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COMMENTARY

LET'S OFFEND

Two articles in this Liberator deal with the party's lack of new and radical policy ideas - one suggesting the party as a whole is too cautious and the other that the Social Liberal Forum could fill this void but has not.

Lib Dem policymaking has been imbued with caution for two reasons - neither of them good - and even when it has produced something potentially eye-catching, such as the penny on income tax for the NHS, it has failed to make anything of it in public.

The first bad reason for caution is that too much of the party is still convinced it can 'win everywhere' and so does not want to say X in case it offends Y, even though Z might like it.

This is tied up with the fantasy that anyone might become a liberal if only the party talked to them for long enough.

They won't. Some people are not liberals and will not become liberals because - whether rationally or not - they believe something else. It is wholly pointless to tread carefully for fear of offending them; they are not going to vote Lib Dem anyway and the party can offend them as much as it wishes since it never enjoyed their support in the first place.

Rather more thought might be given to who the party wishes to please, and if doing this offends committed opponents, so what?

The second bad reason lies deep in 1980s politics. The SDP leadership was so scarred by its experience in the Labour party that it evolved a process under which party members could never pass anything opposed by the leadership.

It imported this into the Lib Dems at merger and although the balance has since considerably tilted towards grassroots members, the dead hand of 'deliberative' policy making is still there.

Want an education policy? Get some teachers. Health policy - round up the doctors, then ask both to think great thoughts for a year before presenting a voluminous paper.

This not merely tends to bias policy towards experts with professional vested interests but makes it hard to respond to public concerns in a timely way, as the policy process seeks to deal with each main area once per parliament.

The resulting policy might be intellectually impressive and fully costed (another Alliance-era obsession) but no-one notices it.

It's surely time to make more use of motions at conferences and less of this cumbersome process and for all concerned to bear in mind that they are trying to produce attractive ideas that can be used in practical campaigns, not conduct a seminar, worthwhile as that might be in its own right.

Looking even further back, the last time the party had 12 MPs, in the mid-1960s, the history books suggest it was at least noted for producing a torrent of new and interesting political ideas.

It's possible that the intellectual firepower then available exceeded anything today. More likely though, a small party trying to attract attention saw no reason for caution. We can indeed learn from history.

DEVOLUTION TO THE RICH

Many Lib Dems will have instinctively sympathised with Catalonia's bid for independence and been horrified by pictures of police beating voters.

Barcelona resident Peter Harvey's article in this issue gives a very different perspective on these events, and one which may be new to most British readers.

What he suggests motivates Catalonia's independence supporters - and what also appears to have motivated voters' support for greater autonomy in two Italian regions recently - is a phenomenon not yet seen in the UK.

Pressure for devolution in Scotland and Wales (and later for independence in the former), and for devolution to some or all of northern England, was driven in large part by the idea that these areas were held back economically by a central government that was not much interested in them and their needs.

In Catalonia, Lombardy and Veneto, we saw something quite different - the richest regions feeling they were held back by having to subsidise poorer ones. Similar motives have driven autonomy in the past in Flanders.

Lib Dem thinking on devolution has largely been in terms of how power over policy and money can be passed to less wealthy areas - and quite rightly so - to enable them to better compete with richer places.

What though if pressure for devolution arise for the opposite reason - so that richer areas can escape poorer ones, as we have now seen in other countries? It would, for example, be easy for any party at the next mayoral election to run a campaign objecting to London not merely being pulled out of the European Union against its will by poorer parts of England, but paying for the privilege by subsidising them through its taxes.

Even the south east, the region traditionally the most indifferent to devolution, might start to get interested.

Is it time to frame the case for devolution not in economic terms but, as Hugh Annand suggests in this issue, a matter of 'taking back control'?

RADICAL BULLETIN

WILD WEST END

Barely more than a week after leaving the Liberal Democrats, Kensington's general election candidate Annabel Mullin surfaced in the London Evening Standard as the face of something called the Advance party, which presumes to be a UK equivalent of France's En Marche.

Mullin told the Standard that Advance had financial backers in place - a remarkable feat if its formation really post-dates her leaving the Lib Dems.

The Lib Dems began an investigation into Mullin over her failure to send activists to help in Richmond Park and why huge resources were ploughed into such a hopeless seat as Kensington.

There is plenty of money in both Kensington and the adjacent Chelsea and Fulham seat and Mullin, and the latter's candidate Louise Rowntree, raised a lot.

However regional officials have noted that the increases in votes recorded in both scarcely exceeded that in neighbouring Cities of London & Westminster who ran a model 'paper' campaign.

Rowntree, a former member of the defunct Pro-European Conservative Party, abruptly left the Lib Dems when a candidate investigation was launched in part into her organising an 'election pint' on polling day night only a few miles from where Richmond Park was being lost by 45 votes (Liberator 385).

It has also been noted that while Mullin's spending was within election limits it exceed that of both the Tories, who were defending the seat, and Labour, which gained it.

Advance looks like an embryonic centre-right anti-Brexit party, and may be linked to an independent who stood in Battersea in June.

However, there is already a centre-right anti-Brexit party, which is unamused at anyone trespassing on its patch.

This is the 4 Freedoms Party, led by Dirk Hazell, a strongly pro-EU Tory who later belonged to the Lib Dems in the early 2010s and is the UK affiliate of the EU-wide European People's Party.

Intriguingly, 4 Freedoms thinks it had a deal for the Lib Dems to stand down in Kensington and Chelsea - and possibly a couple of other places - aborted only by the election being unexpectedly called.

Whether or not any cross-party understanding existed further confuses further what was going in the Kensington and Chelsea & Fulham seats.

4 Freedoms denies it has anything to do with Advance and relations seem to resemble those between rival Trotskyist factions.

BEGGING BOWLS

Your Liberal Britain has secured backing from the Federal Board, despite reservations that its plans will duplicate the work of headquarters

staff, divert party donations and that its guiding force Jim Williams has effectively created a paid job for himself.

YLB began as one of many new members initiatives and has worked on policy development and on digital engagement. Headquarters was slow off the mark on this at the general election but then suddenly agreed to support YLB doing this work even though staff were in place (Liberator 386).

It then wanted to get larger and approached headquarters during the summer to discuss how it could raise donations in addition to those raised by the party - possibly from ex-donors pissed off by the coalition and not yet ready to give directly to the party.

YLB went to the Federal Board and won its backing to carry out three projects - one around further digital campaigning training, one of recruiting experts to advise the party's spokespeople - particularly given the lack of researchers in the Lords - and a third yet to be chosen though there is some pressure for this to be around local government.

Williams is set to be taken on by YLB to oversee this work.

Objections included how YLB would be governed given that it was effectively doing work for the FB, and it may now become an associated organisation even though it does not fit that structure very well, and will report to the Federal People Development Committee.

Dissidents remain though. One FB member said concerns centred on the three projects being expected to cost £80,000 and not necessarily being what the party needed such resources lavished on at present, with improving grassroots skills being more important than finding expert advisers for peers given the mere £12,000 in the party training budget.

There were also concerns that while YLB might want its fundraising to be additional to that party's it need not be and it could simply cannibalise party funds.

WARD OF COURT

The Liberal Democrats may face legal action by former MP David Ward over his sudden removal as candidate for Bradford East.

Ward was sacked by Tim Farron after former Tory minister Eric Pickles attacked him in parliament over alleged anti-Semitic remarks.

This made it look as though Farron was taking orders from Pickles, which was bad enough, but Ward's offence has never been made clear.

It's true that Ward had been suspended some years ago for comments about Israel considered by some as anti-Semitic, but Farron himself said in October 2016 that Ward had "served his time" and was rehabilitated (Liberator 387).

One offence seems to have been a Tweet by Ward on 24 March in which he said: "Boil it down - all terrorist

attacks in UK stem from our foreign policy.” This though was made before Ward was - without complaint from Farron or anyone else - re-selected to fight his old seat and congratulated on this by then chief whip Tom Brake.

Farron might have sacked him for this remark, but he didn't. Having given no explanation he simply appeared to be obeying Pickles.

After his removal, Ward repeated the Tweet comments in a 26 April interview with LBC Radio.

This episode also saw Ward suspended from the party and so he contested Bradford East as an independent - soundly beating the imposed official Lib Dem paper candidate Mark Jewell.

He now wants to appeal but is being blocked at every turn by the party hierarchy, which is trying to claim that the processes used to suspend him as a candidate are not capable of being appealed.

Headquarters has cited: “Clear constitutional provision set out in article 18.7 (a) for modification of the candidate procedures in the case of an imminent General Election.”

Ward's supporters though say this section refers to accelerating selections in the case of an imminent election, not to removing candidates, that there is thus no constitutional provision for what happened and in any event natural justice demands Ward should be able to appeal.

His supporters say that if the party persists in denying Ward an appeal the matter may move into legal action, which might well prove embarrassing.

It may be that Ward said something offensive between his re-selection just after the general election was called and Pickles' remarks on 26 April, but if so no-one has been told what this was. Surely any candidate ousted is entitled to have an appeal heard?

The local party was suspended along with Ward and did not wish to run a candidate against him, leading to a farcical situation in which Jewell was imported from Lancashire as a paper candidate and a local party member who agreed to act as his agent was followed around the constituency by a regional official to make sure he put in a set of nomination papers.

Bradford's highly charged ethnic politics meant that Farron's move against Ward endangered the physical safety of local Lib Dem activists, who found themselves branded as the 'party of Israel' and forced to consult the police on how to protect themselves.

Local activists felt a message from party president Sal Brinton implied they were citing this security issue merely as an excuse not to oppose Ward.

There has also been a highly unpleasant episode in which the local party's 17-year-old then vice-chair was, according to local party officers, bullied out of politics altogether by members of Liberal Youth who abused him on social media when he sought to defend Ward. There is no suggestion that such bullying was officially sanctioned by LY. He has now severed all links with the party.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

Not for the first time Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats finds itself under investigation, following the disorderly abandonment of its annual general meeting (*Liberator* 383) and the unexplained year long suspension of its general secretary Ashburn Holder.

The latest investigation was chaired by Karamjit Singh, an independent race issues consultant, with Lib Dems Chris Richards and Jane Smithard.

John Alderdice's review into the party's engagement with ethnic minorities is meanwhile making rather slow progress and is understood to have developed an emphasis on EMLD.

Matters have not been helped by the original email to EMLD from the Federal Board about the Singh probe, which suggested that EMLD's £2,000 annual party grant was to be "looked at". This point mysteriously disappeared in all further communications around the panel's remit.

Having originally assumed its grant might go though, EMLD did not organise any fringe meetings or stall for the Bournemouth conference.

Mid-October marked a year since Holder was suspended and he is still asking why.

The Singh report makes depressing reading. It concluded that personal relationships within EMLD are so appalling they could not be healed and noted that since it charges no subscription it could not identify who was entitled to vote in internal elections.

Perhaps the greatest problem was a fundamental disagreement what about EMLD was there to do, with some seeing it as pressing for race quality within the party and others as a body to recruit to the party from among ethnic minorities.

The report notes for example that a party member seeking support from EMLD for a Black History Month event "was told this was not the focus of EMLD", while an EMLD member who wanted support for recruitment was "told that the focus should be on changing Federal Party culture first".

Closing EMLD was considered but rejected and the panel's most far reaching recommendation was the creation of a race quality equivalent of the Gender Balance Task Force, while the Federal Board would become responsible for addressing internal race equality issues.

That would leave EMLD with providing a social network "to bring together and celebrate the culture and heritage of different BaME members"[and] play an active role in promoting and supporting ethnic minority candidates in their election campaigns" and "ensuring federal party campaigns and policies take account of the concerns of the BaME community".

These objectives though need an extraordinary general meeting of the current EMLD to change its objectives and election processes.

The breakdown of trust between EMLD and the FB will not help with this and, to judge from correspondence seen by *Liberator*, the current EMLD officers are in no mood to co-operate. 'Witch hunt' was among the politer terms used about the FB.

GOES WITH THE JOB

Did she or didn't she? When former Richmond Park MP Sarah Olney took the post of Vince Cable's chief of staff it took a while for the penny to drop that this meant she almost certainly couldn't contest Richmond Park again.

The post is part-funded by public money and so carries similar political restrictions to those of a council group advisor.

It is unclear whether Olney understood this when she decided to accept, and whether others understood

whether she understood, and an enquiry from Liberator went unanswered.

Olney lost by only 45 votes and had gained a high profile in the seat and her departure put the local party's nose well out of joint.

Purely by chance a role has been hurriedly found for Olney at party HQ with the happy result she can stand again, though leaving Cable minus a chief of staff.

BAY WATCH

There was always a danger that the 2016 decision to have all women shortlists based on previous results would produce disputes about competing claims over diversity.

Such is the case in Torbay, where former MP Adrian Sanders decided not to stand again this year, making way for Deborah Brewer, who was chosen from an all-woman shortlist.

The local party has no complaint against Brewer, but she does not want to stand again.

Someone else does though - long serving councillor and group leader Steve Darling, who has impeccable local credentials and has been registered blind since early adulthood.

Many in Torbay would like Darling to stand, noting that a partially-sighted MP would also be gain for diversity, if in a different way.

Accordingly, the local party wants to appeal against being an all-woman shortlist but no-one involved in the Byzantine world of candidates' matters will say who decided Torbay should be one, or why, or how one goes about changing this.

POISONED CHALICE

For those who were wondering what had happened to the review of the Lib Dem general election campaign, the answer is that it proved hard to find a disinterested chair.

Ros Gordon, chair of the Federal Audit and Scrutiny Committee, was asked to run the review by the Federal Board and eventually alighted on Portsmouth South candidate and councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson to chair it, admitting "it took longer than I had expected to find someone with the time and without conflict to run the review".

The usual chair of such processes is James Gurling, but he would have been reviewing himself given his role as chair of campaigns.

Gurling's excoriating review of the 2015 campaign, which he could review as he was at the time shoved aside by the 'wheelhouse', appears to have been noted and ignored by those who ran the campaign this year.

The 2015 review found: "A not insignificant section of lassitude in our strategic seats can be traced to the approach of HQ with a 'one size fits all' attitude, a command and control structure and a seeming lack of willingness to listen to the difficulties being faced on the doorstep. Two-way communication had effectively failed." No change there then.

One issue likely to land in Vernon-Jackson's lap is the wide condemnation of the nationally mailed leaflets that headquarters sent out in Labour-facing seats, which comprehensively misunderstood the attitudes of potential swing voters there and ignored advice from those on the ground.

GIVE THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANT

Having first tried for no very clear reason to avoid holding a debate on Brexit at Bournemouth, the Federal Conference Committee found itself faced with a valid demand for a special conference.

Rather than concede this expensive distraction, it backed down and agreed not to oppose a suspension of standing orders to allow a debate to take place.

Quite apart from a bizarre moment in which FCC chair Andrew Wiseman appeared to renege on this deal because he sent out the wrong draft email, the episode leaves questions over the committee grasping the mood of the party.

The suspension of standing orders was passed overwhelmingly, it was clear conference wanted the debate - though it reaffirmed existing policy on a second referendum - so why was this feeling so comprehensively misjudged?

A clue might have been there in the colossal number of people who have joined the party since the referendum. Denying them a debate on the subject that was their main motivation for joining seems perverse.

AZERIYOU LIKE IT

The Liberal Democrats have agreed to support a motion to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe congress in December, which trenchantly criticises Azerbaijan over its record on LGBT+ rights.

It calls for the suspension of talks between the EU and Azerbaijan on a strategic partnership until atrocities cease.

