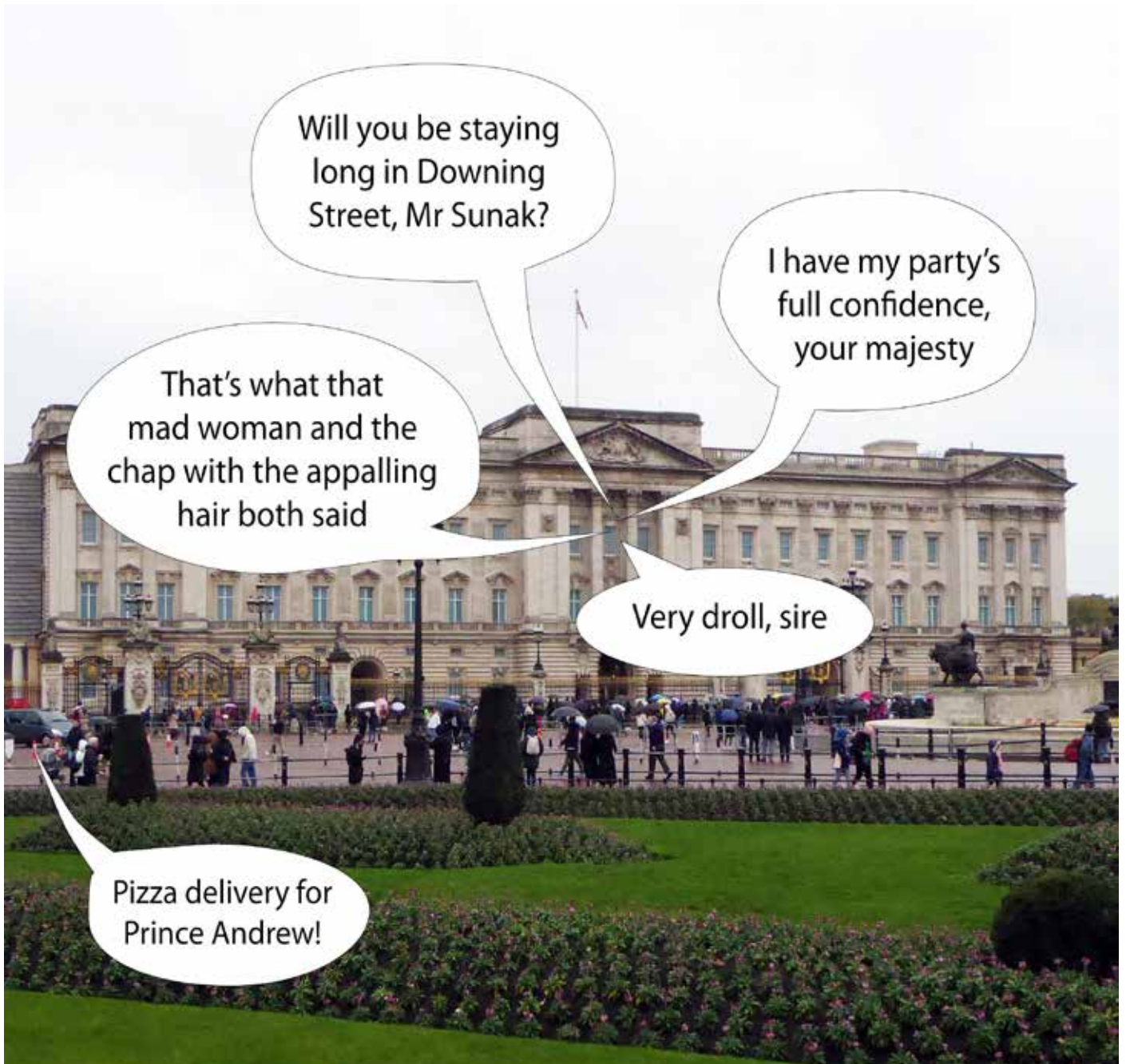


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LIBERATOR

ISSN 2755-5097

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

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

welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words

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Liberator Publications
Flat 1, 24 Alexandra Grove, London N4 2LF

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COMMENTARY

SHORT AND SOUR

When *Liberator* 414 predicted that Liz Truss's premiership would be "nasty, brutish and short" we had no inkling just how short - a mere seven weeks before she imploded.

Her removal by an aghast Tory party had the additional incidental benefit of destroying the reputation of the Institute for Economic Affairs and other libertarian free market fanatics as the very markets they worshiped turned on them.

Her brief tenure has certainly damaged such reputation as the Tories still had for economic management and the precedents are not good for them to retrieve it.

The Major government lost its reputation for economic management in 1992 and suffered a landslide defeat five years later even though the economy was by then doing quite well.

Rishi Sunak has two years at most and the economy is doing appallingly. Even so, he poses a problem for the Lib Dems.

Without pushing the parallel too far, the Lib Dems, like the Tories, two years ago elected in Jo Swinson a leader popular with grassroots but lacking any aptitude for the job, who after a series of dreadful misjudgements lost her role and her seat within a few months.

Nobody voted to replace her with Ed Davey because of his charisma or oratory but after Swinson and Tim Farron - both of whom allegedly held these virtues - the party voted for stability and credibility.

If the Tories were still led by Truss, or Boris Johnson, and Labour by Jeremy Corbyn then Davey's serious and solid persona would be what was needed and would mark him out as a more reassuring prospect than his rivals.

But they aren't. The other two parties have done the same and ditched their grassroots heroes for someone the electorate might at least concede looks and sounds as though they could do the job without upending the economy or holding drunken revels during lockdown.

Davey's 'not the conference speech' - given on 6 November due to the cancellation of conference in September - contained laudable commitments on renewable energy (with a clever link to security against Russian energy supplies), a call for a windfall tax on large energy firms, improving skills, the abolition of Ofwat and the more questionable creation of a mortgage protection fund.

There was also a suspect call to give people a right to see a doctor within a week, which came straight after Davey noted a shortage of 6,000 doctors and a fall of 500 in the number of general practitioners.

This consequently sounded like an undeliverable wish, view apparently shared by un-consulted Lib Dem health experts.

Europe was only glancingly mentioned. Davey is still hostage to the fear that he must say nothing to offend Leave voters, who are unlikely to vote Lib Dem, while saying nothing to inspire Remain supporters, who would vote Lib Dem if given some convincing reason.

Davey has some good proposals but no big idea behind them and precious little to make the public identify the Lib Dems with anything in particular beyond being the alternative to the Tories where Labour is weak. That is unlikely to be enough.

It's been clear that some tacit 'keep out of each other's way' deal between Labour and the Lib Dems has operated at by-elections and may do so by default at a general election since Sheffield Hallam, Cambridge and Bermondsey are the only Labour seats with a Lib Dem in hailing distance.

Is anyone planning for a hung parliament? It's now well-known that many of the problems of the 2010-15 arose from it never having occurred to anyone that a hung parliament was a possibility, and so no preparatory work was done and the hopelessly inexperienced Nick Clegg had to negotiate as best he could.

Labour used to count on 40-odd seats in Scotland where it could run a dead donkey in a red rosette. It now has one seat there.

Even with its poll lead and the Government's incompetence asking Labour to go from 202 seats in 2019 to a working majority - even if it recovers somewhat in Scotland - is a very big ask.

A hung parliament with the Scottish National Party to factor in too is at the least a distinct possibility, so are the Lib Dems planning for this?

There is again a precedent from the 1990s. The substance of Paddy Ashdown's talks with Tony Blair were private but the fact that such links existed was well known and indeed each party benefitted from this in the climate of that time.

If there is a hung parliament the Lib Dems must have some red lines. Labour is already muttering again about identity's cards - remember hatred of liberty runs deep in Labour's DNA.

Whatever happens at the next general election the Lib Dems must avoid being taken by surprise by a hung parliament and having to again make it up as they go along.

And to get them into a position to exploit this, Davey has to try - however much it may not come naturally - to inspire rather than inform.

RADICAL BULLETIN

A DAY IN COURT

It is without known precedent for a Lib Dem member as prominent as Jo Hayes to be expelled, and with the party establishment refusing to give a clear explanation as to why it can hardly complain that conspiracy theories have taken hold.

Expulsions are rare, and are usually for something clear cut like standing against an official candidate or criminal convictions.

Hayes though has not taken her expulsion lying down, and has unsuccessfully sought a court injunction to prevent it, with the prospect remaining of further litigation.

Meanwhile, the judgment in that case has been made public [https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/KB/2022/2508.html&query=\(hayes\)](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/KB/2022/2508.html&query=(hayes)), but that refers only incidentally to the underlying complaints about Hayes, which remain opaque to most party members.

Hayes has held many party positions over decades, most recently as regional candidates chair for the East of England, and it is from that role that the train of events leading to her expulsion arose.

At the root of this are disputes between Hayes and party president Mark Pack, and last summer Hayes announce her intention to stand against Pack for the presidency this autumn.

She was though expelled before she could do this, which - in the absence of any sensible public explanation - gave rise to claims that Pack had feared defeat and so concocted a case against Hayes that was then put to a suitably pliable complaint panel to order her expulsion.

This is plainly not the case as Pack's complaint turns out to long pre-date the presidential election and it appears happenstance that the expulsion ruling came out as presidential nominations were being sought.

Nor was Hayes' expulsion concerned with trans issues as some thought, which are not referred to at all in the judgment.

Hayes took her case for an injunction to restrain the party from expelling her before the presidential election against Pack and against Duncan Curley, Alexandra Simpson and Serena Tierney, the latter trio being members of the panel that expelled her.

Mr Justice Johnson concluded Hayes did not establish a right to an injunction before she started a legal claim, did not establish a sufficient case on the merits to justify an injunction and that the 'balance of convenience' weighed against granting one.

The judgment said that in 2020, Pack made an anonymous complaint about the conduct of an unnamed party member. A procedural error saw that member made aware that Pack was the complainant.

They informed Hayes, who wrote to Pack to say

he was placing improper pressure on the person concerned that might prejudice police investigations, and that could constitute an offence.

She said that if the complaint was not withdrawn there could be consequences involving the police for which she would hold Pack responsible.

The second issue arose after Hayes was in December 2020 elected as Eastern regional candidates chair responsible among much else for finding a candidate for the post of Essex Police Fire and Crime Commissioner after Callum Robertson stood down for work reasons.

Hayes proposed as candidate Jason Hunter, a prominent Remain campaigner who had resigned from the party some time earlier but wished to rejoin though his candidature was opposed by some members.

A dispute followed between Hayes and Margaret Joachim, then English candidates chair, over what the candidate selection procedure was for someone such as Hunter who had been an approved candidate, left the party, but now wished to return.

In February 2021 Lucy Nethsingha, then Eastern regional chair - and later coincidentally a challenger to Pack for the presidency - sent an email to seven people including Hayes and Joachim expressing concerns about Hunter's suitability, and saying some of these remained unresolved.

Nethsingha asked if Hunter should be approved. Hayes said there were no outstanding complaints against him.

Hunter obtained a copy of Nethsingha's email and complained to the Information Commissioner alleging data breaches by the party.

Mr Justice Johnson's judgment said that on 24 August 2021, Hayes sent a WhatsApp message to the party's Federal Board that she was reliably informed that unless this was resolved to the complainant's satisfaction by 5pm that day, the Information Commissioner would fine the party at least £10,000 and the ruling would be published within two days.

Staff member Kerry Buist gave Pack the correspondence with the Information Commissioner and he concluded there was no outstanding deadline and the party was defending the case.

On 1 September 2021, the Information Commissioner emailed the party's data protection officer and said it appeared data protection obligations had been followed and the case would be closed.

Buist reported to the FB in September 2021 that the party had received this email from the Information Commissioner but she was not on legal advice able to share the correspondence.

The judgment says Hayes posted, in the online chat: "I do not accept that Kerry's statements are accurate", and "Remember I am directly elected". The board

voted, on Pack's initiative, to remove Hayes from the meeting, also a step without known precedent.

Pack then filed a multi-point complaint against Hayes, in which he alleged she had: behaved inappropriately towards party staff; breached confidentiality rules; shown a pattern of threatening others in the party; breached the code of conduct; made false claims against Pack, including that he was party to a police investigation.

The judgment then says that on 16 February 2022, the Information Commissioner wrote to Hunter to say he considered the Liberal Democrats had not complied with data protection obligations in relation to the processing of his personal data.

It is not clear from the judgment whether this refers to a change of mind by the commissioner or some further matter that arose.

The disciplinary panel sat in July and issued its ruling in early September. It said Hayes should be expelled because of her conduct at the FB meeting and her conduct over Pack's original complaint relating to the alleged police investigation. The panel concluded her actions over the Essex selection were not in the best interests of the party, could have brought it into disrepute and for that she should be banned for life from holding office.

The judge noted Hayes had sought the injunction before filing a claim, a point to which he appeared to attach considerable importance.

Responding to the claims over the FB meeting, Hayes said the WhatsApp message was outside the scope of the complaint because it was posted on a private WhatsApp group - to which Buist did not have access - and related to someone else.

She said the panel's finding that she bullied Buist was plainly wrong and that the panel erred in observing that Pack made the complaint in his capacity as president and so gave undue weight to Pack's status.

Turning to the Essex candidate issue, she said she had been conducting an elected role and the complaint related to political strategy or tactics and so was not a matter for the complaints process.

Hayes further argued that the panel erred in finding she knew about the complaints against Hunter and in finding it was probably her that forwarded Nethsingha's email to him.

In the case of Pack's original complaint she said the panel failed to consider mitigating factors.

The judge said her assertions "do not all appear, on their face, to amount to alleged breaches of the rules of natural justice."

Turning to the issue of whether anything had happened to justify an injunction, the judge said this was allowed only if the matter is urgent or otherwise in the interests of justice.

