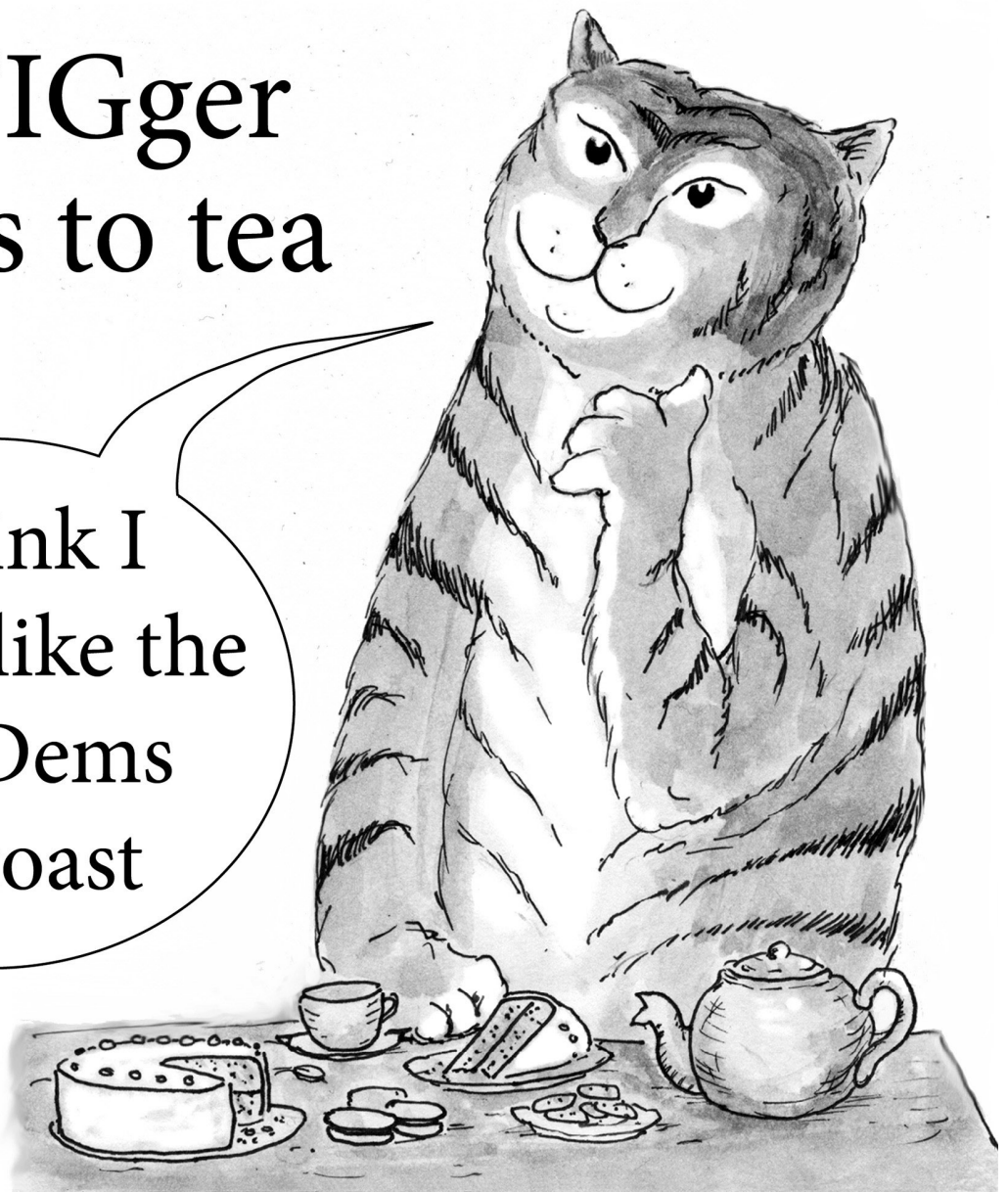


liberator

The TIGger comes to tea

I think I
might like the
Lib Dems
on toast



With apologies to Judith Kerr

- 🍌 Resolve Brexit and we already have the ideas - Paul Hindley
- 🍌 So how did Cable do? - Ruth Coleman Taylor & Mick Taylor
- 🍌 Venezuela's journey from riches to rags - Lorraine Zuleta

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COMMENTARY

RUNNERS AND RIDERS

Liberator does not take sides in Liberal Democrat leadership elections and with Vince Cable having announced his departure at some imminent point - though at the time of writing when exactly was unclear - potential successors are limbering up.

We expect to issue our usual questionnaire to each candidate and publish the answers in the next issue since as this one goes to press no-one has formally declared.

It is however pretty obvious who might stand with Jo Swinson and Ed Davey having conducted semi-public campaigns for a while.

Layla Moran's decision to clear the air with an explanation of much-rumoured 'Glasgow incident' - which according to her own Twitter post was an altercation with her then-partner in which she assaulted him - also suggested she is clearing the decks for a run.

There may be other possible contenders but assuming Stephen Lloyd either has not had the whip restored by then or his endorsement is seen as negative - and that Cable has the good sense to keep out of the choice of his successor - it is mathematically impossible to have more than three candidates since each needs a proposer and seconder.

The only exception would be if candidates nominated their rivals, which would look rather strange.

So the party must consider what it wants its next leader to do, and the most obvious thing is to have the ability to build on the Lib Dems' stance as the only significant anti-Brexit party, at least in England.

Even assuming Brexit is resolved in the coming months, there has been a 'Remain coalition' formed among sections of the public who see themselves as 'Remain' more than they see themselves as supporters of any party.

They are, as a generalisation, people open to world who neither dislike foreigners nor want to wall the UK off.

This is not the only pool in which the party can fish for votes, but surely the largest one and one in which it has some genuine credibility, even if this has been muted.

Lib Dems have taken some pleasure in the way Brexit has ripped fissures in the Conservatives and Labour.

But while it has not done any similar damage to the Lib Dems as a party, it may well have done so to its voter base. Brexit could reshape the party landscape in ways that can barely be guessed at.

It may be that formerly strong Lib Dem bases in what turned out to be Leave voting areas will have been lost, and there is a respectable argument that the party's message should be aimed at winning these places back.

There is an equally respectable one that the party should cut its losses and concentrate its resources on the places most likely to support it now, rather than those that used to but are dominated by Leave.

What there is not a respectable argument for is trying to do both at once. The party would end up with an incoherent message convincing nobody if it tried to please people with opposed priorities and opinions.

If any leadership candidate claims the Lib Dems can 'win anywhere' grill them closely on how, and why they believe this to be true.

REELING IN THE CABLE

Vince Cable was only ever likely to be a stop-gap leader, with the position thrust on him by Tim Farron's failure to reconcile his political and religious beliefs.

Although he has sometimes exuded an air of wishing he'd rather be anywhere else, his brief leadership is likely to be judged rather better by history than it has looked with the party shut out of the Brexit debate.

Any Lib Dem leader would have struggled to be heard the last two years, and Cable deserves some gratitude for having taken on a thankless task which no-one else wanted at the time.

He has clearly been a respected figure rather than a popular one and with his period as leader so dominated by Brexit it is hard to identify any major policy initiative related to anything else that has marked his period in office. The party policy-making process has chuntered on as usual largely unnoticed without Cable trying to drive it any obvious direction.

Dissatisfaction has been growing with a process that has become divorced from practical politics and which leaves policy up to largely self-selected experts. This is something for which the next leader should invite ideas for a more useful replacement.

The exception to Cable's hands-off style was been the misbegotten 'extras' to the supporters scheme, which have caused a colossal waste of time and energy across the party since last summer.

Conference was absolutely right to agree to the scheme itself but to reject supporters voting for leader, the scheme being open to members of other parties, and the leadership being open to non-MPs. Let us hear no more of this nonsense.

The ideas appear to have been promoted because consultants told Cable they were successful in Canada.

So are polar bears. Learning from other countries does not mean blindly copying them in different circumstances.

RADICAL BULLETIN

DESERVED DEFEAT

Though historians have scratched their heads, it has been hard to recall when the party establishment last took as monumental a kicking at conference as it did over the 'extras' to the supporters scheme in York.

Was it Paddy Ashdown's prototype free schools in 1994, or the defence debate in 1986? Either way, something pretty unusual happened.

The supporters scheme itself went through but then hardly anyone objected - despite some qualms about its cost - and had it been left at that it would have made a fitting farewell for Vince Cable's leadership.

Instead, it came larded with 'extras' so plainly foolish that the conference rejected them, despite a parade of the great and good telling them to the contrary.

First to go was the idea that members of other parties could become supporters. Since the argument for the supporters scheme was that it would appeal to those reluctant to join a political party it was inexplicable why it should be open to those who had taken the trouble to join a different party.

Next to go was the idea that supporters - who could join for nothing - should be allowed a vote in leadership elections. At least Labour charged £3 for this - worked well for them, didn't it?

Finally there went the idea that a non-MP could be leader. This would have meant the party had two leaders - one actual leader and one leader of the parliamentary party.

As was pointed out in the debate, the whole country thinks Caroline Lucas leads the Green party and few have the remotest idea of the actual leader's name.

This would have set up constant public confusion and conflict, rather like the disaster 35 years ago when David Steel and David Owen were supposed to be joint leaders of the Liberal/SDP Alliance but had a plainly destructive tension between them.

Former party presidential candidate Daisy Cooper anticipated the possibility of conflict between the two and told conference that a front page Daily Mail article about a bust-up between the Lib Dems' two leaders would be somehow beneficial. This was an unfortunate observation a day after the Mail's front page had been unflatteringly devoted to Steel and Cyril Smith.

Cooper's speech was not though the most eccentric of the debate. That prize goes to Oxford West MP Layla Moran who bounded on stage and shouted: "Wow! I'm an MP! How cool is that!" This was possibly the most ill-judged start to a political speech since Neil Kinnock bellowed "we're alright!" at Labour's 1992 rally, an event widely credited with destroying his campaign.

Compared with Moran, deputy leader Jo Swinson's speech was merely peculiar, quoting chunks of the constitution's preamble then mentioning for no apparent reason artificial intelligence and medical

research.

That is two likely leadership contenders who did themselves little good. The third, Ed Davey, may have marginally helped himself by keeping out of the whole thing.

Chief whip Alistair Carmichael gave a tub-thumping speech in support of the stricken 'reforms' without addressing any points on either side, and later said he simply did as he'd been asked.

From the other side, the conference learnt some surprising things. Federal Policy Committee vice-chair Duncan Brack objected to a provision that allowed supporters to serve on policy working groups - though this was ultimately narrowly passed. He said the Federal People Development Committee had included this because it thought it reflected current practice and when the Federal Board found out the error it shrugged and left it in anyway.

English candidate chair Prue Bray said she had not been told until the motion was published that a provision to abolish the 12 months waiting period before one can apply for candidate approval had been tacked on to it.

Liberator Collective member George Potter said that as a local membership secretary he had been told he'd have to vet all new supporters, a task for which neither he nor any other membership secretary had the training or resources.

As practical objections were raised by its opponents, the establishment's supporters blathered meaningless clichés about being "new and radical" and richly deserved to lose.

The whole thing was mishandled from the start. It began by leaking out over the summer (Liberator 391), then being 'launched' in Cable's speech just before the September conference. There was then supposed to be an all-member ballot, then a special conference (neither of which were permitted by the Federal Board).

Things then went quiet until early March when a series of hectoring articles appeared on Lib Dem Voice from establishment figures in favour of both the supporters scheme and its more controversial attached oddities. This was followed by a half-hearted sticker campaign at York.

If all Cable wanted was a supporters scheme he could have had one at any point and without needing constitutional amendments. Why persist with the rest of it?

BELLS AND WHISTLES

Committee reports to conference are usually of stultifying blandness, so when one admits to problems it's safe to assume they are too appalling to be swept under any carpet.

And so it was with Salesforce, the software that

handles the party's membership data.

Investment in it stopped sometime around the 2015 general election and before long it began to creak at the seams.

Staff spent 18 months trying to patch it up but according to one source "it's a very long list now of things that have gone wrong".

To compound matters, the party doesn't use the normal version of Salesforce but had all manner of special things added on for its use, which means no-one who is now around knows how they work or how to fix them.

Then came last autumn and a "catastrophic failure" when an attempt to fix one problem encountered yet another unknown glitch and a huge amount of data was corrupted. The failsafe supposed to prevent this also failed and local party access had to be removed for several weeks while staff and volunteers manually reconstructed data.

The question now is does the party move to a new system or to a 'clean' version of Salesforce?

There are reported problems too with Connect, the replacement for the old EARS system, essentially an electoral register database used among things for the Minivan canvassing app.

Liberator has seen complaints of February and March updates not being made, possibly because the person who formerly oversaw it took voluntary redundancy in the winter. The updating work appears to have been farmed out externally with some teething troubles.

TIGGER, TIGGER BURNING A BIT DULL

Federal Conference Committee reacted with disfavour to the idea that it should provide a room for one of the TIG MPs to address the conference in York.

Not least of the factors in this was that no TIGger had at that point asked to come anyway.

But with times so hard that there was no autocue in the auditorium - which partly accounts for the strangely abrupt end to Vince Cable's speech - it was not keen to provide free rooms.

Thus Anna Soubry spoke in a function room off the conference premises organised by the Institute for Public Policy Research North think tank.

A question and answer session was held in the auditorium on the Saturday lunchtime with party president Sal Brinton, chief whip Alastair Carmichael, Federal Campaigns Committee chair James Gurling and former SDP chief executive Lord Newby.

What came out was based on Brinton's paper on the subject to the Federal Board. This said that a reference group comprising the speakers at the meeting (other than Gurling, but plus Jo Swinson) had been formed "to support Vince Cable in discussions with TIG" and had already started work.

Under the processes agreed, as soon as the Lib Dems hear of an MP leaving another party Brinton is to call the local party chair concerned who is "asked to contact the local council group leader", something Liberator understands did not happen in South Cambridgeshire.

The PPC for the seat concerned will, in an ambiguous phrase, also be contacted "if helpful". It does not say 'helpful' to who or what.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the paper said that at the board's last two meetings "there was some concern expressed about how decisions about any possible arrangements might be made about working with the TIG". Getaway, surely not?

Working arrangements in the House of Commons were "a matter for the parliamentary party [which had] already indicated that they will work informally to achieve shared objectives, most particularly on Brexit".

The paper then had a stab at saying where responsibility lay for any closer working with the TIGgers or any other breakaway group.

When Paddy Ashdown appeared on the brink of an unpopular deal with Labour in 1998 he had the 'triple lock' imposed on him by conference to ensure the party was represented in any such decision.

That was later modified and applies only to a decision on entering government, so what happens to any decision short of that?

Brinton several times told the York meeting that members "would have to be involved" but said little about whether or if conference actually got to vote on any of this.

Her FB paper though was more robust. It stated, for example 'electoral pacts in certain seats' were a matter for the local party concerned in conjunction with the chair of the Federal Campaigns and Election Committee, the director of elections and chief executive, as was the case in 2017 with the limited local pacts with the Greens. For joint election campaigns, with or without a joint manifesto, the FB would have to take a motion to conference, as would be the case for 'formal coalition but not in government'.

Still if Chuka Umunna stays as head TIG with his enthusiasm for bringing back national service no Liberal Democrat should touch the TIGgers with a bargepole anyway.

SECRET COURT

The suspension of the Liberal Democrats Friends of Palestine (LDFP) over alleged anti-Semitic postings was badly handled in March.

The LDFP was told the suspension was secret and that it could not inform its members, but the complainants were then told and soon after the story was used by the Jewish Chronicle without LDFP members knowing what had happened.

