

# liberator

## *Farron in new gay sex row*



It's a sin  
to tell a lie

When in a hole,  
stop digging

- 🔥 How to really exit from Brexit - Adrian Sanders
- 🔥 Slaughter of the English speakers - Rebecca Tinsley
- 🔥 Why universities sold their souls - Trevor Smith

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# COMMENTARY

## DO KEEP UP

No doubt the Liberal Democrats glacial policy making process will eventually get around to the likely impact of robots and automation on work.

Until then the party will have little to say, unless some MP chances their arm, on what ought to be a subject catching the attention of anyone active in politics.

It is often argued that the Brexit vote was driven by people who believed that foreign workers were taking their jobs, or lowering their pay, and that if these foreign workers were prevented from arriving all would be well.

They cannot though turn back robots at any border, and the speed of technological change could put far more jobs at risk than might supposedly have been by EU freedom of movement.

If we are heading for a world in relatively few people conventionally work - because machines can perform tasks better and cheaper - how will the non-working population be paid, and what will it be paid for?

This is not only a matter of money; for most people their work defines who they are and what they do.

It is though mostly about money. At an extreme, what if we ended up with a relatively small number of technical experts employed and a mass of people - including some in what are conventionally seen as middle class professions - unemployed? It would create an impossibly lop-sided society.

Liberals used to be concerned about industrial democracy and co-ownership - topics that faded from the Lib Dems' discourse after the merger and never really reappeared.

Concern about the world of work might sound rather different today, but the party surely ought to be talking about how work will change with an unstoppable growth in automation.

This is not something that should wait for the policy making process to get around to over the course of a parliament, and nor does it necessarily need the formal process engaged at this stage.

It is exactly the kind of subject that ought to lend itself to blog posts, the electronic equivalents of pamphlets and indeed articles in *Liberator*.

True, there has been some discussion in recent years of citizen's income - though the idea did not get anywhere in formal policy terms - but that was based more on welfare issues than with envisaging how people would cope in a largely workless world.

There is not an obvious solution available - only specialists have really engaged with the subject to date and it has only peripherally been part of public debate.

Radical changes to jobs and work from automation is though a topic the Lib Dems could seize if only because no one else is bothering to say anything much - preferring a sweat shop approach from Tory Brexiteers

or a fantasy return to 1970s trade unions from the Corbynistas.

Up for grabs, who has something to say?

## PUT A SOCK IN IT

Does anyone now really care what Tim Farron means when he says he believes gay sex to be sinful, using that word in a theological context not widely understood? After all, he's resigned as leader and the controversy about what he does or doesn't believe appeared to have blown itself out.

That was until he chose give a January radio interview that disinterred the whole thing - in which he appeared to mean that while he supported LGBT rights he nonetheless believed gay sex to be 'a sin' in a religious context, and wished he had not spoken to the contrary when pressed during the general election.

Few people have ever plotted and positioned to become leader as brazenly as Farron did during the 2010-15 parliament.

He made sure he was out of harm's way as party president, and so able to avoid any responsibility for unpopular acts by the Coalition, while cementing his status as a favourite star turn at conferences and party meetings.

Did it really not occur to him that his religious beliefs on gay sex might conflict with the party's views on individual liberty, and that if he wished to lead the party he had better find some coherent position that it and he could both live with?

Even after his embarrassing television interview in 2015 - which he just about got away with by being new to the role - did he not think that he'd had a close shave and should sort out what he would say another time?

Yet during the 2017 general election his inability to give a clear answer derailed the campaign, and ultimately his leadership.

It's a sad waste in some ways. Farron possessed many of the qualities that would have made a good leader and on almost any other issue his instincts are sound.

He has sought to blame his confused performance on not having enough Christians around him in the party.

Leaders - for better or worse - have 'around' them those they choose. Ultimately the whole sorry businesses is no one's fault but Farron's - and a period of silence on this from him would be welcome.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## ANOTHER FINE MESS

Specified associated organisations (SAOs) are groups of Liberal Democrat members “that share, or support, a particular identity”, the party website notes.

It is hard to think of a worse advertisement for the concept than Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD), which shows disturbing signs of falling apart altogether just as the party has started to think more seriously about encouraging black and minority ethnic candidates.

EMLD has had its troubles before, but the latest bout was kicked off in October 2016 when then secretary Ashburn Holder was suspended from his office over Facebook postings.

The party’s disciplinary process moved with its customary speed, and 13 months later a hearing panel was convened, which decided none of the complaints made were valid and said he should be reinstated as EMLD secretary.

This was quickly followed by the resignations from the party of EMLD chair Ruwan Uduwera-Perera and acting secretary Lester Holloway.

The substance of the accusation against Holder was that he posted on EMLD member Duwayne Brooks’ Facebook page the remark: “I’ve recently had a conversation and in my opinion all policemen are liars. As soon as they open their mouths, it’s a lie.”

That went down badly with former police officer Uduwera-Perera but the complaint was shown as coming from three other EMLD officers, Marisha Ray, James Jennings and Glanville Williams. Williams has insisted he was not involved, and appeared to be only having been misled, though it is unclear by whom.

The regional parties committee decided there was a case to answer as “the posting is aggravated in that it was on the Facebook site of Duwayne Brooks. Duwayne is a high profile councillor and adviser to the Metropolitan Police on racial issues” along with various other infractions, including that Holder was a PPC and should not make such remarks in public.

Brooks is understood to have berated the disciplinary panel about why he had not been consulted as to whether he found Holder’s posting on his own Facebook page offensive.

The disciplinary panel eventually wrote to Holder in December 2017 to tell him: “The panel has ruled that the complaints made against you concerning specific Facebook postings, i.e. that: your actions demonstrated material disagreement, evidenced by conduct, with the fundamental values and objectives of the party, and that your actions constituted conduct that brought the party into disrepute, are not upheld. No further action will be taken and this investigation is concluded.”

The panel said Holder might have expressed himself unwisely, but “this is not an offence under the English

membership rules”.

It said that therefore Holder’s suspension as secretary should be reconsidered by EMLD.

Uduwera-Perera resigned as chair and from the party soon after, though cited policy disagreements rather than the decision over Holder as the cause.

EMLD was expected to discuss Holder’s reinstatement at an early opportunity, but Jennings said days later he could not support this, citing what he considered insults posted about himself and Ray,

Reinstatement would align EMLD as a body with Holder’s critical comments about the police, he suggested.

There matters rested as Liberator went to press, but EMLD has separately been subject to the Federal Board’s unflattering review of its operations (Liberator 387) including a finding that since EMLD charged no membership fee it was impossible to establish who was entitled to vote in its elections.

Those who have run EMLD said it came worst out of the review “in relation to issues that were not in the review remit, and on issues that were not raised with particular interviewees”.

It said the review had embarked on “a ‘fishing expedition’” against EMLD, though it was not clear with what motive.

A draft response for EMLD said the claim that it lacked a membership list was “completely untrue but easily disprovable”, and the review group report contained “wild inaccuracies”.

It went on to suggest that the review’s conclusions were based on a desire to centralise power in the Federal Board, taking responsibility for membership away from EMLD and said that EMLD had continued to function during the past year’s events including the disorderly abandonment of its AGM last spring (Liberator 385).

The review suggested a number of radical changes to EMLD’s organisation and remit, but these have to be agreed by a general meeting of the existing organisation.

A long booked AGM date came and went in November and no date is in sight. As the term of the officers and executive has technically expired, it is unclear who should convene the meeting.

Toby Keynes, who oversees SAOs for the Federal Board, is understood to be the subject of a complaint for “putting EMLD in special measures”.

Few come out of this saga well, but if the party really has - as the review found - an SAO in which personal relations are so bad that it cannot function, then somebody will have to act.

## TIME OFF IN LEWES

The local party executive in Lewes is having an enforced break after the Liberal Democrats south

east region intervened to take it over.

This ought to be one of the party's priority seats having been held from 1997 to 2015 by Norman Baker and only narrowly lost since.

Depending on one's viewpoint though either the local executive or regional party has taken leave of its senses.

Just before Christmas, the local executive was informed of its suspension by the regional party.

Unfortunately, not only the executive was informed. The region sent an email to everyone on a membership list, which may or may not be current, which had the effect of making the entire thing public, not least as it was sent out 'CC' not 'BCC' in breach of data protection rules.

The row is understood to immediately revolve around Chris Bowers, who fought neighbouring Wealden at the general election. He had made complaints about the executive, following which it resolved in December to suspend his membership.

A letter sent by Paul Hienkens, vice chair of the region's local parties committee, to the Lewes executive seen by *Liberator*, stated it was to be suspended because "nether the local party chair nor Mr Bowers disagree on the fact that Mr Bowers has been advised by the chair that he could not take on a role on the executive until such time as he has revoked his complaint against her".

Hienkens went on to say that the local executive called an extraordinary meeting to discuss a disciplinary complaint against Bowers and found him guilty via secret ballot of being in breach of a provision of the constitution used normally to suspend someone where there has been some urgent external factor like a criminal conviction, which did not apply in this case.

"Mr Bowers was not invited to this meeting, has not seen the evidence brought against him, been told who is accuser(s) is/are and has not been allowed to rebut the presumption," Hienkens wrote

"This shows a very clear lack of understanding of party rules, processes and procedures as well as the very basics of due process within a disciplinary matter."

The suspended executive fired back an appeal, which said: "The grounds for suspending Chris Bowers' membership were sound" allegedly concerning a "bullying and abusive" email to the local party secretary.

An outside chair and treasurer have been installed by the region and Hienkens noted that the region's actions removed only the executive, not that the local party's normal activity should cease.

Few things though are normal in Lewes - a separate set of disputes exist between some of the now suspended officers and Kelly-Marie Blundell, who fought the seat in 2017.

An extraordinary message sent by the now suspended local chair Rosalyn St Pierre to Blundell contained the observation, in a dispute over a meeting date: "The future is not about you and I think it would be appropriate to give yourself lesser role on photos."

Hardly the way a chair would normally write to someone who is still an incumbent PPC, but there have been disputes in Lewes about who should be PPC ever since Baker announced he would not re-stand.

St Pierre and council group leader Sarah Osborne are understood to favour local activist Oli Henman, but

face the problem that he is a man and Lewes has been designated an all-woman shortlist.

To add to the fun, a split in the local Tories in early January saw them lose their majority on the council.

## UNDER TWO FLAGS

Does the party constitution have anything to say about a regional officer who sits as an independent on a Liberal Democrat-run council?

This peculiar situation has arisen in Eastleigh where Cllr Steve Sollitt quit the ruling group last August in protest at decisions on the local development plan.

He has now been joined by four colleagues and so the council has a five strong Independent Liberal Democrat group that sits separately from the Liberal Democrat group yet professes continued loyalty to the party.

Sollitt is still listed as treasurer of the party's south central region, and in October delivered a talk on PPERA and accounts to its regional conference.

The issues in dispute in Eastleigh are not easily grasped by outsiders, revolving around which areas should be designated for housebuilding. But a regional officer sitting in a different group must be a first.

## TICKING BOXES

It is hard to think of a less inspiring document than the draft strategy for the Liberal Democrats Federal Board now doing the rounds.

Despite being roundly abused as inadequate by some party bodies, the thing still moulders on and will eventually see the light of day at conference.

One FB member summed it up as "beyond hopeless" betraying little understanding of why the party exists and why people should vote for it.

There is an unresolved question about whether key performance indicators should be included in the motion to conference or be kept secret by the FB.

Some of the sentiments expressed are fine, such as "create a political and social movement which encourages people to take and use power in their own lives and communities at every level of society" and a desire to "run issue-led local and national campaigns to help create a liberal society and secure immediate change though harnessing pressure from outside the political system with our own power within it", which would be a welcome innovation.

It quickly though descends into statements of the obvious like: "Our success at these two objectives will be measured by the number of voters who identify as Liberal Democrat, our overall vote share in opinion polls and elections and the numbers of seats we win" and that the party will "generate political momentum via tangible signs of progress, including membership levels, fundraising totals and council and Parliamentary by-election successes".

In contrast to this vagueness, elsewhere the strategy lurches into over-precise performance targets including "a million people a year take part in our issue-led campaigns". Why one million?

It also says the party should "increase its fundraising income across all channels by 25% by the end of 2018".

By 25% of what? Given fundraising will have been distorted upwards by a general election in 2017, can this really be matched, let alone exceeded this year? There is more, much more, like this.

## GET IT ON YOUR CHEST

“The best bit about being director for people is that every day, I get to come into work and find out how many new people have joined our party”, a breathless message to members from Rachel Palma-Randle said in late November.

This turned out to be an invitation to design a tee shirt showing “what the party means to you”.

Designs featuring letterboxes, broken paving stones and turgid committee meetings were, presumably, rejected. The winner was a rather tame pro-EU slogan. How many of these things moulder unsold is a matter for conjecture.

## EVE OF DESTRUCTION

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is heading, rather unusually, to a Liberal Democrat held seat.

Liberator bends the rules here a little since the award is for the worst motion submitted to conference and this season’s winner was merely submitted to the Kingston local party with a view to it being put forward to Federal Conference Committee.

It was headed Anthropocene Mass Extinction (AME) and ran to 2,144 words specifying in mind bending detail - complete with descriptions of the exact academic papers held by various museums - how mass extinction might be averted by a Lib Dem government.

A session headed ‘conference considers’ indicated the measures proposed were based on “the % agreement found during a door knocking questionnaire of 50 people in the area around Kingston”.

This included: “The Liberal Democrat Party must be ready to govern Britain, in the event of Brexit failure. A government without a considered policy for AME is not ready for purpose. Therefore Liberal Democrats need a policy for preventing AME.”

And how might it accomplish this? Measures suggested ranged from the alarming: “Britain begins reducing her population size”, to the absurdly detailed (the exact size of a hall at the Natural History Museum to be devoted to the subject, with “a complete blue whale” specified among the exhibits), to the plain peculiar: “World society must become more together and liberal. Britain should therefore enforce immigration restrictions until they could be eased.”

No doubt local MP Ed Davey can make appropriate use of these insights.

## SHORTLIST OF ONE

When one is trying to foment a coup it is generally advisable to have an alternative candidate to the incumbent lined up.

Such was not the case in the Liberal Democrats London region where a bid to oust chair Chris Maines failed when his enemies were unable to find anyone to stand against him.

Maines has been under pressure from opponents of targeting, most notably Putney PPC Ryan Mercer and supporters of Louise Rowntree and Annabel Mullin - respectively the 2017 candidates for Chelsea and Kensington - both of whom ploughed massive resources into their own hopeless seats while failing to help nearby Richmond Park, lost by 45 votes (Liberator 387 and others).

Mullin and Rowntree have since left the party but a group around Mercer is still active in voicing its resentment at non-target seats being encouraged to help elsewhere.

In a way the lack of a contest is a pity given there is a worthwhile debate to be had on the merits of targeting as a way to win seats versus its effect on other places, which can become derelict through lack of activity.

Perhaps a highly personalised battle would not though have been the best arena.

