

liberator



- 🔴 * Why I'll fight vaccine ID cards - Alistair Carmichael
- 🔴 * * A new tragedy in Afghanistan - George Cunningham
- 🔴 * * Caring enough to pay for social care - Claire Tyler

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LIBERATOR

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CONTENTS

Commentary	3
Radical Bulletin	4..7
IT'S WHAT WE'RE FOR.....	6..7
Fighting the introduction of vaccine ID cards is a classic liberal battle, says Alistair Carmichael	
AFGHANISTAN:A NEW TRAGEDY UNFOLDS... 8..10	
An imperfect democracy and an expansion of women's rights were emerging in Afghanistan but have been snuffed by the Taliban after western flight. Can anything be saved, asks George Cunningham	
MR SHAPPS CHANGES TRAINS	11..13
The rail white paper is welcome but shows the Tories capable of believing the opposite of what they have supported for decades, says Norman Baker	
WE CAN'T GO ON MEETING LIKE THIS.....	14..15
It's bad enough that conference is online, but why have a strategy paper with no strategy, a philosophy one with no philosophy and policy other parties could have written, wonders David Grace	
CARING ENOUGH TO PAY	16..17
The pandemic laid bare the funding crisis in social care but will any party be brave over the cost of it, asks Claire Tyler	
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK IN SUDAN.....	18..19
It's not just Afghanistan. Two years after Sudan's revolution, the Islamist old guard is fighting back and it's women who suffer most. Rebecca Tinsley reports	
A LACK OF CARE FOR CARERS	20..21
Ed Davey has campaigned hard on support for those forced to become unpaid carers, but what happens when caring ends and they must re-enter the jobs market asks Susan Simmonds	
DARE TO DO SOMETHING POPULAR	22..23
Universal Basic Income could arm the Liberal Democrats with a radical policy that would tackle poverty. The party's paper on this suggests losing this opportunity through excess caution, says Alan Sherwell	
TIME UP FOR THE UK?	24..25
Tensions could pull the UK apart but federalism should offer a liberal way to keep it together, says Robert Brown	
GREEN CARROTS	26
Can the fad for behavioural science help with the damage of climate change and Brexit, wonders Geoff Reid	
REVIEWS	27..29
<i>Lord Benkers</i>	30
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COMMENTARY

SO MUCH FOR 'GLOBAL BRITAIN'

There were all kinds of perfectly respectable arguments for the west either not having gone into Afghanistan in the first place, or having confined its efforts to military assistance. There are though no respectable arguments for the way it left.

It tried to turn Afghanistan into a model of western democracy - an endeavour that George Cunningham, former deputy EU ambassador to Afghanistan, suggests in this Liberator might have needed 60 years to have a chance of success. The west did some good in changing Afghan society, but it would have had to stay a very long time to embed that.

The previous Afghan government's armed forces collapsed even more rapidly to the Taliban onslaught than those of Iraq did in the face of Islamic State, or - longer ago - those of Cambodia against the Khmer Rouge.

Einstein's definition of insanity - to keep doing the same thing while expecting different results - suggests that attempts to transform into western-style democracies at gunpoint societies the west does not understand, and which have no previous experience of democratic government, will fail unless the west is prepared for a pretty much indefinite presence of both military and civilian support.

One of few things on which the Biden and Trump administrations appear to agree is their lack of appetite for becoming entangled in foreign wars. It may be that no 'opportunity' will arise in the foreseeable future for the UK to become involved either, since the flight from Afghanistan has brutally exposed the limits of 'Global Britain'.

The idea that the UK might have stayed fighting in Afghanistan without an American presence was so ludicrous that even most Tories shunned it.

With it went the conceit that the UK has an independent foreign policy post-Brexit. Cut adrift from the EU the UK will become, even more than before, an American satellite as Tories yap about a 'special relationship' that is special only one way.

None of this though excuses the chaotic manner of the western departure from Afghanistan. People who worked with the British armed forces and embassy, even British nationals, have been left behind. The Ministry of Defence and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office have engaged in an undignified war of words over who left people stranded.

The UK is to take 20,000 people under its Afghan resettlement scheme, with 5,000 place in its first year. A good deed certainly, but small compared with the number of Afghans put at risk because they trusted this and other intervening countries.

Afghanistan is now ruled by the same people it was when the west went in 20 years ago, thousands of lives and billions of dollars later. Iraq, after costly wars, is now dominated by Iran and still unstable.

The lesson is not to intervene militarily in countries where there is no way out without the undoing of what you set out to accomplish. And not to assume that democracy and the rule of law - which took centuries to build up in Europe - can be imposed quickly on those with experience of neither.

GET OFF MY LAND

The Chesham & Amersham by-election rightly made much of the Tories' intention to create a developers' free-for-all with planning reforms that would largely carve both communities and local authorities out of decisions on what is built where.

We might also note that the Tory proposal is underpinned by a peculiar new commitment to 'beauty' that is liable to end with planning inspectors and judges having to subjectively decide whether a planned building is 'beautiful' - a recipe for havoc if ever there was one.

So campaigning against the Tories planning policy as it stands does the double of being both right and popular in the seats the Lib Dems are most likely to target. With a Conservative government in office it clearly makes sense to target Conservative seats since inroads into Labour held ones are likely to be few and to arise only from some unusual circumstance.

But the Lib Dems are also strong supporters of building more homes - in particular affordable ones - and those have to go somewhere.

Campaigners will have often found that it is entirely possible for voters to hold two contradictory beliefs about housing at the same time. They don't want any built near them, but worry about where younger people will be able to live.

It's true that urban brownfield land can be used for building without much objection, but not all the new homes needed can go there.

What about the rest? It's all very well to talk - as does a motion at this Lib Dem conference - about involving communities in decisions, but if a community's settled view is that homes should be built in another community that does not advance things.

Ultimately, a local authority has to decide where homes go and it will not want to antagonise local voters.

This means that before arguments about the planning process are settled a wider one must be won about public acceptance that more homes are needed.

RADICAL BULLETIN

YOURS TO SPEND

One of the most extraordinary papers ever to appear among the Lib Dem reports to conference has been issued by the party's Racial Diversity Campaign (RDC).

The party at least in theory seeks to take seriously the idea that it should encourage minority ethnic members and candidates.

It appears to have found an unusual way of promoting initiative among them by making them pay for these activities themselves.

RDC chair Ade Adeyemo's announced: "Despite a lack of financial support from the party, the RDC Executive has worked very hard to get the organisation up and running.

"To date, we have personally borne all costs, ensuring that RDC activities can progress. However, this situation is neither sustainable nor desirable."

Adeyemo went on: "It is disappointing (and frustrating) that halfway through our three-year term, no funding has been forthcoming from the party for RDC activities.

"Everything we have achieved so far has been despite the lack of financial support or a budget from LDHQ. A year on from my 2020 conference report, the RDC executive are still having to pay out of their own pockets for web site hosting, online survey, video conferencing and other incidental costs. The party's continued lack of action is a very serious concern."

Although the report said it appeared no funding was expected in the foreseeable future, the RDC did in fact belatedly get some money to increase the number of ethnic minority parliamentarians and those in senior local government roles.

This amounted to a paltry £5,000 in August, just after the party blew something like 10 times that sum on a report from consultants Diversity Matters on how to, er, increase the number of ethnic minority parliamentarians and those in senior local government roles.

Diversity Matters' main recommendation was, wait for it, that a working group should be set up to improve diversity.

To be fair, Diversity Matters came up with a number of sensible and useful recommendations - and some might say so it should at that price - but it's hard to see that they covered anything beyond what ought to be well known in the party anyway.

Its aperçus included that an equality, equity, diversity and inclusion strategy should

be linked "to the overarching organisational business plan/strategy/manifesto", and on equality analyses "to ensure when implemented that the senior managers/leaders are highlighting when analysis are not carried out and championing their value".

One aggrieved and longstanding campaigner for Lib

Dem ethnic minorities told Liberator that the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality (LDCRE) was "deeply pissed off that the Diversity Matters report is supposed to be in fulfilment of the Thornhill and Alderdice reviews' recommendations but it's actually doing the opposite of what they were told".

LDCRE's anger arises from its belief that both Thornhill and Alderdice held the situation on ethnic diversity was so bad that it should be the top priority over other kinds of diversity campaigning.

As the 2018 Alderdice report noted: "The party has a tendency to try to be inclusive of all issues at all times and that has an intellectual appeal, but it has not worked for BaME communities, because addressing everything means focussing on nothing."

Some think the party may have been 'nobbled' by campaigners for other types of diversity, with ethnicity again not getting priority.

Diversity Matters said no documentation was submitted to it to enable it to review recruitment practices for members and/or potential candidates, and "conducting a full review of recruitment and selection practices for members across the party must be considered a top priority".

The recommended working group is indeed being set up but will it be engulfed in arguments about whether it is concerned with diversity in general or with ethnic minorities as a top priority.

VANISHING HORDE

The conference report of the Federal People and Development Committee's chair Bess Mayhew said, possibly in an unguarded moment: "While the decline in membership numbers has slowed since the beginning of the year, we remain deeply concerned at overall levels of recruitment and retention.

"We have asked for resources to be allocated urgently so that this can be tackled strategically and will continue to do so."

Leaving aside the implication that membership retention is not carried out strategically, the party has gone very coy about its membership total unlike the situation two years ago when it trumpeted this.

Large numbers of people joined to oppose Brexit then and seem to have gone again after the UK left the EU and that battle appeared lost for the foreseeable future. Some at least, while pro-EU, were of otherwise dubious liberal credentials anyway.

But the conference reports can be scoured through all 170 pages without the membership total being revealed or indeed a word on the much-vaunted supporters scheme.

Perhaps Liberator can have a stab at it. The reports do reveal that the party raised £2,315,018 from membership and subscription fees in 2019 and

£1,860,684 in 2020.

That is a reduction of 19.6%. According to the House of Commons Library, Lib Dem membership stood at 115,000.

So if we assume the subscriptions paid average out, a 19.6% fall in income would equate to a fall in numbers to 92,460 members.

That would be a disappointing reduction but hardly a disaster, high by historic standards and according to one source not far off the true figure. So why the secrecy?

LAST MAN STANDING

Alex Cole-Hamilton's unopposed election as Scottish Liberal Democrats leader was predictable since of the other MSPs one had just resigned the post, one is the Scottish Parliament's deputy presiding officer and one nearly lost her seat last May.

Cole-Hamilton is said to be a Quaker with strong Liberal principles but with a noted ability to face several ways at once.

He was re-elected for Edinburgh Western in May with the highest vote ever obtained by any candidate of any party in any Holyrood election.

This was arguably achieved partly by persuading Labour voters to back him as a centre-left candidate, while persuading Conservatives that he offered the best way of preventing another independence referendum.

More radical souls in the Lib Dems were offended by an interview in The Times where he appeared open to working with the Tories at Holyrood.

But talking with members of Liberal Futures - the Scottish equivalent of Social Liberal Forum - Cole-Hamilton stressed unilateralism and presented himself as centre-left, saying he would never serve in a Conservative-led government.

It's possible of course to work with the Tories without being in a Tory-led government but Cole-Hamilton may have to square his several circles before long.

WELL, THAT DIDN'T LAST

In October 2020 Lib Dem chief executive Mike Dixon tweeted: "Delighted to welcome Duncan Gough to the team @libdems as our new chief technology officer. Another sign that we're serious about changing."

Or not as the case may be. In August Gough quit after only 10 months with a missive to puzzled Federal Board members that advocated the abolition of his role.

This is the second of the 'high powered' outsiders brought in by Dixon to have left after a short time in office, after Mimi Turner as director of strategy, research and messaging (Liberator 408) [www.liberatormagazine.org.uk]. The English party executive was told that someone from the Federal Board would conduct an exit interview with Gough. If so this may throw light on a rumoured exchange with a senior party figure.

AFGHAN HOUNDED

Whatever Torbay council leader Steve Darling meant to say about settling Afghan refugees in the home of Fawley Towers, it clearly didn't come

out right.

Darling issued a retraction that said he was proud that Liberal Democrat MPs had called on the UK Government to offer sanctuary to 20,000 refugees to the UK by the end of next year as a bare minimum and said Whitehall must help councils to deliver this target by providing more funding.

He added: "I'd also like to apologise for comments which have been construed as suggesting that Afghan refugees would not be welcome in Torbay because of their ethnic background.

"That is not my belief. I am deeply sorry if these comments offended anyone, the point I was trying to make was that we will need more funding from central Government so that we can support refugees as they become part of our community.

"Here in Torbay, during the Syrian refugee crisis we offered sanctuary to families from Syria, our community is warm and open and will welcome Afghan refugees with open arms."

The Liberal Democrat Campaign for Racial Equality was though not mollified and called on Torbay councillors to sack Darling, describing his apology "a suboptimal partial retraction".

This though was rather spoilt by pointing out in support that the local Tory MP had criticised Darling, a hardly unusual eventuality. Darling has stayed in office.

CODE RED

The party owes quite a debt to lead adjudicator Neil Christian who has had to deal with an unexpected flood of cases since the new disciplinary code took effect in July 2019.

His annual report states there were 967 cases - so around 1% of the total membership - and "it is worth noting that the number of complaints received is at a volume much higher than was ever foreseen when the system was being planned."

It also says 65% were dismissed, which suggests that the code is being viewed as a way to settle personal scores.

RIGHT TURN

After selecting ex-Ukip candidates at the last general election and then a man who makes Nazi salutes for the Scottish Parliament, the pro-Brexit so-called Liberal party has taken another eccentric turn.

Its website carries a statement from its Scottish party secretary Kayed Al-Haddad, which says: "The Scottish Liberal Party is a Classical Liberal centre to centre-right political party in Scotland which is an association of the wider UK Liberal Party." Since the latter claims to support social liberalism this may cause some dissension.

