

# liberator



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## LIBERATOR

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

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

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

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

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The death of Tony Greaves in March saw the loss - among much else - of a rare combination of intellectual and campaigner who had been a fixture in Liberal politics for more than 50 years. These obituaries attempt to capture some of Tony's contribution but we're aware there are many gaps - for example his role in the Young Liberals and his time as a political bookseller. Readers' letters are welcome for the next issue.	
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# COMMENTARY

## IN AN EMPTY ROOM

It must be hard to rise to heights of oratory on one's own in a studio and with the audience dispersed electronically around the country.

Ed Davey's lack of a live audience to feed off at the Liberal Democrats second virtual conference unavoidably made his speech somewhat wooden but there was at least some signs of animating ideas for him and the party.

After his peculiar "wake up and smell the coffee" non-sound bite when he became leader, and rather non-event speech last autumn, this one got more to grips with the need for the party to have some clear things to say.

Davey quite rightly attacked the Government's cronyism in awards of pandemic and other contracts - contrasting this with its treatment of the NHS and in particular nurses' pay. He also raised the issue of women's safety in the wake of the killing of Sarah Everard in unusually emphatic terms.

The Lib Dem position during the pandemic had seemed almost invisible and consisted largely of going along with the government until MPs opposed renewing the Covid-19 legislation in March.

Davey referenced the need to recovering freedoms lost in the pandemic - a distinctively liberal issue if ever there was one - and opposition to the Tories' intended crackdown on protests.

It was also encouraging that he pressed his demand for a public inquiry into the government's disastrous mishandling of everything up until the vaccine programme.

He also sought to try to correct his monumental gaffe on the Andrew Marr Show earlier this year when he said of the EU that the Lib Dems were "not a rejoin party".

Davey did not actually say "rejoin" but made his position clear on favouring closer working with the EU and pro-Europeanism. The earlier damage will though be hard to undo.

The two main new ideas were the creation of a sovereign green wealth fund and a quadrupled employment allowance for small businesses to help them recover from the pandemic.

Both are laudable and potentially popular but both run the risk of ending up where universal basic income so far has: "We've got this great idea for how to improve your life and the economy in general but we can't tell you how it will work because the policy group is still trying to sort out the details."

If ideas like this are going to be launched on the public there has to be some simple explanation worked out to clarify for voters what these are supposed to accomplish and how.

Few voters are likely to know what a sovereign green wealth fund is and may suspect they will somehow end up paying for it.

The question of help for small business is different. Extending the employment allowance to help these firms employ more people is a welcome measure but it's a technical change to a part of the taxation system with which few engage, and needs to be set in a wider narrative about why small businesses matter and what other help will be given to employment.

There was another possibly significant part of Davey's speech, which was something left unsaid.

He will have got virtual applause for attacking the Tories, and some for attacking the SNP, but his speech was devoid of mentions of Labour.

This could be because Davey thinks Labour's tortuous predicament of trying to simultaneously appeal to reactionary bigots in its old heartlands - and younger voters with more modern outlooks elsewhere - makes life so difficult for Kier Starmer that he can be ignored. In any event direct Lib Dem versus Labour contests are fewer than they once were.

Another explanation is that Davey avoided attacking Labour because he wants to work with it.

If this is the case then Davey could hardly start work on some accommodation with Labour by raining insults upon it in his conference speech.

As material produced by the Compass cross-party organisation has shown (Liberator 405) shorn of its dozens of formerly safe Scottish seats, and with the red wall having had several hammers taken to it in England, Labour's route back to power on its own looks nearly impossible. Boundary changes, spending limits change and voters ID will make this worse.

As Liberator 405 noted though, precious little about Starmer's Labour party suggests it has a liberal bone in its body and Davey must tread carefully if he does seek some accord.

Someone else who most definitely has not a liberal bone is prime minister Boris Johnson, whose government is making a bad situation worse with Brexit and indulging in an ever more toxic mix of cronyism and authoritarianism.

It may gain some popularity because of the NHS' success with vaccination but pretty much everything else in has done concerning the pandemic has been woefully inept.

Davey is right to call for a public inquiry and this should look not just at health issues but the slew of dodgy contract awards. Associating the words 'Tories' and 'sleaze' in the public mind worked wonders once before.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## MODERATE IN ALL THINGS

Members of the assorted Lib Dem committees have been regaled with a presentation from Mimi Turner, the party's director of strategy, messaging and research, who has the unusual background of having worked for Richard Desmond, former owner of the Daily Express and certain other publications best not mentioned here.

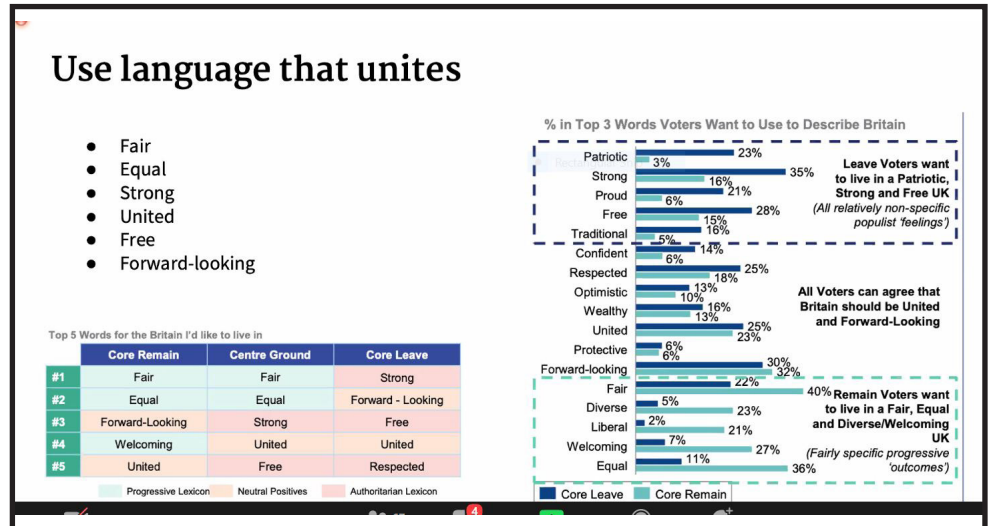
She noted that the party had polled under 10% almost without interruption for a decade and that the public knows little about it, neither of which statements were contentious.

Turner's third observation though was "we have focussed too much on 'world citizens' at expense of other voter groups" adding that this demographic was also contested by Labour, Greens and the SNP.

While accepting the need to keep these world citizens - loosely, Remain supporters - motivated, Turner urged the party to look beyond them.

Nothing wrong with that but she came up with a rather peculiar list: 'moderate social democrats', (surely a demographic very closely contested by post-Corbyn Labour), 'compassionate Conservatives' (surely an oxymoron) and the 'community working class' - a mysterious group described as "not well represented by any political party at national level".

One might perhaps think that appealing simultaneously to 'moderate social democrats' and 'compassionate Conservatives' would lead the party straight back into the failed strategy of trying to be all



things to everyone and 'win everywhere', with a soggy centrism that never inspires one lot of voters for fear of giving offence to others.

This also looks like a return to the treacherous shoals of chasing moderates, tried in particular in 2015, 2010 and 1983 to limited effect - remember "We will bring a heart to a Tory Government and a brain to a Labour one"?

The presentation said: "We need to find value-driven issues we can own which resonate with these moderate voters. The carers campaign is a good example but we need more."

Challenged by committee members Turner said she was not suggesting the party should reject 'world citizens' but needed to build a broader coalition drawing on support from the different groups.

Slides (see this page) that accompanied the presentation had propositions for doing this that ranged from the sensible (stop virtue-signalling pile-ons) to the uncontentious (give members something to

say that makes them look good) to the baffling (targeting farmers), a demographic that comprises 1% of the workforce, though it might be handy for getting posters up along rural roads.

There was also a suggestion to use "language that unites" such as 'fair', 'equal', 'strong', 'united', 'free' and 'forward looking'. With the possible exception of 'equal' all those fail the 'who would say the opposite' test.

## COLD OFF THE PRESS

There is said to be disgruntlement among MPs about the party's media operation, which is giving precedence to the 'carers'

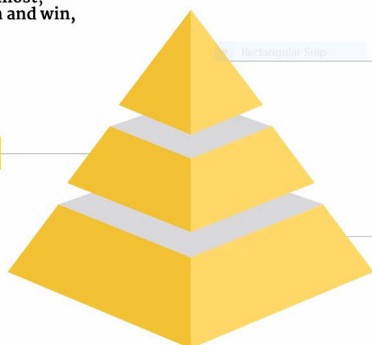
## What winning looks like for us

Identify the issues that matter most, that Liberal Democrats can own and win, which resonate in target seats

Issues that Liberal Democrats can win on

Which user groups can we galvanise?

Small business owners, parents, carers, green-economy employers?



Issues that resonate in target seats

1. What are the nuances in our target seats that can drive the national agenda?

Issues that matter most to most people

3. What are the issues that keep people up at night and define their days?

## Taking the Red Pill

Build associations on a small number of issues we own which resonate in target seats

Prioritise cut-through moments

Give members something valuable

Shift core metrics

10m Carers

Use our resources to generate original cut-through moments

Keep them up to date with the things that matter

Aspiration

13.3 m entrepreneurs, small businesses, entrepreneurs, gig economy workers

Provide prepared insight and new data on existing issues

Give them something to say that makes them look good

Relevance

Compassion

Competence

Parents (of schoolkids and students)?

Develop quick takes on brand issues

Make them feel part of something

Farmers?

Stop virtue-signalling pile ons

Institutions like the BBC that people love?

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## ESSEX MAN

The Lib Dem constitution is so voluminous that almost every contingency is covered except perhaps when an approved candidate leaves the party then not only wants to come back but is actively wanted back to fill an awkward gap.

Callum Robertson, who was the prospective candidate for Essex police and crime commissioner, resigned when he moved out of the area leaving eastern region to try to fill the gap.

Chair Jo Hayes lighted upon the prominent Remain campaigner Jason Hollands, who had recently moved

the Essex.

Hayes thought Holland's media skills and profile would be especially useful in a contest that has about 1.3m voters, no Freepost and where large-scale leafleting is not feasible.

Hollands passed the candidate assessment in March 2019 but withdrew from that year's European elections because of online harassment on a personal issue and later left the party.

He then joined again, but was he still an approved candidate? To add to the fun the spring conference in 2019 had abolished the rule that new members had to wait a year before applying for candidate approval, so was he either still approved anyway or eligible to reapply?

The region and English candidates committee chair Margaret Joachim took opposing views, with the latter ruling that someone on the approved list who lapses or resigns and then rejoins must wait a year and then undertake re-assessment, even though someone who had never before been a member could apply when they wished.

Some are wondering whether the power to license a candidate for one election only still exists, and if so who can exercise it. No-one is sure.

## EMPTY CHAIR

Meanwhile William Powell has had to withdraw as commissioner candidate for Dyfed-Powys as he is fighting a Senedd seat in Brecon & Radnor (Liberator 405).

There being no unsuccessful applicants for commissioner nominations left in Wales, the Welsh party issued an appeal for anyone interested to fill the role.

It sounds like they will be on light duties: "We are not expecting to do any campaigning or produce literature for the PCC elections and the only support will be paper filling and deposit payments from WLDHQ, but we must have candidates on the ballot papers."

**APPALLING APPEALS**

If a Lib Dem has to publish something but does not want it widely noted a good place is usually amid the soporific platitudes of 'reports to conference', where there is a strong chance nobody will read it.

Not this time though. David Graham, the new chair of the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP), has delivered an extraordinary broadside against the way this was run

under his predecessor Alan Masters.

Graham said: "It is apparent to me that the FAP requires modernisation and reform in how it operates."

To judge from his report, it indeed did. Not only had a backlog of cases built up but "complaint has been made about a small number of unacceptable breaches of natural justice in the handling of FAP matters during the term of the previous panel".

He added that FAP "was not operating as accessibly, transparently and efficiently as members are entitled to expect" and that its personnel, procedures, pending cases and recent decisions were not published on the party website.

Procedures were so impenetrable that party members who tangled with the FAP could not understand what was expected of them.

Graham found there was "no express requirement for an applicant to plead a case or for a respondent to methodically address the opposing party's case in reply".

Nor was there any procedure for recusal or substitution of panel members who had a conflict of interest or were unavailable.

FAP had developed clear principles over its work but these were not published in any one place.

Given the secrecy that has attended FAP in the past - in 2012 it took 19 months to announce that it had ruled the 'triple lock' on deals with other parties unconstitutional (Liberator 351) - Graham has made a startling request that, "details about the FAP, its caseload and rulings should as soon as practicable be published on the party website and updated regularly".

There is much else and it promises a welcome and surprising era of openness that other party committees would do well to follow.

## LIVING ON THIN AIR

A report to conference by Ade Adeyemo, chair of the party's Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC), was largely a tabulated list of objectives and actions but suddenly turned into a series of complaints about the Federal Board - delivered with unusual frankness for a 'report to conference'.

Adeyemo said: "Overall, I feel that the board is currently failing, through lack of action, in regard to its commitment to ethnic minority members who wish to stand for elected office."

This went on to say that in October Adeyemo complained to the board about funding and "three months later, and almost a year since the current RDC executive was elected, I am disappointed to say that there is still no funding for the RDC, nor does there appear to be any prospect of funding in the foreseeable future".

The pandemic had masked the impact, but once that passed Adeyemo was "seriously concerned that the RDC will be prevented from working effectively without financial support".

## BEST BEHAVIOUR

Federal Board members may have been surprised to receive an admonishment from party president Mark Pack warning them not to oppose three seemingly uncontentious items at spring conference.

These were to make the vice-president directly elected, make some amendments to the disciplinary process and accept the board report which included changes to PPERA compliance.

Pack wrote: "We obviously don't have the equivalent of cabinet collective responsibility or whipping. I would though encourage everyone to remember what the Thornhill Review has said about the importance of working collectively as a team, and hope that all Board members will approach these items with that in mind.

"In particular, if you have questions or concerns over the details of any of these items, I hope you will take the collegiate approach of raising them directly in the first place with our colleagues responsible for each of them."

Addressing FB members as though they were delinquents unsurprisingly went down badly and perhaps contributed to the disciplinary process measure failing to get the required two-thirds majority.

Not only that, changes to the procedure due to be reported to conference were mis-worded so they appeared linked to the failed constitutional amendment and so had to be hurriedly withdrawn.

## TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK

Tony Greaves certainly did not fade away and was in robust political fighting form to the end (see obituaries pages 28-31).

One thing that incensed him in early March was the wretched former Lib Dem MP Lembit Öpik now hawking himself round the Conservatives offering lectures on 'how to beat the Lib Dems'.

Someone who saw this noted Öpik was once touted as a Lib Dem leadership contender. Greaves responded: "Well, by Lembit Öpik - and if I remember rightly by Mark Oaten. They deserved each other then and they would deserve each other now. Anyway if Öpik has finally abandoned the party all I say is 'good riddance to bad rubbish'."

## ONE SMALL STEP

The Lib Dem Social Democracy Group decided to publish a book on The Future of Social Democracy to make the 40th anniversary of the Limehouse Declaration, which founded the Social Democratic Party (see pages 20-21),

One name among the contributors catches the eye - Chris Huhne on 'how to deliver more housing?'

This is thought to be Huhne's first venture into politics since his speed camera-related misfortunes. Are we seeing the start of a come back?

## A CLOSE SHAVE

Those waiting to question committee reports at the start of the March virtual conference were treated to an unwanted insight into the domestic life of Liberal Reform stalwart Joe Otten.

Bemused Zoomists looked on as Otten took out and used a beard trimmer followed by a hair brush and then a face mask, the latter seeming especially pointless as he was in a room on his own. But then there have always been those who thought Otten was best gagged.

# NUCLEAR OPTION

## Are Liberal Democrat members just electrons floating around or part of the nucleus of something larger, asks David Grace

[“It’s my party and I’ll cry if I want to”](#) is a popular tune again at the moment but why?

People complain that the Liberal Democrats either have nothing to say or say nothing. This is unfair on parliamentarians who struggle to get attention from the media. Strangely Liberals seemed to get more attention in the 1950s and 60s when there were fewer MPs but the modern media environment is different and there are more parties now.

