berator

If Brexit goes through, I'll come back and haunt you!

Paddy Ashdown 1941–2018

Brexit and how Europe sees us - David Grace, Søs Haugaard, Kate Vanovitch & Sonja Rentz

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Paddy Ashdown obituaries

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LIBERATOR

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RAINFORESTS STILL FELLED IN VAIN 18..19 Nearly 15 years since the Wasted Rainforests pamphlet, Gareth Epps finds the Liberal Democrats are still writing reams of unread policy papers that do nothing to rectify their loss of identity

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Cover: Christy Lawrance **Pictures:** Cover: Jan Kraus/Flickr. Page 12:Alex Folkes, 16-17: Jonathan Calder

COMMENTARY

DRAWBRIDGES AND WALLS

If the UK were not consumed by Brexit the extraordinary political dramas playing out across the Atlantic would surely have gained more attention.

Not just that the Democrats showed in the House of Representatives election that it is possible to beat the American equivalent of Brexit supporters, but that Donald Trump has shut down the government, seen former aides imprisoned and been the subject of serious suggestions that he is a Russian spy.

Any of this might have made more of a dent in the support of a normal president, but American politics long ago became as much cultural as economic. Are ours heading the same way whether or not Brexit goes ahead?

We might note in passing that the pro-Brexit sovereignty-junkies have never raised a murmur about British foreign and defence policy having been decided in Washington for the past 75 years.

Liberal Democrats have long complained about the widespread acceptance by the public and media of a 'left-right' scale into which they do not readily fit.

Those complaints have done them little good as most voters saw themselves as members of Conservative or Labour tribes defined largely by economics.

The point that liberals saw politics more on a 'freedom versus authoritarianism' scale might have been interesting but cut little ice.

But for all the talk - chiefly by Jeremy Corbyn - that the Brexit vote exposed a gap between richer and poorer, it did not do so in any uniform way.

Rich Conservatives, extreme free market supporters (usually one and the same thing) and people in comfortable suburbs all voted Leave in significant numbers while residents of inner London - some of the poorest boroughs in the country - gave Remain its largest victories, and some northern cities also backed the EU.

It's too simplistic to say that the Brexit vote was driven by economics - there is a cultural issue too, the one the late Simon Titley often described in Liberator as "Are you drawbridge up, or drawbridge down" - do you welcome the rest of the world (Remain) or want it to go away (Leave).

That cultural issue can be seen in the forces fighting within the Labour party. Young idealists who joined it since Corbyn became leader might have socialists leanings on economics but also tend to be socially liberal and staunchly pro-EU.

Contrast that with people in some traditional Labour one-party states who might also be economically left wing but are socially conservative and resent outsiders. The ideal party for Brexit supporters looks indeed to be neither the Tories nor Labour but the DUP - economically statist, socially neanderthal and mistrustful of outsiders. Could it even expand out of Northern Ireland?

From the outside, the coalition that elected Trump comprises the very wealthy, socially conservative racists and sexists, members of the more extreme evangelical sects and poor people in some ex-industrial areas who backed a purveyor of snake oil since nothing else seems to have worked for them.

Although the UK is free of religious politics outside Northern Ireland, this coalition looks not unlike the one that backed Leave.

Tony Blair's interventions in the Brexit debate have generally been unhelpful since he remains terminally discredited in the public mind by his lies over the Iraq war, and indeed bears much responsibility for the public's lack of faith in politicians.

He did though say something interesting on Brexit when he noted: "If you end up with two groups of people who don't listen to each other, learn from each other or like each other, that's a problem."

The mutual incomprehension between Remain and Leave can indeed turn ugly at times, but is it actually any uglier than that which existed for decades between Conservative and Labour 'groups' who neither liked or listened to each other? The era of the miners' strike comes to mind.

What Blair's observation ought to show is that if a group of people is genuinely deeply committed to a viewpoint there is unlikely to be much purpose in trying to shift it.

Dialogue is always important but it's dialogue between the committed and uncommitted that matters, not between those who don't wish to hear.

Lib Dems have not always grasped this - being at times under the endearing delusion that if they just explained their policies in simpler language everyone would agree with them.

If the axes of UK politics are shifting to 'freedom versus authoritarianism' and 'drawbridge down versus drawbridge up' scales, there is much that ought to be promising for liberals.

For a start, with the exception of the last category mentioned above - the neglected poor - there is not slightest purpose in liberals trying to appeal to any part of the Trump/ Brexit coalition, and clarifying that will at least save wasted time and effort previously spent pursuing the illusion 'we can win everywhere'.

In America the metaphor about drawbridges has become literal with Trump's proposed walling off of Mexico.

Let's be the party of those whose drawbridges are down to the world - those whose drawbridges are up have ample other parties to speak for them.



PERILS OF GOOGLE

The undeclared race to succeed Sal Brinton as party president has so far been confined to newsletter publisher Mark Pack, former LGA group leader the Liverpool councillor Richard Kemp, and Catherine Bearder, MEP for south east England who will be out of a job if Brexit comes to pass.

A quick internet search suggests another contender out there. Parliamentarians have used the presidency as a stepping stone to the leadership (Charles Kennedy and Tim Farron for example). Supporters of Leila Moran, MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, insist she does not intend to stand for leader yet having a marginal seat to defend, but might she fancy the presidency?

It looks that way when one peruses: http://www. laylamoran.com/party_president

There, at least in mid-January, one could find a page built on the party's Nationbuilder site headed 'Layla Moran MP. Party President'.

The rest of the page comprised placeholder text in Latin and a 'donate' button that goes through to Moran's local party.

Since Nationbuilder is a party facility provided by headquarters, all pages carry the rubric that they are "published and promoted by Nick Harvey on behalf of the Liberal Democrats." Harvey would have to be scrupulously neutral in any presidential election, so this will no doubt need rapid correction.

The page also says it is promoted by "Conor McKenzie on behalf of the Oxford West & Abingdon Liberal Democrats". How many of them knew about it?

I COUNTED THEM IN...

The election for London mayoral candidates was the first major internal Lib Dem election for some years, the previous leader and presidential polls having been uncontested.

It duly exposed a long hidden flaw in the membership system when former party president Lord Dholakia - someone extremely unlikely to have cancelled his membership - was among those who found they could not vote.

Investigations found that when the membership software was set up in 2013 something went wrong with facilities to deal with people who are issued new credit cards with different dates and numbers.

It appears that at the 2015 leadership election most details entered were still valid so the problem did not come to light then and lay dormant until last autumn.

The system then sought to take payments on old cards, duly failed, and then nothing happened, with both the cardholder and membership department being left unaware that anything was amiss. This is now being sorted out, though may explain why membership income was lower than expected when the round of headquarters staffing cuts followed (Liberator 393).

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Your Liberal Britain (YLB) has fallen largely silent since its controversial launch last year when it was awarded space in party HQ, the right to approach major donors for cash and commissioned to do several rather nebulous things for the Federal Board (Liberator 389).

On 20 December it published a baffling social media post that said it was rebranding: "We plan to show hundreds of thousands of liberals what they can do to change the world", it immodestly began.

"We'll show them how they can take immediate, practical action to address Britain's urgent challenges. To do that we need a new name and brand. More to follow."

As of mid-January 'more' had not followed. A presentation to the party's English council suggested YLB wanted a name less identified with the party and had been kicked out of HQ in favour of some free temporary desk space in Shoreditch.

Having gained minimal traction in the party, YLB founder Jim Williams is now seeking a wider stage.

He intends to rebrand YLB as 'Hatch', which would direct people to existing campaigns rather than run them itself.

Williams said in one email seeking support: "We're building this out of our existing vehicle - Your Liberal Britain - which has done very similar work within the Lib Dems.

"We're going to rebrand, step out of the party (while maintaining good relations), and begin the work of engaging Britain's liberals in the social, political and communal steps they can take to bring about change."

Talk about ideas above your station. Williams went on: "We're also looking to go up a serious step: our audience is in the thousands presently, and we're looking for it to be in the hundreds of thousands within two years. We're now fundraising accordingly."

OUT OF COMMISSION

There is a sorry tale behind how the Liberal Democrats came to lose their place on the Electoral Commission to the Democratic Unionist Party.

The Lib Dem nominee in 2010 was the former Cambridge MP, council leader and law professor David Howarth and at that point the party had an automatic place.

When the party's vote collapsed by the time his term ended in 2014 the system was changed so that only the Conservatives and Labour had automatic seats and other parties each put forward their nominee for the third place.

Howarth's re-appointment was though more or less a formality given he was the commission's main legal brain.

But when Howarth's second term ended last year, Vince Cable nominated the party's Hilary Stephenson for the role, who until 2015 had been the party's director of elections.

Cable may have been under pressure to nominate a woman, but while Stephenson is familiar with following electoral law she isn't a lawyer - and the commission has a quasi-judicial role - and has not been senior politician.

The speaker's committee, which selects commissioners, was reportedly underwhelmed by the 'other party' candidates and eventually chose the DUP's former assembly member Alastair Ross, though only for two years rather than four.

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS

Lib Dem councillors are always encouraged to report back to those who elected them, but this good advice is not being applied to members of the Federal Board.

Simon McGrath, the English party's representative, makes a practice of sending the 150 or so members of the English council a brief description of what has happened at each FB meeting, and covers nothing that could be reasonably called confidential.

His reporting back has though incurred the ire of English party chair Liz Leffman and party president Sal Brinton.

Matters came to a head when McGrath reported on the November FB meeting that discussed staff redundancies (Liberator 393).

Brinton and Leffman claimed what he wrote breached confidentiality. It is though hard to see how since the missive said merely that McGrath had asked questions and "There isn't a lot I can say as, for obvious reasons, a lot of the discussions were confidential. There are really two issues on how we got here – our income in a number of areas is below budget and our financial reporting systems were not strong enough to pick that up at an early stage . Both issues are being addressed."

McGrath then asked Brinton if he could circulate his report to all FB members so they could judge for themselves whether it breached confidentiality. She refused.

The FB has now drawn up a confidentiality policy that does not bar members from reporting back with certain sensible exceptions.

McGrath's mailing did say: "I will keep pressing on the outstanding points" relating to the party's 2019 budget, which may offer further scope for giving Brinton and Leffman the vapours.

KAFKA WOULD BE PROUD

Former Bradford East MP David Ward was due to have his appeal against the Liberal Democrats' rejection of his application to re-join the party heard on 24 January as Liberator went to press.

Ward was told this had been rejected as it would "bring the party into disrepute", though not how 'disrepute' was defined, and even warned him that his appeal would be cancelled if asked again.

He said he was told he could not be legally

represented at the appeal as it was "an internal matter", even though he is not at present a member.

Ward was removed as candidate just before the 2017 general election after the intervention of then Tory cabinet minister Eric Pickles, who claimed Ward had made anti-Semitic remarks in his pro-Palestinian comments (Liberator 392).

Then leader Tim Farron made it clear he wanted Ward removed though left it to party bureaucrats to do the deed.

Ward has said: "The fear of attacks on the party from political opponents and the despicable Guido Fawkes for not sacking me were used to justify my removal even though the person who took the action against me has admitted she did not personally believe I was antisemitic or that I had, in her view, committed any disciplinary offence."

ELECTRIC INTERWEB

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is off to Calderdale, home of the worst motion submitted for York spring conference. The toilet has been keenly sought by writers of the pointless and nonsensical since the original on the exact spacing of public toilets on different classes of road appeared in 1983.

Calderdale's motion managed the double of being both illiberal and incapable of implementation. It called for terrestrial broadcasting standards to be appleid to "video channels broadcasting to large UK audiences" and to the "what to watch next' sidebars of these".

Apparently obvious to the possibility of material being hosted abroad, it said any channel that generates an annual income above the minimum wage should be held to UK broadcasting standards, and those that refused banned from broadcasting to the UK.

SEASON OF GOODWILL

It's normal for Lib Dem colleagues to send each other Christmas cards, but among the party's contingent in the House of Lords almost all received cards from Jo Swinson and Ed Davey even those who knew them only slightly.

Surely this couldn't have anything to do with expectations of a leadership election this year?

Meanwhile one reader was perplexed to receive cakes from Ramesh Dewan, who normally sends these to peers, it is thought in the mistaken belief that they can influence future peerage awards.

Our reader was on the Federal Executive about a decade ago but is nowadays inactive because of business and family responsibilities. Yet he was still the proud recipient of two fine cakes.

It's not only party figures who are overwhelmed with unsolicited cakes. A message to peers from their whips office read: "Many of you will have received cakes from Ramesh Dewan this week. If you do not want to keep them for yourself, we would encourage you to take them to your local food bank.

