

# liberator



*Spotted in Amersham*

**Blue wall demolition crew**

- 📖 Adapt or die in Scotland and Wales - Nigel Lindsay and Peter Black
- 📖 How to help financial inclusion - Claire Tyler
- 📖 Football turns on its fans - Howard Cohen

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## LIBERATOR

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

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

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

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# COMMENTARY

## THE WALLS TREMBLE

Would any Liberal Democrat, when contemplating the 6 May election results, wish to change places with a Labour supporter?

Going eight seats up in England, one in the London Assembly, one down in Scotland and static on one Senedd seat in Wales was hardly a glorious performance but it did provide further grounds to think that every party's sources of support are shifting.

The continuing collapse of the Labour's ex-industrial 'red wall' seats in the north and midlands is a private battle between them and the Tories since with a few exceptions - notably Chesterfield and recent council seats in Sunderland - Liberals have had little political stake in these for about a century. Lib Dem support in these regions is mainly in conurbations.

The 'blue wall' told a different story. Lib Dem results were good though not sensational in the Home Counties and benefitted from both Remain supporters and the more restrained kind of Tory aghast at Boris Johnson's mendacity and antics.

Indeed the Queen's Speech included a suicidal proposal for the 'blue wall' - from the Tories' viewpoint - in creating a free-for-all in house building and commercial development by tearing up the planning system.

Not only is this a misguided attack on local democracy when there are 1.1m unused residential planning permissions in England, it will also fail because the construction industry's capacity cannot be increased like turning on a tap.

The planning reform does though contain plenty to enrage Tory voters in places with housing pressure - which by happy coincidence are mostly in 'blue wall' areas.

In a way the Home Counties performance should be unsurprising. Lib Dems and Liberals have always done well in council elections in the south under a Tory government.

Results across England though suggest skills and energy in local campaigning lost under the Coalition have been only fitfully restored.

The difference this time is that the Brexit divide - which many assumed buried under the pandemic - showed itself alive and well benefiting the Tories in Brexit areas and other parties in Remain ones.

This ought to stop the Lib Dems being so cautious on Europe. The psephologist John Curtice - addressing a meeting of the 'progressive alliance' support group Compass - said he found Lib Dem timidity on Europe incomprehensible and pointing to the overlap between Remain and Lib Dem support asked: "Who do you think voted for you?" Quite.

Compass seeks co-operation between Labour, the Lib Dems, Greens, Plaid Cymru and the SNP against the Tories and seems to have accepted that election pacts

will rarely be reachable or enforceable, and agreements to keep out of each other's way - as reached by Paddy Ashdown and Tony Blair in the mid-1990s - might hold promise.

It's hard to see much was gained from 'Unite to Remain', but co-operation is worth exploring further so long as two things are borne in mind.

The first is that if a local party is unwillingly compelled to stand down due to national deals made over its head, such intense resentment will result that the pact concerned will almost certainly not work.

The second is to accept that no-one can guarantee where their votes will go. It is one thing for the Lib Dems to do deals with the Greens and Plaid Cymru, quite another to involve Labour too.

It is uncertain that Lib Dem and Greens votes are interchangeable, but it is certain that some Lib Dem votes will - misguidedly - go Tory where the party stands down.

All this points to informal local arrangements to run paper candidates - rather than a national share-out of seats - as likely to be more productive.

Labour though may need to lose even more badly than it did in May before it deigns to become involved.

England was a limited success, but it's clear from the anger with respective party leaderships expressed in articles in this Liberator that something is catastrophically wrong in Scotland and even worse in Wales.

It's not for outsiders to lecture Scottish Lib Dems on unionism and independence but outsiders can plainly see the party has evaporated in former strongholds beyond the four held seats, apart from a decent second in Caithness and Sutherland.

The lone Welsh Senedd seat was won on a regional list leaving no representation at Cardiff or Westminster in a swathe of seats that also dependably returned Lib Dems for decades.

Both suggest that whatever Scottish and Welsh Lib Dem leaderships have been doing needs rethinking from scratch.

Another ailing former Lib Dem redoubt is south west England, where there were modest gains in Devon but a calamity in Cornwall with 16 seats lost.

There are understood to have been personal disputes involved, but this too suggests the Brexit influence is alive and well.

Sometimes being plainly pro-Remain benefits the Lib Dems and sometimes not, but Labour under the hapless Jeremy Corbyn tried facing both ways and lost the trust and support of both sides. Lib Dem timidity should end.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## AND YOU SPENT HOW MUCH?

The Lib Dems spent £1.3m per seat won at the 2019 general election, research shows supplied to us by someone who has combed through the final Electoral Commission data.

Baroness Thornhill was not able to access this full data for her highly critical report into the campaign - since it emerged only in April - but it would surely have added colourfully to her strictures.

Astonishingly, the Lib Dems outspent Labour, at £14.4m against £12.1m, the latter including £55,000 from the nominally separate Co-operative Party.

These figures allow an analysis of the correlation between national spending in a general election and the number of parliamentary seats won (see tables).

Lack of money was held to have prevented greater success in pre-Coalition general elections, but this was clearly not an issue in 2019 when largesse from anti-Brexit major donors flooded in. Unfortunately, a large chunk was spent on the hopeless national leaflets that deluged voters to counter-productive effect.

These contained such absurd messages as “Jo Swinson could become prime minister” and were totally unlike the kind of leaflets MPs said were needed after they saw the ineffective ones used in 2017.

Six general election campaigns have now been fought under rules introduced in 2000 to cap national party spending in the year before a general election.

The first three probably understated Lib Dem spending as the target seat strategy promoted by then campaigns chief Lord Rennard was based on spending in seats over four or more years, with relatively little on the national campaign in the last four weeks.

The declared expenditure for the 2001 general election was £1.4m, but 52 MPs were elected at a cost

Electoral Commission figures for declared party spending.

Year	Spend	Seats	Spend per seat won
2001	£1.4m	52	£27,000
2005	£4.3m	62	£73,000
2010	£4.8m	57	£84,000
2015	£3.5m	8	£437,000
2017	£6.8m	12	£567,000
2019	£14.4m	11	£1,309,000

of just £27,000 per seat in the year before polling day (see tables).

Even after the Coalition ended the party still tried to promote leaders in national leaflets as though they were presidential candidates, forgetting that it had been grassroots campaigns that brought earlier success. The value of the national campaign looks pretty poor at £1.3m per MP in 2019.

## NOTHING TO SEE HERE, MOVE ALONG

The 4% recorded for Louisa Porritt’s campaign for London mayor was in lost deposit territory, but has left the capital’s leading activists blithely unconcerned.

Liberator’s sources say they were astonished when a debrief among the several dozen people most closely involved with the campaign could find nothing wrong with it except vague allusions to “people didn’t hear our message” and no particular ideas were proffered for anything they would have done differently or would do so in future. This rather suggests some fresh blood and thinking is needed urgently.

Porritt herself is not to blame since she pretty much did the party a favour by agreeing to stand after the original candidate Siobhan Bonita withdrew in a huff (Liberator 403) and another potential successor Geeta

Suidhu Robb was expelled from the party for having made an anti-Semitic rant during the 1997 general election (Liberator 405).

Bonita - who ran for mayor as an independent in 2012 - said she resigned as candidate because the campaign went on a year longer than expected, given the pandemic postponement, and that she had not been allowed to run it the way she wanted.

Party	Total expenditure	Number of candidates	Spending limit (£30,000 x number of candidates)	% of spending limit spent
Conservative and Unionist Party	£16,486,696.60	635	£19,050,000.00	86.5
Labour Party	£12,033,341.14	581	£17,430,000.00	69.0
Co-operative Party	£55,198.66	50	£1,500,000.00	3.7
<i>Labour and Co-operative combined</i>	<i>£12,088,539.80</i>	<i>631</i>	<i>£18,930,000.00</i>	<i>63.9</i>
Liberal Democrats	£14,426,931	611	£18,330,000.00	78.7
Green Party	£476,868.70	497	£14,910,000.00	3.2
Scottish National Party (SNP)	£1,004,952.73	59	£1,770,000.00	56.8
Plaid Cymru	£183,914.55	36	£1,080,000.00	17.0
UK Independence Party (UKIP)	£8,761.00	44	£1,320,000.00	0.7
Brexit Party		275	£8,250,000.00	

This is believed to have been because party headquarters diverted money from the London mayoral campaign to Scotland and Wales (ultimately to little effect), a move that angered Bonita who felt senior campaign staff should have fought HQ harder on her behalf.

Her experience as an independent had left her used to running things her own way rather than working in a party structure and she had caused some alarm in September 2019 by unveiling the meaningless slogan 'Love London Better' and then banging on about the equally apolitical matter of 'kindness'.

Seeing the campaign stuck on 5% in the polls, London region commissioned a review from Scotland's Kevin Lang (Liberator 401) which found that hardly anyone - not even those associated with the campaign - could say what it was about or what Bonita would do if elected.

The Porritt campaign eventually settled on 'jobs, homes and clean air' as its main themes. Nothing wrong with those, but nothing either to distinguish the Lib Dems from what any other mainstream party said, and nor was there anything particularly striking in proposals for how these goals would be achieved.

Lang has been invited back to do a further review, though in light of Scotland's dismal results it's unlikely much can be learnt from there.

The Lib Dem campaign in the Richmond, Kingston and Hounslow London Assembly seat was a bit semi-detached from the main campaign and almost won, but the votes garnered there were enough to at least bring the Lib Dems a second assembly seat from the top-up list.

## LIMITS OF TECHNOLOGY

When a hustings had to be called for the Chesham and Amersham by-election somebody somewhere thought they had a brilliant idea - hold it on Zoom.

It rapidly became apparent that this would take the party back to the situation before 1872, when secret ballots became required for elections, since anyone on the call could see how others voted and any household with two or more members would pose an obvious problem.

## THE COMPANY THEY KEEP

Not content with recruiting ex-Ukip candidates (Liberator 399) the pro-Brexit 'Liberal' party has gone even further by standing a candidate who turned up at the Glasgow Southside election count wearing a yellow star, giving Nazi salutes and shouting anti-vaccination slogans.

Derek Jackson (not the former Kingston and Brent activist of that name) was "dismissed" from the party after his conduct became known.

A statement issued to Liberator said: "The Liberal Party notes with considerable concern the behaviour of its former candidate, Derek Jackson, at the election count for the Glasgow Southside Scottish Parliament seat and does not in any way endorse his actions. Mr Jackson's membership has been suspended with immediate effect.

"The Liberal Party is sorry for any offence Mr Jackson may have caused to any members of the public or to other candidates. Mr Jackson, who has acted entirely independently in adopting certain symbols and

gestures has massively misrepresented The Liberal Party and its core values.

"The Liberal Party vehemently and actively opposes any form anti-Semitism or racism or the use of any symbols which evoke or promotes any such sentiments. The Liberal Party stands for a society that is open, tolerant and equal for all individuals and communities, whatever their heritage, faith or gender."

This does not though explain how he came to approved to stand - let alone adopted as a candidate. But then if you go fishing among Brexit supporters you are likely to have some unpleasant catches.

## DROPPING THE PAYNTER

The dire result in Cornwall was by some distance the worst Lib Dem performance in England on 6 May with a net loss of 16 seats.

Brexit and local issues may have been at work but matters cannot have been helped by the English party deciding that cabinet member Adam Paynter should be barred from standing as a Lib Dem for a year.

A dispute arose between Paynter and a councillor Dulcie Tudor - who subsequently left the group - after he forwarded an email from her to senior staff concerning a planning matter, which she said was a breach of confidence.

Tudor complained to the English party, which suspended Paynter from standing for public office for 12 months.

This would normally mean little but with elections looming it meant one of the most prominent councillors could not stand.

Suspension is anyway not supposed to be a penalty but a stop-gap pending further action.

Paynter has since tangled with the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP) and was refused permission to proceed on grounds he argued of improprieties in the hearing that suspended him, lack of evidence and a "manifestly excessive" penalty, which the FAP decided had t been "within a reasonable range".

He has also gone to the FAP over "new points were not raised within the appeal time limit; procedural fairness of the disciplinary hearing; whether adequate notice of the case against [Paynter] was given; whether cross-examination [was] required as a matter of fairness".The FAP is mulling those over.

Paynter held his seat as an independent on 6 May, without Lib Dem opposition.

## PASS THE PARCEL

Few Lib Dems outside London may know or care who its regional chair is, but all ought to care about how the party's Byzantine internal election and appeals processes work. Or not as the case may be.

Anne Glaze, Rod Lynch and Juliet Makhapila all stood for London region chair last winter and Lynch is understood to have lodged an objection to Glaze's use of social media to promote herself.

Returning officer Cec Tallack felt that even if Glaze had infringed the rules on using party Facebook media, her winning margin was such that this could not have made any possible difference to the outcome and so he imposed no sanction.

Complaints then went to the Appeals Panel for England (APE), which upheld them though said the London's peculiar and complicated election rules were

a contributory cause of the situation and inadequate.

It decided another ballot was needed, having somehow managed to find that Tallack had been right but overturned his ruling anyway.

Glaze - and former chair Ben Sims acting for the regional executive - then took the matter to the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP).

An FAP ruling said Glaze received 1,147 votes, and since 1,849 were cast in the simultaneous executive committee elections that looks like an overwhelming win.

Sims and Glaze both argued that she had not been told there would be an appeal against her election - giving her no chance to make representations - and that in any event the offence she was supposed to have committed was not one for which she could be disqualified.

The FAP likes to hold itself out a party's Supreme Court. Not in this case.

Due to a barely comprehensible issue about what is in the purview of a state party constitution and what is in the federal one it decided it had no jurisdiction.

Its ruling [[https://d3n8a8spro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/60152/attachments/original/1619680750/Benjamin\\_Sims.docx\\_%281%29.pdf?1619680750](https://d3n8a8spro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/60152/attachments/original/1619680750/Benjamin_Sims.docx_%281%29.pdf?1619680750)] though sounded as though FAP chair David Graham wished that he had.

Graham wrote: "If proved, [Glaze's] treatment would amount to a clear breach of natural justice.

"It would have been unfair to fail to give her, as an interested party most obviously affected by the decision whether the election should be re-run, a fair hearing.

"It is also at least arguable that the London Region Executive would have a sufficient interest to be heard given that it bears the expense of re-running the election. If proved, it would also be quite unfair, and beyond the remit of an adjudicative body, to retrospectively penalise conduct without any power to do so in the rules pertaining to the election in question.

"Unfortunately, the FAP does not have jurisdiction to correct these alleged errors by the APE."

In a final salvo at the hapless APE, Graham said: "It would appear to be arguable that a decision made without any opportunity at all for participation by a directly affected person is not binding on them and may be set aside, though that would be a matter for the APE to adjudicate if an application is made to it under article 9.3(b) of the English State Party constitution. I suggest that [Glaze] do so without delay."

Graham added for good measure: "This case raises the question whether the English state party's appeals arrangements are sufficiently robust, transparent and timely."

This ludicrous saga raises questions about the adequacy of rules on how candidates promote themselves in internal elections, the basic competence of the APE and the powers the FAP needs. It looks set to run and run.

## IN OR OUT

The creation of the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (LDCRE) in 2018 (Liberator 390) was intended to put a stop to the sort of in-fighting that

caused the collapse of its predecessor Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats.

A baffling exchange on Lib Dem Voice suggests all is not well. [<https://www.libdemvoice.org/open-letter-to-ed-davey-from-blac-lib-dems-67433.html>]

An organisation called BLAC Lib Dems posted about an open letter it had sent to Ed Davey concerning Black Lives Matter and related issues, and said it existed under the umbrella of LDCRE.

A reply came from James Belchamber, who said: "As the Membership Secretary of LDCRE I am surprised to find out that BLAC Lib Dems consider themselves to be in association with us - my understanding has always been that it is a separate (and often oppositional) organisation."

LDCRE chair Mohsin Kahn then posted: "BLAC LD, Chinese Lib Dems, Muslim Lib Dems etc do not have a formal relationship with LDCRE (of whom I'm chair). We are all independent bodies. They are not under us in any umbrella or spoke form."

