

liberator



- 🌟 Home Office, a hostile environment for some - Norman Baker
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- 🌟 Talking trash in Freetown - Rebecca Tinsley

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**Cover illustration: Christy Lawrance and Mark Smulian
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COMMENTARY

OWED TO SO FEW

The local elections produced the first good news for the Liberal Democrats in a long time - the small increase in seats at last year's general election notwithstanding.

Taking control in Richmond and Kingston was perhaps expected, though the scale of victory in both was not. Three Rivers was gain from a brief spell of minority control but few had predicted taking South Cambridgeshire, and the 75 seats net increase was above most forecasts.

This was spun by the party as its best results for 15 years, though that conveniently ignored the whopping 427 seats lost last time this round of elections was contested in 2014 at the nadir of the Coalition. If the party is back in business it still has some way to go.

The results were though patchy enough to suggest that the party is dangerously dependent on places where there happen to be enough enthusiastic members to mount effective campaigns, rather than enjoying a swathe of support across the country built on its national profile.

Despite some good results there are still very few people who consider themselves natural Liberal Democrats and vote for the party as a matter of course - the sort of core vote the Conservatives and Labour enjoy but which the Lib Dem model of 'filling a bath with the plug out' has prevented.

There are those who insist that the hugely labour-intensive model of local campaigning is the only one that can work and that attempts to build a national core vote are somehow aimed at making the party depending on a Remain-voting 'elite'.

It ought by now to be obvious that the model of 24-hour Focus activism, ceaseless attention to temporary local grievances and candidate-as-unpaid-social-worker is the one that doesn't work because the people involved inevitably burn out.

When they do, there are not enough others with the ability, time or inclination to follow them and local parties disintegrate - where now are Tower Hamlets, Islington, Leicester, Adur and other places where the party was once strong but the unavoidable loss of a few crucial activists caused it to all but collapse?

So, enjoy and build on the gains made and plan for more, but the party needs to think strategically both nationally and locally about how it avoids the trap of relying on unfeasible levels of activism by a handful of people, which can rarely be sustained.

HOPE FROM TRAGEDY

It would be grotesque to say that something good has come from the appalling suffering inflicted by the government on those caught up in the Windrush scandal.

Something hopeful though perhaps did.

As Norman Baker, former Lib Dem Home Office minister, argues in this issue, the previous Labour government actually positioned itself to the right of the Conservatives over immigrant-bashing and posturing about tough border control.

The Lib Dems prevented some of the worst excesses during the Coalition, but the subsequent Conservative governments simply carried on based on the assumption that they should pander to racists who take their cues from the Daily Mail, Daily Express and Sun.

Theresa May, architect while home secretary of the 'hostile environment' towards both real and imagined illegal immigration, must have thought she was onto a winner when the Windrush scandal erupted, and that the more people - and as Baker notes especially non-white ones - that she threw out of the country the most popular she would be.

Not so. Public sympathy instead flowed towards those who had lived here legally for decades but suddenly found themselves forcibly uprooted by the Home Office and booted out - or faced with the threat - over minor or non-existent infractions of obscure rules.

Even the Conservative immigration minister Caroline Noakes has said she wants to change the Home Office's 'computer says no' culture.

That culture did not spring from nowhere. It was fostered by May in her absurd quest to cut annual immigration numbers to an impossible extent, a quest driven in turn by her fear of right-wing newspapers, Ukip (though that should be less of a concern now) and general Conservative hostility to foreigners other than oligarchs.

The public reaction was almost entirely in favour of the Windrush victims and one of concern at the obvious injustices they had suffered.

This is hopeful because it shows that the default anti-immigrant setting of both the Conservatives and Labour may be not just wrong but politically pointless too, as much of the UK becomes more relaxed about colour and about the presence of people from all over the world who have arrived here legally and positively contributed in various ways.

Its possible that the Lib Dems could eventually benefit from this long term shift in mood to a more small 'l' liberal public mindset.

At the least, it ought to mean that fewer politicians in any party see the need to pander to anti-immigrant sentiment in the way that warped the last Labour government and drove the present Tory one into one of its worst embarrassments.

RADICAL BULLETIN

GRIM UP NORTH

For someone with such strong views on the sinfulness of gay sex, Tim Farron has an extraordinarily difficult time avoiding it.

His latest faux pas arose in May when he had agreed to speak at something called the Northern Men's Conference.

Any idea that this might be some sort of Andy Capp lookalike convention would have dispelled by a glance at publicity for the event.

As Affinity, an organisation of 'gospel churches' noted in a posting on its website the publicity for the event referred to "...assaults on orthodox Christian teaching, and morality, especially in the area of sexuality, seem to have increased at an alarming rate...even in Bible teaching churches many appear to be wavering under the onslaught of the gay lobby".

For bad measure it added: "Add to this scenario the increasing problems associated with immigration, and Islam in particular and indeed many other things which push Christians further and further to the margins, there is for many a feeling of despair and even fear about standing up and speaking out."

Once the row over this event blew up in public Farron did at least have the grace to say: "I agreed many months ago to attend a church-organised event but just today I've seen promotional material for it which contains things I'm deeply concerned and saddened by. As a result, I have withdrawn from the event."

DIRTY DEAL

MPs routinely complained during the Coalition years about the 'Clegg children', not his actual children of course but the young advisers with whom he surrounded himself under his policy of never listening to anyone who knew more about any subject than he did.

Their commitment to the party and understanding of its values was often questioned, and in May Liberal Democrat Voice threw some shocking new light on this.

It found former Clegg apparatchik Polly Mackenzie boasting on Twitter about the Lib Dems' role in introducing the plastic bag tax.

All very commendable, but Mackenzie went on to say: "We finally got the policy in an eve-of-conference trade, in return for tightening benefit sanctions...PS the benefit sanction turned out to be illegal and never went ahead. Ha Ha."

Neither Mackenzie nor Clegg could have known when they agreed this that the sanctions would be ruled unlawful.

The sanctions regime causes untold misery to claimants. As LDV's editor noted: "I don't think for a moment that anyone doing those deals actually thought about what this would actually involve in practice. That for spurious reasons people could be

brought to the brink of homelessness and starvation. I doubt anyone involved had any idea what it was like to be in this position."

And where might Mackenzie be now? She is director of the Demos think tank and having helped bring about the Lib Dems triumphant result in 2015 its website says she has now also "established the operations of the Women's Equality Party".

DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT

Search the party constitution as much as you like, but you will find no mention of the post of 'treasurer's envoy'.

This is no doubt because the role doesn't exist. Yet Kishan Devani has announced to the world that he occupies it.

Devani's tweet said: "Absolutely honoured to have been appointed a Treasurers Envoy for the @LibDems by the Party Treasurer Lord @mjgerman."

An envoy is normally someone who represents someone else by visiting others, yet there is no indication of who Devani is supposed to see on German's behalf or what power German has to start bestowing honorary titles on people.

Devani joined the Lib Dems from the Tories last year citing racism and Brexit among his reasons and has been an assiduous attendee at campaign days throughout London since.

Some think this zeal results from him wanting to be the next London mayoral candidate.

The recent election results may give him pause for thought though. While the number of councillors in London increased from 115 to around 150 the vast majority of this growth came in the boroughs of Kingston and Richmond.

Lib Dems are also represented on Sutton, Haringey and Southwark (all current or former parliamentary seats) and elsewhere only on Merton, Ealing, Camden and Kensington and Chelsea.

Indeed the number of boroughs with no Lib Dem councillors actually increased as beachheads held even during the massacre of 2014 in Harrow, Brent, Barnet, Hackney and Redbridge fell this time.

That leaves rather a lot of uncovered territory for a mayoral campaign.

Someone else who may fancy standing for London mayor is Duwayne Brooks, former Lib Dem councillor in Lewisham, who has joined the Tories.

Brooks was a friend of the murdered Stephen Lawrence and this tragic history has given Brooks considerable status. It's unclear when Brooks left the Lib Dems but in May he stood as an independent for elected mayor of Lewisham, coming fifth behind Lib Dem candidate, London region chair Chris Maines.

Some who knew Brooks well in the party use terms like "lone spirit" and "not a team player". How will the

Tories find him?

A PHOENIX RISES

From the ashes of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD) there is due to be born the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (LDCRE).

This welcome development should allow the party to put the vituperative personal feuds behind it that stopped EMLD functioning effectively (Liberator 388), with a set of interim officers in place who are either new or who were not involved in the previous uproar.

Rod Lynch announced the new organisation in April on Liberal Democrat Voice with a posting that described him as “chair of the Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats and will be chair of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality”.

This caused some unease as to who had elected him chair of EMLD - which had not held a complete general meeting since 2016 - let alone of LDCRE.

It soon turned out that his position was indeed interim and that proper elections will be held for the new body.

The old EMLD though will not quite lie down. Its former chair Ruwan Uduwera-Perera loudly left the party earlier this year (Liberator 389) but astonished members of the Scottish Liberal Democrats at their conference where the Scots, being a tolerant bunch, had invited both him and Lynch to speak on diversity at a fringe meeting.

When someone had the temerity to question what Uduwera-Perera was at some length saying, “he just started shouting and bawling and pronouncing the party unfixable and stormed out”, Liberator’s spy at scene recalls.

AN IDLE THREAT

Members of the Federal Board have been lobbied hard to accept Tony Hughes as successor to Peter Dunphy as chair of the Federal Finance and Resources Committee.

Hughes is his local party’s treasurer in Newbury and reputedly wealthy, and is no doubt an entirely suitable candidate.

Why though were FB members told - in the manner of a parent issuing blood curdling threats to get a recalcitrant child into bed - that if they failed to back Hughes they would get Gordon Lishman in the role?

Lishman did not want the job anyway, but his friends asked what he had done to offend someone so much that he is used as a bogeyman on the FB.

THE LONE SCRIBE

Deep in Great George Street a staff member toils away on turning the general election review report into a publishable summary.

This was commissioned from Portsmouth’s Gerald Vernon-Jackson, and buried by the Federal Board when members objected to some conclusions, but parts have appeared on Liberator’s website after we received several copies from people affronted by the report’s suppression (Liberator 389).

Now, at some indeterminate time, a summary is promised for publication. Liberator’s website will provide a convenient point of comparison for whether Vernon-Jackson’s more trenchant observations survive.

DRESS SENSE

The National Liberal Club broke with 39 years of tradition when its annual general meeting voted in May - by 49 votes to 36 - to relax its 1970s jacket-and-tie dress code for the summer.

Back in 1976-88, the club housed Liberal Party HQ, and its bar was open to members and non-members alike.

Minutes record that ‘drunken brawls’ in the 1970s, and snobbish complaints about “the riff-raff in jeans from the office upstairs”, led the club to introduce its first ever dress code in 1979, in an attempt to keep unruly Liberals in check. What would Lloyd George have said?

It took though until 1987, when the old bar closed was replaced by the present one and party HQ left for Cowley Street, before the code was rigidly enforced.

Since then, the dress code - with its quirky 1970s concessions like polo-necked sweaters with jackets - has looked increasingly out of date, with visiting Liberals having to queue up at the entrance to don ugly ties from ‘the rack of shame’ behind the counter, and to squeeze into the club’s stock of ill-fitting, malodorous jackets that don’t seem to have been dry cleaned in over a decade (if at all).

No more! Members and guests can now walk in wearing their working clothes - although jeans and trainers are still banned. Technically, this vote was just for a two-month trial period in July and August 2018 - but whether Liberals descend on the club en masse could well dictate whether the change is here to stay.

NOT WHAT WE MEANT

A report by the Scottish Liberal Democrats to the Federal Board shows perhaps the law of unintended consequences.

It said: “A particular issue for the Scottish party is its very low BaME membership. We think we have 4 BaME members (one of whom, a gay councillor of Indian Hindu extraction, we, effectively, deselected from the seat he had been nursing for years, for an all woman shortlist).”

A LITTLE LIGHT READING

Liberal Britain’s Ashdown Prize for Radical Thought, a glorified essay competition, has got off to a flying start.

Those agreeing to help assess entries were given a deadline of 4 May, one day after local elections in much of the country. Perhaps it was thought this would pass the time while telling on quiet polling stations.

Representations were made and the deadline was extended to, er, 7 May.

ADVANCE RETREAT

Annabel Mullin left the Lib Dems in a huff after its London region questioned why she deployed resources in hopeless Kensington instead of targeting.

She then formed a ‘people not politicians’ party called Advance. In May it duly sank without trace, with her 12 candidates largely in fourth place behind the Lib Dem paper ones.

MAY BROUGHT THE DRAWBRIDGE DOWN

It's not just the Windrush generation that suffered from Theresa May's callous incompetence in the Home Office and since - thousands of innocent people were caught up in her appeasement of the Daily Mail, says Norman Baker

Let's get one thing straight right away. Windrush was not an aberration, a dreadful mistake that somehow got through the system. It was the system.

The Tories of course have never really liked immigration, particularly when it involves people whose skin is not white. They can dress it up by talk of pressure on services and concerns about terrorism, but that is what it boils down to.

Back in 2010, the Tories decided they wanted to set a net migration figure. The Lib Dems, who did not endorse this, pointed out this was a hostage to fortune but it was a signature policy for Cameron and May, a way of keeping the Daily Mail happy and, they hoped, warding off Ukip.

DAFT IDEA

But what a daft idea it was. With free movement running through the EU like the word Brighton through a stick of rock, the numbers coming in and leaving were uncontrollable. They may as well have set a target for how many people they wanted to leave or enter Kettering, or for how many days the sun should shine.

Faced with this gaping hole, and with net migration figures way above what they promised, they decided to clamp down heavily on what they could control – migration from outside the EU.

And so we saw business people who wanted to invest in Britain, and overseas students willing to pay heavy fees to our universities, presented with numerous obstacles to entry, and often being turned away. It was clear what the message was: you are not wanted here – go home.

