

# liberator



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# COMMENTARY

## FENCING WITH THE POST

Ed Davey did not cause the Post Office scandal, was responsible for this wretched institution for only a short time and is no more culpable than any of the Tory and Labour postal ministers to have held office in the past 20 years (or indeed Lib Dem ones, as the vanished Jo Swinson also held the role).

It was predictable that the Tories would seek to pin the blame on Davey once the scale of public anger that erupted over ITV's dramatisation of the miscarriage of justice scandal became evident.

His response was widely regarded as maladroit although his longer 1 February piece in the Guardian came across better, but could have been said earlier.

But a popular politician could have ridden out a storm such as that - imagine if anyone had tried to pin the blame for something similar on Paddy Ashdown or Charles Kennedy or even Nick Clegg in his pre-Coalition heyday. The public though seems to treat Davey more with vaguely respectful indifference than with any affection or admiration, and despite rumours that his staff are wargaming an improbable outbreak of 'Davey mania' that is unlikely to change.

Davey's personality is what it is and the party knew what it was getting after Swinson's disasters and Tim Farron's gay sex embarrassments. It voted for calm normality and got it, but a Lib Dem leader has to stand out for the public to be aware of them and what they are saying.

Here the relentless focus on the 'blue wall' does not help. It must be hard for party members - let alone ordinary voters - to identify any Lib Dem policy or even general objectives that differ much from Labour's beyond wanting to dispose of the Tories.

So low has the party been stuck in the polls that some surveys even put it below Reform's swivel-eyed fanatics.

To take one example of the Lib Dems' talent for self-inflicted obscurity, the party last September dropped its policy of a penny on income tax for the NHS and social care which - whatever its merits - was eye-catching and memorable.

Instead came: "We will make sure that companies that can afford to pay more in tax, do. We will reverse the Conservatives' multi-billion-pound tax cuts for the big banks. And HMRC will be empowered to collect more of the £36bn in taxes that the Conservatives are failing to collect."

Such convolutions illustrate the problem. How many people know of the Lib Dems' desire to make "companies" pay more, and even if they do what does "can afford" mean? Reversing tax cuts for big banks is fine but does anyone know about this intention?

How will HMRC be 'empowered'? It has powers anyway just not the staff, so what - if anything - does this policy mean?

Davey can't change the way he come across to voters and so has to make the best of appearing calm and reasonable.

But a naturally low profile leader allied to unnaturally low-profile messages is not going to make the best of what looks like considerable electoral opportunities later this year. Since it's inconceivable that the party would want change leader at this stage it has to change what it says and how it says it.

However, the Lib Dems are not the only party trying to bore the electorate into submission.

As Jon Egan's article in this issue explains, Labour too has dropped almost anything that might mean real change in favour being relentlessly focused on securing a large majority in order to do nothing in particular.

Spooked by the Corbyn era, and misunderstanding the New Labour one, Starmer behaves as though his job is to offend nobody, and especially not the Brexit supporters who deserted Labour in the 'red wall'.

This incidentally is not a justification the Lib Dems can use for their silence on Europe, since hardly anyone in the 'red wall' voted Lib Dem in the first place and most 'blue' seats now targeted voted Remain.

Both Davey and Starmer act as though they expect to do well at the general election because the Tories' self-destructive lunacy will do their job for them.

It may - nobody in their right mind would have predicted on general election night in 2019 that a Labour government with a large majority would be in the offing only five years later or that substantial Lib Dem gains were on there cards.

The Tory soap opera of plots, splits, political and governmental incompetence and internal conflict has rightly driven public disgust with them.

It's easy to see why Davey and Starmer want gains to fall into their laps and to say and do nothing that might prevent that.

But Tories are not the only rival. Voters can stay at home if they feel that voting will make little difference and/or that Tory defeat is so certain they need not stir themselves.

They need a positive reason to turn out to vote, so who will provide that?

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## LACK OF POST HASTE

Why was Ed Davey left so ill-prepared for the deluge of flak that followed ITV's Mr Bates Versus the Post Office dramatisation of the miscarriage of justice scandal?

It ought to have been obvious that the Tories would seek to pin the blame on Davey, since he was postal minister for a couple of years in the middle of the period concerned, and therefore equally obvious that a convincing response was needed.

While no-one around Davey could necessarily have predicted quite how the drama would grab the public's attention, it must have been clear that this was trouble brewing.

Davey clearly did to want to utter the word "apologise" possibly because he has recently made free with calls for all kinds of other people to resign and feared someone would call for his.

He got across that the Post Office management lied to him and that he held a meeting with Bates, but appeared defensive.

How much better to have said that everyone who was a postal minister in the period concerned should make a collective apology.

Meanwhile, anecdotal reports from doorsteps suggest the issue has little longer term traction.

## WRENCH LETTER

Ed Davey's furious reaction to a letter from prominent party figures about the lack of clear Lib Dem campaigning policies (Liberator 420) included the sacking of Baroness Ludford as Europe spokesperson in the Lords.

This was the penalty for her signing the letter, although she was technically sacked by Lords leader Dick Newby having declined to resign.

Ludford though has still not been replaced, with the party now lacking a Europe spokesperson in the Lords and claiming this was intentional on the peculiar grounds that since Labour doesn't have one the Lib Dems don't need one either.

It is a moot point whether Davey proposes to sack the entire English Lib Dem council for having the temerity to support the signatories of the critical letter.

Although couched in cautious terms - and from a low profile body - some 80% of council members are understood to have supported a motion that said the English Council "notes with concern, a lack of distinct and bold policy."

It went on to call on the various relevant party committees "to prioritise the development of policies and the manifesto, in a way which allows for the implementation of broader policies" and asked for these concerns to be communicated to these committees by English chair Alison Rouse.

Those around Davey seem to have decided that they

have a strategy of simply 'not being the Tories' for a campaign almost entirely focussed on 'blue wall' seats.

The letter stated: "We have bolder policies than Labour on the environment, fair votes and human rights, but we are not communicating them. At a general election, echoing Labour's general antipathy to the Tories through local campaigns is part of the battle but insufficient on its own." Several weeks on these policies are still not being communicated.

## SEASIDE SKIVERS

Having cancelled one conference in Brighton because of the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II it looks like another may go the same way.

With an autumn general election likely there is concern that activists may skive off leafletting and canvassing for a long weekend in there middle of the campaign if the planned September conference goes ahead.

Federal Conference Committee (FCC) members appear to have been unimpressed by figures presented to them, which they felt rather transparently downplayed the amount of money lost by cancelling, while hugely inflating the amount lost by not cancelling.

The case for cancellation was backed up by several of the great and good, while FCC members amused themselves by trying to work out which of the latter actually believed what they were saying.

Halfway through the meeting it became evident that cancellation was not going to find favour and president Mark Pack asked: "I can see you're not going to go for full cancellation, can I interest you in cancellation lite?"

The latter would be a shorter special conference, with the Federal Board having 'input' into the agenda, which rather suggests the real motive for cancellation is that the conference might do something politically embarrassing.

Roughly two-thirds of FCC voted for no change, one-third for cancellation, and one person for 'cancellation lite'.

This led to Pack cancelling a special FB meeting set up to discuss cancelling autumn conference. Had he planned to go into the FB meeting saying: "Well of course I don't want to cancel, but FCC have recommended it, so we must?"

It will be evident by mid-March if there will be a May general election, in which case Brighton would go ahead as normal in September.

If not then an October election before the clocks go back looks likely, and any conference event would probably become a glorified rally.

## TORTIOUS TORTURE

The interminable litigation between former

eastern region chair Jo Hayes and the Lib Dems arising from her expulsion from the party (Liberator 418 and others) looks headed for the rare legal territory of an appeal against the outcome of an appeal.

There are two cases. One is against the party over expulsion and the other over trying to unmask people who engaged in possibly related online abuse.

In the latter, Hayes has lost an appeal against a judge's refusal to make a Norwich Pharmacal order, and is understood to plan an application for a further appeal, something for which the courts rarely give permission.

A Norwich Pharmacal order was described in Hayes' case by Mr Justice Johnson as one that "requires a person who has become 'mixed up' in the tortious acts of another so as to facilitate their wrongdoing to disclose information, including as to the identity of the wrongdoer".

Hayes sought such an order against the Liberal Democrats and a former party member named Stephen Dudhill as "she wishes to know the identities of people who made anonymous complaints about her to the Liberal Democrats, and who have said things on Twitter to which she takes exception". This was earlier dismissed by a judge named Master Victoria McCloud and Hayes appealed to the High Court.

The case concerns allegations of online harassment of anti-Brexit campaigner Jason Hunter and whether the names of those who purportedly made these statements were real.

When the case was before McCloud, she was not satisfied that it had been established that Dudhill was "mixed up" in any wrongdoing.

She said: "I just have not seen more than a bit of possible tweeting between each other, and I am not even quite satisfied that I have really seen any or much of that." McCloud also said Hayes should have made the application against Twitter, which would be able to provide the IP address which could then be used to identify the subscriber address.

In relation to the application against the Liberal Democrats, the judge was satisfied

that they were 'mixed up' in "the alleged tortious conduct" but did not consider this reached the threshold required for a Norwich Pharmacal order.

The judge made an order for costs in favour of Dudhill and the Liberal Democrats including a payment on account of £3,808.

Costs must be mounting. Hayes is a barrister and can presumably represent herself but the party is using external lawyers and must be concerned about how much - even if it wins - it can recover in costs.

## SENIOR SERVICE

The Lib Dem code of conduct for members clearly states: "Whilst we should all treat each other with respect, nobody has the right not to be offended."

Will these waters be muddied by a new definition of bullying adopted by the Federal Board, without reference to conference?

The Federal Appeals Panel has already been asked to look into the adoption of this new definition, though as yet with no outcome.

Although the definition appears to closely follow that contained in legislation, one section will give cause for concern.

This is headed Upward Bullying and says: "Bullying can also happen towards someone in a more senior role in a political body or organisation. For example, a parliamentary candidate, an elected member of a public body, an elected officer of any party body, or a member of party staff."

Examples shown include some very wide definitions such as "showing continued disrespect", "spreading unfounded rumours" and "constantly taking credit for the actions of a more senior party member or member of party staff".

The scope for these to be misused in political, strategic or operational disagreements is obvious, with such 'senior' people inevitably in a stronger position than others.

