

# liberator



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Liberator (ISSN 0307-4315) is printed by Lithosphere, 110 Mount View Road, London N4 4JX

## 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.

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# COMMENTARY

## IN FOR A LONG HAUL

Whether Ed Davey or Layla Moran wins the current Liberal Democrat leadership contest they will become the fourth person to hold that post since 2015.

To put that turmoil in perspective, it took the party 27 years to go through its previous four leaders and took the pre-merger Liberal party 43 years for the four preceding them.

In fact the combined tenures of Tim Farron, Vince Cable and Jo Swinson add up to a shorter period than that of any previous leader except Menzies Campbell.

Farron and Swinson were failures due to religious hang-ups in the case of the first and a startling lack of political sense in the latter. Cable was a capable stopgap but no more, though he might have been had he stood for leader in 2006.

Whoever wins this time is at least unlikely to be plunged into a sudden general election or have some political event occur that gives them delusions of incipient victory.

The next leader faces a slog rather than a sprint. They probably have until 2024 before they fight a general election and until May 2021 before any significant local election occurs.

They inherit a party understood to now have 125,000 members - a record or close to one despite last December's performance - and to have clawed its way back into a respectable clutch of second places.

While all is not lost, it is hardly promising either given the lack of MPs and still fragile state of the party's local government base, which has shown only patchy signs of recovery.

Rural Wales, the west country, the Pennines and some areas of previous urban strength all look - to be polite - rather weak.

One factor that ought to play in any Lib Dem leader's favour is the collapse in public trust in the Tory government following its inept handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The charge list is long: late lockdown, erratic testing, a non-existent app, a pointless quarantine, abandonment of care home residents and confused messaging.

All this understandably led to a loss of public respect, exemplified by the episode of the trip by de facto prime minister Dominic Cummings to Barnard Castle.

Trust lost is very hard to recover and especially in a recession, which is what will follow the damage of the lockdown.

Added to that, Boris Johnson is very much a leader for good times, a man most at home as a sort of light entertainer making jokes and engaging in feelgood stunts who doesn't really do 'serious'.

It is hard to think of any prominent politician who has been less equipped to lead the country through a pandemic and recession, and his floundering incompetence is a gift to the next Lib Dem leader.

On top of that the economic disaster of Brexit will be inflicted just at the moment the economy will be weakest. This government could be in deep trouble very soon and the party must be placed not only to take advantage of this but to be clear how it can best do this based on a sound grasp of liberalism.

That next leader should therefore find a range of substantial targets presented and a public reasonably receptive to anyone willing to knock lumps out of a failing government.

They should be clear who they seek to speak for. Having tested to destruction the idea that it can 'win everywhere' the party must decide who and where its voters are and start talking to them again. The next leader should help to identify and then consolidate the elusive core vote - whoever it proves to comprise - and not get diverted.

They should also note carefully the Thornhill report into last December's disastrous general election (Liberator 401) and in particular its call to place limits on the leader's power.

It said neither the leader nor chief executive nor president "should be able to unilaterally overturn agreed strategy, manifesto, messaging or branding".

This may have been said from devotion to party democracy - more likely it was because such interventions are usually arbitrary and damaging.

A leader needs the humility to recognise that, and a willingness to avoid doing what all their predecessors did sooner or later by vanishing into a bunker of unelected toadies who exclude everyone else.

Davey versus Moran has turned into a contest that - unlike say Nick Clegg versus Chris Huhne - has some distinct choices and personalities on offer. Both come with advantages - experience for Davey and newness for Moran - but each also has rather obvious stumbling blocks.

The decision by St Albans MP Daisy Cooper not to stand was the right one for her as a new MP in a seat never previously held, but had the effect of the removing a potentially valuable third option.

As usual, Liberator is not endorsing a leadership candidate. We've sent a questionnaire to both, the answers are inside this issue and we hope they will prove illuminating.



# RADICAL BULLETIN

## JUSTICE DELAYED

When the Liberal Democrats adopted a new disciplinary process in 2018 (Liberator 393) it appeared an improvement on its haphazard predecessor but also open to ‘revenge denunciations’ by people who simply disagreed or disliked each other.

There was also always a question over how a system that needs at least 40 adjudicators and 15 investigators, but which is supported by a tiny complement of headquarters staff, would function if overwhelmed by cases.

Former MEP Chris Davies has been embroiled in several complaints and says that he had to wait three months for an adjudicator to be appointed and after a further three months had still heard nothing despite having been - as he saw it - attacked by people who the process allows to remain anonymous.

He was told when an adjudicator was appointed in March: “We have recently experienced a high volume of cases and are currently working through a backlog of complaints following the general election.”

When he complained again in June having still heard nothing he received an apology but again a reference to a vast backlog and the system having “experienced difficulties”.

A posting in May on Lib Dem Voice by Alice Thomas - who helped design the system - said there were in fact 100 adjudicators, mediators and investigators and the system had dealt with 94 cases.

There had though been “a lack of standard communications [which] meant parties to complaints received inconsistent or unclear communications, or even no communication at all, about the next steps of their complaint”.

Thomas said: “This cannot be allowed to continue” and that by 2 June all complainants and respondents with both active and closed complaints would be contacted, though this did not happen with Davies.

The complaints against Davies arose from tweets he issued immediately after last year’s general election.

He said the party had won a record 62 seats in 2005 under the campaigns leadership of Lord Rennard and that Jo Swinson had unwisely refused to listen to Rennard’s advice over the disastrous 2019 campaign.

Davies also said the party underestimated how much it owed Rennard for past successes and should value his experience.

The complaints allege that Davies was “dismissive to victims of sexual harassment”, “hurts and disgraces the party” and that he needed “lengthy training on sexual harassment and gender awareness”.

Davies says his comments concerned only Rennard’s record as a political campaigner, not any allegations about his personal conduct, and that he was entitled to express such opinions since they referred to the poor

2019 general election result.

Finally in July Davies was told that all the complaints had been dismissed since criticism of the 2019 election campaign was a perfectly legitimate topic, and the conduct alleged against Rennard did not prevent people from complimenting his previous work as a party campaigner.

The other complaint against Davies was so absurd that it is surprising the party entertained it.

This concerned a tweet he issued in November 2019, which said: “We wear red poppies for remembrance and hope for a peaceful future (Royal British Legion). But the EU provides more than hope, after centuries of conflict it was created to ensure it must never happen again. Am I wrong to be cynical about Brexiteers wearing poppies?”

July’s adjudication found Davies had not, as was claimed, brought the party into disrepute and nor had he said that supporters of Brexit shouldn’t wear poppies. It concluded that neither Davies’ view nor the manner in which he expressed it were offensive.

Meanwhile, another well-known party figure was told last December that a complaint had been made against her, and in March that it had dismissed. It then sprang back to life in June only to be dismissed again the same month.

The issue here is not whether one agrees with what Davies or the other party figure said, or with the adjudicators’ findings. It’s the delay that suggests all is not well.

## CURRYING FAVOUR

What a difference a year makes. At the York spring conference in 2019 three Liberator Collective members - David Grace, Mark Smulian and Catherine Furlong - were eating in a curry house when they were approached by Bath MP Wera Hobhouse.

Hobhouse knew Grace but not the others, and despite being in the presence of two complete strangers said she hoped Liberator would not endorse Layla Moran - who was then still expected stand in that year’s leadership election - because she was not a team player with parliamentary colleagues.

Grace explained that Liberator as an entity does not endorse (or oppose) leadership candidates, and collective members would have their own views.

Both Grace and Smulian have the same recollection of Hobhouse’s remarks, and Furlong recalls the conversation but not the detail.

A year on and Hobhouse endorsed Moran when her own leadership bid failed to get off the launch pad. Obviously something highly significant must have changed.

## PLUS OR MINUS

Members of Lib Dem LGBT+ find themselves in the curious situation of electing an executive this summer that will serve for only a matter weeks before it elects another.

A year ago the uproar over the Tory MP and alleged homophobe Philip Lee being allowed into the party led to the resignations of some officers and then a subsequent dispute broke out over validity of the membership list.

These events disrupted planned internal voting and then the general election intervened, and LGBT+'s executive election was eventually abandoned and Dave Page continued as an interim chair.

Now two slates - neither of which includes Page - are vying for control. One is denounced by its opponents for being dominated by young gay men from London, and the other for offering a continuation of past inward-looking disputes.

Whoever wins may have a short time to enjoy their victory as despite taking place in the summer of 2020 these are the 2019 elections and more must be held before this year's end.

## SHUTTING THE HATCH

Your Liberal Britain (YLB) vanished almost as quickly as it appeared and now its successor has fallen silent.

YLB materialised in 2017, an initiative of a new member called Jim Williams, and was handed an astonishing largesse by the Federal Board, including space at party headquarters, the right to approach party donors and an initial donation of £10,000 from Lord Verjee, which then party president Sal Brinton described at the Southport spring conference in 2018 as having been channeled through the party to YLB (Liberator 389).

It did some commissioned work for the FB and held some events aimed at new members, but not a great deal else happened and in early 2019 Williams announced YLB would re-brand as Hatch.

In an appeal to donors he said Hatch would "step out of the party (while maintaining good relations)", and "our audience is in the thousands presently, and we're looking for it to be in the hundreds of thousands within two years".

Little progress is apparent towards this lofty goal. The most recent 'latest story' on Hatch's website dates from 30 April 2019 and its most recent tweet from 9 July 2019, which suggests it did little.

Williams is understood to now be living in America with Hatch soon to be dissolved, although it still lists among its trustees Mark Pack, now party president, and Sheffield Hallam candidate Laura Gordon.

## CRUEL TO BE KIND

The review of Siobhan Bonita's Lib Dem London mayoral campaign by Scotland's Kevin Lang has concluded - as most people could have said - that its 'kindness' slogan is a complete turkey, almost down there with "Jo Swinson could be prime minister".

Nobody would campaign in favour of 'unkindness'. But 'kindness' is not only politically meaningless but liable to become entangled in the public mind with messaging about assisting others with practical tasks

in the pandemic - not anything recognisably Lib Dem.

Lang's report is full of deserved praise for Bonita's energy and commitment as a candidate and her credibility in the role, and his recommendations are entirely sensible.

His measured tones though vanish in the section on 'messaging'. This noted the campaign's main theme is 'Love London Better'.

"I found very limited enthusiasm outwith the core team for the current messaging," Lang said. "Whilst not unanimous, there was a very strong desire amongst interviewees for significant changes to be made."

While short slogans like 'Take Back Control' could be effective, Lang said the party officers and activists he interviewed "did not feel that 'Love London Better' represented a sufficiently compelling slogan".

A significant majority also questioned the campaign's lurch last winter into the 'kindness agenda', which in a masterpiece of restraint Lang described as "[not] sufficient for a political campaign".

Many interviewees - almost all of who were among the most active party members in London - "struggled to provide an answer", when asked what Bonita would do as mayor, with Lang saying: "There is overwhelming positivity for her as a candidate. However, there is an issue with the narrative around what she would do in office and how London would benefit."

Bonita has though had a stroke of luck in the delay of election to 2021 resulting in the withdrawal of former Tory MP Rory Stewart who had intended to run as an independent but who has said he cannot sustain a campaign over such a long period. Stewart could have been a serious rival for the votes of those uncommitted to the Tories or Labour.

## THREE'S A CROWD

The Brexit-supporting so-called Liberal party - fresh from having allowed three former Ukip candidates to stand for it in the general election (Liberator 401) - has started publishing its national executive minutes, which reveal a curious collection of information.

We learn that the party has 148 centrally signed up members and 126 in local branches and gained 15 members but lost 12 during the general election, the balance of plus three described as "a welcome increase in members in Cornwall".

Pity though the party's poor membership secretary, who has "had to deal with a high number of instances where people had taken out membership without checking the name of the party", presumably a reference to people who thought they were joining the Lib Dems. "Refunds are not always offered if the application has been processed" the minutes note.

One the party's few areas of any strength is Ryedale where it boasts five district and one town councillors. All is not well though even there, as there has been "no meaningful contact with Ryedale branch...the party nominating officer has not extended nominating rights to the branch" and local members will be asked to take out central membership.

The minutes also record that the party has £17,000 in the bank. This paltry sum may be boosted by what its July agenda refers to as a "fundraising art sale". The mind boggles.

# THE NEXT LEADER SPEAKS

## Ed Davey and Layla Moran answer Liberator's questions on how they would approach being Lib Dem leader

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

A year ago, whoever won was expected to have a lengthy tenure and this year's contest arises from Jo Swinson's unforeseen loss of her seat.

This time, whoever wins can at least expect a decently long innings. Ed Davey and Layla Moran get to answer the questions, and the former must be surprised to get a second chance at the job, while the latter cannot have expected the opportunity to come so soon.

It's common for people to want to put very specific policy questions to would-be leaders.

We've tried though to get both contenders to think about what the party is for, and what it should do now that it has lost a general election badly and faces a government whose majority means that barring something remarkable it will run a full term.

Whoever wins will inherit a record membership, but only 10 MP colleagues, dire poll figures and the need for a lot of thought about where the party should go, why, and how it should get there.

Each candidate was given the same maximum word count to distribute between the questions as they chose, plus a brief biography, and their responses have not been edited.

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

### I BY WHAT CRITERIA WOULD YOU JUDGE YOUR LEADERSHIP TO BE A SUCCESS?

**Ed Davey:** Winning elections. Winning is our passport to power in town halls, council chambers and Parliaments across the country. There are lots of things we need to do to win seats, like building a coherent message, addressing the structural issues identified in the Thornhill Report and working with local campaigns to understand what they need. Ultimately, those things are steps to deliver winning seats, and that is how any leader should be judged.

**Layla Moran:** Under my leadership I want the party to:

- \* Define what we are for, with a clear vision and a message that's widely known, easy to explain and understand and that offers a distinctive alternative to Labour and the Conservatives.
- \* Hold the government to account, for example by running campaigns to help the most vulnerable (such as the Coronavirus Compensation Scheme I campaigned for) and by using media coverage (e.g. my 'Brexit before breathing' attack, which forced the government to U-turn on the EU ventilator scheme).
- \* Live our values, by increasing our party's diversity. I would start by assessing the diversity of our members and those in leadership roles,

including local party executives, HQ leadership and candidates, and then work with the Racial Diversity Campaign, LDCRE and the FPDC to put tangible actions and plans in place to follow up.

- \* Start winning elections again at all levels, by rebuilding our grassroots campaigning strength, listening to communities and taking action on their behalf.

### 2 THE THORNHILL REPORT SAID THAT IN FUTURE "NONE OF THE LEADER, CEO AND PRESIDENT SHOULD BE ABLE TO UNILATERALLY OVERTURN AGREED STRATEGY, MANIFESTO, MESSAGING OR BRANDING". DO YOU AGREE, AND WHY?