From 2015 when the number of MPs dropped from 57 to 8 paradoxically membership began to rise dramatically until it reached 115,000 in August 2019. I doubt this level has been maintained. After a little searching and scrolling I found Reports to Conference buried deep in the party’s ghastly website. Not my usual bedtime reading but somebody’s got to do it. The report of the Federal People and Development Committee contains the ominous phrase “We have been deeply concerned by the decline in membership numbers.” What a pity it is too discreet to give actual figures.

The same reports detail initiatives by committees and staff to involve members more in shaping party policy. I don’t doubt such things happen but even an old hack like me still feels like an electron floating around in a cloud of probability far from the nucleus of the party. The party’s decline has not yet reduced it to atomic proportions but we may note that electromagnetic force holds the electrons in the same atom as the nucleus.

What force will hold us particles in the Liberal Democrats? It needs to be a little stronger if members are not to fly off. It will not be enough to retain members as a passive audience or even as well-trained workers leafletting and canvassing. The ‘electromagnetism’ we need is a common endeavour where we are all useful. At the heart of liberalism is the role of the active individual. Without it the things fall apart and the centre cannot hold.

To torture the metaphors no further, recall the bombing of Syria in December 2015. Under Tim Farron’s leadership Liberal Democrat MPs (with two notable exceptions) voted to bomb Syria, against the wishes of many party members. The Federal Policy Committee was dismayed that the 8 MPs did not consult them. Nor did they consult the party’s International Affairs Committee. I asked the foreign affairs spokesman Tom Brake why not. We don’t have the resources, he replied. The party always seems to have the resources to contact all members to ask for donations. I was, shall we say, slightly miffed.

Members are not an expensive optional extra. We are the very resources parliamentarians need. At short notice I found three members with considerable experience of Syria, none of whom had been contacted. With 11 MPs now, have we got better at this? Does the party know, has it even tried to identify the expertise within its ranks?

It’s not enough for hard-working, well-meaning MPs to rely on fortuitous, random acquaintance with experts in our ranks. Let’s have a systematic skills audit of party members. I hear conflicting accounts of new members’ experience when joining. By chance I lived in Westminster when I joined and the local contact took me to the National Liberal Club where I soon met the great and the good. This cannot be the plan for all new members, but I hear tales of no contact for months or years after taking the plunge. Is there a welcome pack now? Isn’t that the precise moment to find out what a new member can do and wants to do? The reason for seeking this information is not idle curiosity, but to assemble teams to support the heavy workload of our few beleaguered parliamentarians.

Is the party a rusty old machine or a living organism? Yes, there are many organs, committees, local, regional, national and federal, there are associated organisations, specified associated organisations, not to mention disassociated organisations like Social Liberal Forum, Liberal Reform and indeed Liberator. We are zealous in creating organs but does the blood flow through them all to the head? The Federal Policy Committee sets up temporary working groups to draft new policy papers. Most members are unaware of their existence and few know how to take part in them. Before merger the Liberal Party maintained standing panels to work with parliamentary spokespeople on specified areas of policy. These small groups always met in London, as do modern working groups. With the coming of Zoom, this geographic concentration is unnecessary and indefensible.

I’m seeking an organic party in which members are both valued and valuable to the leadership. I have outlined two changes: skills audit of members and standing policy panels. Better communications between HQ and members is at the heart of this. Let no-one complain they have too much to do to make this happen. If you don’t let others share the burden you will always have too much to do. Spread the load and perhaps we can all sing “What a swell party this is!”

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective.

# THE VOTERS TORIES WANT TO TURN AWAY

Voter suppression - in particular of young people and ethnic groups - is a feature of American politics the Government seeks to import here, says Shaun Roberts

If you've watched any US election coverage over the last year, you've probably heard the term 'voter suppression' over and over again. In the US and other countries, elections aren't just fought on a single front of persuading electors to vote for you. Instead, there's a whole second front about controlling who gets to vote and the process of how they get to vote.

But that couldn't happen in the UK right? Let's start by going into how voter suppression works in the US and how things stack up against the UK. Broadly speaking there are three types of voter suppression.

## NEGATIVE CAMPAIGNING

Exposing the facts about your opponent's record or plans is an essential part of politics. What we've seen in recent years is a marked rise in negative campaigning that's attempting to depress the turnout of an opponent's voters. This can be done with facts, but also through disinformation and lies. Social media has amplified the ability to do this in a highly targeted way that avoids scrutiny and election laws have failed to keep up.

During the 2016 elections, the Trump campaign and its backers ruthlessly targeted 3.5m black voters with negative messages about Hillary Clinton. They used bogus messaging like the Ku Klux Klan was funding Clinton. Black turnout fell by 10%. It worked.

The UK is no stranger to negative campaigning and, while we mostly haven't seen things of the extremes that take place in the US, our own electoral laws are just as outdated.

In the 2019 general election and now in the London mayoral campaign, third party groups appeared from nowhere, spent tens of thousands of pounds on targeted negative social media attack ads, and then disappeared when the election was over.

Is the UK as bad as the US – no it isn't, but do we have protections in place? No. We do not.

## CONTROLLING WHO CAN VOTE

The tactics of voter suppression have changed through the years in the US, but the objectives have not. Today, instead of the obviously racist Jim Crow laws, we see new, marginally more subtle, laws that restrict voting in other ways.

In Florida, more than 1.4m people with a past felony conviction were barred from voting until November 2018. When two-thirds of Floridians voted to restore those rights, the Republicans came up with a new law that said that a convicted felon could only vote again once they had paid all outstanding fines, fees and restitutions. That law immediately disenfranchised

more than 750,000 people. There are dozens more examples, and worryingly dozens more laws being put forward right now as a response to November's elections.

But what about the UK? To vote you have to be on the electoral roll. While there are some restrictions, and EU citizens living in the UK are likely to lose their right to vote in local elections soon, there's not been the same level of active voter suppression around the electoral roll. But that doesn't mean all is well.

The Electoral Commission estimates that 9.0m eligible people are not on the electoral roll. That's only a million voters less than the number that voted Labour in 2019. The Electoral Commission data shows that 25% of black and Asian voters are not on the electoral roll.

This problem has got much worse since the Coalition Government replaced the old household registration scheme with individual voter registration in 2014. As well as BAME voters, this change also hit students. It meant universities were barred from registering all students in halls of residence – prompting a large fall in student registration. This is a situation we should all be worried about.

## RESTRICTING HOW WE GET TO VOTE

The range of tactics used by the Republicans in the US to make it harder for people to vote are plentiful. They include having fewer polling stations or using old equipment in areas where the Democrats are strong – usually around universities or in cities. In the recent election, the Texas governor ordered that there could only be one drop-off location per county for mail-in ballots. That meant that Borden County with 500 voters had the same number of drop-off locations as Harris County with its 2.5m.

Other measures include restricting the hours that you can vote, or restricting who can vote by mail or requiring certain types of ID to vote. The Republicans have even used highly visible police presence at polling places as a deterrent for some groups of voters. Voter suppression is commonplace, and the Republican Party doesn't even attempt to hide it.

Back in the UK, we are protected from the worst of this by the independence of the Electoral Commission and also that elections are run by non-political figures in local authorities.

But again, we've got problems too. 15.0m people on the electoral roll did not use their vote in the 2019 general election. If you're counting, that's 24.0m people that either chose not to vote or weren't registered – that's more votes than the combined Conservative and



Labour vote. When was the last time that anything was done in the UK to try to make it easier to vote?

We require people to either register for a postal or proxy vote, or turn up at a specific location between 7am-10pm on election day. Postal votes are not advertised widely – you can't even apply for one online. We don't have early voting or allow people to vote in a location of their choice.

This might not be voter suppression, but it's certainly not voter encouragement.

It's clear that the UK is not the US, but we can't avoid the fact that a quieter, less obvious, below the radar voter suppression does exist in the UK. The victims of that, like the US, are people from BAME communities and young people.

Now comes the sledgehammer – the Government's forthcoming Electoral Integrity Bill that has a voter ID requirement at its heart. This is as unsubtle a piece of voter suppression as you will see in the US. We shouldn't be surprised. US and UK politics and political parties have always been interlinked, so it was probably inevitable that sooner or later, voter suppression tactics would make it into UK elections.

If passed, voters will need to show a photo ID – either a passport or a driving licence. That's despite nearly 11.0m not currently possessing either document.

Who's going to be most affected by this? Halima Begum, director of the Runnymede Trust, told the Guardian: "People from black and minority ethnic groups are less likely to be registered to vote, vote and be elected. Many voters do not have photo ID, and that ownership of ID can differ by socioeconomic groups, with citizens from BAME communities at a particular potential disadvantage."

The Government is claiming that this law won't affect voter turnout citing the introduction of a similar law in Northern Ireland in 2003. In the words of Conservative Cabinet Office minister Chloe Smith: "There has been no adverse effect on turnout or participation by such groups since then."

Here's the truth - in the 1998 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, 824,391 came out to vote. In 2003, post-ID law change, that number fell to 702,249. In the 1999 EU elections in Northern Ireland, 687,573 voted, but in 2004 that fell to 554,744. In the 2001 UK general election in Northern Ireland, 817,412 people voted. By 2005, that number fell to 723,768.

Voter turnout has never again reached the levels it was at before photo ID was required in Northern Ireland.

In 2019 trials of voter ID took place in the English local elections. Thousands were turned away from polling stations because they didn't have the right ID. Over a third didn't return.

The trial found that 18-34 year-olds were less likely to be aware of the ID requirement required by the trial than those aged over 55. It found that people from BAME backgrounds were less likely to be aware than white voters.

***"The Electoral Integrity Bill that has a voter ID requirement at its heart. This is as unsubtle a piece of voter suppression as you will see in the US"***

The policy solutions to all this aren't hard. We should have automatic voter registration in the UK for every citizen. We need electoral laws that are fit for modern politics and a beefed up independent Electoral Commission that enforce them. We need a written constitution that ensures no government can take away our basic human rights. We need an electoral system that actually reflects the votes cast in the number of seats won.

That's the easy part. The tough part is getting a Government that will actually implement this.

That won't be this Conservative Government. The voter ID law is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the ways they are trying to stack the political system in their favour.

They are threatening the independence of the Electoral Commission. They're attacking institutions that they think might speak out against their actions like the legal profession, the charity sector and the BBC. They are seeking to remove, or at least greatly restrict, the right to peacefully protest. As they do this, they are being cheered on by their friends in an increasingly right-wing media.

If the polls are to be believed, there remains a majority of voters who support broadly progressive parties. But that counts for nothing unless progressives can find a way to work together and win.

A good place to start would be on the Electoral Integrity Bill and the Crime and Policing Bill - both of which progressives of every type can unite around opposing - two bills that strike at the heart of our democracy. This starts in both Houses of Parliament, but it can't stop there – we need to ring the alarm bells up and down the country to alert people just what this Government is up to.

This won't be done by talking about electoral processes or systems or constitutions. We know how that worked out in the AV referendum in 2011.

Progressives need to speak with one voice to answer a single question from voters: "Why should I care about this?"

The answer is clear – we have a Government that is trying to stack the system in its favour, that cares about one thing – keeping itself in power no matter what and wants to take away or restrict people's basic rights.

Voter suppression is just one of the tools the Conservatives want to use to keep themselves in power. Sadly, it can be a very effective one. The leaders of every opposition party need to realise this and work together to prevent it happening.

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Shaun Roberts is a former campaigns director at the Liberal Democrats and now leads campaigns at Unlock Democracy.

# DETENTION QUESTIONS ON THE DOORSTEP

The Government looks set to make the immigration detention system even worse, and the issue will come up at elections. Margaret Lally arms Liberal Democrats with some answers

The UK is unique among European countries in detaining people for immigration purposes with no time limit, whether in immigration removal centres (IRC) or in prisons.

Many of these individuals are asylum seekers whose claim was unsuccessful. But migrants who have been here for years and did not know that their right to stay in this country might be challenged can also be arbitrarily detained.

The Home Office estimates that at least 112 victims of the Windrush scandal were subject to detention and were either deported or managed to get released before that happened.

Since 2016 there has been a steady reduction in the numbers being detained. In 2019 some 24,400 entered immigration detention which was the lowest number since 2009. Over the last year the numbers have decreased further as individuals were released to reduce risk of infection and there was limited scope to remove people. It is now believed that there are 'only' 700-800 people being held under immigration powers with approximately 500 of those being held in prison either because they were convicted of an offence and have already their sentence and are waiting deportation, or because they are being held under immigration powers.

But, at the same time, the Home Office has planned to increase IRCs and has been repurposing accommodation centres so that they are IRCs in all but name.

Some local people and refugee agencies were dismayed to learn of proposals to build a new IRC for women at Hassockfield – the site of the former Meldomsley Youth Detention Centre notorious for its abuse of its charges. This is despite evidence that detention is particularly traumatising for women who may have been the victims of sexual abuse, and despite historically low numbers of women (only 121) being detained before Covid-19. This centre, which the Government plan to open in the autumn, is expected to hold approximately 80 women who have been imprisoned for an offence and are now subject to deportation, have broken immigration laws or have a failed asylum claim.

One of the major concerns is that the facility is relatively isolated making access to legal advice and visits from family and supporters difficult. Home Office sources say more such facilities may be developed.

There are currently two IRCs at Heathrow – Colnbrook and Harmondsworth. Plans for the third runway included demolishing those two centres (good news) and replacing them with a 1,000-place centre (bad news). The Court of Appeal ruled the

third runway was inconsistent with the government's climate change policy. In December 2020 Heathrow won their appeal in the Supreme Court against this decision. It is not clear (to me) what this means for a third runway or the existing two IRCs. The two existing centres are not fully utilised; a large new one is definitely not needed.

The detention of children has been ended but there have been a number of instances of a young person whose age is disputed being detained. It is understood that families are not being detained at the moment but, of course, this may change.

So why is the government expanding the detention estate just now? Might it be because it believes the expected new Bill on border control will give it yet more powers to detain individuals for lengthy periods?

Detention is an inhumane and unfair way to treat people and should only be used as a last resort. It often comes completely out of the blue with individuals being detained when they do their routine reporting to the Home Office. They get snatched away from their family and friends with no warning or time to organise their affairs and may be taken some distance from where they live. It will be difficult to access legal advice or see their families and they will not know what is happening to them.

They may be deported within days; on the other hand, they could be detained for weeks or months and then released – knowing that they may be picked up again. To be detained in this manner is incredibly traumatising particularly for individuals who have already been imprisoned or tortured in their own countries. Research by the British Red Cross highlighted the mental trauma that this uncertainty caused – many individuals said they would have preferred to have been tried by a court and given a sentence – at least then they would know when it ended.

Seeking asylum or coming into the country without the relevant paperwork is not a crime. The individuals are being detained in (somewhat worse than) prison-like conditions for immigration purposes – because the government want to remove them. But because the Home Office, for a variety of reasons, can't remove them many get released. In 2019 approximately 60% were released. Some people will stay in detention for months before being released or deported – the Migration Observatory estimates more than one-third of immigration detainees were held for more than 28 days. Apart from the human cost to the individuals detained the financial cost of the system is simply crazy. It costs over £30,000 a year to detain someone.

Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of

efforts to mitigate the impact of detention. Last year our peers and MPs led the campaign to get improvements in the new Immigration Act which would have: introduced a time limit of 28 days to detention bringing the UK more in line with the rest of Europe; and ensured judicial oversight of detention and that it was only used when there was a realistic possibility of removal.

Sadly, despite considerable cross-party support and excellent debates, these amendments were lost.

Liberal Democrats have recognised managing migration requires major improvement, which will require community involvement and an end to arbitrarily locking up migrants. That is why it is [Lib Dem policy on immigration detention in the UK](#) that all but two of the existing centres should close.

The government has made three main arguments to retain detention. As these are also arguments which come up in local campaigning on the doorstep it is useful to unpick them.

First is 'we must control our borders'. Being able to remove people who have been deemed not to have a right to be here is a key part of controlling borders, which is unlikely to change unless there are major global changes (including an end to poverty; respect for human rights).

This is a reality we need to work within. There are other articles to be written about the extent to which countries should limit migration and the lack of legal and safe routes to the UK. Following an excellent debate, our Spring Conference approved an amended motion to increase safe and legal routes for those seeking sanctuary (including increasing resettlement schemes and humanitarian visas.)

