

# liberator



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- 🌟 UK coming apart at the seams - Wendy Kyrle-Pope
- 🌟 Thorpe, stranger than fiction - Jonathan Calder

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## LIBERATOR

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# COMMENTARY

## HOW NOT TO DO IT

Few noticed that when the Liberal Democrats in July held one of the rare parliamentary debates allocated to them they called not merely for a referendum on any Brexit deal but for a 'government of national unity' to implement this.

A few days later, the Conservative pro-Remain dissident Anna Soubry used the same phrase.

What is going on? By its nature, no government of national unity could be formed along the lines of the wartime coalition involving all the main parties, since ardent Brexit supporters would be opposed to it.

Only a minority of Tories could go along with this, and the position of Labour - which still pretends to be pro-Remain while being led by a life-long Eurosceptic - is uncertain.

So why did Vince Cable call for one, even if he didn't call very loudly? It was later clarified by Tom Brake as being required "simply to provide an exit from Brexit and a final say on the deal".

There is always the problem that if all mainstream opinion is corralled in a coalition, the opposition role will default to swivel-eyed headbangers.

But presumably Cable thinks the turmoil in the Conservatives and Labour parties is such that those who support Remain, or even a soft Brexit, will at some point follow the logic of their positions and break away.

Despite never having been previously floated within the party, a government of national unity might give them something to break away to without having all manner of people who are not liberals - no matter how ardently pro-Remain - swamping the Liberal Democrats.

Cable appears to have been thinking a lot about how the party copes with the baffling state of flux now attending British politics.

Ideas are discreetly swirling around, ranging from creating a category of registered supporters through to allowing non-MPs to stand for party leader and more or less anyone to vote in candidate selections.

The first thing to say is that its initial execution has been counter-productive. An attempt to include a £5 'supporters' rate into a long and dull business motion on subscriptions was spotted and stopped by the Federal Board.

Other stray leaks about introducing a 'supporters' category, and a bewilderingly cryptic piece in Lib Dem Voice by Cable himself served, whatever was intended, to stoke suspicion that that something secret was being plotted.

The proposals for party reform, if that is what they turn into, draw heavily on the Canadian Liberals - who now have supporters but not members - and France's En Marche, the movement that came from more or less nowhere to support Emmanuel Macron.

It's always good to learn from liberal parties abroad - indeed some of the Coalition's blunders could have been avoided had Nick Clegg bothered to - but it's also wise to bear in mind how sharply political contexts can differ.

Liberals have been either Canada's governing or main opposition party for all but four of the past 144 years. They have in spades precisely the core vote the Lib Dems lack. France's presidential system encourages new parties to rise and fall around candidates in a way that has no equivalence in the UK.

We might also note that allowing anyone so inclined to pay £3 and vote in a leadership election lumbered Labour with Jeremy Corbyn which, whatever one thinks of him, was hardly the intended outcome. Tinkering with who can vote in elections can have unexpected results.

The idea of opening up the leadership beyond Parliament might look attractive (especially with only 12 MPs) but could put in question the status the party has clung onto for a century of being ranked with the Tories and Labour among 'the three main parties'. A leader outside Parliament risks moving it to the margins inhabited by the Greens and Ukip, who already do this.

After some to-ing and fro-ing there will be a consultation session at Brighton on whichever of these reforms ultimately sees the light of day.

Past experience suggests the party may rebel or become demoralised if ill-considered ideas are driven through under the pressure of "the leader wants this".

Well-considered ones that bring about an expansion of the party's committed support, and allow it to benefit from any upheavals among its rivals, are on the other hand welcome.

The first step is for the party to be told what is actually planned rather than vague rumours leaking out and back-firing subterfuges being used. As Liberator went to press this had not happened.

## NEXT LIBERATOR

Liberator 392 will be posted to subscribers shortly before the Brighton conference. Do come and see us on our stall there, in particular if your subscription is due for renewal still at the modest rate of £25 a year. Individual copies and back numbers will also be on sale.

We will also have a new edition of the Liberator Songbook

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## MEANS OF SUPPORT

Deep in a boring motion on subscriptions due to be put to the Brighton conference, Federal Board members were not amused to find a reference to a £5 rate for 'supporters'.

The FB removed it, having smelled a rat that some new category of membership was being smuggled in by being buried in a business motion few would read.

The Federal People and Development Committee was equally unamused to find plans being laid for a 'supporters' category without it having been told - never mind consulted - and began to make noises.

Its unclear where the drive for a supporters category has come from, but clear it enjoys Vince Cable's support, and may be seen as a way to pre-empt any serious anti-Brexit party that might be formed by breakaway MPs.

It also remains unclear whether this is an exercise aimed at more closely involving those who have, for example, registered to support party campaigns or who help out at election times, or something more elaborate.

If the former, then an attempt to get semi-detached activists more involved - and presumably to raise money from them - will be pretty innocuous.

But it could be intended as much more, to dissolve the difference between 'member' and 'supporter' as the Canadian Liberals have done, and to allow supporters to vote in leadership elections and candidate selections. There is talk of allowing non-parliamentarians to stand as leader.

There will now be a consultation in September before anything happens - though a fair amount of 'Vince wants' may be expected.

The rows will no doubt turn on where the difference lies between member and supporter. If supporters can do things like attend conference cheaply but not vote no-one will mind much.

However, allowing all and sundry to join for £3 a time and vote for leader saddled Labour with Jeremy Corbyn.

While its hard to see who the Lib Dem equivalent of Corbyn might be, this could lay the party open to all manner of embarrassments if, say, huge numbers of well-funded, social media-organised Brexit supporters joined bent on sabotage.

Candidate selections will be another issue. While the idea of throwing them open to supporters has its attractions there has - if only on financial grounds - to be some incentive for people to remain paying members.

These ideas about supporters have come partly from Canada and partly from envy of the success of France's En Marche.

Canada's Liberals have though since 1874 been either the governing party or the main opposition, except for

four years, while France's presidential system allows new parties to rise and fall around candidates.

Neither is very obviously transferrable to the Lib Dems' situation and while its always good to learn from abroad, some caution is needed about applying experience from there to here.

## MIGRATION SEASON

A motion at Brighton with the innocuous title A Fair Deal for Everyone - which rather fails the 'would you say the opposite' test - will deal with policy on migration and as Liberator went to press a lot of unhappiness was already evident.

It has been prepared by a working group chaired by Adam Pritchard - a Clegg-era special adviser - and members were on 16 July summoned to a secret meeting with home affairs spokesperson Ed Davey.

What exactly it says remained officially under wraps in mid-July but one mole told Liberator that while the consultation document's references to "a robust and humane immigration policy" had gone it still gave up on freedom of movement, had a general tone of pandering to the Daily Mail and tinkered at the edges was "when we should be throwing the entire Home Office in the sea and building something new from scratch".

No wonder it was being kept secret. But it will have to see the light of day when the agenda comes out.

## THOUGHT FOR FOOD

The fiasco of the Ashdown Prize for Radical Thought has raised further questions about Your Liberal Britain's strange status in the party.

It launched the competition as: "Got a big, bold, radical idea that'll tackle the problems facing Britain today - and empower citizens whilst you do it? Then the Ashdown Prize is for you! Plus, your idea might just win you £500 and become party policy!"

There was at least an implication of a guaranteed speaking slot at conference for the winner - which came as news to the Federal Conference Committee.

Promotional blurb offered a meeting with Ashdown in the House of Lords, £500 and to "receive support from the team at Your Liberal Britain to turn your idea into a policy motion for debate at Lib Dem Autumn Conference 2018".

This might have generated something big, bold, radical and empowering. Instead the whole thing has become a laughing stock.

The winning idea, from Dorothy Ford, is a perfectly commendable one - to require supermarkets to donate all low risk food waste to charities.

That though could perhaps make one paragraph in a manifesto. It is neither big, bold or radical and its hard to see who it empowers, plus many retailers do this anyway.

YLB must have invested considerable time in this pointless exercise. Yet when FCC member Zoe O'Connell reported on its pre-conference deliberations on Lib Dem Voice nothing in the list of motions considered appeared to be this one.

Meanwhile Williams and YLB's other self-appointed leaders still have their headquarters passes and access to major donors. Some on the Federal Board want to review their privileged position but fear stirring up the backers YLB has in high places.

## **STRICT DISCIPLINE OFFERED**

The Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton will have to try to sort out the confusion created by the reference back at Southport of the proposed new disciplinary arrangements.

Since the new version is still likely to contain enough to offend several different groups, few would bet on its chances this time either.

The process was proposed by Lord Macdonald, who was reported to have resigned the Lib Dem whip in disgust at conference's impertinence in presuming to refer his work back.

As of mid-July he was, according to the Parliament website, the only peer listed as neither a party member, crossbencher or even 'non-affiliated', leaving his status blank.

The motion at Brighton is now expected to say that all complaints which involve crimes have to be reported to the police but if the victim objects to this only the name of the alleged offender will be given.

This is thought to be in line with legal advice but is sure to prove controversial.

One issue that bedevilled the motion at Southport was that the party president would have a right of appeal against disciplinary decisions.

This is now likely to be changed to allow the 'senior adjudicators' from England, Scotland and Wales to do so. How and where 50 paragons of virtue willing to act as adjudicators are to found has again been left unexplained.

Southport saw a row over anonymity and the new proposals are thought to include allowing the possibility of anonymity of complainant and witnesses right through the process.

Since this would allow a member to face expulsion without knowing who had complained about them, another row is in prospect. It is also highly questionable whether this approach would survive a challenge in the courts.

## **INTERNATIONAL INCIDENTS**

Liberal International nearly had to leave its UK home of 70 years and decamp to Amsterdam because of the Home Office's 'hostile environment' directed against anyone foreign.

It appointed South African Democratic Alliance MP Gordon Mackay as its new secretary-general last winter, and he resigned his parliamentary seat to take up the role.

The Home Office refused to admit him on the grounds that his salary did not exceed its specified threshold for foreign workers to come to the UK and LI was not an internationally-recognised non-governmental organisation.

LI protested to no avail that it was, having observer status at various UN organisations. It then

embarrassingly emerged that LI had never registered any formal status in the UK.

Since Mackay was by then in office, the entire organisation faced a move out of the depths of the National Liberal Club to somewhere that would admit him, probably the Netherlands.

The Home Office remained unmoved but political lobbying eventually secured LI a special status with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office allowing Mackay to work in London.

Mackay is not the only liberal to fall foul of the hostile environment recently. Liberal International British Group invited Liberal International Human Rights Committee member Medard Mulangala, from the Democratic Republic of Congo, to speak at a meeting on China's activities in Africa. He too was refused a visa.

## **WHACK A MOLE**

An error that saw details of how to join a Lib Dem phone bank - and so possibly access personal data - on a Facebook page has led to a potential bureaucratic horror.

The party has told the Information Commissioners Office that it would be willing to insist every party Facebook page has a named administrator.

Given the plethora of Lib Dem related pages and lack of clarity over which have official status - such as the Lib Dem Friends of Cake - this would be a nightmarish task.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, no-one is willing to admit to having signed off on this offer.

## **LIBRARY CARD**

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet has been left confused as to its precise destination to recognise the worst motion submitted for the Lib Dems Brighton conference.