"I do not consider that either element...is established," Mr Justice Johnson said. "Ms Hayes has had more than ample time to start her claim. She has not given any good reason for failing to do so."

The judge agreed Hayes was "on strong ground when she contends that there is a contract between the members of the party...reflected in the party's constitution and rules...so too, when she contends that it is an implied term of that contract that any disciplinary proceedings will be conducted in accordance with the principles of natural justice... I

am prepared to assume that Ms Hayes will succeed at trial in establishing implied terms to act fairly and rationally."

But he found the question of whether Hayes bullied Buist was "a matter for the evaluative assessment of the panel based on the material that was before it... Ms Hayes is unlikely to establish that those findings amount to a breach of contract".

He said nothing in the panel's reasoning suggested that it attached "undue" weight to Pack's status and there was "no basis to conclude that the panel was biased"

The judge dismissed the other points raised and concluded the 'balance of convenience' was also against an injunction.

Were one granted, Hayes could have stood for president and possibly been elected, leaving the party in the awkward position of having a president who might soon after be expelled.

"Ms Hayes says that if an injunction is granted and her claim subsequently fails then there will be no significant detriment to the respondents, even if she is elected as president," the judgment recorded.

She argued the STV ballot could simply be re-counted without her. The judge said: "In my judgment, to the contrary, the grant of an injunction would occasion significant prejudice to the party and its members if it subsequently turns out, at trial, that Ms Hayes was lawfully expelled from the party."

The court is understood to have made a costs order substantially in favour of the party.

Hayes has said Nethsingha interfered in her then role as regional candidates chair as she - as regional chair - had no role in candidates matters.

She said the complaints panel was misled by some witnesses and that the complaints system was not independent as it is overseen by the FB's disciplinary sub-group (Liberator 413).

Hayes is a prominent figure with an active group of supporters and this is unlikely to be the end of the matter.

Indeed Hayes has since issued the claim the judge referred to for breaches of contract of membership including the complaint proceedings against her, the conduct of those proceedings and that she was expelled and so prevented from standing for president.

It ends with the ominous words: "Particulars of claim to follow."

A LITTLE ADVICE

When barrister Anthony Hook's investigation into the Lib Dem complaints system and alleged unfair sacking of a senior adjudicator reported in the summer (Liberator 413) it became essential for the party to get legal advice on whether its definition of transphobia was lawful.

This was a because of a legal ruling known as the Forstater judgement [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60c1cce1d3bf7f4bd9814e39/Maya_Forstater_v_CGD_Europe_and_others_UKEAT0105_20_JOJ.pdf], which held that held that certain gender critical beliefs were protected under equalities legalisation.

Broadly, those with gender critical beliefs hold that sex is immutable from birth regardless of a person's gender identity, as opposed to those who believe that a person's sex can change or gender identity is

paramount.

The investigation did not say the definition should necessarily change, but it did say independent advice was needed on whether it should be changed.

This was commissioned from Guy Vassall Adams KC, who has advised the party on various legal matters.

He is understood to have first sent his advice in May, then been asked a series of questions by the party, leading to clarified advice in August and a final version in late September.

Federal Board member Lord Strasburger meanwhile commissioned his own advice from prominent equalities lawyer Karon Manghan KC. As it happens both KCs belong to Matrix Chambers.

Monaghan concluded: "Gender critical beliefs (that sex is immutable, biological, different from gender, and related beliefs) are protected beliefs under the [Equalities Act] and under Articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights."

She said the Lib Dems were free to adopt a policy on transphobia according to their own definition of the term but "treating a member less favourably because they hold protected beliefs that are not consistent with that policy (for example, gender critical beliefs) will be direct discrimination and unlawful".

Monaghan said a policy that subjected members to disciplinary action, or a threat of it, for expressing beliefs contrary to the transphobia definition, or requiring members to express support for it, "will impact most adversely on members with gender critical beliefs.

"As such it will be unlawful unless it is justified. In deciding whether any such policy is justified, a person's right to hold protected beliefs and freedom of expression will be given great weight.

"A policy prohibiting the mere expression of gender critical beliefs, or compelling a member to express support for the Lib Dems policy on transphobia contrary to their beliefs, is unlikely to be justified."

In a later observation, Monaghan said: "The mere expression of gender critical beliefs, including, for example, views on changes to the Gender Recognition Act, access to single – sex spaces, trans people and sport etc is very unlikely to constitute harassment connected to gender reassignment under the [Equalities Act]."

On the other hand "the expression of hostility or hate towards a member because they hold gender critical beliefs or because they are trans is likely to amount to harassment".

Monaghan concluded the Lib Dems' definition should be modified, "indicating that the holding of gender critical views, their expression, and contribution to debates on related issues, do not breach the policy and are permissible".

There matters might have rested. This was after all a KC's opinion obtained by Strasburger privately and not the advice the Federal Board commissioned.

But when Vassall Adams's final advice was received - after having been asked if he disagreed with Monaghan - he said: "For the avoidance of doubt, I agree with Ms Monaghan's analysis and I cannot discern any significant difference between her advice and my own."

Vassall Adams said on harassment: "Behaviour said to amount to harassment must reach a level of seriousness that takes it beyond the irritations,

annoyances and even upset that arise occasionally in everyone's life."

He further explained: "In a democratic society everyone has to be prepared to tolerate hearing views that they don't like, which is part and parcel of living in a free and pluralistic society. Freedom of expression includes the right to express views that other people find offensive."

Faced with opinions of two KCs, the FB had to act and chief executive Mike Dixon produced a report advising the definition should be modified to permit gender critical views and that those running the party's complaints system should be advised that these are protected by law.

It also omitted the examples that went with the former definition.

These events promise to land the Lib Dems with some embarrassing problems.

The most obvious is that anyone 'convicted' by a party complaint panel on the basis they offended against the old transphobia definition will be able to argue this should be overturned as two KCs have just said it was unlawful.

Then there is the matter of how the previous definition was written. Did those who wrote it take legal advice, and if not, why not and did the FB trouble to enquire before adopting it whether the definition was lawful?

Liberator's letters page in this issue contains views from two people with flatly contrary interpretations of the new definition, and Lib Dem LGBT+ has said it will "resist" the new definition. All this suggests controversy will not yet be stilled.

STAYING AWAY IN DROVES

The turnout in the Lib Dem presidential election was frankly pathetic and those for the party committees are likely to have been even worse.

Mark Pack was re-elected with 4,969 votes, against Lucy Nethsingha's 2,194 and 1,936 for Liz Webster.

The turnout was given as 14.05% which suggest the party's membership now stands at 62,751 (opinions differ and the party long ago gave up publishing a figure).

While the low turnout does not undermine the legitimacy of the elections it does undermine their credibility and an investigation will be needed into numerous claims that the online voting system was defective, difficult to use, or both.

Just to put the unimpressive 9,099 ballots cast into perspective, when Pack beat Christine Jardine in the 2019 election there were 24,515 votes cast.

Even in 2014 when Lib Dem membership was at its Coalition-era nadir there were 16,784 votes cast.

This suggests not only might there have been something wrong with the voting process but also with rules that prevent candidates from campaigning effectively and with many members' understanding of what the bodies actually do that they are asked to vote on.

Other numbers do though float around for total membership. The judgement in the Jo Hayes case (above) refers to 80,000 members, and a research paper issued in August by the House of Commons library [<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05125/SN05125.pdf>] says the party then had 74,000 members and gave an interesting

breakdown.

It said Lib Dem membership was 37% female, 89% in social classes ABC1, had an average age of 51 and the party drew 60% of its members from London and the south, 18% from the north, 16% from the midlands and Wales and 6% from Scotland.

THE COMPANY HE KEEPS

Is there no political sewer too repellent for former Lib Dem MP Lembit Öpik to explore?

Fresh from having given a speech to a Conservative event on 'How to Stop the Lib Dems: an insider's guide on how Lib Dems plan their campaigns' (Liberator 412) he this autumn popped up at a conference held by the remnants of Ukip to discuss 'wokeness'.

One small mercy is that Öpik refers to his Lib Dem membership in the past tense. He says on a Ukip You Tube video: "I was in Lib Dems for a long time, I gave a speech 'is there a future for the Liberal Democrats'? It was a joke, the Lib Dems and the speech."

He concluded the speech by telling Ukip's members "people like you who always impressed me".

Öpik then veered off into telling bemused kippers that they should support something called Operation Earthquake.

This turns out to be "a campaign to oppose the proposed UK Government policy to end the sale of new petrol and diesel powered vehicles", supported by the Motorcycle Action Group.

Operation Earthquake's campaigns and communications director is one Lembit Öpik. Perhaps he will discuss how his campaign skills led him to chuck away a safe seat in 2010 after turning himself into a figure of public ridicule?

THE AMAZING DISAPPEARING TICKETS

Who or what was responsible for the shambles around Ed Davey's 'not the conference speech' on 6 November?

The first most people knew of this was a breathless email from party HQ on 14 October which invited any member who wished to attend to sign up. Those that did within a few days received an email with precise instructions about what to show on the venue door.

Next came a missive on 2 November that said: "Due to incredibly high demand I am afraid we are not able to offer seats to everyone who has requested to come along."

Those still invited would get an email at some unspecified point but those no longer invited would hear nothing further.

Since no date was given for receipt of this email, those no longer invited were left ignorant of whether they could still attend or not.

This confusion was then followed by a message inviting members to watch Davey online.

Surely it is a simple matter to either book a venue and then issue tickets up to its capacity, or to issue tickets and then find a venue to match the numbers?

As it was this chaos made the party look amateurish and must have inconvenienced members who got the original invitation and may have had to make travel arrangements or reorganise other commitments.

FALLING FROM THE SKIES

Motions put to the cancelled Lib Dem conference this year were sadly all too sensible (though in many cases indescribably boring) for there to be an award of the Mitcham and Morden Gold Toilet for the worst motion.

The toilet is though bound for Liverpool, headquarters of the pro-Brexit so-called Liberal Party, which has debated a defence motion that comprised a rather random shopping list of measures including the erection of an 'Israeli missile shield'.

This appears to be a reference to that country's 'iron dome' but that is used to blow up incoming short range missiles. Since no-one obvious in a neighbouring country proposes to lob these at the UK, it is hard to see its usefulness.

Even stranger for a rabidly anti-EU party happy to get into bed with ex-Ukippers the motion called for: "Support engagement with the EU defence framework as a supplement to NATO."

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ACHILLES TAKES THE THRONE

King Charles III's attitude towards public money and its use by the royal family could be his undoing as the deference shown to Elizabeth II fades, says Norman Baker

The absurd proposition that underpins a system of hereditary monarchy is that the most suitable person always rises to occupy the throne.

The reality of course is that the roulette wheel of life applies here as it does in any other family. Over the last century we have had dull but diligent George V, poring over his stamp collection, the Nazi sympathiser Edward VIII who regarded himself as more German than English, the hesitant but well-meaning George VI, and then the professionally boring Elizabeth II: never say anything interesting, never explain anything.

She came to the throne with her views a mystery, as a character largely unknown in the days before television, let alone the internet. At the end of her reign we will still largely unclear on her views on very much.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

She also benefited from the suffocating aura of deference that was shown towards the monarchy in 1952. Fully a quarter of the population believed she had been chosen by

God, her coronation train had to be carried by virgin daughters of the nobility, and soldiers in attendance were told to abstain from sexual intercourse for 48

hours before the event (though enforcement of this directive must have been an interesting challenge).

By way of contrast, Charles comes the throne with a great deal of baggage and without the automatic deference that his mother enjoyed.

Unlike his mother, his views on a wide range of subjects are known, from homeopathy to architecture, fox hunting to climate change. They are known because he has wanted to make them known, to influence public opinion, or because they emerged in the so-called spider letters to ministers, published only after a long campaign by The Guardian and in the teeth of opposition from Charles who then persuaded the government to tighten the Freedom of Information Act to largely exempt the royal family.

Yet a Prince or a King who offers opinions on controversial matters is not a constitutional monarch but a politician. To misquote Voltaire, I largely agree with what he says but disagree with his right to say it.

We are told he will behave differently now he is King. Yet weeks into his reign we already know he muttered "dear oh dear" when confronted with Liz Truss, and let it be known that he wanted to go to COP 27 contrary to the PM's wishes (reverse Voltaire again x2)

I suppose it stretches the analogy somewhat but I have identified three Achilles' heels that could fatally



weaken his reign.

The first comes from his ingrained behaviour whereby he lectures people on what they should be doing, while doing the opposite himself. You might generously call this a blind spot. You may put it down to Charles's belief that the rules do not apply to him – arrogance. Or you might call it hypocrisy.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting rather tired of high profile individuals issuing dire warnings about the state of the planet, when those same individuals are unwilling or unable to take meaningful actions themselves to address the issue.

Pre-eminent among this group is Charles, who set off round Europe to give a series of lurid lectures about the dangers of climate change. Rather than use scheduled flights, or even the train, he resorted, as he generally does, to a private jet. His carbon footprint for the trip to hard-to-reach capitals like Berlin and Rome was 52.95 tonnes, five times what the average UK citizen emits in total in a year. But then he famously complained about the lack of comfort in the first class cabin on British Airways planes. He should try economy.

And back home, he addressed an audience in Cambridge, pleading with them to save "this poor old planet". His message was somewhat undermined by the fact that he travelled to the city, which has an excellent train service, by helicopter, his usual mode of transport in Britain. He says he uses public transport "where appropriate", which appears to be almost never.

Second, is his lack of judgement when it comes to figures who sidle up to him, especially those who offer money for his good causes.

He was best friends with Jimmy Savile and he and Camilla led the tributes to him after his death. Savile even provided marriage guidance advice to him and Diana though on this occasion Jim didn't fix it.

He stood by a Bishop of Lewes who had formally admitted assaulting a young lad, and instead condemned that lad – who later committed suicide.