The second is that 'they will abscond'. Concern about people absconding before removal does not by itself justify detaining individuals without trying other approaches. Many countries have trialled community-based alternatives to detention which appear to have been successful. The UK has also piloted such schemes which again appear to have been successful, but these have been on a small scale and some, including one for vulnerable women, have recently been quietly closed before evaluation.

Third is that 'they are criminals'. A key argument put forward by Tories is that many individuals detained for immigration purposes are foreign nationals who have been convicted of an offence (not related to immigration), awarded a prison sentence of 12 months or more (may be changed to six months) and are automatically liable for deportation. The Shaw Report, commissioned by the Government, on vulnerable people in detention in 2018 recommended that the routine deportation of people born in the UK, or who came here at a young age, was stopped; the Government has ignored this and many other recommendations.

Anything that appears to keep the country safe from rapists and murderers is, of course, a popular cry. But many of the people caught in this blanket policy committed relatively minor offences. They may have arrived in the UK as children or have dependent

*“Apart from the human cost to the individuals detained the financial cost of the system is simply crazy”*

children in this country. Their lives, and those of their families get destroyed because of one mistake. Many of them would have a legitimate right to apply for British citizenship but have been deterred by the exorbitant cost and complexity.

It also seems fundamentally unfair to punish someone doubly harshly because they were not born here. While some will be

held in IRCs, many continue to be held in prison before deportation where it is difficult to access immigration legal advice. This automatic blanket policy of deportation needs to stop.

Fundamentally, to stop detention there has to be a total shift in culture away from the hostile environment to one which is based on being supportive of migrants being in the UK, treating them with fairness and dignity and recognising that they bring valuable experience and skills which we should utilise.

This means more safe and legal routes for seekers of sanctuary to reach the UK, and making it easier for people to come here to work or to join loved ones. The process to establish whether individuals meet the criteria to stay here must not be an adversarial and hostile one as now but a supportive one, which includes a case worker and full legal support.

Liberal Democrats have argued for a case work model and improvements to the asylum process to ensure that decisions are fairer and more transparent as well as quicker.

Should it be decided that an individual cannot stay then they must be helped to develop a personal plan for their return. Evidence from return programmes suggests that key components include the individual trusting their caseworker, feeling they are being listened to and respected, and that they are offered some realistic options.

Ideally ensuring better-quality decisions (as set out in [decision-making policy](#)) and less reliance on a long-drawn-out appeal process combined with personalised planning should help the individual prepare for being told they have to leave. It would almost certainly be better if this decision is made as soon as possible but not so quickly that the full merits of their case do not get explored. It should not be the case that foreign nationals are automatically deported.

There will still be times when people will refuse to leave. There may also be some practical arrangements (relevant vaccines, finalising paperwork) which are easier done just before leaving. The government may want to develop a small number of small high quality short-term holding centres close by the airports to manage such cases. They should be effectively managed and subject to judicial oversight. Individuals should only be held there for days not weeks or months.

It is time to change fundamentally how we think about migrants and to build a more inclusive society; IRCs are a visible symbol of a hostile environment. Do we really need them at all?

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Margaret Lally is a council member of Liberal Democrat for Seekers of Sanctuary and writes in a personal capacity

# LISTEN FOR THE MUSIC

You may not get to listen to a band in a pub, venue or field this year, but the live music industry is ready to bounce back if the government will let it, says Peter Chegwyn

In her excellent article *The arts on a knife edge* (*Liberator* 403, Janice Turner wrote: “Live performance doesn’t 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.”

Nine months on, that is still the case. The threat to live performances, the arts in general, and all who work in the arts community, is greater than ever. Theatres, concert halls and live venues across the UK remain closed with no certainty as to when they can re-open and in what form.

Meanwhile the UK’s summer music festivals watch nervously as the nation slowly exits lockdown and wonder whether the entire outdoor events season will be cancelled again with a devastating and perhaps terminal impact on the UK events industry.

The Government’s much-heralded £1.57bn Cultural Recovery Fund has helped bail-out many venues and arts organisations, but with no certain date for the re-opening of venues, the future remains bleak.

There was some hope of a return to live performances last autumn as regulations were relaxed and limited socially-distanced audiences were allowed to return but hopes were soon dashed with the introduction of tiers followed by full lockdown in November and again in January.

The Government doesn’t seem to understand that live performance venues cannot open at a few days notice in the way that shops, cafes, bars and other hospitality venues can. It takes weeks and months of planning to book shows, arrange tours, sell tickets and promote events. Or maybe this Government just doesn’t care about the arts?

## CRASS IN THE EXTREME

The Government advert on re-training for new careers that suggested a ballet dancer could reboot her career and retrain as an IT worker was crass in the extreme. It was swiftly withdrawn but the damage was done, especially when reports emerged that Dominic Cummings had been heard saying in Downing Street that when Government financial support for various professions was being considered, “The f...ing ballet dancers can go to the back of the queue.”

Those f...ing ballet dancers, along with tens of thousands of other people who work in the arts, have largely been hung out to dry.

Government financial support has largely passed them by. Many who work in the arts are self-employed freelancers who have often failed to qualify for any financial support. Far too many have been forced to take low-paid jobs stacking supermarket shelves to pay their bills. Many will never be able to return to the profession they love. Quite apart from the loss of theatrical and musical talent for which our nation is respected worldwide, the loss of technical skills cannot easily be replaced. You cannot train a sound engineer or a theatrical set designer in weeks any more than you can a doctor or a nurse.

For struggling musicians the picture is particularly bleak. Since the demise of CD sales most musicians rely on live shows for the bulk of their income. A few have adapted to the new norm by successfully embracing social media and promoting live shows online but those, like Laura Marling, who have managed to make these shows pay are few and far between.

Some festivals have gone online - January’s 19-day



Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow proved to be a huge success with healthy tickets sales worldwide - but online shows can never really capture or replace the excitement and atmosphere of a live concert.

So what does the future hold for live music in particular and what is needed for live music to make a triumphant return in the months ahead?

Firstly, the good news. Most venues, though currently closed, haven't yet gone bust or been sold to property developers. They remain ready to reopen when allowed to do so. The people who support them - the owners, the promoters, the artists, the agents, the technical and box office staff are, largely, still in place and bursting with enthusiasm to get going again.

Some venues like Manchester's renowned Band on the Wall have used lockdown to refurbish their venues. Others have raised many tens of thousands of pounds through CrowdFunder campaigns from audiences who have shown they remain both loyal and supportive of them.

The Music Venue Trust and the Save Our Venues campaign have done fantastic work in bringing grassroots music venues together, giving them a powerful voice and co-ordinating the efforts to protect, improve and secure their future. Musicians like Frank Turner, have done a huge amount to support the venues that supported them on their way up, raising thousands of pounds to keep grassroots venues afloat through online fundraising concerts.

Artists have used lockdown to compose and record new material. They too are keen to get out and perform live again. Tours have been postponed, rearranged, postponed and rearranged again but artists at all levels still want to perform live.

Audiences too have shown they are keen to return to live concerts with advance ticket sales for future announced events being extremely healthy. Festivals too report that most people who bought tickets for festivals postponed in 2020 have rolled-over their tickets to 2021 instead of seeking refunds, a crucial show of support that enables those festivals to remain in business and plan ahead.

The main challenge facing all involved with live music is the uncertainty of not knowing when the sector can reopen and in what form.

Ever since the start of the pandemic Government has been swift to force venues and events to close at a moment's notice but slow to give any indication of when they can start-up again. As stated earlier, live performances can seldom be staged at a moment's notice except, perhaps, at the real grassroots level of pub gardens or back rooms. Arts centres, concert halls, theatres and arenas need many months to plan events and sell tickets. Major concert tours and festivals take a year or more to plan. Until the Government can give a clear indication of when venues can reopen and in what form, all involved with live shows are having to plan in a vacuum, not knowing whether they will ultimately be able to go-ahead or not.

*“Many Conservatives think the arts are run by left-wing luvvies and if they can prevent the likes of Billy Bragg from having a platform on which to bash the Tories then all to the good”*

For outdoor music festivals this is particularly challenging as most of their costs have to be paid upfront. There is currently no insurance for covid-related cancellations. Festival organisers are taking a huge financial risk in trying to promote events this summer with no idea as to whether the Government will allow them to go-ahead and, if so, with what covid-secure restrictions or capacity limitations.

One of the little-noticed measures introduced by the Government in recent months has given local authority directors of public health the power to cancel events at a moment's notice.

## CANCELLED FAIRIES

In Hampshire the local directors used that power to cancel the delightfully-named New Forest Fairy Festival at less than 24 hours' notice last autumn, also the Southampton Boat Show, a travelling fairground and a street market in Alresford.

Event organisers are taking a huge risk in spending money on infrastructure and performers with no cancellation insurance, something many are understandably unwilling to do. The Government has been urged to underwrite a covid cancellation insurance scheme for the events industry. At the time of writing they have yet to do so. Without such a scheme, expect many music festivals to start cancelling in coming weeks. Glastonbury was the first. It won't be the last.

There's an added threat to live music that has nothing to do with Covid and everything to do with Brexit.

The Government made a complete hash of the system of allocating touring visas for musicians now we are out of the EU. Work permits and carnets could close the continent to a generation of UK musicians as well as making it difficult, if not impossible, for many European musicians to tour the UK.

As I write, SNP MP Pete Wishart (a former member of Scottish band Runrig) is one of many MPs urging the Government to sort this out instead of indulging in a blame game with the EU as to who is responsible for the mess.

Global travel restrictions may also hamper tour plans for international artists this year. Bands like The 1975 have already cancelled tours. Others may follow. Even some UK-based bands have one or more members living abroad which may mean the whole band cannot tour.

Returning to Covid, even as the Government announces a possible reopening of venues, social distancing just cannot work in many live venues that were designed to bring audiences together, not space them apart. It is not just the positioning of seats, bars, toilets etc, but also that social distancing means massively reduced venue capacities that make concerts financially unviable (unless the artists play for a pittance). Some artists and venues can overcome this by staging two shows in a day instead of one but not all

can or are willing to do this. In short, the re-opening of live venues will allow some shows to take place but only the return of full capacity shows will really allow things to return to normal. Arts venues were among the first to be closed by the Government. They may well be the last allowed to re-open in a meaningful manner.

And what of outdoor music festivals? Outdoors is safer than indoors. The Government roadmap suggests mass gatherings will be allowed with few, if any, restrictions from 21 June.

But there is no guarantee of that. Organisers could be forced to cancel at short notice having already spent huge sums of money on artist and infrastructure deposits, staffing and marketing. With no Government-backed Covid cancellation insurance scheme, it is likely that many major music festivals will not happen and nor will many smaller festivals. Their organisers just cannot take the financial risk. If there is no certainty of them being allowed from late June



onwards, and no cancellation insurance, expect many more cancellations and many festivals to disappear for good.

It may all sound pretty depressing but live music will return. The sector is remarkably resilient and live music plays such an important part in people's lives that it will come back, just like live sport will. Crowds will eventually return, probably in stages. The sector will have to adapt to survive but it is doing that already.

I expect live venues to start re-opening in early summer but with limited performances at first. Small-





scale, grassroots shows will be first to get going again. Large-scale tours by international artists may not happen until 2022. The Government will continue to show complete ignorance of how the live music and events sector operates.

Meetings with DCMS show the civil servants get it, but ministers do not. And do they care? Many Conservatives think the arts are run by left-wing luvvies (Andrew Lloyd-Webber excepted) and if they can prevent the likes of Billy Bragg from having a platform on which to bash the Tories then all to the good.

Thankfully musicians across the world have never let authoritarian governments stifle creativity. Neither will they let Covid do so. The future for live music and the arts is bright. But as with so many other things, it will take time to return to normal... whatever 'normal' now is.

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Peter Chegwyn is leader of the Liberal Democrat Group on Gosport Borough Council and Lib. Dem. culture spokesperson on Hampshire County Council. He organises the 7,000 capacity Wickham Festival, voted the UK's Best Small Festival in the Live UK Music Industry Awards: [www.wickhamfestival.co.uk](http://www.wickhamfestival.co.uk)

# DEADLY TEXTBOOKS

## The UK remains enmeshed with Saudi Arabia even while it continues to export an intolerant ideology, says Rebecca Tinsley

Mikhail Gorbachev reputedly described the Soviet Union's foreign policy as the most expensive failed marketing campaign in history.

Yet, the USSR's propaganda budget is dwarfed by the [estimated \\$100 billion](#) spent by Saudi Arabia since 1979, spreading its ultra-conservative Wahhabi version of Islam across the globe, including to British institutions.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) [recently reported](#) that Saudi Arabia has revised its school textbooks, removing the most overt anti-Semitism and incitement to kill Christians.

This comes a mere 21 years after 9/11, when the kingdom was criticised for the intolerance it propagated worldwide. Saudi rulers repeatedly promised (and failed) to amend their educational materials. Now, many of the problematic passages are gone, but the demonisation of Shia, Sufi and other non-Wahhabi interpretations of Islam persists.

It's not just about school books in Riyadh. Millions of unrevised Saudi books have been distributed around the world for free, and handed out at the Haj. They sit in schools, libraries, madrassas, mosques and Islamic centres from Pakistan to Indonesia to Bradford and Minneapolis. They feed the racism, paranoia and exceptionalism of the Wahhabi faith, reinforcing jihadist messages, and fuelling hatred of 'other' Muslims.

### SANITISED REPUTATION

Will these volumes be recalled and replaced with the sanitised versions? Will school books currently used by five million Saudi students, and in mosques and madrassas in the kingdom be removed and replaced? Or will the less offensive version sit in a warehouse? Should we take the word of the western consultants who are paid to sanitise the Kingdom's reputation?

Analysts believe Saudi Arabia finally acted, fearing President Biden would be more concerned about the blood-curdling anti-Semitism and hatred of Christians than previous US administrations. The revisions may also be due to consultants trying to make the kingdom palatable for inward investment.

The Saudis could have saved their money, since Biden failed to sanction Prince [Mohammed Bin Salman whom US intelligence directly implicates](#) in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi. The White House stresses the US is 'recalibrating' its relationship with Riyadh.

Danielle Saroyan Ashbahian of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom told *Liberator*, "We are heartened that advocates for international religious freedom -- including within the government itself -- are making progress in Saudi Arabia..... some might say astonishing progress. We are also encouraged that the kingdom announced earlier this month their intent to reform their judicial system, eventually codifying its law.

"Of course, Saudi Arabia remains a country without a single non-Muslim house of worship, and where reform is needed throughout the society. Hopefully, we will soon find its textbooks fully expunged of any pretext to violate the human rights of any religious community, atheist or nonbeliever as well as women, members of the LGBTI community, and others".

The current surge in Islamist extremism was a reaction to the socialism and nationalism of a post-colonial generation of Arab leaders like Egypt's Nasser. The intolerant Wahhabi variant was then turbo-charged by the 1979 Iranian revolution. The ayatollahs threatened the Gulf Arabs' legitimacy by challenging the notion that debauched royal families should run Muslim societies or be guardians of Mecca and Medina.

Following the Iranian revolution, Saudi authorities funded a world-wide building programme of mosques, madrassas and Islamic centres to counter Shia Islam. In poor countries, like Pakistan, parents jumped at the chance to send their sons to free schools. According to Mohamed Charfi, the former minister of education in Tunisia, Saudi-backed madrassas in Pakistan and Afghanistan have played significant roles in strengthening radical Islam there.

In *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, David Commins reports that Saudi institutions have trained thousands of teachers and preachers in their particularly intolerant and ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam, a view supported by Arabist Gilles Kepel in "Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam".

### TROJAN HORSE

As Yasmin Alibhai-Brown noted in the *Independent*, King Salman offered to build 200 Wahhabi mosques for Muslim refugees arriving in Germany during the Syrian war, but not a penny to help with their re-settlement or more basic needs. She described it as the "Trojan horse of the secret Saudi crusade."

In his book, *Hatred's Kingdom*, Dore Gold estimates that between 1982 and 2005, the Saudis spent an estimated £75bn globally on 200 Islamic colleges, 210 Islamic centres, 1,500 mosques and 2,000 schools, all teaching an intolerant, fundamentalist version of Islam.

