

liberator



☛ Getting generous - Julian Huppert

☛ Which side won the Iraq war? - Rebecca Tinsley

☛ Life, arts and transport in Covid - Janice Turner, Mark Smulan, Tom Barney

CONTENTS

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LIBERATOR

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- 🔊 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..... 3

Radical Bulletin 4..7

THE COFFEE SMELLS OFF 8..9
Ed Davey's listening tour is all very well, but have the Lib Dems any idea what they want people to think about them, wonders David Grace

GENEROUS GESTURE 10..11
Julian Huppert explains the origin of The Generous Society. Tom King's new booklet on the meaning of liberal values

WILL RUSSIA RESCUE TRUMP AGAIN..... 12..15
Tell a big lie often enough and people will believe it; that is presidential politics in the age of Trump, says Martha Elliott

WHO WON THE IRAQ WAR? 16..1
Turns out it was Iran as American errors left the country at the mercy of their militias and a revived IS, says Rebecca Tinsley

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY..... 19
China and Iran are drawing closer with potentially serious global consequences, says Jonathan Fryer

HERE'S YOUR FIRST TASK ED 20..22
What, besides making coffee, is the one key thing Ed Davey should do as the new Lib Dem leader. Liberator contacted a range of readers, this is what they had to say.

BEWARE OF LABOUR 23
Many Lib Dems look to a 'progressive alliance' with Labour. Kris Brown urges caution in an open letter to Ed Davey

WELL WORTH THE RISK..... 24..25
Liberals should aim to reopen society on its old terms once the Covid-19 risk abates, says Tom Barney

THE ARTS ON A KNIFE EDGE 26..27
Live performance doesn't not work like other businesses and its workforce cannot return while social distancing is in place. Help is needed to save tens of thousands of jobs, says Janice Turner

HOLD VERY TIGHT PLEASE..... 28..29
Just as some progress was being made in reducing car traffic, the pandemic spells trouble for public transport, says Mark Smulian

IS IT A TORY PLOT?..... 30..31
Conservative county council leaders are trying to crate huge unity authorities, it will though still probably end in tiers, says Chris White

DANGEROUS WATERS 32
Action is needed to help refugees making perilous crossings from France to the UK, says Suzanne Fletcher

BLACK AND BLUE 33
Institutional racism is alive and well in the police. It's time to try some new approaches, says Natasha Chapman

IRON CURTAIN TWITCHERS 34..36
Ruth Coleman-Taylor recalls the mysterious invitation to the Young Liberals to visit post-invasion Czechoslovakia

REVIEWS 30..31

Lord Bonkers' Diary 32

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COMMENTARY

DAVEY GOES EXPLORING

As rousing calls to action go “wake up and smell the coffee” is hardly in the same league as former Liberal leader Jo Grimond’s “march to the sound of gunfire” speech.

Even Tim Farron’s “pick a ward and win it” was a bit more inspiring.

Ed Davey’s acceptance speech after his emphatic win in the Lib Dem leadership contest was by several measures pretty strange.

The ‘coffee’ reference is a bit of tired management jargon, inspiring only to serious caffeine addicts. It was hardly something calculated to enthuse a party whose morale has not much recovered from last December’s mauling.

Even more unusually, Davey did not set out what he hoped to do, or hoped to see happen, beyond announcing a ‘national listening programme’, the first fruit of which saw him do a shift in a Stockport chip shop.

He later hinted that this programme would not be a series of such eccentric publicity stunts but would see him spend a protracted period going around the country talking to voters to hear their concerns.

It is rather as if he were a member of an ancient tribe who had gone off alone to seek wisdom from mystics in some distant place and then to return bearing aloft the answer to the meaning of life.

Politicians who fail to listen to voters end up failing, but so too do those who listen too much.

Lib Dem exponents of community politics emphasise listening to their local voters but this can lead to the party’s candidates opportunistically attaching themselves to every passing popular cause, and has been one factor in the Lib Dems failing to secure more than transient loyalty.

The trouble with too much listening is that there is no single view held by ‘the public’ on anything. It is all very well saying that one wants to discover what voters want, but if large numbers of them want different or even contradictory things that is not much help in fashioning a coherent political programme.

Davey will no doubt ignore views expressed along the lines that all the nation’s troubles are caused by immigrants, or that hanging should be restored or that the Earth is flat.

He will do so quite rightly because such views are demonstrably contrary to liberal values, stupid or both.

So Davey already goes off on his programme armed with values and presumably unwilling to indulge fool and bigots, from which we can see that he should not be listening to all voters - since the fools and bigots are extremely unlikely to vote Lib Dem other than by accident - but to those who do, or might, or have, voted Lib Dem.

Asked by Liberator in the leadership questionnaire

this year (Liberator 402) whether the party should still act on the basis it can ‘win everywhere’ Davey said: “I want us to represent everyone who shares our open, internationalist values and beliefs 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.’”

He gave a slightly different, and better, answer to a similar question in the 2019 contest (Liberator 396): “Whilst we can win (almost) everywhere as a one off, I don’t think we can consistently as we can’t be all things to all people and seeking to do so will dilute our messages.”

Davey’s listening exercise may well give him useful insights, but the danger will come if he thinks: “X is popular, so we are now in favour of X.”

What matters is not whether X is popular in absolute terms but whether it is popular with those who might support the party, and not actively unpopular with those who already do.

SEE US ONLINE

This is the first online only Liberator. As we explained in recent issues, we did not feel we were reaching, or could reach, enough people in print and by face-to-face conference sales. We intend though to have a virtual stall at the Lib Dem online conference this month.

Liberator will now be published at: www.liberatormagazine.org.uk and there is a facility on the website to sign up for alerts when each issue appears, and occasional other announcements.

As an online publication Liberator can be copied, forwarded or printed off however readers choose.

We hope this means that many more people will discover Liberator and that readers will pass on copies to others who might be interested so the circulation can rise in a way it never could in print.

We’re still learning what works and doesn’t online and what the possibilities will be, but we hope old readers will come with us and new ones will enjoy Liberator.

RADICAL BULLETIN

RUNNING AGAINST SHADOWS

Winning by 63-37% was beyond the expectations of nervous Ed Davey supporters contacted by Liberator in an interminable leadership campaign where the lack of conventional hustings and party meetings made it hard for anyone to call it accurately.

The eventual result was 42,756 votes for Davey and 24,564 for Layla Moran.

Davey was able to easily outspend Moran but her campaign's energy level was enough for some to think she could win as the contest neared its end.

The endless hustings must have bored the two candidates rigid (and maybe not a few observers) but did mean both were tested.

Both had problems beyond opposing each other, as Davey was running against himself and Moran was running against Jo Swinson.

Davey has Coalition baggage, and even though the Coalition will likely be nine years distant and largely forgotten by the public come the next election he can expect its failings to be enthusiastically exhumed by interviewers and opponents.

His pitch was one of a green economic recovery but his past associations with Nick Clegg, the Orange Book and nuclear power will make some suspicious as will his devotion to a budget surplus at the last general election.

Moran was promoted as being a new and fresh figure who could appeal to the public in a way that a middle aged political veteran could not.

That though was not entirely a campaign positive. This was exactly the way in which both Tim Farron and Jo Swinson were promoted, with Farron proving an at least mitigated disaster and Swinson an unmitigated one.

A Facebook post after the result by Moran's campaign manager Neil Fawcett suggested that its phone canvassing had revealed a notable number of members who felt they made the wrong choice by rejecting Davey in 2019 and did not want to repeat this error. Perhaps after the inglorious Farron and Swinson eras members preferred to opt for experience.

Moran may also not have helped herself by a July interview with the Observer in which she both called for closer working with Labour and suggested she - being instinctively sympathetic to this - was the best candidate to bring a deal about.

That would have obviously annoyed people who oppose the idea anyway, but it may also have worried those who in principle support some formal or informal arrangement with Labour at the next election but want the party's position safeguarded.

One does not reach senior status in the Labour party without being a hard-nosed political thug well versed in dark arts.

The Labour hard cases who formed the SDP at least three times ran rings round David Steel (forming the Alliance, the seat share out and the merger agreement).

Tony Blair humiliated Paddy Ashdown and gave him nothing after 1997 and Gordon Brown tried to neuter the Lib Dems by inviting Ming Campbell into his aborted 'government of all the talents', which Campbell toyed with until sense prevailed (Liberator 320).

Steel, Ashdown and Campbell were all enthusiasts for doing such deals, and even though these events were a long time ago the basics of how negotiations work don't change.

Members may have calculated that a leader who is 'unsympathetic' or even merely neutral would drive a better bargain and that Moran anyway lacked the experience to go up against Labour's high command.

Moran also has her 'Glasgow incident' of domestic violence to contend with, which she was still questioned about on television even as the contest neared its end despite her explanations.

Another noticeable feature was who the MPs backed. Chief whip Alastair Carmichael had to be neutral, but the others split 5-3 for Davey.

This included the ambitious Daisy Cooper, who may well have calculated that this improved her future chances of being leader, as his being older means a Davey leadership might be shorter than a Moran one.

Cooper was also simply being sensible as a new MP in a seat never held before and has already been rewarded by being elected deputy leader of the parliamentary party.

Davey also intriguingly gained Farron's support - although Farron's previous most zealous supporters seemed mostly to back Moran - since they have never given the impression before of being from the same part of the political jungle.

Noticeable among Moran's supporters was Wera Hobhouse, who only a year ago was canvassing against her (Liberator 402) and whose own campaign for leader fell at the first hurdle by lacking an MP to nominate her.

CAPITAL OFFENCES

The fiasco of the shortlisting of a Lib Dem candidate for mayor of London has shone light on some very serious problems with the party's candidate approval and selection processes that go far beyond this contest.

In the course of the summer one candidate has stood down, one has resigned from the shortlist of possible successors and another has been thrown off it after the disinterring of her anti-Semitic activity.

Mayoral candidate Siobhan Bonita stood down in July and implied this was because she could not keep her life on hold for an extra year given the election had

been put back to 2021 due to the pandemic.

It has since emerged that she had asked party headquarters for what it regarded as an unreasonably large sum of money for her faltering campaign.

With elections due next year for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and a huge round of English councils, it felt those were all far more likely to be value for campaigning money than the London mayoral contest.

Bonita's peculiar Love London Better slogan and focus on 'kindness' had also been mauled in an internal investigation into why her campaign was stuck on barely 5% in opinion polls (Liberator 402).

At that stage everyone appeared to take the well-liked Bonita's withdrawal at face value, but on 14 September she announced she had left the party in August and said, though without further explanation: "I really don't want to be associated with current events in the London campaign."

She added: "But my deciding to stand down wasn't based on finances alone. There are serious issues that need fixing in the London region and I couldn't run the campaign I wanted to."

This was the same day that the shit hit the fan about one of her potential successors.

London region's shortlist committee had picked former MEP and Camden councillor Luisa Porritt, Anna Ahmed, who was at one point candidate for Sutton, and Geeta Sidhu Robb of whom few had heard.

When it became apparent that Sidhu Robb might be shortlisted some members started digging and before very long found an article she had written for Grazia - wherein she was billed as a 'health expert' - which argued that obese people should not be allowed NHS treatment because they had chosen an unhealthy lifestyle.

They also found that she had appeared in a TV show Rich House, Poor House (as an example of the former) showing a what some might think a worrying lack of empathy with neighbours in the latter.

These and other examples, including some unusual views on vaccination and diet, led to her place on the shortlist being challenged at the London region executive, which voted 9-7 to tell the shortlisting committee to think again.

Committee members, who included the former MP Tom Brake and London Assembly members Caroline Pidgeon, declined to do so and kept Sidhu Robb there.

With Ahmed having withdrawn that left her and Porritt to go to a ballot of members, which was announced with due fanfare on Lib Dem Voice on 12 September.

The next day You Tube footage surfaced from when Sidhu Robb was the Tory candidate in Blackburn in the 1997 general election and drove round with a loudspeaker from which she told Muslim voters not to support Labour candidate Jack Straw because he is a Jew. Sidhu Robb was duly suspended leaving Porritt as the only candidate.

Enquiries by Liberator have established that the shortlisting committee had before it evidence from candidates' CVs, the results of a technical interview on the Greater London Authority conducted by former GLA research assistant Nick Carthew, results from a mock press interview and evidence of behaviour on social media gathered by a private contractor employed by the party.

They were then told to proceed only on the evidence before them, which had somehow missed the Grazia piece and the other questionable views.

It must be stressed that the evidence of anti-Semitism only became known to the shortlisting committee's members after their work had ended, though it obviously already existed.

Several questions flow from this debacle. If someone wants to be a candidate for such a high profile role they appear to be able to write their own CV and then undergo a process which does not seek to discover whether they have been truthful or have omitted something important in their past that might bring the party into disrepute. There must also be questions about whether a social media trawl is sufficient and effective.

Since London mayoral candidates have to be approved parliamentary ones first, someone has clearly managed to approve a former Tory candidate with some profile as a former reality TV show participant without proper enquiry into their suitability.

This may have been a hangover from the Swinson-era "we'll have anybody" approach to defectors, but the whole thing has seen all concerned saying: "It wasn't my job to check her out." Clearly someone should have.

PERILS OF THE ELECTRIC INTERWEB

Returning officer Alan Masters was kept busy during the leadership election by candidates' breaches - inadvertent or otherwise - of data protection rules.

First up was Layla Moran, found to have committed "a technical breach...in relation to the specific consents relating to these cookies".

Her campaign was required to cease using the affected data, a stipulation which Masters said was "promptly complied with".

Ed Davey then made it one-all after a complaint that his canvassers were in mid-July instructed not to disclose the identity of the campaign on whose behalf they were calling.

Masters found this practice "was likely to mislead members" and required Davey to "forthwith delete the data collected from these calls" and subsequently said he received confirmation this has been done.

Davey then made it 2-1 after a complaint that data was being used for direct marketing that was gathered during his 2019 leadership campaign.

A no doubt weary Masters concluded this was "a technical breach...in relation to specific consents" and Davey was advised to gain new consents before using the data again.

MR MONEYBAGS

The Liberal Democrats should at least be rolling in loot at the next election with Ed Davey as leader if his leadership campaign is anything to go by.

Davey has a reputation as an effective fundraiser and according to Parliament's register of members' interests the Layla Moran campaign was comprehensively outgunned financially, raising £35,000 to Davey's £135,600.

Donors to Davey included some well-known Lib Dems, such as the former MP John Hemming, former

MEP Dinesh Dhamija and former party treasurer Richard Duncalf.

Also noticeable was a donation from former BT chair Sir Michael Rake, who this year became a UK board member of the controversial Chinese telecoms firm Huawei, which should be handy if Davey ever needs to spy on anyone. Another big business name was Michael Frohlich, chief executive of the Ogilvy advertising agency.

There were also donations from what appear to be small businesses run by, presumably, either party supporters or personal friends of Davey: Ashton Care Homes, Onecross Partners and DCD London & Mutual.

Moran had an eye-catching donor too with £10,000 - nearly one-third of her total donations - coming from the former Lib Dem peer Matthew Oakeshott, who has retired from the House of Lords.

Oakeshott left the Lib Dems following a row with Nick Clegg after he commissioned private polling in 2014 that correctly predicted the party heading down a lavatory at high speed if the latter's leadership continued.

Also notable among Moran's donors was historian Peter Frankopan, who according to his Wikipedia entry plays international cricket for Croatia.

VICAR OF BRAY

Baroness Grender of Kingston-upon-Thames caused some offence among Liberal Democrats in the borough from which she takes her title by backing Jo Swinson against local boy Ed Davey in the 2019 leadership contest.

Her reward was a place helping to run Swinson's catastrophic general election campaign with several people having noted that, insofar as anyone was in charge, it was Grender calling the shots.

This year who should pop up on Davey's list of endorsements but Kingston's very own baroness, possibly hoping for a place on the next general election team.

Grender was also effectively number two to Paddy Ashdown in the 2015 campaign, which was enlivened by a bizarre email she sent to all members about Ashdown eating a chocolate éclair (*Liberator* 372).

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

It's sometimes said that political careers are cut short by 'glass ceilings' but it was reputedly glass at a rather lower height that did for former Winchester MP Mark Oaten.

Oaten stayed in parliament after his scandal but retired in 2010 since when little was heard while he busied himself working at the Fur Trade Federation (slogan 'fur for fun and fashion' a sentiment unlikely to be shared by the animals in question).

In the autumn of 2018 he announced to the Hampshire Chronicle (*Liberator* 393) that he had left the Liberal Democrats having become disillusioned.

But who was this standing for the south east Lib Dem regional executive this summer: "After ten years away from active politics the lockdown has re motivated me and I would like to help the next generation of Liberal Democrats."

Step forward Mark Oaten, who while admitting, "not all my experiences in politics were good" says he

is "keen to use my political experiences to help the party I love get back into a position to challenge the establishment at the next election". We only hope he won't be urging members to follow all his examples.

ELEMENTARY OH DEAR WATSON

According to an undenied story in the Sunday Times, Jo Swinson discussed with former Labour deputy leader Tom Watson the possibility of him defecting and standing for the Lib Dems in Lewes at the last election.