Al-Haddad claims his party to be "the authentic voice of Liberalism" and "to offer something quite unique in terms of our policies: which I believe will liberate the individual from complete subservience of the 'collective', a relaxation of the tight hold of custom, law, and authority and thus finally emancipate the individual!"

IT'S WHAT WE'RE FOR

Fighting the introduction of vaccine ID cards is a classic liberal battle, says Alistair Carmichael

What is the point of the Liberal Democrats?

As a party we are called upon to justify our own existence more than any other. Usually the question is posed by opponents or by commentators wanting an easy hit but it irritates me more than a little.

In truth, however, we have to accept that much of the blame lies with ourselves and our own failure to present a compelling narrative of who we are and what we are about.

Some will answer the challenge by referring to our opposition to Brexit, or the war in Iraq, or our record in local government or local communities. Important though all these things are, they are not the reasons for our existence as a party.

Yes, we opposed Brexit but because we are internationalists – not because of the constitutional elegance of qualified majority voting or the Common Agricultural Policy.

Yes, we opposed the war in Iraq but because, as internationalists, we believe in the rule of law.

Yes, we have a long and proud record of achievement in local government but our commitment to community politics is because we believe in community empowerment not just because we have some fetish with pot holes and dog fouling on pavements.

Strip everything else away and you are left with a liberal party which will always have as its core function, defining the relationship between the citizen and the state.

For nationalists the political counting unit will always be the nation state. For conservatives and socialists the political counting units will always be capital and labour.

For liberals the political counting unit will always be the individual.

Since the founding of the liberal party in the nineteenth century ours has been a movement that has sought to promote the freedom of the individual. We champion the right of the individual to live their lives as they choose, as long as they do no harm to others.

UNIFORMITY AND CONFORMITY

Governments always come up with reasons to chip away at individual liberty. Uniformity and conformity, after all, makes life easier for them. That is why we always need to have a liberal party – a party that will stand with the citizen against the demands of the state. We question at every turn the need for us as individuals to cede more power and control to the state.

That is the point of the Liberal Democrats. No other party can be relied upon to do it consistently so we must.

We are, of course, liberals and not libertarians. We accept that sometimes, for the good of our community as a whole, we must allow the government to take more power. That was why, in March 2019, we

supported the passing of emergency legislation to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. Not knowing what lay ahead it was the responsible thing to do.

As it happened most of the powers that parliament gave to the government in March 2019 have not been used and probably never will be - but still the government keeps renewing the legislation every six months. As history repeatedly shows us, when people give more powers to government to regulate their lives, governments are never swift to hand them back.

That is why Liberal Democrats in parliament at Westminster and in Holyrood have stood out against the introduction of vaccine passports to be used for us all to access public services.

This is quite distinct from the requirement to demonstrate vaccination for the purpose of foreign travel. That is a simple and well-established practice of showing respect for the country to which we are travelling.

The proposed scheme will require us, as individuals, to share our medical data in order to go about our lawful everyday business.

For a liberal to accept that there would have to be some overwhelming interest at stake. As far as the proposals by governments in Edinburgh and London to introduce a vaccine identity card scheme are concerned, that overwhelming interest is not there. In fact, there is significant concern that their proposals may make things worse rather than better.

As a society we cannot sacrifice our individual freedoms to governments constantly in search of a quick fix and wanting to be seen to do something.

Until everyone that can be vaccinated has been vaccinated, vaccine ID cards will be divisive and exclusive. The idea probably breaches equality legislation as there are some people who cannot be vaccinated because of a pre-existing condition.

Once everyone is vaccinated then the need to demonstrate this to gain access to clubs, football matches or concerts is unnecessary.

The people who stand to lose out most in this scheme are our younger people – the people who will be paying back the cost of tackling the pandemic for most of their working lives.

They are also the people who have had the greatest disruption to their lives. Exams have been cancelled. Higher and further education has gone online but they have still been expected to pay tuition fees and term time accommodation.

An ID card scheme, we are told, is necessary to improve vaccine uptake among the young – but where is the evidence for this?

In fact the limited amount of research that has been carried out suggests that using vaccine ID cards for domestic purposes makes people less likely to be vaccinated not more. A scheme like this risks pushing already marginalised groups even further away from

community engagement.

I understand completely the desire of people to get back to normal in going to concerts, sporting events and night clubs. I also understand the wish to do so in a way that is safe, but even if you are vaccinated you can still acquire and transmit the Covid-19 virus. The biggest risk from this ill-thought out gimmick is that it may create a false sense of security.

Overwhelmingly those who will be required to administer this pointless scheme are opposed to it. Those who run pubs, clubs

and large events will be at the sharp end of separating the vaccinated from the unvaccinated. Having worked in the hospitality industry myself for years in my youth I do not envy them their task. They are the people to whom we shall be entrusting our data.

The arguments that we advanced against Tony Blair's ID card scheme 15 years ago have not changed. The ID card is just the tip of the iceberg. The really dangerous bit is the database and register of its use that sits beneath the surface.

Are you content to trust this (or any other) government with aggregated data of this sort?

I know that there are many other European countries that use ID cards and it is tempting to say that we should be able to do so too. Some in our party have even suggested to me that for us to follow suit would keep us more closely aligned with EU countries and thus advance our longer-term goal of re-joining the EU. It is a beguiling argument but one which unfortunately ignores the fact that these other countries have all manner of constitutional safeguards to prevent their abuse.

SILVER BULLET

From day one of this pandemic our government has been desperate to find a silver bullet. Domestic vaccine ID cards are just the latest in that long line. Getting the basics right are what we need to beat this virus. Testing, tracing and isolating when infection is identified is the only way to tackle this and the only way to beat this virus for good.

Liberal Democrats, as Britain's liberal party, must not be timid in challenging this latest attempt to redefine the relationship between the citizen and the state. We have never been a 'papers please' society and if that is to change then at the very least we must be allowed to debate that change.

Once we cede the principle that it is acceptable for the government to regulate in this way not just where we can go and those with whom we can go, then we will be at the top of a steep and slippery slope. If it is OK to do it on the basis of Covid-19, what other diseases or conditions might be next?

Vaccine ID cards are just one front on which we should be fighting this war. If the government gets its way on the Elections Bill currently before the Commons then by the time you go to vote at the next

“The ID card is just the tip of the iceberg. The really dangerous bit is the database and register of its use that sits beneath the surface”

UK general election you will be required to exhibit photo ID.

Those who do not have the standards such as passport or driving licence will be given – you guessed it – a voter ID card.

This is a solution in search of a problem as there is no data to support the proposition that we have any significant problem with voter ID fraud. Again, it will be the already marginalised who are pushed even further away from the political and civic processes. When you see Boris Johnson using a

direct lift from the Donald Trump playbook of voter suppression then you know something malign is afoot.

In 1939 the then government introduced its own Identity cards scheme. It was justified (and justifiable) in a time of war. The British public accepted it with the same good humour that we have for the most part accepted wearing masks on public transport and being denied to gather with friends and family, no matter how desperate the circumstances.

Six years later the war was over. The emergency had passed as had the justification for identity cards but still governments insisted on their retention. Their use was supposedly tightly prescribed but in practice abuse was widespread. It took a Liberal Party activist and candidate, Harry Wilcock, to challenge their continued use and eventually to see their abolition. When challenged by the police to produce his card Willcock declared: “I am a liberal and I am against this sort of thing.”

Then, as now, Labour and Conservatives were supportive of the concept on the grounds of utility and convenience.

Then, as now, it was only liberals who stood against it on grounds of principle as well as practicality.

In opposing vaccine ID cards we may well be initially on the side of the minority (as we were initially in our opposition to Blair's ID Card Bill). That is a risk we have to take although I believe that we can eventually turn that around again.

If we go with the flow and appease the Conservatives' controlling and authoritarian instincts now then, next time someone asks you, “what is the point of the Liberal Democrats?” what will your answer be?

Alistair Carmichael is Liberal Democrat MP for Orkney & Shetland

AFGHANISTAN: A NEW TRAGEDY UNFOLDS

An imperfect democracy and an expansion of women's rights were emerging in Afghanistan but have been snuffed by the Taliban after western flight. Can anything be saved, asks George Cunningham

On 31 August, US and NATO forces departed for good from Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Afghan army, millions of educated Afghan women and men who had wanted to rebuild their country - alongside millions of illiterate Afghans increasingly mired in poverty - have been left in the hands of a victorious, vengeful Taliban regime.

When I served as Deputy EU Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2016-18, I participated regularly in the activities of the Youth Thinkers' Society, made up of upcoming educated women and men, the flower of the new learned class from the cities, entering the civil service, the judiciary (including 250 female judges now at especially great risk), academia and business. They were respectful of their Afghan heritage but eager to think for themselves - and many ready to work for the good of their country.

ENDEMIC CORRUPTION

The old traditional Afghanistan was very much still there on the streets - people milling about without work in poverty, porters with rusting wheelbarrows, street vendors, beggars. The younger generation were preparing themselves to build a better Afghanistan than this. Yet endemic governmental corruption was at the same time sapping the morale and resources of the new society that was being constructed. This corruption was siphoning off billions of US dollars that would have otherwise - if wisely spent - helped those whose poverty and ignorance had instead provided fertile recruiting ground for the Taliban.

In the Wolesi Jirga or lower House of Parliament,

a very imperfect democracy was also taking root. Despite the place being awash with the illicit gains of MPs used to acquire apartments and buy votes in continually flawed elections (despite the best ingenuity of the international community to try and fool-proof them), some shoots of democracy were springing up. Many of the new intake of female MPs elected on separate all-women tickets were beginning to drive for change.

Others - who belonged to the small Afghan Civic Democrat Parliamentary Caucus who had fought for a more resilient democracy and against corrosive corruption - were receiving the ire not just of the Taliban that sees democracy as a danger to its proposed theocratic rule but also warnings and threats from government officials impacted by their anti-corruption investigations. Parliamentarians who have not managed to get away or strike a deal with the Taliban are now in hiding, high on the Taliban's hit list.

For sure, 20 years would not be enough to bring permanent change to Afghan society. No, at the time, I reckoned more like 60 years, or three generations. After only one generation, the warlords that fought the Taliban were still around, and senior levels of government and business were still the purview of sometimes besuited tribal elders, their successors and families. It needed more time for them to leave the scene, being replaced with a more reforming younger generation. Serious nation-building is not for those in a hurry.

Events have moved quickly in Afghanistan. Just four months ago, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, head of the Afghan High Peace Council, along with members of

the Afghan Civic Democrats and the head of the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan's office in Kandahar held a webinar organised by Lib Dems Overseas and Liberal International British Group members about their hopes to reach an inclusive political settlement acceptable to all the Afghan people: <https://youtu.be/QGt3DbFjCao>

It was clear at the time to most of us that the peace talks were likely a sham but there was still hope - and somehow we all clung to it while trying to prepare for the worst.

Since the Taliban take-over, Dr Abdullah Abdullah has bravely



continued to try and play a moderating role within Afghanistan. Alongside former President Karzai, he stayed in Kabul to hold meetings with the Taliban leadership in an attempt to persuade them to form an inclusive government.

President Karzai offered himself to the Taliban as an interim president of an inclusive government for one year until the situation became more stable. Both are currently said to be under house arrest.

At the time of writing, the Taliban was said to be close to forming a government. However factionalism within the leadership, notably between the Helmand shura and Taliban figures based in Qatar, and local Taliban leaders may make this an unstable government. Positions at deputy minister level or below may be given to Afghan technocrats. No females will be appointed to ministerial positions.

The only remaining resistance to the Taliban is from the Panjshir valley, where Vice-President Saleh has declared himself the legitimate President of Afghanistan after President Ghani's disgraceful flight. After all, let us not forget he represents the elected government of Afghanistan. The fight is being led by Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary Afghan rebel commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. They are calling on Western governments to help them with arms and supplies. Their hold on territory is a tenuous one.

STATE OF TERROR

Elsewhere, the Taliban is in control but does not have its various factions under control. The expansion of extrajudicial killings and disappearances of government officials, journalists and civil society activists is plunging the country increasingly into a state of terror. After twenty years of administering basic services in rural areas, the Taliban is also grappling with the complexities of running cities, let alone forming a central government. Doctors, engineers and municipal workers are needed. They have called people back to work but many fear returning to an uncertain fate.

In Kabul and no doubt elsewhere in Afghanistan, door-to-door searches are taking place for those considered as high-value targets by the Taliban. Fake emails are being sent directly to those being hunted, saying that US and UK special forces are ready to extract them if they feel comfortable leaving their homes and asking to fill out their whereabouts on an excel sheet. No doubt some of those visits to their homes will be conducted by Taliban dressed in discarded US army uniforms.

The UK has managed to extract 17,000 people from Afghanistan since April, including during its two-week Operation Pitting. The total number extracted by the US and NATO by air is said to be 125,000 persons, no mean

“What should not be done is to squander the remaining leverage based on half-baked promises from the Taliban”

feat in such dangerous circumstances. The UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, along with others, is very conscious of the vulnerability of the hundreds of thousands left behind, many of whom were eligible for extraction but could not reach the airport because of the crowds and the suicide bombing.

Thought is now being given how to give safe

passage to British nationals and Afghans who supported the UK but were unable to get out. Following the lead of the Canadian Government, the UK Government has also set up a new Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme to protect Afghans most at risk, especially women and girls. There are 20,000 places available, 5,000 in the first year of the scheme's operations. This is very low, given the extent of the imminent danger people left behind are in.

Now that the air route is no longer possible, many are heading in particular for the Pakistani border which runs the risk of becoming another bottleneck. It may well close again soon. There are already 1.4m long-term Afghan refugees in Pakistan and 780,00 in Iran. Many will try to move on to the safety of Europe again.

