

liberator



We're going to smash these Tory bricks

We'll have none of that rhyming slang

- 🌟 Time for a progressive alliance, or not? - Layla Moran and Michael Meadowcroft
- 🌟 What happens to carers after caring? - Susan Simmonds
- 🌟 Can Macron win again? - Marianne Magnin

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LIBERATOR

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

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

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Lord Benkers is on holiday

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COMMENTARY

A TALE OF TWO BY-ELECTIONS

Huge congratulations to Sarah Green - the first serving Liberator Collective member to make it to Parliament.

Chesham & Amersham was ignored by the media until the result, but those on the ground grew increasingly confident as the campaign progressed. They encountered a notable distaste for Boris Johnson among moderate Tories, continuing resentment over Brexit in a strong Remain area and fear that Tory planning policies would see a developer free-for-all in the Chilterns.

The party poured people and resources into Chesham & Amersham and the unexpected size of the majority looks good for the next general election.

But 180 miles and 14 days away something quite different unfolded in Batley & Spen, where the party did very little and lost its deposit in a Labour-Tory marginal.

It's hardly surprising the Lib Dem vote was squeezed - and Liberator's sources say the constituency is derelict outside two wards.

Both recent by-elections suggest voters are perfectly capable of working out who was most likely to beat the Tories without needing instructions.

Coming on top of Hartlepool the results might suggest there is no Lib Dem dog in the 'red wall' fight but entire packs of them in the 'blue wall' one.

On this hangs a major strategic choice the party has to make and while it's being debated vigorously all over the place it is unclear how, or indeed if, any formal decision will be taken.

This is the idea of a progressive alliance - greatly differing viewpoints on which are amplified in this Liberator in extended pieces by Layla Moran and Michael Meadowcroft.

To judge by Ed Davey's remarks after both by-elections he sees the 'blue wall' as the place to concentrate Lib Dem campaigning: areas where the party generally has some strength anyway; lots of Remain voters; lots of Tories annoyed by Johnson; Labour out of contention anyway.

Under this the Lib Dems and Labour would largely kept out of each other's way, with no need for the kind of formal arrangement that could be self-defeating as it would repel soft Tories.

As a strategy there is a logic to this - it is much what Paddy Ashdown and Tony Blair did 25 years ago - but others will argue that it means effectively abandoning a large swathe of the country to which liberalism ought to have an appeal because these areas been taken for granted by Labour just as much as places like Chesham & Amersham were by the Tories.

No 'progressive alliance' will be formed on simplistic mathematics about how if party X stood down in seat Y, party Z would then supposedly beat the Tories if voters did as they were told.

This debate has at its heart Liberal Democrat attitudes to Labour. As a generalisation, Lib Dems in 'blue wall' areas regard Labour as pleasant if misguided people with whom they collaborate on the local council and rarely fight seriously at elections.

Having some tacit understanding would cause no great problems and accepting the idea that Labour is 'progressive' no great leap of imagination.

Lib Dems in 'red wall' areas though regard Labour as authoritarian and corrupt machine politicians with whom they are in hand-to-hand combat (occasionally literally) at elections. They see nothing progressive about Labour and consider their credibility would be fatally damaged by any national understanding, tacit or otherwise.

The loudest voices in the party clearly belong to the former group, because they are where the bulk of councillors and members are (and in England parliamentary seats too).

To a lesser extent there is a similar tension in attitudes towards the Greens - are they benign environmentalists or semi-deranged authoritarians who want to minutely control everyone's life?

What matters is whether Labour is 'progressive' and how far it is prepared to commit itself to proportional representation.

It ought to, since that is the surest route to breaking the Tory stranglehold on British politics. But Labour has form on this having reneged on its commitment to voting reform once it secured power in 1997.

A public guarantee to promote electoral reform from Labour would clear one stumbling block.

Can Labour though be a 'progressive' partner for the Lib Dems on other issues? Kier Starmer appears to have decided that his best way to beat the Tories is to join them - from seeking to wrap Labour in the Union Jack, to appeasing Brexit supporters and woefully failing to really attack the Government's mishandling of the pandemic. Nor should we forget that one factor that made forming the 2010 coalition palatable to Lib Dems was that the Conservatives were then less authoritarian than Labour.

This may come down to a decision that the Johnson Government is so appalling that even one led by Starmer would be better and that the number of direct Labour-Lib Dem battlegrounds are so few as to matter little.

It's a huge strategic choice, and the party is just drifting into half working with Labour without a proper decision or adequate thought.

RADICAL BULLETIN

LEARNED FRIENDS

Stand by for a further row about whether the party can reserve places on candidate shortlists for members of a group with particular protected characteristics.

All-women shortlists are now out, since eight of 12 MPs are female (though in theory all-male ones would be permitted to overcome this imbalance).

On ethnicity the party would appear to be in the clear since both Layla Moran and Munira Wilson 'count' as BME and so form 17% of the parliamentary party, well in excess of the BME proportion of the population.

There has though been a move for the Lib Dems to reserve places for those from the Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British community (as classified in the Census).

Legal advice from Guy Vassall-Adams QC in effect batted it back to the party as to whether it should instigate the Rooney Rule.

This term has its origins in American football but essentially means shortlists should have at least one person on them from the ethnic background in question.

Vassall-Adams pointed out the small sizes of both the parliamentary party and the black community bring problems.

"The black population of England and Wales is about 3%, so in a total cohort of 11 MPs [as it then was] you would not necessarily expect to get any black MP and it is difficult to say that they are under-represented (3% of 11 gets you less than 1 person).

"This means that the legal justification for taking positive action in favour of black candidates is a weak one...making such measures hard to defend if a legal challenge were to be brought."

He suggested that given there are no black Lib Dem MPs and the idea of a reserved place on shortlist would be "a relatively mild form of discrimination which only operates at the shortlisting stage and is not determinative of any individual's candidature it may be that the party considers that the potential legal risks are ones it is prepared to take".

Vassall-Adams went on to advise that if the Lib Dems took this course "it would make most sense in those constituencies where there is a significantly higher black population than the national average".

While he "readily" accepted what was proposed was a mild use of the Rooney Rule "it is nonetheless discriminatory [and] ordinarily it would be unlawful contrary to section 101 of the [Equality Act 2010]" .

The Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (LDCRE) has though been doing some legal digging of its own.

It argues that Moran and Wilson may be from ethnic minorities but neither is black, and so the Rooney Rule could be used for black applicants.

This though opens the way for other unrepresented ethnicities to claim a similar status.

LDCRE has found a Government commentary of the 2010 Act that states: "A political party cannot shortlist only black or Asian candidates for a local government by-election.

"However, if Asians are under-represented amongst a party's elected councillors on a particular council, the party could choose to reserve a specific number of seats for Asian candidates on a by-election shortlist."

'Asian' is clearly just being used in this context as an example, rather than to suggest this provision applies only to Asians, but it is not clear if 'local government by-election' is also an example or a specific condition.

With such conflicting interpretations this may all end up before the courts.

ALL IN BLACK AND WHITE

When Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (LDCRE) secretary James Belchamber put a post on Lib Dem Voice [<https://www.libdemvoice.org/dear-white-people-join-ldcres-68052.html#comments>] that encouraged white people to join he can hardly have expected the deluge of angry responses that followed.

Not for the first time (Liberator 407) things kicked off between LDCRE and the Black Lives Action Committee (BLAC) Lib Dems.

Members of the latter accused Belchamber of wanting to fill a race equality body with white people and matters became so heated that comments were stopped, though only after another round of disputes about whether BLAC has some formal relationship with LDCRE (the latter says it doesn't).

This has been fuelled by LDCRE feeling that BLAC takes positions without consulting it but then expects it to give support.

Unlike, say, the Chinese Lib Dems, BLAC seems to have no official status at all, which may make things awkward come conference when there is expected to be a proposal to formalise bodies linked to the Lib Dems in a new category of 'affiliated organisation'.

This would abolish the distinction between 'specified associated organisations' and mere 'associated organisations' that has existed since 1988.

Affiliated organisations will have a status akin to a local party and have to go through the PPERA bureaucratic rigmarole. They will also gain some minor new rights to propose conference motions and suggest members of policy groups.

The idea is that nothing outside this framework will be allowed to use the name 'Liberal Democrats'. Its first test may come with two such bodies locked in a vituperative dispute.

OFFENDED OF SCOTLAND

Liberal Futures (LF) - a sort of Scottish equivalent of Social Liberal Forum - has been doing some thinking about how the Lib Dems can recover from May's debacle in the Scottish Parliament elections, which saw them reduced to four seats.

An LF report noted: "In the fifteen or so years leading up to 2010, we managed to build a natural constituency among public sector employees, professional people in vocational rather than money-focussed roles, and people in the academic world. We secured support from people in rural areas generally, especially Highlands, Borders, and the north east.

"We gratuitously offended large numbers of them in the terms we negotiated in the Westminster coalition (in a way that we didn't in the Holyrood LibLab coalition) and need to find ways of winning these voters back."

The best places to find new support are these same groups, it suggests, but also to look to "relatively affluent suburban areas with social liberal values" while resident EU citizens, nonconformist churches and young people with an international outlook might also be fruitful but "most of all, we have to recognise the needs of voters in severely disadvantaged areas who have been neglected by Labour, Conservatives, and the SNP. They will be loyal voters if we stand up for their needs."

The LF paper said the party's strong unionism had damaged it and it needed "some radical and distinguishing positions that get us into well-publicised debates that aren't constitutional.

"Polling shows that over the last five years, 61% of Scottish voters have at one time or another supported independence so it makes sense to choose battlegrounds where we are less outnumbered."

Some of this concerns only Scotland but much has resonance elsewhere in the UK.

Meanwhile Willie Rennie has resigned as leader and Edinburgh West MSP Alex Cole-Hamilton is tipped as his successor.

Rennie spent 11 years as leader and was energetic in the May campaign, if to little effect.

He told a recent Scottish members meeting that he has been going over the campaign and wondering whether the result would have been different had he done things another way. But when his tactics or strategy have been contested, he has become defensive rather than reflective and has a habit of arguing with anyone who questions how the campaign was run.

CRYSTAL BALLS

Spectator columnist Nick Tyrone peered into his crystal ball and predicted the Liberal Democrats would lose badly in Chesham & Amersham

[<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-lib-dems-are-utterly-lost>].

If the name sounds familiar it could be because, according to Mystic Meg's own LinkedIn page, he was once executive director of Centre Forum, the Lib Dem-linked think tank that morphed into a job creation scheme for David Laws as the Education Policy Institute.

Mystic Meg then went to the rather obscure Radix think tank and now lists himself as an associate

fellow of Bright Blue, which describes itself as "an independent think tank for liberal conservatism".

Among its listed advisory council are Michael Gove, Shagger Hancock, Penny Mordaunt and Matthew Elliott "former chief executive of Vote Leave". You can tell a clairvoyant by the company he keeps.

LEE WARD ISLAND

Shortlisting for the Chesham & Amersham by-election was ultimately narrowed down to Sarah Green and the former Conservative MP Philip Lee, whose past statements on LGBT issues caused controversy when he defected to the Lib Dems in 2019 (Liberator 398).

Lee was originally the Conservative MP for Bracknell but shifted next door and unsuccessfully fought Wokingham for the Lib Dems at the last general election, and still wanted to return to Parliament.

The problem was that he was due to go into hospital for an operation around the time of the by-election.

Lee's proposal that he could fight a campaign from his hospital ward did not find favour with party HQ.

NOW YOU SEE HER...

The Lib Dems made much of the arrival of Mimi Turner as director of strategy, research and messaging, but only a year later she has found a better job and the party evidently sees no need to replace this vast portmanteau role.

In an email to members, chief executive Mike Dixon said in an assertion that might cause some head-scratching: "Our broad strategy and positioning is clear, and our focus now needs more emphasis on getting our political execution right, day-in, day-out.

"This means we won't be replacing Mimi's strategy role on a like for like basis."

Indeed not. Baroness Greender - best known for her senior roles in the resounding triumphs of the 2015 and 2019 general election campaigns - "will be covering media and policy work as interim director of comms".

YES, OFFICER

Chesham & Amersham's profusion of Lib Dem posters brought back memories of the 1970 general election for Liberator reader Steve James, a former mayor of Chesham.

He was driving late one night when he saw a poster for openly racist Tory MP the late Ronald Bell hanging from a branch.

James manoeuvred his car so he could climb on the roof and pull it down, when out of nowhere a torch beam appeared with a policeman on the end of it, who demanded to know what James was doing.

Caught red handed James said he was just putting the poster up. "Well, take it down then", said the rozzer, an order with which James swiftly complied.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF A PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCE

However bad Labour and Greens might be, remember the Tories are worse and must be removed, says Layla Moran

From: Chris Goodall, Former Green PPC in Oxford West and Abingdon

To: Layla Moran, Lib Dem PPC Oxford West and Abingdon

"Dear Layla, Please forgive me for being direct. I feel your chances will be vastly improved if the Greens and Labour don't stand..."

The snap election of 2017 caught us all by surprise. I'd stood in Oxford West and Abingdon in 2015, a seat that on paper needed a 0.16% swing for us to win back, having lost in 2010 by an agonising 167 votes. However, the Tory tsunami hit here just as it did elsewhere, and we now found ourselves nearly 10,000 behind.

