

liberator



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Email: collective@liberatormagazine.org.uk
Website: <http://www.liberatormagazine.org.uk>

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COMMENTARY

WHERE DOES CHINA FIT?

China was the dog that didn't bark at COP26. While much that was useful was agreed without the second (perhaps soon to be first) largest emitter on board it is hard to see progress without it.

If COP26 has thus thrown an inadvertent spotlight on China then so much the better,

From its mistreatment of the Uyghurs, destruction of Hong Kong's freedoms and attempts to buy up tracts of Africa there is certainly much for liberals to deplore about China, and Vince Cable's advocacy of friendly engagement - which left our reviewer in *Liberator* 405 feeling "faintly nauseous" - to put it no higher makes him an outlier among Liberal Democrats.

Another cause of more specific liberal grievance against China is its increasing threats to Taiwan, one of few countries majority ruled by a member party of Liberal International.

Climate is the most urgent topic on which the west must put pressure on China, and indeed Ed Davey has proposed a 'carbon border levy' which would prevent China selling to the west unless it brings its greenhouse gas emissions under control.

The problem is that putting 'pressure' on a military and economic superpower is difficult and no-one really knows to what extent the rulers of China regard the climate as important, or whether and in what circumstances they might resort to military action over Taiwan, the South China Sea or elsewhere.

It's true that China has committed to not financing new fossil fuel power stations in Africa, though not said what it will do about its own.

As Ed Lucas's article in this *Liberator* makes clear, China seeks to influence in all manner of ways - subtle and otherwise - how it is viewed in the world and is quite happy to use its money and influence to shut down criticism even when made by foreigners.

He writes, the Chinese Communist Party "practises - apologies for the jargon - 'hegemonic discourse control'. That means that it expects to have a say over everything that foreigners say or do regarding China, in politics, media, academia or anywhere else".

Also in this issue our reviewer of *The Rise of China: Fresh Insights and Observations* - a collection of essays from the Paddy Ashdown Forum - notes China's behaviour in relation to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Uyghurs has led to human rights provisions being inserted in the December 2020 EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, and EU, US and UK imposing sanctions against several individuals.

When the west confronted the former Soviet Union it did so without the latter being a major trading partner and investor in everything from Christmas decorations to nuclear power stations. China matters economically as well as militarily and its money and muscle are already deeply entwined in both western economies and developing countries.

We clearly need to know and understand a lot more about what makes China work, its internal politics, its long-term goals and points of weakness.

Liberals can rightly deplore China's human rights abuses - as we do those of other countries - but in dealing with such an opaque entity few know what will really carry weight in Beijing.

The need to engage with China over climate issues should not mean that anyone feels obliged to go soft on human rights concerns. The best prospect surely is that China sees a green economy as something powerfully in its own interests and takes action of its own accord.

We are dealing with a country that is heavily armed, a major emitter and has a 'belt and road' project capable of sending trains direct from Beijing to London. Understanding what is, and could be, going on will be vital.

POLITICS IN THE FACE OF MURDER

How much did the murder of Jo Cox really set a precedent that by-elections should go uncontested by mainstream parties when an MP is killed? Eastbourne after all was fought and gained by the Lib Dems after the murder of Tory MP Ian Gow in 1990.

The Lib Dems looked bounced by Labour into not contesting Southend West after the murder of David Amess.

But the seat has not been a Lib Dem target since 1997, although from third place a decent showing and a possible second place might have been expected at a normal by-election.

In a way Batley & Spen and Southend West were easy decisions. The Tories could not be confident of defeating Labour in the former at a by-election in such circumstances, and no-one else had anything at stake, while only a Tory would be realistically likely to win Southend West following Amess's murder.

One must hope no more MPs are murdered. But what if one were in a Lib Dem target seat - or for that matter a target seat for any other party? Would such saintly restraint be shown in a constituency where the identity of the winner was truly up for grabs?

This will hopefully never be put to the test, but if it were what would the Lib Dems do?

RADICAL BULLETIN

THE CLASH OF RICHMOND HILL

Fans of a progressive alliance may care to have a look at the borough of Richmond-on-Thames, where a deal between the Lib Dems and Greens is expected for the May 2022 elections,

This is despite disagreements between the two local MPs and an analysis done after the previous such deal in 2018, which concluded it lost the Lib Dems more seats than it gifted the Greens, with the main beneficiaries being the Conservatives.

The deal goes back to the Richmond Park by-election in 2016, when the Greens stood down and Lib Dem Sarah Olney beat Zac Goldsmith. The Greens again stood down in 2017 - when Olney lost to Goldsmith by only 45 votes.

There was a feeling in Richmond Park Lib Dems that they 'owed the Greens one' and that a council elections deal with them would help to defeat a number of Tories.

In the event six seats across the borough were allocated to the Greens, though with the same agent acting for them and the two Lib Dems in each ward concerned.

But one local analysis found Lib Dem voters declined to be moved around in blocks, as this deal envisaged, and in some tight contests their third vote was unused, went to a hopelessly adrift Labour candidate or even to a Tory.

Under this analysis the deal cost the Lib Dems not only the four seats the Greens won but at least a further two that went to the Tories, since in wards shared with the Greens they came far behind either Lib Dem co-candidate, on average by between 400-500 votes.

The average Lib Dem majority in seats with three candidates was 625, but only 325 in wards shared with the Greens.

In the South Richmond ward - as one example - there was only 41 votes between the two Lib Dems while the Green was 500 votes adrift. One Lib Dem won by just six votes while the 500 votes the Green failed to attract appeared to go to the Tories, since all three Labour candidates were clustered at the bottom with very similar tallies.

This has not gone down well in the Twickenham half of the borough, where Munira Wilson is the MP and has pressed unsuccessfully against having a deal with the Greens next time. Her view seems vindicated by May's by-election in Hampton Wick where one of the Green councillors resigned and, without a deal in place, the Lib Dem romped home with the Green candidate relegated to a poor third place.

The borough party and its deal though covers Twickenham and the Greens will again be allocated six seats, with Olney's support, as it appears to have become accepted wisdom in Richmond Park that a deal

with the Greens is essential.

Just to complicate matters, part of the Richmond Park constituency lies in the neighbouring borough of Kingston, where poor relations between the Lib Dems and some Greens make any deals extremely unlikely.

INTER-CONNECTEDNESS OF ALL THINGS

When William Barter tossed a rock into consideration of the Federal Board report at conference he may not have expected help from the improbable direction of Ed Davey.

Barter's concern was the steering group - an inner executive committee of the FB set up by party president Mark Pack in the name of greater efficiency.

This was supposed to be running on an experimental basis to see how it worked with the rest of the FB, but the experiment seemed to be running a rather long time.

Critics of the steering group tried and failed to get a motion onto the conference agenda so Barter came up with the ingenious idea of calling a separate vote on the section of the FB report that dealt with it.

Cue consternation among the party establishment, but the separate vote was in order, duly taken and squeaked through by eight votes.

Meanwhile over in Canary Wharf, Davey was preparing to give his leader's speech in front of a select invited audience - but at least a live one.

With many of the party great and good thus going around being important in Canary Wharf - and paying no attention to what appeared to be an obscure conference report session - they missed the vote on the steering group, which was close enough to have swung the other way.

The Canary Wharf event came with a bill not unadjacent to £10,000, presumably for an autocue and audio-visuals.

Federal Conference Committee (FCC) fairly resoundingly rejected the idea that this event should have come from its budget and so a donor was found, though it was a £10,000 donation not spent on something else.

Another accidental consequence of Barter's separate vote call was that the session was unable to reach most of the questions tabled from the floor.

Session chair Jon Ball later explained on Facebook that FCC had timetabled the FB report, that of the Federal Appeals Panel and party subscriptions so the time could be flexed between them but the separate vote and an amendment to the membership subscription left too little time. Ball also said Pack had committed to answering the omitted questions.

One such question was from Liberator Collective member David Grace, who asked at Spring Conference 2021 why the party website was so embarrassingly

bad.

Pack agreed, but nothing happened, so Grace asked again in there autumn. The written response said “something” would be done.

Grace asked as a supplementary when “something” would happen and got the reply: “The answer is that within next 12 months, assuming that Federal Finance and Resources Committee signs off [the] project. So a question for you for next autumn if not necessarily next spring conference!”

Meanwhile a side effect of ditching the Steering Group was the need to consider whether it scheduled meetings should become full FB ones to deal with all the business. Members voted by 11-10 not to - with the 11 mainly comprising ex-officio members - so the FB will just have even longer meetings.

APPLYING A GLAZE

People must have read War and Peace several times, trekked the Gobi Desert or circumnavigated the globe by pogo stick in the time it has taken the Liberal Democrats to resolve the ludicrous saga of the election of their London region chair.

Nearly a year after this started Anne Glaze has been declared the winner, having secured more than 60% of first preference votes.

An objection came from defeated rival Rod Lynch that Glaze had made improper use of social media by sending out large numbers of messages.

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

Complaints then went to the Appeals Panel for England (APE), which upheld them, preventing Glaze taking the role, though it said the London region’s peculiar and complicated election rules were inadequate and a contributory cause of the situation.

After that a convoluted pass-the-parcel ensued between the region, the APE and the Federal Appeals Panel (Liberator 407) [<https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>] and there was still nothing resolved, regional candidates chair Dave Raval having stepped in as interim chair for almost the full year.

Raval reported to regional members in October that the APE had after all determined that Glaze had won and the time had passed for Lynch or anyone else to file a further appeal. Glaze now holds the chair until the end of 2022.

MONEY WELL SPENT

It’s amazing what £5,000 can buy like, purely by way of example, the withdrawal of all the most embarrassing bits of a report to conference.

The Racial Diversity Group (RDG) in its original report to conference gave both barrels to partly HQ and Federal Board, complaining that it had been left unfunded with members having to finance its work from their own pockets (Liberator 409) [<https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>]

But during the summer £5,000 was found for the RDG and at conference members were told the reports pack had been ‘updated’, though only for the RDG’s report.

Out had gone all the previous complaints to be

replaced with the mild observation: “Until recently, all costs were borne personally by the RDC Executive, enabling RDC activities to progress whilst we lobbied for party funding.”

M’LEARNED FRIENDS

The Liberal Democrats face two rather unusual cases of threatened legal action in the coming months.

In the first, Natalie Bird wants to judicially review the party after she was banned for 10 years from being a candidate or officer for wearing t-shirt bearing the words: ‘Woman: Adult Human Female’, which provoked complaints that this was offensive to trans women.

Bird has amassed more than £17,000 for legal costs from a crowd funding page and says she has sent the party two pre-action letters.

She said there: “My case is strong and winnable, focusing on the issues of freedom of speech as well as direct discrimination, indirect discrimination more widely towards women in the Lib Dems and harassment.”

What little has become public of the disciplinary hearing of Bird’s case suggests complainants felt she had worn the slogan with the intention of giving offence, which she denies.

In the other case, Jason Hunter has issued proceedings over an alleged breach of data confidentiality related to his candidate status.

Federal Board member Jo Hayes asked at a meeting to see a document related to the Hunter case and was then accused of having accused a member of staff of lying.

This led to an altercation in which party president Mark Pack referred to rule 61 of something called Robert’s Rules of Order and called a vote on excluding Hayes from the meeting, which was passed.

Hayes has approached the Federal Appeals Panel for a ruling that her exclusion was invalid and the rest of the meeting a nullity.

LABOUR PAINS

The idea of a progressive alliance of Labour, the Lib Dems, Greens, Plaid Cymru and the SNP for the next general election took rather a knock at the Labour conference when it rejected support for proportional representation.

Despite support from 150 constituency parties and there being 79% of local party votes in favour, that is not enough under Labour’s rules. Trade unions - dominated by fantasists who think Labour can win the next election outright and implement its conference resolutions - were 95% opposed and PR fell.

This matters firstly as a signal of bad faith in the Labour leadership. If it had wanted the PR motion to pass it could have leant on some unions to support it, or merely abstain, but it did not.

The second reason is that without a Labour commitment to electoral reform there is nothing to form a progressive alliance around. Smaller parties cannot risk taking part in this if they get nothing out of it.

Compass was originally a Labour body for constitutional reform but is now cross-party and seeks to inspire a progressive alliance.

It has taken a ‘glass half full’ approach given the

substantial backing for PR among ordinary Labour members. Others will recall what happened in the late 1990s when Paddy Ashdown and Tony Blair had a 'progressive alliance' to avoid getting in each other's way at the 1997 general election, but Blair reneged on electoral reform once he won a majority.

The ball is now in Labour's court to show the people and organisations that matter in that party support PR. If they don't the whole thing risks being wasted effort.