## SEARCH PARTY

The Federal Board did not accept the general election review put to it just before Christmas by Gerald Vernon-Jackson (Liberator 387) not because of any objection but rather because it was felt to be incomplete.

One such incompleteness is the identity of who was in charge of the campaign - though it may be beyond Vernon-Jackson or anyone else to find out.

Past campaigns usually had one person designated in overall charge (Des Wilson in 1992, Lord Holme in 1997, Tim Razzall in 2001 and 2005 and Paddy Ashdown in 2015). Whatever one thought of their performance they at least were immediately identifiable.

The situation for 2017 is less clear. Tim Gordon was chief executive and convened decision taking meeting at headquarters, but has since left and was not designated as the campaign’s head.

Campaigns chair James Gurling was so marginalised in 2015 (Liberator 377) that he was asked to write the review since he’d taken no part in running the campaign, but he had a larger role this time though may not have been campaign head. Except perhaps for Tim Farron, the horrible truth may be that no-one was in overall charge.

## ALIVE AND KICKING

It’s one thing to unwillingly become a former MP, as Greg Mulholland did after losing Leeds North West last June, but another to be presumed dead as a result.

Mulholland was disturbed to receive an invitation to give his thoughts to the party’s general election review headed ‘dead colleagues’.

# BLOOD FLOWS IN MYANMAR

Persecution of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar is a symptom of the breakdown of a rules-based international order, says Phil Bennion

When news of a further exodus of Rohingya from Myanmar into Bangladesh began to hit the media in August the lack of an international response was in the view of a number of NGOs, “disgraceful”.

By the end of October 600,000 of these refugees had crossed the border. Possibly the world could not believe that such an appalling disregard of human rights could be exhibited by a country now led by such a champion of freedom as Aung San Suu Kyi.

The UN’s High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein described the violent expulsion as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”. Eye witness accounts to the commission spoke of burning homes to the ground, shooting to kill and mass rapes. At mid-January there is still precious little response from the international community other than some laudable grass roots fundraising for provisions for the refugee camps.

At the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth I was approached by the Bangladeshi High Commissioner, who asked for the Liberal Democrats to take a strong position on the refugee crisis emanating from Myanmar.

I was able to ensure that he got the opportunity to speak to Vince Cable as well as join the Liberal International British Group (LIBG) fringe debate where our international spokespersons Jo Swinson and Lindsay Northover were panellists.

What could we as members of the Liberal Democrats Federal International Relations Committee (FIRC) do?

At the very least we could use our collective voice to raise the issue and urge an international response. Fellow FIRC member Paul Reynolds (who has visited the refugee camps) and I drafted a resolution for ALDE Congress which was passed unanimously in Amsterdam in December, giving liberal parties and particularly liberal governments across Europe a common position.

I also drafted an urgency resolution for Liberal International (LI) executive committee in Johannesburg and guided it through with strong support from international colleagues.

Our call is not just for the Rohingya to be allowed to return, but for the authorities in Myanmar to return their land and rebuild their homes.

We also called for moves to amend the constitution of Myanmar to grant citizenship to the Rohingya and a number of other minorities to which it is not currently extended. This would end the ridiculous pretence that the Rohingya are itinerant migrants, when they have lived and farmed in Rakhine province for generations.

The conflict in Myanmar constituted the main debate at the Liberal International Human Rights Committee (LIHRC) which took place at the headquarters of the VVD - one of the Dutch liberal parties - in The Hague last month.

Although Aung San Suu Kyi and her party have no formal relationship with Liberal International, she was awarded our Prize for Freedom a number of years ago for her stand against the military dictatorship in her country.

The question of whether and could the prize be rescinded was discussed at length. It was concluded that LI would press her as a laureate of the prize to stand up to her military, end the violence and fulfil the demands of our resolution.

The LIHRC also believes that the UK has a special responsibility to influence the authorities in Myanmar due to our historical legacy in Myanmar and Bangladesh.

As the Lib Dem nominee on the LIHRC I was asked to speak to our parliamentary spokespersons on international affairs to use their opportunities to raise the Rohingya issue in an effort to reach a resolution and specifically to press foreign secretary Boris Johnson to make a visible stand. I have been in contact with both Jo Swinson and Lindsay Northover and have had positive and constructive responses and undertakings from both.

We now have to keep on pressing this issue. My own view is that the current leaders of the great powers are all setting a poor example and thereby threatening the rules-based international order.

This leads the military in Myanmar, the Hun Sen regime in Cambodia and many others to believe that they can get away with repression and abuses of human rights with impunity.

It is our job as liberals to persist in making the case for human rights under international law if we are to turn this parlous situation around. Persistent pressure will in time be rewarded and that the liberal order will be restored, but it will take determination and effort to succeed.

---

Phil Bennion is chair of Liberal International British Group and a former Liberal Democrat MEP for the West Midlands

# HOW TO REALLY STOP BREXIT

## Finding a way to help enough leave supporters to save face yet switch to remain is the only way to halt Brexit now, says Adrian Sanders

A post being shared on Facebook asks: “What would you do if you could be the Prime Minister for a day?”

I suspect most Liberal Democrats would declare “exit Brexit” and I would be sorely tempted to say the same. Unfortunately the next day our country would still be divided with a majority who voted leave feeling they had been cheated and demanding a return to Brexit while our party would still be flatlining in the polls.

Let’s be honest, being defined as the anti-Brexit party has done nothing to assist our recovery as a party that was once firmly the nation’s third political force and recording at least 20% of votes at general elections. We may have gained a few members but we are now in competition with Nationalists, Greens and Ukipers for third place with fewer than 7% of people supporting us nationally.

We can win local council by-elections, on local issues, just as we did in the 1970s when our national poll rating was in single figures and we had a tiny number of MPs. But breaking into the national debate and consciousness eludes us while we are seen as anti-Brexit obsessives.

### TINY FRACTION

This is further complicated by the fact that our largest and most electorally successful local parties post-2010 happen to be in remain areas. There are exceptions, led by less than wholeheartedly remain Liberal Democrat MPs, but in both cases the numbers are tiny and a fraction of the party’s strength across the UK in the mid 2000s.

The challenge facing those of us who wish we were not leaving the EU is how to persuade those who do to change their minds. I fear, left to us, it is a test too far as no matter how hard we try, how much evidence of future problems come to light and whom they will affect, opinion is hardly shifting.

Whether the polls will shift further away from leave remains to be seen but there isn’t a great deal of time left to prompt a Government u-turn if indeed one could be influenced before March 2019.

“Even though it has become clear the leave campaign’s claims were wrong that Brexit could be harmlessly achieved without customs union or single market membership, with an end to freedom of movement and jurisdiction of the European Court and would result in a financial windfall for the chancellor, we now know to avoid crashing out of the EU we will have to pay into the EU around £40bn, maintain single market and customs union membership and with it freedom of movement and still, at least for the foreseeable future, be subject to the ECJ.”

While the lies over the colour of our passports being linked to our membership of the EU have been exposed they are still believed by many of those for whom the symbolism of the dark blue passport trumps the reality of who can determine it.

Sadly, the longer the Article 50 process drags on with little or no sight of a beneficial end game for anyone the more impatient leavers become for a no-deal exit and the less confident remainers are that the country will come to its senses.

Amending the EU Withdrawal Bill so that the UK Parliament must have a meaningful vote is a significant victory for democracy but makes not a jot of difference to the outcome that whether meaningful or symbolic will simply be a vote to leave with a deal or without one. That’s not exiting Brexit.

I remember during the referendum campaign I wrote a blog about the need for the remain campaign to be aware that for leave-minded voters to switch to remain they needed a way to save face.

This is just as true today. Constantly telling leave voters they were wrong, ignorant, or stupid when their favourite newspaper and politicians were telling them the opposite, and had been for decades, was never going to work then any more than intellectually credible reports and studies proving the opposite will make much difference now.

You cannot wipe out years and years of falsehoods, defamations and deceitfulness about an overseas set of institutions that because of their complexity and location can easily be blamed for many of the failings of UK governments.

One of the key reasons why the referendum was lost was that remain fought it on the compromise deal prime minister Cameron had obtained from the EU, thus confirming the complex nature of the EU and its resistance to reform while reinforcing the narrative that the UK cannot control its own affairs. What Cameron should have highlighted was the peace, security and prosperity membership gives us enabling us to control our own destiny.

Another was the failure of Jeremy Corbyn to engage with the remain campaign and repeat the most powerful image of the 1975 campaign of the party leaders sharing a stage to support a ‘yes’ vote. By refusing to share a platform with Cameron and others Corbyn effectively holed the remain ship below the water line before it set sail.

Those who have recently parted with £7.99, or less, on the paperback version of Nick Clegg’s *How To Stop Brexit*, will have read the same logical, evidence-based arguments that failed to persuade the nation to back the EU. What was needed back then as now to counter



the emotional case for leave is an emotional case to remain in the greatest force for peace, democracy, prosperity and security Europe has even known.

The people running the remain operation failed to recognise that perceptions trump facts and emotional arguments are often more powerful than rational for many people, especially those who feel hard done by, left behind or denied an entitlement they see going to someone they judge less deserving. A failure not unlike the 2015 Liberal Democrat general election campaign.

It's too late to refight the referendum campaign; that Eurostar left St Pancras some while ago. The only way I can see to stop Brexit now is for the EU to come to rescue. That is probably the only way to help some leave supporters reach their own conclusion that the best deal is the one the other 27 member states are offering us. And it needs to be a new deal, not the one we currently enjoy.

It doesn't need every leaver to reach this conclusion and back the case to remain, but it will require a much bigger and sustained shift in positions than so far seen, otherwise we are out of the EU for a generation or more.

## **BACK FROM THE BRINK**

So, if I were prime minister for a day I would write to the leaders of all 27 member states together with the president of the European Parliament and the current president of the European Council asking them to suspend Article 50 and allow all 28 member states and the institutions of the EU and their leaders to come together to find an agreed way forward that allows all sides to save face and step back from the brink.

It would require the 27 to state why they wish the UK to stay in the EU, to spell out the terms of our continued membership including our current opt outs and any changes they may wish to implement that address some of the common criticisms of the EU articulated in many member states. It would need the UK to declare that we wished to remain as a consequence of the new terms because they remove many of the criticisms of the EU that led to the referendum in the first place.

Given Nick Clegg's recent claim that the European Union were ready to change freedom of movement as a concession to Theresa May before she took her hard Brexit stance, there must be room within the leadership of the EU to make an offer that gets the UK, Ireland and those other EU countries whose citizens stand to lose from this mess off the hook while at the same time protecting the union.

A new deal for the UK within the EU to refresh the dream of Schuman and Monnet of nations working closer together to meet the common challenges their peoples face.

Such a deal is not going to win over the more hostile

*“What was needed back then as now to counter the emotional case for leave is an emotional case to remain in the greatest force for peace, democracy, prosperity and security Europe has even known”*

elements of the British media towards the EU but it would neuter many of the criticisms they have overblown and answer some of those they've made up.

It seems to me that as the UK government and leadership of the opposition won't, so only the EU itself can really stop Brexit now.

Now if I could be prime minister for a second day I could then turn my attention to how we rebuild support for the Liberal Democrats as a freedom loving, radical,

reforming, socially just, Liberal - without the neo-political movement no longer needing to be obsessed with Brexit.

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Adrian Sanders was Liberal Democrat MP for Torbay 1997-2015 and is a councillor in Torbay

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# ABANDONED TO ITS FATE

English-speakers are being slaughtered by the Cameroonian government yet the UK - embarrassed by its colonial past - refuses to engage. Rebecca Tinsley reports

It is hardly controversial to suggest the European powers exploited their colonies, leaving a toxic vapour trail. The impact of Britain's divide and rule policies – relying on one favoured tribal elite to impose British hegemony – persists most blatantly in Kenya and Nigeria, with dismal results. In addition, our departure often left chaos, and in the case of India in 1947, millions of people dead or displaced.

Less discussed is the need for Britain to re-engage when the citizens of a former colony ask the UK to put diplomatic pressure on their current corrupt and violent masters.

The problems facing the voiceless, powerless masses in parts of the developing world are often a consequence of our bungled withdrawal at independence. We owe it to these citizens to champion their causes, when invited to.

It may provoke snide laughter among cynics, but in many parts of the world, Britain is still held up as an inspiring example, albeit a flawed one, of responsive parliamentary democracy, free speech, human rights, judicial independence, predictable law and impartial bureaucracy.

To quote a former Kenyan foreign minister, in conversation with your correspondent in 2005: "Britain is our mother, like it or not, and we still have the right to ask for your moral support when we try to emulate your best behaviour."

It is puzzling and hurtful to some African citizens when Britain behaves as if the past was wholly negative and so shameful we prefer to pretend it never happened, denying the historical and cultural links that have left their trace in every village.

## BRUTAL, KLEPTOMANIAC RULERS

Wracked with guilt, and preferring not to acknowledge our complicated common story, we throw aid at brutal, kleptomaniac rulers. African critics point out we even lack the interest to ensure our money reaches the ostensible beneficiary projects.

The truth about our past is surely more nuanced, as in any family, where affection coexists with memories of betrayal and cruelty. A good portion of the best African civil society leaders, professionals and faith leaders were schooled in British-run village classrooms, worshipped at British churches, and were healed by British-trained medical professionals in British-funded bush clinics.

When Africans see how France carefully cultivates its economic, military, social and political ties with its former colonies, they wonder why the British simple hand over aid, forever defining the relationship as manipulative beggar and guilty donor.

A case in point is Cameroon, a small central African nation teetering on the brink of Rwanda-like conflict. Instead of acknowledging our colonial carelessness by making amends, the British government denies it has any responsibility for the legacy of human rights abuses. "Nothing to do with us, guv," is the tone of ministerial answers to questions tabled by Liberal Democrat peers recently.

Your correspondent travelled not to Cameroon but to Bournemouth to gain an insight into just how disingenuous these ministerial responses are. In a chilly church hall, the Cameroonian diaspora gathered to welcome a visiting Roman Catholic African bishop. As women in colourful headscarves distributed trays of greasy snacks, and hyperactive toddlers weaved between the forest of adult legs, a group of Cameroonian men discussed the escalating violence in their country of birth.

This may sound familiar to Liberator readers, but the problem began when the British government agreed to present voters with a binary choice in a UN-backed referendum.

Up until 1960, there were two Cameroons: the larger territory was administered by the French, using the French legal and educational systems and language. In the extreme west and south of the region, the British were in charge. At their schools, students spoke English and studied for O and A Levels, and the courts were run according to English common law.

In 1961, a referendum asked the inhabitants of British Cameroon if they wanted to join neighbouring Nigeria or French-speaking Cameroon. The third choice – establishing an independent, English-speaking country – was not offered. By default, the English-speaking Cameroonians found they were a minority (about 10%) in the new nation. A constitution guaranteeing equal rights was soon watered down and disregarded, and the Francophone majority grabbed the positions of power in government (only one in 36 ministers is Anglophone) and the military. In the years since independence, the British government stood by, mute, as the rights of its former wards of guardianship were eroded.

