic but not ideological people can be meshed with the old party fixers to transform local Labour parties into a new Corbynite movement remains to be seen. It will surely be both messy and patchy." And "We will write them off at our peril. The brave new Labour party will result in lots of blood on the carpet...but in some places we are likely to find they are energised by enthusiastic new campaigners. Let us be ready for them."

Well, Labour (or perhaps Momentum and all the new young activists) did indeed get their act together, not least through social media, and we were not ready for them. It was much better than patchy (for them) but I still think it will be messy and it will all end in tears though it will clearly now take some time to fall apart.

So is all lost? It is widely reported by canvassers that this election felt different. The widespread anger has largely gone except within the hard core who will never vote for us anyway. We saw this when we won all those council seats at by-elections, though it did not follow through in the local elections on 8 May. As soon as the general election was announced people switched to "thinking national" and the "Back Theresa May in the Brexit talks" nonsense and the vacuous "Strong and Stable in the National Interest" stuff swept the Tories

in all over the place.

The movement in the next five weeks was astonishing. But the Tories did not lose a lot – their polls slightly from around 45% to 42%. What happened was that (except in Scotland) the election turned into a two-party presidential style contest in which Labour were able to sweep up support from almost everyone else – us, the Greens, some Ukip, new and lapsed voters – ideologically diverse, a lot of it more middle than working class (the C2s seem to have voted heavily for the Tories). This was the anti-austerity vote. The anti-public service cuts vote. The revenge of the Remainers. The revenge of younger people. So Labour's vote went up to 40% and we were left lying in the gutter.

A top campaigner told me that in her constituency Liberal Democrats had campaigned strongly against public service cuts and persuaded people that it was the big issue. So everyone went out and voted Labour. "We did all their work for them."

In Pendle in a 22,000 population county division where I was agent everyone knew it was a fight to the death between two sitting county councillors, Tory and Liberal whose divisions had been amalgamated. Our strong Facebook campaign backed up the traditional stuff and we found lots of people spontaneously helping – posting, commenting, sharing, attacking the Tories on Twitter – and miraculously we held our seat, splitting the spoils with the Tories whose sitting councillor lost his seat to lots of local delight. But many of the same people supported Labour in the general election - there was a 4.5% swing from Tory to Labour. Our successful county candidate got 3,200 votes. In the five out of six county seats we fought we got over 5,000 votes. In the general election we got 900.

Of course this is not new. I remember watching the first box in my own ward in 1979 when the general and council elections were on the same day and while 70% voted Labour nationally, 70% voted Liberal for the council and we had the biggest majority we've ever had while our parliamentary candidate David Hewitt lost his deposit. That kind of split vote was quite rare then. Now it's almost the norm.

People are more promiscuous with their votes than ever before. Lots of people remember the old political loyalties of their families but don't feel bound by them. People change their mind during a campaign. They vote in different ways in different kinds of elections, even at the same time. And because they are not tied rigidly to one party, they will consider different reasons for voting a particular way, whether that is tactical or by particular beliefs. The election turned into a two-way presidential style contest between Mrs May and Mr Corbyn – a man who we got completely wrong, who was thought by the national Bubble including LDHQ to be an unelectable left-wing buffoon and who spoke at Glastonbury in circumstances more reminiscent of Nuremberg than of a pop concert. But that is another of the astonishing stories of this election.

“Labour’s vote went up to 40% and we were left lying in the gutter”

SERIOUS FIGHTBACK

So what do we do to rebuild? A proper and serious fightback rather than the brittle top-down approach we have had so far. The first thing is traditional and necessary. The 12 held seats

and up to another 20 have to be set aside from the rest and helped to resist the attacks which will now surely come. At least two and perhaps more of the seats we won in 2015 and lost this time can be put down to carelessness over the past two years and that must not happen again.

More widely we need to become relevant again. That does not mean swimming along in all the latest national media froth. It's time for a serious root and branch assessment of what we stand for and why, set against the huge challenges now facing the country, our continent and the planet. What does capital L Liberalism really mean in the modern era that is on the one hand changing so fast, yet where so many people are demanding respect for their roots and action over increasing lack of control over their jobs, their local services, their housing, their role as customers, their relationship with the ever larger and more controlling bureaucracies (public and private), their personal data, their status in society, their role in their community?

Most of all, we have to re-establish ourselves as a campaigning party, based on and in communities (most of them still local and geographical but others too because in the modern world our communities overlap). We must once again adopt a campaigning approach to everything we do. That is not just beefing up our election campaigns, though that is part of what we do. It's about – in every situation and every place - working out what is the Liberal approach to a problem, an issue, a project, the future of a community of whatever kind and then campaigning to achieve that. To stop bad things. To promote and achieve good things. To work with people, many not active or even voting Liberal Democrats, to do so. To campaign both on and outside the organisations of power and of accountability.

It was called community politics, but community politics as an expression and logical consequence of our Liberal ideology founded on free and autonomous people, working freely together in communities for the common good and bound together as citizens of a democracy.

It's revolutionary in social, economic, environmental and political terms but that will only become apparent when we are brave enough to once again think and talk frankly about it – and then practise it.

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

CLIMBING OUT OF THE ABYSS

The targeting strategy has finally destroyed the Liberal Democrats in large parts of the country, a failing worsened by the failure to be clear on the EU, says Michael Meadowcroft

The 8 June election results were not only a great disappointment but a vivid proof that the party is in a highly precarious state and that its future survival is far from assured.

I am not scaremongering - 60 years campaigning for Liberalism, and maintaining a constant belief in the essential relevance and attractiveness of the Liberal view of society, have underpinned all my writing and speaking on the subject. My fear now is based on the disappearance of the party in great swathes of Britain and the lack of intellectual resources to revive it.

Look at the stark statistics. Not only did our overall poll actually decline from its abject level of 2015 but the number of lost deposits increased - from 340 to 367. To some extent the media failed to draw attention to the party's further decline because we actually increased our number of MPs. We need to salute those remarkable colleagues who somehow transcended the trend and won but if we allow ourselves to be deceived by this gloss we will have even less hope for the future.

The current situation needs to be compared to 1950 when the party fought 475 constituencies and polled 9.1% of the total vote. Of those candidates 'only' 29 polled less than the current 5% deposit level. There was still a solid cadre of party members around the country well-versed in Liberal philosophy who were able to produce literature and address meetings all of which strengthened the faithful and nurtured the base for the revival which started under Jo Grimond's leadership five years later. My worry is that today we do not have a similar set of colleagues to emulate that example.

There were constituencies with significant increases on their 2015 level. Vince Cable's 14.7% improvement and Ed Davey's 10.2% increase were highly commendable and were surpassed by the increase of 17.6% on the party's 2015 vote in Bath, with a new candidate, Wera Hobhouse, only adopted on 1 May. Leyla Moran's winning advance of 14.7% in Oxford West and Abingdon was also remarkable. St Albans (plus 13.89%) and Vauxhall (plus 13.6%) also stand out.

By contrast there were some massive slumps on the 2015 vote, particularly in Scotland, such as fourth places in Aberdeenshire West and Kincardine, (-12.8%), Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk, (-14%), Gordon, (-21%) and Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey, (-19%).

In each of Cardiff Central, Hornsey and Wood Green, Redcar and Solihull our vote declined by 10% or more on 2015. Nor did previous incumbency help: in Bristol West, Burnley, Colchester and Manchester Withington the Liberal Democrat vote declined by at least 8%

despite the presence of the Liberal Democrat who was the MP up to 2015. Shamefully we lost our deposit in Colne Valley for the first time. And, the final ignominy, for the first time ever, there isn't a single Liberal MP in Wales.

Local election successes were no indicator of success. Take Southport, where we won every ward at the last borough election but were pushed into third place. Or take Pendle with a significant council presence for ever and control of the council for 11 recent years, where Gordon Lishman polled just 2.1%. Indeed, the transmuting of the original worthy objectives of community politics into a machine for delivering millions of contentless Focus leaflets has had a deleterious effect on the health of the party and has contributed to the dangerous diminution of the party's intellectual base.

CLEARLY AND FEARLESSLY

Our campaign never made an impact. We were lauded by the media for having a clear and principled stance on Europe but it never achieved traction. The key reason for this is that we simply failed to identify ourselves clearly and fearlessly with those of the 48% who were passionate about remaining in the European Union. An astonishing number of Remainers fall into this category. A petition was set up in late May 2016 calling for a second referendum if the Remain or Leave vote was less than 60% with a turnout less than 75%. Within one week of the referendum it had been signed by an astonishing four million voters. Here was the opportunity for the party to reject the referendum result as illegitimate and to put itself at the head of the campaign for a second vote.

A clear stance at this point might just have had a chance of taking off. As it was we fudged it, continually parroting that we accept that "the people have spoken" and coming up with a far too nuanced formula for a possible second referendum. We should have gone directly for the four million who felt strongly enough to sign the petition. They had nowhere else to go, as indicated by the thousands of new members who are likely to have joined because of Europe.

In the era of twenty-four hours media attention, there is going to be a pervasive detailed attention to party leaders. Tim Farron is an instinctive Liberal and because of that I voted for him as leader. Unfortunately once he impaled himself on theological positions, no attention was paid henceforth to his views on the political issues of the day.