Politics has never been a pursuit for the faint hearted. There is an old saying about it, attributed to former US president Harry Truman: "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

## LEAVING IT LATE

The website of Sutton Liberal Democrats now lists no prospective candidate for the Sutton & Cheam seat as the dispute over the deselection or otherwise of David Campanale continues with no end in sight, despite earlier indications it was over.

Campanale was selected as candidate but it subsequently emerged that he used to lead the highly socially conservative Christian People's Alliance party (Liberator 419).

Sutton moved to deselect him in a messy process last summer that involved several meetings. But Campanale has claimed he has been unjustly treated by Sutton because he is a Christian and has been advised by the former MP Simon Hughes and - on legal issues - by Lib Dem peer Jonathan Marks KC.

The party's Federal Appeals Panel page has a mysterious reference to permission to publish the outcome of Campanale's appeal as "pending" and Sutton's website makes reference only to the campaign in the borough's other seat Carshalton & Wallington.

Candidates are being parachuted into seats that have not selected, given the imminence of a general election, and so Sutton & Cheam may end up in this category.

Even were Campanale to remain the candidate this could be a pyrrhic victory as he cannot force people to campaign for him and the place is surrounded by other target seats.

## SLEIGHT OF HAND

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet has finally been awarded a seat on the Federal Board. The award, given for the worst motion submitted for each conference, goes to a constitutional amendment proposed by the FB for York.

This is designed to address the problem of the Federal Appeals Panel having innumerable vacancies, so delaying its work.

It changes the wording from saying the FAP "shall consist of 18 members elected as follows" to "shall consist of 18 members appointed as follows", the appointments presumably being by the FB. Thus does party democracy diminish a little more, the FB itself now being almost entirely indirectly elected.

# PRETTY VACANT

## Keir Starmer has a shadow cabinet of nonentities poised to deliver nothing very much in government. It's a long way from the Blair era, says Jon Egan

It is of course hugely tempting to draw parallels between the current state of UK politics and that period, nearly quarter of a century ago, when Labour was last perched on the threshold of a predicted landslide electoral victory. But as someone who worked for Labour (or as it was termed at the time 'New Labour') in the run up to and during that campaign, I believe that it would be a deeply inappropriate and misleading comparison.

In retrospect, the Blair era is often depicted as a highly disciplined and ruthless takeover of a struggling and ideologically moribund party, sweeping away redundant ideas and values and replacing them with a consumer friendly smorgasbord of promises and policies, many purloined from his secret mentor, Margaret Thatcher.

### WILDLY INACCURATE

However, this is a wildly inaccurate depiction of a party that had admittedly suffered serial election defeats, but was still home to a spectrum of political factions, traditions and interests with deep roots and clear ideas about what a Labour Government should be delivering once elected.

Blair's genius was marketing, an ability to present something that voters perceived to be unappealing, anachronistic and potentially dangerous as an almost magical panacea for a deep seated sense of disillusionment and ennui engendered by a world-weary and shop-soiled Tory Government.

In numerous briefings, seminars and staff training events in the run-up to the 1997 general election, it was increasingly clear to many of us that the Blairite project was still in search of a coherent political ideology or narrative.

Before New Labour's flirtations with the Third Way and Communitarianism, its prospectus was best expressed in a series of platitudinous 'pledges' couched in the vernacular of glib advertising slogans road tested on demographically vetted focus groups in the urban edgelands of the Home Counties.

The void at the centre of the New Labour programme was filled in practice by ideas and agendas often originating in the unreconstructed substratum of the party, and places like Scotland and the English regions.

It was from here that New Labour's constitutional radicalism and determination to rebalance the UK economy derived its energy and its specific political prescriptions.

Scottish devolution was bequeathed to the party by John Smith and its delivery was ensured by his longtime allies Donald Dewar and Robin Cook. Similarly, regional policy (the creation of powerful

regional development agencies) and the structural changes to local government enshrined in the 2000 Local Government Act were championed by local government minister Hilary Armstrong and, of course, that very embodiment of antediluvian Old Labour virtues, deputy prime minister, John Prescott. The depiction of Prescott as a bumbling mascot lovingly preserved to placate that northern natives is a gross insult to an able, though not overly articulate, politician equipped with his own long-nurtured political convictions and ambitions.

It's easy to find fault with aspects of Labour's constitutional reforms and the architecture it created to implement the agenda mapped out in the hugely influential report of Lord Rogers' Urban Taskforce, *Towards An Urban Renaissance*.

From a Liberal and libertarian perspective these institutions may still have appeared bureaucratic, paternalistic and lacking direct accountability, but it is interesting how Liverpool's Liberal Democrat administration (elected in 1998) became such an enthusiastic and effective beneficiary of the new dispensation. Leader, Mike Storey, an elected mayor in all but name, established the UK's first urban regeneration company (Liverpool Vision) and spearheaded an administration that reversed decades of civic decline culminating in its status as European Capital of Culture 2008. Storey and his administration proved that the new institutions could be surprisingly pliant to persuasively argued local agendas and priorities.

From today's perspective the early years of New Labour were the golden age of rebalancing when resources and decision-making at a regional level provided a necessary counterweight to the gravitational greed of our voracious capital.

In time, of course, the void became all-consuming. To paraphrase Marshall McLuhan, the message became the medium. New Labour's essential hollowness absorbed and neutered its capacity for any kind of innovation and radicalism. It ended, not with a bang but with the whimper of slow stagnation, and literal as well as intellectual bankruptcy.

So what about today? Can we expect something similar or perhaps better from Keir Starmer and his team? Compared to Blair's front bench, Starmer has assembled an almost literal shadow cabinet, an assortment of instantly forgettable and interchangeable mediocrities eerily lacking some vital dimension of reality.

And herein lies the problem. Labour is now a zombie party. Compared to 1997 there are no long-established factions or traditions, no powerful regional or trade union constituencies, no wellsprings of new ideas, no politically vibrant local parties - no roots and no

shoots. It is a simulacrum of a party - a project no longer guided by principle or conviction but only a vague AI generated algorithm - a blind imperative to get elected.

If I can be forgiven for reaching for words from WB Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming* (a standby repository for portentous quotations) Labour's recent history can be uncannily summed-up in Yeats's phrase: "The best lack all conviction whilst the worst are full of passionate intensity." After the 'year zero' hiatus of the Corbyn era, Labour has dispensed with ideas, policies and promises. It now deals exclusively in the currency of suppressed expectations and empty assertions. This is perfectly illustrated by its hyperbolically titled Commission on the UK's Future, chaired by its apparently cryogenically resuscitated former leader, Gordon Brown.

The commission's report is the source for a series of subsequently adopted policy statements offering a joined-up approach to economic renewal and rebalancing. Labour borrows heavily from the Government's levelling-up vernacular, emphasising the obvious truism that a country whose prosperity is condensed into a small triangle in the south east of England cannot be operating at the highest level of economic efficiency. Where the report, and the subsequent policy statements, fall down is in the lack of tangible detail, the absence of new structural mechanisms and the unwillingness to free local government from the shackles of central control and suffocating financial austerity.

Brown offers the promising prescription that the solution to economic inequalities is greater decentralisation, but beyond an assertion that even Michael Gove would happily sign up to, the solutions are sadly predictable and anodyne. Brown's nostalgic predilection for supply-side initiatives is reflected in a recommendation that metro mayors and combined authorities should be given greater control over skills, employment support and job centres as well as some infrastructure projects and net zero programmes. In addition, he recommends blending various Whitehall funding streams to meet defined regional needs and priorities. Something that the current Government is already allegedly delivering through its various levelling-up bidding programmes.

He recognises the positive role played by the former regional development agencies and recognises the incongruity of many local government and city region boundaries to the delivery of effective regional economic development, but rules out "turning back the clock" to create or recreate more fit for purpose structures. Instead the Commission promotes the idea of greater collaboration between metro mayors and councils to pursue common regional interests.

The idea that demoralised, cash-starved and enfeebled local government can simply be exhorted to do more to overcome economic inequality is far from convincing. Having recently contributed an article advocating precisely this kind of imaginative collaboration between the Liverpool and Greater Manchester City Regions to deliver an economic counterweight to London (<https://www.liverpolitan.co.uk/opinion/mancpool>), I know how resistant our parochial local government institutions are to any pooling or merging of resources and responsibilities.

As Thomas Pope, at the Institute for Government has observed: "Whether the Brown commission's recommendations lead to much more radical proposals than the current government's – both in terms of the powers that will be decentralised and which areas can access them – will depend on how they are interpreted and implemented by Labour."

The commission's proposals for Lords reform, turning the second chamber into an elected assembly of the nations and regions, appears to have only been embraced only as a "long term goal" rather than a necessary precondition for political and economic rebalancing. Compare this timidity with the audacity of Scottish and Welsh devolution.

## CRITICAL WEAKNESS

Cambridge University's Bennet Institute for Public Policy is not alone in highlighting the critical weakness in Labour's evolving strategy. Without much greater financial autonomy, increased resources and capacity, metro mayors, combined authorities and the wider local government community simply cannot transform prospects for their localities and create the basis for sustainable future prosperity - finessing existing Whitehall budgets along with highly circumscribed devolved responsibilities for centrally defined programmes do not add up to a new democratic or economic settlement for the UK. It is an absurdity to imagine that you can rebalance opportunity without rebalancing power and resources.

In 1997 New Labour assiduously avoided promising the earth, but it did manage to intimate that "things could only get better". It knew that resources needed to be re-allocated in critical and strategic areas, it understood that failing structures and institutional gaps needed to be addressed and it also retained a capacity for radicalism and idealism where and when it was fundamentally necessary.

It is highly doubtful whether Starmer and his team know any of these things. As Laura Kuenssberg's recent interviews with voters in the north west of England reveal, the public have a soberingly low level of expectation for an incoming Starmer Government. To quote Willie Whitelaw's gibe about Harold Wilson, Starmer's mission to travel the country "stirring up apathy" has been singularly successful.

For radicals and progressives the Starmer Government is likely to be a profound disappointment. There are unlikely to be open doors or spaces for dialogue with Liberal Democrats, Greens or Nationalists.

This is Labour in its most brutally functionalist and controlling guise. It is the absence of any intrinsic ideology or principles that precludes the very possibility of fruitful discourse with prospective progressive allies. Only, the highly unlikely scenario of a hung Parliament offers the prospect for the kind of creative reconstructive politics that our failed state so urgently needs.