Our winner was proposed by '12 party members' and titled Internet Blocking By Public Libraries. It appeared to have been proposed by someone thwarted in a Google search.

It said libraries were blocking access to "job search enquiries and military history sites" and it rejected "regulation of the internet by blunt instrument techniques by local government".

Libraries would have to provide the internet "subject to rationing of terminal time" and by some unexplained means "illegal websites to be blocked at source".

## **SENDING A MESSAGE**

All approved candidates in the Yorkshire and the Humber region were invited by their candidates chair Penny Robinson to apply for selection as PPC for Leeds North West. Except one. Greg Mulholland, who held the seat from 2005-17 was conspicuously missing from this list.

Mulholland abstained with Norman Lamb in the vote on Article 50 last year, which did not endear him to some in his local party, elements of which have sought to prevent him being even a stand-in candidate for a snap election and are understood to have not communicated with him before inviting applications to be his successor.

# A LONG WAY FROM LEWISHAM

## Don't be deceived by Lewisham East - a decent result but the Lib Dems must get radical to get noticed, says Roger Hayes

I love a by-election - who doesn't - and Lewisham East was well run by the party and coordinated well with the delayed election in Southwark where we picked up three more councillors on the same day.

Lucy Salek was a good candidate, objectively the best on the ballot paper, but then the opposition wasn't strong. As a quick aside, did you see the Tory candidate? It's scary to think they would let that stand anywhere, but in a by-election? Clearly the Tories were not trying, and I'm sure they were hoping no one else would bother either (more on that shortly).

Simon Drage was a good choice for campaign manager and he did an excellent job. Statistically, the result looked good for the Liberal Democrats and was talked about favourably by a wide range of political commentators across the media. A 19% swing to the Lib Dems - the only party to see its actual vote, as well as its percentage share, increase with the largest swing from Labour (in opposition) since 1983. It makes for an impressive bar chart.

Aside from my own personal disappointment at Labour managing to just slip over the 50% mark (50.2), I had a sizeable bet on the 40-50% range (grrr), this was an OK result. Another sure-footed step in the Liberal Democrat recovery. We can also portray both Tories and Labour as failing and back all this up with further evidence from the May council elections and recent local by-elections.

I do not often get to south east London, but the people were friendly, and what particularly struck me was how the streets look similar of my home patch of Kingston and Surbiton - no good reason why these people shouldn't vote Lib Dem too. The literature was good and clear and focused on a handful of well chosen issues. Plenty to be pleased about really.

### SCRATCH THE SURFACE

The danger would be if the party actually believed the outcome to be an accurate reflection of the party's fortunes. I'd like to scratch the surface and see what might really be going on.

In the same way as Labour fantasises as being last year's general election victor, Lewisham was another hollow win for Corbyn. At one level it was a by-election that everyone lost. Despite its membership locally, Momentum didn't get the candidate it wanted and Labour were happy to keep a low profile and rely on a large residual vote to see it home regardless of how low the turnout dropped. I think Labour, and even the Tories, will actually be pretty pleased with the result. Here's why.

In these badly broken, Brexit times, with both the Tories and Labour all at sea, stirring up apathy may well become a popular political weapon. It's always

been a tool of the despot. In the absence of a tub-thumping populist, what you need is the vast mass of the people shrugging its shoulders and watching Love Island, or football, or both.

Certainly not the Tories, but I don't believe Labour either, in all truth, wants an election anytime soon so spreading a sense of pointlessness in the process is to everyone's interest. But what are Liberals going to do?

For 30 years pre-Clegg, the Lib Dems had become a by-election machine. Winning 22 by-elections and making 19 gains - more than all other parties combined.

One thing that has never changed is the party's enthusiasm for a by-election, but since the debacle of 2015 three significant things have changed:

The party is still reinventing itself - the toxicity of the coalition years maybe receding, but a well-articulated, clear and liberal alternative is still to be devised

We are no longer the automatic party of protest - Clegg killed it, Ukip usurped it and general apathy has taken its place

Brexit - the single greatest issues for 70 years, is one where we have a distinct and cogent policy that has helped attract 80,000 new members, and yet we are still struggling to cut through.

As we have seen time and again: at the general election, party conference, Brexit negotiations, managing government, leading her own party, the prime minister is the sort of person to make ditch water look interesting and effervescent.

Yet, with the possible exception of Philip Hammond, she is still the best of a very poor bunch - so why, oh why, aren't we doing better?

Let's not embarrass ourselves by calculating the individual cost of those 5,404 Lewisham votes, but I bet you're pulling a face as you imagine that number. The Lib Dems just made a better fist of Lewisham than all the others, and as we've seen they weren't really trying.

The party must make a far, far greater impact on the issues of the day if we are to have any impact on the electorate and future elections.

I heard Momentum founder Jon Lansman say the other week that he was happy to play the long game. Jeez, he's only a few younger than me and my days of playing any games, let alone long ones, are well behind me. There must be a solution to help cut through in the shorter term.

We are doing well in local by-elections all around the country once again, but then we were 18 months ago, before the general election was called - look how ephemeral that was and how quickly things changed. We were heading for a sensational win at Manchester Gorton and yet we lost our deposit at the snap general

election a few weeks later.

The Lib Dem average in polls has hovered around the 8% mark for years now, and that is just what we got at Lewisham - 8% of the constituency's electorate voted Lib Dem and about twice that number voted Labour and they won. Two-thirds of the electorate, 45,000 people, stayed at home and shrugged their shoulders.

We used to say, "where we work we win." Now it's more like, 'where we work incredibly hard we might win if we're lucky.' This was the lesson from the May locals.

South Cambridgeshire and Kingston had the best results in the country and the next best was not Richmond, it was Haringey. Honourable mentions also go to Southwark, Merton and Portsmouth.

Haringey was just about the only place in the country to show Labour's potential vulnerability. And it's interesting that Haringey is home to one of a handful of Momentum's supposed 'successes', where the followership do as they are told. But with these bold, noticeable exceptions, almost everywhere else Lib Dems are treading very heavy water and we still have a long, long way to go.

It has always been campaigning that makes the difference. Where we are known for doing things, for getting things done, for taking and distributing power, for enabling communities, that is where we win.

But for too many (including our swollen ranks of new, enthusiastic but as yet inexperienced members) campaigning has come to mean fighting elections not working in our communities all year round.

Action, and only action will get us noticed – Brexit, the health service and social care, the housing crisis, trains, climate change, education – how many massively open goals do we want?

Neither the Tories nor Labour has anything useful to say or to offer on these vital issues. Liberals have plenty to say but no one is listening because the great weapon of apathy has conquered all. And for a while the sun was shining, and the world cup was on, and at least we could shrug our shoulders and swig our beer, and wave goodbye to Boris, and shout at dozy Trump, and all with a smile on our faces. Hey, what'yer gonna do anyway?

## **GUERRILLA LIBERALISM**

It shouldn't be an old man like me to direct the party's future vision, strategy and tactics, but I don't think writing blue letters is going to cut it any longer. So, maybe it's time for guerrilla liberalism. Actions and issues that will grab the attention of a new generation while still holding the attention of the old guard like me.

What I want is for areas where we are strong, like Kingston for instance, not to be the polite alternative to the Tories, but for us to take bold, decisive action on

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We have tried that.  
This is the time for  
direct action”***

things that will not just make a difference to people's lives but will get us noticed and talked about. That will get people wanting to join in and be part of the change. That will have the Tories howling disapproval. And increasingly leaving Labour with nothing to say.

A few months ago, at the turn of the emancipation centenary, I saw a T-shirt that read: "Well behaved women rarely make history". Well, my friends, I think the same is true of Liberals. I am not arguing for insurrection, although I did once say that my main reason for wanting to be elected to parliament was to close the place down. And, in a sense, I stand by that. Its

arcane and archaic practices are the very enemies of democracy, feeding the beast of apathy and allowing reactionary dinosaurs like Christopher Chope to block sensible progress. It must be reformed from top to toe.

And this is the second area where we need to see radical guerrilla action from MPs and Lords. Campaigns, events and activities that will grab the headline and get the party, and what it stands for, noticed.

We cannot live by eloquent debate alone. This is not the time for just politely stating our case and waiting for the electorate to politely form a queue at the polling station. We have tried that. This is the time for direct action, for deeds as well as words, for showing what we mean and taking the action required to achieve it. This is a time for being different and being seen to be different and being known for it.

Taking radical positions and taking radical action is good for the issues concerned, good for getting us noticed, and good for building the activist base.

The third area, open to everyone and (largely) free is social media. I have a deep loathing for Twitter as it seems to mainly be used to enable dickheads to put their feet in their mouths - did I mention Trump? But Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and others can be used to great effect to distribute guerrilla liberalism videos. Of course, they have to be well made, punchy and witty. Straight pieces to camera, however worthy, won't cut it.

So, go on, stir it up a bit. Call out the cheating, lying, law-breaking Brexiteers at every level of government perpetuating a ruinous deception on the nation. Everyday, in every community, on every occasion, every right-thinking person can make a difference. Make sure you're one of them.

I recommend the I Object: the Search for Dissent' exhibition at The British Museum later this year.

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Roger Hayes is a former Liberal Democrat councillor and parliamentary candidate in Kingston

# THE WITHERING OF DEMOCRACY

The 'Thatcher Revolution' did absolutely nothing to reverse the continuing erosion of parliamentary representative democracy - in fact quite the contrary- and led to the rises of forces that threaten it today says Trevor Smith

Now well into my eighties, I am writing valedictory articles looking back over a life spent both as a political scientist teaching and researching about UK politics and as a political activist since my teenage years.

The combination of academic and activist was ideal for a Liberal such as myself. When I started out almost anything seemed possible and it felt one could contribute both as a scholar and as a citizen to the wider society.

Now, both options have severely narrowed. Political science is fast becoming obscurantist and far too 'mathematicalised' to attract all but a cabal of aficionados; this risks ceding the study of current politics, both here and abroad, to contemporary historians.

As with the study of literature, the self-selecting and introspective small group of 'deconstructionists' in political science address only themselves. It is an intellectual form of voyeuristic mutual masturbation.

When political economy, a traditional and well-established discipline that developed over more than a century and a half, gave way, first, to mathematical economics and then to econometrics, its utility was severely circumscribed. So *recherché* did it become, that it provoked a backlash among students and some academics who have been calling for a return to relevance that takes into account the realities and true workings of the economy: new texts are being demanded that address real-life experience. One may only hope that political science will do likewise and academic contributions will again attract larger audiences.

## WIDER CHAOS

The contemporary world of politics in the UK, and elsewhere for that matter, is now so bewildering it verges on the incomprehensible. Trump and Brexit are seen as the main and most recent illustrations, but both are just symptoms of the far wider chaos that besets us, the seeds for which were planted many decades ago.

Trump and Brexit are specific and identifiable, whereas more generalised troubles are not. Thus, mounting corporate greed, widespread fraudulent practices, buck-passing and sheer commercial incompetence are accepted as seemingly endemic facts of modern life.

These are regularly reported in the media but more holistic analyses are completely lacking. We are left shaking our heads in bewilderment at how these

things have come to pass. Definitive explanatory texts are conspicuous by their absence.

