

# liberator



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## LIBERATOR

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🔊 welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words

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**Cover:** Christy Lawrance

# COMMENTARY

## ROUND OBJECTS

Did the Lib Dems really, as some claim, toy with using the f-word before settling on Bollocks to Brexit as the euro election campaign slogan?

The choice paid off. As a simple and direct slogan it was unimprovable and unmistakable, and a welcome contrast to past general election campaigns that have tried to emphasise complicated ideas based on the party's copious repository of unread policy documents.

While this might be hard to replicate in a general election ('Bollocks to not putting a penny on income tax for the NHS' doesn't have the same ring) the idea of having a few clear messages and putting them with conviction can be.

Bollocks to Brexit also showed the party being confident about saying something controversial and sticking to it, rather than listening to those who think it should never say anything definite in case somebody, somewhere, is offended.

Although the Lib Dems did almost 'win everywhere' in the euro elections because of the proportional system, the thinking behind the Bollocks to Brexit campaign was quite different from those where the party has been afraid to take a clear position in case it doesn't 'win everywhere'.

Repeating this clear approach in a general election - on Brexit or anything else - will almost certainly alienate someone, but so what?

If the party is to establish the core vote of reliable support that it needs it cannot do that by exploiting transitory local grievances or seeking to neither offend nor inspire. That approach, as has been seen, leaves the party with a paltry vote on which it can depend and means it has to put in huge amounts of person-power to win almost every vote afresh at each election.

So if the recent campaign has alienated Brexit supporters that should be cause for neither surprise nor concern. Let them be alienated from the Lib Dems, for the same reason that liberals are alienated from the Brexit party and Ukip.

A more pressing concern is how to hang on to the support gained in the euro election. Some of it of course depended on the strange circumstances of the election and cannot be retained - it would be rather surprising if Michael Heseltine and Alistair Campbell were out canvassing together for the Lib Dems - but much could.

Those who have voted Lib Dem once are more likely to do so again than those who never have, and those who see the Lib Dems talking straight about their concerns are even more likely to.

Which is why, if the disaster of Brexit does happen, there should be no hand-wringing about 'moving on'. The Lib Dems have shown what having confidence in what they believe can achieve, and should then become the party of 'back in'.

## NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT

Last summer something close to panic consumed the party leadership about what was to become Change UK. It was well-known that Chuka Umunna was running an informal whipping operation among dissident Labour MPs and that this was probably the precursor to a new party. It was also feared that this novelty would seduce hordes of Lib Dem voters and most of the party's major donors. This drove some of the more foolish ideas about supporters and non-MP leaders rejected at York (Liberator 395).

Indeed, a few people who should have known better called for the party to cave into the TIGgers.

They now look extremely silly, while those who were merely worried look to have unnecessarily lacked confidence.

Change UK managed to launch with no policy or objectives beyond opposition to Brexit, no organisation and with a stance towards the Lib Dems of arrogant disdain - "step aside amateurs, some real politicians are here" rather as elements of the SDP did long ago.

The new party's European election result was humiliating, and it soon after collapsed in the remarkable sight of a party with no ideology still managing to have a split.

Ex-leader Heidi Allen has indicated that she favoured tactical voting for the Lib Dems and she and her associates may be on their way into the party, or some sort of deal with it.

If so, any such deals should be local decisions, not a national carve-up of the kind done with the SDP.

The five remaining in Change UK are by no stretch of the imagination liberals and sit for seats where it scarcely matters to their prospects whether or not the Lib Dems oppose them, and so may soon clear off to lobbying companies and think tanks.

Only one useful purpose possibly remains to the rump of Change UK - as a receptacle for Tories who cannot stomach a hard-Brexit leader, should one be elected, but who do not wish to join the Lib Dems.

Chuka Umunna's defection to the Lib Dems is welcome but he'll have to work to prove he is any kind of liberal - and his vile suggestion that national service should be restored must go.

The confidence displayed in Bollocks to Brexit is a happy contrast to the panicked lack of confidence the leadership displayed last summer towards an incipient rival, and since May's elections the party is starting to believe in itself again.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## LETTER OF THE LAW

If a public election were counted on a different basis to that stated in advance there would be understandable outrage that voters had been misled.

This though happened in the voting for Lib Dem candidates on the European election lists, following a legal challenge to the diversity criteria due to be employed.

The problem goes back to a joint meeting at the spring conference in York of the candidates and campaigns committees, which decided to use 'zipping' as in previous elections, whereby men and women alternate down the lists and different regions have a man or woman in first place.

To this were added various criteria about which places should go to BME, LGBT or disabled candidates.

No legal advice appears to have been sought at this stage as it did not occur to anyone that there was a problem.

People were invited to stand, and indeed vote, on the basis that these diversity criteria were in place.

Thus many people must have stood, or not stood, on their assessment of whether or not the diversity criteria would help them.

But there was a legal problem, which arose from Catherine Bearder being the only incumbent Lib Dem MEP.

Since 100% of its MEPs were female, the party could not legally use measures to favour women since they were not under-represented and equalities legislation allows this only where under-representation is current, not where people fear it might happen in future.

Party president Sal Brinton is understood to have pointed to a European Parliament decision that suggested zipping could still be used, but this turned out to be only an observation from a committee, not a law.

Then the legal challenges started. Some noticed the criteria had been set so that no white man - of any sexual orientation - could top the list anywhere south of the Wash-Bristol Channel line, where the most winnable seats were.

The party sought advice from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). It has issued guidance on when it is permissible to take measures to help under-represented groups, and this would still have stopped the Lib Dems using male-female zipping.

Some clung to the get-out that European elections were omitted from the commission's list of elections to which its guidance was applicable, but it turned out this omission existed because when written in 2018 it never occurred to the commission that there would be more European elections.

The EHRC said it could not give legal advice but

hinted that while it thought what the Lib Dems planned for diversity was praiseworthy it was pushing at the boundaries of legality.

Less than a week before voting closed - but quite some time after it opened - legal advice was finally secured.

This not only ruled that zipping was not permitted when the only MEP was female anyway, but that the other diversity criteria were also barred on the grounds they were in potential conflict, for example that a disabled woman might be moved down to make way for a BME man.

Faced with this it was decided the votes would have to be counted 'neat' with no diversity criteria applied.

The result was if anything more diverse than it would have been with the criteria, with the only white men heading lists being three former MEPs. Women headed five lists in England and a BME man one, and the other higher places showed diversity.

There was then a legal challenge from Dinesh Dhamija, the second place candidate in London, who argued unsuccessfully in the High Court for an injunction to put him in first place, which he said was where he would have been had the planned criteria been applied.

The judge instead left Irina Von Wiese in first place, and said the party's original policy on the diversity criteria would have been unlawful as it risked favouring some candidates with one set of protected characteristics at the expense of those with others.

Responsibility for this fiasco is being batted between the federal and English levels of the party, since Scotland and Wales made their own arrangements.

As with much else, disputes between the federal and English levels can be made to both go on forever and become incomprehensible.

The federal party has insisted the decision over candidate selections were an English matter.

Members of the English executive say they were told they had no power over the matter with the decisions dating from the federal committees' meeting in York.

But when complaints about the diversity criteria reached a crescendo in the south west - over the effective exclusion of former MPs - regional chair Gail Bones circulated a note to members which said: "The National Party have chosen to ascribe specific diversity criteria around the candidate selection process. This has been imposed on Regions from above and it has been made clear that there is no changing this."

It isn't clear from Bones's note whether 'national' meant 'English' or 'federal', but she went on: "There has been no communication from the national party to members to date and we have decided this needs to be rectified."

"If any of you have thoughts on this you wish to share then please send them to the party president,

Sal Brinton who has been closely involved with this decision and can best answer any queries.”

Brinton of course is the federal president, not an English officer.

As both supporters and opponents of the diversity criteria try to find where responsibility lies, a game of pass the parcel has ensued among party officers.

## **PASSING ANOTHER PARCEL**

The farce of disciplinary action against former Bradford East MP David Ward continues (Liberator 395 and others too numerous to mention) with the matter ping-ponging from English to federal levels.

Ward has said that the English Regional Parties Committee (RPC) rejected his application to re-join the party, his membership having been revoked for standing against the official Lib Dem candidate imposed on Bradford East in 2017, when Ward stood as an independent. This followed then leader Tim Farron’s accusation of anti-Semitism against Ward and ditching him as a candidate.

Ward has admitted that standing as an independent was “clearly an infringement of the party’s constitution”, but says he did this in protest at his removal as the Lib Dem candidate without being told which words of his had allegedly given offence or being afforded the opportunity to appeal.

He said the RPC has now told him the two years that had passed since he lost his membership was not long enough and it would bring the party into disrepute to allow him back in so soon. The RPC has not though said how long it thinks would be appropriate.

The matter went back to the RPC after it had previously decided not to reinstate Ward.

He took that to the English appeals panel, which said the RPC did not have the power to make such a decision. RPC chair Margaret Joachim then appealed to the Federal Appeals Panel, which ruled that it did.

If Ward now goes back to the English panel this federal ruling will influence things. So too might the presence of a legal adviser with Ward, who has been persuaded by supporters that he needs such representation in dealing with the party.

## **TAMING THE TIGGERS**

Talks were held in the early stages of the European elections about some sort of deal between the Lib Dems, Greens and Change UK, but it all came to nothing, though with an intriguing hint of collaboration in a general election, though the TIGger disintegration may have put the mockers on this.

Fiona Hall, the former north east MEP, wrote to Vince Cable to warn: “We share a common position but if we stand as separate parties the message will inevitably be fragmented - as will our electoral support.

“In other EU countries it is not unusual to have a grouping acting as an umbrella for different parties and I hope we could find a way to do this under UK electoral rules. But time is very, very short.”

Cable replied that Electoral Commission rules made this impossible as it does not allow for joint lists between registered parties.

He went on: “I tried out the idea of cooperation with Change UK but there was no interest. They may want

to cooperate over a general election but they see the European elections as an opportunity to experiment with their new brand and don’t need a national infrastructure to compete.

“We have had offers to cooperate from the Advance party but they have little to offer and we declined. I haven’t talked to Caroline Lucas but our previous national/local collaboration, while successful, was not well received in the party.”

It’s not clear whether this means collaboration was ill-received in the Lib Dems or Greens, but is an odd comment given there was a such a pact in Cable’s own seat.

There was though then an attempt to have a joint ‘remain’ candidate in the Peterborough by-election, with the Lib Dems, Green and Change UK all standing down in favour of an independent.

Their choice though lighted on Femi Oluwole, a Labour supporter who runs the Our Future Our Choice campaign, and who came under pressure not to stand from the Labour-dominated People’s Vote campaign to which it is affiliated.

Why choose such a compromised figure, and who took the decision the Lib Dems would be willing to stand down?

## **ISLE OF LEWES**

Amid the general rejoicing at Lib Dem local election results, Lewes stuck out like a sore thumb, gaining the unwanted distinction of being one of a handful of places with a Lib Dem net loss and the only one where this exceeded one. Lewes, despite having had an MP as recently as 2015, dropped four seats.

The place has been riven with internecine disputes over PPC Kelly-Marie Blundell - who has now stood down - attempts to suspend a member, the English party alienating some key activists (though not others) and much else. The Lib Dems did though gain majorities on three of four town councils.

One observer noted: “A disunited party never wins, plus [there was] heavy targeting from the Greens.”

## **GUESS THE NUMBER**

Some may have been curious as to why the lists of Lib Dem European election candidates in England were announced with a number of unsuccessful candidates missing.

This was a by-product of the rush to get candidates in place, as Westminster-approved candidates who put themselves forward faced an additional interview to be validated to stand for Europe.

On the compressed timescale this meant these interviews occurred after voting had started in many cases, with those who were unsuccessful thus being ineligible to be candidates even when they were already running campaigns to get on the list.

This meant they had to be removed, their first preferences ignored and counted only from second preferences onwards.

Rather than admit this had happened, the party quietly ignored them in the results.

# ARE THEY UP TO THE JOB THEN?

## Liberator has sent a questionnaire to Liberal Democrat leadership contenders ever since 1988

This time, it goes to Ed Davey and Jo Swinson, two candidates whose ambitions to become leader have been pretty public from the moment they regained their seats in 2017.

The coronation of Vince Cable in 2017 was unavoidable but had the unfortunate side effect that he was never challenged over his ideas and attributes for the job.