It was wholly unnecessary. As other evangelical Liberals have shown, the position is very clear: the state can only be secular and politics can only be

based on reason and logic, invested by a view of society and an awareness of what is sustainable. One's faith determines one's embrace of a moral position which cannot, of itself, be imposed on society. Tim was forced very reluctantly into accepting the distinction in practice rather than on principle and it blighted the later stages of the campaign.

All that ever seemed to come from HQ were incessant appeals for cash. The frequency of these appeals was embarrassing

and spiked local fundraising efforts. Parties need funds, particularly at election time, but struggling local associations are inevitably puzzled at the party becoming a fundraising machine even when boasting of having a membership of 101,000 - its highest ever, which must have produced a significant increase in income.

What has been done to consolidate these members and, indeed, to confirm longer standing members? I am very concerned that, following such a poor election, and the marginalisation of the party nationally, many of the newer members will not renew. What has been, or is being done, to persuade them that it is worth continuing to identify themselves with the party? One key way is to ensure that members - all members - understand what the philosophy and values of the party are. We have not had any publication expressing the fundamental beliefs of the party since the document passed by the 2002 party conference. This was never produced by HQ as an attractive publication for use by associations to embed members and to encourage them to be committed and to campaign.

In 2011 needing this publication in Leeds we had to produce it ourselves and it has proved to be very popular everywhere over the years. An updated publication has been needed for some years and the Agenda 2020 project was designed to achieve this. The final text was delivered to headquarters many months ago and has not been seen since. We have no other document that can be a crucial component of an induction pack for new members and we may well lose members because we have not explained to them why we espouse the policies in the manifesto and, particular, why we have always been in favour of a united Europe.

MALIGN CONSEQUENCES

At the heart of the party's current problem is, thanks to the malign consequences of the targeting strategy, the lack of any party activity or even organisation in a majority of constituencies. This strategy has now been in place for some 25 years and has reduced us to our current abject situation. It is a strategy that can only work once, as in 1997, otherwise it will incrementally destroy the party's organisation in all non-target seats, as it has done. From six million votes, 20 seats and just 11 lost deposits in 1992, before targeting was embraced, we now have 2.4m votes, 12 seats and 367 lost deposits. Some success!

“We simply failed to identify ourselves clearly and fearlessly with those of the 48% who were passionate about remaining in the European Union”

We were simply not in the game. We were just not visible. On BBC Radio 4's 18 May Today programme they had a focus group of half a dozen Remain voters in Bedford and they were asked how they were voting this time.

They all still wanted Britain to stay in the EU but simply did not think of voting Liberal Democrat. Even when Nick Robinson prompted them and said the Liberal Democrats represented precisely what they would like, there was a kind of bemused

thoughtfulness - and little more. We simply were not in the game. And with the vote in Bedford down from 20% in 2010 to 4.3% in 2015, it's no wonder.

I do not agree with Tony Greaves that we do not have a 'base' vote; we do have such a vote but it requires at least a modicum of activity to catalyse it into voting. The disappearance of the party in large swathes of the country even harms the target seat candidates.

In heavily student seats such as Leeds North West, Sheffield Hallam and Cambridge a large influx of late registrations, said to be mainly students, had no knowledge of the party's work in their constituencies and, with no awareness of party activity in their 'home' areas, clearly saw no reason to vote Liberal Democrat - and we lost. It is also significant that we did well in the five contiguous seats in south west London where Liberal Democrat activity over the whole area created an awareness of the party's presence and its broad appeal.

My concern now is how to recover from the present situation. I have no doubt that Liberalism is potentially the most attractive and persuasive of all the political philosophies. It is also the only philosophy that has an answer to the entrenched divisions and anonymity of society today. Only if we can get this over to party members can we hope to get them to the sacrificial commitment that Liberalism requires of its candidates which is necessary if we are to transform our communities.

We have to demonstrate clearly how we are firmly on the progressive side of politics but reject the hegemonic, centralising and authoritarian socialism of Jeremy Corbyn; above all we have to have an idealistic appeal to the younger people who, at last, are becoming politically active.

The question is: where are the cadres of solid Liberal Democrat activists that are needed to go to association meeting after association meeting, however small, explaining the party's values? If there is at least a willing number of colleagues we can train them and send them out, but I doubt that they exist. But if they do not exist, what is to happen to the Liberal cause?

Michael Meadowcroft joined the Liberal Party in 1958. He has been a party officer, city councillor, MP for Leeds West and frequent writer on Liberalism

HERE'S HOPING

The 2017 general election was poor for the Liberal Democrats but its results saw the return of hope among voters - so why can't the party capitalise on that asks Paul Hindley

Politics is volatile at the moment; nothing can be taken for granted. This is something that Theresa May learnt to her cost on the morning of 9 June. In the latest of a year of political surprises, the Conservatives lost their majority despite predictions of a landslide. Labour made notable gains including surprise upsets in Kensington and Canterbury. The Liberal Democrats made a handful of gains; returning a dozen MPs. Ukip was annihilated.

The most striking thing about the election result was the return to two-party domination. Both the Conservatives and Labour received more than 40% of the vote. This was the highest combined vote share of the two biggest parties since 1970. The Liberal Democrat vote share fell back to a dismal 7.4%. British politics is now the most polarised than at any point in over four decades.

The real winner of the general election was not the Conservatives or Labour, it was hope. At first, this might be hard to believe. After all May and the Conservatives remain in power. In addition, they are being propped up by a regressive alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party, the right wing religious fundamentalist party from Northern Ireland which has links with the Orange Order. Finally, of course it is impossible to forget the giant Brexit-shaped elephant in the room.

However, for the first time in many years, there is a sense of hope and optimism from young voters, the likes of which hasn't been seen for many years.

Young voters were engaged in this general election in a way that they haven't been for a generation. According to analysis from Ipsos MORI, voter turnout among the 18-24 year olds was 64%, the highest level since 1992. This would represent a 21% increase in young voter turnout since the previous general election in 2015.

Young voters were inspired by Jeremy Corbyn and by his personal integrity and message of hope. No doubt many young voters were also inspired by his left wing policy platform. As a result, the vast majority of young people voted Labour in June. Democracy should exist primarily to serve the youngest and the poorest the most. Those who will live with the consequences of political decisions the longest and those who have the least in society. The fact that young people are beginning to engage in politics again is a good thing for our democracy.

It was never inevitable however that young voters would flock to the Labour Party. In 2010 at the height of Cleggmania hundreds of thousands of students were enthused by the prospect of change offered by Nick Clegg, not least his policy on tuition fees. But 2010 was a false dawn for the voting power of the young.

TURNED TO ASHES

Within months of the Coalition being formed and the reputation destroying decision to treble tuition fees, much of the political enthusiasm of young people had turned to ashes. Young voters were potentially a core vote that could have remained loyal to the Liberal Democrats. Instead Nick Clegg carelessly and needlessly threw that opportunity away.

Like Clegg in 2010, Corbyn stood on a platform of abolishing tuition fees. Like the Liberal Democrats in 2010, Corbyn's Labour had successfully positioned itself as a radical alternative to the status quo. Young voters who felt like they had been let down so many times with Clegg and with the Brexit vote last year, finally had something to believe in again. They finally had something to give them hope.

Young people found that they could no longer support a failed status quo that had done so little for them. Many younger voters continue to find it difficult to secure long-term employment with decent pay. The prospect of home ownership remains a distant one with many having to pay ever higher rents to keep a roof over their head. All the while they face the prospect of being poorer than their parents' generation. The economic consensus of the last 30 years has failed to deliver young people the wealth, security and ownership that they aspire to.

The 2017 general election also showed that there was still hope left in our democracy.

The battle of big ideas has returned. For the past two decades, the main parties of British politics have advanced only subtly different versions of free market fundamentalism. Whether it be New Labour, Orange Book Liberal Democrats or Conservative 'modernisers', the spectrum of political ideas has been very thin indeed.

This all changed in 2017. The age of narrow ideological difference is over. Labour's manifesto consisted of some of its 20th century greatest hits: renationalising the railways, the Royal Mail and the water industry, having a public stake in gas and electricity and increasing taxes on the richest. The Conservatives on the other hand presented one of their most right wing offerings in recent decades. An ultra-hard Brexit took centre stage alongside other Tory favourites such as bringing back grammar schools and fox hunting. There are once again genuine alternatives on offer. For those so badly let down by the consensus of the last 30 years, there is hope that the long night of Thatcherite economics might be drawing to an end.

IMMENSE DANGERS

However, while 2017 offered hope to some, it showed immense dangers for smaller parties. Britain is in danger of returning to the polarised politics of

socialism versus conservatism that dominated much of the 20th century. Don't be fooled by the modest gains; the Liberal Democrats have never been electorally weaker in modern times. The Liberal Democrat share of the vote was its lowest since 1959, during the high-water mark of the Conservative-Labour two-party state. The party also lost 375 deposits and only came in second place in 38 seats.

In 1959, the Liberal Party only stood in around a third of seats; whereas in 2017 the Liberal Democrats stood in 97% of seats. This means that the average vote share per candidate was actually higher in 1959 than it was in 2017. Unlike in the 1950s, the Liberal Democrats are no longer the only third force in British politics. Voters have a range of alternative smaller parties to vote for, from the Greens, to the SNP, to Plaid Cymru, to Ukip, to newer parties such as the Women's Equality Party and the National Health Action Party.