NUMBERS GAME

Liberator 409 drew attention to the party's bashfulness over its membership figure, which was trumpeted in the glory days of 2019 but is now entirely absent from reports to conference.

Using a rough calculation of the proportion by which membership income had fallen, Liberator put the total now at 92,460 members, which we were advised was fairly accurate and which also looks disappointing but hardly a calamity in a fall from the 2019 peak of 115,000, as shown by a House of Commons library report.

One reader has now drawn attention to the party's annual report to the Electoral Commission for 2020 [<http://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/Api/Accounts/Documents/22744>], which shows 98,247 members against 126,724 the previous year. That was a 22% drop, but still leaves a total the party would have killed for a few years ago and which is high by almost any historic standard except 2019. So why the secrecy?

Rather amusingly, this subject came up in the 'core script' document issued to parliamentarians and other notables for conference.

In among the boring bromides with which they were advised to rebut impertinent media questions was the following:

"It's been reported that membership of the Liberal Democrats has fallen by 27% in the past year. Doesn't this show that the party is in decline?"

And the answer? "Morale in the Liberal Democrats is high at this year's autumn conference after our stunning by-election win in Chesham and Amersham. "Membership of the party remains at historically high levels despite falling slightly from its peak after the EU referendum."

It added "if pushed" parliamentarians should note: "The party has seen an influx of new members since the Chesham and Amersham by-election."

LUCK OF THE DRAW

Now that voting for the Lib Dem vice-president responsible for working with ethnic minority communities has been thrown open to the great unwashed, there is some nervousness on high about who the party might get in the role.

The post was previously elected by the Federal Board and when incumbent Isabelle Parasram resigned due to work commitments it was decided at conference to make it an all-member election.

Parasram's work was much respected and she resisted the temptation to use the role as a public platform to accuse others of racism.

Problem is, the candidates will be unknown to almost all members and turnout is therefore likely to be tiny

and could throw up surprises.

Election rules also rigidly circumscribe how many messages candidates can send and through what channels, hampering candidates' efforts to make themselves better known. The choice is: Amna Ahmad, Rod Lynch, Tahir Maher, Juliet Makhapila, Rabi Martins and Marisha Ray.

PERCENTAGE POINTS

Party president Mark Pack stated during conference that 39% of attendees were first timers. This immediately begged the question '39% of what'? He later said it was of 2,000.

This means the total registered for the online only conference was not greatly more than would be expected at a physical autumn event and indeed the voting figures in some major debates suggest fewer than 500 people were present, again very similar to a physical conference.

With Labour having held an in-person event and the Tories a hybrid one - without either being reported as making any difference to the spread of Covid-19 - it is surely time for Lib Dems to actually meet each other again even if some online version also runs for those unable to attend.

Federal Conference Committee has refused to hold an in-person conference in York next spring, to the annoyance of the Lib Dem-led administration in York which would have liked the local economic boost involved. There may though be one next autumn.

FRIENDS LIKE THESE

While the continuing Liberal Party has lurched rightwards by accommodating ex-Ukip candidates and supporting Brexit something even worse has overtaken the continuing SDP.

It planned a conference in November at which the billed speakers included former Revolutionary Communist Party - and now right wing - oddballs Frank Furedi and Claire Fox and bizarre range of figures from the right wing fringes of politics, none of whom have anything obvious to do with the original SDP of the Gang of Four. So let's (not) hear it for: David Starkey, Rod Liddle, Patrick O'Flynn (former Ukip MEP) and David Goodhart among others.

The SDP (slogan Family, Community, Nation) says numbers at its conference are 'limited'. Why ever could that be?

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CHINA GOES FOX HUNTING

Pressure from the Chinese Communist party to suit down criticism - even in the west - is the greatest threat we face, says Ed Lucas

“Can you name a party policy with which you disagree”. The question was posed at the hustings in August, when I was contending to be selected as prospective parliamentary candidate for the Cities of London and Westminster.

I had lots of options. But one stood out: China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the biggest and most powerful political organisation on the planet. It runs a country of 1.4bn people, and the world’s largest economy (measured by purchasing power). It is fuelled by real, exaggerated and imagined grievances against the West. Under Xi Jinping’s highly personalised leadership, it has dropped the previous ‘hide and bide’ policy and is increasingly confrontational in issues small and large.

COOKED PLANET

Dealing with this outstrips everything else we face. If we cannot negotiate with the CCP, we cook the planet. If we cannot constrain its power, we face a world run from Beijing. Options abound, from the soft-liners who believe that we must accommodate China’s inevitable rise, through to über-hawks who think the only hope is all-out confrontation.

Yet the word ‘China’ did not appear once in the party’s 2019 manifesto. Even worse than having a bad policy on this is having no policy at all.

Dealing with the CCP should be a, perhaps the, central organising principle for our thinking about foreign and domestic policy. It is one of the reasons that I have decided to give up my comfortable niche as a think-tanker and columnist and return to full time politics after a gap of nearly 40 years.

Before we think about solutions, we have to analyse the problem. Start with the central feature of Western politics: freedom. The CCP practises - apologies for the jargon - “hegemonic discourse control”. That means that it expects to have a say over everything that foreigners say or do regarding China, in politics,

media, academia or anywhere else.

The pressure is sharpest in Australia, where the Chinese embassy presented a peremptory set of 14 demands earlier this year, in effect arguing that Australia must muzzle its media and political system. The grievances included: government funding for ‘anti-China’ think-tank research at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and the Australian demand for an independent investigation into the origins of the pandemic. In short, if the Australian authorities wanted to repair their relations with the regime in

Beijing, they would have to accept a de facto Chinese veto on their foreign and domestic policy.

Some might argue that Australia must face reality. It lives in the wrong neighbourhood. China is simply warning that a confrontational approach will have costs.

But Chinese ambitions go far beyond controlling the behaviour of countries in the east Asian region. Take the example of the German publishing house Carlsen-Verlag, which last year produced a children’s book about the Covid-19 pandemic, *Ein Corona-Regenbogen für Anna und Moritz*. This included the seemingly inoffensive sentence “the virus came from China and has spread from there all over the world”.

This prompted the ire of the Chinese authorities. Carlsen-Verlag came under huge pressure. Not only its

printing contracts in China, but its ability to sell any title there, and the future of any author associated with it, were all at stake. Hate mail from Chinese people living in Germany accused it of racism. The consulate in Hamburg threatened (baseless and spurious) criminal charges. Within days, the publisher crumpled. It agreed to pulp all copies of the book, and to reprint it without the offending sentence.

China can do this because it is such a huge market. (It is impossible to imagine the Kremlin exerting any similar pressure on political, academic, media or other public discourse in the West).



The biggest example is that Hollywood has not produced a film even remotely critical of any aspect of the Beijing regime for a quarter of a century. Actors such as Richard Gere (Seven Years in Tibet) are unemployable for the big studios. In Doctor Strange, a Tibetan character had to become 'celtic' to satisfy Chinese censors. The remake of Top Gun was edited to remove a Taiwanese flag from Tom Cruise's jacket.

Countless small examples illustrate the same point. In all contexts, Beijing insists, Taiwan must be referred to as 'Chinese Taipei', rather than give any hint that it is an independent country. This public notice at Milan Airport shows the result: Taiwan (a democracy, where the governing DPP is a member of the Liberal International) has to be represented with the letters TWN rather than its national flag.

That may seem trivial. But the biggest victims of this pressure are Chinese people living in the West. They face 'fox hunt' tactics if they criticise the regime, which include abduction back to China, or threats to punish relatives there. Despite this, the Chinese authorities cloak their activities with charges that critics are motivated by 'Sinophobia'.

A new book China Unbound: A New World Disorder by a Chinese-Canadian scholar, Joanna Chiu, outlines the "erasure of Chinese diaspora perspectives". She describes how Chinese students living in Canada faced threats from and surveillance from the Chinese embassy.

Critical community voices are drowned out by astroturf entities supported by the authorities. Her book is part of a chorus of warnings: Silent Invasion by Clive Hamilton, published back in 2018, detailed Chinese pressure in Australia. Even getting the book published was hard - exemplifying the point it was trying to make.

Here in Britain, tendrils of Chinese influence are everywhere. Cambridge University - especially Jesus College - is one notorious example. But so too is the Corporation of London. Even the supposedly apolitical Lord Mayor's Show has a Chinese veto, manifested in the ban on Taiwanese participation. I was campaigning on this even before I became PPC. My efforts resulted in a belated invitation for Taiwan to return to the show this year - but issued too late for its participation to be practical.

As PPC I will continue to campaign on this. The government's tough talk on China is not matched by deeds. The Cities of London and Westminster is the ideal constituency to campaign against kleptocracies like Russia and would be hegemonies like China.

But resisting Chinese pressure is only part of the answer. We also need to compete. That means better scientific research in key areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and new advanced materials. It means fighting inside international organisations to ensure that Chinese appointees and proxies do not capture vital positions. Already the

"The threat from the Chinese Communist Party outstrips everything else we face"

Beijing regime has made alarming headway in bodies such as the International Telecommunications Union and Interpol.

It also means competing on soft power: promoting our cultural, social and political system as better than the one-party rule of the Chinese Communist Party. That requires a robust, self-confident approach in which we appreciate our strengths

rather than just lamenting our weaknesses.

THREE SEAS

We also need to focus our economic power in parts of the world where China has made headway with its 'Belt and Road' infrastructure programmes. In eastern Europe, for example, Britain should back the Three Seas Initiative which aims to improve the poor connectivity (roads, railways, waterways, pipelines, telecoms) in the countries between the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Adriatic. This could be a powerful rival to the Chinese-led 17+1, which aims to boost Beijing's influence in the poorer, eastern half of the European continent. But the Three Seas Initiative is languishing. It lacks the financial firepower and institutional clout it needs to be effective. The Biden administration is so preoccupied by its domestic woes, and by the immediate challenge of defending its interests in the Indo-Pacific, that it has little bandwidth for European security.

Yet allies are vital in this. Even the US cannot stand up to China on its own. The EU has the economic heft, but not the political decisiveness. Post-Brexit Britain has lost influence both in Europe and in the US.

But we can change that. One priority is to repair relations with France, the only European country with serious interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The US has begun repairing the damage done when it blindsided France with the British-Australian submarine deal. We should follow up by offering broad security and military cooperation with France in the Indo-Pacific, on the lines of what we are already doing in supporting counter-insurgency in the Sahel.

We also be more vocal in supporting countries like Lithuania and the Czech Republic, which have boldly stood up to Beijing over human rights, Taiwan, Tibet and other issues. We can also work with France on supporting these countries.

The CCP is indeed a daunting adversary. But its great weakness is its overweening ambitions. The more people, and countries, refuse to comply with its diktats, the easier it is for others to resist. A more united, more confident West is a pre-condition for any hopes for a calmer and more sustainable relationship. So long as we give reason for China to regard us with contempt, it will treat us that way.

Ed Lucas is the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for cities of London and Westminster

The arrival of Afghan refugees exposes Home Office incompetence and Rebecca Tinsley is among those picking up the pieces of western flight from Afghanistan

“The Home Office dumped 800 Afghan evacuees in this borough, but it took them a couple of days before they notified us,” the resilience officer of a London council tells me.

“And when we finally got the phone call from Whitehall, they said we had 200 refugees, not the 800 who were sitting in hotel rooms without any support or resources. A woman gave birth in one of the rooms, but it was several days until we found out about it.”

The resilience officer said his staff were at their wits' end, struggling to register Afghan families with GPs, Job Centres and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). When I asked the official what had happened to central government's emergency plans for such circumstances, including domestic terror attacks and natural disasters, he said there was no plan that he was aware of.

INEDIBLE FOOD

Meanwhile, hotels are charging the Home Office for services they are failing to provide for evacuees, and in one case, inedible food from one of London's more expensive Lebanese restaurants. The hotel in question refused to accept that Afghans did not necessarily eat Lebanese food (Afghans are not Arabs, and Afghanistan is 3,880 kilometres from Lebanon). When the matter was raised directly with the Home Office, stressing the vast amounts of taxpayers' money being wasted, officials took the word of the hotel management, ignoring photos of rotten food, maggots and mouldy bread supplied by evacuees.

In another instance, the DWP employed five interpreters from an agency to spend the day at a hotel, helping Afghans register for benefits. However, the DWP staff failed to turn up.

Other councils have complained of a similar disconnect between the Home Office and the local authorities who are expected to put the government's Operation Warm Welcome into effect for the estimated 7,000 Afghans currently in hotels across Britain.

To be clear, hotels which have been struggling financially throughout the pandemic are doing very well from the sudden influx of refugees. Did the Home Office think to use its leverage to negotiate reduced rates, or did the drunken sailor approach that has been the hallmark of PPE procurement also apply to Operation Warm Welcome?