"The Whips' Office is not able to coordinate a local delivery here in Westminster as no food bank wants that many cakes."

PARLIAMENT PERFORMS THE PARROT SKETCH

The contortions of Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn over Brexit remind David Grace more of Monty Python than an effective legislature

We all remember John Cleese trying to return a dead parrot to the pet shop. The premise of that sketch was that the pet shop man was lying but would not admit it. Why am I irresistibly reminded of that as I watch the House of Commons debate Brexit?

For months we have witnessed leading parliamentarians on all sides lying to us and of course they won't admit it, not even when John Humphries or David Dimbleby interrupts them. The government has swallowed the whole Ukip songbook and parroted their tunes for two years – the false choice between Europe and global, the lies about EU dictatorship, the fantasies about a glorious future, the myth of independence. The Labour opposition has claimed to have the good of the country at heart and even defined it in six tests and then pretended that they don't know that only continued membership of the European Union would satisfy those tests.

What about the European Reform Group (ERG) nutters who constantly tell us how great life would be with no deal and WTO rules ? What about the really barmy Lexiters who think that the EU is the only thing stopping a socialist utopia in Britain? What about Kate Hoey, the DUP backbencher in Vauxhall? (I'll have to lie down).

BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE

Truly a parcel of rogues in a nation. They are indeed squawking, not just tired and shagged out and they don't even have beautiful plumage, even those who are pining for a Norwegian solution. Is this really all that parliamentary democracy is capable of?

Brexiters harp on about democracy, sometimes even suggesting that Britain has a tradition going back a thousand years (Ask William the Conqueror about that). By contrast they revile the European Union as bureaucratic, undemocratic even dictatorial. We now know that the brexiters' idea of democracy is to ask the people a vaguely defined question once and then tell them to shut up and never speak again. So much for direct democracy.

How does the way decisions are made in the European Union compare with Britain's own dubious procedures? When David Cameron was still studying philosophy, politics and animal husbandry at Oxford, I hope Professor Vernon Bogdanor explained to him that EU policies and legislation are based upon treaties voluntarily entered into by 28 countries, not imposed by some mythical megalomaniac monster in Brussels.

Actual European laws are proposed by the European Commission to fulfil those treaties and drafts only appear after extensive consultation with memberstate governments and stakeholders. Actual primary legislation in nearly all cases requires the agreement of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The parliament successfully amends legislation in up to 44% of cases (varies from year to year).

British ministers attending the council report back to the Commons without a vote, often distorting what happened and blaming the commission. Danish Ministers, however, discuss council agendas in advance with the relevant committee of the Folketing and report back afterwards. The Commons could insist on that too if our parliament had teeth and wanted to use them.

Then we have the Commons and Lords European legislation scrutiny committees. I once questioned the chair (now Bill Cash but then someone called Theresa May). She said that they couldn't scrutinise effectively because they only had a few weeks' notice. I pointed out that the EU work programme is published annually and that as a lobbyist I had usually had months of notice of draft directives. She replied that her committee could only consider drafts when "we are seized of them" meaning only when the UK government asked them to.

Why? Why can't a parliamentary committee look at whatever it wants?

Brexiters, echoed again and again by May, demand "control over our laws" but when asked which EU law they don't like, they don't have an answer except 'straight bananas' which was an EU definition, not a ban, copied from an existing UK regulation.

On the other hand, consider the progress of any draft Bill in the UK parliament. The Civil Service drafts it and when it sees the light of day, the government whips ensure that their majority (obtained by the only first-past-the-post system in Europe) is nailed to the perch to prevent any substantial amendment. The Commons rarely amends anything, the Lords try but then give in. Incidentally the EU legislature (Parliament and Council) has no hereditary or appointed house.

When you analyse the Brexiter's critique of EU democracy, it comes down to this: foreigners get to vote! On a pragmatic level (and as we know UK politicians prefer to avoid a principled approach) a study by Simon Hix of the London School of Economics shows that the UK was only in the minority in council votes 12.3% of the time between 2009-15 compared but only 2.6% in 2004-09 (Who can have been in government in 2009-15?) - seven eighths of the time the UK was on the winning side.

The withdrawal negotiations have tested our democracy to the limit. Recent events might suggest that parliament is powerful but bear with me as I look at the details. The prime minister had to be forced by the Supreme Court to take to parliament the decision to serve a notice to leave under Article 50. Whereas the EU negotiating mandate was agreed by 27 countries and the European Parliament, the British mandate was decided by May with doubtful support from her ever-changing cabinet

"Like so many I rejoiced on the winter night when the Commons defeated Theresa May's deal, but let us not deceive ourselves"

WINTER NIGHT

Like so many I rejoiced on the winter night when, not unexpectedly, the Commons defeated Theresa May's deal, but let us not deceive ourselves. Outside the Palace of Westminster stood rejoicing campaigners, those who wanted no deal at all side by side with those who wanted a People's Vote. Unless some unforeseen dramatic change happens before you read this, those will remain the alternatives. Of course the referendum

only offered a blind binary choice but it seems our parliament cannot manage any better.

At the time of writing, May is going through the motions of consulting and Corbyn through the motions of not consulting. Both seem wedded to Brexit and neither seems able to compromise. Will the Labour Party ever force Corbyn to support a new referendum ? Will May seek to overcome parliament by putting her deal to the voters in a referendum? As you read you may know the answer already but my prediction is that neither will happen.

My preference is for a cross-party national government led by an elder statesman or woman to arrange a People's Vote. My prediction is that this will not happen either. Perhaps a general election is more likely. It is clear that our party system is broken, it doesn't work but while it may be stiff and bereft of life, sadly it's not deceased or demised and has not ceased to be. It is tempting to rehearse how we ever got into this mess.

Liberal Democrats are not without blame. It was Ming Campbell who first suggested an 'in or out' vote. Our leaders failed like everyone else to promote the EU, using it as a convenient scapegoat when needed.

Tempting but pointless. The task now, new referendum or not, is to address the underlying problems of our democracy, yes by constitutional reforms Liberals have advocated for decades (including a written constitution itself) but also by a fairer distribution of wealth and income between classes, generations and regions.

Cleese's character says you have to complain until you're blue in the face but that won't be enough, just as telling people to "demand better" is not enough. That's a slogan for supplicants. The Liberal way is, and always has been, to bring people together to take power to make it better. Between the 'meaningful vote' and the 'no confidence' vote parliament considered a 10-minute-rule Bill banning low-level letterboxes. That should help.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective.

and without any attempt to seek parliamentary approval.

Then the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 handed the government Henry VIII powers. May even wanted to implement the outcome of negotiations without parliamentary approval. She was forced to concede the 'meaningful vote' but without the possibility of amendment. Why was this a concession and not just normal business? Dominic Grieve tabled an amendment to disapply Commons standing orders to allow MPs to propose amendments. Tories were furious when the Speaker accepted that amendment. In other words, they opposed the idea that parliament could actually control its own business against the government's wishes.

I only ask why does the Speaker alone choose which amendments get to be voted on anyway? In the European Parliament the test is objective; was the amendment proposed by a committee, a group or a minimum number of members? In the Commons, Bercow decides.

The heart of the problem is the weakness of parliament face to face with the executive. Parliament does not control its own agenda. In the European Parliament the agenda is decided by the Bureau which includes the leaders of all the party groups. In the Commons every Thursday afternoon the leader of the house, a Cabinet member, currently Andrea Leadsom (I will have to go and lie down) tells MPs what they will be doing in the following week. Would anyone run any club or business like that?.

The business of the house is presented as a motion which MPs can in theory reject but they don't. For example, the house passed such a motion saying they would debate five days on the 'meaningful vote' and vote on it on 11 December. On 10 December, May announced that she wouldn't put her deal to the vote the after all. So much for the pretence of parliament controlling its own business.

In 2010 Liberal Democrats entered the coalition promising to reform the Commons and to establish a House Business Committee. Like electoral reform and Lords reform this promise has achieved little or nothing. The committee exists but is toothless, reduced to begging Leadsom for more time. If nothing else good comes out of the whole Brexit debate, let it be reform of parliament to make it a rational institution with real control of the executive, not just in a crisis.

FRIENDS LET DOWN BY BREXIT

Radio 4 recently asked people from Germany, Egypt, Nigeria, Canada and India how they saw the UK. None of them could understand why the it would want to leave the European Union. The media reports widespread regret across Europe combined with bafflement and irritation but also competition to replace British businesses. Liberator asked friends across Europe how they see Britain and Brexit

Søs Haugaard is a member of the national board and vice-chair of the Copenhagen section of Radikale Venstre, the Danish social liberal party, which is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE).

In May 2016, 10 former foreign ministers of Denmark wrote a joint letter to the editor of The Times to implore Britain to stay in the EU, referring to how the two countries had "joined the European Community together in 1973".They went on to make an emotional appeal to the memory of "the deep gratitude [with which Danes remember] the British people's heroic fight for freedom and democracy in Europe during the Second World War", and how British membership had therefore been seen as a "guarantee that the European Community would continue to develop to ensure peace and democracy."

This is emblematic of the Danish perception of Anglo-Danish relations, which is a narrative of gratitude and kinship. I think that Danes will miss Britain in the EU and they fear that a hitherto close connection between the two nations will grow more distant. Having said that, I believe there is general agreement that Denmark needs to protect its own interests as a continued member of the EU, even if this may be at the expense of British interests in the current situation.

The right-wing nationalist Dansk Folkeparti (The Danish People's Party) briefly latched onto the Brexit agenda suggesting that it was time to reconsider Danish membership. This hope was short-lived; even to nationalists and Eurosceptics it must seem unrealistic to imagine that Denmark would follow Britain's example and leave.

And why is that? Historically, we have always been ambivalent about the EU. A cross-party organisation, Folkebevægelsen mod EU (The People's Movement against the EU), founded in 1972 to campaign against Denmark joining the EEC, as it was then, is still active and has one member in the European Parliament.

Originally, resistance to the EEC was part of a leftwing agenda seeing the community as an expression of capitalist protectionism and the free movement of people as contrary to workers' interests. Largely, Folkebevægelsen is the remnants of this tendency. Add to this the new populist right with its anti-immigration agenda and general resistance to internationalism, and you have a fairly substantial resistance to or at least scepticism about Danish membership of the EU.

On that background, you would think that there was every risk that Denmark would leave, but I do not think so. Paradoxically, this could have something to do with frequent referendums leading to the famous Danish 'opt-outs', which mean, among other things, that Denmark is not in the euro, cannot participate in EU military operations and is exempt from supranational legal policy. I would suggest that the fact that Denmark has continually discussed, negotiated and modified its relationship with the EU has in a backward sort of way ensured our continued membership, and I find it unlikely that there will be serious calls for an actual in/out referendum.

Travelling back from a political meeting with a fellow Radikal, I asked her what she thought of Brexit (everyone thinks it is a disaster—but beyond that).

She said: "It is as if Britain cannot find the right balance when it comes to her place in the world. If only the British could find a happy medium between ruling a worldwide empire and closing in on themselves completely, everyone would be much happier. We shall miss their contribution in what is left of the EU."

Kate Vanovitch is a British interpreter and translator who has lived in Berlin since the early 1980s. She has worked at international meetings with many political and business leaders. She is now applying for German citizenship.

Shopkeepers, taxi drivers, neighbours, clients, friends in Berlin frequently ask what is going on in the UK. Only yesterday a Kurdish taxi driver asked me if anyone had any good reasons for voting Brexit. They are well informed and follow the saga with concerned empathy. My grocer regularly expresses dismay at the obvious confusion of a nation that does not seem to know what it wants. This is a common reaction. People are dismayed that Britain seems to be falling out of the EU like a hapless lemming. They are shocked by the political shambles, surprised by parliamentary absurdities, sorry for the people who are or will be suffering the effects, aware that a huge number of people do not want it. Me and people like me living and working in other EU countries, we are deeply hurt and angry. Many of us.

Horrified by ignorance about the EU right up to party leadership level, by the lies and spin in the media, the slap in the face for small businesses, the denial of realities, the undemocratic process (until the eleventhhour parliamentary brinkmanship).

We feel abandoned. Back 'home' there is an oblivious disregard for our lives. Some of us were not even allowed to vote in the referendum, having worked abroad for too many years. The people back 'home' who did vote were incomprehensibly handed executive power by a cynical government to decide on our lives – and on Ireland and on quite a few other things beyond their ken. They did so by a slim majority, squeezed out by a cocktail of misinformation, shameless lies and provenly illicit campaigning procedures. The 'will of the people' is a modern-day trope of the emperor's new clothes, and our leaders are too cowardly to call it out.