**Layla Moran:** I agree. Hasty decisions, particularly when made by a small group, are always likely to be worse than those subject to wider scrutiny. As the report made clear, two of the biggest failures of the 2019 campaign were the presidential-style 'your candidate for Prime Minister' strategy and the 'Revoke Article 50' pledge, which was confusing and hard to explain. Both were the result of snap judgements based on an overly optimistic interpretation of the summer and post-conference poll bounces.

One of my strongest attributes is my ability to listen. As leader, I recognise the importance of a careful and deliberate decision-making process, where all opinions are considered and taken into account. Meetings and discussions should be seen not as an irritating obstacle to get round but as a valuable way to explore options.

**Ed Davey:** Yes, I do. As liberals we inherently push against concentrations of power, so I don't think it's right for any one person to have that much control.

On a pragmatic level, our party is best when various parts of it work together. The Thornhill report was very clear that we need change right across our party and I am very keen to work with the new CEO and party President, and every part of our wider party, to deliver this.

It is vital that we implement all the recommendations of the review. I am delighted we have already made a very good start in doing that, with some of the immediate recommendations. There are many things that will take longer to deliver, so this is very much a marathon not a sprint but it is vital we do that so that we can help our campaigns across the country in winning elections.





style levels of public services can be paid for with US-style levels of taxation.

We can use this process to address inequality in both income and wealth. We knew already that Britain was one of the most unequal societies in Europe, but the pandemic has exposed this even more starkly. In principle I favour increasing taxes on wealth, which has been becoming steadily more concentrated since the 1980s. However, taxing people's homes (most people's main asset), particularly give the huge regional variation in house prices, is fraught with difficulty, as we saw with the 'mansion tax' proposal. For the richest 1%, however, second homes, financial assets and pension wealth are more significant, and we must be able to devise fairer means of taxing these. I would ask the FPC to explore this and present proposals to conference for debate.

**Ed Davey:** I think we always need to strive to make the tax system fairer, whether that is reducing the tax burden at the bottom or better targeting taxation at those who can afford to contribute more. I'm a huge proponent of a land value tax, and have been for decades, and I also support reforming Capital Gains Tax so that wealthy people don't get twice the tax allowance than most of the population gets.

### **5 HOW DO YOU ENVISAGE FIXING THE ECONOMY AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CAN THIS BE DONE WHILE SEEKING TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE?**

**Ed Davey:** It's not a question of 'can this be done', it has to be done. We are facing a jobs crisis and an environmental crisis and we have to tackle both at the same time, and the size of our response has to meet the size of the challenge.

That is why I am calling for a £150bn investment in the green economy, the largest programme ever, to insulate every home, provide a green jobs guarantee, re-wild our countryside and electrify our transport network with electric cars, bikes and scooters.

I used my training as an economist and my background of creating green jobs and trebling renewable energy as the inspiration for that plan. While I know it is ambitious, I believe it would help rebuild our economy post-Covid and also tackle the huge challenges we face on the climate emergency.

**Layla Moran:** We need a package that simultaneously triggers economic recovery, contributes to meeting the climate and nature emergencies and rebuilds public services, especially health, social care and education.

Happily, all the evidence suggests that this can be done: a green stimulus package will trigger a faster recovery, see larger returns on investment, generate more jobs and can be enacted more quickly than one focusing on traditional high-carbon sectors. I support the conclusions of a recent study by the Smith School at Oxford, which proposed as top priorities: investment in building efficiency retrofits (which reduces emissions, cuts fuel bills, generates jobs and tackles fuel poverty); green infrastructure (renewable electricity generation and storage and zero-carbon heat); investment in education and training; investment in natural capital (upgrading and expanding green spaces, tree planting and conservation initiatives); and support for green innovation and R&D.

### **3 THORNHILL ALSO SAID RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE LEADER, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE "HAVE FREQUENTLY BEEN DYSFUNCTIONAL". HOW WOULD YOU REMEDY THIS?**

**Ed Davey:** As acting leader I've established a strong working relationship with the new CEO and President, with a joint approach to problem solving and tackling the problems identified in the Thornhill Report.

I've a long track record of building winning teams from my time in Kingston and I am confident those same skills would help solve this issue.

**Layla Moran:** I agree with the report's conclusion that the roles and responsibilities of the three posts need to be clarified; I want to see this completed by the end of September, as the report recommended.

Once the roles are clear, the three must build a genuinely collaborative relationship, developing shared goals, having clear responsibilities and leading on them, but feeling free to challenge one another. That's my natural style; I want members of my team to be comfortable in challenging my and each other's views and I always listen to them when they think I'm wrong. Constructive criticism and successful cooperation are key.

### **4 DO YOU WANT TO INTRODUCE WEALTH TAXES TO HELP ADDRESS THE INEQUALITY BETWEEN THE TOP 1% AND THE REST OF THE COUNTRY? HOW WOULD YOU PREVENT EVASION OF THIS TAX?**

**Layla Moran:** As the economy recovers, taxes will need to rise, to repair the hole in the public finances, to rebuild desperately overstretched public services, to prepare for future pandemics and to tackle the climate and nature emergencies. We need to be honest with the electorate, and not pretend that Scandinavian-

## **6 IF THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION LED TO COALITION NEGOTIATIONS WHAT WOULD BE YOUR MINIMUM DEMANDS FOR SUPPORTING ANOTHER PARTY IN GOVERNMENT? WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WORK WITH THE TORIES?**

**Layla Moran:** I support collaborative, cross-party working, and I would work closely with anyone who shares our liberal values. This already happens nationally in areas of shared interest (such as the cross-party coalition to prevent a no-deal Brexit last October) and locally and regionally.

It would be foolish to lay out specific coalition red lines now, several years before the next election, and in any case they need to be debated within the party, but I feel strongly that they should include a commitment to PR for national and local elections.

However, we shouldn't leave this to the last moment; we need to start laying the groundwork now for building a wide cross-party movement for PR. Possible models we can learn from include the Scottish Constitutional Convention of the 1990s, and the Cook-Maclennan agreement between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party in 1997. This government's appalling record over the pandemic and Brexit, and its constant attempts to avoid scrutiny and suppress dissent, provide us with, potentially, much greater public support for political reform than we usually see.

It goes without saying that I would absolutely rule out any coalition with Johnson's Conservatives: the most narrow-minded, populist, bigoted, right-wing – and incompetent – government in living memory.

**Ed Davey:** The lesson from the Thornhill Review is that few people understand what the Liberal Democrats are for, so my first priority is establishing a clear message and strategy for our party rather than thinking about coalitions that may or may not emerge in 2024.

With any arrangement, I would want to see our values at the heart of what we are able to deliver and I think changing the electoral system would be high on my agenda. It is a grossly unfair system, and it needs to change.

Boris Johnson is doing an appalling job handling Covid, and is pursuing an agenda which is a million miles away from where my centre-left politics are and where our parties values are. I can't see that changing, so there is no chance I'd work with them.

## **7 SHOULD THE PARTY SEEK TO ESTABLISH A CORE VOTE AND IF SO FROM WHERE, OR SHOULD IT CONTINUE TO ACT ON THE BASIS IT CAN 'WIN EVERYWHERE'?**

**Ed Davey:** I'd actually challenge the question here. I think setting it up as 'core vote' vs 'win everywhere' is a slightly false choice.

I want us to represent everyone who shares our open, internationalist values and believes we need a more caring, greener and fairer society. By building a coalition of voters that includes Labour voters but crucially also moderate Conservatives we can move forward in the 91 seats where we are in second place.

We obviously need to target our resources effectively given the challenges of our electoral system, but I am

also not going to write off particular places because they do not fit a demographically defined 'core vote.'

When I won Kingston in 1997, it wasn't even a target seat, and being competitive in every election right across the country is how we build infrastructure, local campaigning expertise that we can then target when it comes to a General Election.

Liberal Democrats have always been the champions of community politics, and I want to make sure we foster that everywhere across the country because it has always been at the heart of who we are.

**Layla Moran:** The 2019 campaign revealed the limitations of too narrow a definition of a core vote strategy, in its belief that the 'stop Brexit' message that was successful in the Euro elections would transfer over to the general election.

Liberal Democrats should always aim to widen and broaden our support base, appealing to a greater diversity of voters. We can do this by making sure we listen to voters and campaign on the issues that affect them, such as education, a fairer economy and tackling the climate emergency. By working on local, grassroots issues we can show voters that we understand and address the things that matter to them.

But we can't stop there. That approach gives us permission to engage with voters; we must then take the opportunity to put over the liberal message on other topics, such as addressing equality, and political reform. Only in this gradual way can we build a core vote that will stick with us.

## **8 THORNHILL SAID THAT AMONG OTHER FAILINGS IN 2019 THE LIB DEMS "HAD NOT TRANSLATED THEIR BELIEFS INTO A CLEAR AND RELEVANT VISION OR THE STRATEGY TO PUT IT IN PLACE". WHAT IS YOUR VISION AND STRATEGY?**

**Layla Moran:** We must make the case for a compassionate and cooperative society, in which every individual is free to realise their dreams and live the life they choose. But this needs to be illustrated by talking about practical issues that voters worry about every day. I want to focus on the three pillars that voters told me were most important as I travelled across the country after the 2019 election: education, economy and environment.

We need to invest in early years education to reduce inequality before a child enters a classroom, ensure everyone can access world-class education, and establish a national adult retraining programme. We must support recovery from the pandemic and tackle inequality through investment in public services and a Universal Basic Income. And we should recognise the things we value in society that cannot be measured by GDP, including wellbeing (which should become an indicator of policy success) and care for the environment. The recovery package must focus on green investment, and the UK should aim to become carbon-negative and tackle the nature emergency.

As a party, we need to rebuild our campaigning strength locally and nationally, creating a strong brand with broad appeal. We need to learn and innovate – harnessing the skills, knowledge and experience of our members to ensure best practice in all our campaigns. And we need to live our values – encouraging diversity in the party and respecting a wide range of contributions.





can do this in the short term. As an immediate priority we need to expose the damage the Tories are doing to the country through their approach to Brexit, and to highlight ways in which the UK should be working as closely as possible in cooperation with the EU, for example on climate change, pandemics or cross-border crime. We then need to make the economic case for joining the customs union and single market, and then build on that to make the political case for rejoining the EU.

## 10 WHO IS YOUR POLITICAL HERO OUTSIDE THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS?

**Layla Moran:** Martin Luther King. His ‘I believe’ speech is the only political speech I can remember from my childhood. The idea that a man should be judged by the content of his character and not the colour of his skin is why I am a Liberal today. Injustice for one is injustice for all.

**Ed Davey:** Nelson Mandela. While that may sound cliché, I always admired his ability to bring people together, and the tremendous personal sacrifices he made in reaching his goals.

My very first ever political campaign, before I joined the Liberal Democrats, was when I was at university. My college was invested in Barclays Bank which, at the time was invested in apartheid South Africa. I led the campaign in our college to get them to disinvest, and they did!

**Ed Davey:** I think the Thornhill Report is spot on with this, and I am delighted that Dorothy Thornhill is backing me in this leadership contest.

My vision is of a party that fights for a more caring, greener and fairer society. As someone who was a young carer, and fought the Tories to treble renewable power in Government, this is a message I am personally passionate about but also speaks to our liberal values of wanting to fight poverty, and protect our planet.

This is built around my plan for a new deal for the 10 million carers in our country, that gives them an increased carers allowance, the legal status of a protected characteristic and allows them to keep more of their money from work before they lose their carers allowance.

It is also built around my support for a Universal Basic Income, and a £150bn investment in our green economy that I have already talked about.

## 9 SHOULD THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS BECOME THE PARTY OF ‘BACK IN’ THE EU? IF NOT, HOW WOULD YOU PREVENT ALIENATION OF THE PRO-REMAIN VOTERS?

**Ed Davey:** I will always be at the forefront of any campaign for us to be back in the EU. I am a passionate European and I will always believe our best place is in the EU, working with our allies to tackle the big challenges that we face. My priority now is making sure we get an extension to the transition and avoid a no-deal Brexit that would be so disastrous for our economy.

The Liberal Democrats will always be the home for people who believe in liberal, open and internationalist values.

**Layla Moran:** I firmly believe that Britain’s future lies in rejoining the EU, but we can’t pretend that we

## BIOGRAPHY - ED DAVEY

Ed Davey is the acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, and the MP for Kingston and Surbiton, which he first won in 1997 by just 56 votes. He is the party’s economic spokesman, and is a trained economist having studied at night school for his qualifications.

Ed was a young carer to his mother after his Dad died, and is a passionate campaigner for a better deal for carers.

He is an environmentalist with a strong record, having fought the Tories in Government and helped treble renewable power and cut people’s energy bills.

Ed is married to Emily and together they raise their children John and Ellie.

## BIOGRAPHY - LAYLA MORAN

The daughter of a Christian Arab from Jerusalem and a British EU ambassador, I grew up in many different countries, from Ethiopia to Greece. After studying physics at university, I went on to be a maths and physics teacher for over ten years. I fought Battersea in the 2010 election and was a London Assembly candidate in 2010. I stood for Oxford West & Abingdon in 2015, winning the seat in 2017 by 816 votes, and converting it into a majority of 8,943 in 2017. I’m currently the Liberal Democrats’ education spokesperson.

# BEADS WITHOUT STRING

Hardly anyone knows what holds Liberal Democrat policies together and the party bores and baffles the public. Michael Meadowcroft suggests some solutions

Forty years ago the party had been devastated by the 1979 election. We had climbed back remarkably from the even worse result of 1970 to poll 19% in February 1974 on the back of five successive by-election victories. Had we fought every seat the Liberal vote would have approached 23%.

Disappointingly in October that year the vote fell back to 18% despite fighting almost every constituency. We struggled through the next five years of the Labour government, including the Lib-Lab pact, and dropped a further 4.5% with just 13.8% of the vote and only 11 MPs in 1979. We set out on a carefully planned three year strategy which, alas, was cut short by the alliance with the SDP in 1981.

The situation today is worse than in 1979. In last year's general election we polled only 11.3%.

## VIRTUALLY DEAD

As a political party the Liberal Democrats are virtually dead. The party languishes at 6% in the polls and makes hardly any impact in the media. The party has virtually no core vote. At last year's general election 423 of the party's 611 candidates polled fewer than 12.5% of the vote - the previous lost deposit level.