In reply Lisa Brett, a listed signatory of the open letter, said: "BLAC very much look to LDCRE as the parent organization for all Lib Dem minority groups. LDCRE has always been encouraging to smaller grassroots groups. This supportive relationship is something BLAC Lib Dems have greatly valued.

"We don't need to agree on every issue to be allies in the fight against racism. I hope BLAC Lib Dems will continue to respectfully regard LDCRE as a mentor and ally."

It would appear that BLAC Lib Dems thinks it exists under the umbrella of LDCRE, while the chair and membership secretary of LDCRE maintain that it doesn't and the latter thinks it is "often oppositional".

## JAM TOMORROW

Relations between Lib Dem regional parties are normally conducted with a certain decorum, but not in a baffling statement on the Western Counties website.

This region covers Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bath, Bristol, Somerset and Dorset, but nothing further west.

Why then did it website carry the observation: "Devon and Cornwall Merger. Western Counties Lib Dems have called for Devon and Cornwall to put aside their difference and merge as a new county called 'Jam & Cream Scones Country'." Liberator asked, but answer came there none.

### Western Counties Liberal Democrats

Working for Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Bath, Bristol, Somerset and Dorset

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### Devon and Cornwall Merger

Western Counties Lib Dems have called for Devon and Cornwall to put aside their difference and merge as a new county called 'Jam & Cream Scones Country'

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# **CHESHAM & AMERSHAM BY-ELECTION 17 JUNE**

Help Liberator Collective member Sarah Green knock a brick out of the Tory's 'blue wall' on 17 June.

## **AMERSHAM HQ**

**11 HILL AVENUE, AMERSHAM, HP6 5BD**

**BY LONDON UNDERGROUND METROPOLITAN LINE  
OR NATIONAL RAIL LONDON-AYLESBURY LINE TO  
AMERSHAM (1 MIN WALK)**

**PARKING - AMERSHAM MULTI STOREY CAR PARK IS (3  
MIN WALK)**

## **CHESHAM HQ**

**CHESHAM YOUTH CENTRE, OLD DRILL HALL,  
BELLINGDON ROAD, CHESHAM, BUCKS, HP5 2HA**

**BY LONDON UNDERGROUND TO CHESHAM ON THE  
METROPOLITAN LINE (5 MIN WALK)**

**PARKING - ALBANY PLACE CAR PARK (3 MIN WALK)**

**LINK TO APPLY TO CAMPAIGN FACEBOOK VIRTUAL HQ:**

**SIGN UP TO THE FACEBOOK GROUP: 'CHESHAM AND  
AMERSHAM LIB DEM BY-ELECTION HQ' FOR CAMPAIGN  
INFORMATION.**

**LINK FOR DONATIONS AND PHONE CANVASSING:**

**[HTTPS://WWW.LIBDEMS.ORG.UK/BYELECTIONS](https://www.libdems.org.uk/byelections)**

# IT'S EQUALITY, STUPID

## Chris White draw lessons from the curate's egg of England's local elections

The phrase 'Curate's Egg' has a complex history (including 19th century accusations of plagiarism). Generally it is considered to mean 'good in parts'. Others insist that it is pure euphemism and that it means 'generally bad'.

So which were the results on 6 May for the Liberal Democrats? Hartlepool was wholly bad. But we really weren't playing, so that's all right. Chesham & Amersham is bound to be better.

Cornwall was a shock, although we knew there would be problems. The Independents there also took a bath, so perhaps it's really all about Brexit. Still. As perhaps was Hartlepool.

And there is evidence for that: successes in Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, my own Hertfordshire (especially St Albans) and elsewhere again point to the fact that the Brexit divide is potentially becoming a permanent feature of the political landscape.

We survived in Wales, and Scotland wasn't too bad when we were in danger of not being the story at all.

In all of these local commentators are in a stronger position to comment in detail and so I will try and avoid stepping in where I know little.

### OBVIOUS INCOMPETENCE

The fact remains that the Conservatives did well and that the obvious incompetence and doubtful behaviour of the weakest prime minister in living memory – and beyond – seem not to have touched at least Conservative voters.

And Labour? Well, things were so bad that Keir Starmer took personal responsibility and sacked his deputy leader as campaign director before giving her a new shadow role which does not actually shadow any minister.

This became the story post-election. He might have done better to wait until all the results were in: Labour had some signal successes in those odd mega-contests for regional mayors and police and crime commissioners (PCC) – for example in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. But the vast majority of PCCs remain Conservative, as the creation of this position - a significant concession to our Conservative coalition partners which was not reciprocated in terms of electoral reform or tuition fees - was no doubt intended to achieve.

Starmer's premature overreaction raises bigger questions about his leadership than the loss of council seats.

So what do we actually know?

- ☛ The Greens saw 151 councillors elected in England this time as opposed to the Liberal Democrats' 588. Not a breakthrough but good enough to be a warning.
- ☛ The Liberal Democrats in England did not move forward or back and only gained one council. We received 17% of the vote.
- ☛ Labour did badly in terms of council seats lost.
- ☛ Incumbency was certainly helpful in my area although not so much for either Conservatives or Labour.
- ☛ There is some evidence to suppose that there is a growing feeling among Tories coming our way that the Conservatives are seen as indifferent and complacent compared with the eager Lib Dems (or possibly also Greens).

In St Albans we stuck to positive messaging despite the temptation to respond to fabrications and bile from the Tories furious that we had the temerity to lead a successful minority administration since 2019. Our silent teeth-grinding seemed to work.

We also had the enormous advantage of having Daisy Cooper as an MP: countless times we were told by residents (and not just Lib Dems) how delighted they were to have her as the MP for St Albans since December 2019. This even happened in neighbouring Harpenden, which is in a different constituency, but where a significant number are fully aware of her vigour and hard work.

In some ways this was a strong message enough, although we did point out the failing of the previous Conservative administration in terms of financial management and the fact that we were sorting things out.

We know the Lib Dem brand has been damaged by the Coalition: tuition fees are only part of it. Even merely going into coalition with the Tories remains bad enough for some, especially as we emerged so empty handed.

But I suspect that we don't yet know what we actually stand for. It has been suggested that we are trying to be simultaneously the insurgents and the establishment, an uncomfortable position at best, nonsense at worst.

We have a tendency to seek out niche issues: nothing as such wrong with that, but it does not allow us to speak to those who don't see themselves in that particular niche.

We tend still to think of electors as being frustrated by Whitehall, parliament or their local council. Some even imagine that the electorate is frustrated by the inadequacies of the constitution and will be inspired by a promise of regional parliaments (I haven't met one yet).

In reality the electorate is frustrated not by



governance or by government but by stuff. The fact that the broadband in their home or business isn't very good. The fact that they can't get good service from retailers. The fact that their landlord doesn't actually do what's promised while charging hugely profitable rents. The fact that their housing association has become faceless and remote. The fact that business rates really are an outrageous, heavy, unfair and arbitrary tax.

In fact the frustration for many is far deeper. The fact that they are locked into the gig economy or are holding down two or three jobs to pay the outrageous rents for the poor quality accommodation they are trying to call a home. The fact that their area never seems to be interesting to central government, the BBC or the people who are taking decisions. The fact that after 60 years of comprehensive education, there are still good schools and bad schools. It's equality, stupid.

And until the Liberal Democrats remember Beveridge and Keynes and champion equality we will remain surprised that voters aren't exercised by wallpaper or even the £37bn thrown away on a test and trace system that doesn't work.

In practical campaigning terms there is already a gap in the market for us here: talk to, listen to and stand up for ordinary people. This could well be why Conservative voters, at least in Harpenden, were telling us that they didn't know who their councillors were, never saw them and thus were delighted to see us, masked and eager, on their doorstep.

Tellingly social media posts popped up in the days after the results were published lamenting the fact that certain Conservative councillors had lost their seats. "They had been let down by the residents", one declared. As Brecht said in 1953: "The people

Had forfeited the confidence of the government  
And could win it back only  
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier  
In that case for the government  
To dissolve the people  
And elect another?"

While the Conservatives continue with the attitude of East German Stalinists there are rich pickings – provided we have the policies and messages to persuade those who have fallen for the 'clown minister'. If you haven't, read Piketty.

Meanwhile, in terms of the mechanics of campaigning we can always do better. Some of the problems are micro issues.

What is the difference in Connect between 'refused', 'won't say' and 'not Lib Dem'? No two canvassers seem to have the same opinion.

Why do so many run polling day operations in wards we already know we have won handsomely? Because we always have? Why on earth do we use tellers (at all)?

Others are bigger. Skills are in short supply: too many local parties have next to no artworking capability. Others think they can artwork nice leaflets but are actually wrong. Often laughably so.

*"It has been suggested that we are trying to be simultaneously the insurgents and the establishment, an uncomfortable position at best, nonsense at worst"*

## HOW DAFT CAN YOU GET?

Others are bigger still: we didn't win any of the mega-contests. But did we even try? In the Hertfordshire PCC election we came second (and a strong second when it came to the second round). But not everyone, I now understand, mentioned the candidate in their local election literature. How daft can you get?

The problem started with Clegg's ridiculous proposal to boycott PCC elections more or less the minute it had been

agreed by the Coalition of which he was deputy prime minister. Others chimed in to say it was wrong to politicise the police (oblivious of the fact that the police authority had been part of the county council or equivalent for decades before this needless reform – political bodies unless I am much mistaken).

The rest is a lack of self-belief: we can't win big areas, we say. In fact there is no template as to how we fight these elections nor about the actual role of a PCC or mayoral candidate. They are treated as just local election candidates (although for some utterly inexplicable reason they are treated by the party rules as parliamentary candidates).

London colleagues meanwhile will have their views as to whether there is a template for Greater London elections. Or indeed enthusiasm: I gave a talk to a local party in one of our stronger London boroughs a while back who were blissfully indifferent to the fact that the next election they were facing was the following year's GLA elections rather than the borough election in three years' time.

If, as we suspect, county unitary authorities (or at least very large unitaries) are going to be imposed by the Tories on the rest of the shires, as they attempt to reform us out of existence, we are going to have to find an answer to this.

So all in all, 6 May was not bad but needs to be much better. The 17% in England was creditable given that we had been forced off the streets for the best part of the year and that the narrative nationally is Boris v Starmer or Boris v Sturgeon.

But above all else we need to sort out the brand and believe in ourselves.

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Chris White is leader of St Albans District Council and a Hertfordshire county councillor

# CHASING THE PENGUIN, CHESS PIECE AND BADGER VOTE

None of them can vote, but humans in Scotland got little attention from a misguided Lib Dem leadership obsessed with unionism, says Nigel Lindsay

I had to re-arrange the furniture the day after the Scottish election, so that I could hide behind the sofa as each new result came in.

As polling day approached, the expectations previously raised by the leadership were being dialled down rapidly, but I don't think anyone expected things to be quite as bad as they got.

To recap, in the first three elections to the Scottish Parliament Lib Dems won 16 or 17 seats each time. Clegg's Coalition lost us most of those, with a drop to five in 2011. That total was maintained in 2016 but this year it dropped to four, losing us 'major party' status in the parliament. With it went funding and a say in how the parliament's business is managed.

For the first time, LibDems failed to win any list seats (those which give proportionality to the parliament's composition). We also failed to make an expected constituency gain in Caithness, Sutherland and Ross.

How could it have come to this? Here are five crucial facts.

First fact. A group of LibDem activists developed thoughts about party strategy in September 2016. Their core idea was that Lib Dems in Scotland had become The Boring Party and that we needed to develop a storyline based on radical principles and broadbrush ideas, that would grip voters' imaginations.

They met the leader Willie Rennie and emphasised the need to develop a long-term strategy for the party that answered the questions: what are we for; who should be voting for us; where can we convincingly position ourselves and should we contest all seats or seek only the list vote in difficult ones? Sadly, no such strategy emerged. The opportunity is still there, and it should be taken now.

Second fact. About 20 members of the party co-operated a year ago in producing an essay, *After the Crisis*. That set out a radical vision for developing a new and better Scotland, rather than returning to normality.

Among the ideas included in it were the need to recalibrate work, wealth and reward; to build new opportunities for people whose lives had been badly affected by the pandemic; to control the 'dark economy' and to re-shape the economy to serve the interests of social justice. The plans were given to the leadership along with the names of experts who could help fashion a radical manifesto out of them. Again, sadly, these proposals were not pursued. They could be re-

energised now.

## SILLY AND IRRELEVANT

Third fact. Silly and irrelevant photo-ops of the leader continued to be staged, despite widespread criticism of such events previously. Willie Rennie seemed not to realise that neither baby badgers, nor giant chess pieces, nor gentoo penguins had votes in this election.

These photo-ops wasted valuable political chances, trivialised politics, and presented Lib Dems as lacking relevance. On the other hand, one of our candidates gained superb publicity by presenting a fake cheque made out to the Tory leader, showing how much he stood to gain personally from some of his policies. With a little more imagination, Willie's skill in photo-ops could have been used to make serious political points like that, and to give the party relevance.

Fourth fact. In the recent election, the Conservatives said they wanted to put recovery first and to prevent another independence referendum. We said exactly the same thing and thus appeared to be an echo chamber for the Conservatives. News reports sometimes reported what the Conservative spokesperson had said, followed by "...as did the LibDems".

Fifth fact. This year the SNP scored a remarkable success, getting around 50% of the seats in a broadly proportional system for the third consecutive election. Johnson (elected on 43.6% of the FPTP vote) challenged Sturgeon's mandate (47.7% of the FPTP vote). Meanwhile, Lib Dems scored their lowest share of the national vote at a Scottish parliamentary election ever, both in the constituency vote and in the regional list vote.

The charge sheet is serious. The leadership ran a campaign targeted at holding the seats we had, with no support for the great bulk of constituencies.

The campaign lacked a radical vision for Scotland. It was apparently managed by a small group which ran things in ways that had failed in previous elections. Ideas from the party's own Policy Committee were sidelined in favour of a manifesto that echoed previous elections and was out of tune with the mood of the country.

Offers of help on policy and media questions from well-qualified party members were ignored, when they should have been enthusiastically accepted. And the potential of the list vote – so ably exploited by the Greens and the Conservatives – was not tackled

effectively.

The jury (in the form of the electorate) passed a clear verdict, and so we are left with pleas in mitigation. The strongest of these is perhaps that this was an election fought in unique circumstances, where the benefit of incumbency was enormous. Johnson in England, Drakeford in Wales, and Sturgeon in Scotland all gained from a perception that they had served their countries well in the face of the pandemic.

That made the political environment difficult for us, but other parties can make similar pleas. Sturgeon succeeded in spite of robust attempts by Alex Salmond to flatten her career six weeks earlier. The Conservative vote held despite financial scandals emanating from Downing Street and David Cameron's shepherd's hut. We were not alone in facing difficulties, but we were alone in being broken by them.

None of this is to gainsay the energy and commitment of Rennie, a leader who works unstintingly for the party and its candidates. There were also some good policies, particularly on mental health. We should certainly praise the candidates and their supporters who fought in difficult circumstances. But hard work and niche policies are not enough, as the results demonstrate.

During TV commentary, an Edinburgh academic identified various reasons why parties fail. Two of these were: that they lose their demographic; and that they fail to move with shifts in public opinion. Both of these obviously apply to the Scottish LibDems.

We lost the core of our demographic support (students, rural voters, public service professionals) in the first few months of the Clegg Coalition. There has been no obvious attempt to rebuild the trust lost at that time. And while public opinion in Scotland has moved strikingly towards support for independence over the past decade, Lib Dems spent the election echoing the Unionist slogans of the Conservative Party.

## **STRATEGICALLY ILLITERATE**

This strange rebirth of Liberal Unionism was strategically illiterate. Liberals in Scotland have a proud federal tradition, one that was refined during the election by Ming Campbell. As the campaign progressed, the media were clearly keen to have an alternative to the increasingly boring 'indyref or no indyref' debate. Lib Dems were in a position to supply that alternative but sadly the leadership failed to grasp the opportunity.

Instead, Lib Dem opposition to a second independence referendum was persistently stressed in media interviews. It is arguable that this harmed the campaign significantly. Opposition to a second referendum was confirmed as party policy at a recent conference, though with significant dissent.