The only exceptions appeared to be dodgy Russian oligarchs, who were very welcome if they brought wheelbarrows of cash with them, and almost anyone from China, notwithstanding that they placed, and still place, significant restrictions on UK nationals

entering their country, especially if they are journalists who might report their appalling human rights abuses.

Why is it so difficult to get into your country, the Indians would ask? After all, we are a democracy and part of the Commonwealth. Why is so hard for us and so easy for the Chinese? To which there was no very good answer. How to lose friends and influence people – the wrong way.

The process a person from outside the EU has to go through to gain entry to the UK is expensive and burdensome, and the hurdles are high.

While it is right that the system is rigorous, it is not right that over-zealous officials, spurred on by clear signals from the home secretary and her special advisors, reject applications for entry for the most trivial of reasons.

You want to come for a family wedding in three months' time? Well, we are not sure you intend to return, but we will examine your application carefully

and give you and answer in about four months, unless we get a letter from an MP or you manage to get your case in the newspapers, in which case we will grudgingly look at it earlier.

The other lever the Tories were able to pull was the one that sought to deport people for good out of the UK. So the strategy they decided they wanted was to make life here as uncomfortable as possible for anyone here without leave to remain.

That included refugees

fleeing persecution and death in their own countries, if they had somehow through superhuman effort managed to find a way into Britain. The government naturally preferred to call them asylum seekers, a more loaded term than refugee.

The right-wing press would regularly print stories about asylum seekers living the life of luxury, or committing crime, or both. The reality was that the vast majority were completely law-abiding, many had skills this country could have used, and a great many were penniless, unsupported by the state and



reliant on goodwill from their diaspora or churches or charities, often for months or years until the Home Office got round to examining their case.

Why can't we let those applying for asylum work to support themselves and to contribute to society until their case is determined? The vast majority would welcome that. But of course the last thing the Tories want is for people they would rather were not here to become established.

Some of the Tories even wanted to severely restrict access to medical treatment, which was not only callous and inhumane but ultimately counter-productive, if a person happened to have a contagious condition.

And if that didn't work, well they could be jostled until they leave. Hence the notorious go-home vans, which the Tories deliberately introduced behind the back of the then Lib Dem Home Office minister Jeremy Browne. I wonder if they bothered to consult those sections of government, including in the Home Office itself, charged with building community cohesion?

Immigration enforcement officials were not just encouraged to unearth illegal immigrants and deport them, but were actually given weekly targets for arrests and deportations.

TARGETS FOR ARRESTS

Targets for arrests? How does that work? We're 23 short this week, Bill. Better round up some more usual suspects. Yes, I know we have no real evidence, but we can't miss our target.

And identifying people who could be deported, and so helping meet the migration target, also meant setting high hurdles for people here, hurdles they would really struggle to meet. For the Windrush generation, that meant requiring them to produce four pieces of evidence for every year they were here. Could you do that? I'm not sure I could.

It was suggested, quite reasonably, that all the government had to do was check the landing cards, the entry documents that each person would have completed as first arrived in the country. Simple really. Except that the government destroyed them all, against civil service advice.

And let's be quite clear. It was Theresa May who created this 'hostile environment'. She set out her intentions, including this exact phrase, in an article in the Daily Telegraph in 2012. The buck stops firmly with her.

It was right in the end that Amber Rudd had to go, largely because she seemed not to know what was going on in her own department, even maintaining she was unaware that targets of this sort existed. But it was the prime minister as her predecessor who had filled the chalice with poison.

The Lib Dems in coalition knocked off the roughest corners of this nasty approach, ending child detention, and resisting other harsh ideas, such as turning landlords into immigration officers.

“The only exceptions appeared to be dodgy Russian oligarchs, who were very welcome if they brought wheelbarrows of cash with them”

I attended a cabinet committee meeting when that last item was discussed. David Cameron, in the chair, was terribly keen but as well as Lib Dem concerns, he ran into the not insignificant figure of Eric Pickles who was unconcerned about the people being harassed but very concerned about the burden on landlords.

As David Cameron tried to sum up the meeting in his favour, blithely ignoring the concerns expressed, Pickles banged the table.

“You're not listening, prime minister,” he interrupted loudly. That particular cabinet committee did not meet again and Pickles was the only cabinet minister sacked after the 2015 election gave the Tories a majority.

You have to find allies on individual issues wherever you can, even Pickles. The situation was not helped by the Labour party which throughout the coalition years and indeed before, was even more right-wing on Home Office issues than the Tories. The party that tried to give you ID cards and 90 days detention without trial consciously put itself to the right of the Tories so as not to appear 'soft on crime'. It was a long way from Keir Hardie, from Roy Jenkins, even from Charles Clarke.

So now Rudd has gone and a whole host of Tories are telling us how shocked they were, how they had no idea this was all going on.

They refer to this as the Windrush issue, but Windrush was simply a manifestation of a nasty policy.

With Theresa May at the Home Office, the Tories became the 'nasty party' once again. Time will tell if Sajid Javid intends to make the Home Office more human again. Or will the waters close over, and it will be nasty business as usual?

Norman Baker was Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes 1997-2015 and a Home Office minister 2013-14. For more details about the Home Office, see his book *Against The Grain*, available from Biteback

HOW GREEN WAS MY PACT?

Richmond Liberal Democrats struck a pact with the Greens and took control of the council in May. Was this too high a price to pay? Wendy Kyrle-Pope says it worked, while Theo Butt-Philip (opposite page) urges caution

One of the highlights of the 2018 local election night for Liberator readers must have been the incredible victory in Richmond-upon-Thames, and the added delight of Kingston turning bright yellow again the following afternoon. The two Tory councils were literally swept away.

One reason for this stunning success in Richmond was that our campaign was fought in a different way this time, with six out of the 18 wards fielding two Liberal Democrat candidates and one from the Green Party. In the other 12 wards, no Green candidate put up.

It worked for both parties; we won 39 out of the 54 council seats; the Greens won four, which was beyond their wildest dreams.

Initially local activists found this alliance strange and feared it was unmanageable. But the strategy behind this (both Lib Dem and Green) was very clever and novel in the way it was managed. As with all council elections, there is frequently only a handful of votes between candidates, and in the 12 wards with no Greens, we had no competition from a party which often attracts voters of a similar viewpoint.

And this mattered. Take the example of what happened in one ward in the last elections in 2014. The Greens took only 420 votes, but although one of ours got in, our other two candidates lost by 17 and 55. So a free run in 12 wards, and joint candidates in six did make electoral sense.

So how did this come about? In both the parliamentary by-election of December 2016, and the general election the following spring, the Greens did not put up candidates. This non-aggression pact led to talks between the parties, and the joint wards were decided upon.

There is nothing in electoral law which prohibits joint candidates, but there are data protection problems. A political party is registered with the Information Commissioner, and the data collected by that party cannot be shared with any other. Should two parties wish to share data, this would require a separate, one-election-only, registration, and all the data would have to be destroyed immediately after that one election. In Richmond-upon-Thames's case, this was not done so we could not share any canvassing details with the Greens, nor they with us.

Zac Goldsmith discovered this when he ran as an independent in December 2016. Sarah Olney mentioned the data protection rules on television early on in her successful campaign. One could see how hampered his support team were in that by-election. How much our great victory was due to people being won over by Sarah, hating Brexit and the Government,

and how much to Zac's lack of canvassing records we will never know, but one could see, in the polling stations on election day, how confused, frustrated and ultimately defeated Zac's supporters were. Indeed, I saw Sarah's victory writ large by 8pm in the look of utter bleakness which passed across the local Tory chairman's (temporarily Zac's manager) face.

The 2018 campaign leaflets published the three names, but the policies/information/intentions on those leaflets were all Liberal Democrat. The photographs were of the two Lib Dem candidates, plus Vince or Sarah or another, but no photographs of the Green candidate appeared. Our final A5 leaflet showed the mock ballot paper with the 2 plus 1, and some had two yellow and one green rosette.

As we could not share canvassing information, two campaigns were run. There was no joint canvassing other than a mention in passing on the doorstep that we were running with a Green candidate in that ward.

While there were obviously local and national factors which contributed to the overwhelming victory (Brexit, the Government, the unpopular local Tory Council, fear of Corbyn, bins, social care), the new European alliance style campaign resonated with the electorate. They did not think it odd at all.

Not everyone voted for the 2+1, which shows in the results, but even if people voted two Tories plus one Green, that was one less vote for the Tories. The environment is a major concern for virtually all voters, regardless of their political loyalties. They may worry that a Green vote is wasted, but produce a slate with a potentially winning party and voters will take that chance. This Green alliance also showed how close in policies ours are to theirs, thus reminding the electorate of our planet-saving credentials.

Collaboration for the greater good is surely a hallmark of Liberalism. One would hope that Greens across the country will see this example and realise that working with us could be the key to electoral success. And vice versa. Go hug a Green today.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective

This year's local elections were exceptionally good for the Liberal Democrats in Richmond-upon-Thames. The party now boasts an enormous majority, having won 39 of the 54 seats. Many will want to know just how they did quite so well.

Two factors are obvious: a truly phenomenal campaign, brilliantly planned and executed by a local party buoyed up by its recent recoveries in parliamentary elections; and eight years of an unpopular Conservative council twinned with an unpopular hard Brexit Conservative Government at Westminster.

There is another factor in these elections, but I caution against giving any credit to this one: the Liberal Democrats struck a deal with the Green Party.

The deal worked as follows. The Greens would not field any candidates in 12 of the 18 wards, while the Liberal Democrats would field a full slate (three candidates per ward); in the remaining six wards the Greens would field one candidate and the Liberal Democrats two.

How did it work out? Well, the Liberal Democrats won an overwhelming majority. I was there on election day and at the count, I was amazed at the enormous scale of the victory. There is now only one ward without at least one Liberal Democrat councillor and the Greens have a group of four. The Tories were reduced to just 11 seats.

How much of this was down to the deal with the Greens and how much would have happened anyway? The Greens did considerably worse than the Liberal Democrats in all six of the wards where the Liberal Democrats fielded only two candidates and the Greens one. In one ward the Green was just 121 votes behind the second placed Liberal Democrat, but in the remaining split wards the gap between the second-placed Liberal Democrat and sole Green candidate was huge – the Greens polled between 445 and 701 fewer votes.

The people of Richmond do not appear to have been keen to vote Green, doing so mostly because they were left without a third Liberal Democrat candidate to elect.

The Greens won seats largely off the back of the Liberal Democrats campaign. It is hard to see what they brought to the table.

Had the Greens fielded candidates against the Liberal Democrats, it is possible the Liberal Democrats would have won fewer seats. But we should be wary of making this assumption and attributing too much influence to a party whose appeal seems to be seriously on the wane – nationally from the 2015 to the 2017 general election the Green vote fell from 1,150,791 to 518,213.

Had the Liberal Democrats fielded a full slate of candidates in every ward, it is highly likely that at least three of the seats, which ultimately went Green, would have been Liberal Democrat. Without this deal the Greens would have almost certainly have won nothing.

Although we'll never know the exact result of an election fought without this deal, we can look to neighbouring Kingston-upon-Thames, where no such deal was struck, for some idea. The two boroughs have many similarities politically: both have previously had large Liberal Democrat majorities, both had Liberal Democrat MPs who lost their seats in 2015 only to

make a comeback in 2017, and both boroughs have wards in the Richmond Park constituency. In one borough the Liberal Democrats did a deal with the Greens, in the other not.

In both boroughs the Liberal Democrats ran excellent election campaigns and in overturned large Conservative majorities to elect 39 Liberal Democrat councillors and take control. Deal or no deal, the Liberal Democrats triumphed.

We didn't need a deal with the Greens in Richmond to win, we would have won without them. Just as we have done so often before, just as we did in Kingston.

We have contrived to ensure that seats, which might well have gone to the Liberal Democrats, went to Greens. Green Party candidates did considerably worse than Liberal Democrats – with many voters in the split wards forced to vote Green having been denied the option of voting for three Liberal Democrats. On a better night for the Tories those Green seats could well have gone blue – a full slate of Liberal Democrat candidates would be better placed to withstand a Tory recovery.

Do we want to risk a future Tory victory to appease the few remaining Greens? That is an important decision before the next set of elections.

The situation calls to mind some lines from Kipling's *Dane-Geld*:

"Though we know we should defeat you, we have not the time to meet you.

We will therefore pay you cash to go away.

"And that is called paying the Dane-geld; but we've proved it again and again,

"That if once you have paid him the Dane-geld; you never get rid of the Dane."

We chose to pay a price for a shortcut to victory – which we didn't need to take, to a victory that would have been ours anyway. What price will we be forced to pay next time?

Theo Butt Philip is a former organiser for Twickenham and Richmond Liberal Democrats

No songbooks!

The Liberator songbook for 2017-18 has sold out. A new edition will be produced for the autumn conference. Suggestions of new songs for inclusion may be sent to: collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk

FIRM BUT UNFAIR

The royal family used its recent wedding to burnish its image, but 'Operation Charlie' will call them into question, says Sarah Green

Keeping up with the pace of change and staying relevant can be a struggle. Just look at your local High Street - Blockbuster, BHS, Dixons, Toys R Us and Woolworths are just some of the once ubiquitous names that have now disappeared.

These brands failed to grasp what the British royal family learned a long time ago: the need to adapt or die. This simple rule has seen 'The Firm' outlive other monarchies, as republics became the norm around the world. They understand that change is a constant and have learned to accept it to survive. The royal family reflects rather than drives social change, keeping up with what is (and isn't) socially acceptable. They're adept at side-lining members who aren't hitting the right chord with the public (Prince Edward anyone? The Duke of Gloucester?), and they're not averse to the occasional re-brand. The monarchy may date back centuries, but the House of Windsor was only established 100 years ago, when 'Saxe-Coburg and Gotha' became a PR disaster, sounding a bit too German for a country at war with Germany.

That same public relations machine is at work all year round because the monarchy relies on publicity for its survival. But the nature of that constant need for oxygen is also disturbing. The past few weeks have seen a wedding, a baby and a hip operation. All events that those concerned would presumably prefer to keep private. But the royals are public property, a real-life soap opera where the deeply personal is played out in public. This is why, a few weeks ago, a mother emerged on the steps of a hospital styled and coiffured for a photo opportunity, just hours after giving birth, when the last place she needed to be was out of bed.

