


# liberator



Prime minister, there are people who can't afford heat *and* food

Conservatives believe in freedom of choice

- 🔥 How to beat Truss - Nick Winch
- 🔥 'Decolonising aid' destroys local campaigns - Rebecca Tinsley
- 🔥 Pitfalls of a progressive alliance - Jonathan Calder

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# COMMENTARY

## IS TRUSS THE TORIES' CORBYN?

Lix Truss's premiership is likely to be nasty, brutish and short, as Thomas Hobbes didn't quite say.

Nasty because everything reported from the Truss campaign over the summer suggests her government will combine all the faults of Boris Johnson's with none of its few merits.

Johnson - if in a half-hearted and ineffective way - at least appeared to support 'levelling up' and net zero for carbon. Truss does not even pay that kind of lip service.

Brutish because she relies on and appeals to a narrow section even of the Conservative party on its far right.

Short because the parody of Thatcherism that Truss parades looks like electoral suicide, as even some Tories have noted.

A prime minister dependent on a fringe of extremists like Jacob Rees-Mogg and Nadine Dorries, not even in command of majority of their own MPs and forced to play to their narrow base with ever more unhinged positions resembles nothing so much as a Tory version of Jeremy Corbyn.

Appealing to a fundamentalist base that did not even amount to majority in its own party did of course work wonders for Labour in 2019.

Can we expect much the same from the Tories? By choosing Truss, the Tories missed the chance to wipe the slate clean over public disgust at Johnson's antics by getting rid of those most closely associated with him.

And there is the possibility of Truss making things worse with errors even Johnson (never mind Theresa May and David Cameron) would have avoided. She has co-authored a book that described British workers as "idlers", said she would cut public sector pay in the regions before hastily reversing this and has been reported as planning a 'bonfire' of employee rights. Presumably some employees voted Tory last time.

Truss's government looks like being as accident-prone as the last days of John Major. We cannot know precisely what form it will take but given Truss's views and the nature of her supporters any sudden changes that revive Tory support beyond a 'honeymoon' appear improbable.

She gives every appearance of believing all the Thatcherite nonsense about the virtues of making the rich even richer. This would be a mirror image of Corbyn and about as electorally appealing.

## NO CONFERRING

Federal Conference Committee undoubtedly faced a difficult decision over cancelling conference and applied itself seriously to the task. That does not mean its decision was right.

Cancellation of conference leaves the party facing losses of hundreds of thousands of pounds in costs to the venue, exhibitors, advertisers and party members, and even if some become 'credits' for a future conference, that amounts to the same thing.

It has left members still unable to meet each other after three years and has left the party unable to make new policy or react to political circumstances that will still be there after the state funeral.

Far more appropriate would have been to hold conference on the Saturday and Sunday, end it with Ed Davey paying a dignified tribute to Elizabeth II - in place of a conventional leader's speech - and then leaving the Monday clear of activities to allow those who wished to view the state funeral on some large screens. Resumption on the Tuesday might have been possible too.

Cancellation came from fear of the right-wing press and guesses about public opinion. By the May 2023 elections - never mind the next general election - few will recall or care what the Lib Dems did in September 2022 and barely any votes would be moved one way or the other.

Some other extraordinary reasons have been advanced for the cancellation such as that the media would have ignored conference. How much more so will the media ignore an event that is no longer taking place?

Even if the event was ignored in public the costs were all committed, members would have met each other, learnt from speakers and been trained in a myriad of important activities.

Rumours suggested registrations for Brighton had been well down on pre-pandemic conferences.

This was probably a combination of tough financial times and people having got out of the habit of attending during the pandemic. That habit will now be more difficult to re-establish, particularly if people have lost significant money on unrecoverable hotel and transport costs. Cancelling Brighton may cause knock-on damage to conferences for some years to come.

Cancellation means the Lib Dems have said to the country that they are more hung-up about royal protocol than the cost of living crisis.

The late Queen's reign is often rightly held up as an example of duty and service. She never cancelled events because the optics might have become a bit inconvenient.

What kind of tribute do the Lib Dems pay an admired constitutional monarch by dropping out of the political system over which she reigned?

\* You will find references to 'conference' in this Liberator, which refer to matters scheduled for Brighton but now expected to resurface at future conferences.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## STONE WAVES HIS WEAPON

For the last few years more than 100 members have submitted motions to every Lib Dem conference calling for the UK to sign the UN Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons and to give up nuclear weapons.

Each time the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) failed to choose the motion for debate on the grounds it might cause controversy, and that would never do in a conference debate.

Expecting a similar motion again the Federal Policy Committee decided that the party's defence spokesman in the Commons (that's Jamie Stone in case you hadn't noticed but there's a reshuffle coming so after conference it will be Richard Foord) should present his own motion on nukes. Delayed by the cancellation of Brighton, this will no doubt resurface.

Naturally the FCC selected that and rejected the usual anti-nuke motion. So why does the party need another debate on nukes? Why not an overall defence and security review?

The last one was in 2018 and the world has changed a little since then. Federal Policy Committee originally refused to do this but has now set up a working group on security but with the question of nuclear weapons explicitly excluded, because that's going to be debated separately in September.

No working group on it, no consultation, no chance to consider how nukes fit into the overall security of the country, just the thoughts of Jamie Stone. What does his motion add to the party's current position, which, in case you forgot, is "A medium-readiness responsive posture" which means abandoning the cold war doctrine of continuous-at-sea-defence (CASD) thus reducing the number of submarines needed, but with the option of bringing back continuous patrols if a threat is imminent? Stone's motion reinstates CASD, which is covered by the existing option already, but otherwise adds nothing new or useful.

There could be two motives for putting this on the agenda. The first is that given the Ukraine war, people who want to keep nukes can be sure of a majority at conference, just out of panic and without any reflection on the usefulness of the weapons or alternative defence strategies.

The other is that insofar as the party has a strategy, it is to win Tory seats, the 'blue wall' and we wouldn't want to scare off unhappy Tory voters, would we? A bit too simplistic as we're not getting many Tories to vote Lib Dem anyway. Mostly they stay at home and don't vote. What we're getting is all the anti-Tory votes as Labour and Green voters switch to us.

Stone's motion now is all very different from his stance in early 2021 (Liberator 405 <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>) when he told Lib Dems Against Trident that he and Julie Smith,

the Lords defence spokesperson, were both "strongly opposed to this motion being on the Spring Conference agenda", because "the nuclear issue is potentially extremely divisive" and Ed Davey did not want a row at conference when he was trying to contrast the Lib Dems with the rows prevalent in the other parties.

## AND THEN THERE WAS ONE

Richard Foord was by all accounts an excellent candidate in Tiverton & Honiton and is set to make his mark in parliament. His path there was eased by his far-sighted decision some years ago to reside in the constituency.

For there were at least two other applicants to be the candidate both of whom had strong local connections but who were - horrors! - stridently pro-European.

One was former south west MEP Carol Voaden and the other David Chalmers, chair of the Liberal Democrat European Group.

Voaden had already represented the area in the European Parliament and Chalmers lives elsewhere in Devon but has strong professional connections in the locality.

Since the party is furiously trying to play down its pro-European policy so as not to offend voters in 'blue wall' seats (and few were as blue as this one), Something Had To Be Done.

Cue a hastily invented requirement that the candidate had to already live in Tiverton & Honiton and hey presto Foord was duly adopted.

## GREENS STRAINED

A report to the English Council earlier in the summer from the Federal Communications and Elections Committee included the observation: "We discussed the request of the Green Liberal Democrats to be part of any further work done to communicate the Working with the Green' Paper.

"We did not agree that the Green Liberal Democrats should have an entrenched role in communicating the report, or in any potential future negotiations with the Green party."

Green Lib Dems chair Keith Melton told Liberator the group had never asked for any such status and said he found the comment baffling and thought the language used implied some lack of trust by the party in GLD.

The paper referred to was written last autumn by Lord Stunell and former Southwark group leader Anood Al-Samerai.

It will make bleak reading for enthusiasts of the 'progressive alliance' and for those places where some sort of deal with the Green has been done.

There are for example a joint administration in South Oxfordshire (Liberator 412 <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>) and a local election pact in



Richmond, though this is controversial in particular in the Twickenham half of the borough (Liberator 410 <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/back-issues/>)

The paper appears to have had limited circulation, so let Liberator oblige. It concluded: "The Greens are not the reason for the challenges which face us and deals with them are not the solution. It will be the restoration of belief in the Party's messages, and the development of a strong campaigning local culture, that will make the question of making pre-election deals not only less relevant locally, but also if they do occur, of marginal significance nationally."

Stunell and Al-Samerai noted the evidence that deals with the Greens worked well was "mixed at best" and "serious risks of longer term impact on local parties and the national party were identified".

They also took a swipe at the Unite to Remain exercise with Plaid Cymru and the Greens in the 2019 general election noting that no participating parties actually gained any seats as a result and said they found no convincing evidence that the pact helped to hold any either.

"The consequences of the 2019 Unite to Remain deal illustrate starkly the dangers of any such national, top-down, agreement to future successful campaigning locally," the report said.

"Even the keenest proponents of working closely with another party to reach a pre-election arrangement were clear in their evidence to us that any deals must be local, not national, soundly based on a strategic vision of growth, not born out of weakness, and time-limited, not indefinite."

## TROUBLE IN THE STALLS

Public altercations between Lib Dem baronesses are something of a rarity but Sarah Ludford and Lynne Featherstone have had a row over whether an organisation called the LGB Alliance should have a stall in the conference exhibition area.

Wide awake readers will have noticed that its name omits the usual "T" from the acronym.

LGB Alliance has published a confirmatory email from the Lib Dems which said it could have a stall, but this was followed in rapid succession by a Twitter statement by Lib Dem chief executive Mike Dixon which said it could not due to "an administrative error".

Dixon's message did not cite any political reason - as it might have done due to that missing "T" - for refusing the booking but suspicions were raised among some that this was the real reason and Featherstone tweeted in response to comments from the public: "Both sex and gender are protected characteristics under the equality act."

Back came Ludford: "Lynne, it's 'gender reassignment' which is a protected characteristic, alongside sex and 7 others under the Equality Act. 'Gender identity' is not one and I'm not aware of any legal definition of it (happy to be corrected) so if our party wants to add it, it must define it." The ban on stalls also included an organisation called Filia, which describes itself as: "part of the Women's Liberation Movement".

Quite apart from the inter-baronial row, if the reason for cancelling the stalls was political, does not blaming 'an administrative error' unfairly question the competence of conference staff?

An organisation called Liberal Voice for Women - which is not an official party associated organisation and is separate from Lib Dem Women - then sent a letter to Dixon demanding the two stalls be reinstated, which attracted the public signatures of some 150 people.

These included the general election reviewer Baroness Thornhill, former Bristol council leader Baroness Janke, Federal Board members Lord Strasburger and Joyce Onstad, former MPs Alan Beith and Norman Baker and former MP and MEP Chris Davies.

The letter said the stalls had been cancelled "because a trans activist complained", though it did not say give the basis for this.

It stated: "Not only does this move, and the way it was announced, make our party look unprofessional, but it exposes a troubling lack of transparency as to how decisions about exhibition stands and fringe meetings are made."

As Liberator went to press it was unclear who or what might have brought pressure on Dixon and whether the 'administrative error' was a convenient fiction.

## CHURCH GOERS

A revised Lib Dem members' code of conduct is due to be put to conference this September but with an important change from the draft.

The original included the disturbingly Orwellian condition: "Your responsibilities apply not only to your personal conduct but also to your conduct in communications, including electronic ones, social media and all other forms of media."

"This includes actions and opinions which are expressed or evidenced by membership of organisations which are in conflict with our values."

That in effect meant that if a Liberal Democrat was a member of any other organisation they could be held to support all its views and actions, which was strange as no-one requires Lib Dem members to agree with every aspect of party policy.

It was pointed out that given the deplorable record on sex, abuse of children and equal marriage of certain well-known religious denominations this provision could have removed followers of many organised religions from the Lib Dems. Hasty backtracking followed.

## VANISHING ACT

Amid the oceans of banal self-congratulation that is the Lib Dem Reports to Conference document, the odd nugget may be found.

The document has been remarkably silent on party membership levels since the great post-Brexit wave of 2019 crashed with large numbers of those who joined then not having renewed.

The report states blandly "membership income for the first half of 2022 is lower than we expected", though at least in England "as of July 2022 [it] is beginning to stabilise after a lengthy period of falling, during which the 'Brexit surge' of 2019 reversed".

Liberator last year had a stab at calculating the real figure by comparing the £2,315,018 raised from membership and subscription fees in 2019 and the £1,860,684 in 2020, giving a reduction of 19.6%, which then implied 92,460 members (Liberator 409).

We were later told by a reader who had been on a Zoom call in November 2021 with party president Mark Pack and chief executive Mike Dixon that they showed a slide of membership totals which gave the order of 76,000.

Assuming Dixon and Pack would have shown accurate figures, Reports to Conference now says membership and subscription fees totalled £1,574,472 in 2021 against the £1,860,684 of 2020, a reduction of 15%. Using an average membership fee that would suggest membership is now somewhat short of 65,000. And of the once much-hyped supporters' scheme not a word is to be found.

## COMPLAINTS DEPARTMENT

The Federal Appeals Panel (FAP) has, after a year, published the trenchant though innocuous-sounding report 'SAT v complaints panel' [[https://assets.nationbuilder.com/libdems/pages/60152/attachments/original/1658498280/Case\\_30\\_-\\_FAP\\_Decision.pdf?1658498280&ga=2.59136109.1914398839.1661439127-463347588.1661439127](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/libdems/pages/60152/attachments/original/1658498280/Case_30_-_FAP_Decision.pdf?1658498280&ga=2.59136109.1914398839.1661439127-463347588.1661439127)] (Liberator 413).

Even in somewhat redacted form it is explicit about how the FAP thinks the complaints process should and should not be used.

Although the immediate cause of the complaint involved was one of alleged transphobia, the substance of the report applies to complaints of any kind and says the process must not be used in cases that concern political disagreements or personal offence rather than harassment or bullying.

Among a series of robust comments, it states: "A Liberal party cannot be in the business of policing the thoughts or beliefs of its members", and "no person has a right never to be offended by other people's speech, or to have others agree with their point of view".

It called compelled speech "an affront to freedom of conscience and expression, and contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights", and went on to say the party "may not compel its members to express beliefs (including about gender) that they do not hold, nor to use language or grammar that they do not wish to use".

The report concludes: "The Liberal Democrats' formal disciplinary process is not set up to punish people for being unsympathetic or unkind characters. Nor is it designed to deal with 'political' policy disagreements, personality clashes, inadequate job performance or skills, or minor slights or discourtesies."

FAP sounds though like it will have difficulty ploughing through its caseload. Chair David Graham's contribution to Reports to Conference notes there are only six active members of the FAP but 20 cases pending, giving a mean pending duration of six months and so "well in excess of our target to finally dispose of matters within three months".

The document does show the complaints process is not now being used for denunciations and score settling on a scale reminiscent of Stalin's Russia.

Complaints peaked at more than 300 in 2020, but are now "consistently under 100, and still declining".

In the past year 184 complaints were received of which 133 were dismissed and just eight upheld, although 10 of those dismissed received warnings.

## IT'S A SIX-HORSE RACE

Some light is thrown in the report of the Federal Appeals Panel on the extraordinary delay in resolving a complaint over the 2021 by-election for party vice-president responsible for working with ethnic minorities, which was won by Amna Ahmad.

This supports the fairly common view that when one has come fifth out of six in an election there will rarely be any grounds that could overturn the result in one's favour.

In his introduction to Reports to Conference, party president Mark Pack says: "An appeal over the conduct of the vice president by-election last year was finally concluded in July, with the appeal being rejected. (This does perhaps also show conference's wisdom in voting for a shorter and clearer internal elections appeals process in the spring.)"

FAP chair David Graham then explains the appellant was Juliet Makhapila, who alleged among much else that there were delays by staff in approving her nomination forms, a failure to circulate the final copy of her manifesto and staff delays in approving Facebook posts.

Graham said: "It was found that the evidence did not demonstrate that delays or errors in administration had been materially worse for the complainant than for any other candidate, so as to breach staff neutrality." This though rather implies that all six suffered such errors.

## PICK A WARD AND LOSE IT

After five entire years the case of former MP David Ward is still not resolved. Ward was MP for Bradford East from 2010-15 when he lost his seat. He was re-adopted in 2017 but was removed as candidate by then leader Tim Farron for reasons that have never been clearly explained but were thought to concern allegedly offensive comments. What the comments were and at whom they were directed is also murky though they appear to have concerned Palestine.