To say that we thought winning in 2017 was a long shot would be an understatement. But we could tell that the electoral sands were already shifting in our favour and, being a natural optimist, I felt success wasn't beyond the realm of possibility. So, when Chris sent me that email, I thought to myself: "we'd regret not giving it a shot, what have we got to lose?"

The biggest indication that such a move might help were the Witney and Richmond Park by-elections. In October 2016, the party ran a spirited campaign in Witney that in many ways shook it out of its post-Brexit referendum funk, achieving an incredible 19.3% swing.

In Richmond Park a few months later, Sarah Olney achieved an awe-inspiring victory, taking the seat with a 21% swing from the well-resourced Zac Goldsmith. Here, the Green Party candidate stood aside. Not only did most of the Green votes transfer but, more importantly, it sent a strong signal to Labour voters who followed suit.

In contrast to my cautious optimism, when I'd contacted my campaign manager Neil Fawcett about Chris Goodall's email, he was sceptical. Neil had moved to Oxfordshire to be the organiser for Evan Harris's win in 1997 when the seat first went yellow. He's seen or tried most things and thought this would be a stretch, but if we could achieve it, it could make a difference.

People remember the 1997 campaign as an enormous victory for Tony Blair, but what many forget is that there was a well-coordinated behind the scenes effort between Labour and the Lib Dems. The effort needed to get to that point was immense, and was rooted in a deep sense of common cause: getting rid of the Tories for the sake of the country.

Fast forward to 2015 and we faced vitriolic attack from Labour, the Greens and the National Health Action Party over our role in coalition. It could not have been clearer that this was not 1997. It was

brutal.

Yet, by 2017 the scars of the Coalition were already beginning to fade, and we had a new common cause over which bridges were being built: Brexit. A meeting was set up. It was not easy. The main sticking point was that we could not promise stepping down in another seat. A few days later, after many conversations with branch executives, it was decided that I would undergo a Green Party-only hustings at which their members would vote and decide, and council cooperation was the *quid pro quo*. A few hours after the hustings, they rang to say they'd had a vote and that they would do it. It was a promise of a new politics in Oxfordshire.

Separate to our conversations with the Greens, a progressive alliance (PA) group had also sprung up in Oxfordshire, supported by cross-party campaign group Compass. It was comprised mainly of local activists of all colours or none who had united against Brexit and now found themselves incensed by the prospect of a Tory majority. Their most valuable asset, to us, was manpower, and amplification of tactical voting messaging. They were entirely arms-length and I had no idea how they were organised, but it was effective. They came sometimes a dozen at a time to our action days and helped put up 'Labour for Layla' and 'Green for Layla' posters. Even more than the Greens stepping aside, I argue that this was what made the difference. We won. By 816 votes. It worked.

GREEN PROMISES

We made good on our promises to the Greens, and in subsequent council elections successfully worked with them to create common platforms and even jointly field candidates. We won the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire district councils, the former outright and the latter in a Lib Dem/Green partnership, in May 2019. In the 2019 general election, the Unite to Remain efforts largely did not impact us, as we had decided well in advance of that effort that we were going to work together. We went on to achieve the highest ever vote-share in the seat's history with over 50%. Then, in 2021, we achieved the highest number of Lib Dem gains of any council area in the country and achieved the impossible once again by taking control of the county council, in partnership with Greens and Labour as The Fair Deal Alliance. Liz Leffman, of Witney by-election fame, sits at the helm and in an email to members this month she said:

"For many years, I have been asked by voters why the opposition parties can't work together to effect change.

"In the Witney by-election of 2016, Robert Courts won with 45% of the vote. I was asked then, why didn't

Labour, the Greens and the Lib Dems get together and offer an effective and united challenge, breaking the Conservative dominance of local politics?

Perhaps that might have worked, but at the time, that was not an option. But now, things have started to shift.”

Liz is right, they have. Now the question is, is any of this replicable? At the very minimum all we ask of our party is to let us get on with it. But I think we can do better than that. You will be unsurprised to hear that I do believe a golden thread exists here that is worthy of application to other areas. Like any thread, it is made of several strands. These are: common cause; a clearly defined challenger; and getting the basics right/building the army. I'll confine these thoughts to the next general election, but it is worth noting that they can and have worked at a local level too.

This article only considers arguments for a 'progressive' or 'democratic' alliance in England. While some principles here may well apply in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, I have learned that the political landscapes there are best left to those who better understand them, to whom I respectfully defer.

All political parties want to win votes. It is their *raison d'être*. So, what would cause them to suppress their efforts for the sake of others? The only answer is that the electoral prize must be much bigger than the cost.

At the next election, there are multiple potential prizes. Climate change, electoral reform and social care are all strong contenders. But the most obvious is simpler, though much less laudable: the demise of the current Conservative government.

JUST CAUSE

Beating the Tories and replacing them with a government of decency and fairness is a just cause indeed. We need to convince enough people, especially Conservative voters, that this is not just desirable but also urgently needed. We also need to convince enough party activists that, by engaging in this common cause, it is in their electoral interests too.

This is where it gets complicated, and arguably why the Unite to Remain effort failed. There was common cause in Remain, that much was clear. But the inability of parties to convert the goodwill of candidates stepping down into meaningful progress in the heat of a general election made many question whether the pain of the negotiation was worth the cost. Remember that in stepping down a party loses profile locally that they may want to use to build capacity towards council elections, they anger activists who don't want to or cannot travel to their nearest seat, and even lose money from their national effort. Stepping aside costs.

So, I propose we begin by jettisoning the idea of a nationally-negotiated seat-swap 'pact' of any kind. It is too contentious. Picking a strategy and executing it well starts by eliminating strategies that won't work.

“The main sticking point was that we could not promise stepping down in another seat”

This is one of them. While this may disappoint some, I need to make it clear that this is not a rejection of a progressive alliance project, it is a refinement of the means by which we achieve our aim, in the time frame we have, in the *realpolitik* of the now. There is however merit in locally-negotiated arrangements where they can work.

As Liberal Democrats we need to start by accepting that in the air war of a general election, the wind will always blow against us. It will be our leader's job to talk in terms of a "Liberal Democrat Government", but the media in particular knows that that outcome is unlikely, so will report the election as the choice between a Tory or Labour-led administration.

I was struck while campaigning in 2019, even with Unite to Remain deals in place, that it was unclear to some voters in our target seats who the main challengers to the Tories were. The national noise said: "it Is Labour". The reality locally was often different.

Step one is to agree this between the parties. 2019 taught us the hard truth that, as Lib Dems, we cannot, even with money, campaigning might and well-known candidates, come from third to win.

So, let us start there. This applies to all parties. No more straws in the wind; we must focus on where we are second. It helps even more if we can target our message on converting former Conservatives, rather than fending off attacks from parties to the left. So minimal campaigning from other progressives is the ideal scenario, and this is where stepping aside can come in. If they do campaign, complementary messaging attacking the Government can be helpful.

Chesham & Amersham was an historic win. Three weeks out, it was clear that voters knew exactly who the challenger to the Tories was and what to do. This was in large part due to the skill of the campaign messaging and the size of the campaign. It was also due to the almost complete lack of interest in the by-election from the media. Even though Keir Starmer kept away, our activists counted 42 Labour MPs coming to help. Tony Blair did an endorsement video. Nevertheless, they lost their deposit.

The Greens, on the other hand, did relatively well and held their 1,500-odd votes, but they couldn't mount the level of campaign needed to amplify their messages. The Green bounce we saw in the 2021 locals couldn't compete with the size of our campaign.

Even better, the Tories didn't take it seriously until it was too late. They won't make that mistake again.

Let us imagine the same style of seat, fought from second place in a general election. The Conservatives will plough resources into defending it. Nationally, the airwaves will be full of Conservatives versus Labour. In the local air war, and in the ground campaign, we need to get the message across to voters that it is different in their seat to the national picture, that a Lib Dem win is possible. It's much harder.

MASSIVE CAMPAIGN

This is where the size of the campaign and parties stepping aside come in. Our campaign needs to be massive, and we need as much third-party endorsement as we can get through polling, tactical voting websites, betting odds, local influencer endorsements and local media. All these respond positively to other parties stepping aside for us. So, stepping aside in some seats is helpful.

However, there is a risk. In other seats, by Labour standing aside or vice versa and the parties looking too cosy, we put off Conservative voters who will never endorse Labour. This effect should not be dismissed. Above all, it needs testing.

Many people talk about Canterbury in 2019, but instead let's take the example of Stroud, where we stood down for the Greens. This was a Labour/Tory marginal. We lost all of our presence, while the Greens increased their vote from 2.2% to 7.5%. Labour lost the seat and it was gained by a Conservative. It was an own goal.

The Batley and Spen by-election told a similar story. Our campaign was relentless in Tory-facing wards, yet our candidate was unfairly lambasted for standing. In fact, we took votes from the Conservatives in a carefully-targeted campaign and helped Labour succeed.

We need to get smarter about this. We need to do intricate seat-level polling in every seat and work out what would deliver the results we actually want, and where. Is it the case that people in a seat would be put off voting Lib Dem if others stood aside for them? Let's test it seat by seat. We can't afford to make assumptions. We should only be guided by what the data tells us will work.

What is helpful is what Labour did in Oxford West and Abingdon. They fielded a candidate and didn't do much else. Some Labour members working with the PA group delivered for us at night in hoodies, when they were less likely to be seen. We need to help create a culture where a bit of healthy risk taking is rewarded, where the 'carrot' is obvious, above and beyond the 'sticks' of expulsion the parties wield.

The Greens standing aside in Tory-facing seats is generally helpful to us. It feeds into a narrative that signals to voters what to do and leads by example. To encourage this, we need to ensure that they are properly compensated by similar arrangements in commensurate targets, or at a council level, or both. Justifiably, their question is: what is in it for us?

This plan will only work if our party and, indeed, all parties get their campaigning houses in order. The scale and skill of a winning campaign is as much of an art as a science, but in my experience, it boils down to three main parts: money, message (local and national) and manpower.

In each prospective target seat, for all parties hoping to be part of a progressive alliance, a cool-headed assessment needs to be made on winnability. The aim is to win, and we need to be ruthless about that. This poses another problem. The Greens have very few, if any, Tory-facing Westminster prospects. This is tough, but again leads me to the conclusion that a nationally-negotiated Westminster seat swap is perhaps a little unsophisticated. Proportional representation is the long-term prize for the Greens, but it is not enough. Standing down in a Conservative-facing development

seat for the Greens is certainly a possibility, especially in an area that they want to develop at council level. There are some who argue that all this does is help the Green Party in the medium-to-long-term. That may well be true, but our experience in Oxfordshire shows that, if managed well, it can be very fruitful. Where there is no or little will locally, then we need to move on.

On money and resources, the national parties need to commit early to these seats and target them. It's not just cash that is needed but paid organisers, media machines and so on. When we start early and 'decide to win' we tend to do very well. I was again struck in 2019 by how far behind, in basic campaigning terms, some of our own targets were, let alone other parties.

UPSKILLING OTHERS

In addition to party-propriety training, some of the basics could be delivered by third parties, as political parties rarely wish to share their tricks of the trade. Why keep best practice to ourselves when upskilling each other helps us all? This point is especially radical, I appreciate that. It is this level of mindset shift, however, that I propose we need to make headway in achieving.

On messaging: local issues will feature, but at the national level work could be done to find ways of portraying the Tories that resonates among Conservative switchers that all parties could use. Keeping an eye on what is working for who, and where, and third parties releasing helpful data into the public domain can help. This is, however, where I believe common narratives need to stop. All parties want to be distinct from one another, not least because there will be places where those parties fight one another.

This brings me on to person power. In my view, of all the things to learn from the Oxford West and Abingdon experience that I have yet to see systematically implemented elsewhere, it is the importance of a progressive alliance project that funnels activists you wouldn't otherwise get to bolster your efforts. Member activation and training within parties should aim to recruit and train as much as they can, but creating an army of people from other political tribes and none serves to add to our arsenal and motivate the home team. This is best organised by arms-length organisations of experienced people who can train and direct the willing.

This is what I mean by a progressive alliance: quiet national coordination, not a pact, facilitated by third parties, that leads to a non-aggression agreement between the leaders. The bulk of effort is spent fostering a smart, data driven, targeted approach that is bottom up, not top down; sophisticated rather than a blunt instrument; utterly ruthless in our aim of removing the Tories; and motivated by the common cause of a better country.

I have no doubt that detractors of any kind of entente with other political parties will find holes in my argument. I assure them, I welcome the discussion. Are the other parties perfect? Far from it. Can Labour be cruel and tribal, and the Greens naïve? Some of them, yes. But not all. But I ask: are they worse than the Tories? If your answer is yes, then I thank you for reading this far, but I fear we have reached a fundamental impasse.

The same detractors point to Chesham & Amersham,

and suggest it as evidence that we don't need any kind of progressive alliance. That may be true, but it sounds like wishful thinking to me. General elections are not by-elections. I also say to them: this isn't just about us. We need a culture where we help other non-Conservative parties win too. For every seat they take off them, we are one step closer to the change that we need. We will remain a distinct Liberal voice with a positive message, and once power is wrested away we will play our hand wisely. But we need that seat at the table first.

At the other end of the spectrum there will be those angry with me for even suggesting we abandon a national-level Westminster seat swap initiative. I say to them, we don't need this. It's contentious and distracting. We can achieve the same results by different, less centralised, more sustainable means.