Another impediment to the Liberal Democrat recovery is the lack of any intellectual leadership in the party. The works of Green and Hobhouse helped to shape the Liberal welfare reforms of the early 1900s. In the late 1920s, Lloyd George commissioned what became called the Yellow Book, which outlined a new and dynamic Keynesian economic policy for the party. In the 1960s, Jo Grimond's intellectual dynamism spearheaded a renewed zeal for cooperative ownership and industrial co-partnership. The Red Guard era of the late 1960s and early 1970s left a lasting legacy of community politics.

Where is the radical intellectual leadership of today? Liberalism has a rich and radical heritage, which will need to be rediscovered if the Liberal Democrats are to compete in the battle of ideas.

Corbyn cannot be left as the sole agent of hope in British politics. The Liberal Democrats must also advance hope and they have the liberal radicalism through which to do it. Although, first the party must break away from its mentality of centrist equidistance. Centrist isn't a political philosophy as much as a bland compromise. If the general election showed one thing, it was that if the political centre isn't dead, then it is certainly dying. Don't confuse centrism for liberalism. They are not one and the same thing. We need a radical liberal party not a bland, boring centrist party.

The Liberal Democrats were once the anti-establishment party of British politics. Across the world we have seen the rise of anti-establishment forces of both the traditional left and right.

Corbyn is seen as anti-establishment, but where was Labour's critique of the political establishment in the last election? No commitment to electoral reform, no emphasis on Lords' reform and barely a mention of federalism. The Liberal Democrats must stand to give power to the people. Our democracy needs renewing and Labour has been found wanting.

Despite the Brexit election that never was, Europe is going to continue to be a central issue for years to come. The Liberal Democrats must become the clear, undisputed party of Remain. This would include

“Democracy should exist primarily to serve the youngest and the poorest the most”

clearly advocating a Remain position in any future referendum on the terms of Brexit and promising to revoke Article 50.

Put simply, if we believe that we could never get a better deal outside the EU than we already have in it, why would we ever advocate leaving the EU? Many of

us were committed Europeans. Many of us remain committed Europeans regardless of the Referendum result.

FALLING SHORT

Perhaps most amazingly of all, Labour's manifesto fell short on delivering social justice to the poorest in our society. The Liberal Democrat policies were shown to be fairer for those on lower and middle incomes than those of either Labour or the Conservatives. Cuts in welfare benefits are proven to massively undermine the living standards of the poorest and most vulnerable. Only the Liberal Democrats got to grips with this issue pledging to reverse far more welfare cuts than even 'socialist' Labour. Going forward it is important that new ideas are considered for renewing the welfare state and delivering social justice, such as introducing a universal basic income.

Liberal Democrats can no longer be fearful of their own shadows. 2017 was a watershed for hope. We must galvanise the desire for hope in a way the Labour Party is ideologically incapable of doing. Labour has failed to take on our outdated political establishment. It has failed to fulfil the hopes and desires of young people who voted to Remain a part of the European Union. Finally, it has failed to deliver hope to those who most need it by not protecting the living standards of people who need the support of the welfare state.

A radical vision of hope is needed if the Liberal Democrats are to remain viable in the age of two-party domination. Radicalism not centrism is the way forward. The age of bland pragmatic politics is over; the battle of ideas has been reignited and hope has been rekindled in the hearts of millions of voters. Hope that politics can change their lives for the better. Liberals can only ever be the agents of hope. Millions are crying out for the renewal of our democratic institutions, for the restoration of Britain's place in Europe and for the radical redistribution of wealth from the richest to the poorest. If the Liberal Democrats cannot champion this hope, who can?

Paul Hindley is a council member of the Social Liberal Forum

CONFIDENCE TRICK

Why do Liberal Democrats lack faith in their values and instead try to rely on hyper-activism to win, asks Steve Comer

If we don't learn from past mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them. Those of us that have been involved in Liberal politics for more years than we care to remember can often get a strong feeling of 'déjà vu' as political issues return to the agenda. For example, London airport capacity was an issue when I started secondary education nearly 50 years ago, and is still an unresolved issue.

Yet sometimes we fail to see opportunities when they are staring us in the face, and we fail to notice when our core political values suddenly become more relevant than ever before.

For Liberal Democrats I think the reason for this is largely over-commitment on the part of our key activists. When you are actively involved in politics you rarely have time to stop and think as you are just too busy doing things. This was certainly my experience of 12 years trying to combine being a Liberal Democrat councillor with a day job, while having a bit of a life in the gaps between council meetings, casework and action days spent canvassing and leafleting.

As other commentators like Seth Thevoz have explained in *Liberator*, by 2015 we got to a stage that as a party our campaign leaders simply thought more and more work would stem the flow, but in effect we were just expending huge effort pushing water up a hill, and we got drowned in the process.

The snap election of 2017 came too soon for us, memories of the coalition's NHS re-organisation, and the 'betrayal' on tuition fees were still there. While the gains (and re-gains) we made were welcome, Southport showed how difficult we find it to replace popular incumbent MPs, and Sheffield and Leeds North West were lost due to an unprecedented 'Labour surge' in Yorkshire.

In the Grimond years Liberals realised that the post-war 'Butskellite' consensus was insufficient to deal with a changing nation, even as the two-party vote edged over 90%. There was not much future in defining the party as 'centrist' when the centre ground was already covered by two larger parties.

As late as the 1970s the political discourse was still dominated by a supposed left/right division with the Cold War and nuclear escalation shadowing menacingly in the background. By the 1980s post Lib-Lab pact (and the party's better than expected performance in the 1979 general election) there were debates about Liberal values in a new decade, and about whether social democracy was a bridge or barrier to our aims and values.

DAILY GRIND

In parallel with this was the issue of how our philosophy now fitted into the modern world, and how we made this relevant to the lives of those more concerned with the daily grind of working to pay the bills. The adoption of community politics in 1970 laid the theoretical basis, and the work of many activists soon after proved its relevance to a population that had moved on from deference, yet felt powerless despite the post war increase in material affluence.

The death of Trevor Jones last year reminded me of how much modern Liberal success in this country was based on the work he did in Liverpool and elsewhere from the early 1970s onwards. Without him and without community politics the Liberal Party would have continued to be a glorified debating society on the fringes of politics.

Three decades after that 1970 resolution Liberal Democrats had achieved power in major cities like Liverpool, Sheffield, Newcastle and Bristol, in London boroughs and in large numbers of districts. In many more areas Liberals shared power in coalition, or exercised influence in the places where no party achieved overall control.

Much of the debate within the Liberal Party, the Alliance and the Liberal Democrats has been about how the party positioned itself in relation to others. This has always been a sterile argument as political axes do not stand still. The Corbyn Labour Party is as different from the Blair Labour Party as the current Tory Party is from the led by Heath and Macmillan. Let us not forget that 40 years ago David Steel's public image was as a moderate centrist politician, yet re-read his writings from that era now he sounds like a left winger by today's standards.

The referendum in June 2016 shows that the idea that people always vote on 'the economy stupid' is no longer true. Despite the lazy coverage in some of the media London is not just full of rich people, neither is Newcastle, Bristol or Cardiff (and certainly not Scotland) yet all voted Remain in the EU.

Almost a decade ago I remember then MEP Graham Watson describing a divide in politics between those who have a 'drawbridge up' or 'drawbridge down' view of the world. This has now come into view starkly in the wake of Brexit, but it goes deeper than that, it juxtaposes tolerance with intolerance, those who are pro social change as against the hostile, and those who are forward looking not backward looking.

For years we became used to politics being a largely sterile debate about economics, yet now the world is more complex. It is possible to be wealthy but socially liberal (like Richard Branson) or wealthy and socially reactionary (like Aaron Banks). Income is no longer the determining factor it once was in terms of voting intention.

For Liberalism to survive and flourish, it needs to show it understands today's world and has a vision for the future. It also needs to surf a wave of public opinion that is tired of the old order and wants change. Obama did this in the USA 2008 and Macron in France in 2017. Too often in recent years Liberal Democrats have looked like representatives of the political establishment rather than the insurgent radicals who want to build a better society.

Liberal Democrats did have some achievements in the Coalition government; we successfully promoted marriage equality, fixed term parliaments, and the pupil premium, and made some progress on environmental policy. However we could not or would not distance ourselves from Tory policies like tuition fee hikes, NHS restructuring, and austerity in general.

In government we also adopted a hostile attitude towards public sector employees with pension increases, forced pay restraint, and reduced redundancy payments. Did our ministers not realise that large numbers of public sector workers voted Liberal Democrat in the period 1992-2010?

There has been much talk of the party needing to build a core vote. In a lot of ways we were doing that during the Kennedy years when we broke through in seats like Cambridge, Cardiff Central, Manchester Withington, Bristol West etc. Yet in all those seats we went backwards in 2017. We have simply made ourselves irrelevant to large numbers of people who were our strongest supporters a decade ago.

I believe many of those voters are motivated by liberal values, ideas and beliefs.

Yet too often the party is trying to connect with voters on the basis of logic and dry statistics (and the odd bar chart) not on our vision for a better future.

Even community politics can fall foul of this malaise. If it just becomes a personality cult for a hyper-active enthusiast prepared to work themselves into the ground, then it will not survive if/when that individual keels over with burn out, or if the Liberal Democrats as a national party are seen as damaged goods. And if community politics ceases to become a principled political philosophy and just becomes a shallow marketing tool, people will eventually see through the cynicism of its promoters.