He has allowed himself to be associated with various crooks who were happy to make large donations to his charities in return for the kudos of being photographed with him.

And he has not minded how the money came, even if, as the Sunday Times exposed, millions in used notes were handed over in carrier bags, handed over in secret as it would be for some Mafioso.

Even more seriously, his extremely close servant Michael Fawcett, the one man Charles says he "cannot do without", (think Achilles and Patroclus) wrote a letter offering a rich Middle Easterner help with a nationality application and offering to upgrade his honour, in return for cash for one of Charles's good causes.

*"To misquote Voltaire,
I largely agree with
what he says but
disagree with his
right to say it"*

have confirmed to me that they have begun a criminal investigation, and further confirmed to me recently that that is ongoing.

It seems inconceivable to me that Fawcett would have written such a letter without Charles's approval.

The third Achilles' heel relates to public money and here is where I think Charles is most vulnerable.

As prince, he displayed an unedifying picture of someone keen to maximise the influx of public money into the royal family in general and himself in particular.

He turned the Duchy of Cornwall, once classified as a government department, into his own personal fiefdom. He insists it is a "private estate", although unlike every other private estate in the country, he insists it must be exempt from corporation tax. The Duchy, now transferred to William, gave him a slush fund of more than £20m a year to play with. Its landholdings are vast and include Oval cricket ground – extra cover for the prince to hit the taxpayer for six.

He lobbied successfully for the link between the income from the Crown Estates and the money the royals received to be re-established for the first time since 1760. The consequence is that the Civil List, £7.9m a year in 2011, has turned into the Sovereign Grant, £85m a year at the latest count. It also means that a quarter of the windfall from offshore windfarms on Crown Estate land now goes to the fabulously wealthy royals rather than the Treasury.

Charles, who was as Prince of Wales worth upwards of £100m, never pays for anything himself if he can get someone else to cough up. Anyone who dares to send a bill for services rendered is sent to the royal equivalent of Outer Siberia.

So what will he do as King? He says he wants a slimmed-down monarchy. I fear that simply means fewer people on the Buckingham Palace balcony and other superficial changes. He will not want to make any meaningful changes or serious savings, and therein lies the danger for him.

Support for the monarchy, as opposed to the personal support for the recently departed Queen, is on a downward trajectory. Young people in particular fail to see the point of the monarchy. Charles's best hope is to abandon the trappings, privileges and nonsenses of Europe's last imperial monarchy and modernise the institution so that it looks and is far more like those to be found elsewhere in Europe. There is no sign however that he is ready to do so.

Norman Baker is a privy counsellor, former minister, Liberal Democrat MP for Lewes 1997-2015, and author of "And What Do You Do – What The Royal Family Don't Want You To Know."

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

I reported that to the Metropolitan Police as it appears to me that an offence has been committed under the Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act 1925. The police

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE TORIES?

Like horror porn, the Conservative Party has rogered the nation says former Tory campaign manager J Frasier Hewitt, who had an insider's view

What just happened?

It's a question many a member of my former party is asking themselves.

The past year has been a little bit of shit sandwich for the Conservative Party and they have only themselves to blame for it. The trouble is, they don't want to admit it to themselves.

But the woes of the modern Conservative Party did not begin with Lib Dem sleeper agent Liz Truss crashing the party (and economy). Nor, even, does it really involve the 1990s house-party revivalist movement that struck Downing Street in the spring of 2020.

Back in 2016 those of us who supported Theresa May had come to the conclusion that she was the best placed candidate to prevent the political blonde bombshell that is Boris Johnson ascending the heady heights of power. Many of us were so focussed on this we forgot one thing we actually did know, Theresa was a least bad option; and choosing such an option often ends poorly for all involved.

After May's election, the first really big moment came with the Mansion House declaration in early 2017; the then-PM announced that the UK would be leaving the European Single Market and the Customs Union. The UK's negotiating position would not allow for future cooperation or involvement, in any capacity, with the European Court of Justice.

On an April morning, the second big moment came. A lectern appeared on the steps of Downing Street. May was going to the country. She was concerned that her Brexit deal would be cut to ribbons by dreadful saboteurs in Parliament and she needed a larger majority to get Brexit over the line.

The problem was that, like many of her MPs, the country didn't know who Theresa May was.

SUBMARINE MODE

After six years in the Home Office, operating in 'submarine mode', her two senior advisors Fiona Hill and Nick Timothy had managed to continue this ambiguity of belief for long periods between summer 2016 and spring 2017.

The effect of this was that many people simply projected what they wanted to see onto her. This was reflected in polling and this polling was, in turn, misunderstood as solid support by Downing Street.

May and her 'strong and stable' minions had wanted to set the Conservative Party's flag well and truly 'Ooop North', which is how they came to find themselves launching their manifesto in an old textiles Mill in Halifax. (May's team had obviously never heard the three places one should never on any account

visit, 'ull, 'ell and 'alifax). I confess, when I heard the adult social care changes, I thought "Oh, good, they're actually grasping the nettle. Ballsy. But good that they're trying to address the issue".

The u-turn, forced by the 'dementia tax' line (coined by advocates of Tufton Street orthodoxy), was the start of the long period of discipline problems we have subsequently seen within the parliamentary party. It is a period that makes the Maastricht debate look like a genteel disagreement over tea and cake.

But many of the seats that fell to the Conservatives in 2019 began their journey towards the Conservative column under Theresa May in 2017. In many ways, Johnson reaped the benefit of the unacknowledged work undertaken two years earlier where the Conservatives came up short.

You know well the tale of the next two years; cabinet rows, cabinet walk-outs, resignations, threats to defenestrate one another, Steve Bray stood outside Parliament with his merry blue beret band and consistent fog horn of 'stop Brexit'.

BLOW UP THE PARTY

By the time Johnson eventually came to office in the summer of 2019, Parliament was deadlocked. His solution was to blow up the party. Removing the whip from such notorious revolutionaries as Ken Clarke, Anne Milton and David Gauke, Johnson dispatched his useful idiot Jacob Rees-Mogg to unlawfully prorogued parliament. An action that went unchallenged by too many in the parliamentary party.

If the referendum result split the parliamentary party, and the events of 2017 had led to an internal overthrow, the 2019 general election completed the revolution. The Covid-19 pandemic struck at the worst possible moment for this new-look Conservative Party and it was the nail in the coffin for party management.

Sending all those new and energetic MPs back to their constituencies, and moving to proxy voting in the Commons, proxy votes that were held by the party whips, bred four issues

* A lack of constructive relationships, understanding and knowledge between Members of Parliament and their respective whips. The relationships that we might expect party managers to develop over these months simply never really got going because there was little day-to-day interaction and nothing in person for weeks and months.

* The misguided reality as to how the House of Commons actually operates. The virtual Parliament set-up meant that MPs had a much better idea of when they might be called to speak in a debate, unlike normal times when freshmen MPs might sit

on the green benches for eight hours without an intervention or prepared speech. When these measures were dropped, many of the 2019 intake were incredulous at being made to sit for hours without being called.

* The inevitable release of 'opinions' in the voting lobbies once proxy voting ended.

The final often unspoken issue is really very simple. I will phrase it as a question for you. When was the last time Conservative whips were obliged to managed a large majority and how many of the individuals who undertook such a roll were still involved by 2019? Answers, 1992 and none.

PERMA-CRISIS

When compounded by a perma-crisis in Downing Street from autumn 2021 onwards, only weeks after Parliament had dropped the majority of its Covid-19 measures, the already rebellious back-benches began to boil over.

Perhaps, the only thing that kept Johnson in post for so long was that there was no obvious front-runner to replace him.

When Truss came through the field and ended up in the final two, she played to a base she understood and played the hits over and again.

Truss' brand of 'Conservative' politics is one I once knew well. It comes from the think tank world of utopian ideals, when the solution to any problem is too often pronounced to be "get government out of the way".

Not only is there little respect for what Government

"That Rishi Sunak can conceivably be considered a 'moderate' should show us all how far the Overton Window has shifted in six years"

does, there is no respect for national and state institutions. We are subject to the sober sermons from the organs of Tory thought, The Daily Telegraph, City AM or The Spectator, extolling the wonders of this country while tearing down the pillars that make Britain great.

That Rishi Sunak can conceivably be considered a 'moderate' should show us all how far the Overton Window has shifted in six years.

That certain organs of the libertarian right are now distancing themselves from the Truss experiment as rapidly as possible is as amusing as it is offensive. That we are expected to believe that installing the fourth prime minister in three years is going to demonstrably positively solve anything is more far-fetched than the horror porn bilge broadcast over Halloween.

Sunak will fail where May, Johnson and Truss came before. And it will likely be his back-benches that ensure this.

What happened? A 30-year fight within the Conservative Party has crashed onto the world stage, the markets have eaten them for lunch and the leaders have managed to turn a once great party into an iteration a Monty Python joke.

The Tory People's Front? Or is it more of a People's Front of Toryism? Either way, splitters!

J Frasier Hewitt is a northerner who, once upon a time, considered himself a Conservative party member and campaign manager

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EYEWITNESS IN UKRAINE

Kiron Reid reports from Zaporizhzhia on how Putin's war has united Ukraine in a way it never was before

Staying in my friend's apartment in Zaporizhzhia in south east Ukraine 24 hours after the confirmed liberation of Kherson. I was mentally penning the line "it has been calm, there has been none of the expected retaliation yet by the Russians against civilian infrastructure and residential areas."

Then the air alert siren sounded. And my phone buzzed with the official air alert app (available on Google Play store). The sirens went off in the distance twice in the night.

They had gone off twice in the day and once I heard an explosion. I thought it was a motorbike firing, my friends I was visiting at Rok Ailend (Rock Island) a tattoo, musical instruments, fashion, heavy metal fashion, and equipment shop, knew immediately it was an explosion and jumped on to social media groups to find out where. They were relieved that Ukrainian defences had shot down a missile, which may have been headed elsewhere. It was nearby but not too nearby.

Two days before a UK Foreign Office press release had announced 1,000 additional surface to air missiles to help counter the Russian threat to Ukrainian infrastructure. At the moment the district heating plants here are working (better than during some of my previous visits as a volunteer honorary professor at Zaporizhzhia National University; or as a semi-professional election observer). There is water and electricity but everyone is exhorted through (as we would say in Britain) 'war time type messages' to conserve electricity and other resources. The water might go off if the electric supplies are disrupted.

SLEEPING DISTRICT

A few weeks ago, a missile hit the ground at the far corner of the next block and blew out all of the windows. The damage is being repaired but many windows are still covered by UNHCR tarpaulins or plywood. There is nothing military here, this is purely a residential district with apartment blocks, schools and some shops. A sleeping district it is called,

originally for the factory workers but now people are as likely to be working online in IT for foreign clients – meaning more people are also learning English. A female IT professional in one of the online classes I have joined in told me that this district was heavily targeted earlier in the war because of all the infrastructure here. I am staying with my friend,

Eldar, a university lecturer whose PhD was on the English language about space, and his wife Vika who works for a private language school, teaching English, mostly to IT professionals.

Before the war, like in the British post industrial cities, many of the plants and factories had closed but some large ones were working. The Russians not surprisingly bombed the large helicopter and aviation plant, Motor Sich, that made military and civilian vehicles. I had recommended their museum on TripAdvisor. A brand new, if tiny, airport terminal opened just a few years ago and was, like all airports, destroyed by the Russians at the start of the full scale invasion. That is a few kilometres away from where I sit. I am here to visit my friends, to show solidarity, and to also talk to students and

university teachers as I normally do (in the Faculty of Foreign Languages who speak English, as I speak only a few words of Russian and less Ukrainian).

I cannot stay in the university halls guest rooms (think basic budget hotel – for the guests, the students do not get such nice conditions) partly because this visit is unofficial, partly because a Russian missile strike on a Zaporizhzhia 2 station months before blew all the windows out. (Russian learners know that stations in Russian are called Vozhal, after Vauxhall station in London the first one Tsar era engineers saw).

And honestly, I am being sensible enough to keep away from obvious targets, as well as always carrying a torch because the street lights are all out in the cities at night to save electricity. In south eastern Europe it



is always good practice to carry a torch.

It is very strange seeing a city that I know fairly well, usually busy and lit up at night, now in near total darkness after 4pm. The shops and businesses are mostly open, their lights are on, though a lot have put plywood over the

windows. All other windows have taped Xs on them, as a precaution against flying glass, and shopping malls and residential blocks are surrounded by hedgehog anti-tank defences, the metal rust coloured Xs that you are familiar with from war movies, remnants from World War 2 when I was growing up in the '90s, or films about Afghanistan. The popular Arora shopping mall near the university was bombed by the Russians. Usually it is a big garish commercial display of colourful consumerism. Last night I stumbled past an empty dark mass. Other shopping malls and supermarkets are full of products and busy.

My few words of Russian are less useful now as there has been a conscious switch to Ukrainian. All official communication is in Ukrainian – which is pretty silly when most of the population in the cities I have been through are speaking Russian as their day to day language.

Television is in Ukrainian or Russian films and programmes have subtitles. People are choosing to speak Ukrainian, especially young people, and I think that is what younger shop assistants are mostly using. People did use a mix anyway – my friends are mostly native Russian speakers but they always said “Bud’mo” for “cheers” rather than the Russian “Na Zdorove”.

Some people have obviously switched because they feel they have to be seen to not be using Russian. This is silly. It is one thing after the war that Ukraine as a whole needs to have an open and honest dialogue about.

NATIONAL MYTHS

Understandably the national myths are now deployed in force that Russian is a language only of the empire of the oppressor, but of course people on the territory that is now Ukraine - that has been many different territories - spoke multiple languages. One of the wisest Ukrainian professors that I know, Vladimir Manakin, former dean of the Faculty of Journalism, long said that it should be prized that in Ukraine people had two mother tongues. I often gave the example of the modern revival of the Welsh language and of Irish Gaelic – popularised by choice, promoted to tourists and incomers, rather than suppressed in Wales before, or forced on people in Ireland.