Watson instead retired from politics, exhausted by battles with Corbynites. But what really happened in Lewes?

The selection was delayed until very late - presumably to accommodate Watson if he accepted.

Lewes's former MP Norman Baker told *Liberator* that he was made aware of "a possibility they would try to parachute someone in" in case he wanted to help smooth things over but was never told the identity of the person concerned.

Had Watson stood as a Lib Dem candidate it would have taken the media only minutes to disinter his views on the party from the Birmingham Hodge Hill by-election in 2004.

Watson directed anti-Lib Dem abuse against candidate Nicola Davies in one of the dirtiest by-election campaigns ever seen. British politics is a better place without Watson.

DISINTERRING BONES

The old Federal Executive was widely criticised in the Lib Dems for being too large and unwieldy to be an 'executive' body.

It was replaced in the 2016 governance review by a Federal Board, which was almost as large and equally incapable of avoiding interminable meetings consumed with minutiae.

Now the inevitable has happened and a 14-strong steering group of selected FB members has been created by president Mark Pack to do the 'executive' part of the work with the rest of the board performing a sort of scrutiny role.

Voting to set up this arrangement was 23-6 though FB members had hanging over them the implicit threat of a constitutional amendment to set up the steering group if they failed to play ball.

This may remind those with long memories of the Bones Commission of 2008, which was set up by Nick Clegg to recommend a restructuring of party organisation that would help him centralise control.

Liberator 327 covered this extensively noting it called for a Chief Officers Group that would take over the running of the party's finances and management and set strategic objectives, prepare for elections, supervise media relations, run budgets and administration.

The FE was to be given an 'oversight' role not unlike that of the rest of the FB now. The whole thing faded away during the Coalition.

While Clegg did not make the slightest pretence of democracy in the COG, the steering group is intended to have some posts that are at present appointed turned into elected ones so that a majority of it can be elected rather than composed of ex-officio members. We shall see.

PURSUED BY TRIVIA

The unlamented former regulator of councillors' conduct the Standards Board for England was once described as "a quango that decides whether two parish councillors called each other plonkers in a pub car park".

Is the Lib Dem disciplinary process heading the same way after only its first year, drowning under a tidal wave of trivia?

This year's reports to conference were their usual self-congratulatory selves, from which a Martian reading them might deduce that almost all was well in the Lib Dems.

The exception was the report from Neil Christian, who heads the party's disciplinary process, on how that had fared.

There were always likely to be problems with operating an entirely demand-led system with insufficient people (Liberator 402) and so it has proven.

Christian said there had been 491 cases since the new system was introduced in July 2019, of which 283 were 'ongoing' and 208 concluded.

"It is worth noting that the number of complaints received is at a volume much higher than was ever foreseen when the system was being planned," he said.

So it would appear, as the average time taken to resolve a case stood in July 2020 at 308 days, compared with around 112 days allowed for the complete process from complaint via investigation, mediation and panel hearings.

The duration of open cases had though reduced by 142 working days and at the end of July these stood at 166.

When the disciplinary process started it was a sort of open invitation for anyone to make a complaint against anyone else they disliked, and as Christian notes: "Many complaints are also dismissed as they are

considered so minor as to not constitute complaints. We need to do more within the party to inform members before they raise

a complaint on what we consider could bring the party into disrepute so that very minor complaints do not take a huge amount of capacity within the system."

Of the sanctions imposed so far in cases that have reached panels there have been five revocations of membership, three suspensions, and one each for mandatory training, a ban on holding internal office, an apology and no future action taken.

Christian said that despite the small sample size: "What can be seen is that the over half of the sanctions imposed are suspension or revocation of membership.

"This would appear to indicate that the matters making their way to panel hearings are of a serious nature and are dealt with by the panel as such."

CONVENIENCE CONUNDRUM

Where is the poor puzzled Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet to head as it seeks to reward the worst motion submitted for the first Lib Dem virtual conference?

The toilet has been awarded by Liberator since 1983 to recognise incoherence, bad drafting, irrelevance or impossibility of implementation - of which a 1980s motion on a single time zone for Europe from Lisbon to Istanbul was a noted example.

The toilet is confused as the motion concerned is recorded as having been submitted by 'incorrectly specified'. It had also been incorrectly written.

It said, in its entirety: "They are 4 million unresolved human rights cases in the home office UK theses [sic] applications they are waiting most of them 5 years @ still unresolved all of them."

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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 has, and we decided it could not do that as long as it remained 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.

Liberator PDFs can be download to read on any device you like, or printed for your own use, and freely forward 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.

THE COFFEE SMELLS OFF

Ed Davey's listening tour is all very well, but have the Lib Dems any idea what they want people to think about them, wonders David Grace

What do we think of listening?

Listening is good. I told my sons, hypocritically you may think, that they would have more success with women if they listened to them instead of just talking at them. But is the reason that people don't vote Liberal Democrat that we don't listen to them? Or is it that we don't talk to them, that we don't give them a reason to vote for us?

Liberal Democrat support in the polls had dropped to 8% by the summer of 2011, a year after entering government. It never recovered. Reasons for that have been well rehearsed – tuition fees and austerity but above all not telling the public that Liberals had any ideas which were different from the Coalition government's.

DISASTROUS SLOGAN

Parliamentary procedure assumes two sides, government and opposition so during coalition there was effectively no Liberal Democrat voice in parliament. Attempts to criticise the government were heavily discouraged and sometimes blocked at our conferences. In 2015 we failed to redress this embarrassing silence and went with the disastrous slogan: "Give a heart to the Tories or a head to Labour".

In other words, vote for us to stop other parties doing what they want but we're not going to tell you what we want.

Naively I hoped that after that disastrous election we would spend some time sorting out what we do stand for and, better still, telling people. Instead we devoted time and resources as ever to the how of politics rather than the why. It is true that the party today has many, many people trained and able to communicate but what use is that if we don't know what to communicate.

The Thornhill report summed it up thus, "...the Liberal Democrats had not translated their beliefs into a clear and relevant vision or the strategy to put it into place".

We did of course have one message that the public knew and understood - Vote Remain, which became Stop Brexit – and which led to a huge increase in membership.

Sadly we failed to engage most of those new members, many receiving nothing much after joining or subsequently except requests for funds. Having participated in the growing campaign for a People's Vote we threw away that advantage by switching to Revoke. With everyone believing that Brexit was about to happen, trying to lock the stable door when the horse is nearly out in the yard was not a winning strategy. We were still not telling people what the Liberal Democrats are for.

Actually, it's a good question what any of the parties are for (except perhaps the SNP where it's obvious

now but might be a mystery if Scotland does get independence). I don't believe there is an ideological definition of conservatism. Roger Scruton's *The Meaning of Conservatism* is a pretty good attempt and rightly identifies Liberalism as its chief enemy. The problem is that you hardly ever meet a Tory who follows it or has even read it. At one time, I thought the sociological definition *The party which supports the better-off half of the country* was accurate but now they have put rampant nationalism ahead of economic sense that doesn't apply any more.

We are now witnessing the weird spectacle of a Tory government seeking to defend the right to use state aid to support industry because of the fetish of sovereignty. While we were absorbing that nonsense we learned that their idea of independence is to break international law, even agreements they have themselves made. Don't ask me what the Conservative party stands for today unless it is the cynical self-serving business of holding onto power.

So what does the Labour Party stand for? Under Corbyn there was an out-of-date version of socialism which he believed could be achieved in one country, contrary to the evidence of the entire 20th century. Under Starmer, they would appear to be the mirror image of the Tories, being in the business of trying to get power.

Certainly he's terrified of taking a strong position on Brexit, as he wants to win back the working class voters who voted for it and then for Johnson to make it happen.

You can't call them socialist or even social democrat if you mean the creed of Tony Crosland and Roy Jenkins. Their winning strategy is to attack the incompetence of the government on Covid-19 without a clear commitment to an alternative. Essentially politics has descended into an argument about management – "we could run things better than you". Not a great claim given the current crowd of pirates pretending to be in control. If I had a cat, he'd run things better. Must get one.

Are we condemned therefore to accept that politics is just a rough and tumble in which the best liars take over from those unfortunate enough to be in office when things go wrong? Is that all democracy can offer? There was a time when you could challenge people who dismissed politics as a waste of time and politicians as self-serving liars. With the current administration that has become harder as they live down to the popular opinion of the trade.

Liberal Democrats will not prosper if our policies amount to saying that we would run things better. Even if people listen, they probably won't believe it.

When Ed Davey squandered the only guaranteed media moment he'll have for ages, his leadership

acceptance speech, he said we would smell the coffee and go around listening to people and show them that we share their values. The Today programme picked up on that, pointing out that lots of people voted for Brexit and for Johnson and could Ed really say we share their values. Certainly not, and we shouldn't be afraid to say so.

Charles Moore arguing with his more liberal brother in the pages of Prospect declared that liberalism is not teleological.

In the new pamphlet 'The Generous Society - creating the future that liberals want' (see page XX) the author makes the same point saying "... liberalism has no natural endpoint". Liberals celebrate and value diversity (in all aspects not just ethnic) and complexity.

I once said Liberalism accepts incommensurability. Can't see that on a Focus Leaflet, I admit.

Our core belief in individual liberty is not an empty idea. It includes the freedom to be different, not to be oppressed by conformity. Read that somewhere. This is where we are fundamentally different from Labour and Tories who have a very narrow view of normality and want society to conform to their prejudices.

None of this means that Liberalism is just a wishy-washy, ever-so-tolerant centrist sort of weltanschauung, but if we want people to know what it is we have to agree among ourselves and we have to tell them.

So, listening is not bad but is it any kind of recipe for victory? What a strange society where politicians listening is considered a novelty and a strategy! Let us argue among ourselves by all means but not just about the detail of Land Value Taxation or Universal Basic Income.

“Are we condemned therefore to accept that politics is just a rough and tumble in which the best liars take over from those unfortunate enough to be in office when things go wrong?”

COMMON TESTS

Let us try to clarify what it is that unites us all from Social Liberal Forum to Liberal Reform and all points in between. When we debate and develop new policy let us have a common set of tests to judge it by, to measure whether it furthers or hinders a Liberal society.

As ever, the forthcoming virtual Federal Conference contains some good ideas (and of course some dotty ones) but could you easily explain on the doorstep what connects them together? Have their proposers asked themselves

if their recommendations stand up to any analysis of Liberal ideology?

Yes, don't be afraid of ideology. We are not rationalists, dogmatists imposing a model on society. No, we are empirical, asking whether each policy serves our fundamental values. Let's get them clear.

A political party should have an ideology, should be burning with ideas, answering not only how to campaign but why vote for us. As the Generous Society pamphlet warns, "... there is no excuse for a political party of any size to have left voters uncertain on its vision".

Now is the time, in the political doldrums of 6%, to do this essential work, to define our vision, to elaborate the strategy for achieving it and then to proclaim it far and wide. Listening will not be enough.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

GENEROUS GESTURE

Julian Huppert explains the origin of The Generous Society. Tom King's new booklet on the meaning of liberal values

“Our vision is to see individual freedom, human diversity and ingenuity, and natural beauty flourish and advance within a generous and free society.”

Liberalism is a powerful political philosophy, and has been responsible for many positive developments in the UK and around the world. From human rights principles and equalities movements to Britain's NHS, liberals have been essential.

However, liberalism is under threat, in the UK and around the world. In the US we've seen how much damage even just four (hopefully) years of populism can do. Many European countries have growing far right parties, with totalitarianism increasingly prevalent and powerful in countries like Hungary, Belarus, China and Russia.

HUGE BLOW

Britain has been far from immune. Brexit was a huge blow for liberal values, not just because of the outcome – it's possible to be liberally minded and not support EU membership – but because of the way the referendum was conducted, and the way the aftermath has been handled. Crony government, the demise of civil service independence, and threats to the fundamental concept of the rule of law are utterly inimical to liberal values.

The Liberal Democrats, inheritors to a long line of staunch Liberals, are far less relevant to political debate than many of us would want. There is literally no-one alive in Britain who lived during the last majority Liberal government, and while there were many positives and negatives about the recent Coalition, it is hard to argue that the Lib Dems are on the verge of Government – and certainly not majority government, or even playing the leading role in a government.

There are many reasons for this transition since the heady days of the 1906 landslide, and many contributory factors. But the fact remains that liberalism as a philosophy is not as strong as we need it to be.

The word 'liberal' – at least as used in modern politics – has a strong case for being the most mistreated in the English language. It is casually strewn throughout discussion of politicians, activists and media figures from all parties and none.

Most egregiously, it is often forced into use as an adjective attempting to amend and soften nouns that are its natural opposite, in unwieldy formulations like 'liberal conservatism' or 'liberal socialism'.

Too often, liberalism can risk getting painted into

defining itself by comparison to other views – “Unlike Conservatives we will ... unlike Labour, we will ...” – rather than projecting its own clear vision. Or we can find ourselves being defined by short-term issues, rather than setting out the fundamentals. We are both staunch pro-Europeans, but because we are liberals, rather than because Europe is automatically the right solution.

Over lockdown, a small informal group of us assembled, to discuss what needed to be done to try to change this. There was much that we could have sought to tackle, some of which is being addressed by others in and out of the Lib Dems.

But what we ended up with was a sense that there needed to be a stronger, clear sense of vision, and what

liberalism could offer in today's world. The outcome of that is the booklet *The Generous Society: Creating the future that liberals want* – available for download from <https://generoussociety.com>

We were inspired by documents of the past that have shaken thinking and had a legacy. The Ventotene Manifesto of 1941, *For a Free and United Europe*. A Draft Manifesto, that played a driving force in the formation of the European Union.

The unservile state'(1957)

by George Watson, Jo Grimond and others, did so much to reinvigorate liberal ideas in the dark days of the 1950s and Det Kreative Danmark (The Creative Denmark) by our sister party Radikale did so much to reinvigorate them. And, of course, the still-powerful beginning of the preamble to the Lib Dem constitution.

The Generous Society is a vision document. It does not contain policy proposals or a series of deliverable legislative ideas. There's no timeline for implementation, or detailed costings.

If all that was needed for political control was to have the most detailed, best thought through policies, we would have seen majority Lib Dem Governments for decades. That was not the gap we identified.

VISION AND OPTIMISM

Instead, it seeks to capture the vision and optimism of liberalism, to excite people about what we can do together for society as liberals. It considers what is most needed in four realms.

In the personal realm, we call for a society where no one needs to fight for extra support or protection just to be themselves. In the political realm, we need a society where everyone has a voice and a stake, and where power flows upwards only where this meets our needs efficiently and fairly.

*“The word ‘liberal’
– at least as used in
modern politics – has a
strong case for being the
most mistreated in the
English language”*

In the social realm we want to see people free to develop themselves in the manner they choose. We believe in a more equal society – both in terms of opportunity and outcome – but we also believe in the ingenuity of humans to define their own happiness and seek it, regardless of what that may look like to others. In the global realm, we argue that liberals are committed internationalists; believers in free movement of goods, services, and people.

We then identify ten fundamental freedoms, that are essential to deliver our goals. Structured by the beautiful words of the Lib Dem preamble, which calls for a “society in which no one is enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity”, we group them under those headings, and develop what they mean and what the consequences would be of each of them.

FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS TO LIBERATE BRITAIN

Liberated from... poverty

- Freedom to create and earn
- Freedom to shape your surroundings
- Freedom to move, live and love
- Freedom to be generous

Liberated from... ignorance

- Freedom to learn and grow
- Freedom to specialise and adapt
- Freedom to access good information

Liberated from... conformity

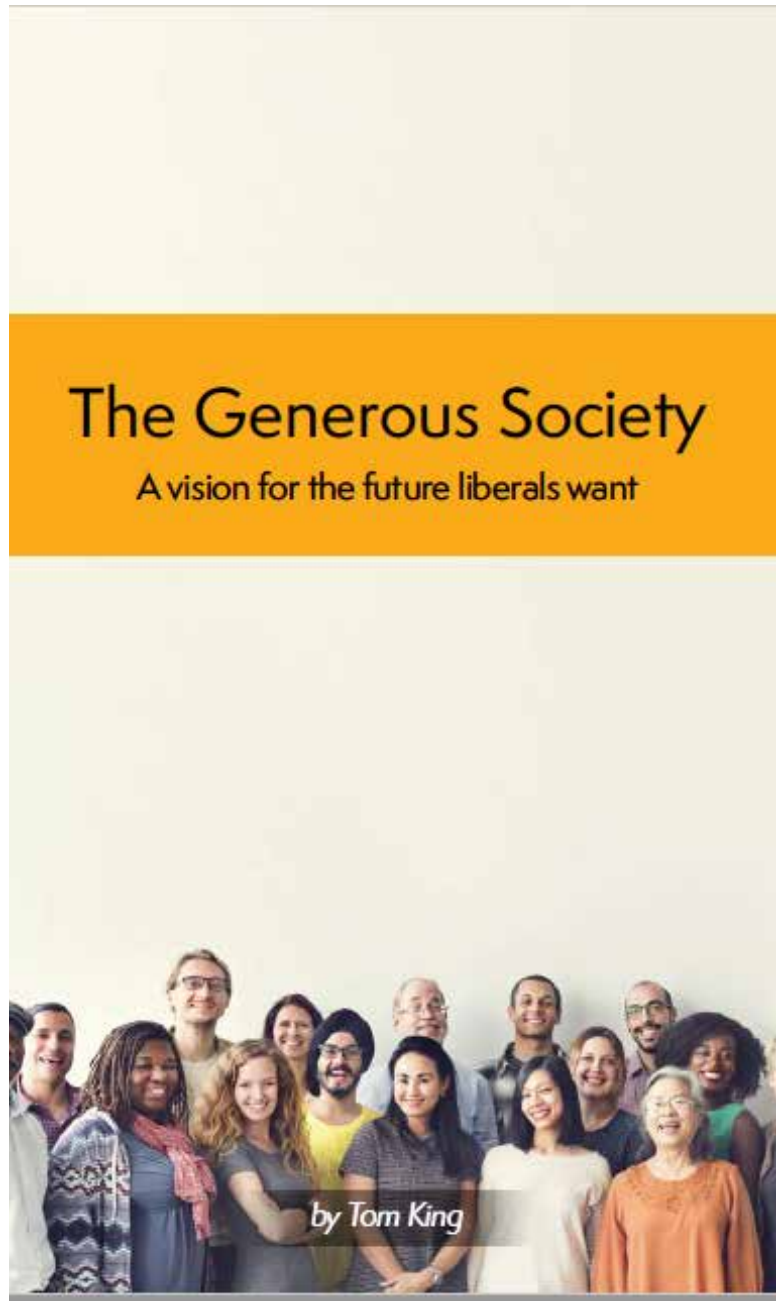
- Freedom from economic demands and anxiety
- Freedom from state and private intrusion
- Freedom to express yourself fully

In British politics, you do not have to be a Liberal Democrat to be a liberal, and to espouse liberal values. We hope that The Generous Society will inspire liberals in all parties, and those who do not identify with any political party. We hope that they will all be enthused and feel strengthened in their efforts. As a result, we hope that liberalism will be reinvigorated in the UK, and that we can therefore build that generous society we envisage.

We hope you read the booklet and do find it exciting, and tell others about it. We of course expect disagreement and criticism – what kind of liberals would we be if not!

There's a fringe event at conference – Friday 27 September, at 5 pm, and we hope you can join us there to discuss it.

The Generous Society, by Tom King: <https://generoussociety.com>



Julian Huppert was Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge 2010-15

WILL RUSSIA RESCUE TRUMP AGAIN

Tell a big lie often enough and people will believe it; that is presidential politics in the age of Trump, says Martha Elliott

Donald Trump's playbook in this presidential election is like a quote from Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*: "It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth...arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honour, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice." All Trump needs to do is say something and, to some Americans, it becomes truth. He seems to possess the magic power to change reality. It's like Hitler's Big Lie - the bigger the untruth, the more likely the public will believe it.

In the last 30 years, American presidential conventions became little more than gaudy coronations. Everyone knew who would be nominated and each party tried to outdo the other in making their four-day event a spectacle. This year the outcome was still predictable, but the global pandemic made the traditional love-fests of the two parties impossible.

The Democrats were resigned to a virtual event early on. The site of the 'convention' in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was merely the production centre for pre-recorded or Zoom speeches from other locations.

When the governor of North Carolina refused to allow the Republicans to hold the convention without Covid-19 precautions, Trump tried to move the rally to Florida. Trump wanted a big rally, cheering him on and Florida's Republican governor was willing to allow delegates to be packed into a crowded venue—that is until Florida became a hotspot of the pandemic.

So the Republican convention was pared down, but was a retelling of "alternate facts," as Trump advisor Kellyanne Conway has described their Big Lies. During the first three nights we were told - in large part from Melania and the four oldest Trump children - that Trump was an empathic, kind, and intelligent person.

That would have meant you had been unable or unwilling to hear any of his divisive and racist demagoguery and Tweets that has pitted Americas against each other - even with fighting in the streets.

No one mentioned that Black Lives Matter, nor names such as George Floyd or Breonna Taylor or any of the other African-Americans who have died by brutal police tactics such as a choke hold to the neck or a no-knock raid, guns blaring. In contrast Trump praised police officers as overwhelmingly noble and courageous - Blue Lives Matter.

BED COVERS

If you'd been hiding under your bed covers with no television, radio, or newspapers for the last three and a half years, you might believe that Trump handled the Covid-19 crisis with expert skill, that the economy was the greatest in the history of the world, and that

American foreign policy was accomplishing all that Trump had promised.

There was no mention of the six million people who had contracted the virus - one quarter of the cases in the world - nor of the 180,000 Americans who had succumbed to the disease.

You might even think that the disease had disappeared, as Trump had predicted, because enthusiastic Republicans crowded together on the lawn of the White House with few masks as Trump gave his 70 minute acceptance speech. Even Trump was bereft of energy by the end of his long-winded fiction. By then many viewers had turned off their televisions. It must have enraged him that more people watched Biden's speech than his.

In his speech, Trump derided Biden 41 times. He characterised Biden as is a Trojan horse who will forever change America into a socialist state. He charged that under a Biden presidency, the suburbs will disappear (meaning minorities and crime will move in).

"If Joe Biden doesn't have the strength to stand up to wild-eyed Marxists like Bernie Sanders and his fellow radicals, and there are many, there are many, many, we see them all the time, it's incredible, actually, then how is he ever going to stand up for you? He's not." Trump said he had "done nothing but fight for you." He claimed that he had done what no one thought he could: "I kept my promise."

I'm not sure what promise he meant other than he's been fairly successfully prohibiting immigrants from coming into the country by separating children from their parents and putting them into cages.

Trump hasn't even built much of the wall to separate the US from Mexico - and Mexico certainly didn't pay for what has been built. American taxpayers have. He claimed that he created the greatest economy the world has ever known, but fails to mention that Obama really deserves the credit for what was a booming economy before the pandemic.

If you were gullible enough to believe that Trump has done a good job handling the pandemic, journalist Bob Woodward's just released taped recordings of Trump from February and March interviews revealed that the president knew the seriousness of the virus while he was telling Americans it was nothing more than a flu, a Democratic hoax.

Covid-19 curtailed many of the pomp and circumstance and silliness of the usual conventions, but the Republicans did what they could, culminating in a fireworks display with the Washington Monument as a backdrop.

The Democrats also had a fireworks display but it was done in a drive-in. Invited guests were allowed to watch big screens to hear Biden's acceptance speech

and watch the fireworks from their cars. Only Biden and vice-presidential candidate Kamala Harris and their spouses were outside of cars, and they were all wearing masks.

In contrast, the Democratic Convention (which was held the week before the Republican convention) was mostly virtual, consisting of Zoom calls and pre-recorded short speeches from former presidents, former Democratic candidates for president, average Americans and even Republicans such as former secretary of state Colin Powell.

The votes for nomination of the president and vice president came from 50 delegates who were streaming live from each of their states, touting some of the beauty or famous products of the regions. Instead of three or four keynote speakers, there were 17 who gave shorter speeches.

The first night (my favourite) was culminated by a speech from Michelle Obama, who wore a necklace that said "V O T E". It was a speech only she could have given, political but not partisan.

She reminded us that our country has a strong moral fibre and pleaded that we return to those basic values, not just by talking the talk, but by taking action. She reminded us that we must vote to correct everything that is wrong with the Trump administration.

In order to save our democracy, we have to have empathy for one another and unite. "And I know that regardless of our race, age, religion or politics, when we close out the noise and fear and truly open our hearts, we know that what's going on in this country is just not right. This is not who we want to be."

Perhaps the high point of her heart-to-heart with America, a modern-day 'fireside chat', was when she emotionally declared: "Let me be as honest and clear as I possibly can. Donald Trump is the wrong president for our country. He has had more than enough time to prove that he can do the job, but he is clearly in over his head. He cannot meet this moment. He simply cannot be who we need him to be for us."

And mimicking and mocking Trump's insensitive comment about the pandemic, she said, "It is what it is."

The final night of the convention was topped with Biden's acceptance speech, perhaps the best speech of his career. He was no "sleepy Joe," as Trump likes to call him. He began with a quote from civil rights advocate Ella Baker. "Give people light and they will find a way." He said those were the words for our time. "The current president has cloaked America in darkness for much too long. Too much darkness for much too long. Too much anger. Too much fear. Too much division."

Biden pledged to draw the best out of us, not the worst. He said we will choose "hope over fear, facts over fiction, fairness over privilege."

He attacked Trump - while never mentioning his name - for his ineptitude at handling the pandemic and failure to stop the systemic racism in the country that came to a head with the murder of George Floyd by the knee of a policeman. He said, "Winning is

"Trump's law and order strategy is a page from Richard Nixon's playbook, and he has also made it clear that he's not afraid of using Nixon-type dirty tricks"

for the generous among us, not just the privileged few at the top. Winning it for those communities who have known the injustice of the "knee on the neck".

To Biden, this a life-changing election. "Character is on the ballot. Compassion is on the ballot. Decency, science, democracy. They are all on the ballot." He said that the president "takes no responsibility, refuses to lead, blames others, cosies up to dictators, and fans the flames

of hate and division." Trump has failed to do the most important job of a president - protect Americans, and "that is unforgivable."

Biden also made a lot of promises. A New Deal type programme of infrastructure projects that will include training for the new types of jobs created by clean energy, and better education for all Americans.

He'll strengthen the Affordable Care Act, not try to destroy it. He'll fight climate change. He'll provide child care and elder care. He'll protect social security, not destroy it. And he'll pay for all of these proposals by rolling back the massive tax cuts that have crippled the economy and created the greatest national debt in history.

Summing up, he said, "May history be able to say that the end of the chapter of American darkness began here tonight as love and hope and light joined in the battle for the soul of the nation."

Traditionally, candidates receive a boost in their ratings following the conventions, but that didn't happen this year. Trump got a 0.7% boost if you average the polls. Clearly, Trump's Covid-19 strategies or economic claims haven't given him support. And his handling of racial unrest was not giving him any traction.

Biden has consistently been leading Trump by double digits, and is ahead in the crucial swing states that handed Trump the presidency in 2016. So Trump's new strategy has been to call himself the law and order president. That backfired the first time he sent in federal officials in Portland, Oregon, increasing the violence. Then federal officers moved peaceful protestors near the White House so that Trump could walk to St. John's Episcopal Church for a photo-op of him awkwardly holding a Bible. That also backfired. But so far, he's clung to the law and order strategy and his supporters have been confronting the Black Lives Matter protestors, causing even more violence and destruction.

So what will the next two months of this presidential race be like in the age of Covid? The conventions were delayed for several months because of the pandemic, but in the interim, Trump tried to hold two of his classic rallies.

EGO-BOOSTING

The first, in Oklahoma, was an embarrassment because the stadium was half full. The second in Arizona was packed with unmasked university students. Both led to rises in Covid cases and so his ego-boosting type of rallies were put on hold. But the

Republican convention was barely over when Trump took to the stump again speaking before crowds of unmasked people wearing red Make America Great Again hats. Biden has been holding virtual news conferences from his home in Delaware. But after Trump continually criticised him for hiding in the basement of his house, Biden has



traveled to small events all with masks and with social distancing to speak to groups around the country.

Trump's law and order strategy is a page from Richard Nixon's playbook, and he has also made it clear that he's not afraid of using Nixon-type dirty tricks. For months, he's been denigrating the US Postal Service (created in the US Constitution) and threatening to defund it because, he says, it's losing money.

In the meantime, postmaster general Louis DeJoy began dismantling mail-sorting machines all over the country, took away blue postal boxes, and eliminated overtime.

Why? DeJoy says it is part of a plan that pre-dates him and has nothing to do with the election. Very few Americans believe that. It's an attempt to prevent mail-in votes. Trump says mail-in voting will lead to fraud - even though that's how he votes. He predicts that the only way he'll lose the election is if it's rigged. He also says if everyone votes by mail, no Republicans will be elected.

But in the middle of a pandemic, the only safe way to vote is by mailing in a ballot. Since most states are making it easy to request a mail in ballot, Trump is suggesting that people should vote twice, once by mail and once in person. Even suggesting to vote more than once is a felony, but attorney-general Barr has tried to justify Trump's suggestions by saying he was only telling voters to go to the polls to make sure their mail in votes were received.

Trump has been so heavily criticised for mishandling the pandemic that he is now attempting to win by inoculation. He claims that his "warp speed" vaccine might be available before the election, and told governors to be ready for a Covid vaccine by 1

November.

Many scientists such as infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, say this is unrealistic. Perhaps he plans on buying the vaccine from his pal Putin because the major pharmaceutical companies have joined forces and vowed that they will not release any vaccine that has not been proven safe and effective.

LYING BRAGGADOCIO

A majority of Americans see this pre-election vaccine promise as little more than his lying braggadocio, an attempt to make people think he is actually doing a good job managing the pandemic. No one is queuing up to get a shot.

So what other dirty tricks can he use? What's left is relying on Russia - or other countries such as Ukraine - to try to interfere with the election. It was clear from Trump's impeachment hearings that the Russians helped elect him and were attempting to reelect him, but he's still denying any interference.

Last week, the White House announced that the heads of national intelligence would no longer be giving in person updates on foreign election interference to Congress. Instead they will send a written report, probably edited by the White House. Why? Perhaps Russian interference is worse than 2016.

Brian Murphy, a whistleblower from the Department of Homeland Security, has charged that in May he was told by the acting head of intelligence in the agency to stop providing reports on Russian interference or the danger of White Supremacists because it would make the president look bad and because it would jeopardise national security.

Murphy was told to shift his focus from Russia to China and Iran. This is being investigated by the

House Intelligence committee. Since Homeland Security works with states and local government to ensure that voting machines are not being hacked, Murphy's disclosure makes me wonder if Trump wants people to vote in person rather than use paper mail in votes because many electronic machines have no paper trail. How can you prove hacking without a paper trail to compare the results?

We didn't know about Russian interference in the 2016 election until it was over because Mitch McConnell and other Republican leaders told President Obama not to release the information because it might skew the election. Now we know it's happening again, but with the election less than two months away, there is little Congress can do.

My biggest fear is that Trump will dispute his loss, which seems inevitable given the fact that he trails so far behind in the polls, and refuse to step down even though the constitution says his term is over on 20 January. Then what? Will he just declare that he won and everyone will just shrug and allow him to stay in the White House?

THINK FIRST-PAST-THE-POST IS BAD?

Here Martha Elliott explains the working of the US Electoral College

Many people—including Americans—wonder how Hillary Clinton got 3 million more votes than Donald Trump and yet still lost the 2016 election. The answer is the antiquated system by which Americans elect a president called the Electoral College.

During the Constitutional Convention in 1787, one of the most highly debated issues other than slavery was how the president would be chosen. The brilliance of the American system was creating three co-equal branches of government: the legislature or Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court.

Each branch of government needed to defend itself from the other two so each was given a 'check'. For instance, the President can veto legislation passed by Congress, but the Congress can override his veto with a two-thirds vote of both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Ultimately the Supreme Court can declare the legislation unconstitutional. Thus, the legislative branch could not choose the President because he (or someday she) might be little more than a pawn of Congress.

Very few people besides Benjamin Franklin wanted the people to elect the president. Even though only white men who owned property could vote, the founders did not want the masses to vote directly for president. It was thought that they would not have knowledge of who would be the most qualified.

Political parties or factions did not exist and were considered dangerous - although the ratification of the constitution created two parties: the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. So it was decided that state legislatures should send delegates to an Electoral

College who would consider several nominees and choose the most qualified to serve.

There was another sticking point in the method - the unequal population of states. The Great Compromise created two houses in Congress, one based on population and in the upper house each state would have two senators. The small states were guaranteed at least one representative in the house. This compromise appeared to be the logical way to divide up electors for president. So, the number of electors given to each state was equal to its number of representatives in the House plus its two senators. The number of representatives was determined by census every 10 years. The smallest state's population usually was the determining factor for one representative. So if the smallest had 1,000 people, the larger states would be divided up in proportion. A state with 5,000 people got five representatives, and the smaller state would have three votes in the electoral college and the state with five representatives got seven.

Although lopsided in favour of small states, this system seemed to work until the population grew and the number of states increased. The number of representatives in the house became unwieldy and in 1929, Congress capped their number at 435. The power of the smaller states began to increase exponentially because they could never have fewer than three votes.

Wyoming that has a population of just under 550,000; California has a population of 41 million. Yet because of the cap, it has 53 representatives. So in the Electoral College, Wyoming gets three votes and California gets 55. Each Wyoming elector represents about 183,000 people and each from California 745,455 people.

Only Maine and Nebraska apportion their electors according to the votes. In Maine, the winner in each of the two congressional districts each gets one electoral vote. The winner of the whole state gets two. It's not perfect, but better than the winner take all system. Donald Trump received all the electoral votes from Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania even though he won each state by less than one per cent.

Every time someone wins the electoral college, but not the popular vote, such as 2016 and 2000, there are calls for abolishing the system, but that would take an amendment to the constitution which would require ratification by 75% of the states. The small states would lose power and so it would probably never pass.

This is why Donald Trump won - and perhaps could win again if he was able to get 270 electoral votes. It's what keeps a lot of Democrats, such as me, awake at night.