As we now see post-referendum, and post 2017 general election, our core Liberal values of social justice, reform of the corrupt political system, and individual freedom do resonate with a significant percentage of the population, so why do so many not associate these themes with Liberal Democrats?

Part of the answer may be that a lot of people who voted against the Conservatives in 2017 thought they saw these traits in Labour, or merely gravitated to the party that looked to be their main opposition.

Jeremy Corbyn looked like many to be a break with the past, even though he is over state pension age, and has been an MP for 34 years. Labour conveyed an image of wanting to improve the living standards of ordinary people, and protect public services. They also successfully fudged their views on Brexit sufficiently to

“We have simply made ourselves irrelevant to large numbers of people who were our strongest supporters a decade ago”

neutralise it as a real issue in the campaign.

Too many people when asked by pollsters said they did not really know what the Liberal Democrats stand for, well apart from us being pro-EU that is. Stretching back over decades we have a strong record on civil liberties, social justice, equality, the environment, and internationalism. Yet it

seems we lack the confidence in our own beliefs and attitudes, rely too much on short term tactics, and too often try to position ourselves according the policies and priorities of other parties

MOTORHEAD ROAR

I saw Motorhead several times on their last UK tours, and like many mourned the premature passing of singer and bass player Lemmy as 2016 drew to a close. The band was never fashionable, and never tried to be, yet over four decades they built up a loyal following to such an extent that you could see three generations of fans at their gigs. They would always amble on stage with no hype, no fanfare or dry ice, and Lemmy would come out to microphone and shout “We are Motorhead and we play rock and roll!” I think we should remember that example, and proclaim “We are Liberal Democrats – and we fight for you!” every time we venture out with a residents survey and a bundle of leaflets.

Steve Comer was a Liberal and Liberal Democrat Councillor in Bristol for 12 years and in the LGA Lib Dem group cabinet for six years

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REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

It's not just the UK that had had a general election. In France the untried centrist Emmanuel Macron has swept to victory, but why and what will he do? Marianne Magnin reports

The hazard of political calendars almost synchronised two recent milestones: the election of the new French National Assembly on 18 June and the first anniversary of the EU referendum on 23 June.

Two dates with very different meanings, which nonetheless for most of us French residents in the UK sound like the opposite ends of a same string: some massive hope echoing a huge slap.

I left my last article (France Holds Its Breath, Liberator 383) hanging on the eve of the first round of the French presidential elections with these questions: would the two most likely second round contenders Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron be able to mobilise voters widely enough beyond their acquired electorate to become president; what would the absentee rate - the real threat to the democratic exercise, be?

Against the odds, a third unknown factor emerged towards the end of the campaign: the surge in the pools of Jean-Luc Mélançon and his far-left populist La France Insoumise movement, despite not teaming up with either the Parti Communiste or a Socialist Party in full meltdown, which he used to be part of.

One could compare Mélançon to Corbyn, able to crystallise people's frustrations around unrealistic economical promises (inspired by Venezuela's obvious failures) and an opportunistic anti-European stance. La France Insoumise actually managed to mobilise nearly 20% of the ballots, making it a serious contender against the Les Républicains (LR) candidate François Fillon, himself entangled into an indictment about possible financial misappropriations.

Le Pen pursued her attempts to enter the mainstream by tactically resigning from Front National just in time and dropping her family name: her electoral poster simply read: 'Marine Présidente'.

Macron stuck to his guns until the very end. The broadcast debates before the first round consolidated the positions of Macron, Le Pen and Mélançon.

The participation rate was at almost 76% within the historical average. Macron rallied 18.19% of the registered voters, followed by Le Pen with 16.14% making them the two final contenders. Fillon achieved 15.16%, shortly followed by Mélançon at 14.84%. Led by Hamon, the socialist party heralded the real shift with only 4.82% to be compared to 28.63% in 2012.

OBVIOUS TARGET

Now clearly the frontrunner, Macron was the obvious magnet or target. Fillon and Hamon called for their partisans to support his candidacy.

Mélançon changed his 2012 tune by not calling his followers to vote for the moderate candidate, instead conducting an online survey which collected nearly

a quarter of million of votes (out of seven million supporters). Independent surveys were revealing that 17% of his group would cast their vote in favour of Le Pen.

Le Pen managed to strike an alliance with the sixth-placed candidate, the sovereigntist and Farage ally Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, who gained 3.56% of the vote, in exchange of the promise of a premiership.

It triggered some violent reactions among the public, outraged at the betrayal towards the Front Republicain that had been acting for decades as a rampart against Front National. This outcry was not enough to prevent Dupont-Aignan from being re-elected one month later as an MP.

All these lines being clarified, the presidential showdown was the debate where Le Pen and Macron confronted each other.

Le Pen showed her true colours to the face of France, characterising her performance by systematic aggressiveness and poor arguments. She had tried earlier that week to swipe the 'I care about you, workers' carpet under Macron in the context of a visit to a Whirlpool factory that was the victim of relocation.

On 8 May, Macron at the age of 39 became France's youngest ever president with 66.10% of expressed ballots, delivering a better performance than expected as the polls were anticipating a 60-40% split.

The real losers of the second round was the participation rate - with only a 74.56% turnout it was the lowest since 1969 and lower than the first round, something never seen before, while among counted ballots almost 12% either blank or invalid.

Clearly, and despite the spectre of the far-right, a material portion of French citizens expressed their sense of disenfranchisement towards politics. In 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen was facing Chirac, the participation jumped by 8% compared to the first round.

But what about the other fraction? The French people's psyche features that peculiar inclination to hold on for what may be perceived as unacceptable, accumulating floods of frustration for way too long, and then suddenly letting loose.

We have called it revolution in certain times. The 2017 revolution not only brought Macron to power but also reduced to shreds the traditional parties - Les Républicains and Parti Socialiste - while destabilising Front National. No half-measures.

Some Cassandras were predicting that Macron if elected would never be able to secure a strong majority in the lower chamber, convinced that the old order would never die. Taking place in June, the parliamentary elections saw none of these fears materialise.

Despite an extremely short parliamentary campaign for Macron's party La République en Marche (LRM),

its candidates - who were announced after the presidential election in May and with a majority of them political novices - managed to deliver a clear majority at the expense of all other parties except for France Insoumise.

Despite an extremely short parliamentary campaign for La République en Marche (LRM) candidates, who were announced after the presidential election in May and with 50% of them political novices, a clear majority emerged at the expense of all other parties except for their ally Francois Bayrou's Mouvement Démocrate and Mélanchon's France Insoumise.

MoDem secured a 47-strong group at the assembly - the third largest, compared to only two deputies back in 2012. The PS was gained only 30 out of 577 elected candidates losing 250 seats in the process, whilst LR clung on better with 112 seats (against 194 in 2012 and nonetheless their worst score since the birth of the present republic in 1958.

Having gathered 17 deputies around his name, Mélanchon's aspiration was to embody the leading force on the left. How long his arrogance, provocations and systematic opposition to LRM and the government will continue to appeal is to be tested against the improvements to everyone's life promised by Macron.

Some described the 348 seats won by LRM and its ally MoDem as a landslide menacing democracy: but the socialist led group back in 2012 had 331 seats. A firm majority indeed, but not a hegemony. What really shocked analysts was that LRM was still unknown as a political movement 14 months before.

Macron's first transgression to established habits came in the shape of a prime minister, Édouard Philippe, snapped from Les Républicains and a protégé of Alain Juppé, the unsuccessful candidate of the right and centre primaries.

Philippe's leaning was analysed as a necessity to counterbalance the heavy number of PS defectors making up Macron's team and official supporters.

STRONG SIGNAL

The alliance with MoDem back in February had only started the process. Macron did need to send a strong signal to moderate right voters ahead of the parliamentary elections that En Marche was neither left nor right, or arguably both left and right. Macron strengthened his coup when Philippe enrolled one of the right and centre primaries' candidates, Bruno Le Maire as his minister of the economy, a position that Macron had himself filled under Hollande presidency.

While this coup was condemned by most LR supporters, a Macron-compatible fringe decided to segregate themselves from hard opposition, leading them to be expelled by LR and to stand as a separate group Les Constructifs at the National Assembly.

The second perceptible change is the way Macron is carrying the presidential style. It follows 10 years

“The French people’s psyche features that peculiar inclination to hold on for what may be perceived as unacceptable, accumulating floods of frustration for way too long, and then suddenly letting loose”

where the function has been either described as agitated bling bling (Sarkozy) or desperately ordinary (Hollande).

Rarefying his presence on the national stage and asserting his leadership on the international scene (as epitomised by his handshake with Trump and his invitation to Putin at Versailles Galerie des Batailles), Macron multiplies his signals to the nation: he is to preside, his prime minister is to govern.

Breaking with tradition whereby the president solemnly address the nation only on 14 July and for new year wishes, Macron summoned in early July

both houses of parliament at Versailles with a speech promising a ‘profound transformation’ of France and Europe.

The congress was criticised by the opposition as too regal, verging on monarchical and offensive for the prime minister who would be left with nothing to announce the following day ahead of his first confidence vote. Macron gained from the right wing the nickname of Jupiter and from the left wing the one of Pharaoh.