It's common for people to want to put very specific policy questions to would-be leaders but we've tried to get both contenders to think about what the party is for and what it should do now that it has unexpectedly and suddenly recovered its political standing from the post-coalition doldrums.

Whoever wins will inherit a record membership, some good poll figures and the prospect of being able to convert into permanent support the hundreds of thousands of Remain supporters who 'lent' the party their vote recently.

On the downside, they will still only have MPs in low double figures - and a party now only really known for being pro-Remain and which lacks much intellectual ferment while also having a policy process that can grind the excitement out of any idea.

Each candidate was given the same word count to use between the questions as they chose and their responses have not been edited.

These are the questions. We hope you find the answers illuminating.

**Q** *Were the European election results a one-off or can the support gained be kept and what other issues would you raise?*

**Ed Davey:** No, they were not a one-off, and much of that support can certainly be kept.

The tectonic plates of British politics are shifting more dramatically than even the early 1980s – we have to think very carefully!

To state the obvious, the Europeans followed great local elections, and the national polls since have been very encouraging. My sense canvassing and talking to activists during both the locals and Europeans was that many of the Tory Remainers switching to us, were switching semi-permanently: they were often lifelong Tories who feel utterly betrayed, especially from business, economic and cultural perspectives – call them the Heseltines, though note, most were far younger than Tarzan.

The Labour Remainers switching to us, I found to be more nuanced. In the broadest of terms, I sensed that anti-Corbynista Remainers are seriously considering quitting Labour permanently. Call them the Campbells – not all there yet, but either tearing up their party cards and affiliations or watching closely the moves of Tom Watson et al. Other Corbyn Remainers switching to us, are less likely to stick and will go back, though the younger they are, the more chance we have of even retaining their support.

Other issues – see below, but in list form: climate change, social justice and core liberal values, from internationalism to equality and human rights. I do think we need a strong economic strategy, which can appeal to both One Nation Tories who share our worries about the divisions Brexit has caused/ revealed and the threat of a break-up of the UK, and to liberal Labour, who want to know we reject austerity.

**Jo Swinson:** I really believe we can keep this momentum going and build on it. The 17,000 new members who have joined since the local elections aren't joining

just because of a good set of election results. They're joining us because we're the only party in UK politics taking a clear, pro-European stand on the biggest issue of the day.

But 'Stop Brexit' placards alone can't beat the rising tide of populism. We must set out a positive vision for the future to counter the hateful and divisive one on offer by the other side. We need to be the party that sets out radical solutions to the climate emergency, outlines how we'll take advantage of the technological revolution and is clear about how we reshape our economy so that it works for people and our planet.

That is how we continue to build on our recent success and we can create a strong liberal movement that acts as a rallying point for all those who are liberal-minded, but maybe not yet Liberal Democrats.

**Q** *Should the party seek to establish a core vote and if so from which parts of the electorate should this be drawn, and not?*

**Jo Swinson:** There are millions of people out there who are liberals but not yet Liberal Democrats, and I want to lead our party to make these people our core vote.

People who believe immigration benefits our country, people who are determined to tackle the climate emergency and people who believe the UK is better off in Europe.

All of them are crying out for a home. As the Conservatives chase after the Brexit Party and Labour vacate the field entirely, we are seeing their voters flock to us as a liberal alternative that is committed to resolve the issues they care about.

**Ed Davey:** Whilst the aim of establishing more of a core vote is sensible it cannot be exclusive. We cannot and must not appeal just to the socially liberal, well educated, pro-EU professionals who reside in metropolitan areas and university towns.

A vital part of the liberal and social democrat traditions is a concern for social justice and those who are left behind. As someone who grew up in Sutton-in-Ashfield, Mansfield and central Nottingham, and who has campaigned with local council candidates in traditional Labour areas, I am totally convinced our messages can be sold to less prosperous, more Leave-voting areas. Nor should we exclude traditional Liberal heartlands, that are more rural and more non-conformist be they in the south-west, East Anglia or Wales and Scotland. We have to work out how a Remain, pro-EU party can win votes in Leave-leaning areas – and part of the answer is to win the argument and to reject appeasement.

Above all, we need to answer the question – why vote Liberal Democrat, much better than we have for some time. Call it our brand, call it our cause – we haven't communicated it well for some time. Paddy Ashdown obsessed about this – and made us the party of education and environment, and won votes from a wide group as a result. Sometimes you shouldn't reinvent the wheel.

**Q *If you were in the same position as Nick Clegg was over tuition fees (a pledge made then broken) how would you handle the problem?***

**Ed Davey:** The lesson is – don't make pledges you can't keep. And if you make a pledge, keep it.

Should one currently “unforeseeable” day arrive where a Coalition negotiation occurs and a Special Conference of the party votes to back a proposed deal, the other lesson is that any “compromises” in that deal should be highlighted from the get-go, and not smoothed over. Total transparency at this level of political trade-off is almost certainly the best course. It's best

to show voters the precise terms of any deal, from the start – and we didn't in 2010.

**Jo Swinson:** The honest answer is I wouldn't break the promise in the first place. While the policy has meant more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university than ever before, the plain fact is that we broke a crystal-clear promise, and it's one of my biggest regrets that I didn't do more to stop it at the time. I remember how I felt in the pit of my stomach when I heard what we planned to do, and I've learned to trust my gut instinct, and never again fail to challenge a decision that I believed to be wrong.

And we were punished for it. We went from 57 MPs down to eight. But I think the fact that we're now seeing a new surge in support shows that people are willing to give us a second look and I want us to make the most of this opportunity.

**Q *Can the Liberal Democrats really 'win everywhere' or does this approach necessarily mean they can lose everywhere too?***

**Jo Swinson:** There is no limit to my ambitions for the Liberal Democrats. We've seen that the old, two-party system is collapsing and there is a huge space for the Liberal Democrats to stand as the answer to the populism and nationalism we're seeing from people like Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage.

If you look at the local and European election results, we have been winning everywhere, and I'm not satisfied to settle for a strategy that relies on building up slowly over the next 20 years. Given the challenges we face, our country can't afford to wait 20 years for us to be ready, so I want us to win everywhere we can, now.

**Ed Davey:** Whilst we can win (almost) everywhere as a one off, I don't think we can consistently as we can't be all things to all people and seeking to do so will dilute our messages. Moreover,

the hard reality is that for us to win parliamentary elections, we will still need a good local party organisation and strong local government credentials – and we just don't have that everywhere. So targeting for the so-called “ground war” remains essential – though I am keen for a more strategic approach to developing the next wave of council and parliamentary targets.

**Q *Would you regard your election as leader as a mandate to take the party in a particular political direction, and if so what?***

**Ed Davey:** No, but with one exception below. The Leader of our party rightly needs to keep consulting and working with the wider party – and given the state of British politics, the next Leader will need to do that more than any recent incumbent.

I am seeking a mandate to make climate change and the environment far more central to our campaigning and messaging than for many years, and if I win I will seek to do that.

**Jo Swinson:** I want to rally a liberal movement to stand up for our values and against the forces of populism and nationalism. I think it is our responsibility as the undisputed heart of the liberal movement in the UK to counter the hateful and divisive narrative of Farage and Johnson, and offer a positive alternative for an open, inclusive and internationalist society.

And I want to harness the technological revolution for our country's future and to build an economy that puts people and the planet first. Our current system is failing in so many ways and we need to be far bolder about challenging age-old economic thinking to ensure we can build a greener, richer, safer society – now and for generations to come.

Our party exists to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by



poverty, ignorance or conformity. That's the preamble to our constitution. I believe my vision delivers on that promise, and I am the best person to turn it into reality.

**Q *What policies should the party put forward to address climate change?***

**Jo Swinson:** We should start by not calling it climate change. It's a climate emergency, a climate crisis, and we should talk about it in those terms. It's one of the key asks of the Extinction Rebellion, who I protested with in London.

On the broader point, I don't actually think the challenge we face is knowing the answers on the climate emergency. As a party, we have fantastic policies, like reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 and for 60% of our energy to come from renewables by 2030 – though I think we should be even more ambitious on the latter.

One thing I would add is to make it mandatory for companies to report on their climate risks and to disclose that information to investors. It will make companies

think about how they contribute to climate crisis and how it affects them, and it will give investors the information they need to move money to lower-risk greener assets.

And, with more than 2500 councillors and our numerous council gains at the last local elections, we can use our local government power base to continue to make a real difference in our communities by implementing progressive green policies.

The big challenge we face is being in a position to implement them, and to do that we need a leader who can get out and sell those policies on the media, and I believe that I've got the energy and communication skills to do that.

**Ed Davey:** We should first promote our fantastic record – to show we have more credibility on this than any British political party, ever. Our work at local and European levels should be highlighted, as well as the dramatic nearly fourfold increase in renewable power, under Lib Dem Ministerial leadership. We led the way to make Britain a world leader in offshore wind – and to drive down the costs of green power so it is now the cheapest

form of electricity. We led the negotiations in Europe to win ambitious EU emission reduction targets that played a key role on the path to the Paris Climate Treaty.

Then on the back of proving our credibility, we need a massive package of policies to apply low and zero carbon technologies to power, transport and domestic and industrial heating and agriculture. We need to upgrade our international climate work. The Climate Change policy paper due to come to this Autumn's Conference is very good.

And my particular focus is on a fundamental, systemic change in our capitalist economic model: we need to make the banks, the pension funds, the debt markets and the stock exchanges take account of climate risks and climate costs in all their decision-making. If we decarbonise capitalism in this way, we can shift trillions of dollars, euros and pounds from fossil fuel investment to green technologies – and catalyse not just Britain's shift to net zero but also the world's – as 15% of global fossil fuel investment is funded via the City of London.



**Q *If Brexit does take place should we become the party of 'back in' the EU?***

**Ed Davey:** Yes. It simply isn't credible to pretend our beliefs and values have changed, due to political developments not going our way: were Brexit to happen, I won't change my views!

There would be challenges campaigning to re-join – and we would need to think carefully about how we do that, listening to our core support. Yet we must remain the internationalist, pro-European co-operation party we have always been.

**Jo Swinson:** I haven't given up on stopping Brexit at all!

But our party history has been built on pro-European foundations. We've always had an internationalist outlook, always said that we succeed when we work with our allies across borders and work within international institutions. So I will always believe that the interests of our country are best served by being inside the EU, which is why it's vital that we deliver a People's Vote and then stop Brexit.

**Q *How are we to raise the resources to fix crumbling public services?***

**Jo Swinson:** I was proud that in our 2017 manifesto we were clear that we would reverse planned Conservative cuts to the corporation tax rate. The UK already has one of the lowest rates in the G20, so there is absolutely no need to go further as some of the Conservative leadership candidates are suggesting.

I believe we need to fundamentally reshape our economy. We need a public debate about the kind of society we want to be and then direct our resources at making that happen. New Zealand, for example, are putting forward a budget that for the first time prioritises wellbeing over economic growth, an issue I have been writing about and working since 2006. This is exactly the kind of debate that is needed in



the country and I believe I am the person to lead it. Resourcing our public services properly will be at the heart of that.

**Ed Davey:** By borrowing, taxing and switching spending from things we don't want to do, to things we do!

This means a fresh approach to fiscal policy – where we recognise that good investment pays for itself and can generate a return above the debt servicing costs, and we recognise interest rates remain low.

The case for higher borrowing for local and national investment in infrastructure therefore remains high.

Higher taxation will be necessary but it must be modest, targeted and carefully designed – not just to win political support, but also to prevent negative economic effects. As one of the architects of the “1p on income tax for education” back in 1990/91, and the principal

architect of the Scrap Council Tax campaign in 2003-04, I believe we can win our case on tax, if we have a clear, simple message.

And I'm keen on more radical long term tax reform. Replacing the disastrous business rates with a land value tax, coupled with a proper taxation system for digital retail, would be a start – but I'm keen on radical decentralisation of national income tax, to give local authorities a fairer, more buoyant tax base.

**Q *Do you regret the Coalition's austerity policies and what should be done to address the dismantling of the welfare state?***

**Ed Davey:** The reality is the Coalition's spending plans were rather similar to those planned by Labour's Alistair

Darling, and we have let Labour get away with blaming us for the inevitable squeeze that any Government would have imposed, back in 2010, when the country was borrowing over £350 million a day.

And there is no doubt that squeeze would have been much worse but for Liberal Democrats stopping the more right wing cutting tendencies of Osborne and Gove – the latter wanting to slash education spending, which we stopped.