Ward had his membership revoked when he stood as an independent in Bradford East in 2017 beating an official party candidate the party ran against him (Liberator 395).

Since then he has several times tried to get readmitted but each time been rebuffed, again without it being very clear why.

Ward sat in a joint group of Lib Dems and independents for a while on Bradford council but lost his council seat in May.

He is now trying again to get his membership accepted but his supporters say the English Party has objected to his application, again without saying why, and he is therefore lodging yet another appeal.

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# THE LOUSE AND THE FLEA

## The Tories have made the worst of a bad choice of leader, Nick Winch looks at how to beat them

When asked to consider the merits of two eighteenth-century poets, Samuel Derrick and Christopher Smart, Dr Johnson famously observed that there was “no settling the point of precedence between a louse and a flea.”

A similar sentiment pervaded the election of the new Conservative leader. Or as someone more graphically put it, the choice was like deciding which of two ‘Portaloos’ to use on the fourth day of a pop festival.

The result was not a surprise. YouGov’s polls of Conservative members were broadly accurate, suggesting an absurdly lengthy campaign failed to change significantly the party faithful’s view.

### STARTLING MEDIOCRITY

This small group – not exclusively reactionary Rover-driving pensioners from the Home Counties with comfortable lifestyles; some of them are political activists with a sense of the public good and social responsibility – decided to elect as leader and prime minister a politician of such startling mediocrity that among a staggeringly poor field, she was only the third choice of Tory MPs until their final vote when she scraped into second place, securing her place in the members’ ballot.

This is not the first time the parliamentary party has not been ‘In Touch’ with the membership. In 2001, Conservative MPs voted for Kenneth Clarke ahead of Iain Duncan Smith who won the members’ vote by 60% to 40%. Duncan Smith’s leadership is not being regarded as a highlight of Conservative history.

However, before considering the implications for Liberals of a Truss premiership, it is worth considering the events which brought it about.

Boris Johnson’s downfall should have taken no-one by surprise – merely astonishment it was so long in coming. Eventually the Job-like patience of Conservative MPs ran out over the allegations of sexual assault by MP Chris Pincher. Johnson, whose sense of sexual morality saw him joke about Pincher’s reputation, seemed untroubled by it when appointing him to the Whips’ Office. However, the flaws in Johnson’s character – his inaccurate journalism; his disregard for the truth and indifference to detail; his lack of integrity; his recidivist spurning of lock-down regulations; his preference for the evacuation of pets over humans from Afghanistan; his relationships (both personal and financial) with Jennifer Arcuri; his indifference towards the constitution; his inept handling of the Owen Patterson affair; his undisclosed meetings with Russians and others; his acceptance of ministerial bullying; to name but a few – eventually overcame the perception that he was an electoral asset.

But even his electoral record does not stand up to scrutiny. He secured a smaller share of the vote in Henley than any Conservative since 1945. He was elected Mayor of London only by narrowly defeating a

Ken Livingstone and in 2012 as incumbent Johnson’s share of the vote actually fell. He has never built a personal vote in Uxbridge and the 2019 election result saw a Conservative victory against, in Jeremy Corbyn and Jo Swinson, two of the least pre-possessing or plausible leaders ever to be put up by the main opposition parties. Even Johnson’s role in the Brexit referendum centred on half-truth, misinformation and a rejection of rational argument. This was a prime minister who shied away from debate and scrutiny (the image of him fleeing into a fridge will live long in the memory), who insulted people regardless of race, creed or colour, who trashed Britain’s reputation in every country except, arguably, Ukraine, who fostered an atmosphere in which many more moderate and rational Conservatives no longer felt welcome and who was, throughout his career, interesting in little more than his own self-promotion.

Unless he plans some Berlusconi-like attempt at political resurrection (and the lure of the riches from journalism, public speaking and writing some more inaccurate and ill-researched books [<https://newrepublic.com/article/120288/winston-churchill-eyes-boris-johnson>] is likely to have greater appeal than the graft of public service), his legacy will be one of self-destruction and political immorality – a legacy he will richly deserve.

So how did Liz Truss - so evidently lacking in political heft - rise to the top of the greasy pole? Why was she chosen and for what does she stand? Is she the vacuous airhead as portrayed by many or a shrewd and canny political operator; a populist without a bone of conviction or the natural embodiment of the spirit of Thatcher; an unrealistic self-publicist or a visionary who can reverse what she sees as the decline of recent years – ironically years during which she and her party were in power?

The Tory leadership campaign was most notable, perhaps, for the complete inability of either candidate to create and sustain a coherent message. Rishi Sunak, no fool and with a record of chancellorship during the pandemic of which he can be rightly proud, failed to recognise the need to identify with the Tory membership – initially directing his campaign, it would appear, to the public at large.

He spoke convincingly of the dangers of tax cuts and the resulting inflation but failed to tie inflation to the damaging effect it has on savers – many of whom are Conservative members.

An inflation rate of 10%+ not only affects prices in the shops and the cost of mortgages: it destroys the value of savings and pensions. This he failed to get across. In the first TV debate, he appeared hectoring, patronising and inconsistent (although in all the broadcast hustings, he showed much more knowledge, imagination and empathy than his cliché-spouting, ill-informed and uninspiring opponent.)



It was an achievement for Sunak to manoeuvre himself into a place where he was simultaneously seen as the 'continuity candidate' responsible for taking to country towards recession and the 'backstabber' who delivered the fatal blow to Johnson. His claim to be a tax-cutter rang false and he failed to time his messages to ensure there was a campaigning peak when the ballot papers were sent out. He may have appeared the more rational, intelligent and competent, but he was also out of step with the Tory membership – two-thirds of whom still wanted Johnson as leader. The Sunak campaign appeared inept and ill-defined from the outset laying waste, incidentally, to the reputation of Gavin Williamson as a campaigning mastermind.

In contrast, with a campaign based on the unremarkable and the sort of phrase with which no one can take exception ("everyone should have the opportunity to succeed"), Truss positioned herself cannily: remaining in the cabinet she could claim her focus was on affairs of state and that she remained loyal to the Government and, by implication, to Johnson.

A campaign message devoid of any substance consisted almost entirely of the implausible claim that she was a politician with a record of 'delivery'. In office, of course, her record has been at best unremarkable. As environment secretary, her 'crusade' against red tape increased river and watercourse pollution; as justice secretary, she refused to stand up for the independence of the judiciary in facing attacks from the Daily Mail; as trade secretary she succeeded only in securing trade deals worse than those in place pre-Brexit; and as foreign secretary she has managed to offend friend and foe alike (although not in the epic way achieved by Johnson himself) and made clear that – like Johnson – she was not bothered about breaking international treaties signed by the government of which she was a part.

Most striking, perhaps, is her inability to exude any consistent political philosophy. Let us not bother about her youthful dalliance with the Liberal Democrat – after all, as Denis Healey remarked when challenged about his membership of the Communist Party at Oxford: "Yes, and I once believed in Father Christmas."

Of greater relevance was her belief in remaining in the EU – her advocacy during the referendum were not the remarks of someone who was at the time' on the fence as she has claimed. Indeed, her tweets from the referendum were still on her site as this month. However, she has painted herself as the arch-Brexiteer, gaining support from many of the more extreme carpet-chewers in the European Research Group.

She has chopped and changed on policy, her initial utterances always based on a kind of tabloid prejudice and an instinct for publicity not fettered by anything as complicated as logic. She has proven reluctant to

*"A campaign message devoid of any substance consisted almost entirely of the implausible claim that she was a politician with a record of 'delivery'"*

face scrutiny – but this may be because her performances when questioned can make cringing television. To not "have the exact number" of how many new houses have been built when the answer is none, or to only answer the question you want asked, may see her shortcomings exposed if interviewed in any more forensic a forum than Loose Women or Desert Island Discs. (Indeed, her interview technique is a heady cocktail of two-

parts insincerity, one-part predictability, with a splash of ignorance, topped off with a dose of the fatuous: just ask yourself – has Liz Truss ever said something which makes you think: "That's an interesting point I'd never thought of".)

## **SNAKE SKIN**

What she does do, however, is row back from a position, casting off previously advocated views like a snake shedding its skin. This ought to be a political weakness, but in an age when the public expect very little from politicians (and receive even less), it appears a recipe for success.

However, it is to be hoped (for the sake of the country – not of the Conservative Party) that in office Truss will demonstrate some evidence of an ability not just to recognise the scale of the problems but to address them in a way which does more than pander to her base.

There are not enough public buildings or buses to contain all those unable to spend winter days in their homes because of the cold. Or food banks to provide for those children facing hunger on a daily basis. A tax cut for those eligible to pay tax does nothing for those too poor to pay and national insurance is irrelevant to the pensioner or the disabled workless. The tragedy is that the nation's problems may not, in the short run, be soluble. There may be years of genuine financial pain – the challenge is to ensure that this pain is evenly spread and it is unlikely that a Truss Government has either the imagination or the will to address that.

Regrettably, the misery of millions provides a fruitful backdrop for a fundamental rethink of how society works – and the opportunity for Liberal Democrats to develop a radical and Liberal approach.

Just as in 1945, after a prolonged period of hardship, the electorate chose a new, exciting and imaginative approach to rebuild Britain, so in 2024 (or whenever) there will be a demand for similar thinking.

It appears unlikely that a Starmer-led Labour Party is prepared to embrace such an approach. Of course, a radical approach will not appeal to every voter but as articles in *Liberator* have often pointed out, trying to offend no-one in the end attracts no-one: now is the time for the party to be bold, imaginative, and to take the lead.

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Nick Winch is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

# LOOK AT THE ELEPHANT

There's one in the political room, it's called Brexit. Labour ignores it and the Lib Dems are shy of it. Confront it, says David Grace

A recent episode of Any Questions was discussing the problems of the National Health Service, the shortages of doctors and nurses, the blocking of beds by patients who could leave if there wasn't another shortage, this time of social care workers.

I had no expectation that the Tory panellist would mention the contribution of Brexit to each separate item in this concatenation of problems. (If you doubt this, read "Going it alone: health and Brexit in the UK" report by the Nuffield Trust and the impact of Brexit doesn't stop at workforce problems. You can download it here: <https://bit.ly/3TpnT3Q> ).

After all, the Tory line is that Brexit has only brought opportunities. They've even appointed Rees-Mogg to go out and find them. The only one I'm aware of is that his Somerset Capital can continue to be managed in the Cayman Islands and Singapore out of reach of any EU financial regulation so he's already found the only thing which matters to him.

## BREXIT LIES

The government got into power by lying about Brexit and are condemned to go on lying about it even as the facts pile up proving them wrong. One of the Tory leadership candidates even proposed new limitations on immigration to 'protect' the NHS whereas the truth is that the NHS and social care were dependent on migrant workers from the EU.

No, I didn't hold my breath waiting for the Tory to tell the truth. Sadly, nor was I on the edge of my seat waiting for the Labour panellist to draw attention to what Brexit has achieved. After all Keir Starmer had told all his colleagues "Sssh, don't mention Brexit. I did but I think I got away with it". Yes he did but it would have been better if he had stayed silent. On 4 July he set out his five-point plan "to make Brexit work" - FFS pull the other one!

There is one step which would at least remove one of the worst legacies of Brexit: to rejoin the single market. So did Starmer embrace it? Did he, hell! He specifically ruled it out saying questions about the single market were "arguments of the past".

He is running scared of the Red Wall voters who switched from Labour to Johnson's Tories in 2019. Never mind that it is the poorest people in Britain, including many in Red Wall, who already suffer the most from being outside the single market. He fears their opposition to immigration which explains his fear of joining the single market which would entail renewing freedom of movement. So don't expect any serious opposition from Labour to the Tory nationalist fantasies. Their fears will let them entrench the myths of Brexit so ably spread by Johnson and his chums. They're not going to mention the elephant.

One of the most enduring myths is about freedom

of movement. Nigel Farage exploited the idea that millions of Romanians would descend on Britain, actually citing a number larger than the entire population of Romania. Johnson scared voters with the prospect of Turkey about to join the EU.

In the referendum campaign a man who had swallowed that lie approached me saying, "I don't want they Turks coming over here". When I told him that Turkey was not going to join the EU he responded, "Don't argue with me. I'm a racist".

Freedom of movement did not mean that anyone in the EU could come and live in the UK. European citizens had the right to work here if they had a job, the right to look for work for three months and the right to study here. Those were the rules but no UK government actually enforced them, even failing to count when EU citizens left the country.

If we did rejoin the single market we could enforce the rules. Those rules are actually a market solution where people come if there's work for them to do. The Tories have started a number of half-hearted and inadequate schemes to address labour shortages, such as allowing extra visas for lorry drivers. That is a bureaucratic solution with civil servants estimating how many will be needed instead of letting the market decide. So much for free market Tories but don't expect principled or even consistent thinking from this government.

In case you think I'm a mad Remainer, just consider some of the latest estimates of the economic effects of Brexit. The Centre for European Reform says UK GDP down by 5.2%, £31bn (<https://www.cer.eu/>). The OECD says that's a drop of £4,250 each (GDP per capita). The trade balance, UK exports minus UK imports, is down 13.7% which means £31.7bn. More generally the UK is recovering from the pandemic slower than other developed countries. Oh yes, economists have separated the impact of Brexit from the pandemic, in case that excuse occurs to any odd Brexiters who have wandered into Liberator.

The OECD has also been working on the reduced growth caused by Brexit and the resultant drop in government's income from tax revenues. If you're not depressed yet, try reading Professor Chris Grey's blog Brexit and Beyond (<https://chrisgreymbrexitblog.blogspot.com/>) or his book Brexit Unfolded: How no one got what they wanted (and why they were never going to). Just don't expect any Tory or Labour politician to be quoting from these sources. Oh no, there is no elephant in the room, honest.

So we come to our own beloved Liberal Democrats. Ed Davey started badly a few days after becoming leader by telling Andrew Marr that we weren't in favour of rejoining the European Union, despite established party policy to that effect.



## FOOLISH DISHONEST

He has of course rowed back from that mistake (Mistake? Didn't he know?). It is foolish as well as dishonest for LibDems to deny what we think about Europe. People know. If they know nothing else about us, they know we think membership of the EU is the best choice for the country and they won't believe in any last-minute conversion to the opposite view (such as Liz Truss has embraced along with God know what else). During the Tiverton and Honiton by-election I was confronted by a rabid Tory woman who said she couldn't possibly vote for us because we want to be in the EU. I didn't deny it. I replied very briefly that it's not on the table and not what the election was about. I imagine she was one of the 16,393 voters who persisted in voting Tory in the by-election.

Analysis of that election shows that the Tory vote only dropped by 7,846 from 2019 despite Johnson's well-publicised law-breaking and lies and their former MP's unusual interest in tractors.

So how did we win? Perhaps 5,000 odd Tories actually did vote for us but the crucial change was that more than 10,000 Labour voters and 1,200 Green voters switched to us.

Why does this matter? Our three successive by-election gains from the Tories may tempt the so-called party strategists to see our hopes resting on dissatisfied Tory voters and raises the temptation of sounding more Tory to win them.

This temptation must be resisted. As Liberator has warned many times in the past, offer a voter a choice between a real Tory and a fake Tory and they will choose the real Tory. There's no future in it. We need to show that we can convince voters who loathe the Tories that we are their best bet, not Labour, not the Greens.

I met a voter like that in Chesham & Amersham. She was going to vote Green "to give the Tories a real kicking". I persuaded her that the only way to do that was to vote for a different Green, our own Sarah.

Back to Any Questions. Sorry to say, I waited in vain for Alistair Carmichael to be the panellist who would remind people of the effect of Brexit. He didn't. It's time for the Liberal Democrats to point out the elephant.

Don't be shy guys. That elephant grows bigger all the time. Everyone will see it eventually. By the way, an Opinion survey showed that 60% of voters (including 40% of Leave voters) think Brexit has "gone badly". Ipsos found, in June, that 45% of those surveyed (including 22% of Leave voters) felt that Brexit had "made life worse". How do I know that? Vince Cable told me in a European Movement newsletter. He went on to warn: "The next few years will consist of endless battles forced by hard-line Brexiters. Their mission is to pull us even further away from the EU and make exiting the single market irreversible."

Come on everyone, don't join the silence. With Vince in whatever language you choose, just shout "look at the bloody elephant".

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David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective



# FOUR INTO ONE WON'T GO

## Jonathan Calder concludes from Duncan Brack's Compass Progressive Alliance publication that this concept cannot work if imposed top down

With its thick concrete walls, the Progressive Alliance control bunker lies deep beneath the soil of... We'd better keep its location a secret, but I can tell you what you will find there.