This was small talk compared to the real governance changes lodged in the speech itself: efficiency, representation and accountability are the three reform beacons meant to articulate the government's and state actions over the next five years.

These were more efficiency by trimming down the number of laws, by speeding up lawmaking or by reducing by one third the number of deputies and senators. Better representation by introducing some proportionality in the electoral law. More accountability by establishing performance targets for each minister and public services, by transparently reporting annually, by being sanctioned for failing and by rebalancing the activity of the parliamentary deputies towards the auditing of governmental and state activities. The next big test for Macron will be September, the traditional month for trade unions and other pressure groups to flex their muscles through massive demonstrations. The hottest topic will be the reform of the employment laws and regulations to better oil the job market: negotiations with employee and employer representative bodies started the week Macron got elected. The end of the summer will tell if the change of method carries with it the structural changes so aspired by French people. Not much space left for a Brexit chat.

For those intrigued by Macron's character, watch the documentary short during his campaign ‘Emmanuel Macron: Behind the Rise’, available on Netflix.

Marianne Magnin was Mouvement Démocrate's candidate for French parliamentary elections for the Northern Europe constituency but stepped down in favour of an LRM candidate, who won with a 70% majority. She is a member of Westminster & City of London Liberal Democrats' executive committee

DRAWING TRUMPS

If Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are subverting multilateral institutions, it's time for radicals to use state power to champion the democratic, rules based international system, says Alex Bourne

When I studied international relations at university, Kenneth Waltz and his fellow Neo-Realists were the theorists everyone disliked. The ideological focus on the wielding of raw state power, stood in sharp contrast with the more optimistic rival theories we were taught.

This was a time when many in the discipline were heralding a new post-state, post-sovereignty, globalised era where travel, the internet and education transcended national borders. Waltz's conception of an anarchic international system where international law, multilateralism and the international community were little more than comforting fantasy seemed grossly outmoded; perhaps even a little offensive.

Yet there was something worse and unforgivable about Neo-Realism, setting it morally apart from other approaches to the discipline. For Neo-Realists argued that no amount of idealism, or human progress could ever break the system. The world, they argued, was locked into a never ending power politics.

So at my university's well appointed campus bookshop, the books of Waltz, the Neo-Realism [god] father, and his ilk somehow never seemed to sell.

Since those university days though, lots has happened. The 'End of History' gave way to the 'War on Terror'. New Labour's 'ethical foreign policy' gave way to the 2003 Gulf War.

Economic growth and stability enjoyed during the millennium turned out to be a bubble that clobbered the millennials. Europe's Far-Right started winning elections. The euro went from being stabilising to hubris. There was a threatened Grexit, a real Brexit, and somewhere in between the idea that free trade and free movement are inherently wrong somehow crept in.

KICK IN THE TEETH

In Britain Theresa May's announcement that "if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere" (admittedly aimed at wealthy tax-dodgers rather than the idealistic) was a kick in the teeth. Elsewhere we've had genocide in Sudan, ethnic cleansing in Burma, and the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Syria. Russia has annexed parts of Ukraine. Two of the Solomon Islands have disappeared (probably) due to anthropogenic climate change. Hungary is putting refugees in barbed wired camps. Several states appear to be sponsoring the 'disappearing' of their LGBT communities.

For many the icing on the cake was the arrival of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States.

It was at this point that I wondered whether the rise of 'The Donald' vindicated the Neo-Realist vision. That

despite the efforts of leaders like Bill Clinton, John Major (before Maastricht), Helen Clark, Tony Blair (in this first term), Kofi Annan and Barack Obama, the idea that there was responsibility and a concept of citizenship between people that bridged national borders had turned out to be a temporary hokum before Waltz's eternal anarchy cut back in.

Amusingly enough though, Neo-Realists have actually been diving for cover, quickly disowning Trump as no son of theirs. Online there are articles by New-Realists deconstructing now infamous campaign speeches and patiently explaining how Neo-Realism 'is' about nuanced, disciplined solutions to various security paradoxes, advancing the national interest to secure peace - not votes. Just because Donald Trump sees the ultimate expression of United States power in missiles and the control of borders doesn't mean he's Neo-Realist, they protest.

Yet once you get past Neo-Realists efforts to avoid being tarred with the POTUS-45 brush, you notice Trump appears to validate their theory in one specific way.

Six months into Trump's presidency, US foreign policy looks not all too different from its form under President Obama. Despite the nauseating Putin-Trump mutual appreciation society in 2016, US relations with Russia are getting worse (G20 notwithstanding). Trump's adoration for Cold War-era like strong men hasn't stopped him bombing Syria. The slow creep towards confrontation with North Korea has been simmering ever since 2011, when the new supreme leader assumed office. The practice of US foreign policy in July 2017 little reflects the protectionist, America First rhetoric prevalent in the Trump's presidential campaign, and in the key aspect of international relations Neo-Realists emphasise (power and force); Trump has so far found himself unable to drive through any of the changes he promised his electorate.

In one sense, this triumph of Neo-Realism over Trumpism is a good result; as no doubt the policies espoused by Trump, if implemented, would dangerously destabilise the global order. The anarchic Neo-Realist 'system' identified by Waltz instead has so far constrained Trump's hubris and maintained the status quo; acting as a check and balance against a disruptive unstable element. This is, supposedly, the positive and peace-keeping component of Neo-Realist thinking. The idea that if mavericks rock the system, the system corrects itself.

Except of course I'm writing this in a radical publication. That means those reading this article are equally as concerned with overturning the

established order as Trump and his cronies are. The radical conception of the global system may be far removed from the Neo-Realist obsession with narrow statescraft, but a difference in objective doesn't mean the barriers Neo-Realists have identified somehow don't exist for non-conservatives. Trump failures, and his isolated successes, therefore need to be looked at carefully.

I say isolated successes because Trump has had some impact on the international stage. It's just the impact is felt in those international issues that Waltz tended to ignore or dismiss.

Within days of entering office, Trump blocked US foreign aid to medical centres associated with abortions and he's in the process of cutting funding to UN agencies promoting human rights and peace building. In both cases he's done this by amending domestic budget lines rather than through any diplomatic negotiation. The moment an international agreement becomes an issue though, Trump's freedom of action vanishes. Although Trump has repudiated the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the fact that every other signatory has affirmed their commitment means exporting American companies will be bound by the agreement anyway. Trump's most public foreign policy efforts, his attempts to introduce a Muslim travel ban, his roll backs of US laws on internet neutrality, and his cuts to funding for science projects, the rollback of stringent environmental standards for new cars; all have all been achieved solely through US domestic legislation.

Here is the key learning point for Radicals: as an ideology committed to making the world a better place, Radicalism risks formulating foreign policy for the world it wants rather than addressing the world as it is.

For example most Radical manifestos rightly would include the ambition to reform and modernise the United Nations. Yet a good look at the institution's rules on reform demonstrates that short of a seismic global political earthquake, any reform proposals are doomed. Yet many Radical manifestos then go on to make proposals on human rights, democracy, peace building, discrimination, pollution and science that can only be achieved if the UN has already been remodelled. Worse, the proposals will completely neglect to take into account how self-interested opponents will array the power of the international system to counter Radical reforms.

If (and it's a big if) the Neo-Realists are right about the centrality of state power, then to beat the ilk of Trump, Radicals need to switch their mindset. Rather than putting our faith in multilateralism over state power, our approach needs to think about using state power to reinforce multilateral approaches.

UNCOMFORTABLE DECISIONS

This involves uncomfortable decisions. It means preserving Britain's privileged position on the UN Security Council and potentially increasing defence

“Amusingly enough, Neo-Realists have been diving for cover, or otherwise quick to disown President Trump as any son of theirs”

spending so British troops can again participate in UN Peacekeeping (when was the last time people saw British troops in blue berets?). It means targeting the British overseas aid budget so instead of giving sums of money to charities to work on grass roots projects, British public institutions are instead visibly leading on priorities identified by developing countries (starting with the 2015 Sustainable

Development Goals). It means getting over our post-colonial unease about bodies like the Commonwealth and using that institution to coordinate, with some of the least developed countries, Britain's diplomacy in the World Bank and IMF.

Radicals should also be seeking to re-engage with Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean regional organisations (Britain's overseas territories qualify it for membership) so that it can support and promote the efforts of those organisations.

One of the reasons Trump's rise is so disastrous is not because of his foreign policy; it is because in the last decade the United States became the last country left that was willing to use its state resources to promote the multilateral order.

Trump has left a vacuum of leadership that needs to be filled. If Radicals are to step up and fill that vacuum, then the lesson of the last few years is that we must overcome the 'small island' mentality, stop dreaming of a UN run by Jed Bartlett, and start using Britain's inherited geo-political privileges to give multilateralism a backbone.

If some radicals could get themselves elected to Parliament of course!

Alex Bourne has been a Liberal Democrat member since the 1990s

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SLOW MARCH IN SCOTLAND

Outside a few strongholds, the Liberal Democrats sounded like ‘Conservative-lite’ in Scotland, with predictably poor results, says Nigel Lindsay

The general election in Scotland can only be analysed in the context of the SNP. The big media story of the night concerned their losses, but overlooked the tiny detail that they won more seats than any other party by quite a long margin. Indeed, the election was fought largely on their agenda and their record in government. Finding from polling that support for independence remains high, they unwisely committed themselves to a further referendum in the next couple of years. By doing so, they played straight into the greedy hands of Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservative leader, who based her campaign solely on opposing a further referendum.