In Robert Lacey's book, [Inside the Kingdom](#), he reports that in the 1980s, more than 70 Saudi embassies had officials charged with getting new mosques built to propagate Wahhabism.

In Nigeria, [at least 20,000 Christians and Muslims](#) who reject extremism have been killed by Boko Haram and the proxies of the Islamic State in West Africa. A Nigerian journalist (speaking to *Liberator* anonymously, for his own safety) says Saudi has sponsored hundreds of fundamentalist imams, including Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf, paying for their study in the Gulf, and bankrolling the intolerant Salafist Islamist movement in Nigeria.



The ‘underpants bomber’ Abdul Mutallab, was reputedly operating on behalf of Al Qaeda, supplied with a Saudi-made bomb, says the Nigerian journalist. He points to the deep links, political and economic, between Saudi and the Nigerian government, warning Saudi’s embrace has deadly consequences for those rejecting Boko Haram’s ideology.

What’s the problem with Saudi textbooks? The kingdom’s pre-sanitised books teach that those who worship differently from Wahhabism are polytheists heading for hell regardless of their good deeds.

Shi’a and Sufi veneration of the grave sites of prophets is “heresy,” while criticism of Islam is “apostasy,” deserving the death penalty. Students must avoid friendship with members of other religions. They also encouraged both violent and non-violent jihad against non-believers. Finally, the passages espouse the death penalty for women who have an affair, and for gay men.

Among several now-expunged passages is a reference to Jews as monkeys and Christians as pigs. In addition, the following has been removed: “The Hour will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims will kill them until the Jews will hide behind the rocks and the trees. The rocks and the trees will say: O Muslim, O servant of God, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him – except for the gharqad tree which is a tree of the Jews.” (Monotheism (2): 102, quoting a hadith from Bukhari, Muslim, and others).

Yet, HRW claims the website of the Saudi committee issuing fatwas continues to proclaim: “Hating infidels is obligatory because they are the enemies of God and His messenger and the enemies of Muslims.”

Nina Shea, from the right-leaning Hudson Institute, told Liberator that reforming textbooks is only part of the problem.

“Innumerable Sunni Muslim villages and city neighbourhoods in Africa and Asia have been indoctrinated in lessons that direct students to fight and kill the religious other, thanks to Saudi-government-published religious texts and export policies.

“Two years ago, one of the leaders of Al Azhar, the great centre of Sunni learning in Cairo, told me that his institution still taught some courses from Wahabi textbooks. Saudi schools in major Western capitals long taught from these texts. Saudi Arabia must replace them everywhere and see that the old editions are destroyed. It must replace them on the Internet. Riyadh must stop inciting, through its prior textbook editions, extremism and terror abroad, as well as at home.”

## GLOBAL BRITAIN

Does Global Britain care? There are 30 state-funded Muslim schools in England and Wales, and 180 private ones. The BBC estimated that the old textbooks were [used by about 5,000 students](#) in the UK. How many religious leaders in British mosques have studied in Saudi, even though the vast majority of British Muslims are not Wahhabi? Will the

*“As the West’s dependence on Gulf oil declines, our ‘money butler’ role explains our obsequious approach”*

British government ensure that poisonous material is not inciting hatred against Sufi, Shia and other non-Wahhabi sects? Will the old textbooks be replaced? What about online material? My attempts to get answers from the Saudi embassy and via written Parliamentary questions (via Fiona Bruce MP) proved fruitless.

Boris Johnson’s Global Britain defines its relationship

with Saudi as a commercial one, boasting (on the Department of Trade website that Saudi is the UK’s third largest trade partner outside the EU. In 2018, Britain exported £6bn worth of goods and services to the kingdom, the same year we were told that Saudi was “exploring up to £65bn of fresh investment in the UK.” Glaxo Smith Kline, Rolls Royce, Unilever, Shell and BAe Systems are the beneficiaries mentioned.

BAe claims to have sold £15bn of services and weapons since 2015. The UK has licensed £6.8bn to Saudi since the start of the Yemen bombing campaign, while the US has suspended offensive weapons sales. UK weapons are being used to target Yemen’s hospitals, vaccination centres and food distribution network. On 1 March, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office cut aid to Yemen from an annual £214m to £87m.

Less discussed is London’s “money butler” role managing the not terribly hard-earned riches of Saudi royals, as well as the sovereign wealth funds of Gulf nations; or the UK’s permanent naval base in Wahhabi Bahrain, a Saudi-aligned country where Shia and [democracy activists are jailed and tortured](#) (including 11-year-old-children), not to mention the mistreatment of Muslim labourers from overseas.

As the West’s dependence on Gulf oil declines, our ‘money butler’ role explains our obsequious approach. Oliver Bullough, the author of Moneyland, estimates that 100,000 properties in England and Wales are owned offshore. Meanwhile, sales of British weapons, the training of security forces, and the maintenance of military systems in the Gulf continue to be lucrative. In 2019, at the launch of the UK-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council, the government announced a new UK Export Finance Office in Jeddah (I await a parliamentary answer revealing the cost of this initiative).

In January, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee’s report, A Brave New Britain, suggested that trade policy should be coordinated with other UK priorities abroad to avoid the incoherence of British international policy. It urged the FCDO to prioritise “mediation, conflict resolution and atrocity prevention”.

Given the UK’s role supplying Saudi’s war in Yemen, and our money-butler activities, it is unlikely our officials will be removing poisonous textbooks from British institutions any time soon.

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Rebecca Tinsley is founder of the human rights group Waging Peace. Her novel about Africa, *When the Stars Fall to Earth*, is available in English and Arabic. A shorter version of this article appeared in Jewish News.

# TWINS IN TROUBLE

## A new Liberal Democrat campaign seeks to help people affected by the suppression of LGBT rights in parts of Poland. Adrian Hyrylainen-Trett reports

From the moment I joined the vibrant demonstration in August 2020 outside the Polish Embassy, I realised that we Liberals had dropped the baton of maintaining LGBT+ rights across the European Union.

Back in 2016, the UK topped the International Lesbian & Gay Association index for LGBT+ rights across Europe, but over the last five years with the Brexit process completed, and rife transphobia especially across social media, we've tumbled to just outside the top 10 as we've become complacent at home and ignoring anything happening abroad.

Our influence has dwindled and countries in central and eastern European have started to regress in all kinds of different rights, including women's on abortion, journalism and censorship of news and democratic protests; we've had referendums on blocking same-sex marriage in Romania, transgender rights being removed in Hungary and above all the introduction of 'LGBT free zones' in Poland which is why this has become such an international issue.

The background to this LGBT+ Polish campaign has its roots in 2016 when President Andrzej Duda - who is still in office - started using 'family' ideology to suggest that gay and lesbian people weren't suitable parents.

It was very similar to the 'Section 28' enacted in the UK in 1988, whereby educational establishments weren't allowed to promote homosexuality.

However, this language in Poland has gained momentum, with one of the main political parties, Law and Justice alongside catholic religious proponents - and encouraged by funding from right wing American evangelical churches - gaining support to hold local or regional referendums to reject 'LGBT ideology' and make them 'LGBT free zones' that is, to eradicate LGBT lifestyles and safety for LGBT+ people.

The reason we launched this campaign was to coincide with the second anniversary of the first local regulations on 'LGBT Free Zones', and the debate ensued in the European Parliament on ensuring the EU as a whole, remained an LGBTQ+ freedom area, in direct conflict with the 'LGBT Free Zones'.

The campaign seeks to influence Polish towns and cities twinned with UK equivalents by proposing local council motions by any party political council group, so it enables cross party collaboration to encourage solidarity, humanity and engagement with our Polish twins - which is why our hashtag for this campaign is #ProtectOurTwins.

Polish regions and towns have been going through these discussions and there are different flavours of council motions depending on the state of this issue in different places.

It is very noticeable that in south-east corner of Poland, there are far more 'red' areas on the '[Atlas of Hate](#)' where they have passed local regulations on 'LGBT ideology' but there are many other areas, which are 'amber', 'green' and 'white - amber' areas, which are still in local discussions.

Green areas where the ideology backers have lost, and many white areas have yet to hold the debate and it is crucial they don't endorse this. Of course, another objective is for those 'red' areas to reverse their previous decisions and reject the 'LGBT free zone ideology'.

Our campaign is to connect and engage with these different cities across Poland, and to help support them. We have been working with our sister party Nowoczesna to ensure we understand exactly what the situation is on the ground and how best we can support them. We have learned from previous campaigns that not engaging and understanding the local conditions and just imposing our views never works, which is why this connectivity between twinned towns and regions is so crucial.

Cities including like Hull, Oxford, and Lincoln are twinned with Polish towns of Szczecin, Wroclaw, and Radomsko, respectively and major Polish cities like Gdansk and Krakow are twinned with Sefton and Edinburgh. There are 50 or so known twinning relationships and therefore tonnes of opportunities for councils to get involved in our campaign whatever their political make-up.

NGOs have praised the engagement concept of solidarity and humanity with our Polish twins, and want to work with us, while our sister parties in other European countries have reacted so positively that they want to replicate our initiative with similar engagement with Polish equivalents. Radikale Venstre in Denmark and D66 in the Netherlands are two parties that have already responded and we hope others will follow in due course.

If you want to get involved, please contact one of the three groups within the party that have collaborated on this initiative. LGBT+ Liberal Democrat's, led by Gareth Shelton-Lewis, LDEG (Liberal Democrat European group), led by David Chalmers and myself, as chair of LIBG (Liberal International British Group).

This campaign is not going to be a one-off headline, as we intend to continue collaboration with our European sister parties and depending on coronavirus conditions, it may be possible for us to attend and support smaller Prides in Poland later this year.

This is liberal internationalism at its best and something for our party to be proud of in leading this campaign.

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Adrian Hyrylainen-Trett is chair of Liberal International British Group

# FURY CROSS THE MERSEY

## Richard Kemp details the grotesque situation inspectors have found in Labour's Liverpool

If I tried to write a fictional story about what has happened in Liverpool, it would be condemned as being impossible and a huge exaggeration. For years we have tried to break into the system but were stonewalled by both politicians and officers who either held information close to their chest or blatantly lied.

Sixteen arrests have been made of people in or around the council including the elected mayor, Joe Anderson. Now an inspection team, led by an independent former council chief executive, Max Caller, has exposed the grotesque practices of Liverpool City Council.

We continually warned about land transactions, tendering and other areas where there was a clear lack of due process. We also warned about the lack of proper governance and the failure of the scrutiny process of the cabinet and officers. Caller has vindicated our continued and continuing objections to malpractice within the council.

There can be no doubt where the blame lies for the damage done to Liverpool's reputation. Liverpool council has a Labour mayor with a cabinet of nine, all Labour. Liverpool Labour has controlled the council since 2010 and has 72 of the 90 councillors.

Following the report, I called for all three people who have been deputy mayor and all current or former cabinet members connected to decisions in regeneration, planning or property development to resign immediately. If they knew what was going on, they are implicated. If they did not, they are incompetent.

It's embarrassing that no other council in living memory has seen 16 arrests and a senior officer being summarily dismissed. The main findings in the report can be summarised as:

- ❖ Inappropriate behaviour from council officers and from Labour councillors leading to many of the problems that the inspection team reported on.
- ❖ Huge waste within the council and a squandering of council taxpayers' money, and a failure to collect millions of pounds due from developers.

- ❖ Poor recording and scrutiny of all council decisions without an open culture which welcomes criticism and accountability.
- ❖ Councillors and officers have accepted hospitality from developers which placed them in a position to be compromised.

It is right then that the Government should insist on some level of intervention. That intervention needs to be achieved in a way that strengthens the council by

increasing the capacity of officers and members. It is welcome that the intervention will only be imposed on the wider regeneration functions of the council. It will not run the council as was first feared but will supervise certain functions.

Where I cannot agree with the secretary of state, Robert Jenrick, is the suggestion that we move to a smaller number of councillors in single member wards in 2023. This totally ignores the community leadership role provided by councillors, especially those in deprived parts of the city. It also ignores the elephant in the room which is the continuing position of the elected mayor.

The post was imposed on Liverpool and gives too much power to one person. Liberal Democrats would seek to abolish it and offer the people of Liverpool full consultation on all the options for governance.

Just as it did after the Militant and Hatton era it will take many years to overcome the damage done to the finances and reputation of our city. Just as we did then, the Liberal Democrats and the people of Liverpool will bring the city through this crisis and we hope our campaign to clean up Liverpool will reap rewards on 6 May.



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Richard Kemp is the leader of the Liberal Democrat opposition on Liverpool City Council and the party's candidate for elected mayor

# IS IT REALLY 40 YEARS ON?

The foundation of the SDP might seem like ancient history but a book to mark its 40th anniversary has some topical ideas, finds Susan Simmonds

This book of short essays was written to mark the 40th anniversary of the Limehouse Declaration. No doubt the event triggered a range of emotions in Liberal Democrats who are old enough to remember, although there are party members - and at least one MP - who were not yet born when it took place. Sadly it passed me by.

As the introduction notes, the Limehouse Declaration set out the underlying principles of a new party which were written in a world with only three television channels and no smartphones; that was closer in time to the second world war than today.

The launch of the SDP - after the Limehouse Declaration - was an important moment in British politics - it was the first significant new party in British politics since 1945. The Limehouse declaration was made by four powerhouses of British politics Roy Jenkins, Shirley Williams, David Owen and Bill Rogers - the Gang of Four.

Unhappy with the direction Labour was moving in - namely, to the left - they claimed "a handful of trade union leaders [could] now dictate the choice of a future prime minister". The SDP brought with it a long ideological tradition which would not only influence its own thinking, but the Alliance with the Liberal Party for two elections in the 1980s and subsequently the merged Liberal Democrats.

## HEADY AND EXCITING

In many ways they were heady and exciting days. For left learning non-liberals and people who had lost faith in the Labour party, the promise of a political philosophy which captured concerns of fairness and social justice, without the horse frightening baggage of socialism, felt like a real possibility and a new way of doing politics.

The Gang of Four brought intellectual weight and new thinking - albeit reliant on a stream of revisionist thinking within the Labour Party which had roots going back decades. It was also a party which looked like a real opposition to Thatcher's Conservatives - which due to its policy stance and leadership the Labour party no longer felt it did or could be.

As part of the Alliance there was early by-election success including Shirley Williams' win in Crosby a few months later and Roy Jenkins' win in Glasgow Hillhead in 1982. They seemed to have it all - intellectual ideas, experienced political leadership, the capacity to win elections and opinion poll ratings which other parties could only envy.

Despite this stellar start, the legacy of the Limehouse Declaration and social democrat thinking seems to have been underpowered in the Liberal Democrats. The Social Democrat Group was formed in 2015 to promote the social democrat heritage within the

Liberal Democrats and to build on those ideas to address the challenges of the future.

The book's premise is to bring together prominent politicians from across the spectrum of social democracy to reflect on its history and the challenges it faces. It also suggests that it sets out a vision for the country and Liberal Democrats that has social justice at its core. The foreword defines social democracy as: a determination to pursue policies that will work; a commitment to fight for the vulnerable; a belief that for democracy to thrive, policies must work for everyone including the affluent.

Overall, there is a great deal in this book worth thought and further exploration, but there is also a gentle undertone of underachievement and lack of ambition in living up to its title as the future of social democracy.

I read this book with a mild frustration that some ideas were not bolder or braver. In many ways the book has taken a road more travelled in the areas it has chosen to review.

Inevitably there are sections of essays that are overly descriptive rather than analytical or offer any really creative opportunities for further thinking. A more judicious use of the editor's blue pencil would have been helpful occasionally, but as always I take joy in a good index and a well referenced footnote. Having said that, there is a huge amount of material here that is worth reading and I'd absolutely suggest you do so. But you may need to dig a little for the really interesting ideas.

Vince Cable writes the introduction in which he concludes that among the most significant challenges for social democrats are mass unemployment, poverty, the problems posed by big data companies and the weakening of multinational institutions caused by rising populism. He further states that social democrats should remain committed to a Keynesian approach to economic matters. However, his great truth is that social democrats will not return to power in Britain on the basis of policy ideas alone; they will have to co-operate.