Rennie's constant stress on this one policy alienated a number of activists and led to some resignations. There is also evidence that repeated Lib Dem stress on the alleged iniquity of another referendum caused some Lib Dems to back the party they saw as most able to prevent such an occurrence – the Conservatives.

Complacency was a feature of the Lib Dem campaign, both during and after the election. Rennie presented no radical vision for Scotland. Ed Davey visited Scotland and said he had detected a "mood change"

among the public, claiming voters were preparing to reject the SNP and the Conservatives. (How wrong can one man be?)

After the voters' verdict, we might have expected some admission from those at the top that they'd got things badly wrong and that immediate change was needed. But all that members received was notice that a review group had been set up, to report by October. There is also to be an online members' meeting at the end of June.

The SNP and their close allies, the Scottish Green Party, now have a substantial pro-independence majority in the Scottish Parliament and can claim a mandate. They have made it clear that they will not seek a second referendum until the pandemic is under control, which placates public opinion. They will probably use the next two years to demonstrate competence in government, and to exploit opportunities to build a sense of grievance against Westminster. The question of competence may not be easy. While Nicola Sturgeon is seen as having coped well with the pandemic, the SNP has a poor record on education, and the failure of her government to address Scotland's heart-breaking drug deaths problem is inexcusable.

Building grievance may be an easier task. Scotland has not voted for a Conservative government in the last 50 years, but has had to live under one for 32 of those years. Brexit was imposed on Scotland despite every single district voting to remain in the EU. Johnson is very unpopular north of the border. Right-wing policies and chipping away at the devolution settlement (as the Internal Market Bill did) will build support for independence, as will colonial-style edicts from the PM that he will not "allow" another referendum.

Support for independence was running at about 55% before the damaging spat between Salmond and Sturgeon. It may well return to that level before long. Sturgeon is cautious, and will want to wait until there is a secure majority before pushing for a referendum. She may not have long to wait.

To return to the back of the sofa. I found myself there again a week after the Scottish elections, when there was a parliamentary by-election for the Westminster seat of Airdrie and Shotts in central Scotland. The Lib Dems gained precisely 220 votes. This was the lowest vote for a Liberal or LibDem candidate in any parliamentary election since the introduction of the universal franchise in the UK nearly 100 years ago.

Lib Dem fortunes in Scotland are plainly at their lowest ebb. Rennie is an energetic and popular leader, but he has made disastrous choices about strategy, campaigning, and image.

There needs to be a complete and rapid change of direction on all three of these if he is to turn the party's fortunes around. An election review reporting in six months is insufficient. A better way forward would be to elect a review group independent of the leadership and party HQ.

This could challenge the emerging narrative that we got things mostly right and the dreadful results were unavoidable, and instead set a new and radical course for the party.

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Nigel Lindsay was a Liberal member of Aberdeen City Council for many years.



# WHY DID WALES FAIL AGAIN?

Peter Black says the Welsh Lib Dem hierarchy should take responsibility for a hopeless and failed Senedd campaign

Three and a half years ago, I wrote in *Liberator* 387 that the Welsh Liberal Democrats were facing an existential crisis.

We had emerged from the 2017 general election without a single MP representing a Welsh constituency, our small but successful Welsh Assembly group had been reduced to a rump of one and our councillor base much diminished.

Unfortunately, the time that has passed since I wrote those words has not been well-used. The triumph of the Brecon and Radnorshire by-election proved to be a false dawn, and once more the party finds itself hanging on by its fingernails in Wales.

Despite an unprecedented investment in staffing and campaigning resource, the recent Welsh Senedd elections were a mess. Those of us seeking to persuade voters to consider placing their cross next to Welsh Liberal Democrats candidates were hampered by a vacuous national slogan, an anonymous manifesto, poor messaging, a shaky digital presence, and bland literature that was not even distributed in all constituencies.

## PLANNING FAILURE

This was not the fault of hard-working and committed staff, but a failure in the planning stage to craft a distinctive message and vision which the party could campaign on, and to address the organisational issues that have plagued the Welsh party for some time. The result was £33,000 in lost deposits, £15,000 of which was lost in contesting PCC elections, which were largely treated as an afterthought.

The slogan on which we staked our future was 'Put Recovery First', three words that were repeated ad nauseum in interviews, in literature and on ballot papers, as if it had not occurred to any other party or

candidate that this might be a good thing.

It was a slogan adopted at a time when Labour were reaping the benefits of a successful vaccination programme, were viewed as having managed the pandemic with a surer touch than their counterparts on the other side of Offa's Dyke, and were dominating the headlines with their plans to move Wales on. Why did we think that we could compete with that or appear distinctive through a three-word phrase?

By and large our policy positions were sound and interesting, they just didn't attract much attention, mostly because our spokespeople did not talk about them and, with the exception of mental health and a vague unexplained and unfunded promise about the environment, they did not feature on our literature.

In one instance that was fortunate. The proposal for the Welsh Government to underwrite personal debt was misconceived and should never have made it into the manifesto, further evidence of us lacking any sort of political filter or understanding of how things play on doorsteps.

The areas of Wales we have always relied on to get us over the line have changed beyond recognition. Rural Wales is no longer populated by traditional liberals, while the farming fraternity has always largely voted Tory despite the misguided contrary view held by some 'senior' Liberal Democrats.

A large influx of English voters and the breaking down of tactical voting patterns subsequent to the coalition has made these seats much harder to win. In addition there is little all-year round campaigning in any of these areas, and scant work outside election time in those parts where Labour is strong, making it more difficult for us to convince voters there that we are a viable alternative to the Tories.

Despite that we continue to focus our resources and

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time into these constituencies at the expense of the rest of Wales, leading to local parties elsewhere becoming moribund and causing an exodus of activists.

This exodus was exacerbated by the capitulation of the Welsh party hierarchy to the federal party during the 2019 general election, when they didn't just give Plaid Cymru and the Greens free rein in certain constituencies, but did so against the wishes of local parties, undermined key activists and ceded our autonomy as a Welsh party on key matters such as candidate selection and approval.

They turned the Welsh Liberal Democrats from a proud, independent political entity into a client of the federal party. It is little wonder that a number of valuable members took that as a cue to call it a day and find other political outlets as independents or in different parties.

## MISSING IN ACTION

For some considerable time, the Welsh Liberal Democrats hierarchy has been missing in action, failing to coordinate or lead campaigning activity, to communicate effectively with members and activists, issuing dubious decrees from on high during the pandemic and failing to explain when challenged. There has been little or no two-way dialogue.

That was reflected in the way the party approached the Senedd campaign. In addition to the inability to articulate a vision for Wales or how the party might deliver a more liberal government, their strategy amounted to just more of the same, reinforcing the mistakes of past elections and further widening the gap between better resourced areas and the growing number of campaigning black holes.

There was clearly an attempt to direct resources at our two most promising regions, Mid and West Wales and South Wales Central. The first of these includes Brecon and Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire, Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, and Pembrokeshire, the second consists of Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf and the Vale of Glamorgan. Despite that, there is an ongoing inability to understand how fighting a region in a top-up list election differs from the more traditional constituency campaigning.

It was also apparent that the party had no idea which voters we were targeting, what messages would most effectively win votes in these elections or how best to use the resources we had.

The key in any top-up list election is to get crossover votes between the two ballot papers, but also to perform credibly in our weaker areas so as to reach the threshold necessary to win a regional seat. We just about did that in Mid and West Wales, with the election of Jane Dodds as the last list member for that region, but this was achieved more by luck than good judgement.

Other areas were mostly left to their own devices, benefitting from funding from the Welsh party for regional freeposts, but failing to do anything in derelict

***“The slogan on which we staked our future was ‘Put Recovery First’, three words that were repeated ad nauseum as if it had not occurred to any other party or***

or semi-derelict constituencies.

If this article appears negative or particularly grumpy it is with good reason. A comprehensive review was carried out following the 2019 general election with 39 recommendations that seems to have been shelved until after the Senedd elections. Many of the actions in that report could have made a big difference this time but were not implemented.

Developing a distinctive vision around which the Welsh party can unite will not be easy but should embrace a commitment to social justice and internationalism, citizenship and community and

should embrace Welsh culture in both languages.

Above all though, we need to rebuild campaigning capacity across Wales, led by and resourced by the Welsh party. The local council elections next year may well be make or break. In particular if our so-called target seats in mid-Wales are to continue justifying their status then we should expect significant progress at a local level.

We cannot continue to ignore the lessons of this and previous campaigns. Grassroots campaigning is meant to be our speciality as a party. If we can at least get that right in 2022 then maybe there is hope for the future.

---

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

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# HORSES NO LONGER FRIGHTENED

The electorate is realigning even if politicians have not caught up, and that creates an opening for Liberals to put their case loudly says Roger Hayes

There were five major things to come out of the local and devolved elections on 6 May but only three made headline news: The United Kingdom is no longer united; 'under new management' Labour is rapidly making itself irrelevant to large swaths of its traditional working-class voters and; the Tories were the major beneficiaries in England.

However, there were two other significant outcomes. Admittedly from a low base, the Greens more than doubled the number of councillors they went into these elections with and profess to have set their sights on replacing the Lib Dems as Britain's third force. In some places, like Bristol, they already have.

Although an almost standstill position for the Lib Dems, just eight net gains in English local elections, what at first glance looks like a rag bag of 'win one, lose one' across the country belies the detail of what I think, when you analyse the results and put all five outcomes together, has really been going on in British politics over the past five years.

## AMORAL SCOUNDREL

We are undoubtedly witnessing our own version of the worldwide rise of right-wing populism. We are led by a serial liar and amoral scoundrel who is doing well despite, if not because of, his outrageous behaviour. And just as his billionaire chums and media backers want, we are prone to shrug our shoulders and give in or give up in despair. However, try this idea on for size:

I think there is a real opportunity over the next year or two for the Liberal Democrats to realise a Liberal renaissance that can put us as a party, and the issues we hold dear, back on the political map.

Cometh hour, cometh the woman, for Sarah Green and the Chesham and Amersham by-election will play a major role in helping make that a reality.

I think what we witnessed at the May elections, and will increasingly see over the next few years, is not a realignment of British politics - as many have often fantasised being led by leading politicians and political parties - but a realignment of the British electorate being realised by ordinary voters un-led and unorganised.

This is a grassroots uprising that we must be alive to, grasp its potential with both hands, and encourage and guide its development through our national and local campaigns and policies.

Sure, the Tories were the big winners and Labour will continue to be the big losers, but there is a definite place for British Liberalism and May's results shone several lights on where our orange blossoms are appearing.

Daisy Cooper spoke of the "blue wall crumbling" across southern England and significant gains were made from the Tories from Oxfordshire to Cambridgeshire.

But I think we might be seeing something even more profound than that. If we can grasp this moment, I am convinced that from the ashes of the last decade we can help realise a Liberal renaissance, and in many parts of the country the people are ready for that and are themselves showing us where by their recent votes.

Brexit has shone a very harsh light on our society and lit up some very dark corners in the process, but I think a revelation is equally beginning to dawn for the more fair-minded and liberal members in our communities too.

What continues to grab the headlines however is the seeming collapse of class politics and the growing irrelevance of the Labour party. This is mirrored by many traditional Labour voters turning to the Tories in the clear post-Brexit realisation that what they have always thought is just what the Tories think.

Of course, we think they are wrong and are being conned by duplicitous Johnson and his chums, but sneering and talking down to them will never win hearts and minds. Such reaction is just tribalism and if anything is likely to drive them further down the twisted path. Their revelation too will come in time

## METROPOLITAN ELITE

Of course, I can proclaim all this from my comfortable position among the liberal metropolitan elite of south west London where we have three MPs (should have been six!), including the leader, and run the councils with no less than 127 councillors. But this too was once an impregnable bastion of Torydom run by self-satisfied Conservatives in the best interest of themselves and their mates with an ineffectual Labour opposition and the tacit acquiescence of the electorate.

When I came to Kingston more than 40 years ago to be the PPC there we only 63 members in the constituency and many thought I was too young and too radical to suit a conservative seat with Norman Lamont as its MP. Thank goodness I wasn't also a woman or I would never have stood a chance.

I told the hustings that selected me that I was once taunted by a Labour member on the Isle of Wight who said that for me it wasn't, 'come the revolution' but 'come the revelation'. I agreed with her and have held that truth ever since. Only individuals can choose what is right for them and make that decision when they are ready and, typically acting in community, will decide which political path to develop.



Daisy may be right, the blue wall may have developed cracks and breaches, and I have no doubt that a victory for the wonderful Sarah Green in Chesham and Amersham will see it really crumbling.

But this time will not be a protest vote, it will be because the electorate have realigned and see that we and not the Tories reflect their beliefs and values and only we will uphold them and see them acted on.

We no longer have to hide our internationalism, or apologise for wanting to protect the environment, or for seeking a fair and just society for everyone, or do any of the other things that make us sound a bit like the Tories so as not to frighten the horses.

***“If we can grasp this moment, I am convinced that from the ashes of the last decade we can help realise a Liberal renaissance”***

Our voters want those too, but they also want all the things we are known for campaigning on in our communities: a good local school for their children; a well-resourced NHS; affordable housing; a fair planning system; sustainable jobs; safe neighbourhoods and; yes, fewer potholes.

This isn't (yet) about our policies but it is about our core values and philosophy as demonstrated by the way we do

our politics, what we stand for and how we stand for it, our community campaigns and local activism. So, heads up Liberals this is a real opportunity let's be sure to make the most of it.

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Roger Hayes is a former leader of Kingston-Upon-Thames council

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# POOR PEOPLE ARE PAYING THE POVERTY PREMIUM

Claire Tyler explains why a House of Lords report on financial inclusion found millions cannot access the services they need, and how this could be improved

I've always felt that financial exclusion – in short people that don't have access to basic banking and financial services that most of us take for granted - gets scant attention compared with other aspects of poverty and disadvantage.

That was why I was so pleased to chair the House of Lords Financial Exclusion Select Committee back in 2017. The committee published a report containing a raft of important recommendations to Government which sought to redress the power imbalance between banks and other providers of financial services and their most vulnerable customers.

We looked at the poverty premium whereby people without a bank account end up paying more for things like utilities, access to cash and insurance. Recently the House of Lords conducted a follow-up inquiry - which I led - and in April the Lords Liaison Committee published the follow-up report [<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1052/financial-exclusion-followup/news/154766/government-strategy-and-increased-fca-powers-needed-to-prevent-financial-exclusion/>] looking at the nature of financial exclusion today, what action – if any - Government took on our 2017 recommendations and what more needs to be done. The short answer is a lot more is needed.

## SIGNIFICANT DEBT

As in 2017 there is a significant and growing problem of financial exclusion in the UK. Indeed the Covid-19 crises has actually made things worse with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) estimating that more than 27m adults – that's more than half the country – now have some characteristics of being financially vulnerable, for example having significant debt, erratic or insecure earnings or very low levels of savings.

Some 14.2m people in the UK are now estimated to have low financial resilience. That figure is up by a third since the start of 2020 as the pandemic hit hard and has made matters significantly worse.

According to the FCA Financial Lives Survey 38% of adults (20.0m) have seen their financial situation overall worsen because of Covid-19; while 15% (7.7m) have seen it worsen a lot. Groups that have been particularly hard hit include: the self-employed, adults with a household income less than £15,000 per year, those aged 18-54, and BAME adults:

More than 5.0m people still rely on cash to a great extent in their everyday lives, which is a lot harder to do since the pandemic began and many shops and businesses have moved away from cash entirely. Some 7.0m say they would really struggle without cash as a means of budgeting and making payments.

A key part of this is the need to tackle the poverty premium. People on low incomes pay more than better-off consumers for a range of essential products and services. This includes paying more for: household energy, through the use of prepayment meters or expensive 'standard variable' tariffs; consumer credit, through high interest loans and credit cards; insurance, through higher premiums in postcode areas considered higher risk.

Many people on low incomes also pay more because of how they have to pay for things, from fee-charging ATMs, to additional fees for not using direct debits.

This presents a real cost to disadvantaged communities. For households living below, or around, the poverty line, the elimination of the poverty premium could potentially release an extra £4bn per year into the local communities and economies that need it the most.

In short, financial exclusion remains a significant challenge for 21st century in a country which prides itself on being a global leader in financial services.