But the same challenge persists – how to get Afghans who are high-value targets from their hiding places, through numerous Taliban check-points and roving extremist groups and criminals, to help them reach a safe country.

Western Governments need to be careful how they deal with the Taliban hereon. There are still certain levers that can be pulled to influence the Taliban. What should not be done is to squander the remaining leverage based on half-baked promises from the Taliban with the international community pretending once again that they have gained concessions that are in reality as transient as a passing sandstorm.

It is clear what is required but not at all easy to achieve. The Taliban needs to be persuaded that it is beneficial for its interests to form a truly inclusive government; to govern in tolerance; to recognise and protect in particular the universal rights of women and minorities and their full participation in Afghan life;



not provide safe haven for any international terrorists (including becoming less of a threat themselves); and to give amnesty and safe passage to all wishing to either remain in or leave the country.

The international community should enter into a dialogue with the Taliban, while standing firm, withholding formal recognition of a Taliban government, nor providing it access to the international financial system, nor lifting sanctions, until it is proven it can govern inclusively in peace according to the above criteria.

The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) needs to seize the opportunity. UNAMA's mandate needs to be adapted to the new circumstances. The Taliban should allow UNAMA to continue providing food security and other humanitarian relief with unimpeded access directly to Afghan people throughout the country. UNAMA itself needs to establish its value and be seen to be neutral by the Taliban to be able to start functioning again now US/NATO protection is over.

Countries with land borders should facilitate the movement of refugees to their final destinations; and all countries will need to open their doors generously to Afghan refugees and asylum seekers who should be allowed to seek gainful employment to live in dignity in their host countries until it might be safe to return to Afghanistan.

NUCLEAR ARMED

Pakistan must also become a major focus of our attention. Having backed the Taliban and been joyous at its success, this nuclear-armed country may itself become even more radicalised by the forces it has unleashed in the region. There may be an opportunity to work with China - with all its influence through its 'Belt and Road' investments in the country - to help the Pakistani government keep radical forces at bay here.

We had given hope to Afghanistan. Despite the military and civilian deaths because of the war, millions of young Afghan women and men had started to create the beginnings of a better society.

The West's hasty withdrawal has put all that at huge risk and it has a grave responsibility to work towards ensuring as best it can that people at risk are safe and that these gains are not completely erased. The successor to the international community's work in Afghanistan therefore falls squarely on the shoulders of the United Nations which must win the full trust of the Taliban as a neutral partner and continue as best it can to ensure those gains are preserved wherever possible.



For the West, of course, the ending has been a disaster, not least because \$84bn of US weaponry from the defeated Afghan army is said to have fallen into the hands of the Taliban, which will be traded to other terrorist groups and terrorist-supporting states around the world to be used against us. The whole episode has given succour to the likes of China, Russia and Iran and has made US allies worldwide seriously question the judgement and value of their chief ally, not least because the US president and secretary of state seem convinced it all turned out OK in the end. EU High Representative Borrell's call for a permanent European 'initial entry force' of 5,000 soldiers shows that lessons are being thought through but it is not clear whether the leadership in Europe is there to make it happen. Europe needs to build up the capabilities to be able to act more autonomously in time of crisis. The warning signs are all there, with a potential Trump 2 presidency in 2024 not an impossibility either.

Afghanistan is not over. We are entering a new chapter and must be prepared to act with great ingenuity and determination to see it through.

George Cunningham was deputy EU ambassador to Afghanistan 2016-18. He is chair of Liberal Democrats Overseas

MR SHAPPS CHANGES TRAINS

The rail white paper is welcome but shows the Tories capable of believing the opposite of what they have supported for decades, says Norman Baker

It was not quite an out-of-the-body experience when I found myself dreamily channelling Jeremy Corbyn's 2019 manifesto. Until with a jolt, I remembered I was in fact reading the Conservative government's rail White Paper.

Political historians will tell you one reason for the success of the Conservative Party over more than a century is their ability, seamlessly and shamelessly, to genuinely believe on a given day the opposite of what they believed the day before, when circumstances require them to do so.

Here it is not simply the volte face that is astonishing, it is the comprehensive demolition of that which has been held sacred for more than a quarter of a century.

The government is "ending the fragmentation of the past", the "escalations in cost, gold-plating and over-specification that have occurred since privatisation". Sorry? They created all this, and in the teeth of opposition at the time from the industry and most politicians, including many of their own backbenchers. But that was then and this is now.

The document also promises to deliver that which many in the Lib Dems and elsewhere have been calling for over many years, such as for simpler fares, better integration between rail and other transport modes, and short in-fill electrification.

LAST RITES

It is welcome that the last rites have been read over franchising, though with the government now collecting the fare box, they will need a mechanism to ensure the operators actually do collect the fares. London Buses, where the concession model already applies, suggests this is not a great priority for operators.

The White Paper even pledges, to my delight, "there will be fewer annoying and repetitious recorded announcements" on trains. Hear it, cut it, sorted. This has been a particular bugbear of mine for years. The announcements on London

Overground that the last door of the carriage will not open at the next stop, an announcement made three times including once when the train is already pulling out of the station. Or the one directing people to examine the safety card at the end of the carriage. Have you ever seen anyone actually get up to read these things? Or on top of all the garbage, the one reminding you that you are in a quiet carriage. If only!

Even more joyfully, we are promised the end of ironing board seats such as those to be found on Thameslink trains, and a new emphasis on what the passenger might actually want in terms of an on-board experience. There is a recognition that making it easier to carry bikes on trains, particularly on tourist routes, is a good idea. Can we perhaps also expect the return of catering facilities on medium distance trains such as those from Lewes to London? (I declare an interest).

But the cynic will rightly say that words come cheap and the question is: will the promises be delivered?

Let us turn first to the new giant of the tracks, Great British Railways (GBR). It is not a good name, and invites satirical attack. And names are important. Some of us ruefully recall the distinctly un-catchy Social and Liberal Democrats. Presumably the government did not feel able to resurrect British Rail



or British Railways so came up with this grandiose alternative, conjuring up an image of John Bull in a Union Jack waistcoat. The name hints at a narrow English nationalism. If they are to be believed, the Scottish and Welsh governments were not consulted about the name, or anything much else in the White Paper. And I hope we are not going to waste a fortune repainting every train.

The government is also at pains to assert that what is being created is not simply Network Rail Plus, though to many of us, that is precisely what it seems to be. I am in no doubt that the vision of a new passenger-centred organisation (and thank goodness we seem to be back to passengers rather than customers) is one shared by Peter Hendy and Andrew Haines, the impressive pair leading Network Rail.

They may be ready for change, and indeed have already started down that track, but the bulk of the employees of GBR, as I suppose we will have to get used to calling it, will be the existing middle management tiers of Network Rail who do not have that same vision, middle management disparagingly called by some in the industry Network Rail's permafrost.

Then there are the contradictions. In contradiction one, the government rightly says it wants more transparency and accountability for the industry. Yet they have chosen not to recreate something independent like the Strategic Rail Authority, which seemed to have been the preferred DfT option until No 10 got involved, but instead to build on Network Rail. This to a large extent makes GBR judge and jury in its own court, and with far more clout than the emaciated bunch of private sector train operators with whom they will be dealing.

The government's answer to this is to beef up the Office of Rail and Road, and I suppose that might work, though a more likely outcome down the line, if GBR proves to be unresponsive or inefficient, will be for ministers and civil servants to begin to micro-manage, just as happened in the old days of British Rail. They won't be able to resist. I note the White Paper allocates considerable reserve powers to the secretary of state.

Contradiction two relates to a specific interface between GBR and the train operators, namely the issue of delay attribution. The

“We are even regaled with a dispute about who should carry the can for a pheasant on the line”

White Paper is coruscating about the bureaucracy involved in deciding whether Network Rail or a train operator is responsible for any particular delay, with it seems 400 employees busy just doing this. We are even regaled with a dispute about who should carry the can for a pheasant on the line. It seems Network Rail is allocated big birds, and the operators small ones, and nobody was quite sure

into which category the pheasant fell.

So when the Williams-Shapps paper (another silly name – I mean, they are hardly Lennon-McCartney) says: “The cottage industry of costly commercial disputes over delay attribution will end”, a cheer goes up. But the White Paper also promises that train operators will be set “demanding standards” for outcomes on punctuality and reliability, and will be penalised if they fall short. It will be still be in the interests of GBR and the train operators to blame each other for delays. Delay attribution is going to continue, whatever the White Paper says.

Contradiction three concerns complexity within the system. On the one hand, we are promised a greatly simplified operation, while on the other, the government is looking for “much closer collaboration and joint working with local leaders”.

LOCAL COMPLICATION

Personally I think devolving some responsibilities to elected mayors or local transport bodies is sensible, but localism implies divergence and tailoring solutions to local circumstances, the opposite of simplification. Indeed, the White Paper confirms that bespoke powers to award contracts and set fares will remain with those areas already exercising that freedom, namely



Scotland, Wales, London, Merseyside and Tyne and Wear, and will be extended to other areas too.

Contradiction four in fact relates to fares. Commitment 35 in the White Paper is just four words long: "Fares will be simplified." Now it is certainly right to rationalise these. There are, after all, as many individual network fares as there are people in the country. But while GBR will set most fares, we are told, there will be "more commercial freedom, particularly on long-distance routes".

The White Paper also says: "We will end the uncertainty about whether you are travelling with the right train company". This sounds superficially fine, but does that mean the cost of travelling from Victoria to Gatwick will come down to the Southern price, or rise to the Gatwick Express price? Does it really mean that the cost of travelling from London Euston to Birmingham will be the same, irrespective of whether you are on a fast inter-city train or a slow stopper?

In fact it is on the subject of fares that the White Paper is at its least convincing, yet the fare structure in place will be crucial to attracting people back on board. The proposed mechanisms are welcome – an extension to Pay As You Go, and the emphasis on digital tickets and contactless payment, but where

are the wholesale changes necessary to update the hopelessly out of date fare structure?

One welcome development is the creation of a new flexi-season ticket, or more accurately a carnet, offering as it will eight journeys within 28 days at a discounted price. But what discount exactly?

The government's press release quotes big discounts against the peak day return, but that is hardly the point. The rationale behind the introduction of what in effect will be a two or three day season ticket is to accept the new reality that five-day working in the office is largely dead. It was not to offer discounts on peak day returns.

Still, at least this is a step in the right direction, but a wholesale updating of fares it is not. I detect the dead hand of the Treasury, stifling the introduction of single leg pricing and other necessary innovations. But they will have to come if the other changes being made are to be a success. A new battle for fares reform starts here.

Norman Baker was Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes 1997-2015 and a transport minister 2010-13

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WE CAN'T GO ON MEETING LIKE THIS

It's bad enough that conference is online, but why have a strategy paper with no strategy, a philosophy one with no philosophy and policy other parties could have written, wonders David Grace

Sir Francis Bacon wrote: "Conference maketh a ready man". I used to agree, being ready for passionate debates intensely argued, fascinating fringe meetings, late night discussions with Lord Bonkers, wonderful seaside meals, the Glee Club and of course the Liberal Revue.

I also met my wife at conference and I bet I'm not the only one (I mean who met his wife not mine). Now, however, I'm not sure what conference makes me ready for. Bed perhaps. There are two constraints on conferences now – pandemic and endemic, the result of Covid-19 and the result of increasingly careful management.

It's a pity the Liberal Democrat conference will be online yet again. Conservatives will be hybrid for four days and Labour live for five days, so perhaps our conference is symptomatic of the caution with which the party seems to pursue everything these days.

It will last 3.5 days, of which 1 hour 15 minutes will be business, 1 hour 15 minutes reports, two hours and 5 minutes for Ed to answer questions and give a speech, leaving 13 hours 15 minutes for policy debates. Given our traditional democratic boast that conference makes the party policy do we make good use of that 40% of the time?

BAD ENOUGH

The need to be online (if indeed needed) is bad enough. The first two online conferences lacked all sense of occasion, passion, tension or indeed opportunity to develop and exchange reasoned argument. At previous real live conferences I have seen audiences engaged, listening, reacting and even changing their minds during debate. The online conference is like a series of lost individuals crying in the wilderness, in the desperate hope that someone out there is listening. When you speak, you have no idea of the audience's reaction or even if there is an audience – no applause, no booing, no laughter, no heckling, no anything. It's no good trying to judge opinion by listening to previous speakers. They are lost too, alone and unloved. Perhaps that's why the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) decided to limit speeches to three minutes. I watched last spring as time and again the chair interrupted "Please draw your remarks to a close" as speakers failed to make their argument in time. This reduces debate to the level of Radio 4's Today programme, a sequence of sound bites or a sorry succession of unfinished points – the rest is silence. This is no way for us to behave.

You can't blame it all on Covid-19.. FCC has 12

members elected by party members and 10 ex-officio or elected by other bodies. Incidentally so exciting is that election once every three years (used to be more often) that the turnout in 2019 was 8,203 out the party's largest ever membership of 105,480, equivalent to 0.77%. To be fair, they work hard but they have the problem of satisfying three incompatible objectives: internal democracy, public showcase, bringing in the money. My concern is the first of those. You can forget about the second, nobody's watching and as for number three I haven't got any.

Internal democracy has suffered ever since the introduction of the so-called deliberative policy-making system which has eviscerated the radicalism of the party.

Much policy has emerged from working groups set up by the Federal Policy Committee (FPC). I don't doubt the earnestness of that committee in choosing which policies to develop, although I question the importance of being earnest and the composition of the committee itself.

We are allowed to elect 15 members who sit alongside 14 others, either ex-officio or elected by other bodies. As with FCC, I imagine this is all in the name of joined-up governance but it dilutes the accountability of the body to members. The turnout for FPC in 2019 was 7,429 which amounts to 0.07%. We cannot claim a vibrant internal democracy on those figures.