There are two stand-out essays - How Can Public Ownership Promote Efficiency? by Roger Liddle, and Towards a Social Democrat Foreign Policy? by Julie Smith.

Liddle's essay gives a thorough review of historic social democratic thought within the Labour party which provides perspective and intellectual weight to the volume. Read this essay first.

Google Anthony Crosland's *The Future of Socialism* (1956) if you haven't read it for a while and be reminded of, as Liddle describes it, "the best book of social democratic theory ever produced in English and written in a sparkling style".

Liddle reviews the Labour Party's history of nationalisation and then examines the renationalisation plans of Labour's 2019 manifesto and their key flaws which finally moved Labour outside the European Democratic mainstream. In a critical section of the book, Liddle explores the challenges for Keir Starmer's leadership, particularly around his restatement of public ownership as a central objective of Labour policy and through the lens of Corbyn's legacy.

Smith's exceptionally lucid and clear exposition of the social democrat foreign policy history and its big strategic ideas since the Limehouse Declaration is the other highlight of the book. It is also an enjoyable read. Her view is that social democratic foreign policy was and remains pragmatic but values driven, and she describes what good social democrat foreign policy can look like.

In her conclusion, Smith calls for the Labour party and social democrats to work together on foreign policy goals and raises the issue of needing more leadership for the UK to play a leading role in international development for which we are respected.

One of the good things to come from coalition was the 0.7% commitment to GNP into UK law and one we are watching being trashed by this government; Smith's view is the "trope that was used to vilify the financial costs of membership of the EU has been repurposed to criticise the UK's international aid budget" – a view with which it is impossible to disagree.

Wendy Chamberlain writes about the urgent need for electoral reform – "a proportional system would be the default if you were setting up a democratic state in the 21st century" - much of it familiar to engaged democrats of all parties, but all the points made are worth review.

## FUNDAMENTAL PILLAR

Electoral reform is a key fundamental pillar in any progressive party and one which could and should provide an area of co-operation. Chamberlain offers a useful insight into the merits of deliberative democracy, and how it could achieve electoral change, but her optimism of how it might lead to change in this environment could usefully be explored in more depth.

Social Liberal Forum director Ian Kearns' essay on how technology will change the future of work draws on the work of Daniel Susskind, and his book *A World Without Work* but adds a social democrat perspective to some of his policy proposals and embeds it into what he calls a historic process of economic transformation, particularly as machines become good at activities which require creativity and empathy.

There is an urgency to Kearns' view that we are not doing enough; education is important, but a more rounded approach to the issues of technology and change, impacts on taxation, income distribution, capital ownership and labour rights are required.

He also discusses Universal Basic Income and deals with criticism of the concept as too expensive very elegantly – either do not believe that automation will not lead to less work for people or believe that there is better solution. Kearns view is the first proposition is not won on argument and that the second has not been thought about. He is also clear that it is a political challenge to find a way of implanting UBI which binds people together rather than driving people apart.

Dick Newby discusses his view that the impossibility of economic growth, as traditionally defined, on a finite planet is now inescapable and requires new thinking, which opens up the prospect of new goals for humankind that could increase wellbeing on a sustainable basis. However, a real gem of policy work is tucked away in his conclusion and would have actually provided a promising thesis for this book – how do we aspire to a better life?

The New Economics Foundation Research has identified five key things which promote well being, connecting to the people around us, being active in our bodies, taking notice of the world, learning new skills and giving to others – how could these be turned more explicitly into public policy goals? Newby highlights the Future Generations Act passed by the Welsh Government in 2015 and its setting of an overarching sustainability objective.

Other essays include Chris Huhne writing about how a government could deliver more housing, Sarah Olney on global free trade and Stephen Williams on delivering social justice through education.

This is a slim volume, so not all policy areas can be explored, but it would have been interesting to read about health and social justice, particularly the contentious areas of migration and asylum, which would have fed into the real area of omission which is identity.

Identity and mass migration was an area of stress for the last Labour government and increasingly for centre left parties in Europe. Based on his pamphlet *Liberal Politics for the Age of Identity*, this is the essay that I would have liked Vince to write. In his introduction Vince notes, "nationalism, ethnically based populism and authoritarian 'strong men' have drowned out the appeal of social democracy and captured a substantial base of social democrat parties".

This is very much an area where perceptions and policy have changed significantly since the Limehouse Declaration and would have been interesting to explore particularly in the aftermath of Brexit and understanding what social democrat thought could add to policy making and how we move forward against an increasingly authoritarian government.

Whether this book is about strengthening social democrat thought and developing credible policy positions within the Liberal Democrats, opening a discussion and outreach around cooperation with other like minded political entities or both, there is a space for it.

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The Future of Social Democracy: Essays to mark the 40th Anniversary of the Limehouse Declaration. Colin McDougall, George Kendall and Wendy Chamberlain MP (eds). Polity Press £10 from SDF.

<https://www.socialdemocratgroup.net>

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Susan Simmonds is chair of an overseas development charity, occasional communications consultant and a very occasional Liberal Democrat in Thanet

# A VERY LIBERAL MUDDLE

Identity politics is not about elevating groups over individuals but rather ensuring that all voices are heard,  
says Miranda Roberts

David Grace made an argument in *Liberator* 405 against identity politics. In his article he shows himself to be compassionate, thoughtful and utterly confused.

Representation is complex. I am white, middle class, straight and cis gendered (if you're not familiar with that term, cis = not transgender). This quartet of advantage has made my life quite pleasant so far.

I'm also female, mobility impaired, a sufferer of chronic illness and manage to always somehow be too young or too old for what I want to do at that moment. These factors have sometimes led to me being disadvantaged.

David asked: "Why should a woman who supports Universal Basic Income be better represented by a woman who opposes it?". The answer is that she is not better represented by that woman. But to ask that question is to misunderstand the situation.

Who better represents me, Miranda, in Parliament? Female Priti Patel or male Ed Davey?

Obviously, Ed. He and I share a certain set of values and a certain philosophical stance. I dislike almost everything Patel stands for. The issue about representation is not answered by individuals - either in the electorate or the elected. It is about the wider view.

In Parliament (and elsewhere in public life) we need a diverse array of voices so that the unique experiences of certain groups are in the mix of the debate. We need to have male, female and non-binary MPs; upper, middle and working class MPs; old, middle aged and young MPs; able bodied, impaired and disabled MPs; straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender MPs, we need a wide range of ethnicities and cultures.

The issue is not that I want to vote for an MP of a specific gender/ethnicity/sexuality/age. It's that I want MPs of these various identities to be within Parliament, in the debates.

When the Commons is discussing family planning and contraception services for example, it's important that there are MPs in those meetings, debates and votes who have first hand experience of the wide range of issues surrounding those topics. If the only people contributing are white, straight, male, upper/middle class, able bodied and middle aged then only one set of experience is used. Bad decisions become more likely.

## LIVED EXPERIENCES

It's not that a single MP needs to be representative. It's that Parliament as a body currently has poor representation of diverse lived experiences.

Let me use my own experience as an example. Up until the age of 32 I was able bodied. I had no physical impairments, other than being rather on the cuddly side and therefore disinclined toward jogging. Then

I had an accident - nothing dramatic, I tripped on a pavement. That was the last day I walked anywhere without planning, mobility aids and pain. Before then, I was a passionate advocate for diversity in all forms, including disability. But I simply had no understanding of the thousands of ways my life would change. The utterly trivial things that would become impassable barriers. It is impossible to fully imagine until you live it. Over time, you find a way to get by and you see the world differently.

I am now an expert of my own impairments and pain. But that does not mean I can anticipate the needs or opinions of any other disabled person. The identity group 'disability' is not homogenous, and nor are any other identity groups.

There is no characteristic that gives universal experience but there is a huge amount of shared, generalised experience within each identity group.

Though my issues and that of another disabled person would likely be very different, we almost certainly have shared experiences. The frustration of people wanting to help, but you want to be able to do that action on your own. The fury when an accessible facility is advertised, but not available today. A group of disabled people would be able to find much in common, no matter how different their disabilities and personalities. The same is true for all diversity characteristics.

To explore this point further, David asked in his article if anyone truly thought of themselves as being BAME. I cannot imagine they do - people don't normally think in government acronyms! But there is a shared experience of being a non-white face in a majority white society. Within the BAME categorisation there is obviously a huge range of nationalities, religions, geographic locations and other factors at play (first, second, third and fourth generation immigrants, were your ancestors part of the Empire/Commonwealth etc).

The shared experience of this group is of being a visibly non-white face in Britain, but there are huge degrees of difference in how that is felt by different communities. (In passing, we should note the growing movement to abandon the acronym BAME. Many feel it is too broad and is used to cover up inequalities between people of different races. No-one has yet found an agreed way to better express this.)

Sometimes people from outside an identity group can be an effective advocate. But in truth, it is simply not possible to fully, instinctively, viscerally understand what it is like to go through life with a different gender, skin colour, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or other defining characteristic. No matter how close we are to someone who possesses that characteristic, we can't ever truly understand it. Sometimes this means that criticisms of a group are

dismissed - which can be fair or unfair.

Look at the criticism of Black Lives Matter. Many commentators (including some BAME people) said: "I agree with their aims but I don't approve of pulling down statues." On the one hand, that's fair. But for a white Briton to say that without acknowledging the violence and disorder we perpetrated through the Empire, slavery and through racist policies and policing - that's verging on hypocrisy. There is an element of lived experience needed sometimes to be an authoritative commentator. This also means that one diverse voice is not enough, as group members have different perspectives. One woman cannot give a defining opinion on what women find sexist, and nor can a single black person voice all experiences of racism. We need many voices.

This matters because if there is no-one in the room who has lived an experience and a discussion or vote is held, that experience isn't being considered in that decision. Sometimes it doesn't matter too much. For example, men will never know how it feels to have a period. If a group of men is tasked with deciding a new procedure to apply for a driving licence, that lack of understanding doesn't matter much. But if that group is deciding about lavatory provision, workers' rest breaks, sanitary product provision - that lack of first hand experience in the room may be a problem.

Railing against the idea of defining identities David asked: "I have a friend who is a quarter Welsh, a quarter Malay and half English; how do you work out if he is under-represented?"

Simple - ask him. Has he been frustrated by Parliamentary debates where an experience connected to his identity would have been relevant? We do not need to assess people and put them in boxes where they must stay, bound forevermore. What nationality and ethnicity does he feel he is? Maybe it's all of those three - or maybe he feels his identity is of being mixed race. Or perhaps he feels his identity is more primarily that of his sexuality, religion - or some other identity, like his profession. Or none of the above.

Identity politics is closely tied with a feeling of either pride or oppression (sometimes both). If you haven't really felt that way, you may not feel there is any identity group you are connected with. But it is for each individual to tell us what identity best represents them.

I understand David's concern that quotas and all 'characteristic here' shortlists are undesirable. But the blunt truth is that Lib Dem members have had the chance for decades now to voluntarily choose the fabulous women, the brilliant BAME candidates. Time after time with depressing regularity, they choose the middle aged, middle class, straight white guy.

## INTERVENTIONIST MEASURES

I campaigned against all women shortlists and I still dislike them now - I'm not convinced they address the right bit of the problem. Good hearted Liberals are often uncomfortable with interventionist measures

*"In Parliament (and elsewhere in public life) we need a diverse array of voices so that the unique experiences of certain groups are in the mix of the debate"*

for elections. I am too. But we need to wrestle with the fact that we do need to take action on diversity. Acting as if everyone is equal has not worked.

Lastly, David confused a point about transgender rights. He objected to a conference motion because of what he called a metaphysical tautology - trans women are women, trans men are men, and non-binary identities are valid.

The business motion centred on practical ways the party could provide better support for trans and non-binary members, so listing the principle in the 'conference believes' section seems fine to me.

If it had been a motion about increasing the provision of discounted rates for unwaged conference goers, I would be fine with 'conference believes' listing the part of our constitution's preamble that refers to freedom from poverty. At this moment in time, when transgender people's rights are under enormous threat, I'm proud to see the party finding ways to show support.

David was also concerned that anyone who spoke against this statement would be "pilloried" and he viewed this as an illiberal pressure to conform.

It's certainly true that the discussions over trans rights have become very heated, inside and outside the party. But this is not about a pressure to conform to a certain view, it's about people's basic human rights to live their lives as their authentic selves, free from discrimination.

Arguments against the idea that trans men are men, trans women are women and non-binary identities are valid normally boil down to one of the following:

I'm simply unwilling to accept a person identified at birth as male can ever 'become' female and vice versa; a misunderstanding/misrepresentation of biology and science, often stating that only binary male and female exist in nature (which is untrue); I don't understand trans stuff and it seems weird to me.

Sometimes the speaker will say how much they support trans people and how provision should be made for them... somewhere else, away from others. It's discrimination, pure and simple and that is why there is an outcry when people in the Lib Dems make these arguments.

We believe in freedom from conformity (so trans people should be allowed to self identify and get on with their lives), and from ignorance (I'm looking at you, people who think gender in nature is always binary).

This wasn't about identity politics. It was showing solidarity with an oppressed group of people while suggesting practical ways we could be more welcoming. To me, nothing could be more appropriately Liberal.

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Miranda Roberts chaired the Liberal Democrat Federal People Development Committee, which oversees diversity, training and membership, 2017-20

# A GAP IN WALES

## Kirsty Williams' decisions to stand down from Welsh Senedd leaves the Liberal Democrats facing difficult elections without a figure whose record has made her popular, says Peter Black

When I first met Kirsty Williams, she was a recent graduate living with her parents in Llanelli, having been brought into the Liberal Democrats a few years earlier by her teacher, the late and much-missed Nick Burree.

She had just won (or possibly lost) the toss of a coin and been appointed agent in a by-election on the now defunct Llanelli Borough Council in a ward briefly held on Dyfed County Council by the current secretary of state for justice. The other half of this act of chance was the candidate.

It is fair to say that there was not much experience of community campaigning in Llanelli, but Kirsty took on the role enthusiastically. Perhaps, though, she should not have listened to those who told her election day was a formal occasion. I am sure she still regrets wearing high heels for the good morning delivery.

By this time, I had been a Swansea councillor for a decade and was involved in helping to run the Welsh party, as a result I brought Kirsty to meetings and got her involved at a national level.

She was asked to speak at a Welsh party conference rally and made a huge impression on everybody there. Subsequently, Kirsty came on board as part of the small team of politicians tasked with running the 1997 general election in Wales.

Kirsty agreed to be our candidate in Ogmere constituency, an area we had not contested for some considerable time. It was my turn to be her agent, though, apart from one public meeting, neither of us spent much time there, concentrating instead in helping Richard Livsey regain Brecon and Radnorshire, and organising daily media conferences.

She was heavily involved in the 1997 referendum campaign that narrowly voted in favour of setting up a Welsh Assembly and was subsequently appointed as the Welsh Liberal Democrats representative on the National Assembly Advisory Group by the secretary of state for Wales, Ron Davies, tasked with drawing up the first standing orders for the nascent body.

### SINGLE-MINDED

During this period she was also thinking about her own future, showing the sort of single-minded determination that has characterised her political career by winning a selection battle to be the candidate in Brecon and Radnorshire against local councillor and future MP Roger Williams.

In May 1999, Kirsty was elected Assembly Member for Brecon and Radnorshire and almost immediately thrown into the deep end as chair of the body's Health and Social Care Committee and as the party's health spokesperson.

She embraced the role and made it her own, impressing everybody with the way she quickly became

an authority on health matters and marshalled experts within the party to support her work.

In the 2006 Welsh Yearbook Political Awards, she was voted "member to watch 2006".

The biggest test of leadership for Kirsty came with the decision of the group after the 2007 Assembly elections, by a slim majority, to become part of a rainbow coalition government with Plaid Cymru and the Conservatives.

It was a decision that Kirsty and I bitterly opposed, taking our resistance to the Welsh executive, and a subsequent special party conference. The failure of that initiative led eventually to the resignation of Mike German as Welsh party leader, and on 8 December 2008, Kirsty became leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, having defeated Cardiff Central Assembly Member Jenny Randerson.

Unfortunately, Kirsty's first Assembly election as leader was a hard one. The party's agreement to enter a coalition at a UK level had left us defending some difficult decisions and contending with growing unpopularity.