The UK is driving away its own. Brits all over the EU are taking other passports. Highly qualified young people are choosing to resettle on the continent because they are so disgusted about the embarrassingly blinkered, mendacious world of Little Englandism.

More than 100,000 Brits are registered as living in Germany. Berlin is the Land with the most (18,000+), having now overtaken North Rhine-Westphalia. While the UK remains in the EU dual citizenship is still possible. The number of Brits applying for German citizenship has grown dramatically since before the referendum, from 622 in 2015 to 7,493 in 2017. I have started the process. When I took my integration test recently, two-thirds of the other candidates in the room were Brits.

The German Foreign Office, British Embassy and Foreigners Registration Office in Berlin have worked together to communicate with British residents. At public meetings in Berlin and Leipzig, German speakers reassured Brits they were welcome in Germany and said they had wanted to bring a list of definite rights (settlement, onward travel, social insurance etc.) but the prospect of 'no deal' meant these commitments could not yet be made as much of it is reciprocal, and nothing is certain without knowing whether the UK will honour the rights of EU citizens.

POLITICS AND BREXIT

Generally, federal politicians have not weighed in on the Brexit decision, as that is clearly a British affair, but have expressed regret at losing the UK. Just 7% of German exports go to the UK.

The Süddeutsche Zeitung has this headline: "Apart from the incompetence and lack of responsibility of the governing Tories, it is the Labour Party, that embodies the breakdown of political culture in Britain."

The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD - our Ukippers) have just decided not to press for Dexit for now after all (their leader said: "Isn't that utopian? Shouldn't we be realistic?") but to demand EU reform. (They do want to abolish the European Parliament though and would like the Deutsche Mark back.)

The Freie Demokraten Partei (FDP) - the Liberal Democrats' partners in Germany and member of (ALDE) is not usually quoted in national news on the topic of Brexit, other themes being more important for them at headline level, their website makes Brexit a key theme and features a long article including: "We Free Democrats would like to keep Britain as a strong partner for the EU, but not come what may."

"Cherry-picking' or relinquishing fundamental principles of the Single Market is out of the question."

"Even after Brexit, the process of European union must continue".

A recent article begins: "We Free Democrats regret the Brexit decision taken by British citizens, but we want to respond to the situation pragmatically. We think the agreement put forward goes in the right direction, because the EU has centred on the interests of people. It is vital that the rights of the EU citizens living on the British Isles are ensured."

The article then goes on to tell the government what to plan for, but what is the federal government actually doing?

Sonja Rentz is an Austrian Young Federalist studying at Strasbourg University and Trinity College, Dublin.

In general, the Austrian people regret the UK's decision to leave the EU and are therefore still open to welcoming the British back. After the ongoing debate for years though, people in Austria are keen on knowing what the British want and ask them for taking a clear decision. May's determination and insistence are however in this context beyond comprehension for many, it is seen as an obstacle for admitting mistakes that might have been made and for reversing in hindsight undesired policies.

Austrian politicians are meanwhile making efforts to reassure certain rights for UK citizens living in Austria. Whereas it has been made clear that the British will lose their official residence authorisation if the UK leaves with no deal, the government is elaborating a special regulation that enables British people to stay and work in Austria, if they have been doing so before the leaving date.

Even though dual citizenship is admitted by Austria solely in special cases, the minister for foreign affairs, Karin Kneissl, not only is considering a new exception for British-Austrian dual citizenship, she also announced an accelerated procedure for UK citizens.

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REVOLUTIONARY TEXT

Much mentioned but seldom read, the Liberal Democrat constitution's preamble contains liberal messages that were widely shared 30 years ago but now seem wildly radical, says Tony Greaves

'Preamble' is a funny word really to hold the importance it does in th Liberal Democrats. In politics it does not seem to be found anywhere else (other than in the remains of the rump Liberal Party which just lifted the old Liberal Party constitution word for word). It comes down from the old Liberal Party and when the Liberal Democrats were formed by its merger with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1988 and everyone just accepted the old Liberal term, perhaps because the SDP constitution did not have one. But I imagine the word means nothing to all the new members in the past 30 years.

Modern dictionary definitions suggest meanings such as "an introduction to a speech or piece of writing" or "a preliminary or preparatory statement" or (in the case of a legal statute) "the introductory part of a statute or deed, stating its purpose, aims, and justification".

This last gets a bit closer to the purpose of the party preamble but not to the nub which is indeed a statement of the very 'purpose, aims and justification' for the party itself. Perhaps we should now call it the Statement of Ideology and Principles, though 'ideology' is a word we are not supposed to use nowadays.

The Preamble to the old Liberal Party constitution was held dear – it contained the articles of faith that a generation of Liberals clung on to in the difficult years after the war. The opening sentences ring proud with the inspiring prose written by Ramsay Muir and Elliot Dodds in the mid-1930s, shortly after the split with Sir John Simon and his Liberal Nationals and at a time when the Liberals were splintering members to both left and right:

"The Liberal Party exists to build a Liberal Society in which every citizen shall possess liberty, property and security, and none shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity. Its chief care is for the rights and opportunities of the individual and in all spheres it sets freedom first."

It should be said that the word 'conformity' is a more recent but very Liberal addition, the result of the party's constitutional review in 1969 chaired by Nancy Seear (later leader of the Liberal group in the House of Lords) and heavily influenced by Michael Steed.

ALMOST PEDESTRIAN

Muir was a leading Liberal thinker and philosopher (and briefly MP for Rochdale). Dodds was a Liberal journalist and writer who owned the Huddersfield Examiner. Together they produced what Seth Thevoz, writing on Liberal Democrat Voice in 2014, called "a beautiful, moving, poetic vision of what a Liberal society would look like". He dismisses the current text by comparison as "almost pedestrian", a "compromise created out of convenience".

I should at this point declare an interest, or at least hold my hand up. I was the person most closely associated with the present Preamble during the negotiations over the merger. There was an initial draft produced by a two-plus-two subgroup but, rightly or wrongly, their efforts were widely condemned on the Liberal side and they stood down. I wrote a new draft using the Liberal Party Preamble as a starting point and incorporating some of the sub-group material, which was then amended and strengthened (well lengthened, anyway) in a process of negotiation between individuals and within little groups during the three-months long negotiating process. While I would not by any means claim to be the author of the final version, I can claim to have perhaps been the nearest there was to an editor, as the person who held it all together while most of the negotiators concerned themselves with more practical matters.

The major row was about the inclusion of the names of international bodies, notably NATO which the Liberal negotiating team opposed and the SDP side fervently wanted (in our view they mistook a specific policy as a principle, and we also did not want to make it difficult for Liberal pacifists to join the new party).

In the end the Liberals gave in, it was included in the founding version, and the merged party later took it out. These arguments were mainly about the nature of the Preamble, not whether we should be in NATO.

But, like most members, I'd not read the Preamble properly for many years apart from the first bit that used to be on our membership cards, which is a rather mangled and clumsy rendering of the old Liberal Party stuff – this was indeed the product of the committee bartering at the very end of the process (and in my absence) T

he Liberal Democrat Preamble is over twice the length of the Liberal Party's, which is partly the result of the SDP side thinking it was a policy document. There is certainly a bit of flab in there. And there are parts that need updating.

But I am now, 30 years later, amazed to find how good it really is. The style is full of "we believe", "we will" and "we affirm", which I don't think is pedestrian. But what astonishes me most is just how much the whole text is a strong affirmation of what we now call social liberalism. The left of centre Liberalism that was the mainstream of the old Liberal Party, suffused with the emphasis on social justice from the best of the SDP.

Above all it gives the lie to the idea that the neoliberalism of the right has any place in the Liberal Democrats. People who join with the intention of turning us into the party of an untrammelled free market within a small state are kidding both themselves and everyone else.

They just do not belong. Nor do genuine Tories or state socialists. This is a fundamentally Liberal text founded on "the freedom, dignity and wellbeing of individuals". Near the beginning it trumpets that: "We aim to disperse power, to foster diversity, and to

nurture creativity. The role of the state is to enable all citizens to attain these ideals, to contribute fully to their communities and to take part in the decisions that affect their lives."

How out of place this would seem in a statement of principles of the Labour or Conservatives parties. It goes on to cover basic rights and social justice, and states that "each generation is responsible for the fate of our planet and...the long term continuity of life in all its forms". This is followed by the promotion of "human rights and open government, a sustainable economy which serves genuine need, public services of the highest quality".

All this in the first two paragraphs out of six or seven. The third starts with the bold statement: "We believe that people should be involved in running their communities", followed by a determination "to strengthen the democratic process and ensure that there is a just and representative system of government", with the stark implication that we have not got that now. "We believe that sovereignty rests with the people and that authority in a democracy derives from the people. "

I remember now how almost every sentence was carefully thought through by the minority of people interested in the preamble and the discussion we had about the phrase "derives from". And we "commit ourselves to the promotion of a democratic federal framework within which as much power as feasible is exercised by the nations and regions of the United Kingdom".

DISASTROUS NONSENSE

You might not think we stand for these things if you remember that our party was an early promoter of the disastrous nonsense of a referendum on EU membership, or think about the way that the party in Scotland now shamefully describe themselves as unionists. More broadly, we might not have made some of the mistakes in the Coalition if Ministers and their special advisers (spads) had kept a copy of the Preamble by their bedside. Of course, many of the Spads were too young and had probably never heard of or read it.

"We will foster a strong and sustainable economy which encourages the necessary wealth-creating processes, develops and uses the skills of the people and works for the benefit of all, with a just distribution of the rewards of success."

And after that affirmation of economic equality comes the rather revolutionary sentence: "We want to see democracy, participation and the co-operative

"What astonishes me most is just how much the whole text is a strong affirmation of what we now call social liberalism" principle in industry and commerce within a competitive environment."

So where has all that gone? Are we really going to leave the field to John McDonnell's rather ill-thought proposals after all the work that Liberals (and some Social Democrats) did in this area over decades?

The Preamble moves on with another bold and essentially Liberal statement: "We will work for a sense of partnership and community in all areas of

life. We recognise that the independence of individuals is safeguarded by their personal ownership of property, but that the market alone does not distribute wealth or income fairly. We support the widest possible distribution of wealth and promote the rights of all citizens to social provision and cultural activity. We seek to make public services responsive to the people they serve, to encourage variety and innovation within them and to make them available on equal terms to all." I don't think this was very controversial in 1988. But now?

Then there is a section on the wider world which contains stuff which in the present climate bring tears to the eyes: "Our responsibility for justice and liberty cannot be confined by national boundaries; we are committed to fight poverty, oppression, hunger, ignorance, disease and aggression wherever they occur. "That is followed by the commitment to "promote the free movement of ideas, people, goods and services".

The rest of this part contains phrases such as "Setting aside national sovereignty when necessary", "Within the European Community [sic] we affirm the values of federalism and integration", "a full and constructive role in international relations". Well, yes.

Many people will skim over all this and dismiss it as generalised waffle. But these words are all there for good reasons. It's a document that demands to be read slowly, with each phrase and sentence mulled over. To me it now feels revolutionary – a good indication of how the centre of gravity of politics has in the past 30 years shifted to the right and to authoritarian and populist attitudes and solutions. It is not our job to shift with them. As the Preamble concludes: "These are the conditions of liberty and social justice which it is the responsibility of each citizen and the duty of the state to protect and enlarge."

Wow – think about that – and that too is a rerendering and improvement from the constitution of the old Liberal Party.

So what has all this to do with party members? It's all in the last sentence of all: "The Liberal Democrats consists of women and men working together for the achievement of these aims."

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

Paddy Ashdown 1941 - 2018

PADDY AS LEADER

By Alan Leaman

Paddy was our brightest star.

His extraordinary energy motivated thousands to work harder for their cause, often beyond what they dreamt was possible. His prodigious stamina held us in awe. He'd been there, done it all and, however hard he drove the party, we knew he was personally prepared to do it all again.

His determination to keep learning impressed and inspired all who came into contact with him. His love of his party created its culture. He forgave a lot while always wanting it to be better.

His sense of fun, combined with his focussed seriousness of purpose, won him friends and respect almost everywhere he went, amongst royalty and statesmen as much as his party's activists and supporters.

His deep commitment to his local community and attachment to the people and topography of Somerset earned him enormous affection and loyalty.

As he showed (with little self-congratulation) in his excellent memoir, A Fortunate Life, these personal qualities propelled him to success in almost every adventure he tried. They also translated into a distinctive, and highly productive, approach to political leadership.

When he inherited the party in 1988 from the chaos of the merger between the Liberals and the SDP, he didn't just rescue the organisation: he-reinvented it. He was casual about the party's name and impatient with what he found. But his mission was to update and build for the future.