In 2016, the status of the Anglophone minority deteriorated further when French-speaking judges were appointed to courts in the English-speaking south and west. The judges refused to conduct hearings in English, and new laws were published only in French. French-speaking teachers were parachuted into majority English-speaking schools where they refused to teach in English. This fomented a civil society movement that has become increasingly polarised and violent, as the Francophone regime of President Paul Biya (in power since 1982) denies they have grievances. Faith leaders have tried to chart a

moderate, conciliatory path, but have been ignored by the government, and sidelined by increasingly militant pro-independence activists.

For more than a year, Anglophone lawyers and teachers have been on strike. Shops and businesses close weekly in so-called Ghost Town protests, although there are claims that secessionist forces intimidate people to stand in solidarity with them. The Francophone authorities have responded with heavy-handed tactics: unplugging the internet, firing on unarmed civilians from helicopters, and shooting people as they emerge from church. According to the International Crisis Group, more than 40 have been killed, hundreds have been arrested, and many are missing. On 5 January, the secessionists' president and eight colleagues were abducted by Cameroonian military forces while they met in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. This follows unauthorised incursions into Nigeria by Cameroonian forces, chasing secessionists who have fled over the border.

In an atmosphere described as "fearful," thousands have gone to Nigeria, blaming constant harassment by the Cameroonian military, and the UN is preparing for many more to arrive as the violence increases.

The Cameroonian authorities claim to have sent tanks and heavily armed soldiers into the Anglophone border area on 29 December to protect civilians from secessionist militants, but refugees tell a different story: young men and boys dragged from their homes by soldiers who beat them, steal possessions and set fire to homes. Villages of 6,000 people are reported to have only 50 inhabitants left. Even the normally supine UN Human Rights Council condemned the excessive use for force by Cameroonian police, and the regime's reluctance to engage in genuine dialogue.

Militant Anglophones have hit back, targeting members of the security forces with assassinations and bombings, denouncing those moderate Anglophones pushing for a more federal, decentralised system that avoids secession. But in the absence of a unified Anglophone position, President Biya survives because of his usefulness to the international community.

More than 2,000 Cameroonian troops have been killed so far, battling Boko Haram (the Nigerian terrorists inspired by ISIS). Cameroon also hosts 320,000 refugees who have fled the chaos caused by militants in the Central African Republic and Nigeria. As with Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania and Rwanda, Africans are fighting the West's wars supplying peacekeepers to the UN missions we create and pay for (yet will not send our soldiers to join). Not surprisingly, Biya feels inoculated against international censure.

Back in Bournemouth, an impassioned member of the diaspora told your correspondent without a trace of irony, "We Anglophone Cameroonians must defend our Anglo-Saxon values." His friends nodded, equally emphatic about their cultural ties to a country that doesn't even know they exist, but for their football team. They want the British government to defend the English-speaking minority, pushing Biya to enforce the various conventions and bills of rights to which his regime is a signatory. They fear the violence will escalate, and in the absence of international concern, the regime will crack down on civil society even more viciously.

British diplomatic re-engagement has amounted to a Foreign Office appeal to all sides to refrain from violence and agree to dialogue. In other words, the usual moral equivalence bordering on appeasement. In what respect is an unarmed and oppressed minority equally responsible for the current violence as the soldiers shooting them from helicopters?

What puzzles the Anglophone Cameroonians is the contrast between British disinterest and France's embrace of its former colonies. The French never went away: they continue to pull strings, controlling politics, the military and the economy in the places they consider theirs, usually to France's benefit.

As if to compensate for their humiliation in World War Two, they have carefully tended their African back yard, creating a new empire in all but name. To quote a French political commentator: "France is a large hen followed by a docile brood of little black chicks. The casual observer imagining that money is the cement of the relationship would have the wrong impression. The cement is language and culture."

## EMBEDDED FRENCH

From Mitterrand's active support for the *genocidaires* in Rwanda, to Hollande's successful military interventions in West Africa, the French are embedded. (In Chad, your correspondent found a hotel filled with shaven-headed, muscle-bound, cube-shaped French foreign legion officers on r&r – and that was just the female soldiers - taking a break from the fight against Islamist terrorists). Cameroon's offshore oil may be on the Anglophone coast, but the companies running the rigs are all French.

Paradoxically, the British Foreign Office typically underestimates its impact in its former colonies, while vastly overestimating its influence in the USA (where almost no one has heard of the so-called special relationship, a persisting UK delusion).

It could be argued that Cameroon doesn't matter, although as the situation deteriorates there will be more Anglophone Cameroonians seeking asylum in the UK, and the UK will have to contribute to the costs of UN refugee camps across the border in Nigeria.

However, there is a principle at stake in Cameroon: does the UK simply pretend there is no special relationship with former colonial citizens who are actively asking for its help? As we draw back into fortress Britain, do we imagine the Chinese, Russians and Turks are not already filling the gap we and the Americans have left in the developing world? Does even the most Trotskyist Corbynite believe our Anglo-Saxon values are less worthy than those of Putin, Xi and Erdogan? To quote the Kenyan politician, it is time for the UK to turn the page and start a new chapter with its African family.

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Rebecca Tinsley is the founder of Waging Peace. [www.WagingPeace.info](http://www.WagingPeace.info)

# HOW UNIVERSITIES SOLD THEIR SOULS

## Higher education has been commercialised to the benefit neither of students nor academics, says Trevor Smith

The enormous expansion in university provision over the past 30 years and more did not have to result in its commercialisation, but the stark fact is that it did. It wasn't inevitable but was always a likely outcome.

That commercialisation has many consequences, now increasingly apparent. There has been a long-held sense of complacency about UK universities' high-standing in the world, which is likely to be severely jolted with a subsequent fall in their international reputation.

One of the first portents came with the realisation that universities, taken together, were regarded by both Tory and Labour ministers alike as a major export industry in view of the large and growing number of overseas students who were coming to Britain, including no less than 66,000 Chinese freshers in 2015-16.

In that year overseas students overall accounted for a net contribution of over £20bn to the sector. Universities were quick to cotton on as they sought the better to influence government policies, and now behave as industrial entities.

Later, the abolition of grants, the hallmark of the British system since 1948, and the introduction of fees for English home students, had a profound effect on the very nature of university provision: it ceased to be a state-supported but ostensibly privately organised system and became just another offering purveyed by the market economy.

### PAYING CUSTOMERS

Students were to be seen not so much as a body of privileged scholars but merely as just another set of paying customers. This perception cut both ways. With the later abolition of mandatory recruitment levels in 2015, universities sought to maximise entrants to courses. There has been a great increase in 'unconditional offers' to widen student recruitment and Essex, for example, intends to double its size by 2019. Other institutions are contemplating two-year intensive degrees along the lines offered by the University of Buckingham since 1976. There was also a converse effect in that the range of degree subjects on offer shrank with the closure of over one in five; foreign languages were particularly badly hit.

This expansion has led to increased student complaints about the amount and quality of teaching they receive. Recently introduced evaluations have revealed many elite universities offering unsatisfactory instruction. Students complain they are also poor value for money. Contributing to this is undoubtedly the enormous growth of the 'gig' economy whereby nowadays 53% of all academic staff are employed part-time. The National Union of Students has warned "low

paid and overstressed tutors may not be providing high quality education to undergraduates paying tuition fees of up to £9,000 a year".

A major cause of poorer teaching undoubtedly resulted from the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise in 1985-86. I predicted this in *Higher Education Quarterly* (vol 41 1987). I drew an analogy with athletics: "...there is little point in training hard for the field events if only the track events are to be judged."

Accordingly, research accomplishment assumed a much greater priority over teaching prowess. The ensuing explosion in the numbers of research articles written led to a corresponding growth in learned journals which, in turn, had to be ranked in terms of quality. Academic career promotion became much more dependent on the quantity of research output than on teaching quality.

It is, of course, much easier to assess research than teaching. Attempts have lately been made with grades of gold, silver and bronze, with some surprising outcomes, but student reactions are likely to be the main criteria in judging teaching.

There has also been a meteoric increase in grade inflation in degree awards. When I was teaching the largest class of degrees was a lower second which accounted for about 40%. Results were standardised year on year – a practice long-since abandoned: in 2016, 73% got firsts or upper seconds, and there were no fails recorded in 2017 among eleven top universities. The latest figures show that firsts now account for 26% of awards. High fees may encourage students to work harder, but that cannot disguise that marks are now much easier to acquire than previously. More likely, untenured staff are anxious not to annoy their paying customers.

Some employers are also expressing dissatisfaction with much of the traditional tertiary education on offer and are now offering their own degrees, which they have been allowed to do since 2012. The College of Law was the first and has since been followed by Dyson, KPMG, an engineering outfit in Hereford - the county has no university - and even by Burnley Fooyball Club. These essentially 'in-house' schemes seem likely to be a growing feature.

International factors have an increasing effect; while the UK has been the main beneficiary in the overseas student market this may now be under threat for a number of reasons.

Thus, massive open on-line courses (MOOCs) appeared from around 2014 whereby students could take courses by distance learning from prestigious institutions like Stanford and Harvard from anywhere in the world. These were sometimes free

and sometimes gave accreditation. They prompted a number of consortia such as FutureLearn in the UK and Coursva in the US. Their initial impetus seems to have slackened off somewhat but this has not discouraged well-established universities from offering off-campus, distance learning degrees of the kind pioneered by the Open University since 1971.

Exeter offered three masters courses in 2017 at full-cost fees of £18,000 but which can be studied for at a time and place of the student's choosing.

Foreign students now constitute the majority on graduate programmes in the UK. Partly, this is a result of a lowered rate of return on PhDs which seems to have deterred home-grown students. Some years ago the Economic and Social Research Council wanted to discover how many UK-born students were taking doctorates in economics; it found none at the three main national centres, Cambridge, LSE or Oxford nor anywhere else in Britain but three were found in Chicago. This augurs badly for the supply of future academics especially when obtaining visas is becoming harder for overseas job applicants. Already, the prospect of Brexit has led to an exodus of non-British researchers from our universities and a fall in the general intake of overseas students.

Then again, other European countries have greatly increased the degrees they offer through the medium of English to compete better in the international market. Sweden, Germany and Holland are among the leaders where fees are lower or even non-existent, while there has been an appreciable increase in the number of Britons taking their university education in these countries.

Finally, there is the highly publicised problem of the vast increases in vice-chancellors' remuneration packages. It began with Colin Campbell's 90% annual hike to a total of £585,000 in 2008. Seeing themselves as 'captains of industry' they sought commensurate rewards. Average vice-chancellor pay and pension packages were £355,000 for 2017-18.

Compared with the rewards in the corporate sector, those at the top of the tertiary education sector are mere petty cash. They have a long way to go to match the greed of contemporary 'robber barons' in the large multi-national companies. The median pay of the FTSE 100 chief executive is £3.5m a year or 120 times that of the average employee, while Jeff Fairburn got £110m as chief executive of housebuilder Persimmon. That said, the pay of vice-chancellors is breathtaking in comparison with the past.

The academic labour market has changed dramatically. As noted, at the lower end far fewer staff have tenure whereas at the top end it has changed out of all recognition with some vice-chancellors receiving in excess of £500,000 a year. Bath, as a location with two universities seems particularly generous: in the past year, the vice-chancellor of Bath University reportedly received £468,000 while that of the smaller Bath Spa University is said to have been paid £808,000.

In the corporate sector there is often little correlation between profits and market performance; while in higher education, "Top earners head worst universities", as the Sunday Times noted on 31 December.

Long gone are the days when higher education exuded a more collegial sense of fellowship with heads seeing themselves as being more like the first among near equals.

## TIME SERVERS

Nor can it be said the present generation of university heads are appreciably superior to the achievements of their predecessors. There are a few outstanding examples but the generality are time servers who have assiduously climbed the academic and managerial ladders to get where they are. Many of the present difficulties facing British universities are extensively examined in David Willetts' recent book *A University Education*. He provides an excellent history of British universities and seeks to analyse almost all of the dilemmas that have faced them over the centuries, but he is often less convincing when examining recent developments. He concludes that there is now a strong case for even greater growth in them and argues, somewhat surprisingly, that expenditure on tertiary education is more beneficial than that spent on primary, contrary to the thinking of his ministerial predecessor, Keith Joseph.

In the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis almost every advanced economy slashed its spending on higher education. The one exception was Singapore. Its prime minister, Lee Kwan Yew, said it was only a piece of rock with no natural resources except the grey matter of its citizens and therefore it should spend more on educating them. His policy has paid off handsomely.

Later, to increase the funds available, the Labour government under Blair introduced fees in England in 1998 of £3,000 a year and introduced a loan scheme enabling re-payment after graduation. The successor Coalition increased these to £9,000 a year even though the Lib Dems, its junior partner, had pledged to abolish them in its manifesto. The loan scheme was duly privatised and subsequently has had a very chequered performance resulting in the privatisation of student debt poised to rack up £800m loss for Treasury, as the Financial Times said on 1 December.

Of all the ex-vice-chancellor in the Lords I am the only one who has consistently voted against charging fees. They are iniquitous and harm the economy.

I take Lee Kwan Yew's view as, increasingly, do others, including Andrew Adonis - who supported them when a minister in the Blair cabinet - as well as the magnate Sir James Dyson. Professor Danny Dorling has produced convincing evidence why fees should go; first, because the proportion of students from poorer UK families has dropped, and secondly because Germany with no fees has a much higher proportion of its school-leavers going to university.

The momentum of commercialisation will continue unabated until its excesses demand new forms of regulation.

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Trevor Smith is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and was vice-chancellor of Ulster University 1991-99

*A University Education*. By David Willetts. OUP 2017

# BATTLING BREXIT FROM THE RED BENCHES

## Brexit can be beaten in the Lords, but it needs Labour to get off its fence, says Tony Greaves

What is astonishing about the political situation today is the fragility of the Conservative Party and the incompetence of the Government – easily the worst in my political lifetime.

The fundamental problem that the Tories have is that they rely on two political bases. Firstly their members and activists who are right-wing, rather old, and vehemently anti-EU. Some are conservative in a nostalgic way, don't like the modern world, hate things like gay marriage and "all the foreigners and immigrants", just want things to be like they used to be – but are scared of any threats to the NHS and pensions. They are strongly patriotic.

Others are aggressively reactionary, often economically neoliberal (low taxes, abolish all the regulations, small state and look after yourself with private provision, get rid of red tape and rule by foreign bureaucrats).

Some younger ones may be socially liberal on things like gay rights but not on penal policy and welfare benefits. They are strongly nationalistic rather than patriotic. But all these groups are united on the Big Issue of the Day – Brexit. For different but overlapping reasons they hate the EU and want out regardless (see poll figures below). They went into raptures at the idea of blue passports. They are vital to the presence of the Conservatives as a force on the ground.

### FAT CATS

The second lot are the people who fund the party. Much fewer in number but essential to the existence of the national party machine in all its facets (policy-making, propaganda, networking). Business people (often men), many from the financial sectors, construction companies, exporters and importers, private sector 'fat cats' and their corporate entities. Many share the right-wing views and prejudices of the Tory grassroots but younger people and women may be more socially liberal, and there is a good number of richer ethnic minority people particularly of south or east Asian origin.