I believe that most of these constituencies lack any viable organisation - a constituency association that campaigns, develops a strategy across the constituency and is a 'self-starter' in terms of a minimum of election activity. There may well be one or two individual wards that function but what makes it worse is that the enforced adherence to targeting over 20 years has meant that even where a ward previously elected Liberal Democrat councillors regularly it often now has only a nominal vote. Once a ward has been lost there is seldom a broader organisation able to revive it.

There are many dedicated Liberal Democrat councillors who survive on casework, campaigning and incessant Focus delivery but without encouraging an adherence to Liberal values - indeed in most cases community campaigning has reversed the original concept of empowering communities and is now a type of 'clientalism', where casework and local issue campaigning are relied for the votes to survive. Even in local government the party has great difficulty in holding seats: in 1996 we had 5,078 councillors; today we have just 2,527. We have a tiny parliamentary party of brave MPs trying to cover the whole range of subjects plus a larger group in the Lords also speaking on behalf of a Liberal constituency that barely exists. The retention of seats, targeting or not, has also been appalling. For instance, today we hold only Orkney and Shetland of the 17 seats we held during my time in parliament, 1983-87. The party has an impressive structure of committees at federal

and national levels but it is all a facade without an activist political membership underpinning it. Finally, it lacks an up-to-date statement of its basic philosophy and values which is essential as the foundation for the development of policy and the inspiration of its candidates and officers.

I set out the current situation as starkly as possible in an attempt to concentrate attention on the steps required to rescue Liberalism and to build a movement capable of confronting the post-virus country we face and of creating a society that understands human values and believes it worthwhile working with us to promote them.

If we do not grasp the party's desperate state we will simply stagger on to a fourth election result similar to the past three. At the heart of the problem during and after the coalition was the lack of a deep understanding of what the Liberal Democrats were based on and what was the unifying thread that pulled together all its policies and campaigning.

No-one in the electorate knew what Liberalism was, and few among our members could explain it. We put forward policies in isolation and, whether or not they were good - which most of them were - they were not related to a unifying view of society.

Take the party's passion for British membership of the European Union. In terms of our election campaign it virtually stood alone. It was a great policy and potentially had the support of a majority of the electorate but we lost out because it was unrelated to our fundamental belief in internationalism, and to a Liberal antipathy to Labour's hegemonic and centralising socialism. We had little to say to voters not keen on Remain, and the fear of Corbyn drove many of 'our' voters to the anti-EU Conservatives.

It is the existence of a philosophy that defines a political party and if we identify, research and put forward good ideas simply on each's merits we might as well be another think tank similar to Demos or Compass.

But we are not Liberals because we are in favour of a united Europe including the UK; not because we opposed the Iraq invasion; not because we oppose identity cards; not because we favour worker-co-ownership; not because we support a tax on land values to return to the community the finance it creates; not because we are passionate about pluralism, not least in the need for a powerful local government; not because we understand the need to enhance the status of the public service; and not because we favour a fair and powerful electoral system.

It is the opposite way round: in every case of these policies, all unique to Liberalism, we support them precisely because we are Liberals. Without this awareness, and without an up to date statement of Liberal philosophy in today's context, we will always

struggle to create a separate, positive and attractive presence and we will be unable to attract individuals in the community who are Liberals but who are as yet unaware of it.

In particular, in any coalition it will be impossible to maintain our identity both within and outside it. The test question for each and every policy is whether it is a step, however small, towards our ideal of a Liberal society.

Unless the leader wants to inherit a moribund party the first priority is to establish the party's identity

Before we can consider and adopt a revival and development strategy we must first update the application of the party's philosophy to today's challenges. The last such statement was adopted in 2002 and in the past 18 years there have been immense changes at both the international and domestic levels,

The task is urgent. This up-to-date statement is required before the party embarks on a comprehensive exercise in reviving local associations. We need to be able to lay the foundations for a strong, firmly based political Liberal party so that, in the future, individuals will be able to say, "I am a Liberal", just as many on the Left say, "I am a socialist."

Following my time in parliament, I spent 20 years undertaking missions for the UN, the EU, the OSCE and other organisations in 35 new and emerging democracies across four continents.

Many of these projects were based on securing elections that were sufficiently legitimate to secure stable progression to successful representative democracies. In most cases all we managed was to buy time in the hope of enabling the necessary structures and practices to develop in place.

Few of them used the time and the main, though not the only, reason was the lack of political philosophy. It is clear that with political parties based on tribes, religion, regions, charismatic leaders, a liberation movement or even on a policy package, a country's democracy will be ephemeral because they lack a coherent basis to formulate and sustain effective government policies. I believe that no political party has been successful over any length of time unless it is based on some level of philosophy.

We need to put in place a working group to prepare an up-to-date draft of Liberal values and principles; circulate it to all members for discussion and put this to a 2021 party conference for approval followed by producing it as a cheap and attractive booklet.

The activities below should commence immediately after the 2021 conference and continue through 2022. Thereafter the preparations for a general election in 2024 - or somewhat earlier - need to be put in train.

We must identify and train a cadre of experienced party members capable of taking the new document to every local association; introducing it with enthusiasm; leading a discussion. Given the state of a majority of associations it will be pointless waiting for them to ask for such a meeting - they must be given a choice of three or four dates on which our envoy will arrive. All the local contact will need to do is to book

*“Unless the leader wants to inherit a moribund party the first priority is to establish the party's identity”*

a room. These colleagues will need a supply of leaflets for the association to send to likely recruits or for delivery house to house capable of being adapted to each association.

Each envoy should not have more associations allocated than he or she can follow up, say, every three months, with pump priming activity financially where necessary. Wherever possible, there should be a

'mixed' programme of political and social activities to develop a camaraderie among members. If each envoy is allocated, say, five constituencies, we will need around 120.

## FELLOW TRAVELLERS

Alongside we need a set of policy panels, each composed of 'top' Liberals and 'fellow travellers' from academia or the voluntary sectors, with the aim of producing a set of attractively designed booklets which can be promoted via social media and the print and electronic media, aimed directly at relevant civil society bodies. The party leader and spokespersons will need to give some time to the appropriate panel in their subject area to give their work more status.

There should be a commitment to ensuring that some literature goes out in every contested constituency and ward. All literature should have at least one paragraph on broader 'values' taken from the new document. The category of target constituencies (and wards) should be replaced by 'special' seats to which extra activity should be encouraged, aided by convivial activities alongside campaigning.

Designated individuals from each association should be trained in the use of social media to make the best use of both nationally and locally produced items.

Regular material needs to be circulated electronically by headquarters, attuned to being able to be cut and pasted for local use. Headquarters needs to be more transparent with the e-mail addresses of key staff members, and of federal and national committee members being made available - if academics and journalists can be generally available our colleagues can be.

In the present state of the party and, indeed, of Liberalism I cannot see any alternative to a pro-active strategy as set out above. The question now is how do we shake the party's leadership, its officers and its top staff out of the current complacency. Rather than await the election of a new leader, the party needs to start getting the strategic structures in place now.

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87



# STARING US IN THE FACE

Responses are needed to everything from a pandemic-induced recession to Black Lives Matter, and a look at Liberal history will reveal many of them, says Trevor Smith

The Liberal Future was the title of one of Jo Grimond's books, published in 1959. It was both characteristic of him individually but also more generally of the Liberal Party for much of the twentieth century.

It revealed his astute intellectual awareness of the many policy vacuums he saw that beset Britain and the wider world, though containing little by way of practical solutions because he was always too lazy and bored to chase up the necessary details this would have required.

Simultaneously, it reflected the Liberal Party's occasional profound contribution in identifying some of the major problems of the moment as it did directly in the 1928 Yellow Book on Britain's Industrial Future and, indirectly, in the 1942 Beveridge Report on Social Insurance.

This was heavily infected with Liberal ideas and William Beveridge himself was publicly acknowledged as a Liberal. From the 1920s onwards the party enjoyed a few electoral 'highs', but mainly suffered from 'lows'.

Its successor Liberal Democrat Party is currently wallowing in a pretty 'low' political situation. However, this could afford an opportunity for it to compose a new prospectus that addresses some of the major questions that face us over the next three decades and possibly longer.

True, there is not the wealth of talent that was available in 1928 in John Maynard Keynes, Ramsay Muir, Walter Layton, Seeborn Rowntree, Herbert Samuel and other such luminaries, but perhaps "commeth the hour, commeth an available group of suitable people".

## CONCURRENCY OF CRISES

They are in fact out there now contributing to the ferment prompted by the concurrency of crises facing the world, but they need to be brought together in a more constructive way: this could offer an opportunity for the Liberal Democrats.

The other political parties are not stepping up to the mark convincingly in a way that is needed. Despite their large parliamentary majority, the Tories under Boris Johnson are consistent only in their constant pursuit of U-turns. The austerity legacy, bequeathed from the era of David Cameron and his Chancellor George Osborne (with the connivance of Two-Facebook Nick Clegg when Coalition deputy prime minister), continues to haunt them while the Theresa May premiership was almost entirely negative.

The Labour Party is also in extremely poor shape. It suffered the worst drubbing in modern history at the last general election. Its Scottish stranglehold has long since been taken over by the SNP and it has now

lost its hitherto monopoly in northern England. And, to cap it all, Labour is doctrinally split between Keir Starmer's more moderate wing and the Momentum element of those who backed Jeremy Corbyn's leadership.

Hence, despite the appalling record of the Tories since 2010, Labour is a long way off from being able to capitalise on it. And it is startling that the Johnson cabinet is being forced into adopting measures of state intervention far beyond anything advocated by Corbyn in any of his general election manifestoes. It is all very confusing for the majority of the public to easily comprehend.

This general political disarray does provide a real opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to seize the initiative in the way its predecessors did almost a century ago. Moreover, it would give them a distinctive role which, with Brexit now likely happening, they don't presently have.

But they do possess ideas that could be re-applied to help deal with the present chaos? In particular, the co-operative notion that lay behind Liberal advocacy of co-ownership and employee participation in industrial and commercial firms springs to mind. It informed much of the thinking behind the Yellow Book though it had a longer history.

The changes widely occurring in contemporary working methods make them redundant in practice but by no means in theory. In fact, they have a renewed salience.

The so-called 'gig economy' - hitherto characteristic of the Third World - has now also taken a very firm hold in the advanced economies.

Added to this are the associated ones like working from home for all or a large part of the week, job sharing, compressed hours and the use of digital platforms that continue to unfold with ever-increasing alacrity.

They all make for a greater atomisation of societies and economies which, as already noted, has had a profound ripple effect on the politics of the world and particularly on the freer, more democratic ones.

Dictatorships, seeing what is happening, have sought to clamp down even more on their subjects to resist these new febrile forces which they correctly recognise as being potentially very disruptive.

Recent attempts by China to increase its control over Hong Kong and Putin's aim to secure the presidency of Russia for his effective working career are stark illustrations of this. It is perfectly understandable why they want to offset the risks of societal fragmentation, indeed, as should the freer democracies though not, of course, in an authoritarian manner.

As Boris Johnson has also come to appreciate, there is such a thing as 'society' but how to ensure its

integrity in modern conditions is the overriding question and begs for a more concerted response which the Liberal Democrats should aim to address.

Firstly, the disruption and massive job losses arising from the pandemic induced the UK government to introduce an extensive system of highly subsidised furloughs to sustain 80% of the incomes of workers who otherwise would have lost their jobs with near-immediate effect.

This clearly cannot be sustained far into the future and reductions are being put in train. It will, however, need replacing, which gives renewed credence to the introduction of a universal minimum wage paid to everybody. This, or something like it, appears to be almost inevitable.

Secondly, reinforcing this last fact is the reduction in the provision of company pension schemes which are now much less likely to be accorded to agency workers or those hired on a one-off basis. The adoption of a universal minimum wage scheme could compensate for the absence of company pensions.

Thirdly, the poorer economy has massively impacted on gender inequalities. Differences in the life chances of men and women were beginning to be narrowed, albeit at a very slow and unacceptable rate, over the last quarter century. This progress has now been reversed in many respects.

Home learning, child caring and the conventional household chores are mainly undertaken by women, while the small number of female chief executives of major corporations, which had shown a slight increase, has now declined again. This is a major drawback.

Fourthly, the 'gig economy' has had deleterious results for government attempts to revive the notion of apprenticeships. Despite devising diverse forms of pre-career training, the goals set for them fall consistently well short of being attained.

The economic downturn and the difficulty of predicting the future size and type of the workforce that will be needed inhibit the hoped-for expansion of apprenticeships. In any case, the certainty that people will now have two or more distinctive careers during their working lives, as skills become redundant and new ones are invented, makes the concept of 'apprenticeship' itself sound ancient. There is little by way of 'a future tense' in the word; the rapidity of acquiring necessary future expertise needs a more appropriate transformative aura.

Fifthly, purchasing habits are also radically changing as on-line and local shopping are finding favour away from the vast retail outlets that sprang up in the 1970s in all major population centres which meant they were no longer confined to the USA. Simultaneously, this new pattern of retailing is fostering both greater atomisation on the one hand and local communality on the other. Out-of-town shopping malls will cease and be transformed into housing accommodation with attendant small shops.

Sixthly, the worldwide eruption of the Black Lives Matter movement, responding to the police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota has had, and will long

*“This general political disarray does provide a real opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to seize the initiative in the way its predecessors did almost a century ago”*

continue to have, considerable ramifications regarding the maintenance of racist policies and icons.

The statues of earlier slave traders and owners are rightly being pulled down or moved elsewhere in anticipation, and streets and buildings are being renamed to erase memories of this form of subjugation. Combined with the proven increased health

risks to Black and Asian people from Covid-19, means that equalities must take far higher precedence with policymakers.

Finally, regional imbalances are very marked and the dominance of Greater London quite overweening. It threatens the future efficacy of the operations of the metropolis and this is becoming ever more apparent. The sheer brutality of economic forces seemed to be heralding changes that would ultimately lead to some reduction in the disparities between London and other parts of the UK. The higher costs of housing, office accommodation, staff salaries and commuter travelling were taking their toll and encouraged some relocations of both offices and staff away from London towards such places as Birmingham and Manchester.

## RE-CASTING SOCIETY

But will this be sustained, particularly after the developments of increased home working, and extensions in the 'gig economy'? What stays firm is the absolute need to re-cast society given all the divergent, centripetal developments that have and still are occurring.

Successive recent political leaders have shown some awareness of this. In the UK, for example, and usually when their poll ratings are low, prime ministers have felt the need to speak of fostering 'The Big Society', 'The Northern Powerhouse', or most recently Johnson's 'The New Deal'. But such utterances prove to be bereft of much real substance and intended only to divert public attention away from the darker issues of concern by joining in daydreaming.

What is imperative is to begin to remodel contemporary Britain and enable it to operate within a more sustainable societal framework in the way the Yellow Book aspired to and the way that the Beveridge Report actually brought about.