Martha Elliott has been a journalist for 40 years. She is writing a book on conscientious objectors in WWII. She also works for Democrats running for office in Maine and was on the board of Democratic Women of Santa Barbara County, California for nearly a decade

WHO WON THE IRAQ WAR?

Turns out it was Iran as American errors left the country at the mercy of their militias and a revived IS, says Rebecca Tinsley

When visiting northern Iraq, my Kurdish hosts took me to a parched field where Darius III of Persia was defeated by Alexander the Great in 331 BC in the battle of Gaugemela.

My hosts pointed out that Iraq is still a chessboard where the great powers slug it out, with no regard for the civilian population. The Greeks may no longer be a threat, but the imperial Persians are now the Iranians, the expansionist Ottomans are the Turks, and the rampaging Mongols are the Chinese.

No one I interviewed - Kurds, Iraqis, Yezidis, Christian or Muslim – thought America and its allies had prevailed in the latest Mesopotamian episode, which began with the 2003 invasion.

Turkey is making a financial killing from the shattered northern Iraqi economy; China is developing the oil fields; and Iran controls Baghdad politics, the southern economy, and sundry armed groups.

In his bid to win re-election, Donald Trump has announced that US troop numbers in the region will fall from 5,000 to 3,500 (a move that will delight America's enemy, Iran). As America retreats, harried by Iran-sponsored militia lobbying missiles into their bases, a resurgent Islamic State is filling the vacuum. What has this escapade cost, and who has benefited?

The US lost 8,000 soldiers and military contractors. According to the Department of Defense, 52,000 were wounded, and one in four soldiers came home with health problems. Nobel-prize winning economist Joseph Stiglitz calculates the war will cost \$3 tn, including the long-term care of veterans.

A former Bush administration official, interviewed for this article, said that when he researched how much taxpayers' money was stolen or distributed to Iraqi war lords, he was warned to drop the investigation. He did, moving hastily to the private sector.

MILLIONS DISAPPEARED

An Iraqi who shifted pallets of \$100 bills around for the US army to distribute to local power brokers, told me: "I have no idea what happened, but millions of dollars disappeared from every shipment. I was afraid I'd get blamed. But no one in authority seemed to care."

Britain lost 179 service personnel. It is hard to find an accurate figure for how many Britons were injured, but it is believed that hundreds returned with untreated traumatic brain injuries. The Ministry of Defence put the financial cost of the Iraq war 2003-09 at £8.4bn. There are also reputational costs, following a problematic performance in Basra.

Brown University estimates 165,000 Iraqi civilians had been killed by 2016, and four times this number died from side effects like malnutrition, the collapse of health services and depleted uranium. The US Army War College's two-volume review, *The US Army in the Iraq War*, estimates half a million Iraqis died.

What was once a middle-income country, "the envy of the Arab world," as I was repeatedly told, is now poor, with unreliable utilities and dismal infrastructure.

According to a Kurdish businessman: "Saddam killed several of my relatives in the Anfal [in which 182,000 Kurds were murdered], but I must admit, he ran the country efficiently. His family was bent, but he wouldn't accept general corruption. If a contractor was cheating, he would be publicly buried alive as a warning. Saddam wouldn't have tolerated this bunch.", referring to the current elite.

"And projects were built to a high standard, then. No one dared mess up. Now, they award contracts to Turks – for a kickback – and the Turks don't care if the roads are crumbling next week."

Thanks to the collapse of local manufacturing since the invasion, most goods in stores are Turkish. Mostly one-sided Turkish-Iraqi trade was \$15.8bn in 2019.

During a fateful phone conversation in December



2018, President Erdogan of Turkey persuaded Donald Trump to withdraw US troops from the region. Turkey promptly took Afrin, a Kurdish city in northern Syria, where Amnesty reports Turkish troops and their proxies ethnically cleansed the area of our allies, the Kurds, through harassment, torture and murder. Yezidis say Afrin is an example of what awaits them if they return home to Turkish-occupied areas.

The Turkish air force has stepped up its raids on PKK (the Kurdish Workers' Party) camps in the remote mountains of northern Iraq, bombing 75 kms inside Iraq. I visited a few days after a raid, and heard locals complain that Iraqi officials are so beholden to Turkey that they hardly mention the hundreds of Iraqi civilians killed and injured during these attacks.

In 2018 alone, one village, Amedi, endured 98 raids, as the Turks attempted to destroy PKK camps that locals claim are nowhere near them. In August this year, when the Turks mistakenly killed two senior Iraqi border officials, Baghdad finally complained to Ankara.

Trump's announcement was also a green light for Operation Claw-Eagle, during which Turkish ground forces advanced 15 km inside the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government area. They now have 50 deployment sites within Iraq.

Turkey controls the Tigris and Euphrates, regularly ignoring the protocols governing their Ilisu dam. Put bluntly, Turkey could destroy Iraqi agriculture if it chose.

There are fears that Erdogan, wishing to distract his voters from the faltering Turkish economy, will reclaim "the lost homeland" of Mosul and Kirkuk (the contested oil producing area of Iraqi Kurdistan). So much for Iraqi sovereignty.

Iran's hegemony has its roots in the decision of Paul Bremer, who led the Coalition Provisional Authority after the invasion, to fire Baath Party members, disbanding the Iraqi army where 80% of the officer class was Sunni.

Shia, who make up two thirds of the population, had been marginalised by Saddam; they seized the chance to take power, money and influence, supported by their co-religionists in Iran. The decision also laid the ground for Islamic State to recruit the disillusioned and unemployed Sunni former military officers sacked by Bremer.

In two books about her years in the region, the former British diplomat Emma Sky paints a dismal picture of how Washington handed Iraq to Tehran. America oversaw a

"Thanks to naïve, arrogant or uninterested Bush and Obama officials, Iran has a stranglehold on the Iraqi state"

system that disenfranchised Iraq's Sunni minority, allowing Iran to capture Iraq's Shia parties. Iran-sponsored politicians subsequently prevented the establishment of an effective and stable government in Baghdad. Thanks to naïve, arrogant or uninterested Bush and Obama officials, Iran has a stranglehold on the Iraqi state, controlling the economy and security in the southern part of the country.

Vice President Biden dismissively compared the Shia-Sunni divide to the sectarian conflicts in his ancestral home in Ireland. Instead of pushing the Shia-dominated government to allow the beleaguered and marginalised Sunnis a stake in the future, he was said (by Emma Sky, who witnessed it) to have acquiesced to the Shia hardmen. This had consequences: the UN and other international agencies follow Baghdad's advice on where to direct reconstruction aid. It has largely gone to Shia areas, fuelling Sunni grievance.

Tehran also controls several powerful paramilitary groups (Kataeb Hezbollah, the Allah Brigades, the al-Nujaba Movement, al-Khorasani Brigades). The Iran-backed militias killed hundreds of protesters last autumn, when Shia southern Iraqis demonstrated against corruption. Recently, they have been assassinating civil society leaders, including Shia. They also intimidate and kill local Sunni, attacking US forces and interests.

From its foothold in Iraq, Iran has established itself in Syria, keeping Assad in power and putting bases along the border with Israel and Lebanon, where its agents, Hezbollah, have contributed to the destruction of the nation, to put it mildly.

Tehran's influence is less overt since a US drone strike on Baghdad in January which killed Major-General Soleimani of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Having lost their most influential figure, Iranian



officials claim they are “leaving Iraqi politics to the Iraqis.” Their militias’ heavy-handed behaviour also contributed to a souring in relations with Shia parties.

But it is equally likely that US sanctions on Iran, the drop in the oil price, and the closure of the border due to the pandemic have prompted Tehran to take a more subtle approach to its neighbour, for the time being, anyway.

SHAVED BEARDS

When Trump obediently followed Erdogan’s instructions, 3,000 Islamic State fighters emerged from hiding in plain sight, having shaved off their beards in 2017. They are once more intimidating officials, extorting money, and smuggling weapons, livestock and medicines, earning the group an estimated \$100,000 a day.

The group conducts 20 attacks a month against Iraqi security forces, temporarily taking over towns. No one I spoke to thinks the US-trained Iraqi forces will be any more successful now than they were in 2014, when 60,000 Iraqi army and police ran away from 1,500 ISIS fighters at Mosul. In the words of the US Army War College, this policy has incubated the most virulent terrorist franchise ever.

Iraq’s prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, has urged Christians in exile to return, acknowledging their presence in the region for two thousand years. Their numbers have decline by 90%, but why would they return? The same goes for the Yezidis: 2,800 Yezidi women remain in slavery, held by Arab families in the region. The Iraqi government has made little effort to find them, and will not prosecute captured ISIS members for the crime of genocide.

If Trump remains in the White House, Erdogan will be unchallenged. Nor will Iran’s expansionism be tempered by diplomatic overtures such as reducing sanctions or reviving the nuclear arms deal. A Biden presidency might be preoccupied with matters closer to home.



However, Britain has influence within the UN, NATO and the G7: it should build partnerships with other nations to push the Iraqi government to ensure all ethnic and religious groups have a stake in Iraq’s future. Iraq must also enact laws criminalising genocide and prosecute members of Islamic State accordingly. And Liberal Democrats must face the fact that military operations against ISIS are necessary.

Islamic State’s UK recruits must be prosecuted according to UK law. I interviewed Yezidi survivors who described the enthusiasm with which European ISIS women tortured, abused, and killed their Yezidi slaves. Let’s not fall for sentimental nonsense about women being less bloodthirsty than men, or lacking agency. They were recruited with online videos that made it clear why they were going to the region.

Pouring aid into Iraq is not the answer, since big projects feed the perception of corruption, says Frances Brown of the Carnegie Fund. Rather, we must address the community’s feeling of injustice.

Let the final word go to the US Army War College: the only victor was “an emboldened and expansionist Iran.”

Rebecca Tinsley is founder of the human rights group Waging Peace

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY

China and Iran are drawing closer with potentially serious global consequences, says Jonathan Fryer

Winston Churchill once famously said: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Actually, this was a riff on an ancient Arab proverb and it has rung true throughout the ages. The latest example is the way that Iran has turned to China as a key ally in its stand-off with the United States.

Given that a sort of Cold War Mark II is developing between Washington and Beijing, the new Beijing-Tehran axis will have growing global as well as regional consequences.

From China's point of view, Iran is strategically important as a major piece in the jigsaw that is the Belt and Road Initiative – China's global infrastructure development strategy embracing 70 countries and international organisations. This involves massive Chinese investment in return for greater connectivity, expanding the market for Chinese goods and gaining access to resources.

Iran's principal resource is oil, for which China has an insatiable appetite being heavily dependent on hydrocarbon imports. Under a planned 25-year strategic partnership agreement that is due to be ratified by Iran's parliament later this year, Iran will guarantee a steady supply of oil at an advantageous price. In return, China will invest heavily in modernising Iran's creaking oil industry infrastructure and associated industrial zones.

This flies in the face of the Trump administration's attempts to exert “maximum pressure” on Iran through sanctions, especially in the energy sector. But Beijing could not care less.

Moreover, China has said it will help Iran develop its nuclear energy capacity, too. And that is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The total value of the 25-year deal is estimated at \$400bn and will include making Iran's railway network, roads and ports fit for the 21st century.

Three free trade zones are planned and the Makran coast of Iranian Baluchistan is going to have a complete makeover, including the creation of new tourist resorts. Outside of periods with Covid-19 restrictions, the Chinese are now the world's most enthusiastic tourists, and Iran is an attractive terra incognita for them.

What will really concern Washington and some of its European allies is that China will become a major military partner of Iran as well. Tehran already has close military ties with Russia, especially because of their joint involvement in propping up Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

But the military link with China is likely to become far more significant and will be largely based at sea. China already has the world's largest navy, is flexing its nautical muscles not just in the South China Sea but in the wider Asia-Pacific region. The Indian Ocean could become its new frontier.

This may all seem strange given that China and Iran have ideologically opposed political systems, despite both being authoritarian: communism on the one hand, theocracy on the other.

But both governments seem willing to put that unfortunate fact to one side. This even extends to the way that the Iranian authorities have refused to condemn China's human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Indeed, some Iranian commentators have even praised the Chinese for stamping on what they describe as the Saudi Wahhabi Sunni takfiri brand of Islamic fundamentalism that has been spreading in central Asia. Most Iranians, of course, are Shia.

Another motive for the Iranians cuddling up to the Chinese is that they feel bitterly let down by Europe. The Permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany were the guarantors of the 2015 Iran nuclear Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and after President Trump withdrew in 2018 Iran looked to the EU to do more, in terms of investment and trade and political support, to lessen the impact of US sanctions.

Though the EU and Britain have remained steadfast in their determination to try to keep the JCPOA alive nonetheless many European companies and financial institutions have been wary of provoking American retaliation by dealing with Iran. In contrast, China apparently has no qualms.

This does not mean that all Iranians are thrilled at the prospect of the new strategic alliance with China. The Tehran Bazaar – historically a politically important player in the country's fortunes – is worried about yet more Chinese goods flooding the market and undercutting local produce.

Economically, Iran is in poor shape, not just because of US pressure but also because of government mismanagement. The population is overwhelmingly young, grew up after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and is worried by a lack of sufficient jobs and low wages.

Then there is coronavirus. Though Iran has not followed Donald Trump's practice of referring to it as the “Chinese virus”, many Iranians do blame close links with China for the spread of the pandemic. Officially, there have been about 380,000 infections in Iran and approximately 22,000 deaths, though some opposition sources suggest the figure may be significantly higher. This has certainly had a significant impact on national morale and the prospect of new golden dawn in partnership with China may not easily dispel that.

Jonathan Fryer is a writer and broadcaster on the Middle East and North Africa and chair of the Liberal Democrats' Federal International Relations Committee.

HERE'S YOUR FIRST TASK ED

What, besides making coffee, is the one key thing Ed Davey should do as the new Lib Dem leader. Liberator contacted a range of readers, this is what they had to say.

ALAN SHERWELL, FORMER CHAIR, FEDERAL CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Ed Davey should:

- * Give as many press/PR opportunities as possible to Layla Moran and Christine Jardine, who are much better at them than him.
- * Amplify his comments on EU membership to make it clear that re-join is medium term aim but recognise that nothing can happen before next general election and a secure majority for it needs to be built first.
- * Put our belief in the closest possible relationship with EU up front by campaigning on specific issues where the benefits are obvious to most folk. For example rights of EU citizens living here and vice versa; Erasmus; mutual recognition of drug licensing; European Arrest Warrant and pet passports.
- * Make our central thrust about poverty elimination and economic fairness. Issues that will be front and centre as a result of Covid-19. Jamie Stone's 'excluded' campaign is a great example and basic income should become the flagship policy. There needs to be detailed explanation of how and why it works but it is the only thing that can.
- * Emphasise morality in foreign policy. Why are we letting China get a foothold in our economy given the persecution of Uighurs and Mongol speakers, Hong Kong and their neo-colonialist activities in Africa?

JOHN HEMMING, MP FOR BIRMINGHAM YARDLEY 2005-15

"Keep listening, both to the voters and also to the party."

NORMAN BAKER, MP FOR LEWES, 1997-2015

"Launch a campaign to get rid of Dominic Cummings."

CHRIS DAVIES, MP FOR LITTLEBOROUGH AND SADDLEWORTH 1995-97 AND MEP FOR NORTH WEST ENGLAND 199-2015 AND 2019-20

"Ladies and gentlemen, I stand by my principles, but if you don't like them I can always change them!" Ed Davey's 'listening exercise' is not intended to reflect such cynicism but his idea that we should no longer be a party that advocates British membership of the EU makes me wonder. I can't support that, and nor will tens of thousands of our members.

"These days I'm a pampered pensioner but my views have changed little since I started campaigning in inner city Liverpool in the 1970s. The Liberals I support want to address inequality and injustice while promoting enterprise, internationalism and the opportunity for every individual to achieve their full potential.

"The principles are all there in the preamble to the party's constitution. As Jo Grimond once wrote, the seas across which we sail may change but we chart our direction with the guidance of the same stars.

"To be politically relevant, even with a parliamentary party that could comfortably fit inside a telephone box (the record is 14 apparently), we have to address real needs.

"There's no shortage of problems, and among our membership no shortage of people with expertise to contribute solutions. We should have the courage to voice the unpalatable means of achieving desirable ends. If that means becoming a think-tank which will be milked by others then so be it.

"Given political realities, for what other purpose do the Liberal Democrats now exist?"

FLICK REA, LIB DEM COUNCILLOR, CAMDEN

I would like Ed to reaffirm his commitment to local government and to safeguard its future. For too long the voice of local government has been ignored and undervalued at the top of the Party but it provides our bedrock, and is the basis for much of our support. I would also like him to fight to ensure its worth is recognised and properly funded by HMG, especially view of all the recent burdens imposed on it by the pandemic!

ROGER HAYES, FORMER LEADER, KINGSTON-UPON-THAMES COUNCIL

“The role of a good manager is to get people to achieve tasks willingly and well. The role of any good, let alone great, leader is to find and hone other leaders all equally committed to the values and philosophy of the cause. In our case Liberalism.