They are often economically neoliberal and may have more liberal views on immigration than Theresa May who at heart is with her grassroots. But what unites a majority of this second group is that they are anti-Brexit – and if Brexit has to happen, they want as close a relationship as possible and most of all to stay in the customs union and preferably the single internal market.

Of course there are exceptions and differences among all the groups, but taken as a whole this is a major division of views among supporters and within the present government. Many MPs are torn between their own views which align with those of the financial and corporate world, and the views of their constituency

parties.

Then we have the Labour Party, whose position is not tenable beyond the short term. In spite of riding high in the polls, half a million members, new waves of activists, and greater surface unity than for many a day, Labour is even more overtly confused and entangled by its divisions on Europe.

A poll by the Mile End Institute at Queen Mary University of London of more than 4,000 members of the four main parties (including the SNP) found that 78% of Labour members thought there should be a second referendum. (Con 14%, LD 91%), 87% thought we should stay in the single market and 85% in the customs union (Con 25% and 27%; LD 96% and 95%). A caveat – this poll was carried out last June. But opinion generally has moved to a slightly more anti-Brexit position since then – in any case, the views of party members are likely to be more informed and secure than those of the general public.

These are extraordinary figures when set against the official Labour policy. Some 80% or more of the huge new Labour membership (552,000 at June 2017) – if this survey is correct – do not agree with the line that is being imposed by Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell. Keir Starmer has rather unconvincingly dragged the party into supporting continued membership of the internal market and the customs union during the anticipated two year transition (which is probably inevitable anyway if such a transition is to mean anything much). But in a series of interviews and speeches in the middle of January, Corbyn repeated that it was "not possible" to stay in the single market after Brexit (clearly untrue) and that Labour "does not support nor will be calling for" a second referendum.

Meanwhile Labour MPs are split three ways. There is a small but vocal group of pro-Brexit throwbacks such as Frank Field and Kate Hoey. The determined group of anti-Brexit members including heavyweights such as Chuka Umunna and Chris Leslie are organised and may gain support as time goes on. The third group are the constituency cowards who voted against Brexit in the referendum but are frightened of their voters. It's this large group that allows the Labour leadership to continue their duplicitous stance, sitting on an ever more painful razor-wire fence which they cannot get off without ripping to shreds the deceit of their general election 'victory'. As everyone now knows this was achieved by seizing back the working class Ukip vote in Brexit-voting Labour seats and sweeping up the anti-Brexit voters everywhere. It's not clear whether Corbyn and McDonnell will move further on these matters or quickly enough for the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

So what of the Liberal Democrats and what of the

prospects for this dreadful bill in the Lords?

On the broad issues of the day other than Brexit, I don't think we really know where the balance of opinion lies within all the members who have joined since 2015 who are a majority. There is certainly some vociferous people (on the internet anyway) who are disturbingly right-wing and neoliberal on economic issues but whether they amount to more than a small but noisy group remains to be seen – I suspect not. There are certainly major debates to be had on the nature and place of Liberalism in the Britain of the 2020s.

What is not in doubt is the solid opposition of all wings of the Liberal Democrats to Brexit. So far this has produced quite a few new members and a degree of respect among pro-European people generally, but no advances in the polls. We just have to believe that this will come in due course as the divisions in the two larger parties foul up politics ever more by the week. But whatever...the job in hand is to do everything we can to stop the calamity that is facing the UK, and the potentially dangerous consequences for Europe. And if we cannot stop it, to reduce the calamity and dangers as far as we can.

Which brings us to the House of Lords and what used to be called the Great Repeal Bill. The now snappily named European Union (Withdrawal) Bill is just the first but perhaps most important of half a dozen or so 'Brexit Bills' which will occupy the time of Parliament for the rest of this year. It's a dreadful Bill, the biggest Government power-grab for decades and a serious threat to the very parliamentary sovereignty that Leavers pretended that the Brexit vote was about.

It's just arrived in the Lords from its travails through the Commons, and had its Second Reading shortly before this issue of Liberator plops through the door. Ten days in Committee are expected to start just after Parliament's February half term, with some five days on Report after Easter. Gruelling times - and remember that the Government has not got a numerical majority in the Lords, even of the politically aligned peers.

The Lords are not going to kick it out as a whole but they may cause a whole lot of bother. It's 'only' about 60 pages long but there are more than a few really big issues. The whole question of Henry VIII clauses – where substantive new law can be made by ministerial declaration. The single internal market and the customs union. The Irish border. The matter of a second referendum (or a "first referendum on the agreement"), and "a meaningful vote in Parliament" (the Grieve amendment). The transition period which looks more complicated by the day. All the rights that are derived from EU law (environmental, citizens, labour protection). The charter of fundamental rights itself. The interaction with devolution within the UK. Retaining access to a plethora of EU agencies

*“The third group are the constituency cowards who voted against Brexit in the referendum but are frightened of their voters. It's this large group that allows the Labour leadership to continue their duplicitous stance”*

and projects. What happens if there is no deal, or a rejection of the deal by Parliament or in a referendum. Whether the Article 50 timescale might (or indeed whether it can) be extended. All the sectoral interests (defence, security, agriculture...)

Some of these things are to be the subject of separate Bills which are coming down the line, though whether this will persuade their Lordships to leave them alone under this first is another matter. There

is a Cross-Boundary Trade Bill which has started in the Commons, which may be a "money bill" which the Lords are supposed to pass on the nod, though they don't have to do so. There is a Withdrawal and Implementation Bill to follow the Withdrawal Bill. There's the 'promise' of an Agriculture Bill. And various more, and your brain starts to addle and your eyes to glaze over. And all against a backdrop of every government department struggling to stand up.

## NUMBERS MATTER

But then we are back to the politics. Numbers in the Lords will matter. About 250 Conservatives, just under 200 Labour, 100 Liberal Democrats. A scatter of others – six Ulstermen, three Ukip, a Green and a Plaid Cymru, about 210 Cross-benchers and non-affiliated, and 26 bishops though it's rare for more than three or four to turn up at a time. The Government can be beaten, but it's the Lords not the Commons. For even the biggest votes it's rare for more than two-thirds of the members to vote. The Government and the Liberal Democrats can get over three-quarters of their members into the lobby. Labour are (should we say, to be polite, since we need their help) less successful, particularly after 6pm. A lot of Crossbenchers don't vote much.

But of those who come to vote, there will be a lot of Crossbenchers and 'others' on our side. There may be a few Tory dissidents, perhaps balanced by a handful of Labour Leavers. Andrew Adonis will try to lead the charge but a lot of his own party may be less than impressed, and the Labour front bench will be hamstrung by instructions from their razor-wire fence sitting leadership in the Commons.

With all the fragility an incompetence of the Government, and the underlying instability of Labour's position on Brexit, the Lords ought to be able to help to create the earthquake that British politics needs this year. But it will not be easy, our obscure procedures will not be well understood away from the red benches and carpets, and it will need a lot of luck!

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

# CORBYN IS NICK CLEGG'S FAULT

What if politics moved at the speed of technology and someone other than Labour sounded as though it offered a better future, asks Allan Biggar

I joined the Liberal Party in 1979 having torn up my application to the Labour Party as I could not stomach the bigoted racist attitudes of the 1970s Labour and trade union movements. I simply could never have been a Conservative. My parents were in domestic service on a country estate in Northumberland – not quite Downton Abbey but posh enough. The one thing my parents drummed into me was I was no different from the kids at the 'big house' and I could do anything I wanted to. Money of course was a bit of an impediment.

I am a Liberal. I'm not a Socialist but I do see a role for nationalised industry. I never quite understood, and still don't, why Government run industry needs to be synonymous with bad management and mega loss. I am a capitalist and I do believe in a prosperous economy and the ability of business to create wealth not just for a few but for everyone. I passionately believe equality, compassion, and the role of the state in providing healthcare, education, and welfare.

A society can choose to pay for what it wants and can afford a decent healthcare system and can afford education if it chooses. The thing, is no one ever grasps the nettle and says we have a choice. We are told it's either too big and badly run (in which case fix it) or it's all because we're ageing and medicine costs too much partly because we can treat so much more so costs rise (in which case, hey we must pay more). Tinkering with taxes and cutting to make ends meet is not the answer.

We need to create a thriving economy and a tax system that is fair and pays for what we need even if that means more (which by the way I don't think it does). Equally I have no idea what the purpose of trusts and free market has to do with providing healthcare or education.

## FUNDAMENTAL MISTAKE

I do think student loans was a fundamental mistake. Breaking the commitment to provide 'free' higher education was simply wrong. It was never free anyway and there were other ways to pay for it than student loans. Again, if society wants to it can pay for anything. And here's a mind-blowing thought - I don't think we are far off needing to work on what a world looks like where work can't be the only way people earn money as the need for physical labour decreases as technology increases. The benefit state we moan about might need far more thought that we can possibly imagine however we're stuck between a 'left-right' argument over costs.

I spent nearly 30 years in Liberal politics. More than a dozen in elected office as vice-chair of the National League of Young Liberals, on the party national executive and a member of staff in Parliament and headquarters. My question is what happened to my party and where is it now?

How did we go from a party about liberty and social priorities whose natural ground was an enemy of the Conservative Party and was an alternative to Labour to a junior partner in a Tory Government and ceding the entire progressive ground to Corbyn?

I won't call it left and right because I'm an awkward Liberal but equally there's no time for a pseudo intellectual argument. The essential point is that we had our heritage and our clothes stolen by Labour, well, given away by our beloved Lib Dem leaders.

I'm told the party has gone over and over what happened under the coalition, so I won't bore you all by going into what was the biggest political blunder of the century.

We were kipped by Nick, and the Tories laughed all the way home when you fell for a full-blown coalition and had to defend the Tory agenda. I know because I've spoken to friends the likes of Steve Hilton who were there. What Nick did you get to show for all this? "It wasn't quite as bad as it could have been", or "it was a bit less Tory than it could have been", are hardly rallying cries for what we achieved in Government. Oh, and to cap it all you committed political suicide over student loans.

Where did any of our (the Liberals) big ideas go? Where did any radical reforming agenda go? I don't mean those till born by our Tory partners like electoral reform but where did any of the vision of a better country go?

Wherever it went it's left the Lib Dems a husk of its former self and left the ground wide open to Corbyn to give people the idea of a better place to live and work.

Utterly ill-conceived as much of what Corbyn talks about is, and not to mention the menace behind it of a return to unreconstructed 1970s economic policy backed by a re-fanged militant trade union movement, any young person or radical thinker has to be attracted by Labour if only because there is no alternative.

Bring back the campaign radical Liberal Party that had big ideas and real passion. Take on the challenges of the future, like what we really do about employment in a world with fewer jobs and how we pay for education and healthcare.

Take on tax and say we need to pay for a fair and decent society but we need prosperity to do so. Think the unthinkable. Someone needs to do something fast



or Labour gets a free run at any alternative to the Tories which is not good for anyone.

Here's three ideas. The first is about work. Since the first hunter gatherer lent across the cave to his neighbour and suggested swapping a few hours of labour helping hunt for a haunch of mammoth our economy has been based on pay for work.

No work – no pay – no income and inevitable poverty for which government has created a safety net called benefits. Being paid for doing nothing is bad. Right? The idea that we all go through education and get a job is already changing. Ask any parent of a 20-year-old and they already know that. Artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation are about to make the industrial revolution look tame. Factories 10 years from now are likely to be human-free zones. Cars, lorries, and buses will drive themselves. Even if you are a lawyer you may be replaced by a software programme which doesn't just churn out the paperwork but can come up with advice and a legal judgement just as accurate as their human counterpart can today.

Doctors, accountants, architects, engineers, and a whole bunch of professionals who probably believe they will always be needed may well be jobless. If you don't believe me have a scroll through the stories of real advances already made.

Now, without a job and so no income how does you live? It may not be by work. Society must find a way of providing income to families which is not based on work.

So, forget about the evil benefit culture which we talk about today, that's a momentary issue in a world changing very fast. Those in Momentum and the TUC who crave the return to trade union power may not have realised that their boat is burning under their feet as jobs go forever.

Is anyone talking about this.? Yes, in the world of AI and invention, but not in the world of politics. How about the Lib Dems spending some time grabbing the high ground on the issues of tomorrow rather than just trying to be a bit less Tory and bit less Labour. Time surely for some radical thinking?

My second idea is that our tax system is totally screwed. It worked in a world before globalisation and free movement of trade where you could pin down companies to pay tax where they operated. There is though a problem with relying on 'income tax' when you might not have any income.

## **SNORT WITH DISGUST**

Now this is where the old school economists will snort with disgust, but you really must tear up the tax tables and start again.

I believe you must look at spending not income. For business a transaction tax is both fair and easy to police and could replace corporation tax overnight. No allowances or offsetting costs, simply levy a tax every time a transaction occurs in the UK. You don't have to track down profits which have been funnelled up and out of the UK. For consumers, reduce VAT but have

*“I don't think we are far off needing to work on what a world looks like where work can't be the only way people earn money”*

it applied across the board. Yes, on food and clothes but a very low level still produces more than is currently raised by income tax and our current VAT system.

Taxing food and clothes is radical stuff. I still remember the 'dead parrot' in 1987 where the Alliance briefly suggested it. But the world has moved on and it needs to revisit these issues. Where tax reform falls apart is if you don't go far enough and

try to mix income tax and VAT or corporation tax and transaction tax. It's got to be a complete about face.

Finally health care and education free at the point of delivery is a fundamental part of a civil modern society. I have no idea what local trusts have to do with efficiency, but we'll leave that one for now. I would simply argue we have to be up front and say how much a world class health care and education system costs and ask people to pay for it. With a reformed tax system, it can easily be paid for. It seems to me that the party allows itself to be limited by thinking we can only tinker round the edges. No! Stand up Lib Dems and give people real vision of the future and what it costs.

Perhaps you think I'm talking rubbish or science fiction? Google was founded 19 years ago. The first iPhone came out 20 years ago. Driverless cars will be tested in the UK this year and widely available in five years time. Innovation is speeding up exponentially and so must the change to the way we live and are governed.

Imagine if we can change politics as much as Google changed the way we interact. Imagine if we are not at the end of old party politics but the start of politics in a new world then, god that's exciting! The future in here. The question is will the Lib Dems be a leader or a follower. I'd prefer to be a leader.

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Allan Biggar was Liberal party area agent for Eastern England

# BIDDING FOR NO TRUMPS

America's ignorant president and Brexit are facets of an illiberal tide swirling round the worlds. How can it be turned back, asks Adrian Slade

At last 2017 has twittered to a depressing close. At last we have finished a year that has done little for the notion of a 'Happy Christmas' and still less for the prospect of a constructive and peaceful 2018 to come.

Almost everywhere reactionary views have hardened and political action has become more and more self-interested. The poor of the world are still left struggling (and not just in the Third World); liberal attitudes and principles are persistently under attack; prejudice, nationalism and physical threats to individuals and countries are on the increase.

In the UK, since 2015, we have watched a relatively tolerant electoral outlook towards community relations and economic fairness continuing to be replaced by a narrow nationalism and mistrust of foreigners not seen since the days of Enoch Powell.