It has been left to local churches and other volunteers to provide support as soon as the evacuees were allowed out of Covid-19 quarantine. Clothes, baby formula, sanitary towels, etc. have come from faith groups and civil society organisations who found themselves in the role of first responders.

I have witnessed the mess described above because my London church leapt into action when bus loads

of bewildered, exhausted and frightened Afghans arrived at the end of August. The evacuees have been unfailingly polite, expressing their gratitude to the UK for rescuing them and providing sanctuary. But a feeling of despair has now replaced the mood of relief as families realise they may be stuck in hotels for many months if the current level of disorganisation persists.

Writing on the Conservative Home website, Elizabeth Campbell, the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, warned the government not to “dither” on rehousing the Afghans, or to pass the blame onto local government.

In polite terms, Cllr Campbell urged the government to acknowledge that Operation Warm Welcome will be a long term effort which needs financial support so it can be led at a local level. (Her article attracted uniformly poisonous comments from Tory members who have suddenly developed sympathy for rough-sleeping UK citizens).

It is thought that there are Taliban sympathisers, especially among hard-line Deobandi clerics and their followers in the UK. Hence names and locations are withheld for the safety of the evacuees. However, several families have given me permission to tell their stories.

Most striking is the lack of homogeneity among the refugees. They represent not an elite that worked for international institutions in Afghanistan, but a cross section of society. Among them are suave and sophisticated former government ministers as well as shop assistants who speak very little English. Some were grateful but mystified that they had been evacuated.

When I asked why there were barely literate farmers among the evacuees, I was told it was known that a certain brigade of the Afghan army providing protection around the Barron Hotel in Kabul, where the UK ambassador processed evacuees, were accepting cash in exchange for entry into the hotel compound. Meanwhile, people who had worked for the UK were unable to reach the airport in time.

People told terrifying tales of their last days in Afghanistan, abandoning their homes with only what they could carry, hiding with friends and relatives while desperately trying to contact the British embassy, and learning from social media that the Taliban had appeared at their homes, searching for them.

Once they had received messages offering them a chance to escape, some had disguised themselves, standing in line beside an open sewer for three days and nights outside Kabul airport, being beaten by Taliban soldiers as they waited. One man showed me the wound on the head of his one-year-old son who

was attacked by Taliban militia. They were berated by the Islamist fighters for “abandoning the country.” Another man witnessed the explosion that killed more than 180 people waiting in line. “I saw the bodies fly up in the air,” he told me. “I can’t get those images out of my mind.”

No one I spoke to complained about the long and uncomfortable journey, once they were inside the airport gates. Several spent another day waiting within the airport periphery, and then hours in the United Arab Emirates before a flight to Birmingham and quarantine. When I met them, at the end of their period in isolation, they were still in the clothes they wore when they left home. They had no other possessions; hence the urgency to find them clothes once they arrived in their London hotel.

Evacuees told me similar and consistent stories about the fall of Kabul. They said the Taliban fighters who appeared at the edge of the city were young men from Pakistan, many of whom were clearly members of the Pakistan armed forces, on loan or freelancing by helping the Taliban commanders.

These Pakistani soldiers had no idea where to go once they arrived in Kabul, and they were “very different” from the Taliban leaders who only arrived in Kabul when it was clear there would be no resistance from the Afghan army. Hence several evacuees referred to the Taliban fighters as occupiers and the takeover of Afghanistan as an occupation by Pakistan. Yet, Pakistan receives the largest slice of UK aid, as our officials find it convenient to accept the lies given them by Pakistan intelligence and politicians.

Many of the refugees I met had worked for the UK in one capacity or other, or for the World Bank, or UN agencies. When I asked them how the West’s aid had been spent, they were scathing, saying most went to US contractors and so the money had therefore stayed in America. The training provided was often of minimal use, lasting a couple of days, rather than the weeks ostensibly contracted.

One refugee who had returned to Afghanistan after getting a master’s degree in the UK, told me about getting arrested by US soldiers one night. They burst into his compound, shouting in English, pointing machine guns at his baby, and terrifying his family, “just like a movie.” They interrogated him for three days and nights, saying that he had been informed on by an Afghan who had told the Americans that he was a terrorist. It emerged that the accusation was made as an act of revenge by a neighbour with whom his family was in dispute about a piece of property. The US interrogator eventually admitted he had a quota of arrests to meet and so they had acted on the tip off from the aggrieved neighbour. “So, they let me go, but I got an insight into how unhappy the American soldiers there were. Many of them were taking drugs and seriously depressed. It was awful listening to them.”

“Did the drunken sailor approach that has been the hallmark of PPE procurement also apply to Operation Warm Welcome?”

TAKE OFF THE HIJAB

Several evacuees expressed their disgust at the way in which the Muslim world had ignored their plight. “I’ve had it with Islam,” said one former government official. “I told my wife to take off the hijab. Where was the Muslim world when we needed help? Nowhere. They’re always talking about Palestine, of course, but they’re not prepared to criticise the Taliban or Pakistan.” Another Afghan told me simply, “I’m just not

interested in all that religion stuff anymore. Not after the way we’ve been treated by Muslim countries.”

I gave several Afghan families a tour of my church, explaining the Biblical episodes illustrated by the stained glass. “It’s the same story as Islam,” said one Afghan wearily. “A poor guy comes along and castigates the rich and powerful for being selfish and hypocritical. And so they give him a hard time. Yeah, that’s Islam too.”

What are the prospects for the refugees’ integration into UK society? All the Afghans I met were focused solely on getting out of the hotel and into a home they could call their own, no matter how simple. They were also desperate to get their children into school, something that only began after several weeks in the hotel.

Some of the evacuees are highly qualified and may find work in the private sector, with global NGOs or financial institutions like the World Bank. But others lack English or marketable skills, and some of their wives seem terrified of stepping outside the hotel. The more educated women were often teachers or students back in Afghanistan. Whether they can be absorbed into the English school system at a time of shrinking budgets remains to be seen.

My new friend who calls me “UK Mum” knows he has a difficult road ahead. His young pregnant wife speaks no English and has sunk into depression, missing her home, friends and family in Kabul. He keeps his spirits up for his wife’s sake, but he told me wistfully, “I miss riding my bike around Kabul. It was a good life there. I wish I didn’t have to leave. I wish the Americans hadn’t left like that. I’m so sad.”

Another man loiters around the hotel dining room, showing any Westerner who will engage him in conversation the photos of his house on his cell phone. He lived in a McMansion in Kabul, part Palladian villa, part Rococo monstrosity. None of the volunteers dare ask him what has become of it.

Rebecca Tinsley is the founder of the Waging Peace NGO

JOHNSON PUTS THE CLOCK BACK 60 YEARS

Committing to rejoining the single market would be popular among those whose votes the Lib Dems seek, so why is the party being so timid and boring about it, asks David Grace

In 1979 I organised a European Youth Parliament in Brussels. I invited the head of the European Community's Environmental Service as a speaker and he asked me unnecessarily to visit his office.

I went but could not see the point as everything was already agreed and arranged. Perhaps it was so he could boast that his son had just got into Eton, information I did not need.

His name was Stanley Johnson and now the whole world knows who his son is. Stanley and Boris share one love, the sound of their own voices. Boris has turned on the hands that fed him, the education paid for by the European Commission, first by Eurosceptic articles in the Telegraph and later by promoting Brexit and all the lies which have followed. Max Hastings sacked him from the Torygraph for writing lies but we are stuck with him.

Let's not imagine however that Johnson is primarily motivated by Euroscepticism. He could as easily have been pro-Europe if he had felt that would lead him to power. His consistent loyalty is to himself and no-one else.

RIDING A TIGER

The problem is that he chose to ride the tiger of Euroscepticism and so far it has not eaten him. He does have the problem of defining a new role for the UK in the world, which he has been making up as he goes.

On 16 March this year Johnson gave his clearest statement on the UK's new foreign policy. He announced to the House of Commons that we would seek friends and allies wherever they could be found, with a passing reference to NATO and Europe.

No, really, but he got even clearer. We would be "engaging more deeply in the Indo-Pacific". Don't know much about geography, but I don't recall learning about this mythical place. As far as I know India is not in the Pacific. Johnson grew still clearer. He was talking to Australia, India and Korea.

How nice for them. Since then he has concluded a new agreement with Australia and the United States to be known as AUSUK. The British role appears to be backing American sales of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia instead of the previous deal to buy French subs. Naturally there was no prior notice to European 'friends and allies' in NATO. The 'Indo-Pacific' focus now has a practical expression in the voyage of the new UK aircraft carrier, HMS Elizabeth, which Johnson announced would promote British trade in the Indo-Pacific.

What can this mean? In the days of the British Empire, trade followed the flag, if the UK wanted to trade somewhere, one method was to send a gunboat, occupy and rule the place. Surely this is not what he means? Obviously the ship will need to buy fuel and food wherever it goes and its sailors will spend money ashore, but perhaps that's not what he means. Johnson and Liz Truss are very proud of their new trade deal with Australia. How will HMS Elizabeth help that?

Before Johnson invented this place called the Indo-Pacific, he and other Brexiters repeated that the UK would stop being European and become global. This was always nonsense. In the EU, we benefitted from trade agreements with 70 third countries, all of which we would need to replace on leaving the EU. While Truss has negotiated successor rollover agreements with many of these countries, the UK negotiating alone has much less clout than the EU as bloc. She was proud to have a new deal with Australia, although the government's own estimates put the value of it at an increase in the UK's economy of 0.02% over 15 years. So far it's an agreement in principle only and already poses a threat to British farmers. Figures for her agreement with New Zealand are similar. The government hopes that in future the UK will join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Meanwhile they are already proposing to break the UK's new deal with the EU. Minister David Frost ("hello, good evening and welcome" – no, not that one) says he didn't know what the deal meant although he negotiated it himself and it was only signed last December.

Johnson and Frost keep publicly blaming the EU for problems with the agreement they proclaimed as marvellous a few months ago. The EU just asks that the UK means what it says in international agreements and abides by its word.

SUSPICION AND DOUBT

Countries around the world may be forgiven if they approach the UK with suspicion and doubt. Perfidious Albion has returned. Even if the UK's special friends the Americans do trust Johnson and co (and Biden appears not to) they will not value the connection as they did when we were in the EU. The balance of that special relationship has shifted still further in favour of the USA. Already our nuclear deterrent depends upon leased American missiles and shared guidance technology. Already HMS Queen Elizabeth is scheduled to carry jets bought from the US and until they arrive has to carry American planes.

Look at the catastrophic departure from Afghanistan and ask yourself if the UK is actually capable of a foreign policy independent of the Americans. Which vital UK interests are we protecting in the Indo-Pacific? Perhaps it's just willy-waving by Johnson, this time on a global stage at our expense.

In 1956 the Suez crisis should have taught the UK's romantic imperialists that the British Empire was not going to last 1,000 years and that this country could not continue to behave as a global head boy. Harold Macmillan came to power as a result and he learned the lesson well. In 1960 he gave his Wind of Change speech and before he left office in 1963 his government had granted independence to 13 colonies with more following soon after.

This was not just a retreat from empire. He recognised that the country's future belonged in Europe and in 1961 applied for the UK to join the European Community. When De Gaulle vetoed the application, Macmillan wrote in his diary "all our policies at home and abroad are in ruins."

Now, 60 years later it's true again. Johnson and the Brexiters have put the clock back with their romantic 'global Britain' rhetoric. As Macmillan also said, "Too many people live too much in the past. The past must be a springboard not a sofa."

Day by day the government doubles down on the lies which brought it to power. They are cornered by their own success. They cannot admit that Brexit was a mistake. That cannot acknowledge that deals with the far side of the world will not make up for Brexit reducing the UK's GDP by 4% (OBR forecast).

Their antipathy to Europe is not just about trade but as we have seen extends to defence and security. Now slowly the true consequences of Brexit are coming home to roost. Shortages of lorry drivers, farm workers, butchers, hospitality staff, health staff, care staff and many others are beginning to be obvious to everyone.

The latest polls show 53% think we should have remained and 47% that we were right to leave. This trend will grow. The Labour leadership are scared to blame Brexit for anything, hoping against hope to recover the lost red wall in the North and Midlands.

Meanwhile the Liberal Democrats continue to believe that we should rejoin at some point in the future, despite Ed Davey's denial of this the day after he was elected. Nobody cares. We're also in favour of land value taxation, proportional representation and, oh yes, abolition of tuition fees, all at some distant point in the future.