A paper to the Federal Board from president Sal Brinton said there had been complaints about "the general anti-semitic, defamatory and offensive posts which happen on a regular basis", the immediate cause being one that said a pro-Israel lobbyist was funding The Independent Group. A link identified this as former Labour donor David Garrard.

The suspension became formally public with the Conference Extra publication in which the Federal Board said it suspended LDFP and had authorised an investigation "due to the gravity of the allegations, the repeat nature of them and concerns with the initial response of LDFP to the allegations".

The latter is understood to refer to a paper from LDFP chair Jonathan Fryer, which went down badly enough for FB members to vote by only 11-10 for the suspension.

NOW YOU SEE HIM...

A news story appeared in January to say that former Bradford East MP David Ward has been reinstated in the party following a disciplinary hearing.

Ward was removed as candidate in Bradford East in 2017 at the behest of then leader Tim Farron after the Tory MP Eric Pickles claimed he had made anti-Semitic statements (*Liberator* 393 and others). He then lost his membership because he stood as an independent against the official Lib Dem candidate, and indeed did better.

The story of Ward's reinstatement was hastily followed by a party statement that Ward was not a member as he had brought the Lib Dems into disrepute.

This was a strange conclusion since an English Appeals Panel had just decided he could be readmitted but remitted it to the Yorkshire region and Bradford East local party to decide. Since both had unanimously backed Ward's readmission the outcome seemed clear.

By acting as it did, the English panel overturned the decision of the accident prone Committee of the Regions.

Its chair Margaret Joachim then appealed against the English panel's ruling to the Federal Appeals Panel (do keep up please).

Thus the matter now vanishes into a labyrinthine dispute between the English Appeals Panel - which is not understood to be amused by Joachim's action - and the Committee of the Regions, with the Federal Appeals Panel trying to decide if it can do anything.

Its options appear to be to either uphold the English Appeals Panel's decision or send the whole thing back to it to reconsider.

ACT IN HASTE

The Lib Dems pride themselves on being a party that acts based on evidence - a point seemingly lost on the Federal Board when, without the slightest attempt at consultation, it adopted a definition of Islamophobia.

Discrimination against Muslims is deplorable and the party has to have a way of dealing with anyone who indulges in this.

The FB's 'something must be done, this is something, so we must do it' approach has managed to worry both Lib Dem Humanists and Secularists and the LGBT+ group.

It adopted a one sentence definition: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

This was copied from the All Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, and while the FB did not explicitly adopt the papers that go with this, what other yardstick would be used in party disciplinary cases to decide whether an offence had been committed?

This has disturbed those who think condemnation of both secularism and sexual orientation might be made by those who then choose to defend these as expressions of 'Muslimness'.

Would it be impermissible to oppose this even though no one has suggested that, say, Tim Farron should be immune from criticism on gay sex because of his religious principles?

The FB was trying to do good by ensuring that Islamophobia has no place in the party. If it had

stopped, thought and consulted first it might have done rather better.

As it was, the definition was rushed through without considered thought leading to Toby Keynes resigning in protest as chair of the Associated Organisations Review Group and Gordon Lishman going with him.

It also leaves the policy working group on the nature of public debate in a bind. Its remit includes: "Extremely hostile online behaviour in debating public issues, especially towards minority groups" and it is supposed to decide what a liberal approach to open and fair public discussion should be in these circumstances.

It though is presumably now bound by a definition adopted without consultation, let alone the sort of thought a working group would give the matter.

TOXIC ATMOSPHERE

An open letter signed by about 70 members and several entire branches has accused the Young Liberals executive of failing to deal with bullying and favouritism, both of which it said had long continued unchecked.

It also said, without giving examples, that there had been cases of discrimination, threats, false accusations and harassment.

The open letter said the YL executive was not in a position to solve these problems on its own, but noted: "The toxic culture that surrounds our organisation needs to stop." It called on the executive to issue a statement and action plan.

Liberator understands the situation has been further complicated by an allegation of assault at a conference and - separately - the ousting of regional chairs by the national executive.

A YL executive member told *Liberator* the dispute had been handed over to the party headquarters pastoral care officer.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE

Even firmly dead and buried, Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD) continues to cause problems.

While the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality has been successfully launched as a replacement for its troublesome predecessor, EMLD has left unfinished business.

Its former secretary Ashburn Holder was suspended in 2016 and a mere 13 months later a disciplinary hearing panel was convened, which decided none of the complaints made were valid and said he should be reinstated as EMLD secretary (*Liberator* 388).

Holder says EMLD officers failed to reinstate him. He clearly cannot be reinstated in something that no longer exists, but has complained and seeks an apology. Long after the events concerned this is still working its way through party processes.

FISHY BUSINESS

It's ironic that the two remnant parties of the alliance years - the continuing Liberal party and SDP - should both end up supporting Ukip. The real pre-merger Liberal and Social Democratic parties were of course strongly pro-EU but have since been taken over by Brexit supporters.

A recent electoral foray by the SDP saw it score no votes at all in a by-election in the City of London Corporation's Billingsgate ward, though one Ukip

MEP has defected to the SDP.

Meanwhile the Cornish Liberals' 2015 endorsement of Ukip was punished with the lightest of slaps on the wrist, rather than the expulsion it merited (Liberator 372).

SHUNTED IN SHADWELL

Tower Hamlets Lib Dems quite rightly disowned their candidate in the Shadwell council by-election when it emerged on the eve of poll that Abjol Miah had in 2014 shared anti-semitic content online.

Campaigning ceased and had Miah won he would have had to sit as an independent, at least pending the outcome of an investigation.

A statement said: "The Liberal Democrats are committed to fighting racism and anti-semitism. Mr Miah has issued an unreserved apology for his historical tweet and is cooperating fully with the party's disciplinary process."

Miah was successively in George Galloway's Respect party, the Tower Hamlets First party of disgraced former elected mayor Lutfur Rahman and the People's Alliance of Tower Hamlets, whose members defected en masse to the Lib Dems last year.

While this restored the Lib Dems to the council, with the impressive Rabina Khan now representing the party, it may have brought a mixed bag with her.

There is an unhappy history of mass signings-up in Tower Hamlets - will any more embarrassments occur?

JUMPING THE GUN

The selection from an all-women shortlist for Sutton and Cheam had to be embarrassingly halted in February after an email from party headquarters to members around the country invited them to join Amna Ahmad on the 23 March Brexit demo. Unfortunately it described her as the candidate for Sutton and Cheam, but went out before the selection meeting.

While it might be technically true that she was then the 'snap election' candidate, having stood in 2017, the other two contenders for the seat not unnaturally objected and so the selection was called off until the candidates committee worked out what to do about it.

SPARE 20 PENCE PLEASE?

There is no doubt some subtle distinction between an 'envoy' and an 'ambassador' and perhaps it is known to party treasurer Mike German.

Liberator 390 reported that Kishan Devani had taken to calling himself 'treasurer's envoy', a post unknown to the party constitution.

Just prior to spring conference, German issued a posting on Lib Dem Voice appealing for 'treasurer's ambassadors', which are equally novel posts.

These people would be members with professional fundraising expertise "confident with major donor relationship-management and raising five-figure sums".

Appointees would be "invited to the Treasurer's Dinner at conference and other federal events" and reimbursed travel expenses. Presumably these are the first things for which they would have to raise funds.

BOG STANDARD

Aberdeenshire East Lib Dems have made a daring attempt to displace Mitcham and Morden as sponsor of the Gold Toilet awarded by Liberator for the worst motion submitted to each conference.

Mitcham and Morden submitted a motion in 1983 specifying in mind bending detail the provision of public toilets on different types of roads.

Aberdeenshire East put to the Scottish Lib Dem conference a motion deploring the closure of public toilets and the, er, inconvenience caused.

Fine, but it made the same error as its predecessor by getting into detail. It said the Scottish Government should "create a network of public conveniences across Scotland accessible with a single chipped card, paid for by subscription" sited so that relief was available "within 20 minutes walking distance wherever people congregate" and no more than 20 minutes' driving distance from any point on a major trunk road.

Measuring the distance from trunk roads would be hard enough, but who is to define 'wherever people congregate' and how many need to congregate to qualify for instant relief?

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, 1996, 2002-04 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

WE'VE ALREADY GOT THE IDEAS

Liberal policies in place over decades offer solutions to the crises of Brexit and inequality. so why won't the Lib Dems grasp them, asks Paul Hindley

Major car manufacturers have announced they are moving some of their production abroad; costing thousands of jobs. Business uncertainty is rife. The Good Friday Agreement is in jeopardy. There are fears of long delays at Dover. The Government is actively planning for food shortages and considering putting troops on the streets. Hatred and bigotry are on the rise. Extremist factions dominate the two largest parties. Parliamentary democracy is being attacked by the prime minister. Britain is a laughing stock on the global stage.

All herald the crisis of our current political age - Brexit. Brexit is the biggest crisis Britain has faced since 1945. It is upending the old politics of the 20th century. We are living through a real anti-establishment moment in our history. Elites are no longer trusted; political deference has gone out the window and there is great dissatisfaction with the status quo.

Dissatisfaction from the crisis caused by Brexit, but also dissatisfaction from long standing socio-economic inequalities and a decade of austerity. Brexit and inequality are stretching our democracy to breaking point.

But what is the driving force behind this anti-establishment politics? Where is it coming from? The answer to this lies mostly in the populist nationalist right and the Corbynite socialist left.

METROPOLITAN ELITE

This is odd when compared to Britain's political history. Historically, it was the Liberals and Liberal Democrats who were in the vanguard of Britain's anti-establishment politics; right-wing nationalists and staunch left-wing socialists were relegated to the extremes. Liberals once embodied radical political change and were a thorn in the side of the intransigence of the two-party system. Today, liberals are seldom seen as being against the elite and are more likely to be viewed as being part of a 'metropolitan elite'.

If ever there was an hour for a bold, radical, anti-establishment liberal vision, in order to tackle nationalism, extremist socialism and Brexit, this is it.

Some 'moderate' MPs from both the Labour and Conservative parties recently established The Independent Group (TIG), which at the time of writing had not become an official political party.

TIG's founding statement should be applauded. It is a masterclass in bland, boring, vacuous and banal centrism. Among its values are such vague platitudes as a "strong economy", "prosperous communities",

"the extension of opportunity" and "parliamentary democracy". It's motherhood without the apple pie. TIG is not the answer to the political prayers of this zeitgeist.

The emergence of TIG should not encourage the Lib Dems to become even more ideologically centrist and more remote from the concerns of voters. Quite the opposite.

The party should seize the political moment. The two biggest parties are dependent on the extremes of the past, while the new centrist movement, complete with all of its austerity apologists, is ill-equipped to meet any challenge beyond Brexit. Britain needs a progressive party with big ideas and that is avowedly opposed to Brexit. A party that seeks to remedy social injustice while delivering power to the powerless. Above all, a party that understands that the real mainstream is to be found in moving away from the status quo, not in propping it up. Only one party can fill this void, the Liberal Democrats.

Anyone who thinks that the Liberal Democrats are a centrist party should read the history of the party and its Liberal predecessors. The Liberal Party in the early twentieth century laid the foundations of the welfare state, legitimised collective bargaining rights and clipped the wings of the House of Lords. Through the People's Budget, the party established the concept of progressive taxation. The budget also initially included a land value tax. It was under David Lloyd George's premiership that universal male suffrage was achieved as well as the first voting rights for women.

During Lloyd George's period in opposition in the late 1920s, the party moved to adopting Keynesian economics. Under the slogan "We Can Conquer Unemployment" in 1929, the Liberals advocated a range of Keynesian economic policies, many inspired by John Maynard Keynes himself through his work in developing the party's industrial policy in the Yellow Book a few years earlier. The post-war consensus owes much to Keynes and to William Beveridge, who designed the modern welfare state.

It was in the 1960s and 1970s that the Liberal Party was at its most radical. The party advocated industrial democracy, workers' cooperatives and co-determination, corporate governance models that shared decision-making power between managers and workers.

The party of Jo Grimond was one that was committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament and he himself was not afraid to refer to syndicalism. During this period the 'red guard' leadership of the Young Liberals became even more radical; supporting libertarian socialism, while vehemently opposing the Vietnam

War, apartheid and even NATO.

The party of the 1960s was clearly left-wing. The party of the 2000s was the only major centre-left party on offer with Charles Kennedy supporting higher taxes for the rich, the abolition of tuition fees, free personal care for the elderly and of course, opposition to the war in Iraq.

The Liberal Party/

Liberal Democrats were to the left of Labour in the late 1920s, the mid-to late 1960s and the 2000s. We should examine the claim that British Liberals represent the centre of politics. When you examine the party pioneering Keynesianism in the late 1920s, the radicalism of the party in the 1960s, and the social liberalism of the Kennedy-era, it is difficult to conclude that the history of the Liberal Democrats is consistent with some vague lowest common denominator centrism.

Taking all this into account, it is extraordinary that the party has failed to realise that our current crisis is the moment for a radical liberal politics to challenge the Brexit establishment, not the moment for a centrist restatement of the status quo.

We must champion proportional representation at every opportunity. Now is the time to overhaul our political system and yet we are letting the moment pass us by.

If we are to tackle the root causes of Brexit, then we need to create a fairer welfare system. The party is already committed to reversing several welfare cuts and abolishing benefit sanctions, but yet again the party leadership is currently failing to champion these causes. And of course, if Britain does Brexit (assuming it hasn't happened by the time this is published), the Liberal Democrats must lead the rallying cry to re-join the European Union.

Building on its radical heritage, the party must seize the initiative and think big. We must capture the public's imagination, remedy the hardships of the present and establish a real alternative to Jeremy Corbyn's socialism and Brexit populist nationalism. What follows are five big ideas based on the liberal tradition that can help to achieve just that.

First, UK-Wide Trials of universal basic income (UBI), where every citizen receives a guaranteed minimum income from the state regardless of whether they are in work or not.

It recently got a trial run in Finland. Although the Finnish government decided to abandon the trial because it did not appear to improve the rate of getting people back into work; it was shown to greatly improve the health and well-being of those in receipt of UBI. A UK trial would have to be more comprehensive. UBI should not be treated like a generous out of work benefit, it is meant to be universal. A British UBI trial would have to be conducted across a wider cross-section of society. Only then will we be able to assess the true merits of UBI and hopefully determine how to roll it out more widely. Jane Dodds, the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats has already called for a UBI trial in Wales.

Second, universal inheritance, where every 25-year-old is given a one-off capital grant of £10,000. The principle behind the policy is to redress the wealth and ownership inequality between the generations. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) proposed in a report last year that a universal inheritance could

be funded by a sovereign wealth fund made up of assets from wealth taxes, the Crown Estate and the government's stake in RBS among other things.

CONSTITUTIONAL WEAKNESS

Third, we need a constitutional convention. If Brexit has shown us anything it is the constitutional weakness of our political system. Parliament remains in thrall to the executive, our party system is dysfunctional, the lack of constitutional safeguards is plain to see, and accountability is limited. Britain desperately needs a constitutional convention to rectify the weaknesses in our archaic political structure. It would bring together people and groups from across civil society and would hopefully result in a system of constitutional safeguards, a proportional voting system, democracy in the second chamber and a solution to the 'West Lothian Question' with a degree of federal autonomy for the English regions and the rest of the UK. It may even result in Britain finally having a codified constitution.

Fourth, there should be a green new deal. Inspired by the policy programme of Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1930s, this would combine two great liberal causes - tackling climate change and Keynesian economics.