The committee felt strongly that banks and other financial service providers need to do more to look after their customers and prevent vulnerable people being cut adrift from financial services.

## STATUTORY DUTY

That is why our headline recommendation was to call for a new Statutory Duty of Care to be introduced, backed by legislation and enforced by the Financial Conduct Authority. It should replace the current weaker commitment to 'treat customers fairly'.

A duty of care would help redress the major imbalance in power between banks and their customers and incentivise providers to ensure that products and services are 'fair by design' for everyone, including the most vulnerable and always act in their customers' best interests. On issues such as unfair overdraft charges, mis-selling of financial products, access to free and basic bank account and free to use cash machines, a duty of care would ensure banks have to think about the impact of their policies on their poorest and most vulnerable customers.

We also concluded that this change needed to be part of a wider and comprehensive financial inclusion strategy. The Government needs to grasp this issue now and set out a strategy for how it will tackle financial exclusion as we emerge from the Covid-19 crisis. We want to see the Government's financial inclusion strategy set out on paper and presented to Parliament within 12 months to ensure proper scrutiny and parliamentary accountability.

We called for this to happen back in 2017 but it fell on deaf ears. A Financial Inclusion Policy Forum, chaired by ministers, was set up in response to our 2017 report, but was felt by some to be too much of a talking shop. Rather we want to see joined up action across Whitehall to tackle the multi-faceted dimensions of financial exclusion.

The report makes a number of other key recommendations to improve financial inclusion, including that measures to protect access to cash announced in the Budget in 2020 should be brought forward without delay and responsibility for this area given to the Financial Conduct Authority as part of its new duty of care. This will be vital for the 5.4m adults who still rely on cash to a great extent in their everyday lives. It was disappointing that there was no mention of this legislation in the Queen's Speech.

The committee is concerned about the decline in free to use cash machines particularly in poorer areas. In 2018 two areas of Birmingham in the top 10% of deprived areas in England – Hall Green and Hodge Hill – saw a 44% and 40% decline respectively in free-to-use ATMs while machines that charged a fee to withdraw cash increased by 59%. The committee saw this as another example of the 'poverty premium' and recommended that the powers of the FCA to mitigate this trend should be reviewed and enhanced.

The report highlights the role the Post Office could play in filling the gap in access to cash and other banking services, particularly given the large scale closures of high street bank branches and free to use ATMs.

To deliver this it called on the Government to consider making membership of the Banking Framework Agreement - where banks allow customers to access their accounts via Post Office branches - compulsory for UK retail banks and to roll out a public information campaign to inform people of the service.

The report recommended the Government should ensure that non-digital access to financial services remains possible.

## ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

Access via free telephone lines, and through face-to-face meetings where appropriate, should remain available indefinitely. This is particularly important for some customers with accessibility needs and older customers who may struggle to adapt to online banking.

The committee welcomed news that Buy Now Pay Later products such as Klarna and Clearpay will be regulated. It called on the Government to ensure that the legislation should be brought forward without delay and the situation be kept under review by the FCA and the Government.

It's time for the financial services industry to recognise it has a fundamental duty to treat their customers fairly.

That duty of care should now be established in law and overseen by the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure greater consumer protection and prevent banks and others from profiting from their customer's vulnerability.

*“More than half of adults now have some characteristics of being financially vulnerable”*

It is now more important than ever that Government comes forward with a comprehensive financial inclusion strategy that will ensure access to cash, protect the public and end the scandal of the poorest being overcharged for financial and other services.

Some consumers will always be considered too risky or expensive to be served by mainstream banks and credit providers when applying purely commercial criteria.

That is why we need a social policy intervention from the Government to make sure they don't get left behind. If levelling up means anything – and that would need to be an article in its own right - these issues should be at the forefront of Government thinking.

Since the report was published there has already been one very timely opportunity to move forward with the duty of care recommendation in the Financial Services Bill.

Sadly, despite an excellent amendment which was passed in the Lords, the Commons threw it out.

There are, however, a few small signs for hope. Only last week the FCA published a consultation on the plans for a new consumer duty, which is set to offer a higher level of consumer protection. The proposed new duty includes three key elements: the consumer principle, which states that firms must act in the best interests of retail clients, or that a firm must act to deliver good outcomes for retail clients;

It also has cross-cutting rules on behaviour, including acting in good faith and taking reasonable steps to enable customers to pursue their financial objectives and; new rules and guidance which set out expectations for communications, products and services, customer services and price and value.

It's not everything we were calling for and it's been a long time coming but it is a step in the right direction. I will continue to press the FCA and Government to move further and faster on this agenda which deserves our backing as Liberal Democrats.

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Claire Tyler is a Lib Dem peer and chaired the House of Lords Select Committee on Financial Exclusion in 2017, and was a member of the House of Lords Liaison Committee follow-up inquiry. She is now a member of the Financial Inclusion Commission



# TIME FOR THE LEAFLETTING CULT TO LOSE THE PAPER

If the Liberal Democrats continue to obsess over paper leaflets while ignoring digital they will stay below 10% in the polls, but there's a way out suggests Martyn Cattermole

I am active on social media, and subscribe to, and read, a huge amount of digital news. So I am generally well informed on politics and current affairs across the spectrum.

But I find the Lib Dems almost invisible. And where visible, the comms is low impact and boring. It rarely builds Lib Dem engagement with the issue or the party. It is true that an assiduous Lib Dem member can follow all the MPs, Mark Pack and party pages and accounts to stay informed but that to me misses the acid test as that only preaches to the converted, people inside the Lib Dems bubble.

It's not reaching out to Labour and Tory voters, getting cut-through, and winning their hearts and minds. And its those voters that we need in order to get more than 6 or 8 % in the national polls.

The interesting question to me is why the Lib Dems are invisible in the media. If you look at social media accounts both local and national then it's quite clear that there's minimal engagement on most posts. That's assuming you assess engagement as likes, shares and retweets. With 2, 3, 5, 12 common, 50 or 60 engagements is a result. There are exceptions but they are rare. Where there is effective engagement its within the bubble of Lib Dem supporters. There is absolutely no evidence of positive, non-troll, non-bot, cut through. That's based on analysis of user accounts.

There's also no evidence among Lib Dems of appreciation of the metrics, the analytics. Bit like in the old days of web analytics where people proudly said things like "that page had 5,000 hits" as though it meant something in terms of customer engagement. I was told on one of the local Oxfordshire Lib Dems pages in a thread that one of their videos had 5,000 views. Now, 5,000 views, from 5,000 users is a start but the real questions are who? What's the breakdown of that? What are the demographics? What's the target audience? And what were total engagements via further views, shares, retweets etc?

## LAZY COMMUNICATIONS

In this case my bet is that the 5,000 views were almost all from existing Lib Dem supporters. That is better than nothing, and of course is great for consolidating support within the Lib Dem community, but if that video and its messages is not reaching the floating and non-Lib Dem voters its failed. Its lazy comms to a soft target with minimal benefit to the local or overall Lib Dem cause.

What is needed are comms that cut through to voters who are not Lib Dem supporters and indeed who voted Labour or Tory last time. It is about targeting. Delivering digital comms and adverts

that are very precisely targeted at a micro level with adverts and messages designed for a specific audience demographically, regionally, and by issue. None of that currently happens. Where adverts are used they are used as a blunt instrument, with no evidence of analytics supporting them over time.

Anyone not read the Mindf\*ck book by Chris Wylie about Cambridge Analytica? About using data, machine learning, AI, to micro target voters? The Lib Dems get a mention. About campaigning tactics stuck in the dark ages. He is not complimentary. His comments are funny though. I don't see much evidence that things have changed.

Whyte said the Lib Dems were "utterly obsessed with handing out leaflets" with parochial content and doubted many people reads these.

He said the Lib Dems were "spending tons of money on leaflets without targeting particular voters" but that questioning the effectiveness of the leaflet was deemed heresy.

So apologies to the dinosaurs but the Lib Dems traditional paper leaflets and fake newspapers are relics from a bygone era, 1960s or 1970s maybe? pre-internet. I truly find it bizarre when most marketing and comms has migrated online due to the power of the platforms and ubiquity of smartphones and tablets through all demographics. And as we know it works. Secures engagement. Paper by contrast is a dated, crude, untargeted, comms tool, as Chris Wylie said in 2019. So save the money, use it for something else, that is more effective.

The other aspect of offline that is a huge Lib Dems missed opportunity are posters and billboards, or any other tactics that are highly visible and in voters faces. I don't see anything on bus stops, nothing on the streets, or on vehicles, nothing along the roads or trains. Offline, I have received one leaflet. That's it. I know why of course, lack of money and billboards are not cheap. However, that blocker should be overcome. Just ditch the paper please.

The Lib Dem invisibility is an outcome of the way the communications activity is done. Yes, there are some Facebook groups and Twitter accounts. But fairly low membership, a couple of thousand members here or there, and mostly they are moribund. Little traffic or engagement. No emotion. Typically infrequent posts, one a day if lucky, and posts getting small numbers of likes or shares.

There is no energy to them, no excitement, there is no buzz. When you have infrequent, boring, factual posts, relatively few numbers of people interact and comment on them. Tumbleweed pages and accounts. Few look at any of these Lib Dem posts or messages and think,

“wow”, that’s really something I want to get involved with. I would go as far as saying that a lot of Lib Dem digital comms only exists as its seen as a ‘good thing’ to have, not as a fundamental comms tool to enable cut through to new voters.

Its true that at a local level there are campaigns about planning and roads and transport and other good things. But there is generally no link between those local campaigns and the national ones about the bigger issues. You don’t see the national party accounts and pages being used to promote the ‘best of’ the local party pages. Same with issues the MPs are pushing. It seems like there is no strategy and coordination about which issues are Top 5 or Top 10 and which are worth promoting nationally including with paid advertising to create a higher profile and more engagement with new voters.

One other symptom of the dysfunctional Lib Dems comms is the way MPs appear to be unsupported for 24 x 7 x 365 digital campaigning online using TV and radio content. A good example, and one of many, was where Layla Moran was on Andrew Marr’s Sunday morning. Layla was good, made some effective points, but her piece disappeared once screened. What did not happen was that Layla and the Lib Dems shared that edited clip across social media quickly. Leveraging it. Repurposing it over all the social media platforms.

By contrast in this case what would have been perfect, if the Lib Dems had a professional and properly resourced comms operation, was that a Lib Dem staffer, or even an unpaid volunteer supporter, was ready on that Sunday morning to support Layla by getting the interview clipped, edited, and published very, very quickly. Within an hour of the interview ending Laylas video clip should have been published as part of her comms and the Lib Dem national comms activity that Sunday. Nice fresh content. But time is of the essence. Shame it failed to happen.

## DISAPPEARING MPS

This Layla example is typical of most Lib Dem media events where if MPs do manage to get on TV or radio, the content is not captured and repurposed, so it just disappears. Sure its watchable on catchup, but that is always a clear second best. The greatest impact is immediate, that day when its fresh. Audience numbers could be substantial if content was captured and published and kept on YouTube for longevity and for being repurposed.

It is worth saying that Alistair Campbell has made similar comments about Labour’s current digital campaigning performance. He was making the point that if you look at what Labour are doing, they are missing tricks in scoring points against the Tories. There has been stuff in the media about corrupt PPE procurement, and the Jennifer Arcuri case, as well as Johnson’s lying and public office governance, probity

*“I see time and time again from Lib Dems activists is that there is no money, the resources required cannot be afforded. That is absolute rubbish. It is defeatist. It is negative. It is not the case”*

and propriety issues. What Alistair expected was that Labour would capitalise quickly on the attack opportunities with hard hitting vids and other content. But it did not happen. Labour failed. So it’s not only a Lib Dem problem.

For me it’s all about opportunities missed. The Lib Dems are below 10% in the polls. Nationally it’s not necessarily because the policies of the Lib Dems are wrong. Or that the quality of Ed Davey or the MPs is not good enough. The poor poll results are I contend due to a failure by the Lib Dems to communicate effectively both offline but more importantly through online digital platforms. Why there is no professional

competent management of the comms operations I don’t know. But it matters, assuming the Lib Dems want to improve results among voters outside the Lib Dem base.

Another obvious issue with the Lib Dems is that typically they spend all their media time responding to new stories and issues, not actually making the news. This then usually means that the Lib Dems end up as marginal, irrelevant, also-rans. They typically have a short term and low impact in debate on most issues as they don’t get enough ongoing engagement.

One striking exception to this was Layla and her parliamentary working group on Covid-19 which has published a few reports and YouTube videos. But again, Layla’s work on this has not been exploited more effectively on social media and wider. Yet another media opportunity missed over the year.

The starting point is to agree that there is a problem. If we agree there is a problem, then it needs analysing, defining, and quantifying, as that is the starting point for finding solutions. In my consulting terminology that would be called the ‘As-Is’ position. It’s now.

The next step is to agree ‘To-Be’ which are the desired outcomes, the strategic comms goals and objectives. Once we know what we are trying to achieve, then the next step would be to discuss and agree the strategy and tactics, which would set out how the Lib Dems comms operation would achieve the ‘To-Be’ goals. The goals are interdependent, very simple, and are quantifiable: to ensure that the Lib Dems have the highest media profile and impact possible; to achieve the required cut-through and support of voters in the target voter segments and demographics.

I think it’s obvious that you have to agree some metrics and targets about what sort of media profile you want, and you can break that down nationally and by constituencies and demographics. You don’t know what success or failure is, unless you quantify it. I see no reason why the Lib Dems can’t set out their vision for that, now, in a new strategic comms plan based on a “specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timed (Smart) approach. The document would set out what was needed for the Lib Dems communications operation and define the gaps. Having established the

resource gaps, you can put numbers on them, you can price it up, for the resources needed.

The goal is obviously that the comms operation of the Lib Dems becomes efficient and effective and adequately resourced. The next question is what is actually needed in order to make that happen. Worth saying that I do not have the information on what current comms resourcing is or know how many staff there are either in the headquarters in London or spread around nationally in MPs offices.

I also do not know what skills staff have and so I don't know what gaps in resources or capability exist.

But again, these issues and information gaps are secondary to the first point which is to assess what 'adequate resourcing' looks like, that can deliver the comms required.

The skills needed will include digital marketing and communications, graphic designers, video editors and people who understand the way Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter operate including the analytics. I don't know how many staff we are talking about because again we don't yet know what the requirements actually are.

The next question, and potential obstacle, is how we might pay for it.

## **ABSOLUTE RUBBISH**

The assumption I see time and time again from Lib Dems activists is that there is no money, the resources required cannot be afforded. That is absolute rubbish. It is defeatist. It is negative. It is not the case and no credible case for more funding for a SMART comms programme has been made to Lib Dem members and supporters.

The main output would be a new strategic comms plan. Based on an analysis of 'As-Is' and 'To-Be'. With the strategy and tactics set out that would achieve the plan's SMART goals. The plan would be put to Lib Dem members and supporters to obtain their support and funding.

If such a plan was developed and it was credible, and it was communicated to members effectively through documents and discussed online in Zoom meetings and working groups, run by Party HQ or local MPs, I can see no reason why people would not wish to support it.

Even at only £10 per calendar month, 1,000 people donating would raise £10,000 a month which is enough to fund a couple of new part or full time comms staff. If direct debit donations were £20 per month and more people donated, then you start to reach an adequate level of funding for a properly resourced, professional, comms operation.

I assume that's what Lib Dems want? Can't imagine that the current situation is tolerable long term where the Lib Dems underperform with only 6 or 8% at the polls? Election oblivion beckons, if those numbers do not improve.

I currently support the Good Law Project, Open Democracy, and a few other organisations that are fighting for democracy. Supporting an effective Lib Dem comms programme would fit in nicely. Just ask....

The difference between this and current Lib Dem fund raising is major. What I am describing is fund raising for a programme where there are measurable outcomes, where there's a clear link between spend, and results. Not just asking for money to go into a general bucket.

The availability of metrics is a great benefit of digital marketing, campaigning and communications. The data can be modelled and graphed, and can be made available to supporters so that they can see that their money is being well used. What I've just described is almost a virtuous circle. With transparency and governance built in through the feedback loop.