I hope we're not going to fight another general election like 2019 saying that we're about to form a government. We should be saying what could be done now, whoever is in government. Even if we had a

“Look at the catastrophic departure from Afghanistan and ask yourself if the UK is actually capable of a foreign policy independent of the Americans”

government today which wanted to rejoin the EU, we cannot be sure that the UK would be welcome.

RHETORICAL SEWAGE

Much water needs to flow under the bridge, given the amount of real and rhetorical sewage in it. What can be said now and should be shouted again and again is that the UK should join the single market. Nothing in the referendum precluded it. Some Leave campaigners even supported it. The current economic problems will only get worse the longer we are out of it.

Joining the single market could help to prevent a Scottish vote for independence and cut the Gordian knot which is the contradictory status of Northern Ireland. There is even a tactical argument for it. Insofar as the party has a strategy (not mentioned in the laughable strategy motion at conference) it is to attract discontented Tory voters in the blue wall. Why are they discontented? Because they are Remainers. Calling for the UK to join the single market will knock down more Tory seats than a plastic hammer.

It's practical. Labour won't say it. The government will oppose it even as everything gets worse. The party has been haemorrhaging the new members who signed up after the EU referendum. Give them a reason to stay and a reason for more to join. Current policy is to develop "a closer relationship" with the rest of Europe and to recommend "a roadmap to join the single market".

Very reasonable. Very sensible. Very moderate. Very boring. As Piers Ludlow of the LSE noted in his blog the EU has "the capacity to bore many but to enthuse some and repel others".

Party communication training tells us to make our messages clear and loud and to repeat them again and again. Joining the single market needs such a message, not a vague commitment. Surely one of our people can boil that down into a Cummings-like three word slogan. That official party strategy says we should appeal to the "whole of the electorate". As Mrs Thatcher might have said, "no, No, NO!". There are people we should not appeal to. Let's stand for something. It would be a step in setting out that the UK belongs in Europe and not stranded on some far Indo-Pacific shore.

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

MIGRATING FROM CLIMATE DISASTERS

Liberal International has set out ways to respond to a wave of migration that can be expected from countries affected by climate-related disasters. Imad Ahmad reports

Millions of people face great difficulties in handling climate-driven events. These problems are evident and the aim here is to address them with policy recommendations.

We suggest a climate justice pathway that links human rights to human and economic development, as well as safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people.

We acknowledge that the burden of responsibility for reintegrating climate displaced people into the economy rests with High Income Countries which have contributed to the majority stock of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Even more relevant as we are approaching the COP26, parties now need to agree on actions on a variety of issues connected to climate change.

More than anything we call for the creation of an effective international framework to deal with climate displacement.

Research published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggests that we have a carbon budget of approximately 10 years before a point of no-return in triggering Earth system feedback effects which will exacerbate the adverse effects of climate change.

IRREVERSIBLE FEEDBACK

These irreversible system feedback effects include the thawing of permafrost in the Arctic releasing methane; weakening of the land and sea to act as carbon sinks and instead acting in the opposite way with increased forest fires and increasing bacteria in the ocean producing more CO₂.

The adverse effects include an increased frequency of droughts, floods, disappearance of small island developing states, increased food insecurity, adverse effects to human health, increased threats to livelihoods and an increase in poverty, changing structure of communities, and interacting and cascading risks.

Adverse effects to human health will be seen in both the Global North and Global South through increased diseases and bacteria (such as an increased incidence in Lyme disease and other vector-borne diseases and *Virbio* bacteria in Canada and Northern Europe), malnutrition, greater vulnerability to diseases through malnutrition, greater risk of injuries and deaths owing to more intense heatwaves and fires.

Climate change will fundamentally affect the lives of millions who may be forced to seek refuge in other areas. Between 2008-14, more than 25m people per year were uprooted because of rapid-onset disasters such as floods and storms. In practical terms, climate-

induced displaced people, whether displaced internally or across borders, in developing countries will be an issue of international concern, cooperation and assistance

It is these people who are most likely to be compelled to leave their homes for other locations both within their countries and across national borders owing to low adaptive capacities, their often-vulnerable location vis-a-vis climate change events, often high population densities, existing hunger and health problems, low incomes, often weak governance structures and political instability exacerbated by the effects of climate change.

By increasing food and water shortages, increasing the population of disease vectors, and increasing temperatures, climate change will also harm labour productivity and economic growth in already highly constrained countries in the Global South.

Furthermore, in general, people who are marginalised – in terms of economy, culture, politics, and economics – are more vulnerable to climate change and adaptation to mitigation responses that fail to defend their rights.

According to the IPCC, the impacts of climate change deepen gender inequalities. For instance, according to sociocultural norms, women have less opportunity to influence decisions to mitigate and cope with the impacts of climate change.

To address these issues, the 200th Executive Committee meeting of the Liberal International declared in 2018 in Berlin several principles for approaching the problems.

Among the conclusions in the declaration reached were that all countries will need to act and that this will require action by many stakeholders. Perhaps most importantly, that climate justice is precisely the task of linking human rights to these issues, using a humanitarian approach and “safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly”.

LEGAL GAP

There is still no clear and internationally accepted institution or framework to assist people who are displaced by causes attributable to climate change. In terms of “the legal gap” these groups are still not covered by international agreements, although there have been promising initiatives during the last 15 years, such as the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration from 2018.

The current system of international law (including refugee, human rights and migration law) is not

equipped to deal with climate induced migration. The intersection of climate change and migration requires comprehensive solutions to the multidimensional challenges it creates.

There is also a lack of agreement among scholars and institutions on the appropriate definition to use for people who have been displaced by causes attributable to climate change.

It is worth noticing that while the majority of climate-induced displacement occurs within the borders of countries, some people are forced to move abroad. Bangladesh, China, India and the Philippines each recorded more than four million disaster displacements in 2019.

To conclude, millions of people in different parts of the world face great difficulties in handling these climate-driven events. Historically, the factual and moral burden of causing this situation is shared between many economically successful nations, not least the Global North.

These problems are evident, and the aim of this paper is to address them with the following policy recommendations. We aim, therefore, to prevent and mitigate the forecast problems by outlining a climate justice pathway that links human rights to human and economic development, as well as safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people. In the following, we seek to approach a humanitarian approach based on sharing the burdens and benefits of climate changes and impacts equitably and fairly.

To get the terminology right, we believe that 'climate displacement' is the most useful term. The alternative term, climate-driven migration, has other connotations that we wish to avoid. Migration is, indeed, one adverse effect following from climate change, but all stakeholders must at the same time recognise that re-allocation of persons due to climate effects will exist – and evidently already exists – in practically every nation and every region in the world. To us, the term migration will most probably continue to mislead the discussion as if this matter would be a challenge only for some nations.

The rising use of the term 'environmental displacement' - refers to other sorts of adverse effects than those from greenhouse gases. We hold the view that other environmental consequences could be included in the term climate displacement.

We suggest creating an effective international framework. With their legacy of contribution of greenhouse gases, the Global North has a responsibility in creating this. We call on the EU to contribute to the commitment of the Global North in developing such a framework and take the lead in the Global North to reduce damage caused by climate change. There are several areas that we would like to suggest as important aims of such a framework.

“Climate change will fundamentally affect the lives of millions who may be forced to seek refuge in other areas”

This should include:

- Developing and support climate adaption programmes in areas vulnerable to possible climate displacement. Examples of priorities are risk assessment, facilitating living standards, financial instruments for managing natural disaster risks and needed infrastructural projects and sustainable finance.

- Supporting the development and the diffusion of new technological innovations that, in a sustainable way, prevent the adverse effects of climate displacement. More specifically, there is a need for early warning systems and other applications to be made accessible in the Global South.

- Recognising the promising work already accomplished, as for example manifested in the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the Nansen Protection Agenda. There is a need for further research efforts on coordinated migration and strengthening of multilateralism.

- Supporting governments and local communities to create protection in most efficient and decentralised ways and promote regional solutions such as for example insurance schemes to raise resources for prevention of climate displacement. This includes sheltering support and all levels of government and in coordination and collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

- Strengthening the legal protection for climate displacement migrants who are not already covered by other regulations.

- An international alliance of the willing to create further support for those people not recognised within the legal framework. Once again, the nations of the Global North have the responsibility of taking lead in this, and such an alliance could find new methods of handling these issues.

This article is based on a paper on climate displacement issued by a Liberal International working group, on which Imad Ahmad was the Liberal Democrat representative. The paper can read here: https://liberal-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Climate-Induced_Final.pdf

A MOTION FOR NOBODY

The Liberal Democrats' new motion on Israel and Palestine is more about keeping the peace in the party than in the Middle East says Guy Burton

The Liberal Democrats have a new policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict after the federal conference in September.

It pulled off the trick of both appearing sufficiently even-handed (which helped it gain approval from both the Israel and Palestine associated organisations within the party) and strongly liberal, by its stated commitment to boost prosperity for all through more trade.

Unfortunately, the motion won't make much of a difference in the real world. That's because the policy is inward-looking rather than outward facing. It is more concerned with keeping the peace within the party than dealing with the conflict as it is.

CROWD PLEASING

If the party were serious about pushing for peace, then it should have focused less on these crowd-pleasing measures and more on detailing what a return to negotiations might look like.

Doing that would have been a valuable contribution towards restarting the process. But to do that would mean leaving the comfort zone and embracing some uncomfortable truths, including acknowledge regarding the dynamics of the conflict and its asymmetrical nature as well as the inclusion of parties Liberal Democrats won't like.

First, the motion should have recognised that the conflict isn't an equal one. Israel is a state – and a rich one at that. A member of the OECD since 2010, its economy was worth \$387bn in 2020 – that is 25 times larger than the economy in the West Bank and Gaza, which was valued at \$15.6bn last year. Israel also spends a sizeable amount on military equipment – around 5.6% of GDP or \$21bn in 2020 – and that doesn't take into account the \$3.8bn in aid which it also received from the US.

By contrast, the Palestinians in the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza – long the site of the expected Palestinian state – have been subject to what the Israeli scholar and activist Jeff Halper calls Israel's "matrix of control."

That includes control over Palestinian land, air and water resources, from checkpoints and movement restrictions of Palestinians to a parallel road system that allows Israelis to bypass Palestinian towns and travel freely to settlements within the West Bank. Israel's occupation also means a difference in the treatment of Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank, with the former subject to civilian law and the latter to martial law.

What about the Palestinian Authority (PA)? It provides a scintilla of representation, but only over 40% of the West Bank, where the most populous and urbanised Palestinian centres are located. Israel has

direct control of the remaining 60%.

The PA is also dependent on Israel economically too. That arrangement was baked into the protocols that accompanied the Oslo accords back in 1993. Under it, Israel decides what Palestinians can import and export into the West Bank and Gaza. Israel also collects taxes and customs duties on behalf of the PA and has used them as a means to exert pressure.

Absent any acknowledgement of the existing power disparity makes the Liberal Democrats' policy motion meaningless.

More trade won't bring greater prosperity to the Palestinians while they lack political autonomy to decide what they want to bring in or sell. As for Israel, encouraging more trade and economic cooperation only rewards its current behaviour – although the proposal to end trade with settlements is a small step in the right direction.

Israeli control will also limit the motion's proposal for visa-free travel for Palestinians. Few Palestinians are free to travel, especially those based in Gaza. A few examples may be illustrative, from the MA student who faced losing his scholarship to study at Goldsmiths College in 2017 because Israel delayed his paperwork to the dozens of students who were couldn't travel abroad to study because Israel closed the Erez Crossing on the grounds of its covid restrictions.

As for the proposed international fund for peace, it's not clear why this would make a difference when vast amounts of money and similar effort have similarly been used during Oslo's heyday in the 1990s.

Perhaps the fund appealed to the motion's authors because of its surface similarity to one in Northern Ireland in the period before the Good Friday Agreement. The fund's advocate, the US-based Alliance for the Middle East (ALLMEP) claims that bottom-up interactions between Jews and Arabs across the political and sectarian divides can help build trust and confidence.

But one look at the ALLMEP promotional video accompanying the proposed fund reveals problems. One is the emphasis on the need to build 'peace' without ever defining what 'peace' means. Without that, it runs the risk of persuading individuals who participate in these projects to accept the wider status quo; in short, what critics have described as 'normalisation'.

So what should 'peace' look like? It needs to take account of the current political climate which is vastly different from 28 years ago, when Oslo's expected five-year period began. Since then, violence has broken out several times between Israel and Palestinians, beginning with the Second Intifada and which has more recently been dominated by fighting between Israel and Hamas.