FPC sets up working groups of which most members are unaware and don't know how to take part. They meet in London and members pay their own travel expenses.

Knowing the party could not afford to pay people to attend, I ran a campaign to re-introduce the the old Liberal Party practice of travel pools by which all members end up paying the same, those living close paying money in and those further away receiving money back. This isn't just about fairness, it's about the kind of policy which gets proposed. When a working group is dominated by people living within the M25, it's hardly surprising if their conclusions represent a metropolitan consensus. This has not changed. Perhaps Covid-19 and the arrival of Zoom will enable wider representation but members still need to know when groups are set up and how to apply to take part.

Surprisingly, at this autumn's conference of the 20 policy motions only six rejoice in FPC and its working groups as their source; 10 have been proposed by groups of members, two by the Young Liberals, one by the Liberal Democrat Women and one on strategy (ha

!) by the Federal Board.

Let's start with that. Prepare yourself. Are you sitting down? It begins with the radical idea that "Conference re-asserts the central importance of having a clear strategy for success in the term of this parliament". So what's the strategy? "Secure the election of as many Liberal Democrats as possible".

There's an idea. It goes on (no, really). We're going to achieve this by "Developing a compelling and distinctive political narrative about the power of a vote for the Liberal Democrats, with wide emotional as well as rational appeal to the electorate as a whole".

Sorry chaps. Saying we need a strategy isn't a strategy. Saying we need a narrative isn't a narrative. Worst of all, we've proved over and over again that trying to appeal to "the electorate as a whole" leaves us flat on our faces. Here's a thought. How about working out which parts of the electorate are most likely to respond favourably to Liberal ideas and appealing to them? How about stopping trying to be all things to all people and actually stand for something people can recognise, you know a narrative?

No, these so-called strategists know how we're going to do it. They say so, by "Demonstrating electoral success at all levels and in all parts of the country". Well, that's the strategy sorted then. Oh yes, the 'strategy' does call for the removal of the Tory government but fails to address the issue of working with other parties. Perhaps it was too difficult or a bit controversial. Couldn't have conference representatives arguing about that, even for three minutes.

Let's take a look at the narrative. Two motions attempt something, F22 optimistically entitled "What Liberal Democrats believe" and F24 "A fairer, Greener, More Caring Society" which sets out policy priority themes.

Neither are wrong, they touch all the key buttons, use all the popular buzz-words but a narrative they ain't.

They are lists of things we believe. Many of these most if not all people believe. Perhaps that serves the purpose of appealing to the whole electorate. What is lacking is a clear sense of why these items belong together, why they belong to the Liberal Democrats rather than anyone else.

A good test of any political statement is to spell out the opposite and see if anyone could support that. If not, you're just spouting motherhood and apple pie.

I used to have to read a lot of very long draft EU directives. These don't spring from rapacious, power-mad European Commissioners as brexiteers believe. Every directive begins with recitals, which quote relevant bits of EU treaties where member-states have set out what they want to achieve. Every new law is grounded that way. Wouldn't it be great if we had, instead of a treaty, a Liberal Democrat narrative as the ground for every policy. Not good enough to say "This is on the list", "This is a neat idea". If we don't know the ground of our policies, how can we expect the

"The online conference is like a series of lost individuals crying in the wilderness, in the desperate hope that someone out there is listening"

electorate (whole or part) to?

So here's a quick analysis of this Autumn's agenda. Two motions are on green subjects and four more have green references, but are they substantially different from what the Green Party or even Labour would say? Perhaps in detail. The level of detail is excellent. One motion is specifically about the European Union (F44 "Rebuilding our Cultural,

Artistic and Educational ties with Europe") and actually mentions that we want to rejoin some day.

Six others reference the results of Brexit and say we should work more closely with the EU, although surprisingly F35 on International Trade doesn't spell out how much better our global trade was when we were in the EU.

CLAPHAM OMNIBUS

No less than 13 motions set out how the government has failed. Imagine the voter on the Clapham Omnibus. The bus is slow and the poor passenger has nothing better to do than read through our agenda or perhaps a newspaper report, in the unlikely event that any newspaper bothers. What does he think we are about? Well – green, pro-EU and anti-Tory government. So that's it. I checked every motion for a clear statement why the policy proposed was Liberal Democrat. I found two mentions of rights of individuals (including some new ones), two citations of the preamble to the constitution, one reference to spreading power and one to loosely worded universal principles. Five other motions had shadowy hints of Liberal ideas if you were already familiar with them and knew where to look.

Do I sound despondent, cynical? I'm sorry. The lousy August weather and a bad attack of gout may have depressed me. Nevertheless, in the clear light of September's sunshine and with no gout ("Chacun à son gout") I do think conference has lost its emotional and rational appeal to me and, I daresay, the whole electorate.

I recognise the good will and hard work of the people so few of us bother to elect, but their best efforts have produced a collection of competent, good policies (sorry, no space to cover Federal Britain, Israel, Carbon Tax or digital human rights) but no strategy worth the name and no narrative at all.

F22 "What Liberal Democrats believe" talks of the "rich diversity of Liberal Democrat philosophy".

Sorry, not good enough. What is the fundamental unity and can we start telling people what it is and why it matters to them. I do applaud (you can't hear it) the motion for encouraging party members to discuss and debate this paper but it also invites members to produce their own statements of philosophy. Maoist and admirable. Let a thousand flowers bloom but in the end, we will need to show why they all belong in the same garden.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

CARING ENOUGH TO PAY

The pandemic laid bare the funding crisis in social care but will any party be brave over the cost of it, asks Claire Tyler

Largely unnoticed by most people, the social care sector has been edging towards crisis for years as a result of chronic under-funding, neglect, lack of awareness of what the sector does and how it is organised and, above all, politicians putting it in the “all too difficult box”.

Despite 12 Green and White Papers and five independent commissions over the last 20 years, successive governments have ducked the challenge of social care resulting in untold misery for millions.

Famously, on becoming prime minister in 2019, Boris Johnson proclaimed on the steps of Downing Street that he would “fix the crisis in social care once and for all” and promised to introduce legislation that year.

Despite various tantalising hints and rumours no such plans have been forthcoming. At the time of writing it is being trailed very strongly in the media that plans will be published, with tentative funding proposals already sending many Tory MPs into convulsions. Are we really about to see something? By the time of publication we should know.

CRUELLY EXPOSED

The pandemic has cruelly exposed the plight of those dependant on social care. The total number of deaths of care home residents due to Covid-19 in England and Wales is estimated at well over 40,000 and this is likely to be an underestimate. The NHS provides free care for all based on need but there is no equivalent care service for families to turn to when they or their loved ones need help, causing untold heartache.

The cost of inaction is falling on the shoulders of the 11.5m unpaid carers in the UK – some of them aged 80 and above, whose contribution the current social care system almost completely ignores despite the fact they are the only thing stopping the system from complete collapse.

Partly due to Covid-19, this national scandal is no longer hidden from view but something I sense the country increasingly understands and feels is grossly unfair.

Part of the problem is the way in which this debate is invariably framed – particularly by Johnson and co – as being all about avoiding making people sell their homes to pay for care.

In reality, it's about so much more than that. It's not just the elderly who are affected. Younger disabled adults make up around half the costs of the adult social care budget and generally don't own their own homes.

The stark truth is that the NHS provides insurance against the costs of health care, paid for primarily through taxes. But for social care, there is currently no way for individuals to insure themselves, thereby pooling risks across the population. The absence of this protection is a glaring gap in our welfare system.

The problems facing the sector are myriad and

include that despite spiralling demand, particularly due to an ageing population, spending is lower than 10 years ago due mainly to central government funding cuts leading to big reductions in local authorities' spending on public services. Government funding for local authorities fell by 55% in the decade between 2010-20.

The means tested system with a high threshold for care results in many people who need care being unable to qualify for support either in their own homes or in a care home. In a recently published survey, England's directors of adult social services reported almost 75,000 disabled and older people and carers waiting for help with their care and support as social services struggles to cope with soaring needs arising from the pandemic.

Age UK have estimated that more than 1.5m people are missing out on the care they need. This backlog of unmet need places a huge burden on the estimated 11.5m unpaid family carers, so often acting as the last bulwark against crisis care, but at a huge personal cost to their own health and wellbeing. Carers UK have also estimated that unpaid carers save the Treasury some £193bn a year.

Care homes have suffered badly during the pandemic which the Kings Fund think tank has described as having a “devastating impact” on the quality of care, despite some short term additional government funding provided through local authorities and the infection control fund. The costs of Covid-19 and the dramatic fall in care home occupancy, from around 90% at the start of the pandemic to 80% by February 2021, puts many providers at risk of failing.

Other problems are that fees vary considerably depending on geography and people who don't qualify for free care – ‘self funders’ in the jargon - end up cross-subsidising local authority funded residents; essentially they are propping up the whole care system by a form of stealth tax.

Finally, the vastly underpaid and undervalued workforce receive little or no training or professional development resulting in high levels of turnover and vacancies.

All of the above causes knock-on problems for the NHS, both in terms of increased admissions for those unable to look after themselves at home without care and support, and long delays in discharge from much needed hospital beds due to lack of social care provision in the community.

Addressing all this will require bold action and a strong political will. We need a comprehensive programme of reform for social care both now and in the future.

I believe that any reform programme should contain three key pillars:

☛ Shoring up a fragile and highly fragmented sector

reeling from the impact of the pandemic, increased costs and low occupancy rates with some care homes becoming increasingly financially unviable. Immediate funding is needed to improve the quality of care and introduce minimum standards for care homes.

- Individual funding, a 'cap' on individuals' social care costs – as proposed by the Dilnot Commission 10 years ago - alongside a more generous means test for access to publicly funded social care, would at least fix one of the social care system's big problems: the lack of protection for people and their families against potentially catastrophic care costs. The architecture for doing this already exists. Dilnot's proposals were put into legislation in 2014, with cross-party support. They have just never been implemented.
- Workforce development, we urgently need a new deal for the care workforce, with action on pay, training and development, career progression, professionalisation and recognition. In my view care staff who have given so much during the pandemic deserve to be paid well above the minimum wage.

In addition to the 'cap' a total reform package including investment to improve access to social care services, pay care workers decent wages and support providers to deliver high quality care is estimated by the Health Foundation to come out at around £12bn. To put this in context this represents about a month's NHS funding or 0.6% of GDP.

COMPLEX SECTOR

The sector is a complex one and little understood. There are approximately 15,000 homes in the UK with over 400,000 beds run by approximately 8,000 providers – some are very small; others provide a large network of homes. It is a mixed economy - 84% of homes are run by the private sector – including by private equity firms both British and offshore - 13% by not-for-profit organisations, and 3% by local authorities. Funding is a mix of private funders, local authority and NHS.

Despite this funding mix, care homes have been hit by a decade of cuts in social care funding. An investigation by the Financial Times in 2019 revealed how Britain's four largest privately-owned care home operators had racked up debts of £40,000 per bed meaning that their annual interest charges absorb eight weeks of average fees paid by local authorities on behalf of residents.

Many have argued that this debt laden model, which demands an unsustainable level of return while shipping out massive profits of 12% to 16% - often to tax havens - is completely inappropriate for social care. Do we really want our care homes owned by hedge funds and private equity firms?

So how will we pay for it?

If this pandemic has revealed one thing, it is that we can no longer "kick the can down the road" but should

"We should look for a solution through the prism of intergenerational fairness"

take advantage of the growing public and political consensus that social care should be free at the point of need, funded out of some form of taxation. The political 'hot potato' remains how it is paid for and who pays how much.

There are various ways of doing this including raising

the funding from general taxation, some form of hypothecated tax, national insurance or some other form of compulsory social insurance.

None are perfect and all will have their detractors as the Tories are currently finding out, particularly given their 2019 manifesto commitment not to raise national insurance, income tax or VAT. Reports that they are looking at a model where funding comes primarily from national insurance is already being heavily criticised for being regressive, falling disproportionately on the young and low paid.

I'm not about to propose a detailed model but want to suggest a few guiding principles which should help find a sustainable solution.

Primarily I believe we should look for a solution through the prism of intergenerational fairness in which all generations contribute, but no one generation is impacted unfairly. This will be vital to ensure a greater buy-in across the generations.

Any long term reform must also take into account the needs of working-age adults as well as older people. Many working-age disabled people don't own their own homes and have not been able to save for care costs.

Rather than relying simply on raising the money needed from general taxation, I would like to see a funding solution with some element of hypothecation – others are calling it a health and social care 'premium' or 'levy'. No-one likes paying more tax but I think that helps explain to people why the money is needed and the benefits they will receive. For Liberal Democrats it also echoes Paddy Ashdown's "extra penny on income tax for education" which was a distinctive and popular policy.

I also have considerable sympathy with the recommendation of the Barker Commission in 2014 that an additional percentage point of employees' national insurance contribution for those aged over 40 - raising some £2bn - could be earmarked for adult social care. This is similar to other ideas put forward for a new, mandatory system of Social Care Insurance Contributions from the over-40s. In my view this type of approach should be augmented by people over state pension age - who choose to continue to work - continuing to pay national insurance contributions. I can see no good reason for the over-65s who are earning ceasing to pay national insurance contributions.

Covid-19 has brutally exposed systemic weaknesses in our social care system. During the pandemic tens of thousands died before their time in care homes from Covid-19. The best possible legacy we can give all those who have lost loved ones would be to ensure that we fix the care system so that a similar tragedy cannot happen again.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords. This article was written prior to the Government announcement on social care funding

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK IN SUDAN

It's not just Afghanistan. Two years after Sudan's revolution, the Islamist old guard is fighting back and it's women who suffer most. Rebecca Tinsley reports

Sudan's nascent democracy is in danger. The former regime's old guard are reasserting themselves, accused of assaulting women who dare to walk the streets of Khartoum; undermining the fragile economy and stirring up ethnic clashes in Darfur. The struggle between secularists and Islamists which has hobbled Sudan for decades is back on the political agenda.