In 1997 this warped relationship with the media and the public resulted in the world watching two teenage boys parade through London behind their mother's coffin. This relentless demand for private detail, the constant scrutiny and a life followed by cameras is deeply intrusive and begs the question: why do they put up with it? At least they have a choice; Thomas Markle and the homeless of Windsor are just the latest in a long list of 'collateral damage' in the name of preserving the monarchy.

The chance for a royal wedding doesn't come along very often so it is no surprise that the details were carefully crafted to strike the right tone. And judging by the reactions the most recent nuptials largely succeeded, as the presenter and comedian, Richard Osman, reflected on Twitter: "I know the #RoyalWedding is not for everyone, but we all saw Harry lose his mum so young, then grow up into this kind, cheeky, thoughtful guy. Now he's found this incredible woman, and it brings a tear to my cynical eye."

Harry and Meghan's big day was of course carefully stage managed to project the right image. The pomp and ceremony is a welcome distraction to those wanting to avoid confronting the reality that Britain is a divided country and our place in the world is dwindling.

Inequality is on the rise and social mobility has stalled. The monarchy sits at the top of a system rooted in inequality and inherited wealth. It is estimated that just 0.6% of the population (36,000 individuals) owns half the rural land in England and Wales. There are still hereditary peers voting in the House of Lords. In a country that purports to be a meritocracy, our head of state is chosen by an accident of birth.

But suggesting we elect our head of state usually results in a baffled shrug or a 'better the devil you know' response. And one of the key reasons the monarchy has survived into 2018 is because it is almost impossible to separate the institution from the individual. Even ardent republicans find themselves conceding that the Queen is a fine example of devotion to duty, rarely putting a foot wrong. It makes her an impossibly hard act to follow for the next in line.

Unlike his mother who became Queen when she was 25, Prince Charles has had ample time to make mistakes. The future King's reputation never fully recovered after the 'war of the Waleses' and the excruciating Camillagate tapes. Freedom of Information requests reveal he has lobbied ministers on several occasions when, as sovereign, he will be expected to stay neutral and to keep what opinions he has to himself.

But he has a lifetime of controversial opinions under his belt that are on the record. Reconciling these won't be easy. The royal family is well aware of this and has been working on the transition for years. That plan is slowly being implemented and seeing more of the younger royals as some of the older faces are retired is part of that process. Adapt or die. But when the time comes, Operation Charlie is going to be a much harder sell than a happy couple on their wedding day. The answer isn't to skip a generation, but to ditch the hereditary principle altogether.

Sarah Green is a member of the Liberator Collective

FRESH START FOR RACE EQUALITY

Janice Turner explains why a new organisation has risen from the troubled Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats

As *Liberator* went to press, the AGM of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats was due on 9 June to relaunch as the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality.

The relaunch has come about after a long period in which EMLD's work was marred by disagreements and personality clashes. Perhaps the lowest point was the February 2017 AGM which was abruptly adjourned. The chair of EMLD subsequently resigned citing unhappiness with the pace of change in the party on race equality, followed by the secretary. Other key officers also resigned.

After this debacle it was clear to the remaining executive members that nothing short of drastic action had to be taken. They held discussions with the party and met at the House of Lords with EMLD's honorary president Baroness Ece.

It was agreed that, rather than wind up EMLD, a new AGM would be called and members invited to elect a new executive and adopt a new constitution, name and focus.

The meeting elected Rod Lynch as chair and Meral Ece as president to pilot the organisation to the AGM.

A lot of hard work then took place with Toby Keynes of the SAO review body, who very helpfully assisted and advised. A new constitution was drafted based on the party's new template constitution for SAOs, a new website was created and AGN notices and calls for nominations distributed.

An article appeared in *Lib Dem Voice*, in which Rod Lynch made a compelling case for this course of action and he attended meetings around the country to explain what was happening and ask for support.

This reorganisation could not have come soon enough. The party has had to face the tough conclusions of the Alderdice report which might be summed up as saying that it's all very well saying nice things about race equality, but it's time the party actually started doing something about it.

Alderdice pointed out just how unintegrated the party is, and that there were local parties, particularly in London, based in areas with a substantial minority ethnic population but whose membership was overwhelmingly white.

As the preamble to the proposed LDCRE constitution points out, real integration within society has yet to be achieved. Too many in positions of power and influence, no matter how great or insignificant, fail to recognise that our society has yet to reach the point where positive action is no longer required, nor recognise their own responsibility to bring this about.

Discrimination – whether direct, in-your-face racism or indirect institutional racism – is rife throughout this society but our party seems to have lost the passionate commitment and dedication that it used to

have to take it on and defeat it. For Duwayne Brooks, Stephen Lawrence's friend and a former Lib Dem councillor, to become so disillusioned that he's defected to the Tories, is a shocking indictment of where the party's got to.

While EMLD's troubles may have appeared partly down to personality clashes and delays in the complaints process, there was more to it than this. During the coalition EMLD tried to do serious work within the party but was often treated dismissively. I was shocked more than once at patronising attitudes which were a major provocation to people who had fought racism all their lives.

Our party should be better than this. I was one of a number of people who joined the party in the 1970s because, above all other political parties, the Liberals seemed to be at the forefront of attacking racism and apartheid. Our party must regain this passion.

The new organisation needs to help the party to become properly integrated. That means helping local parties identify and take up issues of concern to minority communities. It means helping the party nationally to identify and campaign on race issues and adopt the tough line it used to have.

There are such issues everywhere but are often ignored because our unintegrated political system either isn't aware of these issues or they are but don't see them as important. For example, despite widespread under-representation of BAME workers in the workplace, there is still no requirement for companies to publish their equality monitoring data to hold them accountable for their progress or lack of it. Even the Conservatives are looking at this, with the McGregor Smith report commissioned by Sajid Javid making these recommendations. Race discrimination at work is a vital issue not only for the individual but also because, writ large, it impoverishes whole communities.

There are other obvious issues with criminal justice, housing, education, the list is endless and it's good news that the party's Race Equality Policy Working Group has started working on this.

So I hope that the entire party will get behind the launch of the Lib Dem Campaign for Racial Equality and work in partnership with the organisation to start to do what our party, and our society, needs us to do whether we are in power or not. It's time for action.

Janice Turner is a member of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality

ANXIETY OF YOUTH

Precarious work, unaffordable housing and low incomes, it's no wonder young people are worried, but the ideas are out there to help them says Claire Tyler

Young people are reporting the most stress and unhappiness since The Prince's Trust began its UK Youth Index in 2009.

Today, more than half experience mental health problems, and a quarter admit to feeling 'hopeless'. There is real concern about the mental health of students both at further education colleges and universities and the lack of mental health support services.

When they are asked why, most young people cite reasons related to financial insecurity; more than half regularly report feeling stressed over jobs and money. To most of us who regularly talk to young people this won't come as any surprise.

To others, this might sound a bit puzzling. Haven't young people heard the prime minister and chancellor chorusing about falling income inequality and record high youth employment?

SERIOUSLY MISLEADING

But their chorus is seriously misleading. Far from being frivolous as some commentators have unhelpfully suggested, increased anxiety is clearly linked to a fraying social contract. There are serious and growing disadvantages and insecurity faced by young people in contrast both to older generations at the same age, and older generations now. This means that younger generations can no longer expect to be better off than their parents.

Too often, the government response sounds tone-deaf; they deflect serious justified concern by continually citing the cherry-picked Office for National Statistics figures that income inequality is falling.

Many agree this metric is inaccurate: it ignores housing expenses and doesn't fully record the incomes of the highest earners.

Meanwhile Government ignores income inequality between generations. Millennials are the first generation to earn less than their parents. Whereas incomes of over-60s have surged since the recession and their pensions beat inflation, millennial incomes have slumped below their pre-recession peak. While pensions are triple-locked, working-age benefits have been cut and frozen — and trail behind inflation.

And of course Incomes are only half the story. The Government's favourite metric also ignores ballooning wealth inequality.

Wealth inequality has doubled as a percentage of national income since the 1980s, while the amount of tax we collect from it has remained practically frozen. More than three-quarters of our wealth gains, which have disproportionately benefitted baby boomers, are not the result of any added value in the economy, but simply from the luck of owning a house before prices sky-rocketed.

Homeownership remains a central British aspiration and means of security, but it is increasingly out of reach for young people; one in three millennials may never own their own home.

While too few homes are built, the private rental sector gets more expensive. Young people today spend about twice as much of their income on rent as their parents did. When combined with stagnating wages, only the richest young people can save even a modest financial cushion, to fix a car or a computer, let alone enough for a down payment on a home.

Recently the mental health charity Mind has emphasised the link between precarious housing and mental health problems. They reported that nearly eight out of 10 people with mental health problems say a housing situation has caused or worsened their problem.

Though employment may be high, many young people are insecure and working precariously. One in five of those on zero hour contracts cannot turn down shifts and one in 10 are given less than 48 hours' notice before shifts are changed or cancelled. T

he resulting financial insecurity has tangible and expensive consequences on their health and wellbeing; those on zero-hours contracts are significantly more likely to suffer from mental health problems than those on more secure employment contracts. Moreover, atypical workers have comparatively low job progression and mobility, which reduces both their morale and their economic output.

For most young people on hand-to-mouth budgets, cash flow problems can easily spiral out of control, and young people with 'thin' credit histories, are often excluded from mainstream lending opportunities and can be forced to visit predatory payday lenders and other forms of extortionate lending to make ends meet.

Citizens Advice reports an increase of more than a third in the number of under-25s seeking help for high cost credit.

Despite the Government's refrain on inequality, the public is not convinced; almost three-quarters of the UK say they want them urgently to address the gap between rich and poor.

Perhaps sensing a strong wind, Theresa May recently admitted: "Young people without family wealth are 'right to be angry' at not being able to buy a home".

So what should politicians — and particularly Liberal Democrats — be doing about what can sometimes feel like a counsel of despair?

The more encouraging news is there are plenty of potential solutions available. What's really needed is the political will and, as ever, some electoral courage.

To bring back equity to the housing market, the Government should take the Liberal Democrats' suggestion of letting local councils levy more tax

from second homes and foreign 'buy to leave empty' investments, to fund desperately needed lower cost housing. Furthermore, the Government ought also to take our suggestion on better protecting rental tenants and capping upfront payments. Variations on these suggestion have recently been taken up by the Resolution Foundation's Intergenerational Commission which recently published its final report and recommendations in a report A New Generational Contract.

Crucially, and sometimes overlooked in these debates, the Intergenerational Commission has stressed that the problem is not binary: we do not live in a nation of homogenously rich pensioners and starving young people.

Rather there are significant inequalities within generations too. Policies need to redress inequalities and risks on both sides of the generational spectrum. More stability is needed for the young as they set out in their careers and more stability is needed for older generations as they start to rely more heavily on the health and social services.

Improving security for both will undoubtedly require more taxation, and here we must be sensitive to variance within generations.

Our current inheritance tax system has the misfortune of being both tremendously unpopular, and woefully ineffective. The final report of the Intergenerational Commission suggests a sensible redrawing of inheritance tax, at a lower marginal rate, but properly enforced. This would raise an extra £5bn in taxes.

The report also suggested that this could fund a 'citizen's inheritance' given to all young adults to give them the security and flexibility needed to better train their skills, pay off debt, or make a down payment on a home.

Additionally, the report proposed making earnings of working pensioners subject to National Insurance contributions. If properly implemented this should only materially affect larger pensions and wealthier individuals but could help go some way towards paying for the increased health and social care costs of the baby boom generation.

To boost the incomes and wealth of younger generations, we must first reverse Conservative freezes and cuts to working age benefits and uprate them at least to inflation. We must also make more secure environments for young people working precariously.

The Intergenerational Commission suggests protecting zero hours contract workers with minimum notification periods for shifts and minimum contracts. We should also extend parental leave and contributory Jobseeker's Allowance to those who are self-employed.

“More than three-quarters of our wealth gains, which have disproportionately benefitted baby boomers, are not the result of any added value in the economy, but simply from the luck of owning a house before prices skyrocketed”

The government, the private and third sectors also need to invest far more in skills training for young people to give them the skills for the digital economy.

Currently many young people are feeling increasingly excluded and marginalised, but this need not be the case.

SHIFT THE DIAL

The Liberal Democrats' longstanding proposal to reduce the voting age to 16 would help engage and empower young people, and potentially start to shift the dial on the constraining electoral politics around these issues. With creative, evidence-based policies in housing, taxation, and the labour market, a fair intergenerational contract can eventually be restored and protected.

But to ensure young people are hopeful, happy and secure we need to approach all policy with a comprehensive view on wellbeing.

We must put mental health resources in step with physical care, integrate wellbeing into school Ofsted inspections, provide better mental health support to young people in apprenticeships, further education colleges and universities and incentivise employers – perhaps through tax breaks - measurably to improve their employees' wellbeing.

Strong Liberal Democrat policies in these areas need to demonstrate that we are the only party committed to putting wellbeing for all at the forefront of our policy agenda.

Finally we need to start a proper national conversation about inter-generational fairness which conveys both the complexities of both inter and intra generational inequalities.

I am delighted that my proposal for a Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness has been accepted and look forward shortly to serving on that committee which will report by March 2019.

As a cross party select committee it will need to embrace a wide range of views but I very hope it will help stimulate the short of national conversation we so desperately need.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

EVERYONE AN OWNER

Spreading ownership used to be a liberal policy. Time to revive it in the form of a radical approach to universal inheritance, says Paul Hindley

It is a massive understatement to say that the Liberal Democrats are in need of new big ideas.

The party is significantly overshadowed by the two political giants of Labour and the Conservatives and if it is to fully recover from the woeful impact of its years in coalition, it will need to capture the public's imagination with new, bold and radical policies.