Hamas owes much of its rise to Oslo. It rejected the process and accused Fatah – the main Palestinian faction which has dominated the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and signed the Oslo accords - of corruption within the PA. Its rivalry with Fatah led to fighting between the two and the eventual split of the occupied territory, with Fatah and the PA in control of the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza in 2007.

In Israel, meanwhile, the electorate has become more nationalistic and right-wing over the past two decades. That was reflected not only in the growing number of settler and religious parties represented in the Knesset (Israeli parliament) and decline of left and centre parties, but also former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's more than decade-long period in office – at least until his replacement following the most recent election earlier this year.

These shifts in Israel and among Palestinians have led to declining levels of support for Oslo.

According to the Israel Democracy Institute, support for two states fell among Jewish Israelis from 70% to 47% between 2007 and 2018. The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research's (PCPSR) most recent poll in September indicated that only 36% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support two states. Half of those surveyed also believed that armed struggle was the more effective way to realise their goals, compared to 28% who believe that negotiations was the most effective way forward.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Given these facts on the ground, the motion's authors missed an opportunity to set out what a 'new peace process' might look like. Rather than simply returning to the failed Oslo process, it could have called for its replacement and provided details of what it might look like.

Specifically, this could have included a more explicit statement to end with the current three-way arrangement that theoretically brings together Israel, the PLO and the US as a third-party mediator. Instead, the motion could have not only called for wider involvement in the negotiations, but also state which stakeholders from inside and outside the region should participate.

If the number of participants is to be increased, then it must take account of the political split between the West Bank and Gaza and that most of the violence in recent years has taken place between Israel and Hamas. For that reason, Hamas must be included in any process, alongside that of Fatah.

No doubt such a suggestion will generate revulsion from some inside the party as well as strong opposition from Israelis, Americans and Europeans who have designated Hamas a terrorist organisation.

But it's worth remembering that peace isn't made between friends, but between enemies – just as happened when the British government finally agreed to talk to Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland

Furthermore, Hamas does have a constituency. Domestically, that same PCPSR poll indicated that a majority of Palestinians polled thought Hamas had done well in its most recent fight with Israel in May.

Were elections held, that would translate into Hamas receiving around 37%, compared to 32% for Fatah.

Externally, the involvement of other countries in a repackaged peace process would bring in some like China that don't have the same aversion to Hamas as the Americans and Europeans do.

At the same time, increasing the number of participants will create its own challenges. Certainly it will appeal more to Palestinians than Israel or the US. Israel will oppose both a more active return to negotiations and the presence of other parties, because it will mean a move away from the status quo. It will not welcome more third parties, since it would dilute the Americans' presence, which has often acted in practice as Israel's advocate and increase pressure on it.

However, wider involvement could actually benefit Israel too, especially if Hamas were also present. While countries like China don't have the same aversion to Hamas as the Americans and Europeans do, they do share Israel's security concerns. Consequently, the international community would constitute a broad front that might challenge Hamas's use of rocket attacks.

The presence of other regional countries in new negotiations is important for at least two other reasons. One is that it would reconnect Israel's normalisation with Arab countries to the peace process – something that has become increasingly frayed through the lack of talks and the signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain last year.

The other is that involving more countries in a new peace process would increase the legitimacy of any new process and also make them more invested in any negotiations and their outcome. It would also be a step away from the current state of affairs which sees them issue rhetorical statements of regret and concern every whenever the latest bout of fighting erupts.

In sum then, the Liberal Democrat motion should have gone further than it did and spelled out what a new approach to peacemaking in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict should involve. They should have spelled out exactly who should be involved as well as acknowledging the disparity in power relations between the different sides, along with a willingness to redress it.

Admittedly, tabling such a motion would have been unlikely to win broad support within the party were it put to conference. But that brings me back to my starting point, that this motion was more about party management and satisfying internal stakeholders rather than offering a substantive way out of the current impasse.

Guy Burton was acting director at the Center for Development Studies at Birzeit University in the West Bank in 2010-12 and author of *Rising Powers and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1947*. He has been a Liberal Democrat parliamentary researcher and candidate

STICK A TAIL ON A DONKEY

The new Lib Dem policy on English regional government uses arbitrary boundaries and indirect elections. What could possibly go wrong, asks Mark Smulian

'Treatment of Octopi in Droitwich' was an imaginary motion in a *Liberator* satirical publication parodying the weird topics that fill the Sunday 9am graveyard slot at conference.

This time that went to something important, and I predict the outcome won't work and will need to be revisited.

The party is now committed to uniform regional government across England and to an English parliament indirectly elected, filled with appointees from these regional bodies.

Can you imagine the Lib Dem uproar if any other party suggested any kind of legislature should be indirectly elected?

Supporters will point to their erudite study of how the upper house in Germany works, but that ignores the context. When West Germany was established as a federal state in 1949 its components had been independent countries within living memory. That is rather different to the arbitrary lines on a map that delineate regions in England that few recognise.

Ask anyone in England where they come from and they will name a large town or city or a historic county.

Absolutely nobody says: "I'm from the East of England", or wherever. Those proud of Yorkshire rarely add "and the Humber" to situate themselves.

There is county and town identity but it seems we're not having any truck with that. Instead some expert group of Lib Dems will draw lines on a map for "six to eight" regions.

At this stage some readers may be thinking: "Hang on Smulian, apart from having been a student in Leicester you have never lived north of Cockfosters, what do you know about the regions?"

The answer for the north is "not a lot". But I do know the south, and I have never heard anyone there, of any political persuasion, evince active interest in regional-level government. Local devolution yes, but not regions. For a start, there are no obvious physical or economic features for boundaries.

Take the Government region for the South East, which was elevated to a regional assembly under Labour.

This monstrosity stretches from Bicester to Margate and was governed for no particular reason from Guildford, which barely has indirect public transport links - let alone direct ones - to the region's outer areas.

Or take the East of England. This includes south Essex - where I grew up - an almost wholly urban area that is economically linked to London that has nothing in common with rural Norfolk and Suffolk but shares interest with north Kent (in the South East).

The East also takes in Cambridge, which has quite a lot in common with Oxford and the intervening area, but most of that is in other regions.

New Lib Dem 'blue wall' seats at St Albans and Chesham & Amersham are only 15 miles apart but the former lies in the East ("hang on, I'll just ask Cambridge what they say") and the other the South East.

Bedfordshire is also in the East, but Lib Dem elected mayor of Bedford Dave Hodgson has been reported as seeking a devolution deal with the rest of the historic county plus Milton Keynes (South East) and the two new unitary councils in Northamptonshire (East Midlands).

Gloucestershire Lib Dems are wont to point out that they live nearer to Scotland than Land's End but are lumped into the South West.

Confused? Under the new Lib Dem policy all these regions must control the same range of services - a top-down approach if ever there was one.

England would then be governed by a 'national chamber' comprising "representatives appointed by the English Regions".

Appetite for regional government varies across England, and the further south one goes the madder a uniform system of regions becomes.

There is a solution, and what is more it was a Liberal Democrat that invented it.

While business secretary, Vince Cable drew up the local enterprise partnerships (LEP). They were not of course perfect and some worked better than others, but they were a genuine attempt to try to match some devolved governance to the reality of local economies rather than observing Saxon field boundaries. They co-exist with local government and different LEPs do different things.

Devolving whatever powers are appropriate in each place to coherent local economic areas could work and requires no-one to surrender any identity or acquire a new artificial one. Local governments could collaborate as now.

Here's another prediction. If a Liberal Democrat minister decided to hold referendums on creating regional governments these would be viewed by voters as a gigantic new feeding troughs for politicians and officers and consequently would be soundly defeated.

Here's another. If a Lib Dem government decided to impose regions without referendums this would be regarded as an undemocratic outrage and hand the Tories an open goal so wide they could not possibly miss.

If some areas want to have regional governments with the prescribed list of powers then fine. Other areas might want other models. A top-down imposition of regional boundaries - let alone with indirect parliamentary elections - is a recipe for failure.

Mark Smulian is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

TO BE A PILGRIM

Lloyd George's museum in his home village is under threat. Gareth Epps reports on ways to help save it

For those Liberals who have visited the beautiful Llyn Peninsula in north Wales, the Lloyd George Museum [<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Leisure-parks-and-events/Museums-and-the-Arts/The-Lloyd-George-Museum.aspx>] in his home village is an essential pilgrimage.

Adjacent is Highgate, his modest childhood home, decorated and furnished as it would have been during his childhood; a little walk away, overlooking the Dwyfor, is the striking memorial designed by Portmeirion's architect Clough Williams-Ellis. This summer, fresh concerns emerged over the future of the museum. As it happened, we were staying in Llanystumdwy on holiday:

a perfect excuse to visit the museum and speak to staff. Accessible by bus from Criccieth on the rail network and perhaps a mile and a half from the nearest station, it seems well loved and respected within local communities.

The museum was funded by Gwynedd Council until 2017, and the UK Government covered the funding for three years. The council offered 'one-off' funding of around £27,000 for the current financial year. Discussions seem to be taking place, with attempts to restructure the museum to be run by a new Trust as part of plans to secure its future. Welsh Lib Dem leader Jane Dodds has visited to highlight the threat. The sole Lib Dem on Gwynedd Council, Steve Churchman, is also involved.

With exhibits spanning the whole of Lloyd George's life, highlighting his campaigns, his humble upbringing and the challenges he faced in politics as a result of that, the museum is a must for Liberals to visit. There is plenty of information as well as memorabilia on the man's many campaigns; the 1980s TV series starring Philip Madoc is referenced, though not some of the more contentious aspects of Lloyd George's later life.

The museum is supported by the Friends of Lloyd George Museum, who raise funds to make additional provision for the museum. They are running a series of six lectures over the autumn/winter period, some of which are run on Zoom. These have so far included meetings on the Welsh Election Study 2021 and 'Lloyd

George and his role in the development of British Intelligence'.

It strikes me that there's obvious benefit in some engagement between the Liberal History Group, the Liberal family more broadly, and the trustees. Parts of the museum shows signs of the lack of recent investment, though everything is in good repair and there is plenty for the whole family to do. Their merchandise offer may benefit from offering books on broader Liberal history for sale, and there is other support that the broader Liberal family may be well placed to offer, not least a digital presence.

The Lloyd George Summer Schools, entirely separately, are being revived under the umbrella of the Lloyd George Society, [<https://lloydgeorgesociety.org.uk/en/>] a body loosely connected to the Welsh Liberal Democrats; with the involvement of some of that party's brightest minds. The group is voluntary and lacks resources but is a bright spot in the otherwise challenging outlook for Liberals in Wales.

For anyone wanting to stay within walking distance I can recommend the cottages at Aberkin Farm, on the banks of the Dwyfor just over the main road from the museum. The pub opposite is now owned by a community group and has an unspoilt historic interior, though it is very much Welsh-speaking with Yes Cymru stickers and what appears to be a replica

poster for the Free Wales Army.

There needs to be closer dialogue between these groups with a shared interest in the museum's future; that much is clear. The museum is close to busy holiday destinations; it should have many supporters not only from the Liberal family but due to the huge significance of Lloyd George as still the only Welsh prime minister. There's no doubt that if asked, Liberals would be generous in supporting this cause and ensuring its sustainability. It only costs £15 a year (£25 for a household) to join the Friends [<https://lloydgeorge.net/become-a-friend/>], and I would hope all Liberator readers would consider that as a first step.



Gareth Epps is a member of the Liberator Collective

CLUTTERING LETTERBOXES

What's the point of Lib Dem election leaflets that say nothing about what the party wants to do, wonders Peter Wrigley as he sifts through the mound from Batley & Spen

I live in Batley and Spen, as it happens in one of the two wards in which the Liberal Democrats decided to concentrate, and have kept all the election literature I received, both posted and hand-delivered, for the by-election held on 1 July.

Other parts of the constituency may have received different amounts but the crude tally of items I received (percentage of vote obtained and change in brackets) is:

Labour 7 (35.27%: -7.42 percentage points);
Liberal Democrat 6 (3.3%: -1.3 percentage points);
Conservatives: 5 (34.42%: -1.61 percentage points);
George Galloway 3 (21.92%: +21.92%);
English Democrats 2 (0.55: +0.55%)

From 11 'others' there was one, percentage shares ranging from 0.40%: +0.40 (UKIP) to 0.09%: +0.09 (Heritage).

The following summaries of their content is by impressions rather than scientific. I'd be happy to hand over the folder to anyone who feels it would be useful to carry out a more systematic analysis.

GLOSSY LABOUR

The Labour literature comprised glossy leaflets, and two letters, one personally addressed by name. They concentrated on the candidate's local roots (she had lived in seven different parts of the constituency and often gave more prominence to the fact that she was local than that she was Labour. She wanted more police, safer streets and protected green spaces, and would "always listen to local people and stand up for Batley and Spen."