This was because, it said: "Activists have reported that detainees have been subjected to beatings, verbal abuse and forced medical examinations. In some reported cases, trans women's heads were forcibly shaved and they were only released once they had provided addresses of fellow LGBT+ community members."

All of which may prove embarrassing to the Liberal Democrats treasurer Lord German, who among his interests in the House of Lords lists 'co-chair, Anglo-Azerbaijani Society', which last December held a convivial dinner in the Lords attended by German and the Azeri ambassador. Not, presumably, including any LGBT+ guests though.

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

The Lib Dem conference in Bournemouth proved a somnolent affair with only the Europe debate really coming to life.

Outside the hall there appeared incongruous posters warning "This performance includes smoke, pyrotechnics, strobes and lasers".

Enquiries established that the signs are always there, not that anyone had made some desperate bid to liven up the event.

A LIB DEM MOMENTUM

Elizabeth McWilliams examines why the Social Liberal Forum lost its way, and what it could become

The trouble with Germany's FDP is that it is a party dedicated to a function, not to one or more principles. Thus its recent apparent renaissance had to be based on something more than its traditional appeal to rich professionals as the party that would cut their taxes. A populist if distasteful stance on immigration appears to have helped.

The same fate has befallen the Liberal Democrats - borne of a similar loss of identity and perceptions created by the 2010-15 coalition that have proven hard to shake off. The risk, as John Pugh put it in *Liberator* 386, is that the party lacks an identity beyond pro-Europeanism, which will not help it appeal to the dispossessed that voted Leave.

During coalition and in the period immediately preceding it, the Social Liberal Forum performed a useful function as the party's conscience; promoting some big ideas, provoking debate and where necessary dissent. Time and again it has been proved right on big political issues. It made a big difference in clipping Tory wings on the NHS and welfare, and by opposing Nick Clegg and his fellow-travellers in a number of areas, it both kept social liberals in the Liberal Democrats and helped the party maintain an identity, to an extent.

However, since 2015 it has gone rather quiet. This summer SLF conference saw a room was almost entirely full of familiar faces. The alarm is because it has not attracted participants from the 60,000 or so post-2015 Lib Dem members.

The sole policy really promoted - a citizens' income - was hardly new and was presented without the necessary debate about implementation. The event overall felt somewhat like a comfort blanket.

What that conference should have addressed was the SLF itself. What role should it carve out in the future? Is its work done? Should it use its links with Vince Cable to become a sort of Lib Dem Momentum, challenging naysayers and creating a wider grassroots social liberal movement that will shape the next generation of the party? What is its role in promoting any progressive alliance? Or should it return to thinking up the big ideas and present some thought leadership for a party badly in need of new ideas?

Part of the success of the pre-2015 SLF was the array of skills at its core: strategic thinkers, political operators, streetfighters and campaigners, and thinkers and innovators; all from a much more diverse set of backgrounds than the party as a whole. That enabled it to be multi-dimensional and fleet of foot, able to function like a think-tank while being regarded by a Clegg SpAd in an overheard conference rant as "a bunch of fucking Trots"

Some Liberal Democrats thought that the perceived closeness of SLF and Tim Farron would lead to a quasi-Momentum agenda. Why didn't this happen?

Well, Farron's leadership failed to go in a social liberal direction, or any direction in terms of domestic policy before Brexit and questions of morality overcame it. But neither did SLF feel comfortable with being close to a leader, nor was it able to present thinking that could be justifiably presented as new. Instead, the peculiarly self-appointed and self-reverential 'newbies' picked up that particular ball, sort of, and to little external effect. SLF was also relatively silent on challenging those aspects of Farron's leadership that conflicted with its values, and missed an opportunity to provide thought leadership at a time new members could have appreciated.

That leads to the big ideas. Vince's clear vision of tackling wealth inequality should be music to SLF's ears; a theme on which it has long been forthright. It could present a way forward that is distinctive and radical where Labour is silent. Unlike many of the more devout advocates of land value taxation, SLF also has the skills to explain it to the agnostic. It could also work with others in the party to tackle the less convincing aspects of the party's stance on housing, including the knee-jerk 'nimbyism' all too often seen when anyone suggests building houses near them.

The newly merged Lib Dems were able to dust themselves down and start fighting elections in earnest using the tools of the People First campaign, a simple and adaptable idea. Its better-known forerunner community politics was an external idea, of course. It is unlikely that the ALDC or the Young Liberals of 2017 have the capability to do this. Motivational and bottom-up thinking tends to come from radical politics, so SLF should be well placed to take on this mantle.

When David Hall-Matthews was SLF chair he had the motto 'let a thousand flowers bloom', putting power into the hands of its activists and helping make SLF a success again. A financially successful model saw membership free with donations encouraged. SLF would do well to return to this inclusive approach. With so many new members as to comprise an almost entirely new party, it is time for SLF to get stuck in and inspire social liberals as never before.

Elizabeth McWilliams is a Liberal Democrat member in Yorkshire

DEATH BY FUDGE

Small parties on 7.4% of the vote can either be radical and outspoken or diminish into irrelevance. Why have the Liberal Democrats chosen the latter, wonders Paul Hindley

Britain seems to be on the verge of chaos. The deadline for Brexit is drawing ever nearer. The Conservatives are riven with civil war and plots of regicide. Jeremy Corbyn and his socialist Labour Party have never been closer to power. Into this calamity enters Vince Cable as the new leader of the Liberal Democrats. With the two big parties getting gradually more extreme this should be a great opportunity for a radical liberal party to make real progress. However, the Liberal Democrats continue to languish at around 7% in the opinion polls.

The Liberal Democrats have yet to engage in the battle of ideas that is raging between Labour and the Conservatives. Some progress was made at the Bournemouth autumn conference in September in strengthening our opposition to Brexit, although this came after a confused response from the Federal Conference Committee to the request to suspend standing orders to allow a debate on Brexit to take place.

Sadly, the response of the federal party to the Opposing Brexit motion was the latest in a long line of conference policy fudges. These range from our policy on Trident, to our Coalition economic policy, to our response to the Health and Social Care Act in 2012.

INTELLECTUALLY OUTFLANKED

The more Liberal Democrat conference is gripped by a centrist mentality of delay and policy fudges, the more the party is in danger of being intellectually outflanked by Labour, the Greens and even the Tories.

Our conference must be a hive of radicalism, not a collection of bland and uninspiring policy motions. We need to be imaginative and creative and engage in the big ideas and big policies which were once central to the Liberal movement.

When radical policy motions are debated (and there is usually at least one at every conference), the federal party must not thwart them or even try to prevent them from being debated in the first place. Our conference must not become a bi-annual social gathering, where bland centrist policies are debated and the only time we recall our radical heritage is when we sing The Land at Glee Club.

I fear that the radical heritage of the Liberal Party, the SDP and the Liberal Democrats under Ashdown and Kennedy will be lost and forgotten. Our heritage is one that founded the welfare state, expanded the right to vote, legitimised workers' rights, legalised abortion and allowed same-sex couples to get married. We called for land taxes in 1909 and for Keynesian economics in 1929. We called for membership of Europe in the 1950s, the inclusion of workers on

company boards in the 1970s and an end to the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Our intellectual heritage is being challenged by the other parties. Corbyn is committed to a radical expansion of cooperatives, the abolition of tuition fees and a Keynesian overhaul of the economy. The Greens proudly support land value taxation. Even the Tories have toyed with social reform and putting workers on company boards.

On the occasions when a policy platform does reflect our radical heritage, we are often reluctant to advertise it to the public. A good example of this was shown in the 2017 general election when the party had stronger welfare policies than Labour, but the leadership completely failed to emphasise this in the national campaign. You can have the best policies in the world in your manifesto, but if they are not part of your election campaign, then it is meaningless.

We failed to capture the public imagination at the last two general elections. Our headline policy offering at both elections (but especially in 2015) was safe, bland and quite boring. Talk of "stability, unity and decency" was thoroughly uninspiring. This further compounded the problem of not getting enough media attention. Any anti-establishment liberal party which positions itself as the defender of the status quo is on course for disaster.

In the 2017 general election campaign we did have one policy that captured a lot of media attention. Ironically it wasn't our policy on Brexit; it was our policy on cannabis.

The party got a lot of exposure from its policy to legalise cannabis; this included interviews, debates and column inches in national newspapers. The policy was radical, liberal and distinctive. The party was saying something that neither Labour or the Conservatives were willing to say. In short, we were challenging the complacency of the established status quo on an important social issue. We should learn from it and do more of it.

We still must ask ourselves the searching question of why many of the people who put their faith in us in 2010 are now turning to Corbyn. Despite our opposition to Brexit, most Remain voters backed Labour in 2017. They would rather back a left wing party that was ambiguous towards Brexit, than a centrist party that was clearer in its opposition to Brexit. Most Remain voters after all supported progressive and left-leaning parties. A recent YouGov poll found that many Remain voters had not yet 'forgiven' the Liberal Democrats for going into Coalition in 2010. The shadow of the Coalition continues to hang over the party and our attempts to attract Remain voters.

Vince Cable partly understands this problem. He is on record as saying that the party is right to oppose the so-called bedroom tax, a policy first introduced during the Coalition. He's also begun to grapple with the thorny issue of tuition fees by announcing a review, which may yet support their replacement with a graduate tax. However, it will be much harder to overcome the sense of betrayal felt by many for the Coalition years and for trebling tuition fees.

It would be foolish to think that Brexit alone will revive the party's fortunes at the ballot box. There were scant examples of this in June. The party received its lowest vote share in almost six decades. Added to this, it is not impossible that Labour could develop a more solid pro-Remain platform. Kier Stammer has emphasised the importance of staying in the Customs Union and the Single Market during a transition period, post-Brexit. Sadiq Khan has openly discussed having a second referendum (imitating the policy of the Liberal Democrats). Even Corbyn, a lifelong Eurosceptic, has said that he would vote Remain in a second referendum.

It is concerning that beyond Brexit, the Liberal Democrats have been reluctant to engage in the battle of ideas or to develop new ideas. Back in the 1960s, when the party then as now only had a handful of seats, it was a hot bed of new radical ideas. This approach currently appears to be lacking. It is essential that we regain our political imagination. We need to offer Britain a radical vision of social justice and political reform. We Liberal Democrats must regain our spirit of wanting to fundamentally change Britain.

To do this the party needs to break its addiction to centrism. We are not a centrist party. We are a liberal party. We are a radical party. Centrism is bland, boring, establishment and status quo. Liberalism is a philosophy of radical change. It is exciting, imaginative, anti-establishment, while seeking to end the complacency of the status quo. Small parties on 7.4% of the vote don't have the luxury of complacency. They can either be radical and outspoken or diminish into irrelevance.

With Labour's overt move to the left, there is space for a social liberal party calling for capitalism to be reformed and for a fairer distribution of wealth, power and opportunity. This is the historic territory of the Liberal Party. The Liberals coined the phrase 'social reform' while introducing the first welfare policies over a hundred years ago. Unlike socialists who want to gradually dismantle capitalism and conservatives who are blind to the inequalities caused by rampant free markets, liberals aim to make capitalism fairer and more egalitarian.

The Liberal Democrats should aim to become the main centre-left party by offering a distinctive non-socialist alternative form of progressive politics. If our critique of Corbyn is just more of the same Coalition era watered-down Toryism, then we will fail to win

"The Liberal Democrats have yet to engage in the battle of ideas that is raging between Labour and the Conservatives"

over any new progressive voters. Labour's ambivalence towards the welfare state is its Achilles' heel. We need to emphasise that our welfare policies are more progressive than Labour's; from reversing more welfare cuts to ending benefit sanctions. Labour has abandoned welfare politics in favour of a staunch left wing platform of re-nationalisations and state control.

OWNERSHIP FOR ALL

The Liberal Democrats require fresh thinking. We should revisit our economic policy and find solutions to the inequalities within the gig economy, the centralisation of asset wealth and the threat to jobs caused by technological innovation and automation. The party must revive its 20th century mantra of 'ownership for all'. In fairness, Vince Cable has already begun to develop a new idea of having a learning fund for young people paid for by increasing inheritance tax and introducing new wealth taxes.

The party must become more strident in its support for political reform, not just electoral reform and Lords reform but also federalism for the regions and nations of the UK. A radical decentralisation of political power will be both distinctive and anti-establishment. We should also support the decentralisation of economic power by supporting an extensive expansion of cooperatives and credit unions, as well as establishing new building societies.

The party needs to support radical social reforms, such as the possibility of introducing a universal basic income (UBI) for every adult regardless of social background or employment status. We should pay close attention to the UBI trials currently being conducted in Finland, the Netherlands and Canada.

We Liberal Democrats should also revive our reputation for improving public services and once again become the champion of public sector workers in health, education and local government. This naturally means revisiting Coalition era public service cut-backs and calling for them to be reversed. Some contrition wouldn't be lost either.

The time for bland centrism is over. The Liberal Democrats need to become both radical and imaginative. The uninspiring policy platforms in 2015 and 2017 contributed to the bad election results.

Liberal Democrat conference needs to once again become a radical policy making body. We can no longer continue to abandon our radical heritage to other parties. We must defend and advance our historic big ideas. Britain needs a radical liberal response to socialism and free market conservatism, not a centrist one. If we fail to think big then we will be caught in an intellectual pincer move by the other parties. Not only will we lose ownership of our big ideas, but the cause of radical liberalism itself may dwindle into obscurity.

Paul Hindley is a council member of the Social Liberal Forum

BEYOND CATALONIA'S SMOKE AND MIRRORS

A traditional elite is fighting to defend its privileges by seeking Catalan independence, says Peter Harvey

There is a place in Europe where an ethnic minority of people, identifiable by their surnames, govern the rest.

The government will only communicate with the people in the language of an elite minority and most children cannot be taught in their own language and are punished for using it in the school playground.

Shopkeepers who use the wrong language in their signs face a hefty fine, schools display government propaganda in the classrooms and the parliament has not met for weeks because the government wants to avoid debate

Public TV and radio are under the iron control of the government, which has territorial ambitions on the land of four other countries and an important sports club changes the colour of its strip to show that that it publicly supports government policy.

That place is called Catalonia.

Catalonia led Spain's industrialisation, with many people coming from poorer parts of the country to find work, just as the Irish and others flocked to the north of England. They worked in the factories and produced wealth for the Catalan bourgeoisie who owned them. But power remains in the hands of those old families, whose names are almost the only ones to be found at the top of politics and business: Puigdemont, Pujol, Ferrusola, Colau, Forcadell, Turull, Forn etc.

In Catalonia as a whole the 20 most common names are Spanish: they end in -ez like Hernández and Pérez as well as Garcia (itself a Basque name) but very few of them are to be found at the top. Of the 16 ministers of the present Catalan government, only two do not have traditional 'Cathar' names as they are sometimes known. The people whose families originate from other parts of Spain, and who overwhelmingly speak Spanish, feel discriminated against.

It is as if power in Yorkshire were in the firm grip of the Arkwrights, Oldroyds, Sutcliffes and Hardakers while the Joneses, Robertsons, Murphys and Patels are scarcely visible. And a knowledge of Yorkshire dialect is essential for employment.

BANKING SECRECY

Let there be no doubt. Catalan independence is driven from the top by the wealthy classes. And the imminent EU-Andorra banking agreement, which will end banking secrecy, is believed to be behind the desperate move to get Catalonia out of the EU before January. They have €55bn at stake up in the mountains. At the other end of the spectrum, there has been vociferous opposition to independence from Catalonia's gypsy community.

Language is a potent tool by which these 400 families maintain their position. Although Catalonia is officially bilingual and has a Spanish-speaking

majority, the government only uses Catalan in official communications; if you write a letter to a public authority in Spanish, the reply will come in Catalan. It may be that you exercised your constitutional right to use Spanish because you can't understand Catalan. Hard luck mate, find a translator.