It is Vladimir Putin who has popularised Ukrainian and has created a modern unified Ukraine.

This did not exist before, not in reality. Vladimir or Volodymyr Zelenskyy, is a Russian speaking comic actor popular across the former Soviet Union, from eastern Ukraine, who Putin decided to treat as an enemy. The former KGB man defeated by a comedian. That is funny.

Putin has not only unified Ukraine, he has united

“It is very strange seeing a city that I know fairly well, usually busy and lit up at night, now in near total darkness after 4pm”

Europe and the ‘western’ powers more so than in decades. One good thing to come out of the war is a Polish-Ukrainian solidarity which hopefully will lay to rest ghosts of past violent atrocities and conflict. Millions of Ukrainians went to Poland as refugees. Many were already working there, as

some Poles were working across Europe, and in much greater numbers in Britain before Brexit.

Zelenskyy does broadcast to the nation every night – from his mobile phone in selfie mode. His speeches appear unscripted. People watch them. Maybe not all the time, but they do listen to the president. Two young friends heard the same broadcast as I only because it interrupted the Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, so they watched, and then went back to Arnie.

In my original Liberator article on the election of Zelenskyy (reprinted in Liberator 412) I was quite critical of the president. Since he was elected he impressed me more and more. Still his authorities continued to cooperate with Russia. Not only on gas imports (crazy that Ukraine was so slow to massively adopt solar and wind – belatedly encouraged by UK Aid when UK stop fixating on oil and gas).

His administration also handed at least one volunteer fighter to the Russian FSB when the Russians claimed he was a Muslim terrorist. They learnt the hard way not to believe the Kremlin.

Ukrainian politics was corrupt at many levels and unduly influenced by regional and national oligarchs. Except the few pro-Russian oligarchs who have fled, Ukrainian politics is now far more united in a common purpose than before and parties and politicians all seem to be pulling together for the common wheel. Yes there are far right and pro-Russian / Communist groups (the latter now banned – pretty bloody reasonable in a war) but they have minimal support.

As the British Group of Liberal International and National Liberal Club have promoted, the Ukrainian Liberal party Holos has been active in rallying support for Ukraine.

Holos meaning ‘Voice’ or ‘vote’ was founded by Ukraine’s most popular rock star, Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, and is now led by understated glamorous and articulate Kira Rudik who has been tirelessly criss-crossing Europe and continents to call for military and non military aid, for sanctions on Russia, confiscation of assets, war crimes trials, reparations and funds for reconstruction.

As I write, she had spoken in Oxford in conjunction with Oxford University Lib Dems. Ironic that one thing that group and their previous president Liz Truss have in common (apart from sometimes worryingly neo-Con views) is that Truss was as foreign secretary and her brief tenure as PM a staunch supporter of Ukraine.

Truss was alert to the dangers of Putin long before other Conservative MPs, and long before Boris became a leading ally of Ukraine, abandoning his previous cosy up to Russian money.

Back to Kira Rudik, she has definitely promoted Holos more than their 6% of the vote and 20 out of 450 MPs would achieve, and illustrates well how all

talent is incorporated in Ukraine's fight for survival and defence of democracy in Europe against brutal aggression.

Recently, I walked along the main road through the city and saw where a Russian missile destroyed a residential block, in retaliation for the blowing up of the Kerch bridge.

Of the course the Russian media (and the popular press in Serbia that repeats their narratives) says that Britain blew up the Kerch bridge and that Britain is at war with Russia (as well as all of NATO). This Russian reprisal destroyed one ornate early 1950s buildings built in the Soviet baroque or Krushchevian style, when Krushchev was in charge of the Communist party in Ukraine.

GAPING HOLE

A gaping hole and remains of family apartments hanging out into the air. My friend from the Translation Department, Marina, and I had coffee and cake at the smart Dobra Cava shop on the next corner. University lecturers help with translation for the war effort, on top of online classes, while those who have gone to western Ukraine or abroad fundraise and support volunteer efforts from there. The leading Shakespeare scholar in Ukraine, Nataliya Torkut, is very active in fundraising for her son's home city of Kharkiv and her university city of Zaporizhzhia. Her son, Igor Cherniak, is fighting to defend Kharkiv, previously an anti-corruption campaigner.

I have been working in south Serbia running a field office for Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the region next to Kosovo and North Macedonia.

I resigned because I was preoccupied with the war, and I decided it was time to act. The OSCE promotes peace, stability, rule of law, democracy and economic development. It was set up to bring the former Cold War adversaries together. Russia, Belarus and their allies are destroying that.

Another time I will write about what needs to be done after the war. For now I needed to see for myself, and as you can't fly to Ukraine, it was easier to drive from Serbia. As a tourist I drove 2,000km (1,200 miles) across Serbia, a finger of Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova and north through central Ukraine to avoid hotspots.

There was little difficulty and always efficient and professional border guards, police and customs. Only a miles-long queue of trucks to cross the Danube into Romania was an indication that not only Brexit isn't working – there are some logistics problems in the EU



as well.

My male friends cannot leave Ukraine and most of their wives and girlfriends have stayed, so I have come to visit them. Marina commented "the descendants of Zaporizhzhia Cossacks are not afraid of anything". The city was twinned with Birmingham in Soviet times, some here remembered and now a few people in Birmingham have remembered again.

My overwhelming impression is that while the war is everywhere, people are trying to live their normal lives. The babushkas sweeping the flower beds, people selling produce on the street, drinking coffee at the numerous kiosks, walking in the parks. There are improvements since I was here in May 2019. Some more restaurants, coffee shops, repaired buildings, better roads and pavements; Eldar tells me that thousands of kilometres of 'new' roads were laid under Zelenskyy but many have been destroyed in Russia's war, including to his home town which is on the frontline.

There are new USAID sponsored history signs, tourist information signs, benches, landscaping in small parks. And repairs, maintenance and improvements are continuing despite the war. There are many men and women in uniform around and the shopping malls sell military equipment, but Ukrainians in this city saw off the Nazis, they are going to make their home better after the war. This is a modern European country where people have chosen their own path, not that of Mordor. They will need us all to work together to rebuild when the war is over.

Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective and a former British seconded diplomat to the OSCE Mission in Serbia

A CLEAR RUN FOR LABOUR

Cancelling the Liberal Democrat conference was wrong - and worse it has been followed by foolish policy announcements, says Liz Barker

The decision to cancel Federal Conference in Brighton because of the death of the Queen has given rise to considerable debate within the party.

It is an issue in which I have a particular interest because of past experience, but more than that it is incident which throws the spotlight on a much neglected, but important subject in our party, governance.

Before going any further I need to make three things clear. First, I do not criticise members of staff in public because they are not in a position to answer back. The correct thing to do is to raise concerns with elected officers to whom staff are responsible.

Second, I do not criticise officers or colleagues without having tried to raise my concerns in private and in so doing obtained as much information as possible about what actually happened. Third, having been chair of Federal Conference Committee (FCC) when 9/11 happened and having had to make judgement calls quickly in a time of uncertainty, I do not think it fair to make criticisms based on hindsight.

The key event was the email sent to all members on the evening of 8 September which announced that because of the death of the Queen all campaigning would cease immediately. It made clear that all public events would stop and concluded: "In terms of conference, it is just too soon to even consider that issue whilst the nation mourns. We will update everyone on that as soon as we can."

It went on to state that there would be no campaigning in advance of the Queen's funeral, which was subsequently scheduled for 19 September, what would have been the Monday of our conference.

The messages were clear, but there was a problem. These decisions were announced by a member of staff, chef executive Mike Dixon. Since they were matters of political judgement, and debatable, they should have been announced by officers who are elected and therefore can be challenged and held accountable. That is what the FCC did when it announced its decision not to hold conference at all.

The chair of FCC later sent an email to members explaining that the committee, advised by conference staff, had worked through a number of options from rescheduling conference to later that week to abandoning it completely.

Each option was assessed in terms of financial cost to individuals who had booked to go to conference, the financial cost to the party and the political cost in terms of media coverage, or lack of it. Having done the modelling they concluded that the best option was complete cancellation which would enable people to recoup some accommodation and travel costs.

One option was not considered, namely having a scaled down, internally focused gathering on the

Saturday and Sunday. It was a possibility which many members, who have not met in person apart from by-elections for over two years, would have favoured. In reality the chief executive's announcements meant that this option was ruled out. I understand that this decision was taken because there was a fear that Liberal Democrats would be caught behaving inappropriately at a sensitive time. In my experience Liberal Democrats are perfectly capable of gauging a situation and, even if it is difficult, acting appropriately.

The upshot of this excessive caution was at a time of the greatest opportunity to lay into an eye-wateringly incompetent Tory government we gave Labour a clear run.

It appears that some broadcasters understood that the Liberal Democrats had lost important coverage, and Ed Davey has had some broadcast slots.

In subsequent weeks Ed has tried to make up lost ground, but in the last couple of weeks we have had two stupid policy announcements. The promise on waiting times to see a GP was risible, and the £300 pounds for mortgage payments went down very badly with young people. neither was run by the relevant spokespeople in the Lords, I don't know about the Commons. Both bear the hallmarks of the dire communications operations in 2015 and 2019. When we still bear the scars of tuition fees, whoever is responsible for these latest bits of nonsense should fess up and do the decent thing.

As a small party, made up of small teams and heavily reliant on volunteers, we frequently blur the lines between staff and elected officers. It is high time that we meet again in person and start holding people to account. See you at conference.

Liz Barker is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

UK FAILING THE FAIRNESS TEST

A new relationship with Europe and a commitment to help people struggling with bills are needed to restore trust in politics, says Claire Tyler

Our political system is all but broken. The public's faith in our politics and politicians has been severely eroded. The Tory Party is out of ideas, not to mention politically and morally bankrupt. Rishi Sunak has no mandate.

Recent polling from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) shows that two in three people believe that parliamentarians are "only out for themselves" rather than "serving the interests of the country". Four in five people say politicians poorly understand their lives and only 6% said voters have the greatest sway over public policy.

The only change which has the potential now to fix our battered and stricken system is a general election. For the decade ahead, repairing trust in politics is going to be an uphill struggle whoever is in power.

What is the offer we should be putting forward to the electorate to restore trust? Two key pillars stand out for me. Firstly, if we really wish to secure meaningful UK economic growth and increased productivity then it is inescapable - given our geographic location - that we will need to build more effective and friction-free trading arrangements and partnerships with Europe. And secondly it is time for a major swing in the pendulum back towards greater equality, social justice and a focus on societal well-being.

The new prime minister's promise that he would govern based on "integrity, accountability, and professionalism" already lies in tatters.

Integrity was dead on arrival. Sunak threw it under the bus to secure the leadership of the Tory Party through the support of Suella Braverman, Gavin Williamson, and Dominic Raab. This averted the need for a vote of the Tory party members which Sunak very much feared he would lose.

So what about accountability and professionalism for the last twelve years of Tory rule? The audit sheet is a depressing read:

- ☛ Suella Braverman is happy to tell the Commons that the immigration and asylum system is broken; and to share her "dream" of forced removal of refugees from the UK to Rwanda.
- ☛ George Eustice has been trashing the flagship Australia trade deal as "not actually a very good deal... the UK gave away far too much for far too little in return".
- ☛ The NHS has a waiting list of seven million and 10% staff vacancy rate. There are 165,000 vacancies for care staff, and half a million citizens waiting for their care needs to be met.
- ☛ Professor Tony Travers has assessed that on average local government budgets are down

20% in real terms since 2010, and Kent and Hampshire county councils are now warning of real threat of bankruptcy.

- ☛ The Economist has reported that the proportion of reported crimes leading to a charge has fallen from 16% in 2016 to just 5.6% today.
- ☛ The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates teachers' pay will have fallen by 14% from 2010 to 2023; and spending per pupil will in 2024-25 be 3% lower than 2010 levels.
- ☛ The Resolution Foundation points out that unemployment benefit, at 14% of average earnings, is only slightly above destitution level, and is half its 1970s level; and compare this to the payments at 75% of an individual's last salary in the Netherlands.

As Covid-19 fades – at least for now - from centre stage, the impact of Brexit on our economic decline and under-performance compared to the rest of the G7 becomes ever starker:

- ☛ Michael Saunders (formerly of the Bank of England) gave the following sombre summary assessment: "The UK economy as a whole has been permanently damaged by Brexit. It's reduced the economy's potential output significantly, eroded business investment."
- ☛ The Bank's former governor, Mark Carney, said that in 2016 the UK economy was 90% the size of Germany's, but is now less than 70%.
- ☛ Bloomberg has assessed the French stock market as now larger than the UK's.
- ☛ The Office for Budget Responsibility assessed the fall in UK productivity attributable to Brexit as 4%.
- ☛ Supply chain problems are leading to empty shelves in shops and pushing up prices ever further.
- ☛ Given the relatively small size of the UK market compared to the huge EU market previously fully accessible from a UK base, the UK is now a much less attractive target for potential foreign direct investment from strategic or industrial investors.

Given this, any strategy to secure meaningful growth in the UK economy together with material improvements in productivity will need to focus on negotiating improved and 'less-friction' terms of trade with the EU. Despite the reluctance of politicians of all stripes to call this out, this is simply an inescapable

fact of our major locational advantage and geographic proximity to Europe.

So, when the now infamous 'fiscal event' took place on 23 September, we were already in a cost of living crisis, with the highest inflation in 40 years, out-of-control energy prices, and the continuing widespread trauma caused by Covid-19.

The markets' response to Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng's 'fiscal event' - the completely unfunded and by far the largest give-away budget in 50 years with a focus on tax cuts for the well off - was instant and devastating.