## UNHOLY MIX

Death threats and racial assaults have become frighteningly more commonplace, taking their cue from the increasingly intolerant language of international diplomacy. In the last year the world has been bombarded with an unholy mix of bombast, prejudice, naivety and nationalistic opportunism.

And where does it mostly come from? The president of the United States, Donald Trump, certainly this century's least suited candidate to be elected president and probably the least suited of the last century as well

- a conceited, self-righteous and woefully politically inexperienced president who seems incapable of speaking in any language but twitter and hyperbole.

Ever since he was elected, politicians and journalists across the world have been trying to analyse who he really is and why he acts in the way that he does.

Does he really mean it when he rattles missiles with Kim Jong-un and talks about response in spades? Does he really believe that there is so little threat from climate change that a country the size of the USA can afford to pull out of the first international agreement to take this key issue seriously? Does he really believe

that moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem will do anything other than increase tension in the Middle East and probably threaten American diplomatic lives into the bargain? Does he seriously imagine that his withdrawal of \$370m of funding to the UN, as a 'punishment' for voting against the United States on the issue will help America, let alone anyone else?

On a more personal level how could he have so little sensitivity to the ever-growing international issue of sexual abuse by politicians and public figures that he was prepared to give full backing to a candidate for the Senate like Roy Moore of Alabama, only to receive a firm slam in the face for his misjudgement? Does he not look more carefully at similar accusations building up in his own direction?

What is becoming increasingly clear, as broadly confirmed by the recent television programmes featuring Trump in his earlier years, is that he has never had to be answerable to anyone but himself.

He was handed a golden spoon by his father and he has used it to build a property empire and company

in which he has been the sole principal shareholder and chief executive. His business has been run on what might be called 'the acolyte principle', a principle he is now deploying in the White House: "I am the sole and final decision maker. If I decide to employ you, even if you are part of my family, you take the job on

my terms and to my brief and, if I don't like what you are doing, I fire you."

As various members of his team have already found out, he is simply bringing to the White House his experience as a sole trader who has never been answerable to anyone but himself and he is hoping to run the country accordingly. Individuals are only as good as the last conversation they had with him and, as for outside bodies like Congress or the Senate, they are an irrelevant nuisance.

'Fake democracy' as he might call it. "It is me that the people elected to govern, not them."

That is of course why Trump has a sneaking



admiration for autocratic leaders like Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. They are able to get things they want done without much reference to anyone else. And, of course, it has also suited Putin to help to put Trump where he is today. Putin would rather deal with an arrogant, politically naive business autocrat than a politically experienced woman

Democrat with that much more intelligence than her ex-president husband.

The fact that Trump has recently just managed to get his tax bill through the Senate says more about that innate yearning to see taxes lowered that hides unspoken in the majorities of almost every western democracy, without too much concern for the consequences down the social scale, than it does about Trump's ability to achieve other measures. Roy Moore's defeat has now seen to that.

There have been a number of recent accounts of Trump's lifestyle in the White House and they are very revealing.

We all know that his life experience is built on buying and selling property; buying and developing golf courses on which he then plays all over the world; and chairing the American version of 'The Apprentice' in which, at the end of each series, he employed the winning 'apprentice'. In the process, although he may not have known it at the time, he was also creating another long-running TV job in the UK for another plutocrat, Alan Sugar.

Whether any of that experience helps to make a good president is questionable but what is even more troubling is the revelation that, no doubt having first let the world know his latest thoughts on Twitter, Donald Trump is said to spend 4-8 hours a day watching television stations that mostly fuel his 'anti-Liberal rage', ranging from CNN, Fox News and the BBC to MSNBC and others with which we are not familiar in the UK.

All the while he is consuming a fast food diet of almost unbelievable unsuitability for a man of his size and age. On an average day he lives on take away meals of which just one example includes two 'filets-o-fish', two Big Macs and a chocolate milk shake washed down by two or three of the 12 Diet Cokes he drinks each day. It is surprising that he finds time to think or talk politics or policy with anyone else, but then perhaps he doesn't.

And, with all that in mind, what if he does pay a visit to the UK? It is hardly likely to advance the peace process or ease the Brexit negotiations.

At the time of writing it looks as if the Queen may have told Mrs May that she is not willing to see him at Buckingham Palace or Windsor on state terms, and it is not difficult to see why. She never sanctioned Mrs May's invitation in the first place and he, having failed to give Mrs May any assistance whatsoever in strengthening the 'special relationship' or extracting

*“Putin would rather deal with an arrogant, politically naive business autocrat than a politically experienced woman Democrat with that much more intelligence than her ex-president husband”*

her from the mire of Brexit, is not likely to attract from the British public anything other than hostility to almost every other policy that he is currently espousing.

It would be nice to think that the manifest awfulness and danger of a continuing Trump regime would present opportunities to

gain political advantage to those of liberal or Liberal/Democrat persuasions in Europe or elsewhere.

Sadly, at the moment, with the possible exceptions of Angela Merkel (who remains more level-headed than most leaders), Emmanuel Macron in France and Justin Trudeau in Canada, where there are some glimmers of liberal light, it doesn't seem to. The world is now more sharply divided attitudinally than it has been since the worst days of the cold war.

## **SABRE RATTLING**

Despair is commonplace. Hope is very hard to find and one of the principal reasons for this is the prejudiced, sabre-rattling, nationalistic, behaviour of the president of the United States.

A man who chooses to communicate almost exclusively on Twitter, a medium that does little to promote tolerance and much to spread the diatribe of far right extremists, is not a man of mature judgement. Each day he opens the floodgates of illiberalism and nationalism a little wider.

So what, if anything, can Liberal Democrats do to stem this tide, of which the whole Brexit issue and the attitudes it has engendered are an integral part? As individuals or even as a single party, the answer has to be 'not very much', but across party and country boundaries we can and should be working more closely with those of like mind to attempt to reverse the direction in which Trumpery is allowing the world to go. Preference for absolute Liberal political purity may help us to feel comfortable but, if the world around us is becoming hi-jacked by illiberalism, that may be too high a price to pay.

As those who pursued Richard Nixon quickly discovered, it is not easy to get rid of an American president but, for the world's sake, ideally Trump should go now before the last trump finally sounds.

This article was written a few days before the press revelations and publication of Michael Wolff's 'Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House'. As Wolff seems to confirm much of what I have expressed, might I suggest that his book could soon prove to be the equivalent of Nixon's Watergate. That really would be the 'Last Trump'.

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Adrian Slade was the last president of the Liberal party and is a former parliamentary candidate

# SLF LOOKS TO SET AN AGENDA

## The Liberal Democrats may be ideologically disorientated after the Coalition years, but the Social Liberal Forum isn't says Geoff Payne, answering criticism in Liberator

As one of the organisers of the Social Liberal Forum conference, I was intrigued by the article by Elizabeth McWilliams in Liberator 387.

Any kind of feedback is helpful. Those who let us know they enjoy SLF conference encourage us to keep it going, and those who are critical can help us improve it. Elizabeth McWilliams is very much in the latter category, but before I respond to her points I think it would be worth pointing out the challenging circumstances of organising the conference in 2017.

In January 2017 we decided on the theme and Mary Reid, who headed the conference team, determined the date and sorted the practicalities of organising the conference. We decided that the theme should be globalisation. It seems like an age now but after the Brexit vote we were concerned at how divided British society had become and that this seemed likely to benefit the Conservatives, winning over votes from Ukip that they had won from Labour, making them look like an unbeatable political force.

It was not just the UK, a number of elections were about to take place across Europe that look ominous for liberal internationalists. As it happened the results were not as bad as we feared, but are still a matter of concern.

So we wanted to look at issues such as global warming, and why from a psychological point of view politicians are unable to impress upon voters the top priority it deserves given we are destroying the planet for future generations and maybe our own.

### LEFT BEHIND

We wanted to look at the implications of the decline of western power in the world, noticeably around failed western military interventions in the Middle East and what our new principles of foreign policy should be for today. We wanted to look at the low income social conservatives who voted to Leave the EU, arguably against their own economic interests, the 'left behind'. On the other hand we wanted to look at how the huge mobilisation of opponents of Brexit presented opportunities for the Liberal Democrats.

In fact there were a huge number of issues we wanted to look at. But as spare time volunteer Lib Dem activists there was plenty to do in 2017. When Theresa May announced the general election it started to look as though we would have to cancel the conference.

Not only do general elections take up time for us activists, they also change the political landscape. We were struggling to find time to chase up speakers, although some had accepted, and it was also clear that we had to change the agenda to attend to that most important post election question; "now what?" So in

the end the conference agenda combined both themes.

Because of all the distractions the early booking for conference was low and this also put pressure on us to cancel. My hope was that after the general election we would have lots of Liberals wanting to ask questions about "now what" and fortunately with lots of publicity on social media we managed to get a decent number to come along. "Same old faces"? Maybe. They are of course very welcome, but it is true we need to be better at getting the newer members to come along.

There is a problem that SLF faces in that during the Coalition a lot of Lib Dem members felt they needed us for the reason article gives, to oppose the regressive policies of the Coalition on issues like austerity, welfare cuts and NHS marketisation. Since 2015 we now find ourselves much more supportive of the party leadership under Tim Farron and now Vince Cable. We still had an important victory in the welfare debate in 2016 where we helped defeat attempts to support the housing benefit cap and benefit sanctions, and there is now an enormous task to re-establish the credibility of the party as a progressive force.

The article contends "The only policy we put forward" was basic income. Yet the overall theme of the conference; globalisation is fundamental to what Liberals are all about.

In 2005 it was a huge vote winner when we were on the right side of opposing the war in Iraq and up to the last general election our opposition to Brexit was a major factor in the doubling of the membership of the Liberal Democrats, albeit it did not help us improve our vote in the general election. One of our great successes during the Coalition was getting the government to increase international aid to 0.7% of GDP, meeting our international commitments.

I think the problem appears to be that the party has in recent years become more parochial. Our opposition to the war in Iraq was a pivotal moment in the history of the Liberal Democrats but there is very little discussion in the party about why we were right then and how this is consistent with our other foreign policy decisions such as support for interventions in Afghanistan and Libya which have in hindsight proved to be just as disastrous - both for the people of those countries and the blowback we are getting in the UK.

I suspect it is not that we are less internationalist in our outlook but that it has become much harder to calibrate what our response should be at a time of diminishing western power. For example, in places like Syria it is hard to find any liberals at all who are capable of realistically running the country, so who should we be supporting when Daesh threatens the security of both the region and the West? And how

should we do it?

I still think we were right to make globalisation our major theme. We should be discussing these things now, as the more we do the more likely we might be on the right side of the argument again in the future. However our next conference will have another theme, to be decided maybe by the time you are reading this.

Of course that still leaves open the question of whether SLF has “lost it’s way”. I know from my 30-plus years’ experience in the party that this can happen.

Radical Quarterly, LINK and the Liberal Movement have all come and gone during this time. I think that post-Coalition the Liberal Democrats as a party are still disorientated ideologically, and so the SLF is needed more than ever.

The article points out that under the leadership of David Hall-Matthews we supported “let a thousand flowers bloom”. We still do. We would love to have regional groups organising events at regional Lib Dem conferences, the main road block to that appears to be that the kind of people who could do that have other commitments to their local party and/or region. But it could still happen. We charge for membership these days for the same reason Liberator charges for subscriptions; we could not function otherwise. The cost of having a stand and organising fringe meetings at Lib Dem conference runs into thousands of pounds. So I urge readers of Liberator to join SLF and help us achieve more via our website; [http://www.socialliberal.net/join\\_the\\_slf](http://www.socialliberal.net/join_the_slf). As you can see when you get there, if you cannot afford a subscription you can still be a supporter for free.

## UNEASY RELATIONSHIP

The article points out the uneasy relationship SLF had with the Tim Farron leadership of the party and I am not clear what this is based on. I can comment personally that I could appreciate that Tim was trying to keep the party united and where he had to make a difficult decision, for example on bombing Syria, he sided with the party establishment. So I was uneasy about that.

However I very much liked Tim’s personal narrative, his love of Ken Loach films that stood up for the poor, and I believe if he had more time as leader that would have changed the party in a more socially liberal direction, although it was going in that direction anyway.

SLF has always had a good relationship with Vince Cable and he knows better than anyone that his emphasis on wealth redistribution is music to our ears.

This is actually an important ideological debate within the party at the moment. Under the leadership of Nick Clegg he placed his priority on increasing social mobility without the need to tackle income inequality. He was OK with the rich getting richer as long as in absolute terms the poor did not get poorer.

*“I suspect it is not that we are less internationalist in our outlook but that it has become much harder to calibrate what our response should be at a time of diminishing western power”*

Clegg liked to point out how it was in Sheffield that life expectancy declined the more you travelled into the poorer parts of the city. If he had read the Spirit Level he would know that far wider research had been done on this and the real driver for life expectancy – and other social indicators - was the level of inequality, which also usually increases in poorer areas.

Of course we all want greater social mobility. If he had read the Spirit

Level he would know that societies with greater social mobility are those that are more equal, but that gets ignored.

Unfortunately for some Liberals the argument is put as a defining issue; “Socialists believe in redistribution of wealth, Liberals believe in redistribution of opportunity” as though the two are mutually exclusive. And interestingly not much is actually said about “redistributing opportunity” almost as though it is a soft option.

My hope from now on is that the party can be more radical in tackling inequality of wealth and inequality of power after the setbacks in policy during the Coalition years.

I have a proposal for Elizabeth McWilliams. That she attends our AGM this summer and stands for the SLF council. Anyone coming into the SLF council asking questions about the direction of SLF is just the kind of person we need to make us think and reconsider what we are doing.

The date for the AGM is not fixed yet. However the next SLF conference is now scheduled for the 14 July in Resource for London, Holloway - the same venue as last year. I would like to ask Liberator readers to put that date in your diary and keep it clear so you can come. SLF are planning to publish a book soon on “Big Ideas” and the conference will be based on that.

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Geoff Payne is a SLF council member, writing in a personal capacity

# ALIVE AND KICKING

## Questions over Social Liberal Forum's future are out of place and it is launching a major publishing project, says Helen Flynn

An article in *Liberator* 387 asked if the Social Liberal Forum (SLF) had lost its way. I can reassure readers that it most certainly has not, and now is embarking on its most ambitious project ever.

But before that, a few words about the evolution and history of the SLF.

The SLF was formed before the Coalition came about in order to ensure that social liberalism was at the heart of Liberal Democrat policy making. At that time of the party's development, the Orange Bookers were holding sway and Nick Clegg was leader. The SLF gave a voice to those who were unhappy with aspects of Clegg's leadership, and, I suppose, was best described then as a faction of the party. During the Coalition years, we provided a strong counterpoint to prevailing views and ideas coming from the parliamentary team who were in Government, by publishing articles, blogs and pamphlets, and bringing motions to conference, that re-affirmed long-held liberal views on the NHS, economics and education, etc.