Largely through his force of personality, clarity of vision and attention to detail, he turned the Lib Dems into a serious party. In the first few months, we were losing to David Owen's rump SDP and a resurgent Green Party. Paddy knew that every party must continuously re-earn its right to exist.

Paddy taught us that the role of politicians is to lead – it is their duty as well as their privilege. He wanted to do things, not just to be someone. He took seriously his responsibility to argue, persuade and cajole, particularly perhaps when he knew that the majority was against him. He always saw that, whatever happened in elections, he had the power, if well used, to re-balance the terms of public debate and make a difference.

Early campaigns on passports for the people of Hong Kong, reform and support for the EU and, later, the sustained effort to win the argument for intervention in the Balkans, marked out someone who knew what he believed, was confident in his principles, and respected people enough to want to persuade them.

Those principles also made him seek out a better form of politics, and to reach beyond the Liberal Democrats. From the 1992 Chard speech advocating a renewed centre-left, through the abandonment of 'equidistance', to the Cook/Maclennan collaboration on constitutional reform and constructive engagement with Tony Blair, Paddy was driving a distinctive



agenda of reform that might have revolutionised British politics for the better.

The 1997 Labour landslide put that project on hold. It has been in retreat ever since. Labour is controlled by the old left and the Lib Dems continue to suffer the consequences of coalition with the Conservatives. Who can doubt that the country is paying a heavy price for this reverse today, particularly as we wrestle with the fallout of Brexit? But this agenda will return. And, then, a future Liberal leader will surely pick up the baton that Ashdown has left for them.

Alan Leman is a former member of the Liberator Collective and was head of office for Paddy Ashdown



PADDY AND BOSNIA

By Rebceca Tinsley

Paddy Ashdown once said that a politician should have one issue – any issue – for which they are prepared to be lined up against a wall and shot. For Paddy, that issue was Bosnia. He knew it would not win him votes, but it was the moral litmus test of the 1990s.

Parliamentarians mocked him for his relentless championing of the Bosnian Muslim cause, accusing him of being sanctimonious. His efforts were ignored, and he was belittled by arrogant Foreign Office ministers and officials, implying Paddy didn't understand the "ancient ethnic hatreds" in play, as they always do when they are looking for a reason not to confront a dictator. Right from the beginning, Paddy knew that Milosevic, Mladic, Karadzic and their druggedup, alcoholic Serbian thugs would run away if the international community showed the slightest unity of purpose. And so it came to pass, belatedly, not via the useless European institutions, but thanks to Bill Clinton and a hand full of cruise missiles.

Paddy instinctively grasped what the FCO still cannot see: that bullies only respond to having their bluffed called, not appeasement. He understood that the occasional morally equivalent chastisement from London, Brussels, Paris or Washington would have no effect on Belgrade. Rather, he advocated consistent pressure from a united international community, with serious consequences for broken promises. As the Serbs shelled Sarajevo at their leisure, and the bodies piled up, and the UK public woke up to the genocide being perpetrated within two hours' flying time of London, the diplomats responded with a toothless peacekeeping force with no mandate to protect civilians. Paddy predicted this pitiful policy would fail, as it did, culminating in Srebrenica.

After the war, it emerged that Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary urging appeasement of Milosevic, and his FCO mandarin, Pauline Neville-Jones, had formed a company to privatise Serbia's public utilities for Milosevic. Both Hurd and Neville-Jones now sit in the House of Lords, regarded by the media and their peers as wise and respected commentators on foreign affairs.

Nor did Labour cover itself in glory over Bosnia. John Smith told colleagues: "Our people don't care about this kind of thing." Meanwhile, Labour MPs like John Reid and Jeremy Corbyn had a knee-jerk sympathy for their former Communist comrades in Serbia, and a suspicion of any cause, such as the Bosnian Muslims, supported by the USA.

Paddy's track record meant he was well-equipped for his role as UN High Representative in Bosnia (2002-06).

Paddy always stood out as one of the few British politicians who had a backstory, a distinguished and varied life before entering Parliament. He had been tested, unlike today's bland, carefully-coiffed, sausagemachine politicians (Cameron/Blair/Miliband/Clegg) who went straight from elite schools to Oxbridge to working in their party's research department or being an intern, to being elected. Paddy had been through character-forming experiences, and it showed. Parliament is all the poorer for the absence of people of moral backbone like Paddy Ashdown.

Rebecca Tinsley is a trustee of the Bosnian Support Fund.

PADDY AS CAMPAIGNER

By Roger Hayes

During the 1992 general election campaign I worked with Simon Titley on the national tour and had responsibility for the 'rich and famous list'. I saw Paddy up close: in the heat of battle on the campaign stump; tired and frustrated; laughing and encouraging; quiet and contemplative; involving and personable. It was another false dawn, but I saw in Paddy a new and different style of leadership that would take that experience and from it shape himself and the party for the great victory five years later.

Here are four moments from that campaign trail that exemplify the great man's reach and inspirational style.

On the campaign bus from Aberdeen to Edinburgh there was a full press corps onboard and Paddy made the most of their presence. He knew everyone's name and talked to all of them. From small talk to serious interviews he worked the full length of the bus. It was one of the camera crew's birthday and Paddy presented him with a cake and led the bus in Happy Birthday. There have been few leaders who would have been so at ease in such a situation. He was the same with all campaign workers and members of the public, a smile and a heartfelt "thank you" for everyone.

One of my favourite memories was getting to know the less snooty members of the rich and famous list – celebrity donors, some of whom gave more generously of their time and money than others. There were many lovely people like Nicholas Parsons and Barry Norman, but it was a late-night telephone conversation I had with Barry Took that typified the high esteem in which Paddy was held. Took saw the fun in everything and contributed a lot of good ideas to the campaign. He and his wife Lynne were natural Liberals, but I was in no doubt that, at midnight, after a long day, Took made that extra time available because of Paddy's presence as leader.

I took the long rail trip from Paddington with Ludovic Kennedy who was the guest speaker at the Penzance Pavilion. It was a packed house and both speakers were on great form – Kennedy on social justice, Paddy on everything else. He was a good storyteller and always held the entire audience, even those who may not have been natural supporters.

After a long and gruelling campaign, the eve of poll rally was in Taunton. We had prepared a path of flaming brands to provide some theatre for the cameras as Paddy left the rally. We of course had a team on hand, but the sizeable number of ordinary local people who formed outside the hall and cheered him on his way was quite spontaneous.

I had known Paddy from before he was a candidate and knew he was special from the start. We didn't always agree, and sometimes vehemently so, but the debate was always good and the respect strong. He was undoubtedly on the best things ever to happen to British Liberalism and I fear it may be some time before we see his like again.

Roger Hayes is a former leader of Kingston-upon-Thames council

PADDY AND LIBERATOR

By Mark Smulian

A cheery shout of "don't buy Liberator" usually heralded Paddy Ashdown's arrival at our stall at conferences.

Other leaders would give a polite if wary greeting (Cable and Farron), look as though they had just seem something profoundly unpleasant (Steel) or hurry past (Kennedy, Campbell, Clegg).

Paddy was the only leader who saw dissent in the party as a strength rather than a cause of weakness.

I don't doubt he disliked some of Liberator's content - though he did subscribe - but he recognised that if he was to lead a party that was alive and active, rather than inert, it was going to contain people and ideas of which he did not necessarily approve, and overall this was to be encouraged.

This unusually healthy attitude is illustrated by his unflagging support for the Liberal Revue. Indeed, he made a celebrity appearance in his frogman's outfit in the first revue in 1984, an event recorded - perhaps fortunately for him - only in audio.

In 1989, straight after disastrous European elections, the revue had taken aim at the prone figure of 'The Democrats' and administered a good kicking that can't have been conformable viewing for Paddy.

We took the next year off but in the summer of 1991 received a message that Paddy wanted us back. His reasoning was that the party would be better and stronger if it had the chance to come together to laugh at both itself and the political environment.

This request came too late to organise a show that year, but the seed was sown and the revue returned in 1992 for its mid-1990s second innings - as late as last September Paddy still asked when the revue would return.

Paddy was also the only leader to participate regularly in the Glee Club. He may have only have had one, very long and complicated, joke but he would be there for most of the evening, rather than making the normal brief leader's appearance. He actually liked the party and its members.

Our most surprising contact with Paddy came at the Glasgow 2014 conference when we were told he wanted to discuss with Liberator the general election campaign, which he was heading.

Flattered, somewhat baffled, but intrigued, we agreed. It turned out he was tired of being told what people thought he wanted to hear, and felt we'd know what activists actually thought. We answered truthfully that we were hearing concerns that the choice of target seats had become too mechanistic based on voter contact and leaflet delivery numbers alone.

It was good having a leader with whom we could have a friendly relationship even when we disagreed and who thought Liberator served a useful role.

At Nottingham in 1993 various collective members sprawled drunk on the bar floor late at night were interrupted by Paddy's unmistakable tones: "This is what I like to see, Liberator prostrated at the leader's feet!" A pity we can't be again.

Mark Smulian is a member of the Liberator Collective

PADDY IN THE LORDS

By Claire Tyler

I was devastated to hear the news of Paddy's passing just before Christmas. It felt like a hammer blow even though I know he was gravely ill. I simply found it impossible to imagine a world without him.

In my early days in the party back in the 1980s Paddy was my main political inspiration – to me he seemed to encapsulate the very essence of liberalism. Indeed if it hadn't been for Paddy's example I do wonder if I would have stayed the course.

Many years later when I joined the Lib Dem Lords Group in 2011, I found Paddy very approachable and friendly, although his disdain for the institution was clear and came from his strong liberal principles. He didn't want to be 'clubbable' in a place he passionately believed needed root and branch reform. For Paddy, I often felt that an appointed second chamber was not just an anachronism but an abomination! However Paddy still wanted to encourage rookies like me trying to find our feet in a very strange new world. I always remember the very kind note he sent me after I contributed a small 'think piece' to group colleagues about why, for me, me being a Liberal Democrat – and a social Liberal at that - meant having a strong commitment to social justice and equality. The exchange was all stimulated by a fascinating email that Paddy has circulated with his own thoughts - on Christmas Day! I did wonder what Jane thought about that.

Immediately after Paddy's death It was a real comfort to me when tributes stating to pour in across the political spectrum and beyond talking about his amazing life and career and, above all, his ability to enthuse and inspire others. Paddy was genuinely loved and respected by people from all parties and none and seen as a giant at a time in our political life when such people are so badly needed and in very short supply.

Even journalists spoke of their huge respect and admiration for Paddy. His sheer energy, charisma, determination and ability to inspire were mentioned by all along with his compassion, decency and desire to help others. So many have talked about his very personal style of leadership and above all his ability to inspire people to action.

Paddy was a visionary. He liked to spot big trends and kick off conversations about what they meant for the changing world we live in and for public policy. I recently listened to a great Ted Talk he gave on the globalisation of power. I found it such a compelling and insightful speech on the profound implications of the shifting global power bases and how existing structures of governance and accountability were failing to provide any real check on the emerging new 'superpowers' – not least the IT giants who are well able to sidestep any national laws or regulation, not to mention tax.

It was Paddy at his very best, deeply concerned with the impact of unhealthy concentrations of power and control.

Paddy's passing leaves a massive void which will be hard to fill. His unerring commitment to liberalism – so desperately needed in these dark and bewildering times – provided a beacon of light for us to follow.

PADDY AS LOCAL POLITICIAN

By Les Farris

My wife and I first met the Ashdown family shortly after we moved from Sussex to Somerset early in 1981. We have remained close friends ever since, sharing the ups and downs of life, political and otherwise, and many holidays at their house in Burgundy. Appalled at Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal plan to erode by creeping privatisation the network of public services diligently constructed over decades, I determined, at the ripe old age of 40, to get involved in political action for the first time and joined the LIberal Party. By coincidence, a local Liberal had won a district council by-election for our local ward from a 'Condependent' the very same week. It was probably the first rural ward won by the Liberals in the constituency since Paddy had been adopted as candidate in 1976.

Sensibly, he had targeted the market towns with their concentrations of voters before tackling the rural parts. Our new councillor, who had campaigned alone with his family over the large tract of countryside that made up our ward, and I decided to form a branch. At the inaugural meeting with just a handful of people present, I succumbed to Paddy's powers of persuasion to take on the role of chairman. This was my first encounter with him and the beginning of our friendship. It was also the beginning of the heady years of the 1980s when the Tories were ousted from office at every level of government in our ward and throughout the constituency of Yeovil. Not long afterwards, all but one of the five Somerset constituencies had a Liberal/ Liberal Democrat MP, due in large part to the enthusing energy and leadership of the MP for Yeovil.