As a group we made our opposition to the tripling of tuition fees clear and struggled to keep up with a raft of policies and budget announcements, so as to defend them in the chamber and build our own initiatives around them. At one stage Kirsty had to publicly admonish Vince Cable for proposing that a planned £13bn defence training academy at St Athan be scrapped, without first notifying her or consulting us.

As a result, we barely survived the 2011 election, being reduced from six AMs to five, largely as a result of a small reduction in the Plaid Cymru vote that enabled us to hold on in the regions. Kirsty comfortably held onto her Brecon and Radnorshire seat due to her own personal popularity and hard work.

The party though was in a strong position to influence the agenda of the Welsh Government, with Labour having failed to secure a majority and not wishing to enter into another coalition.

As finance spokesperson, I worked under Kirsty's leadership to ensure that we gained significant concessions in return for our support in getting Labour's budget passed.

In 2011, we agreed to support the Welsh Labour Government's 2012–13 £14.5bn Budget on the basis, among other things, of securing the Welsh pupil premium, an extra £20m to spend on the education of the poorest pupils.

Teaching unions welcomed the deal, with ATL Cymru director Philip Dixon saying: "Our children are our future and investment in them is investment for all. Labour and the Lib Dems deserve credit for ensuring that our children, especially those in most need, will now get a better start in life."

In 2013, we more than doubled investment for



the Welsh pupil premium in exchange for abstaining on the Welsh government's annual budget. In 2012, the Welsh Government agreed to take forward the Welsh Liberal Democrat idea of a health technology fund to allow patients better access to innovative treatments.

The following year we got a further £9.5m investment in this fund and a £50m intermediate care fund to drive integration of health, social services and housing.

In December 2012, Kirsty won ITV Wales' Assembly Member of the Year Award and was a CBE.

Kirsty has never forgotten her roots as health spokesperson and in fact retained that role throughout her leadership, taking up the cause of a long-running 'more nurses' campaign for a law requiring minimum staffing levels for nurses in Welsh hospitals.

She was successful in a 2013 legislative ballot and in 2016 her Nurse Staffing Levels Bill became law in Wales, one of only two private members bills to be passed that term, the other was my own on park homes.

## WIPED OUT

The 2016 Assembly elections were to prove even more difficult and the Welsh Liberal Democrats Assembly group was all but wiped out as a result of continued unpopularity from the coalition and a rise in the Ukip vote in anticipation of the Brexit referendum six weeks later.

Only Kirsty held her seat - with an increased majority - and she stood down as leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats the day after the election.

On the first day of plenary she voted with the Government on the appointment of the First Minister effectively torpedoing a Conservative/ Plaid Cymru/ Ukip attempt to put Leanne Wood into the office.

Labour though only had 29 seats and after consulting with a special Welsh Liberal Democrats conference, Kirsty agreed to become education secretary to enact a programme that included our policies on reducing infant class sizes, employing more nurses in more settings, through an extended nurse staffing levels law, funding 20,000 extra affordable homes, introducing a new 'rent to own' housing model and ending mental health discrimination.

All of those policies have been put in place over the last five years during which she demonstrated what Welsh Liberal Democrats can really do when given the opportunity.

The reforms that Kirsty are not just ground-breaking and far-reaching but will benefit young people for some considerable time. She has been the stand-out performer in the cabinet during the pandemic, handling the crisis with the sort of competence and imagination that Westminster has been crying out for.

While MPs were squabbling among themselves over the campaign led by Marcus Rashford to provide free meals for poorer children during the school holidays in England, Kirsty got on with the job.

*“Once more we face a difficult election, this time without Kirsty’s popularity and experience to guarantee us representation in the new Senedd and to help us move forward”*

She put £11m aside to provide free school meals over all holidays until at least Easter 2021, determined that no child should go hungry.

Kirsty also provided over £420,000 to help to deliver free meals to students who are shielding or self-isolating, announced that new starter teachers will receive an 8.48% pay rise, backdated to 1 September, and provided £2.3m for schools and colleges to make face masks available for students so that they and staff felt confident and safe to return to their learning

environment.

She introduced a capital grant for schools so they could accommodate smaller class sizes and ensured that all schools in Wales have superfast internet and put in place a whole school approach to mental health, truly inclusive lessons on relationships and sexuality. A modern approach to modern languages trusts teachers by giving them the freedom to be creative with lessons, and makes Welsh history, citizenship and identity compulsory for all pupils.

In addition, Kirsty has announced an extra £30m to develop new Welsh- medium education. This capital investment aims to help reach the longstanding target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050, by supporting young learners to become Welsh speakers by the time they leave school.

With her decision to stand down in the forthcoming election she has left a massive gap both in the party and in the Senedd itself.

Once more we face a difficult election, this time without Kirsty's popularity and experience to guarantee us representation in the new Senedd and to help us move forward. After 23 years in front line politics, she has left Wales in better shape than when she started.

---

Peter Black was the Welsh Liberal Democrats Assembly Member for South Wales West 1999-2016

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# PATRIOTIC GESTURES

As Labour wraps itself in the Union Jack, the Compass organisation has looked at place and identity. Are there liberal ideas there too, wonders Wendy Kyrle-Pope?

“This publication is an attempt to provoke a discussion by addressing the many tensions and potential impasses that have seemingly prevented progressives from constructing successful alternative narratives to right nationalism/populism that are able to mobilise a broad alliance of different groups and perspectives.”

A bit of a mouthful, and its contents are, at first glance a ragbag of essays, polemics, conversations and ideas. It is Labour talking to Labour, and wondering if they should try “to confront the right with the left’s own, more progressive, version of nationalism or patriotism? Or should we abandon these terms and instead try to build a different, unifying progressive path?”

It is as important to us Liberals because, once you have negotiated your way through the 75 dense pages, there are some interesting ideas, most of which align with our views of democracy, patriotism and identity. And it is topical.

## UNCOMFORTABLE CONVERSATIONS

The essayists believe that Scottish independence appears a given, the reunification of Ireland a distinct possibility, and after Brexit asks “what are we?”

“What was once Great Britain, the British Empire ... We are struggling along to replace that with something else ... with something new”. It notes, “recent movements for racial justice across the world have instigated uncomfortable conversations about the vicious history and legacy of the British Empire, rightly unsettling notions like pride, place and tradition”.

This breakup of the union, or at least its rearrangement, highlights the ‘nebulous’ concepts of patriotism and nationalism, because they can no longer be ‘brand values’; Black Lives Matter and other movements need somehow to be knitted into the fabric of a new flag.

This new flag, which Neal Lawson discusses in *A Flag is a Simple Thing* is so necessary “because our democratic system isn’t working for enough of the people enough of the time. If they cannot find security and freedom in democracy, then eventually they will look elsewhere.”

The collection begins with a transcribed conversation between Francesca Klug, Frances Foley and Clive Lewis (Labour MP for Norfolk South) on race, identity and belonging.

It is a moving and important conversation because it underlines the suddenness with which people from immigrant or mixed-race families, although born in the UK, discover their otherness, their struggle to determine their own identity when they reach their

teens, and how they resolved this. Although their stories are not new (a mixed-race boy, the daughter of a family of Jewish refugees), they are still fresh and shocking and redemptive.

Natasha Walter, in her excellent piece *Asylum and British Values*, is very sceptical of the statement made by successive Governments: “The UK has a long and proud tradition of offering protection to vulnerable people who are fleeing war and persecution”. She sees the proof of this in the treatment of her own grandmother, a Jewish refugee from Germany in 1939, and Angelique, a Congolese asylum seeker in 2006. Walter’s grandmother was on the last boat from Hamburg; her family remained in Germany and perished in the camps. “she did well in her new country – she worked, she married, she had children, she lived and died in safety”, but “Dig a little deeper, and the narrative becomes more complicated. Eva Stein did not come here as a refugee, because that was not a legal status until after the Refugee Convention of 1951. Instead, she came as an economic migrant, when a friend who had already got to London found a family who were prepared to sponsor her”. Some 80,000 Jewish refugees found sanctuary here, but 500,000 more were refused. “This refusal stemmed from a xenophobia that feels wearily familiar. The Daily Mail stated in 1938: “the way stateless Jews are pouring into every port of this country is becoming an outrage”. Angelique fared no better nearly 70 years later. Walter reminds us that it is the volunteers in the community who care for refugees, finding accommodation, advocacy, English lessons, clothing. She was delighted to see this spirit of kindness continuing during the pandemic last year. “Neighbourhood mutual aid groups sprang up quickly as society locked down, and their members saw humanity before they saw citizenship. The response was never – is this a British citizen?” Esther Brown and Marius Ostrowski look at Patriotism in a *Globalised World: Implications for Progressive Foreign Policy*. “Until 2016, the British left was largely able to get by without a distinct foreign-policy vision of its own... At the same time, Britain enjoyed a firm and respected role as both an EU member state and the gateway to Atlanticist links with the United States”. However, the rise in nationalist populism has shown up the cracks in the Liberal world order which we have enjoyed since the end of the Cold War.

They continue: “The progressive left is traditionally suspicious of foreign policy because of its perceived association with assertive nationalism.” ... “The 2019 election showed that patriotic sentiment carries a powerful mobilising force among the British public. By neglecting the new ‘national turn’, the progressive left shuns the patriotism of some of the people it seeks to represent.”

The Left has always been a force for change internationally, women's suffrage, human rights, the rights of workers, anti-colonial emancipation. "In all of these cases, the left's instinctive preference is to offer solutions that bypass the nation-state in favour of fostering an alternative global order built on non-governmental organisations and international institutions."

However, when in Government, Labour tends to get drawn into domestic issues, and, without a positive foreign policy of its own, often uses the status quo inherited from previous incumbents, "Left-led governments have repeatedly been drawn into projects of naked realpolitik, ranging from 'humanitarian' interventionism to petropolitics and resource competition".

So where is their solution? "The common thread that must distinguish a left-patriotic foreign policy is the centrality of multilateral engagement, which provides something akin to a system of checks and balances at the global level... This means using international institutions, or working as part of aligned groups, to level the global playing field and act as a mediation forum." To a liberal, it sounds very familiar.

Best among these essays is *Can the North Save England from Itself?* by Simon Duffy. He begins with a nugget from history. At the Battle of Dore (in Sheffield) in 829, Edwin, King of Northumbria, met Egbert King of Wessex. Instead of fighting, Edwin "chose to recognise Egbert as High King of England, and so it was at that moment England was born". Duffy notes: "The battle prefigures an important reality" which is the acceptance of the North of the dominance of the South, and the next 1,200 years of London and the South being the top dog, earning more, living longer, the differences between the two realms "equivalent to those that existed between East and West Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall".

He then discusses the Brexit conundrum – why, ask Europeans, did the areas who received the most EU investment vote for Brexit? The simple answer is that those areas did not feel they were represented by the UK Government, one which closed the coal mines and handed out, then cut, subsidies, and did not want another yet another far-away power dictating to them. Duffy argues that democracy has been eroded by years of cosmopolitanism, and the real power lies in the hands of a "deathly and elitist oligarchy [of thinktanks, bureaucracy, statistics] detached from ordinary life".

He looks at the possibly replacements – the Movement for Neighbourhood Democracy, Flatpack Democracy, the People's Powerhouse – all based on localised forms of democracy, small government, identity politics if you will. Absurd? Naïve? Well, look at Scotland. Only 50 years ago the SNP was a tiny band of jingoistic dreamers, laughed at by their countrymen. From Thatcher onwards, governments of all hues ignored Scotland, and the New Labour decision to introduce devolution came as a surprise, but it further pushed open the door for the new tartan, socialist-lite reincarnation of the SNP. Labour's solid red block of all the seats across the most populous part of Scotland vanished overnight.

## IRREVERSIBLE LOGIC

Lawson agrees, continuing this argument.

"Fundamental change often starts small, but its logic can be irreversible. The ideologies of Thatcher and Blair were foreign to Scotland, and so progressive Scots realised that only if they took their destiny in their own hands could they reverse the journey to increased inequality and injustice. "Achieving sovereignty and freedom makes a lot of sense if you have more faith in yourself than in those who have power over you".

Duffy believes that the "process leading to the development of a new constitution with constitutional protections for the local, as is normal in the rest of the world...England was created by the North's submission to the South. But perhaps England can only be saved by the North. If the North begins to organise to reclaim its own sovereignty, create its own power and exercise its distinct voice it may be able to wake the rest of England up to the need for radical reform, before it is too late."

Stuart White in *A New Kind of Dreaming; Democratic English Patriotism* continues this idea.

"For many on the left in England, Britain is their country. The goal is a Labour or progressive government for Britain. But the left in England cannot continue to focus on Britain to the exclusion of England. Scottish independence is a realistic possibility. Irish reunification is moving onto the agenda. If the UK survives, it will likely be in a much more federal form. In this context, the left in England should accept that its primary territory of political action – in which it seeks to win power – is England".

But White too recognises that there isn't just one England. "Moreover, some identify less as English and more as Northern, or from Yorkshire, as Cornish, or as Londoners... we should give priority to democracy, not to identity. The task is not to connect to a particular, established English identity and make politics an expression of this – to try to wrap progressive policy in the flag of St. George." White believes that "the building of democracy in England must be participatory, bottom-up, and inclusive".

These essays do not resolve the issues of the correct form of patriotism, or how to make every individual belong, but what they do have in common is that a radical solution is required to prevent the breakup of the UK, one which I have heard voiced by those at the other end of the political spectrum, the Old Right.

That is almost total devolution for the four national states, with the establishment of an English Parliament, with strong regional input; all states with enhanced powers to manage their economies and raise tax. There would be one Parliament for the UK, created solely to control the currency, defence, intelligence and diplomacy. This might not stem the drift towards a united Ireland, but could refigure the way this country is governed, allowing us to wrap ourselves in a flag of better democracy, true representation and kindness. A liberal solution.

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Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective.

Belonging; Place and the Nation. Compass February 2021. Jack Jeffrey [ed]

# OBITUARIES - TONY GREAVES

The death of Tony Greaves in March saw the loss - among much else - of a rare combination of intellectual and campaigner who had been a fixture in Liberal politics for more than 50 years. These obituaries attempt to capture some of Tony's contribution but we're aware there are many gaps - for example his role in the Young Liberals and his time as a political bookseller. Readers' letters are welcome for the next issue.

## TONY AND COMMUNITY POLITICS

*By Gordon Lishman*

It's much too early to write any sort of summary of who Tony was, what he did, what he stood for, and what he achieved. It's certainly too soon for me; I'm a long way from coming to terms with my feelings and loss.

Tony did not leave a body of work and writing we could use to build that summary. It will require a lot of work and thinking and sharing of memories and ideas. As with Jo Grimond, Tony's authority and contribution will come from words, phrases, arguments, instinctive responses, explanations, conversations and the memory of one of the finest intellects I've known. And that's an idea he would have found uncomfortable and an imposition!

I've already mentioned some of those touchstone memories in short biographies I wrote 20-odd years ago for party publications: Dictionary of Liberal Biography; Who's Who. It's anything but easy to add it up to a summary despite the fact that Tony was simply and quintessentially himself – what you saw was what you got. I've heard this week from people whose memories of Tony go back 60 years. It was 56 years of my life since Weston-super-Mare in 1965. Our occasional, long, rambling conversations involved more agreement about everything – politics, families, places, ideas – than with anyone else I've ever known. I doubt it will ever come together in a single, coherent assessment. I don't care.

When people talk about Tony as their 'rock', that's what we mean. Utterly solid, reliable and himself – through and through. But that certainty of identity was accompanied by humility, thinking and questioning.

There has been a lot of emphasis on words like 'grumpy' and 'curmudgeon'.

I have three thoughts:

- ☛ Tony was grumpy and sometimes angry with people who had power and responsibility and questionable ideas and who should be held to account.
- ☛ He was often kind and approachable and unstinting of his time with people who sought his advice and help.
- ☛ It's worth asking what was he angry about and was he right? For me, his basic view was right overwhelmingly often – even if I wouldn't always have expressed it like that.

Apart from the tactics and the arguments, Tony's crucial contribution to community politics - as an idea, a practical guide, an ideology and a liberal belief – was and is that he was so thoroughly grounded as a person in his communities, his history and his people. He was as far as it is possible to imagine from being a 'citizen of nowhere'. He was a thoroughly practical person, at home with ideas and thought. He was a Northerner, a citizen and representative of Winewall and Colne and Lancashire with strong Yorkshire roots. He was an Oxford-educated Liberal intellectual internationalist. He was a husband and a father who, like all good people, had to work out in practice what that meant. He did not for a moment see any dissonance between those elements. Why should he?

