

# liberator



- 🔥 Boris Johnson, the man with no bottom - Harold Elletson
- 🔥 Fixing a broken Britain - Roger Hayes
- 🔥 Thought slavery had been abolished? - Isabelle Parasram

# CONTENTS

## SUBSCRIBE!

Liberator magazine is published six/seven times per year. Subscribe for only £25 (£30 overseas) per year.

You can subscribe or renew online using PayPal at our website: [www.liberator.org.uk](http://www.liberator.org.uk)

Or send a cheque (UK banks only), payable to "Liberator Publications", together with your name and full postal address, to:

Liberator Publications  
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove  
London N4 2LF  
England

## THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE

Jonathan Calder, Richard Clein, Howard Cohen, Gareth Epps, Catherine Furlong, David Grace, Sarah Green, Peter Johnson, Wendy Kyrle-Pope, Tim McNally, George Potter, Stewart Rayment, Kiron Reid, Harriet Sherlock, Mark Smulian, William Tranby, Claire Wiggins, Nick Winch

Liberator (ISSN 0307-4315) is printed by Lithosphere  
Studio 1, 146 Seven Sisters Road, LONDON N7 7PL

## LIBERATOR

🔊 was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective.

🔊 acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none

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

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

## DATA PROTECTION

We hold subscribers' names and addresses to fulfil our contract to provide copies of Liberator, and to contact them about their subscription. We do not pass details to third parties - unless required by law - with the exception of our distributor, who deletes the files used for address labels after use. To alter or remove your details or discuss any enquiry please contact: [liberatorsubs@hotmail.com](mailto:liberatorsubs@hotmail.com)

## INTERNET

Email: [collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk](mailto:collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk)  
Website: <http://www.liberatormagazine.org.uk>

Blog: <http://liberator-magazine.blogspot.co.uk>  
Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/6806343091>

**Commentary**.....3

**Radical Bulletin** .....4.5

**THE MAN WITH NO BOTTOM** .....6.7  
Boris Johnson might see himself as a 'great man', but is an empty vessel without values says former Tory MP Harold Elletson

**IT'S TIME FOR US TO FIX A BROKEN BRITAIN** .....8.9  
After three wasted years and the possible horror of Brexit it's time for the Liberal Democrat to take the lead in creating a reformed Britain, says Roger Hayes

**ANOTHER ALLIANCE?**.....10.11  
Should there be a Remain Alliance involving Liberal Democrats at any imminent general election? Liberator canvassed some views, this is what we got

**IS IT OUR FAULT?** .....12.13  
Pro-European politicians have been too scared to make a robust case for the EU, and that includes the Liberal Democrats says David Grace

**THE LEADER OF THE PACK** .....14.15  
Jonathan Calder looks at the Social Liberal Forum's new book on liberal ideas Wolves in the Forest

**JUST THIS ONCE**.....16  
The enormity of Brexit demands that Remain parties stand aside for each other, says Naomi Smith

**THOUGHT SLAVERY WAS ABOLISHED?** .....17  
Modern slavery is rife despite legislation, with UK nationals often the victims, says Isabelle Parasram

**BRAZIL: BACK TO DARKNESS**.....18.19  
A supported of torture, military dictatorship and white supremacy rules a potential economic giant and makes Donald Trump look like a liberal. Jonathan Fryer reports

**THIS MAY NOT LAST LONG** .....20.21  
Liberal Democrat MEPs have no idea how long they will serve in Brussels, but are making the most of their opportunities, says Jane Brophy

**INDIA SEES A LANDSLIDE**.....22.24  
First-past-the-post has allowed populist nationalists a huge victory in India. Seth Thevoz reports

**RADICAL LOVE TO FIGHT FARAGE** .....25  
Beki Sellick fought the Brexit Party in Peterborough, can an example from Turkey help see it off?

**SECRETS OF THE FEDERAL BOARD** .....26.27  
The board doesn't work as intended and the party presidency can't, says Gordon Lishman

**RENT ASUNDER**.....28  
Regulating rent increases should be a matter of intergenerational fairness, says John Bryant

**OBITUARY: GEOFF TORDOFF** .....29  
Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to the chair who saw the party through the Thorpe scandal

**REVIEWS** .....30.31

**Lord Bonkers' Diary** .....32

**Cover picture: Christy Lawrance, pages 18-19 Mark Smulian, pages 22-24 Seth Thevoz**

# COMMENTARY

## BAPTISM OF FIRE

Jo Swinson's emphatic victory in the Liberal Democrat leadership race gives a substantial mandate and unlike her recent predecessors she is neither a stopgap (Cable and Campbell), a narrow victor (Clegg) nor has any obvious ruinous weaknesses (Kennedy).

So what will she do? The campaign itself gave few clues. Clearly many members felt it was high time the party had its first female leader, but the political differences between her and Ed Davey were not very obvious. Apart from Davey's scepticism about working with other parties, there were precious few strategic differences on show either.

Both were Coalition ministers, both came from somewhere vaguely right of centre on economic issues, neither proposed to do anything notably reckless.

As with Clegg versus Huhne in 2007, with few political differences the choice became largely between personalities.

That could be said to show the party is politically united, so no need for the candidates to respond to conflicts that don't exist.

To an extent that is true. Since its sudden resurrection in May's local and European elections there has been unity around the anti-Brexit message and enthusiasm to put it forward. The muttered allegations of inactivity against Cable suddenly stopped and the new leader has an unexpectedly promising start to build on.

Can this though outlast Brexit? At the time of writing every scenario from no deal through to revocation of Article 50 remained in play as might a general election.

This has given Swinson a baptism of fire like no leader since Paddy Ashdown in 1988 took over a party falling to pieces after the merger. There has been no period of relative leisure in which she can consider political positions and messages; it's been straight into the fray and while opinions may differ about her initial response to Jeremy Corbyn's proposal about an emergency government Swinson has so far been pretty sure footed.

But what happens once Brexit is resolved, however that happens? The party could be in any position from having to defend itself against Brexit supporters shouting about "betrayal" (though few are Lib Dem supporters in the first place) through to fielding a clamour from angry, frightened Remain supporters that it should be the 'party of back in'.

Liberator asked just this question to Swinson and Davey in its leader candidate questionnaire (Liberator 396). Swinson answered: "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."

Pretty clear. If Swinson "will always believe that the interests of our country are best served by being inside the EU" then were Brexit to happen the Lib Dems would be the 'back in the EU' party even if that were expressed as some long-term aspiration.

From such a position ought to flow the final demise of the 'we can win everywhere' approach, to which Swinson showed some attachment in the Liberator 396 questionnaire.

One effect of the 2016 referendum has been to create Remain and Leave tribes with which polling suggests many identify far more strongly than with any party.

Since the Lib Dems will inevitably be identified with the Remain tribe a leap in the party's usual strategic thinking will be needed. Instead of trying to appeal to everybody it will have to pitch its appeal to the socially liberal, internationalist-minded 'drawbridge down' people who dominate the Remain tribe.

It may for other reasons pick up votes - even win by-elections - in strongly Leave areas but it would be suicidal for the Lib Dems to start saying different things in different areas on Europe (since social media will see this instantly exposed) or to lapse into 'one the one hand but then on the other' as the party struggles to avoid offending anyone.

The party will inevitably alienate hard Leave voters - the inspired Bollocks to Brexit slogan has seen to that. It has though a providential chance to finally build its core vote among Remain supporters.

Critics, notably the former MP Paul Holmes, have argued that a core vote strategy somehow means an exclusive focus on the middle class.

It doesn't. It means a focus on a recognisable set of values and on those who share them, whoever they are.

This is what the other parties do, and just as one can find working class Tories and champagne socialists the point of a core vote is not that it excludes those outside but that it gives a reliable base from which to build.

Until recently the Lib Dem core vote was a derisory 5% and every additional vote had to be won anew each time.

Present circumstances offer an escape from filling the bath with the plug out. Will Swinson take it?

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## SECOND WORST EVER

Members of the old Lib Dem Federal Executive used to often claim that it was the worst committee on which they had ever sat - too big, too unwieldy and with agendas of such length that many items were never reached.

Criticism was such that the governance review after the 2015 election replaced it with a Federal Board intended to be a more streamlined body.

The party website describes it as “responsible for, co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the party’s strategy and the work of the federal party” and for preparing a document outlining party strategy once a parliament.

It has 35 voting members, of whom only 15 are directly elected, and so is not vastly different in size from the old FE.

As anyone who has sat on a committee will know, when one gets that big it becomes more like a public meeting than a working body, which is pretty much the tenor of complaints about the FB that Liberator has heard.

One objection is the propensity of its chair, party president Sal Brinton, to hold meetings at very short notice at which FB members are informed of something that has been decided, rather than allowed to debate and decide the matter.

Suggestions for improvements include fewer meetings and more discussion documents which can be circulated and discussed on line.

“The meetings are absolutely dire because there are too many people with their own undeniably laudable agendas,” one member told Liberator.

“The amount of time spent dealing with diversity, discrimination, complaints and appeals mechanisms is tedious. About a third of the people phone in and most people must have their say.”

Another member felt it wasn’t as bad as the FE but “all too often discusses trivia rather than matters of substance and it spends far too much time on process rather than strategy”, with some suspicion that this is a deliberate ploy on Brinton’s part to leave those who really take decisions on strategy free of FB interference.

One member felt that Brinton’s peculiar approach to calling speakers caused problems. Members must message her if they wish to speak and are then taken in turn with the result that meetings degenerate into a series of prepared speeches rather than dialogue.

As to its size, one despairing member said: “It has too many people, but who do you cut out?” Every corner of the party wants its person there and would object to their removal.

The FB does though have its defenders. One says its over-arching role makes it better than the FE was, and it could always set up working parties to get round the

size issue.

One member saw Brinton’s approach of short notice meetings on issues like relations with other parties as a useful step to greater accountability. Agenda papers though can arrive piecemeal and sometimes very late.

Brinton’s term of office expires this year and whoever is the next president must find their own way to chair the FB.

The presidential role has always had three parts and the holder will not necessarily be good at all of them: chairing the FB, being “the principal public representative of the party” - an ill-defined role in the constitution - and an unspoken role of being chief visitor to local party dinners and events.

Presidents have always resisted splitting these up, but the job makes vast demands with little in the way of expenses.

Would the sky really fall in if the FB had a chair whose sole job was that role, while the president did the public-facing and member-motivating stuff?

## DEAL OR NO DEAL?

Uproar on Anglesey where the only Lib Dem councillor Aled Morris Jones has said on Facebook that he has been told a deal has been done over the heads of the local party to stand down in favour of Plaid Cymru.

He said this had been agreed - presumably by the Welsh Liberal Democrats - while Vince Cable was still leader and before Plaid stood down for the Lib Dems in the Brecon and Radnorshire by-election and “we as a local party were not aware of this”.

There are two issues here - should such deals be done, and if so who should be involved in agreeing them? Local parties should clearly not find out after the fact.

The Lib Dem peer Roger Roberts posted in the subsequent exchange “nothing will be imposed on constituencies” but Morris Jones clearly had been told that something had been imposed on Anglesey.

If there are to be ‘Remain alliances’ they should be better managed than this.

## FREQUENT EMERGENCIES

Are some people getting carried away by trying to extrapolate the European election results into Westminster terms and then wondering how randomly first-past-the-post might work with four parties in contention.

A briefing to peers indicated a startlingly high number of seats shown as potentially winnable in some scenarios if such trends continued. This has led to some seats suddenly being judged winnable that look, to put it politely, speculative.

These include Battersea (8%), Chipping Barnet (5.4% and a close Tory-Labour marginal too) and even more remarkably Cardiff North (3.3%).

Before local party members get ideas about who to select they might note that regional candidates chairs are appointing the overwhelming majority of candidates, with only a select few using the emergency selection procedures (adapted from the by-election procedure) that gives members some role.

This is the second time that unexpected general elections or the threat of them - have seen the party use emergency selection procedures and new members could be forgiven for thinking this is normal.

To compound matters, the party is still using its all-women shortlist criteria, which means some places that unwillingly had one imposed on them now have fast track selections too.

One group of people who are unlikely to stand are those elected as MEPs in May. Even though their tenures in Brussels may be brief they have been lent upon to withdraw as Westminster candidates and so could end up before long serving in neither parliament.

As one told *Liberator*: "We've been strongly encouraged [to withdraw] rather than told. But quite heavy handed."

## CANDY CRUSHED

Within hours of the event supporters of Ed Davey were gleefully spreading the word that Candy Piercy had been fired by Jo Swinson from heading her campaign team.

Piercy, one of the party's leading agents and campaigners, was not talking when *Liberator* approached her for comment, but essentially the same story has come from all sides.

Observer political columnist Andrew Rawnsley noted in his 30 June piece: "There are mutterings from some Lib Dem staffers that Ms Swinson, who has been deputy leader for the past two years, is difficult to work with."

And that seems to be the problem. Piercy gave campaign advice that Swinson did not want to hear,

## GETTING A HEAD IN EASTBOURNE

There's been little heard from Stephen Lloyd, elected as Lib Dem MP for Eastbourne 2010-15 and re-elected in 2017 but who resigned the whip because of a foolish election promise to vote for any Brexit deal the government proposed. He has been expected back at some indeterminate point, and may yet find himself in a very awkward position if he still lacks the party whip were a sudden general election called.

Lloyd can perhaps console himself with a colossal bust of his head, apparently cast in metal, which he proudly showed off on Facebook as the gift of an admirer. Maybe the head can rejoin the party even if Lloyd does not.

## SHOVE IT THROUGH A LETTERBOX

Brecon and Radnorshire was a welcome by-election win but a closer one than many had predicted.

The Greens and Plaid Cymru stood down but the previous Tory MP Christopher Davies proved to have a larger personal vote than expected despite his expenses embarrassments.

Then there was the Lib Dem literature. One by-election veteran parliamentarian told *Liberator*: "I went for two days and the leaflets were crap. Have we not learned from other drubbings that there is no point putting out leaflets which say nothing other than the name of the candidate?"

"We were sent out to villages - having made a hell of an effort to get there - to deliver leaflets with no local issues, no statements at all about what Jane Dodd would do as an MP."

Others were asked to deliver leaflets with messages such as "standing up for our health services", which is rather a statement of the obvious.

So, a win to be congratulated but lessons to be learnt about literature.

## CALL THE UN

The row between the Federal Board and the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine promises to drag on almost as long as the Middle East dispute itself.

LDFP was suspended by the FB earlier this year over alleged anti-Semitic postings but following investigation of its social media policies and practices this was later lifted.