The big spending mistakes of the Coalition was the early cut back on public investment, which didn't make economic sense, as well as some of the benefit cuts which hit the least well off. We did make these points strongly within government but we should have made our points more forcefully to the wider public as well.

And of course we need to stop the dismantling of the welfare state. We need to consider new radical ideas across the piece – starting with housing benefit. We must remember that the state used to spend its housing subsidies on bricks and mortar, subsidising council homes. Now a lot of housing benefit subsidy is going to private landlords, some of whom are providing very poor housing for it. I want to examine the case for capitalising future housing benefit payments and switching them into a more ambitious council house building programme.

**Jo Swinson:** I've been very publicly clear that there were some policies, like the bedroom tax, that I regret. It was just a bad policy and it shouldn't have happened.

The financial crisis should have been the wake-up call to fundamentally change the way we do things – but as a country we failed to take that opportunity. I think we are on the brink of another revolution that could help us fundamentally reshape our economy and our society – the tech revolution.

Advances in technology could help boost productivity and deliver those gains back to people. We need to start putting people and planet first – our welfare state is something we should be proud of, giving people dignity and a safety net

in hard times. Welfare shouldn't just help people to survive, but thrive, and that is why we need to match welfare with opportunities, for example ensuring everyone is equipped with basic digital skills to allow them to find work and provide better lives for themselves and their families.

### **Q Who is your current political hero?**

**Jo Swinson:** That's a tough one! When I was a child it was Anita Roddick, whose campaigns on environmentalism inspired me to get involved in activism.

Nowadays there are so many to choose from. I love the work that Led by Donkeys are doing to highlight the lies and hypocrisy of the Brexit campaign all around the country – and doing so with a healthy dose of humour. I'm a big fan of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who is shaking up Washington with her new approach to politics.

For me though, it's Jacinda Ardern. The courage, humanity and compassion she demonstrated after the terror attacks showed the kind of leader she is. She is someone who understands the incredible power they have as a figurehead to shape how people respond to those situations.

I think the world would be a much better place if we had more leaders willing to respond like that, than to rush to the politics of anger and division that we're seeing more and more.

**Ed Davey:** Paddy Ashdown. I joined the party partly because he inspired me so much. From the environment to Europe, from education to how to build and motivate a campaigning party, he was just superb. Even when I disagreed with him – not least on his Lib-Lab plans after the 1997 Blair landslide – I thought he was an amazing Liberal. He was, is and will continue to be my political hero.

## **ED DAVEY BIOGRAPHY**

Ed first got active in politics after reading *Seeing Green* by Jonathan Porritt as a teenager – and green issues have remained close to his heart ever since. After serving as the economics adviser to Paddy Ashdown, Ed won his seat of Kingston and Surbiton in 1997, when it was 106th on the target list.

From there, Ed has helped Liberal Democrats across the country, at all levels, get elected, including a diverse and majority female group in his home borough.

In 2012 Ed became the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change where he quadrupled renewable power and made the UK the world leader in offshore wind.

After losing his seat in 2015, Ed campaigned hard for Remain at the referendum, and gained his seat back in 2017. Since then Ed has been fighting for us to keep our place in Europe, pushing for a proper response to the climate emergency, and helping Liberal Democrats get elected across the country.

## **JO SWINSON BIOGRAPHY**

Jo is part of a new generation of politicians who work across party lines to solve the big issues.

She was first inspired by Body Shop entrepreneur Anita Roddick. Since then, she has campaigned to save our environment, including securing commitments from manufacturers to reduce excessive food packaging.

As a business minister, Jo introduced shared parental leave, extended flexible working rights, clamped down on unscrupulous payday lenders, increased penalties on rogue employers failing to pay workers the minimum wage, improved corporate transparency, introduced new rights for consumers buying digital content and made gender pay gap reporting happen.

Jo has always loved technology. Her first computer was a Spectrum ZX 48K, she learnt programming at school and she now leads the Liberal Democrats' Technology Commission.

Jo joined the Liberal Democrats at the age of 17. By 25 she was the youngest member of the House of Commons, representing her home constituency East Dunbartonshire.

Jo lost her seat in 2015. She set up her own business and wrote her book *Equal Power*, before winning against the SNP by a 10% margin in 2017 and becoming deputy leader.

# IN - OUT - PENDING

Whoever becomes the next Liberal Democrat leader, they can look forward to an overflowing in-tray. Sarah Green takes a look inside

In 'Bollocks to Brexit' the party struck gold with a simple message that resonates with voters. With 16 MEPs an increase of 700 councillors and a respectable result in the Peterborough by-election, there's no doubt the party's fortunes seems to have turned. The new leader inherits a buoyant and upbeat party, with membership hovering around the 100,000 mark. This contest has the potential to galvanise members and capture the imagination of the wider voting public as the candidates promote their vision(s) for a Liberal 21st Century Britain.

The race is on - but what is waiting for the next leader of the Liberal Democrats?

To be blunt, we can't stop Brexit with a swearsy slogan. The most immediate question therefore concerns the level of cooperation with Remain parties and MPs to prevent Britain leaving the EU.

The arithmetic in the House of Commons demands smart politics, not grandstanding. That feeds into how the new leader approaches Remain MPs and groupings across the house. Is 'Bollocks to Brexit' our mantra for all routes that keep us in the European Union or only when it suits the fortunes of the party?

On which point, should the new leader offer the remnants of Change UK the hand of friendship now that it has been smashed at the ballot box? Indeed, it is possible that some of the MPs that have now left Change UK will consider defecting to the Liberal Democrats. Managing these relationships will require bold leadership and a deftness of touch.

Beyond Brexit, what does the party have to say? As voters start to consider us again after making us sit on the naughty step post-coalition, the new leader will need to offer more than a catchy headline or two. What will Jo Swinson or Ed Davey have to say of substance about the health service, social care, education or the economy?

There are also internal challenges waiting for the leader's attention too. It was only a few months ago that the party made a quarter of HQ staff redundant thanks to a serious hole in the budget. What is in place to make sure that doesn't happen again? And it's worth pointing out that our most recent fantastic set of election results came on the back of depleting our already stretched staff - they are much maligned, undervalued and under appreciated. How will the new leader ensure our staff have the proper resource, support and career development we should be offering? Does it require a change in senior management? Or another look at the party structures which didn't anticipate the gap in party finances?

Indeed, the creaking committee system wasn't agile enough to respond adequately to Your Liberal Britain and couldn't manage the most recent EU selections

without an element of farce. And given the party is still tainted by recent scandals (and there is no real indication that we've learned from them), the new leader would do well to get behind the new disciplinary process.

The electorate for this leadership election is party members, the majority of whom joined after 2015. They were clearly not put off by our reputation in coalition. But until very recently the Liberal Democrats were languishing at 8% in the polls, suggesting the wider voting public were not yet ready to give the party another hearing. Voters who were our natural supporters and those who lent us their vote lost faith in the Liberal Democrats. The next leader has to earn it back.

It is widely expected that he or she will be at the helm for more than one parliamentary term. This gives them the space and time to make their mark not just on the party but on British politics. To do so the new leader will need to inspire both internally and externally.

We live in unprecedented times. But history, while rarely repeated often rhymes. In the 20th century progressives enjoyed major victories in 1906, 1945 and 1997 in part due to cross-party working. Moreover, anti-Conservative forces have been divided and the story of the last century is one of Conservative domination.

With the two main parties at Westminster now in severe disarray, the Liberal Democrats holding a clear position on the biggest issue of the day and voters seriously considering us again, the opportunity to permanently break the existing two party system has never been more real. Or more needed. Can Ed or Jo capitalise on that? Will the new leader be open to collaboration and even electoral pacts or do they think we should go it alone?

Either way, it will require bold, decisive action and for the leader to take the party with them.

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Sarah Green is a member of the Liberator Collective

# WHAT THE BBC WON'T TELL YOU

## Liberals saw a renaissance in the European Parliament elections, despite the media emphasis on the populist right, says David Grace

I spent the late evening of European election night, as so often, shouting at the BBC.

Sometimes I think they're biased but mostly I think their failure to 'educate and inform' (as well as entertain) is grounded in determined ignorance. They reported the European Parliament elections as if they were only taking place in Britain and then under a first past the post system instead of an admittedly poor version of a proportional one. Consequently they focussed on the success of Farage's Brexit Party in the UK with an occasional slight mention of Le Pen's and Salvini's successes in France and Italy.

It was as if the BBC had become the communications department of the populist right. After an hour and a half they managed to get a Liberal Democrat in the studio at last and it was left to Alistair Campbell to explain to the viewers that Remain parties had done better than brexiteers. Thus our national public broadcaster missed the big story of the night, the Liberal renaissance across Europe.

Before this year's elections, the two biggest groups in the European Parliament were the European People's Party (mainly Christian Democrats but not Tories because they left under Cameron, disliking the federalist views of the group) and the Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (including the Labour Party) which between them had always held over half the votes and thus controlled business between them.

Our group the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) had been fourth after the European Conservatives and Reformists (Tories and assorted right-wing nutters). As the table below shows that has all changed.

I have grouped together the Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) as the two Eurosceptic groups that Brexit MEPs might join, but they are separate groups and indeed previous Ukip MEPs have split up and joined both. Farage was chairing the EFDD. Incidentally while all the members of these two groups are Eurosceptic, they do not all want their countries to leave the EU.

You cannot divide the European Parliament like Britain into Leavers and Remainers but you can make a broad division between those on the one hand who want the European Union to develop (pro) and those who either want it to retreat into a Europe of nations or disappear altogether (con).

Scoring results in that way shows pro: 510 (down from 521), con: 175 (up from 155). I have left out the European United Left/Nordic Green Left 38 members because they don't fit neatly into either category. Thus, the first clear message of the elections is that, although the Eurosceptic vote is up, the majority for further progress in the EU is still huge.

The second clear message is that ALDE has increased enormously and will have a crucial role in the new parliament as EPP and S&D no longer control over half the votes. The parliament's agenda is derived from an annual work programme agreed with the European Commission but the detailed timetable and division of work between committees is agreed by the parliament's bureau which has all groups on it.

Compare this with the House of Commons business which is controlled by the government and announced on Thursday afternoon's by the leader of the house

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT 2019

UK PARTY	EU GROUP	MEPS 2014	MEPS 2019	%	UK MEPS
-	EPP	216	179	23.9	0
LABOUR	S&D	184	153	20.4	10
LIBDEM	ALDE	69	105	14.0	16
TORIES	ECR	77	63	8.4	4
GREEN	GREEN	52	73	9.8	7
BREXIT	ENF +EFDD	78	112	15.0	29

(until recently the ghastly Andrea Loathesome).

So who are our European family in ALDE? It must be admitted that ALDE is a broad church, embracing not only variations of liberalism but also politicians who had never before described themselves as Liberals.

ALDE describes itself as “the group that stands firm for European values. We believe the European Union is a community of values. ALDE believes values are the outcome of ongoing public debate, of the confrontation of ideas and convictions, of a process shaped, directed and owned by citizens themselves. ALDE puts values first.”

For anyone who finds this a little vague, I can recommend an academic study of the positions taken by ALDE (and other groups) in the European Parliament: <https://bit.ly/2HVTdVb>

The breadth of opinion may be about to widen further as the president of the parliamentary group, the redoubtable Guy Verhofstadt, proposes to create a new group by merging ALDE with President Macron’s Renaissance Group: Europe en Marche. Macron’s own views on the desirability of this have changed over time.

Meanwhile, here’s an overview of where the MEPs come from. ALDE was built up by Graham Watson and others on the basis of the old European Liberals and Democrats and Reformists (ELDR) to which were added a multiplicity of parties from new member states. In many countries, ALDE has more than one national member party and in some they fight each other at national level.

For example, in Denmark, Venstre (Danish for ‘left’ but that is only of historical significance) now often forms the core of a right-wing government whereas Radikale Venstre (Social Liberals like most of us) is more often to be found in a left-wing coalition and was the model for the Moderates in the wonderful Borgen TV series.

Wonder of wonders., the biggest component in ALDE today is provided by the British Liberal Democrats 15 MEPs and one Alliance Party MEP.

Macron’s group will outnumber that with 21 members. Next, the Romanians provide eight as does Spain (from six different parties), the Germans seven, the Czechs six and the Dutch six (from two very different parties, VVD and D66), the Danes five (two parties), the Belgians four (two parties).

The rest come from other countries but the new group contains no-one from Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Poland and Portugal. Looks like ALDE’s leaders need to spend a bit more time courting in the Mediterranean. Glad to see that we now have two Hungarian MEPs in the group, who can stand up to the demagoguery of Viktor Orban.