It would support a raft of green project initiatives designed to increase our renewable energy sources as well as making the country more sustainable. This in turn would create green jobs and provide a large stimulus to the economy. It being promoted in the United States by progressive Democrats such as Presidential hopeful Senator, Elizabeth Warren and the left-wing Representative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Finally we should revive co-determination, with workers on company boards.

The law should require that every British-based company with more than 1,000 employees must have at least one-third of its board made up of worker representatives. They should either be appointed after consultation with relevant trade unions or by introducing German-style works councils, which would appoint the worker representatives and be directly elected by employees. Forms of economic democracy are essential to bridging the divide between capital and labour. This would ensure a fairer, more democratic and more stable form of labour relations.

As Beveridge once said, "a revolutionary moment in history is a time for revolutions not for patching". Britain needs to see a liberal policy revolution. Our Brexit crisis demands just that. There is a real desire for something new to radically change politics, but TIG is not it.

Liberals have all the policy ideas they would ever need to solve the current crisis, which is about much more than just a referendum vote that happened three years ago. Now is the moment for a radical restatement of liberalism to overturn the failed status quo. Let's seize it.

Paul Hindley is a member of the Social Liberal Forum council

GETTING ON WITHOUT US?

The UK may end up absent but European Parliament elections will be held in May. David Grace assesses the ALDE group's chances

The most disappointing thing Nick Clegg ever said was “Much the same as now”.

It was in the debate with Nigel Farage ahead of the 2014 European elections, in answer to the question: “How do you see the European Union 10 years from now?”

Five years later and the UK is torn apart over Remain or Leave. Meanwhile the rest of Europe gears up for elections to the European Parliament in May. As I write we don't know if the UK will take part.

To follow the evolution of European-level politics or indeed politics in individual European countries requires a real effort in the UK, where the BBC is more concerned with how Trump felt when he got up in the morning and the ghastly print media is too busy calling politicians traitors if they dare to take an interest in matters beyond Dover.

I have watched the evolution of Liberal co-operation at European level over many years. At first the UK Liberal Party was part of an ungainly body called the Federation of Liberal and Democratic Parties of the European Communities (FLIDEPEC) and the Young Liberals were part of the European Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth (EFLRY, not to be confused with WFLRY or IFLRY).

FLIDEPEC developed into ELD then ELDR and now the Liberal Democrats are part of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) - not just 'in' Europe, but 'for' Europe.

I discussed the prospects for May's elections (not Theresa May's election, she's finished) with senior figures in ALDE.

A presenter on Radio 4 recently asked a visiting EU politician if the European Parliament elections would be between federalists and wreckers. It was a naive overstatement but not so far from the truth.

Andrew Duff, former Liberal Democrat MEP for East of England, wrote an article in March saying the choice for the EU was to return powers to the national level or to create a democratic federal government. Andrew has clear ideas on how to bring about the latter.

Constitutional reform has been on the back burner in the EU for more than 12 years since the troubled pregnancy and birth of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007. In the UK and elsewhere politicians who support the EU nevertheless speak of reform.

The problem is when you then ask them which reforms they would like, they rarely have an answer. I looked at the manifestos of the main political families to see if they had one.

Let's look first at the groups which want to build the European Union.

* **European People's Party (EPP): largest group, 217 MEPs**

The EPP, the Christian Democrat group, wrote their manifesto in 2012 and don't seem to have written a new one. They stand for a “strong, transparent and efficient Europe”. They want a European political union where “citizens must be able to make clear and comprehensible choices about the policies of the European Commission”. Specifically they call for pan-European elections (undefined) and direct election of the president of the European Commission by voters. They also want a real European foreign policy where Europe can speak with one voice, to be achieved by removing the veto on those issues and having majority voting. I must say, it sounds wonderful. Their rhetoric proclaims respecting work, completing the single market, promoting the family, fighting climate change and, yes, boosting education.

* **Party of European Socialists (PSE): second largest, 186 MEPs**

The PSE including the British Labour Party (I wonder if anyone has told Corbyn) are calling for “A new Social Contract for Europe”. In the way of socialists they are very keen on plans calling for them on social action, affordable housing and clean public transport, much of which lies beyond the competences of the EU. I searched but could find no proposals for actual reform of the EU although they do want 9 May Europe Day to be a public holiday in all member states. Their rhetoric embraces reducing inequality, ending austerity, investing in research and development, boosting education and building a sustainable Europe and a feminist Europe which also respects LGBTI rights.

* **Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: fourth largest, 68 MEPs**

So what does ALDE want? To renew Europe! The manifesto calls for resisting protectionism and promoting free and fair trade (useful phrase that, covers a number of contradictions). They want to boost infrastructure and, yes, invest in education. Reform proposals include simplifying bureaucracy (how?), moving to qualified majority voting on security and having one European seat on the UN Security Council (I can't see Macron buying that). They want the European Parliament to have the right to initiate legislation and Council meetings to be more transparent. ALDE's rhetoric gives priority: “To reform the European Union and be the counterforce to nationalists who want to

destroy it.”

* **European Greens: fifth equal largest group, 52 MEPs.**

The Greens want “to renew the promise of Europe”. Their long manifesto announces they are: “For a Europe where people and planet come before profit. Where women are never second to men. Where nobody’s rights are denied and every voice is respected.” They want “a full multi-level democracy in which all public decisions are taken in a transparent way by elected representatives.” Specifically they want to end vetoes and move everything to the normal legislative procedure which means co-decision by Parliament and Council with qualified majority voting in the council. They even favour a European constituent assembly and treaty change by Europe-wide referendum without any national veto. Of course, they have many proposals for fighting climate change and pollution.

On the other hand, which groups do want to destroy or at least weaken the EU? Wikipedia gives a useful list of such parties and a terrifying map showing where right-wing populists are in parliament or government, which appears to be the case in most European countries.

I don’t know if any of them have a prime minister who believes she is the embodiment of the “people’s will” and everyone who disagrees with her is playing parliamentary games. Perhaps by the time you read this, nor will we.

* **European Conservative and Reformists Group: third largest group, 75 MEPs**

ECR was set up by the Tories when they left the EPP, opposes deepening political links in the EU and the policies of the European Central Bank. They talk of respecting member-states and cutting regulation. They call themselves Euro-realists and propose a “reformed European Union that is more flexible, decentralised and respects the wishes of its member states”. The group includes the prominent Leave campaigner Daniel Hannan.

* **European United Left/Nordic Green Left: fifth equal, 52 MEPs**

This is a group of communists and left socialists. It may not be fair to put GUE/NGL in the bad guys list but they are at least ambiguous about the EU. Their constituent declaration (1994) says they are “opposed to the present European Union political structure” but committed to integration. They are a confederal group with a wide variety of views yet united in aiming to construct another European Union with fully democratic institutions and without neo-liberal monetarist policies.

* **Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy: seventh largest, 41 MEPs**

This was the original home of the UKIPpers with Farage as leader but they have rowed and split up. The group claims to favour co-operation among sovereign European States and rejects a single centralised ‘European superstate’. They are very keen on referendums (except of course

another one in UK)..

* **Europe of Nations and Freedom: eighth largest, 37 MEPs**

This lot include the Front National as well as Janice Atkinson, former UKIPper and call for respect of “the people’s will” (Sure I’ve heard that somewhere before) but insist there is no such thing as a European people. For them there can be no democracy above the nation-state.

So, who wins in May? With or without the UK, we can expect changes after the election. The EPP has suspended Fidesz, the party of the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban. His assaults on democracy had led to many Christian Democrats calling for his party’s expulsion.

The PSE must expect to lose seats as their member parties are doing very badly in the polls across Europe. ALDE hopes to displace ECR when the Tories leave and become the third largest group but this may depend upon the attitude of President Macron. ALDE’s leader Guy Verhofstadt has failed to reach a deal with Macron. Nevertheless, En Marche MEPs may end up sitting with ALDE if not inside it.

A well-informed prediction suggests the following results. EPP: down to 180, PSE: down to 120, ALDE: up to 85 or even 100 if Macron joins in.

However, the various nationalists split across different groups could rise to 130 MEPs, which would make them the second largest group if they only united to form one group. Being nationalists, they probably won’t.

Many British voters swallowed the Brexiter line that the EU is undemocratic. Given the poor coverage of European elections by British print media and the BBC and the failure of Remain campaigners to correct this myth it is unsurprising.

In 2014 the main European groups agreed to link European Parliament elections to the presidency of the European Commission. Each main group nominated a Spitzenkandidat. The agreement was that the candidate of the party with the most votes would become president. This had little resonance in Britain as the Tories had left the EPP and had no candidate, Labour refused to promote the candidacy of Martin Schulz and Nick Clegg actually rigged the Liberal Democrat delegation to oppose the nomination of Guy Verhofstadt because he was scared of Guy’s federalism.

The EPP got the most votes and their candidate, Jean-Claude Juncker, became president. This year the EPP has nominated German MEP Manfred Weber and the PSE has chosen Dutch Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans. ALDE has yet to decide but has announced a list of seven candidates for high office, of which the excellent Danish competition commissioner Margrethe Vestager would seem the obvious choice for president.

Rarely has a European election been as consequential as the next one will be. ALDE may do well but so may the assorted nationalists and populists. As things stand, none of us will have any effect on this election. For us, Nick Clegg, the European Union will never be the same again.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective.

WHAT'S THE RECORD OF THE LAST MAN STANDING?

Vince Cable probably did not intend to become leader in 2017, but as others fell away the job was his. How did he do, ask Ruth Coleman Taylor and Mick Taylor?

In 2017 following the second election after the coalition, Vince Cable found himself returned to parliament after a gap of just two years. It seems very likely that being party leader was not uppermost in his mind. However, within a few days, Tim Farron had resigned as Lib Dem leader, leaving 11 MPs eligible to stand, four of whom had just arrived in Westminster for the first time and one who had already stood against Farron and lost. One by one MPs ruled themselves out, leaving Vince, at 73, as the only man standing.

It says a lot about Vince that he agreed to stand at all, given how Ming Campbell had been hounded out as leader because of his age. He inherited a party that had just suffered the second worst general election result since 1970, with a greatly diminished councillor base and huge financial problems.

Vince quickly realised that the issue the party had to lead with was Brexit, because it was clear that Labour would not try to stop Brexit and that “An Exit From Brexit” was one of the party’s clear messages.

He has doggedly pursued this, ignoring the siren voices that urged a different course. At the time of writing, the outcome is not clear, but his strongly focussed campaign has brought the possibility of the Exit from Brexit tantalisingly close.

UNFORTUNATE TENDENCY

There has been an unfortunate tendency, especially amongst armchair critics writing, for example, on Lib Dem Voice, to blame Vince for the party’s lack of publicity in the media and to accuse him of focussing on Brexit to the exclusion of all else.

In reality, as regular readers of LDV and other on-line sources will know, Vince and other spokespeople have been pushing out press releases on a whole raft of policies and have had some interesting success stories such as the ‘upskirting’ Bill pioneered by Wera Hobhouse MP.

As Vince’s new booklet shows, he has made thoughtful and relevant speeches on a wide range of matters designed to raise the profile of Liberal Democrat policies. It is not the fault of Vince and his colleagues that the press and media have currently ditched coverage of political ideas in favour of documenting the titanic internecine warfare in the Labour and Tory parties, our own everyday Game of Thrones.

The quiet rebuilding of the party at local level will be one of the positive legacies of Vince’s leadership,

even if it hasn’t, as yet, started to make headlines. In Vince’s short time as leader, the party has gained thousands of new members, many of whom had never joined a political party before. The quantity of young people among these new members means that, if we can convince them to stay around, we will be a much stronger party in future.

Recent council elections suggest that Liberal Democrats are beginning to regain

public confidence and votes, as well as recovering confidence in our own ability to campaign and win. The fall-out from Brexit, especially if Labour and the Tories disintegrate as predicted, ought to be a great opportunity for our party. This is a much better place for the Liberal Democrats than seemed possible immediately after the last general election and owes a lot to Vince’s calm, focussed leadership.

Vince has also made a point of being a very visible and unifying leader, speaking at events such as the anti-Brexit march and European leaders meetings, as well as addressing dozens of regional and constituency meetings, offering local members the opportunity to share their fears and concerns with him and give him ideas to take into the melting pot of party policy.

It is perhaps unfortunate that, in recent months, Vince became somewhat obsessed with promoting movements and supporters with leadership voting rights.



For most of us, this was a major distraction from the serious task of persuading new people to join the party as members. Of course, the idea of a magic bullet that will, at a stroke, solve the party's perceived problems and bring in swathes of new people is always attractive, especially in dire circumstances, but would this idea have gained so much traction if it not been backed by the leader?

As it was, with the threat of a no-deal Brexit only days away, the spring conference in York devoted time to discussing the 'supporters' scheme' before rejecting it almost in its entirety, despite a strong show of solidarity by parliamentarians and leading party high-ups.

But what sort of a party has Vince been leading? "Think for yourself, don't follow leaders" was a long-ago Young Liberal slogan and the Liberal Democrats, past and present, seem to be a party that does not want to be led. Indeed, one of the main functions of leaders, both past and present, seems to be to act as the official repository for blame when the party ends up in a place they would prefer not to be – even when, as with Clegg and the Coalition, they cheered the leader on with a magnificent vote of confidence at the start of the adventure.

If everything falls into place and Brexit is defeated on Vince's watch, there will without doubt be immediate cheers and praise. On past performance, it will only be a matter of months – weeks? - before the usual armchair critics are telling us that this was always going to happen and that Vince should have concentrated instead on more worthy campaigns such as equality, redistribution of wealth or – from his position as leader of a tiny parliamentary party – convincing the Government to replace first past the post voting with the single transferable vote.

Barely a week before the time of writing, Vince's choice of announcing his resignation for immediately after the local elections seemed like excellent timing. The expected Brexit Day, 29 March, would have passed, and people would have had time to react to the outcome through the ballot box. But now we are faced with yet more Brexit mayhem and the first task of the new leader could well be to lead us into a general election when the voters will be heartily sick of voting and candidates and campaigners will face an uncertain and unsafe political environment.

In the past, Liberal Democrats have prided themselves on riding the shockwave of popular culture and using our skilful interpretation of movements of opinion to harvest support.

FORCES OF DARKNESS

But Britain has changed so much since the referendum in 2016. Political disagreement is now casually expressed as a death threat: any internet communication seems likely to be hacked and over-

“Vince’s brief period as leader seems likely, after some distance, to be seen by the party as a period of sensible consolidation when the chaos of Brexit made it almost impossible to gain traction for anything else”

written by the forces of deceit and darkness. If Brexit rears its head in a conversation, it can rip apart families and friendships, years of loyalty and cooperation. What message of hope can we offer to our confused, chaotic, ungovernable country and who has the courage to take the risk of being a leader? Could the leadership of our party come down yet again to the last man – or woman – standing?

Vince's final gift to the party, his Beyond Brexit booklet of essays, handed out after his final conference leader's speech, identifies many of the areas where we need to transform our policies to address

Britain's present-day problems: the Brexit-damaged economy, the fractured political system, the cash-starved education system that is failing to prepare young people for the future . . . This is not a task for a leisurely future, it is a necessity for now if we want to be contenders in the political game.

We are, as the curse has it, living in Interesting Times. One of the best ways we can assist our next leader, whomever she or he may be, will be to address our sclerotic policy development process to build on our basic beliefs and work out, efficiently and quickly, how to tackle the failing institutions of modern Britain and bring about real and positive change.

We could of course learn from our assorted political predecessors how they campaigned to repair deep social divisions and economic collapse and how they managed to regenerate Britain as a country fit for purpose.