That though is not the end of things. LDFP has said: "There is still unfinished business in that we believe the board acted contrary to the constitution in the way it has treated us and furthermore it refuses to accept that we have not made posts that are anti-Semitic or defamatory." Watch this space.

## MAKING THE CUT

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is placing itself at the disposal of 10 conference representatives who submitted a motion on circumcision.

Each year since 1983 the toilet has been awarded by *Liberator* to the worst motion submitted to each conference.

Although the motion referred only to 'circumcision of children' since female genital mutilation is already outlawed it was obvious where its real target lay.

Male circumcision is a serious topic and a motion to restrict it would have sparked a huge row with some religious groups, which is no reason to avoid a subject. The motion though was too short, contained no reasoning and wins for being a classic case of a motion being just a series of assertions.

# THE MAN WITH NO BOTTOM

## Boris Johnson might see himself as a 'great man', but is an empty vessel without values says former Tory MP Harold Elletson

Imagine for a moment, my friends, that you and I are the subject of this great panegyric. We are none other than our hero, Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, lately of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, now of Downing Street in the City of Westminster.

Let us cast aside doubt, suspend our disbelief and let our minds wander, free of care, down the pleasant pathways of conjecture to whatever meadows of idle contemplation may take our fancy.

Here we are in the mind of our great leader in a place of watermelon smiles and grinning picaninnies. All is as it should be. The pygmy chieftains, having feasted on missionaries, are now cannibalising each other and merrily playing with shrunken heads. It is a land of deep fecundity where the women are 'large-breasted' and the enormous bananas, dangling from the trees and stirring our subconscious with their phallic impertinence, are all unassailably curvaceous.

### POISON TOADS

This, my friends, is the land in which our hero, the World King himself, strides from glade to glade, towering over the forest canopy like a colossus. It is a land made for great deeds to be done by a Great Hero, perhaps the greatest the world has ever known: yes, gentle reader, a hero to slay giant poison-toads, blow back the fiery dragon's breath by the sheer force of his will, save countless damsels and, in the furnace of his raging libido and the crucible of their unquenchable desire, father innumerable bastards.

It is a land of towering mountains, dark valleys and roaring cataracts. Our Hero, as you can tell, is a romantic and he has claimed this place as his own but he is haunted by uncertainty. On the banks of the river, where the sunlight flickers in the placid water, he catches a glimpse of his own reflection.

And then, perhaps as so often in the past, he sees not Our Hero, not the flaxen-haired, chivalric knight of his imagination but the squat, scowling Saracen who haunts his darkest dread. He sees neither the thrusting jaw, nor the heroic pose for the sculptor, but the trembling, timid schoolboy, who stands alone and afraid, his secrets all uncovered.

Here he is, with watermelon tears, slope-headed, abandoned and alien. Here is "Johnnie Turk." Here is Boris Kemal. Here is Something of the East. Here is the Ottoman. Here is Our Delight-ful Little Friend. Here is where he doesn't like it up 'im.

For, like so many who call up the spirit of nationalism, who use it to cloak their own moral vacuity, he is unsure of himself. He is what he himself professes to despise. He is the Turk in power because of hatred and fear of the Turk, 75 million of them coming to a street near you. Get out and vote to stop

them. Don't let Dave let them all come and ruin Our green and pleasant land. All unsaid, or only said by dear Nigel, but never contradicted by our Great Hero. And the Facebook ads rolled on and on. They still roll on into the broad, sunlit uplands of fake news where Our Hero loves to run naked through the long grass.

So here we are, dear friends. Here we are in the mind of our great leader. And it's a dirty, depressing swamp of a place. It's not what you thought. It's not fun. It's not heroic. It's not even got the chill thrill of romanticism in politics. It's just lonely, insecure, anxious ambition. It's disgusting, really.

Its walls are dripping with sweat and fear.

Let's get out of here. Let's go somewhere and think about how we got here.

It's a sunny day. Let's go up the Thames to Windsor. Let's visit the College of Our Lady Mary at Eton beside Windsor.

Allow me to be your guide. Ah, but who am I? And what do I know of this place and these Great Ones?

Let me introduce myself. I was sent here shortly before Moggy and Dave and our Great Hero.

I, little lad from Lancashire, torn from the bosom of my cosy, coastal primary school, divorced from my friends and sent into this gilded prison system, I too stood in black, looking at the altar in the vaulted chapel, praying for Home.

And I listened to Them. I heard them talk of History. I saw them in their winged collars and embroidered waistcoats.

I heard about Great Men and How They Changed the Course of History.

But I heard the Irony too. I learned that History is fickle. She is no-one's mistress. She is never mastered, nor possessed.

And politics always ends in tears. Or political careers do, anyway.

What matters, my friends, my dear, sweet friends, is Lord Hailsham's bottom. Yes, the bottom of the late, great, Eton inmate, Lord Chancellor Hailsham.

And Our Great Hero, in all his time among the Great Ones and at the feet of the finest teachers in the land at the College of Our Lady Mary at Eton beside Windsor and afterwards at the University of Oxford, never heard tell of Lord Hailsham's bottom. Or, if he did, he never took note of it. And that is the great pity of it all.

I had meant to give you classical references, to tell you that Our Great Hero was like the child emperor Eligabulus or that, surrounded by a fawning chorus of Daily Telegraph commentators, he reminds me eerily of Peter Ustinov as Nero in 'Quo Vadis,' with his courtiers calling him 'Divinity' and telling him that his execrable singing as Rome burns is divine.

But I cannot get past Lord Hailsham's bottom. We are confronted, you and I, inescapably, by this bottom.

And I have to tell you that it is the most important thing of all.

The greatest standing rebuke to Johnson and all he represents, all he amounts to, is this bottom.

## **BANANA STORIES**

Shortly before Boris Johnson went to Brussels to make up stories about bananas, a novel, a “fast-moving political thriller,” was published about a British journalist who arrives in Brussels to dig up the dirt and becomes involved in all sorts of adventures. The parallels are now obvious enough for a new edition to be published of this great work, which is entitled ‘The Man with No Face’ but there, my friends, the similarities cease, for Our Hero has a face. The problem is that he has no bottom.

He is The Man with No Bottom.

And, believe it or not, gentle reader, a man with no bottom is much more frightening than a man with no face.

This, my friends, Lord Hailsham knew. He realised that ‘bottom’ is what really defines a politician. If you have ‘bottom,’ you have values, a sense of purpose; a measured, weighted view of life. You have commitment. You have fundamental beliefs. You share interests with the people you represent. You are not playing a game. You are anchored.

The law and religious faith were at the core of Lord Hailsham’s bottom. Indeed, Shirley Williams remarked, in a beautiful speech she made on his death, that “sometimes he held a kind of dialogue with the Almighty and it was not clear whether or not they were speaking as equals.”

In the past, the Great Ones in the Tory Party were like Lord Hailsham. They knew why they were in politics, what they were there to do and who they were doing it for. The same was true of Healey or Callaghan, Grimond or Ashdown. Or, whether you like it or not, Mrs Thatcher.

They all had bottom.

Boris wants to be the World King. He is playing the game. He has been taught the ‘great man’ theory of history. This is how he sees himself and what he wants to become.

He has employed Dominic Cummings, who is cleverer than him and, like Lenin, a believer in the practice of Bismarckian ‘Realpolitik.’ Cummings, he supposes, will help him to succeed in his Heroic Tasks, solving the riddle of the Irish border, slaying the Eurocrats and liberating Britannia. Then, at last, he will be, if not World King, at least the Great Man and no longer the lonely little boy, unsure of his heritage.

Yet, there is a problem. Cummings will grow bored with his empty vessel and is probably already making notes about his time at the court of the King Clown, so that, like Procopius, whose ‘Secret History’ told the truth about the Byzantine Emperor Justinian and his depraved wife Theodora, he can reveal all when the time is right.

And there is an even bigger problem, the one his great grandfather, Ali Kemal, faced. He was not nationalist enough for the nationalists and so the mob,

*“Like so many who call up the spirit of nationalism, who use it to cloak their own moral vacuity, Johnson is unsure of himself”*

with the connivance of General Nureddin Pasha, hanged him from a tree.

What is the fate of the World King, the Man with No Bottom? The answer to this riddle, my friends, is wrapped in the question. For what is a World King, if not a King of Kings?

‘And on the pedestal, these words appear: “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings. Look on my works, ye mighty and despair...”’

His fate, our fate unless we stop him, is told in Shelley’s

poem that he, I, Dave, Moggy and Lord Hailsham probably all learnt by heart at the College of Our Lady Mary at Eton beside Windsor.

“Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away...”

---

Harold Elletson was Conservative MP for Blackpool North 1987-92 and joined the Liberal Democrats in 2002. Like Boris Johnson, he attended Eton

**Britain’s only political songbook returns, bigger and better than ever!**

# *Liberator Songbook*

**The Liberator Songbook will be on at the Liberator stall and Glee Club at Bournemouth and by sale by post after conference, send a cheque for £5 (payable to Liberator Publications), including postage and packing, to:**

**Liberator Publications  
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove  
London N4 2LF**

# IT'S TIME FOR US TO FIX A BROKEN BRITAIN

After three wasted years and the possible horror of Brexit it's time for the Liberal Democrat to take the lead in creating a reformed Britain, says Roger Hayes

This may seem harsh Ed, but on reflection I am pleased that Jo Swinson won by a resounding margin. There's no 52/48 equivocation here and so, now our youngest ever, first women leader can have the best chance to build the Liberal society that I have spent my life working towards. It's time.

But what does that actually mean in these chaotic and uncertain times?

'Britain isn't working' – some will remember that Saatchi and Saatchi inspired poster campaign for the 1979 general election which brought us the tabloids' golden dawn of Thatcherism.

Then it was a snaking line of unemployed, but today nothing bloody works. The trains; the electricity; the flood defences; the benefits system; the prisons; the you name it. It doesn't work and there is no prospect of any of it working properly in the future. We have carelessly dribbled away control to the unaccountable private sector and to never-reliable 'market forces'.

Your contract to have the bins emptied is with the council, but their contract is with someone else and goodness knows who manages them – certainly no one we can get to talk to when inevitably it all goes wrong.

And all we have now is the tabloids' new and glorious golden dawn of the prospect of Brexit. But will a wild-west, chlorinated trade deal with the Washington cowboy keep the lights on; have the trains run on time (or at all); care for our sick and elderly; or keep the ever-rising flood levels at bay?

These are the most desperate of times but, although we never would have wished for it, now it's here, ironically, this could be our time to shine. But only if we are bold, clear-headed and tenacious.

Here are my three considered tasks for the Liberal Democrats to tackle. These will define us in a national campaign, see us through an autumn general election and set out our programme into a new and (hopefully) enlightened parliament.

I, of course, believe that we can and must defeat Brexit, but that isn't what this article is about. So as not to have made these past three and a half dreadful years a complete and utter waste of time let's claim these three tasks, and our opportunity to bring them about, as a faint silver lining.

Our detractors like to paint us as being all about Brexit and nothing else. This will help show them what lies beyond the nightmare of Brit and why it must be stopped:

## A RENEWED BRITAIN

The first order of business is a renewed Britain – renewed in both body and soul. Beyond Brexit there will be a real need to do all the things that we always wanted to do to fix our country and its place in the world – tackle the climate crisis, build real affordable homes in sustainable locations, regenerate our economy through regional investment, invest in health and education and technology – as a party we have never been short of policy or ambition, but I do think that there is a real need to look afresh at what I kept banging on about during the Coalition – as much as what we do is important, so is how we go about doing it. And of course, most of that is not going to be new legislation or new things, but the fair and transparent delivery of the 1,001 things that we have to get on and do regardless. You know, the day-to-day governing of government.

Any cash-strapped Lib Dem-led local council will tell you that community politics starts with a people-centred approach. Listening to people, involving people, giving people control and agency over their own lives and impact in their communities.

Community politics is not about doing lots for people so that they will love us (vote for us), but about giving people the wherewithal to do things for themselves. Not the 'nanny state' or the 'controlling state', but a Liberal, enabling state. Our politicians and activists are the political wing of their communities, the bridge between government and the people. Let's see that is translated to become the overarching style of government in everything we do.

We need to nourish the soul of the nation and mend its broken heart. The populist madness has deliberately starved us of intellectual and cultural nurture as well as of the practical and economically sustaining necessities such as secure and meaningful work and an affordable home for our families. The gig economy could be very liberating for a new generation, but not when the options are pathetically reduced to which fast-food chain's zero-hours (non)contract to take.

Combining the right style of government with a massive investment in the future: modern technology, infrastructure and social development, will provide the jolt needed to renew our country. This is not just an opportunity to get Britain working again but to advance Britain, working closely with our partners in Europe and throughout the world, not in hopeless, impoverished ignorance, conformity and isolation.



## A BETTER BRITAIN IN A BETTER EUROPE

Back before we went everywhere draped in the blue and gold of the EU, we were quite critical of the often over-engineered policies that emerged from Europe and, yes, its leviathan bureaucracy. So, as we most fervently wish to remain in Europe, let us be clear, with our Liberal colleagues across the bloc, that reform is both desired and necessary. But let us set our sights high.

In a modern, outward looking, interconnected world we can only make Britain better by being in the EU. And we can only make the EU better by being an active, enthusiastic and reforming member of the EU. However, there are three things that need to mark our ambitions for continued membership:

- \* Better behaviour – less macho willy-wagging, posturing and generally spraying the furniture. Caroline Lucas may have been misguided in her all-female cabinet suggestion, but I certainly agree with the desire to reduce the testosterone
- \* More open and enthusiastic collaboration – not so much what do we get out of it but what can we all achieve by working creatively together. There is still too much suspicion and fear and recent events have moved us backwards in this regard. The artists and scientists of Europe have quietly shown the way here, we should learn from them
- \* Root and branch reform, not the odd treaty tweak here and there. Again, the how as well as the what needs to be given careful consideration. Guy Verhofstadt is the ideal leader for this important task

## A REFORMED BRITAIN

Britain is tragically broken. Broken socially, economically and constitutionally. With the severe damage done by these past few years of distracting and uber-expensive madness the first two elements, our economy and society, may take some time to repair, but in the shorter-term our goal should be a comprehensive package of constitutional reforms making our country and, essentially its democracy, properly fit for the 21st century.

This litany will be as old as the hills for most Lib Dems but let's rehearse it one more time:

- \* Proper electoral reform with STV for all elections.
- \* Votes at 16 in all future elections.
- \* Full voting rights for all EU citizens resident in the UK.

*“The populist madness has deliberately starved us of intellectual and cultural nurture as well as of the practical and economically sustaining necessities such as secure and meaningful work and an affordable home for our families”*

\*An elected second chamber – no more patronage and privilege, no more Lords and Ladies (sorry to my many chums in the Upper House).