We might not be currently able to break the mould of British politics, but we can certainly out-think the intellectual mould of socialism and free market fundamentalism.

In the last couple of years only two new Liberal Democrat policies have received any traction. The first is opposing Brexit via a referendum on the final terms of Brexit; if you can call supporting Britain's membership of the EU new (something that Liberals have supported since at least the 1950s). The second was a framework for the legalisation of cannabis. Although the cannabis policy is a great example of liberal evidence-based policy, by itself it will only have limited appeal.

Compare our current situation to that of our chief opponents. The Tories are embarking on an ideological right-wing hard Brexit. The dizzying nationalistic fantasies of the Daily Mail and Jacob Rees Mogg seem to dominate the minds of Tory policymakers. Britain has arguably its most right wing government since the Second World War. Even Margaret Thatcher's government confidently supported Britain's membership of the single market and the customs union; something that Tory Brexit ideologues have rejected in their rampant narrow-minded nationalism.

In the minds of the most die-hard Labour supporters, Jeremy Corbyn has become like a socialist messiah. Within Labour today, the extreme left are stronger than they ever were in the 1980s. Socialism is back with a vengeance and along with it many of its big ideas from the mid-20th-century. Old left wing arguments surrounding re-nationalisations, taxation and economic management have returned, some of which, in fairness, offer a refreshing alternative to the Tory economics of the last 40 years.

With both the Conservatives and Labour returning to the ideological extremes, how should the Liberal Democrats best response? Some would argue that the party should stick even more closely to the 'centre'.

Centrism by its very nature seeks to preserve the status quo, whereas this has been anything but the concern for radical liberals throughout history. Liberal Democrats need to break their obsession with centrism and rediscover the rich radicalism of the liberal tradition.

One such aspect of the liberal tradition is the right to ownership. Not just the right to own goods and

property; but the right to own workplaces, local service providers, natural resources and capital. This tradition is what the Oxford academic, Stuart White has called it 'alternative liberalism', as he articulates in a chapter for the new Social Liberal Forum publication, *Four Go In Search of Big Ideas* (liberator 389).

The ideas of the Nobel prize-winning economist James Meade shaped the alternative liberal ownership agenda in the 20th century. Perhaps the most iconic policy to come out of the alternative liberal tradition has been the universal basic income (UBI).

This is the idea that everyone should receive a guaranteed minimum income, usually of between £70 and £100 a week. There have been various UBI trials from Canada to Finland, so far with mixed results. However, another policy related to UBI is the universal inheritance (sometimes called a universal minimum inheritance).

The universal inheritance is the idea that government should give every young person a one-off payment (or capital endowment) of £10,000 on their 25th birthday. The roots of this policy date back to the writings of the revolutionary liberal thinker, Thomas Paine in his work *Agrarian Justice*. It also had proponents in the Liberal Party in the 1970s.

REVERSE PENSION

Central to the universal inheritance is the idea that young people have a right to own capital. Think of a universal inheritance as being like an old age pension in reverse. Old age pensions exist because the elderly do not have access to a regular income and because old age naturally brings additional costs with it. While the lack of an income is a problem not faced by most young people, what they do lack however is asset-based wealth, something that older generations have in abundance. This inequality of wealth assets has only grown in recent years as young adults find it harder and harder to get a foot on the property ladder, leading to the so-called 'generation rent'. Universal inheritance redistributes wealth from older generations to younger generations.

Imagine what a 25-year-old could do with an extra £10,000. They could use the money to help put down a deposit for a mortgage on a home. They could use the money to help fund academic qualifications (such as a masters degree or PhD) or to fund further career development. They could invest the money in starting a new business. They could use the money as a loan guarantor to reassure banks or to pay off pre-existing loans. Or they could just simply save the money to give them additional financial security later on in life. It would also help to mitigate the risk of young adults being disinherited. Universal inheritance first and

foremost is an investment in the future of every young person.

The millennial generation faced the brunt of the financial crisis 10 years ago. The aftermath of the crisis has seen the rise of austerity; along with the rise of new forms of job insecurity caused by the gig economy. The disposable income of millennials is lower when compared to previous generations. Wage growth is slow, if present at all, while house prices remain stubbornly high and public transport costs continue to rise.

This generation of young adults is feeling the effects of decades of social and economic mismanagement, which has resulted from having a free market fundamentalist policy framework.

The baby boomer generation on the other hand tasted the fruits of the post-war social democratic consensus, when government had an ideological commitment to deliver strong public services; ensure full employment; adequately redistribute wealth and protect workers' rights. A universal inheritance will go some way to remedying the intergenerational social injustice caused by the post-Thatcher 'neoliberal' consensus.

The traditional way of funding the universal inheritance is through increasing inheritance tax. By using inheritance tax to fund it you would create a wealth transfer from the old to the young. This is a similar philosophy to increasing income tax on the richest to deliver social security for the poorest.

An alternative funding method has been proposed by the progressive think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). Its recent report *Our Common Wealth* proposes a Citizens' Wealth Fund. This would be a sovereign wealth fund that would have enough wealth assets in it to deliver a universal inheritance to all 25-year-olds by 2030.

The IPPR suggests capitalising the fund with reformed wealth taxes, the Crown Estate, modest borrowing and the sale of government assets, such as its stake in RBS. They also propose making big companies issue equity to the fund or pay a tax of equivalent value.

Sovereign wealth funds are commonly used in countries and regions around the world. Norway's Government Pension Fund is the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world with assets worth more than \$1tn. The Alaska Permanent Fund pays out an annual social dividend to every Alaskan citizen of between \$800 and \$2,000. Sovereign wealth funds are nothing new to the Liberal Democrats either. It was the official policy of the SDP to establish such a fund in the mid-1980s directly being influenced by Meade. In 1989, Paddy Ashdown supported the idea of a sovereign wealth fund in his book, *Citizens' Britain*. Ashdown believed that a Citizens' Unit Trust could be used to redistribute the wealth generated by asset and share ownership in-order to create a 'citizens' capitalism'.

“This generation of young adults is feeling the effects of decades of social and economic mismanagement, which has resulted from having a free market fundamentalist policy framework”

DEATH THROES

When Ashdown was endorsing a sovereign wealth fund, the Cold War was in its death throes. The old ideological battles between capitalism and socialism, markets and state were coming to an end. Not long after the publication of *Citizens' Britain*, the ownership agenda of the Liberal Party, the SDP and the early Liberal Democrats went into decline. The agenda has yet to be revived beyond the occasional murmuring around

land value taxes or cooperatives.

The Liberal Democrats must once again become the party of 'ownership for all'. This needs to start by giving 25-year-olds a real stake in society and in their own futures. Spreading capital ownership throughout society represents a genuinely radical liberal approach, which is distinctive from both socialism and Tory neoliberalism. In the current battle of ideas, the ownership agenda of Jo Grimond, James Meade and Stuart White offers the Liberal Democrats a distinctive policy edge.

Perhaps the reason why the Liberal Democrats most need to adopt the universal inheritance is to reconnect with young people.

Younger voters are more likely to have liberal stances on social and cultural issues than their older counterparts. They also overwhelmingly backed Remain in the EU Referendum and will live with the consequences of Brexit for the longest. Yet the party is still suffering from the decision to triple university tuition fees. Many young people still rightly see this as a betrayal and much reputational repair will need to be done before the party is once again the natural home for younger voters.

The Liberal Democrats should adopt the policy of a universal inheritance. By giving 25-year-olds a one-off payment of £10,000, we would be greatly improving the autonomy, opportunities and living standards of young people. Whether we choose to fund it by increasing inheritance tax or through an IPPR-style Citizens' Wealth Fund, it would be a great engine for social justice. This policy is workable, affordable and radical.

The universal inheritance is the essence of intergenerational justice in the 21st century. It is a product of our radical liberal political heritage. In an age when free market policies have allowed wealth and asset ownership to be centralised into the hands of an increasingly small part of the population; Liberal Democrats need to ensure that it is distributed as widely as possible. Capitalism must be made to work for everyone, not just a plutocratic elite.

Everyone has a fundamental right to own capital. For young adults this means giving them a universal inheritance. Let's enable young people to truly own their futures.

Let's once again champion a radical economy that embodies ownership for all.

TALKING TRASH IN FREETOWN

Rebecca Tinsley reports on a peaceful election that could turn round the fortunes of Sierra Leone

The stench of putrid rubbish is in the air. Along each road in Sierra Leone's sprawling capital, Freetown, heaps of garbage liquefy in the relentless May heat. The piles are so big that they cause traffic jams as cars manoeuvre around them. There is much honking of horns, crunching of gears and belching of ominously black exhaust fumes.

While rubbish mountains might prompt a Focus team campaign in Britain, they are a cause for celebration in Sierra Leone.

The newly-elected government of Brigadier Julius Maada Bio has borrowed a civic engagement strategy from Rwanda: once a month each citizen will be expected to take to the streets and alleys, cleaning up decades of rubbish. Plastic bottles and insidious little water bags, mango stones, and soda can ring tops line each alley, creek and public space. Rubbish bins didn't exist, and neither did garbage collection, until now. The first weekend's turnout was so enthusiastic, and the volume of rubbish so vast, that there were insufficient trucks to collect the piles. Hence the current temporary traffic obstructions.

Democracy activists say the mass clean up initiative marks a watershed moment for this West African nation of six million. Its government is trying to foster civic responsibility, national identity and a sense of collective ownership where previously there has been regional and ethnic rivalry.

As Amadou, a social worker told me proudly, "The new president didn't even steal a dime from the budget for the clean-up. Can you imagine? And our civil servants are so happy because they are

actually being paid."

His colleague, Samuel, recalled that the previous president took a delegation of 40 hacks to UN meetings, while neighbouring Liberia and Guinea took seven each.

BRAZEN PLUNDER

"It was embarrassing. Their plunder and sense of entitlement was so brazen. Ministers would confiscate agricultural equipment belonging to the state and keep it for use on their private farms."

Leaving aside the chronic corruption, Sierra Leone, a country the size of Scotland, has had more than its share of tragedy. Between 1991-2002, a devastating war claimed 50,000 lives. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), rebels-without-an-ideological-cause, traded diamonds for weapons from neighbouring Liberia. The RUF were famous for punishing civilians by amputating arms and enslaving as many as 40,000 child soldiers. In 2014, an Ebola epidemic brought the economy to a standstill, killing 4,000, and most recently a mudslide in Freetown killed a thousand.

I went to Sierra Leone because my small NGO, Network for Africa, is training local social workers, officials and police to counsel survivors of Ebola and



the civil war.

Of those who contracted Ebola, 27% died, but the rest recovered. However, it is likely they will be affected by serious health concerns for the rest of their lives. Moreover, they are stigmatised in a culture where superstition is widespread.

Well-meaning development officials in the wealthy white world are often uncomfortable when confronted by the grip that magic and the fear of evil spirits still has in many countries receiving aid.

But 'sensitisation training' will fail if we ignore the fact that many people believe Ebola (or disability for that matter) is a consequence of angry ancestors or bad juju. For instance, a nurse in neighbouring Liberia who had risked her life helping afflicted patients throughout the Ebola crisis, later bled to death during childbirth because no medical staff wanted to touch her.

I met Foday, a 28-year-old single father, who had to move away from his home district when his daughter's mother died of Ebola. His family and neighbours shunned him because of what had happened to his girlfriend. He was struggling to find a job, despite his qualifications, because the shadow of Ebola hangs over him.

Attending our trauma counsellor training session was Marie, an official from the ministry of social welfare. She told me that each day during the crisis, she had collected children from the hospital green zone, where Ebola survivors were moved once they were well enough to leave the red treatment zone. The epidemic made orphans of thousands of children. Marie would painstakingly trace any surviving family members, and then deliver the children to them, following several weeks of trauma counselling.

Marie also had to assess how likely it was the child would prosper with their extended family. In too many cases, distant relatives would regard the surviving children as either potential domestic slaves, or as possessed by evil spirits. Marie told me it was common to find the children hawking bottles of water on the streets of Freetown; they had been sold to traffickers, or handed over to strangers who promised to provide

"It is as if the book has been closed on the years when rapacious rebels terrorised the rural areas, driving people into urban slums"

education and lodging for the children.

When I asked her what it had been like, during the crisis, Marie recalled the long, stressful days, trying to find safe homes for Ebola orphans. Each night when she reached home she would strip off all her clothes on the veranda and bag them, then scrub every inch of her body with hand sanitizer in the shower. She would collapse into bed, exhausted. But for months she

was sleeping alone because her husband had moved to the spare bedroom.

I expected Marie and the others to be critical of how long it had taken the World Health Organisation to respond at the start of the Ebola epidemic. But, as so often in desperately poor African countries, there was forgiveness. "We're all human," Marie commented. "Once they got here, they were really good. And we remember the British sent their medical ship. That was very helpful."

Perhaps predictably, the social workers, officials and police attending our week-long training session praised the government for its efforts to tackle cultural resistance to public health education messages about Ebola.

Yet, Sierra Leoneans are not shy to criticise their rulers on other matters. Following the election victory of Bio, the mood is so optimistic that the nation's challenges are being discussed in a can-do atmosphere. "We are hopeful," Amadou said with a gap-tooth grin. Less euphoric was his colleague Samuel, old enough to have adult recollections of the civil war. "We'll see what happens," he said quietly.

The fate of the civil war's amputees is less discussed. "They live in special areas," said Samuel, looking uncomfortable.

"Most of them can't work." "They're in compounds," explained a police community worker. But they are not in evidence on the crowded streets of Freetown, or in the residential alleys climbing steeply up the mountains or down to the stinking creeks where women wash clothes. It is as if the book has been closed on the years when rapacious rebels terrorised the rural areas, driving people into urban slums.