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Martyn Cattermole is a Liberal Democrat member in Oxfordshire



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# AMERICA'S DIRTY SECRET AIRED

## The George Floyd case could help America bring its police under control, says Martha Elliott

“George Floyd can breathe again,” exclaimed Judeah Reynolds after hearing the verdict in the Derek Chauvin murder trial. Judeah is the 9-year-old girl who witnessed Chauvin’s 9-minutes-and-29-seconds choke hold on Floyd and testified for the prosecution.

The jury’s verdict: second degree murder, guilty; third degree murder, guilty; and second degree manslaughter, guilty. America could also breathe again. In preparation for protests and possible violence, many US cities had called up all police. Minnesota, the state where the murder occurred, had called up national guard troops. But instead of violence there was dancing in the streets because a police officer had finally been indicted and of killing a black man.

The question now is whether this will be an anomaly or whether police will finally have to stop the unequal treatment of African Americans. In the first four months of 2021, there were 144 fatal police shootings in the US, 62 of whom were black. In 2020, there were 1,021 fatal police shootings. The rate of fatal police shootings of blacks is much higher than any other race, at 36 per million compared to 12 per million of the white population.

By comparison in 2019, there were three fatal shootings by police in England and Wales. What’s changed since in the past decade is the Black Lives Matter movement. No longer are these shootings America’s dirty secret; every fatal shooting is followed by protests and occasionally prosecutions. “Say his/her name,” has become the anthem of the movement. Every shooting becomes national news.

A white friend of mine summed up the unequal treatment this way: “When I get stopped by police, I worry about getting a ticket. I never worry about being shot and killed. That’s white privilege.”

But Derek Chauvin’s conviction is a watershed event. Judge Peter Cahill wisely allowed cameras in the courtroom so that everyone could see the case against Chauvin, who will be sentenced on 25 June. the judge found four aggravating factors, signalling a severe sentence.

What does this all mean for the Biden administration? In his first address to the Congress, Biden challenged it to pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act by 25 May, a year after Floyd’s death. The act was sponsored in 2020 by then California Senator Kamala Harris before she was elected vice president. The act is now before the Senate, but an identical act was passed by the House of Representatives in 2020.

The act would prohibit chokeholds and no-knock warrants at the federal level and requires states to ban both to receive funding from the federal government.

It requires that deadly force only be used as a last resort and officers to use de-escalation techniques. The law would also ban racial and religious profiling and mandates training on discriminator profiling for law enforcement.

In addition, it would limit the transfer of military style equipment to police at the state and local levels. The police often look more like paramilitary units than a unit whose mission was to serve and protect. Another important aspect of the legislation is that it would set up a national registry of police officers who have been found to have used excessive force. This will make it more difficult for them to be hired in another state.

The question remains whether the act will be passed by the Senate - where the balance of Democrats to Republicans is 50-50 - with Harris breaking any tie.

Since many votes are cast along party lines, this gives the Democrats a razor thin advantage. It seems unlikely that any bill will pass the Senate by President Biden’s requested date, and that if one is passed it will be watered-down.

Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina, the only black Republican senator, is leading the Republicans who don’t want a total ban on chokeholds and no-knock warrants and they also want limited immunity for police officers, putting the onus and burden of proof on the departments rather than the individual. In late April, Scott said he thought the negotiations could be wrapped up in a couple of weeks, but even if something is passed by the Senate, the House and Senate versions would have to be renegotiated so they are the same.

One of the challenges for any progress is our federal system, where there are national, state and local controls over police. Even though a few states have already passed laws prohibiting chokeholds and no-knock warrants, it is unlikely that every state will pass the same regulations. The federal government cannot require these changes, but can use the carrot of money from the federal government to try to make positive change. Biden cannot issue an executive order to fix this problem. Congress can only hope that states and municipalities want federal money enough to make fundamental change.

When Biden visited Floyd’s family after his death, he bent down to talk to Floyd’s six-year-old daughter Gianna. She said: “My daddy changed the world.” Let’s hope that her proclamation was prophetic.

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Martha Elliott was on board of Democratic Women of Santa Barbara County, California for nearly a decade. Her most recent book is *The Man in the Monster*. She is working on a book about conscientious objectors in WWII



# KICKING OUT THE BIG MONEY

It may look like fan power killed the European Super League but football's 'slave' market and financial woes haven't gone away, says Howard Cohen

It's not often that a football story appears in *Liberator* but when the story involves interventions from the prime minister, the Royal Family and a major international incident, it merits scrutiny even here.

I am referring of course to the bizarre case of the European Super League (ESL). In the space of 48 hours the world of football turned upside down and then, as a result of the power of its fans, it turned back the right way up. Or did it? Was this really a case of ordinary people winning out over the power of the corporate elite or was something else, far more complex, happening?

On 18 April, in a late-night statement released simultaneously by 12 football clubs, six in England, and three each in Spain and Italy, the launch of the ESL was announced.

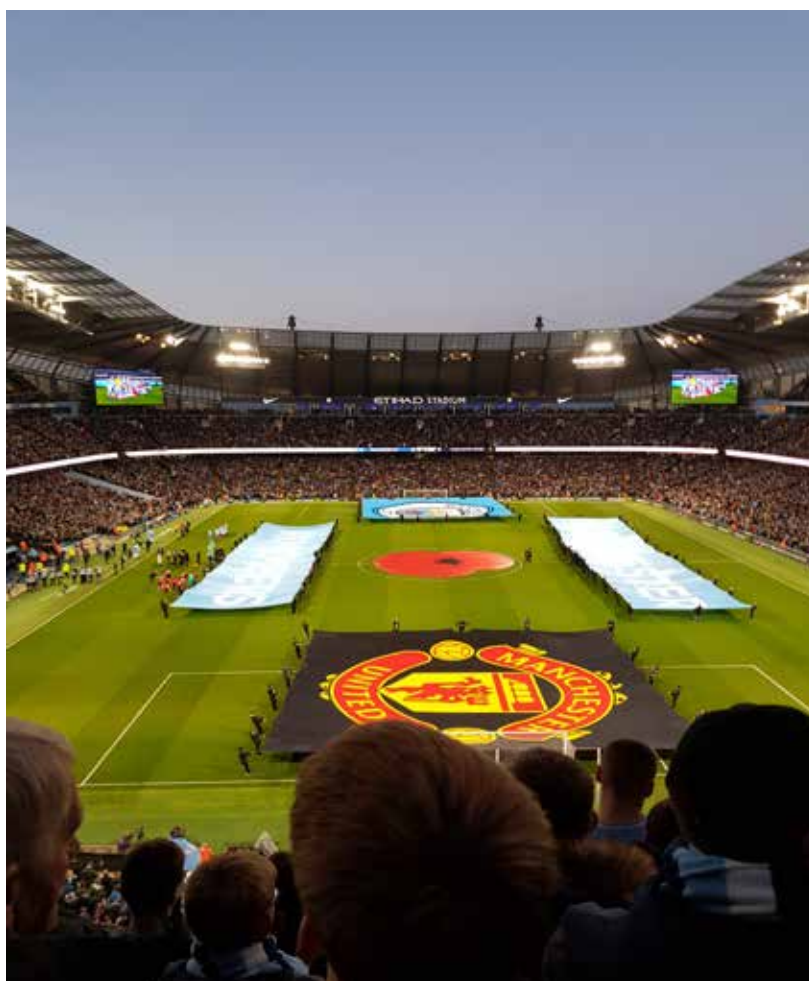
This would involve 15 permanent members, these 12 and three other unnamed clubs, and clubs qualifying each season from Europe's national leagues. The project was to be backed by a \$3.5bn investment from US bank, JP Morgan.

The announcement was immediately condemned by football's international governing bodies, UEFA and FIFA, who threatened to expel the clubs and ban their players from international football. It was greeted in England with condemnation from other clubs, the leagues, the FA, the media and fans' groups.

## ELITE BREAKAWAY

The idea that a multi-billion-pound elite breakaway was being launched in the middle of a global pandemic was greeted with universal outrage. Fan protests

sprang up, and players and managers, including those at the six English clubs, added their own condemnation.



Boris Johnson spotted a populist opportunity and announced in parliament that he would do everything in his power to stop the ESL. Even Prince William joined in with the condemnation.

By the end of 20 April, just 48 hours after the original announcement, all six English clubs had pulled out and the project appeared doomed. The media hailed this as a victory for "fan power" and proof that public protests do work. As Liberals, the temptation is to accept this and hail it as a great victory but was this really about the fans or was it about something else entirely?

To understand what happened over that crazy 48 hours in April we need to

look at what prompted this development in the first place. European sport has endured more than a year of lockdown. Every club has been put under great financial pressure. The world's richest clubs are committed to paying vast sums of up to €1 million or more per week to elite players.

The sums simply don't add up. In England, the emergence of 'new money' from wealthy foreign investors at Chelsea, Manchester City and Leicester, has meant that the traditional elite clubs, Liverpool, Manchester United and Arsenal, are no longer guaranteed to qualify every year for Europe's elite competition, the UEFA Champions League, along with its consequential riches.

These three clubs also happen to have US owners, who are used to the American practice of elite

leagues with no relegation and guaranteed stable income every year. Of the other three, Tottenham took out a £175m loan from the Bank of England in June 2020, to get them through the pandemic, after building a new stadium. Both Chelsea and Manchester City were only invited to join the ESL five days before the announcement and were persuaded on the basis that they would otherwise miss out on being part of Europe's new elite competition. Those two clubs were the first to announce their withdrawal.

So why did they withdraw and why did the project die, before it had even began?

Was it fan power? I really don't think so. Europe's governing body, UEFA, while claiming to be the great protector of fans, threatened to expel all the clubs from its competitions immediately. Chelsea and Manchester City were in the semi-finals of UEFA's Champions League, Manchester United and Arsenal were in the semi-finals of UEFA's Europa League, with three of those four eventually reaching the finals.

FIFA and UEFA threatened to ban the clubs' players from their international teams, with the European championships coming up this year and the World Cup next year. Even if those threats could have been challenged in court, it's likely that any legal challenges could run for years and the bans would have already happened. The players panicked and made clear that they opposed the ESL. Their club managers backed them.

Faced with that opposition, there was simply no way that the clubs could possibly continue the project. The players spoke eloquently about football being for fans and how the ESL would kill the game for the fans.

While some of them probably believed that, it wasn't really their primary motivation. Ultimately it was player power, not fan power, which prevailed. UEFA, the great champion of fans, recently decided to reject a proposal to move the Champions League final, with two English clubs in it, to Wembley, after the original hosts in Turkey were ruled out due to the pandemic. Their reason was that the UK government refused to relax its quarantine rules for the 2,000 VIPs and sponsors that UEFA insisted on bringing to the game, despite the Covid limited capacity. Instead, they insisted that 8,000 English fans fly to Portugal instead, in the middle of a pandemic. Hardly fan power.

There is no doubt that football has a serious problem with its finances and the ESL was an attempt by the clubs involved to find their own solution, within their own elite bubble.

JP Morgan was their new Santa Claus and blinded them to everything else. What has caused this problem? Is it simply the pandemic? Was football in a financially sustainable position before the pandemic hit?

Clearly not. The power of players and the hunger of the top clubs to monopolise all the world's best has been the real cause. While it's true that US sport also has massive salaries and, like the ESL proposal,

*“As Liberals, the temptation is to accept this and hail it as a great victory but was this really about the fans or was it about something else entirely?”*

guarantees that its clubs remain members of the top leagues, it also has multiple checks and balances in place to ensure that no league is dominated for years by the same clubs. It is a completely different system to Europe's and can't simply be cherry-picked for the aspects that a handful of clubs like.

## **FINANCIAL DISASTER**

The arrival in the 1990s of massive TV deals has brought big money into the game. It provided a genuine opportunity to create

financial stability for clubs and to improve facilities for fans. Instead, it caused financial disaster. Transfer fees and players' salaries went through the roof, whilst infrastructure improvements were largely funded from loans and even lottery grants.

The TV and sponsorship money was heavily weighted towards the winners of each league and the qualifiers for the UEFA Champions League. This meant that the rich simply got richer and then spent all their money on buying and paying the best players.

They drove up the salaries and fees to such an extent that, despite their huge incomes, they ended up with massive debts. The only way football is going to solve its financial woes is to deal with the problems of high wages and transfer fees and have a fairer distribution of TV and sponsorship income. The dilemma is that fans and broadcasters actually want more competitive leagues but turkeys don't vote for Christmas, so the clubs at the top are never going to support that.

The government has announced an “independent fan led review” of the club ownership and suggested that there be some kind of system on the German model of 50%+1 fan ownership.

In reality, the problem goes much deeper than simply the selfishness or incompetence of club owners. Of course, as Liberals, we should support any prospect of greater fan involvement in the governance of the game. However, I am not convinced that fan owners would act any more selfishly than private owners, when it comes to favouring their own club's finances and prospects ahead of others.

What the game needs is greater controls over how income is distributed and spent. Clubs should not be spending unsustainable amounts on players' salaries. The worldwide game also needs to completely change the transfer fee system and the amounts spent on agents' fees. Should we really be accepting the concept of buying and selling people, like an ancient slave market, even if the prices are in tens of millions?

Ultimately this is a political issue and not just about the frivolities of sport. It needs to be treated seriously and, as a party, the Liberal Democrats should be talking about it and campaigning on it.

Even if the ESL wasn't truly killed by fan power, there is no doubt that the issue of football ownership and finance is hugely important to millions of people in this country and that this has become an even bigger issue now, as a direct result of the events of April 2021.



# WELCOME BACK

The pandemic has been a tough time for the hospitality sector, but it could have been worse and some of it was doomed anyway, says Nick Winch

When the dust finally settles, life begins to return to a post-Covid normality and there starts to be a rigorous examination of the evidence about how the British Government (and in particular the government of England) handled the impact and consequences of the pandemic, it is likely that certain themes will emerge.

The election results in May suggest that, in the short term at least, British people have expressed their satisfaction with the roll-out of the vaccination programme (the administrations in Wales, Scotland and England all increasing their levels of support).

A cynic might feel that, since the number of people vaccinated is larger than the number who have contracted Covid-19 - and significantly larger than the number of people whose families have been visited by death - the numbers game has played in favour of those in power.

Yes, I know, it has not been the four nations' governments which have delivered the vaccinations, but the picture is one of governmental success, as Boris Johnson has so masterfully painted.

## WASTE AND CORRUPTION

However, this is, of course, only a short-term analysis. The full extent of the incompetence, waste and corruption in the handling of contracts for the supply of PPE, the neglect shown to those living and working in care homes, the failure of a woefully-performing 'track and trace' service, the folly of the 'eat out to help out' scheme, the mistiming of the introduction and relaxation of the lockdown measures, the long notice periods before restrictions on travel came into effect and the fast-and-loose attitude of the Government to the medical advice: all these features will come to constitute a formidable charge sheet for the various inquiries inevitably to be held. In due course, these will prove a damning

indictment of Johnson and a damaging affirmation of Conservative incompetence.

The negligence shown by the Government in many of the health aspects of the pandemic is, of course, in sharp contrast to the sterling work done by those on the front-line of the health service, although it must be questioned why doctors have been unwilling to hold face-to-face consultations with patients, when a circular from the NHS as long ago as last July told GPs they should "restore activity to usual levels where clinically appropriate" and that they should offer face-

to-face appointments.

Even this spring, many readers will have experience of their surgeries refusing to offer appointments (how can a GP diagnose a skin condition on the evidence of a grainy iPhone image, let alone assess a mental health issue on the basis of a phone call?).

While the charge sheet against Johnson, Matt Hancock and Dido Harding will mount up as more evidence sees the light of day, there is also a contrast with the Government's economic response to the pandemic which was both timely and effective.

Until the end of March when we sold our business, my wife and I had worked in the hospitality and tourism sector of the economy running self-catering holiday

apartments.

The prospect of the complete collapse of the tourism industry and the virtual shut down of the economy was alarming not just to our sector, but to the entire working population.

As reports emerged of the spread of Covid-19 in Britain (and our area of south west was one of the first affected with a party of school-children bringing the virus into Torbay after returning from a skiing trip in northern Italy in February 2020), we saw a significant drop in the number of enquiries and bookings for the spring and summer of 2020.