There is a template in 1997, but we need to realise

“Where there is no or little will locally, then we need to move on”

that we need to do even more than was achieved then, starting from a much poorer position. This task is herculean by comparison. We must all ask: how much do we want to win at the next election for ourselves, and how much do we want to win for the country?

The two aren't mutually exclusive. Resources can be targeted more effectively, messaging can be amplified and reinforced in the media, and we can motivate more troops in our ground campaigns. If done right, it is win-win. To do it will mean trust building and engaging in a type of politics that lies opposite to the divisive theatre that our first-past-the-post system encourages.

Change is possible, necessary even. So let's start the real discussion, let's find the model that works in our localities, let's advance liberalism and let's win.

Layla Moran is Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West & Abingdon

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TOO LITTLE CONFIDENCE TO TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY

Winning Chesham and Amersham cannot disguise the plight of a Liberal Democrat party with minimal support, no core vote and no clear vision - and looking for a 'progressive alliance' will make matters worse, says Michael Meadowcroft

The Liberal Democrat party is facing an existential crisis. It has no core vote, it barely exists in most constituencies and is ignored by the media. Even its recent by-election victory has not brought relevance.

The party appears to be unconcerned at the situation. The current political opportunity is clear: the values brought to the fore by the pandemic are exactly those that Liberalism speaks to, and both major parties are in disarray. However the Liberal Democrats are incapable of grasping the opportunity. Revival is possible but only if the party transforms itself and produces a clear exposition of Liberal philosophy setting out a vision of a Liberal society; together with committed local leadership; a thorough strategy for reviving derelict associations and consistent campaigning on Liberal issues. There is no sign that the party is ready and willing to undertake this change.

I do not describe "an existential threat" lightly nor with any sense of fatalism. It is simply that in many decades of active Liberal involvement and advocacy I have never known the party to be less relevant or less conscious of its political identity.

It is operating on the fringe of politics with all the trappings of a party without any of the substance. Its weakness and vulnerability is not inevitable nor is it the consequence of external events but is entirely self-caused.

SHAMEFUL SITUATION

Not only does it not exist as a nationwide organisation but it openly expresses itself satisfied with its meagre electoral support. It has virtually no core vote and no apparent sense of direction. As the supposed representative body for the powerful and highly relevant philosophy of Liberalism its current situation is shameful. If it is prepared to accept the reality of its situation then revival is possible, otherwise it will disappear as a relevant political organisation.

The Batley and Spenningsdale by-election was the nadir of the party as a political force. In a West Riding constituency with a long tradition of Liberalism, sitting Liberal Democrat councillors - including a life peer who was recently leader of the borough council - the party's excellent candidate finished fourth, polled just 3.3% and lost his deposit.

Such a result is hardly surprising when the party leader, in a barely disguised Facebook statement on 28 June, actually encouraged Liberal Democrats to vote Labour. Such disloyalty and disrespect is incompatible

with leadership of the party.

The party president exacerbated the damage by saying that the leader's statement was agreed by the candidate and local campaign - this at the same time as that campaign was urging party members to go to help the by-election campaign.

The campaign chair of the Yorkshire and Humber Region has bizarrely stated that had we not stood the Conservatives would have won. There is simply no way of determining how many of our meagre vote would have bothered to turn out nor how those that did so would have divided between Conservative and Labour. It is not the purpose of the party to assist its opponents. It has also been stated that we were campaigning towards the next year's local elections, though whether our derisory vote encourages anyone to support local Liberal Democrat candidates in the future is highly questionable.

The remarkable by-election victory in the Chesham and Amersham by-election could have been seen as providing the party with a lifeline and the possibility of rescue from a desperate political situation.

The urgent question is whether the party can still grasp the opportunity. I hope so, but am deeply pessimistic. Hardly had the commentators reached for their pens but Liberal Democrats began to talk of a 'progressive alliance'. Does this party never have confidence in the power and attraction of the Liberal vision? At the very moment it demonstrates the ability in otherwise safe Conservative seats to catalyse swathes of former Conservative voters to switch; to destroy the Labour party, and to demonstrate that the Conservative government's apparent capacity to deceive is a thin veneer, the party fails to issue a powerful call to arms and, instead, talks tactically of diminishing its electoral appeal.

We do not want yet another political opportunity to be missed. We need to stop yearning for 'progressive alliances' with illiberal parties and set about producing Liberal success. History shows that any seat can be won over time given a clear exposition of what a Liberal society would be like, leading to a national core vote, committed local leadership and consistent campaigning on Liberal issues.

Much has been made of the comparison of Chesham and Amersham with the Orpington by-election of March 1962. Certainly there are many similarities but there is one key difference: the Orpington Labour vote was significantly squeezed - down to 12.4% - but it did not disappear as it did in Chesham and Amersham. Also there was a subsequent huge opinion poll surge for the party and this barely happened and reverted to

single figures after Batley and Spen. But there is one potential similarity that must be avoided: the failure to build on the result nationally. Such was the national impact of the by-election that at the local elections just two months later we gained more than 500 seats, almost entirely from the Conservatives, including many with barely any campaigning. The party thought that the Liberal hour had arrived. It came as a shock just a year later

when we failed to win the Colne Valley by-election that Richard Wainwright had been nursing assiduously for seven years. Then at the May 1963 elections Liberal candidates failed to win many of the wards gained in the glow of Orpington. The reality is that success has to be consolidated otherwise it will soon ebb away.

FADE AWAY

The lesson of 1962 is salutary now following Chesham and Amersham. Unless the party rapidly provides a philosophic and political underpinning to give voters a reason for supporting Liberalism and a cause to become active in, any boost will simply fade away, particularly as the Batley and Spen failure has already sidelined Chesham and Amersham.

In many ways a more accurate comparison with the recent by-election is the Rochdale victory of October 1972. Before it the party languished at 8% in the opinion polls (compared to 15% before Orpington) and had a disastrous general election two years earlier, polling just 7.5% of the UK vote.

After Rochdale our poll rating jumped to 15% and provided the springboard for the by-election victory out of the blue in Sutton and Cheam six weeks later, followed by the Isle of Ely and Ripon the following July and Berwick on Tweed in November 1973. This fortuitous run of five by-election victories rescued the party and led to it polling almost 20% of the vote in the February 1974 general election. Other by-elections at the time were not uniformly good; two were not even contested and in two others we lost our deposit (then at 12.5%). The difference is that today the party's "basic vote is down to some 2%. We fail dismally in consolidating our successes; since the war, up to Chesham and Amersham, Liberals or Liberal Democrats have had 34 by-election victories but only Richmond Park is now still held. The party's poll rating has been in single figures for seven years.

The other huge difference is that the Liberal party of the early 1970s was in better political shape than the Liberal Democrats today.

It had a solid philosophical foundation having had a high-powered Liberal Commission producing a substantial report "re-examining Liberal principles and their application to modern conditions."

It was a document that could confidently be given to any new potential Liberal activist or even member. Today there is no such basic publication, indeed the last time the party had a document on its basic

"We need to stop yearning for 'progressive alliances' with illiberal parties and set about producing Liberal success"

principles was 19 years ago. The political world has changed out of all recognition and we have nothing to relate Liberalism to it. Unless the party has an attractive and substantial document setting out its values and its vision, by-election victories cannot be consolidated. Some of us have been lobbying for some years to get a new publication but there has been little interest. Even now the Federal Policy Committee's work on a new document has no sense of urgency and it talks of producing "a short

statement rather than an exhaustive one." This is a wholly inadequate response to a critical situation. See for comparison Liberal International's excellent document: <https://liberal-international.org/who-we-are/our-mission/landmark-documents/political-manifestos/liberal-manifesto-2017/#jump-English>

The Chesham and Amersham victory will produce a number of potential members interested in the political vision of the party; unless we have good quality material to give them they will lose interest. There are just a few potential political recruits in each area and they need to be sought out and nurtured.

HOSEPIPE POLITICS

Without such people we cannot make the necessary contacts with the wider electorate. We cannot baptise people with a hosepipe and we have to draw in those individuals who can be imbued with an awareness of the Liberal vision that will persuade them to commit to the party over the long term.

- The current state of British politics is an open goal for Liberalism. The values that have been highlighted in society during the pandemic and which will continue in its aftermath are essentially Liberal values:
 - solidarity between individuals, recognising a common need;
 - community identity to focus on support for neighbours and on carers;
 - recognition of the importance and value of the public service;
 - a greater emphasis on human as opposed to economic values;
 - the value of Keynesian economics;
 - the necessity for job creation, particularly using co-operative and common ownership structures;
 - the recognition of the need for internationalism.

Alas, the Liberal Democrats have shown little sign of campaigning on these issues. In fact, there is a great absence of Liberal Democrats campaigning on any issues outside their local wards. Meanwhile the Conservative government continues to flout civilised values, common decency and even truthfulness with total impunity and virtually unchallenged by any opposition. Any half-decent opposition would be able to expose and undermine this appalling government.

And the Chesham and Amersham by-election has demonstrated how flaky the Conservative vote is.

Labour has ceased to be an integrated and values-based political party. It is increasingly obsessed with searching for a viable basis for unity. It has no answer to the loss of previously 'safe' seats nor to its almost total absence in Scotland - which sent 56 MPs to Tony Blair's parliamentary Labour party in 1997. Its disintegration in Chesham and Amersham was startling - down from 21% and second place just four years ago to 1.6% and fourth place on 17 June. Its class base has largely disappeared and the core voters on which it has relied since its inception have become disillusioned by the chasm between what they believe and the party's expressed policies. The potential for a progressive, sensitive and intelligent Liberalism incrementally to replace Labour as the more formidable alternative to the Conservatives is apparent. Nothing would worry the Conservative party more.

The 'progressive alliance' hankered after by too many Liberal Democrats is ineffective because Labour is not a progressive party - as anyone fighting it in its industrial fiefs knows only too well - and Labour dare not enter into such an alliance as it would hasten its disintegration. Publicity for a Liberal Democrat link-up with Labour would inhibit transfers to us from the Conservatives, and it would inhibit and hamper Liberals' progress.

Despite having the most fertile ground for Liberal values, certainly since the Iraq invasion in 2003, and the abject state of the two major parties, the Liberal Democrats are making no impact nationally and is disregarded in almost all discussions of politics and elections.

The party's inherent problems still remain and the by-election does not of itself change them. Only the opportunity is different. It barely exists as a party. It has been way down in the national opinion polls averaging only around 7% and in two very reputable polls was shown in fourth place behind the Greens.

The party has no core vote. At the recent parliamentary by-election in Airdrie and Shotts on 13 May it polled a derisory 220 votes - the lowest vote ever in a parliamentary election by the party or its predecessor.

At the recent mayoral election in West Yorkshire, traditionally a region with a strong Liberal tradition, the candidate lost his deposit, finishing fifth behind the Greens and even the Yorkshire Party.

This result is a vivid consequence of the rigid targeting strategy of the past 25 years. The party cannot kill off political and electoral activity in an increasing number of seats and then expect it to poll well when the entire county is one constituency. If we do not have a significant core vote of electors who vote for the party out of loyalty to the brand, there is no prospect of winning mayoral or police and crime commissioner elections.

INCESSANT LEAFLETS

And increasingly this applies to parliamentary elections. The party has become almost entirely a party of local redoubts, often isolated within a broader area and struggling to hold on against the odds by dint of immense activity and commitment. In too many areas genuine community politics have been subverted

by the reliance on incessant delivery of Focus leaflets devoid of political content.

The party has a very impressive training programme, but to what end? It has no regular news bulletin, information service or even a frequent political briefing. A political party requires ammunition to be successful. The Liberal Democrats do not produce any such material. Nor nowadays is there any ferment of pamphlets or booklets from the various special interest groups. Occasional efforts, such as the publication pulled together by Layla Moran, Mark Pack's blogpost series and the Generous Society report by a number of Cambridge Liberal Democrats stand out as honourable exceptions.

Before Chesham and Amersham the party was almost never mentioned in any consideration of the political situation, either nationally or in regard to a particular political issue. It has reverted to struggling for relevance. It rarely has a representative on any political programme.

It still faces an existential crisis and yet no-one in the party regionally or nationally appears to be concerned about this.

Saving one's deposit is now regarded as an achievement. Frankly, I am not interested in such a party; only in the promotion of Liberal values and in succeeding electorally to be able to apply those values in government.

There is no possibility of revival unless the party has a clear identity. The that 2002 statement of values is now very dated but the party has no key document which takes note of any of this.

It is shameful. From 2015 we hoped that the Agenda 2020 project would produce a key document. Nothing happened. Then the Federal Policy Committee was pressed to do so, but again no result. Even now the committee is only talking vaguely of having a short consultation document later in the year. Meanwhile the party has no extended document on its political philosophy to give to serious enquirers.

Liberal thinking and writing today is mainly coming from outside the party. It is writers and commentators such as Ian Dunt, Timothy Garton Ash, Simon Wren Lewis and Nick Barlow who are currently promoting Liberalism. Have approaches been made to Samuel Kasuma who recently resigned as No 10's race adviser for solidly Liberal reasons? How did the party fail to recruit Michael Sandel, the American political philosopher whose writings and lectures are absolutely in the Liberal mainstream? Such individuals demonstrate that the political argument for Liberalism can be intellectually sustained. The fact is 'celebrity' Liberals do not today identify themselves with the party. Even in the dark days of the 1950s the Liberal party attracted such names as Ludovic Kennedy, Robin Day, George Scott and, later, Honor Blackman.