In 2019, a transitional government consisting of a joint military and civil council and a civilian-led cabinet took power after vast protests that ended Field Marshall Omer Bashir's dictatorship. Yet, two years later, the women who were at the heart of the demonstrations face pre-meditated physical attacks [<https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/sudan-s-women-flogged-in-public-by-young-men-inspired-by-violent-social-media-campaign-1.1215635>] as they claim their space in the new Sudan. Islamists and traditionalists are fighting back [<https://www.cmi.no/publications/7443-bring-back-the-public-order-lashings>] against progressive change, defending Taliban-like laws that punish women for seeking education and other opportunities. Meanwhile, a judge sentenced a 21-year-old to Islamist-era cross amputation of a foot and hand for stealing \$48. The previous regime's 1991 criminal code also allows crucifixion and stoning to death.

A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Women from the black African ethnic groups in the periphery have been the targets of rape, torture and murder for many years. But it is less usual for women identifying as Arab to face violence. Now, say non-Arab activists, they are tasting the persecution endured by non-Arab females in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile states.

Video [<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-blue-nile-activists-campaign-against-sexual-violence>] of a recent gang rape in Blue Nile was widely shared on social media as an explicit warning to women across the country not to demand equality.

Uniformed men, thought to belong to the Rapid Support Forces – the rebranded Janjaweed militia which killed as many as 400,000 Africans in Darfur – were filmed perpetrating the rape. The video is part of a series of reprisal attacks on women following the signing of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The new Sudan government has not yet ratified CEDAW and is asking for exemptions. Yet, even in its amended form, CEDAW is unacceptable to Islamists and other traditionalists from all ethnic backgrounds who defend and perpetrate violence against women.

The attacks are linked to calls to bring back the old regime's public order laws which punished thousands of women each year for vaguely-defined offences. Women's rights groups accused Islamists of using the law to deter women and girls from leaving their homes to seek education or work. In 2009 the case of Lubna Hussein gained notoriety when she was convicted of public indecency for wearing trousers, and jailed for six months. Amnesty reports that 40,000 to 50,000 women a year [<https://blog.amnestyusa.org/africa/arrested-and-beaten-for-wearing-trousers-stop-the-public-flogging-of-women-in-sudan/>] were arrested and whipped under the public order laws.

Sudan's 1991 Family Law [<https://www.cmi.no/publications/7276-covid-19-and-the-urgent-need-to-protect-sudanese-women-against-violence>] effectively legalises marital rape and domestic violence, assigning control of all women and girls to male guardians. According to strictly interpreted Islamic law, a four-year-old son or male cousin is considered the moral guardian of a grown female relative. The UN says that 88% of women [<https://www.unfpa.org/data/fgm/SD>] in Sudan have undergone female genital mutilation.

In a recent survey, 34% of Sudanese agree that men are justified in beating wives if they step outside the home without their permission, if they do not obey them, or if they decline to have sexual intercourse.

These attitudes are not restricted to the older generation. The public assaults on women have mainly been perpetrated by gangs of young men, cruising the streets in vehicles, spotting women whom they consider to be indecently dressed (in trousers, or without headscarves, hijabs or niqabs) and beating them before driving away. Bystanders are reported to offer no help or support to the women, and on occasion they applaud as women are whipped.

There have been hundreds of online messages from men expressing approval of the attacks.

Women led a series of peaceful protests in April calling for the abolition of discriminatory laws, and the adoption of international treaties and charters guaranteeing equal legal status. At one demonstration a man drove into the crowd, [<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudanese-women-protest-gender-discrimination-and-demand-legal-reform>] running over one woman and then physically assaulting several other protesters.

The Women's Cooperative Association of Khartoum has complained that the Ministry of Industry and Trade will not register a women's cooperative unless they have male members.

The transitional government is under pressure from the old guard on several other fronts. Elements from

the previous regime are alleged to be using targeted currency speculation [<https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/forex-speculators-arrested-in-sudan>] to undermine attempts to rescue the troubled economy. (Sudan's annual inflation rate reached 341% in March this year). Many of former president Bashir's officials and supporters had financial stakes in government-connected businesses that are now threatened with increased scrutiny.

Civil society groups have highlighted the continuing presence of Bashir-appointed judiciary in Sudan's legal system. In June, Moaz Abdel Majid Ismail, a 21-year-old man was sentenced to traditional 'huddud' punishment for stealing goods worth \$48. Hudud is the cross amputation of a hand and a foot. As recently as 2013, three Darfuris were sentenced to be crucified under the 1991 code, and two women were sentenced to be stoned to death in 2007. This puts the country in breach of international and regional treaties which Sudan has signed.

WOMEN FIGHTING BACK

In spite of the threats to their safety, women in Sudan are countering the traditionalist narrative. Sudanese diaspora members are also vocal. For instance, a UK-based group of Sudanese women's rights activists, co-convened by Waging Peace, the NGO I founded, came together weekly for nine weeks to find ways to help for the survivor of the Blue Nile rape and her family.

Fatima Bensouda, the retiring prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, recently visited Khartoum, adding impetus to efforts to extradite Ahmed Haroun, the former governor of South Kordofan, indicted for crimes against humanity and war crimes, and former president Bashir.

Ethnic tensions in the remote western region of Darfur have increased alarmingly, [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-57899843>] as UNAMID, the UN/African Union peacekeeping force, withdrew at the start of 2021. UNAMID sites have been sacked and looted, and there are concerns that armed anti-transitional government groups will step up attacks on civilians. The promised 20,000 Sudanese protection troops have not materialized.

The International Organization for Migration estimates that attacks on non-Arab groups led to 150,000 Darfuris fleeing their homes this year. Internally displaced people at the camps in El Geneina that I visited in 2004 at the height of the genocide still have no incentive to return home. As recently as last month, 20 were killed in El Geneina.

Khalid Omer Yousif, Sudan's Minister of Cabinet Affairs, argues that the revolution "ended the legitimacy of Islamists" and old regime loyalists. But, he concedes: "This is going to be a very long process and it must involve civil society and well as the

"Women's rights groups accused Islamists of using the law to deter women and girls from leaving their homes to seek education or work"

transitional government." Another advisor to the transitional government, speaking anonymously, says that those benefitting from the previous system will resist change because their wealth, social status and the status of their ethnic group is threatened. He appeals for the international community to use any leverage it can to support the transitional government.

Meanwhile, unfortunately, the Republic of South Sudan has little to celebrate as it marks 10 years since independence from the

north. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty express concern that government corruption is rampant, human rights are ignored, peaceful critics and opposition are detained and tortured, and leaders manipulate ethnic grievance to maintain their grip on power. An estimated 400,000 people out of a population of 11 million have died in the conflict that erupted in 2013.

The president, Salva Kiir (an ethnic Dinka) and his vice-president, Riek Machar (a Nuer) have deliberately provoked tribal clashes across South Sudan, each trying to gain political advantage.

Diplomats from America, South Sudan's most generous backer, express disgust at the personal greed of government officials and ministers, and their indifference to the suffering of their citizens. The Troika (the UK, USA and Norway) which have supported the world's newest nation, are reportedly frustrated by those in power in the capital Juba.

Attempts by civil society to highlight popular concerns have been met with violence. A peaceful demonstration, called for 30 August, had to be abandoned when the government promised to respond to any protest with bullets. Civil society leaders were rounded up, mildly critical think tanks have been closed, the internet was suspended prior to the march, and radios taken off air.

South Sudan is now used by dictators as a warning to disgruntled African minorities and movements seeking secession from repressive ruling elites. It is yet another example of what happens when the West loses interest in a country before the work of building legitimate and sustainable institutions is complete.

Rebecca Tinsley founded Waging Peace, an NGO supporting Sudanese asylum seekers. Her novel about Darfur, *When the Stars Fall to Earth*, is available on Amazon in English and Arabic

A LACK OF CARE FOR CARERS

Ed Davey has campaigned hard on support for those forced to become unpaid carers, but what happens when caring ends and they must re-enter the jobs market asks Susan Simmonds

As Liberals, we want people to have real choices about their lives and to be able to lead a good life.

If we want people to have a real choice about taking on unpaid caring roles and have as much autonomy and control over their lives as possible while they do it; then as a society we have to get more things right than we currently are.

Liberal Democrats have run some powerful campaigns, based on solid evidence and backed up with some profound personal stories, but I believe that we need a wider and more holistic approach and campaign on issues which also impact on carers, such as statutory services and improving the voluntary sector support available. Carers deserve good support while they care and that includes support after caring finishes.

Covid-19 has shone a very bright light into the lives of unpaid carers and the pressures they juggle every day; many services they were reliant on are not operating at full capacity, piling on additional stress.

UNDER-SUPPORTED AND IGNORED

This is not new; unpaid carers have been left under-supported and ignored for years, either because of lack of capacity to organise or because they are exhausted. Austerity cut and undermined council services and the funding of carers organisations, which diminishes the voices of carers badly.

Ed Davey introduced a private members bill to give unpaid carers more rights to flexible working and urged a dramatic shift in how we think about social care. And it is impossible to disagree with that statement. We absolutely cannot carry on as we are. And flexible working is important, particularly in giving unpaid carers choices about their lives, but I think we need to be bolder and more ambitious.

This means a great deal more understanding about why people become unpaid carers, how their life choices and chances are affected, how that impacts on the people being cared for and what happens when they stop being carers.

Once we understand that we can offer policies which make unpaid carers lives easier, more fulfilling and give them and the people they care more choices in the expectation that will deliver far better care.

And we must remember that carers are not a homogenous group. Caring ranges across physical and mental health and disability, and all combinations of those, for short and long term conditions, some chronic, some degenerative and some life limiting.

Some unpaid carers look after children and young people, others partners of their own generation and

others older people. Others again are young carers looking after parents or siblings.

For some conditions that unpaid carers manage there are excellent research and support groups that really empower unpaid carers and can provide advocacy and support. For others – particularly rarer conditions - there is less help. In some areas there are local authorities and voluntary sector organisations providing excellent services and support, in others less so.

Ideally this should look like unpaid carers being part of a team, working with paid carers and professionals, such as occupational therapists, to work effectively co-designing a care package to support the person concerned. I'm sure that in some places this exists, however it is not my experience.

This is where I declare an interest. I was the main carer for my mother until her death a couple of years ago. I gave up my wonderful job in Iraq and came home to nurse my mother who was seriously unwell.

The next few years were very difficult. – negotiating the care system which at times seemed to be focussed on caring for itself rather than my mother was very tough and utterly exhausting. No experience has changed me more profoundly.

I have never felt so powerless, un-listened to or unable to influence or change my mother's situation. I am used to working at a senior level, making things happen and implementing change. I have spent years advocating on behalf of people who felt powerless – for the first time I truly understood what it felt like.

I became a carer because I had little choice – the quality of care that my mother was offered was simply inadequate and unfit for purpose. Although my mother was intellectually capable, she was unable to stand up for herself against the bullying and poor service that was so prevalent around her and it was not reasonable to expect her to spend her days negotiating or coping with that.

The quality of some care was completely unfit for purpose, but there were also paid carers who were thoughtful, respectful and incredibly professional and a couple who were totally out of their depth but so very kind.

A few of the paid carers were severely undertrained, in two cases they were unable to communicate effectively with my mother due to inadequate English. One, once left her in bed half washed and naked because she was late for church, another - ignoring medical advice not to move her – dropped my mother and broke several bones in her hand; she is still working as a carer for the same agency despite a safeguarding process and not being honest about her

actions.

In a care home where my mother was recovering after a hip replacement, the unit was frighteningly understaffed, the food was inedible, days went past without adequate personal hygiene and she was losing weight rapidly. A later, privately funded respite break ended in a hospital stay after a few days because very basic care protocols had not been adhered to by staff.

Although all the home care was brokered by the local authority, (which meant we paid for services) never once did they ask for feedback about the quality of the care from their agency. Their annual survey asked questions about my mother's physical and emotional needs and how she felt about them, but never once asked for feedback about the impact of carers on our lives – timekeeping, training or the ability to empathise and communicate.

Each time I complained, I was told it was staff shortages and if I continued the agency would refuse to continue working with us and we would be 'blocked' and refused care.

As a carer, I received virtually no support from local organisations - again funded by the local authority. Their signposting was weak, and knowledge base either very low or not communicated effectively.

There are a great many organisations providing local services that they think are valuable and meet needs. If I had needed a course on assertiveness training or someone to listen, I would have been well served. My request for a manual handling course was met by the response that I needed to source one privately and my concerns about the local authority's breach of data protection regulations around my mother's finances was met with bewilderment followed by total lack of interest.

And the most damning of all statements – the hospital consultant who was responsible for my mother's palliative care told me that generally, they only ever saw people as frail as my mother if they were looked after by their families.

And after, the standard offer of bereavement counselling had been made and that was it.

For carers who want to return to employment – particularly after a significant gap - there are very negative perceptions. I once joked – not entirely in jest – that you get more support coming out of prison than unpaid carers get to pick up their lives again. I used to be chief executive of a charity working in prison education.

So, how do we ensure that unpaid carers have choices – to provide care, to get the support and to have good choices when their caring role ends?

Fundamentally, so much of the responsibility for ensuring that carers have a quality of life falls on local authorities who are the gatekeepers to some services and often are the main funders of local carer groups.

How far this should be the case and the interface with the NHS is a serious area for policy making and discussion and this may change post pandemic.