The Conservative revival in Scotland has been as rapid as it was unexpected. Conservatives won less than 15% of the popular vote in the 2015 Westminster election and nearly 29% this year. The Conservatives now hold more seats than Labour in Scotland for the first time since the 1950s. Davidson is likeable, energetic and effective and projects strong convictions, which seems to build support among uncommitted voters.

Liberal Democrat results in Scotland were better than elsewhere in Britain. With less than 10% of the population, Scotland delivered 33% of LibDem seats, with one held, three gained, and no losses. That is quite an achievement in relative terms. The hard work and the unfailing optimism and energy which Willie Rennie injected into the campaign as leader certainly paid off. We almost won five seats rather than four, as North East Fife was held by the SNP over our candidate by just two votes at the third recount.

We held Orkney and Shetland, where Alistair Carmichael deservedly increased his majority after the vituperative SNP campaign against him two years ago. We gained Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, won by Jamie Stone on a 9% swing. After losing his Scottish Parliament seat, Jamie threw himself into local politics, won a council seat and kept his profile high. His 2017 win followed intensive door-knocking in the small communities of this far-flung area. Jo Swinson regained East Dunbartonshire, likewise after intense local campaigning. Christine Jardine won Edinburgh West from an Independent (formerly SNP) following constant campaigning with the indefatigable Alex Cole-Hamilton and a team of local councillors.

As in England and Wales, however, our performance outside the seats we won and narrowly missed was distressing. Although our vote rose in most seats, it was typically from 2% to 3% so there were many lost deposits. Sadly, we also failed to reverse our 2015 losses in north-east Scotland, coming fourth in the two seats we held there until the coalition.

Part of the problem was that the herd mentality of the Scottish media. This led most outlets to focus their election reporting on Davidson and her intention to forbid the Scottish electorate from voting again on independence, and presenting the SNP as hell-bent on having another referendum. In this sterile environment it was an uphill struggle for Labour and the LibDems to gain much coverage.

How, then, should the Lib Dems in Scotland have elbowed their way in? Perhaps by distancing themselves from a discredited establishment, much as insurgent parties in mainland Europe such as Podemos or Le Republique En Marche have done? Or maybe by an unashamed projection of Liberal values, as Justin Trudeau did in Canada? Or even just carving out a niche by emphasising the party’s long-standing commitment to federalism, rather than the extremes of nationalism or unionism?

None of the above. The main message of much Lib Dem literature was just ... that we opposed a second independence referendum. Yes, folks, Conservative-Lite.

This message undoubtedly helped us win seats from the SNP where we, rather than the Conservatives, were seen as the main challenger. The evidence suggests that it didn’t help much elsewhere. More damagingly, it reinforced a perception that, like Labour and the Conservatives, we are an establishment unionist party. If federalism was pushed by any Scottish party it was (extraordinarily) by Labour. In Scotland, as in the rest of Britain, we have done little over recent years to educate voters about our core beliefs. We cannot be surprised, then, that people in most constituencies do not know what we stand for, and therefore see little reason to vote for us.

Where now? The SNP will have to accept they are unlikely to win 95% of the seats at every election, but they stand to prosper under a Tory government pursuing the hard Brexit that Scotland voted against. May’s self-serving agreement with the DUP has already created major problems for ‘Ruth Davidson’s Conservatives’, who look on helplessly as the fruit of the magic money tree is exported to Northern Ireland. Labour needs to recognise that its improved results probably owe more to Jeremy Corbyn than Kezia Dugdale. Liberal Democrats have thankfully re-established themselves as a force in Scottish politics. Now we need to start explaining what Liberalism is, and lay foundations for wins in the parts of Scotland we didn’t reach this year.

Nigel Lindsay is a member of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and was an author of *The Little Yellow Book: Reclaiming the Liberal Democrats for the People*

Adults in the Room by Yanis Varoufakis Bodley Head £20

The political world, the pollsters, the media and the establishment were all shocked when Greeks voted 'No' in their referendum on the European bailout in July 2015. The No vote was not, as many suggested, a suicidal move; rather it was a statement of defiance, harking back to 1940 when the Greeks under General Metaxas allegedly replied to Italy's ultimatum of war with a single word reply – Oxi. Oxi Day is still an annual celebration of Greek pride and nationalism.

The 2015 referendum was called by the left-wing Syriza government under Alexis Tsipras, which urged a No vote to reject further austerity measures demanded by Greece's creditors in response to the nation's horrific debt problems. The Greek economy had been mismanaged for years; corruption was rife, the non-payment of taxes a national pastime and a staggeringly generous public sector pension scheme all meant the country was economically on its knees.

Against this backdrop, Syriza rose from 4.6% in 2009 to opposition in 2012 with 26% and on to government with an overall majority in January 2015. Taking control, Tsipras appointed Yanis Varoufakis as finance minister. A newcomer to party politics, he was brought from academe into parliament and government to be finance minister and was the first public figure to admit that Greece was, to all intents and purpose, bankrupt. In his book about his six months in office, he describes the negotiations he had with the EU, the IMF and European Central Bank.

He begins his account with an analysis of how Greece had been continually betrayed by governments of both centre-left and centre-right, seeking funds from elsewhere while ignoring the realities of the country's plight. Greece's creditors were also themselves to blame, adding debt to a nation already unable to pay and demanding increasing levels of austerity which crippled the poor and left the tax-avoiding classes unscathed.

His book shows that he was



REVIEWS

not prepared to continue Greece's asking for loans it could not repay, insisted on the restructuring of existing debts and an end to the austerity measures which were reducing many in Greece to grinding poverty

On becoming minister, he spelled out to Europe the scale of the problem: Of 2.8m Greek households, 2.3m had a debt to the taxman they could not service; 1.0m could not pay their electricity bills; for 48% of families pensions were the main source of income and the €700 state pension was cut by nearly 50% under the austerity measures; the minimum wage shrank by 50%; 1.4m out of a labour force of 3m were jobless, of whom only 10% received unemployed benefit with 15% receiving nothing at all; 500,000 employed in the private sector were not paid for three months.

Varoufakis told Europe this could not continue. The Greeks had voted for an alternative approach and Europe should respect that. He details various measures he proposed both to recalibrate the Greek economy and address the suffering of the people while proposing plans for Europe to support Greece and ensure the country remained within the eurozone. It was, he stressed in the interest of all parties that Grexit did not happen.

However, as he chronicles, "Europe's deep establishment" having previously been prepared to spend good money after bad propping up a bankrupt nation became an ambivalent collection of contradictory messages. Angela Merkel might make encouraging noises in phone calls to Tsipras but her finance minister Wolfgang Schauble would renege on agreements and change the rules of the games. Christine Lagarde of the IMF seemed sympathetic

to Varoufakis' approach but lacked the clout to change anything. The same attendees would contradict themselves from one meeting to another and little coherence existed on the European side while they presumably tired of the constant repetition by Varoufakis of his position.

The most sympathetic player on the stage was Emmanuel Macron who understood the Greek dilemma and the need to restructure or write-off much of Greece's debt and Varoufakis writes of the support he paradoxically received from a range of right-wing figures including Norman Lamont, Wall Street and city bankers.

Faced with impossible demands from the troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF, the Greek government called the referendum. The result was a massive rejection of the bailout conditions being demanded of Greece, with 61% opposed. The Greek people had spoken – but

**TERROR
IN
FRANCE
THE RISE OF JIHAD
IN THE WEST
GILLES
KEPEL**

in the days that followed, there occurred what Varoufakis describes as a rare event – a coup d'état by the government against the people.

Within a week, Tsipras had agreed to cuts in pensions and tax increases greater than those rejected by the public. Varoufakis resigned, left parliament at the subsequent election and became a media star and writer of a very readable book giving his take on a remarkable six-month period in Greek and European history.

We will have to wait for history and the memoirs of others to see whether he was a farsighted and economically correct as he portrays himself – and whether Europe is more co-ordinated and consistent in its approach to the Brexit negotiations.

Nick Winch

Boys in Zinc by Svetlana Alexievich Penguin 2017 £9.99

Svetlana Alexievich is a Belorussian journalist whose life-long mission has been to tell the truth about war, and the human condition. This book about the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan has just been published in English for the first time, a welcome development for those of us unaware of her work before she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2015.

Alexievich interviewed dozens of soldiers who served between 1979-89, when the Soviet Union withdrew, defeated. She catalogued the horrors they endured at the hands of Afghans who did not want their fraternal, socialist 'help'. The soldiers, most of whom were barely out of their teens, were told they would be welcomed. Their bewilderment and fear soon turned to brutality: whole villages laid to waste, civilians massacred, and homes looted. Their stories echo those of Americans in Vietnam and South Africans in Angola or Mozambique. Drug abuse, boredom, loneliness, and terror punctuate each beautifully written paragraph.

Alexievich interviewed medics who worked around the clock in unspeakable conditions to save the lives of Afghan civilians, only to be spat at by their patients. If a little girl accepted candies from a Russian soldier, the Afghan mujahadeen amputated her hands

as a warning to others not to fraternise with the occupying army.