\*Parliamentary reform – a modern legislature with modern work practices and behaviours, no more Victorian dressing up and gobbledegook claptrap.

\*Full review of UK federation, devolved powers to the nations, regions and to local councils.

\*A written constitution – no more making it up as we go along.

\*A full review of the role of monarchy and our head of state as part of our constitution.

\*A modern Bill of Rights – everyone a citizen who knows where they stand.

\*A participatory democracy through citizens' assemblies with meaningful consultation and policy development on a wide range of topics.

\*Disestablishment of the church – a secular nation in a modern world.

The Liberal Democrats are a progressive party with ambitious

policies, it's time we equipped our country and its people to play its full role in a modern Europe and a 21st century world.

Bollocks to Brexit, this is the future. Let's make it ours – it's time.

---

Roger Hayes a former Liberal Democrat council leader and parliamentary candidate in Kingston-upon-Thames

**Don't miss out - read  
Liberal Democrat Voice**

**Every day, thousands of people are reading Lib Dem Voice, making it the most read Liberal Democrat blog. Don't miss out on our debates, coverage of the party, policy discussions, links to other greta content and more.**

**[www.libdemvoice.org](http://www.libdemvoice.org)**

# ANOTHER ALLIANCE?

Should there be a Remain Alliance involving Liberal Democrats at any imminent general election? Liberator canvassed some views, this is what we got

## **GARETH EPPS, LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE**

If ever there was a situation where the national interest dictated this sort of response, this is it. To do otherwise would be a Pyrrhic victory for tribalist purism. Evidence from local arrangements now strongly suggests this approach would help block the act of national self-harm the Tories are attempting to inflict on the nation.

Indeed, the circumstances are such that a broader alliance is needed, as Brexit is the sole dynamic and given the close connections of the new hard-right Tory regime to Farage and various Russian state actors.

There will need to be a huge effort to put experienced campaigners in places where they are needed, and to talk common sense to any self-defeating tribalists in local parties who would rather see a Tory elected than a one-off Stop Brexit candidate.

## **IAIN BRODIE-BROWNE, CHAIR, SOCIAL LIBERAL FORUM AND SEFTON COUNCILLOR**

In 50 years I have never thought pre-electoral pacts were a good idea but faced with an Alt Right government willing to dismantle all the civilising successes of the post war settlement both at home and abroad I now believe that we should seek to an agreement based on four measures.

It should be for one-to-two years and cover a limited number of seats - 100-150 - to be agreed locally, preferably in clusters of seats.

It should be dependent on agreeing a limited programme: PR - the first action of the new parliament; emergency action on climate change; revoke A50; emergency relief from austerity.

## **JENNIE RIGG, CALDERDALE**

I'll believe this is going to happen when I see it. My belief is that this is somebody in a position of some, but not enough, influence trying to bounce the party in a direction which they would like to see it going. A former leader, perhaps?

As for what I would like to see in the event it does turn out to be true? I'd like to see HQ consult the actual constituencies that will actually be affected - some local Green parties are very 'lexity', for example, so it would make no sense for a remain alliance to stand aside for them. And obviously no deals with the Labour party, who are 'Brexit' as a party no what matter the stances of their individual candidates."

## **GERALD VERNON-JACKSON, LEADER, PORTSMOUTH CITY COUNCIL**

A Remain Alliance does give us a chance to win more seats and have a stronger voice for Remain in Parliament. Just look at the result in Brecon and Radnor. If the Greens and Plaid had stood candidates there would have been an ERG-supporting Tory in Parliament representing that seat. Instead we have the wonderful Jane Dods holding the torch of Remain.

If we can do this in 50 seats that makes a huge difference.

I have always supported working with other parties as long as we have the terrible electoral system that we have now. These things have to be negotiated centrally, but they can lead to some locally difficult decisions. If we are going to change the Brexit outcome, we will need to make tough decisions, but the end prize could be wonderful.

## **MARK BLACKBURN, FORMER DIRECTOR SOCIAL LIBERAL FORUM**

The theory of a 'Remain Alliance' is much easier than the practice. In 2017 I stood in Somerton & Frome, which had been a Lib Dem seat until 2015. I soon came under massive and sometimes vicious pressure to stand down in favour of the Greens, who were offering to withdraw in next door Wells to assist Tessa Munt. Neither the local nor regional party would have had any truck with me stepping aside, and it was clear the Lib Dems were far more likely to beat the Tories than the Greens having previously held the seat and having more councillors. I came second and the Green vote was submerged under the Corbyn surge. Which begs the question, although I'm in favour of the principle of a Remain Alliance, how many seats can we realistically hand over to the Greens where they would have a better chance of beating the Tories, which is the ultimate goal?

## **SUSAN SIMMONDS, THANET**

I'm old enough to remember the howls of injustice from the seat carve-up prior to the 1983 general election. It was a painful episode and a few egos and political careers were harmed in – what many thought – was the best chance of political realignment for a generation.

Hopefully this time, candidates of all parties will feel that this is a more just cause to step aside for.

We've done well electorally on an anti-Brexit platform – but I'm sceptical as to whether this will translate to a general election when people will be voting about the future of the health service, education and income tax. The messages that won the referendum have not yet been fully discredited and Johnson has brought new energy to the debate. I don't think we have any choice but to attempt to keep the anti-Brexit vote as a bloc. Maybe a heroic gesture is what people need to see, but unless we play it cleverer than we have in the past, we risk losing the identity we have worked so hard to reclaim but I think we have learnt that the electorate doesn't say thank you.

## **JOHN HEMMING, FORMER MP, BIRMINGHAM YARDLEY**

I have long taken the view that to get constitutional change and in particular electoral reform there is an argument for electoral pacts to maximise the number of MPs that support this. The same principle should apply for remaining in the EU and could carry forward to constitutional change. Hence I have said we should have local agreements with the Greens where it is possible and I have no objection to local agreements with PC as we have had in the past with Richard Taylor in Wyre Forest. I think, however, it is important that these are locally driven with national support and assistance rather than nationally driven.

## **CHRIS WHITE, HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR**

After Brecon and Radnor, the advantages to a Remain party are fairly clear. And Plaid and the Greens will anyway want payback. We are a long way from an SDP style seat carve up. My guess is that any such alliance will affect the margins - a few seats rather than even dozens. The alternative is being steamrollered by the Tory moneybus again.

## **ALAN SHERWELL, FORMER CHAIR, FEDERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE**

Parties have basic principles and a range of policies. Electors vote as they like on basic approach or individual policies. Parties don't own voters and cannot automatically deliver their votes to others. So, electoral pacts are generally useless as parties cannot deliver voters and not standing only weakens their organisation.

The exception is where an election is genuinely about a single issue, as this one seems to be. So, I favour a Remain Alliance in principle in a limited number of seats. Indeed, if Remain is all that matters to you, you'll likely vote for best placed Remain party anyway.

- \* Local parties should have a say. Conference needs to agree the party centrally takes the final decision
- \* The SNP should not be involved. The election won't be single issue in Scotland, so necessary conditions not met
- \* Labour or Tory MPs can only be involved if unequivocally and demonstrably prepared to defy their party whip. Expressing support for remain is not enough
- \* Parties should only stand down based on GE 17 and local elections showing the seat is winnable and another party is clearly better placed to win.
- \* It must not be possible to characterise as a stalking horse for Corbyn PM

## **JONATHAN FRYER, VICE-CHAIR, FEDERAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE.**

Any Remain Alliance deals should be bottom-up (arranged locally) rather than top-down. I still shudder recalling the Liberal-SDP carve-up 30-odd years ago. As the largest Remain party the Lib Dems should get the lion's share, but with fair allocations for the Greens and Plaid Cymru and some Independents.

The SNP might be more problematic following things Jo Swinson has said, but we may need to bite that bullet. As for Labour, who knows whether they will have made their minds up about their position in time; either way, they are so tribal I'd be wary of touching them with a barge-pole.

# IS IT OUR FAULT?

## Pro-European politicians have been too scared to make a robust case for the EU, and that includes the Liberal Democrats says David Grace

Is one of your best friends a Brexiter? Is a member of your family? My mother, whose information came from the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph, would almost certainly have been if she were still alive.

She voted to stay in 1975 because that nice Mr Heath asked her to and that nasty Mr Benn took the opposite view. Her views were perhaps understandable for someone brought up as a Young Conservative in the 1930s, but they weren't called that then. They were (honestly) the Young Imperialists, known as the Imps.

Why then can I not understand the present generation of leavers? On a platform in Strasbourg I was recently asked to explain why people voted Leave. I found it hard to answer. You can easily explain why leaders of the Brexiter's campaigned and still campaign, if not how they can champion what they know to be false, such as 'no deal' will be good for us.

These leaders believe in a low tax, low regulation economy. Those whose wealth derives from financial markets specifically want to escape the European Union's attempts to regulate that sphere to address the problems demonstrated by the 2008 crash. The EU might interfere with their current occupation of shorting the pound while promoting policies which push it down.

But how do we explain the millions who voted to leave? While it is true that many of the poorest people paying the price of austerity for years wanted to blame someone, to kick Cameron and the Conservatives, there were millions more middle-class voters across the south east and south west who also voted to leave.

### CHATTERING CLASSES

If you argue that they were lied to and duped by Boris and his friends, you have also to explain why well-educated members of the chattering classes failed on this occasion to see through the lies.

Again and again during the ghastly years since the referendum Yeats' words have come back to me: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity."

Do his words provide the explanation? The passionate intensity of the UKIPpers and their allies in the Tory and Labour parties was manifest long before the referendum. Indeed the referendum was their baby and the gestation lasted for decades. While they ranted and roared and climbed the polls, what were Remainders doing? We should not be surprised that Cameron and Osborne and the Tory Party in general having spent so much time in parliament, in

government and in elections attacking the EU, lacked all conviction when trying to defend membership in the short months of the referendum campaign. Nor can we be astonished that Jeremy Corbyn, who always saw the European Union as a capitalist plot, carried no conviction when he apparently campaigned to stay. My question concerns the Liberal Democrats. Can we honestly say we did our best?

The Liberal Party and then the Liberal Democrats have been firmly on the record as supporting the European Communities and the European Union since 1960. Liberal Assembly that year passed a motion calling for British membership and most of the losing group who regarded the new European institutions as anti-free trade left the party.

A rarely quoted section of the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution, copied I believe from the preamble to the Liberal Party's, reads: "Within the European Community we affirm the values of federalism and integration and work for unity based on these principles." The commitment has always been clear but has it been loud? Undeniably under Grimond, Thorpe and Steel, it was loud and clear. (If you want to see what a passionate referendum speech is like, check this from 1975: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6V33aNujAA>). Paddy's record was pretty good too, helping Major to get the Maastricht Treaty ratified by the Commons when Labour were voting with the famous Tory bastards like Portillo to block it. Charlie Kennedy lent his usual affable support to the European cause although perhaps was never on top of the details. After that, leadership pronouncements on Europe become a little less compelling. Never forget it was Ming Campbell who while strongly supporting membership was the first Remainder to suggest an In-Out referendum, a safe position for a minority opposition party but a dangerous one for the country.

So we come to the coalition years. Conference in 2009 adopted our pre-manifesto, A Fresh Start for Britain, which recalled our commitment to a referendum and declared "Liberal Democrats will continue to push for a more accountable and effective EU" without at any point rehearsing let alone proclaiming the Union's achievements.

This is a classic example of the debate on Europe. On the one hand we have the Brexiter's totally negative polemic – the EU is awful. In response, we have the discourse which immediately surrenders half the ground – the EU doesn't work very well and needs reform.

I got so fed up with hearing so-called Remainder politicians right up to the day of the referendum saying: "I support the EU but it needs reform" that I challenged every time I heard it, "Yes, and what reform would you like?" No answer.

Tim Farron did reply to a tweet, but much more slowly than usual, saying he supported ALDE's proposals. I checked with ALDE who had not heard of their proposals. Every time I did public meetings, with every sentence, with every breath the Brexiter would characterise the EU as "undemocratic", "bureaucratic" or even as a dictatorship. EU policies were never described as the result of extensive debate in council or parliament but by the simple epithet "Brussels decides". As ever, the BBC was complicit in this misrepresentation. I could and did respond with a quick explanation of EU democracy. It took less than a minute. I never heard any of our leading spokespeople try the same. They just let the lie stand unanswered.

Forming a coalition with the Conservatives in 2010 was bound to involve compromise on Europe but did we go too far?

Cameron and Clegg were anxious to avoid Europe derailing their co-operation. Clegg had already re-committed the party to a referendum on in-out and readily, too readily, agreed to Cameron's insistence on a new Bill containing the Tories' promised 'referendum lock', a guarantee that any transfer of powers to the EU would require approval in a referendum.

The wording of the European Union Act 2011 went beyond what Liberal Democrats wanted, partly because our minister in the Foreign Office, Jeremy Browne, was asleep on the job and didn't regard Europe as part of it.

In December 2011, we had the extraordinary spectacle of Cameron isolated at the European Council which was trying to agree a fiscal compact. He tabled a late paper based upon exceptions for the British financial sector but no other country was interested so he walked out. The British media and the House of Commons hailed him for using the British veto. In fact he had stopped a new EU treaty but not prevented every country except the UK and the Czech Republic from signing a treaty between themselves.

Clegg not only claimed to agree with Cameron but backed him up on radio until party pressure (not least from Paddy) forced him to row back and express his disappointment. Clegg was often heard to complain about lack of co-ordination within the European Union. Given his own years in Brussels he might have understood the difficulties of getting 28 countries to reach agreements. It could never be as easy as sitting down to sandwiches with his chums in the Quad, Danny, David and George.

Nor did Vince Cable as a cabinet minister express any greater European commitment. He repeatedly expressed scepticism about the Euro and other EU policies. In January 2015, a unit of the European Commission charged with the task by the European Council produced a report on the UK economy. The report recommended addressing the deficit not just by cutting expenditure as the coalition government was doing but by increasing taxes, in particular property taxes.

*“While Brexiter  
ranted and roared  
and climbed the  
polls, what were  
Remainers doing?”*

As Vince himself had publicly endorsed this idea, a journalist asked him if he welcomed the report, to which he replied, "We don't need Brussels to tell us what to think".

## **DISMISSAL AND CONTEMPT**

This was the response of a Remainer to commission officials doing the job all the prime ministers including Cameron

had asked them to. It is this exact flavour of dismissal and contempt that has marked British ministers' comments on the European Commission for years. Campaigning to stay in the referendum had to take place against that constant, repeated and familiar noise. How did we even get 48%?

It is perhaps too easy to blame everything on leaders who have to confront the media and their political opponents all the time. There is a wider issue which will have affected all of us.