I've read several "carers' strategies" produced by local authorities which fail to address the big strategic issues which face unpaid carers and instead focus on low cost solutions such as increasing volunteering, understanding that carers are under stress, promoting the benefits of befrienders and increasing digital awareness.

These can be important but do little to radically increase the quality of life for many unpaid carers, whose real need is for professional, well trained support, good and frequent respite and joined-up services across the health and social care services.

What is needed is more money - pure and simple. Even before Covid-19, there was serious underinvestment, and is now even more pressing.

The relationship between paid and unpaid carers is essential in ensuring the latter are able to make choices and have a quality of life. Whether that is providing good quality respite care or care provided in the client's home, it is the relationship which – outside NHS services – is the most critical.

Paid carers who are essential to support unpaid carers need a decent wage whoever employs them. Without realistic wages, good training and manageable hours, there will continue to be life-threatening shortages. There is potentially so much scope for paid carers to deliver so much more than basic hygiene and feeding.

Well trained carers - as an occupational therapist told me – could be part of a clients' rehabilitation, particularly after falls and strokes, which would be a really positive impact for unpaid carers.

There should also be structures to ensure agency care staff are treated well. I can give numerous examples from conversations with agency carers who were treated very poorly around training, wages and demanding hours – including a requirement that carers work seven days a week and fund their own training.

ALARMING STORIES

I also heard alarming stories of paid carers in totally inappropriate situations with clients and accounts of racism, with no way for complainants to take things forwards without losing their jobs. Sadly, tender conditions imposed by local authorities - which I've seen in other outsourced industries - seem unable to translate across to care agencies or maybe they are blatantly ignored.

Statutory assessments for unpaid carers under the Care Act 2014 sound good but are meaningless without financial investment to support to outcomes such as access to education, training, recreation and the opportunity for carers to have time to themselves with safe respite care. No unpaid carer should be told by their local authority that it isn't worth going through the process as there is no money.

Sadly, none of this feels encouraging in ensuring that unpaid carers either have a choice about how they care, are able to provide the best care or are being supported and enabled in their choices.

My conversations with other unpaid carers suggest there are other stories which are shocking, distressing and equally difficult to justify. For becoming an unpaid carer to become a choice, as opposed to a decision based on failures of statutory services, the quality of care and support absolutely has to improve.

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DARE TO DO SOMETHING POPULAR

Universal Basic Income could arm the Liberal Democrats with a radical policy that would tackle poverty. The party's paper on this suggests losing this opportunity through excess caution, says Alan Sherwell

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a radical policy that, if introduced properly, could eliminate nearly all poverty.

Unusually for an economic policy, it has support from economists on the left and the right and, therefore, a consensus could be established if it were better understood and it is a potential vote winner if well explained. This paper to be presented at the Lib Dem conference [<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/libdems/pages/1811/attachments/original/1621669347/145 - Universal Basic Income.docx %281%29.pdf?1621669347>] is a welcome attempt to put flesh on the bones of the in-principle decision the party took last autumn.

As a party we need to identify and rebut possible attacks on our policies and deploy arguments to defuse those attacks and promote them successfully. It would help if the government used a definition of poverty based on absolute financial need and not a proportion of average wages.

WHOLLY UNJUSTIFIABLE

Either way it is undoubtedly true there is a level of poverty in the UK which is wholly unjustifiable in one of the richest countries. Thus the paper is right to open by detailing the failings of the current benefits system.

That people in full time work can be in poverty is absurd and the numbers that are is disgraceful. The paper is right that poverty limits choice and trust in society. It can also have a seriously damaging effect on mental health. It cannot be eliminated by simply increasing the minimum wage, although enforcing it more effectively would help.

The paper rightly says that UBI can help address these problems – I would go further – it is the only economic device that I have heard of that can pretty much cure them and, in doing so, it would eliminate the unfairness of the benefits system and the horrendous (and expensive) bureaucracy associated with it.

However, the paper does not seem to recognise that, to work effectively, the rate of UBI must be high enough that individual benefits and the associated assessment system can be abolished, bringing a saving that helps meet the cost. Nor does it recognise, as trials have shown, it can significantly improve mental health, which also indirectly reduces costs.

It is an avowedly Liberal policy, as the paper says although it also has much support on the left and from

parts of the right – Milton Friedman was a fan.

It rightly says it is an individual payment rather than a household one. This means that all individuals benefit equally, which particularly helps women.

More concerning is the statement that there is a need to continue means tested benefits and the Lib Dem suggested improvements to them. Of course, if UBI is introduced at a relatively modest level other benefits can only be phased out as it is phased in.

But, at the very least, we must commit to that phasing out. The provision of income without essentially arbitrary and often maladministered tests gives back dignity to the claimants and is one of its strongest arguments for the policy. Also, we need the savings that scrapping these benefits will give.

The one exception, and here I agree with the paper, is for people with disabilities. They have costs that the rest of the population do not and it would be wrong (and probably impractical) to set a level of UBI that sought to take those into account.

The paper also seeks to exclude housing benefit because of the significant variation of costs across the country. I see no easy answer and it seems so complex an issue that it merits detailed discussion in its own right.

It also suggests that non-citizens should only be excluded in the short term. The end position should be that anyone who is liable for income tax (should their pay be high enough) and is resident in the UK should receive UBI. Citizens living abroad should not.

The major difficulty that I see is the proposal that it should be funded by reducing the income tax personal allowance to £2,500.

Some have argued that this would be politically unacceptable. I don't agree with that. A basic rate payer would be taxed £2,014 more but gain just over £2,600 in UBI. So, anyone earning under £40,000 would still profit. The problem is that the £11.50 a week that they would get is not enough to make a material difference and would achieve none of the aims of UBI for anyone in work. It is Lib Dem policy to raise the allowance further under the current system which re-enforces the view that this payment mechanism is simply wrong as it is only marginally progressive.

We can forego further increases (even due to inflation) in the personal allowance if UBI, even at the low introductory rate, is introduced but someone on £12,000 a year having the same tax increase as someone on £40,000 cannot be right. If this is to be funded through income tax, then it is far more progressive to increase the basic and higher rates of

tax marginally and perhaps somewhat reduce the threshold for the latter than to have this flat rate tax increase for all basic rate payers.

The paper asks a number of questions. The first is whether “our approach of focusing on UBI as a working-age benefit an appropriate one”?

If this means that UBI should not be available to pensioners, then I believe that it is wrong. We have the lowest state pension in Western Europe and the lowest average level of pensioner income.

The pension system does need a complete review. That is reasonably too much for this paper but, ideally, UBI would be a life long payment and child benefit and pensions would be part of the same system (although not necessarily at the same rate).

A fully fledged UBI would eliminate child benefit. There would be a dividing line at 18. Below that a benefit should be payable for every child but the rate would likely be age dependent and it would go the parent/carer.

From the 18th birthday that benefit ceases and UBI should become available to everyone including students and unemployed. Indeed, it is particularly desirable that students are eligible. The two things that most deter working class applicants from university are the belief that “that sort of thing is not for me” and the cost of actually living at university for three years. Fees are a distant third only repayable when you are earning a reasonable salary and then on a sliding scale. UBI at the rate proposed in the paper is not enough to solve the ‘maintenance’ problem but it would certainly ameliorate it.

The second question is “based on the above analysis, at what level do you think we should set an introductory Universal Basic Income scheme”?

CRUCIAL QUESTION

This is the crucial question. The eventual policy must be able to withstand the inevitable attacks on it even though those will most likely be based on incorrect assumptions.

The tension is that the lower the UBI payment, the less it provides financial security, social change or cost savings from simplifying or eliminating benefits.

In other words, the cost of introduction is relatively low but the benefits - why most advocates of UBI favour it - are not visible either. On the other hand, the higher it is, the more it costs although that is to some extent mitigated by getting rid of other benefits and, more importantly, the cost (both social and financial) of administering them, which a lower level does not allow. The other hidden benefit is that, when people on low incomes get more money, they generally spend it. In the USA, monthly relief payments have been made across the board due to Covid-19 and have had a massively beneficial economic impact. This spending also brings in revenue through VAT, corporation tax etc.

Where to start is a question of practicality rather than philosophy. The proposed gradual introduction is probably right. Having said that, the proposed rate is too low for many of the desirable objectives of the policy to begin to be visible. It is also undoubtedly true, as the paper says, that “Running the two systems alongside one another for these levels of basic income thereby makes the scheme significantly more distributionally progressive compared to models we

examined that abolished rates of Universal Credit but did not improve income levels for current claimants.” However, we need an assurance that the levels will increase to enable that abolition.

The third question is: “Given that the recommended scheme does not in and of itself provide the entirety of a person’s income, should we frame it as an introductory rate universal basic income as presented here, or are there better options for how we should refer to this proposal?”

It is essential that it is presented as an introductory rate. UBI should simplify not complicate. So not just universal credit but also things like free school meals should also go and that can’t happen at £50 a week.

Fourthly, “do you agree that HMRC is the appropriate body to administer a UBI?” If the policy is that those eligible to pay tax get UBI then HMRC has all the records that are necessary to implement UBI.

Question five asks: “Are there additional deployment issues we need to cover within this paper? Are there impacts on specific groups or protected characteristics that we have not fully considered regarding deployment?”

Some citizens need additional income because of particular circumstances; most obviously disability. It would be wrong to complicate UBI by having an assessable disability payment as part of it. That means that disability benefit would have to continue in some form but that process would be a good deal less fraught if that disabled person was getting UBI as a right to start with and was not relying on disability benefit for all their income.

Question six asks: “Should we propose specific medium or long term targets for expanding UBI, such as suggesting that it should eventually reach rates sufficient to taper out the couples, or the higher individual, rates of universal credit?”

UBI is not achieving its potential if it does not allow for Universal Credit to be abolished. The concept of couples becomes irrelevant as all adult members of a household receive UBI personally as of right.

Question seven is: “Should we propose that medium-term targets for expanding UBI be legislated for, or left as matters for further work after implementation?”

The two arguments for introducing UBI at a relatively low rate are to test the system to work out flaws and to make it easier to gain electoral credibility.

If that is a reasonable approach then legislating for medium term targets is somewhat counter intuitive. Practically, once a UBI has been introduced, it is difficult to see how it would be possible electorally to take it away again. Also, no Parliament can bind its successor. So, I doubt that there is much point in legislating for future goals. What is important is a firm commitment to moving to a rate of UBI that eliminates poverty and most benefits.

The last question is: “Should we propose that in future, we should work towards rolling pensions and child benefits into the UBI?” Yes.

Alan Sherwell is a former chair of the Liberal Democrat Federal Conference Committee

TIME UP FOR THE UK?

Tensions could pull the UK apart but federalism should offer a liberal way to keep it together, says Robert Brown

It is not too much to say that the future of the United Kingdom is at risk as never before.

The social, economic and political pressures of imperial decline, globalism, the clay feet of our elites, separatist pressures and Brexit have cracked the ageing fabric of the 'mother of democracies'.

Like a majestic bridge whose engineers have made insufficient allowance for wind stress, the British constitution has proven inadequate to the strain. The amorality of the awful Johnson government may prove to be the last straw.

Scotland and Wales feel alienated from Westminster. So, increasingly, do the regions of England. UK democracy is long overdue a thorough political and constitutional renewal.

REVERSING DECAY

Democratic decay cannot be reversed just by structures – it requires the "spirit of a free people" spawning leaders and political programmes to match the needs of the day, political parties prepared to inspire, lead and change society.

But robust political structures help – a civil service with an overriding ethic of the public interest, a Supreme Court empowered by the constitution to keep government honest – and, above all, federal structures to share and delimit government power.

But federalism also involves a place for diverse voices across the country which are squeezed out or diminished in states which hoard power at the centre. We have seen in Britain that a too powerful central government is dangerous to democracy and the freedom of the people.

A reformed federal UK may well be the only way of securing its future against the twin threats of populist centralism and separatist nationalisms. We need though to translate what it means into language and concepts that resonate with people.

Most people are proud of their country. They want to see us leading the world, not in terms of how much of the map is coloured pink, or in how many wars in the Middle East we get unto, but in the quality of our national life and our international contribution - our adherence to the rule of law, the reputation of our universities, the harmony of our society, the contributions we make to research and things which benefit humanity, our strength in delivering substantial and effective overseas aid, our commitment to building peace, defusing tension and helping to provide a common citizenship of the world for all people.

Many Commonwealth countries are federal in nature including Canada, Australia, India and South Africa. More people are beginning to view a federal UK as the most attractive model for constitutional reform – one which provides the strongest basis on which a new, dynamic, Liberal view of our country can be constructed.

In September 2020, the Federal Party passed motion The Creation of a Federal United Kingdom which called for: a United Kingdom Constitutional Convention; a declaration of federal union to be endorsed by Westminster and the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; a declaration of rights; STV for election to the House of Commons; the replacement of the Lords by a Senate representing the nations and regions of Britain.

The motion, sponsored by my local party of Rutherglen & Hamilton West, also made important proposals to strengthen the UK – A United Kingdom Council of Ministers; UK institutions remodelled to serve all the governments and parliaments of the UK; subsidiarity so that the UK Government could not legislate without their consent in areas of responsibility of the federal states or provinces.

This stuff is important - a balanced UK needs a relationship of equals - whereas at present the UK Government either thinks it can barge on regardless or forgets about the devolved Governments altogether. We need institutional arrangements to require them to act federally.

Following on the 2020 Motion, the Federal Policy Committee set up a group to look at how federalism should be developed in England which has now produced a background paper and a motion for the 2021 autumn conference. The key question is whether England should itself be a federal state within the UK or whether the English regions should be the federal states.