The Conservative government's proposed planning changes in which "power [is] handed to developers to build on green spaces" seemed to be the only national issue given any prominence.

Conservative literature comprised three glossy leaflets, a fake newspaper (Batley and Spen Matters) and a personally addressed letter from Boris Johnson (the Downing Street address was not used.) There was also a letter from Johnson, along with a photograph and signature, inside the fake newspaper. The literature promised "change" focused on "jobs, apprenticeships, investment and building back better" along with "cutting crime and anti-social behaviour". There were few specifics but a strong whiff of pork barrel politics: a Conservative MP will be better able to extract favourable treatment from a Conservative government.

Of the Liberal Democrats' six pieces, only one, the Freepost, went to the entire constituency. This was a well-produced glossy leaflet with a reply slip to

an address outside the constancy. It introduced the candidate as "an experienced community campaigner from a working class background, part of a local Lib Dem team" (though he was parachuted at the last moment through no fault of his or ours, and few of us, if any, had heard of him) and, "as our next MP" would be a voice for everyone in the area.

There was no mention of Liberal Democrat beliefs, vision of society or unique policies, just a fairly routine promise to "campaign to protect local green fields. . . and demand investment in our roads and local facilities".

The one unique feature was to claim that the Conservatives, in power nationally, and Labour, in power at Kirklees Council level, both neglected the area and a Lib Dem MP would stimulate a "fresh start."

Two more glossy leaflets and a fake newspaper, were hand delivered in the two wards on which the Liberal Democrats concentrated. In one we held all three council seats (almost entirely the result of strenuous efforts over more than 30 years inspired and led by one family) and the other in which the Tories held all three seats.

These choices meant it is likely more of the votes we garnered would have otherwise gone to the Tories than elsewhere, thus enabling them to win and giving an endorsement to Johnson's appalling government. The literature concentrated on the candidate's personality, voluntary work and leisure activities, (he's keen runner), and local street issues; emphasised that the Liberal Democrats had councillors in the area and showed their pictures; and repeated the claim of Labour and Tory neglect.

So for national issues we have to look to the incomers or emerging (or dying) parties. Chief and most successful among these was George Galloway under the banner of the Workers Party. He too offered a fresh start and claimed he was the major contender in "a two-horse race", (I wonder where he got that one from?) He made it clear that he was a leading advocate of Brexit, opposed the increasing privatisation of the NHS, was against police cuts, mandatory ID cards, student tuition fees and increases in rail fares. He was supporting Birstall market (I wonder how long he's known we had one?) Interestingly he does not mention his championship of the Palestinian cause in the freepost leaflet: this is emphasised on a hand-delivered leaflet which may have gone only to selected areas (though mine is predominantly of Yorkshire or ex-Irish ancestry rather than South Asian).

The English Democrat candidate claimed credibility by pointing out that she had come second in the

constituency in 2016, (but that was when the major parties gave Labour a free run out of respect for the murdered MP Jo Cox). She was against a decade of Tory cuts, Labour's empty promises, the government's gross mismanagement of the pandemic, mass migration, the Barnet formula and social inequality. England should be "put first" and "English history taught in schools."

The Christian Peoples Alliance thought all blasphemy was wrong, supported freedom of speech, but quoted a pupil who wondered why "we have to accept all of this LGBT stuff in a Christian school?" The Independent wanted to "Keep Batley British" and the For Britain candidate was opposed to "jihad mass murder and Sharia oppression of women, gays and others." The SDP candidate claimed that the party is "patriotic and economically centre left", wanted to "stop mass immigration and curb the influence of elites and big business." I did not receive a leaflet or message by any other means from the Monster Raving Loony

The Rejoin the EU candidate highlighted the advantages of EU membership through freedom of movement, access to the largest market place in the world, high food standards, security and more. He received only 75 votes, but bless him for making the points.

The Yorkshire Party (which had come third in the West Yorkshire mayoral election which triggered the by-election, and, along with the Greens, had pushed us into fifth place,) contented itself with vague generalisations about equal opportunities in education - which seemed to involve favouring grammar schools - and the NHS, a more co-ordinated transport system and the rejuvenation of ex-industrial sites.

The Freedom Alliance went into some detail in opposing the many restrictions placed on us as a result of the pandemic, and claimed the loss of life so far, 9.4 deaths per 1,000 people, was "totally normal." The UKIP candidate was unhappy about "political correctness" and "hate crime" and advocated policies on education, families, agriculture, animal welfare, culture and the media (the BBC licence fee should become a voluntary subscription.)

By far the most detailed and compelling leaflet was that of the Alliance for Green Socialism, (AGS.) Among the 11 specific proposals were real action on the climate emergency, an end to zero hours contracts, taxes the rich actually pay, a properly funded NHS, votes at 16, publicly run public transport, decent social security, really affordable housing, and regional

"There was no mention of Liberal Democrat beliefs, vision of society or unique policies"

democracy, not a gimmicky mayor, (hear hear!). For further policy information we were invited to contact info@greensocialist.org.uk. Were I not a dyed in the wool Liberal Democrat I would have been tempted.

IGNORED POLICY

In summary, the major parties have chosen to ignore policy and campaign on local issues, presumably having decided that that that is the way to win election. In this instance the Liberal Democrats have acted as a major party in following them in what we take to be a proven winning technique. By contrast,

the rest have a point or points to make, from a single issue such as suspicion of Islam to the comprehensive menu offered by AGS.

I believe the lesson of Batley and Spennings is that, in those elections where we are not the major challenger we should use the 'also ran' opportunity to attract people to our party rather than simply sell our candidate.

Britain, indeed the world, desperately needs Liberal democracy, but people will not support it, still less devote their time and talents to fighting for it, if we don't tell them what it is. In these situations our educational role should be paramount.

In his splendid book *How to be a Liberal* Ian Dunt writes: "For many years now, Liberals have failed to argue for our

values. We have apologised for them, or seemed embarrassed by them, or not even mentioned them at all."

The Batley and Spennings by-election is a prime example. We must learn, have the courage of our convictions, and have the courage to tell the electorate what our convictions are.

A Freepost leaflet to everyone in the constituency explaining our values in as popular form as possible might, just might, in an electorate of 70,000 have attracted 10 individuals who responded, in the Quaker phrase: "Yes, that speaks to my condition" and come forward to help us. That would have made the loss of our deposit worthwhile. Twenty such activists would have transformed us and the Liberal future would be on the near horizon rather than the far distance.



Peter Wrigley has been a Liberal/Liberal Democrat activist for 60 years and is a former candidate

LETTERS

PASS PASSES

Dear Liberator,

Alistair Carmichael's feisty article about what he terms "Vaccine ID cards" (Liberator 409) prompts me to express an alternative view on the time limited use of Covid-19 passes as one weapon in the armoury. The virus is still causing major public health concerns with rising case numbers and having a major impact on how safe people feel to participate in collective activities as winter approaches.

I have frankly struggled to understand why we taken such an unnecessarily strident and binary position when we could have adopted a more measured and nuanced approach which acknowledges both the potential benefits and risks. I readily admit that there are concerns around Covid-19 passes being socially divisive and potentially discriminatory, and practical issues around workability that need working through. Before younger people had had the chance to get vaccinated it would have clearly been discriminatory, but we are long past that now.

The design of a Covid-19 status pass can help overcome many of these issues. It is perfectly possible to come up with a scheme which isn't anything like a long term ID card that Alistair is obviously concerned about. It can include people who are medically exempt, evidence of Covid-18 infection in the last six months or a negative test.

Scotland introduced its own Covid-19 passport scheme and clearly did experience technical teething problems. In Wales people now have to show an NHS Covid Pass or demonstrate their vaccination status to enter nightclubs and attend large events. This means either testing negative or a lateral flow test or being fully vaccinated against Covid-19. In Northern Ireland work is continuing on the development of an official certification system. So it clearly can be done. As far as I can see it's simply a question of political will.

European countries such as France that have adopted similar schemes and people there barely raise an eyebrow. It is generally seen as a sensible safety measure to help restore more of normal life after a lengthy shutdown of many collective activities. None of the countries that have introduced such measures have seen the roof fall in.

I would be more than happy to do the same if I were going to a large event and frankly would feel much safer and more inclined to go to the cinema or theatre if such a requirement existed in England. Most people outside of politics I have spoken to say exactly the same and view it as a sensible safety measure to help allow more of normal life to continue after such a lengthy shutdown of many collective activities.

Public opinion polls generally indicate more support for, than opposition to, Covid-19 passports but it is clearly a contested area and depends greatly on how the questions are framed. Nobody seems to even question it in relation to international travel.

I have become rather alarmed by how one's position on this issue is being viewed as a test of basic liberal values. As Alistair rightly says, we champion the right of the individual to live their lives as they chose as long as they do no harm to others. The last phrase is incredibly important as by not getting vaccinated unless you are medically exempt you are clearly doing harm to others. My personal interpretation of John Stuart Mills' 'do no harm' principle leads me to precisely the opposite conclusion to Alistair's.

I don't really buy the slippery slope argument – I see this as a short term measure designed to help us get through a global pandemic.

I hope that we can adopt a more measured and nuanced policy stance on vaccine status which acknowledges both the benefits and the risks. Along with testing that includes financial support for isolation, mandatory wearing of face coverings and booster jabs, properly designed Covid-19 passes could help us get through this winter without another total lockdown. With all the consequential damage to the economy and the nation's mental health - for me that's a price well worth paying.

Claire Tyler
House of Lords

RURAL HOMES

Dear Liberator,

There are many factors to consider in the expansion of rural housing (Liberator 409 Commentary). Some of these are uncertain. Will the population increase or will it level off? How practical and expensive is it to convert office and retail to flats? How intensely should we develop brown field sites?

But even if we get optimum answers to these, there will still be a demand for more rural housing. And we all know - because a friend of a friend has told her - that the people in the newest house in the village are dead set against any further developments.

My local experience tells me that it is more nuanced than that. In one nearby settlement, some people are saying that it can't take any more residents despite having a town sized centre and a village level population but at another folks are delighted with the shiny new rec and community centre that came with more houses.

Such gains should be emphasised in the discourse. If residents are struggling to get or retain a bus service, rec, pub, shop, village hall or church, a higher population would make this easier.

For Liberals, more and different people in a small settlement would also raise the possibility of a competent, diverse and confident parish or town council - something which I hope is still important in our scheme of things.

Roger Jenking
Oxford

CLASSICAL POSITION

Dear *Liberator*,

As a proud member of the Liberal Party (not the Liberal Democrats), I was somewhat bemused to read your piece Right Turn in Radical Bulletin (*Liberator* 409), and feel I must comment.

Firstly, the sterile 'left-right' argument does not hold water; instead the Liberal Party sees itself as a radical party based on classical Liberalism - something that the Liberal Democrats seem to have totally abandoned, as evidenced time and again by many of your commentators.

Secondly, it is wrong to berate the Liberal Party on its Brexit stance. If you read the party's policy documents you will see that we are seeking a radically reformed Europe. The Lib Dems have consistently refused to consider alternatives to the dysfunctional and unpopular EU, and are now losing support by their head-in-the-sand attitude.

On a positive note, I heartily endorse Robert Brown's call for a federal UK (*Liberator* 409). But I think there is little appetite for splitting England into federal regions; we probably need an English government and parliament, which can then debate the best arrangements for devolving power to its own regions.

Tim Stevens
Peterborough

REVIEWS

The Rise of China: Fresh Insights and Observations – a Collection of Essays Paddy Ashdown Forum 2021

China is the country with the second largest land area on earth (9,424,702.9 sq km, only exceeded by the Russian Federation), the largest population (more than 1.4bn) and the third largest GDP after the US and EU (\$14.7tn, five times the UK's) according to World Bank data for 2020.

It is big in many senses including as a player in the international relations game. As John Alderdice indicates in the foreword, British politicians need informed views with which to be prepared for future challenges concerning China; which is where this collection of essays comes in. Packed into just over 150 pages, in this volume 14 essays consider facets of present-day China.

Kerry Brown describes China's governance structures, Yeow Poon and Laurence Vandewalle its past and present political culture and Vince Cable its economy. Merlene Toh Emerson discusses the Belt and Road Initiative, which is extending China's influence and reach. How many British politicians know this includes a rail freight route from Chongqing across the Eurasian land mass to the inland port of Duisburg in Germany, at the confluence of the Rhine and Ruhr rivers, at the heart of Europe? The journey takes less than two weeks. China is not so remote or distant as one might think.