The room is dominated by a table whose top carries a constituency map of Britain and across which WAAFs with victory roll hairdos slide little figures representing voters.

"Less than six hundred votes needed for Labour to gain High Peak," barks a voice from the gantry that overlooks the room. "Withdraw the Liberal Democrat candidate." A WAAF pushes some orange voters into the red group." "Labour gain High Peak, sir."

And that, if you believe what you read on social media, is all opposition parties need do to win the next general election.

Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, together perhaps with Plaid Cymru and some smaller parties, should reach agreement to field only one 'progressive' candidate between them in every constituency in England and Wales.

Some early models of this Progressive Alliance (PA) also included the SNP, but such is its dominance of the Scottish scene, holding 48 of the 59 Westminster seats there, that it's hard to see what it has to gain from joining such an arrangement. Besides, Scottish elections now see Unionist voters operating an alliance of their own, happy to fall in behind whichever party has the best chance of defeating the Nationalists in each constituency, and the SNP may well calculate that keeping a Conservative government in office at Westminster improves its chances of winning majority support for Scottish independence.

Would a PA defeat a reviving Conservative Party? Could it even win if the Conservatives were ahead in the polls? Supporters of the idea point out that the Tories never win 50% of the popular vote, so that in many constituencies they win despite polling less than the combined votes of the parties in the proposed alliance.

### SINGLE CANDIDATE

All we have to do is put those votes together behind a single candidate, the reasoning goes, and the Conservatives may never form a government again.

There would be many practical problems in establishing such an alliance. The first is that Labour's constitution has always been taken to rule out any electoral pacts, though some way round this must have been found at Tatton in 1997, where both Labour and the Liberal Democrats stood down in favour of the Independent Martin Bell.

A second problem is that if Labour agreed to join an alliance, there would have to be agreement between it and all the other parties over who would fight which

seats. Liberal Democrats of my generation have memories – perhaps "flashbacks" is a better word – of the endless hours consumed in meetings between the Liberal Party and the SDP to decide which party would represent the Alliance where – hours that would have been more profitably spent on campaigning, watching Dallas or almost anything else. Even if agreement could be reached in time for the next election, it would be at a similar opportunity cost.

Then there is the problem of what policy platform the PA would stand on – there would surely have to be some sort of agreement on policy to give voters an idea of what they are voting for, particularly if we are asking them to vote for a party they don't usually support.

One idea that you read on social media can be ruled out: a one-line manifesto pledging to introduce proportional representation for general elections. If we fought on that while the Conservatives talked about the economy, defence and education – no matter how stupid we thought they sounded – they would win and deserve to win.

We would certainly want to secure some movement from Labour on proportional representation and constitutional reform in general, but if we are exhausted after the seat negotiations it would be easier to agree some form of statement promising to undo the worst of the damage the Conservatives have caused on poverty, the environment and the economy.

We should also have to overcome the fact that a PA would threaten to hang around our necks the gaffes and objectionable views of every Labour and Green candidate around our necks. At the very least, Lib Dem candidates fighting the Tories in our target seats would have to cope with being called "the Labour/ Lib Dem candidate" on all their leaflets, and even if the other PA candidates conducted themselves blamelessly, we should still have to cope with all the worst policies of their national parties. The Greens, for instance, want to leave NATO, but not while the war in Ukraine is going on. It's hard to see that rallying disappointed Conservatives to the PA flag.

When all that had been accomplished, one question would remain: would a Progressive Alliance be worth all this trouble? Parties cannot deliver their voters en bloc to another party because those votes do not belong to them: they belong to the individual voters.

Some specially commissioned opinion polls give encouragement to the idea, but the trouble with them is that they do not seek information like conventional polls ("How would you vote if there was a general election tomorrow") but rather ask people to forecast what they would in a hypothetical situation at some unspecified point ("If there were an electoral pact between X, Y and Z parties at the next election and



this resulted in you having only a Y candidate to vote for, how would you vote?”

And the trouble with that, as psychologists will tell you, is that we are not very good at forecasting our own actions. We are actually better at forecasting other people's, because we take into account a wider range of factors when we look at them. We wonder how our neighbours will be influenced by the election campaign, but are, wrongly, confident that we are far too secure in our own beliefs for it to affect us.

And even if a PA could be agreed, it would contain subtle dangers for the Liberal Democrats. As Simon Titley asked in *Liberator* 346: “Progressive’. What does it mean? The only discernible meaning is ‘not conservative’ or ‘not reactionary’, but those are negative definitions. ... The ‘p’ word is a lazy word, so give it up. It will force you to say what you really mean, and that’s a good thing.”

It may be that being against the Tories will be enough at the next general election, but in the long run the ideology-light Liberal Democrats need something more to found a party on.

But maybe we can learn something from 1997, when a limited sort of PA operated between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and helped bring about the rout of the Conservatives. We Lib Dems saw our vote decline by 1%, yet made a net gain of 28 seats.

Duncan Brack has written a pamphlet for *Compass*, 1997 *Then and Now: The Progressive Alliance That Was and the One That Could Be*, looking at the lessons to be drawn from that experience. It reminds us that that the cooperation between the two parties in 1997 was the result of much work, both public and private.

The public work took place in the talks between Labour’s future foreign secretary Robin Cook and the former SDP leader Robert Maclennan. Between them they agreed a package of constitutional reforms, which included incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, freedom of information legislation, devolution to Scotland and Wales (and elections by proportional representation to their parliaments), an elected authority for London, the removal of hereditary peers from the House of Lords, proportional representation for the European elections and a referendum on voting reform for Westminster elections between first-past-the-post and a proportional alternative.

As Brack says, much of this was already Liberal Democrat policy – some of it was watered down to be accepted as part of the package – but the agreement did break new ground for Labour. And most of it was implemented by the Blair government. The exceptions were the referendum on a proportional voting and the total removal of hereditary peers.

## PRIVATE WORK

Meanwhile, the private work took place in talks between Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown. These looked at electoral cooperation and the possibility of a wider policy agreement than that reached by Cook and Maclennan.

Blair, says Brack, was keen on the idea of the two parties backing a single candidate in a limited number of seats, and accepted that in some the candidate would be a Liberal Democrat. Remembering the hours lost in negotiations with the SDP, Ashdown vetoed this idea saying it would appear “a grubby plan designed

to gain power and votes for ourselves, instead of one based round principles and what was best for the country”.

This line was forced on Ashdown, who had earlier floated the idea of closer cooperation between the parties, by the Liberal Democrats’ polling. This showed clearly that the soft Conservative voters the party was targeting would be happy for it to enter government with Labour in the event of a hung parliament but were hostile to the idea that it should campaign with Labour for that outcome.

So the parties turned to covert cooperation, concentrating on the same issues and using the same language. They avoided attacks on each other, shared information on which seats they were targeting and jointly gave the *Daily Mirror* a list of 22 seats where Labour voters should back the Liberal Democrats.

In the event, Liberal Democrat supporters proved to be more prepared to vote tactically than Labour supporters. The Labour vote went up in some Liberal Democrat targets, but such was the fall in Conservative support that we still won some of them. I don’t know if they were official targets, but Labour also came from third place to win two seats we had rather fancied winning ourselves: St Albans and Hastings & Rye.

Brack concludes from this history that parties should not try to negotiate a national pact. Instead, he says: “Any level of cooperation between non-Conservative parties will need to be more fluid and organic than it was in 1997, built from the bottom up as well as the top down – hence the *Compass* focus on local groups and building trust and relationships over the long term. This could feature a wide range of approaches – including, possibly, local electoral agreements but, more importantly, cooperation in local campaigns and policy discussions, building a common understanding and appreciation of parties’ positions and potential solutions to the challenges the UK faces in the mid-2020s.”

And I am happy to support his conclusion, which takes us a long way from that Progressive Alliance *Takes Bunker*.

Whatever the form a progressive alliance takes, whether it’s an electoral pact or encouragement for tactical voting, the parties that form it need to give an indication to the electorate of what will be the result if they vote for it: a positive agenda of reform, not merely the negative case for getting rid of the Tories.

*1997 Then and Now: The Progressive Alliance That Was and the One That Could Be* by Duncan Brack can be downloaded here [<https://www.compassonline.org.uk/1997-then-now-labour-lib-dems-progressive-alliance-pact/>]

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Jonathan Calder is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

# CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

To go by at the Liberal Democrat conference agenda, no crises face the UK and a few detailed changes are all that is needed.

## Get real, says William Tranby

I have been looking forward to an in-person conference since the first lockdown restricted the liberty of all of us to enjoy our lives.

Despite having retreated from my former campaigning and councillor roles to that of a typical armchair activist, I still view the autumn conference as an opportunity to refresh one's political beliefs in much the same way as some people choose to renew their matrimonial vows. Indeed, I have been wedded to liberalism for many years, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death forces me to depart the earth, and my closed bank account stops my standing orders to the party.

As we approach this year's political renewal, I was concerned that as the UK is facing multiple crises simultaneously, and we will be the first party conference being held after the coronation of Truss the untrustworthy, we might use this opportunity to demonstrate how a Liberal approach would tackle these challenges.

In the recent past I have often found the conference policy motions have lacked the vibrancy and radicalism to challenge the mainstream, almost to a level of being inoffensive to everyone, without inspiring anyone.

Such bland policy-making often reminded me of a former political agent of mine who complained that a fellow canvasser was so polite to voters on the doorstep that he expected him to apologise to householders for leaving his fingerprints on their garden gates. Being inoffensive and reasonable will not rattle anyone's chains.

If ever there was a time to be angry with the status quo and truly radical with our thinking it is now. The multiple crises we face require robust responses, which we are not going to get from the empty-headed occupant of Number 10, whose only strategy will be to focus on the photo opportunity that might arise from any pronouncement, rather than develop policies with any substance. Politics by press release simply will not do any more.

So what are the Liberal Democrats planning to offer to challenge to a Tory-led Government? The crises are many and deep-seated. The cost of living, climate change, the NHS, the war in Ukraine, increasing strikes, the deliberate pollution of waterways by sewage discharges, and resolving the Northern Ireland protocol problem with the EU are the initial handful that come to mind.

The cost of living crisis is addressed in Policy Motion F15. The main new measure not previously promoted is a temporary cut in VAT from 20% to 17.5% which the party estimates will put an average £600 in the pockets of lower-income households.

This would lower inflation by 1.0 to 1.4 percentage points, given the past experience of such a cut in 2008. This is modest and inoffensive but hardly touches the sides when inflation could be running at 18% if the CitiBank projection is right. And what will happen after a year? The lower-income families lose out by £600 when the VAT rate goes back up?



Motion F15 also calls on the Government to provide additional cost-of-living support for household energy costs. But surely the better politics would be not to announce any numbers in advance of conference, but reserve a place on the agenda for a cost-of-living debate, so that the motion tabled would be up to date with something radical?

In its present form Motion F15 already needs to be rewritten to make it relevant. But the lazier political commentators will prepare their copy from the advance version of the agenda rather than a revised version revealed with a flourish at conference.

We already know that Ed Davey has more recently called for a freeze on the price cap, which would surely be the centre-piece of a revised motion? Keep your powder dry until the conference itself. Don't let half baked ideas dribble out in advance.

Motion F34 addresses climate change in a small way. I do not want to undermine the efforts of campaigners who want to reduce single use plastics in social care settings and make sure disabled people can do their bit in addressing the challenges of climate change, but surely this should be a detail in a wider statement?

The all-embracing pre-manifesto motion F41 covers a wide policy agenda, but I do find it ludicrous that it is allocated precisely 60 minutes of debating time on the Tuesday. Such motions would once have been debated over a longer timeframe with hourly slots for each key theme, with the opportunity for members to submit amendments.

Conference is supposed to decide policy. It should not be used to turn our members into compliant nodding donkeys feeling honoured to have been even consulted on what the leadership has decided is best for us.

The war in Ukraine is mentioned only in passing in Motion F10, relating to UK's nuclear deterrent. While recommitting the party to NATO as one would expect, the single amendment to existing policy is to change back from a previous suggestion, and instead maintain the UK's current posture of continuous at-sea deterrence. Apparently, this is because doing otherwise would send the wrong signal to Vladimir Putin.

Do we really expect the Russian president to follow the small print in our conference agenda, and be a little more scared because we propose there should always be a nuclear submarine at sea on our watch?

What is even more surprising is we are committing the party to support engagement with other nuclear weapon states to encourage them to sign the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty, on the grounds that Putin has already signed these. As if any promise from Putin is good enough for us to rest easier in our beds...

Sewage discharges are mentioned in F22 on the Natural Environment, but it only proposes mandating major sewage infrastructure upgrades, with no timescale to suggest it is urgent. There is no mention of punishments such as fining water company directors for their blatant disregard of public safety, or a freeze on dividends until the dumping of sewage in UK

*“Do we really expect the Russian president to follow the small print in our conference agenda”*

waterways is stopped permanently.

The current wave of strikes affecting a wide range of industries is completely ignored. Word searches for 'strike' and 'dispute' were not found anywhere in the agenda document. So we currently have no answers or proposals. I trust the

leadership will come up with something by the time we get to Brighton. That is, if the trains are running of course.

The crisis in the NHS and Social Care is limited to a mention in the pre-manifesto motion, and worthy motions on Mental Health (F5) and Dentistry (F27). The failure to recruit, train and retain GPs is briefly mentioned in the pre-manifesto. Two key ingredients to the current NHS crisis are the poor availability of GPs in primary care adding to the queues at hospital A&E departments, and bed-blocking in hospitals because of the lack of social care capacity. Both of these Government failures have led to the queuing of ambulances in hospital car parks, but this consequential connection is not made anywhere in the agenda.

The pre-manifesto commits to a National Care Agency when a National Care Service, standing alongside the National Health Service, is what the country is calling out for.

If the party wants to propose, quite rightly, that pay grades in social care should be equivalent to NHS pay grades, then why not end the practice of multiple private providers dominating the social care landscape, making profits for their shareholders? We criticise the creeping privatisation of NHS services but keep our hands clean from criticising the private sector in social care.

The final crisis relating to the Northern Ireland protocol, is not mentioned in the conference agenda at all, even though our sister Alliance Party is the only party in the province making electoral gains, and we should surely be supporting their lead on these matters?

Overall, it was another slightly despairing sigh when I read through the agenda.

This is a golden opportunity for our party. The Tories are in disarray, and Labour's leadership is so cautious about admitting anything they propose might be radical, that this is the time to offer bold solutions to a country that desperately wants to hear some genuine leadership.

May I suggest that in several places on the agenda the amendments should start with "Delete all and insert..."

I hope others with more energy and brighter ideas than me have the courage to try.

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William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective



# BUILDING A LIBERAL WORLD

## Liberal International can seem remote; Robert Woodthorpe Browne explains its work on human rights, climate justice and international trade

Apart from meetings to exchange ideas, what does Liberal International (LI) actually do for its members?

There has been a Human Rights Committee for many years, with members from all over the world. The chair is a former Finnish foreign minister, Astrid Thors. The committee monitors violations all over the world issuing statements and warning other governments to take action where possible. It also ensures that new members, especially from countries which do not recognise religious or sexual freedoms, espouse and campaign for every aspect of human rights.

A second committee was recently formed to campaign for climate justice, to assist financially and technologically assist countries to combat climate change which were not the primary cause of global warming but are in some cases suffering existential threats. The president was active in the Glasgow COP 26 conference and the LibDems have two representatives on this committee.

LI arranges training workshops in collaboration with member parties and associated think tanks to give backing to the regional organisations to assist with campaigning and policy formation. These are well organised and have helped many individuals who have gone on to become parliamentarians and even ministers in their home countries.

How then LI run and constituted? Delegates from all continents gathered in Sofia, Bulgaria, in late June to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Oxford Manifesto by European and Canadian liberals seeking a new post-war dynamic.

Liberal International has been headquartered in London ever since, and the secretariat, currently led by William Townsend, operates from the basement of the National Liberal Club. It has a small multinational staff and supported by interns sent for fixed periods by interested member parties

Male and pale at the outset, LI became more truly international under the leadership of such presidents as Annemie Neyts (Belgium) and our own Lord Alderdice. Regional organisations in Asia, Middle East, Africa and Latin America as well as ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe) in Europe are increasingly important in promoting human rights and liberal values in their areas. Their presidents regularly meet online and are becoming more active in LI's activities and future direction, with attendance at meetings of the bureau planned.

ALDE has non-EU member parties so the Liberal Democrats remain engaged and indeed have an elected

Bureau member, past president Baroness Brinton. The Liberal Democrats are full members and ALDE plays an important role in party conferences.

Membership of Liberal International is open to political parties which do not have to have 'liberal' in their name but must have constitutions which respect human rights in all forms, the market economy and internal democracy.