Yet federalism is the Liberal dog that hasn't barked! It should be an integral part of our narrative and our campaign, both at a Scottish and federal party level. It ticks all the Liberal boxes; it is an alternative to SNP nationalism.

A federal UK should be both identified with the Liberal Democrats and an aspiration around which a broad coalition can be constructed. In the Labour party, people like Gordon Brown and Keir Starmer – and above all Mark Drakeford, the first minister of Wales – have talked in federalist language; one of the most significant academic contributions was made by David Melding, until 2021 a Conservative member of the Welsh Senedd. We now see metropolitan mayors like Andy Burnham as genuine regional spokespeople while city deals and northern powerhouses give voice to growing regional sentiment in England.

It is high time we made ourselves again the champions of federal and constitutional reform – a renewed United Kingdom, once again a leader in liberal democracy.

If a federal United Kingdom is to gain political traction, it requires a compelling narrative which encompasses answers to popular alienation from our democracy.

A new United Kingdom is one which is based on respect and status for the nations and regions, partnership, and a renewed focus on delivering for people and restoring the public interest in government. The issue is not basically one of structure but of political trust and ethos.

Federalism is the 'conservative' option – it guarantees the future of the UK, it is pro-UK, it doesn't involve the disruption of separation or Brexit, it avoids a huge constitutional wrangle because it goes with the flow, it can be done in stages, it provides a realistic option for getting rid of the Tories, it can potentially unite people not divide them.

A federal solution enhances Scotland's influence more than independence – allowing sensible alliances with the east of England and the south west on, say fishing, or with the north east and west midlands against London dominance. This might for example change the approach to HS2, the BBC or regional development.

It provides a firm constitutional framework for dual loyalty to the UK and to its nations and regions and could attract a significant number of people currently attracted to independence.

It could create the potential to offset the excessive concentration of economic, financial, political and cultural capital in London - as well as empowering Londoners as citizens of one of the world's greatest cities.

A major strength of federalism is that it enhances the standing of national and regional centres across Britain – Bristol, Manchester and Newcastle for example as well as Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast.

Further, in a federal UK, Westminster does not arbitrarily trump all others - each level is sovereign within its prescribed sphere of competence whilst fundamental provisions of the constitution require consent from both levels of government.

BIG BANG

A federal UK is a big project which is more likely to be achieved in stages than with a big bang – it needs a reform government committed to federalism. So we should give some attention to staging posts that give the process traction. The key ones are likely to be – a declaration of federal union; the establishment of a powerful UK Constitutional Convention to develop and implement it; the introduction of proportional representation for the House of Commons; and changing the House of Lords into a federal Senate.

Wholesale interference with the Lords is politically difficult, as we know to our cost. However replacing the Lords by a federal Senate should be one of the key moves – a Senate of around 200 members elected or appointed across the UK nations and regions to act as a revising chamber as at present but with a new role to represent the voice of the nations and regions in federal affairs.

“A too powerful central government is dangerous to democracy and the freedom of the people”

Currently Liberal Democrats are the sole political champions of a federal UK. Building traction depends on weaving ongoing events into a narrative that supports federalism and partnership rather than the divisions of nationalism – and in which the Liberal Democrats are growing in strength and are seen to be tapping into a reservoir of support.

Credibility also depends on the political context – whether the media and public believe the SNP and the Conservatives can be beaten and removed from office. We need a narrative as to how this might be done and what form potential alternative governments might take.

First there is the UK route via a UK Constitutional Convention. It is not impossible that the prime minister might consider this as a way round problems over a putative Scottish referendum. It is more likely to be a commitment agreed by opposition parties if they jointly win next time.

Secondly there is a Scottish route where the Scottish Government, frustrated on the referendum question, is able to pressure the UK government into some sort of constitutional conference. This seems unlikely but Scottish Liberal Democrats would have a variety of campaign opportunities to argue the case.

Thirdly there is a Welsh route, possibly the most interesting of all. The first minister of Wales is not a separatist but has spoken clearly about the need for a reformed UK in which Wales has enhanced position and identity. An initiative by the Welsh government could be powerful and again should provide opportunities for Welsh Liberal Democrats.

Finally there is an English route where Westminster's shortcomings become even more evident, the demand for decentralisation grows and Liberal Democrats in the English regions can enhance their credibility by a wholehearted commitment to regional empowerment and autonomy.

Ultimately, though a perfect federal UK constitution would be no use unless our citizens have a solid loyalty to the UK and the institutions of the state. Our fractured UK needs reform based on uniting our country not dividing it.

Such an approach gives a compelling reason to vote Liberal Democrat to people who believe, for example, that being Scottish and being British are parallel identities not stark binary alternatives – a campaigning vote winner, with people saying that federalism is a sensible and viable option and reaching a wider audience than our own normal party support.

Robert Brown was Liberal Democrat MSP for Glasgow and a former minister. He is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on South Lanarkshire Council and served on the recent Lib Dem working group on federalism in England

GREEN CARROTS

Can the fad for behavioural science help with the damage of climate change and Brexit, wonders Geoff Reid

Behavioural sciences as an academic discipline emerged in the first quarter of the twentieth century. I seem to have lived most of my life without noticing those engaged in it. I remember a frightening lecture at my theological college in the 1960s which dealt with Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders*, but he was not so much a scientist as a popularising journalist and I admit to not reading any of his subsequent works.

However one of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic is an increase in awareness of various experts whose work we may not have thought about much hitherto.

Just as young children can now use the word "unprecedented," we have learned that there are people called behavioural scientists advising the government about carrots and sticks and others of their ilk on the sidelines offering advice for free. This is particularly relevant to attempts to get an increase in vaccine take-up.

One of the rare benevolent effects of the pandemic is that the crisis forces us to think about elements of our common life that we may not have thought about before - always a healthy process.

When the COP26 talks about the climate emergency are held in Glasgow in November the world will still be suffering the pandemic crisis and some will point to links between the two. Since both involve changes in personal behaviour and mega-political changes, will the behavioural scientists get a look-in there?

Before writing the above I had returned from a visit to our local waste tip. I was intimidated for much of my journey home by drivers who seemed to think that 30 mph is for wimps. How do you change that behaviour? Which carrots and which sticks need to come into play?

That led me to some irreverent thoughts on going greener. We have to drastically reduce car use, especially in urban areas. I believe free bus travel for all must ultimately be part of that. Before I gained my bus pass and senior railcard, I was already reducing my car mileage as I tried to identify journeys inappropriate for car travel. However the bus pass has been an almighty carrot and I have gone much further down that road. That prompts the nagging thought that the more the responsible drivers reduce their mileage or give up their cars altogether there will be a greater proportion of drivers on our roads who come into the irresponsible category. Can the behavioural scientists help us through that one please?

While I cheerfully exploit a bus into town running every 10 minutes through the day, I recognise that badly maintained buses, often with dirty windows, are not going to gain new users easily. One bus company in Yorkshire which has returned to pre-Covid levels of patronage while improving services is Transdev. They are big in Keighley and Harrogate and run services into Leeds and Bradford. They succeed by being attentive to bus users and are rewarded by passenger behaviour.

Their experience and enthusiasm could usefully feed into a public transport framework that really does get people out of their cars. Meanwhile our rail network looks unlikely to return to the discredited pre-Covid franchise model and fresh thinking is desperately needed on that front.

One of the difficulties of formulating policy in 2021 is that we have to keep two or three major crises inside our heads at the same time. Without minimising the seriousness of the other two, I suggest that the slow-burn crisis that is Brexit could be a candidate for number three. Some of the cultural and economic damage is already evident, not least in Northern Ireland.

The pandemic has given the government something of a smokescreen, whereas the chaos caused by Brexit has to be seen as additional to the damage arising from Covid. Brexit is a continuing crisis for both the United Kingdom and the European Union and our national leaders are exacerbating it, not least in the language they use and the way they apportion blame for our woes.

A crisis can make it easier to think and say the unthinkable - free bus usage is probably in that column! It has become almost a cliché to compare human behaviour and the actions of politicians with the aftermath of two world wars. Before World War 2 came to an end, some leaders were already thinking about a new International order focussing on co-operation among rule-based democracies. Domestically Beveridge had already provided some impetus for social reform. As for 2021, when someone like William Hague declares that big government and state intervention are more than just a temporary expedient necessitated by Covid we should be in no doubt that the winds of change are blowing.

There has to be a cross-fertilisation of lessons learned from the pandemic and from the visible effects of climate change. I shudder to think how our government will respond to the necessity of serious international action in response to both. Perhaps the behavioural scientists can offer some suggestions about the relevant carrots and sticks!

Geoff Reid is a retired Methodist minister and a Liberal Democrat member of Bradford City Council.

The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment

by Michael Hunter
Yale 2019 £25

How do people make up their minds concerning important issues of their day, about which it is difficult to remain neutral? And how do beliefs and ideas that start off as marginal, and sometimes even dangerous, gradually become accepted as the norm? Hunter examines the ways in which educated people in Britain jettisoned belief in magic between approximately 1650 and 1750: in doing so, he provides a compelling and erudite account that shines light on the origins of the English Enlightenment, while teasing out the complex processes of intellectual change that underpins his study.

To appreciate the centrality of magic in pre-modern European societies, it is helpful to remember that life at that time had no scientific rationale: instead, human existence was understood in religious and occult terms. This was accentuated during the 15th century, with the Renaissance and the Reformations, which involved great revivals of magic and religion that in turn helped to set the context for the witch hunts of early modern Europe. This means that when doubt concerning magic really started to take root in the latter half of the 17th century, those at the vanguard had to challenge a number of prevailing orthodoxies.

Hunter has devoted much of his prolific output to both the study of Robert Boyle, England's preeminent scientist before Sir Isaac Newton, and the early Royal Society. Both feature a lot in this book. But for any reader expecting to hear that it was the scientists of the Restoration who abandoned magic in favour of science, and that everyone else then followed suit, a surprise is in store.

As Hunter explains, Boyle was a deeply religious man who gave magic a lot of thought: the problem was that by implication the rejection of phenomenon such as spells, witches, astrology, and second sight called into question the supernatural events of the Bible, especially miracles wrought by Christ. For Boyle and many of his peers, scepticism of magic was perilous because it led to atheism.



REVIEWS

Yet some of the fellows of the Royal Society were uncertain of magic, so the organisation solved this thorny problem by adopting a corporate silence on the matter. It conducted no experiments into magic, which only later in the 18th century was misinterpreted as disbelief.

But in some quarters the supernatural was derided at this time. As Hunter explains, it wasn't the scientists who mocked it, rather it was the wits and freethinkers who patronised the coffee houses. Iconoclastic young men who had grown up during the Civil War and Interregnum and seen authority challenged on an unprecedented scale, the wits had read Hobbes.

Key targets for the wits were magic and priestcraft, both of which were mocked for relying on the ignorance and credulity of the people, it was argued. Thus the wits were tarnished as irreligious, provoking an orthodox backlash in the form of earnest books arguing for the reality of the supernatural realm and denouncing the wits as atheists and libertines.

Joseph Glanvill's *Saducimus Triumphatus* (1681) is particularly noteworthy in this regard. Initially, this rearguard action made the wits' heterodox opinions too dangerous for much of the reading public, a development that delayed the broader reception and acceptance of anti-magical views. It took the mechanical philosophy, deism, and especially Newtonian science to make such ideas safe enough for educated people to accept them.

Hence by the 1730s there was a consensus that the universe operated according to a set of laws, while God had receded from being omnipresent to a more distant, non-interventionist deity. All this rendered magic too capricious, something that just did not fit into the new world view. Consequently, doctors began to pathologise witches as mentally ill, ghosts were relegated to children's tales, and the Hanoverian monarchs had no

need of a Dr John Dee to provide them with astrological advice.

Hunter's book weaves a gripping account, with chapters forming case studies on important themes including the notorious poltergeist case of the 1660s, *The Drummer of Tedworth*; the ambivalence of the Royal Society; the changing views of medical men; and second sight in the Highlands of Scotland.

The methodology of the book is particularly noteworthy for its investigation of the ideas of the wits and freethinkers, the bulk of which were expressed orally before 1690s, as committing them to print was too hazardous. This means that a lot of the anti-magical ideas are accessed at one remove, in pamphlets that describe coffee-houses and denounce their irreligious patrons, and in the weightier tomes of men such as Glanvill. Despite the obvious bias of the apologists for magic and the supernatural aspects of Christianity, they coalesce in their attack on free thinking. The wits are castigated for having too much confidence and not enough education, and for being dissolute characters on a high road to atheism. Inadvertently, the apologists allow us access to new heterodox ideas of the Restoration that otherwise would be almost lost to us, and so we should be grateful to the likes of Glanvill.

We must end on a sobering thought, however. Key issues such as whether magic was real or a con trick, and whether its practitioners were authentic or deluded, and the intellectual ramifications of such views, were hotly debated.

Yet as Hunter observes, in reality it was a dialogue of the deaf. "People just made up their minds and then grasped at arguments to substantiate their preconceived ideas, with a new generation simply rejecting out of hand the commonplaces of the old" (p. 46). Discussing the poltergeist *Drummer of Tedworth*, Hunter explains: "It really does seem as if it was a predisposition to believe

or to disbelieve, rather than any decisive piece of evidence, that was fundamental to dictating people's response to what occurred" (p.120).

Despite this being the beginning of the Age of Reason, there is a noticeable lack of evidence of people weighing up both sides and then making up their minds or changing them. This is revealing, not just as a theory of intellectual change, but for readers who like their history to appear particularly relevant to its time of publication. Current debates in the UK include the furore over Brexit, and the extent to which the government's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic has been disastrous. Do we examine both sides and make informed decisions based on the strongest evidence, or are we already committed to one side from the very beginning? And what constitutes reliable evidence?