Catalan is the only language that can be used for teaching all subjects in schools (except for Spanish, which is taught as a foreign language). Inevitably, children from Catalan-speaking families (the elite minority) have an advantage – not to mention the problems facing Spanish-speaking children with mental illness and/or learning difficulties. A family in Balaguer that tried to enforce their right to have their child taught in Spanish were run out of town and lost their business.

A qualification in Catalan is required for any public post. Protectionism is hardwired into the Catalan upper class who became rich behind huge tariff walls on textiles. They can't do that now so they use language as a non-tariff barrier to employment of non-Catalans.

Shopkeepers and other business-owners are required to label their businesses in Catalan at least. In practice that means Catalan only and hefty fines are applied to even the most humble tradesman who puts up a shop sign that is not in Catalan – unless it's in Chinese or Urdu. The main thing is that it must not be in Spanish.

Schools that are allowed only to use the Catalan language are easily persuaded to indoctrinate government policy, and that is what has happened. Many schools have banners and posters calling for independence and display the 'estelada', the independence flag with the star on it. Teachers take children out of school to participate in pro-government demonstrations.

The Catalan parliament has not met for almost two months, apart from set-piece sessions to do with independence. The government can rule without it, so what's the point?

Catalan TV (TV3) costs €225m and employs 2,312 people (2016) for a population of seven million. It is used shamelessly as a propaganda station. It works with a loyalty that makes the old Soviet Pravda and Radio Moscow look like positive models of pluralism. The Catalan government also pays cash subsidies to private media. The leading Barcelona paper La Vanguardia got a bung of a €100m last year; not surprisingly, it follows the government's pro-independence line slavishly.

The nationalists are not content with taking control of what is commonly known as Catalonia. They want the Països Catalans (Catalan lands), which include three separate parts of Spain as well as Catalonia,

parts of France and Italy, and all of Andorra. These are the places where Catalan is spoken. Language drives everything – Catalonia must comprise all the lands where Catalan is spoken. The weather map on TV3 shows all of this area.

Football fans may have noticed that a few years ago Barça started playing in a yellow strip. Yellow is the colour of independence and Barça officially supports independence. The club has been in trouble with FIFA for allowing political (pro-independence) flags and symbols at its matches. It usually plays now in a strip that has the red and yellow stripes of the constitutional Catalan flag, but a blue trim round the neck and shoulders is a clear gesture to the blue triangle on the independence flag.

The 2015 Catalan election was called as a plebiscitary election (a tool of 1930s dictators) to endorse independence rather than to elect a parliament. Unfortunately for the government, the result was a disaster for the government party. Instead of the absolute majority that it confidently expected, it lost seats. In order to stay in power it had to do a deal with an anti-system party (CUP).

We thus have the sight of, in British terms, a Tory government relying on George Galloway for its majority. Even together, this unholy alliance got only 47% of the votes cast (no election has ever produced a majority of votes for pro-independence parties) but the heavy bias in constituency boundaries in favour of the nationalist areas gave them a small majority (72/135) in the Catalan parliament.

This majority of seats, but not of votes, was taken as a mandate for a declaration of independence. In the night of 6/7 September the Catalan government broke parliamentary regulations to force a bill through without the requisite prior scrutiny. This became an Enabling Law that allowed the government to override the Spanish Constitution and the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, which needs a two-thirds majority for amendment. The parliament's own lawyers left no doubt that the government was acting contrary to their explicit advice.

They then passed a law calling a referendum, as is known. What is not so well known is that a second law called for the automatic declaration of independence by the parliament in the event of a Yes vote. The Spanish government referred all this to the Constitutional Court claiming that the Catalan government was acting ultra vires in trying to change the Spanish Constitution.

The court accepted the referral and thus automatically suspended it for five months for consideration. That is why the holding of the referendum was illegal: it was done in contempt of court. The referendum went ahead despite that. The British equivalent would be Holyrood applying for a referendum under the Scotland Act, being refused, and holding it anyway.

SEDITION CHARGE

The Catalan Supreme Court ordered the Mossos (Catalan Police) to seal and guard the polling stations during the Saturday night so that voting couldn't even start. The Catalan police chief said expressly that he accepted the order. Then early on Sunday morning he stood his people down and ordered them to do nothing. That is a matter of incontrovertible fact for which he

will face a charge of sedition in the Catalan Supreme Court (he is already facing one for a different matter).

That left the Spanish police and Guardia Civil to act late, without preparation, in hostile territory, in front of carefully placed TV cameras, and amid a barrage of fake news coming out of Moscow. During all that day the Mossos used a special (and illegal) communication system that kept no record of messages exchanged and orders issued.

Hundreds of people injured? According to the Catalan health service only four were hospitalised. One of those was a bystander who had a heart attack and two others were discharged within 24 hours. But yes, hundreds were attended to because every bump and bruise was taken to swell the records of an organisation whose staff were under orders to allocate a special code to every patient who arrived that day, whatever the actual cause of their injuries.

The police may indeed have overstepped the mark. On referendum day itself the Catalan prosecutors opened investigations into police actions.

Such is the mistrust of the Mossos that the Catalan Supreme Court has removed their responsibility for security in the courthouse and handed it to the Spanish Policía Nacional.

When a regional government drives a cart and horses through any kind of legality, the central government has to act. That is what is happening now.

Finally, a lot has been said about the 'two Jordis'. Let's get this clear. In the run-up to the referendum the Guardia Civil were executing an order from the Catalan Supreme Court to search the Catalan Economy Ministry. While they were there a mob assembled outside the building, trapping them inside. The mob trashed three Guardia Civil cars, stealing the weapons and ammunition that were inside them. The two Jordis were the leaders and instigators of that mob. They are remanded in custody awaiting trial; they are not prisoners serving sentences.

The Mossos, who had responsibility for guarding and protecting the Guardia Civil, were nowhere to be seen that day, leaving them in the building for 14 hours. A court secretary who was witnessing the search escaped over the roof and mingled with a crowd of theatre-goers.

A Catalan Supreme Court judge had to phone the chief officer of the Mossos personally and order (sic) him to get off his backside and do the job he was paid for. The chief is under formal investigation for sedition as a result of that incident.

As of late October the situation is changing by the minute. The Catalan First Minister postponed and then cancelled an appearance in which he was expected to announce elections and it is expected the Spanish Senate will trigger Article 155 of the Constitution, which gives the Madrid government the power to take over and manage, but not modify or abolish, the Catalan regional government.

It is not clear what the reaction will be. As I write, the Spanish police prevented the Catalan police from burning a large number of documents.

Peter Harvey was international officer of the Union of Liberal Students and National League of Young Liberals in the 1970s. He has lived in Barcelona for 33 years and belongs to the Spanish ALDE affiliate party Ciudadanos

UNEQUAL MEASURES

Inequality turned round and bit politicians in the EU referendum. How can it be countered, asks Claire Tyler

We need to talk a lot more about income and wealth inequality and its impact on life chances. You may have heard that UK income inequality has recently declined to its lowest level since the 1980s. To me this feels like a deeply counterintuitive statistic, as perceptions of rising inequality and disempowerment have led to many people feeling 'left behind' by the economy and politics. So what does the data really say? And why might people's perceptions not match up to the figures?

The Gini coefficient looks at what proportion of a country's national income is earned by a given proportion of the population. So, if a small number of people earn a large proportion, inequality - and indeed the country's Gini coefficient - is higher. The Gini coefficient in the UK shows that the income distribution is at its most equal for 30 years, having declined since the financial crisis of 2008. This trend is largely because most groups have seen their income fare poorly, but the poorest have been supported by government transfers, meaning their incomes have fallen less quickly than the richest. Despite this headline 'improvement', there are very real reasons why many people will not feel that.

Clearly generally falling wages are not the preferred mechanism to lessen inequality but have been very much the context of the last 10 years. The first reason is that inequality is still high, having rocketed upwards during the Thatcher years. Indeed, the UK remains the seventh most unequal country in the OECD. The picture is considerably worse if we take into account the UK's high housing costs.

Second, most statistics on economic inequality refer to income rather than wealth - a key distinction. While income inequality has declined, wealth remains hugely unequally distributed. The richest 10% owns more than half of the country's wealth, with the top 1% owning almost 15%, according to the Resolution Foundation. The wealth share of the 1% has continued to rise, while wages have stagnated for the majority.

Third factor, inequality is set to get worse. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that a combination of faster pay rises for richer households and benefit cuts for the poorest will serve to increase income inequality in the next five years.

Fourth, we should not feel reassured by the inequality data because people do not feel that inequality is getting better. In particular, the poorest quartile feel that their incomes have declined to a greater extent than the richest. This raises the wider question of why many people feel like society is becoming more unequal and divided.

Declining real wages harm the poor more. The pay squeeze Britain is enduring is almost unprecedented. Average earnings are lower now than in 2008, adjusted for prices. The Resolution Foundation argues that the

2010s are on course to be the worst decade for pay growth for 210 years, which is some record.

The overriding political and economic focus on austerity means that as well as cuts to welfare, public services and public sector pay has been squeezed over the last five years.

Perhaps one of the overlooked impacts of the high levels of inequality is that the rich begin to remove themselves from society. Take public transport as an example. In more equal societies citizens tend to take public transport together. In less equal societies, citizens tend to drive more and further. This means different sections of society spend less time together, and the wealthy are less willing to fund public systems which they no longer use.

There is an emerging body of research looking at the relationship between wellbeing and inequality. By one definition, wellbeing is synonymous with positive mental health. But I would argue that it goes far wider and is the condition in which an individual can develop and thrive.

So what insights does this new research contain? Although countries with higher Gross National Income tend to have higher average wellbeing, the New Economics Foundation found that this relationship appears to stop after a certain point within countries. In other words, more money does not mean more happiness, after a certain point. This is important for public policy.

In essence, high inequality tends to reduce a population's average subjective wellbeing. This is understandable - it is harder to feel satisfied with your lot when you see the next door neighbours earning twice without being more clever or deserving.

Turning to social mobility and its links with inequality raises an interesting set of questions. If inequality is so damaging to people's lives, why do we put up with such high levels of inequality? Perhaps inequality is less of a concern when social mobility is high? Perhaps rather than trying to reduce inequality, we should simply focus on increasing social mobility?

The stark truth is that social mobility in the UK is declining. I have been following these trends closely since 2011 as co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility. The Social Mobility Commission, set up by Government, confirms this bluntly in its state of the nation report: "Britain has a deep social mobility problem", which is getting worse".

This is evident through all phases of education. 51% of children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development at age five in 2015 compared to 69% of other children. Children in the wealthiest areas are almost 25% more likely to go to a good secondary school than children from the most deprived areas.

These declines in social mobility are not lost on people. A recent social mobility barometer poll

reveals that the young, in particular, are pessimistic about social mobility. Only 32% of people believe that everyone has a fair chance to get on regardless of their background.

Thus far I have painted a pretty bleak economic picture focusing on high inequality, falling wages, low social mobility and feelings of discontentment. Clearly the picture is not all bad and there are some more encouraging economic indicators, particularly around employment levels.

However, there is a lot of compelling work on the pervasive impact of high inequality on society. Inequality is linked to lower levels of trust, higher levels of mental illness, obesity, infant mortality, teenage pregnancy, high school dropouts and homicides, to name a few.

Fundamentally, high levels of inequality create divides in society. When the rich pull away, their empathy with the poor diminishes. Society becomes split into the haves and have nots, who move in different circles, use different hospitals and send their children to different schools. The two worlds gradually separate.

The impact of reduced social cohesion caused by inequality can be felt in one of the most seismic political decisions this country has taken – to leave the EU. There are many factors behind this vote, but the feeling of many of being ‘left behind’ was clearly one.

So who are the so-called ‘left-behinds’? Primarily, I think, people who have been marginalised economically, as changing demands have decreased the number of intermediate skilled working class jobs, to the benefit of professional and public sector workers.

Society has shifted under them, particularly in education. In 1964, 72% of voters had no formal qualifications. This proportion halved to 36% by 2012. Finally, I suspect many also felt marginalised politically with no effective voice, when the major parties responded to these changes by moving to the centre ground. New Labour of 1997 and David Cameron’s so-called ‘compassionate Conservatism’ reflected a move to woo a new middle class professional voter bloc. And sadly I strongly suspect that our own stance on inequality was far from clear.

In essence the lack of genuine political alternatives led to the decline of working class participation in politics. In 50 years, Britain has been transformed from a society where poorly skilled and blue collar voters decided elections to one where such voters have become spectators in electoral battles for the educated middle class vote.

However, in a single-issue referendum, the electoral power of those who had felt marginalised became all too clear. A lack of trust in the government and political class was a key issue for many Leave voters. Brexit was, in part, a vote of frustration at the perceived lack of political representation - one which reversed the trend of declining working class participation in elections.

Wellbeing research can also shed light about Brexit. In particular, high levels of inequality in wellbeing in a region were strongly associated with a greater

“Britain has been transformed from a society where poorly skilled and blue collar voters decided elections to one where such voters have become spectators in electoral battles for the educated middle class vote”

likelihood of voting Leave.

One further social divide revealed both by Brexit and the 2017 election is an inter-generational one. The young voted clearly in 2017 for a different kind of politics – one less accepting of large inequalities in wealth. The Resolution Foundation has established the Intergenerational

Commission, which has produced important research on the breakdown of the ‘intergenerational contract’. Most starkly, expected incomes after housing costs are lower for this generation than the last, for the first time. This is reflected in beliefs. Just under half of Britons believe that young people today will have a worse life than their parents, thanks to forces outside of their control.

Perceptions are important in politics. When people feel disempowered, or ignored, or left behind, they show their anger at the ballot box. Telling people that income inequality is declining, when it simply does not feel like that, is unjustifiable, as well as bad politics.

As politicians we need to be looking at a broader range of economic indicators as well as subjective wellbeing to gain deeper insight into the state of society and the justified grievances of many citizens.

This data is telling us is that the level of inequalities are unsustainable for a cohesive, healthy and caring society. Many of these problems stem from the changing labour market, with precarious, poorly paid self-employment becoming the norm. While this keeps the unemployment rate down, it also means many jobs lack the dignity and respect that previously came with an honest, working class occupation.

The Taylor Report on the gig economy concluded all work should be “decent and fair”, and that one-sided flexibility, where employers hold all the power, is not the way forward. Being treated fairly, with a route for progression, is vital for people to feel valued in their work and society. Otherwise, low wage gig employment breeds disempowerment and discontent, which cannot be ignored simply by pointing at the unemployment rate.

The UK’s rise in inequality and declines in wages has not been a worldwide phenomenon. The UK has fared poorly on these measures compared to its peers in the OECD. This implies that differences in government policy can have genuine impact on indicators like income and wealth inequality, as well as opportunity between classes, regions and generations. The country is not helpless, simply buffeted by international forces, but can surely seek to forge its own future.

The issues are not insurmountable. We need a proper dialogue about these challenges, and how we alleviate them. With creativity and courage, I believe we can. Indeed I think we know what many of the solutions are. What we need is the political will to implement them. Liberal Democrats must start talking more about economic inequality and espousing clear policies if we are to be relevant.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and co-chair of the all party parliamentary groups on social mobility and wellbeing economics

USING THE SHIFT KEY

It's time to give Liberalism back its capital L and use its principles to meet contemporary problems, says Tony Greaves

I remember a party conference soon after the merger of the Liberal Party and the SDP in 1988, when we were called the Social and Liberal Democrats. John Smithson was heckled for starting his speech with the customary Liberal Party address “fellow Liberals”.