It was not always so. In his landmark text, *The English Constitution* (1867), Walter Bagehot distinguished between the 'dignified' and the 'efficient' twin elements of government to describe its operations. These categories can no longer be employed because what these two words connote are, in the current context, much too strong and anyway there's precious little 'efficiency' or 'dignity' left in contemporary Britain. Indeed, vocabulary continues to be drastically debased by malfeasance. 'Charity' and 'audit' used both to exude virtue; the former extolled benevolence, while the latter explicitly meant objective disinterested assessment. Recent scandals in the conduct of major charities and by auditors have violated these underlying assumptions to the considerable detriment of our language.

However, the Bagehotian device of a contrasting juxtaposition does retain its heuristic usefulness.

Thus, with regard to the conduct of contemporary public affairs, the terms 'intrusively dominating' and 'futile' may be nearer the mark in helping to describe the situation of the UK. The Cabinet, Parliament, the political parties and regulatory agencies would be among the contenders for inclusion in the 'futile' category.

The 'intrusively dominating' compromises what, borrowing from the USSR, I've previously termed the *nomenklatura* that has emerged. This is an amalgam of personnel from a variety of backgrounds that nowadays contrive to keep up some semblance of running the British state.

It is a hotchpotch of officials, management consultants, private sector moguls – including bankers, the occasional academic, and professionals brought in from the ranks of lawyers and especially accountants from the 'Big Four' cartel comprising KPMG, Deloitte, EY and PWC.

The Big Four have been a growing 'intrusively dominant' force in the affairs of state. But they would nowadays hardly merit the Bagehotian appellation of 'efficient'. For far too long they have traded on a reputation that is now completely out-dated.

Richard Brookes' recent book, *Bean Counters*, exhaustively chronicles how very far they have fallen short in the performance of their tasks. Failing to warn of incipient disasters (such as Enron and most recently



Carillion), picking up vast fees administering the bankrupt residues. Documentation of the failures of the Big Four continues. Barely a week goes by without new exposes. A glaring example was the National Audit Office report in June on KPMG's failures. Very belatedly, Bill Michael, chair of KPMG, has shown some awareness of the gravity of the situation but stalls at any widespread reforms of the kind that are needed. Very radical measures are called for but they are very unlikely to be forthcoming.

Regulation has become a major industry in itself. The overall numbers are disputed as to whether in the year 2017 there were 78 or only 61 regulatory agencies working and their running costs are difficult to fathom accurately. But the seven financial ones alone cost £1.2bn. Also, they have very high opportunity costs that seriously reduce productivity.

Furthermore, over the years none of the agencies have escaped strong, sometimes blistering, criticism highlighting inadequacies in their performance. They have been most reluctant to institute criminal prosecutions preferring to fine companies so that the penalty falls on the shareholders – a long-time enfeebled lot – rather than punishing the real perpetrators. Unlike the USA, where 10 chief executives have been incarcerated, the few UK convictions have been limited to relatively junior employees.

Chief executives are either fools or knaves: fools if they did not know when it was their duty to keep abreast; knaves if in fact they did but deny all knowledge. Benefit fraudsters, on the other hand, are invariably prosecuted for sums that are comparatively small beer.

The contrast is so stark: why has there been such a reluctance to prosecute the big, bad boys of business? 'Late stage capitalism' is being undermined not so much by its internal contradictions, as Marx opined, as by the wilful avoidance of free market forces by the captains of industry themselves; Adam Smith was nearer the mark in his admonition of businessmen corralling together.

## PRISON SENTENCES

The effective reform of capitalism requires the imposition of exemplary prison sentences in cases of major malfeasance which is most unlikely given the intrinsic self-protective nature of the nomenklatura.

How did all this occur? As I have argued in *Liberator* 389, the main factor has been the relentless decline in the up-front exercise of the twin principles of individual ministerial responsibility and collective Cabinet responsibility - both classic Bagehotian doctrines.

The decline began with the wholesale recourse to secondary (delegated) legislation that accompanied the growth in government activities. Perceptively and presciently, the then Lord Chief Justice Hewart, in *The New Despotism* (1929) railed against it but was dismissed almost out of hand by the subsequent Donoughmore Report (1932) as being anachronistic and failing to recognise the imperatives of modern government. While Donoughmore's judgement was largely accepted, it in no way invalidated the consequences that Hewart had pointed out, as history has shown.

After 1945 the advent of the Morrisonian public

corporations was a quite conscious major withdrawal from any direct ministerial oversight in the running of the nationalised industries.

The much-vaunted Thatcher Revolution did absolutely nothing whatsoever to reverse the continuing erosion of parliamentary representative democracy - in fact quite the contrary.

Thatcher did not reduce the role of government as is so often claimed. Commentators usually opt to emphasise her dogged determination rather than examine the actual consequences of her policies.

In fact, in four main ways, Thatcherism greatly exacerbated the effects of the longer-term tendencies already well under way in the reduction of front-line ministerial duties thus further undermining what once had been the conventional way of ordering public affairs.

First, for its part, privatisation of the nationalised public utilities did not restore free competition – it merely substituted a series of oligopolistic cartels with little or no exposure to market forces. Ironically, some of their major shareholders have turned out to be foreign state-owned industries.

Secondly, Thatcher's wilful 'hollowing out' of the civil service destroyed the collective memories of Whitehall departments which had been crucial to Bagehotian efficiency. The reduction in the senior cadre necessitated contracting hordes of management consultants to come up with quick fixes to knotty problems.

Consequently, these necessarily became one-off issues that could not contribute to the acquisition of accumulated knowledge as had happened in the past. Edward Bridges' paean to the Administrative Class, *Portrait of a Profession* (1950), according it with some of the traditional virtues of a religious order, came out just before these same virtues were about to be greatly eroded or even discarded altogether.

Thirdly, the wholesale selling-off of council housing at very cheap discounted prices to sitting tenants – again in the name of privatisation – secured an advantage to one generation at the expense of those to come. Under the rhetoric of advancing a 'home-owning democracy', it laid the foundations for a future housing crisis that has seen a large rise in homelessness together with an unprecedented increase in the proportion of rented accommodation which meant a corresponding decline in home ownership. All this is documented by John Broughton in *Municipal Dreams: The Rise and fall of Social Housing* (2018).

Fourthly, taking "private = good/public = bad" as the main axiom of government policy (based on little or no hard evidence) led to the articulation of TINA ("There is No Alternative"), which by definition seeks to preempt political debate: the intention couldn't be clearer. TINA was the apotheosis of Thatcherism and says it all.

The ultimate result of the Thatcher Revolution was to usher in a very high degree of authoritarianism which could and did at times verge on totalitarianism. This, in due course, was to sow the seeds of devolution and later the rise of populism.

One obvious illustration of this was the introduction in 1989 of the Poll Tax to replace the local rates. Knowing it risked great unpopularity, it was introduced as a pilot scheme in Scotland. This immediately provoked total animosity and widespread

rioting throughout the UK and was swiftly abandoned by John Major.

The Poll Tax controversy had two results: the lack of any real prior public discussion highlighted the counter-productiveness of TINA, while using Scotland as a test-bed sparked off an independence/devolutionary upsurge which would prove unstoppable. Thatcher's approach had led to a seemingly endless one-way road, congested with lorries all labelled TINA. Inevitably, it proved unsustainable.

The riots were a portent as populist feelings were beginning to surface. Major was more moderate in his approach, though he proceeded with a privatisation of the railways which occasioned one of the worst of all the de-nationalisations. His successor as prime minister, Tony Blair, caught some of the new prevailing public mood with his advocacy of the so-called New Labour programme. It was more rhetoric than substance but conveyed an approach that gained wide appeal that secured him three consecutive general election victories.

Looking back, the maladroit invasion of Iraq and the effects of the 2008 banking and financial crises now colour this interpretation so that in its way New Labour postponed rather than reversed the longer term trends that had been at work since WWII.

In 2010 the succeeding Tory/Lib Dem Coalition was a stark manifestation of a growing mood in the electorate as was further evidenced in David Cameron's very narrow majority in 2015, feeling increasingly menaced by Nigel Farage's Ukip tactics on Britain's continuing membership of the EU.

Farage played heavily on what he saw as increasing populist dissatisfaction. In its way, this populism helps put politics and public sentiment back into government decision-making that had been increasingly attenuated over the previous 60 and more years. The accusation that London-based elites had usurped the directing of affairs of state was not without foundation.

Cameron was being driven into a corner by Ukip and he attempted to turn populism to his advantage by having recourse to a referendum over remaining in the EU. To the surprise of himself and most people he lost and resigned forthwith. Henceforth, Brexit would dominate the political agenda.

His successor, Theresa May, having declared she would not, could not resist resorting once more to 'normal' politics by calling a snap election in the hope of increasing the thin Tory majority. This ploy also failed, she lost seats and now has to depend on a tenuous pact with the Ulster DUP's 10 MPs to stay in office. Like many other western democracies, the UK internal politics are very precarious, of which continuing ministerial resignations are a part, and decisions on Brexit postponed and no firm policies have emerged as to the future. Will Brexit ever happen?

## **BREXITEERS' PARADOX**

At this point there is a paradox to emphasise: the Brexiteers proclaim they want all government powers to be repatriated to the UK and to assert full national sovereignty (as if this were remotely possible in the modern, multi-national world).

But it has become increasingly clear, they don't want a return to full Parliamentary sovereignty, but rather a re-enforcement of power with 10 Downing Street at the centre. Part and parcel of this aim is to attempt

also to claw back some of the powers that had been devolved to Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh. None of this augurs well for the renewal of a more vigorous democracy in the UK which is so desperately required.

What will eventuate? It would not be surprising if in the short term there may well be a greater recourse to plebiscitary politics. There may be yet more calling of referendums, both local, regional and national on specific issues. Controversy, inaction and hesitancy would ensue.

There may also be a move towards hypothecation whereby taxes are imposed to pay for a specific area of policy which could not be subsumed into any others. A variation of this can be seen in the introduction of a 0.7% of GDP to pay for overseas aid.

More directly and recently, there have been growing calls for a hypothecated tax to pay for the NHS. A diluted version is to be seen in Boris Johnson's claim that money previously paid to the EU would, after Brexit, be allocated to the NHS. May later reiterated this when trying to gain support in the Commons for her Brexit policies. Although financially dubious according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, Johnson and May are resorting to plebiscitary-type rhetoric. Such schemes and verbiage, by their very nature of course, increase the difficulties for the overall governing of the country.

There may be some compromise by seeking informed debate on proposals by employing such devices as citizens' juries which have been utilised in Oregon and, increasingly, elsewhere.

Citizens' juries are demographically representative panels convened to consider and debate particular major public policies such as capital punishment, divorce provision, taxation and the like. Held over a number of days expert proponents and opponents are called to present evidence and to undergo cross-examination after which the jury is invited to vote. Their verdicts can, in turn, be taken into consideration by municipal, regional or national legislatures to guide their policy deliberations. Such juries may be regarded as useful additions to the methods of participatory government.

Another recent development has been the institutional provision for indicative changes. One of Cameron's more lasting reforms has been the creation of the Behavioural Insight Team or Nudge Unit as it is more colloquially known. Created within the Cabinet Office in 2010, it became part-private in 2014. It seeks to persuade both corporate and individual behaviour to move in new directions deemed desirable by governments. It has laid claim to a widespread series of successful initiatives. It has offices around the UK and abroad and charges for its services. While lacking formal democratic powers it is not directive, seeking to persuade by reason and evidence how ways of doing things might be improved. As such, it is a useful adjunct to democratic rule but not a substitute.