“The Liberalism of the Liberal Democrats requires a fresh and compelling definition for the 2020s. We can never be defined by the stance of others, but our time is surely shaped by them and the environment they create.

“Yes listen, all good leaders spend a lot of time listening, but Ed Davey must, above all else, clearly define what Liberals stand for, why those values are so necessary now, how our values are most suited and more relevant to the challenges we face and demonstrate how they can be turned to the needs and service of all the joyously diverse people across Britain, across Europe and throughout the world and to the lasting benefit of our planet and all the species we share it with.

“This is the one key thing Ed must do now as leader. Just not being the others is our greatest failure.”

SUSAN SIMMONDS, MEMBER, THANET LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

Congratulations Ed, on winning the leadership. The one key thing that I would ask you to do is to promise us that the expertise and experience of the activists within the party will be listened to and acted upon. Don't assume that the best people are outside the party.

It is staggeringly unlikely that the coalition years would still be as difficult as they are if party activists who were shouting out against the bedroom tax and tuition fees had not been ignored. Promise us that never again will LibDem bottoms on the seats of government limousines look more important than integrity and liberal principles.

Put structures in place to keep yourself accountable. Make sure that you have the things in place to act when activists say campaigns are not working, when targeting is clearly out of control and when messaging is falling flat on its face.

Promise us that your leadership will never go into a bunker or a bubble and the voice of the activists and members will not be ignored or drowned out. As the leader of this party, you inherit a legacy; a legacy which exists because of the expertise and energy of activists, campaigners and agents. Please never forget that you were an activist once.

OLIVER FORDER, MEMBER, FEDERAL FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

“Currently, it is difficult for the Lib Dems to have their voice heard in the national media and by the public.

“Consequently Ed Davey needs to define one issue in line with core Lib Dem values on which to concentrate, like Paddy Ashdown and the penny on income tax for education. The two key areas to which the other two parties pay lip service but where they are reluctant to offer radical solutions are the environment and the social care crisis.

“To an extent, we are already associated with the green agenda, so it is more difficult to say anything game changing here. Therefore, my view is that Ed Davey should concentrate on developing a radical policy to address the social care crisis on which a united party will be able to campaign in order to gain media and public attention.

“It is an issue which has great and immediate reach across the nation. Is anybody really happy about our treatment of the ill, the vulnerable and the old?”

“If this is successful, it will re-establish our radical credentials and it should become possible to have other policy proposals heard. This is also in line with many of Ed Davey's statements in the leadership contest.”

GEOFF PAYNE, MEMBER, HACKNEY LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

“We had two good candidates who somehow failed to grasp our moment in history.

The corona virus changes everything. Up until the 1970s we saw a reduction of inequality and an expanded state. Then in the 1980s onwards we had the Thatcher/Reagan neoliberal revolution which shrunk the state and increased inequality. And now?

“A proportionate response would require radical policies. Certainly the Universal Basic Income policy on which we are all apparently all agreed is a good start and would have been very helpful during these current difficult pandemic times. “Investment in regional development is also very important to correct the regional inequalities that led to support for Brexit. The Tories say they are now delivering on that, partly as a reward to those regions that did support Brexit and elected new Tory MPs and partly to make up for lost EU funds, but local government and democratic accountability are missing.

“The danger as we saw with our ‘Revoke’ policy on Brexit at the last general election is that our message will backfire. The mistake we made was that the idea emanated from the Lib Dem bubble where we talk among ourselves and think something is a good idea without considering how our opponents will attack it and might succeed in doing so.

“This is where good leadership is required and I hope that Ed Davey can demonstrate that.”

MARK BLACKBURN, LIB DEM CANDIDATE SOMERTON AND FROME 2017

“Within and without the party, there is a strong and justified impression that Ed represents the centre right rather than the centre left. This may superficially appear attractive in his professed aim of attracting soft Tory voters in constituencies such as his own, he needs to take immediate, robust and sustained efforts to show the party and other potential voters that whatever his objectives close to home, he can genuinely champion a progressive centre left approach nationally.

“Inside the party he needs to do this to stop it haemorrhaging members and supporters who see his election as Clegg & Co v2.0, an impression not helped by his continued attack on voters for not understanding the Coalition; hardly a ‘listening’ mindset. Many strong people in the party have already gone, and others are considering where their political future lies.

“Outside the party, there’s oversimplification in thinking that where you’re second to the Tories, you have to pander to people who voted for them. Maybe not frighten them too much, but to beat them you also need Greens and Labour votes. We will never take back my own constituency, lost in 2015, unless these people believe in us sufficiently to vote tactically.”

TREVOR SMITH, LIB DEM RETIRED LIFE PEER

“I joined the Liberals in 1955 which were dark days for the party. I fear the position is even worse now. Ed Davey, of university fees and Coalition fame, is very much a ‘Yesterday’s Man’ who simply says “smell the coffee”, while backsliding on the EU.

“Then, we had an emerging charismatic - soon to be leader - in Major Joseph Grimond. Who is there now?”

“I urged Davey to compete with Clegg for the leadership, but he wouldn’t. He couldn’t see how shallow and disastrous Clegg was and as proved.. I’m too old to leave the Lib Dems, as others now are in droves, but if I were 18 again I doubt I’d join, and certainly not the Tories or Labour who in their different ways, are equally unappealing. The entire UK party system is broken. Nicola Sturgeon is the only party leader worthy of the name.”

GWYNETH DEAKINS, FORMER LIB DEM COUNCILLOR IN TOWER HAMLETS AND REDBRIDGE

“He should do or say something really outrageous so that the press have no choice about whether to report it instead of ignoring us as they usually do. Doesn’t really matter what the outrageous thing is.”

ALLAN BIGGAR, LIBERAL AREA AGENT IN 1980S

“Stop trying to be slightly nicer than the Tories or Labour. Stop tinkering with the system making things a little bit better and a little bit less bad.

“No one can get excited about that. No one is going to get on the streets knocking on doors for that. Start talking about making Britain (all of it) the best place in the world to live. The best liberal democracy in the world. The best health service, education, transport, justice system and the most green economy in the world.

“Tear up the rule books. Don’t say we can’t afford it. We can’t afford not to. Covid-19 has turned the world upside down. Balancing the books is frankly irrelevant right now. We have a chance to start again. If we forever stuck with finding a bit more money for health or building a few more schools juggling the tax revenues and spending to make a square peg in a round hole then we consign future generations to the same old same old.

“Not only is that a rubbish thing to do, but campaigning for a slightly less bad future is doomed to failure. Let’s campaign for the best and die in a ditch trying to make it happen.”

MICHAEL MULLANEY, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY, HINCKLEY AND BOSWORTH COUNCIL AND LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLOR

“The first key thing Ed Davey should do is make it plain that Liberal Democrats are a party for all of Britain, that we’re here to take up the big issues that matter to people in their everyday lives across the regions and countries of Britain.

“As a party we shouldn’t just be seeking to be a party of the Remain voting affluent south east and London. Disillusioned ex-Tories in Surrey are a key target group for our party but we need a broader appeal than that.

“The issue of challenging the government to maintain the furlough scheme for as long as it’s needed to continue to protect jobs and prevent mass unemployment is key.

“Ed’s number one priority should be continuing to press Boris Johnson to maintain the furlough scheme until it’s safe to end it. The start of Ed’s leadership, visiting a fish and chip shop in the north west of England was good way of signalling that he wants the Lib Dems to be a party for all parts of Britain.”

BEWARE OF LABOUR

Many Lib Dems look to a ‘progressive alliance’ with Labour. Kris Brown urges caution in an open letter to Ed Davey

Dear Ed,

Sincerest congratulations on your election as leader of the Liberal Democrats. I really look forward to working with you in making the case for Liberal Democrats at every level of government, whether that’s local, regional or national.

I should point out that everything I say below is a personal opinion, though is reflective of conversations I have had with many members, councillors and parliamentarians from across the north of England.

There has been a huge amount of discussion throughout the leadership contest about our future relationship with the Labour Party. I have seen comments circulating on line that range from a Blair-Ashdown non-aggression pact to something far more formal.

I want to set out some of the reasons why I think a closer working relationship with Labour would be wrong and take this opportunity to invite you to the Liverpool City Region and meet with me, members and councillors to share our experiences of being in opposition to Labour and take you on a tour – not just of the areas we represent, but places like Walton and West Derby – places we need to win back as a party, but which also have some of the highest deprivation levels in the country.

I don’t know what it’s like in other parts of the country, but I can speak from experience having been a Labour member and councillor in London well over a decade ago, to being a Lib Dem member and councillor in Liverpool elected only a couple of years ago.

I remember very clearly, as a fresh-faced north London Labour councillor back in 2006 being told by our group leader very clearly that our whole strategy as a party was to play up the east–west deprivation divide in the borough, and as one councillor put it: “Keep the poor, poor and they’ll keep voting for us.”

Such an idea made me feel sick. That we were willing to play politics with people’s life chances was just one of many reasons why I turned my back on the Labour Party.

Moving north, I have seen first-hand what Labour in office means. In Manchester we were all disgusted by Labour’s heartless ‘homeless tax’ plans in 2019, a policy that would have seen rough sleepers fined up to £1,000 for sleeping in doorways or tents.

Back in Liverpool, the Labour Party that brought us Derek Hatton and Militant, now commands an almost one-party state that has failed on the climate crisis and is now widely regarded as one of the most insular local administrations in the country.

In fact, a recent report by Transparency International ranks Liverpool as one of the lowest in the world when it comes to development sites. Finally, let us not forget that it was Liverpool Labour that bullied Luciana Berger out of her party and is still investigating numerous accusations of anti-Semitism among its members.

There will be lots of examples that individuals can point towards the real ‘nasty party’ of politics. There may well be issues in Parliament that we can work on with Keir Starmer, but we must in no way have a formal electoral pact.

Starmer may appear ‘sensible’ on the outside, but be under no illusion, he’s as tribal to the Labour Party as they come, and would not hesitate to throw us under the bus when it comes to it. Besides, electoral pacts didn’t exactly work out well at the last election with other parties such as the Greens and Plaid Cymru, did they?

I don’t want us to be a ‘Labour-lite’ option for voters. We’re not a branch of the Labour Party or the Tories. I want to see us stand out on our own and offer a real liberal alternative on jobs, the economy, health and social care and the environment.

Some people will say that a Labour government would be better than this Tory government. It will just be different, that’s all. That’s not an excuse to do everything we can to make it happen. I don’t want the Tories or Labour in charge, I want us in charge to build a liberal and fairer Britain.

Whatever path you choose to go on over the next four years, I will stand with you and fight the good fight, but please consider that there are many of us, both members and voters who really do not want a closer relationship with Labour.

Best wishes
Kris

Kris Brown is a Lib Dem councillor in Liverpool and prospective candidate for Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner

WELL WORTH THE RISK

Liberals should aim to reopen society on its old terms once the Covid-19 risk abates, says Tom Barney

The coronavirus emergency seems to have called into existence two new parties, divided by their attitude to what will come afterwards.

I call these two parties This Too Shall Pass and Nothing Will Ever Be The Same Again. My purpose here is to argue that Liberals should align themselves with This Too Shall Pass.

I have no sympathy with those who set a crude economism above all else, and would happily sacrifice lives and health for the sake of making money, but though the emergency measures we have had were necessary, I believe that the reopening of society on the old terms must be the eventual aim.

It is one Liberals must hope and press for: the revival of joyful engagement in human affairs, to the greater fulfilment of individual minds and character.

Any changes introduced by the emergency which last beyond it are likely to reflect trends which already existed; the emergency will have done no more than accelerate them.

Working at home is one example. I subscribe to a magazine which some years ago changed hands and relocated its editorial office from London to Lincolnshire. It was able to assure us, as lockdown began, that there would be no difficulty in getting printed copies of the magazine to us. The editorial staff had mostly switched to working from home rather than relocating with the office. They were used to it. Many more people might find that managing working time and recreation for themselves, and having a greater choice about when they can see family and friends, are things they want to keep.

DISSOLVING BOUNDARIES

Some (not all) schoolchildren may have found that the lack of a rigid timetable, some dissolving of subject boundaries and an easing of academic hothousing are things they wish they could keep. In time this might lead to pressure to reform the schooling system to make it one which will better engage and absorb children and adolescents: one characterised by what Margaret Meek called “intellectual activity as desire”.

It is less likely that the current need to work at home will influence higher education. Bernard Crick once argued in a lecture that when the universities expanded in the 1960s they had ignored a great demand for part-time study. They assumed they would simply be admitting more full-time students straight from school, when they should have incorporated part-time and mature study into the mainstream of their courses and devoted greater resources to it.

Anticipating the objection that he had forgotten the Open University, he acknowledged that body’s great achievement, but asked: “do the OU’s customers necessarily want distance teaching? That is one survey that will never get funded by the OU”. As a professor at Birkbeck College he taught only part-time mature

students: “I know what our students think about the relative merits of distance and face-to-face teaching”.

Quite. Students should not have to depend on pre-digested materials for ever, nor solely on material in electronic form. They should be interacting directly with the specialised knowledge of developed minds in order to develop their own; and with their fellow students for the same purpose. They should be using libraries to explore thought in depth: printed books and journals remain unsurpassed as a means of doing this. They should themselves be using these materials to stimulate their own thought in depth: even undergraduates should be original researchers of a sort. They should be taking their place as citizens, probably in a new community. None of this can be done if they are confined to home and studying only online.

And higher education is only a special case of what applies also to the wider society. Those of us engaged in scholarship are desperate for libraries and archives to reopen. But the public libraries too should not want to confine themselves to e-books indefinitely. The threat to public libraries posed by the squeeze on local government finance has brought about campaigns to save them. These campaigners have pointed out that the public library building is a haven, a visit to which increases social contact and wellbeing, and thus a sense of community. Many people, moreover, much prefer the printed book to its electronic equivalent as a friendlier and more humane artefact to handle. And public libraries’ local studies collections are used with delight by many amateur historians: local history is perhaps the most democratic form of scholarship.

The live performing arts – music and theatre – must eventually be restored in full for humanity’s sake. It was once feared that radio and the gramophone would kill live concerts. They did not, nor did television kill live theatre or the cinema (though it may have altered them). People obviously felt a need for live performance, and this is not surprising. The spectacle and sense of occasion when seeing and hearing actors or musicians live expand the mind in a way few broadcasts could. Nor is this only a matter of the great city theatres and concert halls: many a local rep makes a town a more attractive and convivial place to live.

Nor is it even a matter only of the professional arts. Amateur theatre companies and amateur orchestras provide delight and edification for local audiences, and probably greater delight and edification for the actors and players who are given an interest and a purpose in life. Yet musicians cannot at present even meet at each others’ houses to play chamber music, perhaps the most rewarding of all musical activity.

We need, and must regain, the ability to travel to unfamiliar places. Getting away from familiar ground, and the fresh experience that brings, have the effect of re-creating the mind, and indeed of expanding it, both delightful experiences and necessary human ones.

Travel does not even need to be ambitious to achieve this. I have often experienced a lifting of the spirits just by travelling to, say, Birmingham or Darlington for a meeting.

There are those who say that the emergency has given us an opportunity to reconsider our attitude to travel, at a time when we need to do this anyway for ecological reasons. Perhaps so. But if we need to give up the promiscuous use of budget flights for casual weekends in foreign cities, this does not dispose of travel as such. It can be done in more considerate ways. We can, for example, take the train into mainland Europe, unlike flying a delightful experience in itself, which begins the process of re-creation even as we embark. We can make fewer expeditions but savour them more slowly and more deeply. We clearly should drive less and use public transport more, yet the emergency has threatened this: people must be encouraged back to public transport as infection dissipates.

All these examples demonstrate the sheer necessity of meeting people and being exposed to other minds and fresh experiences. Conferences - not only political ones - are many times better for being face-to-face affairs, with the informal exchange of ideas and the formation of new friendships that they stimulate. We all need our hobbies and interests to enhance our lives, and we all, quite simply, need friendship and fellowship. These things make an active civil society flourish; and they make our individual lives worth living - give us more of life in fact.

The time is likely to come when the outbreak of coronavirus is extinguished, but the means of preventing the disease not yet created. Some people, nervous of the risk, may then still not want close contact with others, and will urge that restrictions should be maintained indefinitely.

But I believe that when the time comes that the risk is not an immediately present one we should prefer to live with the residue of risk rather than continue with precautions at the expense of human relations.

I belong to an organisation which puts on regular public events. The editor of its newsletter recently wrote that these events could not restart until we are "101% certain that the virus has been brought under control". Interpreted literally this is impossible. But even 100% certainty is impossible in practice, and the heavy emphasis given by this exaggeration implies a yearning for something of the sort.

UNFORTUNATE INABILITY

There is an unfortunate inability among too many people to assess risks, and to decide which ones are worth taking, as witness the apparent desire for 100% safety by some railway passengers on the very rare occasions there is an accident.

But risk is a part of life; we are risking our lives by being alive. And risk of disease is a part of human relations. Were we taking an ill-advised risk in visiting

“When the time comes that the risk is not an immediately present one we should prefer to live with the residue of risk rather than continue with precautions at the expense of human relations”

pubs and theatres before this emergency began? Were people doing so in the days when many of our theatres and concert halls were built, when tuberculosis was common, and incurable? When I contemplate the closely packed seats of any auditorium, I cannot believe the building's designers thought they were creating something dangerous. Nor were they.