The package caused sterling to plunge; gilt yields to rocket; and mortgage rates to rise by more than two percentage points. The Bank of England had to make a £65bn emergency intervention to prevent major pension providers becoming insolvent. To calm markets further, the Bank of England then had a 0.75% interest rate rise. The housing market has been hit badly. The UK overnight lost its much-cherished global reputation - built-up and nurtured over generations - for fiscal probity and for sound fiscal and budgetary management.

These events have caused real anxiety and distress for millions – much of it unnecessary and self-inflicted. It just doesn't wash to blame it all on Ukraine and other international factors. While they are clearly a factor, the prime minister and a small number of Tory MPs have been more than happy to share their view of the Truss/Kwarteng 'fiscal event' as a mistake, indeed, a fiasco. The Resolution Foundation identifies this as causing £30bn of the £60bn black hole needing to be filled.

The cumulative impact of this economic mismanagement and rapidly growing inequality over the last 12 years of Tory rule is dire. All the research on wellbeing shows that not being able to meet basic needs has a negative impact on wellbeing individually, as families, communities and as a nation.

Many respected commentators, including the IFS, the Resolution Foundation, the New Economic Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation have pointed out that the rising cost of living is having a greater effect on low income households and the most vulnerable. This was reinforced in a recent report from the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee. None of this remotely passes the 'does it feel fair' test which is so important to rebuilding trust in our politics.

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt has been trying desperately to stabilise this catastrophic situation - initially through cancelling nearly all of the Truss/Kwarteng unfunded tax cuts and there has been some stabilisation in market conditions.

The Autumn Statement saw a painful combination of tax rises and spending cuts to reduce the size of the fiscal black hole and attempt to re-establish our economic reputation on the world stage. But the UK will be paying a significant political risk premium to lenders for years to come.

One very visible effect is that millions will be paying higher mortgages and rents - of several hundred pounds a month - for years to come. No wonder

"For the decade ahead, repairing trust in politics is going to be an uphill struggle whoever is in power"

people are anxious and public wellbeing has nosedived.

Inflation is at 11% and rising and food inflation is at 14%. Real wages for many are at a 40 year low. Overall, real wages are barely higher than they were in 2007. We are facing an immediate crisis in terms of increased poverty, increased mental health distress and

worsening overall health outcomes for millions. A poll by the Money and Mental Health Institute found 59% of respondents said rising prices had had a negative impact on their mental health.

Half reported they had to reduce expenditure on essentials - food, toiletries and petrol - over the last few months. There are around 2.5 million renters already behind with or struggling to pay their rent and 15.3 million people using credit to pay for essentials.

Use of food banks - including by people in full-time employment - is sky-rocketing, and 27% of hospital trusts are offering food banks to staff with others planning to follow.

An estimated one million children are in food poverty and not receiving free school meals. Fuel poverty is estimated to have tripled and many say they are scared to open energy bills. As ever, it will fall to an already overstretched NHS and social care system to pick up the pieces.

Immediate action is needed from the government to stop the cost of living crisis becoming a mental health crisis.

High up on my list are:

- ☛ Raising all benefits - including Universal Credit and disability benefits - by 10% in line with inflation as early as 1 December 2022;
- ☛ Moving to review and revise in line with inflation all benefits not every six months, not every year, starting from April 2023;
- ☛ Moving all children from families living in food poverty into free school meals programmes;
- ☛ Requiring/incentivising mortgage providers and landlords to restructure payments for those struggling with payments with a view to minimising home repossessions and evictions;
- ☛ Requiring regulators to work with the energy companies to secure medium-term payment restructurings with bill-payers and provide a compassionate response to customers;
- ☛ Introducing a windfall tax on energy companies to increase their financial contributions to the financing of the energy price cap and extending the levy beyond oil and gas companies to electricity generators;
- ☛ Ensuring the provision of debt advice services and debt relief schemes to prevent people from spiralling ever further into debt.
- ☛ Planning for the introduction of a National Care Service alongside the NHS.

Underpinning all the above must be resetting the trade relationship with Europe to help deliver improved growth and productivity. *Continued on Page 19*

TIME TO RAISE SOME TAXES

Only tax rises are needed to balance the budget and cuts to vital public services should be avoided, says William Tranby

All the talk for some weeks now is how the Government will tackle the economic mess caused to the public finances following the disastrous Truss and Kwarteng show.

The economy is now entering a long recession according to the Bank of England and is still to recover to 2019 levels of economic activity, unlike the rest of Europe and the wider West. The fabled Brexit opportunities never materialised, so the job occupied by Rees Mogg has been scrapped, because even he could not find any. As usual the scare stories are about cuts, but the scariest story of them all is that they will become the new reality.

It is not as if there are any more obvious efficiencies in public services to implement which would magically deliver savings while maintaining service standards.

Local government in real terms has lost about 40% of its spending power since the Tories were in office. They failed to realise that their other policies have only increased demand for public services as the poor get poorer while working longer hours at minimum wage.

DISTRESSED FAMILIES

Distressed families suffer with increasing mental health problems, and with less family time for parents to engage with their children the mental health crisis for young people only deepens.

The Tories have failed to maintain the real growth needed in NHS spending that the Blair/Brown governments achieved and so we now have 40,000 nursing vacancies, while hospitals spend far too much on profiteering agencies to fill the gaps. I could, like most of those reading this, go on.

The latest talk is that Government departments will just have to cope with their existing cash budgets, which means that as inflation reaches 10% or more and most public services are now facing strike action from the public sector unions, deep cuts in service levels will be the result.

World-class public services? I heard that from the lips of Sunak at prime ministers questions recently. This man has no conscience, or perhaps no consciousness, because even if he was given the transcripts from focus groups in red-wall seats telling interviewers what they do to get by, he cannot relate to the experience of people going hungry, or scared to put on their heating.

If you have always lived in comfortable surroundings, you simply cannot understand the plight of the poor. This is the man who rightly increased universal credit during the pandemic by £20 a week, but also took it away again a year later.

This only followed a Tory trend that has cut benefits in other ways. For example, the benefit cap that impacts on large families, the bedroom tax, or changing the formula to trigger free school meals, so thousands of deserving children go without.

As I write this on a London Underground strike

day in the capital, pondering on the presumed split of tax rises to spending cuts being used by the Tories in the Autumn Statement, I can only feel dismay at the suggestion that the Tories will cut spending again after 12 years of doing the same thing.

The economy is in a dire situation, but like medieval doctors who believed blood-letting would revive their dying patients, the Tories continue to believe cutting public spending will not only balance the books but also revive the economy.

Can someone please tell them that public spending is a key driver of demand for goods and services, and salaries paid to public servants employed in both central and local government are also spent in the real economy?

I would therefore argue that only raising taxes should fill the black hole of around £60bn in the budget. So, what principles should be employed in choosing which taxes should rise?

The first principle should be to increase taxes on unearned income. No more taxes should be raised from people's employment. The second principle is that the richest people should receive the biggest increase in their tax bills. The third principle should be to simplify the tax code to promote fairness and equal treatment between people, however they receive their income for day-to-day expenditure.

Earnings drawn from capital – dividends, capital gains, rents, patents etc should be taxed at the same rate as earned income from employment, and with a combined tax allowance for all earnings whatever the source. This would, at a stroke, stop business people making use of multiple tax codes for their earnings, besides their paid employment, such as being partly paid in dividends at a lower marginal tax rate and with an additional tax allowance.

Inheritances and capital gains are what I would describe as unearned income. They are currently given a better tax treatment than earned income from employment. Why has this been the state of affairs for centuries? While I would argue in the first instance for an equalisation of tax treatment, there is an argument for such unearned income to be taxed at a higher rate than employment earnings.

Rich people get richer because of asset growth. It is not surprising that people on high salaries don't spend all their earnings on day-to-day expenditure but start buying assets such as property and shareholdings, which over time grow in value, and in the case of shares provide additional unearned income.

WEALTH TAX

Capitalism can be narrowly defined as the management of assets to grow their capital value. And this is where the biggest tax rises should be made. A wealth tax on the top 1% of people (variously defined by different sources as those with assets between £3.6m and £5m) is the missing link in our tax regime.

Taxing rich people should also apply to those offered additional tax allowances on their pension contributions. Why should people in the 40% tax bracket get a proportionately higher Government contribution to their pension fund than those paying 20% tax?

Of course, Government should have an active role to play in encouraging pension saving, but offering higher tax allowances to richer workers is perverse. The opposite should be the case. Those working at the national minimum wage should be the ones to get an enhanced Government contribution into their workplace or private pensions.

The one increase in taxes on incomes I would suggest is a replacement for the ill-fated health and care levy because it was targeted only on employment earnings. In previous Liberators I have argued for an NHS tax applied to the incomes of people of retirement age, who no longer pay National Insurance.

I would apply this to those (whether working or not) whose gross income drawn from all sources – state pension, private pensions, dividends, capital gains etc - exceeds £25,000 a year.

It is difficult to trace an accurate figure for average incomes of pensioners from Government statistics because they concentrate their studies on the disposable income after housing costs, which is not helpful.

But I believe £25,000 a year is close to the average for pensioners currently. There are between 11m and 12m pensioners in the UK, and an NHS tax at 5% would, I estimate, bring in £2.5bn to the Exchequer. (Others are welcome to challenge my maths but it is the principle here I am more concerned about.)

National Insurance is paid by working people, and total annual contributions are used to calculate eligibility for the state pension. So once people retire National Insurance is no longer levied against their income.

However, the biggest users of the NHS are retired people, and those on higher incomes should reasonably be asked to pay a contribution to it. This would also help to respond to the arguments that the triple lock should no longer apply. With around a fifth of pensioners only getting the state pension it is important for the triple lock to stay in place to compensate for rising prices during inflationary times. But I would argue that those who do not rely on the state pension because of additional workplace and/or personal private pensions should pay a higher rate of tax to help fund the NHS.

In the run up to the Autumn Statement the Labour Party have been concentrating their fire on the withdrawal of non-dom status for foreign nationals living in the UK and the withdrawal of charitable status for private schools. I have no problem with

“The economy is in a dire situation, but like medieval doctors who believed blood-letting would revive their dying patients, the Tories continue to believe cutting public spending will not only balance the books but also revive the economy”

supporting these ideas but where are the more radical ideas like a wealth tax?

Whether some or none of the measures I have suggested are included in the Autumn Statement should inform the on-going debate in the Liberal Democrats.

The party has proposed some worthy individual measures in recent months but there is no sense of the overriding principles such measures are based on, other than a general reference to ‘fairness’, so may I re-iterate mine: no increases in taxes on earned income from employment, but raise taxes on unearned income;

tax rich people more, and introduce a wealth tax as a priority; simplify the tax code so all taxes on income are at the same rate, with one combined tax allowance structure for individuals set against all income sources.

William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective

CONTD FROM PAGE 17...

This will require compromises on both sides and new language of mutual co-operation to negotiate mutually advantageous trade deals.

Economic growth is important but so is how the fruits of growth are used, who benefits, and how sustainable that growth is.

I believe the ultimate goal of public policy should be how GDP contributes to individual and societal wellbeing and to the UK becoming a better and fairer society. I hear precious little talk of such thing coming from this Government. We need a general election to provide a major shift in political and societal objectives and priorities; and a much closer partnership and trading relationship with Europe that benefits everyone, particularly the least well off.

Claire Tyler is a Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords

IN THE PALE ORANGE SHADOWS

If someone put the Liberal Democrats in power would their timid policies provide them with anything to do, wonders Steve Yolland

For many of us, of a certain age, the modern Liberal Democrats are in many ways unrecognisable from the radical, campaigning Liberal Party of our youth.

We, who grew up forged in the fires of the Young Liberals and the Union of Liberal Students, at the heights of titanic struggles against apartheid, nuclear weapons such as cruise missiles, Nazi groups active in our major cities and the like, now look on confused and regretful as we seem to have become a polite and almost entirely middle-class debating society, meandering our way through worthy and no doubt well-meaning policy development, but with little to recommend us and seize the public's imagination, nor, it seems, to excite the majority of our membership.

A classic example was the attitude of our party grandees, who (with the party's support marooned at the time at 6-8%, so it seems hard to imagine who they thought we were going to offend), failed to lift high the torch for an unambiguous commitment to rejoin the EU.

BEDROCK SUPPORTERS

This would have been a commitment which would have, at a stroke, differentiated us from both Labour and the Tories, kept the faith with our bedrock supporters, (and many who have drifted from us from time to time, but not entirely left us behind), and, as is now clear, would have unambiguously positioned us to benefit most from the rapid and completely predictable public disenchantment with Brexit.

Instead, we presented (and we continue to present) mealy-mouthed waffle about "pursuing the closest possible relationship with the EU", ignoring the obvious fact that the closest possible relationship - as is clearly enshrined in party policy, by the way - would simply be to ask the British people if they'd now like to Rejoin.

Another, more recent example, is our seeming determination to actually maintain or even increase our reliance on nuclear weapons, in direct contradiction to decades of informed scepticism about their worth, and at the very moment that the war in Ukraine surely demonstrates that they are an unusable and irrelevant defence mechanism, redolent of a neo-colonial machismo that bears no resemblance to the position and role of modern Britain.

At the very least, we need a serious, informed debate that doesn't rely on knee-jerk machismo, but rather a serious-minded review of all of Britain's defence options, how to get nuclear disarmament talks re-started, and how to engage with those countries with whom we disagree profoundly, short of threatening to

blow each other off the map.

Our passionately presented commitment to union between the component parts of Great Britain is yet another example of policy inertia.

Admittedly there is little doubt that the party in Scotland is emphatically unionist, (while the public are clearly not), which is the Scots party's absolute right, of course, but the rest of the party simply falls meekly into line.