So how will Vince's brief period as leader be seen by the history? It seems likely, after some distance, to be seen by the party as a period of sensible consolidation during the time when the chaos of Brexit made it almost impossible to gain traction for anything else. The increase in membership during Vince's watch will surely be seen as crucial to the party's future success. By the public? Around 2010, Vince was one of the most recognisable faces of the party and was well-liked and respected, but after nearly a decade his name does not seem so familiar to the fickle and forgetful voters.

Perhaps 'steady as we go' wasn't what the party wanted or thought it needed after the 2017 general election, but that was what was on offer. We should thank Vince for doing the job that no-one else was willing to do, taking the Exit From Brexit campaign into Parliament and around the country, keeping the party together and starting us on the road to recovery.

Ruth Coleman-Taylor and Mick Taylor have a long history in the party as Young Liberals, parliamentary candidates and councillors and are both are currently standing for election in Calderdale

FROM RICHES TO RAGS

Lorraine Zuleta charts Venezuela's fall from wealth and democracy to poverty and repression under its socialist government

Venezuela won the lottery with its share of natural resources but has been on an economic, social, political and humanitarian roller coaster.

This has been due to poor stewardship of resources, personal and political ambitions in conflict with the country's interests - including support for rogue states, international criminal and terrorist organisations - and the electorate falling out of love with the Government's failure to deliver promises.

Freedom, democracy and the rule of law became seriously imperilled as a result. The country is currently plunged in political, economic and humanitarian crises with people dying from violent repression, hunger, lack of medicines, water and frequent long blackouts. This has driven mass migration to neighbouring countries endangering their stability too. More than five million people have left Venezuela since 2000, with three million leaving since 2015.

Why should this be of interest to the Liberal Democrats? Look at what is happening in the UK today where the Tories are riding roughshod over voters, making a complete hash of Brexit, protecting the interests of a wealthy few, compromising the economy and jobs to keep the party together and Labour being a totally ineffective Opposition, also struggling to keep the party together.

UK PARALLELS

I see several parallels with what happened in Venezuela in the 10 years prior to Hugo Chavez's election, ushering in his Bolivarian socialist programme. Also Chavez and his successor Maduro were bedfellows with Ken Livingstone and Jeremy Corbyn and much of the Momentum rhetoric whiffs of Chavez.

Livingstone cut a dodgy deal as mayor of London with Chavez providing consultancy to Venezuela in exchange for free or cheap fuel for London buses. This was cancelled by Boris Johnson after his election as mayor.

I tell this story as a Brit who married a Venezuelan and went to Venezuela in 1974. We left a miserable UK, blighted by strikes, power cuts and a three day week to arrive in warm, sunny, vibrant Venezuela.

With basic Spanish, a maths degree and experience as a statistician I soon found a great job in the Corporacion Venezolana de Guayana (CVG) and later worked for a global consulting firm, leaving Venezuela for Spain in 1990.

I remain in regular contact with Venezuelan friends and last visited in 2013. I belong to a couple of Venezuelan lobbying groups and have spoken directly with victims of torture and unjust imprisonment, to friends and family whose loved ones died through lack of medicines and people who emigrated because day to day living became impossible.

In 1969 Venezuela was the richest country in Latin America with its buoyant oil driven economy and a thriving liberal democracy that had recovered from the woes of the Perez Jimenez dictatorship. The main parties were Accion Democratica (AD) and COPEI, centre left and centre right respectively. Presidential terms were five years and by and large the Government changed hands each time. Governments worked with local business groups, large multinationals and advisors to build and diversify the economy and consolidate the democracy.

Venezuela was a magnet for immigration of skilled and unskilled workers from Europe largely Spain, Portugal and Italy and other countries in South America searching for better opportunities and/or escaping dictatorships. Venezuela welcomed immigrants and many of these countries' largest fortunes were made there.

Venezuela boasts the world's largest proven oil reserves and the Government depends on crude exports for most of its income and foreign currency, leaving the country vulnerable to boom-bust cycles.

When oil prices rise, Government coffers overflow and when they fall it tends to get in trouble. It also has large iron ore, bauxite, gold, uranium and other mineral deposits in the Guayana region plus very cheap hydroelectric power from the Guri Dam built on the Caroni River in the 1960s.

The CVG was established to develop the Guayana region and was the holding company for the state owned companies and joint ventures (most totally nationalised in 1970s) that exploited and transformed Guayana's minerals, thus investing part of the oil revenues to diversify the economy. Ciudad Guayana's population grew from 10,000 in 1960 to 500,000 in 1975.

The oil price surge made Carlos Andres Perez's Government from 1974-79 flush with money. Personal incomes and consumption were high even in the lowest income groups. Domestic prices were high and many people saved to go for a consumer binge in Miami.

The early 1980s sharp fall in oil prices seriously impacted Government spending, exchange rates, foreign investment and consumption. From 1983, there was a three tier exchange rate mechanism with rates determined by the Central Bank/Government. The system was riddled with corruption. Families' living standards were eroded and many immigrants sold up and returned to their countries which by then had seen economic revival and/or a return to democracy.

Oil prices dipped even further by the mid 1980s with the corresponding knock on effects and the Government inevitably took the blame.

In 1988 Perez successfully ran again for president, campaigning largely on the record of "economic successes and living standards" during his first presidency. Inaugurated in January 1989, expectations were astronomical.

Soon after, Perez was forced to face reality and take the medicine prescribed by the Central Bank and

international financial institutions, aimed at reducing the country's indebtedness, implementing essentially neoliberal policies, deregulating markets and exchange rates, which immediately slashed living standards for much of the population.

On 27 February 1989, just a few weeks later in an event called El Caracazo, people took to the streets of Caracas with mass riots and looting causing many civilian casualties with estimates ranging from about 300 dead (official) to 2000+ (estimated by morgues), a large number reported missing and many were businesses devastated. Venezuela was under martial law for a few weeks until everything apparently quietened down. El Caracazo triggered my decision to leave Venezuela.

In 1992, with escalating dissatisfaction due to plummeting living standards, increasing inequality and the alleged corruption of Perez, Hugo Chavez with a group of military officers and reportedly some support from Cuba, the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, unsuccessfully attempted to seize power.

Chavez and others were tried by military courts and jailed. Later that year there was another unsuccessful coup. Finally in 1993 Perez was ousted on charges of corruption, traditional parties fell into disrepute and after significant political manoeuvring, Rafael Caldera - of COPEI, who had been president 1969-74 - was elected by a motley coalition as president. Caldera pardoned Chavez and his fellow rebels enabling them to successfully stand for election in 1998.

Chavez, was a charismatic socialist revolutionary who stood on a pledge to harness the nation's oil wealth to fund housing and welfare programmes aimed at redressing the inequality and poverty.

Rising crude prices in the 2000s enabled him to make good on some of his promises, which won popular approval. He took advantage of the quick wins to change the constitution including extensions to presidential powers and terms.

After Chavez took power, Cuba positioned itself to provide support with social programmes, security and "enforcement of the revolution" in return for financial support and free oil to replace that lost from the former Soviet Union. With this symbiosis, the Castros maintained power in Cuba in exchange for strategic and operational support to implement Chavez's programme.

After a few years, Chavez's approval ratings started to wane due to repression of opposition and dissidents, including threats, arbitrary imprisonment and torture and expropriation of their property.

There was also significant evidence of links to organised crime and terrorist groups such as the FARC and Hezbollah and that international drug cartels were provided with a safe drugs route to Europe and the US.

He also failed to address the needs and expectations of the middle class who had elected him.

By 2008 it had become apparent that, although Chavez was democratically elected, he and his cronies had hijacked the democracy, turning it into a dictatorship, applying Cuba's formula for maintaining power, hunger, repression and fear.

Chavez's Government were responsible for widespread human rights abuses and Diego Arria, Venezuelan permanent representative to the UN in the 1990s and former chair of the UN Security Council reported him to the International Criminal Court in The Hague in 2011. Chavez was elected for the last time in 2012 shortly before his death in Cuba.

Nicolas Maduro, Chavez's named successor was groomed in Cuba for months before officially taking office in April 2013. Maduro is a former bus driver, allegedly born in Cucuta, Colombia and therefore according to the constitution not eligible to be president. Lacking Chavez's charisma and with no worldly experience his presidency was questioned by a large part of the electorate from the start.

He selected his ministers from cronies and military strongmen who, with help from Cuba, would control opposition and dissent. Shortly after Maduro came to power oil prices started to plummet, a scenario for which he was ill prepared to absorb the blow.

Maduro has presided over a criminal torturous regime delivering no less than economic and humanitarian catastrophe. With hyperinflation, devaluation, scarcity of cash and change of denomination of currency the country has been brought close to bankruptcy through rampant corruption and profligate administration of resources. The Government has only been kept afloat by billions in loans from China and Russia. Inflation in 2019 is expected to hit 10m%, private business has completely collapsed and even oil and electricity are threatened by the Government's failure to maintain vital infrastructure, even in those sectors that provide the nation's wealth. Food distribution is mainly managed by the Government handing out food bags.

VIOLENT REPRESSION

There have been many peaceful demonstrations since 2013 usually meeting with violent Government repression. There was a popular consultation in 2017, including Venezuelan voters around the world, with overwhelming support for fresh free and fair elections.

There have been weak attempts at dialogue between Maduro's Government and the opposition facilitated by the Pope, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, former Spanish PM among others, all to no avail mainly because of the lack of credibility and impartiality of the 'mediators'.

Sham presidential elections were held in 2018, with Maduro claiming successful reelection, a result not accepted by Venezuela's National Assembly or 90% of the electorate and much of the international community.

Maduro is now viewed as the usurper of the presidency and Venezuela is witnessing a political standoff between the entrenched regime and Juan Guaido, the president of the National Assembly, required by the constitution in presence of a power vacuum to step in as interim president to call and organise free and fair elections.

Guaido has attended multitudinous rallies, citizens' assemblies in main cities and has visited and has the support of most Governments of liberal democracies and the Venezuelan people.

What happens next? Who knows? Guaido is in the process appointing new ambassadors and diplomats to those countries who recognise him as interim president.

The Venezuelan people are hoping and praying for the restoration of freedom and democracy in their country and are putting their faith in Juan Guaido.

Lorraine Zuleta is a former Liberal Democrat councillor in Southwark and lived in Venezuela from 1974-90

RUNNERS AND RIDERS

Who will be the next Liberal Democrat leader? Liberator assesses the contenders - some more likely than others

Now that Vince Cable has said he will stand down as leader in May, the Liberal Democrats have yet another leadership election on the horizon.

These used to be rarities but Nick Clegg's humiliation in 2015, Tim Farron's weird obsession with gay sex and Cable's stopgap status has resulted in three leadership changes in four years.

With spring conference having emphatically rejected the idea of a non-MP leader, let's look to the present parliamentary party. How do they stack up and who was raising their profile at Spring Conference in York?



* **Ed Davey**

Odds: evens

Spring Conference: 2 Fringe meetings and speaker at the Rally

An MP for 22 years (with a brief break) and former energy secretary in the Coalition with little role in its larger embarrassments. Not much doubt he could do the job but will the party want a middle aged bloke in a suit? Having not stood in previous leadership contests against Clegg, Farron or Cable, there can't be many more opportunities for Ed to throw his hat in the ring. Charisma rating: Classic identikit politician



* **Tom Brake**

Odds: 25:1

Spring Conference: 1 Fringe meeting

Mildly obscure figure but is the only MP to hold a seat since 1997. Posed topless in Men's Health in 2015 for an article on how 'fit' politicians are. Has raised his profile even further as Brexit spokesperson, at times grabbing more attention than Cable. An unlikely contender though.

Charisma rating: Brake fluid



* **Tim Farron**

Odds: 1000:1

Spring Conference: No scheduled appearances

Tried it once and didn't like it (leadership, not his more obvious problem at least as far as we know). Came with reputation as inspiring campaigner but showed little of this in the 2017 and was lucky not to lose his seat. Hard to see any route to a comeback.

Charisma rating: Gay's not the word



* **Alastair Carmichael**

Odds: 25:1

Spring Conference: 1 Fringe meeting

Holder of the only truly safe seat. Gained a reputation as something of a bully as chief whip during coalition, now seen as a safe pair of hands as chief whip. Touted as potential leadership contender before but would probably have stood by now were he interested.

Charisma rating: Whisky tasting host



* **Wera Hobhouse**

Odds: 100:1

Spring Conference: No fringe meetings
Slightly unexpected new MP for Bath, born in Germany and a former Tory councillor. From her private members bill to ban 'upskirting' to trying to save her local branch of KFC, Wera is a committed campaigner. Lacks profile to stand for leader and has shown no known interest in the role.

Charisma rating: Earnest campaigner



Layla was widely reported to be 'on manoeuvres' for the leadership which may explain the decision to reveal her arrest at the 2013 Glasgow conference for slapping her partner. Might be best advised to stick to holding her marginal seat.
Charisma rating: Excitable teacher



* **Christine Jardine**

Odds: 20:1

Spring Conference: No fringe meetings or spot at the rally but delivered a set-piece speech on the conference floor.

Christine regained Edinburgh West in 2017. A former journalist and broadcaster who has the air of not taking things too seriously, she is a commanding presence whether on the podium or on television. While Christine is not expected to stand and is little known in England, she isn't without her admirers.

Charisma rating: Mischievous, chummy neighbour



* **Jamie Stone**

Odds: 100:1

Spring Conference: No appearances
Newly elected for Caithness and Sutherland in 2017 and a long record as a local councillor. Continues the tradition started by Ronnie Fearn of the parliamentary party having at least one pantomime dame. Would get laughs but unlikely to stand.

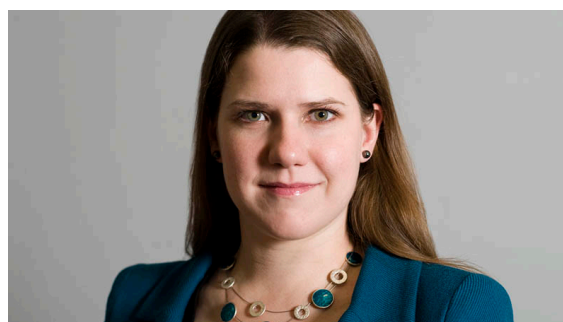
Charisma rating: McWidow Twanky



* **Norman Lamb**

Odds: 100:1

Spring Conference: 1 Fringe meeting
Few doubted Lamb could have done the job but he suffered in 2015 from close association with the Coalition and lacking Farron's (then) flair. Diligent champion of health issues and interesting backstory in having sponsored a rap artiste's career. Abstained on the bill that triggered Article 50 and unlikely to stand again.
Charisma rating: Local solicitor



* **Jo Swinson**

Odds: evens

Spring Conference: 2 Fringe meetings and speaker at the Rally
Youngish MP for 14 years (with a brief break) and a coalition minister who emerged without much mud sticking. Has the experience and a significant following. Gained coverage and plaudits recently for calling out the failings of the pairing system in parliament. May have a problem should Scotland go it alone in a second independence referendum.

Charisma rating: Determined Head Girl

* **Layla Moran**

Odds: 10:1

Spring Conference: 3 Fringe meetings
Darling of the 'Lib Dem Newbies' who was elected in 2017 and unsullied by serving in Coalition.

AND THEY'RE OFF!

With 16 candidates already in the field do the Democrats have any hope of finding someone who can beat Donald Trump asks James R Davidson

We're barely half-way through March, and the fight for the Democratic nomination for US president in 2020 is well underway. The number of declared candidates - 16 - is one of the largest in history, and the number looks likely to continue expanding.

Nearly all of the declared candidates are running on similar platforms: Medicare for all, a green new deal, criminal justice reform, expanding voting rights, tackling income inequality.