"There isn't a family in this country that wasn't affected in one way or another," said Amadou, his crooked smile faltering for a moment. We



conducted training sessions in which participants role-played traumatised clients, based on their own experiences. It emerged that every person there had lost a close family member in the war. An important technique in countering flashbacks is to teach people to visualise a safe place from their past, into which they can retreat when terrible memories overwhelmed them. In the case of many of our participants, none of them could dredge up a happy childhood memory that didn't lead to a horrific one. Instead, we asked them to create an imaginary safe place. Several of them chose the days they had spent with us, in a hotel conference room, as their most secure moments in life so far.

DEVASTATING LEGACY

Apart from the civil war's devastating legacy and Ebola, Bio's new government faces massive economic challenges if it is to tackle the nation's lack of development (Sierra Leone ranks 178 out of 187 countries on the UN's index).

"The scoundrels who have emptied our coffers for decades neglected the most fundamental sector, agriculture," explained Samuel. "We have excellent farm land, and we used to export food, but for years our government has relied on rents from our natural resources to fund their extravagance. We have subsistence agriculture, but we need a concerted effort to farm efficiently and on a big scale. It shames me that I could not feed my children as well as my mother fed me when I was a boy."

But even the sombre Samuel was pleased that President Bio has pledged to make Sierra Leone self-sufficient by the end of his five-year term.

Among the participants in our training week, there was also resentment that the international media had exaggerated the level of violence and ethnic tension during the recent election campaign.

"They seem to have decided what the story of Sierra Leone is, as if we cannot have a different future," one of our social worker participants remarked sadly. Indeed, if you are accustomed to civil wars and coups, the current situation would seem remarkably peaceful.

President Maada Bio, age 53, comes with his own baggage. He was in a group of officers who overthrew the government in 1992. He now takes what he calls "collective responsibility" for human rights violations during the junta, while the army was fighting the RUF. He staged another coup in 1996 to get rid of his superior officers because, he says, they reneged on a



promise to hold elections. He duly handed over power, although a British intervention was required in 2000 when the RUF made a final attempt to seize Freetown.

It was Tony Blair's short, sharp military action in Sierra Leone that strengthened the hands of liberal interventionists who claimed that a prompt and concerted show of international force at the early stages of the conflicts in Rwanda and Bosnia might have deterred the Hutu and Serbs respectively. Arguably, the subsequent failures of the Afghan and Iraq interventions damned the people of Darfur and Syria to their miserable fate.

Back in Freetown, the cult of personality is already in evidence. On main routes, hundreds of posters have gone up, proclaiming, "Congratulations, Mr President." They join other public exhortations to wash your hands, not to leave dead bodies on the streets and to study ("today a reader, tomorrow a leader"). They fight for space with the riot of faith-based adverts (Red Hot Prophetic Church, New Wine Ministries, Wind and Fire Crusade) on every street. The patient and forgiving people of Sierra Leone need all the luck they can get.

Rebecca Tinsley is director of Network for Africa



Review by Lord David Alton

In the post war years, more than anyone else, from this Celtic Fringe Orcadian outpost, Jo Grimond breathed new life into the Liberal Party. Like a benevolent grandfather, who knew exactly how to handle 1960s wayward grandchildren, he encouraged the National League of Young Liberals to explore the boundaries.

By the 1970s their Red Guards were morphing into Green Guards and simultaneously engaging in community politics – sometimes in tough inner-city neighbourhoods – and were never afraid to be a thorn in the flesh of the Party establishment.



In his racy, well-written and thought-provoking memoir, *Power To The People - Confessions of a Young Liberal activist 1975-1987*, Felix Dodds provides an insightful sketch of the politics of those years and how the Young Liberals interacted among themselves, with the Party leadership, and how they responded to events. We

also learn a lot about Felix himself - not least his sometimes-mischievous sense of humour – and about the clever band of young men and women who brought an untarnished, refreshing, idealism and energy into the heart of political life. Some of them, like the late Mike Harskin, became an indispensable part of the Chief Whip's engine room. Others have gone on to make remarkable contributions in many walks of life.

Having cut my own teeth as a schoolboy chairman of the local branch of Young Liberals; then National President of the Young Liberals in the 70s and MP and Chief Whip in the 80s, Felix's narrative inevitably stirs many memories – but you don't have to have been intimately involved in those times and events to learn something useful from this account.

In paraphrasing Samuel Ullman, Robert Kennedy once remarked that "*youth is not a time of life, it's a temper of the will, a quality of the imagination*". Perhaps this memoir is also meant to remind us never to stop trying to see things through younger eyes nor to dismiss people or their ideas because they are young. And ultimately, this memoir is all about passing on the baton – and a belief in the extraordinary privilege of living in a democratic and free society.

I do not know whether Felix Dodds is a relative of Elliott Dodds – who died in 1974, the year Felix's political feelings became aroused after attending a meeting about apartheid in South Africa. But Elliott Dodds would have been quite an inspiration for Felix.

In 1920 he published *Is Liberalism Dead?* followed, between 1922 and 1966, by six other major books. Although he would not have agreed with all of Elliott Dodds' ideas Felix would have recognised the clarity of his thinking and the importance of the *Unservile State Group*, of which, in 1953, Elliott became chairman, and which, for the first time since the publication of the Yellow Book, in 1928, explored what British Liberalism was for.

Felix has been a worthy heir to this tradition – evident in his own writing; in the creation of the Young Liberal Philosophy Group; and a brave willingness to think outside the box. This hasn't always made him popular but, as his namesake rightly insisted, parties become hobbled and incapable of progress when they suffocate free thinking, crush conscience, or become incapable of accommodating or understanding dissent. From time to time we all need to be challenged and made to feel uncomfortable. There's an old saying that for the pearl to emerge from the oyster a bit of grit has got to enter in.

In every generation democracy and politics need more bits of grit. That's why this chronicle of the Young Liberals matters and why Felix Dodds story should encourage another generation to pick up that baton and to be part of an honourable tradition.

Lord Rennard Review: The 1980s is a fascinating period in British politics and Felix Dodds played a fascinating role in that period and which he writes extremely well about. The group of people who were close to him then have stuck together and have mostly used their political and campaigning skills to great effect ever since. It took courage for Young Liberals to support a Labour candidate because he was openly gay and the SDP's sitting MP appeared to be homophobic, but I think that they were right even though it caused ructions internally. They pushed the Liberal Party and then the Liberal Democrats to adopt the green agenda well in advance of other parties. I did not agree with all the activities and statements made by this group (for example the one suggesting that the Alliance Manifesto of 1983 was 'not worth voting for'). But they were inspired and inspirational and Felix's account deserves to be read widely.

LIVING IN A FLAT PACK

Its easy to call for more homes to be built - but who is going to build them and where, wonders Mark Smulian

“We are pushing shit up hill”, was the favoured weekly press day admonition of the irascible news editor Frank Hotston when I worked for a magazine called Building Today.

Frank is long dead but were he (or indeed Building Today) to magically return they would find 30 years later an eerily unchanged set of issues around housebuilding.

The need for more homes is - as Frank would also have put it in another favoured phrase “as obvious as the balls on a dog” - and the issues that hamper this now in planning, industry capacity, skills and the cost of land would almost all have been recognisable to Building Today’s news desk in 1987.

Ministers, policy makers, the industry, social landlords, campaigners and others have been round and round the question of how to deliver more homes ever since, with little to show for it.

The motion at Southport was another example. Fine as far as it went, but not addressing how to get homes built.

There were 217,000 new homes built last year, against a government target of 300,000 a year by 2025. Yes, even the Tories have recognised that more homes new homes are needed, though they refuse to will the most obvious means of doing so by lifting restrictions on local authority borrowing to build homes.

The planning system is often blamed for holding up the supply of new homes - usually by free market advocates.

That though is there to ensure that building does not become a free for all and that when development does take place it can - at least in theory - be planned together with the necessary infrastructure and with a contribution towards this from developers who will benefit from the increased land values.

Planning can sometimes be slow, and subject to local political pressures against building new homes.

It’s significant though that not even the Home Builders Federation (HBF) seeks any root and branch change.

If the entire planning system vanished tomorrow - along with green belts and areas of outstanding natural beauty - it would make very little difference to the supply of homes because the problem is capacity.

Put simply, there are not enough people who have the skills to build homes and, at least intermittently, there are not enough materials from which to build them.

There is not a skill shortage because of some transient factor that will soon right itself; there have been skill shortages for at least 30 years, probably longer.

Even though being qualified in a skilled construction trade is usually a relatively secure route to being in demand and reasonably paid, the industry has never cracked the problem that it cannot recruit enough people.

Whether it is the pay available during apprenticeships, the usual necessity to work out of doors in all weathers, an image of mud and grime or just that other industries offer something more attractive, construction has been riven by shortages of skilled tradespeople in all but the uttermost depths of recessions.

This is despite having a well-organised system under which firms pay a statutory levy to the Construction Industry Training Board, which they get back according to how much they invest in training.

The idea is that those that fail to invest in training cannot simply poach skilled labour from those that do, but must contribute through levy payments.

Even if some increase in recruitment could suddenly be achieved - and little in the past suggests it can be - it would still be years before the throughput of people in training schemes made much difference to the availability of skilled labour.

Liberator readers are unlikely to be interested in the niceties of construction training, but the skills shortage makes it impossible to bring about any great leap forward in building conventional new homes even were the land, money and planning permissions all available.

One way to increase the industry’s capacity to some extent is to encourage small and medium sized firms to build homes once again by making smaller sites available.

The industry has become dominated by about 10 huge builders, with a plethora of very small firms and the middle having vanished through takeovers and mergers.

Volume builders may have large developments in progress but they will release about one home a week to avoid overloading local markets - and can afford to keep up this leisured pace.

Smaller ones would need their money back quicker, the thinking goes, and so have an incentive to make homes more rapidly available. This is no doubt true, though how many additional homes can be provided remains to be seen.

Brexit is going to make a bad situation worse. Research by the HBF found that 19.7% of workers on housebuilding sites are ‘non UK’, rising to more than 20% in the south east and 56.3% in London.

Some 70% of workers from the EU are aged 20-39, compared with only around half of UK born ones, suggesting that relying on British workers would soon present the housebuilding industry with not just a skills crisis but a retirement one too.

CRITICAL CONCERN

As an industry-wide construction Brexit manifesto put it: “Given the severity of the skills shortages we already face, the retention of these workers is of critical concern to the construction industry.”

There is a problem here too for attempts to

regenerate the regions. Given that the building work associated with this is presumably intended to be additional to - and not instead of - economic activity in the south east, there is no pool of unemployed skilled tradespeople ready to leap into action.

Even the north east and north west drew 7.2% and 5.2% respectively of their housebuilding workforce from other EU countries, according to the HBF.

Nor would encouraging the social housing sector solve the problem. That would be worthwhile in itself, but so long as housing associations and local authorities are chasing the same scarce skilled workers as anyone else the balance of the types of homes built might change but not the overall total.

One solution though offers itself. Post-war prefabs have largely vanished, but until comparatively recently could still be found. They were a cheap way of rapidly housing people bombed out of their previous homes.

The concept, though not the designs and materials used 70 years ago, has come back into favour with those looking for how to drive a leap forward in new home completions rather than a slight nudge upwards.

Modular housing would see components made in factories and assembled into homes on site.

The idea is that the components would be cheaply mass produced in a manufacturing process by people who need some skills but not the lengthy training of a traditional craft worker.

Being factory work it would be at risk of delays from bad weather only at the final assembly stage, and being standard products there would be less risk of defects.

Modular homes must be assembled, but this could be by people who also need less elaborate training than a craft worker.

So what is holding this back? It's a question of confidence - few want to put in the large investment needed to get a modular building components factory up and running unless they are sure there will be a market for the homes, whether from social landlords or private buyers.

Legal & General Homes has dipped its toes furthest into the water with a manufacturing facility near Leeds for its private rent market venture.

Housebuilder Berkeley, which operates mainly around London, has said it will open a factory and Essex-based Swan Housing Association has started manufacturing components, though Warrington's Your Housing Group pulled out of a deal with a Chinese investor to build one.



CHICKENS AND EGGS

It's a chicken and egg question - there can't be a market for modular until the components are available and the components can't be available until there is a market.

One solution is for the central and local government to support this by making land owned by public bodies available for modular housing and by both local authorities - preferably freed of their borrowing restrictions - and housing associations then using these sites.

If that process started it could scale up to a point where the private sector became confident that its investment would be viable and joins in, finally driving the sharp increase in output needed.

And where should these homes be built? There is nothing like an application to build new homes to get Liberal Democrats frothing at the mouth. Printers hum with Focus denouncing plans to 'concrete over' almost anything.

It's not only Liberal Democrats who are capable of believing that more homes must be built but not near anything in which they have an interest; plenty of voters will simultaneously worry about where their children can live while opposing construction of the homes they might live in.

Developments that are inappropriate on heritage, amenity and 'town cramming' grounds should be opposed.

But it is hypocritical for a party that talks nationally about solving the housing crisis to have a default setting of opposing new homes unless there is some reason not to - rather than the opposite.

Modular housing could offer a way to mitigate the housing crisis. If it does, those homes (always ritually described by developers, social landlords and politicians as 'much needed') will have to be built somewhere, even if they spoil the next Focus campaign.

FARRON FACTORS

Tim Farron's faith and accent should not be held against him, says Gordon Lishman

Tim Farron's enforced departure as leader raises important questions well beyond his religious views and apply to all would-be leaders.

I'm an atheist and a humanist. I don't think that agreeing with me is a necessary condition of my supporting for a leadership candidate. Nor do I prefer potential leaders whose faith is more defined by observance than serious belief. I have supported candidates with strong religious faith and that issue hasn't had much impact on why I didn't vote for others.

In all those cases and others, people's political positions and sometimes their voting record have been influenced by their beliefs.

Leaders should be people of strong principles prepared to live by them. For many in our party, those beliefs are religious and a major part of why they are liberals. I'd rather have a leader of strong beliefs than not.

Parties should define leaders, not vice-versa. This is the most important message for the liberal and left side of politics. It is the conventional wisdom, particularly to the press, that a leader is 'the boss', whose personality and ideas define their party and who intervenes from on high whenever there's a perceived problem.