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# LETTERS POTENT

Chris Bowers organised the letter to the Guardian on the Lib Dems identity crisis which led to an intemperate outburst from Ed Davey and the sacking of a peer. He explains what happened and why...

It was a couple of minutes before midday and I was in the supermarket, when my phone beeped. It was a text from my contact at The Guardian. "Letter and related article going live at 12.45." The aubergines, parsnips and jars of olives would have to wait.

Several weeks of organising a jointly signed letter with 30 signatories was finally coming to fruition. Would our attempt to inject some purpose into the Lib Dem motorboat without sinking it achieve its desired aim? By the end of the day, Ed Davey had done a good impression of having a bad day at the office. By the end of the week, no-one could be in any doubt that we were not the tiny minority of committee hacks some would like to dismiss us as.

## UNDERSTANDABLE IRRITATIONS

For all Ed's understandable irritations, this wasn't an attack on him. This was a cry from the heart of Liberalism for the inheritors of the British Liberal tradition to shout what it's all about.

I say the letter to The Guardian took several weeks to organise, and it did. But really the process began about eight years ago. I was watching the seven leaders' TV debate in the 2015 general election when it struck me that I could summarise in three or four seconds what six of the seven parties stood for – the one I struggled with was my own. And if I, a district councillor and parliamentary candidate, couldn't sum up what the Lib Dems stood for, what chance the rest of the electorate?

Out of that realisation came a project that led to the publication in December 2021 of the New Liberal Manifesto (free to download from; <https://newliberalmanifesto.org.uk>). It's not an earth-shattering document, but it does set out what British Liberalism means in a modern-day context. I was the lead author and managed the project heading a five-person reference group covering most functions in today's party (the others were Duncan Brack, Monica Harding, David Howarth, and Rob Parsons).

Our ability to promote the New Liberal Manifesto was hampered by the unfortunate timing of the Queen's death, as it scuppered the party conference at which we were set to have a fringe meeting about it. Worse still, by the end of 2022, the party seemed to be moving further away from trumpeting liberal values and policies. The leadership's target seat strategy seemed to be built on saying as little as possible, so elections could be fought on local issues and swing voters would not be scared to vote Lib Dem.

The target seat strategy makes a lot of sense – it learns lessons from 2010 when we overreached ourselves, deluded by Cleggmania into thinking we

would win a lot more than we did. The focus on around 30 seats sets a realistic target for the effective and efficient deployment of human resources at a general election.

Unfortunately, one lesson from 2010 wasn't learned. The capacity to win elections on local issues is a Lib Dem strength, but you then get a collection of Lib Dem MPs at Westminster who represent very different things. In 2010, those MPs who had squeezed the Tory vote to beat Labour were different animals to those MPs who had squeezed Labour and the Greens to beat the Tories.

If our target seat strategy is successful, and we were to have a hung parliament, how do we know all Lib Dem MPs would have the same platform? If someone is elected in a Leave area having not mentioned the B-word, while someone else in a Remain constituency campaigns on the party's traditional internationalism, those two Lib Dem MPs could easily clash when it comes to how we should influence a new government.

In addition, if we want to fight the 2024 general election as a series of de facto by-elections, what is going to motivate people to travel 50 or 100 miles to their nearest target seat to wear out their shoe leather, scrape the skin off their knuckles and risk doorstep abuse if they aren't inspired by what the party stands for? There has to be a core offering that motivates people to make considerable sacrifices for the party.

By the start of 2023, there were a number of party members who all had that "Am I the only person to think this?" feeling. Enough were willing to admit this in private conversations for a couple of dozen of us to meet informally in York at spring conference. Out of that came a private briefing with John Curtice in May, which in turn led to the fringe meeting at autumn conference in Bournemouth 'Shouldn't we be doing better? – the need for bolder messaging.' The meeting was so popular that many who turned up couldn't get in, while enough did to give health and safety officers kittens.

Some of the appeal of that meeting was down to Curtice himself, who is a highly impressive speaker because everything he says is backed up by his polling. But his message chimed with what many of us fear: that the party should be doing much better ("at least 20% average in the polls," Curtice said), and that the Lib Dems must be associated with policies to have any cut-through. Interestingly, his polling suggests it wasn't our 'Revoke' policy in 2019 that did for us but the fact that we had nothing other than a stance on Europe, which again reinforces the idea that we need three or four standout issues to inspire voters and motivate supporters.

House of Lords group leader Dick Newby was part of that meeting, and he faithfully promised to take away the feeling of the meeting and feed it back to the leadership team. Yet very little seemed to happen, so in late October the group that had come together in York decided to write a multi-signatory letter to The Guardian. Great care was taken in the phrasing, to the point where the first draft was almost technocratic in its docility. We were keen to call for an extra dimension to the party's campaigning in the form of a statement of one or two policies that could create a Lib Dem identity in voters' minds, not to criticise the target seat strategy (which we don't object to).

The final draft was signed by 30 people with a range of roles within the party, but it could have been signed by many times that. Numerous people who helped compile it said they couldn't sign because of their party function, or that they felt uncomfortable signing so close to a general election. Hardly anyone disagreed with the main thrust.

We needed to pick the right moment, and there was plenty going on in mid-November that we had to let play out (notably Suella Braverman's game of 'Does Rishi dare sack me?'). But that gave us time to establish contact with the deputy political editor of The Guardian, who felt our letter was significant enough to warrant a story if the letter was timed not to clash with a big political event. Letter and article finally went public on 29 November.

We had notified Ed earlier that day, so he knew it was coming. But his reaction to the Federal Policy Committee that evening was, ahem, unfortunate. He can be forgiven for being irritated, but the letter was worded in such a way that he didn't need to see it as an insult – there was scope to embrace at least part of what it was saying. And when his whole strategy is based on a couple of dozen target seats that will be won with a lot of effort by a number of individual members and supporters, it's not smart to be intemperate with many of the people who give masses of time to the party and have access to the very people whose soles could be worn out on the campaign trail.

## LUDFORD SACKED

His decision to fire Sarah Ludford as Europe spokesperson in the Lords probably drew more attention to our letter than if he'd left her be. His decision not to replace her feels the bigger setback – we now have no Europe spokesperson in the Lords.

By the weekend, no-one in the party could kid themselves that our letter expressed a minority view. Caron Lindsay wrote a piece on Lib Dem Voice, which attracted around 50 comments: virtually none opposed the substance of the letter. We were deluged with people saying that if they'd known about the letter in advance, they'd have signed it. Some even asked for it to become a national petition. And stories abounded of

*“The capacity to win elections on local issues is a Lib Dem strength, but you then get a collection of Lib Dem MPs at Westminster who represent very different things”*

people saying behind closed doors that we had expressed the feelings of a large chunk of the membership.

Since then, we have slightly backed off. If you want to achieve something, you have to make it safe for those who can make it happen to do so. We don't want to push the leadership into a corner – we just want them to add to their campaign strategy clear communication of what we stand for. We're not short of policies, but we aren't shouting about them. The most obvious policy area is Europe, though in truth it could be anything from the Liberal agenda.

The party does have an identity problem, but we're not looking to solve it this side of the election. If voters instinctively know that the Conservatives are the free-market party who want fewest regulations and little to change, that Labour are the traditional workers' party with strong state intervention, that the Greens are for protecting the environment and fighting climate change, that Reform UK is the guardian of a hard Brexit, and that the SNP and Plaid Cymru are for independence for Scotland and Wales, how do they think of the Lib Dems? This is where we fall down – we're not associated with anything, the way we were in the 1990s with 1p on income tax to fund education, or in 2003 for our principled stance against the Iraq war, or in 2016-19 fighting for a second referendum or a soft Brexit.

It would be nice if traditional Liberalism could find expression in a description of the party that takes just three or four seconds, but that's a problem for after the election. Before the election we just have to have an identity or purpose that will motivate people to campaign and give us bargaining policies in the event of a hung parliament. To say we just want to get more Lib Dem MPs elected isn't enough – that's a means to an end, not the end in itself.

That's why our request is for the party to stand for something. The obvious four policy areas are education, environment, modernising Britain's governance, and internationalism (particularly Europe), and our stance on Europe can be directly linked to the cost-of-living crisis, as Brexit has left the government with far less money to play with. But the most important element is that anyone campaigning for the Lib Dems at the 2024 general election can say "I'm backing the Lib Dems because ..." For an activity like politics that demands a lot of people's time, money and shoe leather, that's surely not too much to ask.

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Chris Bowers is a former Liberal Democrat district councillor and four-time parliamentary candidate. He was Lib Dem co-editor of 'The Alternative' (2016), essays exploring cooperation between Labour, Lib Dems, Greens, and others

# DOUBLE CINDERELLA SYNDROME

## Child mental health is being neglected by the Government and NHS says Claire Tyler, who is promoting a private member's bill to fill a vital gap

Children's mental health has rapidly become a touchstone issue. Why? Primarily because mental health problems among young people have increased sharply in the last six years with one in five children and young people now having a probable mental disorder according to the latest NHS data.

To put it in a nutshell, an increasing number of young people are experiencing mental health problems, yet too many are unable to access the help they desperately need through school or NHS services.

Young people's mental health services struggle to meet demand. As a result, thresholds for treatment are very high, with many young people turned away because they are not 'unwell enough'.

Those accepted into Children's Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS), provided by the NHS, are often left waiting many months – if not years – for treatment, during which time their mental health often deteriorates. Too many young people are being left to reach crisis point before getting help.

Running alongside this, the current state of emergency care for mental health patients is alarming. Some 12% of the A&E departments recently surveyed by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine had child mental health patients waiting more than five days before their treatment was decided.

The number of referrals to CAMHS reached a record number in May 2023 (466,250) and the number of urgent referrals of children to crisis teams has also reached a record high.

Mental Health service providers have reported seeing an increase in the severity and complexity of the mental health needs of children and young people, exacerbated by Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis.

Their umbrella organisation, the NHS Confederation, estimates that mental health services are also treating double the numbers of children and young people with eating disorders who need urgent care now than before the pandemic. That's the equivalent of six children in a class of 30.

Particularly worryingly, suicide rates among young females have also been steadily increasing.