Paddy and I did not agree on everything: Thatcher's legacy being a point in question and the advisability of stretching out the Coalition for a whole parliamentary term being another. But these differences, although resulting in lively discussion, did not impinge on our relationship.

Perhaps men do not make close and long-lasting friendships with other men as frequently and easily as women do with women. That certainly is the case for me which is why Paddy's death leaves a particular void in my life. As, of course, it does in the lives of so many people. Paddy and Jane's son Simon described his father accurately as having "a ferocious appetite for life" in his eulogy at the funeral. Those individuals whose life force burns with the fierceness of a magnesium flare leave in their wake a particular darkness. Particularly so, of course, for their nearest and dearest.

Paddy Ashdown was a great and good man. Compared with the current crop of leading politicians who resemble nothing more than a bunch of disputatious nonentities engaged in self absorbed squabbling while the country totters on the brink of a calamity of historic proportions, Paddy Ashdown was a political giant.

Les Farris is a former regional agent for the Liberal party

WHERE DID ENGLAND GO?

Jonathan Coe's new novel Middle England uses characters from some earlier books to chart the nation's path into one of mutually uncomprehending tribes after the 2016 referendum, finds Jonathan Calder

I was taking a short holiday at the Prince Rupert Hotel in Shrewsbury and planning my days out – Ludlow or Much Wenlock? Ironbridge or Bishop's Castle? – when the August 2011 riots broke out.

The news of arson, looting and murder in London, Birmingham and Leicester came from a completely different country, but it is a country we are all living in today.

Perhaps the feeling that the times are out of joint and the certainties you grew up with no longer apply is an inevitable accompaniment of growing older, but English society and English politics have changed to an extraordinary degree in the last 10 years. It is that change and that sense of middle-aged disconnection that are the subject of Jonathan Coe's new novel.

Middle England is the slightly unexpected sequel to The Rotters' Club and The Closed Circle, and deals with the struggles of some of the cast of those novels living through the run up to and aftermath of the referendum on British membership of the European Union.

The action of the novel takes place between April 2010 and September 2018, and I can be so precise



because the action is dated to a month and year throughout.

It finds Benjamin Trotter, the unheroic hero of the trilogy, living in a converted mill house on the banks of the Severn north of Shrewsbury. The towns and villages he passes through on the drive to or from his widowed father's house – Bridgnorth, Alveley, Quatt, Much Wenlock and Cressage – are an incantation that runs through the book.

Coe means business here, which threatened to be disappointing to someone who enjoys his more fantastic register, as displayed most famously in What A Carve Up!, but Middle England is a funny book as well as a serious one.

Here is the Conservative spin doctor Nigel, a new character introduced in this book, who is presented throughout as a laidback admirer of Cameron. Until: "Cameron," said Nigel, his face twisting. "What a twat. What a grade-one, first-class, copper-bottomed arsehole. Sitting in his fucking shed writing his memoirs. Look at the mess he's left behind. Everyone at each other's throats. Foreigners being shouted at in the street. Being attacked on the bus and told to go back where they came from. Anyone who doesn't toe

> the line being called traitors and enemies of the people. Cameron broke the country, Doug. He broke the country and ran away!"

Coe is fair to his characters – come to that, the paragraph above is entirely fair to David Cameron. So, while Benjamin's father is not above the odd racist remark, his confusion when he finds that the Longbridge car factory is no longer there has the nobility of a Lear:

"Whatever happened to all that? It was bad enough when I was working here. Every man for himself, survival of the fittest, I'm all right Jack. That's what was starting to take over. But now it's even worse . . . fancy clothes and Prosecco bars and bloody . . . packets of salad. We've gone soft, that's the problem. No wonder the rest of the world's laughing at us."

It wasn't laughing at us, of course, though it may be now.

What this episode does bring out is the way that support for Brexit was closely aligned with a distrust of the ethics and outward appearances of social liberalism.

A review of the novel for Politics Means Politics by Chris Grey makes the same point, noting how, in the experience of many people, that liberalism too often consists in Them telling you what you cannot do:

"In Middle England, this theme first

appears when Sophie has to attend a speed awareness course ... at which she meets one of the instructors, Ian, whom she subsequently marries. Amongst those attending, there is a palpable air of 'righteous indignation' at being 'picked on' so that the room 'smelled of victimhood'."

In the middle of this national slide over the cliff came a bright spot: the 2012 London Olympics and their opening ceremony in particular.

Thanks to Coe's enthusiasm for dates, I

can tell you it took place on Friday 27 July 2012. The ceremony was as good as everyone said at the time, presenting a vision of Britain that was liberal, inclusive and true to its history. It was all the better for not trying to improve its audience, as the planners of the Millennium Dome had done under Blair. Then, one commentator suggested the Work Zone resembled nothing so much as a giant restart interview. Whatever that ceremony's virtues, however, they have vanished without trace.

The closest parallel to this brief flourishing of a liberal Britain is the Festival of Britain in 1951. In a famous essay published a dozen years later, Michael Frayn wrote: "Festival Britain was the Britain of the radical middle-classes, the do-gooders; the readers of the News Chronicle, the Guardian, and the Observer; the signers of petitions; the backbone of the BBC. In short, the Herbivores, or gentle ruminants, who look out from the lush pastures which are their natural station in life with eyes full of sorrow for less fortunate creatures, guiltily conscious of their advantages,

though not usually ceasing to eat the grass.

"And in making the Festival they earned the contempt of the Carnivores - the readers of the Daily Express; the Evelyn Waughs; the cast of the Directory of Directors - the members of the upper- and middleclasses who believe that if God had not wished them to prey on all smaller and weaker creatures without scruple he would not have made them as they are."

And the Carnivores soon had their revenge. By the autumn of 1951 their political wing, the Conservative Party, was back in power and Churchill ordered the Festival's South Bank site to be cleared.

For Carnivores and

"The impossibility of communication between political tribes and generations is one of the themes of Middle England and an urgent and important one at that" Herbivores then, read Leave and Remain today. Perhaps Brexit has only brought into prominence a divide that has always been there, yet the impossibility of communication between political tribes and generations is one of the themes of Middle England and an urgent and important one at that. It is lent a sad irony by the way its characters' lives are stuffed with phones, computers and all the technology for it they could ever need.

While Coe's litany of Shropshire place names – Bridgnorth, Alveley, Quatt,

Much Wenlock and Cressage – chime with my August 2011 holiday in the county, that month's riots were not the first indication that the times were out of joint.

I would now point to the patient queues I saw waiting to withdraw their savings from the local branch of Northern Rock during the 2007 Liberal Democrat Conference. Which suggests it is the credit crunch that lies at the root of our ills and that the vote for Brexit was only a symptom of the malady.

There will be other fictional takes on the extraordinary period through which we are living, but I doubt if many will combine seriousness of purpose with humour in the way that Coe does in Middle England. Sam Leith in the Guardian described it as "great big Centrist Dad of a novel" and, to writers and reviewers of a certain age, that can be nothing but a compliment.

Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective Middle England. By Jonathan Coe. Viking, 2018, £16.99



RAINFORESTS STILL FELLED IN VAIN

Nearly 15 years since the Wasted Rainforests pamphlet, Gareth Epps finds the Liberal Democrats are still writing reams of unread policy papers that do nothing to rectify their loss of identity

"It is time for us to realise a number of very important things. We are a people, we recognise each other as brothers and sisters united in a common struggle for our freedom, for our survival, and we recognise each other because we share a common culture..... We want the same things – freedom, self-determination, peace, justice, harmony and equality for all people. There are millions of us, we are a people, but until now we haven't started to realise our strength..... as a people, a vast nation of free brothers and sisters who must unite with each other in a struggle for our collective self-determination and freedom." [- from 'We Are The People', John Sinclair, May-June 1970]

In Prague in January, marking the 50th anniversary of the actions of Jan Palach, an unnamed person set themselves ablaze. This action reminds us of the last attempts by individuals to take power in a radical liberal political movement. In Paris, Prague, Chicago and goodness knows where else, there was an appetite for genuine revolution as the only way to bring change over a bloated, reactionary and corrupt political establishment. Blood was shed, anger set out...and many of those involved took and used power for good in subsequent years. It was a surprisingly low-key anniversary until this year.

GAMMON MANIFESTO

1968 was of course also the year of the original gammon manifesto, Enoch Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech. The Liberal Democrats recently paid tribute with a policy paper that managed simultaneously to triangulate towards racist sentiment, be utterly tedious and make precisely zero mark on the outside world. The party for too long remained wedded to an approach of producing more, hopefully less offensive but similarly valueless papers. The debate on the policy itself, in the manner of two bald men fighting over a comb, generated enormous emotion but contained so little substance as to suggest that even those present and participating had not bothered to read it.

It has taken the Liberal Democrat rump surprisingly long to acknowledge that this was possibly not the best use of limited resources, with a common-sense announcement coming just before a version of this article was due to be printed in Liberator 393.

Fortunately, Federal Policy Committee (FPC) has finally acknowledged this reality, curtailed its

programme of deliberative policymaking and seems set to move to a streamlined, higher-impact approach: not that we will see any sign of this at York. (I look forward to an extended visit of the great pubs of that city, and finding relevant political debate in pubs such as the Swan and the Golden Ball that have wrestled with the botched efforts of the Pubs Code Adjudicator to enforce the law and stop pub companies wrecking pubs and communities in a continued, spectacular failure of 21st century capitalism. Tours can be arranged.)

Back in 2004, a now-officer of the party's FPC, the cerebral Jeremy Hargreaves, wrote a rather wonderful pamphlet about Liberal policymaking with the accurate title Wasted Rainforests. After the 2015 apocalypse, he and I referred to this much when reviewing the party's policymaking process and setting the current vision for the future, in the form of the Agenda 2020 policy paper which remains the mediumterm Liberal Democrat policy framework, in spite of subsequent events.

The main thrust of Wasted Rainforests was that despite Labour and Tory failings in the mid-2000s, the Liberal Democrats seemed unable to fully capitalise. Resembling in places a cry of boredom recognisable by anyone experiencing a particular sort of FPC meeting, few passages have dated – though the passing of an era when "whoever [the Tories'] leader is, it is inherently difficult for a party principally made up of people whose main aim in life is to be opposed to the modern world simultaneously to be popular" should be noted. The thrust of the pamphlet, though – solving the problem of a process that values managerialism above political relevance – remains topical, even if its solutions now appear somewhat Utopian given the passage of time.

The core problem faced by the Liberal Democrats in 2019 is not one of its policymaking process. It is a crisis of the party's identity, an aftershock of the Clegg catastrophe and the degree of denial of those leading the rump party. Moreover, no amount of policy development work will significantly ameliorate or harm the situation. Unless the party regains a vision, identity and values, it is in terminal decline, with no likely successor. While this may not bother some of the party time-servers, to believers in the Liberal cause it is a big problem.

The problem of many people in current politics - by no means restricted to Liberals - is that a lack of vision is combined with a spectacular lack of selfawareness. The principal Liberal Democrat delusion is that the years 2010-15 were not a spectacular collapse of trust in a governing party without equal in modern history; they were some sort of misunderstood triumph that somehow only needs repeating on a few thousand Focus leaflets for the poor misguided public to somehow see the light.

In parallel, the obscuring of the party's identity is such that even if the public believed the party would do what it says (which they don't), nobody understands what it is that Liberal Democrats believe. Hence the current 'moderate movement' drive - a peculiar fetish normally associated with unfortunate bowel conditions - comes over as a particular misreading of the situation. It also fails to light any sort of a spark among armchair party members, proportionately fewer of whom are inspired into any sort of activity; a syndrome far from unique, but one that doesn't seem to have been addressed to any serious degree.

No amount of virtuous campaigning about potholes or Post Offices – or even pubs – will alone make up for this. The continued success of the formerly Liberal Democrat bloc in Ashfield as the 'Ashfield Independents' represents perhaps the apotheosis of modern-era Liberal Democrat community campaigning.

Formed when the council group stayed together during the suspension of their leader after a police investigation widely suspected of being politically motivated and eventually laughed out of court, the group has now taken minority control of the council. Their activity is founded on a spectacular work ethic, a programme of relentless campaigning and communication of the sort many Lib Dem local parties would pride itself. Given the latter, how many local campaigners could justifiably say they do much different to these campaigners, who have based themselves on the ALDC (mis)interpretation of community politics? And how many promote Liberal values? And, on that subject, why has ALDC left the stage at the point where, for the ground war revival of the party, they are needed most?

The party should adopt a rule. Unless a policy or working group develops an idea that will attract widespread positive media attention; or unless it tangibly removes doubts about the party's identity in the minds of the public, it does not deserve the time of day. That rule should apply to conference agendasetting as well as the work of FPC. Should the policy motions presented to Federal Conference Committee (FCC) fail this simple test, then FCC should challenge the party to 'demand better'.