Five years ago European group leaders with the support of some national governments established the Spitzenkandidat system, although there is nothing in the treaties about it. The idea was that each political group would nominate a candidate to be president of the commission. After the EP elections established which group had the most votes, the European Council (heads of government) would duly nominate the candidate of the winning party. The idea was to give the voters a direct effect on the choice of commission president and thus to give the EP elections more resonance, rather necessary given average turnouts across Europe of less than 50%. Incidentally this year

the UK had its highest European turnout, sadly only 36.9% whereas across the union, the average was 50.99%.

The experiment worked in 2014 in that the EPP had the highest vote and their candidate the Luxembourgish Jean-Claude Juncker became president. There was no resonance in the UK as the Tories had no candidate and the Liberals and Labour totally failed to promote the idea itself or their groups’ candidates. Indeed Nick Clegg rigged the British votes in ALDE to oppose Guy Verhofstadt’s nomination because he was frightened of the latter’s federalism. For the 2019 elections, people tried to run the Spitzenkandidat system again. Given impending Brexit, once again the British public were unaware.

For some weird reason ALDE decided not to run a Spitzenkandidat but instead to have a seven-person panel called Team Europe from which a commission president could be picked. The team included the current commissioner responsible for competition policy, Margrethe Vestager, who is from our friends in Radikale Venstre.

The EPP remains the largest group after the elections and now expect the European Council to nominate their man, Manfred Weber who has been leading their group. Weber is from Bavaria’s Christian Social Union and is not everyone’s cup of tea. He promotes an ever closer union as set out in the Treaty of Rome but his voting record includes supporting the United Kingdom’s drive to freeze welfare payments for EU immigrants and not banning so-called gay conversion therapies.

The treaties provide that the European Council nominates the commission president but it is the European Parliament which elects the postholder. Donald Tusk, as president of the European Council, has the task of arranging negotiations about the nomination.

Now other names have come up including Margrethe Vestager. She has been popular and successful taking on both Google and Apple in her role as competition commissioner. The parliament has until 21 June to come up with a candidate who would command the support of the house.

Here is an interesting parallel with Westminster conventions. In theory the British PM should be the person who commands support of the Commons, not just the choice of the largest party, currently the Tories who do not have a majority. If the UK ends up with Boris but the EU gets Vestager, which system would you call more democratic?

If you have found this all too simple, there is one small matter which could affect it all – Brexit.

The European Parliament currently has 751 seats, of which the UK occupies 73. It has been decided that if the UK leaves, parliament will go down to 705 and 27 of the UK’s seats will be reallocated to other countries. Thus, many countries have actually elected MEPs to occupy these ‘Brexit seats’ and these people await anxiously to discover whether the UK actually leaves. Don’t we all?

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

# IDENTITY POLITICS BEYOND BREXIT

Everyone at York was given a copy of Vince Cable's pamphlet, which raises issues of realignment, political identity and the B word. Susan Simmonds discusses why

Being able to review the latest pamphlet by Vince Cable in the light of a very, very decent – if not brilliant – euro election result not only adds to its relevance, but also provides much richer territory to explore than when it was first published in March.

That said the recent election results - the euros in particular - illuminates some of its potential contradictions.

The pamphlet *Beyond Brexit – Liberal Politics for the Age of Identity* is a collection of essays which attempts to provide a roadmap for liberals, social democrats and progressives in a world after Brexit.

While our unequivocal message of opposition to Brexit has paid recent electoral dividends, there has been justifiable concern expressed, within all political parties, that discussion of other policy issues has been completely stifled by the impasse in Parliament and its domination of the media and conversations in the public space. This pamphlet provides a counterweight to that.

The essays provide precise and incisive analysis of major issues that include economics, housing, inequality and taking the green economy seriously. So many of Cable's proposals are evidently obvious – and for that he is to be congratulated - that I have found little to disagree with in either his analysis or his solution. This may suggest that I don't think very hard or don't know what I am talking about, but my lack of disagreement actually reflects that Cable is writing at a sufficiently strategic level not to provoke critical discussion or engagement around the detail.

And at this strategic level the pamphlet could actually provide much of the policy declaration that Change UK should have organised before their launch.

## SCREWED UP ON BASICS

Thankfully they didn't and also screwed up on a number of other basic functions that a competent – if new - political party should be able to manage. Although it is an undeserved misfortune that such principled politicians as Heidi Allen and Anna Soubrey should turn out to be such public and unmerited casualties of the carnage of Brexit.

Commiserations aside, how far Cable's ideas can and should be part of any politics of realignment is part of a discussion that as a party we need to have. In my view that should best be left to the candidates in the upcoming leadership contest to illuminate and expand upon and for the members to test at the hustings. And as an undecided voter, their thoughts on this will play a major part in making my choice.

But having given Cable a largely free pass on the

content, the title is *Liberal Politics for the Age of Identity*. And Cable is very clear in asserting that Liberal politics can thrive in an age of identity. But I think there are a number of unexplored issues which challenge but fundamentally do not undermine his assertion.

Cable doesn't enter into extensive definitions of, or discussions about, identity within politics. Admittedly this is a big academic area, full of rich definitions, language, personal stories from many cultures and would be difficult to capture in a pamphlet such as this.

So critiquing around this level of opaqueness adds a probably unintended level of complexity. However, Cable does make one pertinent comment by way of definition; "one feature of so-called 'identity politics' is that the previously accepted norms of rational economic debate do not seem to apply – in effect, people vote against their own apparent self-interest".

This comment is worth exploring further for two reasons. Firstly Cable views identity politics as causing political schisms along lines of social identity rather than recognising and acting on them. This is an important point as it can potentially perpetuate marginalisation through affirmations of difference.

The UK political system has always to some extent worked with identity politics. Ethnicity, religion, class, gender and sexual orientation have always had an impact on how parties see themselves and how they formulate and deliver their policy and legislation. Some parties in government have passed genuinely progressive legislation on women's rights, equal marriage and minority rights; others to their shame opposed this and passed oppressive legislation in recognition of appeasing and pandering to their membership bias and phobias.

Secondly, Cable's comments imply there is a shift in the depth and placement of identity politics in UK society. His comments that people are voting against their own apparent economic self interest suggests that this is a phenomena that is embedded outside the more explored areas of identity politics. Whether his comments imply that people believe that they are doing so irrationally, rather than believing they are rationally voting in their own best interest is one for further exploration.

My experience of spending time in a Brexit voting economically neglected seaside town, is that people voting for Brexit strongly and passionately believe that they are voting in their own self interest, believing that it will release jobs for locals rather than migrants and free-up scarce social housing. They may be wrong, but that is what they believe and so far no amount

of evidence from experts has changed their views. Although I'm not sure in parts of Thanet that any political party has tried very hard.

For that reason I think that the impact and direction of identity politics in the UK is changing. It has always existed, but prior to Brexit much of the sentiment had no place of expression which provided it with a respectable voice or legitimate representation. Frequently people who felt 'left behind' didn't vote or even bother to register to vote. Or they did what we saw in Barking and Dagenham in local elections in 2006 which was to vote for the BNP who became the official opposition on the council.

Brexit has been an enabler and a definer of a social identity. For those who wanted it, it has provided a platform for casual racism and provided a veneer of decency or mood music that has allowed attacks on and undermining of our societal cohesiveness. It has damaged democracy, civil society and trust in both the political process and individual politicians.

However, at best Brexit has shone a light on a phenomenon that already existed. It has provided a description of the most recent manifestation of identity politics. This allows us to examine it, dissect, review, assess and as Liberals, reach rational conclusions about how we deal with it. It may provide an opportunity for us as Liberals to build on our distinctive, liberal, social identity which is outward looking, internationalist, pro-immigration – as the late Simon Tittle once described it; “drawbridge down”.

Cable makes the point that in the age of identity, Liberals can thrive. The euro elections have provided a useful and a somewhat unexpected test for that assertion. The Lib Dems did well in the euros. We now have more MEP's than we have ever had. Lib Dems topped the poll in London and we outpolled the Conservative and Labour parties. Supporters of other parties have been open about voting for us as the party most able to send a message to the government that they want Brexit stopped.

Whether we can build on this is the last major point. Cable sets out his stall clearly when he says, “our response cannot be to banish experts and usher in an age of unreason. Rather we must be better at demonstrating what we believe, to calmly continue setting out the facts and evidence – which these essays seek to do – and to propose radical change which leads to a more prosperous, socially just and environmentally sustainable society. Winning those arguments in the current divisive atmosphere is much harder if living standards are squeezed and inequalities widen”.

I hope that the euro elections have taught us as a party many things – and I will leave others to do and share the analysis, but there are a couple of points that are pertinent. Firstly that identity politics is now deeply embedded into the British Party system and continue to influence the political discourse. That

*“Frankly blatant lies are winning the game. There is no shame in telling them, no shame or career penalties in being caught out in a lie – provided the electorate like it”*

is not to say that it has not always existed and the Labour and Conservative parties have always been given an electoral advantage by that and one that as a Liberal party we have struggled to get cut through with our policy positions.

But if calmly setting out the facts and evidence is of course right, in an age of fake news and scepticism about the views of experts, this may not be enough. And I'm equally pessimistic for any other political party which has a thoughtful policy agenda.

Frankly blatant lies are winning the game. There is no shame in telling them, no shame or career penalties in being caught out in a lie – provided the electorate like it - and there

are no umpires with any clout to impose any sanctions. The old filters of the media and political parties being responsible and regulated for their messages have long gone.

## **TOOTHLESS TIGER**

And against the rise of social media, sadly the Electoral Commission has become a toothless tiger lacking the powers to deal with its reach or impact. Nor is being proven right after the event - as the Lib Dems were after the Iraq war or will be about Brexit - going to be any use except to keep us warm in bed at night or provide anecdotes around the fireplaces at the NLC.

So if setting out the facts and evidence is not enough, how do we create cut through? The simple answers – blatantly lie, create fake news ourselves or misuse facts are not an option for us as a party which takes a lot of care to behave with integrity and believes that to be important in aspiring to govern. Maybe we should just say ‘bollocks’ instead.

I confess I didn't like it – it is not a word I am comfortable using. Not because I'm prudish about swearing but it is simply not part of my vocabulary. However it seems to have provided an element of cut through and delivered our best euro result ever; although I'll leave the discussion of the correlation between increasing our vote share and using non-inclusive and potentially offensive language to others.

If we accept that we can thrive in the age of identity - and I do believe that Cable's assertion is fundamentally correct - then we have to build on this and ensure that we retain our new support and even take that message to places we have not been before. Whether that is through our traditional campaigning tools or new political alliances is up for discussion. See you at the hustings.

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Susan Simmonds is a member of Thanet Liberal Democrats.

Beyond Brexit – Liberal Politics for the Age of Identity. By Vince Cable. [www.libdems.org](http://www.libdems.org)

# TIANANMEN AND DARFUR COME TO KHARTOUM

The bloody crackdown on democracy activists in Sudan was encouraged by other Arab dictatorships as a warning to their own people, says Rebecca Tinsley

You might have expected jubilation among British Sudanese on 11 April, when President Omar Bashir was forced from power. On that day, a diaspora group was attending a meeting organised by Article 1, the charity I founded. Instead of joy, however, we found fear that democracy activists back home would be tied up in pointless negotiations as the transitional military council bought time to regroup, and then slaughtered the protesters.

As predicted, the Sudanese security services have now dispersed peaceful demonstrations with deadly force, killing at least 60, wounding 600, and raping dozens of women, including female doctors.

On 3 June, as the operation began, the Rapid Support Forces or Janjaweed (who made their mark killing at least 300,000 in Darfur) surrounded hospitals to stop the wounded seeking help, and went into medical centres, beating doctors. They looted widely, dragging people from cars and dumping bodies in the Nile.

At the time of writing, there are 20,000 troops on the streets of the capital. Because the internet has been cut, there are no reliable casualty figures from the many uprisings in cities across Sudan.

Nor is it clear how much support the Janjaweed militias have from the middle and junior ranks of the regular army. However, there will be little help from the international community, beyond the usual toothless diplomatic condemnations: the UN Security Council declined to even discuss events in Sudan, thanks to the Russians and Chinese veto.

The head of the Janjaweed, General Mohamed Hamdan Dagolo, known to all as Hemeti, spent the last week of May touring Egypt and the Gulf, consulting the Khartoum regime's financial backers.