I'm surprised by my strongest feeling since Tony's death. It's actually loneliness – not a normal feeling for me, but I have lost the most important reference point in my life. I can only imagine what his wife Heather feels. She comforted me when my dad died 36 years ago. I hope the rest of us can offer something similar to her.

---

Gordon Lishman is treasurer of the Social Liberal Forum

## TONY IN THE LORDS

*By Liz Barker*

Tony was no fashion icon, indeed he has looked exactly the same since I met him in 1981, but his attire best captures the difference between common perception and the reality of the Lord Greaves

Charles Kennedy nominated Tony to the Lords. I was at a constituency dinner once during which the chair said: "Ah Tony Greaves, the fellow never wears a tie." Not true, he did; always. There was speculation, did he own a suit? No he didn't, but he didn't own any jeans either. At conference after a journalist (I guess Simon Hoggart) speculated what the leadership of the SDP would make of this beard and sandals Liberal, Tony's brilliant put down was: "I have never worn a sandal in my life, and if he keeps writing rubbish like that about me he will find that I am not the pacifist he thinks I am."

Shortly before he arrived Norman Lamont asked me: "Is Lord Greaves the man who invented the Focus leaflet?" Yes" I replied. "Ah" said Lamont "So he is the most dangerous man in the Liberal Democrats". "Yes" I replied. And many people in other parties thought likewise.

People who only knew the mythical Tony Greaves expected him to hate everything about the Lords and to fail to get on. Those who had worked with him before, including SDP colleagues with whom past relationships had been at times awkward, and former opponents from local government, knew to expect something quite different.

We saw Tony arrive, harumph loudly about the flummery of the place, and then quickly settle down to use the Lords to campaign on the subjects about which he was knowledgeable and passionate.

He was annoyed with himself if he didn't table at least six written questions every week and his eyes lit up at the prospect of sitting through the night on legislation such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Bill. It's telling that public testimonies from organisations such as the Ramblers sat alongside quiet messages of sympathy from around the House.

In weekly group meetings Tony was the insightful curmudgeon we have worked with for years. Every director of campaigns since 2010 who came to tell the Lords how we would win the next election was met with a salvo from the back of the room about how political campaigning was more than marketing soap powder.

A few years ago he told the group in no uncertain terms that we had to modernise our campaigning techniques because young people are living socially and politically online. Yet he told me a couple of months ago that he had a Nokia phone with which he could get texts, so he wouldn't be upgrading that thank you very much.

People expected Tony to be sexist. He wasn't. He was a strong supporter of women, and what mattered most to him was that you had to understand and campaign hard to make Liberalism a reality for everybody. From Pendle to Parliament that is exactly what he did.

---

Liz Barker is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

## TONY AND CAMPAIGNING

*By Candy Piercy*

When I joined the Liberal Party in 1981, Tony Greaves was the campaigning guru.

Fast forward to the early 1990s. By this time I was deputy director of campaigns (OK there were only two of us in the department at that time!)

My boss, Chris Rennard, told me to go to Lancashire where a parliamentary by-election was looming. He told me to meet Tony Greaves who, for some unexplained reason, thought we could win in Ribbles Valley – a safe Tory seat with a majority of more than 20,000 votes. Tony was already churning out local Focus leaflets and getting the ball rolling.

So I packed my bags and headed north. The next day Tony took me to look round the seat. He said we were going to 'drive the seat'. Seeing my puzzled expression, he patiently explained.

Driving the seat was a way of assessing how winnable the area was. Getting a feel for how prosperous or poor each area looked. And crucially, whether they reminded us of other places where Lib Dems were winning.

As the day unfolded I listened, and I learned, at the feet of a master campaigner. We looked at the front doors on an estate – how many were still in a state of disrepair and doubtless belonged to the local council housing stock. Which houses had new smart doors and had been purchased by their proud owners?

We looked for gardens kept neatly and others that were junk yards. We saw prosperous commuter areas where most owners were out at work. We saw bungalow estates clearly owned by retirees and starter homes for young families.

As we drove round little pockets of houses, I realised that this seat looked just like the parts of Eastleigh where we were just breaking through in local government – and others reminded me of parts of Eastbourne where we had won a famous victory months before.

And I realised that Tony was right. We could win Ribbles Valley. I carried the glad tidings back to a very sceptical Chris Rennard, who told me that if I really thought we could win, I should get stuck in, be the campaign manager and make it happen. He appointed Paul Jacobs as the agent and we headed back to the beautiful town of Clitheroe in the heart of the constituency.

The rest is history. With our lovely candidate Michael Carr, Paul and I worked with Tony and legions of brilliant Lib Dem volunteers to deliver another famous victory and we killed off the Poll Tax into the bargain.

And I had learned the most important political lesson of my life from Tony Greaves.

To research a seat properly, don't just look at the figures. Drive the seat. Open your eyes and get a genuine feel for what is really happening on the ground. Then get out there and win.

---

Candy Piercy is a former Liberal Democrat deputy director of campaigns

## TONY AND THE MERGER

*By Michael Meadowcroft*

I knew no more loyal, reliable and solid Liberal colleague than Tony Greaves and I relied on him on frequent occasions from the early 1970s onward but the five months we spent in close company negotiating a merger between the Liberal Party and the SDP between late September 1987 to January 1988 were days of angst, mental stress and unrelenting physical pressure. I have vivid memories of the two of us on desperately late trains northwards from Kings Cross after a traumatic day of negotiation with Tony huddled in a corner in his duffel coat. Whereas I could go on to Leeds followed by only a short taxi ride home, he had to get off at Wakefield and then drive across the Pennines to his Pendle home.

Remarkably, amid all the effort of keeping on top of the discussions and participating in them, he managed, together with the Young Liberal chair, Rachael Pitchford, to keep a detailed diary of the whole process, which they published as *Merger - The Inside Story*.

This is a key document for anyone seeking to understand why Liberal politics in the succeeding 30 years have struggled to promote a clear identity.

Tony and I, together with six other colleagues, were elected by the Liberal Assembly to the negotiating team. Our overriding aim was to produce a solution that would keep the Liberal Party intact, whatever else happened with the SDP. We failed, and not because of any skill on the part of the SDP team which was regularly at sixes and sevens and on two occasions fell apart when their leader collapsed in tears.

The problem was the lack of solidarity and sense of purpose of the Liberal team. David Steel could not be relied upon to put forward what our team had agreed in its pre-meeting, and we had, for instance, Chris Mason from Scotland who announced in advance that he was in favour of “merger at any price”, and Andrew Stunell who was a good negotiator but, as he said, for no particular end. Time after time, Tony and I would put forward proposals that would promote Liberal values and would have to be accepted by the SDP in its straitened circumstances, only to have them rejected by our own colleagues.

Paradoxically, both Tony and I were both involved in the drafting of preambles to the eventual constitution. I was one of two Liberals and two SDP initially charged with its drafting. I accepted the assignment not least to demonstrate my determination to secure an acceptable eventual merger, and the four of us produced an agreed draft, only to have it rejected by the full groups. Finally, as time was running out, the SDP said that they would agree anything as long as it contained a reference to supporting NATO, and Tony Greaves was instrumental in producing the text that was adopted and is still largely the same today. Ironically, both Tony and I had resigned from the negotiating team before the end of the process. Both of us spoke against the merger at the Liberal Assembly following the negotiations but to no avail. Unlike myself at that time, however, Tony swallowed hard and joined

the new party. No wonder he later wrote, “Why I am (possibly) a Liberal Democrat: [f]undamentally I am not a ‘Liberal Democrat’ for fundamentally I don’t know what it means”.

---

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87.

## TONY IN PENDLE

*By David Whipp*

For over half a century, Tony Greaves applied his Liberal values in his work for the people of Pendle. Originally elected to the old Colne Borough Council, Tony was a founding member of Pendle Council following its creation in 1974. He remained a member for most of the council’s existence and also represented Colne for 25 years on Lancashire County Council.

Tony set the tone for the local council, with a ‘power to the people’ approach, which has helped create a can-do culture rooted in local decision making. He inspired polycentric Pendle to become parished throughout including the urban towns of Colne and Nelson.

Through Tony’s influence, Pendle was one of the first authorities to devolve power to area committees. Even the equitable way that the mayor is selected was down to Tony.

In Colne, everyone knows someone who Tony has helped. His contribution to the town that he represented for so long is incalculable. Tony has left his mark on Colne, the community he loved, with myriads of projects because of his handiwork. Defending heritage, demanding decent homes, creating new leisure facilities and fighting for rail route reopening gives a flavour of his local campaigning. An example of his tenacity is the restoration of Shackleton Hall, after the prominent town centre building suffered decades of dereliction.

Axing the poll tax can also be chalked up towards Tony’s credit. He was the first to mobilise when the 22,000 majority Tory MP in neighbouring Ribbles Valley was elevated to the Lords. Pendle’s resources were soon deployed producing pioneer Focus leaflets in a successful by-election campaign that led to the end of the iniquitous tax.

Fighting for social justice was a constant strand of Tony’s work for Pendle people, whether they be minority communities aggrieved residents, badly housed tenants, asylum seekers or, more recently, EU nationals. He has made a difference for individuals and for communities. Without airs or graces, he’s been indefatigable in fighting for the person in the street. He has never been afraid to speak truth to power.

Though passionate and principled, and uncompromising in his work for residents, Tony generally sought consensus rather than conflict in the council chamber. A genuine cross-party approach in an area where no-overall-control has been the norm for several decades. His dogged determination exasperated many, but Tony wouldn’t leave a stone unturned in the fight for what he believed.

Tony’s influence on Pendle, as a place, its people and its politics will be felt for many

decades. His death is not only felt by colleagues, but by political opponents and council staff who share our grief at his loss.

Though one of a kind, Tony has always been part of a team. His teammates are now picking up the torch of Liberalism that Tony has carried so long and so ably. As a Pendle council Liberal colleague commented, "Tony has gone, but a little bit of Tony has rubbed off on every one of us. In a way, he is still here."

---

David Whipp is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Pendle

## TONY AND LIBERATOR

*By Mark Smulian*

Tony Greaves was a huge supporter of *Liberator* and indeed in what turned out to be his last few weeks he had made a point of circulating the PDF of *Liberator* 405 throughout the Lib Dem peers.

This was a generous gesture since he didn't really approve of our decision to take *Liberator* out of print and digital only last year. He

complained that this put a stop to his habit of reading it in the bath and marked a sad break with a long print tradition.

When the reasons for the change were explained to him more fully he did though take up the idea of promoting *Liberator* electronically with enthusiasm.

I don't know what Tony's first engagement with *Liberator* was, but his name crops up pretty often in the 1970s editions.

By the time the current *Liberator* Collective came together in the 1980s Tony was of course a fixture at party events and well known for his trenchant column on the back of *Liberal News*, but our links with him really dated from the awful time immediate before and after the merger.

Neither *Liberator* nor - as far as I know - Tony began as opponents of merger at any price but both became strong opponents as the extent of David Steel's surrender to the SDP became evident.

Tony was kind enough to say a number of times that *Liberator* was one of the things that kept him in the party as 'The Democrats' fell apart in their early days.

Our relationship with him remained at the level of



friendly chats at conference until his elevation to the House of Lords after which, I imagine, he had more time to 'do' national politics.

He became not only a frequent contributor to the magazine but also one of *Liberator*'s 'go to' people to find out what was going on in the darker recesses of the party.

I'm not of course about to reveal what he leaked to us but let's just say he had a sharp eye for the platitudes and idiocies of 'lines to take' that are sent out the parliamentarians and little patience with people who reduce political campaigning to marketing babble.

It was typical of Tony that even aged 78 he mildly complained that *Liberator* had too many elderly contributors such as himself.

In his case it was because few had followed him as a political thinker of that calibre, nor had his depth of knowledge and conviction about liberalism or the ability to lucidly apply that to all manner of political issues. If Tony was on your side in a debate it usually meant you'd got it right.

---

Mark Smulian is a member of the *Liberator* Collective



# LETTERS

## WHAT ABOUT FREEDOM?

*Dear Liberator,*

At no time over the recent, moderate years of post-Thatcher Britain has there been such a threat to a way of life, such a threat to liberal democratic freedoms, as there appears to be from Boris Johnson and his nasty toff zombies right now.

Never – equally – has there been so much need for a dynamic Liberal leader, holding a nasty toff zombie government to account.

But I am going to let you into a sad secret. I am not at all confident that Ed Davey is the person that the hour is calling for.

In many ways, for the sake of the party and the coming elections, I hope that I am proved wrong, and Ed grasps the political opportunity in front of him. That he comes across to the general public as a man full of righteous anger and integrity about the arsonist approach to civil liberties on show from the Conservatives.

The evidence so far does not stack in his favour. I was desperate for Layla Moran to win the leadership. With her modern-day articulation of Charles Kennedy's 'The Future of Politics' - the book which persuaded me to join the party in 2002 - she was unsullied by the Coalition years; she was the fresh, engaging face that I wanted (and still want) for the party.

Having spent more than 20 years working in frontline mental health social work, I have been desperate for the party to be on the front foot, taking the fight to the Government on the hollowing out of local government and other agencies' ability to tackle poverty and deprivation. Which is why I was so frustrated that Ed Davey was nowhere to be heard when the likes of Louise Casey called for a new Beveridge Report.

Beveridge, one of our most famous Liberal forebears, is synonymous with government-sponsored, progressive provision for our most disadvantaged citizens. Given the issues brought forward by climate change and the pandemic, and as the implications of Brexit take full hold, we will need a similarly radical re-visioning of what the social contract should look like for the British citizen today.

Which brings me to our leader's recent fixation with his own role and others' contribution as carers.

What could be wrong with that? Surely this is a good thing for him to have been talking about? And yes, I understand the broken-record approach to messaging that is probably important in days when the party's airtime is reduced. But there is no point in Ed trying to become the voice of the 10 million carers if there is no wider strategy being articulated as well.

Why spend time and effort talking about carers when what the country needs is a champion of our civil liberties, and the Labour party, riven by split

loyalties, is in no shape to fight this particular cause.

Perhaps the two campaigns might not be mutually exclusive? Ed would need to come up with an over-arching narrative. And he could do worse than for it to be all about freedom.

He will also need to think through the policy implications of his suggestions, not jump on bandwagons and be tempted to play identity politics.

For example, recently, when he lobbied the government to fund carers' breaks after lockdown it was a nice idea in principle, but the practicalities didn't seem thought through.

Was there the skilled workforce available to pick up the role when carers opted for this funded time off? If the money was available but the personnel were not, any such initiative would surely go the way of the Nightingale hospitals, that had to be packed up because they could not be staffed? In my experience the home care and residential care sectors have been backs against the wall for months. The staff are exhausted and traumatised. Many who are EU nationals may not be able to stay here after the summer.

If, heaven help us, Ed misses the open goal on civil liberties and continues with his carers campaign irrespective, he could do worse than explain to the nation that carers, if given a role in policy-making, can identify the crucial gaps in public services that are imperative to fill, and to plan for in a long-term, sustainable way.

Carers across a range of needs and age-groups could help our party develop a clearer narrative about tax and spend, and the provision of what I will call the public services framework for the upholding of basic human rights in this country.

In the same way as groups like ATD Fourth World UK, for whom I have worked in the past, have consistently promoted the need for people with direct experience of poverty to be part of the policy-making process, the Liberal Democrats could seek to develop and fund ways of bringing carers' specialist knowledge into our own policy making. Working with other organisations as well as the technologies that have developed during the pandemic could enable us to be creative and radical in ways that the other parties cannot and will not.

It is no use Ed Davey banging on about carers if people don't understand why he has tied himself so tightly to this mast. The re-telling of his personal story can seem mawkish at the best of times. If there is no over-arching political narrative, he will end up being pitied. And one doesn't need to be a scholar of Machiavelli to know that isn't a good look.

This narrative might focus on civil liberties, human rights, and the need for carers and their loved ones to access their full range of freedoms. The hour has cometh. What will Sir Edward do with it?