Never underestimate the importance of group dynamics. For coalition ministers their group was no longer their party but the other ministers, civil servants and special advisers they had to work with daily.

For most activists in the Liberal Democrats, what is their dominant group? It would usually be the continual campaigns to win local government seats. That rarely involves proclaiming the merits of the EU or even knowing or finding out what they are. How many active Liberal Democrats could honestly get up at a public meeting and put the positive case for Europe?

The party has developed a strong culture of training but it does not involve understanding, defending or promoting the EU. Our selection of euro-candidates requires little or no knowledge of the EU. Our delegations to ALDE congresses are mostly unelected, self-selecting on the basis of being able to travel without expenses.

Our MPs will all know with great clarity the strength of Euroscepticism in their constituencies but remain relatively unarmed with the arguments to defeat it. The sad truth is that our commitment to Europe is skin-deep. Perhaps our recent successes in opposing Brexit will anchor and deepen that commitment. Defeating Brexit will not be enough. We need a long-term project to change how people see the European Union. It is of course rather late to start but let's do it.

---

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective.

# THE LEADER OF THE PACK

## Jonathan Calder looks at the Social Liberal Forum's new book on liberal ideas *Wolves in the Forest*

Ever since *The Orange Book* appeared in 2004 social liberals have wanted their equivalent.

It's not that it presented a coherent point of view - its contributors were drawn from across the party and their chapters tended to the technocratic rather than the philosophical; It's not that it had a successful launch - its promoters' plans were scaled back at the Liberal Democrat conference because some, not without reason, saw the whole project as an attempt to undermine Charles Kennedy's leadership; it's not that it was particularly good - beyond David Laws' call for the NHS to be replaced by an insurance-based system and Stephen Webb's cuttings job telling us the masses could not bring up their children properly,

I would struggle to tell you what was in it. Yet the memory of *The Orange Book* - the memory that it exists - has stuck and social liberals have yearned for an answer to it.

### NOT LIBERTARIANS

A first attempt was made in 2007 with *Reinventing the State*, edited by Duncan Brack, Richard Grayson and David Howarth. The best thing about it was Howarth's introduction - as I find I wrote on the Guardian website at the time: "Howarth ... shows that Liberal Democrats are not libertarians. For them, property rights are human inventions that must be justified by the sort of society they produce. If that society's members are suffering through inequality, then the state should act."

The individual chapters, many of them by Lib Dem MPs, were generally less impressive; the best of them was Chris Huhne's, with its argument that the British state fails to deliver because it is so centralised.

Now comes another attempt, this time from the Social Liberal Forum (SLF), and if nothing else you have to admit that *The Wolves in the Forest* is a better title than *Reinventing the State*. It has just the two editors - Paul Hindley and Gordon Lishman - but the more collective vibe of the SLF means that four more people are credited on the title page: Iain Brodie-Brown, Louise Harris, Neil Hughes and Nigel Lindsay.

Some things don't change: David Howarth contributes the introduction here too. He begins by pointing out that it is 110 years since Lloyd George delivered his 'People's Budget': "He described a time when 'poverty and the wretchedness and human degradation that allows follows in its camp, will be as remote to the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests'

'The wolves of poverty, wretchedness, human degradation and inequality are still with us. Far from being remote to modern Britain their infestation of modern Britain is becoming more widespread.'

This time the contributors are not MPs (though, as we shall see, a Labour peer turns up) and not just because there are fewer Lib Dem MPs to ask these days. It is a book about ideas, not a programme for

government, and that does tend to make an editor look to activists rather than parliamentarians.

As Howarth says, *The Wolves in the Forest* arises from the belief of social liberals that inequality in Britain today is too great and we should be proposing ways to reduce it. The remedies proposed vary from the local to the global, from the specific to the philosophical and from the political to attempts to take the politics out of the fight against inequality.

It is a book of short chapters - the sort you tend to dip into rather than read from cover to cover. Dipping in, you discover lots of good things. There's Chris Willmore on inequality and the way that even well-meaning discourse can position being a white middle-class male as the norm. There's Kirsten Johnson on equality of access to the arts, which is an important cause and becoming a more urgent one as state schools become ever more league-table driven. There's Chris Bowers emphasising the impact of environmental degradation and crisis on the already disadvantaged.

I shall, however, follow David Howarth, who identifies two key themes of the book: the revival of the British Liberal tradition after the Coalition and the contested inheritance of John Maynard Keynes. One of the authors contesting that inheritance is the Labour peer, former leading Young Liberal and former editor of this magazine, Peter Hain.

When I joined the Liberal Party, support for industrial democracy was one of its defining policies. Interest in the idea had a long history in the party and, more recently, Jo Grimond had been very taken with the Mondragon federation of worker cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain. That dwindled in the Alliance years into the belief that if people had shares in the companies they worked for, and so shared its profits, they would work harder. As well as being of doubtful benefit to the workers involved - if your company goes under you could lose your income and much of your capital in one swoop - it represented a retreat from the idea that participation in the governance of their employer was at once a worker's right and a means of personal development.

It is this insight that Lishman turns to in his chapter on 'good work'. He supports worker representation on company boards, not so much because one worker can represent the views of all workers as because it would change the nature of the discussion on those boards. He also wants to see statutory works councils in all organisations with more than 50 employees and emphasises the need for more continuing education, particularly for those who left school early or did not go to university. He ends by calling for good work to be placed at the heart of Liberal Democrat campaigning. That is a call I can support, though the widespread problem of bad work leads me to see a stronger role for trade unions than this chapter does.

Another group of ideas that has long interested social liberals is those around social credit, a citizens' income

and a citizens' inheritance. It is this last idea that interests Stuart White and he traces it back to Tom Paine and his argument (later endorsed by Mill and anticipated 150 years before by Gerrard Winstanley) that the land should be a common inheritance. From this he reached the conclusion that every citizen should receive the sum of £15 on reaching the age of 21 – the idea was that those who had had their land appropriated should be compensated by those who had done the appropriating through an inheritance tax.

This again is an idea that flourished in the Liberal Party in the 1970s and is now making a return, though the idea of a universal basic income is currently getting more attention. White is attracted to the citizens' inheritance because it would give every citizen the capacity to, in Paine's words, "start the world" in a creative, self-defining way. It's an appealing idea and one that would be far more straightforward to introduce than universal basic income. The political opposition to it would be immense – any talk of further inheritance taxes will be seized upon by the Conservatives and their supporters in the press – but if liberals are not prepared to tackle accumulations of economic, and thus political, power then liberalism will not survive.

The fact that these ideas, which can appear so new and striking, have a long history in the Liberal Party leads Howarth to conclude that liberals have much unfinished business. He distinguishes liberalism from the centrism offered by Blair and Cameron – "none of the ideas presented here is, or was ever, centrist" – and suggests that, while Lib Dem ministers may have made useful reforms and restrained the Conservatives' worst instincts, the Coalition did little to promote liberalism.

Not that it was the ministers' fault or even the deputy prime minister's fault. Howarth manages to be both forgiving and damning when he writes: "Liberal Democrat activists tended to blame Nick Clegg for the lack of progress, and it is true that Clegg understood practically nothing of the British Liberal tradition.

"But the real problem is that little of the radical liberal programme remained in that party's manifesto even in the 2005 general election. Clegg was as much a consequence of the decline of liberalism as a cause."

The other debate Howarth directs us to is the one over John Maynard Keynes and his legacy. Hain claims Keynes for Labour, praising in particular the Brown government's bringing forward of public spending after the 2008 crash. That was a good example of using public spending to boost flagging demand in the economy, just as Keynes advocated.

## PUNCH BOWL

However, many who invoke Keynes's name never explore the other implication of his theories: that government should act to curb demand when the economy is booming and in danger of overheating. Or, in the words of William McChesney Martin, the

*"Little of the radical liberal programme remained in that party's manifesto even in the 2005 general election"*

longest-serving chairman of the United States Federal Reserve, it should "take away the punch bowl just as the party gets going".

I cannot remember a single article from the left making this point through the long Blair years. Instead – and I am looking at you, Polly Toynbee – we heard constantly that public spending should be increased because the economy was doing so well. We Liberal Democrats generally stuck to Labour's planned spending totals but tried to make it sound as though we were being more ambitious.

There is a more fundamental problem with Keynesian economics in the modern world. In his essay *Why I am a Liberal*, Keynes says: "I believe that in the future, more than ever, questions about the economic framework of society will be far and away the most important of political issues. I believe that the right solution will involve intellectual and scientific elements which must be above the heads of the vast mass of more or less illiterate voters."

One day it may be that we have all learnt from the Brexit debacle and regained our respect for experts, but that does not sound a very 21st-century view.

And if any socialist still seeks to claim Keynes as one of their own they should read this: "Ought I, then, to join the Labour Party? Superficially that is more attractive. But looked at closer, there are great difficulties. To begin with, it is a class party, and the class is not my class. If I am going to pursue sectional interests at all, I shall pursue my own. When it comes to the class struggle as such, my local and personal patriotisms, like those of everyone else, except certain unpleasant zealous ones, are attached to my own surroundings. I can be influenced by what seems to me to be justice and good sense; but the Class war will find me on the side of the educated bourgeoisie."

Keynes died 73 years ago and LT Hobhouse and TH Green make their obligatory appearances too. Liberal Democrats are either going to have more recent thinkers to be inspired by or do the intellectual heavy lifting themselves. The Wolves in the Forest is a welcome sign that we may be prepared to do just that.

---

Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective. Wolves in the Forest, see: <https://www.socialliberal.net>

# JUST THIS ONCE

## The enormity of Brexit demands that Remain parties stand aside for each other, says Naomi Smith

In any A-to-Z of the Liberal Democrats, the letter A should stand for Alliance.

The party grew from an alliance between the Social Democrats and the Liberals, themselves the result of a much earlier alliance between the Whigs, Peelites and Radicals.

In their short history – at 31, the party has been defined by our ability to forge such partnerships.

In the recent Brecon and Radnorshire by-election, a Remain alliance showed, starkly, just how important the ability to work in partnership is as Lib Dems battle not only to gain seats, but to rescue the UK from the black hole of Brexit. The Remain alliance between the Lib Dems, Green Party, Plaid Cymru, Change UK and the Renew Party saw Jane Dodds win with 1,425 votes.

That modest margin of victory is significant for two reasons: first, it demonstrates just how crucial working in alliance was. Had Plaid Cymru fielded their own candidate and received only the 1,299 votes they won at the 2017 general election, we would have been into recount territory.

The Greens expected to get a similar number of votes had they stood – handing victory to the Conservatives.

Second, had the Conservatives come to an arrangement with the Brexit Party, their combined tally would have given them victory, with room to spare.

So a Tory failure to work in alliance proved just as significant as the Lib Dem decision to work in partnership. Alliances are important, and the Conservatives are painfully aware of that after Brecon. So is Nigel Farage.

It's easy to claim that Brecon was a one-off, with a Tory MP who'd made false expense claims. But here's a thing. At Best for Britain, our data analysis called the result to within a couple of percent. We also called the Peterborough result within 0.5%.

Why is this significant? Because our work shows that, unless pro-Remain parties work together in key seats, we will gift victory to Boris Johnson and his pals in the Brexit Party. It will be a big enough majority for them to tear up the social contract altogether, rolling back on decarbonisation, and a host of other hard won rights.

Let no one doubt how difficult this is for a great many MPs. Conservatives who have spoken up for Remain voters have been threatened with deselection; Labour MPs in northern seats face a career-threatening dilemma, in the shadow of Jeremy Corbyn's prevarication.

Lib Dems who are serious about defeating Johnson know that, in some seats, Labour is best-placed to deliver a Remain victory. Supporting an alliance is easy when you are in the driving seat, but the real test comes when your support must go to an erstwhile rival.

As chief executive of Best for Britain, a pro-EU campaign, my avowed goal is to stop Brexit by all democratic means.

Brexit has already cost this country dearly and our economy has taken a big hit. But this issue is not just about Brexit, it's about the disaster we face if Boris Johnson is gifted a working majority.

It's about the wrecking of the NHS; it's about profit-takers cherry-picking the juiciest parts of our state institutions; it's about the dismantling of our welfare state, a British bedrock since David Lloyd George laid its foundations.

It's about shattering the Union, without any sort of a plan, and putting Northern Ireland in an impossible and perilous situation.

It's about what sort of country we want to live in, and to bequeath,

That's why it's so important that the Lib Dems don't just work as part of a Remain alliance, but cheerlead for it as well. If, as politically engaged citizens, we don't stand up against the narcissistic nihilism of Johnson and Trump, then what are we even in politics for?

That's why Best for Britain has sought, successfully, cross-party support for its pro-Europe stance. Brexit has opened up deep fracture lines in the traditional political landscape, and we owe it all who did not vote for Brexit to fight,

That's why we, as a politically engaged actors, should encourage politicians to work across party dividing lines, and explain to voters why traditional tribalism must be set aside.

The warning signs could not be clearer: Johnson's relentless focus on what's best for Johnson; warnings from Europe and the US that Britain can forget about cutting deals if it rows back on the Good Friday Agreement; a stagnating economy with a poorly pound, looking nervously over its shoulder as the clouds of a global recession appear on the economic horizon.

If Johnson gets his way, a general election, a new vote, an electoral event of any sort will come too late to stop Britain plummeting into a No Deal abyss, where we are likely to languish for a very long time. We must hope MPs can prevent this cataclysm.

As Britain stands on the brink, our best chance is to work together with rivals, putting up with short-term pain for long-term gain.

It's a huge leap but then, as Lloyd George said, you can't cross a chasm in two small jumps.

---

Naomi Smith is chief executive of Best for Britain



# THOUGHT SLAVERY WAS ABOLISHED?

## Modern slavery is rife despite legislation, with UK nationals often the victims, says Isabelle Parasram

“Enslaved on a British cannabis farm: The plants were more valuable than my life.”

“Reports of modern slavery increase by 30% in Wales.”

“Male slavery survivors in UK struggle to get support as numbers soar.”

These newspaper headlines are shocking, not only because modern slavery is, in itself, shocking, but because many people do not realise that slavery is rife within the UK.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was introduced to tackle this. It contains a number of laudable provisions:

- \* the provision of mechanisms for seizing traffickers’ assets and channelling some of that money towards victims for compensation payments;
- \* the creation of a new statutory defence for slavery or trafficking victims compelled to commit criminal offences and
- \* the provision of child trafficking advocates.

However, four years on, there is some criticism that the Act does not go far enough and that its practical application is not having the impact many anti-slavery organisations think it should have.

In a recent report, Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015: Final Report, Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, Maria Miller MP and Frank Field MP observed that victims of modern slavery in the UK are experiencing difficulty in accessing legal aid in pursuing civil compensation claims.