A public awareness, however vague, of what a party represents is the basis for its 'identity'. In this context 'liberal' gives an idea of what the party is, but when the concept is qualified by 'Democrat' it loses that semblance of clarity. There is no 'Liberal Democrat-ism' and to make revival more feasible we probably have to focus simply on the time-honoured 'liberal'.

The party has a formidable bureaucratic structure. It has its federal committees, panels and working groups, many replicated at an English party level. It has a highly structured candidate approval system and

it has a detailed appeals process. It is all very worthy but it has produced a party structure that exists to replicate itself and it takes an army of people willing to take on the array of posts simply to maintain it.

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Their time and effort is appreciated, but the structure is commensurate with a nationwide major party when what is needed is more akin to a guerilla warfare organisation able to respond rapidly to political events and opportunities.

The party simply doesn't exist in a majority of constituencies. It has been largely killed off by the strict targeting that has hollowed out the party over the past 25 years. The abject state of the party's organisation is largely hidden by the amalgamation of a number of constituency associations into one broad association within which there is perhaps only a single functioning constituency body. The campaigning staff at HQ are producing excellent literature but in most constituencies there is no-one to take it up and to use it.

We cannot continue to blame the coalition for the party's electoral plight as if the party will eventually return to pre-2010 levels by evolution. It will not do so and the interminable party bureaucracy is itself hampering the necessary changes. It needs a very different initiative that operates more as a guerilla force, with a new campaign plan akin to the community politics initiative after the 1970 general election. The Chesham and Amersham by-election was essentially such a tactic and it demonstrated that the coalition does not have still to be a dead weight.

Practical strategies to revive the party in the country are eminently possible but the party leadership and key officers apparently have no desire to revive derelict associations and thus rebuild the basis of a national party.

We keep seeing the trite statement that "where we work we win". It is far from invariably true. In all but the smallest municipal wards even a vast amount of work is not now going to achieve electoral success without a substantial core vote of electors who vote Liberal as opposed to voting for a local individual, however hardworking.

FRANKLY EMBARRASSING

Moreover where massive effort has produced an initial success it cannot be maintained without that core vote. The comparison between the votes

Despite having the most fertile ground for Liberal values, certainly since the Iraq invasion in 2003, and the abject state of the two major parties, the Liberal Democrats are making no impact nationally and is disregarded in almost all discussions of politics and elections"

in wards with a huge amount of campaigning work and the pathetic vote in neighbouring token seats is stark and frankly embarrassing. The effort to keep on winning is killing and too many colleagues suffer burn out trying to carry on successfully. Without a vision of the kind of Liberal society we wish to achieve we cannot attract enough candidates and key workers. Mending pavements and saving post offices does not recruit long term local leaders. Our record of holding seats over a period of time is poor and one single national political set back, such as the effect of the 2010 coalition, knocks out far too many good colleagues. Today we have only half the number of councillors that we had in 1996.

A further problem for the party is its almost complete failure to transfer a local vote to parliamentary elections.

The clearest example is probably Hull. Last May Liberal Democrat candidates topped the total vote in the city. It was a remarkable result but at the 2019 general election Liberal Democrat candidates polled 5.3%, 6.1% and 5.6% in the three Hull constituencies. The same pattern is visible just about everywhere. Even the late, and much lamented, Tony Greaves could not transfer the local vote in Pendle to the parliamentary contest. And Trevor Jones and his formidable electoral machine in Liverpool did not deliver a single parliamentary gain at a general election. The evidence is that dedicated local campaigning can win council seats but does not build a Liberal core vote that will eventually enable parliamentary victories.

Liberals have a number of solid policies that are unique to a genuine Liberal party, including co-ownership in industry, land value taxation, civil liberties, human not economic values, federalism, devolution to regions and to local government, community identity, holistic and broad education, embracing the ecological imperative, a viable social care system, supporting refugees and asylum seekers, enhancing the public service and electoral reform, none of which are consistently explained and promoted.

Even when we have a stance which is supported by the public we do not run with it. Take the party's opposition to the Iraq invasion in 2003. We were the only party with all its MPs present and opposing the government but we did not explain our commitment to international law that underpinned that vote and by the time of the next election we hardly mentioned it. Now, having been the sole party committed to a

united Europe, we dilute our commitment to the EU and, completely unnecessarily, state that we will not campaign to rejoin the EU until "the time is right". We are aware from involvement in continuing pro-EU campaigns that there are ex-Labour activists who are now footloose but are inhibited from joining us by this perverse and unnecessary decision.

The Guardian's leading article on 19 June, following the Chesham and Amersham by-election said it all. It ended: "To keep the momentum going will require more than the politics of protest. Sir Ed must see the possibility of a major political restructuring and shape it. He should make a virtue of positions that decentralise power, free the individual citizen and promote quality in public services. He needs policies that are not only popular but also clearly associated in the minds of voters with the Lib Dems. Being a responsible partner to the EU, rather than a troublesome neighbour, would be a good start. Liberalism is its own creed, and its adherents ought to make the case that it remains the one most capable of meeting the challenges ahead."

The country desperately needs Liberalism but the question is whether the Liberal Democrats are capable of promoting it. The party may have declined too far to be revived in its present form. The Liberal Democrats must be urgently reinvigorated if they are to provide a principled, effective, campaigning Liberal voice which is again capable of capturing the public imagination and winning across the United Kingdom.

This needs a different type of party, more attuned to today's changing society and capable of expressing a Liberal vision for that society, exposing the inanities of the Conservatives and the impotence of Labour. It particularly needs to flourish with the opportunities and problems of social media.

One of the most significant papers of recent years was that produced in 2016 by David Howarth and Mark Pack: "The 20% Strategy: Building a core vote for the Liberal Democrats."

No attention has been paid to the crucial arguments in that paper. A core vote depends on a distinctive philosophy not on policy that shifts with events. Unless there is a dedicated set of Liberals who pick up that strategy and work towards it there is no future, not even with spectacular by-election victories - as the years following Orpington and the 1972-73 by-elections show. There is nothing wrong with the philosophy - all it lacks are the individuals to promote it. If not the Liberal Democrats then who?

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87 and is the author of numerous publications on Liberal politics

LABOUR FOR THE TAKING

Far from seeking a 'progressive alliance' Liberal Democrats should "pummel the life out of Labour", says Jonathan Hunt

Long before we crunched the gravel drives of the well-heeled in Chesham and Amersham, it was obvious that Labour was on the wane. Hartlepool was a welcome clue.

And the huge drop in its majority to just a few hundred in Batley & Spen was confirmation. Even a Guardian columnist wrote that Starmer has "ignored the fact that Labour can no longer monopolise politics of the left".

Which provides a massive opportunity for we Liberal Democrats. Many of us on the non-socialist left have long believed our real role and purpose must be to replace Labour as the main party of opposition to the Tories from the progressive left (for want of a better term).

Labour has ceased to be the party of the working class, whatever that may be today. Harold Wilson came to power in 1966 with the support of about 11m working class voters and 2m of the middle classes. In 2015, it attracted the votes of 4.2m working class and 4.4m middle class.

Those figures, of course, reflect vast changes in education. In the mid-1960s about 5% of the population went to university; now it is close to ten times that figure. But the steady decline of working class jobs - and the prominence Labour then gave to such issues as jobs, wages and public housing was an important factor.

In the US the loss of manufacturing jobs led to the election of Trump. Can we really be surprised at the 'new poor' in the UK for voting for Boris?

Some may regard such social and economic revolution with a hint of sentimental sorrow. Our response must not be sympathy for Labour: just pummel the life out of it. That's what we should be doing to Labour in its current state of identity confusion and electoral unpopularity.

This time we must not fail, as we have with previous opportunities. We must establish ourselves both as opponents of traditional socialism and proponents of true radical action to bring about massive change in our unfair, unjust and crooked society.

The scale of the problem is vast. But that rarely produces a rush for change among contemporary politicians, too cautious and afraid of losing votes among some prized categories of the electorate.

But as we know, it requires reform comparable with the reform acts of the mid-19th century or those of 1906 and 1945 in the last century. But are we Lib Dems up to it? Not, certainly, if we continue to show our nice, pleasant, bland side, of being kind and caring to all.

We may become well thought of, but such a campaign is unlikely to win many votes, even if with Ed Davey we have a splendid example of what it means to be caring.

And also, to his credit, arguably our most successful secretary of state in the awful years of coalition.

But as well as making urgent progress in climate change measures, it is our duty to bring about massive redistribution in many areas, but compressed here into three.

The first is redistribution of wealth, reversing the still growing trend of the rich getting massively richer, largely at the expense of the poor. That can be achieved first through the tax system without hitting those who genuinely create widely shared wealth for all.

But other means must also be introduced. Most of us contribute to pension schemes, directly or through deferred wages. But few are able to decide where our money is invested, or what controls are exercised over the greed of those who run the bodies we own.

Directors voting themselves huge unearned salary increases and share perks must end, by legislation if necessary. The growing examples of rebellious shareholders must be swelled by enlarging voting power to all pension fund members.

That leads to the second priority, redistribution of power, something all Lib Dems would welcome. First is a voting system that truly reflects the wishes of the electorate, as in so many other areas power continues to reside with the wrong people.

When once asked as a candidate what law I would seek to introduce first, I said a repeal of Enclosure Acts, chiefly of the 19th century but also many improper acts of enclosure in more recent times. Examples are many, but space limited.

And workers must have more say in the running of organisations.

Thirdly, redistribution of rights and responsibilities. Even more discussion and ideas can be expected from enforcing rights for all state-funded services, starting with the NHS.

Give residents a real say in how their communities are run, through such decentralisation to local community councils in urban areas, as part of great shake-up, and with decent funding of local government.

Enforce the right of children in a society where funding has been halved over a Tory decade.

Ensure that the law treats individuals equally with large companies that are able to hire expensive lawyers.

There are enough strong cases and issues to fill a whole edition of *Liberator*. So let's start now.

Jonathan Hunt was a senior journalist on three national newspapers, and is former Southwark councillor and a parliamentary candidate in several constituencies

A REPEAT IN FRANCE

Emmanuel Macron came from nowhere to take the French presidency in 2017. Can he do it again, asks Marianne Magnin?

On 24 April 2022, at 8 pm, the newly elected French President is announced on the French media. Which name and face will appear on the screens? What will it tell? The crowning of Macron's previous five-year mandate? The call for a measured alternative either towards the left or the right? Or the accession of the far right as a populist kick?

What has happened since the cataclysmic election of Macron in May 2017 carried by En Marche, the grassroots movement that did not exist twelve months earlier but swept away French bipartisanship? As of summer 2021, what is the political record of Macron and of his government?

The face of Mitterrand is progressively revealed on public channel Antenne 2 on 10 May, 1981, 8.01 pm

While it took almost 30 years (1953-81) for Francois Mitterrand to consolidate a plethora of leftist parties, take control of the Socialist party (PS) and ultimately be elected and re-elected as president, Macron's journey resembles the one of a rocket. It brings with it the benefit of speed but also the question of safe landing.

The local elections mid-2020 and the consular, regional and departmental elections a few months ago are seen as an indicator of Macron's government performance to date. But this could easily be misleading for La République en Marche (LREM, the institutionalisation of En Marche movement), as a party, suffers from a weak presence on the ground, having failed over the last five years to anchor itself in the local fabrics.

In the case of Macron, on one hand his political engine - En Marche - so powerful in 2017 as a surprise effect, has lost steam and the direct interest of Macron: LREM has been unable to convert votes to the same level since then, hardly scoring 7% at the last regional elections. On the other hand, public opinion towards Macron is improving (39% positive in June 2021), including benevolent views secured among PS and Les Républicains (LR) voters. One year ahead of the end of their mandates, Hollande scored 16% and Sarkozy 37%. See here a graph of the rise and fall of the popularity of presidents [<https://www.sudouest.fr/politique/emmanuel-macron/barometre-politique-la-popularite-d-emmanuel-macron-perd-trois-points-en-juin-2021-4009400.php>].

Since French presidential elections are strongly related to the personality of the candidate, while other elections are defined by the proximity the candidate has built with citizens, Macron may well centre his forthcoming campaign on himself, assuming that he decides to run again. Revealing is the discomfort of the last elections in May, where candidates representing the presidential alliance refrained from labelling themselves as LREM, as if this association was toxic.

Another shifting element is the Macronie, the

assemblage of political figures pinched from left and right back in 2016-17 and of new comers into the political arena.

LIKE QUICKSAND

Rather than a solid runway, today the Macronie looks more like quicksand. A major alert happened in May 2020, when the haemorrhage of LREM MPs crystallised around the departure of a dozen of them towards a new parliamentary group: that day, LREM lost its absolute majority at the National Assembly (289 seats), with 285 affiliations remaining. An increasing number of cabinet members resigning provides another signal that not all historical LREM forces are ready to front the same side of the battle.

This trend makes LREM's alliance with the Mouvement Démocrate (MoDem), who boasts 58 MPs and affiliates, even more critical in the run-up to the 2022 presidential and legislative elections. All the more so since MoDem is solidly implanted locally, has extensive experience in campaigning, a well-identified and long-standing identity and clear public policies.