Of course, the media was easy to engage with at that time for the SLF, as there is nothing like a bit of - what appears to be - in-party fighting to whet the appetite of the press and provide newsworthy stories. Also the sense of alienation of party members around such issues as academisation, the Lansley reforms to the NHS and the bedroom tax, ensured there were lots of supporters for the SLF brand of liberalism.

A lot has happened since the Coalition, but we have had two leaders since Clegg who have been broadly sympathetic to the SLF cause, in Tim Farron and Vince Cable, and the party seems to be abandoning elements of neo-liberalism that were more common under Clegg's leadership, as it strives to reassert itself as a party of the centre-left in opposition to the Tories.

Since the Coalition, the SLF has had to think again about what our purpose is. But this has not been hard, as the politics of identity, the effects of globalisation, and the inward-facing politics in many major countries have created a general tide against liberalism, and especially social liberalism. So, is there a need for an organisation to stand up and promote the values of social liberalism at this time in our country? Absolutely.

Social liberalism has arguably never been more needed in the UK. Large parts of the country have been deprived of investment. Austerity is a policy that social liberals always instinctively opposed, and the prolonged period of austerity has meant that wages have stagnated and there is a crisis in the provision of public services. Ordinary people who are unable to fully benefit from the benefits of globalisation are suffering and are blaming the wrong things as the cause. This was one of the reasons why so many people voted for Brexit.

So what now for the SLF? We have noted that the Lib Dem party has struggled to be effective in bringing forward and promoting radical policy ideas that can catch media interest and thrust liberalism into the national spotlight again. As my colleague Gordon Lishman often says, we need to be "insurgent". It is not enough to tweak policy ideas that other parties are promoting. And the long and detailed policy papers that come out of the Federal Policy Committee are hardly going to pique the interest of the general public.

As a result, SLF has come up with a plan to bring forward radical policy ideas from progressives from all parties and none, and have been hard at work for months in realising this project. It has a working title of *Big Ideas in Brief*, and asks politicians and commentators to write articles of around 2,500 words where they can relay their own radical thinking about what we need to do to move British society and our economy forward.

In this publication, we are broadly looking at: industrial economics, welfare society, climate change and globalisation. But we hope that this will be the first in a series which will look at other policy areas using the same format and variety of contributors. The book will be published in time for the March Lib Dem conference and will be on sale there.

So talk of "losing our way" could hardly be more inaccurate. However, all this work takes capacity and resources - two things we are sorely lacking. So I appeal to you to help us. We are still looking for a new executive director, someone to handle membership, and general admin help. Please email me at [helen.flynn@socialliberal.net](mailto:helen.flynn@socialliberal.net) if you think you have the time and skills to help.

But most importantly, please join the SLF, or renew your membership. Membership is only £24 (£10 for concessions) per year. Our council elections are this summer and members are eligible to stand.

There really never has been a more important time for social liberalism.

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Helen Flynn is chair of the Social Liberal Forum

# OBITUARY: BILL PITT

## Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to the Alliance's first MP

Bill Pitt, who has died aged 80, was a popular and convivial Liberal party colleague. For a decade and more he was very much one of 'the club' of Liberals of like mind who campaigned together and socialised together. For a time he edited *Radical Bulletin*, then a separate internal party briefing journal. On occasions when it did not appear he always had an excuse, sometimes blaming problems with his local post office, but it was suspected that he had simply not prepared it! He joined the party in the 1960s after, rather curiously, a few years in Norwood Young Conservatives. He became a member of a number of party committees and was well known and liked - which stood him in good stead when it came to the Croydon North West by-election of October 1981.

Bill had fought the three previous general elections in Croydon North West, losing his deposit in the 1979 contest. He had, however, polled more respectably - 23.7% - in the May 1981 Greater London Council election in the identical seat.

Croydon North West was technically a marginal seat with the Labour party almost but never quite gaining it from the Conservatives. In normal circumstances the Liberals could not have envisaged winning it but the circumstances when the MP died in June 1981 were entirely different. The SDP had been launched three months earlier with great fanfares and an immediate public response. An alliance with the Liberal party was negotiated and when an unprepossessing by-election vacancy occurred in Warrington. Roy Jenkins bravely took it on for the SDP-Alliance and failed to win by under 2,000 votes.

Although the understanding was that the two parties should fight by-elections alternately when Croydon came up, Liberal leader David Steel, made public his wish that Shirley Williams should be the joint candidate. With Bill's electoral record he regarded him as a loser. As he records in his memoirs, Steel never had much time for the party, and rather than preparing the ground by persuading party officers of the good sense of the proposal, he simply tried to bounce the party.

Inevitably, the party responded by backing Bill. A party council meeting in Abingdon overwhelmingly affirmed its support for him and he was duly nominated. This internal defeat rankled permanently with Steel, but Williams and other SDP leaders loyally backed Bill and he won a remarkable victory, becoming the first Alliance MP elected as such. The point was well made at the time that if the Alliance could win a by-election in a Conservative-Labour marginal seat with a non-celebrity candidate it augured well for the future. It turned out to be Bill's fifteen minutes of fame and he lost the

seat in May 1983. He was somewhat complacent about holding the seat and he spent more time on parliamentary business than was conducive to local success.

There was an important sub-text to Bill and Croydon North West. Myself and a number of party colleagues were concerned to safeguard the future of the Liberal party against an over-weening dominance of the SDP within the Alliance, which was a real possibility at the time. I wrote a booklet on the philosophical challenge to Liberalism of a resurgent social democracy but the possibility of electoral eclipse was more immediate. An SDP victory in Croydon, following on the heels of Roy Jenkins' near miss in Warrington, would have created an SDP momentum of great danger to the party. Bill's victory was therefore of wider significance.

The postscript to the inauspicious attempt to replace Bill by Williams in Croydon occurred when the next vacancy occurred, in Crosby, Merseyside.

Steel records that Anthony Hill, the Liberal candidate in situ there, "graciously stood down." That is not the case. The news of the sitting MP's death became known when the SDP's rolling conference had arrived in Southport. I was standing in the conference bar talking to Hill while Shirley's voice addressing the conference came over the PA system announcing from the platform that she intended to fight the by-election. Anthony, a loyal Liberal of 20 years' standing, was simply pushed aside, but felt that it was futile to try to 'do a Croydon'.

Subsequently, Bill and his wife Janet moved to Kent and he fought Thanet South unsuccessfully at the 1987 and 1992 general elections. Thereafter he, rather perversely, joined the Labour party for whom he unsuccessfully fought local elections.

Bill was raised by his mother in Brixton Hill, south London, and attended Heath Clark grammar school, Croydon, and the London Nautical School before studying for a philosophy degree at North London Polytechnic. He worked first as a lighting engineer, then as a housing officer for Lambeth council, and finally as group training manager at the Canary Wharf group in east London. On his retirement from full-time employment in 2003 Bill got involved with a number of local voluntary organisations, particularly to do with music and photography. He also became a newsreader for the Academy FM Thanet local radio station and a mentor to newer recruits to the station's team.

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

# TOLERANCE - THE CHARACTER OF STRENUOUS LIBERTY

## Tolerance is a vital political virtue under threat from social media, says John Thurso

Growing intolerance, if we do not guard against it, becomes the Trojan Horse by which we unwittingly cede both freedom and liberty.

Tolerance remains the greatest bulwark against tyranny which is why I call it 'the characteristic of strenuous liberty'.

Let me draw on four university rectorial addresses. Lord Boothby spoke on tolerance in his 1959 rectorial address at St Andrews University. Another, given by my grandfather Sir Archibald Sinclair at Glasgow University on 1940 said: "The worst sign of decadence in a nation is indifference to freedom – the growth of the herd instinct, the unwillingness of men and women to think for themselves and to defend unpopular causes, the desire to find a man on whom to throw the responsibility for government which in a democratic country belongs to the individual citizen."

At the heart of modern liberal philosophy is the concept of liberty and its sister freedom. It is still perhaps best expressed in its simplest form by John Stuart Mill's definition: "The Liberty of each limited by the like liberty of all."

Liberal philosophy's main points are: the sovereignty of the individual, both rights and responsibilities; the protection of minorities; freedom to do, and therefore to achieve, coupled with freedom from adversity and negative consequence; equality of opportunity.

And it is possibly still best encapsulated in the proclamation by the founding fathers of the United States of the right of every individual citizen to "life liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

In defence of these ideas are a range of values, such as courage, acceptance of others, humour, and tolerance of all except intolerance.

I came to know Charles Kennedy well when we represented neighbouring constituencies. He had great courage. The most obvious example was his leadership over Iraq. Pretty much everyone now agrees with what he said. At the time, and sitting behind him on the green benches I well remember the taunts at PMQs. As Charles stood, there would be a barrage of comment accusing him of being a traitor and a coward and much else.

Both of Charles's rectorial addresses are well worth reading and you will find in them and his analysis of politics at that time the characteristics and philosophy I am discussing.

The four addresses were given with different tones at different times but the values and philosophy underlying them are remarkably consistent.

All four assert the importance of education, recognising that ignorance fosters intolerance and

knowledge and education fosters tolerance and ideas.

They all assert the value of compassion and understanding, bringing with it the need to enable everyone to fulfil the potential which is their birth right.

They all stress the need for each individual to assume their rights and just as importantly their responsibilities in helping to create a better future than the past they inherited.

They address fundamentally different circumstances, but it is the very consistency of the ideas, all looking to the central values of western liberal democracy, which attracts me to their thoughts.

Do not for a moment confuse tolerance with permissiveness. Tolerance is a far more active value than simply not being bothered by what others do. It demands an understanding of what others believe and do to create an active desire to tolerate their views and beliefs thus ensuring plurality of thought in the great market of Ideas.

It is perhaps most obviously exemplified in the defence of freedom of speech where it remains a bulwark against the inevitable desire, particularly of those in power be it nationally or big companies, to shut down debate to exert ever greater control to deliver whatever they perceive desirable.

We see it today in the struggle between those charged with security who want ever wider powers to conduct surveillance, as against those who assert the rights of the individual to privacy from the state since the state will always try to use all its powers for all its ends and therefore the powers must be limited.

The critical point is to be vigilant that power granted for a specific purpose does not become abused by general use, such as when security surveillance legislation is used for parking offences.

It is tolerance that both oils the debate and leads to reasonable conclusions. Yet there must also be boundaries beyond which tolerance does not go. We cannot tolerate intolerance nor harm. Indeed we are back to Mill and the limit of the like liberty of all. So where tolerance helps us forbear the ideas of others and celebrate the diversity of human life, the boundary is indeed that which threatens tolerance itself – intolerance. But not simply intolerance alone but where intolerance begets harm; the distinction is important.

Tolerance therefore is essential as it tills the intellectual soil which permits the seeds of new ideas and thoughts to germinate and flourish; that in turn feeds the great market place of ideas which has done so much to improve the human condition.

Tolerance therefore is most certainly not passive, nor



merely permissive. What then are its values? Boothby listed four characteristics being: courage, compassion, comprehension and humour.

It was courage that Sinclair showed in speaking out against appeasement and putting the argument in 1940 that fascism had to be defeated by war and convincing a party that was more instinctively anti-war that it was the time to fight for liberal democracy.

It was courage that Charles showed when he defied the received wisdom that the duty of oppositions in war is to loyally support the government and instead to make himself the focal point of opposition. And it is the courage we see again and again from men and women of principle who stand against control and intolerance and for freedom of speech and expression.

Compassion too is an active value. It demands first an understanding of the needs of others less well off. Indeed an understanding that the less well-off have needs. And then a desire to act to effect change to give others a chance. But it is also about understanding the views and values of other thoughts and beliefs with compassion to value them and their part in a plural society.

Comprehension is obvious, to seek to understand other points of view. Not necessarily to agree with them but to understand them so as to engage constructively with them. It further underlines the importance of education. Education brings knowledge and a comprehension of different understandings which in turn leads to discourse and mutual tolerance.

Humour is in many ways self-evident. Charles was a past master at gentle self-deprecating humour and could often use it to make a point that struck home more surely than many hard crafted arguments. It gives us all a sense of proportion and shines a light on humanity.

To grasp the importance of tolerance one must also look at the reverse – Intolerance, and what it does. Any study of history shows that the world is in constant flux. Ideas are always changing. Threats appear in one century only to subside in another and be overtaken by a previously unforeseen danger or dilemma.

Intolerance suppresses thought, discourages discourse, and demands allegiance to the status quo usually to the benefit of a static and rigid regime. It is the clearest hallmark of dictatorships and undemocratic regimes throughout the world and history.

Worst of all to my mind is the intolerance of the majority, however small, for minorities however large. That is the intolerance of populism, which, when enflamed by the skilled demagogue leads to disaster.

I have studiously avoided reference to today's politics because I wanted to concentrate on the timeless values rather more than a particular problem.

However there is one area of danger on which we all need to reflect. Because I do believe we are in a period when intolerance is on the rise and we ignore it at our peril.

And that is the way in which our communication of knowledge, and therefore understanding, is being undermined by new technologies and the internet. This is not to criticise the internet. It is just a technology. But how it is used contains immense threats to tolerance and liberty.

Social media programmes are designed to be addictive. Sean Parker one of the founders of Facebook

has admitted that Facebook was deliberately designed through its programming to be addictive. He called it a social-validation feedback loop which gave a little 'dopamine hit' to encourage continued use.

From Google on down all internet operators mine data, in their words, to better serve your desires by personalising the ads you receive. The amount and scale of big data is truly mind boggling and the ability for it to be corrupted by hackers is quite frightening. And that is before you begin to think about what happens if the state gets to use it.

All social media and search engines use algorithms to work out what you like and to prioritise the content put before you according to those likes. This deliberately acts to reinforce your prejudices.

Taken together this means that those who rely on internet media for news will be receiving to a considerable extent news which has been preselected to meet their recorded likes. Furthermore in their own social networks they will be fed, deliberately, those things that give the dopamine hit. Dissenting views are blocked. The inevitable result is that communications on social media winnow out the voices of difference, and news feeds will prioritise known prejudices.

The result is that we are being driven into ghettos of mutual intolerance where we talk only to the like minded and blocked off from the wider discourse. This unwitting intolerance is only now starting to be observed and represents a severe challenge to tolerance.

We only have to look at how politics have shifted over the last decade, coinciding with the rise of social media to begin to understand the consequence. Evidence is emerging that 'fake news' has been weaponised and is being delivered via bogus social media accounts. However it is only because of the construction of those sites, using likes to receive likes, that it can have an impact.

Of course the internet cannot be uninvented, nor should it be, and recognition must be given to the immense power it confers on individuals in many areas. But we are only just beginning to understand that with those benefits comes an equal capacity for evil. The challenge of the 21st century may well be how we preserve the flow of knowledge and discourse that allows tolerance to be at the heart of our liberty. This may entail regulation, or the break up of the giant global internet companies - as big a threat in the 21st century as the oil, steel, and railroad giants were in the early 20th century.

We have been here before over the centuries and liberal democracy has continued to win through and gain ground, because ultimately it is ideas and discourse that bring peoples together.