If the Liberals are to have a future, then the new 'Liberal Future' must tackle the six causes enumerated above of our current malaise.

Some new ideas will be needed, but in many cases our liberal tradition has already devised policies that can be drawn upon and re-adapted for the twenty-first century. As the Conservatives tie themselves in knots over Brexit, the integrity of the UK itself, Huawei, Hong Kong, chlorinated chicken and hormone beef, and Labour seeks to deal with its many internal problems, the opportunity for the Liberal Democrats to fill the policy vacuum is wide open. Daisy Cooper, the gifted MP for St Albans should be asked to lead the exercise, as she's as likely as not to be the next party leader but one

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Trevor Smith is a retired Liberal Democrat life peer

# GETTING THE BUILDERS IN

## Susan Simmonds finds much to think about in Layla Moran's Build Back Better booklet

This is Layla Moran's contribution to a Liberal Democrat response to the coronavirus pandemic though she is very clear that this booklet does not form part of her leadership candidacy.

Obviously we need to take that at face value. She also claims it is not a manifesto, that all contributors have written in their own capacity and inclusion in the booklet should not be taken to mean that they are supporting her or agree with every proposal in it.

I would add in the spirit of full disclosure, that I have not nominated either candidates or made any public comment about who I will or won't support. In all honesty, I have not made up my mind about who I will be voting for.

People who have followed Lib Dem policy over the years will find much here which is familiar and I'm not going to review those contributions – others have done so before. Layla's comments are that there are areas of policy which are worth looking at again in the light of the pandemic and I agree that is an unquestionably clear and sensible position.

The booklet also contains articles by names that we know well as policy thinkers at the top of their game – and as always they are a joy to read and reflect upon. It is good to see some new writers and policy ideas up for discussion. Some of the short chapters and changing tones of voice jar slightly despite some sensitive editing and I absolutely would have liked longer pieces from a couple of contributors. As with all policy booklets, there are occasional areas where the articles are more descriptive than analytical, with no implementable policy ideas and in a couple of areas that really is a missed opportunity. Some articles are pitched at a high strategic level and others take on a high level of detail.

### PROFOUND UNCERTAINTY

I would add a word of carefulness. I do have a slight internal note of caution about pitching big progressive ideas in a climate of such profound uncertainty and anxiety and when the prevailing mood from many people is to return to a sense of normality and almost denial about the changes which may need to stay in place in the long term to prevent either a resurgence or limited outbreaks of the virus. Layla acknowledges that in her foreword and argues that people are starting to see the opportunity for a transformation.

Having offered that gentle note of caution, I've had the advantage of time to watch the crisis develop which has given a much clearer understanding of the issues which have traction and not all of them are explored as fully as could be useful.

That said, this is clearly the time to make the case for increased funding for the NHS and social care. The clear impacts of the virus on the BAME community also call for urgent and radical change. Ade Fatukasi's article 'A natural home for BAME voters' is

outstanding and if you read one contribution, make it this one. Please expand these ideas and publish them as a book.

Tara Copeland's contribution 'A double burden' explores the impact of the virus on the domestic responsibilities of women and how this has impacted on gender inequality. I think this article could usefully be expanded in the light of the changing workplace and is a policy area where I hope the party will commit to more long term study and thinking.

The chapter on health, wellbeing and social care contains a lot of interesting writing, but I was slightly disappointed that this did not have the cohesiveness of some other chapters in the booklet. Professor Anisur Rahman's article on 'Valuing staff, telemedicine, addressing the backlog' requires that lasting changes should be made and we learn lessons from the coronavirus, including greater use of telemedicine and on-line consultations.

Tamora Langley's article 'Letting go of local hospitals' is really thought provoking around democratic accountability, allocation of resources and challenged my sense of localism.

The section on social care was one of those I would have liked more depth and it is one of the areas which will be under intense scrutiny when any inquiry into the response to the pandemic takes place.

However, I think this is one of the areas where I may have the advantage of hindsight in how the virus played out.

A key policy area during coronavirus is discussed by Dr Mohsin Khan. 'Time to be loud and clear on social care' makes the key point that merging health and social care is not a solution, and calls for a greater involvement from local government and makes useful points about funding and preventing hospital admissions.

There is much to agree with here, but a longer article, addressing some of the structural issues, around poor quality care in both residential and community settings, poor local authority commissioning practices and poor professional standards would be helpful, as this is where a key set of policies and campaigning objectives should emerge. Huge profits are made from the care of frail and elderly people – often people who have no family or people to advocate for them against standards that can be negligently low.

There are some brilliant examples of good practise and it is expensive, but if we are ever going to make the case for an increase in taxes to pay for high quality social care it is now. We need to limit the use of zero hours contracts, have proper sick pay so carers can stay at home if they are ill and invest in high quality training so that carers can perform more than the minimum care tasks for their patients. We need to look at how people, families and carers can co-design care and ensure that carers are able to deliver it.



The sections on the economy and industrial policy are pretty flawless: work is covered under the chapter on digital technology. For many people who still have a job, digital has made a huge impact on work, adding some new pressures and relieving others. Digital profoundly impacts on equality, and as the chapter says we need to ensure that the existing economic divide is not exacerbated by the wealthy working from home and the poor still having to commute. Again, this is an area that has come under intense scrutiny and I think we need to say more about this.

Working from home has now become the new normal and this has implications on living space, child care and mental health. This is not just transferring a role from an office to a spare bedroom or kitchen table; it is a fundamental shift in how we work.

I believe that Liberal Democrats need to campaign to make sure that employment rights are fit for purpose, that organisations are not hollowed out and workers still have access to protection from bullying, support for mental health and access to advice about health and safety. Working from a sofa is not sustainable indefinitely. As part of building back better, let's find a way of ensuring that the skills to manage working from home are available to every worker and every manager.

While the government has put some money into the system to support young people into work - and rightly so - older workers also need support. Older people need to work for longer before receiving state pensions - particularly women - and have challenges getting back into work if they take time out or are made redundant.

I'm hearing some distressing stories of older people being brought back from furlough later than younger colleagues and facing redundancies at disproportionate rates. If we face future lockdowns, then we need to ensure that any furlough system cannot be used to discriminate against groups with protected characteristics. We need to make sure the scale of this is understood and we need to ensure that older people are protected from unfair redundancies and furloughing - particularly those who are not in unionised workplaces.

All the articles in the chapter on international relations are interesting and Dr Christine Cheng and Fionna Tod's too brief articles are both standouts. 'The pandemic and human rights' by Irina von Wiese is pertinent and her necessarily concise tour of repressive governments and their opportunism in using the virus to impose regulations when the world isn't really looking is a reminder to be vigilant.

Her comments on the UK's drastic powers to reduce civil rights are important and should not be forgotten - Lord Paddick's article on policing and public trust is also helpful here. Irina's comments on Marowiecki's attempts to change electoral rules only days before Poland went to the polls, does lead me to a few final thoughts about our own democratic issues.

*“If we are ever going to make the case for an increase in taxes to pay for high quality social care it is now”*

## UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY

I would have liked to have read some Liberal Democrat thinking about how the pandemic has impacted on or could be used to undermine democracy and citizenship. Leaving aside the issues of trust in this government and the undermining of some of its institutions, how do we ensure that we can still be active citizens in any future lockdown or if the need for social distancing continues?

Should we give serious thought to what elections could look like in future, whether government safeguards are effective enough to manage the implications of any introduction of online or digital voting or whether we feel a switch to all postal voting is an effective and secure democratic mechanism. How are we going to campaign in future or interface with constituents? Unequal access to digital resources will exclude people, as will lack of skills in digital by both elected representatives and their constituents and there is an inevitable impact on communications without the ability to engage in person.

Cllr Emily Smith notes some good examples of how her rural council has responded to the virus and reaching out conversations with social media, and we need to look at this area and share good practice in the longer term.

If coronavirus is the catalyst to put the vast majority of political engagement on line, then ensuring that the Electoral Commission has the right powers in place to manage this is an absolute priority. Our electoral laws are already insufficient to ensure that social media is fully democratically accountable and need a major overhaul to capture the developments in social media.

The final chapter written by Layla Moran, with contributions from Duncan Brack and Mike Smithson, asks what we need to do in the post-coronavirus era and suggests we need to make ourselves relevant again.

Engaging though this article is; further comment would probably stray into the area of manifesto, so I urge people to read it for themselves.

I do hope that this has booklet will stimulate discussion about policy in this clearly changed world in which we find ourselves but also serve to focus campaigning priorities and energy in the months to come - regardless of who wins the leadership election.

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Susan Simmonds is a member of Thanet Liberal Democrats

Build Back Better: Britain after coronavirus: policy ideas for Liberal Democrats. Layla Moran (ed)

# LIBERAL LESSONS ABOUT A PAINFUL PAST

More statues not fewer is the way to better reflect history - and leave Gladstone alone - says Stephen Williams

Statues have been moved and removed, defaced and smashed since ancient times.

As ruling dynasties are supplanted and once powerful states are vanquished their replacements were often keen to sweep away the physical memories of their predecessors. During the last two centuries archaeologists the world over have found in rubbish heaps or river beds the busts or decapitated statue heads of former kings and emperors.

So while I was initially shocked that some protestors in my home city of Bristol toppled the statue of Edward Colston and dunked it in the harbour, when I reflected on it I thought it was an appropriate action.

While it was the police murder of George Floyd in Minnesota that triggered the Black Lives Matter demonstration, the Bristol context was years of civic foot dragging and burying heads in the historical sands of the city's involvement in African slavery.

Since the toppling of Colston we've seen the defacing of Churchill's statue in Parliament Square, the toppling of Columbus in Baltimore, the decision of Oxford University to remove a statue of the imperialist Cecil Rhodes and Liverpool University caving in to pressure to remove Gladstone as the name of a hall of residence.

Colston was a wealthy man from the time of Queen Anne, who made much of his fortune from lending money to slave traders. He was also an official of the Royal African Company. His link to slavery and its 21st century descendant of racism is pretty clear.

The case against explorers is quite weak, they didn't decide the colonial policies that came later. The case against Rhodes seems to rest on a belief that imperialism was entirely bad, rather than him being the British equivalent of the Belgian monster Leopold II.

## SCORE SETTLING

But the case against Gladstone is at the opposite end of the spectrum of 2020 judgement to Colston. It seems to me to be more to do with a left wing score settling against anyone (especially current Liberals) who doesn't embrace the entirety of their world view.

In their world, there is no room for balance or nuance. A historical life should be viewed in its entirety. Gladstone was clearly what we would now call a man on a journey. In his early years he was indeed the "rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories" but by the mid-point of his extraordinary political life he was the 'People's William'. In his career he achieved far more to improve Britain than the people's Jeremy.

Statues and place names are physical reminders of particular points in our past. They are not in themselves history and by moving or changing them we are not erasing the past. If that past is uncomfortable for contemporary society then liberals have a duty to find a way to reconcile the need to understand history with a desire for a cohesive and inclusive society.

Sometimes the balance will tip in favour of removal of the painful reminder – what could be more of an insult to a 21st century Bristolian of Afro-Caribbean origin than the statue of a slave trader in the centre of the city? It's right that Colston will now go to the city museum, as part of the displays on the history of Bristol and slavery.

I'm reminded of a similar situation in Estonia, which I visited on a Liberal Democrat delegation in 2007. The liberal government had moved a statue of a Soviet soldier from the centre of Tallinn to a cemetery that contained war graves. The Estonians saw the Russians as occupiers and oppressors, not liberators. This caused consternation in Moscow and Putin responded with a cyber-attack on the Estonian economy. Most





central and east European capital cities have statue parks of communist era politicians. Statues are indeed powerful symbols from the past.

While on another delegation, to Australia, I saw Dublin's statue of Queen Victoria which had been shipped off to a Sydney shopping centre, probably the world's longest journey by a statue.

In most circumstances I believe the balance tips in favour of keeping the statue or place name but with an accompanying plaque or information panel telling the full warts and all story of the person who is commemorated.

As liberals we believe in rational debate, a sifting of the evidence leading to an understanding of a situation, from which we can decide whether and how to change that situation or be content with how things stand.

A totally illiberal way to respond to our past is to demand a complete rearrangement of the facts of history so that they can be judged by or made to conform to contemporary values or opinions. I recently gave a brief talk to the Friends of a local library on the political language of George Orwell.

We don't live in an Orwellian society but much of his language and the tactics of the characters of 1984 has seeped into our current politics. I'm thinking in the context of this article about Winston Smith's explanation of the work of the Ministry of Truth: "Do you realise that the past, starting from yesterday, has actually been abolished?...Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book has been rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street and building has been renamed, every date has been altered....History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right."

Some of the more extreme demands to sweep away all the statues and place names that commemorate dead white men come straight out of this Orwellian attitude, perhaps unwittingly. Yes, there is an imbalance of representation in our public art. The answer is not to remove what we have but to put up more statues, busts, murals and paintings to women, people of colour and gay people. My nomination for the empty plinth vacated by Colston is Hannah More, a Bristolian author, educationalist and campaigner with Wilberforce for the ending of slavery.

To build a modern society that is cohesive and where everyone is valued and enabled to make a contribution, one of things we must do is understand why society is in its current state. That is the role of history and the job of historians is to give us all the complete and unvarnished facts about our journey from whatever point in the past to our present situation. That history must be inclusive, not because liberals want a current society that is inclusive but because if the story isn't inclusive then it isn't complete.

I'm a Welshman from a working class family. My favourite subject at school was history and I now live on the English side of the Severn as I studied history

*“Statues and place names are physical reminders of particular points in our past. They are not in themselves history and by moving or changing them we are not erasing the past”*

at the University of Bristol. I'm also gay, regard myself as a feminist and have campaigned against racism. While I don't judge a book by its cover I do judge a history book by its contents. Churchill is supposed to have said: "History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it." He did, won a Nobel Prize for his efforts and history has indeed been overly kind to him.

## **OXBRIDGE TYPES**

Until quite recently most of the history books studied at school or found in bookshops to enjoy for your own learning were written by white, male, straight, English, public school, Oxbridge (or Sandhurst) types. The stories they told were about

men like them. All things good and indeed bad were done by people like them. Women were ancillary characters, with a few queenly exceptions. Poor people and slaves were mentioned in the context of the rights taken away or given to them by the ruling elite. The homosexuality of some of the ruling elite was swept under the carpet. One of the most popular articles on my blog is about the historic sites in Britain and their LGBT associations that almost always go unmentioned in their guide books.