Like much conventional wisdom, it's wrong in principle and practice. I don't want a leader who gives in to authoritarian assumptions about their role.

Shifting responsibility for the Liberal Party's general election manifesto from leader to party was a long battle, eventually successful and carried into the Liberal Democrats. The same was true of the party's election of its leader and the principle that the leader's role was defined by the constitution rather than by the commons party and the slippery concept of the British constitution. The leader is the spokesperson for the party, not the other way round. If a leader has strong personal views and principles, they won't always agree with every bit of the party's policy. Who does?

She or he should be able to say what they think without undermining the party and while recognising that the party's position is decided by the party. Particularly on issues of conscience, it should be accepted they will support their beliefs, even if the party's policy is different. Yes, a leader should lead, but that should be based on mutual respect.

There was one comment in the Farron debate which at first struck me as risible – but then realised it was meant seriously. It argued "Farron should go" because "young people today are very tolerant, so they can't stand anyone who doesn't share their views on tolerance".

Can I suggest that it's not difficult to be tolerant of people with whom you agree? The test of tolerance is the way you respond to people with whom you disagree. Although I am happy about the fact that most young people eschew religion, I don't think that

we should impose our belief on everyone else.

This confused and illiberal view about tolerance is linked to the fallacy that leaders wholly define parties. More than one person reported people saying that they wouldn't vote for the Liberal Democrats because of Tim's interpretation of his faith. When that's clearly personal and different from the party's view, it's the party position that should be dominant. And Tim made clear that he shares this view.

"It wasn't Tim's religious views that put people off; it was his funny accent and the fact that he didn't look like a statesman"

Not many people would say this openly, but my experience suggests that the prejudice is quite widely shared. Like other forms of expression of prejudice, it's followed by "of course, that's not my view, but we have to understand the views of ordinary people".

To many people, my accent is very like Tim's. I wouldn't say that it was 'funny' in either sense of the word, but I have noticed it affects how people see me and does mean quite a lot of people (including many with regional accents) don't see you as leader or chief executive material.

Since 1945, how many people with an English regional accent have been prime minister – one, I think, Harold Wilson. My guess would be that Peel in the 1840s was the last before Wilson. In a time that challenges many forms of prejudice, perhaps we should turn our attention to this one.

There are arguments, more or (often) less convincing, to explain why many party meetings are in practice open only to people who can stay in London overnight. Are those reasons good enough to justify the fact that our party is run from the political and social perspectives of London and the south east?

Is it really acceptable that only three elected members of the Federal Board come from any of the three northern, two midlands and two western regions of England? How many of them live in Labour-facing constituencies?

Aspects of the way these issues around Tim's faith were discussed should prompt more consideration and perhaps tolerance. And if that involves re-thinking some common expectations about the role of a leader, so much the better.

Gordon Lishman is a member of the Liberal Democrats Federal Board

LIBERALS LEFT

Roger Jenking says the continuing Liberal party fills a worthwhile role

Within reason, this is a warts and all portrait of the Liberal party. It is necessary because the only recent news Liberator readers have had is of small attendances at Liberal Party events and - to put it politely - unwise alignments made by one party group in 2015-16 (Liberator 372).

It is no secret that the Liberal Party is a small player. Since its formation by anti-merger Liberals in 1988, it has not taken off nationally and has declined. It is thinly represented in most parts of the country, overall membership is low and patchy and meetings, including assemblies, do not need large venues.

Many of the big beasts, Michael Meadowcroft, Rob Wheway, Fran Oborski, have left and David Morrish has died. The party is seen as a pro-Brexit, mildly distributionist, de-centralising, cautiously radical.

Looked at nationally the party is tiny. But in areas ranging from the west country through the East Midlands and Yorkshire to Merseyside, there is a significant presence. The party can be looked at as local groups coming together to act nationally. In that perspective then the presence does not look so very shabby. Many of the people in them more than punch their weight.

I am one of the few Liberal party members to vote Remain in 2016. I was reluctant but convinced ultimately by the dangers and uncertainties of leaving and I still had an amount of European idealism. And, if I had voted Leave, I would have to hold my nose.

I hold no brief for the xenophobic reasons for leaving the EU. Nor do I believe that indigenous British culture was in danger of being swamped, but there was limited validity in the population density argument. And even closer ties with the US is code for a profoundly unequal relationship.

But beyond these general and, in some cases irrational arguments, there are ideological objections, valid in their own terms, in the political spectrum. Conservatives might feel that the EU interferes with the pure free market. Socialists might dislike the 'rich persons club'. Above all, how is it possible to reconcile Liberal belief in de-centralised community control with an avowedly ever closer union of powers and the much cited democratic deficit?

Some Liberals in one area did not distinguish themselves in the referendum and the following general election but there were good, solid reasons - ideological ones at that - for Leave.

Meanwhile, the party's support for 'Canzuk', which advocates free trade and movement between the 'old Commonwealth' countries of Australia, Canada and New Zealand might appear discriminatory in favour of 'white' people. This is a criticism which should have been directly addressed.

But none of these countries are now more than about 70% white and no Liberal would object to other countries joining.

I would like to see Liberals go further on re-distribution. Gross inequality means that we must look at taxes on wealth, large amounts of property, inheritance and increasing differentials in income tax. But in ideas to tackle the continuing economic power of old money, the party has done well. Its universal inheritance policy would give everyone a sum of money in youth, paid for by large increases in inheritance duty. The dead have no economic rights and the scions of rich families have no inherent right to further bonanza.

Inequality has been fuelled by austerity. Liberals opposed Coalition policy on this. Unlike the authoritarian left, we realised that tax raised to pay off debt was wasted money. Liberal Democrats have claimed that inequality in 2015 was less than in 2010, but that depends on which percentiles one looks at. Liberals would have taken the third way, neither savage cuts or letting the debt grow but getting more revenue from the better off and big corporations.

The party recognises that the old fashioned nationalisation advocated by the Corbynistas would not be successful. We would prefer a government golden share, co-operating and regionalisation. We are bringing something to the table on this.

A slew of radical policies exists. Not all of these are fully thought out and some areas are stronger than others - like any other political party.

I won't go through the list but may I draw special attention to our opposition to nuclear weapons and power.

I have largely avoided criticism of the Lib Dems. I know, as do others in our party, that there are more genuine Liberals in that party than in ours and that it is not completely stuffed with technocrats. Co-operation between Liberals in both parties, others and none should be encouraged.

But the Liberal Democrats in recent times have a besetting sin and that is trying to place the party in the best place in the political spectrum for optimising electoral advantage. Pragmatism is inevitable in politics but there is a limit. If I am allowed one chauvinist boast, it is that there are a few chancers in the Liberal Party.

It is not for everyone, especially if you want to base your social life around politics, but there is definitely a place for it.

Roger Jenking is a member of the Liberal party

THE EAST IS RED

Liberal Democrats success in parts of London's May all-out elections masked a wipe-out in the capital's east.

Gwyneth Deakins offers some ideas on how to rebuild

Inevitably after the latest local elections in London we are hearing much about the Lib Dems' successes and little about the failures. That is perfectly reasonable since no-one wants to discourage the activists by deluging them with pessimism. However, despite the well-advertised triumphs in Richmond, Kingston and Merton there are some less welcome developments elsewhere.

The fact is that in London, apart from places where we have or have had MPs and there are strong local parties (like Southwark, Haringey) the Lib Dems are represented only on Merton, Ealing, Kensington and Camden.

The number of London councils on which there are no Lib Dem members increased from 18 to 23. We got wiped out in Redbridge, Brent, Hackney, Barnet and Harrow.

It seemed to make little difference whether the local parties fought what we would normally consider to be good campaigns, or not. We failed to make breakthroughs in places where the local party is numerous and fought well-publicised and well supported campaigns, and we failed to hold on to seats where local councillors had been conscientious and industrious. In particular east London is something of a wasteland for Lib Dems, with no councillors east of Camden north of the river, and none east of Southwark in south London.

It seems to me that there are four principal reasons for this.

LABOUR ROLL

First and most obviously, Labour is on a roll in London at the moment. In Redbridge they won wards where they had fought only limited campaigns with unknown candidates and a less than stellar record of running the council.

Corbynism appeals to young professionals - the very people who would be most disadvantaged by a Corbyn government of course - and has not put off enough traditional Labour voters to make a significant difference.

The fact that most current Labour council leadership is virulently anti-Corbyn is a subtlety that escapes most voters. In the nature of political cycles, it is to be expected that this tide will turn but we cannot wait mutely for that to happen - it would be good to have some ideas about how to turn it sooner rather than later.

Second, in east London particularly the population is increasingly from the BAME communities and the Liberal Democrats have failed, with the exception of some outstanding individuals, to engage effectively with them.

Labour most obviously has enabled people from the BAME communities to rise to high political office - even the Conservatives have done so - the Lib Dems' record on this is embarrassing. Even the photo on the London Lib Dems' Facebook page until recently had no non-white party members in it until I and certain others put some pungent messages on the page. Unless we employ all-BAME shortlists to get such candidates elected I cannot see how we are going to change this. But change it we must.

Third, my experience is that with every year that passes more people vote in local elections according to the national political picture rather than on local issues.

The shifting population in London, reflecting the lower levels of home ownership and the higher levels of short-term renting, exacerbates this problem.

Our traditional menu of regular newsletters and action on local issues is difficult to sell to people who have only lived in an area for a year, who expect to move on again and who work too many hours to be concerned about what is happening at the end of their street.

Unfortunately, the Lib Dems at national level are scarcely visible. Inevitably much of the blame for this lies with the press who give publicity to parties mainly by reference to the number of MPs they have. Even so, the Greens for example seem to put themselves about more effectively than the Lib Dems. Our MPs and Peers need to do better. And a change of leadership should happen sooner rather than later.

Finally, a gripe I have had for many years of involvement in east London Lib Dems - the lack of support from the party, nationally and regionally, for small local parties.

In saying this I must exempt certain individuals from any criticism - quite the reverse in the cases of the excellent Caroline Pidgeon and the steadfast regional campaigns officer Pete Dollimore.

Overall however it feels as though those who know the right people get more help - for instance who decides which local London parties are going to get Sir Vince to come to their annual dinner, and which ones struggle even to get a peer to come and address their AGM?

Are target seats determined by who shouts the loudest and self-publicises most effectively or by a strategic analysis of where our efforts should be targeted?

Who decided that Connect was the best software package for small parties with limited IT skills? Who decides where our party luminaries should help with canvassing and appear in those annoyingly smug group photos on Facebook?

Arguably they should first and foremost be helping us to defend seats we already hold but that seems to be less important than fraternising with the usual suspects elsewhere.

It is worth pointing out that the lack of Lib Dem councillors is not solely a concern for individual boroughs where our representation is small or non-existent. Our representation on London-wide bodies will be similarly reduced and the outlook for future mayoral and Greater London Authority candidates is bleak unless we can turn things round.

Lib Dems outside London may feel that as long as we are doing well in the rest of the country this matters little, but of course it does matter what happens in our capital city. And I believe the signs are that we face similar uphill struggles in other cities too.

So, what are the answers?

I think we have to accept to some degree the turn of the political cycle – Corbynism can't last for ever, even if it takes a Corbyn government to illustrate how disastrous left-wing Labour can be. Having said that the Lib Dems could and should be far more outspoken in their critique of Labour. This is especially true in London – Caroline Pidgeon does a good job of calling out the mayor but we need to be hammering London's Labour councils on a much more strategic basis. After all, more of them than ever are now virtual one-party states and in-fighting is likely to feature heavily as much as the usual maladministration.

PLAN OF ATTACK

At the moment there isn't a coordinated plan of attack to ensure that we are all plugging the same messages all over London about why a Labour-led council is a Bad Thing.

At national level we have to be much bolder in challenging Labour. According to the usual laws of politics the current level of discord within Labour should be electoral suicide, yet it is not so. They have persuaded the public that it is they who are most likely to defend public services such as schools and the NHS, although our policies, especially the £1 on income tax to support the NHS, are equally if not more attractive. We have to continue to highlight the absurdity of Labour's position on Brexit, although Brexit didn't get us more than a handful of votes at the local elections – not in Redbridge anyway.

And I think we need to look again at our campaigning techniques. This is more about our messages than the mechanics of the operation. I have argued for a long time (including in *Liberator*) that there is too much emphasis on the mechanics and not enough on the 'softer' aspects such as voters' emotional responses to current issues. I could find fault with my own campaign in Redbridge and blame our losses on

“In east London particularly, the population is increasingly from the BAME communities and the Liberal Democrats have failed, with the exception of some outstanding individuals, to engage effectively with them”

inadequate technique but I know there were other places where this was not the case and they still lost – sometimes more heavily than we did. There is a big opportunity here to use our new members to give fresh insights on what they think will work.

Naturally there are opportunities for growth and success in the future. Few London councils have been taken over by Momentum and yet there is a strong undercurrent of Momentum members dissatisfied with the established leadership of many London Labour councils.

I have not mentioned the Conservatives but their outlook in east London is scarcely better than ours. So we should keep bugging on . . . as long as we don't get

carried away by our successes, and take a long hard look at our failures too.

Gwyneth Deakins has been a Liberal Democrat councillor in Redbridge and Tower Hamlets

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FOLLOWING GANDHI AGAINST BREXIT

A campaign of non-violent civil disobedience is needed now to stop the madness of Brexit, says Jonathan Hunt

Brexiters depend increasingly on distorted definitions of democracy and on astounding economic illiteracy. Every time any are challenged, from cabinet ministers to saloon bar bores, they fall back on repeating that 17m people, wrongly described as a majority of the British people, voted Leave.

That's a little over 36% of the electorate, close to what Hitler obtained to seize control of the Reichstag in 1933.

According to them, 2016 was The Vote. It must bind us forever. We don't need a second opinion. The British people have had their say – once.

It is like taking one point in the past and declaring that was The Decision. As Clement Atlee was the last prime minister to achieve a decisive majority vote, his views must continue to dominate.