Emil Kirchner's essay focusing on EU-China relations explains the tensions between economic interests and core liberal values. China's behaviour in relation to Hong Kong, its territorial expansionism over Taiwan, its mixture of inducements and sabre-rattling towards neighbours and its allegedly genocidal human rights violations against the Uighur community have led to human rights provisions being inserted in the December 2020 EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, and, this year, to the EU, US and UK

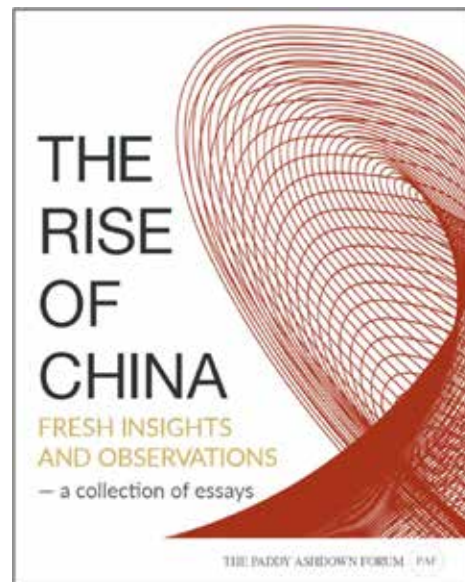
introducing sanctions against several individuals.

Philip Bennion's essay on China and the West has a broad sweep; Michael Mainelli considers multi-lateral institutions; Humphrey Hawksley considers China's policies towards its near neighbours; Juli Minoves discusses

Taiwan specifically while Andrew Leung revisits Hong Kong.

Tim Clement-Jones' essay on the tech war describes US, EU and UK foreign policy's recent evolution to a harder line, partly because of China's shift towards tighter autocracy and use of technology for repression and surveillance, but also because policymakers see China as vying for supremacy in surveillance, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and other emerging technologies. I would have liked more information about this aspect.

On a related theme, Paul Reynolds assesses the potential for military conflict. He considers that in the future the US will



remain supreme militarily, and that China's focus is on homeland security rather than global reach. He sees China's political leadership under its current leader Xi Jinping, in contrast with that of the US, as deeply involved in unified economic and military decision making. He discerns a pattern of economics-led stealthy expansion followed by expanding military reach and capability in - among other examples - the new military base, supposedly for anti-piracy purposes, in the strategically well-placed port of Obock, in Djibouti, on the Gulf of Aden. I would have liked more detail about these, and about the measures, including confidence-building, which he suggests should be adopted to avert armed conflict.

Christopher Cheadle considers how the international community needs to balance competition with cooperation with China to tackle the existential threats to the climate, environment and biodiversity.

I have learned much about the tensions between interests and values and why they must be managed. To borrow a phrase from Phil Bennion's chapter title, China versus the West is a contest neither can win. I highly recommend this book.

Jo Hayes

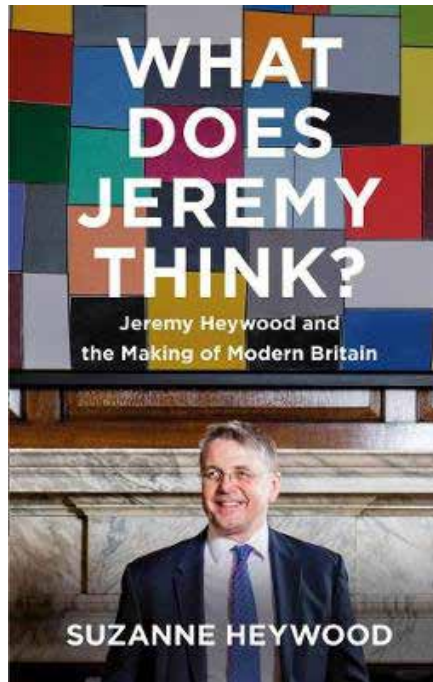
What does Jeremy think? Jeremy Heywood and the making of Modern Britain by Suzanne Heywood William Collins 2021 £25.00

The book opens with the events leading up to Black Wednesday, 16 September 1992 – in the middle of the Liberal Democrat autumn conference in Harrogate – I remember some delegates packing their bags and leaving immediately. As one knew, or suspected at the time, on becoming prime minister, John Major barely ceased being chancellor of the exchequer as well.

Norman Lamont does appear as something other than Major's poodle, but then as The Guardian pointed out in their review Heywood's assessment of David Davis's approach to the Brexit negotiations as "less exhaustive"

than Theresa May's that does not necessarily contradict Dominic Cummings' appreciation of the man as "thick as mince and lazy as a toad".

While this will be an importance reference to the careers of Blair, Brown, Cameron and May, it does not contain any dramatic revelations and is nuanced in the way one would expect from a civil servant. It should, one hopes, at least provide a litmus paper against which to judge the autobiographies and biographies of the usual suspects.



From a Liberal point of view, the book is probably of most interest insofar as it deals with the formation and workings of the 2010-15 Coalition. A sceptic at first, as a master of compromise he came to see the virtues of the Coalition. We can thank Vince Cable for his opposition to the proposed take-over of AstraZeneca by Pfizer – we might have one less vaccine otherwise and a weaker pharmaceutical industry. Ed Davey as secretary of state for energy and climate change was "refusing to compromise on the government's green commitments".

Apparently, Cameron "stopped inviting Ed to the meetings and even held one particularly controversial discussion in his office...leaving one of the private secretaries to guard the door in case Ed tried to break in".

And we find out the purpose of the Liberal Democrat conference - delivering the knockout blow

to Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Bill - though some of its provisions had already attained a life of their own.

Where then, might we ask questions about the veracity of the book? There is circumspection about the death of David Kelly - Iraq War whistle-blower - and the Hutton Inquiry, which it says Heywood advised Blair to set up.

The book attributes Heywood's departure as principal private secretary to Tony Blair to his desire for a new role and domestic reasons in a new family. Wikipedia, not necessarily a reliable source, says "he left the civil service in the wake of the Hutton Inquiry where it emerged that he said he had never minuted meetings in the prime ministerial offices about David Kelly, a job he was required to do".

Suzanne Heywood, on the other hand, says; "When the Hutton Report was published... it cleared Jeremy's No. 10 colleagues of any wrongdoing – and didn't mention Jeremy at all since he hadn't been involved in any of the key meetings or decisions."

Heywood tells his wife: "A veil of sadness had settled on Number 10 from the day on which they'd heard the news of Dr. Kelly's death." One draws one's own conclusions. As Heywood warned Blair, "it would haunt him for years".

The book is a compilation of Heywood's notes and recollections, together with those of his wife, the author. They worked together on the book, much of the time in his last days in hospital (he died of lung cancer) including prompts of questions to put to colleagues and politicians in interviews thereafter.

Cameron reputedly tried to block the publication of the book, it is thought because of revelations that he had instructed the civil service not to prepare for the possibility of a 'Leave' victory. We are however, dealing with the Prince of Fools.

There is one problem with this book, which might be addressed when it goes into paperback; it needs appendices, first and foremost of abbreviations – simply looking them up doesn't work, because time moves on and new meanings come into being. Consider ERM, encountered in the opening pages - the first European Exchange Rate Mechanism, which lasted until 1999. A dramatis personae might also be of value,

since I suspect this book will be a primary source for years to come. One would expect discretion from a senior civil servant, especially one of the character of Jeremy Heywood; every book of this kind has its element of self-justification. Tumultuous times; so I would see this as a yardstick to judge the recollections of others.

Stewart Rayment

Nuclear Folly – A New History of the Cuban Missile Crisis **by Serhii Plokhly** **Allen Lane £25.00**

Next year sees the 60th anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis, the iciest period of the Cold War when, for a period of two weeks, the world was the closest it has yet come to a nuclear conflict. Many books, articles and documentaries are certain to mark the occasion - but few will be as good, as well-written and as revelatory as Serhii Plokhly's new book.

Professor of history at Harvard and an authoritative writer on Eastern Europe, Plokhly sheds new light on the crisis after examining recently released Soviet documents. He highlights the tensions which existed in the Soviet leadership and the rift between Khrushchev and Castro, a rift which continued the threat of nuclear conflict even after Khrushchev had agreed to withdraw the Soviet missiles from Cuba, since Castro still had control of tactical nuclear weapons – a fact of which the Americans were unaware when agreeing the withdrawal of the Russian missiles.

The broad background of the crisis is well-known: the book assumes a certain knowledge of the events of October 1963. Someone wishing to learn about this perilous period might do better to start with Sheldon Stern's *The Week the World Stood Still*. There are, of course, also numerous books documenting events from an American perspective: Max Frankel's *High Noon* and Scott and Hughes' *A Critical Reappraisal* stand out in a crowded field. Many of the participants also chronicled events, although Robert Kennedy's *13 Days* is now somewhat discredited as an accurate work of history and Robert McNamara and

others were, perhaps, too close to events to view them dispassionately when writing their accounts.

In contrast, Plokhly analyses the actions taken by both sides, the miscalculations, the second-guessing and the errors born out of distrust. He concludes, however, that, amid what McNamara later described as “the misinformation, miscalculation and misperceptions”, nuclear war was ultimately averted because of a more fundamental human emotion – fear.

Plokhly describes the harrowing confrontation at sea with a Soviet submarine arming its nuclear torpedoes with its captain initially giving an order to fire conventional torpedoes following harassment from the USS *Cony* and American planes.

After the submarine surfaced due to the fact it could no longer remain underwater because of run-down batteries, it came under fire from American tracer bullets fired ahead of it, prompting the submarine captain to order the priming and loading of nuclear torpedoes. It appears that insubordination by officers on the submarine prevented a possible nuclear conflict at sea.

This book is also particularly good in describing the views and actions of the Cuban leadership of Fidel Castro, drawing on new Soviet sources. Castro misjudged the rationale of the Soviet Union in placing the missiles in Cuba in the first place – they were not primarily there to defend Cuba and its revolution – but the Soviet approach to its ally was somewhat highhanded and condescending: when Havana relayed reports that the US was planning an invasion of Cuba, Khrushchev replied, “We... offer the following friendly advice to you: show patience, restraint and more restraint ... do not let yourself be provoked” and Castro might have reasonably expected to be told of Khrushchev's conciliatory letter to Kennedy from the Russians themselves rather than from an Associated Press teletype.

This is a fine and important book. It casts new light on a period of potentially fatal darkness for mankind, provides information not known even by aficionados of Kennedy and his times, and will shape the interpretation of the crisis by all subsequent writers.

Nick Winch

Poles Apart **By Alison Goldsworthy,** **Laura Osborne,** **Alexandra Chesterfield** **Random House/** **Cornerstone £20**

This first book from the creators of a podcast called ‘Changed My Mind’ is significant for Liberals principally due to the role of my friend and former deputy chair of the Lib Dems’ Federal Executive, Alison Goldsworthy.

Her experience of an ‘us and them’ polarisation ultimately caused her to leave the party; the conviction that polarisation can be reversed is one that could be challenged, hence this review.

The book is studious, well-researched (references comprise fully one quarter of the book) and provides a genuine attempt to understand the significance of those whose minds have indeed changed.

Much of the discussion of game theory reminds me of a rather more directly applied version of the abstract lectures of many a university student. These and other theories were ahead of their time. The famous meme of Murdoch exploiting a worker and distracting them by claiming “that immigrant’s stealing your wages” was learnt, just as the Tories’ ‘dead cat’ theory of distraction picked up from Lynton Crosby and other cynical hard-right..... You see, there: we’re polarised already.

The phenomenon of groupthink may be easier to explain in the context of events of the past decade. Without saying it, it’s a pretty powerful polemic against the device of referenda. Besides the more familiar framing of the tribal mindset, such as through sporting loyalties, it also shows the links to the sort of unconscious bias that leads to discrimination in employment and other settings.