There are those who believe that the increased use of technology that the emergency has made necessary is among the changes that will last.

Some of this derives from the belief that the risk will not abate with the virus itself. But some of it is a doctrinal belief

in a new technological world: some people talk as if online meetings are what we have all been waiting for anyway and the emergency has shown that they are the future.

Yet technology is not sui generis. The world is the one we have always lived in, and technology will aid us when it serves us in ways that enhance and encourage civil society, an active citizenry, community, and fellowship - real human interaction.

We have seen it give us a passable substitute for that while we have had to have one. But anyone who has met by Zoom in any numbers will have experienced the sluggishness of conversational turn-taking, and the impossibility of saying to anyone all that we would like to say, and surely would say if we were meeting them face to face. It may remain a useful supplement to the latter, but it cannot be a replacement for the give-and-take, the subtlety, the rumbustiousness and the sheer life-enhancing joy of human interaction in the flesh.

It is those human values of community, fellowship and mutual understanding which are fundamental to a Liberal society, and which we most wish to promote - and which, I suggest, we must take risks to protect.

We can all be patient with the restrictions we must now endure if we know that conviviality and intimacy will return, and if we can foresee a time when this will happen. It must now be an article of Liberal faith: this too shall pass.

Tom Barney is a member of Lancaster and Morecambe Liberal Democrats

THE ARTS ON A KNIFE EDGE

Live performance doesn't not work like other businesses and its workforce cannot return while social distancing is in place. Help is needed to save tens of thousands of jobs, says Janice Turner

The plight of the theatre and live entertainment industry is yet another damning indictment of the government's appalling handling of the coronavirus crisis and its fallout.

When the government announced the national lockdown in March, the entire theatre and live entertainment industry had to shut down. It was therefore a great relief when chancellor Rishi Sunak announced the furlough scheme which theatres and venues were able to utilise.

However, thousands of workers in this sector – an estimated 70% of the workforce – are employed on a casual basis and so the unions worked hard to lobby the government to help freelance/self-employed workers.

FELL THROUGH CRACKS

The Self-Employed Income Support Scheme was announced on 26 March, but many freelancers in a range of industries fell through the cracks. The government made a series of announcements changing the rules but by July, when an all-party parliamentary group was set up to lobby for support for these workers, the estimate of the number excluded from the government's support scheme was 1.7m.

The rules of the self-employed support scheme were so complex, and changed so frequently, that it was extremely difficult to navigate.

Some found themselves excluded from getting support merely because of the way their accountants did their books. The clients of those who did them monthly could be included, but if their accounts were prepared on an annual basis they were excluded from support. All they were left with was means-tested Universal Credit which falls massively below any reasonable estimate of what is enough to live on.

On 24 March Arts Council England announced it would make a £160m emergency response package available with the aim of helping alleviate the immediate pressures faced by artists, arts organisations, creative practitioners, museums, and libraries over the summer.

Almost 90% of this investment was made up of National Lottery funding. By 9 June the Arts Council had awarded almost 10,000 grants to more than 7,000 individuals and 2,000 organisations, totalling £65m.

A study for the Creative Industries Federation in

June projected that the theatre industry would lose £3bn in revenue and a quarter of its permanent jobs although this only looked at current cancellations rather than longer term issues such as audiences not wanting to return to venues.

UK Theatres and the Society of London Theatre, which represent employers, indicated that, without further intervention, job losses in theatre across permanent and freelance roles is likely to number over 200,000.

All this was made much worse by the government's

announcement in June that the furlough scheme would taper off and close by the end of October.

In August the government would continue to pay 80% of wages up to a cap of £2,500, but employers would pay employer pensions and national insurance contributions (ER NIC). In September the government would contribute 70% of wages up to a cap of £2,187.50. Employers would pay ER NICs and pension contributions and 10% of wages to make up 80%

total up to a cap of £2,500. Then finally in October the government will contribute 60% of wages up to a cap of £1,875. Employers will pay ER NICs and pension contributions and 20% of wages to make up 80% total up to a cap of £2,500. The furlough scheme would end at the end of October.

The government stated that the aim of this extended scheme was to allow employers to ease staff back to work at the same time as, it was hoped, business levels resume.

What the government seemed unable to comprehend was that not all industries are the same. The business model of the theatre and live entertainment industry is to fill confined spaces with as many people as possible. Consequently this sector could not simply reopen as before.

People, obviously, cannot work from home if their job is front of house or backstage, or performing on stage, in a theatre. Theatres and other venues cannot reopen under Covid-19 restrictions. And even if they did consider reopening and limiting their audience to 30% capacity, most could not survive as a business because ticket sales at this level make them unviable.

The immediate result of the government's announcement was theatres announcing thousands of redundancies.

“The business model of the theatre and live entertainment industry is to fill confined spaces with as many people as possible”

WIDELY CONDEMNED

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden had been widely condemned in June for publishing a five-point plan for theatres to reopen, failing to recognise that they are just not viable with reduced audience limits, and with no financial support package.

On 5 July after months of pressure from the industry Dowden announced a £1.7bn support package for the arts. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport stated: “Thousands of organisations across a range of sectors including the performing arts and theatres, heritage, historic palaces, museums, galleries, live music and independent cinema will be able to access emergency grants and loans.”

The funding includes £1.15bn of grants and loans for cultural institutions in England; £100m for the national cultural institutions in England and the English Heritage Trust; £120m to restart construction on cultural infrastructure and heritage construction projects in England; and an extra £18m for Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.

But even so, problems remained. The delay in accessing this money meant that it was simply too late to avoid redundancies. Businesses could not afford the additional payments to furloughed staff that the tapering rules expected, but applicants for some funds were only to be officially notified of any decision by 23 October.

So the tens of thousands in the workforce in the theatre and live entertainment industry are extremely anxious to see how the coronavirus crisis develops and to see not merely how soon their venues can reopen but whether they ever will again.



What this industry needs is for the government to recognise that it cannot be treated the same way as other businesses because of the very nature of its purpose and structure.

The government should extend the coronavirus support schemes, including furloughing, until the Covid-19 restrictions lift to the point that theatres and entertainment venues can reopen in a way that will allow them to stay afloat.

Arts Council England stated last year that the arts and culture industry contributes £10.8bn a year to the UK economy and supports 363,700 jobs. By failing to support the industry adequately at this calamitous point, this is at risk.

Janice Turner is a member of Barnet Liberal Democrats and works in the arts

HOLD VERY TIGHT PLEASE

Just as some progress was being made in reducing car traffic, the pandemic spells trouble for public transport, says Mark Smulian

A bus conductor I used to know once decided to brighten his working day by terrorising the passengers.

He and his driver swapped machines and badges at the terminus, and pretended to start an argument along the lines of “you’re the worst driver I ever worked with, wonder you haven’t had more accidents”.

When this became really heated they swapped back into their real roles with a shout of “if you think you can drive this bloody bus any better, you take over”. The passengers turned and fled.

Such incidents are of course rare as causes of the decline in bus usage (see box), but even before Covid-19 it was tumbling fast despite concerns that climate change and air quality both demand more use of public transport and less of cars.

PLAGUE CARRIERS

With the government having striven to give the impression that buses and trains are mobile plague carriers, it is hardly surprising that transport authorities are starting to worry about car use increasing sharply, even in places that had made some headway in persuading people out of their cars.

The government and some councils have made a good deal of noise about encouraging cycling and walking as alternatives to a resurgence of car use.

These though are red herrings. While it is laudable for councils to try to improve condition for pedestrians and cyclists - even though their interests do not necessarily coincide as any pedestrian mown down by a lycra lout on the pavement can attest - only athletes will make more than local journeys on foot or pedal and even they may balk at doing so in poor weather.

Buses and trains are where we must turn for alternatives to cars, and both are in trouble made worse by the pandemic.

Although the Department for Transport cited a slight increase in rail use in 2019, bus uses was falling even then.

And here’s the problem. If people do not go back to their normal working patterns after the pandemic how can public transport be provided at even the paltry standard it was until last February, never mind be improved?

Most urban areas operate a hub and spokes system. People catch buses into town for work, shopping or amenities and then in the reverse direction to get home. It’s reasonably straightforward to assess these flows and to assume that numbers on, say, a Monday will not be vastly different from a Wednesday. A bus service can then be devised to match these flows.

But if people are going into work only two or three days a week - and not even the same days - and staying in their suburb for home working and leisure,

it becomes difficult to establish a viable public transport service with such low and unpredictable income.

In the course of some work last year I was told by Go-Ahead - one of the big four bus operators - that it costs £180,000 to £200,000 to get a bus on the road before it takes any money. I’ve no reason to disbelieve this.

Buses that cost that much to get into service cannot keep running for very long if an explosion in home working has undermined their takings.

If they are running less often, or not at all, then anyone who can afford it will turn to cars, bringing the associated problems of congestion and air quality at least until electric cars become prevalent.

Some northern city region mayors had been working pre-pandemic on using such powers as are available to them to replicate London’s regulated bus system.

Such measures may need to go beyond the major conurbations if local authorities are to avoid being in a position of willing the ends of less congestion and better air quality while lacking any control over the means to deliver these through improved public transport.

Even the Thatcher government drew back from the prospect of on-road competition between bus operators in London, where fewer people have access to a car than anywhere else in the UK and the overwhelming number of journeys are by public transport.

They accidentally produced quite a good system instead. Transport for London - part of the Greater London Authority - sets routes, fares, frequencies and vehicle standards.

Operators bid to run these routes and since the buses are cashless they are simply paid to provide the service in question.

There has been a huge subsidy from London taxpayers ever since Ken Livingstone was mayor and massively expanded bus services. Perhaps significantly, Boris Johnson did nothing much to change this when he succeeded Livingstone.

Elsewhere, it’s very different. Operators can run any service they please and axe any unprofitable route. Local authorities in theory can subsidise routes deemed socially necessary, but given the state of councils’ finances this largesse is vanishing fast.

The Campaign for Better Transport found in 2019 that 243 routes had been lost or reduced in the previous year and that funding for buses is almost £400m a year lower than it was a decade ago, with local authority funding having fallen by £163m.

Bus services in too many urban areas outside London are bad enough, but in the countryside one might as likely spot a rhinoceros as a bus.

Rural residents, particularly those who either cannot afford a car or cannot drive one (including those who

could once but cannot through age or infirmity) become prisoners in their village if there is no bus service, while those who can use a car will do so for everything. If one has already invested in a car the general hassle of using public transport may outweigh the hassle of finding a parking place.

Those driven back into their cars by an absence, or fear, of public transport in the pandemic will not easily be enticed back and as transport planners often complain, it was already difficult enough to get drivers out of cars and onto buses, trains and trams without having people mentally associate these with disease.

London is an exception to this given the low car ownership, difficulty of parking in the central area, relatively cheap fares and congestion charge.

Indeed DfT figures for 2018-19, show that 45% of London households had no car; the next closest region was the north east way behind at 28%.

Some urban areas made progress in increasing public transport use, but in these places using a car is usually a great deal easier than in the capital and they may face an uphill battle to curb growth in car traffic.

Light rail has been part of the solution notably in Manchester, the West Midlands and after rather a false start in Sheffield.

The idea of these services are that they are fast, reliable and convenient enough to tempt car drivers onto public transport that they would not otherwise dream of using.

The problems here though of falling and unpredictable commuter flows are worse than for other modes.

WHITE ELEPHANT

You can divert a bus; heavy rail lines have branches and links into a national system. Trams don't, they are stand alone and inflexible. Build a tram to a suburb from which not enough people any longer wish to commute and one has a white elephant.

Several cities have sought to use light rail to regenerate their centres, reduce car traffic and improve links, for example between low income areas and places of employment. Trying to construct a business case for light rail might become problematic indeed now.

One measure to curb car use might be a levy on workplace parking spaces (the sort that sometimes have "reserved for the sole use of Mr Arbuthnot Scroggins Managing Director" painted on them, but more usually just a car park inside a firm's premises).

Levies have been allowed since 2001 but only Nottingham City Council has ever implemented one, with income earmarked for its tram system. Elsewhere shrieks of outrage from business groups have seen the idea dropped.

If public policy seeks to 'build back greener' to tackle congestion and air quality then public resources will be needed to provide the public transport essential to make that happen, and an urban bus system that can do that will need the local equivalent of the £722m subsidy level seen in London in 2019-20,

Carrying on with a system that has seen rural routes vanish and even quite large towns reduced to skeleton bus services during evenings and Sundays will simply not deliver public transport to a standard that will entice drivers from their cars, no matter what the parking restrictions.

Bus conductors have long disappeared with the spread of one person operation of buses.

In large swathes of the country the buses have disappeared too, and if they are needed back to deliver public policy goals the present hands-off, leave-it-to-the-market approach cannot do that.

BUS USAGE IN ENGLAND 2018-19

- * 4.32bn, down by 29m on previous year and down from 5.25bn a decade earlier.
- * Journeys in London 2.12bn,
- * Journeys in England outside London 2.20bn

DECLINE IN BUS JOURNEYS OVER 10 YEARS

- * London -1.4%
- * Rest of England -11.9%

TOTAL BUS MILEAGE

- * 1.33bn in 2008-09, 1.18bn in 2018-19 of which 49% in English non-metropolitan areas, 26% metropolitan areas, 25% London.

PASSENGER JOURNEYS PER HEAD 2018-19, HIGHEST FIVE LOCAL AUTHORITIES OUTSIDE LONDON

- * Brighton and Hove 172
- * Nottingham 150
- * Reading 138
- * Tyne and Wear 99
- * Bristol 92

PASSENGER JOURNEYS PER HEAD 2018-19, LOWEST FIVE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

- * Herefordshire 11
- * Somerset 11
- * Cheshire East 10
- * Rutland 9
- * Windsor and Maidenhead 9
- * (Source:DfT)

Mark Smulian is a member of the Liberator Collective

IS IT A TORY PLOT?

Conservative county council leaders are trying to create huge unitary authorities, it will though still probably end in tiers, says Chris White

Some of you who do not live in the two-tier council area of England might be unaware of the fact that there is, in many parts of the country, a distinction between double yellow lines put down by a district council and double yellow lines put down by the county council.

Crudely, district yellow lines tend to be on straight bits and county double yellow lines on curvy bits (safety as opposed to mere convenience, you see).

It normally doesn't matter but recently a road in my division has been resurfaced: the district council put back its yellow lines but the county council has yet to get round to restoring its lines, complaining about the presence of parked cars (yes, I can see the irony too). So I've had to explain to at least one resident that what ought to be a straightforward process is actually much more complicated than they could have imagined. Or is reasonable.

At first sight this is a powerful argument in favour of single-tier local government. At second sight it's simply an argument for one of the two councils to do everything in relation to parking restrictions and for the other to get on with something else. It's also an argument for the two councils to talk to each other, at least from time to time.

Party policy is still, I believe, to support unitary local government in England although we rarely talk about it, not least because these days the move toward unitary authorities is much more about creating very large authorities, often county-sized, rather than the establishment of unitary district councils, which is what we saw in the reorganisation attempts at the end of the 1990s, loosely associated with the move from the community charge to council tax.

TERRIBLE MISTAKE

But why would anyone in their right mind support the two-tier system? I have yet to meet anyone who's moved from two tier to single tier who said this was a terrible mistake and we wish we could move back. That may reflect my circle of contacts or be a fundamental reality.

In Hertfordshire, the 10 districts have been working harmoniously with each other – and with the county council – to create a growth and devolution strategy, which would potentially involve multi-million pound investment by central Government in new transport infrastructure and other measures, all to support the growth in housing which is affecting significant parts of a rather overcrowded county.

It therefore came as a surprise to learn that the county council had secretly commissioned a report from a firm of consultants to prove the county council could run all council services for the best part of 1.2m people. (The population of Estonia, an EU member state, is 1.3m, by the way).

It was even more surprising to learn that this secret work continued during the pandemic crisis when, again, county and districts were working together harmoniously and where, to be honest, we have had more important things to worry about than the restructuring of local government.

And it was yet more surprising to learn that the officer who had been allocated to work on this had been seconded from the adult care services department of the county council which to say the least had a few things on its hands during Covid-19.

The leader of Hertfordshire County Council is also leader of the County Councils Network (CCN). This is notionally part of the Local Government Association, which covers all councils in England and Wales.

In reality the CCN was originally created so that counties would continue to have their own voice after a single Local Government Association was created back in the late 1990s.

To say the least, the CCN has been fulfilling its role in spades and county leaders throughout the country have been baring their teeth with proposals to create single-tier county-based authorities which would cover vast populations and which would do away with their districts, which would quietly be shown the door and thanked for their past services.

So what is wrong with their proposals? A single-tier Hertfordshire would be the largest authority in England (and arguably Europe). Indeed, by the government's own reckoning, insofar as you can understand at all where government really wants to go with this, it will be well outside the upper limit of around 600,000 population which has been mentioned in government quarters from time to time.