Yet there has been a general election every 3.5 years in Britain since Atlee first won. Some 19 second opinions have been expressed. But under Brex-shit reasoning, it can't apply to a referendum based on known facts and agreed positions. Only prejudice and bigotry count.

The end of 2019 will mark the passing of another 3.5 years; by then everyone should know what Brexit means. A short delay should allow perfect 20:20 vision.

PILING UP AIR MILES

Government Brexiters rely on making free trade deals with other countries to replace the current 45% of business done with the EU. But even now when Liam Fox is piling up his air miles he keeps hearing the response familiar to all cold-callers: "Sorry, but we have quite enough trade deals for now, thank you very much. But do ask us again in a year or so."

Wait a few more years and the optimistic Fox may feel rewarded. Trade deals a-plenty will be on offer. Trade deals that eluded us during our years of EU-based prosperity will be stacking up. That is, of course, when our wages, currency, employment levels and living standards have fallen far down the trough.

That may be the kind of enforced business we have to do one day, but it is not what we want for our children and grandchildren – and certainly not what they want for themselves, as a million students recently demonstrated. They watch in anger and despair as leading employers leave our shores and set-up within the EU; the kind of companies they had looked forward to working for will soon be no more on our shores.

In the long-term, a poverty-stricken Britain could win more export business – providing that teams of skilled workers have not been disbanded, and training continues despite the loss of budgets. But we all remember what Keynes said about the long-term. Some of us sooner than others.

It is much later in the Brexit battle than we think. In about 100 days from when you read this, we will be past what some regard as the point of no return. In 270 days, we will formally leave the EU. Whatever the consolidation period, if there is one, whatever the success of retired politicians from all parties in uniting, whatever, whatever....most of us have given up believing in miracles or divine intervention. No Amarda of little EU boats sailing to rescue us.

It is time to campaign, hard, effectively and, I regret to say, ruthlessly. Starting now. Not when we have been cast off into the Atlantic, prostrating ourselves to the uncertain and rapidly changing mercies of Donald Trump. Tweets from a Twit will dictate our fate.

Liberal Democrats are well aware that more than 30m Brexit sceptics did not vote for the simple proposition of quitting the EU. But most voters are not, or have forgotten. They are unhappy about the reality, but are limply accepting it for sake of a quiet life or because they look in vain for a lead.

Believe it or not, a large number don't know that the Liberal Democrats are the only main party opposed to our leaving, and demanding a first referendum on the terms, cost and conditions of what's been agreed. Not a second opinion on the stab-in-the-dark of June 2016.

But we only have ourselves to blame. Even some borough parties in the May local elections refused to promote our Exit-Brexit stance as an election platform "in case we upset those Leave voters who might vote for our local policies".

Yet in most parts of the inner city, Black and other ethnic victims of the institutionally racist Home Office were dying for us to say 'no' to Brexit. They fear their citizenship will be at greater risk as their human rights protection is left behind in Europe. Brexit is just what the immigration Stasi are waiting for.

Let them be reassured that there are good reasons for us to yet be saved from the terrors of post-Brexit.

First, that the electorate will be swelled by millions of young people barred from voting in 2016, but even keener to do so in 2019, especially if under-18s are given the vote this time; and that the caucus of care-home Conservatives will 'leave' permanently,

We have a simple message to communicate. Over and over and over again. Loudly and clearly. And to keep pressing the levers of power, persuading the more thoughtful of that 36% to listen to the blunt evidence, putting peace and prosperity before prejudice.

Let's warn everyone that the simple cash cost of leaving the EU will mean the UK will have to pay, over a period, an estimated £35bn either in taxation or in savagely slashed state services. And put out a mock 'invoice' to help concentrate their minds on financial reality.

Many economists believe it will take another couple of decades of tighter austerity before our post-Brexit bills are settled.

Remaining In, on the other hand, would produce a bonus for us all, with a basket of RPI-tested essentials leaving more change in all of our hard-pressed purses, mostly those of the oppressed poor.

Whatever the savings, we must ram it home to voters we can never rely on Labour to put the needs of the nation first. What drives Jeremy Corbyn and his followers are that they know only too well they could never build a Marxist state while Britain remains within the EU.

To them, Marxism matters much, much more than restoring prosperity to citizens, or any of the supposed left-wing ideas like ending austerity, dealing with bad employers or nationalising utilities. These play second fiddle to seizing and retaining power.

CORBYN'S MARXISM

Corbynite strategy dictates it is essential to depart the EU to begin the process. Policies to concentrate power at the centre is the necessary foundation for total control of political and economic decisions. The Momentum will move inexorably towards where our Marxist masters know best.

Having lived in, or visited Marxist states, I have witnessed what happens when power is centralised; the only line is the state line on every issue, overriding all thought. Few individuals dare express other views for fear of retribution. More enlightening is when the reverse occurs, personal freedom restored, power decentralised and enterprising local communities take over.

Never believe, though, that Conservative policies are a solution. The ultra-Tory policies we are experiencing are transporting us back to the 19th century, creating the ideal conditions that lead to a Marxist revolution.

Indeed, 19th century mill-owners were liberal, benign and caring compared to the multi-national corporates growing obscenely rich by exploiting their workers through low wages, oppressive discipline and horrendous conditions.

Brexit would make us more vulnerable to such predators, if there is no EU to harmonise laws to end these practices. or to plan collectively for a future in which advanced robots will, according to many predictions, lead to 15m job losses. That will be better dealt with by a united Europe in the world's richest market.

And it's why Liberal Democrats must devise and promote more left-leaning policies on a range of economic and employment subjects. Our Three Rs: Redistribution of Power; Redistribution of Wealth and Redistribution of Rights, responsibilities and privileges, are essential to protect workers and human rights, and create investment in industry, infrastructure and individuals.

Our campaign to save Britain from Brexit must be based on a truly popular platform. We have to be ready now to recover our radical edge. First by persuading

“A large number don't know that the Liberal Democrats are the only main party opposed to our leaving”

those accepting the inevitability of leaving that Remain is still a strong probability.

The 2016 referendum shows the nation is split right down the middle, with a third of the electorate, plus a possible two million new voters, still to make up their minds. By 2019, the numbers may have changed significantly.

We must not be beggars without the ballot in our

hands, to misquote an oft-sung anthem. Basic justice demands another vote. If the result still shows a majority to leave, then we must accept the will of the people. But if it rejects Brexit, then we must stay in the EU.

But we first have to force legislators to give us the vote. We achieve that by the usual processes of logic, persuasion and negotiation. But as all negotiators know, reason is never enough. You have to be able to threaten, with meaningful threats to deliver.

Our threat is a comprehensive campaign of non-violent civil disobedience, which Gandhi defined as “the active professed refusal to obey certain laws, demands and commands of a government or an occupying international power.” Civil disobedience was his strategy of non-violently refusing to co-operate with injustice, leading to independence for India.

Injustice perfectly describes any decision to leave the EU without directly consulting the people about its terms and costs. We must use the time we have left to warn Government and Parliament that denial of a referendum means we will rebel with an all-out campaign of non-violent civil disobedience and disruption.

And call out 30m Brexit sceptics to demonstrate that a nation divided will not just mildly go away. Carrying placards through the streets is not enough. We must draw attention to a just cause by causing enough inconvenience to show we mean business.

For the threat of disruption can be more effective than the actuality. Following Gandhi in opposing unjust taxes shows what the wronged half of a divided nation can rightfully achieve.

But we should also preach a positive message. As Remainers, Returners and Reformers let's establish rival, shadow EU negotiating teams, demanding, for example, supremacy of an elected European Parliament; reducing the number and power of Eurocrats; and outlawing the growth of fascist power in some eastern European states.

The EU needs Britain to help protect the peace we have enjoyed for 70 years. And continue to be a civilised, cultured continent, respecting all democratic member countries and all citizens, whatever their race and ethnic background.

Jonathan Hunt is a financial journalist, anti-racist campaigner and member of Southwark Liberal Democrats

OBITUARY: COLIN ROSENSTIEL

David Grace pays tribute to “a proper, old school awkward liberal”

Caron Lindsay hit the nail on the head when she described Colin thus. Colin died on 8 May aged 68 after a long battle with lymphoma. Colin was the first Liberal I met and I met him at the same time as Jeremy Thorpe. Unfortunately I was a Conservative at the time. It was a Cambridge Liberal Students squash (freshers' meeting) in 1970.

Colin must have a share in the responsibility for making me a Liberal four years later. He himself had no such need of conversion, arriving at Trinity College in 1968 already a committed Liberal. Nobody from those university years can have forgotten him. Colin was returning officer for all those student STV elections. Indeed he persuaded the students union that STV was the method to use. He went on counting their elections for the rest of his life.

It was also Colin who moved all those amendments to the constitution of the Cambridge Union Society. When I joined the Young Liberals, there was Colin performing the same tasks and, as I discovered at my first Liberal Assembly, he provided the same services to the party itself.

It would be wrong to remember Colin only for those processes which we mock but which are at the heart of democratic politics. Colin made his mark in Cambridge where he was a councillor for Market Ward 1973-88 and 1992-2014, incidentally the ward with the highest Remain vote in the entire country. Over the years many new councillors benefitted from his mentoring and his immense knowledge both of council business and the history of Cambridge. The city council itself recognised his long service by unanimously electing him an honorary councillor.

Colin was an acknowledged authority on the organisation of local government and the conduct of elections. He was active for many years in the Association of Liberal Councillors, serving on its standing committee, then in ALDC and you will still find the classic ALC Campaign Booklet Number 12 The Theory and Practice of Community Politics (1980) on his website at <http://www.rosenstiel.co.uk/>

Colin produced the 'City Centre Circular' even before the term 'Focus leaflet' was coined. He was a doughty campaigner in the lost struggle to keep the character of the Kite area of Cambridge with its small independent shops and businesses, which has sadly been replaced by the ghastly Grafton Centre. Colin was once riding along Burleigh Street which runs through that area and was stopped by a policeman, who told him it was a one-way street. Colin explained to the confused copper that it wasn't.

It was merely no entry at that end and he had walked in.

On another occasion, so Colin told me, he had helped the police by reporting a car with a fictional number plate. I asked Colin how he knew. He explained the system of county registration to me and that the number on the plate was much higher than the number of cars registered in the county that particular year. This is but one example of the extraordinary amount of detail Colin carried in his head but a trivial one compared with his knowledge of the people in the ward that he served for so long. I am so glad that only five days before his death Colin was at the local election count in Cambridge Guildhall to see the party regain his old ward from Labour.

Colin was an inveterate transport geek and cycling enthusiast and campaigner. Can anyone, even in the Liberal Democrats, have known so much about trains and railways as Colin? One morning last year Cambridge Liberals attended the opening of the new Cambridge North Station to take the first train to the main station. As I arrived Colin was belting south on his bike away from the station. He was determined to take the first train going north as well as the first going south. Not surprising then that Colin's last ever conference speech at Southport in March, when he already knew he was dying, was in an emergency debate on trains. Unlike Colin, I don't know the history but I feel sure that Cambridge's great network of cycle lanes and routes must owe something to his service on the council.

Colin saw his efforts rewarded when we won Cambridge in the general election in 2005 but it would be a mistake to think that Colin's activity was confined to Cambridge. In the 1970 general election, with no Liberal candidate in Cambridge, Colin campaigned for Richard Wainwright in Colne Valley. You could find Colin at elections and by-elections all over the country. Colin worked in IT and assisted party HQ in Cowley Street with his skills. He conducted elections to the party's federal committees and developed software for the count. He also published all the results online stage by stage and you can still find them for all those elections from 1988 to 2016 here: <http://www.rosenstiel.co.uk/idelections/index.htm>.

Nor was his enthusiasm confined to the party. His psephological expertise also involved him in the Electoral Reform Society of which he became chair. He was a pioneer of the party's online conference system Cix and it was once calculated that 10% of all the posts were by him.

I won't mince my words. Colin could be bloody awkward and many a chair of a meeting found it hard to shut him up. They would have been wrong if they had always succeeded, because if you listened there was usually some useful and detailed content to what he said. He served as deputy leader on the city council to David Howarth who recalls him as "... a political pragmatist and ... the most loyal colleague anyone could ever wish for". David adds: "He was a force for moderation and conciliation within the group and even with the opposition."

One last story which recalls Colin for me. The police suspected that the German au pair of a teacher at Cambridge Tech (now Anglia Ruskin University) was a runaway Baader Meinhof terrorist and they mounted an undercover watch outside the house disguised as council road workers. A man on a bicycle came along and asked what was going on. The police said, "Roadworks sir" and tried to get him to go as he was drawing attention to them. The man

stayed and insisted that there were no roadworks due there and he knew because he was on the Traffic Management Committee. No, this was not Colin. The incident was fictional and occurs in the novel *Wilt* but I like to think that the author Tom Sharpe must have met Colin before he wrote it.

Colin was the son of Jewish refugees who fled Berlin in the 1930s but many members of his family did not get away and perished in the Holocaust. Colin himself was a great supporter of the Holocaust Memorial Movement. Colin met his wife Joye in the Liberal Party and she also became a Cambridge city councillor and even mayor. They were married for nearly 40 years. Both attended Simon Tittle's funeral in Lincoln not so long ago when none of us suspected that Colin would die so soon. Many *Liberator* readers will share his family's grief. Let them be assured that we will not forget him.

David Grace is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

OBITUARY: NICK TREGONING

Peter Black plays tribute to a Welsh Liberal Democrats stalwart

I first encountered Nick at a student-style party hosted by a newly elected Welsh Liberal Democrats councillor, who was concluding his year as a sabbatical officer at Swansea University.

Nick was the students' union manager and was holding court as always, the life and soul of the party. A few years later he joined me as a councillor on Swansea Council and, after he ceased working at the students' union, I offered him a job running my regional assembly office.

Nick worked for me for over 15 years and was a close friend and colleague. He was a hard-working and diligent councillor with a strong sense of social justice and a passionate concern for those less fortunate than himself. Above all though he was a committed Social Liberal with an endearing knack of reconciling some of his more liberal views with an unwavering Christian faith.