Indeed, seeking to debate our unionist preference is to light the blue touchpaper on howls of protest for those who argue that it is none of the business of English, Welsh, Northern Irish and international members what happens with Scotland, but only a matter for the Scots party, despite the very obvious fact that with an entwined political culture and economy it most obviously is a legitimate matter for all to consider.

This apparently unshakeable unionist commitment from the party should at least be questioned - especially in the party that championed the very concept of devolution when no-one else was interested, and which, within the context of the EU, should have no fear of a free association of independent nations who have taken upon themselves the right and responsibilities of self-government.

It is said in response that we support a Federal Britain, which might indeed be a smart way through the morass, but where do we see this alternative presented with vim, vigour and with much to recommend it to break the 'yes/no' deadlock on independence?

I put it to you: if we are morphing, in effect, into nothing more than a sort of offend no-one 'Tory-lite' organisation, then what earthly reason is there for Tory voters to switch to us, when they have a successful and persistent Tory party in power which they can simply keep voting for?

As the incomparable Tony Benn once said to me, (not that I have always agreed with him, but he had some things very right), "Stephen, there's no point us pretending to be bastards, because if the public want the bastards in they'll vote for the real ones, because they know we're not really bastards, we're just pretending."

I had cause to remember that comment after we were savaged for our supine failure to make the Coalition with David Cameron work for ordinary folk.

A party in Government which cheerfully discarded treasured policy positions to get along peacefully with its larger partner was always going to be seen as irrelevant and weak, and duly was.

The Liberal radicalism of my youth kept our parliamentary party on its toes, and culminated in Charles Kennedy's principled and impressive opposition to the Iraq war. That radicalism saw us reach a modern high-water mark for the party in terms of electoral success, just as our earlier opposition to apartheid and cruise missiles saw us become increasingly relevant (and talked about) during the Steel and Ashdown eras.

There was always disagreement – sometimes trenchant disagreement – between the party's leadership, some of the hierarchy, and our more radical activist members, but the disagreement was acknowledged, and managed, and frequently more radical ideas weaved their way into otherwise somewhat anodyne policy. We weren't afraid of debate – we lived for it.

This passion for ideas gave us a keener cutting edge, and, for example, bred a generation of community campaigners who truly believed that governing was actually about the welfare of the governed, not those in power. They believed structures and procedures had to be put in place to ensure that the levers of power were increasingly put in ordinary folk's hands, whether in the workplace, in local government, in planning, or, indeed, yet more broadly. When we cried "Power to the People", we actually meant it.

Unlike some, I now fear that the party cannot be dragged back to its earlier roots. We have simply lost too many good members to tiredness, premature death, (vale, Simon Tittle), cynicism, the other attractions of life, and also to other parties, especially Labour and the Greens, and to a lesser extent the nationalists.

Our main appeal – our *raison d'être* – now seems to have collapsed to "We are not the others" ... and fair enough, we aren't, and we know what's wrong with them ... but is apparently not backed up with any successful attempt to define what a resurgent Liberalism could mean for the public, and for the success of the country.

MUTED INTERNATIONALISM

Our internationalism is muted, our industrial policy is never heard, (disgracefully, we did not fully support the rail workers when Labour deserted them), our passion for electoral reform as part of a wider rearrangement of Britain's political structure seems to have degenerated into little more than whining "but First Past the Post is so jolly unfair to us".

No-one turns to us for breakthrough thinking on modern policy conundrums, (they always used to – we were a constant ferment of new ideas), we are not leading the debate on how to preserve and enhance a National Health System become ever more unwieldy and expensive as waiting periods expand exponentially and the seriously ill wait in vain for an ambulance, and while I absolutely applaud the party's commitment to cleaning up Britain's waterways, is it part of a

"If we are morphing, in effect, into nothing more than a sort of offend no-one 'Tory-lite' organisation, then what earthly reason is there for Tory voters to switch to us"

comprehensive and convincing collection of policies, which the public can articulate when they consider who to vote for, unambiguously demanding ecological sustainability and combating climate change?

Or have we now meekly conceded that ground in the public's mind to the Greens?

Some people will read this article and nod sadly in agreement. Others will rail angrily, (wilfully in denial, in my opinion), missing the point that we are unquestionably a pale orange shadow of what we used to be.

Ironically, they will quote recent political successes at me as evidence that things are going well, and insist we need to give it time, we are carving out the centre ground, the electoral calculation may yet swing our way, and so on and so forth.

But if all that were true, then I ask you in all humility, what would a Government with the Liberal Democrats in it actually do that would be distinctively Liberal, democratic, radical, and courageous?

Have we not assumed a mantle of managerial incrementalism so intrinsically unimaginative and lacking in all boldness, so that if someone handed us the levers of power we would do perilously little with them, and merely nibble around the edges of a system which inexorably seems to create a Britain that is inexorably weaker, less safe, dirtier, unhealthier and less progressive than it was when we led the charge for new ideas?

There was a time, remember, when we marched, at Jo Grimond's urging, towards the sound of gunfire.

Wave a pop gun at us now and I think we'd run away.

Steve Yolland is a former Liberal Democrat activist now resident in Melbourne

AMERICA GETS IT RIGHT

Martha Elliott feared the worst in the US midterm elections, but explains why voters unexpectedly shunned Trump

In perhaps even 18 months leading up to the US midterm elections, I dreaded the possibility that the results could be a precursor of what might come in 2024 - a return to the reign of terror of the infante horribilis Donald Trump and more importantly the beginning of the end of democracy in America.

And these nightmares were not without substance. Trump refused to accept that Joe Biden had won the election decisively, both in the electoral vote and the popular vote. But Trump couldn't bring himself to admit defeat and allow a peaceful transfer of power as his predecessors had done for 230 years.

His ego couldn't admit defeat so he did everything he could to stop Biden from taking office. He bullied state officials to 'find' enough votes to change the results of state elections, brought lawsuits in more than 60 courts claiming that there had been massive voter fraud but having no evidence, and put pressure on vice-president Pence to refuse the results from some states. And when all of that didn't work, Trump incited a violent and deadly insurrection to physically attack the US Capitol.

He didn't tell them to pull down the barriers or attack and kill police officers. Their marching orders were to stop Congress from certifying the election which is actually a formality because the electoral college had met in December and voted.

WHY WORRY?

So, if election officials and courts had stood up to Trump in 2020 and the beginning of 2021, why was I worried? In American politics, the party not in the White House usually makes significant gains in the midterm elections. The 2022 election appeared to be headed in the same historical direction. For instance, Obama was elected in 2008 with 60 seats in the Senate (51 is a majority) and 257 in the House of Representatives (218 is a majority). Then in the 2010, Democrats lost 63 seats in the House and 12 in the Senate. It had been 60 years since John Kennedy kept control in a midterm election.

Knowing historical trends, Trump told his MAGA supporters that if Republicans were able to take back the House, he would run for president in 2024. And his loyal election deniers were running for office on all levels. If they won governorships as well as races for state secretary of state - those who are in charge of elections in each state - there might be manipulation of the votes.

One of the other things that skewed the midterms towards Republicans is reapportionment. Every 10 years a census is held. Then the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are apportioned roughly according to population and district lines are redrawn by the state legislatures and in a few cases independent

commissions.

But they are not apportioned equally because every state is guaranteed at least one representative. Thus, Montana gets a representative with only 577,000 people, but California gets only 52 with nearly 40 million people. Because of gerrymandering, district lines in many states favour Republicans in both the state legislatures and congressional districts.

For example, Tony Evers, a Democrat, won the governor's race in Wisconsin by 3.5% of the vote but Republicans won 67% of the seats in the state senate and 64% of the seats in the state assembly. That's extreme gerrymandering.

Part of this is due to the Supreme Court's precedent. Chief Justice Roberts wrote in *Rucho v. Common Cause* in 2019 that the constitution doesn't allow the Supreme Court interfere in even the most extreme gerrymandering to favour political parties. (They can't draw lines to exclude minority groups from holding office.) In most states the legislature draws the district lines so that their party wins. Sometimes this is to the point of making it impossible for the other party to win at all. In North Carolina, Justice Coney Barrett wrote that the districts were grossly gerrymandered and must be redrawn, but also that the state didn't have time to redraw the districts before the November election.

However, after that another federal court ruled that New York's districts had been gerrymandered in favour of the Democrats and ordered that they be redrawn. Actually, the districts had been drawn by an independent commission but the state legislature rejected that redistricting and redrew the lines to unfairly favour the Democrats. Then the new districts were fairer but made the Democrats lost four US House seats in the midterms.

As the election drew closer, the predictions swung back and forth between candidates and control of Congress. Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell even suggested that Republicans might not regain control of the Senate citing the quality of candidates - a slap in the face of Trump who had handpicked many of them.

All of Trump's anointed ones were extreme loyalists and avid election deniers. Even Trump may have worried that Republicans might not win and preempted his critics during an interview on election day, saying, "if Republicans win, it's because of me. If they lose, it's their fault."

As the election returns dribbled in it became clear that the biggest loser of the night was Trump himself. Trump's loyalists lost and lost big. Democrats were able to keep control of the Senate and prevented a major defeat in the House. Republicans have a bare majority there.

Perhaps more important were the statewide results.

Most of Trump's handpicked candidates for governor such as Mehmet Oz, lost. Republican governors who thumbed their noses at Trump such as Chris Sununu in New Hampshire, Brian Kemp in Georgia, and Ron DeSantis in Florida all won big. And every election denier running for secretary of state lost.

There was no Red Wave.

As comedian Steven Colbert

quipped, "The red wave was more like a pink splash, kinda like when you accidentally wash your Klan robe with your MAGA hat."

Reports quickly leaked out from Trump's aides that he fumed all night as he witnessed Republican loss after loss.

Many of us Democrats whether liberal, moderate or conservative breathed a sigh of relief, not just because our party had not been trounced, but because the big winner was democracy in America. The Democrats had run on the premise that our democracy was on the ballot. If election deniers won, democracy would lose. Clearly voters were sick and tired of those who refused to accept that Trump had lost.

The other Democratic planks designed to pull people to the polls were abortion and climate change. Democrats reminded voters that the Supreme Court had overturned *Roe v Wade*, the 50-year old guarantee of abortion rights. They pointed out that if Republicans gained control of Congress, they would pass a national anti-abortion bill. Democrats also said Republicans had voted against climate change legislation. Abortion and climate change are both issues that young voters are extremely concerned about. And voters between the ages of 18 and 25 have had the lowest turnout in all elections. That was not the case in this time. What the poll didn't ask was whether election denial was an important election issue. Clearly, that's a question that should have been asked.

The issues that Republicans ran on were the economy and crime which most polls predicted were the top two issues to voters, and on which voters also said they trusted Republicans more than Democrats. But Republicans gave no plans for how they would fix these

I must admit that I did not give American voters enough credit to understand that our democracy was on the ballot. I thought they'd fill their gas tanks or check out at the supermarket and think "inflation is out of control, I'm voting Republican".

But apparently American voters do understand the importance of democracy and distrusted election deniers. As Biden said just days before the election - elections are not about the past, they are about the future. So, one important takeaway from this election is that Americans believe in our government and believe in the integrity of our elections, and they are sick and tired of those politicians who refused to admit that Trump lost. Maybe they are even sick and tired of Trump himself.

POLLS WRONG

Another big takeaway is that polls cannot always be trusted and may become a thing of the past. They had

"I must admit that I did not give American voters enough credit to understand that our democracy was on the ballot"

predicted that Hillary Clinton would win in 2016. They went both ways on the 2020 election. This year the polls wavered back and forth on individual races in Congress, but the consensus was that the Republicans would easily have a substantial majority in the House. Traditionally polls were taken either by people knocking on doors or by telephone interviews but only landlines. Young people

use cell phones, not landlines and more households are going in that direction. Now more polls are being taken by email and text messages. It's cheaper and pollsters think it's more accurate. Clearly cheaper isn't better, nor more accurate. The rumour is that many pollsters are worried that their time has come and gone.

Third, Donald Trump may have lost his control of the Republican party. If he'd been a good loser and accepted defeat in November of 2020, he might still have some hold. As former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie said, Republicans have to decide whether they are a party of 'me' or a party of 'we'. If they chose 'me' it means they chose Trump. If they choose 'we' they chose the American public.

Yet even with the crushing defeat that he suffered, Trump announced another bid for the presidency in the 2024 election. Clearly, Trump's ego has not accepted this defeat any more than it did in November of 2020. But his announcement speech was very subdued. He had a crowd of supporters and Mar-a-Lago members, but he wasn't yelling or fist pounding. He wore no MAGA hat.

If Donald Trump wins the Republican nomination - and it's a big if because this election seems to point to Americans tiring of his chaotic personality and lack of reasoned governing - he might have an advantage in the presidential election. America doesn't elect its president by popular vote. It picks it by electoral vote and in most cases, it's a winner take all of the electoral votes in each state. Gerrymandering and the imbalance in representation in both the state legislatures and the Congress may make it easier for a Republican to get elected president - even Trump in the seemingly unlikely scenario that he gets the nomination.

The constitution doesn't require that the winner of the popular vote in each state receive all the electoral votes.

It is improbable the electoral college will be changed because the small states would be giving up power, but Nebraska and Maine have moved away from 'winner takes all' to more equitable systems.

Most of the small states are red (Republican majority). Thus the Republican nominee has an advantage right out of the starting gate. Until the electoral college is reformed, presidents will be elected president who do not win the popular vote. And so it is still possible that Trump could win the presidency. Heaven help us.

Martha Elliott was on the board of Democratic Women of Santa Barbara County, California for nearly a decade



LETTERS

TRANSPHOBIA2

Dear Liberator,

There's a new Lib Dem definition of transphobia that is being hailed as a victory by gender critical people. Which only means they haven't actually read it properly.