As I concluded in *Anti-Politics* (1972), what is needed is "to create conditions for politics which are radical in temper but classical in form". That hasn't happened in the intervening 46 years and it remains very unlikely. However, without it western democracy will likely increasingly give way to a more Chinese People's Republic model of managing the state.

# PROTEST PARTY

## The Liberal Democrats should be leading the protests against social injustice, says Natalie Bird

I joined during the coalition years, one of the few to do so, there were a large number that chose to leave the party instead during this time.

I don't know how you all feel about the party at the moment but it seems like the media dismiss us as a load of irrelevant sandal wearing old men - which is probably a pretty fair comment if you look at the lack of diversity within both local parties and further up the ladder.

I don't know about you, but this attitude angers me and I hope that it angers you too.

I'm tired of all the talk that we should give up and let a new central party come in and set the country to rights. We do not need a new centrist party - we are the progressive centrist party that this country needs now.

After the highs of the Cleggmania days of 2010 and then being thoroughly whipped by the public in the elections that followed, it feels to me as a comparative newbie to the party that we have lost our path, our principles and our vision.

We seem happy to state that we are not Labour or the Tories yet aside from the 'Exit from Brexit' message we seem to have no other defining messages and we risk being seen as a one issue party vastly out of touch with the public.

I would argue that this time is the greatest opportunity we have to redefine ourselves, to ourselves and then to the wider public.

We are living in times of great economic and social turbulence. Domestic violence is rife within our country; two women a week are currently killed by their partners.

We have record numbers of homeless, there are an increasing number of single parent families with children on the streets, the government is stopping paying personal independence payments to many disabled people and some people are being so badly affected that they are choosing to kill themselves.

We are seeing the same with regard to mental health issues with the Department for Work and Pensions cutting benefits and stating those claiming employment support allowance are fit for work (even if their doctor says otherwise).

Mental health is one of the biggest challenges to this country with more and more individuals struggling to cope under work pressures, and individuals being diagnosed with anxiety and depression who are then pushed out of the workplace by uncaring employers into a benefit system that won't support them.

Is it then any great surprise that more and more people are committing suicide (in numbers that the DWP won't disclose or doesn't care about when benefits are cut).

I don't know about you but this is not a country I feel proud to live in. If we are going to change our party's near extinction and become a strong political force

again we are going to have to rethink our aims and objectives.

Firstly we will need to capture the country's attention and the voters imagination. How do we do this? By being innovative, imaginative and radical with our thinking and the solutions we propose.

As the referendum showed, voting is driven by feeling and emotion not by rational thinking and policies.

If we are going to step up we need to put the major social justice issues of our time at the very top of our agenda, we have to provide a space and a voice for the lost working class and we must provide a place for women because women's issues are not just their's alone but affect every one of us throughout our lives.

We will need to stand our ground and become the party of social justice. Instead of being led, we will have to lead the protests and the marches, give voices to the voiceless and become a strong voice of hope for the many people that are without hope.

In the public perception presently we are not seen as strong, they see us a bit 'meh', too wishy washy, then to think what is the point in wasting their vote on us. If we are to change this we have to be bold in creating a new vision, not just for the party internally but a new vision as to what this country can be.

We need to put the great back into Britain and become the leading party by doing so.

Will this happen by the next election - no. We have to be realistic but can this happen in the near future - absolutely it can but we will need inside out change throughout the party at every level

Do we have the power to change the course of UK politics? I believe we do but we will have to make changes swiftly.

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Natalie Bird is an executive member of Stockport Liberal Democrats and sits on the party's north west regional executive and the Social Liberal Forum council

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# UK COMING APART AT THE SEAMS

Scotland and Northern Ireland are being dragged out of the European Union against their will, but the latter has an escape route thanks to the Good Friday agreement, says Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Brexit is an historic event. Whatever happens with the negotiations, one thing is certain; the question of the Irish border and the effect of any changes to its currently frictionless state, and the consequences to both sides of that border, could make or break not only Brexit, but change the future of the United Kingdom.

This is because it will damage the legitimacy of two unions: that of Great Britain, and that of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Scotland and Northern Ireland are being forced from the EU against their majority preferences in the 2016 referendum, and the Supreme Court failed to protect their constitutional settlements, including the convention that legislative consent motions should precede any changes in the powers of the Edinburgh and Belfast legislatures.

Ireland and Scotland are closer than people imagine. We are the same people, crossing and re-crossing the Irish Sea over the centuries, usually on the tides of economic exigency, wars, rebellions.

Christianity came from Ireland to Scotland in 6th century. Protestants were settled there by Elizabeth and Cromwell in the 16th and 17th, Irish Catholics, who came to build the canals and railways, settled in the late 18th and 19th centuries. And yet our relationship with the English, and later British, governments, could not be more different.

## HUGE PROBLEMS

Both countries always caused huge problems for England over the centuries, because neither would be subdued. But Scotland had the advantage of not being conquered (well, at least not for long) and, because Elizabeth I did not produce an heir, the crown went to Scotland, an even greater advantage.

Ireland became part of the United Kingdom by conquest, Scotland initially by crown, then by the Union of the Parliaments. Ireland had life beyond the Pale, Tudor conquest, Cromwellian oppression, plantations, the potato famine, (one third of the population died, one third immigrated), and successive failed Home Rule bills. The larger part of Ireland won independence in the 1920s, but the six counties in the north remained British.

And the Westminster Government, for the first time in its long history of regarding Northern Ireland as a problem, a source of trouble, a financial drain; good only to provide Unionist MPs as lobby fodder to prop up successive governments, must face the fact that, unless the border issues is settled, the other negotiations will come to nought.

Few governments over the last few hundred years have understood Ireland or cared about it. It was a possession, not a partner; something to be controlled, less it let the French in. The Irish were the wrong religion. When southern Ireland became independent in 1921, Northern Ireland was created as a Protestant-Unionist fiefdom, and was governed like that for 50 years, with Catholic-Nationalists frozen out of every level of political and economic decision-making, as Ireland had been for centuries.

Hence the Troubles. Hence the Good Friday Agreement to finally end them. And, by that agreement, the chance of referenda on both sides of the border, on reunification.

Scotland may have had it easier than their cousins over the sea, but its political union in 1707 (1706, because the old calendar was still in use) was a bitter thing.

The religious and civil war of the last century had done nothing to ease its path, and both countries deeply distrusted the other. The plan for Hanoverian succession did not sit well with the Jacobite half of Scotland. However, the driving force behind the union was money, or the lack thereof.

Scotland, jealous of the colonies England, Holland, Spain and Portugal were building, wanted in on the act, and in 1698 decided to sail to what is now Panama to establish a colony there. Everyone with £5 (or less) invested in the Darien Scheme, a total of £500,000, about half the country's capital. It was a complete disaster, 2,000 died, of sickness and starvation, and only one ship out of the 16 that sailed returned. The union was celebrated in Scotland only with various riots.

The next 80 years were marked by two Jacobite rebellions, general mistrust and lingering support for Bonnie Prince Charlie, until he died in 1788. Then the picture improved with the coming of the industrial revolution. Scottish engineers, inventors and entrepreneurs were at the forefront, and Scotland's economy thrived under the union.

Scottish soldiers, sailors, civil servants and politicians dominated Britain and the empire. Nationalism was an emotion, not a political force, until the late 1970s, and the election of Margaret Thatcher (Tory MPs in Scotland could be counted on the fingers of one hand) and, more importantly, the coming of the oil.

In those 35 years, the Scottish Nationalist Party went from being a small sect to leading the devolved government in the 2014 referendum on independence,

which it looked like winning in that unusually sunny summer. Panic at Westminster, with leaders of all parties all scuttling up to Scotland, begging for a 'no' vote; Gordon Brown wheeled out of retirement to bring home-grown gravitas to the affair.

In the end, it was money (again) that was the key; the price of oil was dropping like a stone, RBS was in disgrace (and what was effectively Government control), the summer sun had gone, and "too much uncertainty" gave the 'nos' 55% of the vote.

Brexit, for which most Scots did not vote, has given new impetus to the call for another referendum, so far denied them by Westminster. The people of Northern Ireland, on the other hand, are in a unique position with regards to the EU.

Under Article 2 of the Good Friday Agreement: "It is the entitlement and birth right of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland".

This allows anyone in Northern Ireland who qualifies to be either an Irish, or a British citizen, or both. The agreement also opens the way to referenda on reunification on both sides of the border should circumstances dictate.

So, what are the likelihood of such referenda being called, and what would be its result? The last referenda (to accept the agreement and make the constitutional changes in Ireland) in 1998 showed 71% of Northern Irish voters, and 94% of Irish voters in favour.

But how would both countries vote soon? The next scheduled assembly elections are due in 2022. By then, Sinn Fein will probably be the largest party and, if votes for Irish nationalist parties outweigh those for unionists, it will be impossible to deny a referendum on the north's constitutional status, as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

Last March's elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly saw Sinn Fein come within 1,100 votes from topping the poll. Thirty thousand votes (or three council wards) now separate parties committed to remaining in the UK from parties explicitly backing Irish unity. This is primarily because Catholics outnumber Protestants among the under-35s, four out of the six counties and the two largest cities already have a Catholic majority, and immigration adds Poles and Lithuanians, Hindus and Muslims to the electorate, people without the baggage of Anglo-Irish history, people who want what is best for them and their new home.

As the demography changes, so does opinion; a recent poll of 18-44-year olds found 56% wanted to live in a united Ireland, with 34% opting for the status quo. Liberal unionists, who feel strongly about gay marriage, abortion rights and EU membership, are the emergent social-liberal majority, and regard the DUP as the party of reactionaries. The future belongs to the nationalists; the unionists have left it too late to change their appeal. Their current inability to restore

*“Unless the border issues is settled, the other Brexit negotiations will come to nought”*

the Belfast Executive, plus their stubborn refusal to back an Irish Language Act, or even discuss abortion and same sex marriages, merely underline the fact that they are completely out of touch with a growing majority of their countrymen.

The Unionists' old arguments that Ireland was under the rule of Rome, monocultural and so much poorer than the north no longer hold water. Ireland is much less Catholic with a capital C, more multicultural, and far more prosperous.

Ireland was poorer for many years; in 1921, the Irish Free State's GDP per capita was 45% of the north's; By 2012, even before Ireland's recovery, its GDP per capita was higher than the UK's. Their new argument, that unification would be too expensive for the south, may carry more weight.

So how does Ireland view the possibility of reunification? Will money play as important a part as it did with Scotland? Probably not; the older generations in Ireland have the dream of a united Ireland embedded in their psyche, but the younger may need a little more persuading.

An Irish academic friend told me that young people "could not even point north. We are now too comfortable in the South, with fancy coffee and foreign trips to be bothered with that romantic stuff about reunification. The Orange folk are too strange, with hats and sashes their fathers wore, and we don't get the rubbish about King Billy".

## **DYSTOPIAN PAST**

And more recent history, of the Troubles, the bombings, Canary Wharf, Harrods, Bobby Sands, the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six, Civil Rights Marches and Bloody Sunday, mean nothing to them, echoes of a distant, dystopian past.