I tried it at Bournemouth this year and got no reaction, perhaps because most of the people present had never heard the phrase. As party leader Paddy Ashdown wanted to rename the party ‘The Democrats’. A ballot of members to choose between ‘The Democrats’ and ‘Liberal Democrats’ chose Liberal Democrats by around two to one. One argument was that there was a historic Liberal vote and by ditching ‘Liberal’ from our name we ran the risk of losing it. Many of us just thought we were Liberals.

But in the early days it was not popular to say that. Policy-making in the new party was like treading on eggshells. A vocal body of opinion thought we had to create a new synergy, different from and better than either L/liberalism or S/social D/democracy. This was nonsense; it was clear to anyone who could see further than next week that the destiny of the Liberal Democrats was as the Liberal party of British politics, a role we had inherited from the Liberal Party itself.

Paddy once came to Pendle for a campaigning visit and we held a public meeting where, possibly to the surprise of some, he gave a long thoughtful speech about Liberalism. But Charles Kennedy was really the first leader to talk about Liberalism and Liberal objectives on a regular basis. He was later echoed by Nick Clegg (though his Liberalism was of a somewhat different shade to that of Charles). Tim Farron never had any doubts that he is a Liberal.

EMBARRASSING WORD

I am using the word Liberal with a capital L in all this. But the small l usage has taken over much discussion within the party. So where does it leave us, as the Liberal (or liberal?) party and as members of the party? What are we and does it matter? First let's get rid of the embarrassing word ‘neoliberal’.

It is certainly not a ‘neo’ version of what we stand for. If you don't agree, read the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution (as a whole). Neoliberalism is a narrowly economic view of politics and society and our place on this planet. It is the political expression of neoclassical economics that has overwhelmed much of academic teaching of economics in recent decades. It underpinned Thatcherism and Blairism. It is now clear that, as a comprehensive description of how the world works, it is wrong. Politically so-called neoliberals “belong well to our right. (And if Richard Cobden and John Stuart Mill were alive today I am quite sure they would be with us and not with the neoliberals!)

So why is there a problem? Lots of people in the

party just call themselves liberals; lots of others use the words liberal and Liberal interchangeably. But if half the world now call themselves liberals and mean lots of different things by that, our party must make it much clearer what we stand for and how that makes us distinctive.

We will not do that if we don't say that our principles, our policies, our aims and objectives and indeed we ourselves are specifically Liberal, relating to the Liberal Democrats and not just a smallish subset of all the ‘liberals’ strung across the planet. I checked *Liberator* 386. Ignoring specific references to the party or its members (and where it was ambiguous starting a sentence) the words L/liberal and L/liberalism occurred 33 times. 20 with an L and 13 with an l. Often mixed up for no apparent reasons (in one piece Roger Hayes helpfully referred to “capital L Liberals” then relapsed to lower case!)

One more qualification – ‘liberal’ does not have an identical meaning in all places or all languages. American liberalism used to be rather more corporate than the British version and more identity-based, though there seems to have been a convergence of meanings in recent years and British and American liberals have always felt themselves to be political buddies. But the French word ‘libéral’ is a more neoliberal term than ours and its usage is for politicians who are on the right at least in economic terms. The use and self-use of the word liberal has seen quite a dramatic surge in recent years. All kinds of people have professed themselves and others to be liberals. It has got to the stage when saying someone is a liberal is almost as useless as calling someone a socialist – all things to all users, and as meaningless.

But let's be fair - liberals are generally against a lot of dreadful things that are going on in the world.

They are against the corporate and security statism and ‘controlled democracy’ of Putin's Russia. They are against military adventurism such as that in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and the invasion of Iraq. They are against dictators such as Assad and sundry African tin-pots, or religion-based regimes such as the Saudis and Iran. They are against ISIL and other insurgent jihadist groups. They are against Trump and Breitbart and the rest of the alt-right. They are against Brexit. They are against terrorism, and against illiberal responses to terrorism. They are against treating refugees like human flotsam (and, worse, turning them into jetsam). They are against the rise of right wing populists and fascists from the BNP to Farage to Wilders to Le Pen to Alternative Deutschland to the Austrian Freedom Party. They are against rigging elections.

But they don't know how to respond to Xi Jinping's China as it opens up its economy but clamps down on dissent. When it comes to separatist/ nationalist movements they are as confused as ever. They are

against poverty and inequality but not sure just how much.

The globalisation of more open markets and the development of what people call free trade was widely thought to be a liberal construct, inevitable, desirable, with liberals “believing they are on what they like to think

is the right side of history” in the words of the New Statesman’s John Gray, an interesting and perceptive commentator well to the right of Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell but certainly not a liberal.

A year ago he wrote: “Today’s liberals differ widely about how the wealth and opportunities of a market economy should be shared. What none of them question is the type of market globalisation that has developed over the past three decades.” But that is clearly wrong about British Liberals. Long before the events of 2008 and its aftermath threw so many liberals into an orgy of self-searching and creative thought, the Liberal Party itself had called for ‘fair trade’ rather than multi-national dominated ‘free trade’.

And then there is the whole question of identity politics where the issues (of tackling discrimination and promoting personal freedoms) are fundamentally liberal but the politics are more complex.

The US academic Mark Lilla created more than a frisson of panic among liberals when he suggested identity liberalism had created a “kind of moral panic about racial, gender and sexual identity” which granted specific rights and privileges but not duties to the wider society. It was based on personal and tribal claims; it fragmented and distorted liberalism’s message and “prevented it from becoming a unifying force”. Add to that the effect of the rise of petty patriotisms around the world – more tribalism – and it looks like liberalism is falling apart rather than hegemonic. If the appeal of the likes of Ukip and the Front National is essentially tribal in nature, where does it leave the liberal politics of identity?

For a time around a year ago after Trump, Brexit and the rest, everyone was debating the fate of what the Guardian’s tame Tory Matthew d’Ancona called “all you despondent liberals”. His answer – “get off your wusses [whatever that means]...soft liberalism doesn’t cut it any more. Time to try the hard variety”. All under the headline: “Liberals stand your ground and toughen up”.

And to be fair he set out a pretty good check-list of 10 very liberal issues. But Zoe Williams, sharing his space but not his politics, pointed out that when the right attacked ‘liberalism’ they were really attacking morality and values which underlie all decent and civilised political discourse and action. To which we may cry “hear, hear”. But that does not help us to develop and promote our own Liberal definition.

POLITICAL NASTIES

Not every decent person is a Liberal, and not every one is a liberal. After the unexpected Corbyn surge in the general election much public debate has reverted to the kind of clash of celebrity-leaders that the media

“Saying someone is a liberal is almost as useless as calling someone a socialist – all things to all users, and as meaningless”

find easy. With Theresa May struggling to survive on three fronts, assailed by the EU, Labour and her own party, the underlying issues have rather sunk out of sight. But they will come back. In spite of what some think Corbyn and McDonnell are not political nasties. But they are not liberals and do not consider themselves to be so.

The global political struggle is still a complex and convoluted battle between the forces of authoritarian populism (in all its forms) and liberalism (in all its forms). This is in the context of enormous modern issues such as climate change, global migration, the decline of local democracy and the public sector alongside the rise of managerial/ technocratic solutions linked to the insidious takeover of services by private corporations, the rise of strident nationalism accompanying a breakdown of international diplomacy and security in all its forms, a global economy ever more controlled by huge unaccountable corporations (linked to the collection of ever more data in the hands of the GAFA-led oligopoly not to mention sinister operators hellbent on undermining western democracy), the future of work and indeed the meaning of humanity in the face of robotisation – automation on a previously unknown scale and depth, all linked to a global society in which the forces of neoliberal economics are running riot and a planetary ecosystem which gets closer to disastrous collapse with every day that passes.

If all this is a fair account of what is going on, Corbyn’s 40-years-old socialism is not going to provide many lasting answers. And an upsurge based on one old man’s rather quaint charisma is not going to last long in a country that is still essentially open and democratic.

Our task as Liberal Democrats is to develop Liberal answers to these and so many other problems, starting from the fundamental principles that underpin our party, then campaign for them.

I am reminded of Roger McGough’s little poem. “Once I lived in capitals/My life intensely phallic/But now I’m sadly lower case/With the occasional italic.”

It’s time for all of us to start using that shift key a bit more.

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

WHAT'S GONE WRONG IN WALES?

With no MPs for the first time in 150 years and only one assembly member, the Welsh Liberal Democrats have been hammered like nowhere else. Peter Black looks at what caused this

The Welsh Liberal Democrats are facing an existential crisis. For the first time since the Liberal Party was formed in the nineteenth century we no longer have an MP representing a Welsh constituency. Our once small but successful Welsh Assembly group has been reduced to a rump of one and our councillor base is smaller than it has been for some time.

The reality facing party officials is far removed from the heights we achieved in the previous decade. In the 2005 general election we secured 18.4% of the vote and four MPs. Two years later we were on the verge of entering the Welsh Government for the second time, but in this instance as part of a rainbow coalition that would have excluded Labour, the dominant party in Wales for over a century. In local government during the period 2004-12 we helped to run councils as diverse as Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, Bridgend, Monmouthshire, Ceredigion, Conwy and Wrexham.

It is not the case that the party squandered these chances. The reluctance of several key individuals in the Welsh party to get into bed with the Tories led to the rainbow coalition being rejected, and replaced instead by a Labour-Plaid Cymru Government. In terms of local government, we achieved a great deal in running things only to see the national tide turn against us. Those councillors who had won their seats on an anti-Labour swing failed to consolidate their gains properly and were swept away once the Liberal Democrats themselves became unpopular.

The fact is it is not easy being a Welsh Liberal Democrat. That is best illustrated by the 2005 general election result. Across the UK, the Lib Dems secured 22.1% of the vote, nearly four percentage points more than in Wales. That is a disparity that has been in-built for us as a party for a long time because what was then the third party vote has always been split between us and Plaid Cymru.

SHEEP AND FUNERALS

We have few heartlands, mostly concentrated in rural mid-Wales where sheep outnumber people and community politics consists of candidates being seen at as many local funerals and church services that they can get to. Even there the traditional Liberal Democrat radical base has been eroded by incomers from outside Wales.

We have survived by ruthlessly squeezing Labour and Plaid Cymru votes to stop the Tories. In

Ceredigion we squeezed the unionist vote to stop Plaid Cymru. In both cases that squeeze unravelled disastrously earlier this year as two-party politics reasserted itself.

Where we have built up an urban base through community politics-style campaigning we have relied too much on one or two individuals to do the work, we have failed to consolidate properly, resorted to tactical voting arguments instead of substantive and relevant policy positions and seen our advances lost through political misfortune outside our control.

Our other problem is one of identity. Unlike Scotland, Wales does not have a national media to speak of. The Western Mail, the so-called national newspaper of Wales is outsold by its more regional sister papers, the South Wales Evening Post and the South Wales Echo. There is no one Welsh newspaper that can be bought anywhere in Wales, while much of rural Wales relies on weeklies for their news and gossip. One of the biggest selling papers in Montgomeryshire is the Shropshire Star.

Most people rely on UK newspapers and UK TV and radio channels for their news. As with the rest of the world these traditional news outlets are declining in favour of internet based media. That is an area which the federal party is still playing catch-up on; the Welsh party is decades behind them.

The upshot of this dearth of Welsh media is that it is harder for political parties to convey a distinctively Welsh message. Plaid Cymru of course is the exception to this. Their name translates as the Party of Wales. At Welsh Assembly elections they have a clear identity that is associated with Welsh governance. When they do well, the Welsh Liberal Democrats do less well.

In 2011, we only survived the anti-Clegg holocaust because the Plaid Cymru vote fell back. In 2016, Plaid advanced and Ukip arrived to sweep up what was left of the 'third party protest vote'. Our representation in the Welsh Assembly was almost wiped out.

It is fair to say that because of the circumstances outlined above, all the remaining political parties in Wales rely on their UK showings for their electoral success here. Labour, the Tories, the Liberal Democrats, Greens, even Ukip, have tried to rebrand themselves as Welsh parties, embracing the Welsh language, distinctive Welsh policies, and federalist structures, but when it comes to voting in Assembly and local council elections, people have still largely relied on their instincts as to how we are doing across

the UK.

That is not to say the UK parties do not operate this side of Offa's Dyke as distinctively Welsh parties with Welsh interests at heart, we do. But perception is important, and when we throw into the mix Wales' non-conformist,

radical political tendencies, it was inevitable that the Welsh Liberal Democrats association with a UK Tory-Lib Dem government would be disastrous for us, no matter how much we protested about some of the policies being implemented by them.

If all of this sounds like an excuse, then it isn't. For all their weaknesses the Welsh Liberal Democrats have made a substantial contribution to Wales. We were of course the original party of devolution, advocating a devolved Welsh administration nearly a hundred years ago. We had federal structures and a distinct Welsh organisation and policy making process in place well before devolution and when the Welsh Assembly was established we were ready to contribute to it.

When devolution tottered on the brink in 1999-2000 under Blairite control-freakery and Labour impotence, it was the Welsh Liberal Democrats who entered a coalition with Rhodri Morgan's nascent ministry, bringing with us over a hundred Welsh policies, most of which were implemented. We helped to cut class sizes, established the first all-Wales homeless strategy and set up a distinctive Welsh arts policy to name just a few of the successes of that first coalition.

And when in 2011, Labour again found themselves without an overall majority we negotiated budgets with them that set up a Welsh pupil premium and secured hundreds of millions of pounds for important projects. And again, in 2016 with Labour short of the 50% of seats needed to govern, Kirsty Williams, our sole AM, joined the government as a Welsh Liberal Democrat education secretary.

Under Kirsty, our pupil premium has continued to be made available to schools, a new curriculum is being introduced, higher and further education is being reformed and student finance is to be transformed with means-tested grants equivalent to the minimum wage being made available to Welsh students from 2018, whilst at the same time additional resources have been found for the higher education sector. She is also investing in more support for teachers so they have more time dealing with pupils and less with administration, and putting in place a distinctive policy to protect rural schools.

Kirsty has not just concentrated on education though. The agreement she struck with Labour will see a Welsh rent-to-own scheme introduced next year to help those who can afford a mortgage but not the deposit, to get on the housing ladder. She is pushing government to introduce minimum and safe nursing levels in our hospitals, more money for mental health and some protection for our smaller councils from austerity cuts in their funding.

Our problem of course is communicating these successes and getting the credit for them. It brings us back to the lack of a Welsh media and our poor campaigning presence across Wales.

"It was inevitable that the Welsh Liberal Democrats association with a UK Tory-Lib Dem government would be disastrous for us"

Like the rest of the party we have seen a surge in membership. Well over half of our members are new. All of them will have had the opportunity to vote for the new Welsh party leader - either Jane Dodds or Liz Evans - who, for the first time is not a parliamentarian. That

is a change that has been forced on us by electoral circumstances. The new leader faces an enormous task.

She will firstly need to establish proper support arrangements. She will not have the advantage enjoyed by parliamentarians of staff to manage her diary, issue press releases and reply to correspondence. The Welsh party will have to make those arrangements for her with the few staff they have left.

SKILLS DEFICIT

Secondly, she must address the huge skills deficit that exists across the party. We are fighting council by-elections blind. If we are to start winning again then we need to give these events the intensity they deserve, including high quality, relevant campaigning literature, full canvasses of voters, proper use of Connect and professional polling day operations. We cannot afford to continue being amateur in our approach to these elections.

And we need to make use of our new members to get out into our communities across Wales, talk to people and implement all-year round campaigning. The next elections may be four years away, but we cannot afford to wait. We must organise and build up support.