Returning to the Restoration, for those who believed in the supernatural, the ghostly Drummer of Tedworth was proof enough in itself; for doubters, it was a hoax even though no evidence was forthcoming to support this, despite the whole house being searched more than once and floorboards taken up. One is left wondering if Hunter's readable and meticulous book on early modern England has put its finger on a human quality that transcends any given period.

Stephen Brogan

Julian at the Wedding by Jessica Love Walker 2020 £12.99

Our friend Julian reappears, this time, going to a wedding with his friend Marisol and the brides' dog Gloria this time, who leads them astray but all is well in the end. The colour is exceptional.

The following points are only important for their absence from the mainstream, though I'm happy to have reviewed a growing number of children's books where the main character(s) aren't white and the ambience isn't heterosexual; obviously Julian's Nana is older, but this book depicts age positively. I apologise this might be mistaken for political correctness, another prejudice to be overcome. Buy this book; buy Julian is a Mermaid if you haven't done so already.

Stewart Rayment

Summer of Soul (film) 2021 Questlove (dir)

How could an event featuring several dozen of the world's most famous musicians and attended by hundreds of thousands of people be filmed in its entirety and still immediately vanish from public view?

The answer is that the Harlem Cultural Festival - despite later being described as the 'Black Woodstock' - clashed with the actual Woodstock and no-one outside the black community was interested.

Now, 52 years later, the footage has been disinterred and put together in a film that roots the event in the political context of 1969.

Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy had both recently been assassinated, riots had engulfed Harlem and other inner cities and deep mistrust existed between the black community and the police (and indeed still does).

Harlem entrepreneur Tony Lawrence conceived the series of free outdoor concerts that would make up the festival as a way to bring the black community together, but to get it staged he needed heavyweight political backing.

This came from New York's mayor John Lindsay - a liberal Republican of a political breed that no longer exists - who was well regarded among black residents.

There is ample footage given over to performance interspersed with the history and politics, which is interesting but often done in rather abrupt jump-cuts that made it hard to take in one point before the next flashes up.

Almost everyone living or dead who appears remains famous among music fans, which gives an idea of the calibre of the festival, including BB King, Mahalia Jackson, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Hugh Masekela and the Staples Singers. The only act I noted as completely forgotten was the Chambers Brothers.

Oddly though Motown, America's most famous black-run label, is represented only by Steve Wonder and - briefly - David Ruffin.

The film shows the music and presentation changing almost before our eyes. In one of numerous recollections by audience members

who were there at the time, one notes that black musical groups in the 1960s were usually four men in matching suits and ties singing conventional soul with coordinated dance steps.

There's plenty of that, but also a stir caused by the musically uncatégorisable Sly and the Family Stone dressed in psychedelic finery and including - unusually for the time - two white musicians and two black women as instrumentalists rather than singers.

Looking around audience shots there is a scattering of white faces - including a hilariously out of place TV reporter trying to discuss the simultaneous moon landing with audience members far more concerned with the music - but this was overwhelmingly a black community that felt oppressed creating something for itself. More than 50 years later, with George Floyd and Black Lives Matter, not so much has changed.

Mark Smulian

A Modest Man (play) by Francis Beckett

Pandemic restrictions have hit fringe theatre hard and this play has only just been revived at Highgate's Gatehouse Theatre after a brief appearance in late 2019.

The title refers to the quote - sometimes attributed to Winston Churchill - that Clement Attlee was "a modest man with much to be modest about". Attlee was modest, but he surprised both friend and foe with the range of reforms his government brought in.

He is best remembered now for the creation of the NHS, the welfare state - with ideas largely borrowed from the Liberal William Beveridge - and, less creditably, the British 'independent' nuclear bomb.

Beckett, a journalist and political historian, is concerned here with how this restrained, mild-mannered, laconic and frugal man succeed in managing the bunch of talented but ambitious and treacherous ministers who made up his cabinet, many of whom didn't really believe that a government led by someone like Attlee would ever accomplish much.

We see Attlee doing this by an iron resolve and refusal to be diverted from what he thought was right once this mind was made up.

It several times shows

him politely listening to the expostulations of ministers devious Herbert Morrison, passionate Aneurin Bevan and posh and two-faced Hugh Dalton and then equally politely ignoring them and continuing his course.

Everyone plays several parts and Beckett gets many laughs from Attlee's deadpan responses to colleagues and circumstances.

Attlee was a public school educated Tory when he went to London's East End before World War 1 and was so shocked by the poverty he saw that he became a convinced socialist and never wavered from this.

Beckett shows this change through Attlee's interactions with Rose - the play's only fictional character - who we meet introducing Attlee to the slums, then as his secretary, then defecting to the Communist party over Labour's inter-war timidity and finally as a Daily Herald reporter, frustrated when prime minister Attlee only wishes to discuss cricket before casually giving her the scoop that yes he will create the NHS.

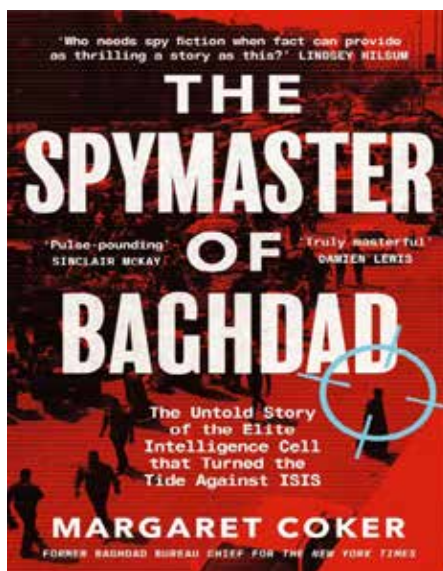
We know now that Attlee's exhausted and divided government would plunge from its 145 seat majority on 1945 to just five in 1950 and defeat in 1951. Whether Attlee's ability to manage his party faded, or whether his resolve to stick to austerity and rationing alienated too many voters is probably the subject for another play.

The Conservative governments of the 1950s though did little to unwind Attlee's reforms suggesting that even though the 'modest man' was a shockingly bad public speaker who could not rouse voters, his legacy was a popular one that largely endured until the Thatcher era.

Mark Smulian

The Spymaster of Baghdad by Margaret Coker Penguin Viking 2021 £20.00

The title sounds like a John Le Carre novel, but this story, by the former Baghdad bureau chief of the New York Times, is a page-turning true life espionage tale of jaw dropping courage. The world



beyond Iraq has been repeatedly been told that the Iraqis were useless in the face of Islamic State, and that American special forces were responsible for crushing the jihadists.

True, the Iraqi army collapsed at Mosul in 2014, allowing IS to establish its brutal caliphate, stretching almost to Baghdad. However, a group of Iraqi intelligence agents played a vital role in preventing dozens of IS atrocities and eventually defeating them. Meanwhile, on the battlefield, the Kurdish Peshmerga did the heavy lifting.

This book follows two brothers working for the Falcon group of agents, one of whom went undercover in a IS cell for 18 months, eventually paying with his life. Tasked with driving car bombs into heavily populated Shia neighbourhoods, he stopped more than 30 massive explosions that would have killed thousands. The story of how the intelligence services fooled IS into believing their operations had been successful is fascinating.

The book also traces the intellectual journey taken by a Sunni chemist who is so appalled by the rise of the Shia majority that she joins IS. At least, she tries to offer her ricin-making services to IS, but because she is a woman, they have no interest in her skills. Despite the dreadful way she is treated by IS, she continues to believe in their cause, so great is her hatred of the Shia authorities.

Coker describes the suffocating way in which many Iraqi families function, with each son fulfilling their father's wishes, with no say what job they do or who they marry

and each daughter submitting to highly circumscribed lives within the home. Archaic notions of respectability and honour have a crushing effect on daily life, with parents living in fear of the judgment of nosy neighbours.

The book explodes several myths. One is that with the exit of Saddam, Shia and Sunni were suddenly at each other's throats. It is clear from Coker's experience that there was long-standing loathing between Shia and Sunni and Saddam managed to keep a lid on it through fear.

Another is that foreign IS recruits were significant whereas in truth they made up only small numbers of jihadists. Instead, it was easy to attract the thousands of Sunni officers sacked by Paul Bremer, head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. They did not subscribe to the sectarian extremism of IS, but they saw it as a means to getting rid of their new Shia rulers. In addition, Saddam-era officers were schooled in how to use terror and brutality to achieve their aims so they did not blanch at IS's methods.

Rebecca Tinsley
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Pirate Stew by Neil Gaiman illustrated by Chris Riddell Bloomsbury 2020 £12.99

I was disappointed by this book when I first read it, a surprise since I've usually enjoyed the works of Neil Gaiman and Chris Riddell. At 48 pages, it seemed longer than most similar books, and I had doubts about it holding the attention of a small child. Beautiful though it maybe, a judicious edit might have helped it flow. But who am I to judge? Unable to test-run because of lockdown, I fretted too long; dispatched to a pirate cove, with two of the scurviest knaves [<https://www.salesfromthecrypt.co.uk/>] that ever sailed the seven seas, the book has been read over and over again, along with eating the butter, taking the soap... putting them in places where they be found as hidden treasure... I repent. As with all pirate stew, the proof is in the eating.

Stewart Rayment

Summer was still young when I set out to discover England – and, indeed, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. I had in mind writing a book along the lines of Paddy Ashdown's *Beyond Westminster* – or *Beyond Our Paddy*, as it was affectionately known to his many admirers. I still miss the man and those letters of his marked 'Top Secret: Burn Before Reading.'

A gratifyingly large crowd had gathered on Oakham Quay that morning to see me leave Rutland aboard the *Saucy Sarah Olney*; Cook was inconsolable and even Meadowcroft was heard to blow his nose loudly. (The *Well-Behaved Orphans*, by contrast appeared to be *Bearing Up Well*.) How everyone waved as I sailed away!

I had planned to follow Ashdown's lead and spend some time working aboard a Grimsby trawler, but the passage from Rutland Water to the North Sea is a treacherous one and not to be undertaken without the services of an experienced pilot – that may be why it does not appear on many charts. Besides, from what I hear, the Grimsby skippers have all tied up their vessels, left for Norway or become Uber drivers. Some have done all three.

So I arranged instead to be dropped off as soon as I was out of sight of the Quay, and waiting for me on the beach were my old friends the Elves of Rockingham Forest. They had promised to show me the real England – the Ancient England – and I was grateful for the offer.

Their leader, an elven prince named Elrond or Elvis or something like that, told me that we were to travel on foot. "What about the A6 and the A14?" I asked. "We shall have to cross them somewhere." "They won't trouble us," Elvis replied. "We shall travel by the old roads."

And Elvis was right. We walked all that afternoon through woods and never heard or saw a motor car at all. As dusk fell we entered an elven settlement in what I calculated to be the Northamptonshire Uplands, though quite where all those trees had come from I never worked out. That evening I was treated to an elven banquet and a harp concert – Aeolian cadences and all that. I returned their hospitality by teaching the assembled company to sing *The Land*.

I passed the next week with Elvis and we travelled with Gypsies, spent a night with poachers and conversed with foxes and badgers. At length, we reached the beechwoods of the Chilterns and my companion went into Chesham to sell some elven woad to a vegan supermarket he knows there.

He returned shaking his head. "You humans are funny. In the town there is a special building and all your kind are going in there, putting a cross on a piece of paper and dropping it into a box. What strange ritual is this?"

"Ritual, man? – sorry, elf," I returned. "That is not ritual: it's a parliamentary by-election!"

Naturally, I took command of the nearest committee room and rallied the troops. I had no cavalry at my command, but was able to commandeer some

Lord Bonkers' Diary

bicycles and routed the Conservatives – I shall employ mounted elves and vegans at every by-election in future whatever the ALDC says.

I bade farewell to Elvis, who had to return to Rockingham Forest on urgent business, and hurried to the count. Who should I meet there but Ed Davey? "What are you doing with yourself these days?" I asked, only to sense a certain *froideur* in his reply. Still, we had a chinwag and I suggested that, in the

event of a Liberal Democrat victory, it might be a good idea to have himself photographed knocking down a wall of blue bricks with a hammer.

At the count I also met my old friends Freddie and Fiona, those ultimate Liberal Democrat insiders. They were full of their plans for a 'Progressive Alliance'. "All we need do," said the latter, "is change the Labour Party constitution, have all the parties agree a common manifesto and then get them to stand down wherever we think they should."

I reminisced that the Liberal Party had stood down in half the seats in the country in 1983 and a fat lot of good came from it. "The trouble with you old-fashioned Liberals," replied Freddie, "is that you lack ambition. You should have stood down in more seats."

After Sarah Greene's victory I spent my days wandering the Oxfordshire countryside like the poet Arnold's *Scholar-Gipsy*. I found the charred remains of the castle once occupied by Dr Evan Harris in the surprisingly mountainous country east of Abingdon – I fear those peasants with their pitchforks and flaming torches did for him in the end. I also met our own Layla Moran and played her the song composed in her honour by Eric Clapton. I employed the *banjulele* that I had carried with me all the way from Oakham.

At Sutton Courtenay I visited the graves of George Orwell – the only decent Blair the Socialists ever came up with – and H.H. Asquith. I was pleased to note that the latter resting place was decorated with floral tributes from his close relation the noted East End gangster and philanthropist Violent Bonham Carter.

When I set out on this odyssey I swore that I would not spend time in a zoo, having unhappy memories of the Bonkers Hall Safari Park and its sudden closure. (I still maintain that those nuns were the authors of their own misfortune.) I am, however, glad that I changed my mind upon reaching the West Country: this gorilla costume is warm in the autumn evenings and I have always been fond of bananas. The neighbours are charming too – the elephants are happy to trade buns for bananas, I have been invited to take tea with the chimpanzees next Tuesday and I have already signed up two giraffes as Liberal Democrat members.

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