The argument used by Hertfordshire County Council, and of many other counties across the country, is that this would save large amounts of money. The fact remains, however, that the cost of local government and the cost of democracy is not the be all and end all.

You could construct the same argument to suggest that there should be no local government at all and that it should, NHS style, all be run from the centre with minimal local input. But I doubt many of us would want to see the NHS as the basis for how we run all local government services. On the contrary, most of us would prefer to see key elements of the NHS being absorbed into local government, as it is in some other countries.

More to the point, good decisions are not taken by centralised organisations: the waste of money that could arise from local services being managed by people who do not know the patch could potentially eat substantially into the alleged savings from removing one tier of local government.

This has been shown by the county council's attempts to enforce social distancing on highways and pavements, which turned into an object lesson as to what happens when plans are made from a desk miles away from the ground which is affected by the proposals. The district council and local county councillors have spent weeks unpicking the mistakes made.

There are also profound issues of representation. The model in Hertfordshire, and elsewhere, for single-tier local government based on the county area, involves at most two instead of (as now) seven councillors dealing with mundane, but to affected residents highly significant, day to day casework - possibly an activity not known by county leaders.

The whole nature of being a councillor would radically

change and the net result would probably a small number of full-time councillors, happy with day-time meetings, combined with most decisions being taken purely by council officials rather than locally based and accountable elected representatives.

You will not be surprised to learn that the county council consultants' report was rather light on how the democratic deficit would be made up.

To state the obvious, if you ask a consultant to provide you with a study, you set the parameters and the study tends to prove the basis for your original question without challenging the initial assumption. So a hand is waved and we are told, almost as an incidental, that there would need to be sub-county arrangements like area boards and parish councils.

VAGUE ARRANGEMENTS

These at the moment vague arrangements of course have their costs which the consultants seemed to have ignored. Worse still almost exactly half of Hertfordshire is not parished and so new in many cases very large entities would need to be created from scratch. That is a further cost.

So if we go down a unitary route, even if that route were to involve two, three or even four unitary councils instead of the county council's preferred one unitary option, there would still be a need for a bottom tier, which in half the county would be a brand new structure.

This raises the simple question: is any of this actually worth it?

“You could construct the same argument to suggest that there should be no local government at all and that it should, NHS style, all be run from the centre”

The abolition of district councils, which might be an obvious solution to the complexity of the sometimes silly interface between county and district, suddenly looks far less worthwhile then might at first sight have seemed obvious.

There are other ways of making local government work better. And it is these other ways that the 10 district council leaders in Hertfordshire are looking at.

So is it just a Conservative plot to do away with local government or indeed the Liberal Democrats?

Given that half the district leaders in Hertfordshire are Conservatives and are as exercised about this issue as I am, and given how many Conservative

district councillors would be losing their jobs, this isn't a Conservative plot (except that Conservatives do like to plot against each other).

It's simply a time-wasting exercise intended to diminish accountability at a time when we should be thinking about more important issues.

Ministers are fools to be going along with it. But this is an exceptionally foolish set of ministers, as we knew already.

Chris White is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Hertfordshire

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DANGEROUS WATERS

Action is needed to help refugees making perilous crossings from France to the UK, says Suzanne Fletcher

Just five years ago, the tragedy of the little boy Aylan Kurdi, found dead on a beach, was broadcast and woke people up. There was an outpouring of concern around the world, the awful human tragedies could not be ignored, but it did not lead to lasting action. It is too easy to put on 'snooze' and worry about other things.

Here in the UK, the Conservative Government was forced into action, with a promise to resettle 20,000 refugees, which was fulfilled this year. But still, the Conservatives resisted calls from the Liberal Democrats and others to offer sanctuary to refugees already on the move across Europe.

The Dubs amendment to commit the UK to take 3,000 unaccompanied child refugees was only accepted after a huge battle, but did provide a route for the children in Calais camps to come to the UK safely.

But the Conservatives closed that scheme in July, after resettling just 480 child refugees. Without safe routes, desperate people – including children – will continue to take unsafe ones: including attempting to cross the Mediterranean and the Channel in small boats.

Just weeks ago, the body of a young Sudanese man, Abdulfatah Hamdallah, was found on a beach near Calais. We are becoming desensitised to young and old who are drowning as result of desperate attempts to flee. It is in the headlines again, but it seems there is more concern about people from other countries coming and landing here, seemingly invading us.

One of the first acts of the coalition government was to end child detention. We rejoiced. The numbers were reduced from over 1,000 a year to very few who were age-disputed. That act kept many of us in the party. Ending child detention needed to be put into legislation too, just in case a future government reneged. It is as well that legislation was achieved by us, as now all initial processing, essential for safeguarding and health reasons as well as identification, has to be done within 24 hours.

The other issue to be addressed urgently is what can be done to prevent the dangerous channel crossings. It isn't a fun day-trip, it's a desperate attempt to reach safety, in many cases to be reunited with family. Just think what would drive you to make such a journey, with children too? The government has referred to those crossing as "illegal migrants" but 98% of more than 5,000 people who have arrived that way so far in 2020 are asylum seekers.

Instead of building barriers and deterring people, there could be processing of family reunion and asylum claims in France., done in a way that promotes justice and fairness, not hostility.

Relying on international asylum law is no substitute for a formal transfer system on family reunion.

The UK government must bring forward primary legislation to protect the rights of these unaccompanied children because otherwise, unfortunately, we will just see more risking their lives. Sally Hamwee and Tim Farron have long argued and campaigned for family reunion.

Family Reunion appears not to be on any upcoming Brexit negotiations – well, it must be. The Government must stop blaming EU rules for causing problems, and start to work out solutions that have both compassion and practicality. Not just vague mentions of co-operation and dialogue, but workable solutions. The EU has not covered itself in glory on the issue either. After 1.1m refugees and migrants arrived in Europe in 2015, officials proposed a change intended to ease the pressure on Mediterranean countries. Deadlock among member states meant the proposals were shelved. It also should not be allowing France to behave so disgracefully to those who have arrived there.

The reasons why people make these dangerous journeys must be tackled urgently. We should significantly increase the numbers of refugees resettled in the UK through UNHCR programmes, offering thousands, not hundreds, of places to those fleeing war and persecution.

There needs to be international effort, with us playing a constructive part. A recent report said that conflicts with US military involvement have displaced at least around 37m people since the beginning of the 'war on terror' nearly two decades ago. These are estimates, and it is not only about the US, but how little attention is paid to the causes of the terror that people flee from, becoming refugees.

Nobody talks about the cost of war, never mind the cost in human tragedy of those left living, with future life destroyed.

The only people benefitting from the vast movement of people around the world, leaving their homes, family, work and culture to become refugees are the smugglers. How can we possibly condone this?

So what do we do, let down by Government, the EU, and by international co-operation?

We campaign, we support others with the same aim, and above all we ensure that we treat those who come here with justice, fairness, compassion. As Hassan Akkad, the Syrian refugee who took up a job as a cleaner in his local hospital to help during the height of the coronavirus pandemic, said in a message beamed on the cliffs of Dover: "It is only luck that it is not us, and not our children."

Suzanne Fletcher is parliamentary and external relationships officer of Liberal Democrats for Seekers of Sanctuary and writes in a personal capacity

BLACK AND BLUE

Institutional racism is alive and well in the police. It's time to try some new approaches, says Natasha Chapman

The United Kingdom is institutionally racist. Institutional racism does not refer to attitudes or views held by individuals - a person can strongly believe in racial equality and still enact racist systems.

Institutional racism occurs when societal systems discriminate and cause or perpetuate racial injustice that affects areas including health, education, employment and justice.

Institutional racism is often much more subtle and harder to prove on a case-by-case basis than instances of violence or verbal abuse but is arguably just as serious due to its detrimental impact on the lives of many.

Black children are three times as likely to be excluded than their peers, even as early as primary school. In many professions – even white-collar, heavily unionised professions like teaching - black employees are routinely paid lower wages than their peers.

A 2019 report found that 46% of black households in the UK live below the poverty line, in contrast to 19% of white households.

Policing as a system in Britain is no different. Having more Black police officers than ever before hasn't stopped the statistics demonstrating the appalling racially motivated oppression at the hands of the police that is still the lived experience of black citizens today.

In London in 2018, 43% of all stop and searches were carried out on black people despite them making up just 15% of the population. Black children are four times more likely to be arrested than white children across the whole of the UK.

This is not mere chance, it is racial profiling on an industrial scale, fuelled by persistent social attitudes which despite decades of diversity training still prevail within our police forces.

There is no disagreement that a new approach is required. To find this new approach, another question must be answered: if years of increasing diversity and training in the police has failed to address these issues – what is the alternative?

It is more important than ever for us to push for the decriminalisation of victimless crimes, such as drug use (which black and Asian defendants are more likely to be given prison sentences for than white defendants)

and look to solutions that don't require police involvement, such as mediation and counselling.

Many suggestions abound, such as separating investigatory and law enforcement powers and exploring restorative justice as an alternatives to prison sentences as solutions.

Lots of these proposals have not been tried. Some of it will fail. That doesn't mean it's not worth doing because our current policing methods do not prevent crime and

our current justice system is profoundly unjust.

Liberals need to have the courage to stand up for their core values of justice, equality and human dignity. We should not allow ourselves to be held hostage by an increasingly right wing media.

We should not allow us to be convinced that just because our police don't have guns they aren't proportionately targeting black communities.

Policing reform needs to happen now. This cannot continue.

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

“If years of increasing diversity and training in the police has failed to address these issues – what is the alternative?”

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

Plans for a 'virtual' Glee Club unfortunately had to be abandoned due to insurmountable technical problems. We hope the Glee Club will return next spring

IRON CURTAIN TWITCHERS

Ruth Coleman-Taylor recalls the mysterious invitation to the Young Liberals to visit post-invasion Czechoslovakia

In January 1970, a group of 11 British and one Finnish Young Liberals travelled to Czechoslovakia on the first leg of a cultural/political exchange with the Ceska Lipe branch of the Young Czechoslovak Railway Workers Union.

My husband Mick and I were there and we have traced three other participants and shared memories with them. Three of the group have died and the rest long ago lost touch.

Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring in 1968 had been world news, when the Communist Party led by Alexander Dubcek tried to create "Communism with a human face": liberalising how the party worked, experimenting with the market system, freedom of speech and movement, openness to the world.

In August 1968, when some 600,000 Warsaw Pact troops moved in to end the experiment, and Graham Tope (now Lib Dem Lord Tope) spent three weeks in prison because the regime thought he was a Czech revolutionary pretending to be English, while another Young Liberal, Elisabeth Wilson, walked across the border as the tanks rolled in.

SPY FILM

So we know when we went. We know how we travelled: train and cross-channel ferry. At the German border, late on a freezing day, we had to walk to a Czechoslovak steam train, running on a railway with a different gauge: like a clip from a spy film.

Where we went was first to Prague, stopping en route at Pilsen station where, even though - or perhaps because - it was the middle of the night, we were able to lean out of the train window and buy big paper cups of Pilsner beer. We were loaded into a coach and driven through the snow into the High Tatra mountains, bordering Poland, on steep narrow ungritted roads without fences. There we stayed at the Hotel Alpsky in a small ski resort called Spindleruv Mlyn - which still exists - in what is now Slovakia.

There were some cultural visits including the Bohemian glass factory in Ceska Lipe, which did wonderful engraved glass: to a rough ice-hockey match in Bratislava during which several hockey sticks were broken, plus a day or two as tourists in Prague just before we came home, going to Kafka's house, the Charles Bridge and so on.

What we did was go skiing with our hosts then go out with them in the evening to eat, drink (lots!) and sometimes dance. Both the skiing and the evenings out gave ample opportunity for conversation, much of it political and without much sense of being watched or overheard.

The big questions about this visit all start with why. Why did they invite us in 1970, long after the end of the Prague Spring? Why invite the Young Liberals? Our hosts said they had read about the YLs in the Guardian and wanted to know us better. At the

time this seemed perfectly plausible. The Young Liberals of that era had plenty of national publicity, but 50 years on, is it really believable that a bunch of railway workers who spoke very little English had been reading the Guardian?

Certainly, somebody had briefed them about us. They were very interested in the developing campaign against sporting links with South Africa. (Later in 1970 Stop The Seventy Tour successfully stopped the planned South African cricket



tour of the UK, which was significant in defeating South Africa's Apartheid policies). Then again, this was supposed to be an exchange but the return visit to the UK never happened - why not?

Czechoslovakia in 1970 was very visibly a country under military occupation: armed uniformed soldiers not only patrolled the streets and railway stations, they were often to be seen in the pubs and restaurants in the evening. We saw quite a few tanks and passed many troop barracks.

(Ray spent a night in a barracks after being rescued by two women soldiers from an aggressive thief, who was also a soldier). It all gave the lie to the Soviet propaganda that the troops entered Czechoslovakia at the earnest request of the local population, not that we had believed that anyway.

There was rigorous exchange control then: Czechoslovaks who travelled abroad could only take about £5 with them. Our hosts assumed we were in the same situation, so they gave us all spending money out of union funds. It proved to be very difficult to spend.

Czechoslovakia was economically depressed so the railway workers - industrial aristocracy in the Soviet bloc - had plenty of money but little or nothing to spend it on other than eating, drinking and enjoying themselves (bread and circuses).

Whenever we asked for our bill in a pub, someone had already paid it, sometimes our hosts, quite often someone who had been talking to us during the evening. People offered some of us money for our clothes, particularly American-style blue jeans: we were not a fashionable lot, but our clothes marked us out from the locals. We had to decline (or simply give them away) because there was nothing in the shops we wanted to buy.

We think we were advised not to take cameras. The only photo the five of us have retrieved is of the Bohemian brandy glasses given to us all as souvenirs.

"It all gave the lie to the Soviet propaganda that the troops entered Czechoslovakia at the earnest request of the local population, not that we had believed that anyway"

SMUGGLED CAMERA

Louis Eaks smuggled in a film camera borrowed from Granada TV and took footage of soldiers, tanks, barracks etc. We weren't searched and it wasn't confiscated.

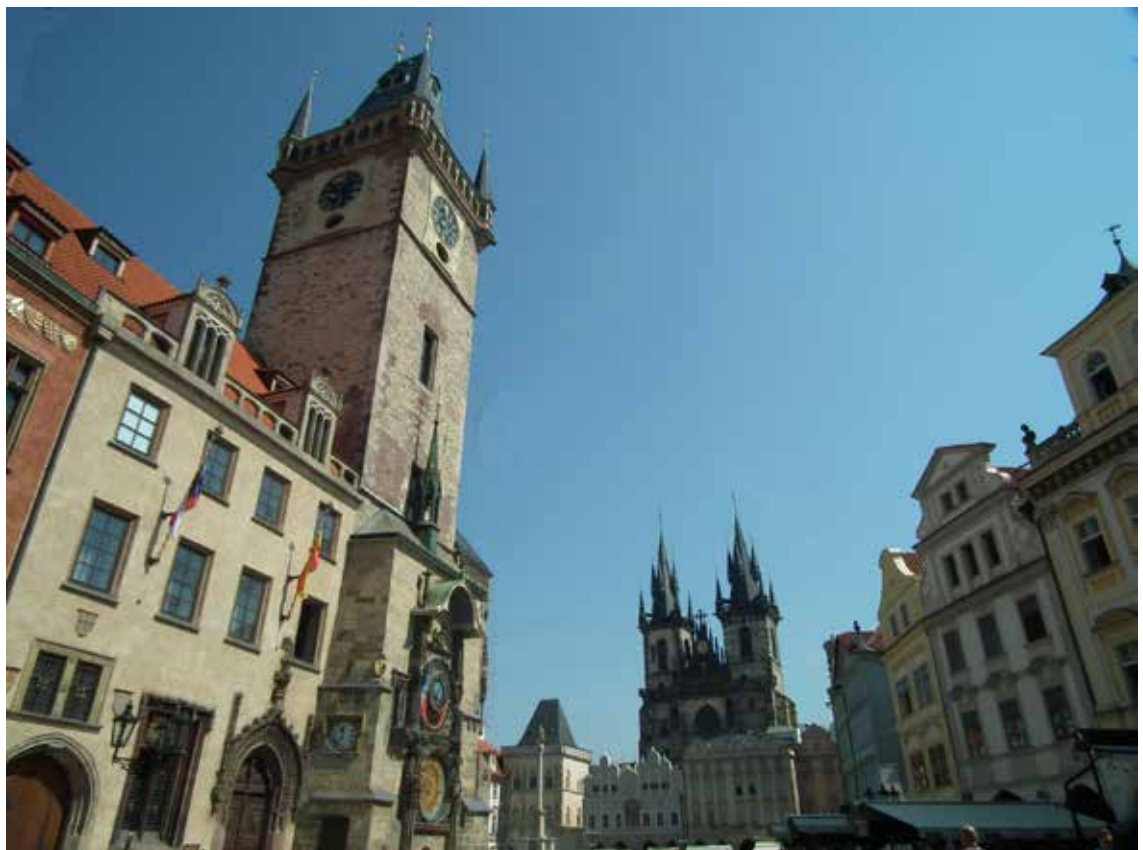
The local chocolate tasted just like the ersatz chocolate available in Britain when we were all very small children (pause for Proustian moments). One day, Mick and the Finn (sadly no-one remembers his name), strayed too near the Polish border and were suddenly threatened by soldiers

on skis, wearing white camouflage and armed with machine guns. They fled.