There is a long way to go on both sides. I interviewed a Belfast lady, who described herself as a refugee of 30 years, having fled to London to escape the horror her family experienced there. She had recently met a relation of those who had perpetrated that horror, who had asked her forgiveness, which she freely gave. She longs for peace in all of Ireland, but the wounds she feels are so deep, healed only on the surface, she wept and would not, could not, discuss the possibility of a united Ireland.

The Government must remember her, but also that the most important point of the talks on the border issues and how they could be resolved is that it isn't just Ireland beyond it, but the whole of the European Union. Ireland has powerful friends.

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Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective

# ALL TOGETHER NOW?

The plethora of anti-Brexit groups resembles disputes between Monty Python's "People's Front of Judea" and 'Judean People's Front'. David Grace offers a guide

My A-level history books contained two words I did not understand, words which never came up at home or even in the classroom. They were 'fissiparous' and 'tergiversation'.

Forced to consult the dictionary, I learned that fissiparous meant "inclined to division". (I'll come back to tergiversation.)

Fissiparous is the very word for the state of pro-European campaigns and organisations in Britain today. The arguments around Brexit have been stuck in a bog of detail around customs unions. The government has surrounded the bog in a fog of complicated and unlikely schemes designed to reconcile the unreconcilable. The myths perpetrated by the Leave campaign are repeated in parliament and the media with ministers promising wonderful futures which they know they cannot deliver.

Into this nightmarish landscape come troops of Remainers seeking the path out but do they know the way? Why are there so many of them? In *Three Men in a Boat*, you will recall Harris leading his group through Hampton Court maze and running into other equally lost groups. Eventually the groups coalesce when Harris meets a woman who says: "We're following a man who knows the way out." The man is of course Harris himself. Let us pretend that I am the keeper standing on ladder and shouting helpful instructions.

## EUROPEAN MOVEMENT

To start with the oldest group, the European Movement (EM) is even older than the European Union and its predecessor communities. The international level (EMI) was founded at a conference in the Hague in 1948 by 800 delegates from across Europe, chaired by Sir Winston Churchill and a British section was established a year later.

By the 1980s the word 'movement' was perhaps a misnomer. It was true that leading British pro-Europeans held positions in the EM but they did their serious work elsewhere. The 'movement' was behind the pace of events, praising them after they happened rather than making them happen.

In 1995 the EM appointed Danny Alexander as head of communications so of course by 2000 hardly anyone knew they still existed. (Confession – I didn't get the job myself). As the demands for a referendum on membership grew stronger, the 'movement' grew weaker so that by 2015 there was only a part-time secretary and a small collection of branches with committed but elderly members. EM lacked hair, its activists being mostly male and mostly bald. Things have improved recently but it is not surprising that people who wanted the UK to remain in the EU set up new organisations.

## BRITISH INFLUENCE

The first rival organisation was British Influence founded in 2012 with co-presidents, Danny Alexander again, Peter Mandelson and Ken Clarke. Like many who campaigned for Remain it focussed on the economic arguments for staying in the EU, the very approach which I believe cost us the referendum. I understand Lord Sainsbury's generosity was involved. It has disappeared as a campaign and evolved into a consultancy for firms doing business in the EU.

## NEW EUROPEANS

In 2013 New Europeans was set up by former Labour MP Roger Casale to campaign for the rights of EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens resident in other EU countries. As we know, David Cameron and a compliant parliament ensured that no-one in the first group had any votes in the referendum and very few in the second group. It was as if he wanted to lose. New Europeans are still active, particularly on-line but seem to have little if any effect on the current government.

## OPEN BRITAIN

Remember Stronger In, the official Remain campaign in the referendum, formed in 2015 and recognised by the electoral commission in 2016? Who was on the board? You got it. Danny Alexander, Peter Mandelson et al. Led by Will Straw it followed the orthodox pundits' advice and made the economic case for EU membership, which its opponents dubbed 'Project Fear'. After the referendum, Open Britain grew out of this group and now includes Norman Lamb. Originally (and still on their website) Open Britain campaigned for a soft Brexit, keeping the UK in the Single Market but they now also support the call for a People's Vote and share an office with the European Movement. They have 39 local branches, mainly in London and the south east and they too focus chiefly on economic arguments.

## BRITAIN FOR EUROPE

Keeping up? Only three big groups left. Britain for Europe is not really a national campaign. Originally a Facebook group, it was set up by local groups across the country to co-ordinate their activities. They also have groups in Spain, Gibraltar and France. Their chair, Tom Brufatto, works for the European Movement and the group is in partnership with EM.

## PEOPLE'S VOTE

The current European Movement chair, Stephen Dorrell, has brought together the EM, Open Britain and Britain for Europe to campaign together for a People's Vote on the deal or no deal with the option of remaining in the EU. People's Vote grew out of the All

Party Parliamentary Group on EU relations set up in 2017 by MPs and peers from Conservative, Labour, SNP, Plaid Cymru and Liberal Democrat parties. It was launched on 15 April 2018 by Chuka Umunna, Anna Soubry, Layla Moran and Caroline Lucas as well as Captain Jean Luc Picard of the Starship Enterprise, alias Sir Patrick Stewart, presumably not speaking Klingon.

The money comes from George Soros' Open Society Foundation. The People's Vote campaign represents at last a reversal of fissiparity. It is also supported by some smaller bodies including Scientists for Europe and Healthier IN the EU.

## ANOTHER EUROPE IS POSSIBLE

Two other campaigns are worth mentioning. Another Europe is Possible was set up rather late in 2016 to campaign for Remain among the progressive left, a counterbalance to the bizarre Lexiters. I have never heard a substantial argument from right-wing brexiters based on facts rather than myths, but I accept that there is a coherent, but utterly wrong, right-wing case.

If you regard national sovereignty as more important than peace, environmental security and economic stability then you may oppose the attempts of people like me (Nick Clegg calls us quasi-utopian) to build a federal Europe.

Farage, for example, has often said that a weakened economy and weaker environmental protection would be prices worth paying for independence. What I cannot understand is the swivel-eyed socialists who dismiss the EU as a capitalist plot and expect to build a socialist nation state in isolation.

Is Corbyn really one of these? Surely the twentieth century should have taught them that socialism in one country doesn't work. National socialism has a terrible history. Another Europe is Possible brought together trade unionists, greens and left-wing activists to fight for Europe. Today they proclaim six progressive elements of EU membership: workers' rights, environmental sustainability, the free movement of people, human rights, science and research funding and transnational innovation. They also call for another referendum.

## BEST FOR BRITAIN

Gina Miller, of the Supreme Court Article 50 case, founded Best for Britain in 2016, specifically to campaign for parliament having a vote on the final Brexit deal. They do now support a people's vote after that. In the 2017 general election they ran a tactical voting operation to support MPs who would demand a final parliamentary vote. Best for Britain is also linked to the company set up by Gina Miller, UK-EU Open Policy Limited, which produces detailed research on the consequences of Brexit. They particularly want to get young people involved in the struggle and through crowd-funding can give grants to local groups.

*“Into this nightmarish landscape come troops of Remainers seeking the path out but do they know the way?”*

## YOUNG EUROPEAN MOVEMENT

This brings us to the youth groups, also fissiparous although I hear they are working together more now. The oldest established is the EM's Young European Movement which is also the British section of the Young European Federalists,

although some of the Brits run scared of the word federalist. In the 1970s the Young Liberal Movement had its own contingent in this group, known as Radical Youth for Europe. The Tories and Labour also has sections. YEM nearly disappeared but has revived in recent years and has sections at several universities.

## OUR FUTURE OUR CHOICE

Then there Our Future Our Choice, is founded by Femi Oluwole, who demand that young people must be heard, especially because 73% of them voted to remain. They have a big presence on social media and even on traditional media and have focussed on the Labour Party, perhaps with some success as Young Labour are calling for the Labour Party conference to debate Brexit policy with a view to calling a referendum.

For Our Future's Sake

Meanwhile the National Union of Students has set up For Our Future's Sake whose website shows a bunch of bananas with an arrow and the caption "This Shit is". I know, it's my age but what is the point of this? They want – yes, you guessed it – a People's Vote.

Forgive me if I haven't mentioned your local group (Little Snodsbury for Europe) or your interest group (Cycling Trans-Gnomes for Europe). Nor have I attempted to catalogue the myriad of Facebook groups.

Is it good to have so many organisations? Whatever their origins, their motives and funding and the egos of their leaders, perhaps they do serve to bring in more people than one simple body would.

It is however excellent that they are now, many of them, working together for a People's Vote. Surely this is the way out of the maze? Oh yes, tergiversation? Boris Johnson is a tergiversator! Look it up.

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

# STRANGER THAN FICTION

Jonathan Calder exposed the fact that great dane assassin Andrew Gino Newton was still alive, and looks at why the Jeremy Thorpe story still holds enough fascination for the BBC to make *A Very English Scandal*

My blog Liberal England (“An eclectic mix of musical choices, random news items from Shropshire (where he doesn’t live), and political news and views” - New Statesman) has been going since 2004. By far the most popular post I have written in all that time is one from May this year entitled “What became of Jeremy Thorpe’s son?”

The interest in it continues: as I write this in mid-July, it has had more readers this week than any other post. The answer to the question it poses, incidentally, is that Rupert Thorpe is now a leading paparazzo in the United States. He was one of the photographers involved in the famous court case over Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones’s wedding snaps.

I take this exceptional and lasting interest as confirmation of the extraordinary popularity achieved by this summer’s dramatisation of the Jeremy Thorpe affair, *A Very English Scandal*, which was based on John Pearson’s book of the same name, made by Blueprint Pictures and screened by BBC One.

It told the story of Thorpe’s sexual relations with a young man called Norman Scott and his apparent attempt to have him murdered when Scott’s refusal to stop talking about it threatened Thorpe’s political career after he became leader of the Liberal Party. Scott escaped with his life: his great dane, Rinka, was not so fortunate.

The popularity of the series was so great that it returned Thorpe to the front pages when the newspapers discovered that Norman Scott’s alleged would-be assassin Andrew Newton was still alive.

My blog may have played a part here. Planning to write something disobliging about Newton, I decided to check if he really was dead, as I thought I had read somewhere. I soon found that, under the name Hann Redwin, he had been very much alive as recently as 2015 – he was sailing boats, building aircraft and flying them from Redhill Aerodrome in Surrey – and published a post to that effect.

## FLEET STREET’S FINEST

Two days later he was being doorstepped by Fleet Street’s finest. The press were excited because there was talk in 2016 of reopening the Thorpe case because of a claim that Newton had first tried to persuade another man to murder Scott before taking on the job himself. The police in South Wales had not taken things further because they too believed that Newton was dead and had apparently not checked this belief with Google as I did.

What was puzzling about their interest in this story of a second assassin was that it was first told in the

Spectator by Auberon Waugh as long ago as 1981. Put up to it by his Private Eye colleague Richard Ingrams, Waugh stood against Thorpe in North Devon for the Dog Lovers’ Party at the 1979 general election, which took place while the latter was awaiting trial at the Old Bailey for conspiracy to murder.