They also said the lack of mandatory training on modern slavery for all participants in the criminal justice system means that some victims might not be afforded the best defence for crimes they may have been forced to commit.

There is no clear or consistent pathway for victims to access the healthcare, housing and financial support that they require to re-build their lives, the report found, as currently signposting and support services for confirmed victims are often provided by the voluntary sector.

As part of my work as Liberal Democrat vice president with a particular remit covering diversity and BAME matters, I often get the opportunity to meet organisations within the voluntary sector who are filling the gaps that the Modern Slavery Act does not seem to cover. Not adequately, at least.

Marking the recent World Day against Trafficking in Persons, I attended the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative launch of a new anti-slavery network, Commonwealth 8.7 Network - an event held at the Australian High Commission.

Through Commonwealth 8.7 Network, more than 60 civil society organisations will work together to push for greater action across the Commonwealth in eradicating modern slavery and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7.

At this event, I met a number of people representing organisations across the UK who are at the forefront of combating contemporary forms of slavery, such as Red Godfrey-Sagoo, the chief executive of The Sophie Hayes Foundation, Neil Wain, the international programme director of Hope for Justice and Joanna Ewart-James, executive director at Freedom United.

These organisations fill the gaps in a variety of ways. Some equip supporters with awareness, education and ways to take action that drive real change. For example, lobbying the government to grant a young woman, who was trafficked from Nigeria to the UK into domestic servitude, leave to remain.

Other charitable organisations partner with commercial organisations to provide practical support for human trafficking victims through which they can access the opportunity of a paid work placement and a job in the food business.

Some have specialist teams who work closely with police to identify victims of modern slavery, build bridges of trust with them and remove them from exploitation and into safety.

Despite the tragic subject matter being discussed at the launch event, it was heartening to meet so many committed and passionate people who are determined to make a difference for victims of modern slavery on a practical level, despite the growing scourge of slavery across the globe.

As party vice president, I can contribute in my own way to filling the gaps - by highlighting the issues surrounding modern slavery, inviting anti-slavery campaigners to speak at events I sponsor and encouraging parliamentarians, assembly members, councillors, police and crime commissioners and others to champion some of the causes identified by anti-slavery organisations.

It is clear, though, that there is much more to be done.

The National Crime Agency’s national referral mechanism statistics show that referrals consisted of 2,454 female, 2,688 male and three transgender victims. UK nationals were among the most commonly reported potential victims and according to Kevin Hyland, the first UK independent anti-slavery commissioner: “Only 1% of victims of slavery have a chance to see their exploiter brought to justice.”

My challenge to you is, how can you help fill the gaps too?

Isabelle Parasram, is vice president of the Liberal Democrats for diversity and BAME

# BRAZIL: BACK TO DARKNESS

A supported of torture, military dictatorship and white supremacy rules a potential economic giant and makes Donald Trump look like a liberal. Jonathan Fryer reports

Brazilians long had an ironic favourite saying, that Brazil is the country of the future – and always will be.

But there is a new riff, which is less amusing: that Brazil currently risks becoming the country of the past. That past is the period of the military dictatorship, between 1964-85. Like their neighbours in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, the Brazilian junta made torture endemic. Leftists, intellectuals, students and anyone else the regime did not like were in danger of imprisonment, disappearance or death. No wonder many tens of thousands fled the country.

Today, some Brazilians are once again packing bags and leaving them in the hall in case they have to flee at short notice. The reason is the election to the presidency of former soldier Jair Bolsonaro, who took office on 1 January. He likes to portray himself as the Donald Trump of South America and they certainly have many traits in common.

## TRUMP LOOKS LIBERAL

Only Bolsonaro makes Trump look like a liberal. He declared at one point that the problem with the military dictatorship was that they tortured too many

people and did not kill enough. And despite the fact that Brazil has acquired an excellent reputation in modern times for bringing in equal marriage and free anti-HIV/AIDS treatment, his verdict on homosexuality is reflected in his statement that if his son were gay, he would rather he was killed in a car accident.

His views on women aren't much better. He has four sons himself; his fifth child was a girl, prompting him to joke to his macho entourage: "I must have been weak that night!" He has called for a return to the old values of God, country and family – a mantra of Latin America's dictatorship years – in which women fulfil their true destiny as wives, mothers and homemakers.

The Roman Catholic Church in Brazil for a long time supported such conservative traditionalism, until a generation of liberation theologians preached the gospel of the poor and championed solidarity with the oppressed. A wave of secularism then swept the country post-1985, but Bolsonaro is determined to reverse that, decrying godlessness.

He was born a Roman Catholic but his wife is an evangelical protestant very much of the kind that dominates the Bible Belt of the United States



and provided the bedrock of Christian fundamentalism that helped elect Donald Trump.

They believe wives should obey their husbands and that a man with many children is blessed by God. Some also sign up to the eschatological concept of ‘rapture’, which in a nutshell maintains that Christ’s second coming is imminent and that it will happen in the biblical territory of Israel, when all Christians will rise up to Heaven, but all others (unless they convert) will be damned. No wonder Bolsonaro loves Netanyahu’s Israel almost as much as he loves Trump’s America, though so far he has not carried out his threat to move the Brazilian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Interestingly, even worryingly, the demographic that predominantly supports Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil is made up not of the elderly but of young, well-educated men. Moreover, that is true among the sizeable Brazilian diaspora here in the United Kingdom.

Most of these migrants are young, many attend evangelical churches and more than half of them voted for Bolsonaro. If one asks them (as I did) why, often the answer is that he will bring back order to a country that was “ruined” by years of left-wing rule by the Workers Party (PT), notably under President Luiz Inácio da Silva, known as Lula.

Lula brought in family benefits and other measures designed to lift tens of millions of Brazilians out of poverty and reduce what still remains the biggest national wealth gap on the planet. This did not please the rich or the aspirant middle class.

Moreover, the PT and its leaders were accused of massive corruption, which eventually did for Lula as well as his successor, Dilma Rousseff. But those that took over from them were equally accused of corruption. Indeed, just about everyone in Brazilian politics, including the MPs, is seen as corrupt.

Lula was effectively prevented from standing for election last year, but the minister of justice is now accused of having been mixed up in the ‘car wash’ plot to bring him down. On a regular basis there are demonstrations of red-shirted PT supporters – especially in the impoverished north east – calling for the minister’s resignation. But equally large demonstrations have come out in support of him. Brazil is now an even more divided country than Brexit Britain. So while Bolsonaro’s political agenda appals many liberal-minded Brazilians, the conservatives are cheering him on. Under him, the deforestation of the Amazon basin is accelerating, as mining companies and cattle ranchers are given freer access to virgin territory. The indigenous communities living in the forests are under particular threat. Rather like 18th century European colonialists, many urban Brazilians consider the ‘Indians’ sub-human, who can be chased off their land or even killed, if necessary. Other candidates for murder are the landless activists who occupy unoccupied or under-

*“He declared at one point that the problem with the military dictatorship was that they tortured too many people and did not kill enough”*

used farmland. Bolsonaro has given a green light for them to be turfed off, with whatever force is required.

## **WHITE SUPREMACY**

He has a cavalier attitude to human life, other than unborn babies and people like himself. Of mixed Italian and German stock he is an unashamed believer in the theory of white – i.e. European – supremacy. He has referred to Arabs as “scum” and has a dim view of Africans. So much for the myth of the happy rainbow nation propagated by the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro and others. Racial disparities are still marked in

Brazil and prejudice lies just below the surface.

Still in his first year in office, Jair Bolsonaro is Trumpian in his dismissal of critics and even if he does not resort to twitter like the US President, he has come out with some pretty wacky ideas.

To a degree Congress and the media are holding him to account, but only to a degree. And even if he were to fall (yes, some people are talking about that already), opponents are not exactly encouraged by the fact that his vice-president is a retired army general and there isn’t a rich field of alternatives. Besides, just as with Trump, Bolsonaro has quite a solid base of support. He’s a Marmite politician; people love him or hate him and many middle class families find themselves split right down the middle over this. And he has strong support from Washington.

Economically, Brazil still hopes to be the country of the future and given its natural resources, including hydrocarbons, as well as its young population, in principle it should have good prospects.

Nearly two decades ago, the British economist Jim O’Neill promoted the concept of the BRICs – emerging economies that might overturn the hegemony of older industrialised powers as the century progresses. Bolsonaro certainly believes that, and rather echoing the line taken by Putin’s Russia and Xi’s China, he is prepared to demolish a few liberal shibboleths to achieve it.

---

Jonathan Fryer is a vice-chair of the Liberal Democrat Federal International Relations Committee and over the past 30 years has made several radio documentaries on Brazil for the BBC. This article is based on a talk given to the AGM of Liberal International British Group

# THIS MAY NOT LAST LONG

Liberal Democrat MEPs have no idea how long they will serve in Brussels, but are making the most of their opportunities, says Jane Brophy

Brexit. It's the hot word on everyone's lips. It has been since the referendum that has seen us calamitously try to leave the European Union in 2016.

It's not just been the hot word back at home in the UK but also around the European Parliament and its member states. The topic itself raises many questions: How will it affect the EU? How will it affect Britain? Who will take our places if we leave? Who wants to stop Brexit? Will we stop Brexit?

As Lib Dem MEPs, we know that we may not be here for very long. We weren't expected to be here. If you'd asked most people three years ago, they would have expected us to have left the EU by now. The European elections came around like a whirlwind being confirmed only two weeks before polling day. In the elections, the public put their faith in the Liberal Democrats, the single strongest remain party. They got behind our Stop Brexit message that showed our European friends that many of us do not want to leave the European Union. The election results gave a very clear message. Our country is not united behind a bubble of politicians in our country pushing for Brexit, let alone a hard, no-deal Brexit.

## DEFIED THE ODDS

We have already defied the odds by getting ourselves here as MEPs 3 years after the leave vote and we are determined to defy them again. That's why we have one key target for the next two months. Our key, common target, to stop Brexit. We know we may not be here for long so it's vital we make an impact and do everything we can as MEPs to stop Brexit and make people realise that we are leaders in Europe, not leavers.

As a delegation of 16 MEPs, we have a significant opportunity as a party to make a real difference in the European Parliament. In our parliamentary group Renew Europe, the Lib Dems are the largest single party and make up the second biggest delegation behind our French counterparts, being a 17 strong unit with Naomi Long from our sister party the Alliance in Northern Ireland. This increase from one MEP, Catherine Bearder, from the last term in 2014 to 16 has given the party significantly more sway in the Renew Europe group and gives us a great standing as leaders in Europe.

This bigger influence in Renew Europe has seen us not only have Martin Horwood elected as a vice-president for the group, but also gain considerable support in our fight to stop Brexit. This has included former ALDE leader Guy Verhofstadt coming to campaign with the party during the European elections and the candidate for Renew Europe president Sophie in 't Veld of the Dutch party D66

coming along to our last People's Vote march sporting one of our famous Stop Brexit t-shirts. A large number of our colleagues supported our anti-Brexit campaign in the chamber in Strasbourg and took to social media to express this along with their disgust with the Brexit Party disrespectfully turning their backs on the European anthem at the opening of parliament. This incredible support has made us feel comfortable in our group with our liberal friends from around Europe. It has also made us more committed than ever to fight for our liberal values and to Stop Brexit.

Along with working with our colleagues in Renew Europe, we have held meetings with other influential members across the European institutions, including a very productive meeting with chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier and some intense questioning of the president-elect of the European Commission Ursula Von Der Leyen. Both these figures reiterated their desire for us to stay in the European Union.

The meetings reassured us that the desire for us to remain in the European Union stems from all levels and bodies of European politics, not just from within our own party, country and political group. This desire should act as a cry to our UK citizens to show just how important we are in Europe.

We have also held meetings with prominent Remain groups from both Britain and abroad. Both British in Europe and The 3 Million came to visit us in parliament to discuss their concerns about Brexit and its impacts on both European citizens based in the UK and British citizens based in Europe.

They highlighted their worries about the rights of people living and working abroad and emphasised the importance of these rights for a functioning Europe. We reassured them that we are committed to fight for their rights and to do everything we can to stop Brexit. People should feel safe and secure, no matter where they live or work, and being a member of the European Union provides these guarantees.

Unlike our Brexit Party colleagues, our sole focus hasn't been Brexit. Our level of influence has extended well beyond the Renew Europe group and has seen members of our party take up key roles as leaders in the parliament. Lucy Nethsingha from East of England was elected chair of the committee on legal affairs and my colleague Chris Davies chair of the Fisheries committee.

This faith put in our party from the whole parliament shows how committed our colleagues are to keeping us as leading members of the European Union. They still see us as having a vitally important role to play in Europe. Since May, we have been working hard to create a legacy for ourselves in Europe and we will continue to do this, no matter how long we are here, by making real, lasting change for a better world.

I sit as a full member on the Employment and Social Affairs committee. I am doing everything I can to make an impact no matter how long I am here, especially for the north west. I am determined to ensure that support for work and training opportunities are provided for all people, who should not have to face any kind of discrimination when applying or hunting for jobs, or in the workplace itself. I am very pleased to have been given my first case file and hope to be able to work on many more.

*“The future of industry in our country is seriously at risk and our government has neglected to provide vital support”*

within the EU.

Forge Europa, like many other businesses, have invested time, money and effort to prepare for Brexit, however they have had no guidance from the UK government. This is a government who claim to support businesses and to create the best conditions for it. This clearly is not the case with such neglect. This lack of assistance is something we should highlight as Lib Dems. It shows just how under prepared and how unorganised the government are for Brexit. The future of industry in our country is seriously at

## LEFT TO BURN

I also sit on the delegation to Brazil and have been closely following the shocking events in the Amazon, as the rainforests have been left to burn. I have put pressure on the Brazilian government, sending a strongly worded letter to the Brazilian ambassador calling on his government do more to stop the destruction of this most precious global resource. The influence of the EU to drive international action to protect our planet from climate change was clear as Brazil now makes attempts to tackle the Amazon fires after intense pressure from European leaders.

I have also been involved in cross group campaigns to try to make real change, including co-signing a letter to the Japanese ambassador to ban commercial whaling. I wrote to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora demanding a ban on trophy hunting, a practice that should have no place in the world, which was co-signed by more than 50 MEPs (including some from the Brexit Party!) This cross-party work shows the power of the European Union and the considerable influence that can come from 28 countries working together to make the world a better place.