Looking ahead it has been estimated that 1.5m children and teenagers will need new or additional support for their mental health over the next three to five years and this includes seeking treatment for eating disorders.

It is estimated that only around a third of children with a probable mental health problem are able to access treatment, showing how far away from parity of esteem with physical health we really are. Many of these children stop attending school or college. There

are also massive variations as to what support is available depending on where one lives.

A FOI investigation by journalist Justine Smith published in The House Magazine last April revealed a postcode lottery in child and adolescent mental health care, with some desperate young people waiting up to four years for help. Almost three-quarters of the English trusts surveyed said they currently had at least one young person who had been waiting at least a year to be seen and 40% had someone waiting at least two years.

Funding ranged from £35 per child under the former Doncaster Clinical Commissioning Group (0.5% of its total budget) to £135 per child or 2.2 % in Salford – a huge difference. This data needs to be tracked and published regularly to throw a spotlight on local services, but this isn't happening.

Without doubt, years of underfunding and neglect of children's mental health services have taken their toll. They have been subject to the 'double Cinderella syndrome' or the 'double 8 syndrome.' Only 8% of mental health services spending was spent on children and young people's mental health in 2021-22 (despite referrals to children's services accounting for around 18% of mental health demand on the NHS as a whole). And in 2022-23, just over 8% of the NHS budget was spent on mental health generally.

The NHS Long Term Plan, published in January 2019, included a welcome commitment that funding for children and young people's mental health services would grow faster than both overall NHS funding and total mental health spending. In reality, however, it has become much harder to track whether this has happened, not least given the switch from Clinical Commissioning Groups to Integrated Care Boards along with the changes to how the Mental Health Investment Standard and its 'dashboard' operates. The proportion of mental health funding spent on children's services is not separately identifiable. In short, transparency and accountability is totally lacking.

Along with others I've been arguing that it's a retrograde step that mental health is now part of the Government's new Major Conditions Strategy rather than having its own standalone strategy.

This happened following the cancellation of the previous long-term mental health and wellbeing plan proposed by the government. With the new Major Conditions Strategy focusing on conditions such as cancer, heart disease, musculoskeletal disorders, dementia and respiratory diseases, there is a clear risk that it will concentrate on middle aged and older individuals, and that the mental health of children and young people will be neglected.

Given all this. I've been calling for a comprehensive cross government strategy covering all aspects of mental health support with six key elements.

## **PREVENTION**

Any proper strategy should start with prevention. The Royal College of Psychiatrists have recently published a report calling on the Government to prioritise the mental health of babies and children. It sets out evidence showing that intervening very early on may help stop conditions arising or worsening and prevent babies and young children developing mental health problems in later life. This might include support for mothers in pregnancy, working with parents to promote attachment to their children and recommending parenting programmes in the early stages of a child's life.

## **EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES**

Early intervention is critical to stop problems escalating to a stage where expensive crisis care is needed. I'm a strong backer of the early support drop in centres for 11-25 years olds on a self referral basis in community hubs as championed by Young Minds and others. So I welcomed the £5m announced by the Government recently for 10 existing hubs but we need to urgently move to a national network of hubs to support young people who don't meet CAMHS thresholds.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN SCHOOLS**

From the outset I've supported the creation of Mental Health Support teams in schools (MHST). I was struck by research evidence earlier last year from the charity Barnardos – which delivers 12 such teams across England - which found MHSTs to be effective at supporting children and young people with mild to moderate mental health problems.

They improve outcomes for those with access to them and critically, the evidence suggests they are cost effective, saving the government £1.90 for every £1 invested. However, once again, the problem has been the glacially slow roll out of this programme. As things stand by the end of this year MHSTs will serve roughly a quarter of all primary schools and just over half of secondary schools.

The Barnardos research identified a gap in the current model to address the needs of children with moderate or more complex needs, special education needs or younger children. It recommended that the roll out should include school counsellors to fill this gap.

I support this recommendation wholehearted and am delighted that 1 March will see the Second Reading of my Private Members Bill in the Lords designed to ensure that every school has access to have access to a qualified mental health professional or school counsellor. I very much hope this will enable all schools to provide their pupils with the mental health support they need to support their wellbeing and enhance their academic attainment.

## **NHS FUNDED CAMHS SERVICES**

The stark reality is that too many children face high access thresholds, rejected referrals and long waiting times between referral and start of treatment during

which problems often escalate. This was amply borne out by the Children's Commissioner For England's 2023 Annual Review.

The mental health of children and young people in England was looked at by the House of Lords Select Committee examining the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014, which I chaired. Our report was published in December 2022. Members – myself included - were shocked by the results of a survey we commissioned showing how in many places CAMHS had reached crisis point. I vividly remember one mother who told us: "Having had a seven-year-old son who was so dysregulated he was trying to throw himself out of windows and grabbing knives, there was no support for him (or us). The GP, after two failed CAMHS referrals as he 'didn't meet the threshold' told us, if we could at all afford it, even if it means borrowing money, to find support privately. That CAMHS will not accept a child unless they have made two viable attempts on their own life."

We need to see urgent and fully funded plans from the Government – based on the current pilots - to implement four week clinical access standards for children and young people's community mental health and a clear understanding of how quickly the sector can reach these standards.

## **INPATIENT CARE**

It is estimated that around 3,500 children under 18 are admitted to mental health inpatient facilities. Despite the commitment to eliminate out of area placements, too often still children are being admitted to inpatient units far from home without a clear understanding of their rights and subject to restrictive interventions and inappropriate care. This must stop.

## **TRANSITION TO ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

The transition from CAMHS to adult services simply isn't working for many young people. The Long Term Plan set out an ambition to move towards a 0-25 model for young people, which I support, but it's not at all clear what progress has been made towards this.

There is currently significant variation across the country in the age at which a young person is expected to move to adult services. Often this transition is abrupt and based on a person's age rather than their readiness and young people often don't feel adequately prepared for this change. Differences in threshold also mean that young people getting support from CAMHS may not meet the threshold for support from adult services. We need a comprehensive model for 0-25 year olds so that young people don't fall through the gaps of children's and adult services.

Finally, given the highly regrettable postponement – yet again – of the long overdue reforms to the Mental Health Act. It's imperative that Government takes urgent action to improve the plight of children under 18 admitted to inpatient care units to ensure they and their families are aware of their rights and receiving appropriate care and that their voice is being heard.

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Claire Tyler speaks for the Liberal Democrats on mental health issues in the House of Lords and is vice-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health and co-chair of the All Party Group on Children

# IS THIS THE END?

Donald Trump is not invincible but it could be the end of American democracy if he returns to the presidency, says Martha Elliott

“Everyone in the streets and windows said, ‘Oh, how fine are the Emperor’s new clothes! Don’t they fit him to perfection? And see his long train!’

“Nobody would confess that he couldn’t see anything, for that would prove him unfit for a position or a fool.”

Finally a little child cried out that he had no clothes. But the Emperor continued in the procession, and the noblemen continued to “carry” his nonexistent train. Donald Trump is determined to be president for a second term in 2024, and he just might be able to do it. If he does, it might be the death knell of the republic.

Following the attack on the US Capitol that was blatantly ignited by Trump, it seemed that his political career was over. The insurrection, a violation of his oath of office, had led to his second impeachment, and he skulked out of Washington on US One before Biden had been inaugurated.

The Emperor was naked. But the Senate refused to find him guilty in the impeachment trial, leaving him eligible to run for another presidency. That act of sympathy or stupidity was the little crack that Trump need to weasel his way back into power.

Never willing to admit defeat, Trump kept insisting he had won the election. But the 2022 midterm elections made him look even more pathetic. He was posing as the undefeated strongman of the Republican party, but his vice-grip was weakened.

## KISS THE RING

Those who had kissed Trump’s ring and based their campaigns on the false claim that Trump had actually won the 2020 election, lost.

What Trump hasn’t accepted or admitted is that most Americans know he lost the 2020 election.

The midterms confirmed that and many Democrats and moderate Republicans heaved a sigh of relief; it seemed as if the age of Donald Trump was over.

On top of the 2022 humiliation, Trump also faced a slew of legal problems – from state cases in New York charging him with tax evasion and in Georgia alleging election interference to federal cases claiming he had kept highly classified documents and lied about it to the growing evidence of his role in the 6 January attack on the Capitol.

At present, he is facing 71 felony indictments and the possibility of long prison sentences. The pundits proclaimed that this would certainly sink his chances of running again for the presidency. Wrong.

Proving Yogi Barra right that “it’s not over until it’s over,” Trump’s legal woes soon became his comeback vehicle. He claimed he was a victim of the ‘deep state’, a secret cabal run by liberals. He whined his all-too-familiar cry that he was the target of witch hunts by liberal prosecutors and judges who are being orchestrated .

Each of his legal cases have become red badges of courage. He uses the court proceedings as campaign events to gain support and money. He cancels campaign events to appear in court and then holds press conferences on the courthouse steps. His base of supporters – as many as 25% of American voters – don’t believe he is guilty or just don’t care. Like a phoenix, he has risen from the ashes of the embarrassing midterm defeats and he seems to be unstoppable. For months he has been the front runner for the Republican nomination – and, God forbid, the presidency.

Soon after the Iowa caucuses, all but two other



candidates dropped out: Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and former South Carolina governor and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley. Then two days before the New Hampshire primary, DeSantis dropped out and threw what was left of his support to Trump.

It's dangerous to think Donald Trump is a loser, perhaps because more than anything he hates to lose and will do anything to win.

Eight years ago, I thought Trump was a long shot for the Republican nomination and had no chance of beating Hillary Clinton. To me, he was nothing more than a failed casino owner and a B-/C+ television celebrity. He came in third in the Iowa caucuses, but won New Hampshire by about 20 points with 35.3% of the vote. Then the press began to take him more seriously, and he won in South Carolina and Nevada. By May, Trump was the presumptive Republican nominee.

His Make America Great Again (MAGA) rallies were covered on the news just about every day. As people saw enthusiastic crowds cheering his every word, he gained more and more devotion from supporters. And defying all the polls and the odds, he won the election in November and became the 45th President of the United States. He had lost the popular vote by two million votes, but due to the outdated and unfair American system, he won the electoral college vote and the election.

But elected or not the Emperor was ill-equipped and unfit to be president. He proceeded to prance around the world alienating our allies and meeting with dictators who he admired.