Equally alarming was Soviet officialdom's disregard for soldiers' health or safety. They were transported in planes flown by drunken pilots; the hospitals were short of medicine and equipment; and given tins of food that had expired 25 years before. Officers sold their underlings' clothes and weapons to the enemy, stripped the possessions off dead soldiers, and turned a blind eye to bullying and theft.

Wounded soldiers returned home to families who believed the Soviet propaganda about military success and friendly Afghans. Traumatized and neglected, the soldiers met indifference or contempt from those who had avoided service.

Most disturbing and painful are Alexievich's interviews with the mothers of soldiers who never came home. Their agony was made worse by the brutality of their treatment by officialdom. Remains were sealed in zinc coffins and dumped in the courtyards of parents' apartment blocks or behind sheds at airports. Once it was clear there would be no victory in Afghanistan, the fallen became an embarrassment, rather than heroes.

Alexievich believed she had a duty to recount the mothers' tender memories of their sons as affectionate and gentle little boys; the terror of watching bookish or musical souls taken away to defend their 'homeland', and the emptiness of life once they are told their sons have been killed.

However, by the 1990s the same forces now running Russia fomented a backlash against Alexievich's truth-telling. The final quarter of the book details the legal proceedings against her, instigated because she challenged the popular notion that Russia is still all-powerful and that its recent history is glorious. The persecution of Alexievich reveals the mindset of those in the Kremlin, and their millions of supporters who prefer lies rather than facts. We must hope the international fame brought by the Nobel award will protect Alexievich from the fate awaiting too many other brave journalists, trying to work in modern Russia.

Rebecca Tinsley

Parliament Ltd, a journey to the dark heart of British politics by Martin Williams Hodder 2017 paperback revised & updated

The blurb states that "Parliament Ltd reveals the financial interests that British politicians would rather you didn't know about."

Fair enough. I chose not to stand for Parliament, chances for a Liberal being slim aside, partly because I couldn't afford to – the pay was not that good for a backbencher with no particular prospects otherwise. This clearly makes the old Chartist case of the chances for working class representation. If I had have pursued Parliamentary ambitions at the time, and been successful, what would I have done with my job? I was, by then, a partner in a small intellectual property firm, much of which I had built up myself. Given the uncertainties of politics would I need to return to this? I would have ceased working in that field, but might have retained the partnership without remuneration (we couldn't carry sleeping partners). As an elected member, I would have used my knowledge of intellectual properties as need be, a fairly specialist area of which Parliamentarians are by and large, ignorant.

This is the paradox journalists like Williams don't quite understand. Many of the Lib Dem MPs who lost their seats in 2015 were ordinary people – take Paul Burstow, whose biography describes him as "buying assistant with Allied Shoe Repairs in 1985. In 1986, he worked briefly in print sales with KallKwik Printers, before becoming a research assistant at the London Borough of Hounslow in 1987".

After that he worked for ALDC before becoming an MP. I don't see much of a silver spoon there. So, what the hell is he going to do after Parliament at the age of 53? If he's offered a job by MHP Communications he's going to take it. A number of former MPs who've given similar periods of time to their communities are less fortunate.

"Here's a case of a politician

meddling in foreign affairs, despite having business interests that might be linked”, Lib Dem’s very own Raymond Asquith.

Asquith, as a hereditary peer, joined the House of Lords after a successful by-election in 2014. His Wikipedia article says that he entered the diplomatic service in 1980, was posted to Moscow 1982-85 and Kiev 1992-97. So, he might reasonably be able to tell us something about Ukraine, although Williams omits these details; but surely, that doesn’t matter to financial probity?

I recall once being barred from speaking on a particular matter in the council chamber, when I was the only person there who probably knew anything about the matter. This had involved residents taking direct action in the demolition of a structure used for drug dealing, I cast the first stone, as it were. My imposed silence made the debate rather futile. Small beer, but in Asquith’s case, he did have something to say.

So, I ended up rather disappointed in a book which seemed promising. The exposure of underhand defence dealings and the like ought to be something that would find a sympathetic reading, but it is lost in sanctimony and a certain economy with the facts. Ulterior motives? I looked up Williams on The Guardian’s website; it makes no mention of his own financial dealings.

Stewart Rayment

Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West **by Gilles Kepel** **Princeton 2017 £24.95**

A French friend found himself struggling to save victims of shootings at the restaurant La Belle Equipe in the 11th district; other friends in a town just south of Paris told us about bullets fired during the murder of a policewoman in Montrouge landing near their house; a Jewish acquaintance with an important position at the Mémorial de la Shoah, the Holocaust centre in the Marais, brought up an unexpected subject when we met for coffee: she wanted to talk about when and where she’s emigrating.

You do not have to look far to find

someone who has been touched by violent extremism in France. According to country’s interior ministry, there were 851 recorded anti-Semitic incidents in France in 2014, more than double the number the previous year.

“How fragile civilisation is.” notes Salman Rushdie. “How easily, how merrily a book burns”. He likes to quote Heinrich Heine: “Where they burn books they will in the end burn people too.” Rushdie has been the canary in the coal mine of Islamic extremism.

The rise of terrorism - and, by implication, the fragility of civilisation - is the subject of Gilles Kepel’s authoritative study, in which he explores the emergence of jihad, looks at how various administrations have tried to cope with developing problems, and traces popular reaction and the increasingly important right-wing Front National party.

He brings up the cases of individual terrorists, mentioning early experiences that turned them in this direction. Early in the work, Kepel emphasises the importance of this subject: “If we fail to understand the genesis of French jihad, for which we now have an in-depth case study that can be considered a paradigm for other Western countries, we doom ourselves to a political myopia that constitutes, alas, the mental horizon of a ruling class whose inanity jihadism has exposed”

Recent French administrations have acted in ways that missed the developing problems or even exacerbated them. Kepel regards the period from 2005-12 as one of lost opportunities and gross errors. He notes, for example, that President Sarkozy’s inflammatory words in reaction to the 2005 riots were anything but constructive, reinforcing the sense of polarisation in society, and that François Hollande, who had originally won over the older generation of Muslims, had problems retaining their support when his administration’s efforts to spur job growth didn’t do enough to deal with the appalling rate of unemployment, particularly in the Paris suburbs.

One crucial error concerned the prisons: somehow it didn’t occur to the authorities that prisons could be destructive, that they could, in fact, be incubators of terrorism.

In prison Boubaker Al-Hakim was mentor to Said and Chérif Kouachi, the killers who attacked the cartoonists at Charlie Hebdo. Al-Hakim wrote: “Prison was hard. We were humiliated by those infidels [kuffar] but at the same time it was a marvellous gateway for calling people to Allah and explaining His path... Today I say to my Brothers in France: don’t look for specific targets, kill anyone at all! All the infidels back there are targets.” It was also in prison that Amedy Coulibaly, another leader in the 2015 attacks, was radicalised.

The Syrian-Spaniard Mustafa Setmariam Nasar alias Abu Musab al-Suri, published “The Global Resistance Call” online early in 2005. It was a break with earlier al-Qaeda policy, where agents from the Middle East were assigned attacks on the US - instead, al-Suri urged terrorism in Europe, inciting the poorly-integrated younger generation of French Muslim immigrant families to join in jihad.

In a thorough discussion of the magazine Charlie Hebdo, Kepel observes what a profound effect on the French the attack has had, in that several of the murdered cartoonists, men with decades of experience, were beloved by the public, they “incarnated a facet of popular culture”.

But Kepel acknowledges that mistakes were made. In 2006 the magazine reprinted the cartoons that in Denmark had caused such controversy. This established Charlie Hebdo’s reputation for Islamophobia, and for many, it was further proven by caricatures that appeared in September 2012, including one of a naked turbaned figure prostrate in prayer, drawn at an angle that showed his dripping penis and a yellow star stuck into his rectum. Shortly afterwards, Kepel was invited to speak on a radio programme. He quite reasonably criticised the caricature as an obscenity against the dignity of every Muslim. As a result, he was attacked by the magazine’s lawyer and received hate-filled emails.

In an epilogue, Kepel brings into his narrative even more recent events, the humanitarian welcoming of Syrian refugees, Muslims, against the backdrop of the invariable opposition of Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Kepel has contributed a well-

written and balanced study of the subject, which deserves to be read by anyone who wants a better grasp of what is really going on.

Christine Graf

**Jane Austen
The Secret Radical
by Helena Kelly
Icon Books 2016 £20.00**

A Radical Jane Austen? I hadn't given the matter too much thought, though, once put, it seems quite obvious. I read Jane Austen quite late in life; school boy prejudices against anything on the reading list, I crashed through them one after the other while in bed with flu – probably not the best time. And as Kelly points out, it is difficult not to carry the baggage from TV and film adaptations. That said, the connection between Mansfield Park and the slave trade is pretty obvious.

Kelly postulates a fictional Jane Austen in order to gain an understanding of the author in her time. That time is of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when the south of England, where Austen mainly lived, was under the threat of invasion, at least until Trafalgar. With that comes reactionary measures, insularity (as for most of the time travel on the continent was unobtainable) and a military presence. Kelly's argument is that this bigger brushstroke is always there in the background of Austen's novels, now lost to the general reader, but that would have been taken much for granted by her contemporaries.