BARMY AND MISGUIDED

There is something in Paddy Ashdown's words that should ring in the ears of those at the party's top table. Ideas that get the party noticed; that give it a voice and the right to be heard. It should not matter if some of the ideas are barmy and misguided; indeed, it would be a fitting tribute to Paddy if some are.

So back to building a movement. While politically restricted for some years, I found myself for a few minutes on a train bound for London on the day of the People's Vote march, before heading elsewhere. It was noticeable that people were talking aloud of not having been to a similar march for decades (or at all); it was also noticeable that the passengers were mostly born before Britain's accession to the EEC. Beyond marching, it is unclear precisely what action forms part of their struggle, beyond participation in a few online echo chambers.

For Lib Dems, the position is less optimal than even in the time of Iraq. While in 2003 there were noises off, dissenters generally exercised admirable self-restraint and left the party's voting record unblemished. That is no longer the case for parliamentarians who have made self-indulgence and/ or short-term, Pyrrhic local electoral compromises at the expense of any hope of party unity.

And while Brexit provides a single issue around which some will rally, the Lib Dems are attractive to only a minority of those marching. To tackle the party's toxicity, it must promote a broader identity (remember the Tories' style of campaigning under William Hague, and the speed of recovery, anyone?).

The loss of the party's identity from 2010-2015 is less well-recognised than the loss of trust. People no longer know whether the party stands on the side of the most vulnerable and - under Universal Credit oppressed, for example. The party has sound policy on related issues such as food banks, and earnest discussions continue in some quarters about the merits or otherwise of a universal basic income; but this assumes a false sophistication about politics.

The actions signifying the identity are absent. Similarly, not only on those issues where the rump Lib Dems have triangulated a centrist fudge of a nonposition, such as immigration, or also issues such as economics where the party is split; or areas (most) where the policy response has merely been overly technocratic.

The fundamental divide in Coalition years, by the way, was not between supporters of the Social Liberal Forum and the various right-wing fronts of the time; it was between those at Westminster level who were in touch with the realities and experience of life in poverty, and those who were not. Then as now, those seeing people turning up to their businesses brandishing untargeted CVs to meet meaningless Department of Work & Pensions targets probably have more of a grip on reality than the vast majority of current Lib Dem members.

Forgetting about the afflictions of the party for a moment, there is a desperate need for us, the Liberal people, to find our strength and voice.

Beset by factionalism as it is, the anti-Brexit broad movement should be a powerful enabler for this. Right now, the only place where it appears in any genuine form is in the Extinction Rebellion movement, with its direct challenges not only to traditional climate enemies but the new and strategic threats: the media.

Perhaps the construction of that movement requires autonomous activity outwith political party constraints; perhaps it needs some strategic thinking to defeat the limitations of people's reliance on technology rather than human interaction. Either way, it must be realised without the need for orthodox, traditional political leadership. And it is essential. Unless Liberals collectively and powerfully address the challenge, other activity will be futile. Either way, that stockpile of policy papers may be an important source of fuel for the world after 29 March – in a nonpolitical sense.

Gareth Epps is a member of the Liberator Collective

JUSTICE FOR THE LITTLE PEOPLE TOO

The words of Lord Lester's lordly friends over the sexual harassment allegations against him show a hypocrisy with a 25 year long echo, says Gwyneth Deakins

Last November the House of Lords debated a recommendation that Liberal Democrat peer Lord Lester of Herne Hill be suspended until 2022 following accusations of sexual harassment from a lady later identified as women's rights activist Jasvinder Sanghera.

Reading the Hansard of the Lords debate could only provoke gibbering rage in anyone whose ideas of gender equality had evolved since the 1970s. Forget MeToo, rules about rape trials, or what we have learned from enquiries into historic abuse scandals.

It would also provoke fury from anyone who was capable of following a logical argument and had studied the report of the Commissioner for Standards, who had addressed every one of the doubts anyone could reasonably raise about the accusation. It had been accepted by the 14 members of the Lords Committee of Privileges and Conduct, although they recommended a four year rather than life suspension.

Key points from the commissioner's report are that the accuser's statement was corroborated by several credible witnesses – with some inconsistencies as would be expected from people trying to remember events from 12 years before, showing that they had not colluded. The procedure for investigating and judging an accusation against a lord had been discussed at length, agreed by all peers including Lester, and followed in other recent cases.

The process was to be 'inquisitorial' and not 'adversarial', and the standard of proof should be 'on the balance of probabilities' not 'beyond all reasonable doubt'. Members did not have the right to cross examine complainants.

Lester himself had defended these procedures in another case in 2009. Yet he started challenging the process in his own case from the very beginning, before the inquiry had got under way, and continued to do so throughout.

Technically Lester's Lords pals were trying to refer the case back to the committee on the grounds that he had not had a fair chance to defend himself. However their speeches ranged more widely, calling into question the integrity and competence of the commissioner, the fairness of the procedure and by implication – or even directly - the integrity of the complainant.

EGREGIOUSLY OFFENSIVE

It is quite shocking that several the most egregiously offensive remarks along these lines were made by Lib Dem peers. The grounds on which Lester's friends argued his case could be summarised as follows:

- * Lester is a friend known for x years and they cannot believe he would do such a thing.
- * Lester has an 'unblemished', 'international', 'distinguished' reputation. It is therefore particularly important that this reputation is not damaged by unproven allegations.
- * The commissioner was either badly advised, acted in bad faith or was incompetent. She (!) was "only a part-time judge in a mental health tribunal".
- * The complainant was of questionable character – she had probably leaked details of the case to the press; she might have been "telling the truth but it doesn't mean she was right"; there were no witnesses to the alleged harassment, only people she had told afterwards; her story was inconsistent.
- * The rules are not fair to this individual and should not be followed in his case because they obviously aren't fair. "What is fair depends on the circumstances." "There is a danger we are ...too bound up in our own rules and too little concerned with the man at the centre of the allegations."
- * The House should not be swayed by current fashion in the way it regards accusations of sexual harassment. They "should not be intimidated by the present atmosphere about sexual harassment into making the wrong decision just because of the present climate".

So, in summary, none of Lester's friends is aware that individuals with notable achievements in improving the general lot of human beings are often guilty of appalling behaviour towards individuals in their private lives and the implication of taking into account someone's great reputation is that someone who does not have such a distinguished reputation need not be treated as carefully.

They also in effect said that if we don't like the verdict we can change the judge (even though we appointed her) and (especially if she is a woman) we can impugn her competence and integrity. (The commissioner is a former president of Law Society and a judge.)

Lester's friends want to go back to the mid 20th century and attack the character of anyone who complains of sexual harassment, feel rules are for little people and that fair treatment of abuse survivors is just a silly modern trend which will pass and shouldn't influence our judgment of our old friend. None thought to ask why Sanghera would have made up such a complaint or submitted it if she had any doubts about what happened. What was in it for her? What was the potential damage to her reputation and didn't that matter? Or why Lester made no effort to explain,

just issued a blanket denial, leaving the commissioner no choice but to believe him or Sanghera? Or why the House of Lords decided on an inquisitorial rather than an adversarial process for disciplinary enquiries (it was meant not to be a 'lawyers charter').

These Lords exhibited a poisonous combination of the old boy network, white male privilege and women as second-class citizens. It was the peculiarly English type of self-righteous humbug masquerading as a concern for fairness and respect for due process.

The only saving grace for the Lords and for the Lib Dems was the speech by Baroness Hussein-Ece who had actually had experience of sexual harassment and of dealing with accusations of such in the workplace.

She pointed out how much courage it takes for victims of abuse to speak up, how inappropriate were the personal attacks on Ms Sanghera, how poor a record Parliament has on harassment and abuse, and most importantly that "human rights may be enshrined in law but we must begin at home".

Despite the recommendation from the Privileges and Conduct Committee being referred back by the House, the committee refused to change its decision. Thereafter Lester resigned from the House citing the pressure the affair was putting on his health.

As an epilogue, taking a cue from Hussein-Ece's comment that "human rights must begin at home", it is worth recalling an episode from Lester's past which casts a different light on his reputation as a champion of human rights.

The enquiry into the Tower Hamlets local party led by Lester in 1993-94 gave a very different impression of his commitment to fairness and individuals' rights from that advertised by himself and his friends.

To recap briefly, Tower Hamlets was run by a Liberal administration from 1986-94. Tensions over the availability of housing came to a head at a by-election in the Isle of Dogs which was won by a BNP candidate. Reacting to the subsequent media storm in which Labour accused the Liberals of stirring up racism against Bangladeshis, Paddy Ashdown asked Lester to head a panel of inquiry into the local party's conduct. Lester's report was highly critical of the local party and concluded that three members should be expelled.

Lester said in The Times that in the Lords enquiry into the complaint against him he had been treated "despicably" This was after he had been given two chances to read the commissioner's report, comment on it, write to the committee and appear before the it to argue his case. Finally he had his pals in the Lords speaking and voting on his behalf.

"Lester appears to have no sense of irony or of the depths of his own hypocrisy"

RECOMMENDED FOR EXPULSION

So how would he describe the way the three Tower Hamlets members recommended for expulsion in 1994 were treated?

After several weeks of consideration and meetings of the panel, Lester rewrote the final report a few days before

publication date, giving the panel members only a few hours to read and comment upon it, leaving those more sympathetic to the Tower Hamlets party no opportunity to influence the final report.

He told individuals who were interviewed by his panel that their remarks would not be quoted in his report, but they were.

The report recommended immediate expulsion of the three local party members without any reference to the constitutional Party process for expelling members, including appeals.

It was published and reported in the press before any of those named for expulsion had seen it or knew what they had been accused of. As chair of the local party even I was allowed only to read it very shortly before publication.

It is not my purpose to rehash the issue here – the point is that whatever the rights and wrongs of the actions of the Liberals in Tower Hamlets and the conduct of individuals, any inquiry should uphold fairness and the rules of natural justice and the constitutional procedures aimed at ensuring those principles are maintained in practice.

As a human rights lawyer one would have expected Lester above all people to understand the importance of this. When it came to his own case 25 years later he seems to have developed an acute sensitivity to it. In 1994 however his only concern seemed to me to be to get heads on plates by any means possible.

Lester appears to have no sense of irony or of the depths of his own hypocrisy. No-one need regret his fall from grace. He was justly and fairly treated by the Committee of Privileges and some sort of justice for Sanghera was obtained. Lester fundamentally failed to understand how the principles he had campaigned for should apply in practice. As such his public reputation is deservedly undermined.

In conclusion the words of Hussein-Ece should be recalled, especially to some of her party colleagues in the Lords: "How do we treat people who are not powerful, who do not have powerful friends or friends sitting in your Lordships' House who can speak and advocate on their behalf?

"We must begin at home and remember why human rights have been enshrined in our laws. It is to protect the little person as well."

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

INFERIORITY COMPLEX

Why do Liberal Democrats so lack confidence in liberalism, wonders Michael Meadowcroft

Why is it that the Liberal Democrat party is permanently weakened by its members' lack of faith in Liberalism, even more than the Liberal party before it? We have the most powerful and attractive philosophy on the planet and we have the best record of policy development and yet are permanently agonising over pacts and arrangements with opponents and with targeting a handful of seats. I never thought when I joined the Liberal party in 1958 that it would still be necessary to convince party colleagues of the relevance of those values.

Is it any wonder that we are unable to maintain even double figures in the opinion polls and are largely ignored by the media? Anyone wanting to read about Liberal philosophy and values will struggle to find any material. All he or she will get from party headquarters is the preamble to the party constitution. The booklet developing this stirring document had to be published here in Leeds, and the basic party document on which it is based dates from 2002! The best statement of Liberal philosophy currently available is Liberal International's recent manifesto.

Following Paddy Ashdown's sad death we had the story retold of his recruitment to the party following two hours of persuasion by that iconic bobble-hatted canvasser. But how many canvassers do we have today capable of explaining liberalism at length? I suspect that being reared for decades on the meagre gruel of the Focus leaflet has cast virtually all understanding of the party's values and of its view of society into outer darkness. This all the more lamentable given that the huge gap in British politics today calls for a committed anti-conservative party, based on pluralism, internationalism, human values, sustainability and on diminishing poverty and deprivation – precisely what Liberalism is.

Because we were not a viable alternative party at the 2017 general election many electors who were determined to vote against the Conservatives went right across to Labour, despite its hegemonic authoritarianism and illiberal statism. The lazy conformity that places parties on a Left-Right spectrum, stretching from state control to laissez faire capitalism, does Liberalism no favours. The real spectrum that reflects political reality actually runs vertically with Liberals at the diffusion extreme and both other parties at the opposite end embracing a concentration of power. We simply have very few points of contact with the Left-Right axis and this leads some naive colleagues to fall into the centrism trap.