To the chagrin of policy wonks everywhere, the race will probably focus on charisma, biography, fundraising, and media prowess instead of policy differences and ideological distinction. Can you hear the collective groan?

Twenty-three potential candidates is a staggering number, leaving many to contemplate a scenario similar to the 2016, when Republicans nominated Donald Trump due to a heavily splintered field (with only 17 candidates) that prevented a majority of voters from coalescing around a candidate who wasn't completely insane.

Given this, the Democratic nominee will be the candidate with high name recognition who can captivate American media, thereby depriving their competitors of enough oxygen to get their campaigns out of the single-digits.

While this dynamic doesn't facilitate nuanced discussion around complex policy proposals that would drastically change the American economy, it is helpful for taking on Trump.

SHEER IDIocy

Media coverage propelled Trump to the presidency. Bombast and sheer idiocy garnered Trump an estimated \$5bn in free advertising throughout the entire 2016 presidential cycle. To put that number into perspective, Hillary Clinton ran a \$1.2bn campaign.

During the Republican primary, Trump was able to rack up delegates by winning with large pluralities over a highly divided field, resulting in a Trump victory before anti-Trump Republicans could coalesce around a single non-Trump candidate.

The 2020 Democratic primary is increasingly likely to face a similar predicament - though with far less severe consequences. Despite voters' desire for a fresh face to take on Trump, name recognition appears to be a major factor in who's winning in the polls, at least for now. A recent Iowa poll of 401 likely Democratic caucus-goers (Des Moines Register/CNN/Mediacom) showed Joe Biden at 27%, Bernie Sanders 25%, Elizabeth Warren 9 %, Kamala Harris 7% and the rest of the candidates with single-digit showings of 5% or under.

With the two most well-known candidates winning

52% of likely caucus-goer support in a race with 16 declared candidates, name recognition is a powerful force.

However, this narrative is complicated when you compare these poll numbers with 2016 Iowa caucus results. Sanders 'lost' the caucus to Clinton in what was essentially a tie. Three years later, half of Sanders' supporters are shopping around for another option. Joe Biden faces a similar dynamic by virtue of being the Hillary of the 2020 field - an establishment figure with near 100% name recognition and a progressive enough record that most Democrats or Democratic-leaning voters can go along with. Nearly half of voters seem to be taking a wait-and-see attitude, the operative word being see.

And, so, that leads to the real question of 2020: will there be a breakthrough candidate that can challenge Biden's and Sanders' dominance?

Fortunately, the Democratic nomination system doesn't have the feature that allowed Trump to dominate the delegate game: winner-takes-all states. With all states allocating Democratic convention delegates proportionately, Democrats have more time to explore their options thoroughly before needing to settle on a preferred candidate.

The two most-obvious challengers to Biden and Sanders are Senator Kamala Harris and former Representative Beto O'Rourke.

Black voters made up 25% of the Democratic primary electorate in 2016, and in 2018 Democrats wrestled back control of the US House of Representatives by running the most diverse class of candidates in history.

If Harris - a bi-racial US senator running on her record as a 'progressive prosecutor' during her tenure as California's attorney general - can quickly consolidate support from black Democratic primary voters and others looking for racial and gender diversity on the 2020 ticket, she'll be in an enviable position to challenge Biden and Sanders.

O'Rourke, a former US Representative from Texas best known for barely losing a 2018 Senate race in that deeply-conservative state, announced his candidacy for president on 14 March and raised more than \$6m in 24 hours.

He became a Democratic cult figure during his 2018 Senate race, attracting support from all over the country (and building a national donor base), with viral campaign videos and support from Democrats across the ideological spectrum.

The liberal media darling's youth (he's 46), charisma, and ability to turn virtually any policy discussion into an easily-digestible soundbite often garner him comparison to President Obama. Republicans have already identified O'Rourke as a serious challenge to Trump. The Republican National Committee tweeted

his 1998 'driving under influence' mugshot on St. Patrick's Day.

It's impossible to predict who will win the nomination at this stage in the race - the first debates are scheduled for June - but it's pretty safe to assume that a contested Democratic National Committee convention is possible.

If no one has a majority of delegates going into the convention next summer, the nominee will be selected through backroom deals and delegate wrangling. Would a Biden-Harris ticket win over enough delegates to nab the nomination? Sanders-Kamala? O'Rourke-Kamala or vice-versa? At this point, more than a year out from the convention, these are the most obvious outcomes. And with Democrats wanting a diverse ticket that truly presents the American people, Harris is an obvious choice for anyone's vice president.

Whatever the Democratic ticket (Gillibrand-Buttigieg, anyone?), the question remains: how do they beat Trump?

Clinton's 2016 loss is often pinned on one of a couple of factors, depending on who you ask and which direction they want to see party move in.

The first is that Democrats lost many blue-collar, white voters in the industrial Midwest. This exodus was frighteningly large. In 2012, Obama won Iowa by approximately 6%. Trump took that state by a 10% margin in 2016 - a net loss of 15 points. Iowa, which has been a decidedly 'purple state' for decades, was suddenly redder than Texas. This dynamic was also seen in Ohio.

The second is that in many reliably Democratic-leaning states, notably Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin, in addition to losing the blue-collar vote, there was lower-than-expected turnout of urban voters.

The seeming-inevitability of Clinton's win, along with the Department of Justice's last-minute reopening of the investigation into her emails and a milquetoast running mate in Tim Kane, hurt turnout among important Democratic voters. This fatal combination allowed Trump to win those states by thousands of votes, handing him an Electoral College victory while losing the popular vote by approximately 2,864,974 votes (I'm clearly not bitter).

The key to a Democratic victory in 2020 will be to adopt a strategy that simultaneously addresses both these challenges - running a ticket that appeals to both the blue-collar, white voters who have historically been Democrat's bread-and-butter, while also embracing the party's future as increasing young and diverse. This balancing act is crucial for the party's chances of winning the Electoral College in 2020 and preventing a Democratic civil war for the party's future, the obvious outcome of a 2020 loss.

WORKING CLASS CONCERNS

The general consensus is that Sanders and Biden are probably the best options for courting voters with working class concerns, and O'Rourke will do well with this demographic as well. Though they speak to that voter in different ways, all three are much more palatable to those who defected to Trump in the last presidential cycle than Clinton was.

Harris, a woman of colour with strong experience and a progressive agenda, is the most obvious choice for Democratic primary voters looking for a candidate that speaks to the party's diversity. She has the

sizzle factor needed to energise the urban, young, left-leaning voters as well as communities of colour around the country, which would come in handy at the top or the bottom of the ticket. If she's not the presidential nominee, she's at the top of everyone's vice-presidential shortlist.

The presidential candidates who could weave the two groups together most seamlessly might be Biden and O'Rourke.

Biden's eight years in the Obama White House have made him a strong candidate with black voters in the south, including strong support for him in South Carolina (the third primary state, after Iowa and New Hampshire). But Biden will also have to face the more questionable aspects of his record on issues of race: his opposition to busing in the 70s, his mishandling of the Anita Hill testimony in 1991, and his support of the Bill Clinton crime bill in 1994. Will his support from black voters stand up to the litigation of his long voting record?

As for O'Rourke, his near win in the 2018 Texas Senate race was largely fuelled by strong support and turnout from voters of colour. It was also a rebuke of the Democratic Party and its refusal to commit serious resources to changing the electoral makeup of this majority-minority state.

Demographically, Texas isn't so different from California, and O'Rourke demonstrated that a combination of demographic shifts in the state, along with serious financial investment from Democrats, could turn Texas blue in the very near future. Perhaps he could carry the state and its 37 Electoral College votes for Democrats in 2020, all but assuring the downfall of Trump.

In 2016, Trump's greatest advantage was his ability to inflame the right groups of people and dominate the news cycle (remember that free \$5bn?). For Democrats to come out on top next year, we need a candidate who can play that media game and garner that type of media attention.

Biden, who is basically the country's goofy, endearing uncle, could play this game well if he can avoid any serious self-inflicted wounds. A self-professed "gaffe machine", you never quite know what Biden is going to say.

If he has the discipline to stay interesting, be funny, say slightly weird things (remember the 'big fucking deal' comment?), without getting into unforced-error territory, this dynamic could certainly work for him in a positive way. If not, he could declare in April and be done by June, a victim of his own spontaneity.

If Biden's your goofy uncle, Sanders is the lovable grouch, not afraid to pull a punch, and the media would love a Sanders v Trump slugfest. O'Rourke is beloved by the media, and Harris, who serves on the Senate Judiciary committee, has garnered a lot of media attention with her expert questioning of judicial nominees.

If Democrats can weave back together the Obama coalition: white working-class voters, the youth, and voters of colour; and take back the reins in the media cycle from a sitting US President, it's game over for Trump. But they must do both, or it'll be four more years of agony under the Orange One.

James R Davidson is an Iowa Democratic Party activist

PORN BAFFLES THE TORIES

The Government's bid to stop minors accessing porn sites is technologically illiterate and bound to fail, says Natasha Chapman

From 1 April this year, anyone in the UK wishing to view online pornography will first have to verify their age, likely using their credit card, passport and/or driving licence (depending on the software being used by the website that they are trying to access). Some age verification systems may also include a pass which can be bought from local newsagents - I can just imagine effectively announcing to Mrs Joshi at the corner shop my intention to watch smut later when I pop in to buy energy drinks and crisps.

This restriction on access to online porn has been pursued by the Conservative government since 2015, motivated by the wish to prevent those under the age of 18 from watching it.

This largely came about due to a 2015 report by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), in which it claimed that a tenth of 12 and 13 year olds were addicted to porn, a fifth of young people had been upset or shocked by pornographic images that they had seen and that 12% of young people had made a sexually explicit video.

These figures are undeniably hard-hitting and worrying. They are also very likely to be false. These findings, far from being the result of a scientific study (as the NSPCC appeared to be passing them off as), were obtained through the use of an online market research company called OnePoll, a company that pays people short of cash to fill out their surveys 10p a go. The survey that produced the report's findings consisted of 11 questions and requested that parents get their children to answer them.

There is absolutely no way of knowing how, presumably, being in the same room as their parents would have affected the answers given by children, or how many of the respondents to the survey even were children.

As these measures have come from the same technologically illiterate government that dreamt up the Snoopers Charter, it should be of no surprise to anyone that as well as being authoritarian and heavy-handed, they are completely ineffectual. As this 'porn ban' is only in effect in the UK, it is very easy to bypass with the use of a virtual private network (VPN), which allows the user to fake their geo-location.

Despite this, many worries abound regarding privacy and are not unfounded. One of the main arbiters of age verification will be porn industry giant Mindgeek, the parent company of major online porn sites Pornhub, Youporn and Brazzers, which has created software called AgeID that it intends to sell the use of to other adult websites.

AgeID's now updated privacy policy stated that the company could collect the "names, addresses, dates of birth, and browsing data" of users. It also states

that the privacy policy can be updated at any time, meaning that it would be very easy for it to revert to this and create a database linking people's real names, identifying information and their browsing habits. I don't feel that I should have to explain why this is a potentially dangerous prospect.

Putting these restrictions in place also has the potential to harm the independent and niche porn producers who have been transforming the adult industry in recent years.

Increasingly, adult entertainers have been creating their own content and finding means to market and sell it more directly to their audiences and thereby cutting out the need for potentially abusive and exploitative bosses and working conditions.

Age-verification technology won't be cheap, and if independent performers find their websites are blocked without it their source of income will disappear and they will likely have to go and find a mainstream porn company (such as one of those owned by Mindgeek) to work for, when many of them have enjoyed the freedom of working only for themselves until now.

Protecting children is a laudable aim, but these measures fail to do that. Forcing UK broadband providers to block adult websites without age verification technology achieves nothing that couldn't already be done at home by parents with child safety blockers.

Like many things restricted from children, such as cigarettes and alcohol, simply banning access to them doesn't actually work.

What does work is extensive sex education including important concepts such as consent and healthy relationships, and talking to children about these issues frankly, honestly and without shame.

Natasha Chapman is chair of Lincoln, Sleaford and North Hykeham Liberal Democrats

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A GAP IN THE CLASSROOM

Claire Tyler finds poor early years provision has created regional attainment gaps for school pupils

There is a growing realisation that something must be done to kick-start social mobility. If we do nothing, it will take more than 40 years to close the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged children and their better-off classmates.

Pupils from disadvantaged areas lag behind their classmates by about half a grade per subject at GCSE, affecting their lifelong employment prospects and social mobility. And this gap varies wildly across the country. While London is pulling ahead in raising attainment, other areas such as Somerset and Blackpool are left behind. If we want to build a fairer society where all are socially mobile, we must close this attainment gap, and fast.

For the last seven years I have co-chaired the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility. At the end of February, it launched its report Closing the Regional Attainment Gap. Our year-long enquiry examined the problems causing the gap and proposed solutions. We found that good teaching is a key driver of social mobility – teachers are with their students for many hours every day and shape the direction that their life takes.

We also found that inequality abounds during nursery and school years. It is well established that the single greatest point of leverage for social mobility is between the ages of zero and three. But the stark reality is that for many children, early-years education is not up to scratch. Many staff lack the necessary training to help children develop the skills they need to thrive, with one-third of early years staff lacking English and maths GCSEs. This matters because poor language skills teaching in early years can affect children's chances later in life - a child with poor vocabulary aged five is more than twice as likely than others to be unemployed aged 34.

Without high-quality early years education, children from disadvantaged backgrounds arrive at school less prepared than their more affluent classmates. It is worrying that many children from disadvantaged areas simply aren't getting the good quality teaching they need. On average, nearly 10% of teachers in the most disadvantaged schools are not appropriately qualified. This is most stark in the STEM subjects - a young person in a disadvantaged school is 22% less likely to be taught physics by someone with a degree in the subject. This is troubling given the growing consensus that deep knowledge of a subject is essential for good teaching.

Even when disadvantaged schools recruit good teachers, they often are not there for very long. According to the evidence we received, the most disadvantaged schools face the highest staff turnover rates. This becomes a vicious circle – schools experience a teacher shortage due to high turnover. They then recruit inexperienced staff, who go into the job with the best of intentions but many leave

when faced by the rising pressures in disadvantaged schools, where teachers face long working hours, low job satisfaction, inadequate resources and the impact of pupil's home lives inevitably spilling into the classroom.

These pressures are magnified by acute funding problems. Our evidence showed many schools lack the financial support for even their basic duties. This is compounded by the impact of austerity, especially the cuts to social services. Since 2010, more than £2.4bn has been cut from central government funding for local authority children's services. The number of children's centres, which once provided vital support, has fallen by a third, with schools often stepping in to support disadvantaged pupils and their families.

According to the Association of Schools and College Leaders, for many schools, this has meant washing some pupils' uniforms and giving food parcels to their families. As a result, raising attainment gets crowded out by more immediate priorities. Without serious investment, schools will not have the resources to improve social mobility.

Closing the Regional Attainment Gap makes it clear that we need to urgently improve funding, early years provision and teacher recruitment to have any hope of closing the regional attainment gap. The report contains recommendations to make this happen.

We need to ringfence funding for children's centres to ensure they have the resources needed and to move towards qualified teaching status to early years staff, along with increased pay, conditions and status. To ensure high-quality teaching that follows the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, OFSTED should re-establish its inspection programme of nurseries and children's centres. Better teaching before they start school will help children be school ready from the moment they set foot in the classroom.

When it comes to improving teaching in schools, we need to encourage the best teachers to work in the most disadvantaged schools.

Offering more generous financial incentives would be a good start. However, retaining teachers is not all about the money. They also need support networks, including access to wellbeing programmes, better flexible working and plenty of continuing professional development. By taking these steps, we can ensure that enough teachers are recruited in disadvantaged areas and stay there.