There are many parties in the world calling themselves 'liberal' - think Australia, Japan and several central and eastern European countries - which would not qualify for Liberal International membership, and would not want to.

Membership is also open to support groups and these exist in several countries including the UK (Liberal International British Group, currently chaired by Irina von Wiese), Germany, The Netherlands, Brazil and Israel.

The Constitution also recognises the International Network of Liberal Women and the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth, which are represented on the bureau.

Liberal think tanks are a more recent addition to membership as many offer training and services to liberals around the world. Notables are the German Friedrich Naumann Foundation, with offices in many countries, the Swedish SILC, and the European Liberal Forum. Recent joiners include the Paddy Ashdown Forum.

At a time of increasing threats to the liberal world order, LI updated its charter with the adoption of the Andorra Manifesto, [<https://liberal-international.org/who-we-are/our-mission/landmark-documents/political-manifestos/liberal-manifesto-2017/>] after a year of consultation.

LI is constantly seeking, with others such as the Washington-based National Democratic Institute, to halt the growth of illiberalism worldwide. This a campaign in which all liberals have to engage.

Demonstrating the move to greater inclusivity, the current president, Dr Hakima El Haite, is a Moroccan businesswoman and politician who, as minister for the environment in her country chaired the United Nations COP 22 meeting in Marrakech. The vice-president is Professor Karl-Heinz Paque who is also chairman of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

Federal International Relations Committee chair and former MEP Philip Bennion was elected in Sofia as a vice president on the bureau, having served for many years as vice chair of the Human Rights Committee.

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Robert Woodthorpe Browne chaired the Liberal Democrat International Relations Committee 2007-20 and is a Patron of Liberal International



# TWO UKRAINIANS, ONE CAT

## Rose Stimson's Ukrainian guests are now safely in the UK, no thanks to the Home Office

Four months since fleeing Ukraine and three months since applying for their visas (Liberator 413), the magic visa emails finally arrived. There had been no way to discover what was happening and there were many stories of 'black holes' but also of later applicants getting their permissions in days.

Our other route of enquiry was through our MP – which worked for others but made no tangible difference for us. Every time we raised a query about progress, a researcher would spend hours on the MPs phone or queue at the Home Office.

I understand most MPs had several such cases. I estimate ours took up about three days of researchers' efforts. Multiply that across 650 MPs and you get a huge amount of wasted effort to shield a failing system.

When we got replies through our MP to explain the delay - these varied from "under consideration" to "paperwork is all in order" and "the caseworker assured me that no evidence was outstanding on either case and they just need to wait we are not going to comment further on this case". In other words go away and stop bothering us.

The only way we knew there was visa movement was via our local authority contact (who was on holiday at the time) telling us that the statuses had changed. Any such system dealing with folk in a distressed and transient state must be: simple to access and use – using a phone to access a Government website and download documents is not something everyone can do; consistent, don't change the forms half way through an application; transparent – the applicant should have clear and available access to the progress of an application; fair and respectful

Their cat Kity (pictured) started her journey in Ukraine and was considered a Ukrainian, not a Polish, cat which meant extra rabies precautions.

We could only apply for animal import and isolation licences once we had the visa but the APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency) was exemplary and maybe the Home Office could learn from them. We were able to speak to a human being, which saved a lot of time all round, APHA phoned us to discuss the case.

A vet visited to check that we could provide satisfactory isolation facilities – ironically we were not inspected for issues of people safety until our guests had been with us for two weeks. Kity is now happily

mouse-ing around our garden.

As we approach six months since the start of the scheme, a mixed picture is emerging. Official organisations and ministers are cheering the 100,000+ refugees now in British homes as a significant achievement by all involved, policy makers, statutory bodies, local voluntary support organisations and hosts.

There are stories of relationship breakdowns between hosts and guests and that is inevitable if you put strangers together in a closed, domestic environment. Personality and culture differences will emerge, that is inevitable, some of those can be resolved and some cannot.

The biggest challenge now facing those who have chosen to come here will be accommodation after they leave the hosts. We know there is little social housing, private accommodation will be difficult to obtain as many will not be able to provide UK credit history yet

nor find the deposit and other financial resources.

Some hosts seem to think after the six months they initially signed up for, magically further accommodation will manifest for their guests. Some hosts are prepared for 12 months and a very few for an indefinite period. For many guests the only option will be hotels or hostels and this is true for all refugees. As a host it would be difficult to say to someone you have

lived with for a significant period - OK off you go to the hostel.

Refugees minister Lord Harrington is suggesting that if a host cannot continue to provide accommodation it is just a question of finding someone else.

That may not prove as easy as it sounds. There is a suggestion of increasing the allowance paid to hosts which would be a cheaper solution but may lead to greater pressures within homes, especially those that have stretched their accommodation considerably.

There is no obvious solution to a problem that is not unique to refugees, Ukrainian or otherwise. There is insufficient, available accommodation, of satisfactory condition or otherwise. That is not the same as saying there are insufficient properties – empty dwellings, second homes all exacerbate an otherwise pressurised situation.



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Rose Stimson is a former member of the Liberator Collective now involved in community work in Herefordshire

# DEDICATED FOLLOWERS OF FASHION

The latest fad in international development is ‘decolonising aid’, an approach likely to destroy well-functioning local NGOs in developing countries, says Rebecca Tinsley

A well-intentioned strategy to ‘decolonise’ Britain’s overseas aid may have the opposite effect, harming home-grown charities in the developing world.

The UK government and big funders like Comic Relief are changing their policy to favour non-government organisations (NGOs) in the global south. It sounds like a good idea, but most genuinely local charities in the developing world will be disqualified from applying.

Overseas aid is as influenced by fashion as any other business. A few years ago, the sector concluded that investing in females, disadvantaged in many cultures, would lead to fewer child marriages, and less maternal and infant mortality. Like a school of fish turning direction abruptly, the entire funding world decided to favour NGOs supporting women’s empowerment projects.

There followed a trend to support programmes promoting democracy, transparency and accountability in institutions in the developing world. This evolved into ‘building capacity’ and ‘sustainability’ in NGO jargon, as it was concluded that a ‘skills transfer’ from the global north to the global south was necessary before there could be transparency, accountability, democracy or indeed female empowerment.

## WHITE SAVIOUR SYNDROME

But this policy implicitly assumed there were insufficient skills in the developing world. It went hand-in hand with ‘white saviour syndrome’, a modern version of 19th century missionary zeal. The Black Lives Matter movement kick started an appreciation of white privilege influencing those working in the developing world.

Last year, the NGO Peace Direct produced a paper calling for the decolonisation of aid. It was driven by the dismay felt by anyone who has observed the aid machine in action in poor countries.

This is best characterised by white four-wheel drive Land Cruisers chauffeuring around 25-year-old white international development studies graduates, driven by a local English-speaking teacher or doctor who has left their job for the better pay offered by the NGO, thereby depriving schools and hospitals of the skilled professionals they need.

These ex-pat staff live in comparative luxury in pleasant compounds, served by local people, while they dispense their charity’s wisdom in the months before they are rotated on to the next posting. Unlike nuns and priests from the developed world who go to work in remote villages for decades, few NGO staff stay for long because it is good for career advancement to sample several ‘hardship postings’.

Not surprisingly, local staff feel patronised, especially when an inexperienced young white person orders them about. Not all ex-pat staff behave like this, but I have seen enough to know this lack of humility is a problem. It is no surprise that local staff may be unmotivated to put in more than minimum effort, or that projects fail when they are conceived thousands of miles away in a one-size-fits-all manner.

I declare an interest: since my friends and I started the NGO Network for Africa fifteen years ago, we have striven to respect the knowledge of residents in the countries where we work.

It seemed logical to find reputable, established local NGOs that were making a difference, and then to support them. Besides, trying to create an empire from scratch is risky and expensive. We asked local charities what they thought their community needed (this part is not rocket science), and worked out how we could best assist those NGOs in achieving their aims.

An NGO based in the UK can help a worthy charity in the global south by finding funding in the wealthy world. This process demands the ability to fill in grant application forms that are Byzantine in their complexity and length. It also requires the skill to write budgets and business plans; to create monitoring and evaluation systems to gauge progress; to distinguish between outputs, outcomes and impact; and to produce regular reports to assure funders that their money is being well used.

Like most UK-based partners, Network for Africa requires our local NGOs to abide by rules about diversity and discrimination, transparent accounting, whistleblowing, not employing relatives, not abusing beneficiaries, etc. We let them get on with their work, which in our case is training local people to be mental health trauma counsellors. We don’t have property or vehicles or staff in-country. Instead, we find admirable existing NGOs sharing our vision, and who are already trying to achieve our aims. Local people are usually the most effective messengers promoting change. With experience, we learned to avoid the obvious con artists and egomaniacs.

In the words of Florence, the Ugandan woman who runs our projects: “This is exactly how we should split responsibilities.” By luck, we decolonised our efforts years before the Peace Direct report came out.

Peace Direct’s vision has been adopted by UK funders like Comic Relief, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and other large foundations.

Now, they want to give direct support to developing world NGOs with an annual turnover of £75,000. I cannot think of a reputable African charity, started by

local people, that raises such an enormous sum. Most likely, the beneficiaries will be the local branches of the big aid agencies like Oxfam, Action Aid, Muslim Aid, Islamic Relief, Christian Aid and World Vision.

Why is this happening, if it will cause so many community charities in the developing world to collapse?

Big aid agencies like the FCDO want to write a few cheques rather than hundreds. They prefer to employ fewer staff to monitor a handful of beneficiaries rather than getting quarterly reports from lots of small and medium size NGOs.

Imagine you are a Rwandan woman running a charity teaching hundreds of illiterate HIV+ sex workers to read, in addition to vocational skills. You lift them out of poverty, helping them support their children and avoid a dangerous occupation like prostitution. But English is your third language, and the grant application form runs to 50 pages. It is written in dense English and seems to require the same answer to several slightly differently worded questions, none of which seem to make sense.

You and your team are good at teaching literacy, advising women on reproductive health, and giving hairdressing lessons. But you cannot write a business plan or create a budget. You aren't sure how to measure the impact of your efforts. You cannot imagine how you will find the time to complete the application or write the regular reports. Added to which, filling in the online form assumes a constant power supply, reliable internet coverage and a sophisticated computer. Just registering your charity with local authorities is unthinkable expensive. This is why you need a partner in the UK.

Oxfam employs 4,317 staff of whom 2,447 are overseas. It has a network of offices and vehicles in 66 countries. It receives £10m annually from the FCDO, and £28m from other foreign government aid programmes like Sweden, Switzerland and the US. The UN provides £28m and the European Commission gives £15.7m. Altogether, Oxfam has a turnover of £344m, and is well placed to benefit from the change in funding because its in-country ex-pat staff can apply without needing anyone back in the UK to fill out the forms.

The same applies to Action Aid, which is supported by the FCDO, the Dutch government, the People's Postcode Lottery and the European Commission. Their 200 staff and £50m turnover enables them to have offices in beneficiary countries. Christian Aid has 481 staff overseas, and of its £86m annual turnover, £40m comes from institutions like the FCDO, USAID, the UN and the European Commission.

They will do fine under the new system because their existing local outposts will be able to make applications, as if they were community-based NGOs, which they are not: they are branch offices, carrying

*“These ex-pat staff live in comparative luxury in pleasant compounds, served by local people, while they dispense their charity’s wisdom in the months before they are rotated on to the next posting”*

out centrally determined policies.

## **NIMBLE MINNOWS**

The purpose of this article is not to doubt the worth of the big agencies like Action Aid. But there is a role for nimble minnows who can be more flexible, listening to their local partners and adapting their projects to reflect the individual needs of different communities in poor countries.

The changes proposed make it easier for the UK government and the big agencies, but it would be wrong to frame them as

decolonising aid. That lofty goal requires a greater change of hearts and minds.

Currently, many NGOs in the wealthy world are having sessions, often run by a facilitator, in which staff discuss their white privilege. Their websites may announce that the NGO will make a conscious effort to do better. But there is usually no suggestion that real changes will be made, beyond recruiting a few trustees of colour.

One is met with an uncomfortable silence if one suggests that we could tackle white privilege in the UK more effectively if we improved educational opportunities for ethnic communities. It is easier to stick platitudes on home pages, and publicly gnash our teeth than tackle food deserts, poor access to healthcare or polluted environments in ethnic areas.

Laudable statements that recognise white privilege and colonial thinking don't begin to address inequality in Britain or our insensitive bossiness in the developing world. Sadly, the way in which the latest fashion statement is being put into action may harm genuinely local civil society in the global south. Another wasted opportunity.

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Rebecca Tinsley is the founder of Network for Africa



# AMERICA - CARNAGE OR REDEMPTION

## Will America remain a democracy as Donald Trump lurks in the wings for another attempt on the presidency? It all depends on the mid-term elections in November says Martha Elliott

When Ben Franklin was walking out of Independence Hall after the constitution had been signed, a woman called out to him, "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" Franklin reportedly quipped, "A republic, if you can keep it."

Never since the Civil War has that retort been so prescient. The big question is whether the 2022 midterm elections will be the death knell of the republic or proof that America has survived the on-going grip that Donald Trump has had on the Republican party - far more power than most presidents have wielded after leaving office.

Throughout Trump's presidency, there were clues - warning bells and screams by tell-all books - that Trump was little more than a petulant, childish bully who knew nothing about the American Constitution and the limits of his power. Or if he knew, he didn't care.

He believed that treason was disloyalty not to the United States of America, but to him, a view that I would assign to a dictator. According to many in his inner circle who either quit or were fired, his attitude was "I'm the president and I can do anything I want." If a cabinet member or advisor didn't comply with his orders, he or she was soon kicked out. He soon became the Teflon Don, the only president impeached (the equivalent of an indictment by Congress) twice. But because it takes a two-thirds vote of the Senate which was controlled by his loyal acolytes, he was never removed from office.

Trump has promised to run for president in 2024 if the Republicans can retake the House of Representatives. Whether the Democrats can keep both the House and the Senate may not be known until election night or beyond, but that election may

determine whether we can actually keep our republic.

There are many permutations of the question and variables of whether the Democrats will keep control of Congress. Traditionally, the party in control loses seats during the midterms. Every controlling party has lost seats during the midterm elections (non-presidential elections) since John F Kennedy was president. The most important factor is who will be able and willing to vote. That may sound like a truism, but even before the 2020 election, barriers to voting having been established.

### VOTING BARRIERS

In 2013, the Supreme Court's 5-4 conservative majority struck down parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that

required federal courts to approve any changes in voting rights legislation in states with a history of preventing minorities from voting, thus violating the right guaranteed by the 14th and 15th amendments. Without that review, since the 2020 election, Red states (Republican controlled) have established many barriers to the ballot box—from shortening hours and days when votes can be cast to insisting that signatures on mail-in ballots exactly match the original registration forms. I know my signature has significantly



changed in the last few decades - never mind since I was 18 and first eligible to vote.

Redistricting (a process to make sure all Congressional districts have the same amount of people that takes place after the 10-year census) has also denied minorities the chance to elect a representative to Congress. All of the restrictions most affect minorities, the poor, and the elderly.

Motivation to vote is often tied to Americans' views on what's most important to them: the inflationary economy, the recent Supreme Court decisions



- especially the one overturning of a woman's right to abortion, the many criminal investigations of Trump and his company, or the revelations of what caused the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.

The bottom line for a majority of voters is Trump himself. Do we want him in the White House again? I, a liberal Democrat, agree with conservative Republican Liz Cheney who says Trump should never be permitted in the oval office again.

I wouldn't even want him to be allowed to take a visitor's tour of the building.

One of Trump's campaign promises was to appoint justices to the high court who would overturn abortion rights. During his four years in office, he was able to appoint three ultra conservative justices to the Supreme Court, giving the conservatives a six to three supermajority. The Trump-appointed justices testified before the Senate under oath at their confirmation hearings that they believed in the tradition of stare decisis—that a decision that has been decided by the court and reaffirmed is a firm precedent that could not be overturned.

## LYING JUSTICES

Yet these justices appear to have lied to the Senate. They overturned a 100-year-old precedent that allowed jurisdictions to regulate concealed weapons. In that case it was a New York State law which required applicants who wanted a concealed-carry permit to have a valid reason to carry a hidden weapon. The court announced that decision just days after 19 students and two teachers were murdered at a Texas elementary school and in response Congress passed the first gun control legislation - albeit limited - in decades. The legislation was far less sweeping than most Democrats would have liked, but nevertheless it was a bipartisan first step.