Back at home one of our major tasks has been to raise awareness of the role of the European Union in the UK. The valuable work of the EU often goes unnoticed but makes a huge difference to everyday life. This is a problem we face in the fight against Brexit and means it is a key area for us to highlight. From small things like having no roaming charges when travelling around Europe to large investments in our infrastructure, the EU has a huge impact on our lives, and is not a drain on our economy as suggested by Brexiteers. The low tariffs on our imports and exports keep our food prices low and mean that we can enjoy foreign produce in our daily lives without paying a premium for them, something that would change were we to leave.

It's also vital to raise awareness of the impact of Brexit on businesses based in the UK. I visited Forge Europa, a company based in Cumbria who create LED lighting. They're not only worried about the effects of Brexit on their business and expansion but also the clouding and neglect of other important issues such as climate change due to extensive debate on Brexit. Forge Europa has always tried to be as eco-friendly as possible and they rely massively on other countries for business, making the most of the free trade block

risk and our government has neglected to provide vital support demonstrating just how recklessly they have dealt with Brexit and how poorly thought out the whole Brexit plan has been.

I have visited many local parties and attended anti-Brexit marches and events throughout the north west and will continue to visit more. Attending these events and visiting local parties has enabled me to see the real desire and passion that people have to stop Brexit. This government, sadly, won't listen and are continuing to be held to ransom by a minority from within the political spectrum. These rallies and the anti-Brexit sentiment shared by so many cannot be ignored and we will carry on trying to get ourselves heard.

The rallies will be rounded off with a final People's Vote march in October, which is expected to be the biggest ever to tell the government that the people deserve the final say on Brexit. We did not vote for a no-deal Brexit and this decision must be given to the people whose lives it will impact.

As MEPs, we will continue to fight for the UK and its' citizens. We will continue to work as hard as we can to make an impact in the EU working within our committees and the wider parliament to make the world a better place. We will continue to work to create a legacy. We will continue to work to stop Brexit.

---

Jane Brophy is a Liberal Democrat MEP for north west England

# INDIA SEES A LANDSLIDE

## First-past-the-post has allowed populist nationalists a huge victory in India. Seth Thevoz reports

In India's 2019 Lok Sabha election, a simple story dominated – “Modi tightens his grip”.

But the election was marked by a series of complexities and changes. I was fortunate to spend seven weeks travelling around India, during six of the seven phases of voting, and to take in much of the campaign, from Darjeeling to Kochi, from Shimla to Chennai. I very much agree with Ruchir Sharma that India comes alive at elections, and that the enthusiasm is infectious. Forget the humble British election window-poster – in India, entire streets are decked out in hordes of party flags, as far as the eye can see.

And that was certainly the first hint of the BJP landslide to come. It wasn't that the Congress Party didn't have a campaign presence. It was that the Congress's presence was made up of occasional, large, slick, expensive-looking billboards, whereas the BJP presence felt more “grassroots”, with thousands upon thousands of shopkeepers proudly displaying everything from party flags to life-size cut-outs of prime minister Modi – and expecting these proud displays of divisive partisan loyalty to help rather than hinder their business.

### FINANCIAL SCANDALS

I went into the election aware of a number of key psephological advantages which the opposition parties should have had. The ruling BJP has overseen a stagnating economy, with the highest levels of unemployment since the 1970s. A series of financial scandals has shown many of the BJP's politicians to be no less corrupt than their rivals. And crucially, as Prannoy Roy and Dorab Sopariwala have highlighted, women's turnout in India is rising far more sharply than men's turnout (indeed, the former is likely to overtake the latter in the near future), while women voters are the very group that the BJP do worst among.

And my early forays, in the southern states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, provided some basis for the feeling that a Congress Party comeback might be on the cards – never natural BJP territory, the Congress was clearly making some headway in the south, and the final results reflected that – although it should be noted that the Congress's progress was largely at the expense of the long-flourishing Communist parties of the south, rather than gaining ground from the BJP. But even then, the fact that the BJP could even command a good one-fifth or one-quarter of the vote in areas that they weren't seriously contesting suggested a resurgence in BJP fortunes. And the less populous south is not where

elections are won or lost.

The further north I went, the clearer it became that this would be a BJP rout of the Congress Party. Indeed, in recent years, the Congress Party has lurched from crisis to crisis. Its status in Indian politics as a centre-left establishment party was once akin to the position of the ANC in South Africa – as the party which fought for and won independence, voting Congress used to be the patriotic thing to do. But having totally dominated Indian politics for so long, a lasting reputation for venality set in, and the image still mars the party to this day.

Rahul Gandhi has also come in for much criticism, most of it deserved. His gaffe-prone leadership in the 2014 elections saw the Congress suffer a landslide defeat, shedding a third of its vote share. And while he has noticeably improved as a public speaker in recent years, Gandhi remains as perennially wrong-footed as ever.



Early in the campaign, a fired-up Gandhi told a rally that India's Supreme Court had accused a BJP minister of corruption. Not only was the allegation false, bearing little relation to the court's statements around an ongoing case that was still sub judice, but the Supreme Court promptly responded, with an almost unprecedented demand for a formal apology in dragging the institution into a blatant piece of defamation.

Instead of resolving the matter swiftly, Gandhi spent three weeks of the campaign going through every iteration of response, from complete refusal to apologise, to 'clarification' that he got his facts wrong while refusing to apologise, to humiliating climb-down 'unreserved apology' as legal action was pending.

While the Congress had much to offer voters – their policy to roll out universal basic income across India could be revolutionary – they squandered half the campaign talking about whether or not Rahul Gandhi had libelled a cabinet minister. The Congress also failed to dispel their decades-old reputation for corruption, even after five years out of office.

The BJP, by contrast, could scarcely have had a slicker operation. Traditionally, campaign professionals from around the globe have descended on US elections, to pick up the latest cutting-edge polling techniques. But aficionados of politics and tech would have a field day in following the major Indian parties.

The BJP's social media strategy was miles ahead of rivals in 2014, and in 2019 it remained remarkably advanced, in a country with 650m mobile phone owners (including 350m smartphones), and where an increasing proportion of voters get their news from their phones.

The term "multi-media" barely does justice to the full scope of the BJP's campaigning; and just as impressive as the variety of such work are its slick production values.

It is a mark of the kind of operation the BJP ran that the Supreme Court deliberated over whether or not to permit the release of a multi-million-dollar blockbuster biopic, portraying Modi as a strong leader fending off foreign and domestic enemies. This slickness of output covered everything from 'fake news' bulletins, to Modi soundbites that clearly had an addictive effect on many voters – I lost count of the number of times I was on a remote hillside, only to hear Modi's distinctive voice emanating from the

*"I attended one of Modi's rallies as an observer, in Mangalore and it scared me to death"*

mobile of a passer-by, the only visible person in sight, who was fixatedly listening to the prime minister's demagoguery, while out for a walk up the mountains.

And, of course, it is impossible to discuss Modi's electoral triumph without discussing Modi himself. It is no exaggeration to say that Modi utterly dominates Indian politics – traditionally a highly fractured, and regionally-based arena.

Indeed, before his rise to the premiership, he was frequently dismissed as just another parochial chief minister, overlooking just how totally he had dominated local politics in Gujarat, and just how ruthlessly he had relied on the race card to play off one group against another, dominating divided public opinion. And so he has proven as prime minister of the country. Modi has a mere plurality of the vote, on 37% (up from 31% in 2014).

## FRACTURED OPPOSITION

But it doesn't feel that way on the ground. The fractured opposition is led by a stagnant Congress Party, remaining static on 19% for two general elections running. Through sheer force of personality, actively courting controversy to fire up his base while enraging his opponents, Modi has made this election about himself, and about his leadership. The current generation of frontline Indian politicians are widely derided as minnows; so by default, Modi is seen as the only substantial politician on the national stage. And as long as elections are predicated around talking about Modi, the die have been very heavily loaded towards his re-election.

India's first-past-the-post electoral system, bequeathed by the British, exaggerates this trend.



Asked to describe the Indian electoral system to other foreign observers, I usually ask them to imagine British first-past-the-post, only with the SNP breakout in Scotland having been matched by comparable breakouts of regionally-based parties in every remaining county of the UK. Faced with such fractured politics, the bar to getting elected is rather low. And so Modi may not have much more than a third of the popular vote, but against a divided opposition he's quite capable of achieving stonking landslides. We need only look at the decade-long grip on power of Stephen Harper's conservatives in Canada, on barely more than a third of the vote. And there are lessons for Britain, too, on how a populist right-winger clinging on to a third of the vote can 'divide and rule' through the vagaries of the electoral system. All the same debates found in Britain, around a Progressive Alliance to beat the Conservatives, were also found in the run-up to this year's Indian elections – and they came to little, as internecine squabbling over individual seats led the few pacts that were already in place (as in Delhi) to fall apart – so Modi's third of the vote was still enough to let him steamroller all the other parties, with an increased majority. In the 2014 election, the BJP secured 282 of 545 seats, just past the minimum "winning post" of 272 seats – but it was still the first time since 1984 that an Indian party had won an overall majority in the Lok Sabha. In 2019, Modi increased his seat tally to 303, while the Congress languished behind on 52 seats.



I attended one of Modi's rallies as an observer, in Mangalore – it couldn't have been more different from the rather jovial Communist rally I observed in Kochi, more akin to a carnival – and it scared me to death.

Until then, I'd often heard people comparing Modi to Hitler, and the BJP to modern-day fascists, and I'd regarded such comparisons as crass and crude – Hitler is over-deployed as an analogy in the era of Godwin's Law. But having now seen a Modi rally up close, I'm fully converted to the comparison – the whole thing was terrifying. The sheer scale of the open-air event was extraordinary, and the huge crowd, stretching over hillsides as far as the eye could see, were whipped up into an aggressive, hate-fuelled frenzy, chanting

anti-Muslim abuse. And even though we were on the fringes of the city, I could quite understand why every bar in Mangalore was locked up or even boarded up on the day of the BJP rally – and when I asked one bar owner, he said, "You don't serve alcohol when the BJP are in town. Bad things happen."



Dr Seth Thévoz was research assistant on India's bestseller, Prannoy Roy and Dorab R. Sopariwala's *The Verdict: Decoding India's Elections* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2019)



# RADICAL LOVE TO FIGHT FARAGE

## Beki Sellick fought the Brexit Party in Peterborough, can an example from Turkey help see it off?

As the Liberal Democrat candidate in the Peterborough by-election in June, I shared many a public platform with the Brexit Party (BP), witnessing up-close their first attempt to follow MEP wins with a Westminster MP. From my experience, I'm asked: What is the Brexit Party? Who votes for it? And what strength does it really have?

The BP came over as Nigel Farage's latest vehicle to promote himself and seek a quick-as-you-can Brexit of any-sort-at-all. At the time (polling Day was 6 June, pre-Prime Minister Boris), this had seemed a fairly remote possibility. I readily admit that the BP raising Brexit as an issue helped us to gain pro-EU voters from the Tories and Labour. With the 'main parties' so compromised on Brexit, their campaigns were literally rubbish: focused on fly-tipping and litter, attempting to deny that people in Peterborough were interested in the EU, either way.

However, in polling week, the risk that the BP might actually win squeezed Liberal Democrat voters to Labour, so we slipped behind the Tories into fourth place (albeit with triple our 2017 vote share, while all other Remain parties lost their deposits). Despite Peterborough's 60% Leave vote in 2016, the BP wasn't locals. On the ground, the BP was comfortably-off middle-England retired people from all over who took up hotel residence and ran a city centre stall for the campaign; supported by money delivering targeted social media and printed leaflets.

The local BP was their 'local' candidate, who lives in the countryside outside the city constituency. Inevitably, he was a recent convert to the BP; awkward that he featured in the Conservative candidate's campaign launch photo, snapped during Peterborough's wait for the by-election to actually start. (It took nine months from our short-lived Labour MP's arrest; through her trial and re-trial, appeals, brief custodial sentence to the eventually successful recall petition which finally unseated her.)

The messaging was subtle: vote for an ordinary person like you (picture of middle-aged white male). The BP attracted votes from Conservatives and Ukip, tapping into a rich seam of disaffected/ Leave voters and making vague promises. Their candidate - a millionaire property developer - sounded as policy-free as his 'rubbish' opponents, a rare specific was to propose that local planning should be relaxed (provoking some raised eyebrows). Generally, he espoused reasonable views: putting sheep's clothing onto the Farage wolf within.

When framing careful answers of Liberal and personal integrity and ultimately of love, which could be heard even at the conservative 'Christian' hustings, I was struck by how easy it is to give the sought-for answer to any voters' question, if you do not represent

anyone but yourself and your party does not aspire to govern. At the same hustings, a prominent local Green (their 2017 parliamentary candidate and a personal friend) challenged my Liberal Democrat integrity, alleging that Vince Cable had lied, apparently referring to tactical voting recommendations in the euros.

Given the BP approach, even this one example of petty bickering between Remainers was profoundly disappointing. Naomi Klein warns against promoting division amongst those she dubs the 'Caring Majority' in her anti-populist book "NO! is not enough". Instead, we should build a broad, inclusive, welcoming progressive platform around say sustainable economy, fairer society, true democracy.

The BP's strength lies in its skilful manipulation, backed by money, and its non-local supporters. A chill spread through the count as BP votes mounted and victory looked possible, when their affable affluent hotel-staying OAPs were joined by a group of thickset younger white men (Tommy Robinson lookalikes), presaging a rumoured Farage attendance. These men made diverse members of my team feel vulnerable, reminding us of what we stand for.

But Labour votes rallied, so Farage decided not to put in an appearance and the BP didn't win what was hopefully their best chance. It may be wish-fulfilment on my part, but I think the BP is waning. The Peterborough by-election was only two weeks after the euros, and as the campaign ended the shiny new protest vote was dulling: intrinsically difficult to maintain cohesion around their single issue, which will one day be 'over'.

The BP's strength does not lie in policy-making, but we should learn from them. We can't beat the BP for blatantly undeliverable promises, yet we should join them in the popular space. In Turkey, the Republican Peoples Party (CHP) attributed their win against Erdogan's individualism and polarisation in recent Turkish elections to their deliberate strategy of engaging depoliticised voters. CHP's 'Book of Radical Love' calls for: respectful local listening and working together (resembling Liberal Democrat community politics); with being a source of positive, relevant solutions (exemplified at our campaign training); and demonstrating core values (giving due credit; taking patient, persevering steps to achieve justice).

We too accept that not everybody needs to agree all the time, "Our differences are precious as long as they bring colours to our lives; they are harmful if they plant animosity in our hearts."

Lessons for me: to counter populism, division and hatred, let's keep up the community politics, find common cause and hold onto our strength: Radical

# SECRETS OF THE FEDERAL BOARD

## The board doesn't work as intended and the party presidency can't, says Gordon Lishman

Liberator asked me about the Federal Board as it was getting comments along the lines of "it's even worse than the Federal Executive, for example that there are too many people on the FB and ... it has unmanageably long agendas rarely completed in the allotted time".