Our overarching recommendation is that by redesigning the pupil premium as a 'social mobility premium', we can encourage schools to invest in initiatives designed to improve social mobility.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat peer and Co-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility

FROM THE TOILETS OF HISTORY

The TIGgers and Liberal Democrats may want to do deals - there's a textbook example from 1981 of how not to do this, says Mark Smulian

I guess it's rare for even locally significant political events to take place in a lavatory.

That though happened in Tower Hamlets at the 1983 general election as a delegation from the SDP retired to the only private space in the flat where a meeting was being held to consider the proposition put by Liberal agent Barrie Duffy: "My candidates are either going to stand as 'Liberal Alliance' or 'Liberal'. Now which is it?"

Duffy correctly sensed that the SDP brand would unproductively muddy the waters in two constituencies where they had no presence and the Liberal one was then high profile.

But the only reason this issue arose was that the Liberals and SDP had decided to divide the country's constituencies between them - an undertaking fraught with avoidable problems.

When considering what to do about The Independent Group - assuming it becomes a party - Vince Cable, or whoever is leader by then, should closely study David Steel's actions in the early 1980s with the SDP, and then do the opposite.

There has been much made of comparisons between the SDP and The Independent Group and some will waken unwelcome memories among Liberals of a certain vintage.

The SDP sprang forth as a full-formed party and with a fairly clear ideology based on that of the Labour governments of the 1960s - memorably described by Ralf Dahrendorf as offering voters "a better yesterday".

By contrast The Independent Group was not a party at its outset and beyond opposing Brexit has committed itself to only faint generalities.

That though hasn't stopped a number of Lib Dems who ought to know better from calling for immediate accommodation with The Independent Group - even total merger.

FAINTHEARTED, SELF-HATING

I suppose it's to a degree reassuring in an uncertain world that we can still count on one thing not to change - the existence of fainthearted, self-hating Liberals ready to collapse in a heap at the first sign of a new party forming in 'the centre'.

It's since become well-known that David Steel rejected the idea that Roy Jenkins and his associates should join the Liberal party and instead encouraged him to form his own party that would work in alliance with it.

Steel always gave the impression of deeply disliking most of the party he led, and presumably thought Jenkins might oblige by forming a more congenial one that he could eventually take over.

Whatever the precise motive, in this approach lay the design flaw in the whole alliance project and which ultimately brought it down.

No-one has suggested that The Independent Group wish to join the Lib Dems, but we can at least avoid repeating errors.

The essential feature of a political party is that it has to have some reason to exist, to espouse a philosophy or cause that otherwise is not heard.

Thus if the SDP was the same as the Liberal party there was no point in it existing. But if it wasn't the same, it would inevitably come into conflict with the Liberals, which is what happened.

Once the SDP was a separate party its members, perfectly reasonably, expected it to develop a view of society, policies and programme for government that was distinctly its own.

And since it operated on overlapping political terrain, it could do this only by differentiating itself from the Liberals since they were the only party with which voters were likely to confuse the SDP - if you were a committed Thatcherite or socialist you had other parties to vote for.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man. David Owen, a politician possessing no liberal instincts, became SDP leader and took his party off in a direction of Thatcherite economics and gung-ho militarism, always sounding as though he couldn't discuss a nuclear weapon without wishing to use it.

Relations between the two parties duly soured, but even if the Liberals had had a less spineless leader than Steel there would have been an inevitable difficulty - if the Liberal leader was a midwife at the SDP's birth he could hardly complain when it turned into a stropy adolescent as it grew.

The problem lay in two parties being in such close alignment that they divided up every constituency between them, ran on a joint manifesto and tried to operate in public with two leaders pretending they were of one mind when it was obvious they were not.

The idea that Steel and Owen could in 1987 have harmoniously headed a coherent government remains among the least credible propositions ever put before UK voters, and got the answer it deserved. The alliance had, inevitably, become incoherent through its equally inevitable internal tensions.

So that's one approach not to repeat with The Independent Group. But since no one in the Lib Dems can stop other people forming political parties that at last in part compete with them, what should the response be to this group?

The first thing is to ignore the self-hating, confidence-lacking liberals - the sort of people who promptly

deferred to them when SDP grandees said, in terms: "Step aside amateurs, some real politicians have come along to show you how to do it."

Little suggests any of The Independent Group have brought a significant part of their local party machines over with them. They may be able to pay for a costly 'air war' but with their old parties gunning for them and formidably better equipped on the ground, they will have difficulty. The SDP never grasped how much local work is needed in third party politics.

It follows from this that The Independent Group for all its bluster needs the Lib Dems a great deal more than we need it.

There might be an opportunity to simply agree to keep out of each other's way where it matters, and the local pacts with the Green party in Richmond and Brighton point a way forward that wasn't there in 1983.

I admit that I don't know the local circumstances, but if some deal were done between incumbent MPs and Lib Dems in Totnes and South Cambridgeshire that would take care of the only places, so far, where the two appear in real contention at parliamentary level.

There is little reason for The Independent Group to try to organise in seats that are held or targeted by the Lib Dems (and little reason for anyone sympathetic there to join them rather than the Lib Dems).

Deals could be left to local decisions. No one thought it odd, or worthy of condemnation on either side, that the Lib Dems and Greens stood down for each other in some seats but not in others.

These are different parties with different goals who may have in enough in common to pragmatically strike deals in some seats.

Back in 1981 the SDP said it wanted to contest half the seats. This was plainly a negotiating gambit but Steel and his pusillanimous coterie - not for the last time - abased themselves immediately and offered them seats in which the Liberals had a strong presence and established candidates. The anger and resentment caused festered for years.

There should not therefore be any repeat the Liberal SDP Alliance's fundamental error of trying to pretend they were simultaneously separate and not - offering voters as a result a baffling combination of different names, different leaders, but the same manifesto and policies.

It's true that the novelty of The Independent Group may seduce some large donors allowing it to run an attention-grabbing 'air war'.

So what? In seats where the Lib Dems and Independent Group have reached deals this may be beneficial, in seats neither is seriously contesting it doesn't matter, and if either goes onto the other's territory there will be obvious mutually assured destruction.

Do we want to help the TIGgers at all? Perfectly valid questions have though been raised about whether anyone in it is any kind of liberal.

Probably few if any are. Are they though individually

"Back in 1981 the SDP said it wanted to contest half the seats. The anger and resentment caused festered for years"

appalling enough to oppose?

The SDP had 28 MPs defect to it. Some remain as active Lib Dems, some others were OK and not a few were the worst kind of Labourite machine deadbeats for whom the Liberals should never have stood down (and indeed in Liverpool Broadgreen and Hackney South did not).

If there is a snap election The Independent Group will not be prepared for it and

will be hard put to do more than defend what it holds.

If there isn't, let's see who it signs up, what it says it stands for and what degree of common ground there is before leaping feet first into formal deals as some people have recommended.

GUT AUTHORITARIANISM

The dominance of Blair-era ex-Labour MPs is not very hopeful. The gut authoritarianism of 'moderate' Labour is not now often recalled, with its full panoply of identity cards, 90 days' detention without trial and people being arrested for photographing trains in public places. It wouldn't entirely surprise me if the ex-Tories turned out to have more liberal instincts than the ex-Labour members.

If we're not tied into a national carve-up any standing down can be left to local decisions by Lib Dems who know the TIGger MP concerned, know their own local strengths and who will be the people who have to make any deal work.

If the MP concerned is someone who was probably in the wrong previous party all along then local discretion might mean the Lib Dems can work with them.

But if they are an heir to the succession of authoritarian scumbags who Labour had as home secretaries (think Jack Straw and John Reid) then no, and no Lib Dem leader should arm twist local parties to stand down because they've entered an unwise national pact without thinking through how it works on the ground.

Just before the SDP was formed the Liberal party's London region was taken over by radicals led by former Liberator Collective member Colin Darracott.

As the Liberal Assembly met in Llandudno to debate forming the alliance, London put up an amendment that whole thing should be delayed until we had been able to get the political measure of the SDP, see what it would be like, what we were potentially attaching ourselves to and whether we liked the idea.

In the prevailing Nuremberg rally-like atmosphere the London amendment of course got nowhere.

As it was the alliance was formed while the SDP was in its first flush of novelty and flash-in-the-pan 50% poll ratings and the Liberal leadership utterly lost its nerve.

The rest is history, and we should be highly selective about which parts get repeated.

Mark Smulian is a member of the Liberator Collective

OF CATCHFARTERS AND VIRTUECRATS

A new Social Liberal Forum book shows why the problem with Labour is lack of radicalism and how Lib Dems should fill the gap. Iain Brodie Browne explains

On every side you hear that the political and economic consensus has collapsed. All political parties drank deeply at the well that contained the toxic potion that induces austerity. Labour did not sup with a longer spoon. The question we must now confront is not about the past but rather how we rebuild a progressive politics that can capture the imagination and the allegiance of this generation and build the better society we crave.

The Social Liberal Forum's (SLF) aim and purpose is to lead that debate. We caught a glimpse of how that may be possible at the fringe meeting in York when we launched a new book: *Am I a Liberal?*

It includes an essay by Keynes alongside a new companion essay by Ian Kearns. Ian is a recent convert from the Labour Party and a former leading light in the IPPR think tank. The room was buzzing with ideas. Ian's essay laid out an ambitious liberal vision and displayed a grasp of strategic and tactical awareness when he asserted:

"I do not believe, as a matter of basic disposition, that we can or should seek to meet these challenges of our circumstance by appeals to moderation. To define ourselves as moderates is in my view a mistake. It positions us primarily by reference to the extremists we are against rather than the great causes we are for; it implies a belief that small changes to the economic and political orthodoxies of the last twenty years will be good enough when, like Keynes, we must think in much more radical and ambitious terms than that; and it strips our politics of the emotional power that a commitment to fundamental liberal principles has engendered in other periods of our history and ought to be able to engender again."

VISIONARY COMMITMENT

Among the key proposals in the book was a "visionary commitment to making this the best educated country on the planet in ten years", echoing the successful political approach of our Social Liberal colleagues in the Netherlands D66, whose revival was built around that proposition.

Who can doubt that "we will not dig the future economic, social and cultural wealth of this country out of the ground but must cultivate it in the minds of our people".

Tony Greaves reminded us in *Liberator* 394 that the preamble to our constitution commits Liberals to the widest possible distribution of wealth. Now is the time to make concrete proposals to fulfil that commitment. Kearns advocated a 'universal citizen endowment' to be given to everyone on reaching adulthood.

It is a sign of how timid the left has become that there has been no reform of our inheritance taxation and avoidance is widespread. Liberals have for generations argued that the person receiving a bequest should be taxed as opposed to the estate of the deceased as an incentive to wider distribution. But this proposal takes that idea much further. Other ideas include universal basic income, sovereign wealth funds, and an updated version of the long held Liberal ideas of workers' ownership. These ideas are discussed in the SLF's book 'Four Go in Search of Big Ideas' in an essay by Stuart White which is required reading for all those interested in this important debate.

When John MacDonnell published his proposals for an Inclusive Ownership Fund I was reminded that Jo Grimond in his advocacy of realignment of the left argued that "there might be a bridge between Socialism and the Liberal policy of co-ownership in industry through a type of syndicalism coupled with a nonconformist outlook such as was propounded on many issues by George Orwell".

Regrettably this was not achieved in Jo's lifetime and the intense tribalism of Labour activists makes it hard to envisage today- and that is before we get to the detail of MacDonnell's policy.

It is worth pausing for a moment to unpack MacDonnell's puny proposals and contrast them with our ambitions. Firstly, their scope is very limited and only affects 11% of the workforce, many of whom already have a better deal under the employee ownership proposals Vince Cable and others put in place. MacDonnell's plan is for new shares to be issued to employees but there would be a cap on the dividend paid to workers of £500 - everything in excess of that, £2bn-plus, would go to the Treasury. If the full dividend was paid to the employee the average payout would be around £14,000 a year.

You can clearly see that Labour's proposals are in favour of the state rather than the worker. £500, although welcome, is not going to have a transformative impact on people's lives or significantly redistribute ownership.

When set beside proposals made by Grimond, Steel and Ashdown or those of the social liberal Nobel Prize winning economist James Meade, the most charitable thing that can be said is that they are exceedingly modest.

In many ways the Inclusive Ownership Fund typifies the dilemma we have with Labour. In short; they are not as radical as they think they are. It was no surprise to read in Kearns' essay that he left the Labour Party "not because it is too radical but because it isn't radical enough". He goes on to give

some examples to back up his assertion.

In my mind I have divided the Labour coalition into three elements: the catchfarters, virtuecrats and those decent folks who joined and are bemused by what they found. Let us begin with the virtuecrats, they make up a significant proportion of the recently recruited activists. They are people who are convinced of their moral superiority and believe everyone else is motivated by malice. In my experience they talk grandly of dividing time between 'before JC' and 'post JC'.

And yet, as Kearns notes "Labour's claims to represent the poor are in tatters" not least because of its divisions and deceit over Brexit. All the analysis confirms that if Brexit goes ahead, it will be the poor and most vulnerable in our society who will pay the price. The economy will be in post-Brexit freefall and Labour will not have the money to pay for the investment needed to repair the damage.

It is worth quoting Kearns further on the contradictions inherent in the virtuecrats' position: "In the last few months Labour has supported Tory tax cuts for the rich while the benefits freeze stays in place for the poor. The central plank of Labour's 2017 election manifesto, moreover, and by far the biggest spending commitment in it, was the £11.2bn promised to abolish student fees, a move that would mostly help children from wealthier families because they are the ones most likely to make it to university.

"In that same manifesto, Labour failed to commit to reverse the closures of Sure Start centres that exist to help the most disadvantaged among the young and refused to reverse all the Tory government's welfare cuts. Corbyn's Labour, it is now clear, is committed to pouring money into the pockets of the middle class while screwing the poor if that's what it takes to get elected."

I am sure we can all add to the list. In a recent Sefton council debate Labour's virtuecrats were pouring out their vitriol on to the wicked Liberals over the roll out of Universal Credit. My colleague John Pugh calmly intervened to point out that in parliament he had opposed the roll out of UC and tax cuts for the wealthiest along with other Lib Dem MPs, only to find Labour did not join them in the anti lobby.

SUBMISSIVE SUBORDINATE

What of the catchfarters? A catchfarter, a useful 18th century word, describes one who is a "a lackey, a particularly submissive subordinate willing to follow so closely behind one's superior as to position themselves in range of breaking wind".

You can find them in the shadow cabinet. They supported Blair with enthusiasm equal to that which they now proclaim for Corbyn. Many of them are surprised to be there. They owe their unexpected inclusion to the unwillingness of others, brighter and better, who refuse to serve. They supported Blair over Iraq, 90 days imprisonment without trial, identity

"The Inclusive Ownership Fund typifies the dilemma we have with Labour. In short; they are not as radical as they think they are"

cards, the light touch regulation of the banks and now they embrace Corbyn's Brexit facilitating strategy.

The SLF selected the Keynes essay because in it he faced up to the challenges from which the party was hiding. Keynes was writing against the backdrop of the two general elections of 1923 and 1924. In 1923 the old Liberal coalition had come back together to defend free trade, temperance and land reform. It was the last

hurrah for those certainties. The Liberal party polled almost 30% of the vote and returned 158 MPs.

By the election of 1924 the decline had set in with the party falling to 62 MPs. In 1925 Keynes addressed the Liberal Summer School telling them that the old certainties would not provide the basis of a revival. In a passage beloved by radicals and particularly Young Liberals ever since he wrote: "Half the copybook wisdom of our statesmen is based on assumptions which were at one time true, or partly true, but are now less and less true day by day. We have to invent new wisdom for a new age. And in the meantime we must, if we are to do any good, appear unorthodox, troublesome, dangerous, disobedient to them that begat us."