There is a growing mood of intolerance in many areas and it is indeed the Trojan horse by which we could unwittingly cede our freedom and our liberty. But tolerance offers the best antidote. Through the power of tolerance and discourse we will ensure we maintain our freedoms and that is why I believe that of all the liberal values tolerance ranks highest and is truly the character of strenuous liberty.

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John Thurso is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords and was MP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross 2001-15. This article is abridged from his Charles Kennedy Memorial Lecture

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## INJUSTICE UNRESOLVED

*Dear Liberator,*

National party officials are still doggedly hiding behind dubious clauses in the party constitution to avoid confronting the injustice done to David Ward, long term Liberal and Liberal Democrat Bradford councillor and former MP for Bradford East. They are hoping that David will quietly go away. He won't!

The underlying background to this case is the suggestion that he is somehow anti-Semitic though it is now formally acknowledged by party officers that this is in no way true.

In 2013, while an MP, he was on a delegation to Gaza and, in the course of commenting on the appalling conditions there, he criticised the government of Israel. Some prominent Liberal Democrats objected to the language of his comments and he was temporarily suspended from the parliamentary party.

In October 2016 David was re-adopted to fight Bradford East and his suitability was challenged by the Jewish News. The then party leader, Tim Farron stated that his suspension had been lifted and he had the right to be re-adopted. It follows that anything leading to his sacking as candidate must have occurred after that date. No evidence at all has been produced to explain his subsequent sacking. Indeed the then chief whip, Tom Brake, telephoned David to congratulate him on his re-adoption and to wish him well.

Then out of the blue, at 10.11 on 26 April last year the Jewish News carried a story of objections to David's candidature in highly objectionable language. The story carried a quotation: "Lib Dem peer Lord Palmer of Childs Hill said that he was 'disappointed' that Ward was standing and was still hoping to persuade the party leadership to drop him from the 2017 candidate list .... 'I have - and am - pressing the party leadership to see that he is not a Lib Dem candidate.'"

At 12.15 on the same day, during prime minister's questions, Sir Eric Pickles, a former chair of Conservative Friends of Israel, raised the question of Ward's candidature alleging that he had been criticised for "anti-Semitic

# LETTERS



utterances." At 14.15 that same afternoon David received a formal scanned letter from Tim Farron as Leader removing him as candidate for Bradford East. Just four hours from the allegations in Jewish News to sacking. Hardly a coincidence.

He was informed that because his sacking was under special rules relating to the election period there was no provision for appeal. Party colleagues should reflect on the fact that the party leader and national party officers can remove any candidate on the eve of, or during, an election without any redress.

Following his sacking, David said that if the party put up a local candidate he would not stand but if it parachuted a candidate in then he would stand. In the end paid party officials scuttled round the constituency to fill in nomination papers for a former councillor from Preston.

David duly stood. He polled 7.8% and the "official" candidate polled 1.8%. David's party membership was suspended and he understands that by opposing an official candidate, suspension of membership automatically follows. He has never sought to appeal that suspension but only his sacking as a candidate.

David is not some paper candidate or recent recruit. He joined the Liberal party some 35 years ago and was elected to the Bradford council in 1984 and remained a councillor until he was elected to parliament in 2010.

After losing his seat in 2015 he was re-elected to the council in 2016. In all he has been a Liberal and Liberal Democrat councillor for 27 years and has fought six parliamentary elections in the city. He is a thorough Liberal and there isn't an anti-Semitic bone in his body. Those who accuse him deliberately conflate his forthright criticism of the Israeli government for its treatment of the Palestinians with anti-Semitism. It is an increasingly common tactic.

The criticism of the party cannot be set aside by relying on clauses in the constitution not designed for

the purpose used, because a grave injustice has been done to a loyal party colleague.

He has been subjected to actions that are wholly unworthy of a party containing the name Liberal.

Baroness Sal Brinton supinely refuses to act, quoting constitutional niceties when, as party president, she should be seeing why David has been treated so appallingly. She, and other officers, are frightened that the action last April will be shown to be unjustified. It is paradoxical that actions that the party would condemn if taken by an authoritarian regime against one of its citizens, have been taken by the party.

The repercussions on the local party and on its leading members have been intolerable. It is high time that the party took action to investigate the actions of April 2017 and to redress the injustice done to David Ward.

Michael Meadowcroft  
Leeds

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## WEST SIDE STORY

*Dear Liberator,*

Reading Liberator 387 is a sobering, if not downright depressing, undertaking. The various prescriptive articles setting out the path to restoring the relevance of the party shy away from stating the obvious precondition - a public show of contrition for continuing with the coalition long after the need to stabilise the economy had passed. This massive misjudgement, whether for reasons of folie de grandeur, political innocence or personal ambition, shifted public perception of the Liberal Democrats from being a positive, enlightened and moderately left of centre party into, rightly or wrongly, a quasi Tory party.

The last few years here in the West Country and of course elsewhere, have been politically disastrous. To lose every seat except Bath in what, historically, has been our strongest region, has set the party back to the period before Paddy Ashdown led the

breakthrough in 1983 - over 30 years ago.

To rebuild the party in this region requires the recruitment to activism of a large contingent of new members prepared to work hard for many years on the basis of a distinctive and unambiguous radical set of policies. To state the obvious, there is no quick fix.

The other basic requirement of a revival is the sidelining of the neoliberal faction so dominant in the coalition. Is Vince prepared for this? Your reviewer's critique of David Law's Coalition Diaries describes, graphically, just how illiberal is this prominent architect of the coalition.

I never initiate political discussions with friends and neighbours but because of my previous employment others do so, especially if they have been Lib Dem supporters. It is clear they are now in a quandary as to which party to support. One thing is certain - they won't vote Tory.

Les Farris

Western Counties Region area agent  
and press officer, 1984-2002.  
South Petherton

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## WILBERFORCE RECORD

*Dear Liberator*

If the historical references in Michael Meadowcroft's article An unnecessary impediment (Liberator 387) are anything to go by then his advice is flawed.

William Wilberforce was a Tory and was not responsible for the abolition of slavery, something that has yet to be achieved. Wilberforce was instrumental in the outlawing of the slave trade, unlike Clarkson who realised that slavery would only be abolished in stages through salami tactics, Wilberforce opposed manumission. Wilberforce's less well known achievement was the Combination Acts through an amendment to a motion that sought to curb the power of Spitalfields weavers which was hardly a transformation of social conditions for the better. He also unsuccessfully attempted to foist Christianity on India but was blocked by the East India Company.

Andrew Hudson  
Ulveston

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## MAN IN WELLIES

*Dear Liberator,*

Our neighbour, former Guardian editor Peter Preston, who sadly died early in January aged 79 after a brave fight against cancer, once told me – knowing me as a local Lib Dem -- about one of his first jobs in journalism.

Soon after joining the [Manchester] Guardian in 1963, he was assigned to follow Jo Grimond during the general election. This involved, then as now, covering the leader's press conferences, meetings and travelling round the country.

One trip by small plane involved visiting a rural constituency some way out west. Grimond was taken off to a private meeting and Preston was left for a couple of hours in the care of a somewhat verbally-limited Liberal in wellies who spent much of the time grunting noisily to himself.

Fair enough, thought the future editor. It gave him time to write his copy. But when the election was over Peter was amazed to see that his non-communitive companion had actually been elected to Parliament.

Remembering we were both in the same trade, albeit at different ends of the hierarchy, he was reluctant to name the strangely silent new representative of farming folk.

Peter went on to become a great editor of a paper of remarkable editors, championing and supporting many of the great causes that unite all true liberals – and courageously exposing those who threaten our shared values. And he was a highly likeable head of the lovely family we are fortunate to live opposite.

Jonathan Hunt  
Southwark

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## LIBERATOR FACEBOOK GROUP

***We have made some changes to the Liberator Facebook group, caused mainly by the administrators being tired of having to deal with abusive postings and numerous complaints about the rude and aggressive tone of all too many comments.***

***From 1 January, the group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/6806343091/> has become for Liberator subscribers only. Anyone who wants to check the status of their subscription can do by emailing: [liberatorsubs@hotmail.com](mailto:liberatorsubs@hotmail.com)***

***We hope this will encourage group members to use it as a forum for political debates and not have it clogged up with the unpleasant drivel that has appeared in the past.***

***Our other group: <https://www.facebook.com/LiberatorMagazine/> is open to anyone and will carry news from and about Liberator. It takes postings and comments only from administrators.***

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**Joseph Chamberlain,  
international  
statesman, national  
leader, local icon  
Ian Cawood and Chris  
Upton [eds]  
Palgrave MacMillan,  
2016**

Liberals tend to love or loath Joseph Chamberlain. On the one hand there is the radical, champion of municipal enterprise, on the other, the deserter into Tory ranks, wrecker of perhaps the last real chance to save Ireland within the union. I cast my mind back a long way to A level history; one of the questions put was 'why did the champion of radicalism, choose the Colonial Office in Salisbury's Cabinet?' This seemed some kind of cop out compared with what he might have achieved elsewhere. Radicals within the Liberal party and the Liberal Unionists could still coalesce over common issues in days when party disciplines were less fixed, but imperialism was the order of the day, and something where Chamberlain had more in common with most Tories (though why not with Rosebery or the LImps?)

This collection of essays, which stems from the Joseph Chamberlain Centenary Conference of 2014, in Newman College, Birmingham (in which the Liberal Democrat History Group was a major participants), answers some of the questions that arise there.

Chamberlain was of a generation with a more direct understanding of empire, along with Dilke, Rosebery, Curzon and Salisbury. TG Otte's contribution particularly underscores that, whilst Jackie Grobler (also emphasising the man as a meddler of ill-intent in South Africa) and Tom Brooking (New Zealand and the development of what would become Commonwealth) give depth to that understanding.

Moving through national and Birmingham politics, contributors frequently contrast Chamberlain with an ally and friend who became an opponent. This tells us something, somewhere along the line it is noted that political



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careers frequently end in failure, not necessarily because one is ahead of one's time, but one is out of step with one's colleagues. Chamberlain (and interestingly, his sons) failed to recognise this. To this end, whilst destroying Gladstone's government, he invariably paved the way for Campbell Bannerman's.

I am not a Chamberlain fan, but this collection greatly contributes to our understanding of one of history's might-have-beens – tremendous focus, but in the end too much focus and not enough flexibility. This is not a comprehensive biography of Chamberlain, but covers much of the basic ground while throwing light not only on less explored aspects of his career but late 19th century politics in general.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Forty Shades of Blue Factionalism and Divisions in the Post-war British Conservative Party from Churchill to Cameron by Vincent McKee Takahe Publishing 2017 £13.95, £6.95 for Kindle**

This is an overview of the Conservative Party and how it has changed over the years. Despite the title there aren't any juicy titbits of how factions were formed and plotted but it is a helpful reminder of what actually happened.

We tend to forget now that from the end of the war until Ted Heath was replaced by Margaret Thatcher the Conservative Party was 'moderate'. The leaders generally accepted what was called the Butskelite consensus. There was a wide measure of agreement between Conservatives and Labour that the state should take some

responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. There was also an acceptance that nationalisation of some large service providers was desirable.

The main figure for the Conservatives was Rab Butler who would now be regarded as a left-wing Conservative and the Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, who would be regarded as a Labour right-winger.

In my view the effect of the war was to accept that people facing bombs and accepting rationing felt they were all in it together. If you were in the forces and were injured or killed it happened to you regardless of your class. There was therefore an understanding of mutual dependence.

It's interesting to be reminded that Enoch Powell started off on the progressive wing of his party and would have regarded himself as a one nation Conservative. McKee argues that the rise of Margaret Thatcher was not as inevitable as it seems. What was obvious was that the right wing of the Conservative Party was much more active in promoting ideas and campaigning for them whereas the 'progressives' didn't appear to have much to say other than carry on as normal.

In many ways the Brexit campaign mirrors this type of division, with the moderate wing of the Conservative Party being complacent with no new ideas whereas the right wing was very active and appeared to be promoting solutions.

Then as now immigration was a big issue. Although he did not try to organise any faction or take any internal position, Powell did have a significant influence in bolstering the right wing.

The book also reminds the reader how unpleasant were many of the various individuals and organisations which promoted or sustained the commitment to Thatcherism. McKee reminds us

of the viciousness of the right wing attacks on John Major. During this period it was Portillo who played a similar divisive role to that played by Enoch Powell.

It is, despite its title, quite readable for those who remember a significant section of this period. I suspect it will be more difficult if you haven't got that recollection and for whom the name alone of individuals or organisations will not mean much.

Rob Whewey

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## **Britain and the Arab Middle East** **by Robert H Lieshout** **IB Tauris, 2016 £29.95**

Britain's war against the Ottoman Empire, following the Turks' decision to side with Germany in the First World War, was considered a sideshow by many generals and politicians in London, who believed that the Western Front was the real battlefield. Yet British intervention in the Middle East, partly in harmony with Arab forces keen to liberate themselves from the Ottoman yoke, was to have resounding consequences that are still being felt today.

Lieshout's weighty study of the subject, essentially covering the years 1914-19, examines the voluminous public records covering the period, notably of the War Cabinet and Foreign Office, supplemented by diaries, presenting material in such detail that one almost believes one is present.

There were wrangles aplenty about just how much encouragement the British Government should give Sherif Hussein of Mecca regarding the putative independent Arab Kingdom that was meant to come into being after peace was agreed, but there is little doubt that he and his sons were largely duped.

Despite the Entente, France comes over very badly most of the time, and whereas by 1918 the Lloyd George government believed that the infamous Sykes-Picot Agreement carving up spheres of influence in the non-Turkish parts of the Ottoman Empire could not stand in its original form - because of the Wilsonian doctrine of self-determination, -Paris dug its heels in, determined that France should

have its Syrian and Lebanese cake and eat it.

Another issue that gave rise to huge disagreements within the British government was the Balfour Declaration, whose centenary was commemorated last year. The only Jewish member of the cabinet, Edwin Montagu, was strongly opposed to the Zionists' pleas as he believed the Arab population of Palestine would not agree to Jewish domination there and moreover that Jews elsewhere might suffer further persecution in their home countries if a Jewish state were proclaimed.

Some of the most valuable parts of Lieshout's book cover these sometimes heated discussions and the personalities involved. Largely, he lets the documents speak for themselves, keeping critical commentary and theorising to a minimum, which allows the reader to make up their own mind.

Presumably for marketing purposes, the book uses a fetching photograph of TE Lawrence in Arab garb on the cover, though he was in reality quite a marginal figure, despite the publicity that his romantic derring-do later generated. The index will be of use to serious scholars of the period, as well as to amateur historians of the Middle East, as this well-documented narrative is a valuable resource.

Jonathan Fryer

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## **Fractured Lands How the Arab World Came Apart** **by Scott Anderson** **Picador £7.99**

In August 2016 the New York Times devoted its entire magazine to a story by veteran Middle East war correspondent Scott Anderson and photographer Paolo Pellegrin. Much of the magazine story has now been printed as a book whose premise is to describe how the Arab world came apart. Jake Silverstein, the editor in chief of the New York Times describes this as one of the "most clear-eyed, powerful and human explanations of what has gone wrong in this region that you will ever read".