When he returned, the transitional military council, of which he is the de facto leader, expelled Al Jazeera, and shortly after, the assault on the demonstrators began. General Sisi in Egypt and the Gulf Arab monarchs made clear their priority: get protesters off the streets because of the message it sends to the rest of the Arab world democratic change can come from below. Moreover, the Saudis have been paying the Janjaweed and the regular Sudanese army to provide 14,000 ground troops for their war in Yemen. A move to civilian rule in Khartoum would have brought those troops home.

British Sudanese always knew how badly this episode in Sudanese history could end. There were 14 coups between independence in 1956 and the one that brought Bashir to power in 1989. On the night I arrived in Khartoum in 2004, there were roadblocks at

every intersection, with soldiers waving the business end of machine guns in our faces because of putsch rumours. Hence Sudanese could be forgiven for believing it was too early to break out the fermented camel's milk this time.

## FOLLOW THE MONEY

The protests, which started in December, began when the International Monetary Fund told President Bashir to end subsidies on bread and fuel. Sudan has foreign debts of \$55bn; it is subject to sanctions due to its genocidal campaign against its non-Arab citizens; and it is on the US list of state sponsors of terrorism - all impediments to accessing the international finance needed to modernise its feudal economy. Instead of removing the subsidies gradually, as the IMF suggested, the regime did it all at once. The move backfired spectacularly.

Khartoum devotes 75% of its annual budget to 'security' - the armed forces, the Rapid Support Forces/Janjaweed, and the National Intelligence and Security Service (the equivalent of MI5).

Education, health and infrastructure have been neglected for decades as a consequence. Moreover, any non-security sector spending has benefited the patronage network of self-identifying Arab ethnic groups along the Nile. These crony capitalists made fortunes from a construction boom, while the periphery remains marginalised.

Bashir's regime has also stolen Sudan's oil revenues, earning it the bottom ranking on Transparency International's global league table. (A Wikileaks cable from the US ambassador to Khartoum alleged Bashir himself has \$9bn in London banks). The result has been hyperinflation, unemployment and brain drain.

Despite misty-eyed Western media reports about the solidarity and undoubted courage of the protesters, bear in mind that few of them objected when Bashir's regime imposed its harsh version of Islam and Arabisation on the non-Muslim black Africans in the southern part of Sudan, leading to the deaths of two million people, and the eventual secession in 2011 of South Sudan.

Few of today's protesters were concerned when the regime sought to eliminate the black African tribes of Darfur from 2003 until the present day; it is therefore ironic that the citizens of Khartoum and Omdurman have now experienced the brutality that Darfuris have endured daily since 2003 at the hands of the Janjaweed. There has also been virtual silence from today's protesters about the systematic bombardment of black African citizens in the Nuba Mountains since 2011. In other words, the trigger behind the revolution



was economic hardship.

Another feature of the uprising eluding the media is the irrelevance of Sudan's opposition politicians, in line with global trends away from traditional parties. The protests were organised by the Sudanese Professionals Association, rather than the discredited old parties which have occasionally been bought off by the regime. A senior opposition figure failed to attend the protests, claiming he was "waiting for the right moment to join," a statement confirming the demonstrators' contempt for the appeasing older generation.

Much has been made of the visibility of women in the protests. Yet, Sudanese women have always been involved in anti-regime activity for good reason - they have so little to lose. Islamism's interpretation of Sharia accords them low status; in Khartoum state alone, 40,000 women a year are arrested and publicly beaten for 'indecent', like wearing jeans as they walk to school: and Sudan has one of the world's highest rates of female genital mutilation. While it has been encouraging to see women asserting their dignity during the protests, remember that Egyptian women were also at the fore of protests in 2011, only to be harassed and then banished to their traditional exploited status when the barricades came down.

All along, Sudanese Diaspora have warned about the determination of Sudan's 'deep state'. Bashir's Islamist project began years before the 1989 military coup. Bashir and his colleagues systematically inserted their followers into positions running hospitals, the media, factories, the judiciary, universities, the clergy, the military and civil service. Their tentacles extend everywhere and they are firmly entrenched. Now we know the transitional military council never had any intention of moving to civilian rule. Their promises of elections within nine months have been condemned by Sudanese rights groups who point out that 40% of Sudan (Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan states) is at war with the regime, there is no accurate census, and the regime has decades of experience at stuffing ballot boxes and intimidating voters and opposition.

Unlike Bashir and his colleagues, the Janjaweed commander, Hemeti, is not motivated by Islamism, but by imposing an Arab identity on multi-ethnic Sudan. The European Union has been indirectly funding his militia through the Khartoum Process, preventing migrants from the Horn of Africa reaching the Libyan coast.

Hence, we should not be surprised that representatives of the EU and Britain wasted no time conferring their blessings on Hemeti when the transitional military council ousted Bashir. It is especially nauseating that both the EU and UK issued pious statements supporting the will of the Sudanese people, a factor that never previously seriously concerned them. The EU and the UK have persisted with the Khartoum Process, despite evidence that the Janjaweed sell migrants to Libyans who hold them for ransom or sell them as slaves.

Throughout Bashir's bloody rule, the international community responded to atrocities by "expressing concern to the authorities", blandly encouraging the regime to respect human rights. Over the years, the West declined to apply targeted personal financial smart sanctions against the architects of the genocide, even after UN Security Council approved them.

There has never been follow through on any mildly



critical threats, and the UK has actively encouraged business links with Bashir's regime, even as it bombs hospitals and schools in the (mainly Christian and black African) Nuba Mountains. Sudan's rulers always understood the West's lack of sincerity about human rights, and acted accordingly, promising to abide by peace agreements that were broken before diplomats left Sudanese air space.

## QUESTIONABLE INTELLIGENCE

George W Bush was more critical of Bashir's ethnic cleansing, but Obama bowed to pressure from Saudi Arabia, which bankrolled Bashir and his deep state. Moreover, the CIA has been fed questionable intelligence about Islamist terrorists by Khartoum, (which once gave sanctuary to bin Laden) thereby inoculating the regime against serious pressure. The US responded to years of ethnic cleansing by calling on Bashir to enact reforms, wilfully ignoring the regime's track record of broken promises and genocide.

As for the UK, its historic foreign policy aims in the region were to bolster anti-Soviet regimes during the Cold War, to discourage Arab nationalist movements thereby preventing Arab or Muslim unity in the Middle East, and to support autocrats in the name of maintaining security (meaning selling arms to feudal tyrants possessing oil).

Labour, Tory and coalition policy on Sudan has been to offer platitudes about human rights, while insisting that only through engagement with the regime could the UK influence it. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office did not suggest 'engagement' with the Soviet Union or more recently Venezuela).

Bashir's National Congress Party (formerly the National Islamic Front) was never likely to go quietly. Its leaders have much to lose, including personal fortunes amassed through corruption, property and investments in London (several members of Bashir's cabinet hold British passports), and their shares in Sudanese firms.

The faces at the top of the transitional military council may be different, but their intentions remain the same. In summary, nothing will change in Sudan until everything changes.

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Rebecca Tinsley founded Article1, which helps Sudanese asylum seekers in the UK. The illustration is by children her team visited in refugee camps in December, showing the Sudanese army's action

# “WHAT THE FUCK JUST HAPPENED?”

## Losing contact with ordinary voters cost Labor an Australian election everyone expected it to win. Steve Yolland reports

As I write this, just two days after the Australian election, the sense of shock at the Liberal-National Coalition's narrow victory over Labor is still causing most citizens to mutter, confused: “What the actual fuck?” I am not being coarse for the sake of effect. That is by far the most common comment.

It's not just that there was a widespread sense that the Coalition, victim of recent leadership instability, was long overdue a “pull yourselves together” kicking.

It was that a Labor victory had been predicted for so long, with “two party preferred” margins as high as 53-47 in their favour being forecast in usually reliable opinion polls as late as the morning of election day, that the eventual win by their opponents was ... well, flabbergasting. Stupefying. “Shome mishtake, shurely?” (Election night in Australia is universally accompanied by parties and heavy drinking.)

In its way, this result is just as shocking (and therefore interesting) as the Brexit vote and the presidential win of Donald Trump.

So what produced a result which looks like ending up as 51-49 outcome in favour of the Coalition and prime minister Scott Morrison, now owners of a wafter thin majority that will theoretically allow them to continue to hold the Government benches for another three years?

### ELECTION TRAGICS

There are many factors and I will try and unpick them intelligently for the election tragics that make up a goodly proportion of Liberator's readers.

Firstly and most obviously, the Labor leader, Bill Shorten, was an unpopular figure, in part because he had a history as a dominant and powerful head of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, which is not an organisation which spends much of its time cultivating the affection of the middle class centre of Australia - where most Australians sit - but also because in Parliament and on TV he exhibited all the natural charisma of a brick.

Ironically a decent, engaging and friendly character away from the cameras, once they turned on he became over-controlled, lecturing, somewhat superior and just plain boring. And as he was Labor leader for six years, that was a long time to bore people.

The recently anointed leader of the Liberal Party, by contrast, has been a relentlessly cheerful “ordinary bloke”, with an ever-present baseball cap perched on his head, who made no pretence of any great intellectual heft, but insisted he had plenty of empathy for the ‘battlers’ - Aussies who want a “fair go”, or as they picturesquely put it here, “a fair suck of the saveley”.

As one Liberal insider put it: “When he got the job

last year he immediately began building his persona as an ordinary, knockabout bloke who can knock back a beer and roll up his shirt sleeves to have a go. He knew the importance of filling in the picture before his opponents defined him to the public.”

By achieving this, Morrison captured the aspiration of many working people to not actually be working people, thanks very much, but rather to ascend to comfortable middle class status.

The Labor Party - with a complex and substantial “tax and spend” agenda that required endless explanation - appeared mired in the class warfare battles of previous decades, stating, in effect: “We'll tax you what we need and then spend it on you as we see fit”, to which many Australians clearly said: “Thanks a lot, I'll just keep me money and spend it myself”.

Whether or not a new Liberal National Coalition government will actually do anything much to help the people who switched their votes to them remains to be seen - they didn't expect to win either, so have a very sketchy plan for government - but painting Labor as the party of higher taxation was certainly a successful part of their pitch.

It will be a long cold day in hell till a political party in Australia again goes into an election promising significant tax reform or even tax increases.

This effect was multiplied by the Labor Party's inability (wary of offending environmentally-aware/Green voters further south) to enthusiastically support the proposed Adani coal mine in regional Queensland.

The Coalition found it simplicity itself to portray Labor as wishy-washy on the mine (which they were) and by implication, therefore, as wishy-washy on jobs for regional people - estimated as maybe as many as 15,000 from Adani alone. This effect was re-doubled by no apparent solution to endlessly rising power prices and problems with water supply to regional areas.

There now no Labor seats left in Queensland north of Brisbane. And the “don't care about jobs” message hurt Labor in regional New South Wales, too, where the impact of Adani was little more than symbolic of two very different agendas for Government, but where Labor was portrayed as having forgotten their core base in favour of chasing a more ideologically-driven pro-environment vote.

The scale of the rout is notable. Across Queensland Coalition candidates in fact polled 57% to Labor's 43% - unheard of margins.

Maybe Manchester United supporters offering to go over to Anfield and cheer on Liverpool so the Kop can have a day off.

By running dead on new coal mines and talking up their climate change credentials, Labor made a bold attempt to speak to inner city Sydney and seats across left-leaning Victoria in particular, which had delivered a massive electoral setback to the Liberals in a recent

state election.

The attempt failed. Although the Green vote around the nation stayed roughly the same at 10.5%, blue collar voters were resolutely unimpressed.

It's not that they don't care about climate change, it's just that they want to care about it without paying more tax on a second investment home, (often called a "bricks and mortar pension" in Australia), or their parents having to give up long-established tax breaks on shares in their superannuation portfolio.

Ironically in well-to-do Coalition seats in the centre of cities there were small swings to the Greens and even to high-taxing Labor – the so-called 'doctor's wives' effect, where comfortably off people dabble in more progressive politics because whatever the outcome it won't really affect them. But move into the outer suburban ring and the effect was reversed, leading to a clutch of vital Coalition wins in seats in marginal seats in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania where they should, by all expectations, have been swept aside.

## SCARE TACTICS

So it is worthwhile considering why the Liberal-National scare tactics on tax were so effective.

Australians are not, in a general sense, anti-taxation in the way that some in America are. It's not that they are selfish. Indeed, Australians donate more per head of population to charity – including to charities overseas – than any other country in the world.