Fortunately, schools policy in Wales is now in the hands of a female working class Liberal Democrat minister. Kirsty Williams has just launched the first post-devolution reform of the curriculum. I was delighted to see her say that history in Welsh schools will be "taught in a pluralistic way, which challenges both the amazing contributions of Welsh people in our own nation and across the world and sometimes things that should make us feel a bit uncomfortable".

The young beneficiaries of Kirsty's new curriculum will be shaping Welsh and maybe British society in the middle decades of this century.

Fortunately, we don't have to rely on our own school years to make us better informed. History isn't nuclear physics, aspects of it can be learned throughout life by people of all abilities. Those of us who are campaigning to change society in a more liberal direction have a duty to study our past and act to make sure that our contemporary fellow citizens are able to live their lives without being trapped by their past and to look about them and feel that people like them are valued and celebrated in our public space.

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Stephen Williams was Liberal Democrat MP for Bristol West 2005-15 and was minister for communities in the Coalition Government



# WE JUST WANT TO BREATHE

## Mary Page looks at how Bristol's fallen Colston statue could point the way to a better society

Recently Bristol made international headlines, which has left many in this beautiful city arguing about a statue. It was from a past legacy which most people, including me, had walked by, never really noticing its significance. Had it been taken down quietly, I doubt the majority would have even questioned its absence.

Now we have an empty plinth, with space for something or someone else. A chance to catch our breath, to think of a new icon for our city. We were forced to look at an uncomfortable 'warts and all' image of the past, and that, has been understandably painful for everyone.

The wall-to-wall media commentary created a platform for black voices who previously went unheard. Imagine if Colston's statue had had a voice, shouting out beliefs from its past, would more people have understood him for what he was?

Without context, his presence was brainwashing all of us. Why did we showcase a slave trader as a hero? Instead of remembering that black lives, back then, didn't matter, and had no voice.

### HIGH HORSE

Many people who were previously silent have taken to shouting their differing views. Everyone is arguing and fighting from their respective 'high-horse' vantage points. This difficult debate, comes on top of the tragedy of thousands of deaths from an invisible killer, Covid-19 which threatens all of humanity.

The pandemic arrived on top of a referendum that had already divided the nation. That's a lot of trauma in a very short space of time, so I know we are all hurting. To cure the pain, it is time to stop arguing, say sorry, and start listening.

If I had been elected as Bristol Mayor last May, at the now postponed elections, it was in my - and the Bristol Liberal Democrats' - manifesto to review the locations of the city's statues and plaques. As we believe it's important that we all see images which make us feel welcome in this city of sanctuary, not ones that oppress, offend, or make any of us feel like we don't matter.

Can any of you tell me what statues we had in Bristol to represent our 16% Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population, 45 religious groups, 187 countries of birth, and 91 languages spoken? I was told it was just one, but on closer inspection, it's a couple more. We appear to have more of animals, mythical gods and creatures, like unicorns, the nine muses and a phoenix.

In St Pauls, there is a bust of Alfred Fagon (1937-86), a Jamaican poet, playwright and actor. By Central Library there is a statue of Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) a religious, social and educational reformer, who opposed the practices of Sati and child marriage. Then just last year in 2019, we welcomed the Sikh Soldiers Memorial. Not much for over 74,000 people to feel at home.

When the England versus West Indies Test cricket coverage faced technical problems July, Jamaican cricketer and commentator, Michael Holding hit Sky viewers for six by talking about the erasing of black history by the winners who get to write it. Good that he did, because it taught us a valuable lesson. Like him, I had heard that Thomas Edison was the bright spark, but instead it was Lewis Howard Latimer who invented the carbon filament lightbulb. Now we've seen the light we should all fact check for Fake News.

Some social media is a joy to read, Paul Walker is ex-forces and now works with the police to increase BAME representation. His writing and ranting is enlightening. We met at an event run by the police and crime commissioner, I liked him straight away and when Ujima radio wanted to talk about knife crime, we went together.

His recent post about 'The school That Tried to End racism', one of a number of brilliant Black Lives TV programmes, said: "Life is all about learning but some learning can be difficult, challenging and awkward and the subject of race and unconscious bias features high up on that list. Well here's an absolutely brilliant documentary series on the subject in a really open, positive, entertaining and informative manner..."

In another he said: "Sadly it's of no surprise to us! If you're Black/BAME/PoC (People of Colour) you become accustomed to backlash when you step up and speak out!"

"There's been a spike in racial hate crime nationwide including vandalism, assaults (both verbal and physical) and online abuse (myself included)! It's not pretty! Instead of dealing with the uncomfortable conversations there are those choosing to do the above nasties in an effort to silence the noise and enforce the status quo!"

"So the time is now, more than ever, that our allies to the quest for equality step up and stay with us! We need to harness the strength of Unity within the wider community to get through this challenge. Continue to respectfully confront hate, continue to ask questions and gain knowledge, continue fight discrimination and social injustice in all its forms! A fight for one is a fight for all."

He's right, we need to be allies. It's a similar story with the absence of statues to represent the 51% of women in Bristol. There are just two for actual people, Queen Victoria and Amelia Edwards (1831-92) who promoted votes for women and a new one for the women of World War 2. There's a plaque to Emma Saunders (1841-1927) at Temple Meads, a charity worker who visited sick railwaymen in hospital, and one to Hannah More (1745-1833) poet, playwright and slavery abolitionist.

There's a memorial to Sarah Guppy, in view of the Clifton Suspension Bridge. Who, you say? She's the woman who designed it. You thought it was Brunel didn't you? He only used her work to build

it, and didn't even finish the job, yet took all the credit. Unsurprising, as at that time only men could patent work, and it was in her husband's name, so she was written out of history.

Why is that you ask? Well 'history is written by the victor' a thought echoed by Michael Holding. We have literally had our past whitewashed, mansplained, the disabled hidden away, and the people of colour taken out of it, leaving us with heteronormative shades of grey. We've seen 'her-story' become 'history', but now we need to tell it as 'our-story', to give pride to a place where we all belong.

Please don't think that discrimination isn't done by you. I've seen it in our own party narratives, too many paint the other political parties' people as demonic or evil. Sadly we can see some people doing that in our leadership contest or areas of intersectionality. The tribal othering needs to stop, its time to lay down the weaponised wounding words, and instead learn to listen.

Pushkin Defyer, Young Liberals' BAME officer, is a personal friend, and we would do well to listen to him. He said recently in Lib Dem Voice: "It will take difficult conversations such as the ones we are being forced to have during this time of upheaval, but after decades of dealing with barriers and racism to this day, is asking white party members to have a few difficult conversations and be a little more considerate really too much?"

## LOCKDOWN LIFE

With lockdown life, many people have spent time reflecting on what is really important, like health and wellbeing. In order to start healing, we need informed conversations about these big issues of 'equality, diversity, and inclusion'. In fact, we even need to change those words according to Dr Nisreen Alwan in her BMJ blog, to 'equity, justice and belonging'.

To achieve those, we need to tackle things like pollution, transport, and homelessness. Unless we stop having decisions made in a 'winner takes all' way, we will continue to have a society where at any point, you and your view, and therefore your life, doesn't matter. Instead, we need deliberative-democracy, in citizens assemblies, neighbourhood, community or parish councils. That is the way to make our votes matter and our voices heard.

We need to create a new life together, which values all those coronavirus acts of kindness we've just witnessed. While staying home, we've seen a tantalising glimpse of that greener and more sustainable future. One with cleaner air, less congestion, and work-life balance.

We know in our hearts that everyone deserves our help. Most of us, even Boris Johnson's government, would like to be seen as kind and caring people. Many clapped on Thursdays for the NHS, key-workers and carers, more stepped in when the state failed us over PPE, others pulled together in our communities to help save lives in our lockdown isolation.

*"The tribal othering needs to stop, its time to lay down the weaponised wounding words, and instead learn to listen"*

People did that, for everyone in our country regardless of whether we were like them or the total opposite. I think we did it, because when we were faced with a common enemy, we remembered the one thing we all have in common, that we are all human.

There are more than seven billion humans, so how can we have those difficult conversations where we disagree strongly, yet do it in a polite and respectful manner? If we want to be free to

be ourselves, we need to respect the rights of others to live the lives they choose. Everyone needs to be a full participant of society. No one should be discriminated against, or find barriers in their way.

Nisreen also says: "Millions of people have been deeply moved by the Black Lives Matter protests that took place all over the world following George Floyd's horrific death at the hands of the police in Minnesota on the 25 May 2020. Calls for equality were made by so many people of all backgrounds. 'I can't breathe' has become a global call for justice."

So what will you do to make 'equity, justice and belonging' happen? As that's what is at the heart of this heated debate. Many of us have heard the call to be allies and realised it's not enough, not be actively racist. If we want to make Black Lives Matter, it is no longer enough to be an innocent bystander, we have to create enough space for everyone to be able to breathe.

My friend Edson Burton, poet, playwright, person, says it best in his new heartfelt poem: "We don't want to erase your history, we don't want to destroy your legacy, we ain't here to make you feel guilty, we just want to breathe..."

It is time to re-educate ourselves about the past. We must seek to respect and celebrate those with different opinions, ways of life and culture to ourselves, not act in fear or with hate. It's no longer 'history', it's 'our-story' a shared body of work, and Black Lives belong right at the heart.

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Mary Page is the prospective Liberal Democrat candidate for elected mayor of Bristol

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# THE COMMUNITIES THE LIB DEMS IGNORED

Janice Turner looks at why the Liberal Democrats' performance among black and minority ethnic voters has been so abysmal, and at one way to change that

When the general election review published its report into the party's dismal showing, many were surprised to find that a substantial section of it covered the party's failure to engage with minority ethnic communities (Liberator 401).

It called for the recommendations of the Alderdice Review to be carried out in full, with urgency, and that the party's targeting strategy should be revised to include the BAME electorate, particularly in the most diverse areas.

When the review committee issued a call for submissions the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality (LDCRE) had responded with a substantial paper that sought to demonstrate how the party's failure to take race equality and integration seriously has cost us seats and power. It utilised a combination of data and anecdotal reports from members' experiences during the campaign.

## SUBSTANTIAL FACTOR

We made the point that while the BAME population is around 14%, the fact is that it is a substantial electoral factor in many areas. It is over 40% in London, Birmingham, Leicester, Slough and Luton. It is over 30% in Manchester, Bradford, Wolverhampton and Blackburn, and Nottingham, Coventry, Watford and Reading are not far behind.

Why this is crucially important is that unlike many other demographics, the BAME community is very partisan. In the 2019 general election Labour won 64% of the BAME vote, the Conservatives won 20% and the Lib Dems won 12%. This is a major factor behind why Labour lost long-held seats in the north but held on to London. A survey of the London electorate before the 2018 council elections showed that about 75% of the BAME electorate in London were planning to vote Labour.

Making this worse was our party's targeting strategy. Reports from the campaigns during the election revealed that the 'get out the vote' strategy was excluding the BAME communities, and this made it far more difficult to win.

In a three-horse race a party needs roughly 40% of the vote to be elected. So for example, in a typical London constituency with a BAME population of 35%, Labour can probably rely on 75% of the BAME electorate to vote Labour so it starts off with 26% in the bag, so they only need 21% of the remaining voters to win.

If a party ignores the BAME community it has to get their vote from the white community, which means it has to get 61% of the white vote to win. It also ensures that Labour's built-in advantage remains unchallenged.

LDCRE argued that we will never break through if we do not change our strategy and develop a new priority of engaging with the BAME electorate.

LDCRE's analysis of the seats where our party came second found that all of the top 12 seats had a BAME population bigger than the vote differential, along with 17 of the top 20. In all, one-third of our second-place seats have BAME communities larger than the vote difference. For example, we lost Wimbledon by 0.59%, where the local BAME community is 35.1%. We lost City of London and Westminster by 4.63% where the local BAME population is 38.4%. We lost Chelsea and Fulham by 12% where the local BAME community is 31.9%.

We lost Finchley and Golders Green by 5.95% where the local BAME population is 35.9%.

It would also be a mistake to assume that all these seats are Labour: of the 31 second place seats where the BAME population is greater than the vote shortfall, 19 are Conservative.

However, LDCRE was able to demonstrate how a campaign that targeted the BAME community led to huge success.

Committee member Anton Georgiou fought a council by-election in January in the Labour fiefdom of Brent and in Alperton ward he started off in third place and needed a 20% swing to win.

But he organised a multiracial, multilingual LDCRE canvassing team, ignored the party's official target list and hit the whole ward. One BAME resident said he'd lived there for 40 years and it was the first time anyone had asked him to vote for the party. They won a 28% swing and Anton is now our party's first councillor on Brent council in four years. It is only the second time in a decade that we have taken a seat from Labour in London.

The local Labour Party had taken the local community and the BAME voters for granted, something that some in the Labour Party are saying themselves. A new voice was needed. The massive swing to the Lib Dems demonstrates that the BAME community had voted Labour because our party's targeting strategy had failed to reach out to them and had left them with no alternative choice. As soon as they were given a real choice they switched to the Lib Dems.

In contrast to the LDCRE campaign, three other Lib Dem candidates stood in council by-elections in Brent at the same time, but the Lib Dem vote in those seats fell by 0.6 - 3.2%.

LDCRE are calling this the Alperton model, and as we have no councillors at all in two-thirds of London boroughs there is a real need for the party to adopt it



The general election review stated that in implementing the Alderdice review the party must include the main change it calls for, which is changing the culture of the party to embed at all levels the concerns and interests of BAME communities and issues in all its activities, reaches out to the BAME communities and actively plans how it will achieve real integration at all levels.

It must also ensure resources – paid staff and investment - are in place to implement this. This has never been more important.

The Alderdice review stated that the party is not representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the country as a whole. “Even in those parts of the country where a substantial proportion of the population is from racial and ethnic minorities, the membership and representation of the Liberal Democrats does not properly reflect that diversity.”

There was no evidence of widespread racism, however it did seem that - for some individuals and organisations in the party - addressing the low level of representation of ethnic minorities was not an agenda item, much less a significant priority. LDCRE agrees with this: it put forward one of the few responses to the Alderdice review and it was endorsed by Lord Alderdice, yet the party sat on it for two years.

In his own report, Alderdice wrote: “I became convinced that if things were really going to change this now had to be a ‘Number 1’ priority issue for the party.

”If there is to be positive change, the approach to race and ethnic minorities has to become a top priority. Liberal Democrats themselves must come to understand that liberalism means diversity and unless that can be seen in identifiable BAME members and representatives, then BAME communities, and indeed the country as a whole, will not be persuaded of the credentials of the Liberal Democrats on this issue.”