Recent legal cases mean

that gender critical views such as a belief in the immutability of sex are a protected belief under the Equality Act, Article 9 ECHR and Article 10 ECHR. But crucially the Forstater judgement only gave protection to those gender critical beliefs which do not seek to destroy trans rights. This doesn't give transphobes the right to express any heinous opinion they like and claim protection.

The definition also contains the unequivocal statement from our preamble that the Liberal Democrats "reject all prejudice and discrimination based upon... gender identity". Having a protected belief does not exempt anyone from this. And there is a very, very narrow range of ways that gender critical beliefs could be expressed that would "not harass or discriminate against trans people, nor create an environment which is hostile or discriminatory to trans people"

The clarity of this definition will mean our disciplinary system is more capable of dealing with transphobic behaviour. And the legal advice received did say that we could hold our candidates to a higher standard - insisting for example that they agree with a set of key policies. Candidate approval and selection is a matter for state parties, and this advice will be passed to them.

As a party we have excellent policies around trans rights, all of which have been overwhelmingly supported at our conferences. Ed Davey and Christine Jardine recently met a group of trans members in Westminster to hear about their experiences and what they need from our party, and I'm hopeful that this will lead to more positive statements from our parliamentarians.

I know that some people are disappointed that the party has had to accept the implications of the Forstater judgement. I'm one of those people. But I firmly believe that our new definition is both legally sound (which is important to ensure the party doesn't spend all its money on lawsuits with transphobes) and makes it clear that behaviour that hurts or discriminate against trans people is not welcome in our party.

There is an aggressively hostile environment towards trans and non-binary people in this country. It's fuelled by the media, exacerbated by Tory politicians and makes our country a worse place for everybody. The Liberal Democrats will always stand up for trans rights and work to make both our party and the country a safe and welcoming space for trans and non binary people.

TRANS DEFINITION

Dear Liberator,

A big decision by Federal Board on 7 November has dramatically changed the landscape for debates within the Lib Dems on sex, gender and trans issues. This follows strong advice from two eminent barristers that the party's use of its now discredited definition of transphobia to discriminate against gender critical members is unlawful.

Until now, any member who expressed gender critical views, even in a polite and respectful manner, was likely to suffer a vicious social media pile-on calling them bigoted, hateful or worse. They also faced ending up on the wrong end of a formal complaint of transphobia and potential expulsion from the party.

The transphobia definition should have been aimed exclusively at members behaving in a harassing or bullying manner towards transgender people. But it also wrongly penalised members who hold respectable gender critical views such as sex is immutable, biological and different from gender.

The fact is that there is a world of difference between being gender critical and being transphobic, although they do get wrongly lumped together by some people who should know better. Every one of the many gender critical Lib Dems I have met absolutely detests transphobia, as does everyone else in the party.

Now the definition has been changed to specifically permit the expression of gender critical views internally or publicly, provided they are not expressed in a harassing or discriminatory manner.

The legal threshold for harassment is pretty high. Previous court cases have concluded that everyone has to be prepared to tolerate hearing views that they don't like, which is part and parcel of living in a free and pluralistic society.

For me, this has always been about free speech, an absolutely fundamental liberal value. Unless we debate with people we disagree with, we have no way of knowing whether we are right or wrong.

This change to the transphobia definition is very good news for the Lib Dems. We are leading the way on this and we are now the only progressive party that explicitly permits open debate on gender issues, as any party that calls itself liberal should do.

This must give us a big electoral advantage against the Greens, Labour and the SNP who moving in the wrong direction so far as freedom of speech on gender is concerned.

Paul Strasburger
House of Lords

Mary Regnier-Wilson
Chair, Federal People Development Committee

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Ebury Press 2022
£16.99 (hardback)

This should be in the lavatory of every aspiring politician. Vince Cable interleaves quotations about the trade from the good, the great and Boris Johnson with wisdom acquired from his years in the business. You will learn that it's not a good idea to embark on a political career with a vision of yourself as a knight in shining armour, and that politicians can be divided into priests (Barack Obama, Jeremy Corbyn) and plumbers (Lyndon Johnson, Angela Merkel). Cable's verdict is that we need more plumbers.

And so on through choosing a party and standing for election, where we learn that Cable fought off a bid by some Liberal Democrat members in Twickenham to adopt a different candidate for the 1992 general election. This is followed by chapters on climbing the greasy pole and on government and power, where we are told to forget any hopes of finding a collegiate cabinet when you are asked to join it. From there we reach the heights of leadership and the world stage, but these are inevitably followed by a chapter on failure, defeat, decline and escape, after which there is only retirement.

But it's the quotations that make this book and destine it for the lavatories of the politically ambitious. Here are half a dozen of the best:

Labour MP in the Commons tea room: "Nye Bevan is his own worst enemy."

Ernest Bevin: "Not while I'm alive he ain't."

"I will make a bargain with the Republicans. If they stop telling lies about the Democrats, we will stop telling the truth about them." – Adlai Stevenson

"He went 15 rounds with the English language, and left it slumped, bleeding, over the ropes." – Matthew Parris on the speech by John Prescott that swung the 1993 Labour party conference behind John Smith.

"Margaret Thatcher and Ted



REVIEWS

Heath both have a great vision. The difference is that Margaret Thatcher has a vision that Britain will one day be great again, and Ted Heath has a vision that Ted Heath will one day be great again." – Robert Jones

"Like most people, I couldn't care who he goes to bed with, as long as it isn't me." – Ken Livingstone on David Mellor

"There is nothing to be got by being a Liberal today. It is not a profitable or a remunerative career." – Herbert Asquith (1920)

Jonathan Calder

A History of the Scottish Liberals and Liberal Democrats by David Torrance. Edinburgh University Press, Also available as an e-book.

This useful book is intended to be the first in a series on Scottish political parties. It covers the period from the Reform Act of 1832 to the election as leader of Alex Cole-Hamilton in 2021. Dr David Torrance, is respected in Scotland as a journalist and author who makes no secret of his centre-right perspective. In this book he sets out a readable and well-informed account of Liberal politics in Scotland over almost two centuries, and thereby fills an important gap in the record.

The story falls into three sections – the Liberal hegemony in Scotland through the nineteenth century; the difficult years from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s when at times the party elected no MPs; and the years of revival that followed and faltered. A theme that runs through the volume is the party's stalwart commitment to Home Rule (Devolution) not just to Scotland but 'all round'. This policy emerged strongly in the 1880s and has never been abandoned.

Torrance is well-informed, and the

bibliography is valuable in itself. The end-notes to the chapters back up the content, and provide reliable sources for what is sometimes surprising new material.

The chapters on the success of Scottish Liberalism in the 19th century underline links to the politics of the Scottish Church and to what was happening in Ireland. They record the tradition of 'anti-landlordism' in the Scottish party and emphasise Rosebery's importance as a party organiser long before he reluctantly succeeded Gladstone as prime minister.

Of course Scots were vital to the party's success nationally. Most Liberal prime ministers, including Lord Aberdeen, Gladstone, Rosebery, Campbell-Bannerman, and Asquith were Scottish or sat for Scottish seats.

However, from 1924 onwards the party in Scotland mirrored the divisions and lack of purpose that can be seen south of the border at that time, and the influence of Scots dwindled. Torrance usefully reminds us of the great work done by Lady Glen-Coats who held the Scottish party together during these difficult times and resisted the imprecations of those who wanted to merge with the Conservatives or their 'National Liberal' avatars.

For many readers the most interesting part of the book will be the half of it which covers the period since 1964. Then, by a combination of regional focus and strong candidates, the party won all the Highland seats and re-established itself as a force to be reckoned with. David Steel's sensational by-election win in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles a few months later helped the party regain its confidence. By this time, it provided almost half of the UK's Liberal MPs.

Perhaps inevitably, Torrance's account is at times selective. There is no mention of the election of Peter McLagan, Scotland's first

black MP, as a Liberal in 1865. His information on Liberalism in central Scotland and the election of MPs (and later MSPs) is sound, but that is only half the story.

Perhaps a second edition of the book will be able to fill the gaps, especially around local government. The astounding and pioneering work done by Greenock Liberals is noted, but little is said about the development of a community politics strategy more widely, especially in Dunfermline, Aberdeen, and Inverness, where it provided a firm foundation for later success in parliamentary elections. It would also be helpful if a later edition could follow the development of centre-left policies by the Scottish party, and its Commission on the (2010) Coalition, which was the only contemporary Lib Dem coalition-sceptic body in the UK.

As well as recording salient facts, Torrance provides thoughtful analysis at all stages. He concludes that (in coalition with Labour at Holyrood between 1999 and 2007) "the Scottish party was rather better at deriving policy and electoral benefits from coalition politics than Nick Clegg et al. between 2010 and 2015". He examines the attempts over many decades to develop greater understanding between Scottish Liberals and the SNP. In contrast to the party leadership's outright opposition to independence he points out that, in the 2014 referendum, 43% of LibDem voters supported it.

The book ends with a comparison between Scotland in 1921 and 2021. A hundred years ago, the nation's frame of mind was socially conservative. Today it is liberal by temperament and belief. Torrance suggests that political success is not measured by elections alone, and the huge change in the attitudes of the nation "owed something to the influence of Scottish Liberalism in all its manifestations."

This is a valuable and well-researched book. It should have a place on the shelves of everyone concerned with Liberal history.

Nigel Lindsay

Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy by Ian Hall Bristol University Press 2019 £9.50

The book's scope covers Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term in office, from 2014 to 2019. It lays out Modi's agenda for reinventing Indian foreign policy on Hindu nationalist principles. This translated into, for example, increased muscularity with Pakistan. His doctrine, if there was one, was an apparent shift towards realism, coupled with a focus on efficient and effective implementation.

But Hall makes the case that rather than behave as a pragmatist or realist, Modi acts as a self-consciously transformational leader with a clear ideological agenda. Foreign policy is delivered less in terms of building India's power and influence than was aimed at. This was due to a lack of process and consultation and lack of focus on implementation.

Moreover, Modi's reinvention of foreign policy was undermined, Hall argues, by the upsurge in communal violence under Modi's watch.

The impact on foreign relations was less important to Modi, however, than the appearance of making a positive impact on India's foreign relations. While there is little concrete evidence that Indian voters choose their representatives based on foreign policy, the principal target of foreign policy messaging was domestic, not international; the author argues that Modi was convinced that personalising India diplomacy would prove electorally advantageous with his majoritarian right-wing base of supporters.

He aimed to create the impression that if he as India's representative was lauded and listened to by world leaders, then India itself must stand tall. Summits and bear hugs for world leaders were aimed at portraying himself as a statesman, elevated above the normal political fray. Polling shows that on the domestic front, Modi succeeded in making the majority of citizens perceive an improvement in India's image abroad.

Imaduddin Ahmed

Ballots, Bombs and Bullets by Pat Bradley Colmille Press 2022 £18.00

This was recommended recently by Lib Dem president Mark Pack in his regular newsletter, and is the memoir of Pat Bradley - who is an unsung hero of British democracy.

Bradley's remarkable career had two distinct and overlapping phases which the book outlines in detail. The first saw him in charge of running elections in Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles - where he kept electoral democracy going in a society teetering on the edge of civil war.

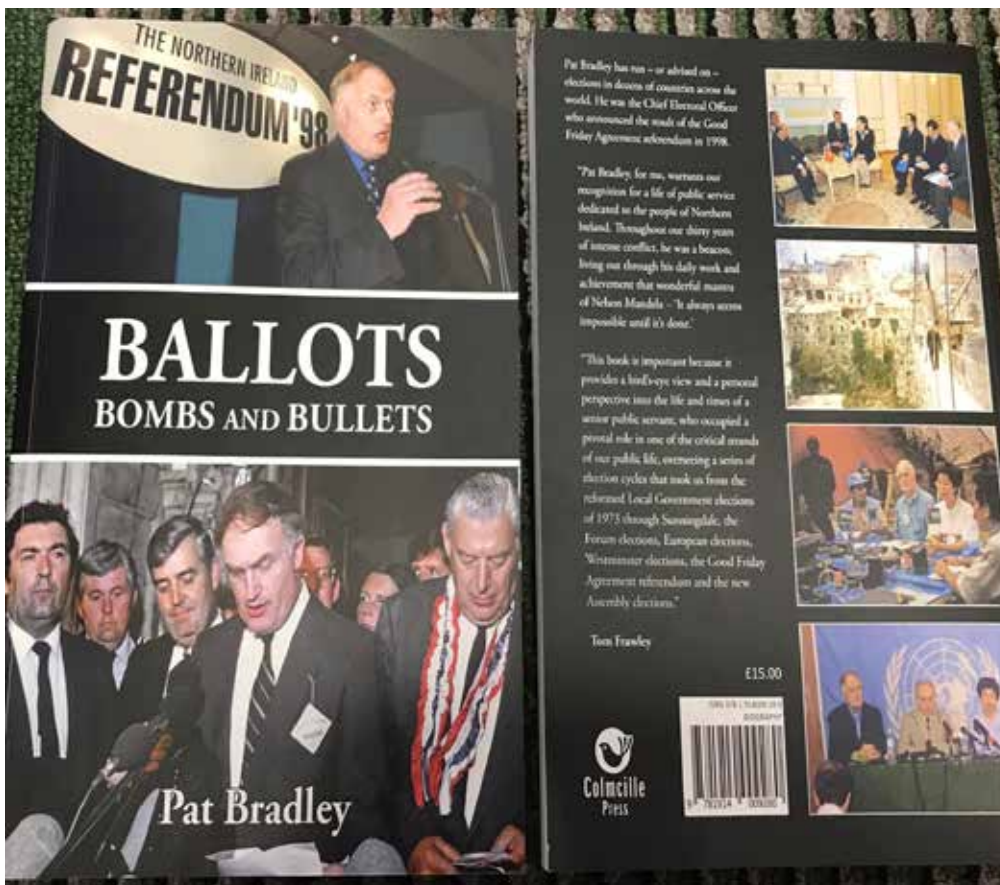
As a result of his work and experiences there Bradley became a recognised global expert in elections and conflict resolution. That saw the UN, EU and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office beat a path to his door to solicit his help in running elections in troubled hotspots and emerging democracies around the world.