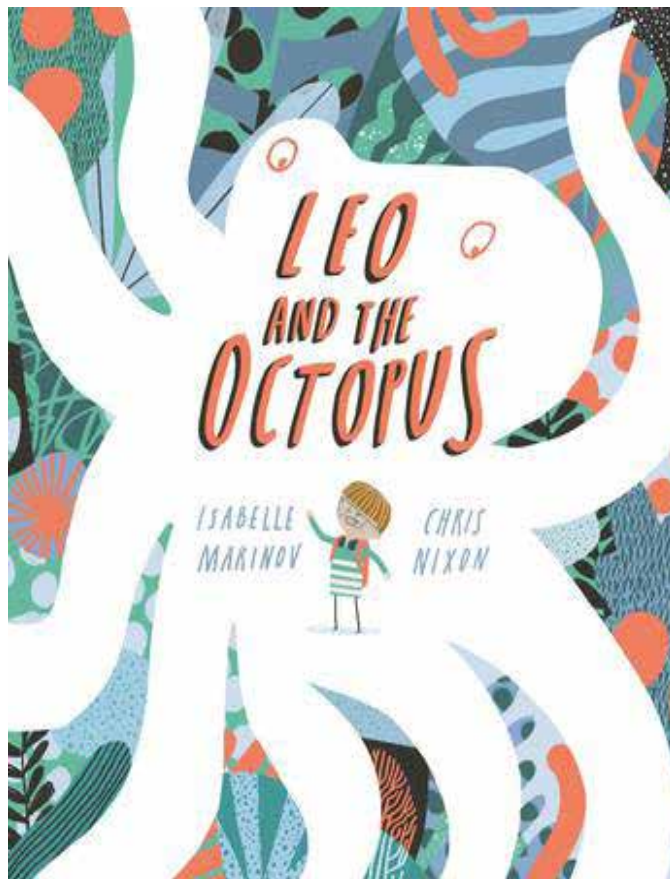
While a barrage of statistics are convincingly used that correlate some aspects of polarisation, though, it is an interesting theory, rather than definitive. For example, in the reviewer’s home district, there are communities that clearly voted two-thirds Remain in 2016, and others that voted by a similar margin to leave. There is little discussion of this, though; and little if any sign that the polarisation evident in election counts is being

amplified in real life. Using a variety of transatlantic examples, reflecting the spread of its authors, the phenomenon of activist capitalism is brought to life, using Nike on Black Lives Matter, and UK cider makers (though not Brewdog).

The effects of demographic change and generational decline in trust in the political system is also touched on - fuelled by inequalities of outcome and wealth that flourished well before Brexit and Trump. These in turn fuel insecurity that reinforces groupthink. Covid and climate change impacts will of course amplify this further.

In terms of the politics, some familiar ground of inflammatory social media campaigning, fear-mongering and the toxic territory of American far-right media is covered without surprise. Topically, there is also a clear account of the ways in which Facebook historically pushed the most inflammatory content as the optimum way to generate a response. The book highlights the way, too, that the 2009 expenses scandal was used to normalise thinking of politicians as all bad, as being 'all the same'; in hindsight, a device repeatedly used by the Tories to both normalise bad behaviour and attempt to neutralise or dismiss evidence of fact. But it does not make the link between cause and effect of the 'othering'.

The fact is that - while the agitators in this are predominantly of one political hue - those of us on the opposite site have continued to be caught like a rabbit in the headlights. The response of so-called liberal leadership has generally been not so much to adopt a high moral tone, as to make no sound at all. The current Lib Dem president, no stranger to writing books that tell us what to do, has generated no strategy that learns the lessons deployed in this book. The brief period of assertive campaigning that fleetingly generated a surge in support for the party has been followed by a lengthy period of blancmange. Full in the face of all the evidence, the Lib Dems and Labour have engaged



in a strenuous tussle to see who can be the least relevant.

The disappointment is that, instead of a clarion call to mobilise those who believe in the principles of liberal democracy, the establishment can somehow stand up against its erosion. The truth, as we all know, is that the establishment itself is being eroded; the only response is to overcome the oppressors, not understand them. The 'culture war' issues that distract and drain energy from these bigger battles are touched on, but only just. The conclusion becomes more persuasive in talking about the need to appeal to a shared identity, mindful of the lesson learned that emotion trumps reason. While at times a frustrating read, the threads of a convincing narrative for liberals are present much more here than in anything from any current party figure in recent times.

Where it's possible to be cynical about the 'depolarisation' narrative of the book: it's not just about the context in which the Facebooks of this world draw people to more extreme positions; progressives and Liberals spend far too much time empathising with the situation of people already driven into destructive patterns, and far too little time learning the lessons of the same science to redress the

balance.

But then, maybe that's the subject for another book.....

Gareth Epps

The Nature Seed, how to raise adventurous and nurturing kids by Lucy Jones and Ken Greenway
Souvenir Press
2021 £16.99

Part of the ethos behind the establishment of the Soanes Centre, where Ken Greenway works, was that if you teach children to know their environment then they will love and respect it.

Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park is London's innermost woodland - three miles from the City, 30-odd acres, so it is a tough

challenge. The authors have pooled their experiences to take that message beyond those boundaries and share that knowledge with parents who want their children to grow close to nature; it is never too early to start.

To this end, there are lots of practical examples of things to do, how they work out for you is a matter of trial and error, but here is a guide. Don't keep your crabs in a bucket for too long... they'll probably die - a rather grimmer message than the authors' - and come on Ken, it's much more fun to use a flint and steel to get a fire going than a lighter.

There are some useful comments on inequality of access to nature, which would serve those of you who are in a position to make decisions on open spaces. It is fairly easy to scan through the book and see which sections are relevant. Also note that the situation will change with time.

This is a book for parents and teachers to nurture their children; it is broad practical guide and you'll need other resources, some of them suggested. You cannot leave fighting climate change to politicians. Assuming they are on the right side anyway, they have far too many other decisions to balance, and nobody is going to

thank them for any of them. Start making those small steps your self; we all know what acorns grow into (I hope).

Stewart Rayment

Leo and the Octopus
by Isabelle Marinov,
illustrated by Chris Nixon
Templar Publishing
2021 £6.99

You have be careful when buying books about Leo, they aren't always that good. This one, however, is brilliant. Leo has an autism; there's nothing wrong with that, but he has difficulties with his life until he meets an octopus named Maya. So, every child and adult will find this book valuable, either in understanding their world or understanding the world of their friends and colleagues.

I note that it is already being used professionally in that field; every school and library should have a copy.

Isabelle Marinov has been writing since she was nine in German and Luxembourgish, her native language but her published work has only recently appeared. Chris Nixon is an Australian illustrator whose affinity with surf culture blends well with an octopus.

Stewart Rayment

Leopard and Me
by Patricia A Shaw
illustrated by Nick Roberts
New Generation Publishing
2020 £13.95

Like all the best children's stories, this is, of course, true. Leopard had gone walkabout. Finding him should have been easy enough, I mean, Beanie Babies® were everywhere in those days, the mid-90s. A friend was going to Germany en-route to Copenhagen and obliged with a couple of postcards, told the story and it went (what we would now call) viral. On one day, postcards

Leopard and Me

Patricia A. Shaw

Illustrated by Nick Roberts



arrived from opposite sides of the world. But not a leopard to be found anywhere (well, obviously you'll say, he was on the other side of the world). My secretary Rachel, was a BUNAC student on her year out. She collected Beanie Babies and was anxious to acquire the rarity, Britannia Bear, only sold in this country, so between us we scoured the shops to no avail.

Pooh Corner, the annual picnic for my god-children, was almost upon us, when both of us chanced upon the bear and leopard at the same time. Rachel found them in Bath; I found them in Tunbridge Wells. A close call, but if you're ever in the same position, do it.

Fortunately, Patricia Shaw tells the story from the recipient's end, not mine, and a charming story it is, the kind of experience every three-year-old should have. A primary school teacher before lockdown, Patricia Shaw has pitched her book at early readers – five-year olds - The Jolly Postman meets the Velveteen Rabbit you might say. Abbie is a child of colour, so I'm pleased to announce another book that represents our more diverse community. A fruitful collaboration with illustrator Nick Roberts; those of you around in the 1990s may recognise some of the characters, or at least, a National Liberal Club blazer.

And where are they now? 'Abbie' graduated from medical school,

straight to the frontline fighting Covid-19 this year; Leopard is still with her. Andy is furloughed; the rest of us soldier on. Confronted with the sign 'Do not climb the fence', the unnamed girl in Nick Roberts' illustrations showed early promise as the lawyer (and regular contributor to *Liberator*) she now is, saying: "Well, it says nothing about going under it" as she slid through for the annual clearance of Pooh Sticks from the stream. The Pooh Corner Picnic didn't take place this year, but will revive. It's only the second year missed. Some of the children of earlier years now have children of their own for the tradition to thrive. Childhood is too brief and should be momentous, Leopard and Me will show you the way.

Stewart Rayment

An Account of Daniel Quare 1648-1724
by Patrick Streeter
Matching Press £10

Streeter is a former Lib Dem councillor in Tower Hamlets and has had his interest in Quare sparked - presumably - by their joint connection with the Essex village of Matching.

Quare was among the most celebrated clockmakers of his age and his work can be found in royal collections and prominent museums. This was an era when each clock was an individual masterpiece and technical innovations were still being made in accurate timekeeping.

It seems though that Quare's descendants did not follow his example and instead became farmers at Matching where Streeter, so to speak, found them and assembled their story.

Mark Smulian

I am at last granted an audience with the head keeper, where I explain that, despite my costume, I am not a gorilla but a peer of the realm and press my case to be allowed to return home to the Hall forthwith. She, however, is implacable: "If I believed every sob story I heard from an animal I soon wouldn't have a zoo at all. When I was a junior keeper I allowed two penguins to 'go back to our nunnery' and I didn't half get into trouble. So it's a no from me. Beat your chest when you get back to your cage. The punters like that."

Yes, gentle reader, zoo life is beginning to pale. The taste of bananas has become a torment to me and I have been moved next door to the hyenas, who have no conversation and snigger at everything – one might as well be living with a pack of Twitter influencers. The conclusion to all this is clear: I shall have to abandon the usual channels and make my escape.

One solace of zoo life is that a kindly keeper leaves us his newspaper after he's eaten his sandwiches, and I have taken to reading the day's stories to my fellow inmates. Today there is much debate over the prime minister's suggestion that feeding people to animals could help solve the biodiversity crisis. Generally speaking, the lions and tigers are all in favour of the idea, while our herbivorous friends urge the provision of a vegan alternative. The anteaters suggest that everyone should eat ants.

This evening I strike gold when I get talking a sparrow who has dropped in for a few crumbs. It transpires that he has a brother-in-law who knows a starling who is friends with a racing pigeon. I give the sparrow a note to pass on to said pigeon, emphasising that it is to be put eventually into the hands of the Wise Woman of Wing. I need not have worried: it turns out she is known to all the fowls of the air.

Today's most popular news story involves a daughter of the Duke of Rutland. She was fined just £50 for speeding – half the normal minimum, the paper says – after she claimed paying a penalty would cause her "cashflow issues". There's a lot of tutting from my companions and some scepticism is expressed about the genuineness of those issues. But what, I ask myself, if the Duke and his family really are short of tin? Could there be a fire sale in prospect? I have no interest in Belvoir Castle, which has always struck me as rather flashy, but the Manners own land in the north of the county that I have long coveted – I strongly suspect that a geological survey of it would reveal a rich seam of Stilton crying out to be mined. Then there is the recipe for pork-pie jelly that they have kept to their bosoms for generations and charged the rest of us

Lord Bonkers' Diary

a pretty penny to use. It would be pleasing to get my hands on that. This is an opportunity too good to be missed and I wait all the more impatiently for rescue.

I am woken by a hand being held over my mouth. "Don't breathe a word, Lord B.," says a squeaky voice. I look up to see skinny figures descending from the cage roof on ropes: the Well-Behaved Orphans! "I

just needs to unlock the cage," says my rescuer. "Are you sure you can pick the lock?" I whisper. "If I can get into Matron's gin cupboard, I can cope with any lock," comes the encouraging reply.

So it proves, and as my prison door swings open I see a familiar figure flanked by a couple of my gamekeepers carrying orchard doughties. "There's no time to talk," says the Wise Woman, "I've got wheels." I see a charabanc parked beside a newly opened gap in the zoo's perimeter fence, and the Orphans and I hurry to board it. "If anyone asks," says the Wise Woman, "the kids are a visiting Himalayan choir, I'm their driver and you're their pet yeti."

"Fancy going off with those elves!" she continues. "I thought we'd never see you again." I admit in the reply that it will be wonderful to go home to Bonkers Hall. "You're not going home yet," she says. "The chief whip phoned and they need your vote in the Lord's. The Tories are planning to pump sewage into our rivers."

I arrive at Westminster just in time to take part in the vote. The attendants in the Lord's really are a cut above the rest: despite my gorilla costume, I am greeted by name and urged to hurry through the lobby.

Brushing off a Conservative peer, who is convinced his grandfather shot mine and mounted him over his fireplace, I reflect once again on the remarkable resourcefulness of my own Well-Behaved Orphans. Some children would have balked at the task of squeezing through the bars of the cage, but these fellows assure me that it was "no worse than a chimbley". I make a note to stand them all a slap up tea when I reach Rutland, just as soon as I make sure that Farron has not ripped the pews out of St Asquith's and forced everyone to sing "Shine, Jesus, Shine."

And so to St Pancras, where I sit in a café writing this last entry and wondering what budget fares East Midlands Railways makes available to unaccompanied gorillas.

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