One of the key motives for Hollande not to have sought a second mandate was his appalling approval rate as he progressed his presidency, which was mostly attributed to the perception by French citizens that he had not met his 60 commitments. A lesson well learned by Macron, who resisted publishing his manifesto [<https://en-marche.fr/emmanuel-macron/le-programme>] until two months before election day. It was organised around 40 themes, with rather imprecise or not too ambitious measures. Since he entered the presidential function, Macron cautiously repeats that "he does what he says".

Out of the 401 promises made in 2017, economic measures form the lion's share of those implemented. It might not be that surprising, bearing in mind that Macron was minister of finance under Hollande.

The state launched a €10bn fund in favour of industry and research, with the objective to protect French scientific and technological sovereignty. To further stimulate business, social contributions were reduced and labour laws were reformed and simplified. The government also promoted at EU level a harmonised status for trans-border workers.

In 2018, the government introduced a major tax reform enabling deduction of income tax at source, and the systematisation of online tax returns. It also replaced the controversial solidarity tax on wealth (Impôt de Solidarité sur la Fortune ~ ISF, a mere 1.5% of total tax receipts) with a tax on real estate, and is gradually abolishing housing council taxes.

Three high-profile environmental commitments have not been met: reduce by 50% the number of air pollution alert days; go to war against the release of pesticides and endocrinal substances; and decrease nuclear energy to 50% of French mix by 2025 (67% in 2020).

The Climate Convention, which brought 150 citizens together to develop a set of recommendations during months, raised further hopes for the nation to tackle climate but has been perceived by many as disconnected from implementation.

To fight school failure and its long-term repercussions on the individual's wellbeing and their suitability for the job market, Macron's main plan was to halve the number of classmates (to 12) at primary schools in underprivileged neighbourhoods: this is only partially implemented.

On the matter of national security, Macron successfully promoted the introduction of European frontiers guards but did not deliver on justice reform, a system which is chronically short of resources in terms of judges and whose prisons are often below par. Police trade unions also put pressure on a number of liberal promises to be abandoned.

The ushering of Macron on the European and international scene was undoubtedly a step change compared to his predecessor. Despite an early failure to insert LREM in the EU ecosystem due to poor appreciation of European institutions, Macron's vision for Europe was instrumental in strengthening the EU's position on a number of subjects, such as anti-dumping laws, maintaining CETA or introducing a GAFA taxation regime. Macron's interactions with Trump and Putin, even if not entirely successful, have been seen as contributing to reposition France, a middle-size power, as a country that counts.

One last critical promise remains unmet: the introduction of proportionality at parliamentary elections.

Made to MoDem as the condition of their endorsement of Macron's candidature early 2017, that alliance allowed him to pass the first ballot round. Failure to honour his word may well cost him dearly in 2022. France's democracy is facing severe challenges, which find their roots in the current voting system that does not fairly give to each citizen the right to get their voice expressed and debated publicly. Without proportional representation an increasing fringe of voters feel disenfranchised, pushing them either towards extremes, abstention or civil violence. The yellow vests debacle is a point in case.

The quality of a captain is tested not in perfect weather conditions but when a storm strikes.

Over the last four years, France has been hit more than once. Major terrorist attacks in Paris (Bataclan, Charlie Hebdo) and Nice (Bastille day) belong to the previous presidency, but the threat level is still very substantial and atrocities carried out by isolated jihadists such as the beheading of history teacher Samuel Paty continue to shock the nation.

Increasing far right aggressions are not to be ignored either. The impression that terror threat has waned is only as good as the prevention is. Macron has clearly stepped up domestic measures. Better coordination at European level between police forces and secret services seem to bear some fruit.

Social unrest and Covid have undoubtedly impacted the French landscape. The former, embodied by the yellow vests, was directly related to the decision by Macron's government to surtax fuel at the expense of poorer households. It exacerbated the discontent among outer-urban and rural communities regarding a speed limit reduction. While the latter, as a global

pandemic, demanded strong response from the state.

TOP-DOWN INCLINATIONS

Of the government's own making, 2018-19 protest movement revealed a lack of dialogue and empathy characteristic of Macron's top-down inclination. The fact that one of the goals of the yellow jackets, which brought more than three million into the streets, was to obtain the right to direct initiative - a bottom-up mechanism to petition the government, is indicative of a disconnect in governance.

One wonders, seeing how disrupted and conflictual the country turned, why PR has been swept aside by Macron, whereas the use of special powers was aplenty and a sometimes disproportionate response by the police force was directed at the demonstrators.

Decisiveness in time of emergency on the other end requires strong top-down measures. France was ill-prepared to Covid-19, there were some policy hesitations and coordination issues, but the government quickly got its act together by mobilising national resources to treat, protect and prevent.

It for instance took only two weeks to introduce an exceptional job allowance mechanism during the first lockdown. Governing by decree and emergency orders has been widespread, often disquietingly silencing the National Assembly and bypassing the prime minister.

As much decried as it is, Macron continues to demonstrate leadership: when he addressed the nation in July 2021 and announced mandatory vaccination for health workers and a health passport throughout public establishments, 880,000 people registered overnight. The far-left and far-right called out vaccinal dictatorship, some demonstrators wore a yellow star and a vaccination centre was destroyed, testifying the politicisation of the health crisis.

Compared to the UK, France appears to have better contained Covid, with deaths per million one third lower at 620.

Macron's promises seeking to reduce France's public debt (97.6% of GDP in 2019 and 115.7% in 2020), to reform the pension system, which represents 13.6% of public spending in 2019 are postponed until the Covid crisis has stabilised.

Macron's undeniable success has taken place outside the realm of public policies. It relates to his impact on French political landscape and dynamics. En Marche hijacked the 2017 elections at the expense of traditional forces.

Since then, Macron has managed to prevent the left and the right from recomposing themselves. Socialists are split between the temptation of going further left with France Insoumise, to change the colour of their pink jacket to green, or to recycle themselves as 'pure' Macronists.

Figures on the right hesitate between LR or going solo, as illustrated by figurehead Xavier Bertrand who refuses to partake in LR primaries ahead of 2022.

By positioning far-right Marine Le Pen as his only opponent, Macron has so far neutralised other parties. By playing Jupiter ruling from above his government, the National Assembly, his key allies, LREM and ultimately the people, Emmanuel Macron may well find the court deserted when it comes to re-election.

Marianne Magnin is federal chair of Mouvement Démocrate overseas, which covers 130 countries

A STRANGE SILENCE

Myanmar has seen random shootings, organ harvesting and the suppression of all dissent by the military since its coup in February. This report draws on eye-witness sources in the country

Until early this year I knew virtually nothing about Myanmar. I read quite a lot in the press about the barbaric treatment of the Rohingya people, that was about the extent of my knowledge.

On 1 February there was a military coup. In comparison with the Rohingya crisis coverage of the coup and its aftermath seemed strangely muted. Noticing that some of my Facebook friends in India had friends in Myanmar I sent some friend requests. Three requests were accepted. Initially contact was very limited, but gradually as the situation worsened I found myself in regular, eventually daily, contact.

What I heard made me increasingly worried by the virtual silence of the western press.

BRUTAL RESPONSE

I started posting information on Facebook based about reports I was receiving of the brutal response of the military to the non-violent opposition; a response that included openly shooting protestors in the streets of major cities and burning entire villages to the ground. It also included the arrest of doctors or nurses found to be treating or helping injured protestors rather than handing them over to the police. Many doctors went into hiding in order to avoid arrest. When the police fail to arrest the doctors they frequently arrest family members instead. The bodies of these family members are sometimes returned to the remaining family with their internal organs removed.

As a result of my Facebook posts a friend suggested that I should write something more substantial. My friends in Myanmar were very supportive of this idea, but when I asked them for the documented evidence I felt was needed they were not able to supply very much. -

The major problem, which accounts - partly - for the silence of the western press, is that all independent journalism has been shut in Myanmar. All international journalists have been forced out and local journalists have either been arrested or fled into exile. There have also been attempts by the military to shut down internet access. My friends in Myanmar have little to rely on beyond what they see going on around them and what is shared on social media.

All three of my friends in Myanmar have reason to believe they are wanted by the police and must be careful about who they are in contact with. One is even reluctant to contact members of her own family for fear that might endanger them.

None of these individuals is involved in anything that might be described as criminal. In all three cases it goes no further than civil disobedience and

charitable work. Also, I have no reason to believe that any of them are involved in any kind of overt political activity, if they were in any way politically connected the information they provide would not be of the ad hoc, piecemeal, almost inadvertent, kind that it is.

Almost everything I have received is via conversation on Facebook Messenger. Sometimes it includes photos and brief articles, but most is undocumented statements which I have to try and verify from elsewhere.

To give one example, people have recently been refusing to pay their electricity bills and the People's Defence Force (PDF), has been active in bombing offices of the Electricity Power Corporation.

The junta forces have in turn been shelling residential districts of Yangon. The junta is trying to keep sole control of oxygen supply and prioritise it for the army rather than civilian Covid patients.

It has been cutting off the electricity supply from factories producing oxygen that refuse to comply. There have been no reports of any of this in the western press. I have not been able to corroborate the cutting off of the electricity supply or the shelling of residential districts of Yangon, but I have found confirmation of the electricity strike from the Times of India [<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/myanmar-electricity-grid-losing-spark-as-people-power-bites/articleshow/84266194.cms>]

I have also found confirmation of the bombing of offices of the Electricity Power Corporation from from a rather curious source, the website of GardaWorld, a Canadian security company which appears to play some role in the guarding such facilities. [<https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/499826/myanmar-explosions-reported-at-electricity-power-corporation-epc-offices-in-lanmadaw-mingaladon-and-sanchaung-townships-yangon-july-9-update-1>]

The response of the junta to the strike according to my friends was firstly, as expected, cutting off of electricity to those participating, cutting off internet access and finally mass arrests.

I am told that large numbers have fled Yangon in order to avoid arrest. I have not been able to find independent confirmation of this, yet a payment strike big enough to put the finances of the Electricity Power Corporation in jeopardy suggests, at the very least, considerable anger on the part of a large proportion of the population plus a readiness to face the inevitable consequences, even when this means risking their homes and livelihoods.

The most terrifying thing about organ harvesting is the openness with which it is done. Whereas in China, a close ally of the current regime, organ harvesting is

highly secretive and the bodies of those whose organs have been harvested are cremated to destroy the evidence, in Myanmar bodies are returned to their families crudely sewn up, leaving little doubt as to what has been done.

I have seen photos on Facebook of bodies thus returned to their families. Part of the logic appears to be to inspire terror. But equally important it seems is the financial aspect. Dr Win Naing of the National League for Democracy, the former ruling party, accuses the army of deliberately shooting protesters in the head so as to leave intact their organs, which it is actively engaged in selling. This is reported in Manorama Online, the online version of a Kerala based Indian newspaper. [<https://www.onmanorama.com/news/world/2021/03/25/myanmar-military-selling-organs-of-killed-protesters-says-leader.html>]

ORGAN HARVESTING

I have seen only one report pertaining to organ harvesting in the western press, in the Guardian on 10 May, of a well known poet arrested, tortured and returned to his family minus his organs. The Guardian article mentions other poets killed by the regime, but makes no further mention of organ harvesting. [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/10/body-of-arrested-myanmar-poet-khet-thi-returned-to-family-with-organs-missing>]

Organ harvesting, in particular of family members of medical workers on the run, has been repeatedly mentioned by my friends. In view of this persecution, coupled with the arbitrary arrest of volunteer health workers and confiscation of humanitarian supplies - plus the forcing of state schools to remain open against the wishes of both parents and teachers, even as the Covid epidemic escalates - one can only assume that the threat to public health is being utilised in a larger campaign of terror.

The terror is almost palpable. The sound of shelling in residential districts is frequent, as is random shooting in the streets and public transport. Streets are often sealed off for an entire day and buildings searched on ridiculous pretexts. One friend told me about a week ago that her street was sealed off due to a woman being shot on a bus by the army. The police went through the charade of 'investigating', sealing off the entire street and interrogating numerous individuals. Another friend, just over a week ago, told me that a bomb had been reported in her apartment block, so the police and army arrived to remove it and search the entire building. They identified a neighbour as the culprit, as if he or she would bomb their own building. The bomb was of course planted by the army. My friend managed to hide as the building was searched. She was not officially living there, she had moved out of her own apartment because she feared arrest.

Going out at all is dangerous. Instances of people being shot at random in the street, usually in the head, are not uncommon. Such instances are reported solely on social media. Arbitrary arrest and interrogation are even more common. One friend was in a cafe recently, talking to a business partner, when she noticed the army pulling up outside. They abandoned their food and managed to get out just in time.

Amid the terror and uncertainty however there is a deep sense of solidarity. While fear of Covid makes

contact with neighbours difficult, social media plays a vital role in keeping in touch with those one can trust.

The importance of social media in maintaining contact adds in some ways to the vulnerability people experience. If one's mobile phone is found and contacts searched it can put the entire list at risk. One of my friends in the course of a train journey was stopped several times and had her bag searched. As a precaution she had hidden her mobile phone inside her dress. When they attempted to search her more intimately she threatened to create a scene. Thankfully, as a respectable and very determined looking middle aged woman she got away with it, a younger or less confident woman probably would not have.

Because going out is not possible when streets are periodically sealed off and not advisable when the army is in view, life can be very difficult. Even as the economy collapses and many are out of work the price of decent food has been rising rapidly beyond what many can afford.