So commenced the second phase of his career, where he served as a senior/lead technical advisor in elections in 30 countries and five continents - from South Africa to Saudi Arabia, Kosovo to Hong Kong, and Russia to Lebanon.

The first part of the book outlines how Bradley secured a job in 1973 as a deputy electoral officer for a large region in Northern Ireland essentially by accident, and despite his clear lack of relevant experience or prior knowledge for the role.

He was based in his home city of Derry, which at that time was badly affected by the Troubles and a challenging place to run elections - with paramilitary groups determined to undermine or stop the democratic process.

A previously untold insight revealed in the book is that - at this very period when it was essential to ensure that democracy worked and was seen to work - organisationally Northern Ireland's electoral infrastructure was a shambles. When Bradley started his job, he was given next to no training and discovered that most of the other deputy electoral officers across had only taken on the role to see out their years in the public sector - with little intention of actually doing much work.



He also found he had insufficient staff support and no suitable offices to work from, and that the basic materials needed to run elections (eg: ballot boxes etc.) were stored in a rusting shed 40 miles away from Derry.

Within weeks of starting the job – and still without any training, backup or facilities - he was thrown in at the deep end by the sudden announcement of the February 1974 general election. It was to be the first of many elections Bradley organised in challenging circumstances over the next 26 years. In 1980 he was promoted to chief electoral officer for all of Northern Ireland, with the buck stopping with him for many key elections over the following two decades.

'Ballots, Bombs and Bullets' offers many fascinating insights and anecdotes into what was involved in running elections in Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles – from a 200lb bomb left opposite Bradley's office desk, to the time he evacuated his staff by armoured car from a polling station that was under continual attack before taking their place to ensure it remained open so the election could be deemed valid. The book also tackles the issue of voter fraud and 'personation' - outlining the lengths to which some people

went to indulge in the practice, and the constantly evolving responses required to tackle it.

It also shines a light on the informal 'gentleman's agreement' that existed between nationalist and unionist parties with regards voter impersonation – with both sides engaged in the act - until the practice grew to an almost industrial scale that enabled Bradley to persuade Westminster to take action. Bradley (who was officially an independent public officer) also challenged and won a legal tussle with Margaret Thatcher after she declared to parliament that he would follow a particular course of action which he didn't agree with.

Of the many elections Bradley worked on, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement referendum was undoubtedly his magnum opus. It was crucial to the entire peace process that the referendum was run in a way that was beyond reproach, especially with high profile political figures and parties opposed to the agreement's success (such as Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party).

Bradley went to great lengths to ensure that the referendum was run in a watertight manner – even agreeing to sleep overnight with the completed ballot boxes to assuage Paisley of his paranoia that the

state might seek to interfere with them. To Bradley's credit the legitimacy of the referendum and its result has never been questioned – either at the time or since – in a part of the world where pretty much anything political gets challenged. It was a not insignificant contribution to ensuring that the path towards peace could be followed.

The book then goes on to describe how the knowledge and expertise Bradley had acquired was highly sought after by key international organisations seeking to introduce or enhance democracy in areas of conflict – particular after the Iron Curtain collapsed in the 1990s.

Both before and after he retired in 2000, Bradley spent a number of years advising on elections in over 30 countries. He was a technical advisor in the first full democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 in which Nelson Mandela (who Pat met twice) was elected, as well as in the first democratic elections in post-Communist European nations like Russia. In the process of his work Pat rubbed shoulders with the presidents of South Africa, Bosnia and Kyrgyzstan, and was even shot at in East Timor. An outline of his experiences in 20 countries is provided in the book, complete with details of various comical situations and close shaves he encountered in the process.

There is also a chapter giving technical background on types of democratic governance, voting systems, eligibility to vote, electoral boundaries, counting and announcing election results etc.

Steve Bradley

Weak Strongman: the limits of power in Putin's Russia by Timothy Frye Princeton 2021 £20.00

"In democracies, we expect an informed public to guide policy makers and hold them accountable. This is not possible if the public holds opinions untethered from reality."

In this quote Timothy Frye is

referring to the American public's knowledge of Russia, but the statement could equally apply to a public's knowledge of its own government's policies and actions.

Frye does not consider Russia to be a democracy – not even an illiberal one – and makes the above remark because he is concerned that American scholars and commentators living in a democracy need a deeper understanding of Russia.

Weak Strongman (2021) is about President Vladimir Putin and the amount of personal power he has over Russia. It focuses on the domestic rather than on foreign policy though the two are intertwined. As with all academic books on politics, events will have moved on, though not usually as tragically as with the current invasion of Ukraine by the eponymous Putin. This is why the main value of the book is its theoretical content or its challenges to current ways of thinking about Russia.

Whilst Frye hopes this book will be more accessible to non-specialists by including many interesting anecdotes from his years spent in Russia, he includes both theory and challenges. He advances the premise that we can understand Russia and Putin more easily if we regard that country as an autocracy like many others and its leader as a weak strongman with associated constraints. By challenging what he regards as current US thought on the matter, he believes he can go down the comparative route, rather than regarding Russia as *sui generis*.

For European liberal democrat readers in 2022, regarding Putin and some other leaders of authoritarian countries, as 'personalist autocrats' could well be the best takeaway from this book, which is well-written, relatively short and interesting to read.

A 'personalist' autocracy is one which is dominated by one person, usually the leader, rather than by one party or the military. Examples of other such states could be Belarus, Turkey or Venezuela. Frye suggests we can even see it in Orbán's Hungary, a so-called democracy within the European Union. He posits that 'personalist' autocracies are less able to survive economic shocks than other types of autocracy and that they are usually

more corrupt.

Something for us to take note of in the UK is Frye's fear that "as long standing democracies become increasingly dysfunctional and less attractive as a model", someone comes to power via a coup, rigged elections or populism then sets about dismantling any democracy by taking over the courts, the media and the legislatures. Opposition leaders are branded as foreign agents. Future elections are not free and fair.

Of course, no individual can do this alone, and strong institutions such as military, church or organised political groups could overthrow them when they reach power, so there is an incentive for the leader to keep them weak. In Russia, Putin has kept his inner circle and oligarchs competitive with each other. They are replaceable if they cause problems. However, the *siloviki* (described by Frye as 'members of the state security agencies' but might include politicians arising from these) have great influence and help with repression of any opposition. But they often disagree with each other and have no leader other than Putin who has gradually built a 'vertical of power' with himself at the top.

So why then does Frye call him a 'weak' strongman? Is it because, although he can keep the elite under control to a large extent, this does not necessarily apply to the public, many of whom are willing to protest despite severe consequences? Is it because no-one believes in Putin's promises of economic recovery any more or because the wealthy do not invest in Russia? Is it due to Putin fatigue?

His theory is that personalist autocrats need to constantly keep the balance, for example between pleasing elites and the public, also between having strong forces to oppress the public but not so strong they could overthrow him. Autocrats need popularity as well as a 'big stick' and Frye asserts that Putin's popularity has been genuine although it sank to its lowest level in 2020. Previously, it was mainly based on the economy or rallying around the flag. The president benefitted from high oil prices and the low-risk annexation of Crimea. Now the future could be bleak.

Turning to foreign policy, Russia

is in a more unique position when compared to other autocracies for various reasons. Looking at history, including the time of the Tsars and the Soviet Union, Russia has always felt the need for military dominance in its neighbourhood and to keep its great power status. One constant in recent Russian foreign policy is regarding the US and its allies (NATO) as a threat and, amongst Putin's political advisors, hard-liners have 'ruled the roost' since Putin returned as president in 2012.

But autocratic rulers face difficult trade-offs in foreign policy as well as domestic policy. It is difficult to square an open economic policy with an assertive foreign policy that benefits those who are against reform such as hard-line security agencies. One example of foreign policy failure is how a divided Ukraine was brought together by their opposition to the annexation of Crimea in 2014. And whilst the Russian people were pleased with this event at the time, economic sanctions have been in place ever since and Ukraine was pushed towards the EU and NATO.

Behind the scenes, there is growing awareness that Putin will not stay on for ever and there is jockeying for influence due to this succession question. More importantly for us is that Russia should change the rules of the game rather than just the leader. We cannot assume that removing the leader will make things better.

Personalist autocracies are more likely to choose another non-democratic regime. However, in Russia a generational change could give us more optimism as Russians are generally better educated and wealthier than in other autocracies.

So, in 2022, we can see that the limits of power in Putin's Russia are currently being tested out. Russia and the rest of the world are being affected in many ways. In his Ukraine war of 2022, Putin has failed to keep the balances all personalist autocrats need to keep and there is an air of desperation in the extent of propaganda at home and the actions being taken in Ukraine.

Carol Weaver

Monday

Eventually, even the humiliation of one's enemies palls, and I am no longer watching that extraordinary new series of Hancock's Half Hour set in the jungle. (Besides, have you seen the price of telephone calls these days?) Nevertheless, I still maintain that no camel could have sacrificed his penis in a finer cause than making Matt Hancock feel thoroughly sick. Did you know the man has left a wife and three children, one of them adopted?

That's why I would never allow one of the Well-Behaved Orphans to be taken into the household of a Conservative Cabinet minister. However, if you are not a Tory bigwig then you are welcome to email your enquiry to sales@homeforwellbehavedorphans.rut.

Tuesday

Popping into the supermarket for a can of Monster – that puts hair on a fellow's chest! – I come across Freddie and Fiona busily comparing tines in the soup aisle. "A mulligatawny is pleasantly warming at this time of year," I offer. It transpires that they are not planning to drink the stuff so much as pour it over the works of the Old Masters in our public art galleries to protest about the burning of fossil fuels. "I wouldn't pick on those artist fellows," I advise. "They can be jolly temperamental at the best of times. Did you know the celebrated Dutch painter Van Morrison bit one of my forefathers while painting his portrait? He didn't get much of a tip, I assure you." They will not, however, be diverted from their chosen course. When I ask why they are so determined to soup the work of the great artists, I am told: "That's simple: they painted in oil."

Wednesday

Who should I meet in Westminster but our own Ed Davey? He is full of a new policy he has announced: "You know how we're targeting middle-class voters in affluent seats in the South of England?" he asks. "Well, I've decided to step that up. In future, if I come across someone who owns a house in Guildford or Wimbledon then I shall hand them a plump cheque to go towards the cost of their mortgage." I fear I am rather short with him: "What about the Young People and the rents they have to pay? Are you going to give them cheques too?" However, I save my strongest point till last. "What about people who have no mortgage costs because an ancestor had the good sense to come over with the Conqueror and extort a vast estate of prime East Midland agricultural land from the Saxon peasantry? Why should they be penalised?" I flatter myself that I leave him with plenty to chew on.

Thursday

I can hardly bring myself to write I am so angry. Our new King was visiting York today – birthplace, it happens, of our own Vince "High Voltage" Cable – and a member of the assembled crowd launched several eggs at him. It's not that I'm outraged at, you understand: for much of their reign, the first four Georges couldn't venture out of the palace gates without being pelted with rotten cabbages – and quite right too! No, what angers me is that Every Single One of those eggs missed its target. What has happened to English cricket? I can remember the days when an Anarcho-Syndicalist XI could take on and beat first-class counties and the touring Australians would count their fixture against

Lord Bonkers' Diary

the Marxist Groupuscule XI as among the hardest they faced – I remember poor Doug Walters being comprehensively yorked by a Molotov cocktail at the Griff and Coton Ground, Nuneaton. If the Marxists could have agreed on who their captain was, they would have been stronger still. But this is a time for action not for reminiscing: I am off to supervise fielding practice at the village school.

Friday

Despite the Wise Woman of Wing's excellent embrocation (3/6 a bottle from Boot's in Uppingham), I will admit to being a little on the stiff side these days to have made Gareth Southgate's final 26. So it was little hardship for me to announce my personal sporting boycott of Qatar, but cricket is another matter. For some years now my own eleven has opened its season with a chilly April fixture against a team selected by the President of China. Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that the Chinese government's persecution of the Uighurs leaves me with no choice but to abandon the fixture. Today, therefore, I have written to the Chinese Ambassador withdrawing my invitation. There will no Lord Bonkers' XI v. President Xi's XI next spring.

Saturday

Talking of Davey, I went along to his leader's speech the other day – I suppose a leader's speech without a party conference is what those fellows in suits dream about, but I missed the stalls area and the chance to clear my pipes and belt out 'The Land'. I fear Davey was rather let down by his advisers, as he spent the entire speech Facing The Wrong Way. It's true: the audience was behind him! My theory as to what happened is this: Davey was all set to make a speech in Brighton when September's event was called off because of the death of our beloved Queen, and no doubt he had rehearsed at the venue – the Pavilion, the West Pier or wherever. There, I assume, one turned left on leaving the star dressing room to reach the stage, whereas at this week's event he was required to turn right and no one in his backroom staff remembered to tell him. Gladstone, when he embarked upon his Midlothian campaign, employed a man to make sure he was facing in the right direction at all times, and Davey should do the same.

Sunday

The heartiest of congratulations to our own Baroness Benjamin as she becomes the first member of the original London cast of Hair! to hold the Order of Merit since Lord Jenkins of Hillhead. I was perhaps a little too old to be a regular viewer of Play School, though if I had no pressing business then pretending to be in a rowing boat or whatever was a pleasant enough way of passing the time, and I was impressed that she always knew which window the film clip could be seen through. Certainly, the show made for better viewing than a crew of "celebrities" one has never heard of eating the nether parts of animals in a jungle.

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