## DEFIANT AND ERRATIC

Ardent supporters saw his defiant and erratic behaviour as proof of his leadership ability. He was their president, and so he got their unconditional devotion. If any Republican disagrees with him or criticises him, he or she not only incurs his wrath, but also receives retribution such as being cut off from funds and donor lists. If you don't kiss his ring, you don't get his support and that means you won't be reelected in districts that are filled with Trump supporters.

The best example of this is Representative Liz Cheney, daughter of the former vice president and staunch conservative Dick Cheney. After the January attack on the Capitol, she led the investigation of his misconduct and ultimately recommended he be impeached. One of the few anti-Trump Republicans, she was crushed in the midterm elections by a Trump supporter.

On 15 January, 110,000 Iowa voters left their homes in sub-zero weather to travel on snowy roads to caucus for Trump. Some actually said they would crawl over broken glass to vote for Trump. He came in third in 2016, but whopped the competition this year. He received nearly 52% of those who caucused, more than his two rivals combined (DeSantis, 21%; Haley, 19%). It was the coldest caucus and lowest turnout on

*"It's dangerous to think Donald Trump is a loser, perhaps because more than anything he hates to lose and will do anything to win"*

record, and Trump won by highest percentage anyone has gotten since the caucus started in 1976. The next highest winning percentage was George W Bush in 2000 who got 41%.

So who votes for this disgraced former president who is facing decades in prison? The majority of those who voted for him in Iowa felt he would fight for them and was most aligned with their views.

By far, the majority of his supporters are blue collar workers without college degrees. Many of these people feel they have been marginalised by society and a government that is more concerned with the rights of minorities and immigrants – and even women – than they are with their rights. They would love to build a wall to keep out the rest of the world. The reality is that Trump may like the cheers these supporters give him, but he cares more about giving tax cuts to the rich than helping out low wage earners.

Surprisingly, the majority of Evangelical voters across the country support Trump, a man who is not religious, who has been divorced twice, and who has had numerous affairs. Why do very religious and conservative people support him? It's not a simple answer because the reasons are widely varied. One Iowa minister actually likened Trump to a Messianic figure. A woman in New Hampshire said she believes he believes in God and prays – although the only evidence of that is the photo of him holding up a Bible in front of St. James Church in Washington DC.

On 23 January 2024 New Hampshire held its primary, and Trump beat Haley 54% to 43%. Immediately, Trump was crowing victory since he had won New Hampshire in 2016 and then went on to win the presidency. Even Biden said that he was now focusing on the race against Trump.

But in reality between Iowa and New Hampshire, there is only about 3% of the American electorate. And they are mostly white, while more than 25% of American voters are non-white. Both states are majority Republican, but nationally there are more registered Democrats than Republicans and there is a growing number of people who are independents.

Two-thirds of Iowa voters said it didn't matter to them that Trump was facing 71 felony indictments. That seems like voters don't care what he does, but if you turn it around, one-third of those Republican voters said they wouldn't vote for him if he were convicted of a crime.

He can't win the general election if a third of his base abandons him. Exit polls in New Hampshire showed that many of those voting for Haley did so, not because they were 'for' her but because they didn't want Trump.

New Hampshire revealed a growing vulnerability in Trump's chances of winning the presidency. A large block of voters in New Hampshire and nationally are independents and college educated, and the majority of them voted against Trump even more than 'for' Haley. Anyone but Trump. If he can't win over independents, women (because of his appointment of anti-abortion

justices to the Supreme Court), and college educated voters, he can't win the general election—without cheating.

So how is it that so few people have cast a ballot and yet the race may be over? There are more people in many US cities than Iowa and New Hampshire combined. Why should two little states have so much power picking the presidential candidates. I blame the news media who concentrate on early polling. It's far easier to report on who's ahead in early polls and by how much than it is to report on real issues. So long before the voting begins, people assume the leader has the nomination. But I don't remember President Gary Hart (later disgraced for his extramarital affair). They've come to believe that whoever wins New Hampshire wins the nomination. It's true that national polls show Trump ahead, but many things could change before then.

First, Polls change and don't even agree on results. Even though she came in second, Haley did well in New Hampshire and is nipping at Trump's heels. She's having 17 fund raisers in the coming weeks to keep her campaign flush with money She won 72% of the people in New Hampshire who describe themselves as moderates and 65% of the independents. It is impossible to win the general election without moderates and independents.

Polls show voters are already handing her a sympathy vote as the underdog. If she wins even one race decisively, more people might flock to her as a viable alternative. If Trump's convicted of a felony, he might lose a significant block of voters whose litany is, "Anyone but Trump."

Trump is constantly saying Biden is incompetent and that he can't put two sentences together. Perhaps he should let him listen to himself. A lot of what he says makes no sense or he mixes up people like saying "Nikki" was head of security at the Capitol. (He meant Nancy Pelosi, but even that was completely wrong.)

## MENTAL COMPETENCE

There's also the question of Trump's mental competency, not just because of his age, but because of his increasingly erratic behaviour. He's angry at Haley because she hasn't dropped out of the race; the longer she runs, the longer he has to focus on primaries and not on Biden. So when she refused to drop out after New Hampshire, he ranted at his press conference and later on social media. In the past few days, he's mocked Haley's clothes; he's attacked her race (Indian ancestry) and calls her "Nibra" and "Nimbrata" even though she's gone by Nikki her entire life. He refuses to debate her, and he refuses to take any questions at his public appearances.

What if his ego overrides his advisors' and he goes off script at a rally, and begins a nonsensical rant? What if more of his own aides who witnessed his behaviour after the 2020 election appear at rallies? What if prosecutors allege he sold classified documents to our adversaries? What if he is convicted of felonies and sentenced to prison? He might be able to pardon himself for federal crimes, but not state – and he could be convicted for his interference in Georgia. (I hope prosecutor Fani Willis's affair with the independent counsel she appointed does not jeopardise that case.)

There are so many things that could turn public opinion against him that the race shouldn't be declared over this early.

Frankly, I'm conflicted about whether I want Trump to be the nominee. Biden probably has a better chance of beating Trump than Haley because Biden is 81, and Haley is blatantly declaring that both Biden and Trump are too old. On the other hand, if a Republican is going to win, I'd prefer a sane Haley to Trump, who, according to many of his former advisors, is poised to try to become a dictator. They say his plan has always been to never leave the White House if he returns. He didn't even pack up in 2021 until it was clear that the majority of Americans were appalled at his spurring an attack on the Capitol, the symbol of American democracy.

I do think his reelection would be the end of American democracy. I admit that in the past, I've declared that I'm leaving the US if certain people were elected – Trump, Bush, maybe even Reagan. But this time I'm seriously considering becoming an expat if Trump is reelected.

In a perfect world, neither Biden or Trump should be running. They are just too old. I wish Biden had either given Vice President Kamala Harris a bigger role in the administration so she was the heir apparent or at least not run and let the primaries pick a new Democrat like Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. But here we are facing a rematch, and I pray that somehow Biden can win.

I don't need to see Trump naked to know he has no clothes—and should not be emperor.

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Martha Elliott has been a journalist for 45 years and is the author of several books on the US constitution and political process. She has also been active in Democratic politics and was on the board of Democratic Women of Santa Barbara County and works on Democratic campaigns in Maine where she now lives

## Rural community councils are in danger but once represented liberalism in action in the countryside, says Nigel Lindsay

Imagine ... if community politics became so embedded in society that semi-statutory organisations were set up all over England to implement its principles.

It may sound like a dream, but in fact that is more or less what happened in rural areas of England from the 1920s onwards. Starting with Oxfordshire in 1921 and spreading quickly to other Shire counties, Rural Community Councils (RCCs) were established right across the country by the 1950s.

Despite the name, (RCCs) were not local authorities. They were official but independent groups that acted as a bridge between government and local authorities on one hand, and community organisations such as village hall committees, parish councils, playing field committees, and rural housing associations on the other. Their initial aim was to provide a consultative forum in which the statutory authorities and the voluntary organisations could consider matters affecting the county.

This work was generously supported in its early years by the Carnegie UK Trust, which also made grants towards building costs for village halls where possible. Government soon saw that the work was valuable and, before long, funding for RCC core costs was provided by the Development Commission (a quango set up by David Lloyd George in a Liberal Government) and by county councils.

Starting by interpreting the actions of government and voluntary bodies to each other, RCCs grew rapidly; though their work always had a low profile. Often led by Liberals, they concentrated on capacity building and training local leaders to help village communities realise their ambitions. This was complemented by the provision of expert advice services for village halls and parish councils, and in some areas by support and grants for local agricultural businesses and craftsmen.

Work to identify local needs and find local ways of meeting these needs was encouraged. This led to the formation of Old People's Welfare Committees (which grew into today's Age Concern) and the formation of local choirs and drama committees. Other independent organisations that owe their early expansion to RCCs include Citizens Advice, Nature Conservation Trusts and local history groups all over the country.

All of these activities were consistent with the principles of the New Liberalism of the early 20th century, and also with the ideas of community politics that developed in the 1970s. Many of the prime movers in the early years were women with radical ideas, such as Grace Hadow (a suffragist) in Oxfordshire and Flora Murray (a supporter of the Youth Disarmament Crusade) in Lincolnshire.

By the 1980s, if not earlier, many of those involved as trustees and chief executives were well-known Liberals, including Jack Ainslie, Lesley Pinchbeck,

David Clark, Andrew George and myself among others, although we were all scrupulous in keeping party politics out of our work. Andrew went on to become Lib Dem MP for St Ives, while David occupied a senior rôle in the National Council of Social Service (now NCVO).

By the 1990s government spending cuts were hitting rural areas hard, and RCCs turned their attention to assisting local provision of services where government and councils had withdrawn. Small developments of affordable housing in villages up and down the country owe their existence to RCC development work. And local transport initiatives, providing solutions more flexible than traditional bus networks, were also developed.

RCC work was traditionally low-profile, with staff always ensuring that credit for new developments went to local community leaders rather than advertising their own part. This was entirely in line with their philosophy, but it did not serve them well when the need arose to claim a share of diminishing government spending, and visibility became all-important.

Government interest in rural areas was waning fast, with White Papers delayed or abandoned, and the self-inflicted harm of Brexit caused ministers to take their eyes off the road as rural life changed at an ever faster pace around them. RCCs began to seek ways of making their role more visible, and many changed their names to something more eye-catching – Communities Together, Community First, and Community Lincs, among others.