The conservatives' most alarming and controversial decision was a reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 case that made abortion legal in the US. The court, citing questionable history and common law, said decisions on abortion should be left to the states. The majority of the court seemed to reject a constitutional right to privacy, a move which threatens access to birth control, LGBTQ+ rights, and even interracial marriage.

More than six in 10 Americans believe that abortion should be legal in all or most cases. Yet only 20 states have guaranteed access to abortion and reproductive rights. If any issue gets American women to vote for Democrats in November, the access to the right to legal abortions will.

Abortion rights are a very important pull to the ballot box. Since *Roe* was overturned, more than 60% of the new voter registrations have been by women. In Kansas, a 'red' state that overwhelmingly voted for Trump in 2020, the state's constitution guaranteed abortion rights. Republicans tried to eliminate those rights in a state referendum, but the overwhelming

*"I, a liberal Democrat, agree with conservative Republican Liz Cheney who says Trump should never be permitted in the oval office again"*

opposition of women rejected that by more than 60%. A special Congressional race in upstate New York recently elected the Democratic candidate who ran on keeping access to abortion.

On election night of 2020, Trump went on national television to announce his big lie: the election had been stolen from him and the American people. That lie is still spouted by Trump at every rally at which he speaks even though there were multiple recounts

in multiple states, sixty courts threw out Trump's lawsuits to overturn the state vote because of fraud, and the Department of Justice investigated the allocation and told Trump that he lost. To this day, Trump has not conceded the election and continues to rally crowds behind his false claims.

Yet, fraud in the 2020 election is the major election issue on which many Republicans are running. If a Republican for federal or state office wants Trump's endorsement, he or she must say the 2020 election was stolen from Trump through fraud. . Trump has to believe that that the candidate is a true loyalist, almost guaranteeing that these candidates will get the votes of the Trump loyalists.

Even those Republicans who first said that there was no proof of fraud have since changed their tunes because they know without that 20-30% of the vote, they will lose. And Trump and his supporters are choosing statewide candidates whose job in 2024 will be to certify the votes in their states.

## SHAKY GROUND

Some have lost despite Trump's endorsement and others have won their primaries, but now seem on shaky ground in the November general election. Even Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell has voiced concern that the Republicans will not retake the Senate because, as he explained, of the poor quality of candidates running, a slap in the face to Trump.

What really happened between 6 November, 2020 and 6 January 6, the day a mob breached the US Capitol building in an attempt to keep Congress from certifying the presidential election, has been laid out in detail by the House committee investigating the insurrection.

So far, the committee has held thousands of hours of interviews behind closed doors and began holding televised hearings on their findings on 9 June. The public hearings show what Trump did to try to remain in office - the first US President to refuse to peacefully transfer power.

Nearly 19 million Americans turned on their televisions as the committee outlined its case against the former president in its first hearing. The major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, and PBS cleared their primetime schedules. CNN and MSNBC also aired the hearing live. The only network that chose not to broadcast that or any of the subsequent six hearings was Fox News, whose conservative hosts mocked the committee.



So, the loyal Fox viewers, perhaps the ones who most needed to see the evidence against Trump, did not hear the case being outlined by his own aides who were loyal up until they were either pressured to lie about the election results or saw his efforts to incite a violent crowd to prevent the Congress from certifying the vote.

The first hearing showed video clip after video clip of Trump aides testifying that The first hearing laid out the direction of the case, including video clip after video clip of Trump aides testifying that Trump had been told that his claims of a stolen election were false, how he tried to influence the Justice Department to find evidence for him, how he tried to pressure state officials, how he pressured Pence to reject the election results, and to connect all the dots proving that Trump had planned and spurred on the January 6 attack.

Although the committee has continuously said it is up to the Justice Department to decide if Trump should be prosecuted, they certainly have made a convincing case for his guilt.

The first live witness was Caroline Edwards, a capitol police officer, who testified that she had been knocked down by rioters as she tried to keep them from breaching the barricades and hit her head, causing a concussion. She spoke of later slipping in the blood of fallen colleagues trying to keep the rioters out of the Capitol.

Never-before-seen video which had been shot by a documentary film maker was shown, showing the violence against the police and the destruction of the Capitol. Yet many Congresspersons and Senators still voted against certifying the presidential vote and later even claimed that 6 January was no different from a typical day of tourists at the Capitol.

When his aides couldn't convince him to concede, Trump appealed to the courts to get election results thrown out because of fraud. However, his lawyers were never able to give solid evidence that there was any fraud. To pay for the court cases, Trump asked for and received millions of dollars in donations. Almost none of the money was spent on the court cases. Instead, the funds went to a Trump super PAC and used to pay down campaign debt. If true, Trump could

be prosecuted for a violation of federal election laws.

The third hearing outlined the pressure that Trump put on Vice President Mike Pence whose job it was to ceremoniously open the electoral votes from each state and then announce the winner. He had no power to reject the votes. Yet up to the morning of 6 January, Trump pressured Pence to reject the votes. Trumped watched on television as the rioters constructed a makeshift gallows and chanted, "Hang Mike Pence. Hang Mike Pence." His reaction was not to try to call Pence and see if he was safe, but rather to quip that maybe he deserved to be hanged. He did nothing to stop the violence.

Witnesses also testified about how Trump personally pressured personally to get state officials to reject the results of the election. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensberger testified about a phone call from Trump asking him to "find" 11,700 votes that would give him the win. That action is being reviewed by an Atlanta Grand Jury. The Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives testified how Trump tried to pressure him to call a special session of the legislature to create another set of electors who would vote for him. Election workers talked about being threatened and having to go into hiding after Trump's cronies had identified them as rigging election results. All of these actions All of these actions violate criminal law.

## CLAIMS 'BULLSHIT'

Trump tried to get the Department of Justice, led by Attorney General William Barr, to find voter fraud and stop the peaceful transfer of power. But after investigating, Barr told Trump that there was nothing irregular that would have changed the outcome of the election. He said the fraud claims were "bullshit." Barr soon realised that Trump wouldn't accept defeat and in mid-December 2020, resigned. The three men who led the Justice Department after Barr resigned testified in person at the fifth hearing that Trump put pressure on them to try to find a way to overturn the election. They refused and Trump came close to putting a flunky in charge of the department. The only thing that stopped him was that they told him they and perhaps

hundreds of others would resign immediately if he did. Also revealed were the number of Congresspersons who asked Trump to give them blanket presidential pardons for their role in the plot to overturn the election and the riot.

Cassidy Hutchinson, a 25-year-old aide to Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, gave a first-hand account of what was going on in the White House in the weeks after the election.

She told of presidential attorney and former New York City Mayor Rudolf Giuliani telling her ahead of time that he was really excited about the plans for 6 January - Trump's final attempt to overturn the election.

She also told of how Trump knew that the insurrectionists were armed and that he refused to act or ask for the help of the military or Department of Homeland Security. According to Hutchinson, Trump demanded to be taken up to the Capitol so he could be with his supporters as they stormed the building and even tried to grab the steering wheel of the SUV he was traveling in to try to make the secret service to take him.

Since then, there has been more testimony—mostly by former Trump supporters—explaining why they went to Washington to stop the vote. Trump “crazies”, as they were labeled by some of the other White House staff, tried to get fake slates of electors to sign documents swearing that the vote in their states went to Trump not Biden. Many aides and members of Congress unsuccessfully tried to get Trump to give them blanket pardons for their role in trying to overthrow the election or the January 6th insurrection.

Even more concerning for Trump and his supporters, Trump is not only the centre of the January 6th investigation but also of many other criminal prosecutions such as a state grand jury probe into the pressure he put on Georgia election officials or the New York State investigation into his company's criminal behaviour. Recently, the FBI raided Trump's Mara Lago estate and seized boxes of documents, some of which were classified as secret or top secret, dealt with nuclear weapons or disclosed secrets of our allies. The political careers of many who voted to impeach Trump are over. Of the 10 Republicans, four retired, two won their primaries, and four were defeated in their primary battles. Among those defeated was Liz Cheney, who also serves as vice chairman of the House Committee investigating 6 January. She won the last election by 40 points, but lost her Republican primary by 30%. But she has not given up and set up a political action committee to try to defeat all election deniers. She also wants the Congress to invoke the 14th Amendment which bars anyone who participates in rebellion against the US from holding federal office.

As of this writing, it appears that the Democrats will remain in control of the Senate. The House is still anyone's guess, but each day Democrats lead in more races. If Cheney succeeds, the House will remain Democratic. But what's most concerning is that the Washington Post reports that every day “civil war” keeps being repeated in political chatter on social

*“State election officials told of how they had been given death threats, had gone into hiding, and have since quit their jobs”*

media.

Cheney boldly warned at the first hearing: “I say this to my Republican colleagues who are defending the indefensible. There will come a day when Donald Trump is gone, but your dishonour will remain.” Donald Trump's dishonour is already written into history.

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



# RUSSIA MEDDLES IN KOSOVO'S BALKAN TIMEWARP

Kosovos has dropped from the headlines but Russia is stirring fresh instability in the western Balkans, says John Martin

The Kosovo war of 1998-99 was the last major part of the wars in former Yugoslavia. Well known to the British public as it played out on television, many Kosovo Albanian refugees came to Britain (and then returned home after) and Britain played a key part under Tony Blair's government in the NATO bombing of Serbia and deployment into Kosovo that ended the war.

The international community largely administered the province (at one point Liberal Democrat Iain King was head of planning for the UN there) until Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008.

After that Albanian areas developed rapidly, mostly due to investment from the huge diaspora living and working in western Europe. The north remains largely occupied by Serbs, the north side of the town of Mitrovica, and Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok the main towns. It is not widely promoted (even in Serbia) that half of the small remaining Serbian ethnic population of Kosovo live in other parts. The northern districts resisted integration into independent Kosovo institutions, and there is currently a stalemate where Serbian state institutions in effect run in parallel to official ones.

When a well known British political commentator on the Balkans published a book specifically on North Kosovo I thought this was amusingly delusional. Why on earth would anyone want to read a book about a small part (like a few districts) of "a small country half the size of Wales"; a small 'country' in fact not even recognised by many other countries. And why was such a niche book published by a respected scholarly publishers, *Ibidem*.

In fact Ian Bancroft's book is well worth reading not only for insight on a small part of a small land half the size of Wales, but because by research, anecdote, vignette and personal experience it is interesting and relevant for anyone interested in the western Balkans.

There are many points that will be familiar to people who have travelled in the former Communist countries, especially the non-EU and variably democratic ones in south eastern Europe.

Many common themes stand out from across former Yugoslavia, in particular the southern parts that I know to some extent, and Albania.

## CONVERSATIONAL AND THOUGHTFUL

Furthermore, *Dragon's Teeth* is a good read. It is conversational and thoughtful in style, a bit like one of my favourite little books on the region, Tony White's

*Another Fool in the Balkans* (2006) which is more travelogue, largely between Croatia and Belgrade.

It seemed a bit pretentious that Bancroft, in his mid-30s, describes himself as a writer and diplomat, but this flamboyant English / Manx man and Evertonian had already worked for the OSCE in Bosnia, and in Serbia, and crucially for several years ran an office in the north of Kosovo for the EULEX, the European Union's (support to) Rule of Law mission.

On top of this Bancroft has travelled extensively in the region, for work, out of curiosity, with family and in pursuit of excellent wines. He is probably the most prominent promoter in English of wines from Serbia, and knowledgeable about the native grapes of the former Yugoslav countries (check out <http://www.autochthinos.com>, and @Autochthinos on Twitter, as well as @bancroftian for Ian's regular profile).

Autochthinos was a word I never knew until I went to Serbia to work two years ago. And found it used (unspellable and unpronounceable) first by wine enthusiasts but then noticeably by each people (ethnic, national group) to say that they were the original inhabitants of the land so the state (whichever state) should adjust to them.

A reasonable argument but one as the famous British historian Noel Malcolm has pointed out that depends on when you start. And I do not believe you can solve the problems in the Balkans (or Ireland) by concentrating on who was in the land centuries (or even many decades) ago. A Liberal democratic approach of human and constitutional rights for all is what wisest commentators advocate to prevent any new unravelling.

Kosovo has been back in the news due to confrontation over number plates and identity cards. In pursuit of Serbia recognising its sovereignty, the government of Albin Kurti has pursued a policy of reciprocating measures (for Serbs living in Kosovo basically) that Serbia implements - not recognising Kosovo number plates and ID cards.

The European Union for a decade has been unable to negotiate an agreement (on almost anything), mainly because the two sides want to stand on their positions, as defenders of their states, rather than solve problems for people actually living in north Serbia, or the also affected Albanians in south Serbia, and Serbs living outside the north of Kosovo. The latter are the forgotten majority in fact.

One of the points that Bancroft makes repeatedly is that the living conditions in the post industrial underdeveloped regions of former Yugoslavia are actually very similar, the same in remote villages,



and that the people have the same issues in common. I expected a myth or legend or particular statue to be the 'Dragon's Teeth' of the book's title, but in fact the writer uses this imagery to show many times features - man made, old and new, and natural - that resemble giant dragon's teeth.

The post industrial and post multi-ethnic / cultural nature of the districts is something sadly common across much of the western Balkans. Tales of the Trepca mine as a huge employer and whole community, show how important and relatively prosperous Mitrovica was during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and then Yugoslavia. It's Mitrovicë in Albanian; anglicised spellings are used in this article.

The mine employed 23,000 people at its height. Bancroft discusses its history with expert Mina, of course in an Irish pub in Leposavic. The book covers a pen portrait of the formerly multi-ethnic Bosniak Mahala, football, music (brass band, jazz, blues, rock), boundaries, barricades and the attempts to reopen the main bridge over the Ibar river between the two parts of Mitrovica. It's open now to pedestrians but not traffic,

Ian's recent suggestion is to turn it into a social space. He writes about his friendship with Oliver Ivanovic, a reformist Serb politician who was murdered in January 2018. Still unsolved. Religion and religious buildings are also covered. It should be noted that while mostly culturally Muslim, Kosovo Albanians are largely secular, as in Albania itself. There are Christian Orthodox Albanians as well as Catholics, the latter especially in the north of Albania. Other ethnic groups like Goranje, Bosniaks, Turks, Montenegrins and of course Roma complete the mix.

Britain traditionally takes an active foreign policy interest in the western Balkans and is very active diplomatically there now and British tourists (like Serbs) are flocking to Albanian beaches, but these parts of Kosovo are not on the tourist trail yet. The book may interest you in the region as a starting point or someone who knows it already.

No one seriously thinks that there will be war in the Balkans again, as the US Ambassador in Belgrade Christopher Hill said not likely over number plates. However a wise long served Norwegian diplomat in the region has cautioned that there can be miscalculations if people engage in provocations, with serious, even fatal results.

The possibility for miscalculations abound when people are fed propaganda constantly that says they are the victims, that others are preparing to use force against them, and that they will be protected by military force.

Many politicians suggest that Germany vetoed attempts to 'exchange territory' between Serbia and Kosovo, which at one point the Trump administration seemed keen on but later under special envoy Richard Grenell concentrated on practical economic development steps. Unfortunately both states and many of their population are obsessed with their patriotic nationalism.

This is understandable for Kosovo Albanians given what they went through but is not helping sustain development. The Russians certainly do not want any progress in peaceful relations in the western Balkans

and want to keep 'frozen conflicts' between Serbia and Kosovo and in Bosnia running to derail peaceful coexistence and stability, hinder efforts to reform politically and economically, and pursue the stated goals of most politicians and many people to join the European Union.

## RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

Putin's war propaganda is genuinely popular in Serbia, and the Russian bots, ambassadors and henchmen targeted on the area exaggerate and promote the risk and fear of conflict, to keep things tense. I even found the Russian propaganda that there was fighting in the north of Kosovo repeated to me by a highly intelligent Ukrainian professional contact - there has been none - and published on a Zaporizhzhia news site. The NATO Kosovo force, retains 3,500 personnel on the ground and has increased its deployments in the north to try to diffuse tension, just as the small EUFOR in Bosnia has increased its capacity and recently the UK sent a small number of military specialists to Bosnia and Herzegovina to reinforce the NATO mission there.

When countries (or rather politicians or local leaders) reject the Russian sphere of influence then we know that the Kremlin physically tries to discredit those politicians and destabilise politics - as seen in Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Albania.

Russian 'journalists' and 'tourists' are turning up in some surprising restricted places. Meanwhile Belgrade is full of Russians who have fled the war, maybe to move businesses and families. It is obvious of course that Russians do not go and live in the paradises of Republika Srpska (Bosnia) or north Mitrovica that Russia would like to make mini-Tiraspol, just as all the pro-Russian 'Christian brothers' Slav patriots who support the war on other white Christian Slavs, go and work in mostly in EU countries.