Two things all three friends have in common is their deep Buddhist faith and their intense patriotism. One would find it relatively easy to leave, since she has friends in nearby countries, but told me very firmly she would never abandon her country in its hour of need. All three give regularly to charities supporting those in greater need than themselves, even though the humanitarian items supplied by these charities are at risk of being confiscated by the army. One told me that a charity supplying oxygen to Covid patients to which she regularly donates is run entirely by Muslims. Affiliated to a mosque in south east Yangon, it distributes oxygen and other vital supplies each day to all in need, regardless of their faith or ethnicity. I happened to see an article about this same mosque in a Singaporean online paper; a spokesperson was quoted as saying: "Myanmar must, from this Revolution onwards, embrace diversity and respect the strength and love of minority religions toward others." Such brave words, coupled with actions, have clearly struck a chord with those ordinary Burmese people, mostly Buddhist, who are donating generously to them.

In the past Muslims in Myanmar were often persecuted as part of the army's tactic of divide and rule. Now the new National Unity Government, formed in exile, to which the vast majority of Burmese people give their allegiance, includes representatives of all the minority groups and is committed in future to a decentralised federal state granting significant autonomy to the various regions.

This new spirit, shared on all sides, symbolises the birth of a new Myanmar, even as the old Myanmar is engulfed in its death throes. This birth is likely to be a very painful one if the world continues to turn its back on Myanmar.

The author and contacts in Myanmar have asked to remain anonymous

THE DESPAIR MAKES SENSE

Canada's Indian residential school scandal saw children beaten, abused and even killed. The country and the Vatican must face up to their inglorious past says Rebecca Tinsley

Between 1870 and 1996, the Canadian government sanctioned the removal of 150,000 indigenous children from their families.

First Nation, Metis and Inuit children were sent to 130 residential schools where they were beaten, experimented on, starved, sexually abused and stripped of their ethnic identity. Recently, hundreds of bodies have been found in unmarked and mass graves. First National leaders fear 6,000 children may have died in the residential schools' system.

Canada's Liberal prime minister, Justin Trudeau, is demanding an apology from the Vatican, since Catholic institutions ran 60% of the schools. No apology is forthcoming at the time of writing, although Pope Francis expressed sorrow. He will meet indigenous leaders in December when they visit Rome, but in the meantime, the legitimacy and credibility of the Catholic church in Canada is being questioned, and there is palpable public fury.

There are growing calls for the schools' codex historicus (records of daily life), correspondence and photographs to be made public. However, the Archbishop of Toronto, Cardinal Thomas Collins, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that local dioceses have already apologised and made records available, a claim disputed by groups representing First Nation people.

UNMARKED GRAVES

The Cardinal described as "unhelpful" Trudeau's hint that the government may take the church to court. The President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Richard Gagnon, declined to ask the Pope to issue an apology, and neither will the bishops ask Catholic entities in Canada to turn over the relevant records that would aid in identifying unmarked graves.

Maltreatment at the schools has been public knowledge in Canada for decades. In 1907, public health officials noted that TB was ravaging the malnourished children. The officials involved were sidelined or sacked. Survivors of the school system were not believed when they described the systematic and deadly government-sanctioned attempts to "kill the Indian" in them, or that they had dug graves for their fellow classmates.

In 2005, following years of litigation, the Catholic church was ordered to pay \$25m to compensate the survivors. It raised less than \$4m, and in a secret hearing, a judge absolved the church of finding the rest. Yet, at the same time, \$28.5m was raised for a new cathedral in Saskatoon. A shrine in Canmore, Alberta, has recently been built at a cost of \$16m, and the diocese of Regina is currently raising \$17m for cathedral renovation, so clearly money is not short for

favoured projects.

Meanwhile, the partially released records from the Vatican Bank reveal Vatican assets of \$6bn in assets, land and art.

In 2008, the government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, taking testimony from survivors and producing 94 'calls to action' including the need for action on child welfare, health, language and cultural matters, justice and reconciliation.

However, the recent discovery of a mass grave of 215 children, some as young as three, at Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia brings fresh attention to the issue. It was followed by the discovery of 751 bodies in Saskatchewan, and another 182 in British Columbia. Since then, thousands of pairs of children's shoes have been left on the steps of Catholic churches across Canada in make-shift shrines, and more than a dozen churches have been destroyed in arson attacks.

While the Anglican, Presbyterian and United churches have apologised for their roles in running some of the schools and paid full compensation, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops says the church in Canada is decentralised and thus not liable. In a statement to the Globe and Mail newspaper, the conference denied responsibility: "The Catholic Church as a whole in Canada was not associated with the Residential Schools, nor was the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops."

The statement said that 16 of the 70 Canadian dioceses and three dozen religious communities were associated with the schools, but that each was "corporately and legally responsible for its own actions."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has taken legal action to obtain records from the Catholic-runs schools but many have still not been shared. Former senator Murray Sinclair who chaired the commission took testimony from survivors who told of children being buried in large numbers, and of friends who suddenly went missing from the institutions.

In a video message, Sinclair said that since the discovery of the mass graves, he had been inundated by messages from survivors saying to him: "I told you this had happened," and expressing anger that no one had believed them. There was also the painful realisation, Sinclair said, that friends whom they hoped had escaped were probably dead.

According to testimony given to the commission, babies resulting when priests abused indigenous girls were confiscated and, in some cases, disposed of in furnaces. So much for the sanctity of every little sperm.

ELECTRIC CHAIR

Children were also the subject of experiments, being deliberately starved to study the effects of malnutrition. Survivors of St Anne's school in Fort Albany, Ontario, have recalled whipping, beating, widespread sexual abuse and punishment by shocks in a home-made electric chair.

Sinclair predicted that more mass graves would be found. As his commission weighed the evidence, they asked the then government of Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper to allow a fuller enquiry forcing the churches to hand over the relevant documents. Their request was denied.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, the director of the Indian Reservations School History and Dialogue Centre at the University of British Columbia, told the CBC she was shocked that a senior archbishop interviewed by its Ottawa Morning programme professed ignorance of the abuse and the cover up. "They've been in courts for years, fighting the survivors," she commented.

Ottawa-Cornwall Archbishop Marcel Damphousse told the CBC he needed to educate himself about what had happened in the schools. He said: "The whole church is suffering. Some of those students were Catholics."

Responding to the archbishop's words, Turpel-Lafond pointed out that survivors had been speaking about their experiences for decades, and there had been 30 major prosecutions. She said there was frustration that survivors had been unable to access the church's records. She called for criminal investigations to arrive at the truth.

Michael Coren, a commentator on religious affairs, told the CBC that the Catholic church was not solely to blame for the mistreatment of indigenous children. However, while other denominations had apologised for their record running the schools, the Vatican declined.

Coren suggested that lawyers have warned that there will be enormous legal consequences if there is an admission of responsibility. Nevertheless, he counselled the Vatican to acknowledge public anger in Canada and to apologise, notwithstanding the financial penalties.

He also accused the Catholic authorities of double standards, arguing that the church operates in a centralised manner and with one voice when it refuses to accept married men becoming ordained or same-sex marriage, rather than devolving policy-making. He also pointed out that the Vatican had previously apologised for its role in the colonial conquest of Latin America. Yet, on the issue of the Indian Residential Schools, the church abruptly ascribes each diocese autonomy.

The Canadian government has pledged to give former daytime students and their offspring \$10,000 compensation each in recognition of the harm suffered under the school system, following a 14-year legal battle. This comes in addition to a \$50m Day Scholar Revitalization Fund to contribute to the healing of psychological wounds, and to support the reclaiming of language and culture. It is estimated that it could cost \$1bn to locate all the suspected mass graves.

In a poll, two-thirds of Canadians said the church should bear responsibility, whereas 34% place the majority of blame on the Canadian government of the

day and 80% of respondents said they were ashamed and believed the recent revelations were the tip of the iceberg.

It was a Canadian prime minister, (a Liberal), Lester Pearson, who got Apartheid South Africa kicked out of the Commonwealth.

Canada has provided leadership in peacekeeping missions around the globe, and its diplomats have been the architects of important measures such as the landmines treaty and the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

While the USA had Richard Nixon, Watergate and the Vietnam War, Canada had Pierre Trudeau and flower power. While Donald Trump was branding Mexicans as rapists and drug pushers, Canada had Pierre Trudeau's son, Justin, personally greeting Syrian refugees as they got off planes, saying "welcome home" and giving them warm coats.

Yet, as my generation of Canadians enjoyed the post-war boom, peace, stability and unimaginable plenty, indigenous children were being removed from their families and shipped to schools far away. Their hair was cut, all personal belongings were removed, they were forbidden to speak their native tongue, and they had little or no contact with their families. They grew up without love or attention, surrounded by a system aimed at eliminating their culture and memories of home.

As a child, I recall seeing First Nation men slumped in an alcoholic haze on Toronto street corners, avoided by pedestrians as they pan-handled. At the time, less tolerant people suggested 'they' were work shy, while more sympathetic observers acknowledged that their land had been taken and their culture was at odds with the modern world.

Now, the despair of those men makes sense. Their misery has been handed down to their children in the form of poor parenting and substance abuse. There is also an inherited aspect to post-traumatic stress, as studies of Holocaust survivors and Rwandan orphans show: overactive cortisol production and stress leads to obesity and hypertension.

The scars, both physical and emotional, will be with Canada's First Nation people for a long time. Their children are placed in foster care at 14 times the rate of other children.

In recent years, Canadian diplomats, officials and politicians have often seemed smug and self-righteous about their human rights track record. I hope they will now observe a period of silence and reflection. And then act to reverse the harm caused.

Rebecca Tinsley is founder of the human rights group Waging Peace. This article first appeared in Independent Catholic News [<https://www.indcatholicnews.com>]

KOSOVO'S WINDS OF CHANGE

Two decades on from a war that horrified the outside world, how is Kosovo doing in establishing a working state?

Ian Bancroft reports

More than 20 years on from the end of the war, and 13 years after its declaration of independence from Serbia, Kosovo is witnessing a whirlwind of political change. The party of former prime minister, Albin Kurti - running on a joint ticket with Kosovo's then acting president, Vjosa Osmani, since elected the fledgling state's second female president - won just over half of the vote in February's snap elections (giving them 58 of the assembly's 120 seats).

Despite securing a mandate for change the likes of which Kosovo has not previously seen, the new government faces substantial challenges on several fronts; challenges that may quickly test the patience of Kosovo's restless electorate.

Support for the old incumbents - the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) - has been decimated. Senior members of the PDK - including former president, Hashim Thaçi, and assembly chair, Kadri Veseli - have been indicted by the Kosovo Specialist Chambers for crimes against humanity and war crimes.

ORGAN TRAFFICKING

The Chambers - which sit in The Hague but were established within the Kosovo legal framework - arose out of the Special Investigative Task Force (SITF), itself established by the EU to investigate allegations contained within a 2011 report by Council of Europe rapporteur, Dick Marty; most notably those pertaining to organ trafficking. Though the Chambers are widely opposed in Kosovo itself, with many arguing that its jurisdiction should extend to war crimes committed by

Serbia, the PDK did not enjoy an electoral bounce from the arrests.

Instead, Kurti's messages of anti-corruption, social justice, and equality resonated strongly in a youthful society frustrated by decades of state capture. Himself a political prisoner - he was sentenced by Serbia to 15 years in prison in 1999 but released upon the fall of Slobodan Milošević - Kurti's credibility is beyond doubt, even if some dispute the sincerity of the Vetëvendosje party's left wing credentials. Vetëvendosje derives part of its legitimacy from its vehement opposition to the international community and its presence in Kosovo; a stance that emphasised the agency of Kosovars and contrasted sharply with the conformity of the incumbents. The party even opposed the Ahtisaari Plan under which Kosovo's then conditional independence was declared. Vetëvendosje remain a fascinating case study of a social movement evolving into a political party. It is this biography that led many diplomats and commentators to look at Kurti with something of a romantic glint in their eyes.

Though nationalism was almost non-existent during the elections, there are lingering concerns about Kurti and his nationalist leanings. The flag of Albania as opposed to that of Kosovo is regularly displayed during his public appearances, and he recently voted in Albania's own general elections (he holds dual citizenship). In an interview for Euronews only days after his electoral triumph, Kurti stated that he would vote in favour of unification with Albania were there ever a referendum on the matter. Though committed to consolidating Kosovo's statehood, it demonstrates his willingness to consider other possibilities were

Kosovo to find itself hamstrung in the international - or indeed solely European - arena.

Indeed, Kosovo has in recent years struggled to consolidate its international standing. New recognitions had stalled until the Trump administration secured a deal with Israel as part of an otherwise much-ridiculed Washington Agreement reached last autumn.

Membership in international organisations such as Interpol and UNESCO have remained beyond Kosovo's reach. Securing a seat at the UN is but a distant dream. Serbia, meanwhile, has run a successful campaign that has led to some 18 countries revoking their recognition of Kosovo's independence; many having



been persuaded to not pre-empt the outcome of the ongoing Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

Nor is there at present a viable EU membership perspective for Kosovo, nor arguably any of the western Balkan six.

Five EU member states refuse to recognise its independence (Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, and Cyprus), in part because of their own particular separatist concerns. Promises pertaining to visa free access to the Schengen Area have been frustrated, despite Kosovo fulfilling each of the conditions asked. This included the controversial demarcation of its border with Montenegro, which prompted Kurti and supporters to set-off tear gas canisters in the Kosovo Assembly (an offence for which they received suspended prison sentences). Certain member states – France, in particular – refuse to budge. The EU's leverage in Pristina has been severely undermined, despite it remaining Kosovo's largest donor.

The normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia is firmly on the back foot. Kurti has been reluctant to entertain additional compromises with Belgrade. He has even threatened to review all the agreements reached to date to assess the extent to which they are favourable to Kosovo's interests.

Such a move would likely spell the death knell of dialogue and the progress made to integrate Serbian judges, prosecutors, police and civil protection. With presidential elections in Serbia scheduled for spring 2022, there is little scope for substantial progress in the coming year. There is, however, scope for preparatory work ahead of the likely re-election of Serbia's president, Aleksandar Vučić.

Reaching a comprehensive agreement remains paramount for both Belgrade and Pristina. It will require further compromises from both; compromises that their respective populations will be ill-prepared to entertain. Unlocking the Association/Community of Serb-majority municipalities, a key facet of the 2013 Brussels Agreement, is a pre-requisite for integrating Kosovo Serbs into the Kosovo framework. Though Kosovo's Constitutional Court ruled parts of it unconstitutional, creative solutions will be required to ensure this body is finally formed.

For Miroslav Lajčák - the former Slovak foreign minister and president of the UN General Assembly, who serves as the EU's special representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and regional issues - the challenge is also to ensure the EU remains committed to Kosovo and the process of dialogue. Ten years on, there is a growing sense of weariness and impatience.

Regional relations have been further shaken by a spate of so-called 'non-papers' articulating various visions for the Western Balkans. The first, ostensibly produced by Slovenia (soon to assume the presidency of the Council of the EU), proposed among other things - such as the 'peaceful dissolution of Bosnia-Herzegovina' - the unification of Albanian and Kosovo, with the 'Serbian part of Kosovo' to be granted a special status modelled upon that of South Tyrol.

A second non-paper - focused specifically on securing a deal between Belgrade and Pristina – called for the establishment of an 'Autonomous District of North Kosovo', which would have legislative powers in a whole host of areas. The document also proposed a special status for the Serbian Orthodox Church. Both papers and the generally lacklustre response of the



EU may well have re-emboldened ideas once deemed destabilising for the entire region.

For a government committed to rooting out corruption, the task ahead is fraught with peril. Kosovo's rule of law institutions have largely been captured by the old regime. Years of appointments to prosecutorial, judicial, and intelligence posts have compromised their very independence. For a government committed to tackling corruption, this poses a fundamental challenge.

WHIFF OF ABUSE

There is little appetite for an Albanian-style process of judicial and prosecutorial vetting; a process that has proven disruptive and time consuming. Vetëvendosje itself will have to be whiter-than-white to prove that they are fundamentally different from their predecessors. Any whiff of abuse of office will breed skepticism - with the old regimes it had been expected.

Kosovo, meanwhile, has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects Kosovo's gross domestic product (GDP) to grow 4.5% in 2021 having fallen by some 6% in 2020. The IMF also believes that GDP growth will remain below pre-pandemic rates for some time to come. The socio-economic challenges are stark. Kosovo has one of the youngest populations in Europe. It is both a blessing and a curse. Youthful exuberance is driving the creative and programming sectors. Many Kosovars are working for US and European companies from the comfort of their own homes. Yet some 30,000 young people enter the job market every year. There are too few jobs, and many lack the requisite skills to

fill the positions that exist.

Deep-seated structural reforms are required to stem Kosovo's chronic brain drain problem. Back in 2019, Kosovo's State Agency of Statistics put the youth unemployment rate at 49%, though a sizeable number are likely employed in the grey economy. The loss of doctors and nurses has hollowed out the country's healthcare system. Whilst Kosovo's sizeable diaspora provided billions in remittances each year, they are more of a security blanket for those struggling to make ends meet. Its approach to reform, however, is likely to expose fundamental tensions between those aggrieved by years of market-oriented reform and privatisations, and those eager to see the economy further liberated from the jaws of the former incumbents. Strengthening Kosovo's health, education, and social welfare systems may help Kurti weather some of the various storms, but improvements on these fronts will require time and patience.

Kosovo, like several other countries in the Western Balkans, has been slow to receive vaccines. Kurti has been unequivocal in his rejection of the Chinese Sinopharm offered by neighbouring Albania. In contrast, Serbia's vaccine roll-out has been one of the most successful in Europe, with citizens of neighbouring countries flocking to Belgrade. The potential for vaccine inequalities to fuel tensions are clear.

Rumours of vaccines in a Serbian-run health-centre

“Kosovo’s youthful population may finally lose the belief that their hopes and dreams can be fulfilled without leaving the country behind”

in Štrpce/Shtërpca (the Republic of Serbia continues to provide health and education services, among others, in Kosovo Serb populated areas) prompted a raid by Kosovo's police. Most Kosovo Serbs have been travelling to south-west Serbia to receive vaccinations. Indeed, many Kosovo Albanians with Serbian ID cards have been travelling to south Serbia to receive jobs. Kurti - and indeed the EU - would be wise to use this opportunity to build bridges within

and between communities; to realise the potential for vaccine diplomacy and defuse any possible tensions.

Back in 2014-15, an estimated 120,000 Kosovars boarded buses and left in search of a better life in Western Europe. It is unclear just how many eventually returned. The mandate handed to Vetëvendosje by the electorate creates a sizeable weight of expectation. Fall short in their professed aims and Kosovo's youthful population may finally lose the belief that their hopes and dreams can be fulfilled without leaving the country behind. It is an expectation that they should be careful to manage given the substantial obstacles to reform that the old regime have left behind. Nor should they take Europe's support for granted.

the region's membership prospects are weak and getting weaker. Change will have to be driven by conviction, not conditionality.

Ian Bancroft is a writer and diplomat.

He is the author of *Dragon's Teeth: Tales from North Kosovo*

[<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dragons-Teeth-Kosovo-Politics-Society/dp/3838213645>]



LETTERS

REMEMBERING TONY GREAVES

Dear Liberator,

In 1971 Tony decided to get elected to Colne Borough Council. He didn't live in Colne but in Roughlee (gravely described to me by a leading YL of the time as a place so remote that he couldn't get to party council meetings!). But he was a teacher at Colne Grammar School so qualified to stand.

Typically, the ward he chose was Waterside: the poorest, most neglected ward in the borough. He won by 5 votes after a campaign comprising Gestetner duplicated leaflets and a lot of door knocking.

The new local government structure saw Pendle District Council created along with the 'new' Lancashire County Council. Elections were in June and April 1973 respectively. If we were going to win, we needed to get cracking.

By this time Tony and Heather had moved to Winewall and somewhat by chance Sylvia and I had moved to Colne. We worked endlessly to create the necessary ingredients for a successful campaign: 53 candidates for the 53 seats, ward newsletters and enough money.

Tony produced the leaflets, still on the Gestetner, until we managed to acquire an offset litho machine. It took a bit of renovating and was installed in Tony's attic and must have produced over a million Focuses before it collapsed in 1979, pursuing the various campaigns we organised and guided.

Fund raising comprised regular jumble sales (with organised teams door knocking to collect it), the occasional auction, sponsored walks and various other events.

The 53 candidates took a bit of finding. We used to meet on a Friday evening at the Cotton Tree pub where we would write down who we had – 11 was the number for quite a long time – and think of anybody who might remotely be interested. Gradually names appeared and between us we persuaded most to become candidates. There was no panelling in those days, and we relied on our judgement – a few drifted away but not many.

We then had to get them nominated; no use leaving that to the would-be candidates as they hadn't a clue how to go about it. We simply knocked on doors and asked people to sign the form. On one occasion somebody asked Tony (and they had previously never met) if he could assure them that the candidate was a person of integrity, which Tony obligingly did, and they signed. In Earby, I was doing the same and stumbled on what seemed to be a Mother's Union meeting and after some discussion was advised that Liberals would do a lot better in the other Earby ward, so I dutifully went off and did that.

In the end we had 39 candidates and won 23 seats including all 12 in Colne.

There had already been the county council elections with six wards in Pendle. We fought four of them and won two – Tony and Sylvia in the two Colne wards.

I was mightily impressed by the fact that Tony had convinced Sylvia to stand; try as I might I had never managed it! She fought 'Crabby' Crabtree, the sitting County Councillor. He put out a leaflet containing the following: "One of the candidates, the Liberal, is a woman with a young child and shortly expecting a second; how can she possibly fulfil the duties of a county councillor." She won handsomely and I beat him in June.

The February 1974 general election was a glorious campaign even if the result was disappointing. Tony was the candidate, and I was his agent.

The campaign primarily involved leafletting and we delivered most of the constituency seven times. Tony, as ever, wrote the leaflets and somehow we borrowed a first class offset litho machine and set it up in an empty shop.

We had an excellent organisation and a gang of at least 50 superb hard-working volunteers. Thus, we could deliver the whole of Colne (about a quarter of the constituency) in a single evening. Nelson, somewhat bigger and less organised, took a bit longer.

It was a frenetic time. On another occasion, around a lunch time, Tony and I were having an all-consuming argument about poster board stakes when a woman came in and kept trying to interrupt us to volunteer to help. We ignored her; Tony suddenly said "I'm going for lunch" and stalked out followed by me. Roughly an hour later I returned to find she was still there, and she did become a volunteer.

We had peaked in this campaign and things fell apart quite a bit afterwards. Tony lost his deposit in October 1974; the 1976 Pendle elections were a disaster (the Thorpe affair had a very big bad effect), and we were reduced to six members - including Tony. In the 1977 county council elections only Tony held his seat. We did keep going though, but only on a reduced level. In 1978 we saw three gains and in 1979 we made five gains.

Overall though it was not a happy time to be a Liberal campaigner.

John Smithson
Huddersfield

Dear Liberator,

I first met Tony Greaves 40 years ago after I'd won a journalism scholarship from City University to work at the New Statesman magazine.

I was researching local by election results and collating them to provide a database of electoral trends that were missed by the mainstream media. This evolved into a regular column by Peter Kellner the then political editor, and was imitated subsequently by others.

Tony was working from an office in Hebden Bridge, involved in a well respected party publication and assiduously kept record of local council by election results which he generously allowed me to add to my other sources. We enjoyed a pint together on the two nights I stayed in Hebden Bridge and he regaled me with stories of how local Liberals hated Labour and were natural allies of the Tories. When I mentioned a Lib/Lab pact to defeat the Tories he said he'd rather join with the Tories. I was surprised when he accepted a peerage having heard him rage against the unelected chamber, but party leaders are good at stifling criticism by rewarding awkward characters like Tony, or embarrassing ones like the paedophile

Cyril Smith, with titles. As US President Lyndon Johnson said of J Edward Hoover, the notorious FBI director: "Well it's probably better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in."

Steven Walker,
Feature Writer, Morning Star

JONATHAN FRYER IN BROMLEY

Robert Woodthorpe Browne's obituary of Jonathan Fryer (Liberator 407), overlooks his local government career.

He was Liberal/Liberal Democrat councillor for Chelsfield & Goddington ward on the London Borough of Bromley from 1986-90 at the same time he was parliamentary candidate for Orpington. Although he had ceased any political involvement with Orpington he was a supporter of the association's social events which enabled me to get to know and appreciate him and his liberalism.

Graem Peters
Lib Dem councillor
Chesfield & Goddington 1993-2001

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LORD BONKERS IS AWAY

The Nun and the Pig by Treive Nicholas Amberley Books £18.99

If you know someone who doesn't understand why Nelson Mandela matters, this is the book for you. Many people below the age of 45 know little about apartheid South Africa (or the Soviet Union, for that matter).

This memoir, by a white British man, recalls his eight months teaching disabled children at a Catholic mission in the Transkei Bantustan in 1980. It is a digestible and enjoyable introduction to the era of white minority rule with its injustices and absurdities. If the reader is unfamiliar with apartheid, they will soon grasp why it was the focus of so much political activity among those who lived through the era, even though we were thousands of miles away.

The apartheid state set up Transkei as a nominally independent self-ruling administration, known as a Bantustan. It was home to 2.5m Xhosa, an ethnic group which has produced generations of the liberation movement's leaders (Mandela, Sisulu, Biko, Mbeki, Tambo).

Bantustans theoretically had their own laws, and whites and blacks were allowed to mingle, unlike in South Africa. However, many black men left Transkei in search of mining work, meaning they were away from home for months at a time, often returning to their families only once a year.

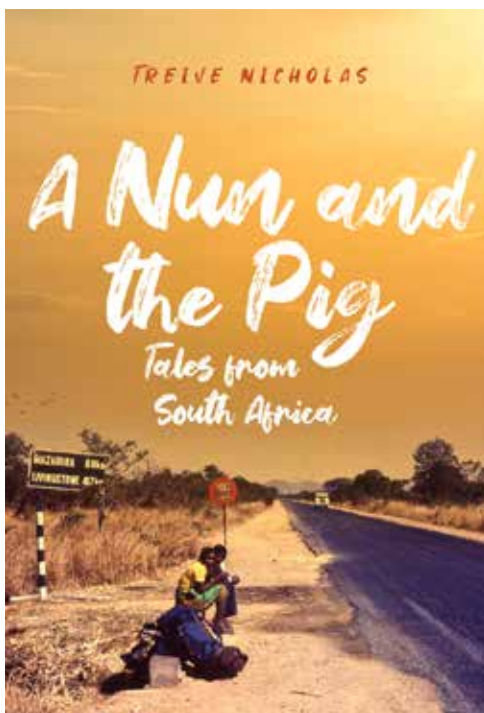
Despite their absence, Nicholas notes, it was a fiercely patriarchal society in which the nuns were called on to assert their authority regularly in order to get anything done. The author admired their determination and grace under pressure, as well as their kindness to the disabled children for whom they cared.