RCCs can be seen as Liberalism in action. They empower communities, thereby providing the context within which individuals can fully realise their own potential. But the withdrawal of government support for core costs has led to difficulties for many RCCs. Kent, Lincolnshire, and Staffordshire have already gone and more may follow unless government priorities change. I was chief executive of Lincolnshire RCC 1988-98, so when I heard in 2021 that Community Lincs had been wound up, it seemed urgent to research and publish its story.

This is the first book to record the work of any RCC. Its title, *Making Happier Places*, is taken from words used by a Lord Lieutenant in the 1950s, who described the work of the RCC as "making the countryside a happier place". I hope it will provoke thought on the value of intermediary organisations such as RCCs, and how they can provide a template for future Liberal action both in the countryside and in towns and cities.

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*Making Happier Places: Rural Community Council work in Lincolnshire 1927 to 2021*, by Nigel Lindsay, is available for £12.50 incl. p&p, from: [Clairefontainebooks@mf.me](mailto:Clairefontainebooks@mf.me)

# HAVE THE POPULISTS TAKEN OVER THE NETHERLANDS?

The Dutch general election gave a strong showing to the far right PVV, but Liberal International bureau member Lennart Salemink explains things are more complex than they seem

It is the 23rd of November and the VVD parliamentary group assembles just after the elections the day before. For the first time since 2010 the VVD is not the biggest party of the Netherlands. Incumbent prime minister Mark Rutte, of the VVD, announced he would not run for re-election as he was already the longest serving prime minister in Dutch history.

The electorate of the Netherlands made a clear choice. The populist right wing party of Geert Wilders won the general elections by a landslide with 37 seats out of 150. The leftwing coalition came second with 25 seats. The VVD came third with 24 MPs, and the Netherlands' other Liberal International member party D66 went down from 23 to nine MPs. Even though the PVV became the biggest party and the VVD came only third, most journalists gathered around the VVD with one simple question. Are you joining a right wing coalition that is preferred by a majority of the voters?

The previous general elections in the Netherlands were only held in 2021. With 34 MPs the VVD managed to gain a fourth consecutive term as largest political force in The Netherlands.

Forming a government however was unusually complicated in 2021. With 299 days it was the longest

government formation in Dutch history, even though the negotiating parties were exactly the same as in the previous government. It was a centrist coalition with the Christian Democrats, Christian Union (both European People's Party), D66 and VVD (both ALDE and RENEW).

The formation of the pre-covid government was shaped by unease over a few wicked problems.

## NITROGEN CRISIS

The nitrogen crisis had a huge impact on Dutch farmers. It started when a Dutch court ruled that the government did not take sufficient measures to protect nature under EU legislation (the birds and habitat directive) because of nitrogen ammonia emissions.

As a consequence, infrastructure and housing projects were halted until emissions were reduced. To lower the emissions main polluters had to shut down. Many of them were farmers, causing massive farmers protests. Earthquakes in the northern province of Groningen because of mining were another long lasting political issue. But also there was a tax scandal that highly affected lower middle incomes, unjustly treating them as fraudsters. It caused major injustice to a significant group of people, comparable to the British Post Office scandal.

The coalition talks are dominated by both possible solutions and a blame game for mistakes made in the past. Pieter Omtzigt (Christian Democrat) left his party after discontent about he was treated by his party and government and formed his own party New Social Contract (NSC). The negotiations were stuck, delaying a new government for months. Eventually the four parties agree on an ambitious government, with a legal proposal



to tackle the main political issues.

In March 2023 the Dutch went to polls to elect new provincial parliaments. All 12 provinces hold elections at the same time. In our constitution the senate is elected by the provincial parliaments.

Different from most other European countries, the Dutch senate has the competence to block all legislation, since laws have to be approved by both chambers of parliament.

This time it is the nitrogen crisis that dominates the campaign. The national government has introduced a major bail out fund for nitrogen polluters, mainly farming companies. This leads to farm protests and the rise of the Farmers Citizen Movement, which won 16 out of 75 senators. The VVD went down from 12 to 10, the Christian Democrats from nine to six, D66 from seven to five and the Christian Union from four to three senators. The governing coalition thereby had no majority in the senate and needs either the Farmers Citizen Movement or leftwing parties for a majority. Christian Democratic leader Wopke Hoekstra (current European commissioner) demands a re-negotiation of the coalition agreement.

In 2023 another wicked problem dominates the political debate. Migration is high in the Netherlands and the government is struggling to accommodate the asylum seekers who arrive. It leads to tragic situations, such as asylum seekers who must sleep outside, just in front of the inadequate housing facilities. Recent projects show that the Dutch population is likely to grow to 22 million (from 17 million now) until 2050 due to migration. The government introduced a law aiming to share the burden of asylum facilities equally throughout the country. Thereby it can force municipalities to host migrants.

The VVD membership, MPs and top-level politicians demanded a lower influx of migrants. Several senior cabinet members of the VVD prepares negotiations for months. On 7 July 2023, the negotiating parties concluded a deal was out of reach. The fourth Rutte government collapsed. Three days later Rutte announced he will not run again. Another few days later Sigrid Kaag, D66 leader, stepped down as well. New elections are planned for 22 November.

At the first glance, the election result of 22 November was a major shift in the Dutch political preferences. The PVV is the biggest party for the first time, New Social Contract made its debut in parliament with 20 MPs and the Christian Democrats had only five MP's left. The Farmers party now has seven MP's. The liberals have lost ground in parliament. The VVD went down from 34 to 24. D66 from 24 to nine.

Beyond any doubt, the Dutch electorate become much more volatile. In one year, two national elections give a very different outcome (senate and parliamentary elections).

Many voters have turned away from governing parties due to concerns over migration, cost of living and geopolitical unrest. NSC and the Farmers Party, the BBB, attracted a significant number of voters

*“Beyond any doubt, the Dutch electorate become much more volatile. In one year, two national elections give a very different outcome”*

(and politicians) who were centrist and Christian Democratic before.

The main difference is that the PVV is now the largest party. They became that by pledging they will drop their most radical policy proposals on Islam and Europe. Many voters decided to give them a chance to deliver. However, it is not the first time a new and 'populist' party is part of a government. In 2002

the Pim Fortuyn party became part of the coalition with the VVD and Christian Democrats. The PVV was part of a silent support government with the same two parties in 2010, the first Rutte government.

## COALITION COUNTRY

The Netherlands is a coalition country, and it will be impossible for any party to govern alone. A government needs to rely on support in parliament and in the senate to get any legislation done. Traditionally speaking, the largest party will take the initiative to form a new government. At the moment this article is written, four parties are talking the possibilities to form a possible government. The largest party (PVV) under the leadership of Geert Wilders. The new centrist parties NSC and BBB and the VVD.

The VVD has signalled that the election outcome, however, does not make our participation in a new government self-evident. In fact, the VVD does not see government participation as a logical follow up to these election outcomes. It is also not up to the VVD to take the initiative now. But the VVD is willing to enter talks to see what kind of government and government policy would be possible.

During the VVD party convention the core principles of the VVD were underlined once again. A firm commitment to the rule of law and individual freedoms, solid government finances and concrete solutions for economic and migration policies and we will remain an active international player within NATO and the EU.

Government negotiations in the Netherlands may take a few months and is led by former labour minister Plasterk. The VVD did send a formal letter to him with those three guiding principles at the very beginning of the formation process. Given the circumstances with many new parties, it is far from certain if this process will lead to a traditional majority government.

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Lennart Salemink is a bureau member of Liberal International and a VVD candidate for the European Parliament. He is pictured with VVD leader Dilan Yeşilgöz during an online session with party members

# NO MESSAGE TO GET ACROSS

David Grace offers a few ideas for how the Liberal Democrats could answer the question 'what do you stand for', if only they wanted to answer it

With apologies to Marie Lloyd, "We've dillied and dallied, dallied and dillied, lost our way and don't know where to roam. Oh, you can't trust the leaders like the old time Liberals when you can't find your way home."

Back in the 1980s when Liberals still argued loudly about policies there were frequent meetings asking questions like "Where are we now?" By 2010 some had replied with the Orange Book and others by setting up the Social Liberal Forum.

Where were we? In coalition with the Tories of course. Despite strong internal debate it seemed that most of the electorate had decided that Liberal Democrats were sort of Tories Lite, the smile on the face of the tiger. Parliamentary procedures and Clegg's determination to prohibit criticism of the government really left people with no other conclusion.

Naively I hoped that exit from government in 2015 would lead to a revival of debate, to the old ferment of ideas which welcomed me into the party in the 1970s. The Federal Conference Committee is less keen on ferment and some party members never want to hear any ideas they disagree with, as if that would stop the ideas. I'm not saying there aren't some damn good policies. No shortage of them, but do we tell anyone about them? They're usually buried in beta-minus 40-page essays which few members and no journalists ever read.

I hate to ask it but what do the Liberal Democrats stand for? I thought I knew. Maybe you did too. I am fairly certain that most voters don't know the answer. It's no excuse that nobody knows what Labour stands for either. If the only question our ludicrous first-past-the-post system allows voters to answer is "Are you Tory or not?", those who favour the latter will generally vote Labour.

Our party's strategy, if that's the right word, is to hope unhappy Tory voters who would never vote Labour will vote for us. Some may, but many more will just stay at home and some will vote Reform, whose poll rating is close to ours. Yes, we have won four parliamentary by-elections but in the same period from 2019 we have stuck in the polls around 10% and our membership has nearly halved from around 120,000 to just over 60,000.

What was Ed Davey's response to the Guardian letter politely pointing out that we need to do better? Perhaps a meeting with signatories who represented a broad spectrum of the party? Perhaps a relaxed and understanding engagement with the points raised?

No, none of the above. Ed chose instead to dismiss critics as wanting the "comforting luxury" of a "democratic thinktank". So much for the views of experienced campaigners who are so concerned at the state of the party and the deafness of the leadership that we had to resort to the letters page of the Guardian (surely the most gentle and Liberal form of rebellion). Next time I saw the leader on television indulging in the sport of shooting fish in a barrel, i.e. attacking the Tories, the journalist asked what the Liberal Democrats stood for instead. I held my breath

as I waited for the golden moment. Ed chose to shoot some more fish, leaving the viewers no wiser.