Yes; there is a problem of governance, leadership and management at the heart of the party; but no, it's not about the size of the board and detailed agenda management.

A word of warning: political parties are not like other organisations. Although many of the rules of good governance, leadership and management apply, they can't be simply transposed to politics. For instance, in politics a chief executive isn't in charge. Outside politics, most people don't feel the need to say something once it has already been said.

### OPINIONATED VOLUNTEERS

Unsurprisingly, few large organisations outside politics are run by overlapping committees of opinionated volunteers. The extent to which it's necessary to respond to events is more complex than elsewhere and the competitive environment is more immediate and harsher.

Lib Dems tend to focus too much on one element of governance and management: structure – how many committees do you need, how big are they, how are they elected, etc. In fact, almost any structure can work effectively if you apply the other components of good governance: leadership, relationships, processes and accountability.

The system works sometimes – recent decisions on managing the emergence of new parties and the implications of a Remain Alliance; coalition formation; the party's stance on the Iraq war; and the interconnected decisions around establishing the Liberal Democrats in 1988.

It also answers specific questions, for instance about leadership and election regulations. The problem is that it doesn't work well for everyday decisions about the use of resources, political campaigning and positioning, staff structure, budgeting and communication with members.

The core problem is that the FB doesn't know what it's for. The title 'board' was supposed to show it as the central decision-making body, bringing together other bodies and managing our work.

On most matters, the FB is given a subject to discuss, perhaps accompanied by a paper or PowerPoint presentation, but more often a verbal introduction. Comments are taken in groups of three followed by a response. Occasionally, a few points are drawn out and recorded. The leader or their representative attends, usually for one item, delivers a few thoughts

on current politics, hears some comments, answers and departs.

Most politicians are accustomed to legislating and scrutinising. That isn't the same as making an organisation work effectively, taking executive decisions and managing resources. That requires clear, written proposals in advance with recommendations for decision; well-constructed agenda; a clear system of delegation to other people and bodies along with a list of matters reserved for board decisions; and a high level of chairing which summarises and records decisions and is based on the respect and full confidence of members.

We have a leader. We don't have a core leadership team which brings together key players in actively managing how the party works. Good leadership isn't dictating what happens; it involves taking a lead in proposing action and decisions, listening, modifying and achieving broad agreement. That requires a leadership group talking together frequently with a focused agenda and sense of clear direction.

I have known and worked with party chief executives for more than 50 years. It's a job with impossible expectations and more responsibility than power. As Roy Jenkins said about chancellors, they divide into two categories: those who fail and those who get out in time. We need a much clearer understanding of what a party chief executive does and how he fits with the wider leadership, including the need for political judgement and organisational management.

There should be a troika at the top of the party structure consisting of the leader, president and chief executive sharing a clear idea of direction and how to lead and manage all the resources of the federal party.

They don't have to like each other, but they do need to share mutual trust and confidence and understand each others' roles and abilities. Above all, they need to talk to each other frequently about where we are going and what needs to be done. As with a charity or company board chair and chief executive, the roles vary as they balance strengths, weaknesses and experience. The next two years with a new leader and a new president in a challenging political environment is a critical opportunity for a new style of party leadership and management.

We need a second tier for co-ordination and coherent management. It will certainly include finance, campaigns and elections, people management, and digital. The best example was the early Ashdown 'Board of the Party', a small group with no direct power which worked through its members (I participated as ALDC's chair).

In a properly federal party, it would also involve state parties, but that would require a greater balance of members and resources between them and a

recognition of the over-arching federal party's role. It will rely on a staff top management team, working together and with committees and other bodies to ensure that resources are well-used and decisions are effectively communicated.

These arrangements will take up some time if they are to work properly. As with other aspects of good governance and management, that's less time and fewer problems than it takes to sort out the issues which arise from random initiatives from one part of the party or another.

As an example, look at Vince Cable's sudden announcement of proposals for a "liberal movement" which eventually turned into a relatively anodyne supporter's scheme. If Jo Swinson wants to create that wider movement, it will be a lot easier to do it working with other key bodies, bringing people on board with a coherent plan and arguing it out in the party rather than by simply handing down a package of measures to be picked over and challenged by a wide range of players, online and in meetings, who inevitably strike positions, possibly based on a distorted interpretation of proposals.

In retrospect, the last round of constitutional changes assumed that changes in structure would solve the problems of a lack of clarity and accountability which were the most important factors in the demand for changes. It didn't work, partly because the system became more complicated and diffuse and most importantly because it wasn't accompanied by clear, frequent communication to tell members, supporters and the public in simple, direct language what was happening. There was no communications strategy and a tendency to default to bracing injunctions to do what the party wanted, with little explanation of why and even less attempt to engage people in sharing ownership of strategy and initiatives.

## **BREAK UP THE PRESIDENCY**

What's the president for? There's a one sentence job description – she is "the principal public representative of the party and shall chair the Federal Board". In practice the role has always been filled by a parliamentarian (once a recent former parliamentarian) and the latest constitutional changes mean that doing the job properly is impossible for anyone who lives most of their life outside London, doesn't have a secure income and welcomes the workload of a manic Stakhanovite.

What's the job in practice as it has evolved? The president should be a key part of the core leadership team of the Federal Party; perhaps its co-ordinator. Occasionally, they must have the personal authority and the will to tell truth to power when a leader is taking a direction which is bad for the party and unacceptable to its members. It doesn't happen often but it's crucial when it does. It's also the reason why it's not a job for a would-be leader or perhaps even for someone with a parliamentary focus.

The president has to represent the party as an organisation, taking responsibility for what it does and answering for the party on its responsibilities for dealing properly with complaints and scandals and

***“The core problem is that the FB doesn't know what it's for”***

defending its due process.

The president is expected to spend a lot of time on the road, visiting and encouraging members and explaining what the party is doing and why. When we have a lot of new members, it's especially important to keep setting out the core philosophy and ideas of the party to help them to see the

underpinning principles through the accumulation of detailed policies and short-term political choices.

Also, the president has to chair the FB, enabling and managing its work as the core decision-making body. In the new, complex structure, there is also the key role in co-ordinating the slew of committees and other bodies so that they contribute to overall strategy and direction.

Additionally, the president is the manager of the chief executive and, through them the headquarters machinery. That needs management experience, a sense of how to balance the two roles and the people currently filling them, and a close relationship of trust and confidence while maintaining the "necessary quality of distance" to take hard decisions when needed.

The president should take the lead in ensuring the accountability of the federal party to its members; reporting, answering questions, engaging and explaining. A few things need to be confidential, but a culture of secrecy is destructive and counter-productive. They also represent the Party in some discussions with other parties and the international Liberal community.

It's now an impossible job for one person. Some presidents have done some parts of the role well. Would-be leaders are good at visiting and encouraging the faithful. Others have chaired the FE/FB well. Some have simply done what was asked without wanting a greater role. Given the way the job has evolved, there is now too great a risk that a popularity poll between a necessarily small group of potential candidates will mean that some functions will not be delivered effectively.

We need a new approach to enable the tasks to be done consistently and effectively. Two jobs would offer more chance of getting it right: probably a public figure and a chair of the FB /party manager. It should be a two-year term, renewable once. It shouldn't be an MP.

The tasks should be shared with others taking specific tasks and responsibilities, for instance for communication with the party, international relations and managing strategy.

The Party needs urgently to address the ways in which its leadership, governance and management work. That includes changing relationships, processes, accountability and communication, shared leadership responsibilities and structures in order to make it fit for its 21st century purpose and opportunities.

---

Gordon Lishman is a member of the Federal Board and has worked in governance and senior management roles in the voluntary, private, public and political worlds

# RENT ASUNDER

## Regulating rent increases should be a matter of intergenerational fairness, says John Bryant

Back in the 1970s I remember trying to help a friend prepare for a rent tribunal hearing. It was my first attempt at casework, well before I became a councillor. My recollection is we argued that, as the law stood at the time, the landlord could not increase the rent above the local neighbourhood market rent level, or above RPI, unless he could show evidence of investing in the property. We got a partial victory because the tribunal moderated the proposed increase.

I started researching the role of rent tribunals because it is obvious that the kind of rents being charged in the private sector nowadays are way above any reasonable definition of 'affordable'. Housing costs are clearly the biggest barrier for people aged 18-40 to match the progress made by their parents' generation in property acquisition and rising disposable income.

My research found rent tribunals can still be used to limit increases proposed by landlords under the Rent Act 1977, or to determine market rents for assured or assured shorthold tenancies.

However, nowadays there is a preponderance of fixed term shorthold tenancies and the guidance for these on the relevant Government website states: "Your landlord can - renew your tenancy agreement at the end of the fixed term, but with an increased rent; agree a rent increase with you and produce a written record of the agreement that you both sign; use a 'Landlord's notice proposing a new rent' form, which increases the rent after the fixed term has ended. Your landlord must give you a minimum of one month's notice (if you pay rent weekly or monthly). If you have a yearly tenancy, they must give you 6 months' notice."

Regulated tenancies (common before 1989) and assured tenancies (common between 1989-97) gave better protection to tenants, which is why fixed term shorthold tenancies have become the norm in the last 20 years. This is because they allow for exponential rent increases well above inflation, which is otherwise used when rent tribunals have a role in settling disputes for the earlier forms of private tenancy.

The under-40s are markedly different from the over-40s. Around two thirds of the latter are property owners, with others in this age group more likely to have long term tenancies protected by rent tribunals, or may still enjoy permanent tenancies in social housing. Only around a third of the younger group are property owners while the rest are at the mercy of private sector landlords, with a decreasing number in social housing.

The exponential increase in the cost of housing for sale since the 1980s has meant it no longer an option for younger people. In 1983 the UK average house price to earnings ratio for mortgages, was under three times annual earnings but had reached five times annual earnings by 2015.

In London it was topping times times annual earnings, according to the [economicshelp.org](http://economicshelp.org) website.

Office for National Statistics data shows the proportion of household income spent on housing had risen from 9% in 1957 to nearly 20% in 2017. Given these figures covered all types of household, one can easily recognise that it is the younger generation who rightly have a case to expect those in power (mostly in the post-40 generation) to tackle the increasing cost of housing both for sale and rent.

What should now be the Liberal Democrats policy response to this important element in the housing crisis?

The party has argued for an increased supply of housing for some time, through allowing councils to borrow at historically low interest rates to build social housing. The Tories' response has to been to offer cash incentives for first time buyers, but the impact has been to inflate the profits of developers (along with directors' bonuses) with little impact on the overall prices paid.

It is unlikely a determined push to increase construction levels for any type of housing could be achieved quickly because of skilled labour shortages and restricted capacity in the construction materials industry. Brexit would certainly exacerbate these problems if it proceeded. Tackling housing supply problems is a medium term fix, and is not going to help change the fortunes of those trapped in high cost housing now.

Surely the answer is regulating private sector rents to limit increases according to neighbourhood, including for shorthold tenancies? This would require a major investment in the rent tribunal machinery and the building of locally managed databases, to register all rents by post code. Digitisation will obviously help, but within two years the average rent increase (of around 6% a year in recent times) could be moderated to the RPI level, which would provide a real breathing space for renters while housing supply is improved across the country.

Liberal Democrats need to turn their attention to fixing the real problems of our younger generation. Tackling their housing costs is one that has not been at the forefront of our minds in recent years. It's about time it was.

---

John Bryant was a Camden councillor from 2002-14, and as William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective)

# OBITUARY: GEOFF TORDOFF

## Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to the chair who saw the party through the Thorpe scandal

Many readers of *Liberator* will have heard the phrase 'Grimond Liberal' without knowing precisely what it meant, not least because the Jo Grimond era ended 52 years ago. Jo was a superb orator, an intellectual Liberal who wrote numerous books and a charismatic leader who attracted a great cadre of highly competent individuals into party membership and, in due course, into party positions.

Geoff Tordoff became one of the latter. Jo's attraction for instinctive Liberals like Geoff was his innate anti-Conservatism coupled with a determination to take a firm Liberal line on controversial issues, such as the Suez invasion, and a rejection of statist socialism, instead promoting a progressive alternative to both other parties.

I first met Geoff at the Warrington by-election in April 1961 where he was introduced as the only known Liberal in the constituency. This was not entirely true but at least it enabled me to sign him up for the party - a fact that he regularly blamed me for committing him to the lifetime of political struggle that ensued.

He soon became a candidate, fighting Northwich in 1964 and Knutsford in 1966 and 1970. After that he devoted himself to party management for which both his temperament and his particular skills well suited him. He was invariably good humoured, often very whimsical but with a great political awareness of what had to be done and how to achieve it. He was a 'fixer' who could usually persuade party rebels that a different course of action better suited their and the party's ends. He began his party management chairing the Assembly Committee (1974-76), running the annual conference, but crucially he began a three year term as party chair in 1976, a key post at an extremely difficult time: the final months of the Jeremy Thorpe affair and the 18 months of the often fraught Lib-Lab pact which sustained the Callaghan minority Labour government, rather than allow Margaret Thatcher to succeed in a vote of no confidence.

The Thorpe affair did considerable damage to the party. Liberal MPs had been aware of the allegations of a homosexual affair against him for some years but it only became public knowledge when his accuser, Norman Scott, mentioned Thorpe in a minor court case.

In party terms it came to head when he was finally persuaded to resign the leadership and David Steel was elected in his place. Then about to go on trial for conspiracy to murder Scott (a charge on which he was subsequently acquitted) Thorpe promised Steel he would not attend the party conference in 1978. Inevitably he broke the promise and arrived, effectively hijacking the conference. Party members were unaware of all the earlier problems and a candidate moved a motion censuring the

party officers for their treatment of Thorpe. Geoff, Gruffydd Evans as party president and myself as chair of the Assembly Committee, decided that it was time that members knew the full facts and that if the motion was carried, we would all resign on the spot. The motion was taken in closed session and delegates were amazed at what was revealed - the treatment of party staff, the existence of private funds and Thorpe's preference for attending elitist functions rather than giving attention to party campaigns. The motion was forthwith withdrawn without a vote.

During the Lib-Lab pact Geoff was Steel's eyes and ears, and his advice on how far the party would allow him to go was invariably respected. One safety valve which Geoff engineered was the special party assembly in February 1978 in which the party made it clear that it expected the pact to end within a few months but gave Steel a mandate to determine the exact date.

After three years as chair he took on the Campaigns and Elections Committee (1980-82) and became party president, (1983-84). He was appointed to the House of Lords in 1981 and became chief whip 1983-94 - post for which he was admirably suited. He had achieved numerous promotions within Shell chemicals, despite some antipathy from his bosses, but resigned to do the Whip's job full-time. Geoff typically helped to smooth the relations with the SDP during the alliance period.