A significant number of Serbs and Albanians also come to Britain legally to study and to work despite Britain's nasty expensive capricious visa policy doing its best to keep out the type of legal migrants, students, professional visitors and tourists from south east Europe who are exactly the kind of hard working skilled educated migrants that the UK can do with.

Russia is both destabilising and keen on keeping destabilised both Bosnia (using the mini-Orban leader of Republika Srpska, Dodik) and Kosovo Serbia relations through promoting talk of conflict in north Kosovo. This is contrary to the Americans and British - who directly opposite to official propaganda are continually emphasising the need to keep peace and stability.

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John Martin works for an NGO in the Balkans  
Dragon's Teeth - Tales from North Kosovo. By Ian Bancroft. Ibidem, Stuttgart, 2020

A free extract is available here: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/02/28/life-in-the-shadow-of-kosovos-new-border-boundaries/>

# DAVEY BROUGHT TO BOOK

## Ed Davey has edited a book of political essays. Susan Simmonds samples the curate's egg

When Sir Ed became leader, *Liberator* asked a few people outside the collective to contribute to a vox pop and offer Ed a few words of advice in his new role. The vast majority were overwhelmingly kind, congratulatory and generous – my words were more pointed.

Exhausted and furious by the coalition years, tired of watching good people and friends needlessly losing seats due to poor judgements and entirely preventable errors by the party leadership – I offered the following in *Liberator* 403: “Congratulations Ed, on winning the leadership. The one key thing that I would ask you to do is to promise us that the expertise and experience of the activists within the party will be listened to and acted upon. Don't assume that the best people are outside the party.”

Now, I take no credit for anything that happened since and I have no idea if my words were even read. But this collection of essays clearly illuminates just some of the expertise that exists within the Liberal Democrats and provides a real sense that they are regaining their confidence. There has been other good policy writing recently – all of which add up to a real sense that they asking the right questions of themselves and starting to regain a sense of their political space.

Before launching into the review, I also need to declare an interest that I'm no longer a party member after nearly forty years. I'm surprisingly at peace with that accidental decision and enjoying the freedom to pursue opportunities around working in the democratic and civic society space that being no longer being obviously political allows me.

There is much here to be welcomed and I will always be an enthusiastic encourager of policy and political writing within the party – Liberal Democrats still not do enough writing or debate policy widely enough. Liberals have a fine tradition of being politically inquisitive, bold and debating new policy ideas and being a place where differing ideas can be debated and tested.

### INCREASING SCRUTINY

The book is very timely – not only is there a sense of Liberalism being pushed back as an effect of nationalism but Liberal Democrat political prospects are – at long last - improving. As they recover and Liberal Democrats look to become the challengers in an increasing number of seats – as the recent local election results suggest they may – Davey's leadership will come under increasing scrutiny across and number of areas – including policy. And again, Liberal Democrats will be fighting a general election with a leader who has a record in government – which like all records needs to be defended.

So, it is timely and appropriate, that Davey has provided some new insight into his thinking and

direction for the future of the party. That said, there is also some very strong writing discussing some pressing issues authored by academics, leading business people and party members.

It has energy, some real new ideas – all of which should be welcomed and vigorously debated.

However, this book is edited by Davey, which does raise a number of questions and also suggests that there is an element of endorsement of the essays and ideas. Davey is clear in the introduction, that this is not his manifesto, he does not endorse all the proposals put forwards and would have robust discussions with some of the writers – comments which are very welcome.

This is a very readable book containing a series of short, concise essays. The book is consistently edited and thankfully prioritises solutions and thoughtful discussion above overly long and detailed descriptions of the whatever challenge the writer is offering solutions to solve.

Inevitably, there are some chapters which are stronger than others, some offering more though provoking areas of discussion and in a volume of 17 chapters that is inevitable. Some essays are contributions to refresh long held Liberal positions on subjects such as community politics, education and climate change. Other essays speak to future challenges facing the economy, care, housing and technology.

Davey is clear that in bringing new ideas together, he is guided by his own classic interpretation of liberalism; that it is all about power – how to make individuals more powerful in their own lives, and how to hold the powerful to account. He states that liberalism has always been an anti-establishment, reformist, a forward looking creed, aimed at improving people's lives by challenging the status quo and appealing to people's dreams.

His rallying call is that Liberals need to regain their reputation as true reforming challengers. In his most eloquent writing within his introductory chapter, he is clear that the biggest and most obvious setback to Liberal progress has been the decision to leave the EU, but he rightly says that to focus too much on that is to miss the depth of the threat to Liberalism.

He cites new trade barriers and bureaucracy on British business, scrapping industrial strategy, cutting international aid in the middle of a pandemic, ending free movement and its impacts on care staff, lorry drivers and farm and construction workers.

Yet frustratingly, a discussion of the loss of Liberal freedoms as a result of leaving the EU are some of the most interesting potential areas of discussion, which are not addressed in any depth. It is utterly understandable to not want to re-open or re-examine the debate on Brexit or re-joining the EU, but that decision has had a major impact on allowing this government to remove, undermine and water down

many of our freedoms which are part of Liberal Britain and deserve urgent consideration by Liberal Democrats.

And in a post Brexit Britain exploration of these areas is even more important. Without the protections that membership of the EU afforded, rights are more vulnerable across a number of areas, particularly immigration, asylum, democracy and citizenship and freedom of speech and protest. The reform of the Human Rights Act, the undermining of its protections and its impacts on devolution are truly worrying and an integral part of what allows any society to function as a Liberal democracy.

And if we are discussing a battle for Liberal Britain – then those freedoms are truly on the front line.

Refreshingly for Liberal Democrat policy books, there is a strong emphasis on the economy and markets; an area where Lib Dems have not traditionally led the debate, despite some radical thinking and ideas.

Davey co-authors the chapter on climate change with policy expert from Imperial College, Alyssa Gilbert which continues and builds on some exceptional liberal thought and political commitment on climate the environment from the 1970s.

It is rather uninspiringly and unfussily titled *The Climate Strategy We Need: Strong Leadership and Detailed Actions*, however, that sums up the contents very neatly. Turn next to Former MEP Luisa Porritt's essay on how Liberals can fix the housing crisis – some refreshed policy ideas and a brief exploration of the scale of failure in housing provision from both Labour and Conservative governments. Read together, both essays are an important reminder of the value of place making and community and how well Liberal Democrats understand this, but consistently undersell how well they do it.

Amna Ahmad's essay on *Liberal Approach to Tackling Racial Injustice* is thought provoking and important. Those who are engaged with the issue will recognise much of the discussion and that the Liberal Democrats need to make faster and more radical progress is a theme which is increasing in urgency.

Her reflection that Liberal Democrat historic success at championing women and LGBT+ community has not translated into action with ethnic minority communities is telling. She argues there are three reasons for this – the association with colonialism and the slave trade, lack of clear detailed party policy on how to tackle racial equality and the lack of appeal of classical liberalism to some ethnic minority communities; in particular the focus on freedom of the individual and how that meshes with the collectivism that is common in many African and Asian Communities.

Ahmad further comments that the focus that Liberal Democrats put on engaging communities should distance them from the libertarian over-emphasis on the individual and this is an area where Liberal Democrats need to communicate their message more positively to ethnic minority communities – beyond the usual photo opportunities. Ahmed suggests three areas which need attention: culture and allyship, policy voice and action and implementation and it is impossible to disagree that this work needs continued, urgent and dedicated attention.

## CONTROVERSIAL AND DIVISIVE

By far the most cohesive section of the book are the essays which are grouped around financial issues. There is some strong writing and probably the most controversial and divisive ideas sit here, but also possibly the most fruitful in terms of new thinking.

Josh Babarinde's essay *Championing Economic Patriot on a 'right to thrive'* for entrepreneurs and SMEs is an interesting framing of its role and place: "Our entrepreneurs, small business owners, social innovators and self employed are economic patriots....because they generate jobs, local and national wealth, and tax revenue that powers our public services".

His ideas are that entrepreneurship should be embedded into the education system, and that a right to thrive would empower entrepreneurs and de-risk the entrepreneurial journey which includes reforms to the social security systems to ensure level playing fields around parental allowances. He also argues that council estates should become hotbeds for enterprise incubation, which includes a request for short term rent breaks and that there should be better access to finance.

Don't F\*\*\* Business: A Reappraisal of Fiscal and Monetary Policy is Christopher Gasson's well-argued essay on how Liberal Democrats can and should position themselves as the party of business. His conclusion "Being the party of business in the 2020s doesn't mean what it used to in the 1980s" really is – in my view - a way of framing some of the thinking that Liberal Democrats should be doing around fiscal policy, markets and public ownership and also appealing to, particularly, Conservative voters who are realising that we currently have a very broken economic model.

There are two essays on technology which are worth reading, *A Liberal Response to the Blockchain and Cryptocurrency Opportunity* by Mihir Magudia, which explores new ground and concludes that politics is almost always behind the curve when it comes to technology writing, and a view from Vinous Ali on *The Future of Britain's Tech Sector*.

While this book has some shortcomings, it is fundamentally a thoughtful and valuable addition to the Liberal writing. How far any of this thinking will be part of the manifesto remains to be seen – but certainly some should.

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*The Battle for Liberal Britain*. Edited by Ed Davey. Think Books £9.99  
Susan Simmonds is a former member of the Liberal Democrats



# ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL

The Lib Dems have lost interest in political visions and have a leader and structure that cannot deliver it, says Michael Meadowcroft

Dr Pangloss rules the Liberal Democrats. Everything works together for good. The party apparently progresses at every election and its future prospects are universally good.

Parties always have to pretend to be optimistic but when the rhetoric requires party leaders, nationally and locally to hide the truth from colleagues it inevitably inhibits the action required to revive the party and to enable it to present a distinctive and attractive Liberal vision to the electorate.

The bizarre fact about the crisis confronting the Liberal Democrats is that the party not only does nothing about it but does not even appear to be aware of it. Judging from the statistics of election contests at which the party has only a paper candidate without any Liberal literature distributed, the base party vote is around a mere 2%. More than one in five of its candidates at the last, 2019, election lost their deposit, even at the low level of 5%.

Even remarkable by-election victories, such as in Chesham & Amersham, North Shropshire and Tiverton & Honiton, no longer have a significant lasting effect on the party's fortunes, with the party's opinion poll ratings reverting almost to pre by-election levels within a short time.

We were at 7% before the first of the three and the average rating now is just 11.5%. Compare previous examples: large national gains after Orpington in 1962, and a decade later the five by-elections between the 1970 general election, at which we polled 7.5%, and the February 1974 election with a national vote of 19.3% - the highest Liberal vote for 45 years.

The lack of a solid core vote and an ability to build on it ensures a miserable record of by-election seat retention. Since the war, up to the three recent successes, Liberals or Liberal Democrats had 35 by-election victories but only Richmond Park is still held. The situation in my own city of Leeds is salutary. The party is in a poorer electoral situation than when we won the first seats back on the city council more than 50 years ago. Last May the party failed to win a single seat in the old county borough area whereas in my time we held five previously solid Labour inner city wards. Seven of the eight Leeds constituencies are derelict and only three of the 33 wards are capable of mounting a winnable campaign. The party is now seeking to hide its failure by combining all the associations into a single city party.

Alongside the party's failure is the manifest fact that the case for Liberalism is as strong today as ever, indeed the values that have emerged in society from the horrors of the Covid-19 pandemic underline vividly the power of Liberalism: solidarity between individuals, the enhancement of community, the importance of the public service, human rather than

economic values, the relevance of Keynesian economics and the necessity for internationalism.

Sadly there is today no political organisation in Britain aware of the power of such Liberal values and capable of promoting them. The case is going by default because the Liberal Democrats have had no published document since 2002 setting out the context and arguments for the values that should underpin its policies and its election stance. The party's autumn conference last year had a debate on the chapter heads of a planned document but nothing emerged thereafter. The abject lack of a Liberal political organisation capable of persuading the electorate and winning elections is allowing illiberal values, short-termism and politics based on slogans to damage our society and to diminish each individual's life chances.

Policies are not freestanding or 'one-offs' but are the topical application of the the party's philosophy to current issues. The principled opposition to the Iraq invasion was not primarily concerned with the presumed existence of weapons of mass destruction but was a consequence of the Liberal doctrine of international law.

The support for joining (and re-joining) the EU is an expression of Liberalism's internationalism. The party's leader is a natural Liberal and is a sympathetic and clearly very decent individual but, alas, he is not a leader.

No articulate exposition of a Liberal vision for society ever emerges and there is no passionate appeal to man the barricades for that vision. Long term recruits and candidates prepared to devote themselves sacrificially to winning elections come from being inspired by the vision rather than from specific campaigns. In my long experience leaders of local campaigns tend to remain in the party only as long as that campaign lasts unless they imbibe the Liberal reasons for the campaign.

Despite the deep unpopularity of the present Conservative government and the failure of Keir Starmer to capitalise on it significantly, the Liberal Democrats have languished at single figures or just above in the polls since 2015.

Twenty-five years of targeting has hollowed out the party and killed off the organisation in non-target seats. Very many constituencies have no viable local party and are incapable of reviving an association without outside help. But the party has no strategy for reviving the many derelict seats, indeed the problem is largely hidden by amalgamating groups of seats into a single association, only one of which is actually active. Without any presence on the ground the voter is not prompted to support the party hence the many embarrassingly derisory votes - and the ridicule of the party on topical comedy shows such as Have I Got News For You. What has Liberalism done to deserve

such treatment?

The initial Liberal context of community politics as an enabling and developmental force has been lost in the mountains of Focus leaflets without any political content and filled with bogus opinion polls, populist campaigns to mend pavements and save post offices and trite and negative claims that “it’s a two horse race”.

Without building a positive Liberal core vote, campaigns have to deliver more and more leaflets until active members either give up or suffer burn out. Another effect is that the local government vote does not transfer to parliamentary elections. Even in Liverpool, a city with an enviable record of Focus saturation, the party has only ever won one parliamentary seat - and that as a result of a fortuitous by-election.

Today we have the remarkable local successes of the Hull Liberal Democrats, gaining control of the council and topping the citywide vote, but polling meagre totals of 5.3%, 6.1% and 5.6% in the 2019 parliamentary elections in the city. Joe Otten, a highly competent Liberal Democrat councillor in the 29-strong Sheffield City Council group, finished fifth in the election for the South Yorkshire mayor.

The party has a formidable bureaucratic structure and, indeed, it spent an inordinate amount of debating time at the recent Spring Conference changing it. Much of the federal structure is replicated at English party level. There is a highly structured candidate approval system and a detailed appeals process. It is all very worthy but it has produced a party structure that exists to replicate itself.

It takes an army of willing volunteers to take on the array of posts simply to maintain it. It is a structure commensurate with a nationwide national party which simply does not exist on the ground. What is needed is a guerrilla warfare organisation able to respond rapidly to political events and opportunities, a unit able to write rigorous ‘vision’ documents, drawing in Liberals from outside the actual party, and a strategy team equipped with a systematic plan to revive derelict associations.

Finally, the ill health of the party is vividly demonstrated by its current passion for what is curiously called a ‘progressive alliance’ aimed at removing the Conservatives from office and which requires the co-operation of the Labour party.

Such an alliance is deeply flawed because Labour is certainly not a progressive party - as those of us who have fought it in its industrial fiefs know only too well - and Labour dare not enter such an alliance as it would hasten its disintegration.

Publicity for any Liberal Democrat link-up with Labour would diminish the number of transfers to us from Conservatives, and would inhibit and hamper any prospect of Liberal progress as a nationwide party. As it happens it would also demonstrate that I wasted 15 years of my life winning Leeds West from Labour. I am not one who only points out problems and I have also set out the operational strategy needed for revival and have put it forward at national and regional levels since 2018 without it being accepted by anyone.

I had made my mind up to ‘retire’ from swathes of various campaigns when I reached my 80th birthday last March to concentrate on personal writing and I wrote a final polemic to try to startle such party activists as exist into doing something about the state of the party.

Even though it was published in Liberator 408 [<https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/archive/>] and had a link published in Liberal Democrat Voice, there was no response apart from those colleagues of the same vintage as myself who also saw the looming demise of the party. I have never felt any difficulty in over 64 years arguing for Liberalism and I have written copiously on every conceivable aspect of the cause. I am deeply distressed - and angry - at the failure of the Liberal Democrats to be a powerful force for Liberalism.

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Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87 and is the author of numerous political pamphlets

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# OBITUARY: RUTH COLEMAN-TAYLOR

## Alan Sherwell pays tribute to a Liberal who saw more than 50 years of activism in many roles

Christine Ruth Moffett was born in Manchester on 21 January 1947 and educated at Manchester High School for Girls and York University. She died in Athens on 13 July..