As the evidence of the spread of the virus grew, alarm bells rang throughout the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors. While super-spreader events like the Cheltenham Festival and football matches were allowed to proceed, holidays were being cancelled and hospital beds and mortuaries were beginning to fill up. Yet it was three weeks into March before the first lockdown was announced. This was not to be the last time that the Government acted tardily.

However, within a matter of days of the announcement of the first lockdown, Rishi Sunak's declared that he was determined "to do whatever it takes" to protect the British economy and the livelihoods of the public, and the Treasury, acting with impressive speed, quickly devised imaginative and comprehensive schemes to support businesses and employees in all sectors of the economy. Particular attention was paid - especially by the media and backbench MPs - to the needs of the hospitality, tourism, leisure and retail sector.

While frequently seen as a single entity, this is, of course, very diverse, ranging from the small shop to the hypermarket, the bed-and-breakfast to the hotel chain, the local village hall to the British Museum and the corner pub to the Wetherspoons chain.

There have, of course, been examples of businesses closing - much coverage has been given to the plight of the licenced trade for example, but many of these pub closures were caused more by the nature of the pubco system and the approach of property owners or breweries towards their tenants.

Some pub landlords I have spoken to accept that the Government itself cannot have too much blame laid at its door. Many retailers found the support measures put in place enabled them to weather the storm and there is no certainty that the empty shops or pubs on our high streets would not have closed anyway - indeed the furlough scheme, rates holidays and grants may actually have delayed a closure which was otherwise inevitable.

Many involved in the hospitality sector took advantage not only of the financial measures on offer, but were able to continue trading during lockdown by taking up the requests from local authorities. They changed their business models completely, abandoning tourism to house key workers and the homeless (receiving significantly more income and better occupancy rates than would have been the case from holiday-makers).

In addition, the grants to retailers were not conditional on the business not trading. Local post offices, food shops and other essential retailers remained open and received government support.

The hospitality sector (or at least the tourism accommodation side of it) also benefitted from the timetables of the lockdowns. During the peak holiday season, businesses were able to open, often being more busy than usual as those who normally holidayed out of season also booked for the summer months. The lockdowns - for which businesses received grants

*“Many of these pub closures were caused more by the nature of the pubco system and the approach of property owners or breweries towards their tenants”*

- occurred during the quieter months when income would have been reduced anyway and this spring saw generous grants for reopening costs.

## **BETWEEN THE CRACKS**

Inevitably, with any quickly created scheme there were bound to be anomalies, with individuals and businesses who "fell between the cracks in the floorboards."

The lack of support for certain groups has been highlighted: the newly self-employed who could not produce accounts

for previous financial years were not eligible to the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme; those who ran their businesses as limited companies and paid themselves dividends in lieu of salary; those, like many in the creative arts, working on short-term contracts and moving between jobs; and those made redundant rather than being furloughed.

Of course, it can be argued that more could have been done. The delay over a decision about tax credit extensions caused unnecessary worry and hardship. HMRC and the National Audit Office estimate that perhaps as many as two million people in work did not receive financial assistance.

Some were more deserving of support than others - those who had previously organised their financial affairs to minimise the tax they paid could little complain if the taxpayer did not immediately jump to their aid, for example - and Sunak has made it clear that he will look at the favourable treatment the self-employed have in many regards received from the tax system for many years, but for the time being it would be churlish not to accept that the actions the Treasury took at the beginning of the pandemic and the continuing levels of support over the past year have ensured that the economic hardships for the British people have been significantly less than might have been the case.

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Nick Winch is a member of the Liberator Collective and has run a pub and holiday flats



# HEADLESS CHICKENS

## Emergency planning was found wanting in the Covid-19 pandemic, hardly surprising given the government's lack of interest in preparation, says Simon Banks

Emergency planning is a hard sell until there is a disaster - and then it's too late. You have to plan for something that may never happen and that, if it happens, will probably not happen the way you thought it would. It costs money: those focused on profit or tight budgets will be opposed.

There are, however, two mutually supportive ways of planning to be prepared. One is to identify plausible emergencies and prepare plans and resources (as far as possible) for all but those that are extremely unlikely and whose impact would be short of catastrophic. The other is to promote the mental and operational flexibility and the ability to listen to authoritative advice that should help in any emergency. Both are needed.

The same analysis, the same basic needs, hold true for national and international emergencies such as Covid-19 as for military emergencies and for major accidents – and the reasons why people get it wrong are similar.

For example:

On the early morning of 7 December 1941, Japanese aircraft attacked Pearl Harbor. The poor preparedness of the Americans on Hawaii, despite warnings that war with Japan was imminent and the Japanese were expected to launch an attack somewhere, has been much debated. Some points carry valuable messages for civil emergency planning:

- ☛ Bad: navy and army had separate commands and no-one was in overall command (uncoordinated decision-making structures).
- ☛ Bad: out of fear of sabotage by local Japanese, aircraft were concentrated, not dispersed, making them an easy target before they could get into the air (tunnel vision - preparing for one danger and ignoring the impact on others).
- ☛ No-one could really believe that a major Japanese attack could happen on Hawaii and this led to a warning from radar operatives under training being dismissed: “at least 50 incoming planes” was taken to be an expected flight of six US planes (believing that extraordinary events won't happen; failing to react to uncertain warnings; unconsciously bending the evidence to fit what is perceived with what is familiar, a horribly common failing).
- ☛ Good: US navy personnel at Pearl Harbor had been intensively trained, which led to most of them doing their duty calmly amidst fire and death (adaptable preparedness for any emergency).

Or consider a major accident.

On the night of 6 March 1987, The “RoRo” ferry Herald of Free Enterprise capsized at Zeebrugge and 193 people died.

The company responsible, Townsend Thoresen, took such a hit to its reputation, it changed its name (to P&O). The cause of the disaster was quite simple. The bow doors, open to allow vehicles to roll on, had not been closed and water flooded the vehicle deck, destabilising the ship, so that when it turned at the mouth of the harbour, it capsized.

If compartments had been fitted which could have been raised to allow vehicles on and off, but lowered on leaving to create watertight sections, only the rear section would have flooded and no-one would have died.

But this would have reduced the number of vehicles and hence profits (saving money by ignoring risks, even expensive ones with potential to wreck reputations). The rear doors were supposed to be shut by one lone sailor, but after a long shift, he was asleep. No-one was deputed to go with him or check he'd done it and he did not have to report back that he'd done it (failure to introduce checks or fallback procedures). The good point is that Belgian emergency services at Zeebrugge were well-trained, well-equipped and reacted quickly (general preparedness for a wide range of emergencies).

Now let's look at UK emergency planning in the light of Covid-19. I'm no expert, but this seems to be the picture.

### GOOD EMERGENCY PLANNING IS THIS:

- ☛ Make sure generalist emergency services are well-trained, well-commanded and flexible.
- ☛ Scope possible emergencies, including potentially catastrophic very unlikely things (plane hits one of the twin towers). Think the unthinkable. Identify trends (bigger planes).
- ☛ Examine what would happen under each scenario at present, using computers and on-the-ground research.
- ☛ Identify weak points such as unclear roles, inadequate resources, inflexible rules or difficulties of supply (getting what you need where you need it).
- ☛ Plan to correct the weaknesses (though money isn't unlimited).
- ☛ Deliver action planned.
- ☛ Communicate plans to all who need to be prepared, including your successors.

## UK EMERGENCY PLANNING:

- Develop clear plans for who's in charge and who has authority to do what in the event of dramatic, brief events like fire or flood (Gold command procedure; Civil Contingencies Act) but not for events like pandemics.
- Scope some potential emergencies - not others.
- Look at what would happen.
- Identify weaknesses.
- Probably make plans.
- Maybe implement plans, maybe not, and almost certainly not if they're expensive.

A few countries like South Korea, Taiwan and New Zealand seem to have been better prepared, and France, Germany, Spain and Australia acted more decisively when the virus hit, but on the whole UK levels of unpreparedness were common outside the Far East.

It was predictable something like Covid-19 would strike some time. SARS gave warning. Both Bill Gates and scientific bodies had been warning that various trends – pressure on and exploitation of wildlife (increasing chances of disease transmission); population growth; and increased international air travel – made pandemics steadily more likely. The UK tested preparedness for a flu-type pandemic in Exercise Cygnus in 2016, identifying serious weaknesses. Then nothing was done. A report and its recommendations were shelved almost without discussion.

The May government was preoccupied with Brexit and the Johnson government in working out what this government thingy was all about. But if they hadn't been, would we have done better?

There is a strong tendency, seen in the failure to prepare for, and the mishandling of first reactions to, many disasters, to believe if something hasn't happened in our experience, it won't.

Emergency planning is off most radars – including in the Liberal Democrats, or me trawling for views and experience (and trying to get us to address how to be prepared as well as how to react in the crisis) would have been much easier, even taking account of our remote and priestly (for Liberals) policy-making process.

When the Federal Board's original decision on postponement of the last leadership election was found to be unconstitutional, the judgement issued by the assessor said the pandemic was a "once in a hundred years event". It may have been 100 years since the last pandemic, but the next one isn't likely to wait so long; and that doesn't take into account the likelihood that climate change will trigger further major emergencies. If emergency planning stays off the radar, many people will die as a result.

Brexit apart, why did government fail? Money? Preparing meant keeping NHS beds and premises mothballed for use in an emergency when the pressure was to reduce beds and sell surplus premises. Since we have military reserves, like the Territorial Army, maybe we could have an NHS Reserve? But also, there was no unified senior voice on emergency planning within government, nothing like a chief medical officer or minister with the ear of the prime minister, no-one

to remind her or him that the findings of Exercise Cygnus needed action.

Our emergency preparation is led by separate agencies, unlike our procedure for emergency response, which places gold command with the police. Flooding is Natural England. Health is NHS England. Military is military. Planning for a catastrophic failure of computers is with security services if it's a cyber-attack by a foreign state or terrorists, but not if it's an internal fault.

Yet many of the necessary preparations (stores, food distribution systems, ability to move many people quickly) cross institutional boundaries. At county and city level there are emergency planning officers who draw these threads together, but nothing equivalent seems to exist in central government. What councils can do is constrained by diminishing resources, deliberately slow-strangled by centralising Conservative governments.

Some emergency events like floods and rail crashes are handled very well. Others, like Covid-19 and foot-and-mouth, aren't. Some dangers, like cladding on tower-blocks spreading fire, are abundantly evidenced, but nothing is done, as much from decision-makers being busy with immediate issues as from penny-pinching.

## MENTAL FLEXIBILITY

On the whole, the more unusual, the less prepared. On the whole, the evidence of Covid-19 is that NHS management has the necessary mental flexibility and ability to learn fast to deal with such an emergency, but central government doesn't.

The Civil Contingencies Act (2004) is entirely about who has power over what in an emergency once it's happened. The supposedly current NHS Long-term Plan, in 136 pages, nowhere mentions major emergencies.

The possibility of an attack against Britain by the forces of a hostile state – on its land, in its airspace or in its coastal waters – seems extremely remote, despite Putin (cyber-attack is vastly more likely). Yet we maintain expensive armed forces whose primary role is protection against physical and not cyber attack. They have other uses. But if we can afford them, can't we afford good

What to do? How can we ensure a future Exercise Cygnus leads to action? One suggestion: a chief emergency planning officer, with status similar to the chief medical officers (one for the UK, or four?), with direct access to the prime minister and cabinet secretary, a small team and a facilitating, checking, co-ordinating role, liaising with local authorities, monitored by a standing parliamentary committee and making an annual public report with sections redacted as necessary, perhaps presented at an annual conference.

Emergency planning is problematic for devolution, by the way. Viruses, floods and radiation from a damaged nuclear power station or a small nuclear attack don't stop at political boundaries.

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# TORIES PULL UP THE UK DRAWBRIDGE

Government plans for asylum seekers will be cruel and counter-productive but a new campaign will try to stop them. Margaret Lally explains

The short consultation period on the Government's New Plan For Immigration ended on 6 May. It can be found here [<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-plan-for-immigration>]

Many who responded were dismayed by the leading questions, negative language and portrayal of seekers of sanctuary. Despite the consultation having only ended five days before, and widespread opposition to the proposals, the Queen's Speech confirmed that Government intends to bring forward "Measures...to establish a fairer immigration system that strengthens the United Kingdom's borders and deters criminals who facilitate dangerous and illegal journeys". The Government's Briefing Note sets out the main elements of the Bill as:

- Ensuring our system does not reward those who enter the UK illegally and that those who have travelled through a safe country where they could have reasonably claimed asylum, such as France or Belgium, will not be admitted into the UK asylum system.
- Ensuring that for the first time, whether people enter the UK legally or illegally, will have an impact on how their asylum claim progresses, and on their status in the UK if that claim is successful.
- Creating new and expanded one stop process to ensure that asylum, human rights claims and any other claims are made and considered upfront at the very start of the process, ending the cycle of limitless appeals
- Ending the use of hotels and moving towards reception centres for asylum seekers so that they have simple, safe and secure accommodation to stay in while their claims are processed
- Correcting historical anomalies in British Nationality law which have long prevented individuals from gaining British citizenship or registered for citizenship through no fault of their own.

This Bill will be the most dangerous and inhumane attack on the right to seek asylum for decades. It is not yet clear to what extent, if any, the Bill will differ from what was set out in the Plan. I have set out some of the key problems with both.

## UNDERMINES THE REFUGEE CONVENTION

Underlying the Bill is the distinction between good asylum seekers who arrive in an organised tidy way

and bad asylum seekers who just turn up.

It is a fundamental tenet of the 1951 Refugee Convention that individuals seeking asylum should have their claims considered fairly and impartially, and that the method of their arrival into a country should not determine how that claim is dealt with. This is because, generally, asylum seekers are not in a position to seek permission in advance to enter a country, and in many cases may not be able to choose which country they end up in.

Asylum seekers are either often fleeing for their lives from countries in upheaval or in situations where their movements are constantly monitored. They are not planning a holiday. The testimony of Kolbassia Hasoussou [<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/refugees-immigration-plans-priti-patel-b1825756.html>] and others about their journeys to safety show how inhumane and thoughtless these proposals are.

Kolbassia says: "(it) took six or seven months. It was traumatic but I knew the risk I was fleeing was greater than the risk in front of me. There was no legal and safe route I could have taken. In my case when I was fleeing imminent danger, what was I supposed to do? I just had to go and try to save my life."

We do need more safe and legal routes to seek sanctuary. These should include the Lib Dem proposal on humanitarian visas [<https://www.libdemvoice.org/a-radical-new-policy-humanitarian-visas-a-lifeline-for-refugees-67381.html>] agreed at last conference.

The Government plan did have some proposals (albeit very limited, compared with the Lib Dem approach) to broaden the scope of the UK's resettlement offer, and an ill-defined proposal to develop new humanitarian routes to enable the home secretary offer discretionary assistance to people still in their own country whose lives are at direct risk (it is not clear that this is actually new). But even with a massive expansion of legal routes to asylum, these will not be available in every situation and some individuals would still need to use irregular routes to arrive here. We must not allow this fundamental right in the Convention to be taken away.

## RETURN TO 'SAFE COUNTRIES'

A key concern of the Government is that many asylum seekers have transited through another country deemed 'safe', and could have claimed asylum there. If the Bill becomes law, they will be denied admittance and either returned to those countries or to a third safe country. A recent UNCHR briefing [<https://www.unhcr.org/uk/uk-immigration-and-asylum-plans-some-questions-answered-by-unhcr.html>] sets out why it

is not always that easy for asylum seekers to claim asylum in the first country they land in. These include the fact that they may not have had the opportunity to claim asylum in a country considered ‘safe’ or may have a specific reason to come to the UK for example to join family

This is not a new issue. When the UK was part of the EU it was able to return people to the EU state they had travelled through under the Dublin Regulation. It is now not able to and it is far from clear that it will be able to establish return arrangements with any European country.

Consequently, these proposals are unworkable. In the short term it will just further delay the processing of a claim while the government tried to prove a link and secure readmission. It may also lead to more tragic deaths in the English Channel or in the backs of lorries. In the longer term it could have fundamental implications for how asylum seekers are supported in Europe as obviously some countries are more accessible than others. (France had more than three times the asylum seekers applications of the UK last year).