One wishes it were so, but it is not. Aside from questioning the premise of the title, this book does not offer an explanation or strategic

insight into how the Arab world came apart. But that should not be allowed to undermine the power of the book's storytelling, which offers a snapshot of a crisis within parts of the Arab world.

What the book does brilliantly and makes it such a compelling read is to tell the stories and give a voice to people who were caught in the events in the Arab Spring, invasion of Iraq and ISIS. Leila is a veteran activist whose husband and adult children are jailed for breaching Egyptian protest laws, Majdi a Libyan air force cadet who was asked to spy, Majd a Syrian student from Homs, Khulood an Iraqi activist for women's rights, Wakaz an Iraqi labourer turned ISIS fighter who faces the death penalty in an Iraqi jail and Azar a doctor and Peshmerga fighter in Kurdistan. The telling of the stories does provide a level of narrative which is enough to set the scene and allow each individual to speak.

What unites the stories and transforms this into a stunning piece of reportage is not just the time and place in the characters they find themselves, but the choices that they have to make and those that are made for them; the influence and competing loyalties of family and tribe, identity, the nature of change in the Arab world and the need to negotiate the constant shifting sand of politics and religion. Since the stories were written, two have gained refugee status in Europe, one is probably dead and the others remain or have returned to their homelands.

Regretfully Anderson notes in his epilogue that in every place he and Pellegrin went, the situation is worse now than when he went there. He closes by writing that the journey has served to remind him of how terribly delicate is the fabric of civilisation, of the vigilance required to protect it and of the slow and painstaking work of mending it once it has been torn and notes that this is hardly an original thought. Although that makes it none the less true; in the Middle East it is all the more difficult for a lack of meaningful models of good or effective governance and some deeply unhelpful instances of western intervention.

The complete article can be found at [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com) and the [pulitzercentre.org](http://pulitzercentre.org) which has

education resources based on the article.

Susan Simmonds

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## **Review of Death of Stalin (film Armando Iannucci. (dir) 2017.**

The film covers the final days of Stalin and the chaos which followed. It gives an excellent portrayal of the pervasive atmosphere of suspicion which reigned at the court of Stalin when any loose or misjudged joke could land you in the gulag, and the total panic which emerges the minute the strong man dies.

As soon as Stalin's body is discovered a power struggle between the different fractions of the Central Committee – one group led by NKVD head, Lavrenti Beria (cunningly played by Simon Beale Russell) and the other by Nikita Khrushchev (played by Steve Busceni) – who is already showing his anti-Stalin stance - starts to play out.

We know how it ended up but this chaotic conspiracy could easily have gone the other way with major implications for both Russia and the world. It is also fascinating to see how Stalin's dysfunctional family – daughter Sveltana (Andrea Riseborough) and son Vasily (Rupert Friend) are played into the conspiracy. When Sveltana begs for news of her former lover sentenced to the gulag for daring to love Stalin's daughter it really brings home her father's unfeeling brutality.

The film is billed as a dark satire and there are certainly very funny elements in it. Michael Palin is particularly good as Vyacheslav Molotov who shows an almost touching loyalty to Stalin who had not only imprisoned his wife but had also added Molotov himself to his enemy list just before he died. But for me it did not quite work – being neither really funny nor sufficiently dramatic. Director Armando Iannucci was trying to cover a particularly challenging political situation and be satirical. It may be that what works for a short TV programme (like *The Thick of It*) but is not quite right for a two hour film. I have read that Iannucci said that he “chose to tone down real-life absurdity” to make

the work more believable. Perhaps he should have told the story as it was and let it speak for itself.

Margaret Lally

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## **Interesting Times by Peter Brookes The Robson Press 2017 £20.00**

Two years ago Peter Brookes was mourning the passing of Cameron and Clegg, Miliband and Balls; who would have believed that a cartoonist's salvation would come in the form of the fright wigs of Boris and Trump? Dark days, hence the old Confucian curse; but they have produced some magnificent cartoons.

One of Brookes' strengths is in his recycling the great cartoons of the past – Cameron greets Corbyn in the form of David Low's legendary riposte to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Trump meeting Putin over the corpse of Syria is even more powerful.

Will any of Brookes' cartoons join this canon? I increasingly think they will and 'Yonder Star Over Aleppo' could be the candidate. Despite the tragic content, prepare to wet yourself laughing.

The original cartoons can be bought from Chris Beetles Gallery incidentally, mostly for the same £1,450 of 2015. George Osborne has reputedly snapped up many of those featuring himself; I wonder why. The exhibition that accompanied the book launch is over, but for all the great cartoons that didn't make it into the book.

It is worth checking it out at <http://www.chrisbeetles.com/exhibitions/testing-timespeter-brookes.html>

Stewart Rayment

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## **Miss Muriel Matters, the fearless suffragist who fought for equality by Robert Wainwright Allen & Unwin 2017 £18.99**

Unlike the chaps, superheroines typically do not have alliterative secret identities – Sue Storm (*Invisible Woman*, *Fantastic Four* is the main exception that comes to mind), however it is hardly surprising that Muriel Matters was going somewhere and would be far

from invisible.

She came all the way from Australia to chain herself to the iron grille in the Ladies' Gallery above the House of Commons chamber. 'Squithy wasn't amused. Matters would, however, be a suffragist rather than a suffragette and her biography gives a good airing to the divisions within the movement (and indeed the Pankhurst family) as well as those within Parliament.

With brief intentions of entering Parliament herself, Matters would contest Hastings for Labour unsuccessfully in 1924, though May Gordon was the first woman candidate, as a Liberal in 1923. The current home secretary, Amber Rudd, would become the constituency's first woman MP in 2010, just over a century after Muriel Matters had told the Commons that it was “time that the women of England were given a voice in legislation which affects them as much as it affects men. We demand the vote”. Still a long way to go...

Wainwright tells the story well, and goes some way to correcting the simplistic suffragettes versus male chauvinist establishment (embodied not least by prime minister Asquith). Women's contribution to the war effort would even change his mind, bringing Asquith into line with probably the majority of his party.

Stewart Rayment

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## **Clapton - Life in 12 Bars (film) Lili Fini Zanuck (dir) 2017**

This is a brutally honest biography of one of our best known guitar players - Eric Clapton – is well worth seeing even if you already know his back story. The quality of direction is extraordinarily good and it provides a vivid portrayal of life in the 1950-60s and the development of pop culture. Very effective use is made of contemporary footage brought to life with interviews with Clapton, his family and friends.

The film draws out how much Clapton's attachment to music and difficulty in maintaining close relationships was generated by his dysfunctional family background, as well as his constant search for

purity of sound which led him to constantly change bands.

It provides a historical perspective on the capture of the blues in the late 50s by white musicians, such as Clapton, who had the humility and sense to respect the playing of black musicians such as Muddy Waters. Arguably in doing so they helped promote the work of those musicians bringing the blues sound to new audiences while developing blues rock.

The film does not shy away from portraying how Clapton turned to drugs and alcohol and the devastating effect that had on him - even leading him to lash out against those black artists he has championed.

To his credit even when he was at his lowest, Clapton recognised the unacceptability of his statements and sought forgiveness. The development of his attachment to Patti Boyd – then wife of his friend George Harrison – is very powerfully described by both Clapton and Boyd. Music finally helped him turn his life around after the tragic death of his young son leading him to compose one of his best known pieces Tears in Heaven. Today the former addict is a gently spoken family man supporting addiction projects in Antigua, of course, still strumming his guitar. As one of his best friends said in the film – no one pushed Clapton down into the depths and nobody, but himself, pulled himself out of those depths. It is a remarkable story.

Margaret Lally

## The Shining Cord of Sheila Kaye-Smith by Shaun Cooper Country Books 2017 £12.50

Many people have observed the magical or mystical qualities of Sussex. The proximity to the sea, the tones of the underlying rocks all contribute in the light of sun or moon to make it shine.

This is reflected in the writing

of Sheila Kaye-Smith, who was born in St Leonard's in 1889 and whose stories are primarily set in the eastern end of the county and its Kentish borders. Perhaps an unlikely convert to Roman Catholicism, coming from a non-conforming family, and a county which gleefully sings "A penneth of rope to hang the Pope" at its multitude of Bonfire celebrations. She was seduced at a young age by



Christ Church, St. Leonard's; at the cusp of the twentieth century, Anglo-Catholic and higher than Rome.

Although religion features in her earlier books – The Tramping Methodist; Spell Land, where Anglicanism wrestles with Swedenborg, it made a quantum jump after the First World War. Reviewers of Tamarisk Town, her Hastings novel, noted this stylistic change half way through the book. She married a curate, Penrose Fry, in 1929; the author of a book on Anglo-Catholicism. Together they would convert to Rome, and eventually move to Northiam, where they would build the church St. Theresa of Lisieux in the village.

In many respects, the high point of her writing was just before this, The Sussex Gorse, The Fall of the House of Alard, Joanna Godden. Close observation of the countryside, farming and the tangled lives of its people in an age before mass communication. She regrets the encroachment of the town on the countryside, the

emigration from London and the loss of the Sussex dialect.

Writing in this style before she had read or met Hardy (he warned her to stay out of Wessex), the comparison is fair – such miserable lives. Misery was not however, the life of Sheila Kaye-Smith, though losses of father and sisters affected her writing. Her characters would be parodied in Stella Gibbons' Cold Comfort Farm, with all of its urban sophistication – not a country book; was the 'something nasty in the woodshed' that haunted Ada Doom encountered by Claude Shepherd on the opening pages of Spell Land?

Cooper makes no mention of Kaye-Smith's politics, beyond a general feminist context (some of her associates were prominent suffragists). Tamarisk Town is something of a local government novel, roughly contemporary with the great South Riding, but set, ostensibly in the 1850s, it has more in common with Jane Austen's unfinished Sanditon.

The chief protagonist, Monypenny, is a Liberal and promotes the 'improvement' of his town. He is also a cad.

Shaun Cooper has done her justice in his biography, with enough of, or on, her writing to tempt you to read more. Some of her books go in and out of print and titles are not uncommon in older second-hand bookshops. Shaun also provides us with some 'Easter Eggs'... I'm sworn to secrecy on these, but will liken them to the extras which you sometimes get on a DVD of a film, and they more than justify their inclusion.

Stewart Rayment

It has been a hard winter in Rutland, but we have not allowed that to interfere with our preparations for the visit of President Trump. To a man and, indeed, a woman, we are determined to give him a fitting reception. Mooning practice has taken place on the village green every Monday and Thursday since Michaelmas and the charabancs to London have long been booked. So great has been the enthusiasm for marking his visit hereabouts that I am exploring the possibility of running a special train from Bonkers Halt, via the rather rusty junction north of Market Harborough, to St Pancras, but the absurd franchising system on the railways does not encourage this sort of individual enterprise.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

leader of the Ukip Party has resigned. Not only that, a Sinn Fein MP has been appointed Her Majesty's Crown Steward and Bailiff of the three Chiltern Hundreds of Stoke, Desborough and Burnham. I hope Her Majesty knows what she is doing. And then someone rushes in to tell me the carillon at Loughborough has collapsed, but when I make enquiries in London by telephone it turns out to be a dubious company with a similar name.

After all that I need a lunchtime stiffener at the Bonkers' Arms. Eschewing the gassy Dahrendorf lager I enjoy a pint or two of Smithson & Greaves' Northern Bitter. The landlord tells me he is bringing in a new menu featuring strasburgers and the like. "Not really My Sort of Thing," I tell him, "but encourage the young people by all means. They, after all, did not vote for this ridiculous 'Brexit'."

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One of the great occasions of the year here on the Bonkers Hall Estate is Christmas Eve. Dressed in a red suit, I visit the cottages of my tenants and hand over hampers of fine things to eat and drink: a goose from the Home Farm; pies and puddings from the kitchens at the Hall; a bottle of Meadowcroft's parsnip wine (which would make anyone merry). I am always accompanied by a flock of Well-Behaved Orphans dressed as elves (adds to the festive effect, don't you think?), but this year I took the precaution of adding a brace of gamekeepers armed with orchard doughties to the company.

Because one of the traditions of these hampers is that every tenant receives precisely seven Brussels sprouts. Yet a few days before Christmas there went out a decree from the Conservative-run Leicestershire County Council's Sprout Compliance Unit saying no one should eat more than six of the things. I wasn't having that – hence the extra muscle on hand on Christmas Eve. Perhaps because we had also doubled the guard on the border, I am able to report that Leicestershire's hated Sprout Police made no attempt to enter Rutland during the festive season, so a merry Christmas was enjoyed by all.

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There is nothing the people of London enjoy more than a good Cabinet reshuffle. From early morning the crowds gather to see the fun: flower girls, costermongers (whatever they are) and scruffy urchins all assemble at the gates of Downing Street (in my young day you could walk into Number 10 and demand pot of tea, but times change and not for the better) to observe the comings and goings. If a particularly juicy reshuffle is expected then temporary grandstands may be erected and, depending on the season, sellers of ice cream or hot roast chestnuts do a roaring trade.

I joined the throng this morning. How we laughed when we heard Grayling had been made Chairman of the Conservative Party! Then we laughed because it was announced when he had not been. The strange Gavin Williamson was pelted with sharpened carrots and Jeremy Hunt was roundly booed. I did not spot Boris Johnson today, but I remain convinced that his career will end with his being running down Whitehall in polka-dot boxer shorts pursued by an angry mob.

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The morning news informs me that the Manchester Guardian has shrunk and the mistress of the

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I have never been one for God-bothering: I rather take the view that the old boy does not need my advice. I have even been known to turn Radio Rutland off when the Revd Hughes comes on to do his 'Thought for the Day'; I can, after all, hear him giving it both barrels in St Asquith's every Sunday. So it is that I have always advised Farron to stay clear of religion when he speaks. He, however, never takes a blind bit of notice. Not only that, he is obsessed with what chaps get up to together. As I once told him, "If you had been through public school and the Army like me, and campaigned in as many rural by-elections as I have, you would be unshockable." He doesn't take any notice of that either.

All this is by way of saying that I did not listen to Farron's interview on Radio Jesus, or whatever it calls itself, and I would advise you not to listen to it either. Come to that, I would advise Farron not to listen to himself. Otherwise I fear he will go on a mission for the Society for the Suppression of Vice Amongst the Uzbeks, or some such body, and never be heard of again.

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I should have known a man with that hairstyle would turn out to be untrustworthy. This morning I learn that Trump has cancelled his visit on a perfectly bogus pretext. My old friend Obama could not have sold the US embassy in Grosvenor Square if he had wanted to, for the very good reason that the Americans never owned it in the first place. It remains firmly in the hands of the Duke of Westminster.

As my regular readers will know, I am not a vengeful man, but I am forced to conclude that Trump has Gone Too Far and Something Must Be Done. So I am urging my American friends to arrange a Presidential visit to Dallas, the home of the fearsome Texas Schoolbook Suppository. It did for poor Jack Kennedy and I have no doubt that it would do for Trump too.

And the mooning? I suggest we save that until the Duke of Rutland is asked to open a village fete that I had rather had my eye on myself.

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