Nicholas was 19 when he volunteered at Ikhwezi Lokusa Special School, run by Sister Mary Paule (the nun of the title – the pig was the mission's clapped-out VW bus). He is good at capturing the atmosphere in Transkei, and of popular culture in 1980, describing the physical beauty of the place, as well as the strangeness of living in a pocket of relative liberty compared to the South African state

surrounding them.

His photos are superb and evocative. He is at his best when describing the political tensions, the racist system of apartheid and how it impacted everyday life for the vast majority of citizens whose homeland it is.

Whites represented only 19% of the South African population then, yet they controlled almost every aspect of the lives of the non-white population, through so-called



pass laws that required them to leave white areas at the end of each day. Blacks had to step off the pavement whenever a white approached, and were perpetually subservient, underpaid, denied proper housing, education, dignity or self-determination. Many lived their whole lives in fear that they would pay the price for infringing apartheid's many discriminatory laws.

When the author visited Durban, he got into trouble for photographing a line of black people standing in the boiling hot sun for hours, waiting for treatment at their dismal section of a hospital, a situation that would never

have been endured by the white ruling class, he notes. The (white) mayor of Durban finds the young Nicholas charming and promises to introduce him to young people at the tennis club. They might have been in Surrey, he reflects. Back in Transkei, he is the only white person at a pop concert. He is amazed to encounter the self-important puppet prime minister of the Bantustan filling his car at a petrol station.

He returns to Ikhwezi Lokusa Special School, aged in his late fifties, and finds a new generation of nuns running the place with kindness, efficiency (and better funding).

However, Sister Mary Paule, whom he so admired, was killed at age 82 by robbers, a victim of the appalling crime wave in the new South Africa. Another of his favourite sisters died last year of Covid-19. There are few reflections on the theological motivation of the mission's founders, donors or sisters, but their decency and commitment speak for themselves.

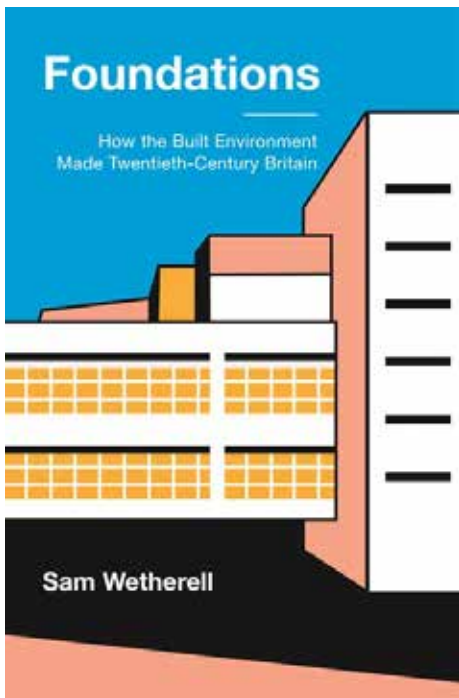
Rebecca Tinsley

The Frontlines of Peace by Severine Autesserre OUP £14

Wars cost the world \$10tn a year, or 13% of global GDP. Donor nations and foundations spend \$22bn annually trying to bring peace to conflict zones.

This book is about the peace building industry in the form of UN peacekeeping missions and NGOs. The author has decades of experience in Congo, East Timor, the Holy Land and Colombia. She concludes that the donor nations (largely the West) impose our one-size-fits-all recipes without regard for the opinions or experiences of local people.

The most dangerous time is the transition between dictatorship and democracy (Sudan, South Sudan, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq), and holding premature elections often



precipitates war. She rightly slams the white 4WD syndrome (young ‘experts’ living in expat bubbles, telling locals what to do), and the arrogance of UN bureaucrats spending vast budgets on conferences for elite leaders, rather than trying much less expensive peace building at a local level.

The lessons she has learned (humility, patience, listening) are equally applicable in tackling drug gang violence in the developed world. This excellent book is a little repetitive but useful for anyone wondering how we can stop the suffering of millions of people.

Rebecca Tinsley

Foundations, how the built environment made twentieth century Britain by Sam Wetherell Princeton 2020 £28.00

A Britain short of houses is in danger of making the mistakes of the past. Local authorities are pressured by government to build more houses, or release more land for that, and are blamed when that doesn't happen, though too often it is the developers sitting on sites waiting for what they see as a more opportune moment. My personal inclination would be to build council houses, which was the way the post-war generation chose to solve their housing problem (most of these

were not the high-rise with which Wetherell introduces his chapter, and given the Parker Morris Standards – not mentioned - possibly some of the best built houses in the country).

Wetherell presents his case through six studies which have typified development from the last half of the twentieth century, though they have precursors – the industrial estate, the shopping precinct, the council estate, the private housing estate, the shopping mall and the business park.

His particular focus is on Milton Keynes, from which he hails, and that gives a personal element to his conclusions, which may make his book more useful to the decision-making politician rather than the planner. Round pegs in square holes is not quite the right idiom for these developments, at least not as intended, but is perhaps more apt as to how some of them turned out.

There are two orthodoxies dominating this – the social democratic consensus following the Second World War, running out of steam in the 1970 and replaced by a neoliberal consensus, which has itself run out of steam, but decision makers don't seem to have caught up with that yet.

I should add the caveat that my definition of neoliberalism, with which I don't associate, is economic liberalism, devoid of its social context, driven by conservative politics. So, Thatcher for example, was an economic liberal but a Conservative politician.

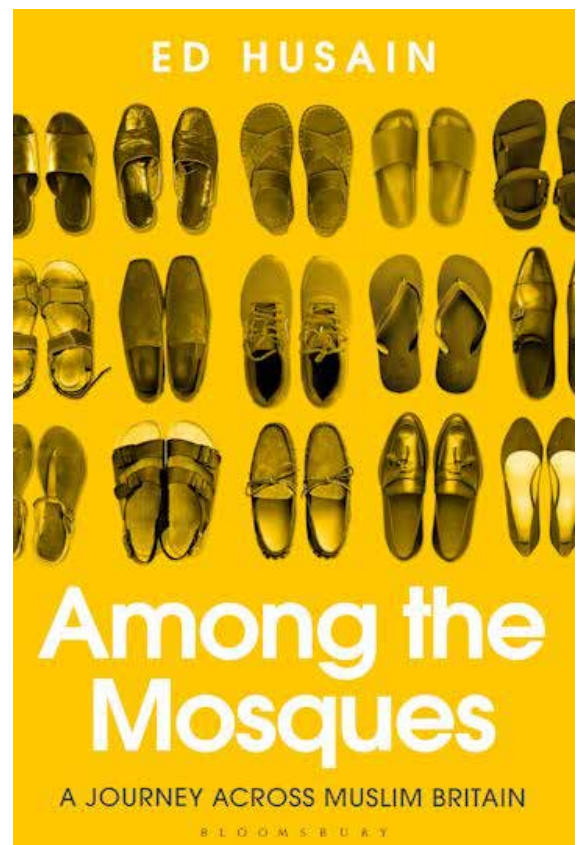
If I look briefly at shopping precincts and malls, supposed answers to the High Street, it is a mall which squats on a previously much-loved cricket pitch where I now live, and even before the pandemic, it was often commented that the number of empty units in both mall and High Street suggest that it might have been as well to leave the High Street to develop organically.

But could this meet the apparent needs of retailers for larger modern units at

the expense of primarily Victorian and pre-war infrastructure, often listed? Wetherell casts shopping precincts as small and localised. I had to deal with the regeneration of a number of these as a councillor in Tower Hamlets – 20 years old or less. Stroudley Walk had failed from the outset. It's rationale, by London County Council and Greater London Council planners, was to replace Devons Road, a thoroughfare. Unfortunately, remote decision makers got rid of the street market, but the shopping precinct didn't appear until around 10 years later, by which time frustrated consumers had found their way elsewhere.

A mall by contrast is invariably privately owned and has sadly, led to a measure of uniformity, globally indeed; not surprisingly it has become a favourite location of the zombie movie.

In recent elections I have found myself opposing a number of housing proposals – either because they propose building in villages without the infrastructure to absorb them or for environmental reasons (they will flood). Labour, who in my experience will build on any patch of open space, throw back at us “where would we build?”, and this is a good question. I may not be alone in advocating the possible creation of new villages but I'm well aware of the hornet's nest that



would stir up.

To those of you who have to make such decisions I commend this book, not necessarily to agree with it, but because it contains the pieces of the jigsaw that you would be putting together and so is a view of some of the pros and cons to be looked at.

There are 13 Liberal Democrats on Milton Keynes Borough Council, to 24 Tories, 19 Labour and 1 Independent; the council is run by a Progressive Alliance of Labour and Liberal Democrats. They have communities which are among the most affluent and poorest in the country. I don't envy their task, but it is something we have to rise to; I wish them well with it.

Stewart Rayment.

Among the Mosques: A Journey Across Muslim Britain **by Ed Husain** **Bloomsbury, 2021** **£14.00**

By 2050, there will be 13m British Muslims. Ed Husain visited towns with growing Muslim populations to gauge how well people are integrating and what the future will look like. Instead, he found mostly self-contained monocultural groups embracing an intolerant and narrow Islam. "A parallel Muslim-only environment has emerged for those who want it," he comments. "The obedience, control and hierarchy of the villages of Pakistan appears to be thriving in the cities of England, too."

Husain reflects that Islam is more at ease with itself in Middle Eastern cities he knows well through his extensive theological study and travel. Books advocating violent jihad and a return to the attitudes of 7th century Arabia are available in Islamic shops around the UK, while they are being removed from Saudi bookshelves.

The author is alarmed by how few mosques allow women to pray, even from segregated galleries. As he browses Muslim shops, he finds popular tomes denying the Earth orbits the Sun; approving of domestic violence so long as women's faces are unmarked; demonising music or connecting

with the opposite sex remotely on social media, refusing to condemn slavery, and encouraging little girls to cover up and marry "the younger the better". He also finds imams conducting Islamic marriages that leave women with few rights under secular law. ("Women are the strongest factor in destroying men's noble character" according to popular Tableeghi Jamaat scholars who recommend women wear tight headscarves even in bed).

He witnesses a well-financed battle between competing literalist sects (Deobandi, Bareilwi, Salafi) anticipating the return of the caliphate. In their 'sectarian silos' Husain despairs of finding any interest in modern Britain or British current events. "What is the future when people make all their interactions about identity?" he wonders.

Politicians play "a dangerous game of communalism to get votes" from clerics and their mass blocs. They ignore forced marriages, high rates of domestic violence, and the well above average rates of disability arising from marrying first cousins.

Husain knows his Koran intimately, and gets a frosty reception when he asks imams and scholars to show him the sura where the Prophet assigned women, Jews, Christians, Black people or gays their lowly place.

Their ignorance is matched by their determination not to allow discussion. "Why are you asking such difficult questions?" he is told by an imam. "We cannot criticise our religion".

Husain's well-informed, intellectual Islam is a far cry from the increasingly hostile attitudes expressed by young Muslims coming from war zones, "seeking revenge and justice for the wrongs done to their countries," he comments.

He wants the government to stop according respectability to intolerant self-appointed Muslim representatives, and to insist schools have modern curricula. But ultimately, the struggle for the soul of Islam - between the literalist Islamists and those who see Islam as an evolving faith - is a battle that Muslims, not non-believers, must fight.

Yet, it is an unfair fight because so much money is backing those who yearn for the return of the

caliph and who despise innovation. Modern Muslims are silent, he remarks, while an organised minority control the mosques, bookshops, schools and charities, and they are vocal online, intimidating and judging their more liberal co-religionists. This is a depressing but essential book.

Rebecca Tinsley

Cinderella Liberator **by Rebecca Solnit, with** **illustrations by Arthur** **Rackham** **Vintage 2020 £12.99**

How could I not review a book with the title *Cinderella Liberator*? How can I review a book by an author whose earlier work includes *Men Explain Things to Me* (Haymarket Books, 2014)?

I don't have problem with the reinterpretation of archetypal stories; *Ever After*, the 1998 film retelling of *Cinderella*, is one of my favourites. James Finn Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* (reviewed in *Liberator* sometime in 1994-95) have, alas, not always been taken as the spoof they obviously were – the *Cinderella* is one of the better tales.

But here we have something different, this is serious. Yet *Prince Nevermind?* Even would be better... why not *Prince Roger?* The story is going along quite well, a bit wordy perhaps, but why this cheap shot of hipster feminism? Charles S Evans, in his retelling the standard Perrault version where Rackham's illustrations first appeared, poses the question "Have you ever noticed that there are some people whom you are not going to like the first time you set eyes on them?"

Rackham's silhouette illustrations to *Cinderella* marked a change in his style in 1919 when they first appeared, although *Sleeping Beauty* was his only other work to widely exploit the genre. It is good to see them again, sometimes reinterpreted – those on pages 24 and 25 originally together, sans cake... I spend too much time wondering about the cake.

The real test of any version of the *Cinderella* story is on that most merciless of platforms, the Christmas pantomime. Will we see Rebecca Solnit's story on the stage? Oh... (I hope so)

Stewart Rayment