It is rather that they do not trust Government to spend those taxes wisely.

As part of a growing trend worldwide, Australians are deeply suspicious of Government at all levels, so when the Coalition festooned all the polling stations in the country in bunting – in stark Labour red – with an unflattering photo of Bill Shorten looking, frankly, confused, with the slogan "Labor: It's the Bill Australia can't afford." it was highly effective. At no stage did Labor ever manage to convey their contrasting priorities with such devastating and effective directness.

And it was this scenario – starkly similarly to Clinton's shock loss to Trump in America – that led one member of the public writing in to a radio station on Sunday morning to dismiss the Labor effort as having been led by 'Hillary Shorten'. You could hear the heads nodding in agreement.

Perhaps the most significant thing about this election is that it shows, once again, that political parties in the western world are no longer either mere vehicles for those who traditionally made up their supporter base or even perfectly aligned to those who they seek to lead, and especially on the left.

Pennsylvania coal miners voted for Trump. On Saturday so did coal miners in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales and those who want to be coal miners in Queensland. Voters in Wales and northern England and the south west voted against their obvious self-interest for Brexit. On Saturday so did

*“Morrison captured the aspiration of many working people to not actually be working people, thanks very much, but rather to ascend to comfortable middle class status”*

those working in the tourism industry in Queensland who said, in effect, we'd rather have a coal mine than the Barrier Reef.

This time round, Australia's conservative parties portrayed themselves as simple-thinking, straight-talking managers, eschewing the internecine struggles that have consumed them in recent years (the Coalition parties have been split between hard right cultural warriors and small-l liberals, much like in Britain) and opted instead for a pitch that they were just a bunch of good old blokes on the side of 'ordinary' Aussies – yes, even

those who work down coalmines, milk the cows, and for those – by offering vague and very unlikely promises on road building – who are stuck in commuter traffic queues for hours every day.

By contrast the Labor Party was simply too overly intellectual, too long-winded, and they constantly beetled off down obscurantist paths – all very noble in their own right, to be sure – without taking care of their knitting.

As one radio commentator explained: "I went to see the mechanic who works on my car, and I asked him who he was going to vote for, and he said Liberal because he didn't want to lose his tax break on the one investment property his family owned. When I told him there was no chance of that, because any change to the law meant that existing arrangements were grandfathered, he looked at me and said 'What the fuck does Grandfathered mean?'" Quite.

You couldn't summarise Labor's failures to explain their goals any more simply, nor could you sound a better warning to the left around the world as they seek to come to terms with the appeal of populist right wing heroes.

It's hard to know exactly what will happen next. The Coalition now has a clean slate and the thrill of a totally unexpected win, and they could take the chance to shift their party back to the centre, (especially as former prime minister Tony Abbott, leader of the hard right, lost his seat to an Independent), deliver modest but welcome tax cuts, finally make some progress on climate change – a notable failure for some years – and de-fang Labor for a generation.

Labor will retreat and lick their wounds, but they already show little sign of having learned their lesson, as their next leader, far from a consensus politician from the centre, will very likely be a dyed-in-the-wool tub-thumping leftie. Which will do wonders for reviving the spirits of their own members, but very little for the electorate at large. Sound familiar?

In the meantime, Australians will move on to arguing about this week's football, and saying: "Thank God that's over for another three years." Although with a likely Government majority of just one, they might be counting those chickens a tad early.

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Steve Yolland is a UK Lib Dem resident in Melbourne

# IT'S MORE THAN MONEY

## Inequality is not just financial, liberals should tackle unequal power too, says Oliver Craven

Many progressives fall into the trap of seeing inequality as purely an issue of money - as if purely more government spending would be enough to solve all of the ills of the disadvantaged.

Liberals, however, realise that inequality is not simply about money, it is an issue of power. Money is an integral part of inequality, but any move to fight inequality with government spending will soon be ended if inequality of power is not also fought, as the rich and powerful pay for the election of sympathetic politicians.

Liberals should be against the format of the current welfare state regardless of its monetary generosity. The current system maintains a false choice between a given job and going hungry. It's clear that we should be allowing people to spend their time in a way which they find fulfilling and valuable, whether that is starting their own business or caring for relatives. It also fails to perform its role as a safety net, allowing many people to fall through the gaps, left struggling on their own without the support they deserve.

When people lack economic security, they become more insular and tribal. This is one of the reasons why we have seen such an uptick in anti-immigration and anti-EU sentiment since the financial crisis.

Those who feel threatened are much more likely to lash out at those who they perceive are a danger to them. This is why it is important for liberals to ensure that everyone has a basic level of economic security and that everyone has a voice in every part of their lives.

To maintain that security, it is vital that everyone has a say in all parts of their lives. Many people are forced into bad jobs having been given a choice between work or going hungry. They have little say in the conditions of their workplace and cannot vote with their feet as they do not know whether they could find other work. To improve people's lives, we must create economic security for everyone, give everyone a say at work and involve people in the provision of the public services they use.

I think the only way to lay a foundation of economic security is to provide a Universal Basic Income (UBI). An unconditional income floor is the only way to truly provide economic security, as then people can be sure that they will be able to live without worrying about jumping through bureaucratic hoops. Excluding disability and housing costs initially is probably a sensible move to reduce costs and protect those in special circumstances. Housing costs could be covered by a universal renter's income paid for by land value tax, encouraging people to move from areas of high demand to lower demand areas.

To give everyone a say at work, we should be promoting small businesses, new cooperatives and mutuals. The best small businesses and social

enterprises involve their staff in decision-making as they are the ones who encounter the problems and must try to find solutions. They value every member of staff and pay fair, living wages. To bolster these businesses, we must introduce stronger anti-monopoly laws, and encourage small businesses to take up contracts from anchor institutions through breaking these up. This would allow smaller businesses to better compete with large ones and create stronger links between business and the local area.

Finally, along with our commitment to localising public services, we should create citizen committees in local government covering each service, allowing users, experts and decision-makers to discuss how best to improve the service. This would empower users to fight for the best service, aided by 'small l' liberal councillors. Similarly, liberal councillors should fight for the formation of community owned utilities, following from examples of community bus services in West Oxfordshire and community energy in Nottingham and elsewhere.

It's clear that the current Liberal Democrat plans to end poverty and fight inequality do not go far enough. Instead of a comprehensive plan to include the disadvantaged and marginalised in our communities, we find a well-meaning but ineffective solution framed to be sold to the concerned middle class.

An important step we can make towards this internally is to make sure our policy-making groups are representative of all income groups and that they are accessible to those on low incomes, rather than forcing people to travel to London to contribute ideas.

Simple changes like allowing phone-ins to meetings would do a lot to improve access. It's also clear that we need a joined-up vision that devolves power to the people and provides them with the economic security required to wield it.

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Oliver Craven is an activist in Lincoln, Sleaford and North Hykeham Liberal Democrats

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# NO CASH FOR SCHOOLS

A funding crisis has emerged in education. John Bryant suggests some ways to solve it

A lot of assertions are made about education spending these days by both Labour and Tory politicians, but to get an accurate picture of what has happened in recent years, one needs to understand how we got to the current crisis. Theresa May continues to say that schools have never had so much money (which in cash terms is true), yet headteachers are cutting staff and the breadth of the curriculum on offer. Why?

About 15 years ago, a review of school standards placed London as the worst region. Since then London schools have raised their collective performance to make London the best performing region.

A number of factors came together to make this happen, including that local authorities in the 1990s and early 2000s could fund their education budget at a higher level than the indicative block grant given by central Government.

Camden was one of these, where an informal cross-party agreement existed that stopped all three parties making political capital out of the schools' budget at council tax-setting meetings.

Camden's secondary schools' more generous funding helped stop them seeking academy status when Brent, next door, had their secondary schools stampeding towards academy status to get the additional funding.

Another factor that helped London improve its schools was the London Challenge. This was a school improvement programme launched in 2003. The policy document Transforming London Secondary Schools set out its aims to create a step change in performance.

The initiative has since been credited by Ofsted and others for a significant improvements, and more recent studies have identified the London Challenge as one factor that contributed to significant enhancements in pupil outcomes. One of the key features was the idea of partnership working between schools and local authorities, and the availability of 'national leaders of education' and 'school improvement partners' to help schools improve their practice.

Other factors included the improved leadership in education authorities and the diverse nature of the school population. Some researchers have attributed improving results in London to the ethnicity of pupils, many of whom came from newly arrived families whose culture was to encourage their offspring to take all possible opportunities to make progress.

One of the lessons that policymakers should take from the London experience since 2003 is that to raise standards they should try similar initiatives in other regions. Of course, that would need funding closer to London's levels.

But what has happened instead is the Tories' call for a national funding formula to level the playing field, but without any real terms growth in the funding pot to bring regional school budgets closer to London levels.

While implementation of the national funding formula has had delays, other issues have impacted school budgets which the Treasury has simply ignored.

The number of students in secondary schools is rising and the spending per pupil has consequently reduced. The cash improvements that May robotically repeats whenever this issue is raised, do not take account of this demographic change.

Other factors are leading to a perfect storm of misery. The costs being borne by schools are rising well above inflation. These include employer national insurance rates, the apprenticeship levy and superannuation costs. The overheads for employing both teachers and support staff have risen massively and there are wide variations in employers' pension contributions.

The national funding formula could never be sophisticated enough to take account of such local cost pressures. So there is a postcode lottery in allocating sufficient funding to attract the quality staff that schools need.

Another new pressure for schools in London, which will also impact on other metropolitan areas in time, is how to offer sufficiently high salaries to retain teaching staff. While the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document offers some flexibility (and academies have the freedom to create their own pay structures), extortionate housing costs are leading to an exodus of young teachers from London because schools cannot hope to offer the salaries a teacher would need to buy even smallest flat.

What should the Liberal Democrat answer be? Certainly, the national pot needs to be bigger but a national funding formula is too crude a mechanism to allocate funding to schools where local costs and challenges are so different. Labour demand for a National Education Service fails to understand that the National Health Service offers wide variations in the availability and quality of patient services across the country, and local accountability for these variations is still poor.

A local answer, where councils can opt for their own initiatives paid from funding raised locally, begs the bigger question on how local taxation requires a major overhaul. Simply tinkering around the edges on business rates supplementing council tax is not enough. The Liberal Democrats need to reconsider a local income tax, which would reflect local pay rates and therefore the relative housing costs in an area.

Punishing London for its success by cutting its funding so that the shire counties can have a bit more of a shrinking pot is not the answer. Levelling funding up for the shires may have its virtue, but levelling London down is a recipe for disaster.

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John Bryant was executive member for children in Camden 2006-08 and as William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective

# POOR PERFORMANCE

## Have the Liberal Democrats got anything to say to people in poverty, and would they listen anyway? Geoff Payne sets the scene for this year's Social Liberal Forum conference

Poverty and Inequality; SLF conference responds to the national emergency that is being ignored.

Have you seen the headlines recently? “Shareholders ‘not stopping excessive executive pay’”, “Council spending on single homelessness ‘down by £5bn since 2009’”, “Universal credit to see 1.9m people lose more than £1,000 per year, IFS finds”, “Lack of bank account ‘costs £500 extra a year’ in bills”, “‘Deeply irresponsible’: DWP kept ‘alarming’ universal credit findings secret for 18 months”, “Dividend income for holders of UK shares jumps to record £19.7bn”.

These all appeared within the last month at the time of writing. No doubt there are more dramatic ones to be found going back further.

Tackling poverty and inequality ought to be considered a national emergency. Even the UN is producing alarming reports about how bad things are in the UK. But everything seems to be overshadowed by Brexit. And of course these issues are not unrelated.

As far as the Social Liberal Forum (SLF) is concerned matters such as these are fundamentally why we exist, and so our annual conference in London on 20 July will be about how Liberals should tackle inequality.

You can visit our website and sign up here, places are limited to 200; <https://www.socialliberal.net/slfconference>.

We booked this date a long time ago, and we now know that the leadership election campaign will be over on this date and the election results announced on the following Monday.

The reputation of the Liberal/Liberal Democrat party has varied over the years. From the great heights of the 1909 People's budget, Keynesian economics and the Beveridge report on the one hand, to our recent record in coalition on the other. It is of course the latter that is fresh in most people's minds.

During the Coalition the argument from the Lib Dem leadership was that we should prioritise increasing social mobility as the best way to tackle poverty. It was put that if we think in these terms we can be far more ambitious than what Nick Clegg described as the “poverty plus a pound” approach of the Left.