Obviously, the new leader cannot do all of this on her own. She will be part-time and working in a media vacuum. But she can establish a clear sense of direction for the party, find a distinctive narrative for us and motivate our membership into taking that message out into our communities. She can also work with party committees and officers to get candidates in place early, initiate training sessions and policy discussions, and use what expertise we do have to help get things started again in areas where we are weak.

If we suffered in Wales because of previous leaders then the new federal leader offers an opportunity. The party has a man at the helm with gravitas and presence, we have a distinctive message on the key issue of the day which, despite Wales narrow support for Brexit, will resonate here with many communities, and we have the time to regroup. Ukip is in decline and, as our poll ratings start to recover so will the chance to recapture some of the successes of the recent past.

Wales may look like a disaster area for the Liberal Democrats but we have been at rock bottom before and we have recovered. Our nation needs a liberal, pro-European party that understands the needs of Wales and has ideas and solutions to our problems. That party is the Welsh Liberal Democrats. The path will be long and hard, but the opportunity is there if we take it. We can be the future Wales needs.

Peter Black was Welsh Liberal Democrat Assembly Member for South Wales West 1999-2016 and is a councillor in Swansea

MESSAGE IN A BATTLE

‘Spokesperson without portfolio’ is what one makes of it and Dee Doocey wants to see the party speaking clearly to the people

It was once said of the Lord Privy Seal that he was not a lord, a privy or a seal. I suppose being Liberal Democrat spokesperson without portfolio comes in to the same category. It is one of those titles used to allow someone to be part of the team without a single silo of responsibilities.

That does not mean a licence to interfere with the work of colleagues with a specific portfolio but that the leader has someone available to think outside the box and help in a crisis. The role is often best done by someone with no personal agenda; but with a close empathy with the party leader.

I have been a party activist for more than 40 years. I have done every job there is to do, including more than 25 years as Vince’s agent. I know what it is like to fight a target seat; but also, how to hold the fort in a seat which the powers that be have designated a no-hoper. My long relationship with Vince is based on mutual trust and, on my part, my admiration for one of the most honourable and genuine people I have met.

VINCE’S CATAPULTS

Vince’s key aim in public life is to get things done and he achieved a huge amount in government in difficult circumstances; setting up two state banks which have invested in small business and green energy; reforming the big banks; a new industrial strategy which has done wonders for cars and aerospace. He also set up world class innovation centres (‘catapults’) around the country and saved the post office network.

I have been a peer for the past seven years and chair the cross-party committee which oversees the finances of the House of Lords and liaises with the Commons on shared facilities. That brings me face to face with a challenge facing Vince as party leader. How do we re-build in a way which retains the best of the old while creating something fit for purpose in the century ahead?

I am also the Lib Dems spokesperson for Tourism in the Lords. Here I can draw on my experience as a former Greater London Assembly member, where I worked on monitoring the delivery of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012 and the policies needed to make and keep London one of the world’s major tourist destinations. Tourism should have a department of its own so that this important industry can fight the battles and co-ordinate the policies for one of our largest sources of employment and overseas earnings. I retain my passion for the fight against modern slavery and child trafficking an area I first got involved in during my time on the Metropolitan Police Authority.

In case you think my interests and experience are London-centric, I was born and grew up in Dublin on what would now be termed a ‘sink estate’. It is

an experience which has left me with a life-long commitment to social housing. I was proud of the work we did during my time as chair of housing in Richmond upon Thames. We introduced innovative ways to make best use of our housing stock and managed to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast as temporary accommodation for people in housing need.

So much for my background. What are the challenges we face as a party both in terms of policy and organisation?

A lot is being written about how liberal democracy in its broadest sense is in retreat across the world. Centre stage is occupied by right-wing populists and autocrats. New challenges to the freedom of the individual and the rule of law seem to be on the march as global mega corporations seize control of the data revolution now underway. I believe that at such a time of doubt and uncertainty the Liberal Democrats have both the leader and the philosophy to meet the challenges of our time.

When both the power of the state and the power of mega corporations can intrude on personal privacy and civil liberties, a party which speaks clearly for the rights of the individual is needed more than ever. We need to argue the case for every individual having the right to develop their talents to the full; but also that with that freedom goes a responsibility to ensure that society must underpin the quality of life for all its citizens.

Despite what is written at times, I believe that at heart we are still a liberal and tolerant country. This manifests itself in a thousand different ways in our individual responses to charities, community organisations and humanitarian appeals, both national and international. The tragedy of our age is that the liberal instincts that are almost part of our national DNA are being channelled in to individual campaigns or trapped, unrepresented by a Conservative Party intimidated by its right-wing and a Labour Party controlled by a left-wing throwback to the 1970s.

For the Liberal Democrats, the immediate task is to restore the party as an effective campaigning force. It is very worrying that we continue to bump along in the opinion polls at somewhere between 7-10%. Perhaps the lesson of the last seven years is that power made us concentrate on managing, sometimes at the expense of our key mission - to provide a voice for those who are unable to help themselves and speak up for values and freedoms now under attack from right and left.

On a practical level, we need to radically raise our game in communicating our messages. We used to lead the field in this area. We must radically improve our social media operation.

I know Vince is aware of this and is taking advice from some of the best in the business. Look at Vince’s Facebook site or follow him on Twitter and

you will see that he is already broadening our communications offering and connecting directly with the users of the new technology platforms.

But the party is not going to rebuild itself on Twitter or Facebook, it needs to rebuild at grass-roots level. That is why Vince is totally committed to building up the number of local campaign staff who can be deployed in key areas and target seats. We have, in Vince, a great campaigner who knows what it is like to win - and to lose! He understands that winning involves being part of a team - both nationally and locally. We must address the twin complaints that most people don't know what we are about and, even when we do, they don't think we are capable of influencing events.

It is important that we produce a detailed and costed programme. But elections are won or lost by also painting with a broad brush, in vivid colours. We must communicate three or four key offers in clear and simple terms. Our Brexit position is clear. But there is a real danger of Brexit fatigue and I have noticed from a lot of people a shift from being concerned to treating the issue with resigned indifference. We must connect with them and make them believe that we really can make a difference.

The housing crisis is without doubt the biggest issue (apart from Brexit) that this country faces. The need to build more affordable housing to rent and buy is a major challenge. But if we could build 300,000 houses a year in the 1950s then we can, and must, do so again if we are to provide both stability and social justice in years ahead. During his time in Government, Vince constantly argued with the Treasury about the urgent need to borrow to build more homes.

But it fell on deaf ears just like it did again when Vince raised this issue with Philip Hammond. We also need a response as radical as anytime in our history in terms of how land is owned, taxed and developed.

We must face up to certain legacy issues, not least the issue of student fees. I believe we need a new contract between young and old so that our choices are not seen as part of some inter-generational war. We must find a way of funding our universities which keep them at the forefront of the world's best while doing justice to the 60% of young people who do not go to university. We must face both the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population without simply burdening future generations with the costs of end-of-life care.

INTER-GENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Such an arrangement becomes easier to fashion if people believe that the broadest backs are bearing the heaviest burden. Sadly, too much wealth, at both corporate and individual level, is concentrated in too few hands and the tax burden is very unfairly distributed. The social justice agenda is one which, properly presented, can unite both young and old. It should be our task to articulate the policies which build the bridges between the generations.

“It is important that we produce a detailed and costed programme. But elections are won or lost by also painting with a broad brush, in vivid colours”

I know Vince is really keen to get more of our members involved in campaigning. Since the 2015 General Election, and certainly since the European referendum, many local parties have seen their membership soar and we have record national membership.

But unfortunately campaigning on the ground has not increased to match this growth. We must ensure that in addition to welcoming

new members we get more actually involved in regular campaigning. We also need to find the skill-sets of the new recruits and deploy these to new styles of campaigning.

Vince is well aware that we must ensure that our message on Brexit makes sense to people and relates to their lives. Boris Johnson won the referendum because he spoke in terms that everyone could understand. Never mind that the £350m for the NHS was a downright lie. It addressed a real concern and was clearly understood. So, we need to humanise our messaging so we address people's concerns in language they understand.

I am an optimist. You don't spend a life time with the Liberals and Liberal Democrats unless you are.

The serious challenges facing our country come when both the Conservatives and Labour have turned in on themselves standing like two giant ostriches with their heads stuck firmly in the sand and unwilling to face unpalatable truths.

Our task is to address those truths and explain our responses with clarity and integrity. In Vince, we have a leader who regularly out-polls both Corbyn and May in terms of public approval. The next six months will shape the nature of British politics for many years to come. It is the challenge to liberal democracy that the Liberal Democrats are uniquely equipped to respond to.

I believe we have the leader to lead us in that fight and a political landscape favourable to our core messages. As Jo Grimond once reminded us, the only direction to march is towards the sound of gunfire.

Dee Doocey is the Liberal Democrat spokesperson without portfolio

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AN UNNECESSARY IMPALEMENT

Tim Farron need never have to himself into trouble over conflicts between his Christian and Liberal views had had thought about how the state and religion interact, says Micheal Meadowcroft

One of the most embarrassing episodes at the last general election was the sight of Tim Farron squirming when being pressed on the consequences of his Christian faith.

It was embarrassing for him as much as for his friends watching not least because he was clearly genuine and very torn. Tim got himself impaled on what he saw as the contradictions between the political positions that his evangelical faith required and those that his instinctive liberalism instinctively led him to.

The issues that became highlighted by the media, and on which he eventually foundered, were particularly, though not exclusively, the 'ethical' questions such as abortion and gay rights rather than poverty or inequality. What was puzzling and, indeed, frustrating for colleagues, was that there was no need for Tim to have to agonise: there is no intrinsic dilemma and no incompatibility between faith and political belief.

What was curious in Tim's resignation speech was that he focussed on his position as leader as opposed to being an MP as such. In fact the only difference is the increased media attention; the issues and the necessity to go through the lobbies to vote on them are identical. Why then could Tim apparently be comfortable to be a constituency MP for 10 years and then to find it impossible to be party leader?

Throughout history there have been Christians active in politics. In the early sixteenth century, Thomas Muntzer was a fiery preacher and, at least initially, a follower of Luther. He became an increasingly radical political figure eventually with communistic views and was finally tortured and executed in 1525.

In the seventeenth century the Diggers were a politically radical group of Protestants. The best known of them, Gerrard Winstanley, argued for the common ownership of land. The eighteenth century, with the formalisation of political parties, saw evangelicals involved in parties the best known of which were William Wilberforce as a Liberal in the House of Commons, and Shaftesbury as a Conservative in the House of Lords and both were leading figures in the abolition of slavery and the transformation of social conditions.

ACTIVE EVANGELICALS

Evangelicals were prominent in many radical charitable causes but not many allied themselves with political parties. One who did was FB Meyer, a popular Baptist minister in London who allied himself to the Liberal party at the 1906 general election and despite his socialist sympathies maintained his support

for Asquith into the 1920s. Even more so, the great Methodist, Scott Lidgett, was actually the leader of the Progressive Party on the London County Council, albeit when it was in decline following its glory days in control as a Lib-Lab coalition. In 1964 Frederick Catherwood wrote *The Christian in Industrial Society* which drew together the findings of an evangelical study group. One non-conformist reviewer commented, "Political Liberals will find their next manifesto here." As Sir Fred Catherwood, and somewhat perversely, particularly as a keen supporter of proportional representation, he much later became a Conservative MEP.

Political support can come from unexpected quarters. When I came to London in February 1962 to join the staff at Liberal Party HQ I attended Westminster Chapel, the largest congregation in London, under the ministry of Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones who was regarded by many as the foremost biblical scholar of his day. I was staying at the old London Central YMCA building in Tottenham Court Road where there was a regular lunchtime meeting. With some temerity we invited Dr Lloyd Jones to come and speak. He agreed and joined a group of us for refreshments beforehand. When he discovered that I was at Liberal HQ he was delighted and said that he had always stated "you could be a Christian Liberal but you couldn't be a liberal Christian". He then recounted his opposition to Ramsay MacDonald when he had been a minister in Port Talbot many years before.

Also at that time there was a Friday lunchtime Christian fellowship which included a delightful young man who believed that it was a Christian duty to have the Ten Commandments as part of the secular law.

I pointed out that it would be rather difficult to have a law against coveting. He was not at all cruel or harsh but as part of this belief in the universality of the commandments he believed in capital punishment for murder. I then asked him how was it that three great men of God, Moses, David and Paul, had all been murderers - in Paul's case as an accessory to murder. He returned the following Friday and said: "I wish you had never asked me that question - it has disturbed me all week." All penal policy has to hold out the potential for redemption.

It is evangelicals, with their belief in the Bible being the only authority for their beliefs, who have the particular theological problem with certain political issues. Indeed one could point to many Christians actively involved in politics whom evangelicals would reject as not being theologically 'sound', hence my

concentration in this article on those Christians who rely on the application of biblical teaching for their personal views.

Of course, the interpretation of biblical positions on current issues is far from being uniform and presents many significant problems. For instance, the extrapolation of certain texts on supposed God-given territory has led some evangelicals, notably but not exclusively in the USA, myopically to support the present state of Israel with its intolerable and unacceptable treatment of the Palestinians - who themselves include an indigenous Christian minority, under pressure both from Muslim bodies and Israeli occupiers and often ignored by evangelicals.

Even evangelicals who do not go so far in their acceptance of a God-given right for Jews to occupy all Palestinian land, tend to be over-indulgent to Israeli claims and actions. The late Ian Paisley used his biblical interpretation to reject the European Union, with its founding Treaty of Rome. Latterly Dr Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, together with a number of British Conservative evangelicals, has used biblical allusions to back their support for Brexit.

However much some evangelical Christians rely on 'proof texts' in support of political positions, any struggles with conscience or intellect are wholly unnecessary. It is neither possible nor necessary to enact personal views in legislation.

First, laws are not only words on paper but need to command a sufficient public consensus to be sustainable, as Mrs Thatcher discovered to her cost over the poll tax. It follows that for a Christian minority to seek to impose laws on the majority that have not had the Christian experience is not possible.

Second, one's faith is individual and is unique to human beings, thus no inanimate body including the state can, by definition, possess it. Consequently for the evangelical politician, just as their religious belief comes by faith, their political positions have to be determined by reason and logic, imbued, certainly, by faith and political values but, for Liberals, the state is essentially secular in its basis.

Third, whereas it is open to believers to share their faith and to proselytise, they cannot seek to impose by law that which they cannot persuade the electorate to embrace. Throughout history such attempts have led to more and more repression in the pursuit of what the particular religion regards as beneficial. Consent is essential to the survival of democracy.

Fourth, only a secular state can safeguard religious rights. A theocratic, or even a state controlled by political parties based on a specific religion, cannot ensure a plural society. In fact, my experience of working in 35 new or emerging democracies is that only a party structure based on political philosophy produces a stable democracy.

Fifth and last, paradoxically it is also in the interest of religion that the state itself should be secular; beliefs enforced by law cannot be rooted in hearts and minds. Arguably, for the evangelical, even having

"It is evangelicals, with their belief in the Bible being the only authority for their beliefs, who have the particular theological problem with certain political issue"

an established church, which implicitly prompts that country's citizens to believe that as a consequence they are 'Christians', without having any necessity for a personal commitment, assumes a passive tokenism which militates against a vibrant evangelical Christianity, such as Tim Farron espouses.

CURIOUS HANG-UPS

Evangelical Christians often have curious hang-ups with homosexuality and gay marriage. Even if the individual finds it difficult to escape from a personal antipathy that has no bearing on him or her as legislator. The key issue for the MP is how does one enable the greater good. Only Liberalism understands that individuals are made up of altruism and selfishness and the task of the Liberal politician is to enhance the former and to diminish the latter.