## **ROCKET SCIENCE**

LDCRE is adamant that change has to happen at all levels of the party and that this has to include local parties. Local parties should look at how their own party membership compares with the local demographic and then start to engage with local communities, find out what their issues are, and then work out what can be done about them. This is not rocket science: community politics has been around for decades.

The good news, however, is that there has been an extremely positive response from local parties to the Black Lives Matter movement. I have spent my whole adult life campaigning for race equality - it's the reason I joined this party in the seventies, when the Liberals, in fact the Young Liberals, were grabbing the headlines in the fight against apartheid – and I have never, ever, seen such a surge of so many people wanting to join the fight against racism. It's beginning to feel again like this is the party I joined and it's a wonderful feeling.

*“We will never break through if we do not change our strategy and develop a new priority of engaging with the BAME electorate”*

We are assured that HQ is working on plans in response to the general election review recommendations, and we trust that it adheres to Alderdice's key point, that it is the culture of the party that has to change, embedding the interests of BAME communities at all levels. And the party's new campaign to reach out to BAME communities has to start now, has to be properly resourced, and has to be complete in time for the next election.

We need to take this action now because, as John Alderdice and now the party's general election review have said, we cannot go on as we are, an overwhelmingly white party in a multiracial society. And for as long as we do carry on as we are, we have very little chance of making headway especially in London and especially against Labour.

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Janice Turner is vice-chair of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality and author of its submission to the general election review

***Cancellation of the Liberal Democrat autumn conference in Brighton means we will not be printing a new version of the Liberator Songbook this year.***

***There are plans for a ‘virtual’ Glee Club being made to take place at some point during the online conference. Please watch out for details***

# DON'T WASTE A CRISIS

Recovery from Covid-19 offers a chance for a more liberal, equitable and greener economics, says Bernard Greaves

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a major distraction from addressing the catastrophic damage human activity is inflicting on the natural environment. Any optimism that the slowdown in economic activity might have led to some respite is misplaced. While there has been some improvements in air quality as a result of reduced vehicle movements, carbon dioxide levels within the atmosphere have continued to rise, albeit at slower rate. As economic activity increases that rate will increase.

There are nonetheless important lessons to be learned from the pandemic. Not least that the pandemic itself is product of the environmental crisis. Far from being a once in a hundred years occurrence, Covid-19 is the latest in a series disease outbreaks caused by virus infections transferred from animals to human populations, nor will it be the last.

The consensus among politicians and most economists is that an annual percentage increase in economic activity, measured by gross domestic product (GDP) - or gross world product (GWP) - is a necessary prerequisite for meeting the social, cultural and environmental objectives of society and individuals. Under the pressures created by the pandemic that has been reversed. Priority has been given to containing its spread and maintaining the financial wellbeing of individuals and companies by the deployment of huge resources at the expense of economic output.

That conventional view of economics is deeply flawed.

Firstly it is destroying the quality and ecological balance of the natural environment by progressively stripping out its natural resources and polluting it with discarded harmful products. Secondly it is creating huge inequalities as wealth accumulates relentlessly in the hands a few vast corporations and individuals.

Let's set out the principles of Liberal economics.

## PRINCIPLE 1

Liberal economics rejects economic determinism and establishes its appropriate role in human affairs. The prime role of communities is to determine their political, social, cultural and environmental objectives. Economics is the mechanism for achieving them. GDP and GWP are far from satisfactory tools. They measure financial turnover irrespective of whether it is generated by beneficial or harmful activity. They do not measure wealth but merely the money produced by the production of goods and delivery of services. The real wealth of individuals and communities is much wider. It embraces all that adds to the quality of life: learning, innovation and creativity; the accumulated body of knowledge in the sciences, technology and

academic study; the richness of the arts, literature music and culture; the quality of the built and natural environment; the opportunities for social interaction, sport, leisure and entertainment; health, wellbeing and the support mechanisms that see us through times of difficulty; peace, harmony, security and the absence of conflict.

## PRINCIPLE 2

Wealth embraces all that communities value and aspire to in creating a civilised rewarding lifestyle and environment. It consists of more than money, goods and services.

It is turnover that generates profits. Increased turnover creates the potential for increased profits. That encourages the production of short-life goods that require constant replacement, an economy of throwaway goods and planned obsolescence reinforced by large scale marketing and promotion. Advancing technology reinforces that pattern. Apple's business is based upon just that model. Few would doubt the value of advanced technology, but the use of vast resources for marginal gains must be questioned. £10bn of rare and precious metals are dumped annually as electronic waste.

In the run up to the pandemic GWP was running at around 3%. That sounds modest, but over 25 years that amounts to a doubling, and a fourfold increase over 50 years in natural resources consumed and harmful waste discarded. That cannot be sustained. It will destroy the entire the planet as fit for human habitation.

## PRINCIPLE 3

Exponential growth in the consumption of natural resources and in the discarding of waste must be ended. Incremental growth is possible and desirable, conserving and building on what has already been achieved.

It is that process of incremental growth that in Cambridge has created one of the finest universities in the world. From its foundation in 1209 by a small group of scholars fleeing riots in Oxford it has grown to a community of 30,000 staff and students across 31 colleges and 100 academic departments. Its ethos of intellectual inquiry and teaching based on research has spawned a variety of high-tech enterprises and supports a hospital at the forefront of pioneering medical technology. It has tangible assets of over £12.5bn. What cannot be quantified is the wealth of knowledge and value of historic artefacts embodied in 16 million books in its 114 libraries and eight cultural and scientific museums. Its 120 Nobel laureates, 194 Olympic medalists, three world class choirs and the excellence of the architecture of its built environment,

landscaped open spaces and cultivated gardens offer no more than a glimpse of the variety and richness of its heritage. Over a period of 800 years each generation has saved, conserved and built on the legacy it has inherited.

The example of the University of Cambridge offers a vision of a society based less on the relentless acquisition of short-life disposable possessions and more on opening up the richness and variety of human potential and experience. It requires an economy where goods are designed and produced for long life; an economy based on durability, conservation, maintenance, repair, recycling and reuse of materials; an economy that values and conserves the natural resources of the planet and prevents damage to its ecological balance from climate change and pollution resulting from discharged gases and disposed waste.

The widespread deployment of robots in production and the decline of high turnover manufacturing open up the opportunity for new patterns of employment into areas that improve the quality of life and enrich human experience but currently suffer from a shortage of resources.

## **PRINCIPLE 4**

The equitable distribution of wealth is as important as its extent.

Annual growth of GDP and GWP leads relentlessly to the concentration of wealth in the hands of progressively fewer large corporations and individuals with a stake in them. Wealth creates more wealth as the more prosperous buy out the interests of the less prosperous through takeovers and mergers. The rationale is less about economies of scale – in practice the increased complexity and bureaucratic procedures of large organisations often make them less efficient - than increasing turnover and the potential for increased profit. The resultant large multinational corporations reward owners and shareholders disproportionately at the expense of employees. Moreover they suck wealth out of local communities, regions and even whole countries as they export profits to tax havens and low tax jurisdictions. They are powerful generators of financial and social inequalities.

Large organisations are intrinsically vulnerable. Just as they can generate vast profits so too can they incur huge losses and go into catastrophic collapse, with serious economic and social consequences. Their complex bureaucratic management systems make them inflexible and resistant to change. Decisions are dissipated across different layers of management and responsibility diluted. Initiative and created is discouraged; complacency and buck-passing encouraged. Computer algorithms that cannot be programmed for the unforeseen, and can infuriate customers and service users, reinforce these weaknesses.

It is small and medium size enterprises, business startups and self-employment that are the major generators of innovation and creativity. They also usually generate and retain wealth within the communities in which they are located.

## **PRINCIPLE 5**

Developing local economies is crucial to achieving environmental sustainability and the equitable distribution of wealth.

Successful local economies are characterised by local ownership and control. They prioritise: local employment; local procurement and purchasing; local energy generation, waste disposal and recycling; local produce and goods sold through local market; mentoring and in work training; local lending, banking and professional services. Profits remain within communities generating and spreading wealth within them, rather than being withdrawn to remote large corporations. Such economies promote environmental sustainability, not least by reducing the impact of distribution, commuting and travel. Local economic planning that engages local people through their involvement in local democratic processes is a key contributor to achieving these outcomes.

## **PRINCIPLE 6**

Reforming company law and the structure of taxation is crucial to achieving environmental sustainability and the equitable distribution of wealth.

The evidence suggests that more equal societies and higher levels of expenditure on social provision, as opposed to on personal consumption, result not only in greater economic and social justice but also greater environmental sustainability. A concerted package of legislative and taxation reform is required to bring that about. Company law should promote profit sharing, workplace democracy, co-operatives, co-ownership and mutuals. It should regulate and restrict monopolies and mergers and enable the disaggregation of large corporations where they operate against the public interest. International co-operation is needed to end tax havens, with Britain having a particular responsibility because of its overseas and dependent territories. The emphasis of taxation should shift from income to wealth, while taxes on profits should be linked to where goods are delivered and services provided rather than diverted to jurisdictions with low tax rates. The single measure that would do most to redress regional and geographical economic imbalances in the UK is a uniform tax on land values. A universal basic income and a capital grant at the age of majority would likewise be highly effective in addressing personal poverty and economic inequality.

## **PRINCIPLE 7**

Developing high-density low-rise mixed-use development has a major role to play in achieving environmental sustainability and the equitable distribution of wealth.

The principles at the heart of land-use planning over the last century have been a disaster for environmental sustainability, particularly as they have been rolled out in practice in the UK and the US. Separating out different uses through zoning has led to the spread of suburban housing and specific locations for industry, business, shopping, education, sport and now even culture. Mostly remote from one another and at low densities, they have often rendering public transport and local facilities unviable.

*continued on Page 24*



# GOING ONLINE ONLY

Remember that Liberator will go free and online only from September. This is our last print issue.

We'll let all subscribers for whom we have email addresses know when each new issue is available to read and download.

If you think we might not have your email address please send it to:  
liberatorsubs@hotmail.com

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www.liberatormagazine.org.uk - please look for the 'sign to to Liberator's email newsletter' link

We'd planned this move last winter but the cancellation of two consecutive Liberal Democrat conferences would probably have forced it on us anyway.

We're very grateful for the support of longstanding subscribers, but Liberator clearly ought to be reaching a lot more Lib Dems (and others interested) than it does, and it can't as long as it remains a subscription publication sold largely face-to-face.

If you pay us by bank standing order or PayPal, we'd be pleased if people wish to continue these as donations. Otherwise, please cancel these, as we cannot cancel them for you, and arranging refunds would be complicated for our volunteer administrators.

In September, Liberator 403 will appear online only. As a PDF you can download it to read on any device you like, or print out all or part for your own use, and freely forward the PDF to anyone interested.

As Liberator enters its second half century this is going to be an interesting journey. We hope you'll come with us.

*continued from Page 23*

They have led to a dependency on motorised transport for commuting and distribution. They have undermined local economies and created isolation and loneliness to the detriment of mental health.

Vibrant high-density communities with a varied mixture of uses have led to prosperous and richly cultured societies across many different eras and places: Ancient Athens, Pompeii, Renaissance Florence, 19th century Paris and Cambridge today. They can be built with generous internal and external standards of space at no more than four stories. The Garden City movement and the advent of the motorcar led to the abandonment of that tradition. It needs to be restored.

## PRINCIPLE 8

Creating sustainable and equitable communities requires the targeted investment of substantial resources.

There are priority areas for research: electricity generation by nuclear fusion, wave and tidal power, and photovoltaic conversion not reliant on expensive rare metals; carbon capture and storage; low cost hydrogen production; battery technology; desalination and water recycling and conservation; quantum computing.

Liberal economics has a long pedigree in the tradition of Liberal thought. It needs restating and applying to today's world. It is urgent. The world is running out of time.

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Bernard Greaves has written about Liberalism and community politics for more than 50 and is co-author with David Howarth of *Towards a Liberal Future*

# TIME TO GET TOUGH

## Capitalist excesses and their consequences should be in Lib Dem sights, says William Tranby

There has been a general belief for some decades that the 20th century's global economic and political history was dominated by the struggle between capitalism and communism.

After the second world war came the development of social democratic politics which attempted to bridge the gap with mixed economies and Government regulation of the worst excesses of monopoly capitalism.

Liberals either took on board the emerging Butskellite consensus or resorted to a traditional vision of free trade.

The Cambridge Dictionary definition of capitalism is: "An economic, political and social system in which property, business and industry are privately owned, directed towards making the greatest possible profits for successful organisations and people."

This definition (and there are plenty of alternatives) stresses the objective of making profits as the primary purpose of capitalism, not why profits are being sought. I would contend that one of the explicit objectives of capitalists is to use their capital assets to gain more capital through profit-taking.

Edward Heath described the unacceptable face of capitalism when reflecting on Lonrho's excesses in the 1970s. The phrase has been more recently used about Sir Philip Green when he extracted obscene levels of capital from BHS while undermining the company's pension scheme.

Liberals instinctively object to the hoarding of capital without it being used productively in the economy. This is surely an unethical practice which explains the outrage expressed by commentators across the political spectrum about the need to end tax havens.

Other features of hoarding capital include the purchasing of high-end properties in central London and elsewhere by foreign nationals as safe investments, and the tendency for well-heeled professionals to acquire second homes in the most picturesque parts of the UK which consequently undermine the opportunities for locals to enter the property market.

Besides property the definition of 'capital' includes the buildings, machinery, and IT resources used by a person or organisation to help produce goods or services for other organisations or people.

But such resources are required by organisations which are not all privately owned. These include public sector organisations, charities, or social enterprises. Some privately-owned organisations may not aim to increase their capital assets either. For example, some partnerships may only exist to meet their costs and have a small reserve.

The distinction is the real difference between market economics and capitalism. Markets are still probably the most efficient way of distributing goods or services but not all organisations engaged in any market are there to pursue the capitalist objective of increasing their capital value.

This is where the Liberal Democrats should be redefining its approach to the economy, and in particular capitalism. The party should be strident in attacking capitalist excess.

At the international level Liberal Democrats should be leading the argument for closing tax havens (starting with those protected by the UK Government).

At the national level we should be taxing multinational companies on the value of their productive activities within the UK. We should also be regulating markets to help new organisations challenge existing monopolies.

We should increase tax on the wealthiest 1% of individuals through a wealth tax, because their most common feature is that their wealth increases irrespective of the state of the economy, because they use labyrinthine tax avoidance schemes.

As Thomas Picketty has observed, some people embedded in the rentier class have also become super-rich over time because they do not spend all their rental income each year and so inevitably increase their capital assets.

The Liberal Democrats should also revisit the use of tax-free ISAs and SIPP. In principle the ISA is a good way of encouraging people to save. However, there are some who took advantage of the annual allowance of saving £20,000 in stocks and shares ISAs who are now declaring themselves as ISA millionaires. This suggests that there should be an upper limit of total lifetime savings invested in them. My suggestion would be £200,000.