## **TWO TIER PROCESSING OF CLAIMS**

The Bill states that whether people enter the UK ‘legally or illegally’ will have an impact on how they are treated. This means that asylum seekers who do not come through the Resettlement Programme (the majority) will have much lower protection status. The plan said that if these individuals did not come to the UK directly, claim without delay or show good cause for their ‘illegal presence’ they would only be granted temporary protection for no longer than 30 months if that claim is successful.

They would lose access to welfare rights (unless destitute) and have limited rights to family reunion. This is both cruel and counter-productive. It leaves individuals constantly fearing removal. How can we expect refugees to want to integrate into the UK, share their skills and expertise in these circumstances?

## **ONE-STOP PROCESS AND FAST TRACK APPEALS**

The plan made numerous references to the length of time it takes to consider claims and subsequent appeals. It argued that this is the fault of the asylum seeker and the agencies trying to support them when these delays are simply the result of governments failing to adequately invest in a fair and effective system, and support individuals through the process.

Asylum seekers do not want to wait years for decisions – they are forced to do so. Nor do they want to then pursue lengthy appeals but initial decision making is often so poor, and they have so little support at the start, that they may have no choice. Again, the plan argues that many appeals are without foundation but the Government’s own figures show that 44% of the appeals determined in 2019 were upheld – that is a lot of mistakes to make with people’s lives.

To reduce delays and new claims the Bill proposes a one-stop process so that asylum, human rights and any other protection matters are submitted early and considered together. Very little weight will be given to any evidence which is presented later on in the process. There will be a fast track appeal process for

claims considered manifestly unfounded or made just prior to removal. Asylum claims and appeals made in detention will be subject to accelerated procedures.

Many asylum seekers have been profoundly traumatised and find it hard to disclose sensitive information early on in the process, particularly if they are using a second language or speaking through interpreters, and in an environment which is clearly unsympathetic.

Victims of sexual violence and LGBT+ asylum seekers may find it particularly difficult to fully disclose their experiences at the start of the process. The enormous cuts to legal advice mean that they don’t get the right advice at the right time to ensure they give all the relevant information at the beginning.

The plan did include a proposal to provide more generous access to legal advice early in the process. This sounds positive but the devil is in the detail – how generous will it be in practice and could it be set at too low a level to provide enough time for these complex cases?

## **END USE OF HOTELS**

It is planned to introduce new asylum reception centres to ‘provide simple, safe and secure accommodation’ for asylum seekers to stay in while their claims are processed and end the use of hotels to accommodate new arrivals who have entered the UK by irregular routes.

We have already seen examples of what such accommodation will look like at the Napier and Penally barracks where asylum seekers have been kept for months in conditions which have been heavily criticised by Independent Inspectors including for being unsafe.

## **REMOVAL TO OFF-SHORE PROCESSING**

In the plan the Government stated it wanted to amend the Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 to make it possible to remove asylum seekers from the UK while their claim or appeal is pending thereby having the option to develop off-shore processing facilities such as those used by Australia. There are major objections to such a proposal. Apart from the difficulty of ensuring appropriate legal advice and judicial oversight, the offshore detention centres used by Australia have become infamous for the damage inflicted on individuals and the cost.

## **DESTITUTION AND REMOVAL**

The principal aim (apart from stopping asylum seekers coming here in the first place) is to hold them, deal with their cases quickly and then remove those whose claims have been unsuccessful. Within the plan there was a specific intention to implement existing primary legislation to remove support and render these individuals totally destitute and, of course, still unable to work. This is unlikely to speed up removal and will only increase human suffering.

## **CHANGES TO FAMILY REUNION**

The plan stated that the Government’s commitment in Parliament to consult on the family reunion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children was fulfilled by the consultation on the plan. It was unclear what this meant in practice as the document had



few specific proposals and those were in respect of refugees who arrived through “safe and legal routes”, who are the minority. The Queen’s Speech made no reference to family reunion nor is it referenced in the Briefing Note. Will traumatised and vulnerable children still have to find their own way of reuniting with their family?

*“This Bill will be the most dangerous and inhumane attack on the right to seek asylum for decades”*

## AND SOME POSITIVE PROPOSALS

The reference in the Briefing to correcting historical anomalies in British nationality law so it is easier for people to claim citizenship may be helpful. There were also some positive proposals in the plan, such as indefinite leave being granted to resettled people, diversifying the resettlement programme (but not increasing it).

The proposed increased support for integration and English for speakers of other languages courses are welcome, though they will touch on only a small number of people seeking sanctuary.

There are also some helpful proposals in respect of training first responders in identifying victims of modern slavery and providing more support for prevention and the identification of child victims. But there is also a drive to remove ‘bogus’ claimants sooner which will militate against some victims coming forward.

## NEW CAMPAIGN

If it becomes law this Bill will make it even more difficult for people to come to the UK and claim asylum. Our parliamentarians must ensure it doesn’t become law working in collaboration with other charities and faith groups. In response to these proposals a new coalition campaign

Together with Refugees was launched on 10 May calling for a better approach to supporting refugees that is kinder, fairer and more effective. Details can be found here. [<https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk>]

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Margaret Lally is a member of the Liberal Democrats 4 Seekers of Sanctuary [<https://ld4sos.org.uk/en/document/policies#document>] council. The views expressed are her own

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At local authority level, sensible decisions on important detail can be taken in awareness of local circumstances: for example, if a measurable radius was placed on journeys to exercise, Birmingham might vary it for people in the city centre and a limit on distance travelled to shop might be extended in Northumberland.

But good co-ordination between England, Scotland and Wales and between the two Irelands is essential. This could mean a single British chief emergency planning officer appointed jointly by the British prime minister and the leaders of Scotland and Wales, or more likely, regular meetings and joint plans between three chief emergency planning officers.

For viruses, there is a united Ireland and our structures should reflect that.

The World Health Organisation has done sterling work both before and during the pandemic, and needs strengthening and not undermining by any Trump retreads. European co-operation also makes sense. No-one has told the next virus that we’ve left the EU.

Measures like this would make it harder for foreseeable problems like a pandemic to be ignored in the belief that something so strange and disturbing just won’t happen. Alternatively – what?

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Simon Baks is a member of Harwich Liberal Democrats

# OBITUARY: SHIRLEY WILLIAMS

## Ben Stoneham pays tribute to the Lib Dem peer and SDP founder

Peter Metcalfe - an old friend of Shirley and my Alliance agent in Stevenage in the 1980s - affectionately told the story of a phone call from Shirley posing as her secretary to apologise for Shirley being late for a Labour party meeting.

Despite his protests - "I know it is you Shirley!" she persisted with her pretence. Shirley liked to be loved. She hated letting people down. Her fibbing was common but usually to disguise her tendency to over-commit and poor time keeping. It was one of her lovable traits. We nearly always forgave her.

She had a remarkable rapport with people. She once said: "To be a good politician in a democracy, you have to care for people and to be fascinated by what makes them tick." She always slightly cocked her head towards you when she talked to you. It made you feel the centre of her attention. It was remarkably seductive and sometimes she used it to her advantage. Her optimism and that engaging smile through her sparkling eyes won you over.

During the SDP formation and development of the Liberal Democrats public support for her and her tenacity were critical to our success. Roy Jenkins had his vision and gravitas. Bill Rogers provided the organisational genius and sound political judgement. David Owen had his energy and good looks (and we know the rest). Shirley had huge public affection and trust.

The decision to leave Labour was probably made easier by losing Stevenage in 1979 - it eased the social ties which others found so difficult to break. The decision was made easier by the thought that she would not have to stand on a Labour platform she no longer believed in. Those of us privileged to witness her electrifying speech in the Spanish Hall, Blackpool in 1980 never doubted or forgot her courage. She memorably inspired us against the Militant left by taunting Tony Benn's conference speech that day: "I wonder why Tony is so unambitious. After all it took God only six days to make the world!"

She had a reputation for making decisions with difficulty and then changing her mind. Actually she acted more decisively on the SDP launch than others despite having a lot to lose. But it was confirmed subsequently by her failure to stand in the Warrington by election in July 1981. She later recalled: "I did not dither I quaked." Her reputation and leadership ambitions never recovered despite her subsequent joyous victory at Crosby. Sadly even that was a rushed, almost desperate decision which took no account of the threat from the Boundary Commission making re-election at the general election almost impossible. If she had been re-elected in 1983 she might have still been a formidable

contender against Owen for the leadership. That period through to 1988 might have been calmer as she had a good relationship with David Steel.

Jenkins became SDP leader in 1982 and for a time there was some *froideur* in their relationship as she had sided with Owen in the leadership contest. She soon tired of Owen's intransigence towards the Liberals and his drift towards 'tougher' rather than 'tender' policy positions which undermined any sense of partnership as the 1987 election dawned.

Shirley always stood for a partnership of equals with the Liberals. Her commitment to the Alliance and then merger was apparent early on. No one can forget the romantic photo of David Steel and her launching 'A Fresh Start for Britain' in June 1981 - it looked like a couple of 'newlyweds' sitting in a spring orchard but was taken in Dean's Yard, Westminster.

Perhaps one of the happiest periods of her life were when she decamped to Harvard after the 1987 election and started her new life with Dick Neustadt. She came back to help Paddy and later Charles. She remained committed to encouraging more women and young people to follow her into politics. Dick's sudden death in 2003 was another setback but by then she had assumed leadership of our Lords group, which helped distract her sadness.

Shirley had great talents. Her husky voice and her acting skills made her a formidable debater and TV performer. She loved discussing ideas and politics - her sitting room furniture in her Hertfordshire home seemed laid out as if for an Oxbridge tutorial. She had a huge network of contacts. Her energy and determination even in later years was formidable. She had authentic empathy with people shared by few other leading politicians.

She regretted her decision to retire from the Lords in 2016 particularly after the Referendum decision went the wrong way. She kept coming to London by train. Crossing London alone worried her family but they were reassured that there was always someone on the train only too willing to help her and even accompany her to Westminster.

People loved Shirley as we all did in the Lords. Her contribution to social democracy and liberalism has been incalculable and her memory leaves a huge gap in our lives.

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Ben Stoneham is chief whip of the Liberal Democrat House of Lords group.

# OBITUARY: JONATHAN FRYER

## Robert Woodthorpe Browne pays tribute to a leading Lib Dem international activist

I first met Jonathan at a Liberal Summer School in Ilkley Moor in the 1980s. Other attendees, grander than the pair of us, included Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins, several leading Liberals, and Paddy Ashdown, not yet an MP but beginning to make his mark.

Jonathan, like so many of us, was a disciple of Jo Grimond who had visited his school. He had been adopted and, very sadly, was sexually abused by his adoptive father. All of these early experiences are told in the first part of his autobiography *Eccles Cakes*. Sadly he did not complete a second volume before he died, aged 70, of a brain tumour.

Whatever prompted Jonathan to be such an internationalist must have had its roots in this childhood. Aged 18, and before university, he somehow got to Vietnam during the war and was allowed to be a correspondent despite his youth. He then studied oriental languages in addition to European ones. Arabic later became important to him.

Jonathan was always gentle in his dealings with others. Fiercely moral, he was active in the Quakers, although perhaps not in later years. He was active in human and civil rights movements, not only LGBT but championing causes at home and abroad. His travels in the Middle East saw him adopt the Palestinian cause and he was for some time chairman of Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine and a member of the Board of the Council for Arab British Understanding.

He was an inveterate traveller, and the BBC facilitated his wanderlust. I well remember a recording from a deserted and redundant railway station somewhere in Eritrea. As we were both involved in Liberal International and ALDE, we would for many years be on the same delegations or even travel together. A favourite moment was in Cairo visiting the Coptic Ghad Party for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. Our meeting was about to start when a top party member entered. The two Egyptians chatted away in French. When they eventually turned to us, Jonathan and I offered to continue the interview in that language and discovered that we had both, a few years apart, studied at Institut de Touraine in Tours. Our hosts reddened!

Jonathan clocked up some 168 countries during his travels. This became a competition between us, where he pulled well ahead. On arrival in Tbilisi on a Liberal International mission, he turned to me with a Cheshire Cat grin. "You've been here before, and to Armenia. Both are new to me!"

For the Liberal Democrats, Jonathan played many roles. He was a Westminster candidate for Chelsea. I had to stand against him at the hustings - and voted for him myself. A greater interest was the European Parliament and he narrowly missed a seat. This was certainly one of the sadnesses of his life. He chaired Liberal International British Group on two occasions.

On the domestic side he stood in south and east London too, thwarted by the UK electoral system. He also did his bit for the party organisation and chaired London region for a time.

Many of Jonathan's travels were not political. He would spend Christmas seasons in the Gulf, and was commissioned to write books about some of the states. One such venture was pending at the time of his unexpected final illness. His partner lived in Brazil, where Jonathan spent happy periods. He also lectured not only at the School of Oriental and African Studies but on Mediterranean cruise ships.

Living a bachelor life for most of the time, Jonathan was happy to be welcomed on the diplomatic circuit, where he didn't hesitate when told the buffet was open. The same went for international functions at home and abroad.

He enjoyed his wines and would never want to rush home after a meeting, staying on for supper at the National Liberal Club with myself or other colleagues, or at a nearby pub following meetings at party HQ.

His firm views did not usually lead to quarrels and he would readily seek amicable solutions. He took over the leadership of the party's international relations committee in January 2020, just before the Wuhan outbreak became a pandemic. He had strong ideas as to the direction the excellent team he inherited should go. Sadly he is no longer with us to see them to fruition.

He leaves behind him a large number of colleagues who were proud to call him their friend.

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Robert Woodthorpe Browne is a member of the Liberal International Bureau.

# OBITUARY: TREVOR SMITH

## Seth Thevoz pays tribute to a lord who helped keep liberalism afloat financially

Liberator readers will miss the acerbic columns of Trevor Smith, who died in April.

Born in very humble circumstances in the east end of London, with a picaresque childhood in Fitzrovia and Hounslow, he went on to become a distinguished political scientist, professor and Lib Dem life peer.

One of life's instinctive Liberals, he joined the party as a student at the London School of Economics in the 1950s. He would later recall that most 1950s party meetings were of very elderly members, dwelling at length on outdated questions. This prompted Smith and other Young Liberals to form the New Orbits Group, to encourage new thinking among Liberals, publishing a range of pamphlets until 1964. Smith stood as the Liberal candidate for West Lewisham in 1959, the youngest candidate that general election.

In the 1960s, Smith focused on his academic career. After spells as a schoolteacher and academic posts with Exeter, the Acton Society Trust and Hull, he moved in 1967 to Queen Mary College at the University of London, which provided his berth for nearly a quarter of a century, and where he would be appointed professor in 1983.

As an academic, Smith's interests were focused on the interaction between business and political power. He wrote *The Politics of the Corporate Economy* (1979), and more fully developed its themes in *The Fixers* (1996). This latter book reflected Smith's lifelong fascination with behind-the-scenes 'fixers' who made politics happen.

Smith was an accomplished political fixer himself. His main outlet for this was through successive Joseph Rowntree trusts, and by 1975, he was appointed to the board of the Rowntree Social Service Trust (RSST). Unlike other Rowntree trusts, the RSST was not a charity, allowing it to take a unique campaigning stance on political issues.

By the 1960s, a number of Liberal politicians sat on its board, including Jo Grimond and Richard Wainwright, and it was not without controversy that the well-funded trust began making substantial donations to the Liberal Party. By the 1980s, it was by far the Liberal Party's largest donor.

Smith became the RSST's chair in 1987, renaming it the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in 1990. But his ambitions were much wider than simply funding a struggling third party. Under Smith, the trust initiated studies into inequality, and abuses of power; and it convened and funded a number of cross-party initiatives around constitutional reform, including Charter 88.

A bitter opponent of the corporate excesses of Thatcherite Britain, Smith once confided that he "funded all the major parties of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, except the Conservatives and the DUP." In the secrecy-laden environment of 1990s politics, before the days of donor transparency, there

was relatively little awareness in Smith's lifetime of either the degree to which the Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats were financially dependent on the trust, or of the breadth with which the trust funded party political activity across the spectrum, including the 1990s Blair-Ashdown 'project' to oust the Tories.

The summit of Smith's career came when he was appointed vice-chancellor of the University of Ulster in 1991.