Not wishing to be dismissed as a minor dissident luxuriating in the comfort of my thoughts, I do specify that I don't expect our candidates to quote the best bits of John Stuart Mill when on the doorstep. When he himself accepted nomination to become Liberal MP for the City of Westminster, he stipulated that he would do

no canvassing. Somehow I don't think he would have got through our modern approval process.

But I cannot be happy with the mindless slogan we are now landed with: "A Fair Deal". Not bad if you're a supermarket but I thought we were something else. Of course the word 'fair' plays well with focus groups. Everyone likes it, because it means many different things to different people. Is this the gospel which will bring the voters flooding back?

We do want them back, you know. Indeed we want some who have never voted for us yet. Not being the Tories and being "fair" won't do the job. I offer a slogan to bring floating voters home with examples of short, sharp messages for use in leaflets on the top issues of the day as identified by YouGov (see percentage of responses).

*"Our party's strategy, if that's the right word, is to hope unhappy Tory voters who would never vote Labour will vote for us"*

## **THE ECONOMY (52%)**

*Do you think everyone should have enough to buy food and heat their homes ?*

*Come home to the Liberal Democrats !  
We will boost the economy, deliver investment in public services and shift the burden of taxation on to those best able to pay.*

(Actually I made that up because despite being well-informed and checking the party website, I can't find what we're going to do. We better have an answer soon. I don't think the nice Fair Deal words "A fair, prosperous and innovative economy that promotes opportunity and wellbeing" are going to cut it.)

## **HEALTH (45%)**

*Do you want to see a doctor or a dentist when you need to or to have an operation before you get much older ?*

*Come home to the Liberal Democrats !*

*We will give everyone the right to see their GP within seven days or 24 hours if urgent. We will recruit, train and retain more doctors, dentists and nurses.*

## **IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM (37%)**

*Do you want an immigration system which actually works and proper consideration of asylum claims instead of wasting money on Rwanda nonsense and housing the backlog of 175,000 refugees waiting years for an answer ?.*

*Come home to the Liberal Democrats !*

*We will work with other European countries to manage migration from across the sea and will ensure that the Home Office and the Border Service have enough staff to do their jobs.*

(I made that up too because the party doesn't want to talk about it, except to attack the Tories)

## **HOUSING (22%)**

*Do you want your children to be able to buy or rent a house ?*

*Come home to the Liberal Democrats !*

*We are committed to see 380,000 new homes built every year and 150,000 new social homes, such as council housing.*

Environment and Crime follow with 21% each. See what you can do.

I believe 'Come home' is the necessary message but before the general election we better find out where home is.

---

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective

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# ONE TO READ, ONE TO RECYCLE

## Nick Winch reads new books by former Tory ministers Nadine Dorries and Rory Stewart, and finds the latter a worthwhile volume and the former unreadable garbage

It must surely be only a matter of a few months before this nation sees the back of the current Conservative administration, and has there ever been a Government as deserving of such total contempt as this one - which has shown itself to be so morally bankrupt, so lacking in any sense of compassion or concern, so corruptly focused only on its own survival and, above all, so extensively populated by incompetents, the second rate and the fundamentally unpleasant?

When historians look back at the years 2010-23, they will gasp at the mediocrities appointed to high office – can you remember who was the national parks communications officer put in charge of the nation’s spending reviews, the first Lord Chancellor in over 400 years without a law degree, the former fireplace salesman sacked three times from the cabinet and the deputy prime minister during Liz Truss’ premiership? (Answers at bottom of page\*).

### LACK OF TALENT

And, of course, the lack of talent on the Conservative benches is so total that Sunak was not able to find even one person suitable to be foreign secretary – turning instead to a man whose last foray into foreign affairs had been the ill-judged, ill-prepared and ill-fought EU referendum campaign.

But among the list of the depressingly awful Government ministers of the past 13 years, one name stands out – someone whose appointment to the role of Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is proof of the Peter Principle, assuming, of course, that any level of competence had been shown on the way up.

Nadine Dorries’ attempts to privatise Channel 4, driven more by ideological than cultural or commercial considerations, demonstrated a lack of knowledge and a detachment from reality which she has carried forward into her most recent book. (I say recent since she has written over a dozen novels. The first novel received the comments “may it long remain blessed in its singularity” and “the worst novel I’ve read in 10 years”, the vacuous language prompting the Daily Telegraph to run a “Who said this, Nadine Dorries or Father Ted?” quiz.)

Her new book *The Plot* has rightly been described as a truly weird publication. In her role as perhaps Boris Johnson’s most enthusiastic cheerleader, I am sure Boris himself would have preferred a more coherent attempt sympathetically to portray his downfall. As Anthony Seldon wrote in his book on Johnson (reviewed in *Liberator* 417) Johnson was the victim of his own inherent faults. In contrast, Dorries’ quest to

uncover the truth starts with a meeting with a No.10 aide (‘Miss Money Penny’) in an extremely well-known Westminster pub – not where you would logically begin a covert investigation – before moving on to a strange world, sitting in a private room in a private members’ club in Mayfair taking briefings from contacts which she records on an Otter app. In a series of chapters, many of which are for no obvious reason titled after James Bond films (*Skyfall*, *Die Another Day*, *For Your Eyes Only* etc) these briefings are reported virtually verbatim, as Dorries tells of a world where characters are given James Bond nicknames: the principle figure being ‘Dr No’ who has been around Tory Central Office and No 10 for over 40 years – apparently on the party’s payroll, working with others in ‘The Movement’, organising conspiracies to overthrow Conservative leaders dating back to Iain Duncan Smith.

Sunak, Dorries claims, does not do anything without first taking Dr No’s advice – yet he became, she says, immediately vulnerable to The Movement who are plotting to replace him with Kimi Badenoch.

Assuming he exists, Dr No is, of course, not identified although those with knowledge of the Conservative Party hierarchy must presumably be able to work out who he is.

Duncan Smith is, along with Johnson himself, the only person Dorries spoke to whose identity is made public. For the rest, the sources remain anonymous with no evidence of any real attempt to corroborate the information Dorries hears. Strangest of all these sources are, perhaps, ‘Bambi’ and ‘Thumper’ whom Dorries meets in an old vicarage off the M1.

These two elderly Tories pour out allegations about Gove “the backstabber”, Sunak “an empty suit in a boy band”, and many more, while defending Johnson who “fought back against the fists that rained down on him ... they couldn’t control him and so he had to go.”

The writing in the book – and this section is particular – is dire, a parody of the Aga-saga. On ringing Bambi’s doorbell, “a robin, at the sound of the bell, lands on a stone pot to the side of the door, as though awaiting entry itself” but this may be the style of Dorries’ other books.

Unlike a serious chronicler Dorries merely reports what she is told, putting the narratives forward as evidence rather than opinion. That is not to say, of course, that all of the book is based on fantasies and wishful thinking. The Conservative Party is sufficiently rotten that it is conceivable that an MP would engage a prostitute in sex on a billiard table while four of his colleagues watched; that an MP would give a girl a date-rape drug; that shady financial links exist between MPs and the extremely wealthy;

and that in the party, shady figures conspire to bring down leaders. But this is not a book which stands up to scrutiny as a serious examination of the Conservative Party or the process by which Johnson was defenestrated.

Dorries writes that her meeting with Bambi and Thumper “provided me with as much material as I would need to write another book if I so wished.” For all our sakes, please don’t. Such is my devotion to you, dear reader, that I have read all 336 pages of Dorries’ book – time I shall never get back. Please don’t feel the need to read it yourself.

By contrast, Rory Stewart’s book is well worth investigating. For a start, it is well written by a sensitive, knowledgeable and intelligent human being, someone who is therefore out-of-place and ill-fitting in today’s political world in general and the Conservative Party in particular.

Having vaguely considered whether to be an MP – Ashdown had said to him, “For God’s sake, don’t become a Lib Dem, the point is to be a minister. Lib Dems get nothing done” - Stewart saw an article in which David Cameron was calling for people not previously involved in politics to become Members of Parliament.

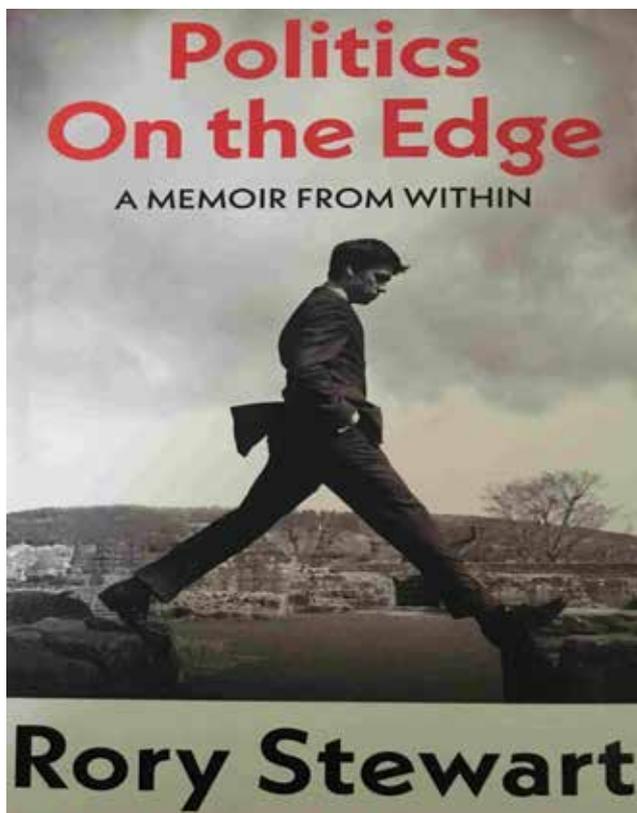
It struck a chord – although Stewart admits to sympathy with many Labour positions, “I was perhaps if not a Conservative, then at least a Tory”. Selected for a rural Cumbrian seat – an area for which he develops a deep affection – he arrives in Parliament determined to do things, in the way he had been able to do as a provincial governor in Iraq.

Politics, failing to recognise the difference between personal ambition and a desire to achieve something, tends to view with scepticism those who appear to be in a hurry and Stewart’s desire, as soon as elected in 2010, to win a place on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee was seen as his “running before he can walk”.