Austen was certainly familiar with the work of Mary Wollstonecraft and draws on her in much the same way as Shelley drew on Godwin (Wollstonecraft's husband). The condition of women in the early 19th century is central to Austen's work, raising awareness of their plight in the patriarchal order, with its arcane inheritance rules

Emma focusses on the enclosure movement, which gained a momentum with the impact of war. The conservative Mr Woodhouse is generally opposed. What is the proto-Liberal position? Well that depends on who. Sir John Sinclair, agricultural improver and advocate of enclosure, while close to Pitt (the younger), is something of a

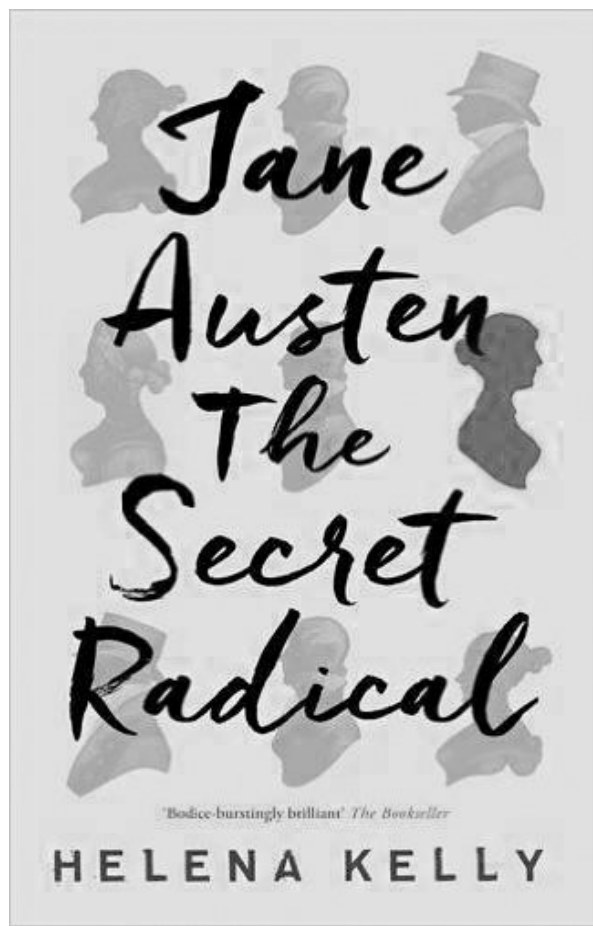
utilitarian. His grandson would sit as a Liberal under Gladstone, and his great-grandson would lose the Caithness seat to the Crofters Party; some justice there given Sir John's appetites, possibly aiding Gladstone's adoption of the Highland Land League's programme.

That aside, does the Woodhouse position make Austen a conservative? Marilyn Butler certainly thought so. The sum total of liberalism or radicalism is not held in any one party, particularly in a time when political parties were loosely defined. Perhaps Austen's position might be close to that of the abolitionist William Wilberforce – not a Liberal in the sense that we understand it, and again, close to Pitt, whose repressive measures he generally supported. Kelly hints that Austen's religious position may have been closer to Wilberforce's evangelical Christianity than that of the Church of England, though unsaid.

So, was Austen's resting place – Winchester Cathedral - a tilt at the established Church? The clergy are not the most likeable characters in her novels? Their complicity in slave ownership underscores hypocrisy; did bishops read St. Paul in Austen's day? A fine conundrum to close on.

Kelly draws all of these elements together entertainingly and demands that I read Jane Austen again. Some of the propositions are a bit absurd, but I'll let you find those and chuckle over them yourselves. There may be unacknowledged sources, but the book has a freshness, as if Kelly has gone down this road of discovery herself. It is often said that a novel tells you more about its time than a history book can, but you have to know that time, not to read it in your own present.

Stewart Rayment



**Rotherweird
by Andrew Caldecott
Jo Fletcher Books 2017
£14.99**

"An old rage burned – so many startling gifts, so much knowledge gleaned along the way, and yet what a mess Mankind had made of everything."

It is a condition of Rotherweird's independence from the rest of Britain that its history be not revealed. Teaching modern history is thus a political appointment, candidates are interviewed by the mayor, "the price we pay for avoiding those idiots in Westminster."

If the history of Rotherweird is not to be revealed, perhaps Andrew Caldecott's novel should not be reviewed? Suffice to say that if, metaphorically, a white page is a white tile, and you step on to it, mysteries, horrors and wonders will open up before you. We know so little of the lives of the masses of Gormenghast, how would Mapp and Lucia fare there? What intrigues and adventures would befall? I have said too much...

Stewart Rayment

Monday

I have seen active service in two world wars (details still hush hush, I am afraid). I was at the General Post Office, Dublin, when the Easter Rising broke out (I had only gone in to buy a stamp). I went canvassing in the Wythenshawe and Sale East by-election. But never have I seen scenes like those I endured at Westminster that afternoon.

It began in the Lords' tearoom, where there was the usual grumbling about the state of the world and the manners of young MPs these days. Soon our discussions took on a darker tone. "Fella's from the North," said one peer. "Keeps talkin' about his children," returned another. "Did you see him with Andrew Neil? Terrible performance." "He's a God-botherer." "Let's debag him!" "Now look here," I began, "I know he would tear the pews out of St Asquith's and have us all singing 'Shine Jesus Shine' given half a chance, but he has many good..." I found myself addressing an empty table. The posse, clad in ermine and tweed, was off down the corridor to the Other Place. There they found poor Farron, who was forced to leap from his office window into the Thames mud to preserve his life.

We Liberal Democrats pride ourselves on electing our leaders by one member, one vote, but should we not pay some attention to the way they are removed from office?

Tuesday

One pleasing outcome of this hung parliament is that the Conservatives have been forced to give up their idea of doing away with Clegg's cherished free school meals, and I am pleased to have played some small part in that. The bright young things in the Liberal Democrat press office rang me during the campaign asking if I could help them source a thin, doe-eyed child for a poster. I, of course, replied that the Bonkers Hall for Well-Behaved Orphans is simply full of them. In fact, I suspect Matron keeps herself in gin by providing the urchins for the BBC's adaptations of Dickens, but I do not Make A Fuss About It.

Wednesday

"Why can't we have a woman as leader?" came a question after I spoke at a local Liberal Democrat dinner this evening. I replied that, while I am attracted to the idea, you must first find a woman who is willing to stand. "At one time," I went on, "we would have engineered a by-election in a safe Liberal seat and got the Wise Woman of Wing to Westminster. She would certainly make a good leader – being Terribly Wise and so forth." Such matters are not so simply arranged these days, not least because there are no safe Liberal seats any more.

Jo "Gloria" Swinson has ruled herself out this time, settling for the deputy leadership and what she fondly imagines will be a shoo-in next time. Well, we shall see, but "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley," as the former Somerset wicketkeeper Neil Burns once remarked to me.

So instead we must look to our new female Members. Wera Hobhouse is no doubt a relation of my old friend L.T. Hobhouse, with whose latest every young Liberal could once be found curled up. If you want someone Terribly Clever, she's your girl. Then there is Christine Jardine, who must be a relation of Douglas Jardine, the great England captain from the Bodyline series. His strategy, based upon the insight that Donald Bradman did not like it up the snoot, brought the Ashes home.

Lord Bonkers' Diary

We could do with similar generalship today.

My eye, however, has fallen upon Layla Morgan – so much so that I have written a song about her on the banjulele. It goes something like this:

Layla,
You've got me on my knees,
Layla.
Rumpty tumpty tum,
Layla.
Darling won't you ease my worried mind?

Thursday

I complain about the prime minister to Meadowcroft this morning as we inspect my gardens. "Did you hear her tell that nurse there is no magic money tree?" I ask. "It sounded Terribly Patronising. Mind you, I suppose she is right. There is no such thing as a magic money tree, is there?" To my surprise, Meadowcroft replies hotly: "What I have in my greenhouses be no one's business but my own, I'll thank you to know." Later I hear him drive off in his new Ferrari.

Friday

Vince "High Voltage" Cable keeps himself lithe and limber with his ballroom dancing, but if he is determined to be leader – and there does not seem to be anyone else prepared to pick up the mantle – then he needs to look to his health. I stop him in a Westminster corridor today to give him some advice. "You need to bathe annually in the spring of eternal life that bursts from the hillside above the former headquarters of the Association of Liberal Councillors in Hebden Bridge," I say. I also offer to introduce him to the Elves of Rockingham Forest. "You want to get your hands on some of their cordial. They do drive a hard bargain, though, so don't accept the first price they offer you. Still, you're an economist so you should know all about that."

Saturday

Years ago I spoke with a red-faced farmer at some county show or other – I must have been there with my Belted George Galloways. He complained to me that the local vicar's daughter was in the habit of running through his wheat fields and doing awful damage. I now realise that the obnoxious child must have been Theresa May. For the farmer said to me: "I wouldn't mind, but she keeps changing direction."

Sunday

It is the day of the annual fixture between Lord Bonkers' XI and the Democratic Unionist Party. The Ulsterman are rather pleased with themselves, having had handfuls of banknotes stuffed down their trousers by the Conservatives in return for their votes. Playing the DUP is always something of a trial: they will not allow two to their batsmen to be in at the same time in case it leads to immoral practices. During the tea interval I hear them saying that there were never any such as thing dinosaurs. I have a word with my old friend Ruttie, the Rutland Water Monster, and she makes a point of sticking her head in through the window of their team bus and sticking her tongue out as it prepares to pull away.

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