When it comes to policies which are uniquely ours we are even more timid. We have the record of being the only party with a 100% opposition to the Iraq invasion, support since 1955 for being part of a united Europe, a long term commitment to taxing land values, to worker co-operatives, to devolution and to electoral reform, plus a long record on civil liberties. Our mantra should be, "Why should electors vote for the parties that get it wrong when they can vote for the party that gets it right." The sad fact is that we do not make electors aware of this.

All this is coupled with 25 years of the targeting strategy that led to 375 lost deposits in 2017 and has virtually destroyed the party in most constituencies. It is the absence of an active campaigning presence we are not on the media and the public map. The targeting strategy succeeded once, in 1997, but thereafter it increasingly hollowed out the party.

The task of reviving the party is going be hugely difficult. We may well eventually reap the electoral benefit of our lonely support for a united Europe but how will the party be in a position to draw such people in? We were not able to profit from the "I agree with Nick" leaders' debates in April 2010 when our poll rating went up by 7% overnight, not least because we did not have the organisation on the ground in a majority of constituencies. Our vote slipped away in succeeding weeks.

We have to have confidence in our beliefs and in our capacity to promote them in every constituency, which requires a determined focus on fighting elections showing that confidence. Clearly we have to consider our response to any post-election arithmetic which may require compromise but a high popular vote adds to the strength and influence of our MPs. It is, however, always and in every situation damaging to abandon the electoral field pre-election.

The party has always suffered from alliances and arrangements. From the Liberal Unionist split after 1886, the MacDonald-Gladstone Pact of 1903 which fatally gave Labour its initial 30 MPs, the Lloyd George Coalition Liberals of 1918, the Liberal Nationals of the 1930s and right down to gifting over half the seats to the SDP in 1983 - for what benefit today? The Liberal party has invariably been too 'nice' and too generous to those who would destroy it. We must stop doing this and instead start believing in ourselves.

It is high time we again studied our Liberal values, abandoned any inferiority complex and fought every constituency with a candidate who believed in them.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

A CHANCE TO GROW

This year sees 8,000 council seats up for grabs, even if party HQ has not noticed, says Howard Sykes

Many people will start 2019 with a sense of trepidation. Brexit looms over everything – and has paralysed government decision making in so many areas, with the oft-delayed plans for the future of social care being just one example.

Despite this, we know that we will need to keep up the fight for our local communities across the country,

And this year sees a huge round of local contests with some great opportunities for Liberal Democrats. Thursday 2 May has 8,000 seats up for grabs, mostly in district and borough councils - but some key contests in metropolitan councils and unitary authorities.

This includes the mayoral and council election in Bedford. Dave Hodgson and the team will be looking to build on their strong record of action in an area that in the 2015 elections - while most Liberal Democrat parliamentary seats were being lost - provided one of the few bits of good news as he was safely re-elected. A lesson in hard work and concentrating on the local picture that the party could do well to learn from.

Other councils with hard working and successful Liberal Democrat leadership that have elections including Three Rivers, Eastbourne, Cheltenham, Colchester, Eastleigh, Hart, Maidstone, Oadby and Wigston, Portsmouth, South Somerset and Watford. Across the country Liberal Democrat candidates and their teams will be pounding the pavements, from Sunderland and down to Chelmsford and over to Devon; working hard and listening to our local communities, and taking the battle to both Conservatives and Labour.

And thanks to lobbying from both the Liberal Democrats and the Local Government Association (LGA), whatever happens with Brexit, EU citizens will have the right to vote and stand in local elections this year – and remain as councillors for their term. We will continue to push for all EU citizens to retain their right to stand and vote locally.

Will Brexit (assuming it happens) have an impact on our prospects? The jury is out -2018 saw some of our best results in areas that voted strongly Remain, and is undoubtedly a very strong incentive for some to get involved with the party and vote for us. However, we also saw a net gain of seats in areas that were strongly Leave, showing that good strong local campaigns can punch through whatever the circumstances.

There will be a new set of unitary elections in Dorset – in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole; and a second unitary for the rest of Dorset. Voters across Northamptonshire's district councils will be spared from local elections this year, following the re-organisation into two unitary authorities in 2020 following the financial meltdown at the Tory run county council. In the current political climate it is a very brave (or foolhardy) person who predicts anything with utter certainty. 2018's by-elections hold some important clues – we were the only UK-wide political party to make net gains, our vote share increased, and ollowing last May's local elections we are in control of South Cambridgeshire for the first time, we retained control of South Lakeland, Eastleigh, Cheltenham, Sutton and Watford, returned to overall control in Three Rivers and regained power in Richmond and Kingston. Our hard work and campaigning saw us gaining seats in metropolitan areas like Hull, Liverpool, Sunderland, Manchester and Sheffield.

Given the enthusiasm across so many areas, as I saw at November's Kickstart event with its record attendance, we have every chance of once again growing our councillor numbers. However, just standing a full slate of candidates will need almost 10% of party members to be prepared to stand.

Saying all that, HQ's obsession with Brexit and its preoccupation budget cuts and reorganisation hasn't filled me or others with confidence that the party nationally is fully focused on this round of local elections, despite the number of times we raise it with them.

How many emails have you had about standing for council or going to help people get elected in May from the party nationally? I can tell you - it's one!

In an era of great political turmoil, the need for Liberal Democrat councillors taking action to empower communities is more important than ever. The impact of austerity on our local areas hasn't gone away, despite Brexit taking the media's attention. The LGA points out that councils have lost almost 60p in every £1 of central government funding, and face an estimated funding gap of £8bn by 2020.

Beyond those headline figures are local stories we will all recognise – daycare centres axed, park maintenance slashed, headteachers protesting over school funding, more homeless people on our streets and the persecution of Universal Credit claimants by a government many of whose members have no idea what real poverty looks like.

And finally, a call to arms. If you haven't already got involved and want to help the local Liberal Democrats then please do get in touch with your local party or candidate and see what is needed. Does your area have a full slate of candidates? If not then step forward. And if you don't have elections in your patch this year then 'buddy up' with a local party which does.

Howard Sykes is leader of the Liberal Democrat Group in the Local Government Association



PADDY REMEMBERED IN BOSNIA

Dear Liberator,

My history with Paddy Ashdown goes back to when he visited the Manjaca Camp in the summer of 1992 while I was detained there. Subsequently he wrote a forward to my book and our paths crossed a number of times since. However, one event that sticks out more than most was when I was asked to translate for Paddy shortly before he assumed his post of the High Representative in 2002.

He asked to have a meeting with the members of the UK Bosnian diaspora as he wanted to hear from them what important changes might make the Bosnian state become a more functional society which one day could move toward European integration.

As I sat with him, I said, "I am here to interpret for you." He smiled and replied "My commiserations." It quickly turned out there was no need for me to interpret as everyone spoke some English. One of his first statements was that he wanted to be the servant of the Bosnian people. So, I used my opportunity to participate in the discussion too.

He clearly wanted to help us Bosnians to change the country for the better. I then tried to explain to him thar the Dayton Peace Accords represented a complicated political system akin to a tight noose around our necks. It did not allow space for Bosnian citizens like myself to change it without some form of outside intervention. I tried to argue that the same international community which put such a system in place had to take some responsibility for it, which he clearly interpreted as some sort of unfair moral obligation, and he snapped back at me: 'What do you want me to do? To be a Turkish Pasha?'

Paddy's knowledge of Bosnian politics and the general mentality

of the Bosnian people was perhaps lower than mine at this point in time.

Yet, during his ensuing tenure, Paddy probably came closer to the Bosnian people than any previous or subsequent High Representative. Perhaps coming from both catholic and protestant backgrounds, plus having served in combat zones outside the UK and in his homeland of Northern Ireland, equipped him better for the role he performed in Bosnia. Perhaps he understood better the mentality of fear suffered by ordinary citizens and he wanted to help them to escape from that fear by helping them build strong state institutions which would serve their interests and provide the necessary security, rather than to serve the interests of the same elites who took the country to war.

He used the huge powers vested in him by his office to push through a raft of reforms which created the foundations of the functional state: he created unified armed forces, he brought together security services and a unified customs service. In a way, he had to behave like a benevolent Turkish Pasha to do that. Additionally, he created the conditions for the Bosnian parliament to pass many reforms which would bring the country closer to EU integrations.

However, the Bosnian politicians voted them down, and to his regret he left his tenure before he would get another go to put this failure right. Since his departure, Bosnian politics has been in progressive decline.

Paddy Ashdown built on the successful foundations laid by his predecessor, Wolfgang Petritsch, probably the only High Representative more popular than Paddy himself. It was not just his huge political or personal experience that had enabled him to do a good job in Bosnia – it was the mettle that none of his successors seemed to have to continue pushing through the reforms needed to save Bosnia from the repeat of the carnage of the 1990s.

> Kemal Pervanic www.theforgivenessproject.com

NOTICKING

Dear Liberator,

Congratulations to Richard Kemp for his account of practical situations in which enthusiasm and commitment triumph over timid moderation. (Liberator 393). My own experience is more theoretical, but at the AGM of our local party in 2018 I put the following questionnaire to our members:

What do you want to be moderate about?(Please tick).

These were: liberty, the maximum amount of individual freedom commensurate with the freedom of others: that no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity; continued and enthusiastic membership of the EU: fair taxation to reduce inequality; electoral reform through proportional representation by single transferable vote in multimember constituencies; devolution to and greater independence for local government; abolition of the House of Lords, to be replaced by an elected second chamber; stakeholder participation in the organisation of industry and commerce, and a share in the profits; serious concern for the health and conservation of the planet; a reformed world economic order, enabling poorer countries to reach an acceptable physical and cultural standard of living.

There were no ticks. Like Richard Kemp, we agree that "we are a crusade or we are a sideline." Peter Wrigley.

Batley and Spen Liberal Democrats

The Children of Harvey Milk: How LGBTQ Politicians Changed the World by Andrew Reynolds OUP 2018

In this highly readable book Andrew Reynolds, former Croydon Young Liberal and current professor of political science at the University of North Carolina. sets out to make two arguments. The first is that seeing and engaging with LGBTQ people is an important factor in political change. The second is that the stories of individual people are essential because they are the catalysts for social and legislative change.

There have been films and books which document the origins and development of LGBTQ liberation movements. In 2017, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of partial decriminalisation there were so many events that parliament went all Julian and Sandy for a couple of months. However, none have focused on the experiences of the first cohort parliamentarians who had to cope with changing attitudes to LGBT people.

Using a mix of richly detailed stories of individuals and statistical analysis of LGBTQ candidates in elections, Andrew plots the growth in numbers of LGBTQ representatives and legal change.

Although the book is global, the focus is on North America, the Commonwealth and a few Western European countries. So while it is useful to draw lessons from New Zealand, the Netherlands and various US states, it is of limited assistance to people battling for equality in countries which are either repressive or dominated by religious beliefs.

For Liberal Democrats there is much in this book to learn and to enjoy, but by far



To this day Labour MPs perpetuate the myth that Labour and trade unions led the fight for LGBTQ equality. Many did not.

Stonewall continues to airbrush from history the pioneering contribution of the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats: first openly gay councillor, first openly trans councillor, first party to have policy in favour of LGBTQ equality. However, as this book demonstrates, all over the world it is in parties with a social liberal philosophy and little to lose by embracing change that pioneers from minority communities tend to find their political home.

The book is strong on the personal stories of LGBTQ politicians and the fact that individuals often faced opposition within their own parties, but the omission of the support given by party leaders, staff and LGBTQ groups is a limitation. Perhaps it is the lack of such contextual detail which leaves the book struggling to answer a key question raised by Andrew. Why is it that in Europe and some Commonwealth countries progress towards LGBTQ equality has been steady, albeit incomplete, but LGBTQ rights in the US remain fragile and under threat?

Liz Barker

In Extremis, the life of a war correspondent Marie Colvin by Lindsey Hilsum Chatto & Windus 2018 £20.00 I can think of three people who have made a difference in genocidal war situations, Pauline Cutting in Beirut, Paddy Ashdown in Bosnia and Marie Colvin – all over the place, but East Timor certainly ranks.

There are others, whose efforts I won't dismiss, but first two I've had some, if small, encounter with and Colvin's death in Syria in 2012 made a profound impact on members of my family.