Of course the Tories were not interested from an ideological point of view in reducing inequality and so we have this curious combination of some good policies like the pupil premium to promote social mobility, and some really awful ones such as the bedroom tax and the benefit cap that have made poor people poorer and some destitute.

The sad reality was that the Lib Dems were half hearted about tackling poverty and inequality apart from a small number of principled MPs who voted against some of the welfare cuts. We now know that there was no great change in social mobility during the coalition, and one of the key findings of the Spirit Level

(The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone, by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2009i) is that it is much harder to improve social mobility unless you have a more equal society to begin with.

It is worth considering how important the Spirit Level is in the equality debate. Some Lib Dems like to define themselves against ‘socialism’ by claiming they are in favour of more inequality as long as the economy is growing and opportunities are increasing. If the poor are getting richer it doesn't matter if inequality increases as the rich get even richer.

Peter Mandelson once famously said: “We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes.”

The Spirit Level shows that that on a whole number of measurements society is better off where income inequality is less. Not only are the poor better off, as you would expect, but counter intuitively the rich also, if not in terms of personal wealth then certainly by other quality of life measurements.

## POLITICALLY EXPLOSIVE

This is politically explosive and there is no shortage of politically motivated think tanks and right wing politicians who seek to discredit it.

So what now? The theme for our conference is Freedom from Poverty, a phrase many of you will recognise from the preamble of the Lib Dem constitution which defines what a Liberal Democrat believes in. The party has moved on from the coalition, but not everyone is convinced.

How do the Liberal Democrats reassert themselves as the party that wants freedom from poverty? We were interested to see that earlier this year Jo Swinson had set up a commission to look at the impact of new technology. We hope to get someone from this commission to speak about this (unfortunately Jo cannot make it). The role of disruptive technology” suggests that many jobs will disappear - many already have, and this could lead to far greater inequality. Some have argued that this is a good reason to introduce the universal basic income as a way of compensating for the lack on employment opportunities. This is undoubtedly a complicated argument but also an essential one that needs to be raised.

We are always on the lookout for a green perspective on our conferences and there is no doubt climate breakdown will have a huge impact on our future. The main priority is to try to mitigate and stop it but unless or until we do the political fallout will be highly significant. The advances in green technologies are very exciting but the big question is, are they happening quickly enough to allow us to have a sustainable future?

In the meantime green issues appear to be very much a middle class concern, the green lifestyle appears on the face of it to involve spending a lot of money up front to, for example, save energy, but which in the longer term will benefit those on lower incomes more.

But even more concerning problems around resource depletion and pollution are pushing people to migrate from poorer countries into the EU and US where we are seeing a right wing backlash. So although the centre left takes the issue more seriously, currently it is the radical right who are benefitting.

We are delighted to announce that Ed Davey will give our keynote Beveridge Memorial lecture on Decarbonating Capitalism and Reducing Poverty. Ed Davey was the Lib Dem secretary of state for energy and climate change 2012-15. In 2013, he set up the Green Growth Group, bringing together environmental and climate ministers from across the European Union in an effort to promote investment in important green technologies.

It is hard to ignore Brexit of course. This will not be the main theme of the conference but Brexit will undoubtedly dominate the political landscape for many

years. The Liberal Democrats have been very good at exploiting Labour divisions on Brexit, but we are not immune to their travails. Generally speaking those on low incomes are more likely to support Brexit. The very people that we as Social Liberals want to help, it seems like we are barely on speaking terms with. This has to be a major concern.

We also need to consider the fragmentation of British politics and where the Lib Dems fit in after the local and European elections. Just two years ago it seemed after the general election we had returned to two party politics, but now we see the remarkable drop in Labour and Tory support, the rise of Brexit, the Lib Dems and Greens, and the likely rethink for Change UK after their incendiary “we’ll be friendly towards your (Lib Dem) face whilst we stab you in the back” strategy memo was leaked.

So there is plenty to talk about and hard to cover everything in this article. Please come along and join the debates about our future.

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Geoff Payne is the organiser of the Social Liberal Forum conference



## **FREEDOM FROM POVERTY**

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**“Liberty without equality is a name of noble  
sound and squalid result” – L.T. Hobhouse, 1911.**

# IT WASN'T JUST BREXIT

## Howard Sykes looks at how local election success set up the European election results, and even got some national help

The May local elections saw a great set of results for us with an increase of more than 700 councillors. We now have over 2,500 Liberal Democrat councillors across the country. Everyone played a vital part from fighting a target seat to standing as a 'paperless' candidate to increase our overall vote share.

It could have been even better, with more seats and councils, if the party had really got behind the local elections as some of us repeatedly urged in 2018 and early 2019 (Liberator 394). Vince Cable, to be fair, was very supportive.

During May, the list has been growing daily and we now lead or have the deputy leadership in more than 47 local authorities – more than doubling of the number of Liberal Democrats in leadership roles.

We gained majority control of 12 new councils: North Norfolk, Chelmsford, South Somerset, Somerset West & Taunton, Cotswold, Hinckley & Bosworth, Teignbridge, Vale of White Horse, Winchester, Mole Valley, Bath & North East Somerset and North Devon.

We have our youngest council leader in Joe Harris in the Cotswolds, and a record number of women council leaders. This includes Vikki Slade (at the new Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council), and there are at least three LGBT council leaders and the inspiring Steve Darling in Torbay.

All are welcome additions to the Liberal Democrat local government family.

The icing on the cake for me was taking control of Bath & North East Somerset, where Jacob Rees-Mogg now has a Liberal Democrat councillor

We reinforced our control of Three Rivers, Eastleigh, and Watford. We also saw Dave Hodgson re-elected Mayor of Bedford, with an increase in our number of councillors on Bedford as well.

You may recall that Dave's result in 2015, winning when so many other places were defeated, setting a great example for local campaigners. We are now the largest group on the council as well as holding the elected mayoralty.

Of course, this doesn't include the places where we have formed 'partnership' administrations, like Eden, Mendip, North Somerset, Guildford, South Oxfordshire, Burnley and York.

Don't underestimate how difficult putting together a partnership can be, I know this from my time as leader of Oldham.

Areas which have been true blue Tory crumbled overnight, meaning a large amount of extra work coming in for both the LGA, the Liberal Democrat group office and the team of experienced councillors who work tirelessly to offer advice and support to Liberal Democrats who have suddenly found themselves part of new administrations after being in opposition for many years.

It's been a nice problem to have. Inside the LGA the

extra seats have helped strengthen our position as the third largest grouping (we had sunk to fourth behind the Independents during the coalition government).

We also gained seats in Labour's so called northern heartlands, including Sunderland, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool and Barnsley.

Bit by bit we are chipping away at Labour's one-party states; a great example of this is returning our first councillor to Wakefield for a generation.

I wrote in *Liberator* 394 that while Brexit undoubtedly would have an impact on our fortunes, good local campaigns in strongly 'leave' areas could still punch through and be successful, helped sometimes by crass administrations. Not being in government nationally or locally helped in many of the places we gained. And where we are in government locally, we had proven ourselves as community leaders, protecting front lines services at the same time as delivering value for money and caring for the most in need.

Our success also set the stage very nicely for at the European Parliament elections just weeks later.

Six of the party's new MEPs are also councillors (Luisa Porritt, Bill Newton-Dunn, Shaffaq Mohammed, Lucy Nethsingha, Antony Hook and Jane Brophy) – showing how strong the local government link is in our party.

The Liberal Democrat local government family is where the fight back started, and we have produced some great campaigners.

The next stage is to keep fighting for a good level of recognition for local government by the party nationally. I commented in *Liberator* 394 that local government was getting too low a profile from Liberal Democrat HQ. While this did get better to a degree, there is still much room for improvement.

Following Vince stepping down, the leadership election gives us an excellent chance to press the local government case.

*Liberator* readers who want to support Liberal Democrats in local government can ask candidates how they would use their position to support us.

Ask them what their plans are to help raise the profile for local government within the party and encourage people – in good time – to put their names forward for election to their local councils.

Ask the candidates for leadership what else they would do to help ALDC, local councillors and local government. Will they pledge the cash and freedoms, so we can do the job people elected us to do?


Two sets of good election results – been a long, long time since we had that. I am still smiling and I hope you are.

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



# LETTERS



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## A TALE OF TWO BY-ELECTIONS

*Dear Liberator*

I was very interested to read Mark Smulian's article on the TIGers in *Liberator* 395, and relating this back to the SDP-Liberal Alliance experience.

In 1981 I was on the management committee of Croydon North West Liberals, when a by-election opportunity presented itself. We fully expected our existing PPC and local man, Bill Pitt to be the candidate. But we were told by the party that Bill should step aside, and make way for Shirley Williams and the SDP instead.

Naturally, we fought this all the way, giving Bill our full support, and after considerable heated discussions with the party elite, we eventually got our way, and Bill became the candidate and then the elected MP.

However, after he was elected, I am not sure the national party (now subsumed under the Liberal-SDP Alliance) gave the seat its full attention.

Shirley Williams then went onto win Crosby, by which time Croydon NW had been all but forgotten. We did get support of a kind in the 1982 local elections - including initially an organiser with rural experience, when we were a London suburban area. But the gains in voting intention we made were wiped out when Margaret Thatcher sank the Belgrano a week before polling day in May 1982. Mrs Thatcher went on to benefit from the Falklands War, and in the general election of 1983, Bill lost his seat.

There are clear lessons for today in all of this - party elites are not good at taking local needs into account, by-election wins need to be built on to ensure future success, and partners in alliances may have their own agendas, which may not necessarily match your own.

At the time of his death in December 2017, Bill was writing his memoirs on this subject - I don't know how far he got but he sought the views of all of us who were involved at the time. A slide show on the Croydon NW by-election was shown at Bill's funeral, and his widow Janet spoke movingly how he was treated by the party elite at the time, who saw him as a thorn in the SDP-Liberal Alliance ambitions.

Jill Whitehead  
Sutton

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## TARGET PRACTICE

*Dear Liberator*

Chris Davies (*Liberator* 395) rightly identifies the electoral system as the main cause of the need for targeting. OK, no argument, let's accept that. We've known it and have been fighting it as a party for over a century. We have not succeeded and first-past-the-post is still there. Now what? Is Chris Davies really saying that targeting needs to be focussed only on the electoral system? Surely not. We have to win under the present electoral system.

I agree with Chris that it is not easy. In West Leeds we had to go from a lost deposit in 1966 to winning the first city council seats for 30 years in 1968, to winning the parliamentary seat from Labour in 1983. Done without any targeting assistance from the party.

Certainly we had extra assistance from outside West Leeds but never at the cost of what colleagues were doing in their own seats. We saw activity and its public profile elsewhere as contributing to our efforts, both by being seen on the ground and in the media, and in keeping Labour occupied in other seats rather than descending on us.

The point is that our success was not built on mindless activism but by building political activity on to local campaigning. We took Labour

on in the local working men's clubs and in the trade unions so that it became acceptable to vote Liberal when it was never acceptable to vote Conservative.

Our slogan at our first parliamentary election - which I would regard as too simplistic to use now - was "Liberal - the only way Left". It was this emphasis on the radicalism of Liberalism and the 'establishment' nature of Labour, which underpinned our electoral success and, ironically, helped in our downfall when the party nationally embraced ex-Labour worthies in the Alliance and thereafter in the merged party.

I really do not believe that Chris Davies or other supporters of targeting really appreciate the depths of the current situation. We lost 375 deposits at the 2017 election; at the 1950 election, which was regarded as a disaster, we would have lost this in precisely 24 seats at the present 5% level.

I have hitherto always supported the 'broad front' strategy and of fighting every seat. I now doubt it. What is the benefit of polling 1%, 2% or 3% in a seat and seeing the great cause of Liberalism trounced in such a way? I now believe that it is shameful to have a candidate unless at least one piece of literature is delivered to every house, whether by hand or in the freepost.

Finally, Chris stresses the use of financial resources. If his concern is only on the provision of finance to target seats, I am totally in support. Have as much cash as you need. We never received a single penny in West Leeds from the party, even after we had won, We had no professional presence in West Leeds until the Rowntree Reform Trust - not the party - provided a modicum of funds for an agent just one year away from the 1987 election. My objection to targeting is its deliberate prevention of activity in non-target seats. This has happened with disastrous results and is still going on. The recent local election results were certainly encouraging but we

should not be deceived by our own publicity. With some rare splendid exceptions, the results in Labour seats, particularly in northern industrial cities were still grim, and breaking out from the current handful of wards will be a very long task.