He was active as vice-chair of the Welsh Liberal Democrats campaigns and candidates committee with responsibility for candidates and would have worked closely with his counterparts in England and Scotland. He stood a number of times for Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, in Gower in 2007 and Preseli Pembrokeshire in 2010.

Despite having been born in Reading and one-quarter Thai, he was a proud Cornishman who for the entire time he worked for me had the Cornish flag displayed above his desk. He was a keen amateur dramatist with an excellent singing voice and had a knack for languages, even settling down to briefly learn Mandarin at one stage.

He dedicated himself to a number of causes locally, being strongly immersed in the credit union movement at a Swansea, Wales and UK level and also as a leading member of the Swansea Bay Racial Equality Council for a number of years. His briefings on credit unions enabled me to put more than one minister on the spot, while we were able to use his knowledge to assist the credit union in establishing itself in Swansea prison.

More recently he served on the board of the Family Housing Association, typically throwing himself into the role as his health allowed, even travelling to a conference a few weeks before his death, despite clearly being not well enough to do so. He also had a close relationship with Zac's Place, a faith-based organisation that helps the street homeless.

In my office Nick often took on some of the more complex health and benefit cases that came our way, priding himself on a 100% record in winning benefit appeals.

As cabinet member for social services in Swansea he helped to turn around a failing children's services to become one of the best in the country, while as presiding officer he brought order to the chaos that Council meetings sometimes had the habit of descending into.

Nick was a very social person who enjoyed nothing more than a meal or a drink with friends. He took great pride in the achievements of his children and in his grandchildren. He was a popular and well-liked and will be missed by all those who knew him.

Peter Black was Liberal Democrat AM for South West Wales 1888-2016

BUILDING ON BEVERIDGE

After an electoral mauling, Liberal Democrats are working out how to rebuild in Wales, says Jane Dodds

The vision is for a “people-centred society. The government’s aims are nothing less than freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear.”

This is from the first State of the Nation speech by Nelson Mandela on 25 May 1994.

In Wales, the Liberal Democrats have set out an aspirational vision of the Wales we want to see. We look to William Beveridge and the Liberal framework he set out in 1942, which articulated a society that had freedom from squalor, freedom from ignorance, freedom from idleness, freedom from disease and freedom from want.

The challenges he outlined in 1942 have not gone away, but have only changed.

Squalor is about homelessness. In 2018, people who seek emergency accommodation are given unachievable conditions to enter hostels. Many continue to live on the streets, without hope. We have a vision to tackle homelessness, building on many years of work and campaigning by our Liberal Democrat Welsh Assembly team.

Ignorance is about access to education. Kirsty Williams in her role as cabinet secretary for education has championed a vision for children and young people to have the opportunity to get on in life, and be well educated.

Kirsty has introduced a fair and effective student finance system - the first in Europe to provide equivalent support for part-time and post-graduate learners, Wales’ first rural schools strategy, grants for small and rural schools worth £2.5m, and in 2019, a further £90m to enhance the Pupil Deprivation Grant. This is real politics, where we show what the Welsh Liberal Democrats can do in Wales to help children to have a fair chance of having a seat at the table.

Idleness is about access to work – well paid, permanent jobs with good conditions. The challenge is great in providing work that supports us all to live fair lives, when faced with technological developments and a weakening economy.

We want Wales to become an exciting and innovative place to live and work. Our vision must be bold, brave, and harness technology to create an innovative, green, and sustainable economy. Examples like the Swansea Tidal Lagoon should have been given the go-ahead long ago. This would lead to a network of tidal lagoons powering our nation, creating well-paid jobs, harnessing our environment and reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Jobs, a tourist attraction, green energy provision and a badge on Wales that says: “We are innovative, positive and open to business”. This says Welsh Liberal Democrats have the drive to create a sustainable economy that creates opportunity for all.

Freedom from disease is about having an effective and accessible health and social care service which responds to the demands of 21st century Wales. Our discussions on health and social care focus on access to services and treatment, waiting times, and healthy life expectancy. We need a vision for our health services which means it doesn’t matter where you live, or how old you are, you will get exceptional treatment and support. We have shown that the Welsh Liberal Democrats have turned this vision in to reality with the More Nurses (Wales) Bill introduced by Kirsty Williams into law in April, guaranteeing a minimum expectation for nurse to patient ratios.

Freedom from want is about tackling poverty. In two years time, poor families in Wales will lose £2,500 a year, and children will suffer the most. Children in Wales have told charities that what worries them the most is that their parents cannot buy food. Cuts to benefits, particularly to those who have disabilities, are leaving people without dignity. The everyday struggle to afford food, fuel bills and basic essentials is not one that should be here in 2018. We need to look at all solutions to help us understand what helps to take people out of poverty.

And we have a sixth giant evil of loneliness, which limits opportunity and impacts on health. Half a million people in Wales say they feel lonely often or always, and not just elderly people.

New parents, people recently bereaved, single adults are among those who describe the debilitating feelings of isolation. Lack of public transport - especially in rural areas, cuts to voluntary agencies and the fragmentation of families has left people feeling alone. The Welsh Liberal Democrats will campaign against cuts to services, and call for a clear strategy to address the epidemic of loneliness.

Through setting out a vision of the Wales we want to see, we are starting a discussion to shape how we develop policy, so we can offer meaningful solutions to the challenges people face.

We want a Wales of hope and of optimism. Not one that pitches us against ‘others’, that does itself down, or limits our citizens’ aspirations.

We will talk to people to hear the issues that matter to them and spend the next few years producing the bold, liberal ideas needed to create the Wales we want. Ideas that will stand the test of time, and offer hope for the future.

Jane Dodds is leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats

**Hired – Six months
undercover in
low-wage Britain
by James Bloodworth
Atlantic Books 2018
£12.99**

This is a shattering book, and absolutely essential reading for anyone wishing to understand modern Britain.

Journalist James Bloodworth spent six months trying to make ends meet on zero-hour contracts. In the process he gained insights into why the UK voted for Brexit, what feeds anti-immigrant sentiments, how people become trapped in hopelessness, how easy it is to end up homeless, and how hard-working, hard-pressed people surrender to an unhealthy lifestyle.

Working as a £7 an hour ‘picker’ at the Amazon warehouse in Rugeley, Bloodworth was constantly prompted to work harder by ever-present messaging. His employment agency repeatedly short-changed him, while tribunal fees introduced in 2013 (thank you, Coalition government) meant seeking legal remedy was unrealistic. Most staff were eastern Europeans who were desperate for work and afraid of the bosses. “Few English locals I spoke to were willing to put up with the conditions,” Bloodworth reports, and there was a massive drop-out rate.

More depressing still is Blackpool, heaving with the homeless, the addicted, the suicidal and the working poor. Bloodworth works as a care assistant, unable to spend more than a few moments with each old person he visits on his hectic daily rounds. He describes a level of “fearful compliance” among eastern European workers, some of whom could not read medical instructions. Moreover, the ‘clients’ were denied their one daily interlude of human contact, such as was the pressure on carers to move on rapidly.

Bloodworth also paints a dismal picture of Britain’s grim and violent little towns where “dull and identikit chain stores offering the same sensory experience,” have replaced individual high street shops. No wonder people

feel British culture has been overwhelmed.

“Ronald McDonald should take more of the blame than eastern European fruit-pickers,” he concludes.

Rebecca Tinsley

**Pay No Heed to the
Rockets
by Marcello Di Cintio
Saqi 2018 £8.99**

For such a small territory, Palestine has generated a disproportionate amount of books; I have several shelves-full in my library, but most of those works are about history, war and the search for peace.

Literature rarely gets a look in. So Marcello Di Cintio’s journey among Palestinian writers in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel, *Pay No Heed to the Rockets*, is both refreshing and informative. The writers the Canadian author encounters physically or through texts range from the dead and famous, such as poet Mahmoud Darwish, to brave young literary activists (some feminist, one gay) mainly working in cafés in Ramallah, Gaza City and Haifa.

Each has a unique story, all in some way affected by the dispossession and dislocation caused by 1948 and/or 1967, but to very different degrees.

Di Cintio says he was prompted to embark on this project - part travelogue, part lyrical tribute to the craft of writing - by a picture of a young girl joyfully retrieving her rather battered books from the rubble of her home

after an Israeli attack on Gaza. The author managed to track her down, as well as some of the writers who have been harassed at times by the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. One of the most moving passages in the book recounts a visit he made to a venerable family library in Jerusalem’s Old City which has successfully fought off expropriation by Israel and encroachment by so-called settlers.

As usual when Palestine and the Occupation are being examined, there is much to make one angry or depressed, but one of the great strengths of Di Cintio’s book is that he does not become emotionally partisan, nor does he lose his critical faculties while hearing the stories of those he meets along the way.

They emerge from the text as recognisable individuals, with their strengths and their foibles, and one gets a clear sense of the environments in which they live and work. All in all, this is one of the best books I have ever read about Palestine and it should prompt people to get to know some of the work by the Palestinian writers themselves.

Jonathan Fryer

Social Liberal Forum Annual Conference 2018

BIG IDEAS: Putting Progressive Ideas at the Heart of UK Politics

Saturday 28th July 2018, 10am-4pm
Resource for London, 356 Holloway Road, London N7 6PA

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Monday

“London, to thee I do present the merry month of May,” as the dramatists Beaumont and Fletcher wrote. Except by the time you read this it will not be May at all but June. Used as I have become to the electric internet, I now find the inescapable delay between the submission of these diaries and their appearance in the next *Liberator* frustrating. Will my observations on, say, the Master of Elibank still be topical when they come out?

If I were not in possession of such an unimpeachable character, moreover, there might be allegations of sharp practice at the press. A reader coming across my suggestion that Rutland Lad is worth following in the 2.30 at Southwell could suspect that it was dropped in after the aforementioned horse strolled home by six lengths. So let me emphasise that I write these lines on a sunny morning in the merry month of May and put an end to the gossip in the Bonkers’ Arms.

Tuesday

Wandering the well kempt streets of one of London’s more prosperous boroughs, I come upon a superior sort of street market. Among the stalls selling organic coffee and artisan gin, who should I find but my old friend Freddie? “We’ve started a new political party,” he tells me enthusiastically. “We’re going to unite the centre of British politics and win the next election.” I ask who he expects will vote for them. “Oh, everybody. You know, sensible people. The sort of people who worked at Liberal Democrat HQ between 2010 and 2015.”

“And is Fiona a member too?” I ask. “She’s started her own centre party. Their stall is over there behind the falafels.”

Wednesday

A message arrives from Jo ‘Gloria’ Swinson via the electric Twitter urging me to “Protest Trump”. I send a telegram by return telling her that neither I nor any of my staff will be protesting Trump. Neither, I point out, will we be wearing plaid trousers or eating grits (whatever they are). The reason I have booked every charabanc in Rutland for that weekend in July is that we are going to protest against Trump.

You will say that ‘protest’ is shorter than ‘protest against’ and that Americanisms always catch on sooner or later – don’t the young people say ‘hoosegow’ and ‘ranngazoo’ all the time nowadays? But these things matter and if the Liberal Democrats insist upon protesting Trump then I shall have no alternative but to protest against them as well as protest against Trump.

Thursday

Did you see that that boys at Uppingham are to be allowed to wear skirts? Things were very different when I was a pupil there, though one of my chums did escape by dressing as Matron and got as far as Houghton on the Hill before the rozzers caught up with him. He later entered the Foreign Office.

You may also have read that my firm Rutland Analytica is accused of swinging the result in the last election in the Bonkers Hall ward. What we did, and you have to admit it was Terribly Clever, was to combine different sources of data and use them to send messages

Lord Bonkers’ Diary

carefully designed to appeal to individual voters. For instance, by studying the electoral register and the accounts of the Bonkers Hall Estate, we were able to find those for whom the message “Your rent falls due on Lady Day: Vote for Lord Bonkers” was particularly pertinent. Really, I can see nothing wrong with this.

Friday

Full of excitement, Fiona rings me to tell me of her latest plan: she and the other members of her new

party are to hire a car. “We’re going to Lancashire and Lincolnshire. Or are they the same place? Anyway, the idea is we cruise round and whenever we see someone who looks as they voted Leave we point at them, shout ‘Gammon!’ and roar with laughter.” I ask if she imagines this will help the forces of light win a second referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union and she goes rather quiet.

“And what about Freddie?” I then ask. “You two are in different parties now aren’t you?” At this Fiona brightens. “So he’s coming along with us. You see, we have decided to form a coalition.”

Saturday

In view of my comments on Monday, I feel it only fair that I should let you know when I am writing this. It is the afternoon of 19 May and I am about to settle down to watch the F.A. Cup final. I rather fancy Chelsea to win with the only goal of the game, perhaps scored by young Hazard from the penalty spot. If anyone were to ask me to forecast this evening’s winning Lotto numbers, I should say 1, 3, 34, 36, 48 and 52. And the bonus ball will be 22.

Sunday

This moving television drama about Jeremy Thorpe has awakened some distressing memories, not least of the fate of poor Rinka whom I always found a Good Girl. I did my best to warn Norman Scott, who was a stable lad and an unstable lad, against taking up with Thorpe, but he was not to be told.

What a dismal crew we were in those days! I turned down both Cyril Smith’s and Clement Freud’s applications to become trustees of the Bonkers’ Home for Well-Behaved Orphans, and subsequent revelations have only confirmed my wisdom in so doing. Equally, if MPs arranged to have a constituent bumped off every time the casework he, or indeed she, generated became a nuisance, representative democracy would soon grind to a halt. No, with certain notable exceptions that I am too modest to mention, the Liberal Party of the 1970s was not a thing of which one could be proud.

At least the screening of the drama has led to my being asked to give lectures on the period over the summer. I shall be alternating “The Peter Bessell nobody knows” and “Ten fascinating facts about Emlyn Hooson” to audiences in a number of our leading seaside resorts. As seems only proper, I shall be arriving at each by hovercraft.

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