After being chief whip, Geoff subsequently took on important non-party roles in the Lords from which he retired in 2016. His wife, Pat, was herself a keen Liberal but suffered from long-term ill health up to her death in 2013.

My long friendship with Geoff involved a particular party piece at each Liberal Assembly - the Bold Gendarmes duet from one of Offenbach's lesser known operas. Just a few months ago, when Geoff was living at a retirement complex in Ilkley, he asked the organiser of musical events there if I could reprise this duet. I did so and enjoyed a final meeting with a much respected friend and colleague.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

---

**The Uneven Path of  
British Liberalism –  
from Jo Grimond  
to Brexit  
by Tudor Jones  
Manchester University  
Press £25**

Tudor Jones, the honorary research fellow in the history of political thought at Coventry University, has written a historical study of British Liberalism of the last 60 years - from Jo Grimond to Brexit. He focuses on ideas developed in the Liberal Party and then later in the Liberal Democrats and has viewed these ideas through the context of major events, both internal and external. Jones seeks to demonstrate a clear pattern of continuity of liberal values, principles, themes and policy and describes how new policy thinking emerged during the main periods of Liberal revival and Liberal Democrat recovery.

Jones describes the book as a history of Liberal ideas conceived within organised party liberalism, not with philosophical liberalism or liberal ideology conceived more broadly in cross-party terms. The thinking and policy development of the continuing Liberal Party is not studied and the thinking of the SDP – more accurately David Owen - is examined in so far as it is influential before and after merger.

The book is an ideological history as Jones promises. It is an accessible, chronological study of liberal thought, written from an historical perspective, although the book most often describes the debate in terms of economic thinking, rather than the detail of other policy areas.

Jones captures in meticulous detail, even-handedly and frankly kindly, the debates within the Liberals and subsequently the Liberal Democrats. He demonstrates an acute understanding of the main events in Liberal/Liberal Democrat thought and how they impact our narrative. Jones has, however, been well guided by many of the party's most prominent thinkers and commentators and uses sources, which he considers to be neglected or undervalued, including election manifestos, leaflets, pamphlets and periodicals. The footnotes –



# REVIEWS

which are plentiful - are a glorious reminder of publications and journals past and the amount of writing which took place. Sadly so few survive.

The uneven path of the title alludes to both our electoral fortunes and the internal debate over the party's philosophy and purpose, particularly the social and economic liberal traditions and how they co-exist in the party. As the late Simon Tittle wrote in *Liberator* in 2004 after the publication of the Orange Book, the party encompasses "essentially three competing strands of thought – left libertarians, social democrats and economic liberals". Yet, "the intellectual contradictions of the 1988 merger were never satisfactorily resolved – indeed debate was actively discouraged leaving an ideological vacuum".

Jones notes *Liberator's* reaction was to congratulate the Orange Book contributors on the grounds "it had been a long time since any MPs have addressed the party's intellectual direction rather than comment on individual policies" and "had long argued that the lack of debate about ideas in the party has been a serious failing and the technical aspects of campaigning - the 'how' of politics – have superseded the 'why' of politics in importance, and not to the party's long term advantage".

Conrad Russell had observed in 1998 that Ashdown "had inherited a 'mixture of traditions' one of which was a distrust of the state 'in which we hear the voices of Gladstone and Grimond'. The other was rooted in a willingness to use the power of the state to widen opportunity and to disperse wealth and power, a political approach personified by Lloyd George. Russell noted these two liberal traditions were "not incompatible, but, like a team of high-spirited horses they are not easy to drive together."

Twenty years later, and to someone now on the periphery of the Liberal Democrats, it feels as

if little has changed. One of the issues I was hoping Jones might illuminate is why Liberalism hasn't had more impact or resonance on a philosophical level and why more people do not instinctively describe themselves as Liberals.

Jones does not set out to answer this question, although his writing and clear analysis does give us clues. The lack of interest, which occasionally borders on boredom, about ideas by some Liberal/Liberal Democrat leaders is striking. The amount of time and energy that realignment projects have taken is also startling when seen in this context as is the sheer lack of leadership by leaders as opposed to just managing the party's reaction to events.

However, political success does not depend on purity of thought. And good policy does not always correlate to electoral success. Sadly.

One issue this book illustrates with incredible clarity is the lack of women either as initiators of policy, writers or as commentators on events. Either women (with the exception of Shirley Williams) are largely invisible within Liberal/Liberal Democrat thought and policy making and the author is reflecting that, or Jones is demonstrating a high level of bias or selectivity in the sources that he uses to make his arguments. Bearing in mind the meticulous use of sources and textual analysis of Jones authorship, I suspect mostly the former.

In part this lack of female visibility is a function of the scope of the book –60 years of history is covered in fewer than 400 pages of text and with a few exceptions, women are under-represented at the higher levels of the party or within its machinery. However, I hope in any subsequent edition that women, who have been involved in Liberal thought and policy making, written chapters in books, pamphlets and contributed to the rich and undervalued seam of writing that Jones talks about

in his preface and are outside the more obvious policy leadership roles in the party, are able to offer analysis and comment.

That comment said, this is a timely and relevant addition to the canon of Liberal Democrat history. It was well paced and I wasn't riled to righteous anger or indignation about the misrepresentation of any person, time or place, which frankly is rare. Others may not share that view. If you are running a Lib Dem book club I suggest this as one for discussion.

Susan Simmonds

---

## **Louis XIV, the Real King of Versailles** **by Josephine Wilkinson** **Amberley 2019 £20.00**

We don't tend to know much about the tyrants that ruled France, Napoleon perhaps being an exception, since the French Revolution tends to be the beginning of our modern history.

Louis XIV's reign starts in minority and is blighted by La Fronde, a series of civil wars, where the French aristocracy seek to reassert themselves against the centralising policies of Richelieu and Mazarin shortly after the civil wars in England.

Louis, the pupil of Mazarin, prevails and many argue that the experience led him to his absolutist policies, though the seeds had been sown decades before his birth. The French aristocracy will become focused on the court, which eventually settles at Versailles, but is primarily a military organisation.

We have just had the Thirty Years War and a protracted war with Spain, but Louis will seek the expansion of French frontiers throughout his reign. Despite Louis's desire to put bread in the mouths of his common people, wars of aggrandisement will inevitably have the opposite effect because of the taxation necessary to maintain the armies.

On the religious front Jansenism raged as a controversy. However, this pales into insignificance alongside the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, or the Edict of Fontainebleau of 1685 which put 1,450 men into slavery and caused around 2,000 other Huguenots to leave France. Louis XIV took his Jesuit Catholic religion seriously;

he saw himself as divinely appointed by God. Any religious heresy might thus translate into a political heresy, as with the earlier problems with the Huguenots, including those, related or not, of La Fronde.

Nicholas Foucquet, whom Philip Boucher has described as "the 'liberal', even libertine superintendent of finances", falls foul of the scheming Jean Baptiste Colbert, who has Louis's ear.

We see here parallels with our own appalling Henry VIII and Wolsey – even down to the king's vanity. The fall of Foucquet is often said to put France irreconcilably on the road to absolutism.

The Dutch Wars of 1672-78 were started by Louis simply for the sake of it; western Europe was at peace. Louis sought to expand against the Spanish Netherlands, and a Dutch Republic might be seen as an affront to an absolute monarch, but this was war for war's sake. Louis had essentially bought Charles II into the war. The ultimate downside for Louis and absolutism was the rise of William of Orange and of grand alliances amongst the German princes, which we would ultimately join, to check the Sun King's ambitions.

The Treaty of Nijmegen ending that war might be seen as something of an apex for Louis's reign. Diplomatically he then made an error, by not responding to the Pope's plea to go to the aid of Vienna, besieged by the Turks. By standing to one side, Louis allowed other powers and alliances to rise. Whilst the rest of Europe may have to gang up on France, inevitably to a stalemate, this is what generally happened. Things begin to unravel. The Nine Year's War (1688-97) might favour France militarily, but with that and the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14) her economy could not take it.

Disaster also struck dynastically, Louis, on the throne for 72 years, would be succeeded by his great-grandson, who, following much the same course, sowing the seeds for the French Revolution.

One might venture that Louis was his own man and Henry VIII was not. I can't bring myself to like either of them. To all around him Louis XIV appeared a success, but was he? Josephine Wilkinson fuels my doubts.

Stewart Rayment

---

## **Derelict London – all new edition** **by Paul Talling** **Penguin Random House UK £14.99**

Paul Talling is the doyen of all things derelict in London. In 2003 he started photographing wrecks and ruins in London and putting the pictures on a website ([www.derelictlondon.com](http://www.derelictlondon.com)). Now he is an acknowledged expert whose guided walks sell out within minutes of being advertised.

This book updates Paul's previous edition published in 2008 with photos and information about roughly a hundred derelict buildings 'new', old and in some cases updated since then. It provides absorbing insights not only into the history of the buildings but also of their likely future.

It seems they may be less often demolished nowadays because of greater appreciation of their historic or architectural merit, but there is a great lack of imagination as to their possible re-use – the default redevelopment is luxury flats or possibly a boutique hotel. Few are renovated for as public or community facilities.

Some, of course, would be better demolished anyway. Poplar Baths, on the fringe of my old ward in Tower Hamlets, would be a personal favourite for such a fate, but it staggers on.

This book is an essential guide for anyone interested in the real social history of the capital. Many of the sites illustrated can be seen on Talling's guided walks, or of course they can be viewed independently if you wish to explore London's underbelly yourself.

Liberal footnote: why/how on earth was there ever a South East Ham Liberal Club?

Gwyneth Deakins

## Thursday

It's good to have the smell of cordite and unwashed activist in my nostrils again: I have placed myself in command of a committee room on the front line of the Brecon and Radnorshire by-election. It seems only yesterday since that fine actor Roger Livesey captured the seat for the Liberals, but today we must win it all over again.

Every preparation has been made. Crack platoons of knockers up have been dispatched to every street on my patch; sharp-eared Young Liberals have been dressed as sheep and given instructions to lurk outside the other parties' HQs to see what intelligence they can gather. A shout goes up! A Brexit party aircraft has been sighted over Talgarth. I give immediate orders for our ack ack guns to be manned (by women, as it happens) and ring the local RAF station to have a Hurricane sent up.

When the polls close we shall be able to look ourselves in the eye and say we have done everything we can to secure victory for Jane Dodds.

## Friday

What a splendid night! It was touch and go at the start of the count, but when the boxes from Ystradgynlais were opened it became clear we had triumphed. We toasted our victory in the finest Welsh champagne and sang our Liberal anthems: 'The Land', 'Woad' and 'Cwm Off It'.

One pleasure of this contest has been rediscovering the delightful countryside of Mid Wales. More than once my memory has been jogged by places I saw in the last campaign I fought here – I went through Three Cocks in the 1985 by-election.

## Saturday

Those who believe we do not export pork pies to Iceland should take a stroll along Oakham Quay, as I did this morning. The Artic Fleet was newly in port, its rigging still sheathed in ice. If I am honest, our local delicacy is a hard sell in Reykjavik as the locals prefer a slap up meal of decaying shark, but we still maintain the trade. The ships I saw this morning had returned from Northern waters laden with frozen haddock, fashionable yoghurts and Bjork CDs.

As a young man I was involved in the illicit pork pie trade, smuggling them into the United States in defiance of its petty regulations. Disguised as lumberjacks, we floated rafts of them across the Great Lakes. Today, I prefer to look for less dangerous markets – an old Thai friend of mine tried a pie only the other day and pronounced it delicious when fried in a wok with garlic, lemon grass and holy basil. I leave for Bangkok next week.

## Sunday

Whenever I leave the village I fear for what I shall find at St Asquith's on my return. I am pleased to report the Revd Hughes is still firmly in charge: his curate Farron has not ripped out all the pews and made everyone sing 'Shine, Jesus, Shine' after all. The Revd chooses as the text for his sermon Galatians 6:9 - 'And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.'

I have to say that Paul sometimes Went On A Bit – I wonder if his correspondents were wholly delighted to see another of his letters arrive in the post, even if their children did enjoy collecting the stamps. In this case, however, I am happy to concede that he was spot on.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

## Monday

My old friend Jo Grimond proved a splendid leader of the Liberal Party, so I have great hopes of Jo Swinson. Already she has shown good judgement by appointing me to the Outer Space portfolio in her Shadow Cabinet and, and this morning I hurry up to Town for its first meeting.

Looking around the table I am heartened by the faces that return my gaze. A fellow called Davey (I didn't catch his second name) is our Chancellor, while our Foreign Secretary is one Chuka

Umunna (note to self: look him up).

I am particularly cheered by the appointment of Douglas Jardine to the Home Office brief. He, I feel sure, is the man to lead the fight against crime: Jardine will not hesitate to give the criminal one up the snoot if he threatens to hang around.

## Tuesday

I am, as my more attentive readers will have realised, more than 75 years in age. I put my longevity down to my annual excursion to bathe in the Spring of Eternal Life that bursts from the hillside above the former home of the Association of Liberal Councillors in Hebden Bridge – that and the cordial sold to me, at rather a stiff price, by the Elves of Rockingham Forest.

Where was I? Oh yes. Being of mature years I am entitled to a free television licence, which is a bit of a nonsense when you consider that I own a Landed Estate, oil wells on Rutland Water and Europe's second-largest Stilton mine. However, I have to say that I get very poor value from that licence, because (like any red-blooded Englishman) I keep a loaded shotgun by my chair and let fly at the screen whenever one of an increasingly long list of politicians or a member of the Dimpleby family appears. The result, of course, is that the set rarely works.

It was with this in mind that I ghosted the following passage in an article by Jo Swinson: "And my message to everyone who sits on the sofa and shoots at the television when watching Johnson's blustering bravado is clear: politics is not a spectator sport."

## Wednesday

Ever since I played old Jofra in the early episodes of *The Archers*, I have taken a keen interest in the wireless. I used to be a major shareholder in the pirate stations that broadcast from the middle of Rutland Water – who can forget Susan J Kramer and the Dakotas? – and am now Chairman of Radio Rutland. It happens that I have my own weekly show and this afternoon I call into our Oakham studios to record the latest edition. My interviewee is the Wise Woman of Wing, who solves people's personal problems ('Anguished of Tickencote' – you know the sort of thing), pronounces on the day's news and offers her celebrated racing tips.

A reversed-charge call from a Radnorshire telephone box brings a question about how to get out of a sheep costume that has shrunk in the rain, but unfortunately it is cut off before the Wise Woman can give her answer.

---

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