The microcosm of Leeds is salutary. We hold just three wards out of 33, none of them in the inner city, in which the revival in the late 1960s started. There is no other ward where we are closer than 2,000 votes to winning. In Horsforth, in which we have previously had representation from the early 1960s we were third, 2,000 votes adrift. This ward is in the Pudsey constituency in which in 2017 there was merely a paper candidate. He polled just 3.26%.

It is simply impossible to leap from that figure to winning a ward which is a quarter of the constituency. In effect that previously solid Liberal ward was written off in the vain interests of targeting. It is time to end the strategy.

Michael Meadowcroft  
Leeds

## TARGET PRACTICE

*Dear Liberator*

It's a pity if the exchange between Michael Meadowcroft (Liberator 394) and Chris Davies (Liberator 395) doesn't go beyond "Targeting is bad – no, targeting is good!". Michael makes some important points, but few of us would argue against some kind of targeting. In a weak, struggling and directionless local party, what needs doing? Pick a ward and work it. That's how Liberals built up from back in the 1970s. It's a form of targeting. In 2010, I hear, Oxford West was lost partly because activists were moved to Oxford East, wrongly believing it could be won. A failure of targeting.

But Chris' tale of how his constituency lifted itself to target status is dated. Since 1997, hardly any constituencies have followed this route while many have gone the other way. Our current parliamentary targets, bar perhaps South Cambridgeshire, have been targets for a long while. In that time, as Michael says, many areas surrounding target constituencies have declined.

A targeting strategy needs to be just that, not a targeting

tactic. Strong local parties with constituencies given target status press for help from surrounding weaker areas. But if that sucks activists in without being a two-way process, the strong areas can find the supply of neighbouring helpers dries up. There are many reasons why it helps a target constituency to be surrounded by constituencies which, while not yet winnable, are active. So the strategy should provide for the strong constituency giving whatever help is most needed to the weaker.

In my county of Essex, we've just taken control of one council and lead the administration in another. But five districts, boroughs or unitaries have no Liberal Democrat councillors at all though most did have within the last 20 years: most border on a strong area. In most, there is no near prospect of winning.

The focus at county and regional level is increasingly on both ends of the spectrum – the winnables and the struggling – but perhaps there is a need for more help at the lower end if the local party can be persuaded it can advance. Otherwise, the work from the mid-1970s through to the mid-1990s to build a genuine Britain-wide presence will have been wasted. Every region and county should be active helping the weak get stronger.

If a system of assessing target seats by ambition and activity as well as vote last time is resurrected, a criterion could well be whether help is going both ways.

Simon Banks  
Chair, Essex Liberal Democrats County  
Co-ordinating Committee

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## Enemies and Neighbours: Arabs and Jews in Palestine and Israel, 1917-2017 By Ian Black Penguin 2018 £10.99

The centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017 (which was also the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 war and start of the occupation) showed the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as far from resolution as ever. With bloody civil wars in neighbouring Syria and in Yemen, and the constant danger that they might erupt in some other Middle Eastern states, the problem of Israel and Palestine now receives less attention than it once did. Many people even ask why we should care.

An obvious answer to that question is that to turn our backs would be a denial of our common humanity. Yet it is also short-sighted in terms of our own, purely selfish, interests which desperately require this problem to be sorted out.

We would do well to remember how the original failure to provide justice for the Palestinians lies firmly at Britain's door. Since Britain ran away from its mandate in 1948, that injustice has been allowed to fester. This has led to resentment and hatred of the West which have become major causes of jihadism. Siddharta Dhar, the British citizen and ISIS member known as the second 'Jihadi John' revelled in producing video nasties of himself executing Western hostages with a carving knife. He also dreamed of liberating the Old City of Jerusalem. So did Ayatollah Khomeini (who spurred on the troops during the Iran-Iraq war by proclaiming that "the road to Jerusalem lies through Baghdad") and Osama bin Laden (who asserted that it was a duty incumbent on

every Muslim to liberate both the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the Al-Haram al-Sharif in Mecca). Do not say that we have not been warned.

Yet how can peace be brought to Israelis and Palestinians? The first step is to develop empathy for each side. As Middle East editor of *The Guardian* until 2016, Ian Black reported from Israel and the Palestinian territories for decades. With a very good knowledge of both Arabic and Hebrew, he is well placed to help the reader develop that empathy.

He does this brilliantly in this book, which covers the political history of Palestine during the hundred years after the Balfour Declaration, showing the failures of the various attempts to reach peace.

Its great strength is that the author looks at the conflict from the viewpoints of individual Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the political movers and shakers. By bringing the story alive through telling us about the memoirs, poems, films, novels, plays, TV shows, journalism and political speeches Israelis and Palestinians have produced in their own languages, he shows us how the situation they each faced turned them into the peoples they are today, and how conflict with 'the other' moulded their national identity. That is the essence of the tragedy.

The book is divided into 26 chapters with an introduction that provides the background from 1882 onwards as well as an epilogue. The chapters have no names except for the dates they cover. Years in which crucial developments occur (1917, 1967, 1987) have their own chapter, while others cover rather longer periods. The result is a straightforward chronological narrative divided up into bite-size chunks. It is easy to read, and Black ensures that the focus is never lost and that each chapter segues easily into the next. Many readers will find it a page turner.

He does not strive for some theoretical neutrality, but simply unfolds the truth, warts and all, before the reader's eyes, objectively highlighting uncomfortable and inconvenient little details with forensic skill. Those who say that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is just too complicated for outsiders to understand should



# REVIEWS

read this book. He shows that it is not. The same applies even more to those who hesitate to venture out of their own echo chamber and have never listened properly to the voice of the other side.

Once there is empathy for both sides, it becomes possible to appreciate the rights, obligations and aspirations of each of them as these are expressed in terms of international law and human rights.

Black concludes the book by examining the various options for peace, which seems depressingly distant in the era of Trump. He succinctly sums up the debate about a 'one state' and a 'two state' solution and implicitly opts for the latter. Unsurprisingly, and since publishing the book, he has recently called for British recognition of the State of Palestine. That is where an appreciation of the rights of each party in international law should logically lead us.

*Enemies and Neighbours* is said to have been well received by Israelis and Palestinians alike. If this is so, then perhaps there are a few glimmers of hope for the future. Read it.

John McHugo

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## **In a Time of Monsters: Travels through the Middle East in Revolt By Emma Sky Atlantic Books, £17.99**

This survey of the Arab Spring and its dismal aftermath makes uncomfortable reading for anyone who is sentimental about Barack Obama's legacy, or thinks Joe Biden would make a good president.

With their muddled and irresponsible approach to the Middle East, following on George W Bush's disastrous policies, they paved the way for the current situation, in which Iran, Turkey and Russia are the winners; the people of the region most certainly are not.

Emma Sky was a UK civilian administrator in Iraq and Afghanistan, and her understanding of the underlying issues, as well as her access to informed local actors, is impressive. *In a Time of Monsters* follows *The Unravelling*, her devastating book about the mess made by the coalition in Iraq and Afghanistan.

She is insightful and subtle when writing about Iraq and Syria: but her attempts to summarise events throughout the region after the Arab Spring are less successful.

If you are concerned by jihadism, terrorism and the waves of migration that they have provoked (and will continue to provoke, since the root causes remain unaddressed) then start with Sky's earlier book, and buy this current tome when it arrives in paperback for her chapters on Iraq and Syria.

Rebecca Tinsley

## Monday

The bells of St Asquith's long ago chimed midnight, but no one shows any sign of going home. I am writing these lines in the Green Ballroom here at the Hall as my European elections celebration party takes place around me.

A cheer goes up. Chris Davies and Jane Brophy are returned in the North West. Another cheer. Caroline Voaden and Martin Horwood are home in the South West. Then a bicyclist arrives from

Kettering, where the East Midlands account is being conducted, with the welcome news that Joan Hunter Dunn is back in the European Parliament.

Freddie and Fiona are here, wrapped in blankets with their feet in mustard baths. Even so, I fear they have each caught a cold after their soaking in church yesterday morning.

"I have been talking to Chuka, and he is very interested in a pact with the Liberal Democrats," says Fiona. "Obviously, we'd be the senior party."

"Chuka?" I ask.

"Umunna!"

"Bless you," I reply.

Of course, you now want to know how the two of them came to be soaked at Holy Communion yesterday...

## Sunday

I am not afraid to say I blubbed when I watched the fire at Notre Dame, but I soon recovered myself and ordered precautions to be taken at St Asquith's. The Revd Hughes was sprayed with fire-retardant chemicals and a party of Well-Behaved Orphans, armed with buckets of water, has been stationed in the rafters at every service.

This morning, just as the Revd Hughes was giving it both barrels, the orphans rose as one child and tipped their buckets over Freddie and Fiona in the front pew. The padre was furious, but I defended them as I could have sworn I saw a wisp of smoke rising from that quarter of the church myself.

Now you want to know what Freddie and Fiona were doing in these parts, which means I have to tell you what happened on Saturday. Writing a diary backwards in this manner is strictly against the Diarists' Code – I believe it was drawn up by Pepys himself – and I will be in the most awful trouble if the Union finds out, so don't breathe a word.

## Saturday

Who should I meet at breakfast but Freddie and Fiona? It transpires that I have invited them for the weekend, though I cannot remember doing so. I am reminded of the day I set the dogs on what I took to be a poacher, only to find he was the leader of the Portuguese Liberals whom I had brought here to stay after meeting him at the National Liberal Club.

Be that as it may, the two of them are full of their new party. It is called Change UK – at least they tell me it was last time they checked. They plan to "replace the Liberal Democrats", if you please, because we are too associated with austerity. I hasten to change the subject and ask them if Jeremy Browne's scheme for selling the unemployed to an offshore bank, developed while they worked for him, came to anything. They go rather quiet after that. Then, fearing for their immortal souls, I urge them to attend St Asquith's the next day.

## Friday

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

A journalist rings to ask what I think of this modern tactic of poring milkshakes over far-right politicians. I reply that the milkshake is an American import we could well do without and that if one is going to dispose of it then tipping it over a passing Fascist seems as good a way as any.

Warming to my theme, I recall that I was once obliged to sit next to Oswald Mosley at dinner. Things were distinctly frosty between us from the get-go and when he made a disobliging remark about Herbert Samuel I

tipped my knickerbocker glory over his head. This soon became a fashion, and many of the fellows who stopped Mosley's gallop at Cable Street were armed with the things, though if I am honest their tendency to melt made them an unreliable weapon.

Mind you, as I told the Manchester Guardian at the time, if it had been one of Cook's trifles I should not have wasted it on a specimen like Mosley.

## Thursday

What a pleasure it was knocking up today! Our slogan 'Bollocks to Brexit' has quite swept the country and at cottage door after cottage door it is uttered spontaneously by the voters.

No doubt you will want to know how the party came to adopt it. It all happened one evening in the Bonkers' Arms as we were setting the world to rights. Meadowcroft was late arriving, and when he did turn up I greeted him with "Good man! We have just got on to Brexit." There came the reply "Bollocks to Brexit: trimming that plumbago has brought on my lumbago." I jotted down his comment on a Smithson & Greaves beermat and telephoned London first thing the following morning.

## Wednesday

Being firmly convinced that Corbyn is a Conservative agent working to bring down the Labour Party, I seldom pay much attention to his views. I was, however, grateful to him for bringing my old friend J.A. Hobson back into the headlines. It has to be said that Hobson's views on the Jewish race made him a prime candidate for the knickerbocker glory treatment, a fact that Corbyn conveniently ignored, but he was Sound on economics – I rather think Leicestershire's invasion of Rutland bore out his analysis of Imperialism. I send a postcard to Corbyn suggesting he also write forewords to Graham Wallas and L.T. Hobhouse, as they could also do with a boost.

## Tuesday

A couple of excitable fellows surprise me at my lodge gates. "Is it true you are extremely old and travel with companions fighting evil?" asks one and I reply that he has put it rather well. "And did you once hold a meeting of the whole parliamentary Liberal Party in your telephone box?" asks the other. When I admit that this is indeed the case, they exclaim together "I knew it!" and rush off.

Anxious to point out that the party was at a low ebb at the time and that this was a telephone box of my own design that also included a library, billiard room and an offset litho machine for printing Focus leaflets, I call after them "The box is much bigger inside than it seems from the outside!" They punch the air and dance with glee.

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