She joined the Liberal Party in 1966 - the start of a long, varied and committed political adventure.

Indeed, one of the difficulties of writing an obituary is the sheer vastness of the number of different political activities in which she involved herself. I first met Ruth in about 1970 and am very aware of some of them but far less so of others. I am not sure that anyone knows much about all of them.

She had a very short early marriage to Geoffrey Addison about which she only spoke to those very close to her. As a result, her early political activity was as Ruth Addison. She worked at Oz magazine in 1969-70 and claimed to have sorted out their filing system (although those around at the time would be very surprised to hear that Oz had a filing system), attended the first Glastonbury festival (Pilton in those days) and was at the Stones' free concert in Hyde Park in 1969. In other words, she was a fairly typical Young Liberal of the time. She was part of the YL delegation to Czechoslovakia in 1970, the story of which has been told in *Liberator* 403.

Ruth became chair of the Young Liberals in succession to Peter Hain at the 1973 conference in Great Malvern. She had not been expected to win but, after a monumentally messed up campaign by the other side, and a good one from her team, she had a narrow victory and was subsequently re-elected to a second year. Unusually, she followed this period by becoming chair of the Union of Liberal Students. I don't know of anyone else who has held both positions.

By this time, Ruth had moved back to Manchester and had started going out with Patrick Coleman,

who was to become her second husband in 1975. One of the first things they did politically as a couple was to help with 'Operation Todmorden' in January 1973, in which Michael Taylor and Elizabeth Wilson were getting the Liberals re-started there. Whatever happened to Liberalism in Todmorden?

Ruth's first (as far as I can identify) council contest was that May for the Collegiate Church ward of Manchester City Council. Many more were to follow.

Ruth was part of a very strong Manchester Moss Side YL branch whose activities included working in the 1975 referendum campaign. The 'yes' campaign were keen to attract youth. So, they really wanted YL involvement and invested in it.

With Ruth as a leading light, the branch wrote and performed street theatre, made banners, threw themselves into community events and travelled the country. This was a cause close to Ruth's heart – international activity was at the core of her Liberalism - and

the branch enjoyed every minute of it (especially winning!). *Liberator* was also based in Manchester at that time and Ruth, along with Moss Side colleagues, was very much involved with it.

Ruth and Patrick married in July 1975. They had four children - Rachel, Daniel, Jonathon and Matthew – and two grandchildren followed - Charles and Nicholas.

She fought her first of seven general elections at Liverpool Toxteth in 1979 and then Macclesfield in 1983 before the family moved to Wiltshire in 1985. Ruth was adopted as PPC for Woodspring and fought the 1987 general election before starting a very successful time in Wiltshire local government. She also spent two years as chair of West Swindon Mental Health Trust.

Ruth and Patrick both stood for Wiltshire County





Council in 1989 but only Patrick won. Ruth was more successful in 1991 when the party took control of North Wiltshire District Council. Ruth became group and council leader in autumn 1994, retaining control in 1995 as, indeed, they did four years later, when Ruth stepped down as leader to give more time to her position on the EU Committee of the Regions, which she had joined in 1997 and continued to serve on until 2007. Her work there included writing reports on asylum and immigration and working with the local governments of candidate countries to facilitate membership.

Her successor as leader lost his seat after boundary changes in 2003 and Ruth was asked to return to run a delicately balanced Council of 26 Lib Dems, 25 Tories, 1 Labour, and 1 independent who was previously a Lib Dem. This was not an easy time as, in addition to the district council and Council of the Regions responsibilities, her divorce from Patrick was going through. Nevertheless, she still found time to fight the 2004 EU elections in the South West Region and she continued as leader until 2005 when she was replaced against her wishes. Friends claim that this was the result of a mixture of envy, selfishness and some concern or resentment that she was often abroad but such political coups are not restricted to Wiltshire. The party lost control in 2007 and the council was abolished two years later.

As is so often the case with council leaders, she became involved with the Local Government Association for many years including acting as an LGA 'peer support' to other authorities.

However, as ever, she went further and chaired the Local Government International Bureau (2005-07) and led delegations to India and China and visited Zimbabwe to assist local government training. She also went to Cameroon (2002) and Montenegro (2006) as an election observer.

She married for the final time in 2007 to Michael Taylor. They initially lived in Leeds where she worked as group support officer for the Lib Dem group on Kirkstall MBC from 2008-10 and fought Kirkstall Ward, in Leeds, three times, getting to within 120 votes of winning this impregnable Labour seat. She also fought two Parliamentary elections in Leeds (Central 2005 and West 2010) and Barnsley East in 2015.

Having moved to Todmorden, she served on their Town Council 2019-22 and was mayor 2020-21 and, somehow, during this period also managed to study at the Open University. She fought her final general election at Wolverhampton South East in 2019.

Within the Party she was a long-term member of the Women's Liberal Federation/ Women Liberal Democrats and ALDES, a regular party delegate to

*“Ruth will be much missed my so many people in so many different fields but, perhaps, the one memory that they will all have is of her capacity to knit anywhere”*

ALDE/ ELDR Congress and ALDE /ELDR council member and a member of Liberal International British Group. She was a member of the Women's National Commission and executive for 10 years

Ruth also served on the Lib Dem Federal Executive, the Federal Policy Committee and the Federal International Relations Committee including a separate spells as vice-chair of each.

I hope that this has given a flavour of the wide range of contribution that Ruth made to the Liberal family. I am sure that I have left many things out and know that I have not really been able to do others the justice that they deserve. I would particularly like to thank Pat Coleman, Paul Hannon and Michael Taylor for the information that they provided.

Ruth will be much missed my so many people in so many different fields but, perhaps, the one memory that they will all have is of her capacity to knit anywhere, including when chairing major debates. It was calming and thought provoking and very effective.

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Alan Sherwell is a former chair of the Young Liberals and former leader of Aylesbury Vale District Council

## Conservatism: the fight for a tradition by Edmund Fawcett Princeton University Press 2020

Edmund Fawcett is faced with a dilemma we all face in this country and across the pond. Where is Conservatism going, and indeed, is it still Conservatism? With Donald Trump's seizure of the Republicans in the United States and the unspecified post-Thatcherism, best represented in the inanity of Boris Johnson and that ilk in the UK there is good reason to doubt. In France and Germany there are other reasons to doubt, as Angela Merkel clearly demonstrated the differences between Christian Democracy and Conservatism and a hardening of the Right as a reaction to this.

I would expect all Liberator readers to have Fawcett's *Liberalism the Life of an Idea* on their shelves - I cannot commend it highly enough -, and so be familiar with his basic mode of operation, taking the development of a political philosophy from its beginnings around the French Revolution through to the present, primarily through key individuals.

This is not say that there were no proto-Liberals or Conservatism before this point, but that they had an essentially different nature. The early Burke would be a good example, clearly within the Liberal canon, yet he goes on to be the backstop of Conservative political thought. Just as conservative libertarians are selective in their reading of Adam Smith, I doubt if Burke would have empathised with the mean spirit that runs through contemporary Conservatism.

If pre-revolutionary political thought might be summarised as an imperfect dialogue between crown and country – each aristocratic - Liberalism and Conservatism emerge from this as attempts to reconcile themselves to those horrors in a meaningful way to go forward; much as either might not want to they have to adjust to the developments in capitalism and the pressures for democracy.

Liberalism essentially takes the lead in this, the necessary corrective to democracy; Conservatism will be dragged to



# REVIEWS

follow suit, an ongoing rear-guard action, which, so far as Britain, France and the USA are concerned, have reached some compromise, but with Germany, despite its advance in other fields, will still have some catching up to do in politics at the end of the 19th century.

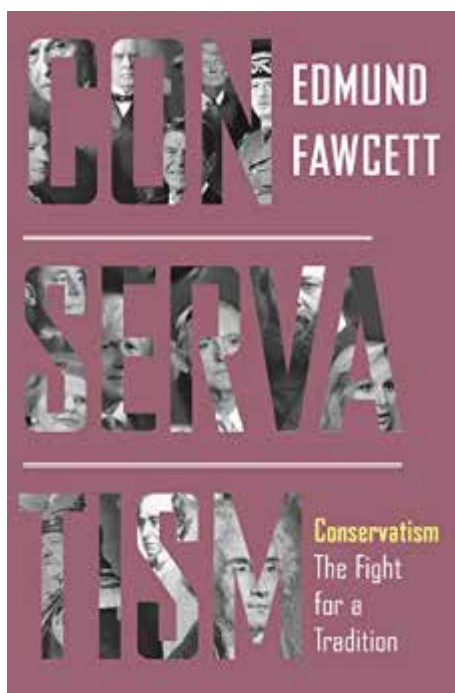
Because Germany then comprised a multitude of petty states the development of its body politic might best be summarised in Weber's opera *Die Freischütz*, the lure of a prince or a leader to pull the national project together. Despite many great thinkers, Humboldt most notably, German Liberalism never quite got it

later Socialism are references to 'right-wing Liberalism' and 'liberal Conservatism'. Some of these perhaps reached their apotheosis in Britain with the governments of Harold Macmillan and Edward Heath, while Margaret Thatcher was clearly an economic liberal within a Conservative political framework. Here things start to slide.

One of the things that is frequently alleged of conservatives is that they do not have an ideology or that they are anti-intellectual in political thought. This is not strictly true, but the ordinary conservative may not think about such things as much as the ordinary liberal.

In the absence of any serious political debate post-Thatcher, conservatism has become very much the politics of greed and selfishness, in a world where the advances of the post-war settlement have increasingly been clawed by back by wealth. Brought up on this, the outlook of the new generation of conservatives is shallow. The workings of the invisible hand aside, governments have acted in the interests of the few rather than the many; the masses are fobbed off with scapegoats of the otherwise necessary EU and immigrants. A very nasty conservatism has developed indeed, and parallels can be found in the United States. Things did not quite come home to roost in 2008 but with the cost-of-living crisis we have them in spades. How will the populism that masquerades as conservatism deal with this, apart from cancelling politics while they have another leadership crisis?

Fawcett summarises the present position thus: "Liberal-democratic society suffers grievous ills that need urgent repair. Populists of the hard right claim to be messengers of that grievance, but their credentials are thin. They speak for interests that cannot be obviously reconciled: globalist liberals and national-minded locals; border-blind capital and left-behind



together.

German Liberals often found it easier to work through other channels, hence perhaps, the rarefied academicism of Berlin, Popper and Hayek, the latter too easily seduced by economic liberals within political Conservatism. Most of Fawcett's book does for Conservatism what his earlier book did for Liberalism. But peppered throughout, in view of this as a rear-guard response to the forces of Liberalism and

neighbourhoods; businesses that want less regulation and the religious faithful that want more moral controls.”

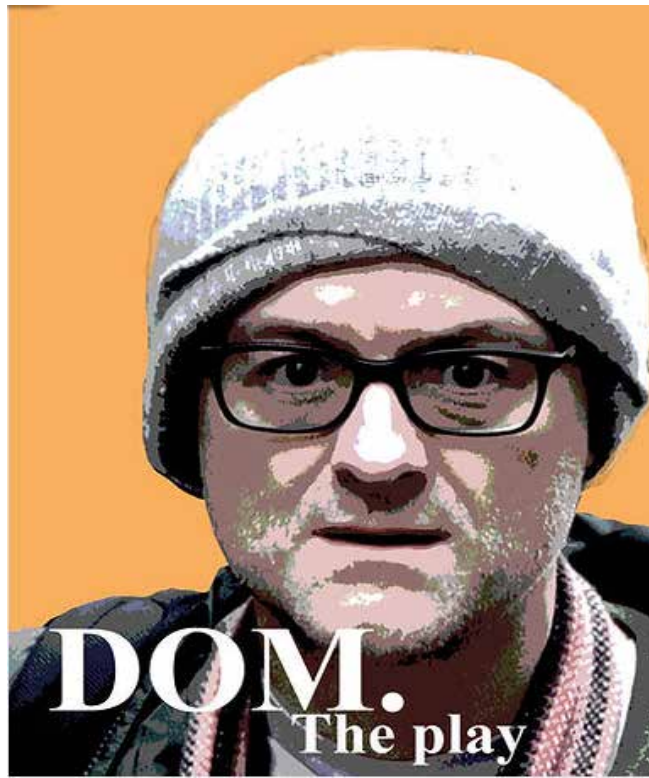
These contradictions cannot be resolved; it is not difficult to see who will lose out. For some reassurance to us, Fawcett adds: “Missing from the hard right’s appeal or well down its list of promises are liberalism’s twin demands for protection from power and respect for all, whoever they are.” There will be a lot to claw back.

In contrasting recent conservative thinkers, of whom only Roger Scruton is likely to be widely familiar, Fawcett suggests that the liberalism that conservatives have adjusted themselves to is now so pervasive that going back may be an impossible road. While homophobia persists, for example, few in the UK would put homosexuality back in the closet; society has moved on in fifty years – as I write, Gay Pride is being celebrated as just another carnival.

Of the American Patrick Deneen for example, Fawcett follows Stephen Holmes in the accusation of ‘antonym substitution’ – taking a liberal argument and substituting it with a conservative outcome. Fawcett’s repost is: “Liberals do not contrast personal choice with moral choice but with choice that an arbitrary authority claims is moral. They do not contrast personal liberty with acknowledgement of authority but with submission to arbitrary, unchecked authority. They do not contrast a person’s sense of themselves with their roots in a community but with unchosen, often subordinate membership in a clan or social group. Liberal reluctance to use coercive law in enforcement of morality is not a denial of morality.”

My unawareness of most of the recent conservative thinkers presented by Fawcett is symptomatic of his remark of how little the two sides of the debate appear to talk to each other.

I do not think I have read a Conservative tract since trying to make sense of David Cameron’s idea as a new Tory leader – I concluded that if he really believed all of that he was leading the wrong



party. Scruton, from 1982 when he launched his Salisbury Review, mourned that conservatives were thinking less of ideas that of policy and practical repairs to the status quo.

Yet this is what practical politics are about; managing day-to-day affairs, rising to the next crisis or problem as the last is resolved or recedes. What has been absent in British politics since at least 1997 is a dialogue – we have had conservative governments of one shade or another. One might go further and say that the dialogue between Liberalism and Conservatism has been at best imperfect since the 1920s. As another of Fawcett’s recent conservative thinkers David Brooks puts it, most of what appals him in modern society has taken place on their watch. Brooks calls on conservatism to find a moral purpose large enough to displace the lure of blood-and-soil nationalism and to restore standards of professional competence and reassert the importance of experience, integrity and political craftsmanship. I regret that I don’t see it happening.

I put the question, would it be true to say that the party that calls itself Conservative in the UK is no longer conservative?

Stewart Rayment

## Dom - the Play Michael Kingsbury (dir) White Bear Theatre

Dom is a fast-moving, sharp comedy about the most controversial figure to emerge in UK politics in the past decade - Dominic Cummings. Was he a creative visionary or a danger to democracy?

Cummings (played by Chris Porter) takes to the stage to give us his views and versions of events, shining light on Brexit referendum tactics (including that bus), his trip to Barnard Castle, Covid and being Boris Johnson’s adviser. He’s outspoken, very confident and takes no prisoners.

Neil Green’s tight script, based on political memoirs and historical research, races along, with never a wasted word nor a dull moment. The audience were laughing throughout.

Energy sparks between Cummings and Johnson, as Cummings struggles to manage the narcissistic and chaotic prime minister. Anyone who has seen Boris Johnson close up in real life (which I have) will find his portrayal uncanny.

Cummings is frequently and furiously frustrated, whether this is over the civil service, kowtowing to Marcus Rashford over free school meals or, especially, at Carrie’s constant interference.

Cummings’ enemies and others appearing include David Cameron, Nigel Farage, Nicola Sturgeon, Tony Blair, Prince Andrew, Richard Branson, John Prescott, Angela Merkel, the Queen, Meghan Markle, Carrie Johnson, people at the Guardian - and even a dancing Theresa May. These parts and more characters are played by Sarah Lawrie and James Groom, who swiftly and convincingly switch posture and accents.

While it is a comedy, the play does not sidestep sensitive issues. Nor it is a one-sided tirade - remain voters accosting Cummings are weak and aggressively self-righteous.