The pension tax allowance for higher rate taxpayers should also be dispensed with, because it is ridiculous that the Government adds value to an individual's SIPP, where all the capital gains and dividends earned are tax-free, and then allows on top a 25% tax free lump sum when the SIPP converts to a drawdown account.

This is another example of the unacceptable face of capitalism, this time officially promoted by the Treasury.

If the hoarding of capital assets is the unacceptable face of capitalism, then surely promoting a fair and diverse market economy, and a more modest tax-free saving and pension regime, is the more acceptable Liberal alternative?

To borrow a Blairite phrase – we should be tough on capitalist excess and the causes of capitalist excess. Mandelson's filthy rich should no longer be acceptable - unless they pay a substantial wealth tax first.

The Liberal Democrats should be the champions of the self-employed, co-operatives, and social enterprises which exist to offer quality goods and services in a regulated market economy, and do not have the overwhelming objective of building capital assets to increase the wealth of the businesses' owners.

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William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective

# A MARKET FOR COUNCILS

Power should be devolved both to and by councils, which should embrace a diverse market for services, says Daniel Duggan

Although local government has provided much needed help during the coronavirus pandemic, the health crisis has also shown a nation in which many citizens, without instruction from those in positions of authority, have helped their neighbours and communities in significant ways.

With individuals and communities empowering themselves by, for example, forming mutual aid groups, it is both timely and necessary for Liberal Democrats to ask what a liberal vision of local government should look like.

Of course, Liberal Democrats have long focused on the question of local government and, in contrast to the centralising agendas of Labour and the Conservatives, have prided themselves on a commitment to localism.

However, while devolving power from central to local government is necessary, acting as a bulwark against an intrusive centralist state, it is equally important for liberals to hold a light to local government and explore the extent to which it requires reform; there is little point in replacing the authoritarian bureaucrat in Whitehall with the authoritarian bureaucrat in the town hall.

Two principles in particular should shape and guide such a vision: the extent to which democracy operates within local government and citizens are provided with opportunities to actively participate, and the degree to which, what I term, 'market municipalism', and diversity of service provision, are promoted by local government.

Within local authorities, democracy should operate at two levels, both internally among elected members, and externally in relations with residents. Although many councils suffer from a democratic deficit in both respects, it is the latter that will be the focus of this section.

## ALIENATED RESIDENTS

Residents can be alienated from decision-making processes, often having little say in the running of their local council. Public consultations frequently serve as little more than tick-box exercise while elections are based on an unfair voting system that frequently grants disproportionately large majorities to ruling groups and, in doing so, breeds a culture of complacency and arrogance within many town halls.

Consequently, and just as liberals are committed to devolving power from central government to local government, much greater attention needs to be paid to the ways in which power can be devolved from local government to local communities, particularly those that feel little attachment to the local authority that they find themselves governed by.

This need to provide opportunities for more people to participate in making decisions that impact their lives is intimately associated and connected with a liberal conception of freedom. An ideal of liberty that is developmental and values self-mastery, self-

cultivation, and autonomy – or what the German Romantic thinker, Wilhelm von Humboldt, termed *Bildung* – is dependent on citizens pursuing a life of active, not passive, citizenship and participating in public affairs.

As John Stuart Mill observed in *Considerations on Representative Government*, the citizen who participates in public affairs is improved: "He is called upon, while so engaged, to weigh interests not his own; to be guided, in case of conflicting claims, by another rule than his private partialities; to apply, at every turn, principles and maxims which have for their reason of existence the general good . . ."

Although there are means by which local residents may seek to create their own community or town council, the process grants a veto to principal authorities who have their own, often conflicting, interests.

However, as well as removing this veto, it is only when the powers granted to such community or town councils are of a greater significance than is currently the case that a 'devolution revolution' is likely to occur. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity – that decisions should be made at the level most appropriate and if decisions can be made at the most decentralised level then they should be – various responsibilities now carried out by local authorities should be transferred, along with the necessary finances, to community councils.

While some might dismiss such proposals, pointing out that the benefits of economies of scale would be lost (although adopting this line of thought shouldn't we replace local authorities with region-sized authorities or, indeed, something even larger?), such claims overlook the benefits of economies of scope.

Whereas economies of scale are concerned with efficiency through volume, economies of scope focus on efficiency through variety. With more community councils, operating in close proximity to one another yet pursuing various different approaches, a greater degree of diversity in service provision would hopefully flourish and, along with it, greater opportunities for councils to learn from one another's successes and failures.

Faced with the reduced budgets, local authorities have sought to generate new income in various ways, one of which may be described as 'market municipalism'. This involves local authorities participating and competing within various local markets with the aim of generating a profit to invest in the provision of public services. For example, my own local authority – Labour-run Gateshead Council – has entered the funeral services market by creating its own funeral services business.

Such entrepreneurial initiatives are, however, not without risk. Not only may ventures prove costly failures for the taxpayer but, rather than correcting market failures and disrupting, say, a local private



monopoly or cartel, such enterprises may result in a private monopoly being replaced by the equally unsatisfactory alternative of a 'local state' monopoly. In the worst-case scenario, it may even supplant a competitive local market with a council-funded monopoly.

As a result, it is essential that local authorities only enter such markets where there is both a convincing business case that a healthy profit is likely to be generated and where the local market is currently not a functioning, free market. Provided these provisos are met, local authorities can play an important role in advancing both choice and competition within local economies where there is too little of either.

Nevertheless, just as local authorities should be encouraged to expand their involvement in some areas, they should play a reduced role in others. Currently, various services are directly provided by local councils which in a more pluralist environment would be provided by others, such as mutuals and co-operatives, the voluntary sector, and the private sector.

Each of these models have their own particular advantages. Mutuals - some of which are run by their staff, others run by staff and service users together - not only practise workplace democracy when properly constituted, but have been shown to increase productivity, reduce staff absenteeism, and be more innovative than services directly provided by local authorities.

The voluntary sector allows local people to manage their own local services and, in the process, draws upon a deep well of knowledge and skills, and improves and develops these further, serving as something of a 'school' for volunteers. Finally, the private sector can bring a spirit of innovation, rigour and efficiency.

Ideally, service providers from each of these sectors - and, where appropriate, the public sector too - would compete with one another in the provision of some public service, delivering maximum choice to users and almost constant innovation and experimentation. Even the provision of some services which do not lend themselves to market principles and the participation of the private sector, such as library services, can benefit from various service models, such as council-run, mutually-run, and volunteer-run libraries, operating within the same town, yet experimenting with different approaches to best meet user demand and learn from one another.

The private sector, in addition to the above delivery models, is arguably more suited to the provision of other public services, such as social care. Crucially, however, in a well-regulated environment no single provider should be able to secure a monopolistic position. Ensuring that the market for the delivery of a particular public service remains not only free, but also open, should be an important liberal objective.

## **BUREAUCRATIC CULTURE**

All too often, however, a bureaucratic culture, committed to uniformity and not diversity, dominates town halls and prevents a diversity of service provision from emerging.

*“Local authorities can play an important role in advancing both choice and competition within local economies where there is too little of either”*

As long ago as 1967 Jo Grimond rightly observed: “The characteristics of bureaucracy are that it is secretive, ridged, nonelective, hierarchical. Its motive force is the furthering of the interests of an apparatus . . . it does not appreciate mobility or dissent. It is by nature conservative”.

Additionally, the excessive influence of trade unions - another conservative force operating within local

government - must bear some responsibility for this stifling culture.

Unison, for example, expressed concern at the Coalition's mutalising agenda, arguing that it was, “. . . an ideologically driven desire to shrink the state and cut public spending. . .” It is, perhaps, unsurprising that a trade union - whose very raison d'être relies on maintaining a division, even opposition, between employees and employers - should be so wary of mutuals, cooperatives, and workplace democracy. An urgent need for trade union reform remains apparent.

Unlike Conservatives and Labour, liberals are not ideologically obsessed with the size of the state, but are concerned at what level, and in what realms, the state, including local government, operates and intervenes.

On the question of local government and the provision of services, a liberal vision is one in which local government would both expand and contract in different ways, at different times, and in different arenas. However, in both cases, our watchwords must be competition, not monopoly, experimentation, not stagnation, and choice, not uniformity.

It might be contended that there is a tension between, on the one hand, seeking to further democratise local government and, on the other, encouraging a particular model of service provision which values competition, experiment, and choice.

What if councils do not wish to embrace 'market municipalism' and compete within local markets? What if they do not want to award contracts to mutuals, the voluntary sector, or the private sector? What if, as many socialists do, they prefer uniformity to diversity on the, quite spurious, grounds that it is necessary for the achievement of egalitarianism? Indeed, is there not something of an inherent tension, even a conflict, at the heart of the liberal vision outlined above?

Although even the most conservative local authorities would, hopefully, be persuaded to adopt such reforms once they had witnessed their success elsewhere, such councils must have the right not to do so - provided, of course, that local electors, operating under the single transferable vote, have the right to remove them from power.

Ultimately, however, both principles - democracy within local government and a diversity of service provision, particularly in the case of mutuals and the voluntary sector - are grounded in an ideal of the citizen as an active, and not a passive, agent and it is this vision of 'civic liberalism' that serves as their common, and unifying, thread.



# LETTERS

can spend is dwarfed by party spending in key seats. So every party identifies its 'battleground' (60-80 seats) and ploughs £100,000 or more into each of them. It is just not viable to opt out of this game or we will simply be annihilated.

As Lib Dems we know that

money spent early achieves most, so we need to identify our battleground seats now and invest over time. If we try to fight the 2019 battle again in 2024 we will get an even worse result. In the main, though nothing is static and review should be regular, places which have elected Lib Dem MPs and councils in the last 20 years offer our best prospects, not those which over-performed in the freak circumstances of December 2019.

Nick Harvey

Former MP, North Devon,  
and former Liberal Democrat Chief Executive

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## PERFORMING FREAKS

*Dear Liberator,*

Michael Steed's analysis of the Lib Dems' 2019 general election drubbing (Liberator 400), Mick Taylor's entreaty to abandon targeting (same issue) and Laura Gordon's vigorous assertion that "northern Liberalism isn't dead" (Liberator 401) together give much to ponder in determining 'where now' for the Lib Dems.

I would never question Michael's statistical analysis, but I am sceptical about his political conclusion that our best prospects are now predominantly in London and the south east. Many seats where we achieved eye-catching swings in 2019 can be explained by the unique political circumstances of that moment: the Brexit saga nearing its climax, defections of high-profile MPs and 'punishment beatings' of pantomime villains like Dominic Raab.

We cannot re-create those conditions in 2024 and many of those seats are likely to revert to their more normal performance. There may be exceptions – a strong local base might see Wimbledon join our south west London enclave, for example. But for the main part, our best prospects for recovering as a significant parliamentary force lie further north and west – and will never be achieved if we are too London-centric and middle class.

Laura pinpointed northern targets we can recover, and Michael described the 'Celtic fringe' which for many decades provided our backbone at Westminster. Such non-conformist and bloody-minded communities remain natural hunting grounds for Liberals, and with Brexit no longer dominating (and tragically dragging down our vote because key slices of the electorate were at odds with us on the issue) they can recover from under-performance and be won back over time with determined community campaigning.

So where should we focus? When Mick Taylor calls for an end to targeting, I wonder quite what he means?

Taken to the extremes of abandoning vast numbers of seats during the campaign, he has a point. While at LDHQ, I heard much anger about people being brigaded out of their own areas to help targets – a concept which extreme geography had not exposed me to in Devon, where you could hardly get people to move 50 miles across one seat, much less go to another in significant numbers. Urban areas are different. Research might usefully test whether the ill-will and damage caused are truly offset by tangible capacity gains.

No, the true importance of targeting is less about people than money. I doubt whether Mick or anyone else seriously thinks we should spread resources equally across all 650 seats. The strange state of electoral law means that the £15,000 a candidate

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## EMPTY SHOPS AND PENSION POTS

*Dear Liberator,*

As someone who spent 25 years in retail, I could relate to Mark Smulian's article in Liberator 401, There Goes the High Street. Indeed, it's almost a Covid postscript to my own chapter The Death of the High Street in the recent Social Liberal Forum book, Wolves in the Forest.

Though sceptical that the Coronavirus pandemic will fundamentally change society, Mark states that it might well intensify changes currently in progress, noting that the "high street and the idea of it as a community's centre were (already) in dire trouble".

However, the danger goes even wider and deeper than Mark suggests. Certainly more and more shops and shopping centres are in peril of closing, and this will undoubtedly have significant effects on local communities and economies. The problems it causes for the wider economy are even greater, though.

There is the immediate obvious effect of lower consumption and spending, and the clear implications of that. There is the shortfall in business rates being paid due to lower occupancy rates.

But most worryingly, many shopping centres are owned by pension funds. (These pension funds also derive significant income from office rental; lower occupancy is also anticipated there with more home working, as Mark touches on.)

This double whammy of reduced income going into pension funds and other investment portfolios presents the spectre that many pensions will be underpaid or not paid at all. Add that to an ageing population and the economic consequences are horrendous. No election probably until 2024 - what state will we be in by then?

Mark Blackburn  
Ilminster

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## LYING AROUND

*Dear Liberator*

One of the weirdest moments in my childhood was finding an English-language copy of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* hidden in the bottom of a wardrobe in the nursery of my (adoptive) maternal grandmother's house in Derbyshire.

She had been president of the local Conservative Association but didn't strike me as a fascist, however I never plucked up the courage to ask her why the book was tucked away under a pile of blankets. However, I did read Adolf Hitler's work surreptitiously. Much of it was pretty boring, while other bits - such as his hatred of the Jews - were revolting.

But one thing which intrigued me and has stayed with me ever since was his theory of the Big Lie - that if a lie is colossal and you keep repeating it, people will believe it as they will feel that no-one would have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously.

This propaganda technique was perfected and implemented by Hitler's henchman Joseph Göbbels, who manipulated political discourse and in particular used the medium of radio to feed the German public a steady diet of nourishing lies.

I am surely not alone in thinking that the Nazis' use of the Big Lie (mirrored by Josef Stalin and the Soviet Communists, one should note) is enjoying a kind of renaissance today on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 2016 here in Britain during the EU Referendum the Leave campaign produced a series of seminal lies, even plastering one of the most effective on the side of a big red bus. The assertion that the NHS could benefit from the £350m allegedly sent by Britain each week to Brussels was demonstrably untrue. An even bigger whopper was the claim that Turkey was about to join the EU, meaning that 70m Turks would become eligible to move to the UK.