By 1928 inspired by Keynes and Seebohm Rowntree the party had drawn up new ideas culminating in the Yellow Book and the ground-breaking 1929 manifesto We Can Conquer Unemployment.

Fast forward to 2019. Once again, we are faced with a country in an economic and constitution crisis. In this new age we need a new wisdom and none of the established political parties or leaders seem able to provide it. People point out that with such a shambolic Tory government the opinion polls still show them with 10 points ahead of the lacklustre Corbyn Labour party. At almost every juncture since World War 2 when the country has faced a Tory government in crisis the Liberal party has surged. As I write, we are languishing around 8-10% in the polls and the new so-called Independent entity isn't doing very well either.

This can be a progressive century but only if we can seize the initiative and present our radical case.

David Marquand identified a tradition in British politics which is inspired by "republican self-respect as opposed to monarchical servility, engaged civic activity versus slothful private apathy, and government by challenge and discussion rather than deference or conformism."

That is at the heart of our political creed. We stand for a decentralised participatory democracy in sharp contrast to socialist paternalists, neo-liberals and Tory nationalists.

Iain Brodie Browne is chair of the Social Liberal Forum and a Liberal Democrat councillor in Sefton

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

The Liberal Democrat Federal Board's adoption without consultation of a definition of Islamophobia leaves some women, LGBT+ people and dissident Muslims unable to answer their critics, says Toby Keynes

On 2 March, the Liberal Democrat Federal Board unilaterally agreed the following definition of Islamophobia, at the request of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims and Baroness Warsi:

“We recommend the adoption of the following definition following widespread consultation with academics, lawyers, local and nationally elected officials, Muslim organisations, activists, campaigners, and local Muslim communities:

“Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type or racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.”

There was certainly no “widespread consultation”, or even warning of the proposal, within the party prior to this decision.

I and other members of the Humanists and Secularists Liberal Democrat committee first learned of it only three days beforehand – far too late for concerns to be raised and taken up effectively with Federal Board members.

The decision also managed to pre-empt the policy working group on the nature of public debate, which is just kicking off with a remit including “extremely hostile online behaviour in debating public issues, especially towards minority groups” and “what a liberal approach to promoting open and fair public discussion and debate should be in these circumstances”?

That group could still provide an appropriate vehicle for the party to have a full, open and honest debate about how we should cope with anti-Muslim prejudice and behaviour, both within the party and in society, so that the party membership can reconsider this decision.

IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS

Meanwhile, the decision has immediate implications within the party because it will inevitably work its way into the party's codes of conduct and because it was intended to put pressure on the Home Affairs Committee's current inquiry into Islamophobia, to adopt the term and definition and incorporate them into government regulations and legal codes.

But why does there need to be a debate?

Surely all liberals oppose anti-Muslim bigotry and hatred, whatever form it takes – especially after the appalling atrocity in Christchurch.

The New Zealand attack should be unequivocally condemned by every civilised person. We should be united in our opposition to this and other acts of bigotry directed against Muslims.

But the fundamental problem here is that the word

‘Islamophobia’ is not just concerned with identifying anti-Muslim abuse and bigotry; rather, it conflates this with criticism of Islam and Islamic practices.

This is reflected in almost every definition of Islamophobia, and they often start from the presumption that hostility towards Islamic practices leads to hostility towards Muslims, so that hostility towards an Islamic practice becomes an attack on Muslims.

For example: “A useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and, therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims” (Runnymede Trust, 1997).”

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition clearly tries to avoid referring to Islam or Islamism, by inventing its own term: “expressions of Muslimness” – but this still actually means Islamic beliefs and practices.

And it still manages to avoid referring to the main victims of anti-Muslim bigotry: Muslims themselves.

Because the definition, like the term, starts from defending Islamic identity, beliefs and practices, rather than from defending Muslims as people, it comes into direct conflict with the rights and freedoms of those groups that are subject to abuse and discrimination within Muslim communities and households that practice oppressive and religiously conservative forms of Islam.

While many Muslim communities and households may be highly liberal, others may express their beliefs through controlling and abusive practices directed against women, LGBT+ people, ex-Muslims and indeed other Muslim groups.

We may argue that such beliefs are not truly Islamic, that they are aberrations; but many millions of Muslims around the world see these as an essential expression of Islam, and of their Muslim identities.

This presents us with a fundamental problem, if we seek to defend “expressions of Muslimness” it requires us to define what is Islamic, and therefore worthy of protection, and what is not.

There is lively disagreement – to put it mildly – within and among different Muslim groups about what it means to be a Muslim, and what practices are Muslim. For us to pronounce on what is or is not a valid expression of Muslimness would be supreme arrogance.

Anyway, it should be immaterial whether a person's beliefs are held by themselves alone or by billions of people around the world, and whether their beliefs are defined by some supposed authority as Muslim or not – freedom of religion or belief, and of expression, should be exactly the same whether they are or are not “truly

Muslim”.

In any case, they cannot override the rights of women, of LGBT+ people, ex-Muslims and those living in repressive, religiously conservative communities and households.

It is people who have rights, and those peoples’ rights that need to be defended, including the rights of freedom of religion or belief and of expression, where these do not conflict with or inhibit the rights and freedoms of others.

Where a cultural or religious practice comes into conflict with the rights and freedoms of other people, those peoples’ rights and freedoms must always have primacy.

Where Muslims are attacked, abused or discriminated against for seeking to express their beliefs and their customs, what matters is that this is an attack on them and their rights as people who happen to be Muslims.

By adopting and endorsing the term and APPG definition, Federal Board has lent our party’s support to a weapon that is used every day as a term of abuse against anyone who challenges any discriminatory, cruel or abusive behaviours associated with some communities: LGBT+ rights campaigners challenging homophobic hate preachers, women challenging Sharia councils that condone male-on-female violence within marriages, ex-Muslims highlighting the treatment they have experienced as ‘apostates’. Even liberal and secular Muslims come under attack.

The APPG report recognises that it cannot brand all criticism of Islamism and religiously conservative Islamic practices as ‘Islamophobic’. But it is wedded to the idea that free speech about religion should be constrained, so it has to find a yardstick to determine what free speech is permissible and what is not.

It is symptomatic of the fundamental problem with this approach that the APPG endorses five tests devised by Professor Tariq Modood, of the University of Bristol. Fail any one of these tests, and we “may be dealing with Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism”.

Every one of these five tests is subjective, meaning that any criticism of Islamic practices could be judged to fail them. The third, in particular, is deeply chilling: “Is mutual learning possible? For example, one may criticise some Muslims for sexual conservatism or puritanism but is one willing to listen to those Muslims who think that contemporary societies like Britain are over-sexualised and encourage sexually predatory and undignified behaviour?”

In other words, it is not legitimate to criticise anti-LGBT and misogynist bigotry unless one is willing to engage with the bigots.

Federal Board recognised that the APPG report had gone off the rails, and has not endorsed the report as a whole (apparently; as I write, the minutes have not yet appeared).

But it does endorse the term and the definition; and any such qualifications are unlikely to provide much protection if the government is successfully pressured into adopting the definition, and everything that follows from it.

There is a better way, and it was expressed in the freedom of expression policy that, unlike the Federal Board decision, was properly debated and passed by conference in March 2015.

This said: “Conference reaffirms its commitment to tackling anti-Muslim hate, anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice directed against people as individuals or groups.

“...In a free and open society no belief system or ideology should have any protection from criticism including satire and lampooning, and there is no basis for privileging religion over other forms of belief or ideology.”

We should always uphold the right of Muslims to freedom of religion and belief, and to freedom of expression, where these do not impact on the rights and freedoms of other people.

But we should be clear that this approach applies equally to people of all religions or beliefs, and that it is people whose rights we defend: Christians, Muslims and Humanists, not Christianity, Islam or Humanism.

REJECT ABUSE

We should also reject abuse directed against people based on their religion or belief or cultural practices, just as with abuse based on ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.

So the basic test that we should be applying here, and that we should be pursuing as policy, is not “Is it anti-Islamic?” but “Is it anti-Muslim?”

“Anti-Muslim” means what it says on the tin, it is in common usage – including in existing party policy - and it starts from the person, not from the religion or culture.

It is anti-Muslim to attack or abuse a person or a group of people because they are Muslim, or because they are perceived as Muslim.

It is anti-Muslim to attack a cultural practice because it is practiced by Muslims, or an institution because it is created by and for Muslims.

So, for example, it is anti-Muslim to attack or abuse a woman who is wearing a nicab or burka (full-face veils), but it is not anti-Muslim to criticise veils as instruments of oppression that many Muslim women are pressured or forced to wear.

It is anti-Muslim to campaign against the building of a mosque because “we do not want Muslims worshipping here”, but it is not anti-Muslim to argue that this is not the right place for any place of worship.

It is anti-Muslim to condemn a foreign government because their leaders are Muslim, but it is not anti-Muslim to condemn the actions and ideology of a foreign state and leader such as Turkey and President Erdogan.

Of course, you may disagree with this as an approach. But this is a fundamental question of what is acceptable behaviour in our party and in society, and we need to be having this discussion as a party, rather than having a decision imposed on us by Federal Board.

The policy working group on the nature of public debate, a policy motion and a debate at conference, may be just the right vehicles for that discussion.

Toby Keynes is an officer of Humanist and Secularist Liberal Democrats and was a founder officer of the SDP precursor to LGBT+ LibDems

TARGETING THE WRONG TARGET

Despite the problems with targeting highlighted by Michael Meadowcroft in *Liberator* 394, Chris Davies is still to hear a better idea

Failure feels so much better when it can be blamed on betrayal. According to Michael Meadowcroft it was the targeting strategy that led to 375 lost Liberal Democrat deposits in 2017 and destroyed the party in most constituencies.

We should have confidence in our beliefs, he told us in *Liberator* 394, and have confidence in promoting them in every constituency.

The party's failure cannot be denied, but the myth of betrayal, of the party having adopted false priorities, must not pass unchallenged. It is based on false assumptions, ignores electoral realities, and denigrates the vast majority of party activists who choose for themselves how to make most effective use of their time.

Targeting is about the allocation of resources, principally of money. Liberal Democrats have never had oodles of the stuff to dish out and prioritisation is essential and insisted upon by donors. There are no political prizes to be won by pretending the world is what it is not. A party that didn't concentrate its efforts in places where it has the best chance of winning wouldn't be one that is serious about politics.

In what may come to be described as the breakthrough years there was no secret about what had to be done to gain recognition as a target seat. Chris Rennard could not have been clearer about it from the moment he became director of campaigns in 1989.

Activists had to demonstrate in the most practical way that they had the determination and commitment to take a big step forward. They had to win local election after local election, bridging the party's credibility gap by proving to local residents again and again that when they voted Liberal Democrat they would get a Liberal Democrat elected.

When I became the parliamentary candidate for Littleborough and Saddleworth in 1985 I inherited a seat which had potential but little presence. Only four of the 24 councillors were Liberals and the party did not exist in most of the constituency. It was 10 years later that I was elected in the 1995 by-election. By that time we held 20 of the council seats and had swept Labour representatives out of the seat entirely. I use the word 'swept' fondly; a press release showed me being presented with the 'golden broom' award to rub home the point. In the 1992 general election we had reduced the Conservative majority, confirmed the party's position as challenger, moved the constituency up the winnable list from 73rd to 13th position, and gone heavily into debt. So much for outside resources. It was local efforts that established Littleborough

and Saddleworth as a target seat. I would have been delighted if similar progress had been made in neighbouring constituencies like Ashton-under-Lyne or Stalybridge and Hyde. Sure, we would have competed for resources but success would have bred success. In practice the handful of activists in such places were more likely to come and help us because they too liked to see Liberal Democrats win.

How would the party have benefitted from sending scarce resources to places where we had yet to make and sustain an electoral breakthrough? The party has not collapsed in these seats; it never really existed in the first place.

I share the wish that we should do more to proclaim our values and beliefs, but radicalism must be made relevant to people's lives. Liberal Democrats became known in the 1990s as the party that called for a tiny increase in income tax to support schools. In truth it was a radical policy only by comparison to New Labour's caution, but it allowed Liberal Democrat candidates to talk credibly about the benefits of public services and the importance of widening opportunity through education, while demonstrating that they were not afraid to talk about the need for tax. More like this, please.

Michael's criticisms are directed at the wrong target and we can surely come together in pointing at the problem. Targeting as it has been practised is a necessity because our parliamentary election system fails to give equal value to every vote. It is a system that reduces our democracy to a sham and a fraud. It discourages parties in marginal seats or seeking tactical votes from being brave and outspoken in proclaiming their values and promoting genuinely radical policies. It has condemned our party to near irrelevance for much of the past century.

In 1983 the Liberal/SDP Alliance won more than 25% of general election votes but gained just 4% of seats in the Commons (23 MPs). It was with this in mind that Chris Rennard pursued a targeting strategy that in 2005 increased our parliamentary representation to 62.

It saw us win 10% of seats with 22% of the votes. That result was the nearest we have ever come to beating an electoral system that is so heavily stacked against us. Howls of frustration at the party's predicament are entirely understandable but if someone who wants to win seats in the House of Commons has an effective alternative to targeting I have yet to hear it.

Chris Davies was Liberal Democrat MP for Littleborough and Saddleworth 1995-97, and MEP for the North West of England 1999-2014

LETTERS



WHY I'M A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

Dear Liberator,

For as long as I have been a member, I have been concerned by a seeming lack of understanding, not just by the public but even by some members of the party, why we are Liberal Democrats?

This question was brought into my head again recently by a friend from university, a member of the Corbyn-backing Momentum, asking me: "How can you, as a student, support and even join the Liberal Democrats after the 2015 Coalition Government?"

Today we are seeing the world step back from the concept of the liberal democracy, nations from Venezuela and Hungary are backsliding on democracy and into dictatorship and demagoguery.

Even here we are seeing the Government attempt to keep power concentrated in its own hands rather than diffused among our elected representatives.

Furthermore, we are seeing the UK turn inwards, away from the world, towards a new period of 'splendid isolation', (or perhaps 'paltry isolation' would be more appropriate). It is not only our duty, but our honour and privilege, as Liberals and democrats to combat this wave of nationalistic right-wing populism preached by Donald Trump, Nigel Farage, Jacob Rees Mogg, Kate Hoey and those like them.

Many believe that the Liberal Democrats are a lost cause, a tainted brand, an irrelevant factor in today's increasingly polarised political atmosphere; however, I would argue that we, as a party and even more so as people, are needed now more than ever. With both other parties floundering and failing, if we don't stand for democracy and human rights then who will?

Theresa May? With her open disdain for human rights and obstinate refusal to respect the

sovereignty of the Parliament she is intended to be accountable to, all while hypocritically claiming to be pushing for British sovereignty and the "will of the people" with her nigh-universally abhorred Brexit deal?

Or perhaps Jeremy Corbyn? With his refusal to accept the will of his own party's membership, seemingly pushing Labour, willingly, toward electoral catastrophe due to his own, personal hatred of the European Union, all while completely failing to root out the anti-Semitism in a party that claims to represent all?

Ultimately I am a Liberal Democrat because I believe that the torch of Liberalism, and all that it represents is in danger of being snuffed out once again, and it is for us to fight to keep it alight, in whatever way we can and to be that beacon of a fairer today and a brighter future.

So, I would say to all who ask me: "why are you a Liberal Democrat?" Bring us "your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free".