Christy Lawrance



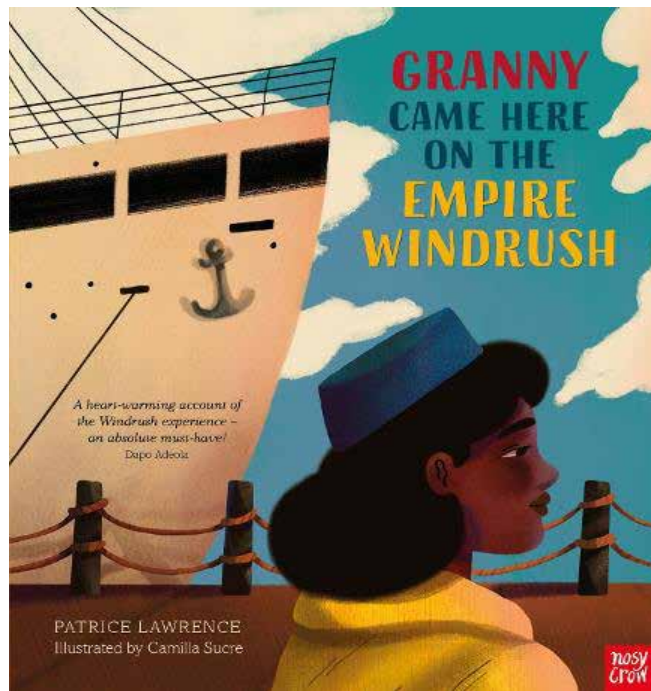
## Heroes of Environmental Diplomacy, profiles in courage Felix Dodds and Chris Spence (eds) Routledge 2022

It is frequently said that winners write history; if the people championed in this book don't win, will there be anybody to write history?

The first question that the man or woman in the street might put is, Barack Obama aside, who are these people? Cast your mind back to COP26. It certainly wasn't a triumph for Boris Johnson; he might have done better to have put Ed Davey in charge of it, the struggle of climate change has to be a cross-party issue and Davey at least demonstrates commitment, as well has experience of earlier COPs as secretary of state for energy and climate change. We didn't really get much information from the news coverage of COP 26, except that it wasn't really going anywhere, with China's opposition, but flip into Obama's chapter and you'll soon get a grip on the chaos behind the scenes, and why it takes the determination and commitment of these individuals to cut through the crap. As Raúl Estrada-Oyuela's Kyoto chapter testifies, the role of the chair is crucial; Alok Sharma (who?) wasn't up to it, even if he had been given the backing.

Sidney Holt is a man who deserves more recognition; he died in 2019. Many older readers will have journeyed on Save the Whale demonstrations in the 1970s and 1980s, but by his death there were only three commercial whaling nations, Japan, who had dropped out of the International Whaling Commission in 2018 but only pursue commercial whaling within their own 200-mile zone, Norway, and Iceland, which had resumed whaling.

His book, with Ray Beverton, *On the Dynamics of Exploited Fish Populations*, first published in 1957 has remained a standard, and locally we are only beginning to address the issues with Marine Conservation Areas – short-term breaks in some waters notwithstanding.



Despite the editors' claim that their book is about people, and despite it being selective of events rather than a running narrative, it is still very much about process, and that is where its utility lies. In a few months' time, the COP moves to Egypt. I felt with Glasgow, last year, there was a failure by the media to really report what was going on, distracted by the side-shows of our own domestic politics. Whether public support or criticism can play a part in such proceedings is an open question, but one where we need to be better informed – journalists covering such events will find it eye-opening. Any of us who end up such events will find it doubly useful.

Felix Dodds will be familiar to many readers as the former chair of the National League of Young Liberals; he doesn't mention this in his biography, but it is good to know he is still fighting the fight. Chris Spence has equally good credentials.

Stewart Rayment

## Granny Came Here on the Empire Windrush by Patrice Lawrence, illustrated by Camilla Sucre Nosy Crow 2022 £7.99

This book will bring tears to your eyes, not because you know of the evil that the Conservatives do to this day, and as we have to live in the shame that they bring upon all

of us with their racism.

It will bring tears to your eyes because it is such a lovely story. Amy has to dress up as someone she admires for school the next day. Granny suggests Trinidadian Winifred Atwell – I wonder how many of you grooved to her Coronation Rag over the Platinum Jubilee - Mary Seacoal and Rosa Parks, but Amy chooses to go as her granny, who had come to England on the Empire Windrush. The story doesn't pull any punches on the problems faced, if not the more recent ones, so helps with our wider understanding.

I couldn't get the QR code to work, but look forward to hearing the story in a Trinidad tongue. The story is beyond the 2-5 range for self-reading, a 25-year-old might still enjoy it.

One of Camilla Sucre's excellent images intrigued me... as they are sailing towards England, one of the characters on the upper deck to one side in his overcoat, he is not part of the in-crowd, his eyes tell us that.

Trinidad has been a multi-ethnic community since shortly after Columbus landed, the Francophone elements are clear in the text; perhaps of east Indian origin? A great book, it should be read beyond the Afro-Saxon community, though it is good to see them getting the books they deserve.

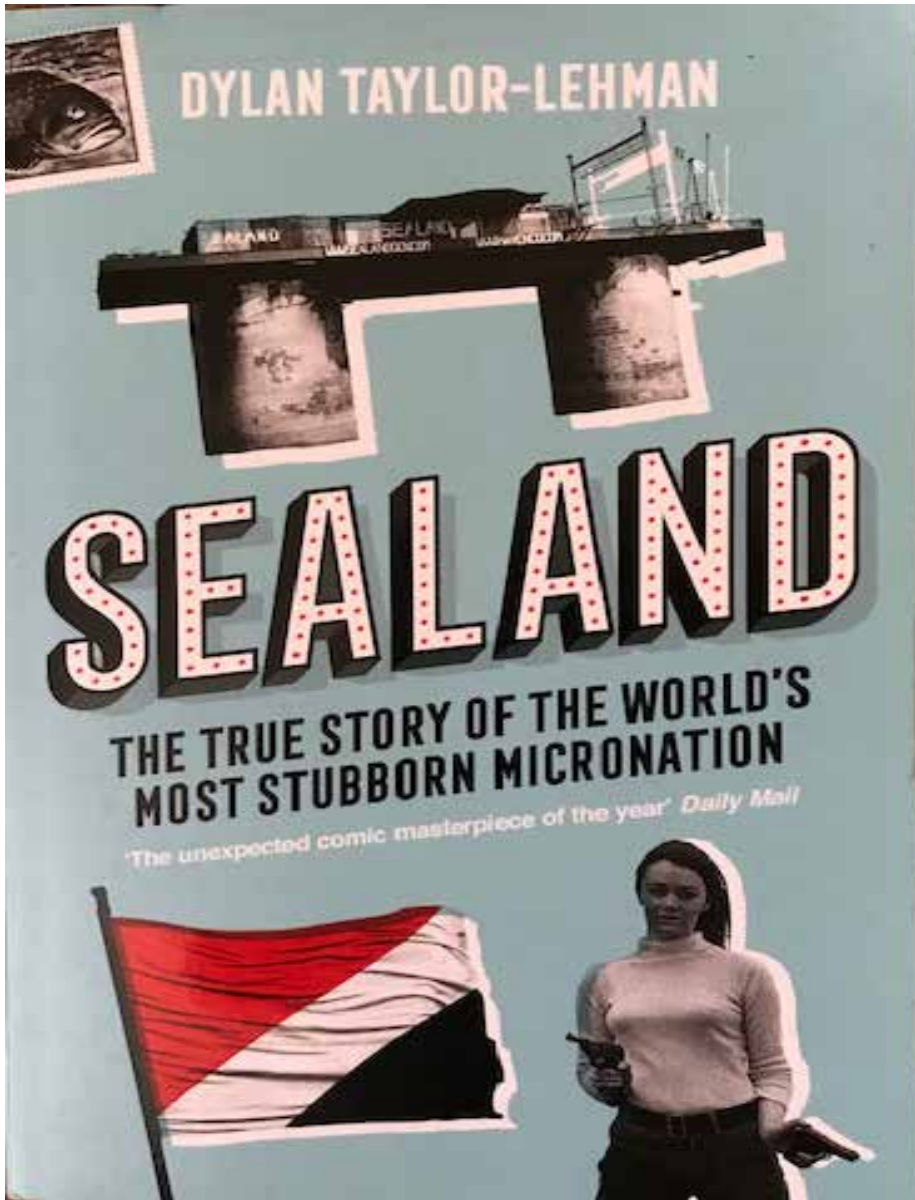
Stewart Rayment

## Sealand: the True Story of the World's Most Stubborn Micronation by Dylan Taylor-Lehman Icon Books

I found myself in the presence of royalty some 50 ago at a Liberal meeting in Southend addressed by local entrepreneur Roy Bates, the self-appointed ruling prince of the self-proclaimed Principality of Sealand.

Sealand may sound like a joke but it's now been there for 55 years and no-one knows quite what its status is.

It occupies a defensive fort built in World War 2 which lies



in international waters. Despite sporadic attempts by the UK government to either blow it up or evict the Bates family, the legal consensus seems to be that since the UK had no right to build the fort in international waters in the first place, it has no right to remove it either.

The story of how the Bates family and their associates have stayed in occupation of the fort against all comers is quite extraordinary - at various stages Bates' 15-year-old son repels boarders with petrol bombs, the clan fight off an armed assault and a messy falling out with potential German business partners had led to the formation of the self-declared Sealand Government-in-Exile, which still exists though has some worrying connections with the far right.

Sealand grew out of Bates's involvement with Radio Essex, a minor 1960s pirate radio station that broadcast from a nearby fort.

Sealand's subsequent history has seen an abortive television station and the sale of stamps, coins, noble titles and other souvenirs, though I never felt it became clear what the Bates family actually use Sealand for beyond a sort of second home in the middle of the North Sea.

Taylor-Lehman appears to American and the book is consequently full of incongruous Americanisms (I find it hard to believe that Bates - a traditional English military man by background - ever told his son he had "gotten" anything). There are also some niggling errors - Taylor-Lehman appears unaware of who Ronan O'Rahilly was (he owned Radio Caroline <http://radiocaroline.co.uk/#home.html>) and calls Radio Northsea International a Dutch language station (that was Radio Veronica).

Odder still is that in its final chapters the book suddenly lurches into a detailed description of the

cockling industry - a different business interest of the Bates family - and a long and rather pointless exposition of who spoke at a conference of micronations in Canada, none of which apart from Sealand has any physical territory.

This is though an entertaining account of the bizarre story of one family's persistence, still being enacted by Bates's grandsons off the Essex coast.

Mark Smulian

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## Playboy of the Western Word

by Lucy Brennan Shiel and Necessary Animals

An album of refreshing originality stepping beyond the comfort zone of rock. With an array of impressive musicianship from Necessary Animals that bridges the spectrum of 60s psychedelia to jazz this an album that cries out to be heard. Rooted in the haunting lyrics gleaned from James Joyce's Ulysses, vocalist Lucy Brennan Shiel fearlessly explores her Irish roots with a humility and reference to Joyce's words that breathes a new life for a new generation. A must have album for those seeking to escape into a fresh and inspiring musical journey.

Playboy of the Western Word is available as a CD from [lucybrennanshiel@icloud.com](mailto:lucybrennanshiel@icloud.com) (£10.00 + p&p) or a download from Bandcamp (£6.00)

<https://necessaryanimals.bandcamp.com/album/playboy-of-the-western-word>

Anthony Forrest



## Monday

“What we need is a mole,” said Paddy Ashdown one day. “Awkward blighters, moles,” I replied, “you should hear Meadowcroft on the subject.” “No,” he persisted, “we need to place a deep-cover Liberal Democrat agent at the very top of the Conservative Party.” I naturally assumed that Ashdown wanted to make one of our chaps leader of the Tory enemy so he or, indeed, she could bring it down from within. I have myself installed alumni of the Home for Well-Behaved Orphans in all sorts of useful places and read their reports avidly. However, as Ashdown outlined his scheme it became clear it was much subtler than that. It was so secret, indeed, that not even the mole could know what was going on. “So what we need,” I summed up for him, “is a young Liberal Democrat who would be perfectly at home in the Conservative Party, is insanely ambitious and bound to be a disaster if they ever become prime minister.” We looked at each other for a moment and then exclaimed as one: “Elizabeth Truss!” Today Ashdown’s plan has come to fruition and I feel sure that, in a very real sense (as the Revd Hughes would put it), he is looking down on us and not saying a word about it.

## Tuesday

Disgusting as the state of our waterways is, it could have been far worse. I have it on good authority that the Conservatives recently considered a fund-raising push under which their branches would have been able, for a fee, to have a leading light of the party take their daily rear in a local river. So it might have been Simon Hart in the River Dart, Theresa May in the Tay or Jacob Rees-Mogg in the Og. The whole idea, thank the Lord, has been suspended sine die – and I shall never again moan about being touched for a raffle prize. (I don’t mean touching me is the prize, though there was one occasion in Saffron Walden....)

## Wednesday

Yes, I miss Paddy Ashdown. I miss his correspondence – those envelopes marked ‘Top Secret: Burn Before Reading’ that arrived by every post – and I miss his company. Despite Ashdown’s best efforts, I never could quite get my head around ‘Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy.’ “What exactly was Toby Esterhase up to?” I would ask him, and “So did old Smiley do right by Ricki Tarr in the end?” Now Paddy is gone there is no one in the party to explain this to me. I tried asking Ming Campbell the other day, but he just told me Sir Percy Alleline was a fine upstanding fellow and that he wouldn’t listen to a word against him.

## Thursday

When cultural historians turn to the British pop scene it is Merseybeat and my own Rutbeat that dominate their writings. There is, however, another movement that should be given its due: Blaby Beat. Yes, this unassuming Leicestershire town has left its mark on musical history. James Taylor, for instance, was so taken with the place that he moved there and became known as ‘Sweet Blaby James.’ He was following a trail blazed by Bobby Vee who, though he was unable to stay for long, urged his listeners ever after to ‘Take Good Care of My Blaby.’ Whether The Supremes ever visited Leicestershire I know not, but their song ‘Blaby Love’ was careful to namecheck

# Lord Bonkers’ Diary

what was rapidly become the hottest and the coolest town in the world. Nor were they alone. One thinks of The Beach Boys (‘Don’t Worry Blaby’), The Rubettes (‘Sugar Blaby Love’), Wizzard (‘See My Blaby Jive’), Vanilla Ice (‘Ice Ice Blaby’), Bread (‘Blaby I’m-a Want You’), George McRae (‘Rock Your Blaby’) and Britney Spears (‘Hit Me Blaby One More Time’).

For a while it was a boomtown. The Beatles’ ‘Blaby You’re a Rich Man’ was taken as a cynical comment on the phenomenon and one I had some sympathy

with, having seen Melton Mowbray after the Pork Pie Bubble of the 1890s burst. Ultimately, however, the Conservative-run council in Blaby proved a poor fit with the counter-culture and rigorous enforcement of its by-laws saw the end of the town’s pop fame. Bob Dylan’s ‘It’s All Over Now, Blaby Blue’ served as the requiem for an era, and my old friends the Rolling Stones sang: “You’re out of touch my Blaby/My poor old-fashioned Blaby/I said Blaby, Blaby, Blaby, you’re out of time.”

## Friday

I don’t know about you, but I’ve heard nothing from the ‘There’s No Monster Brigade’ since the skeleton of an ichthyosaur – otherwise known as a ‘sea dragon’! – was found on the shores of Rutland Water. What I do read are claims that this great lake is man-made and dates from no earlier than the 1970s. Can you believe it? These ‘Rutland Water Truthers’ must get together on their Facebooks and the TikTok to egg each other on. I trust the authorities are keeping a close eye on them.

## Saturday

Conservatives believe culture is something they find in the refrigerator if their cleaning lady is off with her legs, but to Liberals the arts are what make life worth living. One thinks of Visconti’s masterly ‘Beith in Venice,’ of Stephen Sondheim’s ‘Anyone Can Birtwhistle’ and of Nick Harvey and his invisible giant rabbit. Today the culture portfolio is in the safe hands of Jamie Stone, who has a particular interest in contemporary Chinese art. I recently accompanied him to an exhibition of the same, and he went “Ai Weiwei” all the way home.

## Sunday

Perhaps it is all the carbon dioxide in the air, but the seasons are all over the place. It used to be possible for a chap to make a good living playing country cricket in the summer and League football in the winter, but I don’t suppose anyone has tried that since Leicestershire and Carlisle United’s Chris Balderdash. Now winter draws on, as the First Lady Bonkers used to say, and I turn my thoughts to heating my stables. I assure readers that, unlike Mr Nadhim Zahawi, I shall not be stinging the taxpayer for the cost. One year, as I recall, word got around that the stables were nice and warm, with the result that two Well-Behaved Orphans spent several weeks living there in a pantomime horse costume. I couldn’t find it in my heart to be hard on them: by the time they were discovered they had won me a novice chase at Haydock Park.

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