One evening the Finn took me sledging, zooming down the mountainside faster and faster until we suddenly flew over the edge. Fortunately, we and the sledge all landed in a deep snowdrift and survived without obvious damage. My lasting memory is of lying flat in the snow, completely winded, watching heads appearing over the edge above as people leaned out to see if we were still alive.

One morning, after a night disturbed by many external noises, we awoke to find the Alpsky without power. The staff apologised for the cold showers, cold breakfast and the candle-light, but had miraculously been able to boil water for coffee. (Maybe in a pan over the kitchen fire?) Apparently, there had been Russian tank manoeuvres in the mountains overnight. Skiing that day was delayed for a few hours.

In general terms we felt remote and cut off from the outside world, but that was not unusual for travel at that time. There was no internet, no mobile phones,



no computers, no CNN English-language news on TV, no English or US newspapers except in large cities. Instant communication by telephone or telegram existed but was very expensive so was only used in emergencies.

After about a week, we boarded the same bus and travelled the same ungritted roads back to Prague where we spent a day or two being tourists and having more long conversations with the Young Railway Workers.

Around that time, there were huge anti-government demonstrations in Prague, including an occupation of Wenceslaus Square on the anniversary of Jan Palach's death by immolation in protest against the Russian invasion. Some 2,000 foreign students were arrested. All of our parents, who had not heard a word from us since we left the UK, naturally assumed that we had taken part and had been thrown into jail.

LETHAL STRENGTH

As it happened, we knew nothing about it. We had not looked for English-language newspapers nor did we understand the TV news and our hosts never spoke about the demonstrations. The main event for us was probably that we lost our Young Liberal reputation for being able to drink our hosts under the table due to a sneaky Czech attack with local Slivovitz of lethal strength. Several of our team spent the next day's tour of Prague sleeping it off on the tour-bus: oh, the humiliation!

Finally, we hugged our hosts goodbye, said we would love to see them in England, got back on the train and headed home. Somebody phoned home at our first stop in the west and asked them to assure all our families that we were all right. There were some letters between the Railway Workers and the Young Liberal office, which we have not located. Then it all went silent.

Why did we get this invitation? We now think that our hosts wanted to reach out to the west, to convince us that they had not supported the re-occupation of their country and that, like us, they hoped that one day Europe would be a much more open place.

It seemed clever at the time to have our political conversations on mountainsides or in busy noisy pubs, but the technology of spying on subject populations was well-established in eastern Europe and far more may have been recorded than we realised. We hope that these kind, friendly, welcoming young people did not suffer for anything we said - but they were never granted their visit to Britain. Still, maybe our visit to them was one of the pebbles that caused the ripples that eventually led to the collapse of the Soviet Union some 20 years later.

What happened to our hosts? Like us, they were very young when we met, so probably at least some of them are still alive. During the Soviet era, there were massive amounts of record-keeping so perhaps there is a record somewhere of our visit, why it was allowed and what conclusions were drawn by the authorities. I am currently reaching out to a Slovak journalist and hoping that our story will pique his interest and that he will do some research for us.

DELEGATION MEMBERS

- * Ro Chester (Kirkwood): Young Liberals national organiser (deceased)
- * Jackie Lawrence: assistant organiser, London YL activist
- * Louis Eaks: YL chair (deceased)
- * Terry Eaks: brother of Louis, local YL (deceased)
- * David Cronin: London YL activist, later in Nottingham
- * Mike Findlay: Putney YLs, later in Moscow working for ICL
- * The Finn: a student in London
- * Ruth Addison (Coleman-Taylor): YL Chair 1973-75, now in Yorkshire
- * Ray Musselwhite: YL activist in south east, later in Wiltshire
- * Madeleine Skelton (Legg): YL and party activist in south east
- * Mick Taylor: long-time party activist now in Yorkshire
- * Peter Twyman: Putney YLs, active in peace, European and environmental campaigns

Ruth Coleman Taylor thanks Madeleine Legg, Ray Musselwhite, Mick Taylor and Peter Twyman for help in researching this.

**The Economic
Consequences of the
Peace**
by John Maynard
Keynes,
with an introduction by
Michael Cox
Palgrave MacMillan
2019 £22.99

A century ago, the last battles of the First World War were being waged around the conference tables at Versailles and around the globe, as the people battled with influenza. If you walk through any military graveyard of the conflict, particularly in Britain, you might be surprised by how many deaths fall in 1919, after the armistice; some died of wounds, but far more from influenza. And as, a century on, we battle with coronavirus, one wonders what Keynes' polemic of 1919 might tell us?

There is, of course, the mythic figure Keynes; we don't tend to bother with the detail. Like Pallas Athena, he bursts forth from the head that guides the invisible hand with *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*. He has, in fact, got to this position through a charmed career, up to this point, which led him to the Treasury, where he excelled, achieving, as Cox puts it overall responsibility for organising and managing British financial relations with its allies. This would cast negatively on his opinion of the Americans – he argues for the cancellation of war debt, and the ousting of Asquith would cement class prejudices against Lloyd George.

Keynes, of course, becomes reconciled with Lloyd George and his economic ideas form the bedrock of the post-Second World War policy, though Keynes might have been more flexible in their application and innovation. Economic ideas have their time.

Cox writes an excellent, balanced introduction, setting out the controversies of the book at the time, and as time went on. It remains a controversy, though the myth remains remarkably resilient, in that it provides a simplistic account of what would come to pass in the following decades. One recalls that Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published before the Terror.



REVIEWS

Cox points out that much of Keynes' eloquence is devoted to Europe before the war, which he sees essentially as a civil war within European civilisation. Like Burke before him, Keynes was insufficiently familiar with the French to fully grasp their viewpoint, while the leaders – Clemenceau, Lloyd-George and Wilson, did not have the free hand their war-weary countries would hardly have given them.

His book certainly played into the hands of the enemies of Lloyd George and Wilson, who kept America out of the League of Nations. However, the book aided an American change of heart after the Second World War.

I recently had cause to contrast the December 1918 and December 2020 general elections. Not much is usually said of the former, except that Lloyd George used the coupon to decimate his former Liberal colleagues who were outside of his coalition. As a result, he was effectively leading a Conservative government, which would inevitably tire of him.

Keynes writes of the general election campaign in the context of the reparations issue. The dead hand of the press progressively moves Lloyd George towards reparations that he previously had little heart for. As Keynes puts it "A vote for a Coalition candidate meant the Crucifixion of Anti-Christ and the assumption by Germany of the British National Debt. It proved an irresistible combination, and once more Mr. George's political instinct was not at fault. No candidate could safely denounce this programme, and none did so. The old Liberal Party, having nothing comparable to offer to the electorate, was swept out of existence."

A footnote adds that the ship chose to sink ignominiously, in silence. The point aside, there are two things to note, the flower of Keynes' prose and his antipathy to Lloyd George, wherein Cox

surmises, perhaps, class prejudice. He later concludes If the general election of December 1918 had been fought on lines of prudent generosity instead of imbecile greed, how much better the financial prospect of Europe might now be. Within this passage incidentally, falls the famous remark of a Conservative friend of Keynes on the new House of Commons - they are a lot of hard-faced men who look as if they had done very well out of the war.

I haven't found Keynes' assessment of the Spanish Flu pandemic, though it is likely that he suffered from a dose of it. What he says however is of equal relevance while addressing the Brexit issue more directly. That is, the need for European issues, picking up the wreckage of what he saw as a European civil war, at a European level, which he hoped the United Kingdom (its position then being more exceptional than it is now) would be a part of. By extrapolation this applies to wider international issues.

Stewart Rayment

**On The Road –
American Adventures
from Nixon to Trump**
by James Naughtie
Simon & Schuster £20

As the Americans and indeed the rest of us approach the November 2020 presidential election I turned to James Naughtie's new book for his reflections on reporting in the US and his stories, which began with his first trip to there in 1970.

This was courtesy of the British Universities North America Club which was the gateway to the US for a generation of students. For a modest sum there was a return flight, a student visa, the promise of a temporary job and a Greyhound bus pass for \$99 per month.

A few months work allowed him to wander coast to coast, north to south absorbing some

of bewildering contradictions of America and filling him with certainty he would return.

From the outset he was blessed with good fortune first winning a scholarship from the St Andrew's Society of New York allowing a Scottish student to study in the US for a year.

He arrived in 1973. Nixon had been re-elected the year before, Naughtie was there as Watergate was kicking off; a gem for a budding journalist. His second piece of good fortune occurred in 1981.

The Washington Post had recently established a fellowship for a young journalist to work there for a year. He was chosen to be interviewed in London by Ben Bradlee the executive editor whose tussles with President Nixon through Watergate were the stuff of journalistic legend. The next day he received a telegram that said simply 'Welcome to The Washington Post - Bradlee'.

Bradlee fixed it for him to attend Reagan's party at his first Independence Day as president. There on the White House lawn he watched Reagan at close quarters and observed he had a strange air of perpetual relaxation. The trick with Reagan's unfailing geniality, he said, was to understand it was a carapace

This is a terrific read covering America from the President of Darkness, Richard Nixon, to Trump via the hapless Carter - landed with an energy crisis in 1974 and who imposed a 55 mph to conserve energy stocks and later attended an energy conference making a point about cars, planes and energy. Years ahead of his time but the Americans didn't want to hear it. Then George W Bush and his toxic playmate Blair leading to the disastrous Iraq war.

Naughtie wrote of Bill Clinton that there were two powerful impulses in any Presidential quest - single minded obsession and emotional excess, the challenge is to disguise one with the other, Clinton understood that truth without instruction. And later the battle his wife Hilary fought to win the Democratic nomination only to be beaten by Obama and then beaten again only just Trump. Of Trump, Naughtie spoke to Aaron Sorkin writer of the best episodes of The West Wing and asked whether he could write a drama about the Trump White House. He said no.

He explained that you will never see Trump as a character because there is no such thing as an interesting character with no conscience.

Great stuff and there is plenty more where that came from in this book recording his road trips from the heat of New Orleans to the extreme winter cold of Chicago, to the conventions in New York, to the political pressure cooker of Washington. Read and enjoy.



Peter Johnson

Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of Flags by Tim Marshall Elliott & Thompson £9.99

Marshall's surprise seller Prisoners of Geography genuinely broke new ground in looking at way some counties are perpetually in the trouble because of where they are, rather what they are.

Worth Dying For tries to do the same thing for flags, explaining why coloured bits of material that few notice day-to-day can arouse such strong passions and be so contested.

It's unfortunate that the book came to before the recent disturbances in Belarus, which is a good example of where flags have been contested. The white-red-white flag waved by demonstrators was used by a short-lived independent state in 1918. It was then suppressed by the Soviet Union, permitted as a means to encourage anti-Soviet sentiment by a Nazi puppet administration, suppressed again by the Soviet Union, then used by the pre-Lukashenko independent Belarus before the president changed it back to something similar to the Soviet-Era state flag.

There are other examples of revived flags being used to signal the end - or desired end - of a regime.

After Colonel Gaddafi was overthrown in Libya his plain green flag went with him, replaced by the old flag of kingdom he overthrew.

Some places have flag colour clusters derived from a common history: red, gold and green of pan-Africanism, permutations of black, red, green and white in the Arab world and red, white and blue in Slavic Europe.

There are plenty of curious stories. Argentina and Uruguay are the only flags with stylised human faces on them; Marshall opines that the latter resembles Thomas the Tank engine, an example of the silly jokes which occur through the book - I'd hesitate to call them 'wit'.

Marshall is good on explaining the stories behind flags including oddities like Nepal's asymmetric flag and South Korea's complex yin and yang symbols.

He has also included a chapter 'flags of fear' on how various non-state organisations including terrorist groups have used flags as s to instil terror.

The book says a feature of many flags is that colours are supposed to symbolise various things, usually red for blood or bravery but with other colours used in ways that are widely varied and often taken seriously by citizens.

Coming from a country where the red in the Union Jack derives from the crosses of St George and St Patrick but has no particular significance as a colour, this is perhaps a strange concept for Brits to understand.

Marshall advances arguments as to why flags can stir powerful emotions but what it really comes down to is that they are shorthand for nations, ethnic groups or religious beliefs, which are what people are really attached to.

Mark Smulian

Monday

Did you know the new leader of the Liberal Democrats is a man who serves in a chip shop in Stockport? Extraordinary, isn't it? I was in that town today to buy a new fedora and decided to treat myself to a fish supper before turning in for the night. So there I was ordering haddock and chips (hold the mushy peas) when the fellow introduced himself. As he was wearing a visor it was hard to make out everything he said even with my ear trumpet turned to 11, but it was something about wanting to listen to me. I was forced to reply as follows: "Young man, that is not a good idea. First, the people behind me in the queue want their chips every bit as much as I do and, second, if you have made the effort to get yourself elected as the leader of one of our historic political parties, I rather hope that it will be worth my listening to you."

Tuesday

Still, I suppose it is good that we now have a leader. I recall a visit I paid some weeks ago to my own Home for Well-Behaved Orphans. The little inmates hung upon my every word as I told them tales of how life used to be. I spoke of a distant time when one was free to meet one's friends and neighbours as one wished and our thoughts were not dominated by just one subject. "I wish it could be like that again!" exclaims one little girl. "Never mind, my dear," I say, patting her arm, "the Liberal Democrat leadership election can't last for ever."

Wednesday

A correspondent asks for my memories of Britain in the 1950s. I reply that the decade is perhaps best remembered for what the teddy bears got up to. It all began at showings of the film *Rock Around the Clock*, where they slashed the seats, threw bottles and fireworks, and put in shop windows. Soon they were being denounced as hooligans and criminals – I remember writing a trenchant editorial for the *High Leicestershire Radical* along those lines myself. It was an old Chinaman who put things right: apparently some child had made the mistake of feeding his teddy after midnight and that had led to all the disorder. After the headmaster of a leading prep school went on to *Children's Hour* to forbid this practice, there was no more trouble from the 'Teds' (as they had become known).

Thursday

Socially distanced lunch in Westminster with Freddie and Fiona. It transpires that the man from the Stockport chip shop was their favoured candidate in the leadership contest. "We write all of Ed's best lines," they tell me. "That one about rejoining the EU being 'for the birds'? That was one of ours. And we thought of telling journalists to come back in ten months if they want to know what our policies are." I ask how they see Liberal Democrat developing under our new leader. "We're very interested in the yellow halo," comes the reply. Now that may sound like something that would be offered in one of Soho's less salubrious establishments, but they are referring to some opinion poll or other that says we are poised to sweep all before us in the South East of England. I tell them I have heard it all before: there used to be a fellow called Orpington Man we were supposed to cultivate, but he turned out to be a myth (or was that Piltown Man?) Fiona, however, will have none of it. "There are still whole streets in Esher that are not

Lord Bonkers' Diary

within walking distance of a Waitrose. Those poor people! They need us."

I catch the train home to Rutland and spend the evening playing 'Layla' on the jukebox in the Bonkers' Arms.

Friday

It's an ill wind that blows no good, as the proverb runs, and we have seen the truth of that saw here in recent months. For years the Ladies' Mask Sewing Circle has met every week in St Asquith's church hall to make facial coverings for shy people.

There has never been much profit in it: indeed, if it were not for the occasional bulk order from a gang of armed robbers. I doubt they would have been able to keep going. Then came this wretched virus and suddenly they could not sell enough of the things. I even scoured the Hall for spare material on their behalf and was able to come up with two gross of T-shirts left over from an old Liberal Party general election campaign. Which is why you will see many people walking around Rutland in masks bearing the slogan 'One more heaven'.

Saturday

Liz Truss – I could have sworn used to be one of ours – has had what she believes to be the novel idea of selling Stilton to the Japanese. It's not novel at all, as anyone familiar with the economic history of Rutland could tell her. When Japan opened herself to trade with the West in the 19th century, our merchant captains were among the first to sail into Yokohama and Nagasaki. Sweating with thick blue veins and a pungent odour, those skippers chose Stilton as their cargo. Trade with Japan grew steadily and I remember as a boy seeing Japanese craft tied up at Oakham Quay having made the perilous crossing of Rutland Water with their bales of silk. All went well until the Stilton Strike of 1919, when the miners came out demanding better pay and Lloyd George sent the troops in. They were billeted in Cropwell Bishop, and I recall telling LG at the time that this was *Going A Bit Far*, but by then he only had ears for his new Conservative friends and the trade with Japan never recovered. Really, I wonder what they teach in school History classes nowadays!

Sunday

Call me a dangerous Radical, but I have some sympathy with the sentiment that Britons never will be slaves, so I have always been one to defend the mafficking at the Last Night of the Proms. (Besides, I have made a neat profit from the European Union flags bought by the Promenaders outside the Royal Albert Hall in recent years.) Equally, I defend our own Glee Club at Conference from those who would replace it with a discussion on equality in the workplace with only carrot juice served. (It would be invidious to mention Jo Swinson in this context.) How we shall manage this year when everyone is attending virtually on The Zoom I know not, but I look forward to seeing you there.

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