Smith was among the large batch of Lib Dem peers appointed by Paddy Ashdown in 1997; ironically, he held Ashdown's political judgement in very low regard: "better at tactics, but very bad at strategy".

A stroke in 1998 curtailed his career: the following year, he retired as vice-chancellor and as JRRT chair, although he remained on its board until 2007, increasingly disenchanted with some of its decisions, particularly as it turned over once-in-a-lifetime sums to the Lib Dems, depleting the trust's capital reserves.

He remained active in the Lords, spending over a decade as the Liberal Democrats' Northern Ireland spokesperson, and was outspoken on issues of business excess and cronyism.

The coalition years caused much heartache for Smith. He was one of only four Lib Dem peers to defy the whip, voting against trebling tuition fees. He subsequently emerged as one of Nick Clegg's most trenchant critics, calling for his resignation, and describing Clegg in *Liberator* as "a cork bobbing on the waves."

In later years, Smith grew increasingly physically frail, but his mind remained alert. On first meeting him in 2013, I was struck by how quick he was to judge individuals and situations. Over time, I would learn that he was also exceptionally perceptive in making these calls, especially homing in during a conversation on anything the other person didn't want him to know. He was often able to deduce more about an acquaintance's intimate sexual peccadilloes than they knew themselves, without even raising the topic.

Friends will miss his wit. *Liberator* readers will miss his erudition – his last contribution was only in February (*Liberator* 405). In recent years, as his body gradually shut down, he wrote each column assuming it would be his last, and his directness and deep learning always made for stimulating, enjoyable reads.

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Seth Thevoz is the author of *Club Government: How the Early Victorian World Was Ruled from London Clubs*.



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**Africa Reimagined:  
reclaiming prosperity  
for the continent**  
by Hlumelo Biko  
Amberly Books 2021  
£20

This passionately-argued book blames Africa's post-independence failure to thrive on the elite's futile attempts to imitate western models of democracy and capitalism. Instead, the author (Steve Biko's son) recommends returning to traditional African values, making his father's Pan-Africanist dreams a reality.

Some of his solutions should resonate with Liberal Democrats: federalism, devolution of power and spending to a local level, PR elections and cooperative economic partnerships.

Biko laments Africans' lack of self-confidence, rooted, he claims, in insufficient appreciation of Africa's pre-colonial contributions to world history and knowledge. He is disparaging of African elites adopting Western ways and values, thereby making Africans feel their culture is second rate.

He imagines a continent where a few economically viable airlines link cities, rather than the current mess which makes it quicker to fly from Lagos to London and then back to Yaounde, than to fly to the next-door country. He envisages towns using their economic scale to buy goods at a discount and selling them at cost to citizens, eliminating middle people and getting better value. He wants investment in rural areas, stemming the flood of people into city slums; and he calls for children to be educated in their local language, proud of their heritage.

Leaders should have "skin in the game," sending their children to local schools rather than despatching them to the UK; and using local hospitals rather than Swiss clinics.

So far, so good. Who could deny that the tiny, privileged African elite has warped western democracy to its own ends, denying accountability or transparency to its beleaguered citizens?

Yet problems arise with the definition of Africa values, and the misty-eyed view of pre-colonial history on the continent. Biko glosses over centuries of



# REVIEWS

inter-communal warfare and enslavement, with his sentimental view of a bucolic paradise untouched by disease, cattle theft and conflict.

Your reviewer tried to contact the author to ask him to define the customary values he so admires, but to no avail. In my experience, tradition can include panels of elders in Uganda beating women who do not give birth each year; village chiefs in Mozambique who are drunk by 10 in the morning, living off the taxes they impose on fearful subjects who approach Big Men literally on their knees; village chiefs in Liberia who have their pick of pre-pubescent girls; widows forced to marry the brothers of their dead husbands, thereby spreading the HIV that killed their men; and a dowry system that forces girls to stay with the violent older men to whom their parents have sold them.

The city slums that Biko hates offer untold opportunities to young women, finally able to control their lives away from their male relatives, keeping the money they earn, and choosing their own friends. The materialism he sneers at allows women to purchase labour-saving devices, thereby liberating themselves from hours of drudgery.

Biko hates political parties, but in many cases, African parties aren't ideological but based on ethnicity. He praises traditional African habits of cooperation (ubuntu), yet why do so many villages fail to build a well or a road or a solar power grid that would benefit everyone? Answer: there is no meaningful sense of society, just clans and family ties.

Biko's contempt for immigrants includes people from the sub-Continent of India/ Pakistan/ Bangladesh who have been in Africa for generations. Yet he has little to say about the Chinese, the new colonialists, leaving African governments deep in debt.

His Pan-African vision of an EU-style continental entity includes

the Arab majority nations of North Africa, where black Africans face appalling racism.

How likely is it that those countries will vote to submerge their identity into a United States of Africa? I understand his anger about the state of Africa, but his solutions are based in ideals that will exclude 50% of the population: women. I'm sorry he didn't respond to my attempts to interview him.

Rebecca Tinsley

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**In the Thick of It**  
by Alan Duncan  
William Collins 2021  
£25

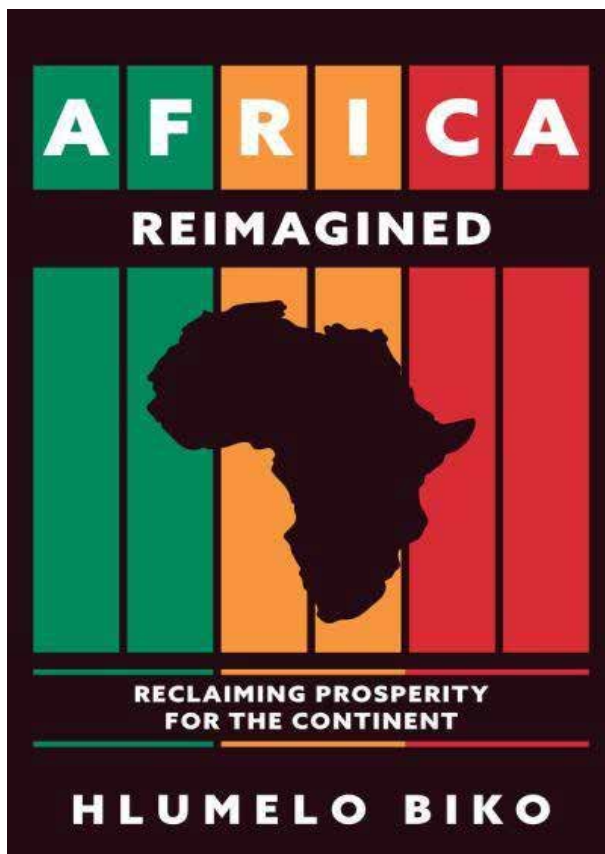
Several journalists reviewing Alan Duncan's diaries have expressed pious disapproval of the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office minister's acid descriptions of his Conservative party colleagues.

But anyone inside a political party, as opposed to commenting on the Westminster Village, will be unsurprised by his venom. Activists of any political colour may appreciate how infuriated Duncan becomes by the ambitious and delusional mediocrities around him who win attention and advancement.

His diaries provide an intimate view of how the swivel-eyed Brexiteers finally gained total control of the Tory Party, much to his dismay. Initially a Leaver, he campaigned for Remain, having grasped the impracticality of departing the EU. He became increasingly convinced that the Leavers were unhinged and careless about the country they claim to love.

Duncan's interactions with the remote, graceless and socially awkward Theresa May prompt one to wonder how someone so lacking in political talent or manners rises to be prime minister.

Similarly, his observations about Boris Johnson's term as foreign secretary make it clear the man is incapable of focusing on



detail, caring about anything but himself, or telling the truth. Boris's promotion of scheming non-entities like Gavin Williamson reflect his disregard for what might benefit the government or the country.

Duncan also regrets the increasing FCO tendency to pull punches, especially regarding Israel, terrified of offending the Americans whether under Obama or Trump.

He concludes that 'Global Britain' is the opposite: a puny country, failing to find a role in the world. Finally, his love for his husband is touching, as is his courage in confronting foreign officials with his LGBT status, irrespective of their prejudices. This is an entertaining read, but perhaps worth waiting until it is in paperback or on kindle.

Rebecca Tinsley

## **What We Owe Each Other, a new social contract** by Minouche Shafik The Bodley Head 2021 £18.19

Minouche Shafik presents a back-to-basics international assessment of the social contract between governments and citizens as we move to a post-Covid economic and political world. She presents

multiple-choice and flexible suggestions for dealing with the problems we face.

Minouche has a lot of form; she is currently director of the London School of Economics, was a deputy governor of the Bank of England, and has experience at the World Bank and IMF. She sits on the cross-benches in the House of Lords.

Clearly written in a matter-of-fact style that wastes no time and flows well, with useful international statistics and comparisons. As it tweaks your memory, use it for your microeconomic decisions as well as the obvious macroeconomic.

Joanne Lynch

## **London's Lost Music Venues Damaged Goods Books 2020 £14.99**

This is the perfect book for an ageing hippy or an ageing punk, or anyone who wishes they had been.

Talling is 'Derelict London', author of the eponymous books, website and walks. He is a former manager, promoter and record producer in the punk era so has considerable personal knowledge of his subject. This book has been in gestation for a long time as regulars on his walks know. It is a considerable work of research with photos and old tickets from gigs of yore.

The book consists of photos and brief histories of around 130 'lost' smaller live music venues all over London. Some are well-known like Eel Pie Island and the Marquee club - others probably less so other than to immediate locals.

Most of the venues were pubs of which many have been turned into flats. A few have changed into boutique bars. Some have disappeared completely to be replaced by more flats, shopping centres or one implausibly turned into a police station. The photos reflect what splendid buildings so many of the old pubs are or were.

Rod Stewart and Reg Dwight seem to have played in every pub in London. The lost venues hosted plenty of other major stars not just before they were famous but when they were - like the Supremes in the Ricky Tick in Hounslow! More obscure acts included Thatcher on Acid, Screaming Custard, Ken Dodd's Dad's Dog's Dead and Angela Rippon's Bum. I can't think why they didn't make it.

Familiar to the regulars on the Talling walks are his stories of violence and mayhem like "110 people were hospitalised and the venue was burned down after being petrol bombed"; "the band were attacked by skinheads with pickaxes as they unloaded their gear . . . the attackers were beaten off with the help of Irish workmen drinking in the public bar"; "Bourbonese Qualk subsequently performed behind coils of barbed wire armed with crowbars and baseball bats as a defence measure". "I got kicked out of there . . . for being drunk and disorderly and throwing another lairy gig-goer across a table full of the venue manager's mate's drinks."

As a footnote It's nice to see the section on east London near the front of the book not placed at the back as every other book about London does.

I wonder what will be the historic music venues post-Covid. Photos of dozens of back bedrooms?

Talling says in the introduction that he isn't writing social history. But he is, in a most entertaining way. History doesn't have to be boring - read this book and see.

It is worth checking out <https://damagedgoods.co.uk/> they are primarily a record label, where you can find many of the sons and daughters of '77 - The Lurkers, The Pork Dukes, The Revillos... and keep up with the action.

Gwyneth Deakins

## Monday

I am demolishing the eggs and b. when a footman bursts in. “Your lordship,” he cries, “the canal is blocked!” I hurry over to the aforementioned waterway and find a narrow boat wedged firmly across it. The assembled gongoozlers offer various remedies: set the Well-Behaved Orphans to work in the mud with buckets and spades; ask the Elves of Rockingham Forest to employ their “High Magic™”; telephone Jamie Stone and ask him to send some rocket fuel down from his spaceport on the outskirts of Thurso so we can (in Meadowcroft’s words) “Blow the varmint clean out o’ the cut.” Whatever the best course of action proves to be, I have to admit the grounded vessel poses a ticklish problem. Here in Rutland we rely upon our canal for the export of Stilton and pork pies to the industrial Midlands. If Stilton is held at the docks for too long it can develop a distinctly gamey flavour. While I rather savour this myself, it can prove something of a hurdle when it comes to those difficult export markets.

## Tuesday

As if the blocked canal were not enough, the morning brings sad news. Lord Greaves, scion of the famous brewing family, is no more. History tells how in 1824 Jedidiah Greaves and Obadiah Smithson met, swore at one another, became the firmest of friends and resolved to go into business together brewing the finest beer in England. The house of Smithson and Greaves had done so ever since, notably in the shape of their famed Northern Bitter, which is always on tap at the Bonkers’ Arms. Yet there is more to the company than that as, unusually for brewers, both families have always been staunch Liberals. So they have regularly produced special brews to mark notable victories by our party. I have no memory of their Landslide from 1906, which suggests that it lived up to its billing, while the ale brewed to celebrate Mark Bonham-Carter’s victory at Torrington in 1958 is said to have been so potent that many of his supporters were unable to find their way to the polls at the following year’s general election. To mark Lord Greaves’ passing I give orders for black ribbon to be tied around the beer pumps at the Bonkers’ Arms and for the darkest ink to be poured into the jar of pickled eggs.

## Wednesday

The estimate from the Elves of Rockingham Forest proves to be steep and, if one reads the small print, involve the hiring of several JCBs. As the efforts of a party of well-meaning water voles come to naught, I drive over to Wing and the cottage of the Wise Woman this afternoon, only to find a notice on her door saying she has “Gone A-Maying”. What are we to do?

## Thursday

It is one of the great sights of London. Late at night the cognoscenti gather at the rear doors of the Treasury to see the rabble scrabbling for contracts and used fivers. Despite my travails in Rutland, I cannot resist taking in the spectacle on my journey home from Westminster to St Pancras. Here is the brother-in-law of a junior minister; there the landlord of the local of an eminent peer. Here the former nanny to the second family of a cabinet minister; there a fellow with a folder of incriminating photographs. How the recipients caper as they pocket their gifts! Some can barely walk, so weighed down are

# Lord Bonkers’ Diary

they with cash. Really, I wonder the spectacle is not in every guide book.

## Friday

Back in Rutland, we are still racking our brains to solve the problem of the blocked canal. Hard as we try, the transshipment docks behind Oakham Quay continue to fill and no solution emerges. Really, if it were not for the memoirs of a previous MP for this part of the world (I do not mean my own 20-volume work), I should despair. Fortunately,

Alan Duncan has published *Noises Off* and given us all a Jolly Good Laugh. He details a row they had in the Falcon at Uppingham – a pleasant watering hole, but it’s not the Bonkers’ Arms – with the Dowager Duchess of Rutland and describes her as “a haughty old boot”. Reader, I roared.

## Saturday

Just as we are despairing over our blocked canal, a saviour appears: it is Alfred, that excellent carthorse. “I’ve been in Oxfordshire,” he reports. “Why don’t you stand as a paper candidate?” they said? ‘You won’t have to do any work,’ they said. ‘Just come over and sign your Consent to Nomination,’ they said.” It transpires that the poor beast has been delivering Focus in the county’s Liberal Democrat target wards ever since.

I apprise him of our problem with the canal and after pushing his straw hat to the back of his head, he takes a stub of pencil from behind his ear and starts to make calculations in the margin of a back number of the High Leicestershire Radical. Finally, he says: “Hitch me up to the boat, take a turn round that tree and I’ll shift it myself.” He is as good as his word and the assembled throng cheers him when he trudges off south-westwards back to Oxfordshire. “They want me to deliver thank you leaflets, but I don’t suppose anyone there will thank me.”

## Sunday

If St Asquith’s were open as usual I should have urged the Revd Hughes to hold a service of thanksgiving for Albert’s efforts, taking some lines from Job as the text for his sermon: “Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword.”

Soon, as the Covid virus departs with its tale between its legs, we shall be able to enjoy such pleasures again, and I have thought of the perfect way of taking advantage of this regained freedom. I shall travel the length and breadth of these islands and write a book about my experiences. Ed Davey was supposed to be undertaking such a journey, but as far as one can tell got no further than his local fried fish shop and Auchtermuchty Zoo, so I shall instead take my inspiration from Dame Peggy Ashcroft’s *Beyond Westminster*, which saw its author venturing into more challenging locales than this. There is no doubt about it: as well as being one of the greatest actresses of her generation, she was the finest leader the Liberal Democrats ever had.

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