Thomas Hague
Sheffield

PREAMBLE PROBLEMS

Dear Liberator

Tony Greaves' article on the Preamble to the Liberal Democrats' constitution (Liberator 394) is timely and important.

The current lack of awareness of Liberal values, and the lack of an understanding of the Liberal view of society, leaves the party at the whim of every passing political fad and gives its leaders a free hand to sell off the party to every new group that falls for the trap of believing the fallacy that there is some elusive political 'centre' that can sweep the country at the next election.

As Tony points out, the preamble provides a firm foundation for a Liberalism that places the party

firmly on the anti-conservative and anti-statist wing of politics, which is the real gap in Britain's current politics. It is just a pity that the current abject self-inflicted state of the party means that no-one even gives it any serious consideration.

I have a few comments on Tony's article. First, the original 1936 text began with the statement: "The Liberal Party exists to build a Liberal Commonwealth" The word 'society' only replaced 'commonwealth' in the 1969 revision, along with 'conformity' in place of 'unemployment'. I rather like the word 'commonwealth' in its broader Liberal sense but I have to accept that it is probably obsolescent. Second, the 1969 revision contained the startling phrase that the party "looks forward to a world in which all peoples live together in peace under an effective and democratically constituted world authority".

In the merger negotiating team I accepted the invitation to work with David Marquand, Richard Holme and John Grant to produce a preamble for a new party which would be a worthy text, and also to demonstrate that I intended to be a constructive member of the team.

The text we produced at least provided an Aunt Sally to be knocked down by colleagues paragraph by paragraph! By the time Tony Greaves embarked on a fourth draft time was getting very short and the SDP's view was that anything would do, provided that it contained a commitment to NATO.

The problem with the merged party was much more fundamental than anything that could be covered by a Liberal preamble. In some ways there is still the problem of giving credence to a social democracy that, even though it can provide pragmatic amelioration of social conditions, is incapable of tackling the more fundamental problems of society and politics.

Michael Meadowcroft
Leeds

Vice
Adam McKay (dir)
2018

It would have been easy to make a film about Dick Cheney a one dimensional portrait of a monster, who manipulated his way to power to kill hundreds of thousands of people in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Vice does not spare Cheney's culpability but shows how a man of no particular distinction or ability - except for ingratiating himself with the right people - could reach such heights.

The young Cheney is depicted as a drunken brawler thrown out of Yale and given an ultimatum to shape up by his Lady Macbeth-like future wife Lynne.

It's not explained how he ended up on an internship programme in Congress, but he became a Republican more or less by chance, forging a lifelong alliance with Donald Rumsfeld, the future defence secretary during the Iraq war.

Cheney attaches himself to deeply conservative causes - with the notable exception of refusing to campaign against gay marriage out of respect for his lesbian daughter - without ever appearing to believe in anything deeply. Surrounded by rich right-wing ideologies, he goes along with them as the best career option.

From his early association with Rumsfeld, Cheney seamlessly attaches himself to Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush senior, rising ever higher in the Republican hierarchy and increasingly understanding the full power of the American presidency if the incumbent is willing to use it.

Which is why he, initially reluctantly, accepted George W Bush's offer to become his vice-presidential running mate.

Cheney can see both that the vice-presidency



REVIEWS

is normally a non-job but that it is defined by what the president is willing to delegate to it, and that Bush junior is out of his depth and would be relieved to hand foreign policy and defence to someone more experienced.

After 9/11 the film suggest Cheney, rather than Bush, was in charge of the response and while the latter postured on aircraft carriers. Cheney directed torture, kidnapping and mass murder.

Not only that, he takes good care to ensure that Halliburton, the oil services company he ran while in Clinton-era exile from power, was allowed to fleece the US military in Iraq with no questions asked.

The film's technique is not a straightforward biography, using short bursts of information and even a false ending to move the action along. There is some humour, though mostly to be had from seeing how Cheney manipulates people who are not even aware this is happening.

It raises a question about presidential systems. The odds of an idle halfwit like Bush and a dour plotter like Cheney rising to power in a parliamentary system are about nil - there is a clear ladder one must climb, constant public exposure, backbenchers and a party to keep onside and constituents to placate. The presidential system allows someone as inadequate as Bush to win on image and someone like Cheney to win by appointment as a running mate.

The film also raises questions about the Republican party. It is in theory America's mainstream centre right party but apart from Bush senior every president it has elected since Eisenhower has been a crook, fool, warmonger or some combination of these.

Looking at the financial interests behind it depicted here, this is perhaps less surprising than one might think.

Mark Smulian

A Rope from the Sky: the making and unmaking of the world's newest state
by Zach Vertin
Amberley Books
2018 £18.00

The story of South Sudan reveals what goes wrong when greedy rebel war lords try to become peace-time leaders; and when the international community casts common sense to one side in its haste to 'solve' a diplomatic problem.

Zach Vertin's compelling account reflects the giddy optimism surrounding South Sudan's independence in 2011, leading to today's bloody tragedy. He is the master of his subject, and anyone wishing to understand how tribalism, nepotism and kleptomania continue to destroy Africa should read this book.

Vertin worked with the US's special envoy to the Sudans during the crucial period when the world's newest nation was finding its feet, following its secession from Khartoum.

He skillfully illuminates the ego-based conflicts between the leading South Sudanese politicians, president Salva Kiir and vice-president Riek Machar. Both men continue to manipulate ethnic identity issues to hold onto their power bases and fill their offshore bank accounts, with no regard for the 400,000 civilians who have been killed since 2013.

Half the South Sudanese population has been displaced in the civil war which they ignited and continue to provoke. Meanwhile, the international community has handed over an estimated \$5-\$7bn to the fledgling government, without demanding accountability or transparency.

This aid has built luxury homes for their leaders in Kampala and Nairobi, while their 12 million citizens remain illiterate, malnourished and terrorised by militias. Peace deals will probably come and go until South

Sudan's donor countries get serious about holding Kiir and Machar to their promises.

Since Vertin's book was published, there has been a new and ironic twist in this miserable story. At the time of writing, there are popular protests across Sudan against the same Khartoum regime that waged decades of war against their southern Sudanese black African citizens.

Khartoum's racist ethnic cleansing led to two million deaths, and the eventual secession of South Sudan. President Bashir and his cronies are using deadly force against unarmed protesters. But his former adversary, Salva Kiir, is standing by Bashir's regime, and rumoured to be offering to send troops to keep his erstwhile oppressors in power. There is truly honour among thieves.

Rebecca Tinsley

Battle-scare, mortality, medical care and military welfare in the British Civil Wars by David J. Appleby and Andrew Hooper (eds) Manchester University Press 2018 £75.00

It is a tragedy that the problems of the battlefield dead remain with us in much the same way as they did in the 17th century. The editors of this collection of essays have a considerable reputation in their field set out to establish how these problems were dealt with.

Ian Atherton's *Battlefields, Burials and the English Civil Wars* recounts the failure to identify mass graves, both by customary recollection and modern archaeology, but provides a wealth of archival material, including those of minor encounters as well as the better-known battles, such as Marston Moor and Naseby. From this you will get a better picture of the actuality of the Civil War.

Hooper's contribution: 'To Condole with me on the Commonwealth's Loss: the Widows and Orphans of Parliament's Military Commanders, might also be of interest, a sorry story of shabby treatment in the main; does anything change?'

Does Katherine, Lady Brooke, wear the posy shown in her portrait at the execution of Archbishop

Laud? Scottish ministers and nobles were imprisoned in the Tower of London after seizure at the Committee of Estates in Alyth, Dundee in 1651 (the committee was the functioning Scottish Parliament, which had recognised Charles II as king after the execution of his father).

Recalling Hooper above, the Scots appear to have been rather better at providing for the prisoners than Parliament their widows and orphans. Will Theresa May, should she last so long, attempt to emulate the Rump Parliament or little Franco - Mariano Rajoy - when Scotland asserts its independence in the wake of Brexit?

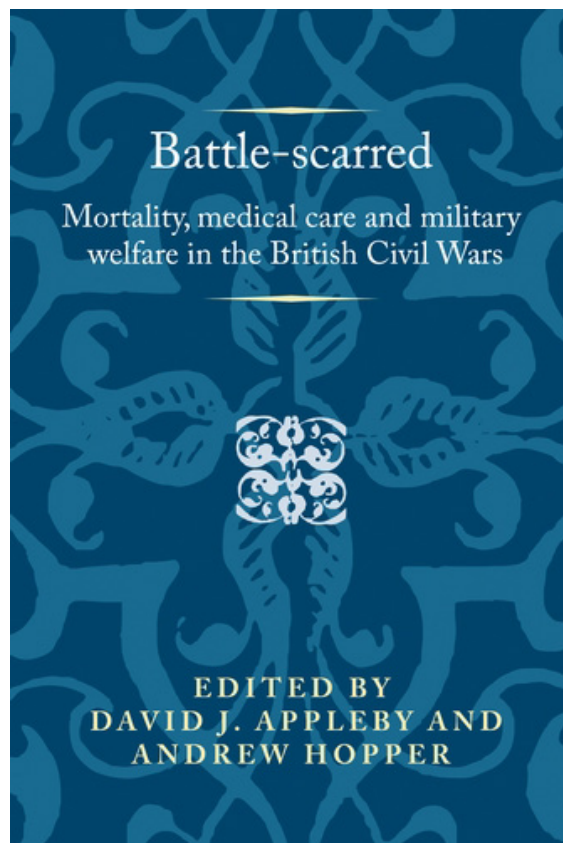
The editors see their work as extending our understanding of the Civil War to the experiences of the ordinary man and woman. The Long Parliament established the principles of care for the wounded and bereaved and so set in place the chain that continues to the present.

Stewart Rayment

Hezbollah, a short history by Augustus Richard Norton 3rd edition Princeton 2018 \$16.9

Something which has become clouded in the on-going problems of the Middle East is the maxim that my enemy's enemy is not necessarily my friend; allegiances shift rapidly and this isn't just the case in the Syrian Civil War and associated conflicts, it continually dogs Lebanon.

When Norton first published his short history, Hezbollah was widely lionised as the defender of Lebanon against Israeli aggression, something the Lebanese army could not, or would not, do. There was a growing understanding that Hezbollah might be responsible for Israel's aggression, but if so, Israel's behaviour was disproportionate and targeted the Lebanese economy so broadly that there can be little doubt as to their



overall objective. Hezbollah had been the main player in persuading the Israelis to withdraw from the bulk of southern Lebanon. They have not withdrawn completely, though they claim that the land still held is Syrian, thereby legitimising Hezbollah's initial stance against Israel. The occupied land, though small, is important for water supply.

While there was never any particular doubt as to where Hezbollah got the weapons and probably training to achieve this military success, the last decade has shown them as more closely tied to Iran and Syria. Their involvement in the Syrian Civil War has been as crucial to Assad as Russian airpower – no matter how many piles of rubble he can create, Assad still needs capable ground forces.

To those who had some respect for Hezbollah, this is disappointing. It may be improbable that the Syrian Civil War wouldn't overflow into Lebanon, but the very success of Hezbollah on Assad's side has made sure that it would.

Back in 2007 when the first edition of this book was published, Norton wrote of the need for compromise. Twelve years on, the compromises are going to be much messier.

Syed Rahman

Monday

Meadowcroft emerges from his potting shed displaying an un wonted sense of urgency. "Steel's been suspended by the bigwigs," he informs me. "I'm not surprised," I reply. "Do you remember when he persuaded us to stand down in half the seats in the country to make way for the SDP Party? No good came of it. Well I never thought it would."

It turns out that he has been suspended for quite another reason. It has emerged that all those stories one heard about the appalling Cyril Smith were true and, what's more, he admitted as much to Steel, who promptly did chuff all about it and later nominated him for a knighthood. No wonder E.W. Swinson was up in arms. Smith, whom I once described as "Extremely Large", was one of many politicians I was at pains to keep away from my Home for Well-Behaved Orphans. There were times when I had a whole phalanx of gamekeepers deployed with their orchard doughties to keep these undesirables away. All power to this inquiry's elbow, I say.

Tuesday

News reaches me from America that Bernie Sanders is going to have another shot at the Presidency. I fear he will prove a bit long in the tooth for the campaign, but you must admit that he has had a wonderful career. I remember him as a young comedian: while his brother Mike had all the patter, Bernie was the lovable one who would win the audience over with his mugging and his goofy voice. Then the two brothers fell out – one might have called them the Cain and Abel of ITV comedy – and Bernie found fame all over again. His partner this time was a large dog called Schnorbitz. Come to think of it, 'Schnorbitz for VP' could be a winning slogan for him. Please remember that you heard it here first.

Wednesday

With the scents of spring in the air, I remember this morning the horse trials I used to hold every May. They were a fixture in the social calendar of this corner of Rutland and the crowds would throng the lanes that lead to the Hall. How people booed and jeered as the long-faced defendants were led in! Time, however, moves on: juries became less and less willing to convict and Liberal social reform grew to favour schemes to divert equine offenders from court altogether. The result was that the last trials were held in 1986, but I still miss them on a day like today.

Thursday

So my old friend Vince "High Voltage" Cable is to throw in the towel and make way for a younger man or, indeed, woman as Liberal Democrat leader. All of which means that I rather put my foot in it the other day.

You see, I met Cable by chance in London and had a long chat with him. Our conversation ranged over his boyhood in York and experiences as a young economic adviser in Kenya, before he regaled me with amusing tales of his time as whip of the Labour group on Glasgow City Council. How we laughed! Then we discussed the finer points of ballroom dancing: he is known as a dab foot at the Cha Cha and Rumba, while I have a lot of balls.

Then, as I now see, I spoilt things by saying: "Tell me, old man, what are you doing with yourself these days?" No wonder he gave me rather an old-fashioned look when we parted.

Lord Bonkers' Diary

Friday

Last time I called in at the Lib Dem Whip's office at the Commons, I found several of our MPs dressed in rucksacks and hiking boots. When I asked what they were up to, I was told they were off to deliver leaflets for something called 'The Independent Group'. So I made it my business to look into it. I discovered from someone in the Lobby that this group's members include Lucretia Berger and Anna Soubrette. "Do you know Mike Gapes?" asked the journalist. "Yes," I

replied, "I am afraid he does."

I was told, however, that the shaker and mover behind the group is one Chucky Umami, so I curled up with a pamphlet he has just published. It soon transpired that he is one of these hearty public school types who want to send the nation's youth off to camp. Sleeping under canvass; washing up in a bucket of cold water; doing PT with your shirt off... You know the type.

By the time I had finished reading, it I was clear that the man is worse than that. He wants to haul every teenager in the country off to the Jack Straw Memorial Reform School, Dungeness. Why in Gladstone's name are our people delivering for him?

Saturday

When we do have a new leader, he, or indeed she, will have to do something about our membership cards. I admit it makes an impressive photograph when one of our candidates stands in front of a bank of card-carrying members, and you can see a fellow Liberal Democrat coming down the street a mile away. But are those giant Orange diamonds practical? They do take up an awful lot of space on the bus, for instance. Wouldn't we rather have something you could just slip into your wallet? After all, in these straitened times not everyone has domestic staff to carry his card for him.

Sunday

You don't have to be the Wise Woman of Wing to have noticed that the Brexit negotiations are going badly. I have chartered a charabanc to take the villagers on the great march in London, but by the time you read this... To be candid, I haven't the faintest idea what will have happened by the time you read this. As to what Brexit will mean for Rutland, I can foresee only an outbreak of criminality. Where there are borders and tariffs, smuggling inevitably follows. Someone hereabouts will make a great deal of money out of it in the years to come. It's a good thing I am such a morally upstanding fellow.

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