After losing her eye in Sri Lanka, Colvin seems to have been happy with children asking her if she was a pirate; her biography is a charter of adventure, whether on the high seas or not. I'd particularly recommend having a copy of her collected journalism On the Front Line (Harper Press 2012, reviewed interLib 2013-04 page 12) to hand if you'd really like to capture the flavour. The open question, for family, friends and colleagues must be 'did the Sunday Times press her into dangerous situations, which would ultimately cost her life?'

Mortality rates for war correspondents are high – even within the pages of this book. One senses an element of bravado and having never been closer than a lingering whiff of teargas it is hard to judge. Paradoxically she never received the Martha Gellhorn Award for Journalism, not even posthumously; her inspiration, with whom it is perhaps too easy to draw parallels, lived to a ripe old age.

Lindsey Hilsum is international editor at Channel 4 News; like Colvin, she has something of a specialism on the Middle East. She said in The Guardian (27 October 2018) that she got to know Colvin better in death than in life – diaries that might otherwise have remained unread, but has certainly done justice to a friend and colleague in this book. Will justice reach General Shahadah? One can only hope so.

Stewart Rayment

The New Enclosure by Brett Christophers Verso 2018

It's probably immodest to review a book in which one is quoted, but in my defence I've no connection with Christopher and had entirely forgotten the piece he quotes from.

This was a feature for Public Finance in 2015 about public bodies selling off land, which Christopher argues amounts to the UK's largest and stealthiest privatisation of all.

Christopher calculates that since 1979 some 2.0m hectares equivalent to 10% of the British land mass - has been sold either by central or local government in everything from right-to-buy for council housing through to sales of redundant military bases for redevelopment.

This has led, among other things, to the privatisation of what appears to be public space complete with intrusive security guards telling people what they can and cannot do there.

He suggests the creation in England and Wales of equivalents to the Scottish Land Commission and the spread of community land trusts to develop sites for social purposes.

Governments of all kinds have promoted a mass sell-off of public assets and no doubt have done so too cheaply given Whitehall's perennial hopelessness in any kind of commercial negotiation.

It's questionable though whether the public resources would have existed to make use of the land concerned had it not been sold. Mark Smulian

The Golden Rhinoceros: Histories of the African Middle Ages by FX Fauvelle Princeton University Press

Too little is known of the precolonial history of Africa, partly because so few African cultures had writing, and partly because Europeans refused to believe there were once sophisticated empires on the continent.

This book sets the record straight, with vivid descriptions of powerful kingdoms, written mostly by Arab missionaries, officials and traders. They tell of elaborate courts and palaces, but few traces of the buildings remain. Moreover, little attempt has been made to excavate areas where ruins may lie. Until the end of apartheid, it was inconvenient for white academics in South Africa or Rhodesia to admit the Bantu people had been capable of sustaining thriving societies.

Gold and slaves were traded north, and salt came south. The Arabs described sub-Saharan Africa as "sudan," the land of the blacks. (It is still common for Arabs to call black Africans "abid" or slave). The author chose not to discuss how many black Africans died on the way to miserable lives in Arab lands. Nigerian academics believe vast numbers of men bled to death after being castrated by the Arab traders.

A common and familiar theme emerges: outsiders plundering Africa for its wealth, and imposing their religion. There is evidence of Chinese, Afghan and Indian goods traded in Africa from the sixth century onward.

Next time a politician denounces free trade and migration, bear in mind that history is not on their side. We humans have been interconnected for a long time. Rebecca Tinsley

Drawing the Line, the Irish Border in British Politics by Ivan Gibbons Haus Curiosities 2018 £7.99

In some respects, it is rather amusing that the Irish border has come back to haunt the scum of the Conservative party, since the acts that lead to its creation included high treason in the highest echelons of the party. Further, that the Unionists might actually cause the break-up of the union.

I have no sympathy with them. Mr Gladstone might have resolved the Irish question and Asquith probably would have if war hadn't intervened. Had it not happened we would live in a very different world. Although revision of the border was mooted in the original separation, politicians on either side had other things to contend with and that remained the case pretty much up to 2016 – even Sinn Fein would not have wanted a referendum that they would lose. Once we were both in the EU it was clear that the solution lay there – not least jn lifting the Republic out of the dark ages of de Valera. Now the Tories have torn it all apart.

Ivan Gibbons gives us an

Liberal Revue - from the vaults!

The Liberal Revue can now be enjoyed again online at: https://tinyurl.com/ya2w6l7d or by searching on "Liberal Revue" on YouTube.com

The revue entertained party conferences with songs and sketches in 1984-86, 1988-89, 1992-94, <u>1996, 2</u>002-04 and 2008 before calling it a day

You Tube now has all the shows that were filmed from 1988 and onwards, although sadly the recording of the 2003 show is lost.

Sound only recordings exist of the first three shows, plus a one-off performance in London in March 1986, and will be added when efforts to improve the sound quality are complete.

An archive of Liberal Revue scripts, programmes and recordings has been lodged in the National Liberal Club library intelligent background to the rock that May's Brexit founders on. It is concise, primarily impartial and inexpensive - just what you need to understand the issue. History aside, the UK subvents the Northern Ireland economy by £24bn a year, and provides around 40,000 public sector jobs. Trade between Northern Ireland and Britain outweighs its trade with the Republic by four to one. The Republic's economy, even with EU support, does not have the clout that facilitated the reunion of Germany – which has its own unresolved problems. So, ditch Brexit and get on with life.

Stewart Rayment

Lady M, the life and loves of Elizabeth Lamb, Viscountess Melbourne 1751-1818 by Colin Brown Amberley 2018 £20.00

One of the great questions in any biography is what does the author really think of their subject? Typically, biographies are of the pen of a friend or enemy; but after 200 years a little objectivity can be expected. The secret lies in the 'and loves', although Elizabeth Lamb's political impact is justly covered. Of 'and loves', Elizabeth certainly knew how to enjoy herself, and if we exclude her husband, for whom she provided an heir (he had already sloped off with his mistress) counted Lord Egremont and the Prince of Wales among her long-standing conquests.

She was certainly more fortunate in this than her friend Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. Although this may have been the only way for a woman of her class to get on in the world and influence politics (she was a conduit for Fox through to the Prince Regent), I'm not sure if the author really approves, and certainly not of the more dissolute elements of her lifestyle and that of her compatriots – endemic gambling, excessive drinking, which would, in turn, hit the health of all of them.

There is a certain irony for Elizabeth's efforts to raise the family in the peerage; she didn't live to see her second son, William, become Queen Victoria's favourite prime minister (and what a load of bollocks recent television representations have been), but the line terminated with her third son, Frederick, in 1853; her male children lacking their mother's fecundity.

In an age when politics was still primarily a male aristocratic affair, there is a general consensus among recent biographers that Lady Melbourne and the Duchess of Devonshire made a significant contribution to the progressive Whig cause. Their

campaigning is regarded as central to keeping Fox in Parliament, against

the wishes of George III. The fears of the extremities of the French Revolution played upon reactionary trends at a time when the body politic was out of synch with rapidly moving changes in society. Elizabeth can be seen as self-interested – supporting the introduction of the Corn Laws for instance, agriculture being the main source of landed wealth.

A proper biography of Lamb is long overdue and here we have it, the right balance between the sensational – she was a bit of a lass, and the serious. She gets six lines in the Encyclopedia Britannica, all in the context of her son. The Dictionary of National Biography runs to about 3.6 pages. Her annotated letters were published in 2000, but even then, she was overshadowed by Lord Byron, as no doubt, all associated with him were.

As Byron's 'Corbeau Blanc' (the title of that anthology); she features in his Don Juan as Lady Pinchbeck. That at the age of 60, Elizabeth could turn the head of Byron and become his closest confidante says something. I think Byron has the last word on her:



I said that Lady Pinchbeck had been talk'd about

As who has not, if female, young, and pretty?

But now no more the ghost of Scandal stalk'd about;

She merely was deem'd amiable and witty,

And several of her best bonmots were hawk'd about:

Then she was given to charity and pity,

And pass'd (at least the latter years of life)

For being a most exemplary wife.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

The obituaries will tell you how Sir Paddy Ashplant fused the community politics promoted by the Association of Liberal Councillors with his expertise in jungle warfare to win a string of by-elections and raise the Liberal Democrats from the ruins of Steel's grand strategy. What they will not tell you is how my domestic staff loved his visits (Cook would frequently announced that he made her "come over all unnecessary"); how he stood his round in

the Bonkers' Arms and entertained the locals with his favourite joke; how he allowed the Well-Behaved Orphans to question him for hours about his time in the Special Boat Service (they were always particularly interested in the escape techniques he had been taught lest he be captured by the enemy).

We know that because such have been there will be such again, though not for us. I fear his passing cast something of a pall over Christmas here at the Hall, but we must carry on the fight for Liberalism because it is What He Would Have Wanted.

Juesday What better, on a cold winter's day, than curling up by the Library fire with a good book? My choice today is the new Almanac from the Wise Woman of Wing; I buy it for its herb lore and racing tips. I turn eagerly to its predictions for 2019 to see how this Brexit hoo-hah will turn out, but find that foreseeing this is beyond even her powers.

Wednesday If we Liberals are to return to government before we grow much older, it behoves us to make full use of today's modern technology. Thus it is that you find me in Sussex for the maiden flight of the Bonkers Patent Delivery Drone. If all goes well, it will fly from door to door, dropping off the latest issue of Focus. More than that, if anyone is in the habit of refusing delivery, it will lie in wait behind the hedge until he goes out. Why, it could be the Bonkers Patent Exploding Focus of the 21st century!

When I discovered that the village I had chosen for this trial lies close to Gatwick Airport, I feared that the coming and going of jets would turn flying my new invention into something of a challenge. I can report, however, that the skies have been empty for some hours now, which has made things much easier than I had expected.

Thursday A blowy day on Rutland Water as I join the crowds thronging Oakham Quay to watch the day's ferry sail for the Hook of Holland. The Empress of Rutland is certainly a fine vessel, and it happens that my majority shareholding in Rutland Ferries has proved something of a goldmine of late. I had a phone call from one Grayling (he managed to cut himself off twice during our conversation and sounded as though he had got his head stuck in the wastepaper basket at one point) asking if I had any ferries to spare. I told him I had, partly to stop him crying and partly because of the extraordinary sum he dropped into our conversation.

If I am honest, the Saucy Baroness Scott has been in dry dock for a couple of years, while the First Lady Bonkers has been grounded on the mudflats beyond the harbour bar for longer than that. Still, I did not get the

Lord Bonkers Diary

impression that this Grayling is the sort who investigates the goods he buys too closely.

Friday

Who should I bump into in London today but our own Nick Clegg? Curious to know what he is doing with himself these days, I treat him to lunch at one of my clubs. He turns out to be full of his new job, telling me how Satan's chief operating officer Mephistopheles called him while he was walking in the Alps last summer and invited him to fly to Hell to meet Satan himself. "I said

to them, if you're prepared to let me into the inner circle, in the black box, and give me real authority, then I'm interested.'

Clegg describes Satan to me as "a shy guy" and "thoughtful", before adding: "The thing that persuaded me to do it is Satan and Mephistopheles asking the right questions for the right reasons – about things like the barrier between free speech and prohibited content, wellbeing of children, integrity of elections, AI and giving people control over their data.'

Let us put churlish thoughts aside and hope that Clegg can do for Satan what he did for the Liberal Democrats.

Saturday I still maintain that my great grandfather was fully justified in his decision to call out the militia to quell the Stilton Riots of 1819, but my sympathies are instinctively with those campaigning to widen the franchise. Why, I sat through Ken Loach's Peterloo the other day, even though I generally find his stuff Rather Hard Work, It happens that in the early 1970s that I myself wrote a musical called Peterloo! - I added the exclamation mark having noticed the success of Lionel Bart's Oliver! some years before.

My show, it has to be admitted, was not a great success, but I was proud of its theme song. Imagine my fury when I travelled to Brighton to attend the Eurovision Song Contest a year or two later, only to find that song had been stolen by a bunch of Swedes. They tried to hide their plagiarism by changing its title to Waterloo, but I was not fooled for a moment. I consulted my solicitors, but eventually decided not to pursue an action.

Sunday Guidebooks advise tourists to give the islands on Rutland Water a wide berth lest they be eaten. I am no keener on being boiled in a pot while a bouquet garni floats past my nose than the next man, or indeed woman, but I must say I have always found the inhabitants good fellows In Their Own Way. Some authorities claim they are related to the primitive tribes of the Upper Welland Valley, but from my conversations with them on committee room practice and the LBW law, I would say their beliefs have more in common with those of the Church of Rutland.

Even so, I am concerned to hear over sherry after Divine Service at St Asquith's that the Revd Hughes's curate Farron is determined to go on a mission to these islands. The last thing we want at this time of year is to have to defend a by-election.

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