Nick Perry  
Hastings & Rye



## BLAIR - EVEN WORSE

*Dear Liberator,*

There was is mistake in the Commentary of Liberator 405. The Blair government did not propose 90 day detention 'without trial'. It was much worse than that.

Already in England and Wales you can be detained for 182 days while waiting for trial in the Crown Court and that limit can be extended by a judge.

Many have been extended during the pandemic although the backlog of cases existed well before that. The backlog was caused, in large part, by courthouses being sold off and funding cut for 'sitting days' for part-time judges, who pick up much of the volume work.

Blair's proposal was 90 days detention without even being charged.

Cllr Antony Hook  
Faversham

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## SHUTT IN

*Dear Liberator,*

I appreciated Tony Greaves' obituary of David Shutt (Liberator 405), however, the story of David's adoption in the Sowerby constituency in 1970 is even more arcane than he recounts.

Sowerby had a solid Liberal history not least being contested by the Yorkshire chair, John G Walker in 1951 and 1955, and had always had Liberal councillors. It was imperative that it be fought at the 1970 election. I was the Yorkshire Federation secretary and I struggled to get candidates in place. David Shutt agreed to fight Sowerby and was duly selected by the Sowerby association.

His adoption meeting was arranged and Richard Wainwright agreed to be the guest speaker.

I heard that a meeting of the association had been arranged immediately before the adoption meeting but thought nothing of it. However, when I arrived at the meeting venue I was told that the meeting had decided not to fight the election after all! So, we had a distinguished guest speaker, representatives of the press and members of the public outside the room and, apparently, no adoption meeting.

David and I argued in vain with the members for a short time that it was too late to change their original decision. When those outside could not be kept there any longer, I decided that it was time for action. I went outside, took Richard Wainwright on one side and told him what had happened. He then came into the meeting and told them cryptically that "no-one could prevent the word 'Liberal' appearing on the ballot paper"!

I said that I thought that those opposed to fighting the election should now leave. To my surprise they went. I suggested to those who remained that we ought to go ahead and they agreed. The press and members of the public came in and we had an adoption meeting! The press never found out why the meeting had been delayed.

To their credit, many of those who were opposed to fighting accepted the situation and helped in the campaign. David saved his deposit, then at 12.5%, at a very difficult election for the party.

Michael Meadowcroft  
Leeds

**Please note that the  
*Liberator Songbook*  
is out of print**

**We expect to produce a new  
version for the Glee Club at the  
next physical Liberal Democrat  
conference**

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**Friendly Fire: How Israel Became its Own Worst Enemy and the Hope for its Future**  
by Ami Ayalon  
Steerforth Press. 2020

Something I admire about Israeli society is its ability to produce mavericks. There are plenty to choose from. From around 1987, with access to Israel's state archive, a number of revisionist historians blew apart Israel's view of its own history. Some went further, like Shlomo Sand, whose *Invention of the Jewish People* (2009) argued that 'the Jewish people' was a construct, and proceeded to undermine crucial ideological building blocks for Zionism's claim to Palestine.

There has been another category of maverick, however, of battle-hardened elite leaders anxious for Israel's future. In 1988 Yehoshafat Harkabi, former head of Israeli military intelligence, published Israel's *Fateful Decisions*, warning his compatriots of the imperative of making peace, most particularly with the Palestinians not for their sake but in order to save Israel from catastrophe.

He foresaw that Israel's inability to surrender conquered land in return for peace would cost it the unquestioning support it enjoyed in the west and would ensnare 'Greater Israel' in a demographic trap, unable to divest itself of its non-Jewish population. He pleaded for self-criticism concerning Israel's share in responsibility for the conflict. In 2008 Avraham Burg, another distinguished public servant, made another impassioned plea in *The Holocaust is Over* for his fellow Israelis to recognise the reality of Israeli strength as an opportunity to make a generous and productive peace with a prostrate adversary, warning of the dangers of clinging to victimhood, an unhealthy state of mind that risked taking Israel down a darkening path.

Now, such prophets have been joined by another member of the elite, Ami Ayalon, former commander of Israel's elite naval commandos, then commander of the navy, director of Shin Bet (the internal security agency) and a Knesset and cabinet member.

In 2012 Ayalon took part in



# REVIEWS

a landmark film documentary, *The Gatekeepers*, in which with five other Shin Bet directors he discussed the futility of counter-terror security operations since 1967.

The futility lay in the fact that they did not deter but simply intensified the Palestinian determination to resist. To Ayalon's chagrin, however, the film director omitted his overriding concern, the imperative of making a generous peace as the only viable exit from this impasse.

Ayalon is understandably concerned by the profound moral and psychological damage which control of "an archipelago of apartheid-style Bantustans" will do to the controlling society. He quotes Rabbi Yeheshua Leibowitz, a relentless critic of the occupation: "The corruption characterizing every colonial regime will also infect the State of Israel. The administration will on the one hand have to deal with suppressing Arab rebel movements and on the other cultivate quislings, Arab traitors."

In confirmation of the truth of Leibowitz' prophecy, Ayalon remains haunted by a friend's story who, six weeks after the 1967 war, witnessed a reserve officer casually kick over the barrow of Fanta drinks of a harmless old Palestinian vendor. "That was what power could do to us." But he experienced it himself in the Gaza Strip refugee camp, in the look of utter hatred on the face of a refugee 15-year-old. Thoughtful Israelis must, Ayalon implicitly demands, ask themselves "What are we doing to ourselves and to our captives?"

With the realisation by 2000 that the occupation was not likely to end, Ayalon felt, "Our democracy was, bit by bit, devolving into a tyranny." For Palestinians, of course, it has been a tyranny since the occupation began. Ayalon recognises the folly of Israel in ignoring the Saudi peace offer of 2002, a full withdrawal in return for a full peace with the Arab world,

and he knew – as did his chosen Palestinian interlocutor, Sari Nusseibeh - that George W Bush's much vaunted Road Map to Peace was a roadmap to nowhere.

What happened, however, was that the Palestinian Authority's ability to govern was eviscerated in the Second Intifada, and it progressively lost the confidence of ordinary Palestinians.

Israel's deliberate overkill simply made things worse. Of Operation Cast Lead in 2009 Ayalon admitted Hamas "won because they understood the nature of modern warfare better than we did". The Hamas 'win' was to gain the Palestinian street, while Israel disgraced itself internationally.

What's to be done? Like Harkabi and Burg, Ayalon urges mature self-examination: "The fact that we have become a booming economy and the fifth strongest military force on earth, vastly beyond anything our Arab enemies has at their disposal, does nothing to dull our basic insecurity... [which is] whipped up by populist politicians to get elected."

Ayalon knows what will happen if Israel fails to overcome that sense of insecurity, but allows ex-prime minister Ehud Olmert spell it for him: "If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South Africa-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories) then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished."

It is not only Israelis who should take note. If a binational state is what Israelis fear above all, Palestinians should obviously think about how they can put this fear to effective use in their struggle for emancipation.

David McDowall

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## The Extreme Gone Mainstream, commercialization and far right youth culture in Germany by Cynthia Miller-Idriss Princeton University Press 2020

Far right youth today eschew the 'old' neo-Nazi or skinhead style of shaved heads, bomber jackets, and high black boots that had become popular with British and German far right youth in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, they embrace a broad array of styles and clothing with multiple coded symbols conveying varied aspects of far-right ideology and beliefs.

Cynthia Miller-Idriss has already run through a familiar sociology of the attraction of the far right to certain disaffected youths. It comes down to what Aristotle said, we are a social animal, and have a need of peer acceptance. She adds to this analysis how clothing, as outward symbols, can be a factor in this interaction.

I should add, at this point, that I do not hold they view that all skinheads, particularly with the dress code cited above, are racist or far right, that is too easy a stereotype, typically adopted by the far left.

I recall some of the debate around Rock Against Racism and reggae – how can you like reggae, a black music, and be a racist? Well, simply it didn't universalise. There were skinheads in my Young Liberal branch in the late 70s and early 80s; it was a major social force in the town, so attracted all kinds.

If you recall the opening lines of The Specials Do the Dog: "All you Punks and all you Teds, National Front and Natty Dreads, Mods, Rockers, Hippies and Skinheads", well the Teds in a small market town were well into middle age at the time and I don't recall of any Dreads, no National Front members, though it was a sign of the times that Jerry Dammers should identify them as a youth cult; but all the rest were present alongside a majority following the fashion mainstream.

You can see them in the short-lived cartoon strip run in *Liberator* at the time; unfortunately, one of the Punks changed her hairstyle

regularly, breaking the first rule of cartooning. How distant that seems; no longer in the milieu, I'd be hard pressed to recognise the far-right in Britain today (well, no actually... outside Wetherspoons, taunting a Peoples' Vote demonstration last September – unfortunately I didn't photograph them, but white, probably England football shirts were prevalent, but this lot were no longer young); well over a decade ago, British National Party (BNP) members were finding a new home in Ukip. An aside, in *The Guardian* report of the retirement of Brian Parker, the last BNP councillor in May 2018 he was described as "having a taste for 70's knitwear".

Some brands are picked up by the far right by default – the N(...azi) on New Balance trainers (worn by supermodels in London and dads in Ohio!), Alpha Industries bomber jackets – a plainly American logo, unless you're on the German far-right, for whom it references a banned Brownshirt (SA) logo; upside-down, (the logo was on a Velcro label, so that you could personalise it), it became V(aterland) and a symbol of readiness to fight. Alpha is less fashionable now in far-right circles.

Poor old Lonsdale was even more unfortunate – LoNSDAle – the capitals recalling the initials of the Nazi party, showing beneath a partially opened bomber jacket. In Holland, the association was bad enough for young racists to become known as Lonsdale Youth in the earlier years of this century, but the brand was favoured by skins and mods long before then, Paul Weller used to wear it in the late 1970s and you wouldn't associate him with racism, it was more about looking sharp.

The brand Thor Steinar purportedly doesn't have official connections with far-right groups but its logo has been banned in some German Länder, though the bans have been overturned in higher courts. Others such as Ansgar Aryan are more blatant. Their current line includes White Lives Matter, of course they do, a misogynistic Antifa Girls need discipline (presumably aimed at the American market, though there are German groups that use the name), and a number of tee-shirts harking back to a militarist, probably National Socialist past.

Their Truth About Communism tee-shirt claims 'around 130 million deaths' (as few as that?). It has constantly baffled me why Communist iconography is acceptable – the mass-murderer Che Guevara for instance.

Germany has constitutional means for banning National Socialist imagery, but 75 years on there seems to be less of an appetite for exercising it, particularly at a local level, where administrators may not be aware of the initial nuances. German football clubs that have taken a stand against racism and homophobia can find themselves targeted, and it only takes a small number of agents provocateurs to inflame violence that can be very damaging for a small club. How does this square with the rise of AfD?

Miller-Idriss raises the point that while clothing can be an entry point in youth radicalisation, it also provides a point of engagement to challenge the assumptions that go with that clothing – I frequently challenge people wearing Che Guevara tee-shirts for example.

This might be an area where Young Liberals and their like could be active. I go back to my Young Liberal days – we did engage with our local National Front youth; school aside, we had a meeting with them, disagree, went to the pub together, and then, as we often did in summer months, went off to an old viaduct, lit a fire, drank more and still disagreed. One of them was on the national exec of the NF youth movement. I bumped into him in the street in London a few years later and he told me that the evening had changed his life – they'd really loved the bonfire and camaraderie, and he'd started to question his values, he still didn't agree with us, but was now a Conservative, but simply not treating them as dirt, as many socialists did, had started the change.

Stewart Rayment

## Monday

Another depressing day searching for the leader of the Liberal Democrats. As no one has seen or heard of Ed Davey for months, I have given orders for a search of the whole Bonkers Estate to be conducted. No stone has been left unturned: Meadowcroft's potting shed, the crypt under St Asquith's, the cellar of the Bonkers' Arms and even the shaft of an abandoned Stilton mine have all been scrutinised, but we have found neither hide nor hair of the man. When two Well-Behaved Orphans go missing, it is a good bet that they will be found either at the railway station standing on one another's shoulders in an adult's overcoat or under the dining table with a bottle of my best cherry brandy. I have personally searched both locations and did not find Davey at either of them.

## Tuesday

I awaken in a sunnier mood and, after the eggs and b and a read of the High Leicestershire Radical, I go for a brisk walk on the shores of Rutland Water. There is a first hint of spring in the air and, sure enough, it has brought out the mermaids. They sit upon the rocks combing their long hair and polishing their scales. How splendid they look! It is a pleasure to hear them singing each to each and they kindly sing to me too. I am tempted to return the favour by telling them the old joke about their vital statistics being 36, 24 and 3/6 a pound, but recall just in time that it Went Down Baldy the last time I tried it on them. (I still have the dent in my bean from the rock that was flung.) On the off chance, I ask if any of them has seen Ed Davey. "Darling," comes the husky-voiced reply, "the only Davy we know is Davy Jones." At least I tried and, bearing no ill will, I tip them off that the gossip on Oakham Quay is that the inshore fisherman will try their luck in these waters at low tide.

## Wednesday

"What you people have to do, dearie, is stop attracting new groups of supporters and then letting them down as soon as the election is over." My interlocutor, you will not be surprised to learn, is the Wise Woman of Wing. I have popped over to her cottage to pick up a herbal tonic for my moustache, which is none the better for its long experience of lockdown, and the conversation has turned to the fortunes of the Liberal Democrats. She is definitely On To Something. I remember when Clegg came to Leicester during the 2010 general election and made a beeline for Del Monte University so he could be photographed with crowds of adoring students for the evening papers. The next thing the aforementioned students heard, he had stiffed them all for their course fees. Then there was the 2019 election, for which we hit upon a slogan that was unparalleled in effectiveness since the days Gladstone was wowing the burgesses of Midlothian. I am talking, of course, about the masterly "Bollocks to Brexit". Many pro-European types were won over to our cause, only to hear Ed Davey tell them that Brexit was here to stay as soon as the election was gone.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

I once suggested to Charles Kennedy that he make the Wise Woman of Wing a peeress – I wish he had taken my advice.

## Thursday

The evening sees my joining a socially distanced brigade to maintain the defences on Leicestershire's border with Nottinghamshire. Fences are reinforced, mines laid, booby traps dug. We have seen too many promising Leicestershire cricketers snatched from

Grace Road by the Trent Bridge press gang to take these matters lightly – the names Stuart Broad and James Taylor spring to mind. One day my campaign to have first-class status restored to Rutland will bear fruit, but for now I am happy to throw in my lot with Leicestershire even though they did invade us in 1974. For is it not the case that Leicester was a prominent Roman city many centuries before Nottingham was a collection of mud huts on the banks of the Trent called "Snottingham"?

## Friday

The days when I could blithely start a diary entry with "To Cropwell Bishop" are long past. I have not visited even Bonkers House in Belgrave Square for a year, while the Hotel Splendide, Antibes, seems a distant dream. The Elves of Rockingham Forest still come go as they please, lighting their bonfires in my covers without a by your leave, but the rest of us hereabouts are Doing Our Bit. I spend the morning making arrangements for polling day, as by tradition voters in the Bonkers Hall ward come at six to collect their Good Morning leaflets and are treated to a slap up breakfast. I can now confirm that this year the queue will be rigorously stewarded and that each voter will receive a takeaway meal in a bag bearing the legend: "Remember, your rents fall due on Lady Day."

## Saturday

Who should I meet outside the Police house in the village but Sergeant Carmichael? We share a chuckle over the sightings of Ed Davey reported by the public following my recent television appeal. Would you believe that one woman was convinced he had served her in a Stockport chip shop? And that a family from Fife solemnly reported seeing him mucking out the wildebeest at their local zoo? As the rozzers are up to their helmets in this Davey business, I help them out, clipping an old lady round the ear before helping a group of unseasonal apple scrumpers across the road.

## Sunday

Do you have the electric internet? It's amazing what you can find in it: for instance, as I write these words I am viewing what appears to be a Liberal Democrat event. Wendy "Neville" Chamberlain, Jamie Stone (increasingly known as "The Wernher von Braun of the Flow Country"), Daisy Super from St Albans... they are all there. Wait! Who is this? Call off the dogs: I think I have found Ed Davey!

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