The development of our laws over the past 50 years have had an immeasurable benefit to LGBT men and women with, it would seem, no downside. On a different issue where the same principle applies, the question of regulating surrogacy came before parliament in my time. Alan Beith was a supporter of the Bill and said to me that he did not like the idea of surrogacy at all but "It is going to happen and always has. It is up to parliament to establish the best regulatory framework for the optimum benefit of all concerned."

The second touchstone issue is often abortion. Frankly, the absolutists on both sides have not been beneficial to the sensitive and supportive treatment of women faced with the difficult decision. The 'pro life' campaigners have behaved monstrously, picketing abortion clinics with callous disregard for the feelings of the women attending - and even on occasion murdering the doctors - and blatantly ignoring legal restrictions on election literature. On the other side, an over simplistic 'right to choose' attitude diminishes the perception of the potential of human life, for instance, in accepting as 'normal' the termination of a pregnancy where a scan shows the embryo to carry the Downs Syndrome gene, without pondering how close that comes to a dangerously eugenic concept of the value of life.

Rather than taking up a stance anti-abortion per se the evangelical should, as always, adopt the 'greater good' test and support the Steel Act test of the effect on the mother involved being the determinant.

Tim Farron need never to have got himself into such a corner. His personal views may well be out of kilter with the radical Liberal he clearly is but that is of no concern to anyone but himself.

He should never have let those views be known. And, if raised by Andrew Neil or any other journalist, the answer from day one should have been, "my personal beliefs are just that, personal, and of no concern of anyone else. What matters is my actual record on any issue, including ethical non-party questions. My votes in Hansard are there for all to see."

Privacy is also a Liberal value, even for politicians.

LAMB ROASTED

Norman Lamb's view of the EU is wrong - it could serve as a decentralisation model, says Hugh Annand

Norman Lamb made a number of valid points in his thought-provoking, article in *Liberator* 386.

The passage I challenged him on at conference was on the EU. He describes the EU in terms that could have been written by a Daily Express 'outrage bot'. He is right, however, to say that we should be articulating a Liberal vision for Europe - in the way that Emmanuel Macron has tried to.

I can assure Norman that far from being concerned with accumulating ever more power for its institutions, the EU is far more decentralised, and has more checks and balances, than the UK.

For example, when putting forward any legislative proposal, the Commission must explain to the European Parliament, national governments and national parliaments why this needs to be done at European level, and what it is trying to achieve.

Imagine if the British government wasn't allowed to do anything unless it first convinced every local authority it needed to be done and could not be done at local level. Policymaking would become a lot more, to use Norman's word, sclerotic, but it would bring decision making closer to the people.

This idea of bringing decisions closer to the people is what is meant by 'subsidiarity'. As I put it to Norman, the idea is that the EU should look after the big things - climate change, international passenger rights and so on - that cannot effectively be tackled at local or national level. What too often happens in practice is that national politicians 'kick upstairs' those things that are too controversial to handle at national level. If things go well, they take the credit; if not, they blame technocrats in 'Brussels'. If the Commission says: "Look, folks, this is really something you should be tackling at national level", it is accused of being inflexible.

European institutions would love to be closer to the people, but such initiatives provoke the Eurosceptic press to frothing about taxpayers' money being spent on 'propaganda'.

If we are going to address the problem of people feeling powerless and detached from decision-making, three things need to happen.

Firstly, national politicians need to be better informed, and more honest, about what the EU does. If national politicians used and then praised the EU as a force for good, rather than using it as a convenient dustbin/scapegoat for unpopular but necessary policies, people would understand it better. There is both scope and appetite for reform. It is Eurosceptics who have historically been the most resistant to change: an efficient, transparent, truly democratic EU would deprive them of their narrative and livelihood. There is no need for us Liberals to go round saying: "Ooh, isn't the EU awful?" If we are to turn the Brexit supertanker around before it hits the looming iceberg, we must say: 'The EU is broadly a good thing, but

here's how we want to make it better."

Secondly, the UK (and especially England) needs to become more like the EU. At present, most English matters are controlled by Whitehall/Westminster. Local authorities have a few crumbs of power but in most policy areas have limited room for manoeuvre and can be overruled by central government.

Local authorities can be taken to task for doing things that are the preserve of central government. But what if it was the other way round? What if all power were vested, by default, in the level closest to the people, with it being up to them to say to the next level up "could you deal with it?" Of course, Westminster could keep defence, foreign policy, shared critical infrastructure and so on, with local authorities and the devolved administrations, responsible for all the rest.

MPs would have far less to do, so we would need far fewer of them. A reformed upper house, made up of indirectly elected representatives of local government and civil society, could put an end to the patronage of appointments to the House of Lords. Again, the EU sets an example here, with the Council (from elected national governments) effectively forming a powerful upper house of the legislature, and the European Committee of the Regions (local government) and European Economic and Social Committee (civil society) playing a consultative role.

Thirdly, politicians at all levels should subject all new policy initiatives to the 'Mrs Jones test.' Before signing off a manifesto, or tabling legislation or speaking, or voting imagine yourself on the doorstep of your constituent, Mrs Jones.

You have 90 seconds, before her eyes glaze over to explain how this policy initiative will make her life better.

If you can't answer that question, maybe don't do what you were planning to do, at least not at your level.

If we can leave behind the disappointments and broken promises of coalition and go back to telling the truth, my hunch is that people will respect us for it. Power to the people, yes: but information is power, so we must start with being honest, well informed and transparent. If we as a party can win back people's trust, we can put power back into their hands.

Hugh Annand is a former chair of Brussels and Europe Liberal Democrats and works as a translator for the European Commission

REAL, RADICAL REDISTRIBUTION

Jonathan Hunt argues that redistributing wealth, power and responsibilities are the key to coherence and voter attention

As a party, we boast several library shelves of detailed policies but we seem unable to explain how these hang together, how they relate to one other and how they help present the big picture in a Tweet, let alone a slogan.

We know what we stand for, and respond well to questions about any aspect of our platform. We are good at saying the right things. But a succinct answer to 'what do Liberal Democrats stand for' too often eludes us.

It is even more evasive as the political centre has leapt to the left in size 14 boots, if that is where hard-line, dictatorial Marxists are really to be found. So where do we on the centre left now reside?

Many of us would reply firmly: on the Liberal and democratic left still backing some of the ideas Corbyn and his fellow-Marxists espouse, but have little intention of ever implementing.

To attempt to define and put those together, I suggest a term that has recently re-entered the political lexicon, though many of us would swear it has never gone away. Redistribution can be applied to so many areas of public activity, though I have limited them to three major groupings. Let's look at what they cover, with one or two examples:

Redistribution of Wealth. There is little new in the concept of taking from the rich and spreading it among the poor. Jesus Christ, Mohammed, most other religious icons and Robin Hood all got there first. The IMF and other conservative bodies have recently joined.

What is different today is the huge leap in numbers, both in amounts of wealth, with the obscenely wealthy on one side, and obscenely poor and needy UK citizens on the other. The Britain envisaged by Beveridge 75 years ago is quickly disappearing.

Work, his solution to poverty, is no longer the answer. More and more unscrupulous employers cheat their workers out of the money and conditions they deserve.

Income tax is the first, most obvious and usually the fairest. At current levels, before the autumn budget, our's is too low. Most of us can afford at least another penny and probably several if personal allowances rise. Penny increases have proven popular in opinion polls when we sought to predicate them for worthy, under-funded destinations; education in the last decade, the NHS in this.

They poll well, but do votes follow emotion? Should we have the courage to campaign on the fact that austerity has wreaked so much damage in what we once regarded as essential public services. We know Labour won't be precise on paying for their promises.

We have toyed with a wealth tax, and Vince was its principal advocate. It is morally and economically

right, and we must do it. But again to what level, and how do we measure wealth? Perhaps engage the Sunday Times Rich List compilers?

Obese cats on exorbitant packages need to be slimmed own. Many suggest their dosh should be tied to that of the lowest paid in their organisations. I would reverse that. The pay of the lowest and other salary levels should be linked to that of the bosses. Alarmed shareholders would soon reduce bosses' 'rewards'.

And a timid HMRC must raid those who pay no tax at all, especially foreign-owned multi-nationals. A sales tax, levied on all revenue received in this country, is one way. I have long preferred a US-style withholding tax, based on assumed profits. Once the taxman has the dosh, they can argue for a refund.

Redistribution of power. Changing the voting system is dear to the hearts of all Liberal Democrats.

But power is unevenly and unfairly distributed in so many other areas. Control of companies is a scandal. It is our money that is invested in equities. Yet we have so little say in policies and how they are run. Pension and a multitude of other funds, assurance companies and charities circulate members and investors annually. This should be used to consult on how to vote at the companies' annual meetings.

A campaign for democratic capitalism is the essential first battle in the war to create a market economy worth protecting. But investor power is not enough; Keynes's Yellow Book proposals for workers to have shares and a real say in the way the organisation is run is rightly winning new support.

Redistribution of Rights and responsibilities. This is a field rich full of opportunities for Lib Dems. As in a famous phrase from a long-lost manifesto, it follows "devolving power to the lowest level consistent with efficient administration". And in a more leisured society, ordinary citizens would control the running of our local communities.

You will have your own ideas of whose rights should be extended first, and who should act more responsibly. For starters, here's one idea, about company pensions, which are no more than wages postponed.

Under-funding should be covered by the Theft Act, and board directors should be punished with large fines and jail sentences in companies that don't meet their commitments. Just watch the funding levels jump upwards.

Jonathan Hunt is a member of Southwark Liberal Democrats

IN DEFENCE OF LOCAL PARTIES

Sometimes maligned and marginalised, local parties are still the Lib Dems most important building block, says Simon Banks

Imagine you're a leader or strategist of a new, vibrant internet-based mass political movement struggling in power. Activists' enthusiasm is waning and suddenly, membership is dropping. In many places you can't find candidates for office; elsewhere, mutually hostile groups fight over your name. The movement could collapse as fast as it rose. What would you give for a network of local activists doggedly keeping going whatever, resolving internal disputes democratically?

We have that already - local parties. *Liberator* 386 took seriously the potential of our many keen new members: contributors have sometimes downplayed it in order to paint a depressing picture. However, both *Commentary* and Sarah Green's article suggested detaching some new members from local parties would help. I argue instead that the best approach is to support and challenge local parties which need to get out of a rut and that local parties remain crucial to success.

Mark Pack and Jim Williams, in their pamphlet *How to Build a Party for Tomorrow*, make powerful points about an integrated, value-led, web-savvy approach. How can local parties plug into this to contribute and gain?

There is a crying need for more online engagement of Liberal Democrats having particular political interests – and not just for the newcomers. Groups like Green Liberal Democrats do their bit, but interest groups could be as narrow in scope as one policy issue and operate on a basis like Meetup with no or tiny subscriptions.

Our commitment to strong and empowered communities should not mean just locational communities. But very few people – even students - can say where they live means nothing to them and has no effect on them.

HIT AND MISS

Some sections of the party often belittle local parties, yet sometimes it seems to me incompetence increases as you go up the scales. Sarah says local parties are “notoriously hit and miss”, but what sector of the party isn't hit and miss? Certainly not HQ.

In some places newcomers are forming informal local networks. Good. Such networks can be local without being restricted to local party boundaries; they might even lead (alarm bells) to takeovers of weak local parties. Remember, though, informal networks cannot democratically or fairly select candidates or claim justifiably to represent members' views on, say, a major proposed development. One could run a campaign for something and another, a campaign against it. Some bureaucracy is there for good reasons.

Criticism of local parties should take into account the

way they're constrained by a top-down constitutional set-up, a legacy of the SDP, so they can't create a new elected officer post or have an immediate handover after the AGM to keen new officers and executive without seeking region's permission. The top-down approach naturally runs throughout the party: for example, English regions have been told they must have elections on a three-yearly, not two-yearly basis because HQ couldn't handle more frequent elections thanks to one member, one vote – and it seems regions have meekly accepted this.

So if someone is inadequate and won't resign, sorry, you're stuck with them for three years. A Liberal approach would be to have a local party constitution template with some provisions (that the chair should step down after maximum three years or that accounts should be maintained and communicated in keeping with the law) and others optional, subject to periodic review by region to make sure nothing obviously illiberal creeps in.

Local party membership development officers keen to contact new members have been impeded by growing chaos in the central membership records, so new members may not appear online for months, renewals are not recorded and someone who resigned two years ago is listed as newly lapsed and therefore to be chased. Yet the consequences will probably be blamed on the local party.

Some local parties have been better than others at involving new members. In mine – North East Essex, not a stronghold – four of the six officerships are filled by people who joined after the 2015 election, most county council candidates were newbies too and it looks like nearly all target ward candidates for the district in 2019 will be newbies.

But they're only a small minority of the new members, many of whom do not respond to whatever invitation. That's no surprise: many long-established members don't either. We might have gone out of existence if it hadn't been for the newcomers. More established local parties with bums already firmly and affectionately on seats sometimes need a strong push to take newcomers seriously – but that's common to most organisations.

Sarah Green suggested new members be allowed to “maintain their membership via SAOs”. Membership is centrally recorded anyway: payments go direct from the member to HQ which periodically sends local parties lists (frequently wrong) and famously, most people now join centrally online.

Members who wish to ignore their local parties can do so and continue in membership via direct debit. Those who lose contact with their local parties through moving or someone's failure similarly continue as

members. What problem would this suggestion solve? You can join centrally (automatically becoming a local party member), not even open their emails (or ask to be taken off their email list), never turn up to get a good councillor re-elected or to a social or political discussion and yet be active in some other aspect of the party. I know of people like that. Yet if things change and you want to get involved

locally (if only to question the PPC or ask the executive to support a proposal for a light-controlled crossing near your kid's school) you can, right away. Abolish the system by which members are automatically allocated to a local party and you drive some struggling local parties below the minimum membership and out of existence even if they have a few decent activists.

It also suggests moving away from the belief in bringing power as close to people as possible and in community activism which is fundamental to British Liberalism. We'd be telling new members, "Of course we know local politics is boring and unimportant. So is getting MPs elected. So ignore it."

Consider what local parties do, and no-one else can. They seek, select and support local election candidates. They run local campaigns based on democratic decision-making. They select and monitor parliamentary candidates. They should do much more, of course, as many do, but the fundamentals are important. Some do them badly – but that isn't their sole fault. Regions and county (or city) co-ordinating committees should be supporting them. Most do to some extent, but it's indeed hit and miss. How many have tried to assess how effectively their local parties were engaging new members and to offer advice and help? Party HQ, meanwhile, for all its good points, supplies duff membership information, sends out endless financial appeals and doesn't always listen to local feedback on what works.

TEAR OUT HAIR

I've come across situations in local parties which make me want to tear my hair out. Delete 'local parties' and insert any organisation I've been deeply involved in. It's worth thinking about what 'weak local party' means. Some of these, especially in difficult areas, are weak in terms of membership, finances and electoral success and yet are well-run by people making the best of a very difficult hand. Others are quite large, may have plenty of money and major electoral successes in recent times and yet be run in a slipshod, short-termist or self-defeatingly rancorous way. Both groups need help, plus of course the small and rather badly-run ones. But all but the biggest will be kept alive purely by volunteers.

Most of the people who are not thinking strategically, who are not articulating hope, making progress or engaging new members well, were idealists once. They've been ground down. But most of them are capable of being fired up once again if they see things moving.