Only one of Thorpe’s co-accused there is alive today, George Deakin, and he will have to spend the rest of his life with the infamy of being the uncle of the guitarist in Black Lace.

If I am something of a scholar of the Thorpe Affair, it is understandable. I joined the party two months after Thorpe was charged; when I started going to Liberal Party assemblies we sang songs about it – ‘On Exmoor bah t’at’ – at the Glee Club.

So in reviewing *A Very English Scandal* I have to remember that it was a drama, not a point-by-point recreation of events 40 or 50 years ago. Seen as a drama, it was very good indeed even if some figures received scant justice. David Holmes, for instance, was a successful entrepreneur not a buffoon, while Emlyn Hooson was far from the bitter, vengeful figure he was painted as. This portrayal, however, did show us that not all Liberal MPs were seduced by Thorpe’s charm or well treated by him.

Hugh Grant’s performance as Thorpe has been rightly praised. As well as his arrogance, Grant showed us why Thorpe was an attractive figure to liberally minded voters, particularly in the scenes set in the Commons chamber. I thought no actor would be able to get near to Thorpe’s ugly-handsome, doglike face, but there were times when Grant made me see it.

It is no criticism of Grant to say that the script never showed us what a formidable local campaigner Thorpe must have been. When he gained North Devon for the Liberals in at the general election of 1959, it was an extraordinary feat.

I was also going to suggest that Thorpe must have had more charisma than Grant showed us, given the lengths to which others were prepared to go to help him. Thinking about it, however, I have seen parties do that for the most mundane people. It was a sad fact about the nature of political allegiance rather than the function of some extraordinary feature of Thorpe’s personality that saw him so indulged.

Ben Wishaw’s Norman Scott was a more modern figure than the real Scott, but then a drama written so long after the event is bound to take a different approach than would have been taken at the time and will probably be more interesting for it.

So while Wishaw was wholly convincing as Scott the fashion model in 1960s Dublin and touching in the scenes that showed the failure of his marriage, we never heard the tones in the real Scott’s voice that told



us he had spent time among the horse-riding classes and desperately wanted to pass as one of them.

His great scene – giving evidence at the Old Bailey – was very much a Russell T Davies one and it showed Whishaw's Scott at his most 21st century. At the actual trial Scott was repeatedly asked by the judge to speak up: here drama you half-expected him to break into I Am What I Am, with the whole courtroom joining in the final chorus.

The sexual politics of *A Very English Scandal* were complicated because they were complicated in Scott's own mind. Was he a victim of rape or a partner in a loving and unacknowledged relationship?

Those who say that today Thorpe would face no problems with such a relationship risk underestimating Scott. It is hard to imagine him going quietly, like a Victorian parlour maid who goes home to have her baby after being seduced by the young heir to the lord of the manor.

Much clearer were the issues at stake in the powerful scene where the Earl of Arran ("Call me Boofy") gave his reasons for taking Leo Abse's bill to decriminalise gay sex through the Lords. "And the deaths go on," he says, remembering his own brother, "By hanging, by poison, by gas. Men killing themselves through fear and shame. And I don't think it's suicide: I think it's murder. They are murdered by the laws of the land and I think it's time it stopped."

There were many fine performances among the minor characters and much fine writing for them too. In his book *Preston* makes Peter Bessell, Thorpe's friend and fellow Liberal MP, the centre of the story, even if you could never claim he is its moral centre. By all accounts Alex Jennings caught him and his lounge-lizard voice perfectly.

Then there were the indomitable Michelle Dotrice as Edna Friendship, Eve Myles as the tragic Gwen Parry-Jones (who reminds us of Scott's ability to scatter suffering in his wake) and, above all, Monica Dolan as the redoubtable and unexpectedly loyal Marion Thorpe: "I practically grew up with Benjamin Britten ... I've toured with orchestras. I couldn't begin to tell you the things I've seen."

Many of the lesser male characters, particularly those caught up in the plot to do away with Scott, were played for laughs. This "make 'em laugh, make 'em cry" approach is very Davis, but I wonder if the contrasts in approach to the story here were too great.

Nevertheless, Davis went in for a lot of shaping of events, because the Thorpe story is stranger even than it was shown to be in *A Very English Scandal*. Sir Jack Hayward – 'Union Jack' – was an idiosyncratic millionaire whose good causes included keeping his home-town football club, Wolverhampton Wanderers, and purchasing Lundy Island for the National Trust.

It was through the Lundy campaign that Hayward came into Thorpe's orbit. Though he was no Liberal, Hayward gave money to the Liberal party because, in words that later acquired a heavy freight of irony,

*"Hayward gave money to the Liberal party because, in words that later acquired a heavy freight of irony, he had sympathy for the underdog"*

he had sympathy for the underdog.

## **PERSONAL DISPOSAL**

The money he gave did not go through the party's books, but was put at Thorpe's personal disposal. It was the prosecution's claim at Thorpe's trial that some of it had gone to pay to have Scott dealt with.

Other murky financial transactions gathered around Thorpe. He gave the running of the National Liberal Club

to 'Georges de Chabris' (real name George Marks), who moved his family in to live rent-free and then left suddenly owing the club £60,000. Before that, a Department of Trade report into the collapse of the secondary banking firm London & County Securities, of which Thorpe was a director, had been highly critical of him.

I sometimes got the impression from Liberals of Thorpe's vintage that it was the mishandling of the party's money that they could not forgive him for – the shooting of poor Rinka came a distant second.

Was he guilty as charged? It would have been a brave jury that committed on the basis of the evidence given by Scott, Bessell and Newton. Yet one of the jurors, when interviewed after the trial by the *New Statesman* (it would be illegal today), said they would have convicted Thorpe at least of a conspiracy to frighten had such a lesser charge been put before them. They were frustrated, he said, that it had not been.

But the truth and what can be proved in a court of law are two different things. Why did Newton travel to Barnstaple – all right, Dunstable and then Barnstaple – to look for Scott whatever his precise motive? It is hard to believe that Thorpe's difficulties with Scott do not supply the answer to that question.

Let us end on a sobering note. Four years after Thorpe's trial the Liberal Party, in alliance with the SDP, received more than 25% of the national vote. Three years on from the end of the Liberal Democrats' coalition with the Conservatives, we can only dream of such riches. There appear to be some things Liberal voters, like Thorpe's contemporaries, find harder to forgive than shooting a great dane.

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Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective

# LIVING LONGER BUT DYING TOO SOON

## Care for people with learning disabilities still fails to prevent avoidable deaths, says Margaret Lally

People with learning disabilities are now living significantly longer. Thanks to advances in healthcare and improved support the population of older people with learning disabilities will increase four times faster than the overall adult learning disability population. This is the good news.

But people with learning disabilities are still dying too soon. The recent pNHS Learning Disabilities Mortality Review found that overall the life expectancy of people with a learning disability lagged far behind a person in the general population - 23 years for men and 29 years for women. These figures are shocking. Why is it happening?

Generally people with learning disabilities will have a poorer health profile than the general population. There is a higher prevalence of dementia in people who have Down's syndrome and they are more likely to be afflicted with this cruel disease at a much earlier age.

### MORTALITY RISK

People with learning disabilities may also have an increased risk of mortality due to conditions associated with their condition – for example epilepsy and aspiration pneumonia. Some will have poor general health due to insufficient exercise and inappropriate diet and this makes it harder for them to combat illnesses.

However a major problem is the failure of services to accurately diagnose and respond to symptoms. Many people with a learning disabilities, particularly those with limited speech, find it difficult to communicate what they are feeling and if a doctor does not know the individual they may find it hard to understand and accurately identify the cause of changes in behaviour.

For instance, the symptoms of a condition such as dementia may be confused with those associated with the underlying learning disability. What is seen as challenging behaviour may be due to the individual being in pain – not their learning disability.

In 2008 the Michael Report Healthcare for All: Report of the Independent Inquiry Into Access to Healthcare for People with Learning Disabilities, and the subsequent Confidential Enquiry into Premature Deaths of People with Learning Disabilities (2013) concluded that there was a failure of services to take into account the needs of this client group and make reasonable adjustments. This led to misdiagnosis and in some instances premature death.

Poor care and neglect are also factors. In 2014 a young man called Connor Sparrowhawk drowned in a bath while left unsupervised by the NHS unit which was caring for him. It was concern about his death and repeated failures in the care of people with

learning disabilities that led to the establishment of the NHS Learning Disabilities Mortality Review.

In its report published on 4 May this year it noted that, having undertaken detailed studies of 103 deaths in 2016-17, there were 13 instances where the person's health had been adversely affected by treatment delays, poor care, neglect and abuse.

Why does this happen and what can we do about it? There are three underlying issues:

- ☛ The needs of people with learning difficulties are just not seen as important as everyone else's. The Michael report emphasised that the access issues that they have are also issues for everyone else. This does not mean that people with learning difficulties require the same response but that they are given equal consideration and that reasonable adjustments are.
- ☛ But because there has been some improvements in how people with learning disabilities are looked after, they are living longer. They will have many of the age-related health and social care needs as other older people (only sometimes earlier in their lives) and they also face specific challenges associated with their learning disability. This is not always sufficiently understood.
- ☛ Inevitably there is a lack of resources in both health and social care to address these complex needs.

At the end of April 2018 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published its Guideline on the Care and Support of People Growing Older People with Learning Disabilities which identified a number of key issues and made proposals for changing practice.

As noted above, people with learning disabilities are both particularly vulnerable to illness, and find it difficult to communicate their health needs.

It is, therefore, essential that their health is regularly reviewed. GPs are expected to provide an annual health check for people with learning disabilities to both help promote a healthy lifestyle and identify any underlying conditions (including checking whether they have been able to have a sight and hearing test). But this check will only improve health outcomes if it is used effectively. Particularly where the doctor does not know the person with a learning disability well, the individual must be able to bring with them someone who does know them really well, and can help them to both explain how they are feeling, and understand what interventions are being offered.

Similarly hospitals must make the reasonable adjustments that enable the person with a learning disability to communicate their symptoms, such

as allowing longer appointments; utilising a wide range of communication tools (videos, easy read information for example), ensuring they have an advocate with them.

Practitioners working in acute medicine may not be sufficiently familiar with the Mental Health Capacity Act and so assume that a person with a learning disability lacks capacity. This can result in treatment being given without consent or, conversely, treatment being withheld. Both situations can be extremely traumatic for the individual with a learning difficulty and may also mean they don't get the right treatment.

It should be assumed that they do have the capacity to make decisions about their own treatment and supported in making those decisions, unless an assessment demonstrates otherwise. Using a hospital or health passport, which sets out key information about the individual including how they like to be communicated with, their current health status, and who needs to be consulted about their care, helps overcome some of these challenges. A particularly successful initiative is employing a learning disability liaison nurse who works with the hospital staff, the individual and their supporters to facilitate communication.

Ensuring good health care is essential but more needs to be done to ensure that, like the rest of us, people with learning disabilities live healthy lives and achieve their aspirations. This requires a combination of effective person-centred care planning for the individual, and local authorities promoting a wide range of community services, including physical activities, which are accessible and reflects the preferences and abilities of local people with a learning disability.

Care plans should identify what activities are important to individuals and how they will be supported to do them. Particular emphasis should be given to maintaining and nurturing relationships – whether it is those with family, friends, or more intimate ones with partners.