Remainers complained in vain about this distortion of reality, but large swaths of the public were happy to believe what they were told, just as millions of Germans had in the 1930s.

Meanwhile, in America, Donald Trump and his team were up to the same tricks, manufacturing and disseminating untruths to great effect. That helped him win the election and he has stuck with the strategy of the Big Lie while in office.

So, to a large degree, has British prime minister Boris Johnson. I am certainly not arguing that Johnson is a fascist, but the technique of the Big Lie (perhaps promoted by his amanuensis, Dominic Cummings) is evident to me. The US presidential election in November will be a litmus test to see if sufficient people still swallow the lies. For the health of democracy both in the United States and here in Britain one cannot only hope that they do not.

Jonathan Fryer  
Tower Hamlets

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## WHAT ARE THEY FOR?

*Dear Liberator*

There is little to disagree with in the articles in *Liberator* 401 from Laura Gordon and Michael Mullaney on rebuilding the party in the midlands and north, but it does raise the question of why experienced and effective campaigners like them and Lisa Smart found it necessary to set up regional campaign groups in a federal Party like the Liberal Democrats

If our federal structure worked, then the tasks these groups are intending to perform would already be being done by our regional parties individually or in concert.

That they are not makes it all the more urgent that, in tackling the recommendations of the general election review, the party sorts out a proper federal structure that adds more value than the current, essentially organisational, one does.

Alan Sherwell  
Aylesbury

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## SILVER LININGS

*Dear Liberator,*

Many thanks for *Liberator* 401 and the thoughtful and informative articles on Covid-19 and our 'government', especially Mark Smulian's thoughts about work and community. However, I have to disagree with some remarks in the Commentary.

Along with justified criticism of Liberal Democrat reluctance to "rock the boat", comes this: "Among the many irritations...has been people who ought to know better wittering about hearing birdsong". I don't know who they are - but this is a strange kind of debased Puritanism, to suggest that in a crisis, people shouldn't enjoy anything (or if they do, should keep quiet about it). No-one can get through desperate times purely on grimness. Hearing birdsong doesn't equate to not caring about deaths and job losses.

It also describes claimed positives of the lockdown as "fanciful". OK - *New Scientist* (not a very fanciful publication) has on 30 May: "Coronavirus Set To Cause Huge Carbon Emissions Fall".

The headline is then qualified: if we go back to our old ways, the fall will soon be insignificant. Elsewhere, there are references to benefits for bees (not an unimportant matter to anyone dependent on pollination happening), but also to conservation areas in poorer countries being under severe pressure because of loss of tourism and direct funding. T

The climate emergency, if it goes unchecked, will make Covid-19 seem a minor matter. Forget the mass extinction event: think about masses of people evicted by inundation and desertification, far beyond the recent Mediterranean crisis, crowded into camps in poor countries as the rich ones close their gates.

By the way, on the Johnson response to the virus: *New Scientist* reports Chinese studies found workspaces were 100 times more dangerous than public transport. So in which location has our government insisted on facial covering? You could guess.

Simon Banks  
Harwich



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**The Unfinished Arab Spring**  
**Fatima El-Issawi and**  
**Francesco Cavatorta**  
**[editors]**  
**Ginkgo £40**

In the wake of the December 2010 self-immolation of the impoverished young Tunisian street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, a wave of unrest swept across much of North Africa and the Middle East, leading to the ousting of presidents Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

At the time, I railed against fellow journalists who adopted the lazy slogan of ‘Arab Spring’ for the new phenomenon.

Lazy for at least two reasons. First, the term was a clumsy adaptation of the 1968 (ultimately failed) Czech uprising against the country’s Soviet occupiers (the ‘Prague Spring’); just as virtually every US political scandal since Watergate brought down US president Richard Nixon in 1974 has similarly been sloppily dubbed X-gate or Y-gate.

But the second, and more important, reason for my displeasure was that it was blatantly obvious from the turn of events, not least when they reached Syria, where I was lecturing in March 2011, that this momentous political trend was not a matter of just one season. Or indeed one year. I predicted it would take at least a decade, probably two, before we could map its trajectory or judge its success.

While I was working with the late Palestinian-Jordanian minister, Jamal Nasir on his autobiography we adopted a fresh term to describe what was happening: The New Arab Awakening. We were intending to write another book, with this title, deliberately echoing that of the classic 1938 history of the rise of Arab nationalism by George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, but sadly the nonagenarian Dr Nasir died before we got very far with that.

Now, however, a book has appeared that effectively does what we would have wanted to achieve, but with the added benefit of bringing together contributions from a wide range of distinguished



# REVIEWS

scholars, many of them from the region themselves.

The title is well justified, too. The *Unfinished Arab Spring* is in two distinct parts. The first is a series of case studies, covering Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Morocco and Algeria (Yemen being an interesting omission). Each chapter’s author takes a different approach that is country-specific and illustrates well how very differently each uprising or revolution has turned out, from “delegitimising democratic demands” in the case of Egypt to “resource competition” in Libya.

The second part brings an analytical approach to the dialectic between the ‘dynamics of change’ and the ‘dynamics of continuity’. Various agents and actors are identified, from well-educated youth to secular women, but so too the technological context, not least the prevalence of social media and other alternative platforms.

In the second section, Tunisia receives particularly close attention, which can be justified not only because this is where the so-called Arab Spring began (in mid-winter, of course), but also because Tunisia is the one country in which the New Arab Awakening can be said, more or less, to have been a success. Whether others will prove to be in the long term remains to be seen, though there have been encouraging recent developments in Algeria.

All of the chapters have extensive footnotes and at the end of each there is a very useful bibliography. This is, after all, a serious collection of academic papers, though most of its authors have nonetheless managed to write in a style that is accessible to the informed general reader.

As a part-time School of Oriental and African Studies academic myself, I did momentarily baulk at one chapter heading in Part Two: “Youth Activism and the Politics of ‘Mediapreneurship’: The Effects of Political Efficacy and Empowerment on Mediated

Norm Conveyance in Tunisia and Morocco”. But do not be put off by this, or indeed by the price of the book. For a work of such scholarship, £40 is quite reasonable. And if you cannot afford to buy the book yourself, get your library to order it. You and they will be grateful.

Jonathan Fryer

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**Bad News: what the headlines don’t tell us**  
**by Mark Pack**  
**Biteback Publishing**  
**£18.99**

The PR blurb says that you should always read stories in the Daily Mail backwards (let me think about that. No.) So it is that the eyes land at the most striking part of the party president and acting joint leader’s tome on the subject of the media...and find endorsements from Cameron and Clegg SpAds, and Johnson government economic adviser (and sometime Lib Dem) Tim Leunig.

Books ‘exposing’ the tricks of the media are not a new thing. And while some aspects of newer media are touched on, it’s hard to see what here is genuinely new, or what angle is particularly insightful. For one thing, it makes heroic assumptions about the budgets of news outlets to investigate stories properly in the modern era. There are genuine insights – such as why the Daily Hate Mail uncharacteristically took a genuine moral stand in seeking to bring Stephen Lawrence’s killers to justice. The words about reporting of deaths caused by a disaster, too, are prescient.

It doesn’t help matters, either, that the Pack literary style, pleasant enough, is factual and dry in a way that doesn’t really help bring out the subject matter. (Cats do feature, for those interested.)

The familiar devices from the blog and newsletter (“most readers will disagree with this”) are present, like them or not. This familiarity tends to lead to truisms and tautologies; no, it’s no surprise Steve Webb’s significant and successful pension reforms got no attention at the time. There’s also a peculiar lack of structure about some of the biggest issues of the day; false equivalence and fakery are paid surprisingly even-handed lip service, then discarded as themes only to be taken up towards the end of the book.

Most Liberator readers will be most interested in the political relevance of this book. As a general tome on how press offices work with a PR slant on the news media, indeed, the book is a helpful primer for the apprentice or the casual observer. But those expecting advice for Liberals to reverse the party’s traditionally disastrous media management may be disappointed. At times the reader could shut their eyes and imagine they were in a training session about how awful the media is, which is why you should double the amount of Focus leaflets being delivered...but this is more about Mark Pack the PR professional than Mark Pack the politician. With the exception of a brief chapter on election campaign coverage, the political anorak might find thinner pickings than most.

For, mostly, we know that the papers are manipulated, and particularly by our political opponents. Ho hum. Or I am I just too much of a hardened old cynic?

Gareth Epps

**Heroes in the Shadows, humanitarian action and courage in the Second World War by Brian Fleming Amberley 2019 £20.00**

Heroes in the Shadows is a natural follow on to Fleming’s earlier book, *The Vatican Pimpernel*, the story of Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty, who saved at least 6,000 lives from the hands of the Nazis and Fascists during the Second World War.

How do you measure heroism? The heroes in the shadows range

from diplomats, most commonly well known, to ordinary people, focussed around the Comet Line and other routes by which fugitives – refugees, airmen shot down over Europe, made their escape.

Many of those who aided them would lose their lives, and the majority of volunteers were women. It is worth recalling the motto of the Comet Line – *Pugna quin Percutias* – fight without strike, broadly an example of passive resistance against the Nazis. This aspect of opposition to the Nazis is less likely to be recalled than militant actions, though perhaps more so relied on the solidarity of its members. The class and related conflicts in France and Belgium

made resistance more difficult and infiltration more of a hazard.

There are some gripping passages as one moves through accounts of narrow escapes, and the motivations of those encountered. It would be a spoiler to say more on that basis, but suffice to say we are mainly talking about ordinary people whose heroism and humanity deserves to be remembered.

Fleming represented Dublin West in the Dáil 1981-82 and the Seanad, from 1983-87, for Fine Gael. Working in education thereafter, he continues to promote education amongst the disadvantaged.

Stewart Rayment

# THE UNFINISHED ARAB SPRING

Micro-Dynamics of Revolts between Change and Continuity



EDITED BY Fatima El-Issawi AND Francesco Cavatorta



## Monday

The wireless brings sad news of the death of the composer Ennio Morricone, best known for his theme for the film *One Upon a Time in Rutland*. This was the best known of the 'pork pie westerns' that did so much to revive the film industry hereabouts, my own studios included, but by no means the only one. The critics also praise 3.10 to Manton Junction, High Leicestershire Drifter and *A Bullet for the Lord Lieutenant*. Yet it is to *Once Upon a Time* that I return. Who can forget its opening scene, set at a polling station, where a teller and the presiding officer glare at one another for 40 minutes without dialogue in a dispute over whether the former's rosette is too large?

At least the government has finally stumped up some cash to keep us arts impresarios in business. This is particularly welcome, as I have had to cancel this summer's music festival here at the Hall. Over the years this has become something of a fixture in the calendar, featuring such favourite acts as the Clement Davies Group (you must know 'Keep on Standing'), Norman Baker's Airforce and Joy Division – what a charming girl she was!

## Tuesday

Much to the bookies' chagrin, it has turned out to be a meagre field in the latest contest for the leadership of the Liberal Democrats. So much so, that we are down to just two candidates: the splendid Ed Davey and the equally splendid Layla Moran. I had been one of those urging the MP for Bath to stand. Wera Duckworth, as you probably know, is some sort of relation by marriage of the great Liberal philosopher L.T. Duckworth and was the inventor of the Duckworth Lewes Method, which had much to do with Norman Baker's victory in 1997. Stand she did, but she soon sat down again. Now I am plagued by supporters of the said Davey and Moran asking me to nominate their man or – indeed – woman. "Now look here," I tell them, "You have the 200 nominations you need, so go away and do some hard thinking." The line generally goes dead at that point.

## Wednesday

With the village hall being a little too cosy to permit of social distancing, we now hold our discotheques for the young people on the green. Whilst spinning the discs, I observe that many erstwhile dancers are standing stock still with their feet planted and arms at various angles – rather as if they have remembered an urgent appointment whilst halfway through a pull shot. I ask one young lady the reason for this. "It's Layla Moran's radical stance," she explains.

## Thursday

I ring Layla Moran with the news about her radical stance, only to find her a little downcast. It seems the slogan Freddie and Fiona wrote for Ed Davey – "I'm very important and wear a suit" – is hitting the mark with the Liberal Democrat membership and she is at a loss to know what to do by way of a response. I tell her of an old friend who was faced with the loss of his marginal seat, only to be returned with an increased majority after rescuing a child from drowning. The

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

most important thing, he was always maintained, was that he ensured no one spotted him pushing the child into the water in the first place. "Baby animals are popular too," I remark, just before bidding her farewell. Sure enough, the evening papers all bear the headline "Layla Moran Saves Ducklings from Drowning".

## Friday

Jamie Stone telephones, full of his plans for his new spaceport in Sutherland; no

wonder they call him the Wernher von Braun of the Flow Country. I wish him well with his scheme and am then reminded of the days, shortly after our triumph in 1997, when we Liberal Democrats had our own spacecraft. The *Bird of Liberty* was piloted by David Chidgey, then the MP for Eastleigh, and funded by a group of donors who believed that if there were alien civilisations orbiting nearby stars then they would inevitably hold by-elections and that these might offer the party a chance of increasing its number of elected representatives. For a time all went well, but the *Bird* was brought down by an errant Russian satellite and Chidgey was located only after a thorough search of the less frequented Pacific islands.

Inspired by these recollections, I set to searching the outbuildings here at the Hall until I locate the old girl. She is clearly in need of some TLC, but after a day of cleaning and polishing she looks more her old self. When I fire up the engine the Well-Behaved Orphans who were responsible for the cleaning and polishing declare that I should call her "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang". I'm sure you will agree this is a damn fool idea.

## Saturday

Amid great rejoicing, the Bonkers' Arms reopens today. As its landlord's landlord I am invited to pull the first pint of Smithson & Greaves Northern Bitter to be served there for months. Not only that: I stand everyone present a drink – after all, they do not all enjoy the benefit of a secret passage that emerges in the pub's cellar. I take the precaution of posting pickets in case hordes descend upon us from Leicester, Oadby and Wigston, but all is quiet. It later transpires they have all gone to Market Harborough.

## Sunday

So this is to be that last printed edition of *Liberator*. It seems only a few years ago that every street corner had its barefoot newsboy selling the magazine. I well remember their shrill cries of "Eleven reasons Clement Davies must resign – you won't believe number seven" and "North Devon shooting: we interview Rinka's mother". I once heard them crying "Rutland fraud case: shock new developments" and had to tip them half a crown a piece to desist, but we need not go into that here. In future, or so the amusing young people who put the magazine together tell me, you will have to download *Liberator* from the ether by means of the electric internet. I hope to see you next time, but in my experience this can be a tricky business: it's not just a matter of pointing it at Sandy and hoping for the best.

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