“Membership development officers keen to contact new members have been impeded by growing chaos in the central membership records”

Perhaps the new members are different from the old and need handling differently? Well, in a way, but my experience has been that for at least those from the 2015 surge willing to consider becoming active, their interests and values are remarkably similar to those of the veterans. They do not need a guidebook to show an instinctive Liberalism.

In my local party we held the first 'pint and politics' meeting aimed particularly at new

members not long after the 2015 general election. The turnout was modest: one of our problems is that we cover a wide area without a natural centre. One young new member who came, cycled several miles to reach a rail station and then reach us via a branch line. The numbers of newcomers and oldsters were matched. To break the ice without shining the light too hard on the newcomers, I suggested we all say why we joined the party. There were some differences, of course – Nick Clegg's resignation speech came a bit late to decide my political orientation and Rhodesian UDI is not an issue nowadays – but it was extraordinary how little difference there was. A while back, I was discussing with two newish members the shortcomings of much local literature, and argued that every Focus should try to empower people, not just persuade them Cllr Bloggs could do everything for them. I didn't need to explain why this touched on something basic to our Liberalism.

They are different, yes: they're mostly young, keen, even more slewed towards the male gender than the older members and more at home on the net. My impression is that the post-Brexit surge may have brought in more liberal conservatives and fewer leftish radicals. There is no doubt the party needs to do more at all levels to engage new members – after all, that big membership surge signally failed to be reflected in votes this May, though you might have expected each new member to pull in on average a couple of voters. Do local parties give them their head? On average, not enough – but are other party groups any better?

So what can be done? How about this start:

- * promote online interest and policy groups;
- * create an attractive, well-promoted site where each local party can advertise up to two events a year where they'd like a crowd;
- * regions or county co-ordinating committees to offer local parties, particularly weaker ones, help in producing and implementing development plans;
- * reform the party's structure and procedures to increase flexibility and empowerment;
- * link policy and campaigning at all levels – so the Focus campaigner's experience gets fed in and listened to and the Focus doesn't miss a chance to point out how a local problem links to a national issue.

The aim must be to go hard for new opportunities without wrecking our established strengths.

Simon Banks chairs North East Essex Liberal Democrats' Campaigns Committee and is regional executive member

ONE AND ALL

The European Union originally functioned on the basis of unanimity. recreating that might be a liberal approach to running it, says Clive Sneddon

This is not directly an article about Brexit, although written as Theresa May announced an agreement in Brussels to accelerate the Brexit negotiations. It is rather a recognition that the European project has not worked out as its initial vision would have required, and that British voters, in voting with their heart rather than their head, were right to see genuine problems in the EU, which could yet prove fatal to the European project if not addressed effectively and with imagination.

These problems come from the EU's decision-making processes, in which power is concentrated in the Council of Ministers. By definition, each head of government has political legitimacy within their own country because they were elected by that country's democratic procedures. That gives them no political legitimacy to make decisions for the EU as a whole, whose voters did not elect them.

The legitimacy issue was initially sidestepped by a unanimity rule, assuming that decisions every state had agreed to would have been agreed to by their voters if they had been given a say. But once enlargement increased the number of states significantly above the founding six, a rule change was agreed to allow decisions to be reached by weighted majority voting. By definition, this means that some decisions will not have been agreed by everyone. The latest figures I have seen show that the German and British governments have each been outvoted from time to time, the Germans slightly more often than the British. Nevertheless, it means that it was not a fantasy for the Leavers to campaign on 'taking back control', because some Brussels decisions were indeed imposed on British voters by the Council of Ministers.

UNTHINKABLE WAR

Since the reason for the unanimity rule was to prevent such a situation arising, what good reason existed, in line with the initial European vision, to justify such a change? The vision after World War II was to unite the peoples of Europe by working together, so that they should know and understand each other, and thus make war between them unthinkable. Over the last 30 years or so, the EU member states have agreed programmes which have furthered this vision, notably by accepting Margaret Thatcher's advice to create a single market, and aiming to secure the free movement of goods, capital, labour, and services.

For individuals freedom of movement has been extended to taxpayer supported programmes for students to study in more than one other member state, with the right to work after study. That has created a real sense among the under-30s across Europe of what being European means. Working

in another country, which is something many over-30s have done, has been less effective because the experience has often been confined to a single other country. Brexit will reduce the range of different cultures available, and that is a loss to Europe as well as the UK.

The justification given at the time for the change to the unanimity rule was the fear of the tail wagging the dog. If made explicit, that fear was presented as one small member state only agreeing what everyone else wanted if it got its own way on something politically important to the then government of that country. This was not an abstract fear. France under General de Gaulle had shown how a determined government, acting in the interests of its own people alone, could and did wag the European dog's tail. The 'empty chair' policy pursued by France in the mid-60s, after de Gaulle had first vetoed British accession in 1963, forced the other five to accept a Common Agricultural Policy, which has now created so many vested interests to defend it that it persists to this day. How, only eight years after the Treaty of Rome, did the European project hit the nationalist buffers in this way?

No one in the immediate aftermath of a second devastating world war wanted another. The only viable way forward was seen as existing states cooperating to create new international institutions such as the United Nations, and to deprive states in Europe of the ability to wage war by making sure that the sinews of war were shared between European states, hence the 1951 Coal and Steel and Euratom treaties, and hence in particular the importance of France and Germany working together, because they had fought each other three times between 1870 and 1945. That is why the success of these treaties enabled the next step, the creation of a Common Market in 1957.

The 'ever closer union' of the Treaty of Rome implies ever closer cooperation between the European states, but not necessarily replacing existing states with a United States of Europe. The machinery created to run the Common Market involved member states; an international treaty between states could hardly do otherwise. But it innovated in creating a Commission with the remit of devising European policy, even though individual commissioners were appointed by the member states; this required commissioners to think of the interests of Europe, not of the interests of the state which had appointed them, and also to be the civil service to implement policies across Europe once they had been approved.

Once proposed, each policy had to be approved and enacted by the Council of Ministers, making them both government and legislator. This accumulation gave too much power to those whose legitimacy existed only at national level. While legislative power has mostly been passed on to the European Parliament,

especially once it was directly elected by voters across Europe, the weighted majority procedure has made the executive power of the Council of Ministers more easily exercised, and reduced its legitimacy. De Gaulle's subversion of the unanimity rule made the project no longer about cooperation, but about how the interests of individual states could best be served by the European project.

As successive treaties have created ever closer union, the national interests underlying each step have remained visible. The setting of common standards, and the willingness to enforce competition by taking on global businesses, has benefitted consumers across Europe, but is such a slow process that change is barely perceptible to the general public. Indeed, the public is more aware of the arbitration procedures for big business in proposed trade deals, which casts Europe as pro big business and against the ordinary people. The Nobel economics prizewinner Joseph E Stiglitz has pointed out in his book *The Euro And Its Threat To The Future Of Europe* that some of the measures imposed on Greece did not increase its ability to repay its debts but did help French and German banks, and that market fundamentalists in numerous European finance ministries had lost sight of the need to ensure each economy was run for the general good, and served growth and equality as well as those who controlled the assets. Bismarck's common currency may have been part of the creation of the Second Reich, but the Eurozone as presently constructed is not bringing the states of Europe together.

Is there a Liberal route to a Europe which will achieve two goals? First to make war unthinkable between and within its member states, and second to work with national governments to make sure our economies function for the many, not the few?

Such a route cannot lie through market fundamentalism, or in the acceptance of ghettos within which it is difficult to find or create work. Those who feel abandoned are likely to find in nationalism a solution to their problems, and to feel justified in blaming foreigners, a frame of mind which leads to violence and could take Europe down the path it trod in the 1930s.

An alternative method of taking decisions may work better. If the original remit of the European Commission to propose policy for Europe is reinstated, and the proposed policies are decided on solely by the directly elected European Parliament, it could then be up to the national parliaments to decide whether or not to adopt each European directive, and whether or not to modify it in their country.

If the Commission did its job well, its policies would be seen to be of benefit to all, and would be adopted by the European and national parliaments. If it did its job less well, the European Parliament might not approve its policies, and, even if approved by the European Parliament, some, or in extreme cases all, national parliaments would reject them.

“The Eurozone as presently constructed is not bringing the states of Europe together”

UNANIMITY RULE

This procedure would achieve the objectives of the original unanimity rule, in ensuring that no state had imposed on it something with which it disagreed, while providing an incentive to ensure that genuinely European policies were devised.

The outcome would not be a United States of Europe, but rather a Europe that worked for all. Achieving this outcome would mean persuading the Council of Ministers that its role was no longer to make decisions but to advise the European Parliament, just as from a more local perspective the Committee of the Regions does today. The creation of a directly elected Parliament with parties formed across national borders has not so far created a truly European polity.

Voters are not conscious of voting on European issues to be resolved by Europe, but rather vote as they would at home, as if it were for national governments to resolve European problems. This may change if there is a clear change in decision making, whereby national governments propose national policies to national parliaments, while the European Commission and Parliament work together to create acceptable European solutions to European problems.

So far, since Article 50 was triggered, the 27 have started a process that has not involved the UK for its advice; given the longstanding tensions between those who want to do more and those who want to do less, the EU is unsurprisingly nowhere near deciding its future.

Its Brexit negotiating stance is as myopic as that of the UK government, but whereas Brexiteers have a fantasy of the best of all possible worlds, the 27 are only looking at what national advantage can be obtained, whether by attracting EU institutions, or attracting all the businesses now queuing up to leave the UK. A centralising Europe that pulls power to the centre on the way to a United States of Europe risks forgetting the idea that decisions should always be taken as close to the people as possible. Europe should involve its peoples in its decisions, and bear in mind the British response to World War II of seeking global as well as European solutions.

And all solutions should ensure the well-being of the citizens of Europe, by running the economy in Keynesian style for the benefit of all.

Clive Sneddon is a former leader of North East Fife District Council and has been a Liberal Democrat candidate for the European Parliament

HEADLINE NEWS

Reaching for a high headline rate of corporation tax may not be the best way to secure government revenue, says David Thorpe

Whenever those concerned with the different strands of Liberalism come together to frame the policies for a fast changing world, it won't be long until the topic turns to tax.

Liberals of a particular stripe will urge that in the interests of equality taxes should be raised, and in a country such as the UK where the tax system is progressive, that the better off and big business should bear the greatest burden.

That will lead to a furrowing of brows from the other side of the committee room table, as those from a different tradition of liberalism drink deep and ponder how it could have come to this.

For those of that view, tax cuts are the ultimate form of localism, as they empower individuals by giving them greater control over their own resource, benefit society by increasing spending power and generate economic activity.

At this point the group will agree to disagree on most things, before, in thoroughly liberal fashion, alighting upon something with which they all agree, and focusing stoutly on that.

And liberals of every hue agree that growth from small and medium sized enterprises is a positive objective for policy makers to achieve, yet, largely unconsciously, liberals of all stripes seek to frame the tax system in such a way that benefits the largest, the most global, businesses, at the expense of the smaller, more dynamic enterprises.

This is because liberals, and progressives more generally, focus on achieving a headline rate of corporation tax as the best way to ensure that businesses pay their way in the world. But it is the largest companies that are the winners from this, for they are more likely to have overseas sales, earnings and profits, taxed at whatever the local rate is and so mitigating the impact of a progressively high tax rates even on big corporations that are not seeking to aggressively avoid tax.

Smaller companies are likely to derive a greater portion of their revenue from within their own domestic economy, so are more likely to have all of their taxable income in one country and therefore to have to pay any increased corporation tax rate, that immediately places smaller companies at a financial disadvantage relative to larger, multi-national rivals.

Whether you come from a liberal tradition that focuses on social justice and equality, or one that is based on creating free markets where thousands of buyers and sellers operate to find the most efficient price for all, a tax system with an invisible hand helping the big player against the little is not an outcome to be desired.

And then there is the next phase, the bigger the multi-national companies get, the greater their capacity to stretch the bounds of legitimate tax planning to the limit, while the smaller companies

have less capacity to do this, and so are placed at yet another disadvantage.

Those liberals of a distinctly moral bent should be aware that company directors have a fiduciary duty to maximise returns for all shareholders within the letter of the law, a company director who chooses not to use legal and legitimate tax breaks is acting in a way that, if not illegal, is certainly contrary to the commitment those directors make when they accept the job and the salary. So the answer can't be moral outrage or draconian increases in the headline rate of corporation tax, instead the government should cut the headline rate of corporation tax from here, and then, not simply close loopholes where they can, but also introduce reliefs for companies doing the right thing (such as locating jobs in areas of acute deprivation), and continuously work to close the loopholes that reward either socially bad things (such as financial engineering) or simply add nothing to society.

Such a tax system should be more dynamic and responsive to economic realities. As the needs of the economy and society evolve through different phases of the business and economic cycle so the tax system can be more responsive, cuts to corporation tax are likely to be less effective as economic levers, because such a blunt instrument makes it easier to profit by financial engineering, whereas targeted tax cuts or increased allowances can be linked to activity that generates economic activity.

Multi-nationals are more likely to be able to weather the storm and deploy capital in a variety of economic conditions, framing tax policy to entice them to act in a recession is therefore unlikely to be as effective as actions which aid smaller businesses, which, in straightened economic times will likely struggle to raise finance for their activities, and have less capacity to generate returns from markets where the economic conditions are better.

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

Coalition Diaries
2012-2015
by David Laws
Biteback 2017. £20.00

It is certainly courageous of David Laws to have published this 'warts and all' diary of the last half of the coalition. It is more personal than his previous two coalition books, revealing more of the man.

And he is clearly well-suited to his post-parliamentary career running a think tank; for the Laws who emerges from these diaries is a conscientious policy wonk, working a punishing schedule as he agonises over the finer details of looming policy roll-outs. It's all here, in deeply personal terms: policy ideas, feuds, compromises, even recurring hangovers.

What he seems to have less time for is the rough and tumble of politics. The inevitable 'meat' is here — juicy tales, straight from the horse's mouth, chronicling the bust-ups with Conservative ministers. Laws certainly doesn't pull his punches in his account of squabbles with the likes of Cameron, Gove and Pickles.

But Laws seems to draw most of his ire towards his fellow Liberal Democrats. His contempt for many of his parliamentary colleagues is particularly clear: Adrian Sanders is "that prime-time lightweight", John Pugh a "left-wing numbskull", Sandra Gidley "a complete nonentity", John Hemming (misspelt 'Hemmings') "awful".

And Tim Farron is repeatedly described in caustic terms, making Laws' public denunciation of him earlier this year much less abrupt in the context of these diaries - "very negative...blah blah blah blah...a pleasant, populist lightweight, with deeply offensive and illiberal views on issues such as gay marriage - totally unsuitable to lead a liberal party worthy of the name."

Groups or people that Laws disapproves of are repeatedly dismissed as "left-wing". Laws's judgemental streak throughout these pages often leaves him looking arrogant, sneering and condescending.

Nor does Laws seem to have much time for the wider party.



REVIEWS

"I hate party conferences", he complains after arrival at the 2014 Glasgow conference, "They are expensive...stressful...tiring...and they are very tribal events, and I'm not a tribal person." Indeed, his awareness of the party beyond Westminster and Yeovil seems quite limited - for instance, "Never heard of him" is his verdict on Lord Smith, and the only reference to Liberator (inevitably described as "left-wing") is when a copy features Laws on the front cover!



The one exception to this stream of condescension for fellow Lib Dems is Nick Clegg. Gaby Hinsliff's Guardian review of Laws's previous Coalition book perceptively noted: "unusually for a ministerial memoir, this book isn't really about its author at all. Clegg is the true hero in this version of the coalition story, forever throwing himself in front of Tory bulldozers in a noble but doomed fashion."