Research highlights that strong social networks and relationships may be a factor in facilitating good health (particularly mental health) and resilience. Research for people with learning disabilities highlights that their lives are often quite isolated, particularly as they get older when they are no longer able to participate in initiatives which are learning disability specific but may be excluded from provision for older people because of their learning disability. Promoting age relevant facilities for people with learning disabilities and ensuring adequate transport to those facilities (which could be volunteer car driver schemes) is another part of the jigsaw the local authority can put in place.

A key part of any care plan is future planning. Two thirds of adults with learning disability live with their families – often continuing to live with them well into old age.

*“Generally people with learning disabilities will have a poorer health profile than the general population”*

## **FAMILY CRISIS**

Consequently many older people with learning disabilities are not known to health or social services and do not become known until there is a crisis in the family – often the illness or death of their parents. Future planning needs to look sensitively but realistically at what will happen when the family can no longer

provide care, and indeed, when the person with a learning disability might want to live elsewhere. An early discussion of possible options just makes it easier for everyone. Of course this only works if there are realistic options to offer. Local authorities need to do more to promote positive housing solutions which meet the changing needs of people with learning disabilities, including shared living schemes as well as looking at adaptations to the family home to make it suitable for the person to continue living there. There can be more imaginative use of personal care budgets. It is, of course, essential that the emotional and practical needs of carers are also looked after through, for instance, easily accessible information and respite care.

Many people with learning disabilities live happy and fulfilled lives with the people they care for and who care about them. But too many lives are still being cut short by inadequate care, and certainly not everyone with a learning disability is able to live healthy and fulfilled lives growing older.

There is a particular responsibility on government, health and social care commissioners and providers to identify the needs of some of the most vulnerable in our society and ensure that high quality person centred services are put in place to meet those needs.

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Margaret Lally is a member of Islington Liberal Democrats and chaired the NICE committee which produced the Guideline on the Care and Support of People Growing Older People with Learning Disabilities. The views expressed are her own

# OBITUARIES - DAVID & JOAN MORRISH

## Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to two stalwarts of west country liberalism

David Morrish was one of the very best of us. He had everything - an instinctive and innate Liberalism, considerable intelligence, great debating skills, always with a ready anecdote in his attractive Devonian burr, an immediate charisma and a political integrity and loyalty which meant that he had many opponents but no enemies.

He was one of that band of Liberals denied a role in national politics by an electoral system that excludes all but a handful of Liberals from office. That he chose not to seek party office beyond the Devon and Cornwall Region was a loss to the Liberal cause. His death in February brings a sense of what might have been.

David came from a Liberal background and his first taste of campaigning came as a 14-year-old in Plymouth in the 1945 general election. Also campaigning in that election was Joan Squire, a Liberal party member in Tavistock. She and David met at the Liberal Party Assembly in Ilfracombe in 1953 and they eventually married in 1959, with a courtship interrupted by David's year at Wisconsin University on a Rotary Foundation scholarship and time spent working with the United Nations in Iran. This latter post left him with a lifetime's interest in and concern for that country and its people.

On his return to Exeter in 1959 his first - and last - teaching post was as a geography tutor at St Luke's College, now part of Exeter University, where he stayed until his retirement in 1990. His professional life was as an educator, particularly in the training of teachers. Their daughter, Claire, arrived in 1962 and a granddaughter, Emma, in 1996.

David's early personal involvement in Liberal politics in 1956 was even preceded by joining what is now the Electoral Reform Society and, just, by becoming a member of the Society of Friends in 1955. He retained a lifelong involvement with the Quakers and with the peace movement. He refused to undertake national service in 1956 choosing instead to register as a conscientious objector and stating his willingness to serve in the Friends' Ambulance Unit.

My friendship with David began in 1962, the year after he had first been elected to Exeter City Council. I went to the city as part of my regular tour of Liberal council groups as the party's local government officer. I stayed overnight with the Morrishes and found that we shared the same radical Liberalism. Exeter and the Morrishes became a regular convivial stop on future tours. David was a member of the council from 1961-74 and from 1996 until his retirement in 2011. He switched to Devon County Council from 1973 to 2004, all the time representing the same Heavitree ward. His 50 years' service was recognised by being

made a freeman of the city of Exeter in 2011. He recalled his first city council meeting when he had been advised not to speak and not to challenge the mayor - he did both! He fought the Exeter constituency five times and the Tiverton seat four times. He contested the Devon constituency for the European Parliament election in 1994. During my time in parliament, the chief whip, David Alton, told me with considerable astonishment, that a Liberal councillor had turned down a knighthood. Knowing how much such honours were often coveted, even by Liberals, I could understand his surprise. I went through possible names in my head and I came to the conclusion that it must be David Morrish. The next time I was with him, I looked at him with a sideways smile and asked, "Did you turn down a knighthood, David?" "Ah," he responded, "you'll have wait for my memoirs!" Alas, he only reached page 12 of his draft. I fear that the concept of memoirs was also somewhat un-Quakerly to David.

In 1985, to the Conservatives' huge surprise, they lost control of the Devon County Council for the first time in living memory. David set about putting together a three party coalition - Liberal, SDP and Labour. Eventually the Liberals and SDP put together a two-party administration, with Labour supporting from the wings. It proved to be fractious blend and David survived as leader of the council for only two years. Interestingly David's somewhat naïve but typically 'pure' antipathy to having a group whip was a contributory factor in the joint administration eventually petering out.

In 1987 David and I found ourselves in minority within the Liberal party, opposing the leaders' proposal to form a merged party with the Social Democrats. At the special Liberal Assembly in Blackpool in December David made one of the better speeches against the proposal, telling delegates that, "Our constitution, preamble, membership scheme and name are worth fighting for .... they are not memorabilia but assets for the future fight."

The merger proposal was inevitably passed with a large majority. Rather than abandon the cause we became part of a small continuing Liberal party, huddling together for mutual warmth and comfort. David typically held on to his Exeter ward seat, "without prefix or suffix" and his wife, Joan, won the next door ward. Together with two other Liberal party stalwarts they had a group of four on the city council. Some 20 years later I made the decision to join the mainstream Liberal Democrats but David remained loyal to the 'mighty handful' to the end of his life. It was typical of the high esteem he was held by all that Ben Bradshaw, the Labour MP for Exeter,

and a local Conservative councillor visited David in his final nursing home and that Ben attended the funeral. His final years were accompanied by a great frustration at his increasing frailty.

Joan survived David by just six weeks. She was a Liberal Exeter City councillor for the Barton and St Loyes ward for 20 years, eventually stepping down in 2012, and a Devon County Councillor for 10 years.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

# LETTERS



## THE FOOD OF RADICALISM

*Dear Liberator,*

In Radical Bulletin, Liberator 390 reported that Your Liberal Britain had relaxed its deadline of 4 May for the Ashdown Prize for Radical Thought competition slightly as something else was happening on 4 May.

And the outcome – the prize-winning, original, radical idea above all others? That supermarkets should donate non-perishable unused food to food banks.

There appear to be practical difficulties about this proposal – in particular, many food banks are not short of food, but of volunteers and sometimes adequate premises. A big increase in food supply would require a big increase in volunteers.

However, even if it's a good idea, how is it radical? It addresses the symptoms and not the root causes (Latin: radix – a root, hence 'radical') of food poverty. It doesn't challenge any vested interests or power imbalance.

Is this radical thought, or just evidence that many Liberals don't want to change things too much, but get a thrill from the word 'radical'?

Simon Banks  
Harwich

## DISOBEDIENT SERVANT

*Dear Liberator,*

In his call for civil disobedience (Liberator 390) Jonathan Hunt displays the type of arrogance that has helped lose the referendum vote and plays into the hands of the Daily Mail.

By what right is it justified to use extra parliamentary means to frustrate a decision made by a majority of people voting on the grounds that he doesn't agree with the decision?

Suggesting that people who voted leave are stupid isn't exactly the way to win hearts and minds. Disruption is a tactic that is by no means restricted to just causes and remainers aren't the only people who can indulge in it. Any perception that Brexit is being frustrated against the wishes of the majority is likely to unleash a nasty backlash on a bigger scale than anything likely to be used by hard remainers.

Eighteen years ago the fuel protestors launched an effective and nasty poujadist campaign again increases in fuel duty which effectively means that measures to halt climate change are going to be difficult to implement. Jonathan Hunt's positive message regarding a supreme elected European parliament isn't even shared by a

lot of remainers.

The only way Brexit can be reversed without massive opposition is if there is another referendum. There is no guarantee that a referendum wouldn't produce a similar result to 2016 what would Jonathan Hunt do then? Tim Farron seemed to be perplexed by the concept of a hard remainder, Jonathan Hunt appears to have given an example.

Andrew Hudson  
Ulveston

*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

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**Empire & Revolution,  
the political life of  
Edmund Burke  
by Richard Bourke  
Princeton 2015  
paperback 2017**

Every generation of students seems blest by a good guide to Burke, since he is a mainstay in the studies of history and political philosophy; mine was Conor Cruise O'Brien's introduction to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Penguin 1968).

Bourke presents us with a much more thorough assessment going into the minutiae of Burke's life. Burke is typically cast as the political theorist of British Conservatism and the *Reflections* are, of course, the basic statement of that.

Had Burke, a Rockingham Whig, sold out and become a Tory? Yet the pallbearers at his funeral were all Whigs, primarily Rockinghamite or independent (although Portland had, by then, accepted office as home secretary in Pitt's government – he too was disquieted by the French revolution).

As with most political thinkers, the answer is not as simple as that and there are many examples of Burke's proto-Liberalism in his Letter to the Electors of Bristol, where he supports the American revolutionaries on the basis of 'no taxation without representation' and his arguments for the impeachment of Warren Hastings and the critique of despotism and corruption in politics. It should be remembered that what are now canons of political thought were highly polemical work-a-day politics in their time.

Bourke's book is important because it looks in detail at the cusp of a great transitional period in politics and political thought; I don't simply mean in this the obvious cataclysm of the French revolution nor that of America. It is a period in which Whiggism will begin to transform into what will come to be recognisable as Liberalism and the chance to be guided through the detail of this is a tour that shouldn't be missed.

Stewart Rayment



# REVIEWS

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**Parties, Agents and  
Electoral Culture  
1880-1910  
by Kathryn Rix. Royal  
Historical Society  
Boydell Press 2016 £50**

The demise of the traditional party agent and its replacement by the 'campaign manager' has been an unremarked evolution over the past 30 years. In addition, there have been very few books of memoirs of agents or indeed of books about political agents. Kathryn Rix is thus filling a long standing niche, at least as a first instalment.

Rix chooses her commencing and terminal dates with a measure of logic. She argues that 1880, as the last election with cities as single constituencies, saw a sea change in the agent's role. Previously the candidate's agent was more often than not a local solicitor, doing it as a professional duty without necessarily being of the same political hue as his candidate.

He - and it was always a 'he' - usually specialised in the vagaries of election law and handled the legal process of electoral registration. Although the lawyers progressively gave way to political agents the lawyer/agent syndrome clearly survived much longer in the far flung areas.

I recall Jo Grimond relating how in 1945, on the recommendation of his local Liberal party officers in Orkney and Shetland, he went to see a local solicitor whom he invited to act as his agent. The solicitor responded, "By all means - and in which party's interest will you be standing?" Her terminal date of 1910 is chosen as it marks the entry of Labour party agents with a very different perception of the agent's role.

Another consequence of the delineation of constituencies was the development of constituency party organisation. It is difficult

to appreciate how recent are parties as we know them today. Constituency party organisation was developed from the late 1860s by Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham, and executed by his brilliant organiser, Francis Schnadhorst.

Before this, local parties were largely separate entities, loosely federated at the national level. Each party's chief whip was the key figure in placing and financing parliamentary candidates. Now there was the beginning of mass membership and local democratic structures.

When Gladstone announced his espousal of Irish Home Rule in 1885 he caused a huge and lethal split in the Liberal party. The Liberal Unionists, following Chamberlain, who opposed Home Rule, were defeated at the 1886 conference of the National Liberal Federation and went off to form a separate party. Initially it formed an electoral pact with the Conservatives and was assimilated into the Conservative party by 1912.

Crucially, Schnadhorst stayed with the Gladstonians. He was promised a high salary and, it is said, had been badly treated by Chamberlain. It was a great, if expensive, coup by the 'official' party but my view is that he was past his peak by 1886 and, hampered by his increasing deafness, was a waning asset.

Nevertheless he was a seminal figure in the development of agency and Rix acknowledges this at length.

For the purposes of her book, Rix makes a distinction between paid and unpaid agents. In some respects this is an artificial definition. For instance, in Leeds there was John Shackleton Mathers, who was a remarkable agent for the city party. He was a building society agent and appears to have earned enough to enable him to devote the majority of his

time to running the party in Leeds.

Described by Sir Wemyss Reid, editor of the Leeds Mercury as “the best wire-puller I ever knew” his tactics of seduction and co-option into the Liberal party of all the leading Labour personalities as councillors and magistrates kept Labour at bay in the city for a decade beyond Bradford and other cities. However, because he was unpaid he does not figure in this book.

Rix examines the different aspects of the agent’s duties, extending beyond the narrow election period.

She is very interesting on the topic of social activities of the parties. She points out that many Liberal agents were greatly hampered in organising social activities by the party’s, or the candidate’s, pro-temperance stance.

Rix has trawled through an astonishing array of theses, books and articles as a basis for her book and occasionally it descends into being a catalogue of quotations from these sources, but its authenticity cannot be doubted.

In the light of her diligence it is rather churlish to point out an undiscovered but important source. In Leeds we have the oldest subscription library in Britain, established in 1768. It possesses a remarkable scrapbook from the 1892 parliamentary election in East Leeds kept by the Conservative agent, Charles Wilson, leader of Leeds City Council for 20 years and one-term MP for Central Leeds.

Wilson kept everything - invoices, receipts orders etc - so that it is a goldmine for researchers. Martin Wainwright used the scrapbook as a major source for his MA degree at Merton College, Oxford, later written up in 1971 as Ireland not Socialism - A Leeds Election.

I hope that Rix can be persuaded to continue it in a second volume.

Michael Meadowcroft

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## **Building Anglo-Saxon England** **by John Blair** **Princeton 2018** **\$41.95**

Whenever the periphery rose up against the monarch, almost invariably the liberties enjoyed by the Saxons were raised against the despotism that came with the Conqueror and his descendants.

How true this was may be conjecture, but Saxon (and Danish) England shaped expectations of a more pluralist body politic – be that only shared between elites for many centuries.

John Blair, of Queen’s College Oxford, has a firm root in archaeology, which unlike Whiggish speculation, forms the core of this book, combined with a firmer understanding of the institutional developments of the Saxon period – his earlier work, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England* (OUP 2005) for example.

So, even in the Saxon period we might see a steady move from the outdoor assembly of the moot to indoor gatherings from around 1000 – with the potential implications for control.

Typically, of early medieval societies, Saxon England must be recalled as slave-based – the þeowas forming a significant social class, developing over time, and that such documentary evidence as survives informs us that institutions such as the church would seek to assert themselves over the lower orders, not always successfully. Responding to the question, ‘when Adam delved...’ Blair states: “Archaeology does not, on the whole, support the hypothesis of a seigneurial class intruded into local communities from above.”

There are caveats, but there appears to be some basis for the theory of a freer Saxon England, and if the period is of deeper interest to you, then you’ll be well rewarded by this book.

Of particular value, the broader context aside, from a local history context - you should know your turf (alas, my favourite burghs get scant mention, but as Blair says in the context of assemblies, the Guildhall, in London mostly destroys archaeological evidence of the Roman amphitheatre, where Saxon moots were held – an almost accidental continuity, and this will be the fate of other sites in urban areas).

Stewart Rayment

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## **Goddess of Anarchy,** **the life and times of** **Lucy Parsons, American** **Radical** **by Jacqueline Jones** **Basic Books** **New York 2017 \$32.00**

Jacqueline Jones is mostly renowned for her studies of slavery and its aftermath among America’s black and white underclasses, from a feminist perspective. Lucy Parsons is thus a likely subject – black (though in denial, a former slave, she claimed Mexican and Native American origin) and champion of the American underclasses. The problem with that is like so many self-appointed tribunes of the proletariat, she neglected their diversity, particularly careless in a society as racially divided as America. In some respects, the Parsons were part of this problem, for example, Arthur Parsons, while highlighting the plight of black share-croppers, not wanting to see them compete in the labour market with white Chicagoans. One can trace this trait is socialist thought back to Marx and Engels.

The other problem is that, while probably induced by the violence of America’s response to the class struggle, the violence of her rhetoric contributed to the popular misunderstanding of anarchism. This indeed, would lead to the judicial murder of her husband, Albert Parsons and his comrades, in the wake of the Haymarket outrages.

Is there, at least in its conventionally understood 19th century-on context, a goddess of anarchy?

Stewart Rayment

## Monday

To demonstrate solidarity with our friends in the European Union I have been residing at the Hotel Splendide in Antibes. Yesterday I returned to the Hall to find that the scents of early summer – jasmine, wisteria, honeysuckle – had been supplanted by the scents of high summer: buddleia, lemon verbena, damask roses. Remind me to give Meadowcroft an emolument.

This morning I decide to enjoy our own countryside at its finest by undertaking an expedition that is a long-cherished ambition: I shall explore the Rutland Union Canal. Built by one of my forebears to connect the docks of Rutland Water with the manufactories of the English Midlands, it was once central to the local economy. Pork pies and Stilton cheeses were sent west by narrow boat and in return we received pottery from Stoke-on-Trent, coal from the Charnwood Forest, Shuttleworths from Hebden Bridge, Liberty Bodices from Market Harborough and Playfair Cricket Annuals from Fleet Street.

In recent years, if I am honest, the canal has been allowed to fall into a state of desuetude – it is some years since the last holidaymakers ventured as far as Oakham Lock and many years since I playfully pushed L.T.C. into the cut there. So it is high time I attempted a navigation of my own.

## Tuesday

I spend the day on the speaking telephone assembling a crew for the Flower of Rutland. I, of course, am the captain, but Paddy Ashplant will make a splendid second-in-command and navigator – it has rightly been said that there is nothing more dangerous than a British office with a map. For muscle (opening locks, coiling ropes and so forth) who better than Jo Swinson and Layla Moran? Come to that, who better for ship's cook than Cook from Bonkers Hall? Finally, we have a Well-Behaved Orphan as cabin boy so that (as is traditional) we have someone to eat in case of emergency – not that there is much meat on him if I am honest.

As to motive power, I sign up Alfred, a horse from one of the estate farms. "If it's not delivering Focus it's hauling narrowboats," he remarks morosely.

## Wednesday

A splendid first day, though Ruttie, the Rutland Water Monster, is in playful mood when we enter the first lock and almost capsizes us. Then we take a wrong turning and perform two laps of the moat at Bonkers Hall without Ashplant noticing anything amiss before the Great Seal of Rutland dives in to show us the way out. As we pass through villages, locals come out to cheer and warn us of shallows and shoals ahead.

We moor for the evening on a wooded stretch and soon meet the King of the Badgers at the head of a hunting party. He promises to Have A Word with the foxes who have been depredating my tenants' chicken runs and in return I undertake to give Gove one up the snoot the very next time an opportunity presents itself.

Then we hear strange music and see lights among the trees. Who should it be but my old friends the Elves of Rockingham Forest? What an evening we have! The elves play their ancient songs (aeolian cadences and so forth) while I supply a selection of music hall songs upon the banjulele. Ashplant then tells an amusing anecdote about two tribes of his acquaintance, and Tom, the aforementioned Well-Behaved Orphan and cabin boy, proves to have the sort of voice that moves elderly ladies to weep and dig deeply into their purses when the communion plate is passed around. I shall recommend him to the Revd Hughes.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

## Thursday

The morning begins on a distasteful note when I find the Elves of Rockingham F. have charged me mooring fees for yesterday evening – particularly galling as these are my woods. I find myself somewhat in sympathy with Cook's view that they are "nasty heathen things," but it is best to keep in with these fellows. I have Tom post a cheque at the first sub post office we encounter.

Matters do not improve, for we find the canal increasingly hard going. Locks are jammed,

the channel silted and weeded, and the sun beats down without mercy. If it were not for the brute strength of Alfred (and Jo Swinson and Layla Moran) we should make no progress at all. "It's all too reminiscent of the Barnsley Central by-election," Alfred remarks.

In the cool of the evening we moor outside a public house somewhere in the wilds of High Leicestershire. The landlord and locals are adamant that we should venture no further west, warning of "pirates" if you please. What rot!

## Friday

I write these lines having been cast adrift in an open boat after the Flower of Rutland was seized by pirates. At least they were proper pirates – wooden legs, hooked hands, parrots – not like those rather disappointing Somalis one used to see on the television news. Mind you, I do not appreciate beings addressed as a "scurvy dog" – by the pirate captain or his parrot.

My only companion is Tom, who proves a quick-witted child as he has smuggled some bottles of Smithson & Greaves Northern Bitter aboard under the very noses of the pirates. Perhaps he is too quick-witted: "Why are there so many orphans in Rutland, your lordship?" he asks with a steady gaze.

## Saturday

"Cast adrift" was perhaps something of a misnomer: "grounded" would be a better word. Soon after Tom and I have waded ashore, Alfred appears on the towpath. "I expect you want me to fetch help," he says without enthusiasm. "Gamekeepers, elves and so forth." Off we go at a brisk trot, and I do indeed seek help from those and many other quarters. Tomorrow the Flower of Rutland and her crew will be liberated and the pirates put to flight.

## Sunday

What a battle it was! The pirates were assailed from all sides by elven archers and Well-Behaved Orphans with catapults. Then they faced close combat from gamekeepers armed with orchard doughties and badgers armed with powerful jaws. Eventually, Cook freed herself from her bonds and (before untying Jo Swinson, Layla Moran and Paddy Ashplant) fetched the pirate captain a fearful blow over the head with her soup ladle. After that the fight rather went out of them.

I have not enjoyed a holiday so much in years. Not only that: with a spot of restoration the Rutland Union Canal will make ideal cruising for the more adventurous boater. I think a horse-drawn hotel boat would also prove popular, but I shall pick my moment before suggesting it to Alfred.

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