And this theme is even clearer in Laws's diaries - the Clegg who emerges here is selfless, principled, charming, sincere, and forever being thwarted despite his best efforts. At times, the book reads less like a diary, and more like a love letter to a former boss.

Understandably, as a diligent reforming minister, most of Laws's day-to-day passions and frustrations here are aimed at

policy delivery. But as the diary chronicles the inauspicious final half of the coalition, the unintentional overarching theme is one of electoral decline.

Laws's political instincts throughout this are capricious at best. He is certainly aware that "an electoral tsunami is about to descend upon us", but despite being at the centre of things, Laws's understanding of what was happening to the Liberal Democrats in the country seems rather limited.

On the eve of poll in 2015, he writes, "I am hoping that I will have a reasonably solid majority of say, 6,000, 7,000 or 8,000, but I could not rule out a shock result where I lost or only held on by a slim margin." Laws lost his seat by over 5,000 votes, overturning his 13,000-strong majority.

If there is a defence for Laws's often defective political judgement, it is surely that he was not the only one - a sort of group hysteria fell upon the party in coalition, with those

closest to the centre of power most likely to believe their own propaganda. This is frequently reflected in Laws's conversations with other coalition insiders who had drunk the 'kool-aid' - Alistair Carmichael, for instance, is recorded in 2014 as having "thought a second [successive Con-Lib] coalition government would be a good thing for the Lib Dems and he didn't think we should worry too much about the consequences for our electoral support".

These diaries are undoubtedly authentic and fascinating, and will be of invaluable use to historians in the future. But the narrator presented here is aloof, unlikable, and his judgement frequently proves unreliable. This is clearly the diary of a man who never intends to stand for parliament again.

Seth Thevoz

Open Arms by Vince Cable Corvus 2017

Vince's first novel walks an interesting tightrope. He's taken the advice given to nascent novelists - write about what you know - and applied it thoroughly. So the settings for this book are all places he clearly knows intimately - the palace of Westminster, the Indian subcontinent, an English town with mixed levels of poshness - and the topics of top rank party politics and big business are also well within his field. He has, however, managed to avoid the pitfall of writing a thinly veiled autobiography, a charge which could be levelled at many first novels by politicians.

To my surprise I actually found myself genuinely enjoying this book. I was expecting slightly dry wit and technocracy, and I got it, but I also got gruesome murders and fruity language as well as a healthy dose of the expected dry wit leavening a fairly intricate plot. His descriptions of the machinations of politicians within both Labour and Tory constituency associations made me cackle with delighted recognition. His knowledge of Indian politics is pretty impressive too, and significantly adds interest to those of us who are already pretty familiar with the way UK politics works. Vince is a little over fond of descriptive tautology but otherwise his prose is pretty engaging.

Where his writing really shines, though, is in his characters. They really are people, not cyphers or plot devices. Even the minorest of people has a believable little biography and motivation. His cast of characters is a little testosterone-heavy, but I suppose that's only to be expected in a book set in the worlds of politics and business. I loved his mischievous moderate tory lead, Kate, and the incredibly capable Shaيدا with her various masks. A slight downside to his facility with people, though, is that the cast is also huge; if you haven't got a great memory for names you might struggle to follow some of the meanderings of the plot.

Where Vince gets into trouble, and the one serious criticism I would make, is when emotions become the focal point. There are points in the plot where a character has

an emotional reaction to an event, and that is what motivates their actions. While the emotional beats are there, and believable, they are very faint.

His descriptions of emotional turmoil could only have been written by a man, and a man of a certain age at that: thoroughly determined to keep all feelings under a bushel, even though he knows it's necessary to describe them a little just to advance the plot. The reader is left to fill in a fair few emotional blanks from their own experience, and that's a little disappointing.

That said, I would like to thank Vince personally for having what sex happens happen behind a tastefully drawn narrative curtain. I think that was the right decision. Nobody wants Our Glorious Leader winning the Bad Sex Award.

I do like, however, that he is brave enough to leave loose ends - I'm still vaguely wondering what happened to Mehmet - and that the ending is quite realistically downbeat. It would have been easy to tie everything up with a nice narrative bow and present a happy ending to the reader, but Vince resists that temptation.

Realistically, I don't think we can expect this to be a blockbuster. The only people who are going to find it really interesting are politics geeks. However, for a first novel, this is not at all bad. I would genuinely, happily, buy the second and expect it to be of interest.

Jennie Rigg

Brighton Up by Nick Szczepanik Biteback 2017 £18.99

Football fans are seldom grateful. This season Brighton & Hove Albion started life in the premier division. As the new boys, they face teams with much greater experience and deeper pockets. I thought they did well to only go down 2-0 in their first premier



match against Manchester City, holding off the Sky Blues for all the millions spent on them, well into the second half. But then I'm neutral; did I hear a good word from a Seagulls supporter?

Nick Szczepanik's book is about how the Seagulls got there, from the threat of relegation in the 2015-16 season, through the tragedy of the Shoreham Air Show disaster, and as I write, they've just beaten West Bromwich.

Now one might think that events of 1997 had little to do with this, but the book still opens with the almost ritual slugging off of David Bellotti, who won the Eastbourne by-election in 1988, putting the Liberal Democrats, in media eyes at least, back on the road to recovery.

I wasn't quite sure why he went on to become chief executive of a football club after Parliament, but he did, and it wasn't his greatest moment. However, as Liz Costa, vice chair of the Brighton and Hove Albion supporters' club, said at his death in 2015, the irony of Bellotti's involvement in the club was eventually positive in galvanising all fans against him and leading to the new stadium at Falmer.

Bellotti's crime, in the eyes of the fans, was the sale of Albion's home of 93 years, the Goldstone Ground, which he led with then club owner Bill Archer. However, the club was heavily in debt - £5.7m and there were problems with the site.

Unable to attract investors, Bellotti would attempt to justify his position, saying "We had debts of £5.7 million that we had to clear by the following year or we would go under. The problem was the Goldstone couldn't be redeveloped. On one side we couldn't add a roof

and other restrictions meant we couldn't be given Football Trust funds. The site had no potential, so we couldn't attract a buyer for the club, who would have in turn cleared its debts. We were running out of time and no one had come forward to help us so we had to sell the Goldstone to keep the club alive."

The £7.4m sale of the Goldstone Ground in July 1995, meant Albion had to play 'home' matches at Gillingham for two seasons and Chartwell, who bought the site for a retail park, sold it to Abbey Life Assurance for £23.86m only two years later. Bellotti needed a bodyguard.

All this may be incidental to the Seagulls soaring into the premier division, where, yes, it is tough for them, playing at a new level against world class footballers. The saga of how they got there should inspire the most critical of fans (and we all know more about what's happening on the field than the players). So, play up Seagulls, you can do it.

A Siegle

Dalston in the 80s by Andrew Holligan Hoxton Mini Press. 2017 £14.95

In the dark days of the 1980s, the Focus teams of east London worked closely with each other, so I often found myself down the mean streets and council estates of Dalston, particularly when Jeff Roberts was standing against the SDP's Ron Brown – I remember we did Jeff's good morning leaflet, before heading back to Tower Hamlets to do our own in the 1983 general election; we didn't go much on the Alliance.

The Rio was a fairly good cinema, the reggae scene was scorching, though you might get the 'piss off white trash treatment' in some of the record stores. Is Rupie Edwards still around?

Youth culture was edgy. You didn't want to be a punk walking down the street just before the pubs closed, just as likely to get picked up so the coppers could be safely in the station charging you. I recall the police couldn't quite understand when they turned on the skinheads, why the black kids and the punks wouldn't cooperate – had enough

mate; there were some serious short comings in policing in those days.

Hot summer days, and Andrew Holligan brings it all back. I wonder if we were ever in the same place at the same time? Holligan's black and white photography captures the era perfectly. I like to see someone with a snout on featured on the cover – a great antidote to political correctness which has little or nothing to do with Liberalism.

Hoxton Mini Press produce attractive little books about East London life and are worth checking out; if you can't get hold of them in an independent bookshop try info@hoxtonminipress.com or this link

<https://www.hoxtonminipress.com/products/dalston-in-the-80s-photo-book-13>

Stewart Rayment

ISIS :A History by Fawaz A. Gerges Princeton University Press, 2017

There is always a danger, when writing a book about current affairs, that the content will be overtaken by events. In principle that ought to be the case with a book on ISIS, the self-styled Islamic State, given the group's rapid loss of most of the territory that it had seized in Iraq and Syria. However, not only is the new paperback edition of Fawaz Gerges's study of ISIS an update of the 2016 edition but is, as the title states, a history, and therefore more concerned about where ISIS came from rather than where it might be going.

The book's great advantage over more journalistic works that have appeared over the past couple of years is that the author relies mainly on Arabic-language sources as well as interviews with men – and they are mainly men – who hold various types of Islamist believes.

Islamism, as opposed to Islam, is a political ideology based on a conservative yet radical interpretation of selective texts from the Koran and the hadith, the reported sayings, actions or habits of the Prophet Mohammad. Most mainstream Muslims – Sunni and Shia alike – are quick to denounce ISIS as being alien to Islam, but there is no denying that its leaders

and followers self-identify as being true believers, while decrying all others, including other Muslims, as meriting death because of their failure to embrace the 'truth'.

Gerges helpfully analyses different strands of Islamist thinking, placing ISIS firmly within the Salafist Sunni spectrum, albeit at an extreme end. Moreover, two of the most important recruiting grounds for ISIS fighters and supporters have been among poor, marginalised Sunni communities – farm labourers, café waiters and the like – and former Iraqi army officers from Iraq's Sunni minority who were disbanded and sent home by the American occupying forces in 2003, later being further excluded from public life and gainful livelihoods by Nouri al-Maliki's Shia-dominated government.

Shia critics of ISIS, not least the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, often accuse the Americans of 'creating' ISIS. Objectively, they did play an indirect and probably unintentional role in that process. But the sectarian politics of al-Maliki, backed by gross abuses of human rights by Baghdad government forces and Shia militia, were more directly to blame. It is clear from reports from Mosul and Tikrit that some of Saddam Hussain's former army officers were welcomed by ISIS with open arms. Moreover, their experience of crushing dissent in Ba'athist Iraq proved useful in enforcing Islamic State's harsh rule.

For many Westerners, the most difficult thing to comprehend about ISIS is its barbarism. The filmed execution of foreign captives, the sexual enslavement of Yazidi women and throwing gay men off the top of high buildings are just some of the most egregious examples. Undoubtedly terror is used by ISIS as an instrument of control, but the group's ideologues 'justify' it through their perverse interpretation of religious texts.

Nonetheless, it is very clear from Gerges's book that the self-declared Caliph of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi – perhaps, but not definitely, killed last year – is or was a psychopath, for whom the torture and killing of unbelievers was deeply satisfying.

Jonathan Fryer

Monday

Like every red-blooded Englishman (and, indeed, ever red-blooded Englishwoman), I am looking forward to this winter's Ashes series Down Under. How will our touring party fare in the likely absence of Ben Stokes? He is the chap who was filmed engaging in a bout of fisticuffs at chucking out time in the middle a one-day series – scenes reminiscent of the Minor Counties Championship before the recommendations of the Archbishop of York's Commission were implemented. Will it prove a tour too far for Anderson and Broad, who have justly been acclaimed as the Hinge and Bracket of English pace bowling? Why has no place been found for the Blessed Liam Plunkett when one of the Overton-Window twins from Somerset has been included? Should Mason Crane be on the ship at all? In my day a boy of that age who bowled a googly would have been sent straight to the Headmaster, just as surely as if he had used a semicolon in an English composition.

Tuesday

Down at Cowley Street or whatever it calls itself nowadays, I congratulate the bright young things of the use they are making of the electric interweb and wireless Twitter. As I tell them, the Liberal Party, Herbert Asquith in particular, adopted cinematography with enthusiasm in that technology's early years. Asquith starred in a rather fruity comedy named *Confessions of a Cabinet Minister*, which was followed (with diminishing returns, according to the critics) by *Confessions of a Privy Councillor*, *Confessions of a Prime Minister* and *Confessions of a Statesman Forced from Office* by that Bastard Lloyd George. You can see where Helena Bonham Carter Gets It From.

Wednesday

To the University of Rutland at Belvoir in my capacity as vice-chancellor. This role, I will admit, is something of a sinecure as I generally leave the budgeting to the institution's famed Department of Hard Sums and concentrate on handing out scrolls to young people in mortarboards. This morning, however, I find the place in turmoil. Some silly ass with a hyphen who makes the tea in the Conservative Whips Office has written asking about our course in European Studies. That subject is naturally of interest here in Rutland as we have been trading with the Baltic since the Middle Ages, when ships bearing jute and flax crossed Rutland Water to tie up at Oakham Quay. I find this immensely impressive, even if I have never been quite sure what jute and flax are. Where was I? The letter: what immortal crust! I dictate a reply telling the aforementioned ass with a hyphen that there are many unhappy countries on this Earth where the government does tell universities what to teach and if that is the way he wants to see things done he should go and live in one of them.

Thursday

Whom should I meet in a London street but our own Nick Clegg? As so often, he has Freddie and Fiona in tow. Clegg is full of his new book, telling me brightly: "It may seem odd for a former leader of the

Lord Bonkers' Diary

Liberal Democrats – and someone who has fought against the illiberal habits of Labour all my political life – to advocate joining the Labour party." "Not a bit," I reply, "it's just the sort of tomfool idea I would expect from you." Having foolishly travelled up to town without a horsewhip, I have to content myself with giving him a Hard Stare.

Friday

On the way home to Bonkers House in Belgrave Square after a working day in the House I am asked by a dishevelled fellow if I can spare any change. I give him half a crown: I would only have spent it on drink.

Saturday

I make my way to the woody bank that lies beneath the Ornamental Arch I had erected here on the Bonkers Hall Estate to mark the victory of Wallace Lawler in the Birmingham Ladywood by-election of 1969. After making sure I am not observed, I rap upon a door that is half obscured by foliage and am admitted to the home of the King of the Badgers.

You may have read of the beastly cull of these noble and stripy creatures instituted by the Conservative Party to retain their grip upon the farming vote. Here in Rutland I have endeavoured to even up the odds by supplying firearms to the badgers; my visit this morning, as well as being a social call upon this most sagacious of companions, is paid with the purpose of collecting payment for these munitions. (It's remarkable the riches badgers turn up when they dig and snuffle at the roots of things.)

After signing his cheque, the King of the Badgers confides in me that he is worried about the more hot-headed young badgers, who are full of talk of strangling the new leader of the Ukip Party. I reply that if I were in his shoes I should do nothing to discourage them.

Sunday

Were you in the hall for Tim Farron's speech in the Europe debate at our Conference in Bournemouth? To the best of my recollection, it went like this:

"The day I took over as leader, one journalist predicted confidently that 'the party that began with Gladstone will now end with Farron'. I resolved that we were going to survive, grow and win again. The Liberal movement of Gladstone, Lloyd George and Jo Grimond was not going to die on my watch."

"It's the movement of Paddy Ashplant too," I observed to my neighbour, "and Farron got that bit out of his memoirs."

"And I did it. Me! Little Tim from Preston. There's part of me that says if I never see another referendum in my life that will be too soon. But there's another part of me that flipping well wants to hold my seat. I've got four kids. I'm a bit of a Euro-sceptic. We lived in a shoebox but because I had great parents I didn't realise it was a shoebox until I was older. Have you been to St Asquith's and seen the space those pews take up? They should rip them out and then we could all sing 'Shine Jesus...'"

At that point I left the hall.

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