His first years in office left him “contemptuous of what I saw as the superficiality of the leadership”, appalled at “the careless machismo of so many cuts to government spending” and wondering whether to be merely a one-term MP. Disappointed at not being made a minister, he resolved instead to stand as chair of the Defence Select Committee, and while his committee produced reports which illuminated darkly-lit corners and therefore irritated ministers, they were largely ignored by the Government.

## SCLEROTIC NATURE

He was appointed a junior minister after the 2015 election – the first of five ministerial posts in a little over five years. In each he tried to achieve things but was frustrated by the sclerotic nature of government.



Despite promises of an upgrade, the A66 “remained not much wider than when the Roman legions built it as their expressway to Hadrian’s wall”.

He is scathing about Britain’s declining role in the world: in 1995 there were 26 UK-based diplomats in Zambia. By 2017, there were just two – the ambassador and a secretary. In contrast, Germany had over 100 personnel in Zambia in their development agency alone.

At Defra, Liz Truss wanted a 10-point plan for national parks. Rejecting his wish to visit the parks and talk to their heads to find facts and identify proposals, Truss wanted it ready to go “into the Telegraph on Friday”.

Details did not matter – it was only a press release

masquerading as a plan. As prisons minister, he did good work starting to raise staff morals and introduce examples of best practice but – you guessed it – was moved to another department before he could achieve results. And then what do you do with an expert on issues in Asia? You give make him minister for Africa – a continent of which he knew nothing. “A Balliol man in Africa” was what foreign secretary Johnson wanted.

Stewart is particularly scathing about Boris Johnson – an unprincipled charlatan – and following his defeat in the leadership election in 2018 (despite a Cleggmania-like temporary surge in popularity, Stewart was never going to win in a contest where a recognition of reality and an willingness to speak honestly were unacceptable to Tory MPs and members) he had no role to play in the party. Just being a permanent backbench rebel held no appeal. Stewart was always motivated by the desire to do things, to achieve results for honourable reasons: not for him the quick headline and the superficial platitude.

Stewart’s is a wonderfully entertaining book, but a deeply depressing read. It graphically demonstrates everything that is wrong with the short-termism of British government and politics, a world where intellectual rigour is scorned; “Never be interesting” said environment secretary Truss to her then junior Minister. He subtitled his book A Memoir from Within. The sadness is that even if he could ever have been described as “within”, he was never going to be a good fit - and British politics and society are the worse for it.

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The Plot – the political assassination of Boris Johnson by Nadine Dorries Harper and Collins £25

Politics on the Edge by Rory Stewart Jonathan Cape £22

Answers: Danny Alexander, Chris Grayling, Gavin Williamson, Therese Coffey.

Nick Winch is a member of the Liberator Collective

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**BEAM US UP**

*Dear Liberator,*

Thank you for your interesting and informative edition of *Liberator* (420). I was particularly interested in Suzanne Fletcher's article about the need to allow all refugees to vote in UK elections. This cannot come too soon.

One group of UK residents who would benefit are, of course, those who come from Europe, some of whom have been contributing for many years to our economy but unable to vote for those who represent them.

Your article on rejoining the EU, which would help this group, was disappointing to say the least. We are all aware of the difficulties faced by those who are already negotiating and working for closer integration and rejoining the EU. As we move to a new year the last thing we need is to be told is not to expect results any time soon.

The reason that your writer considers there is not enough support in the country for rejoining has a lot to do with the negative slowly, slowly approach of both Labour and our party leadership, so afraid of losing votes at the general election that they seek to play down the obvious need to be an important part of the EU again.

Why no mention of the work of the European Movement and in particular the Our Star Trek visits to cities throughout Great Britain, which are bringing hope to EU supporters? It is our members, often our councillors and MPs, who are leading events which are encouraging people to keep faith in rejoining rather than telling us to just leave it off the agenda until the general election is over.

You may wish to read the impressive annual review just published by the European Movement.

Janet King  
Bromsgrove

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**WATER FALL GUY**

*Dear Liberator,*

While greatly flattered by the mention in *Liberator* 420 following my near-immersive baptism at an Liberal Democrat Christian Forum fringe at party conference, I thought I should write to correct a few

inaccuracies which seem to have crept in (I'm sure entirely innocently).

When approaching Juliet Line at the end of the fringe I didn't apologise and then say I should have let her speak - I apologised for cutting her off because I knew it was a very emotive issue for her, but said I had been given very clear guidance at the start and that was why I had cut her off. I stand by that decision, but clearly as a fellow human who has a heart I wanted to make sure she was OK as she seemed distressed by the decision.

It turns out Juliet hadn't been in the room at the start when I made the point we shouldn't be going into specific cases - and had missed my comment that I serve as an adjudicator and so felt duty bound to be clear on this to stay above reproach, given some of the cases which come before me.

I also should clarify: mercifully it wasn't a glass over my head, it was a bottle over my front. I say mercifully because the top I was wearing was a fabric which doesn't wet easily, so it just flowed straight off onto the floor. Like water off a duck's back, some might say.

For clarity: I've already been baptised by full immersion. I suppose a top-up can't hurt.

Chris Adams

Chair, Liberal Democrat Christian Forum

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**MIND YOUR MANNERS**

*Dear Liberator,*

May I comment on the Lord Bonkers' Diary item (*Liberator* 420) about Restore Trust?

Your diarist shows uninhibited prejudice against Violet Manners and her fellow candidates for the National Trust's council. How come it is unacceptable to malign people due to the colour of their skin, sexual orientation or disability, but quite in order to do so because of their social class?

Restore Trust supporters come from all political parties and none. Its sole objective is to persuade the National Trust to stick to its last, and not go off on wild tangents, which, however laudable, are not part of its brief. Also, the National Trust's AGM was in Swindon, not London.

Patrick Streeter  
London

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**Our Bodies,  
Their Battlefields**  
by Christina Lamb  
William Collins Books  
£10.99

While many war correspondents report on battles or military equipment, Christina Lamb's articles in the Sunday Times often focus on civilians in conflict zones.

In her most recent book, she examines how rape is a weapon of war and its devastating consequences in traditional conservative societies. She interviews survivors in Bangladesh, Bosnia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Argentina, as well as women from persecuted minorities such as the Yazidi (Iraq) and the Rohingya (Myanmar).

Two themes emerge: the first is that victims find no sympathy from their families. They bring shame on their community because they did not resist their rapists to the point of death. A girl is only worthwhile if she has an intact hymen, and a wife is merely property. Once defiled, these survivors are despised. No one in their families has the empathy or imagination to put themselves in the place of a woman, enduring a gang rape, whose natural instinct is to survive.

The other theme is the reluctance of judicial systems to recognise rape as a weapon of war. Thousands of Yazidi women and girls were captured by ISIS, sold many times on Arab and Turkish WhatsApp groups or in Syrian or Iraqi markets, and gang raped continually. Yet Iraqi courts refuse to prosecute ISIS members for rape, saying the victims should be satisfied that jihadists are convicted of terrorism. This denies the victims the recognition that a crime was committed against them, or the possibility of justice. More than 2,000 Yazidi women remain in slavery in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, but nothing is done to free them, although their whereabouts are known by the authorities.

Judges often reverse a rape conviction on appeal for technical reasons, not caring about the devastating impact on the brave witnesses who defied cultural norms to testify. Judges in Rwanda openly laughed at victims' stories, and even ICC staff shrugged off the



# REVIEWS

idea of prosecuting because "there was no crime against humanity."

The hardest chapter deals with the continuing mass rape of babies, children and women in the Congo. Nobel laureate Denis Mukwege heroically repairs broken bodies despite threats from the corrupt DRC regime, the militias and government soldiers responsible for the violence.

War lords wishing to clear a village so they can mine coltan (for your mobile phone) rape their victims in public, instilling terror and causing hundreds of thousands to flee. But there is also a culture that perpetuates the belief that illness such as HIV can be cured by raping an infant.

A member of the provincial parliament in DRC raped 48 babies. His supporters collected the blood believing it would protect them in battles. When parents complained to the police, the parents were arrested. The West has too much vested in sourcing of minerals to put any pressure on the DRC regime, accepting blatantly false election results in a recent presidential election.

In the UK, only 3.3% of rape reports result in conviction, so we have no grounds to feel smug. Besides the brave women prepared to talk to Lamb, and to make a fuss, knowing they will face appalling treatment, an unlikely hero emerges: William Hague.

He was the first foreign minister to suggest that sexual violence deserved attention. He convened a four-day conference in London which raised the profile and fostered solidarity among participants from around the globe. His efforts ten years ago were allowed to wither.

Lamb continues her important work, investigating the systematic castration of Ukrainian soldiers by Russians who have been trained to brutalise them.

Rebecca Tinsley

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## **Can Parliament Take back Control? Britain's Elective Dictatorship in the Johnson Aftermath** by Nick Harvey & Paul Tyler **Real Press/Radix Big Tent/The Democracy Network**

As this wretched right wing rump of the Tory party continues to attempt to run a government, the appalling Rwanda Bill trundles on like the walking dead as Sunak threatens the Lords not to go against the will of the people. The will of the people? It is not even the will of the Parliamentary Tory Party. Before Sunak we can all remember Boris's hideous attempt to prorogue Parliament; May's try on to initiate the Brexit process without reference to Parliament. The list goes on.

It is against this depressing background that two fine former Liberal Democrat parliamentarians have together written a book that asks the question Can Parliament take back control?

Both authors, Nick Harvey and Paul Tyler, have a wealth of Parliamentary experience between them. Both were elected in 1992, Harvey for North Devon and Tyler for North Cornwall. Previously Tyler was elected in 1974 and served between that year's two general elections as MP for Bodmin, and later served in the Lords from 2005-21.

Nick was a one of four Lib Dems in the Cook-Maclennan talks before the 1997 general election which agreed with Labour a programme of constitutional reforms for the following Parliament when Nick was the Lib Dem spokesman on constitutional reform.

Paul was Lib Dem constitutional reform spokesman in both the Commons from 2001-05 and the Lords from 2005-21.

They pose a big question. Parliament is clearly not in control as we now live in, as Lord Hailsham put it in his 1976 Dimbleby Lecture, an elective dictatorship where the government controls Parliament whereas the Government, the executive, should be answerable to the legislature, Parliament. The authors have included in an appendix the full text of Hailsham's lecture which called for reforms still to realised.

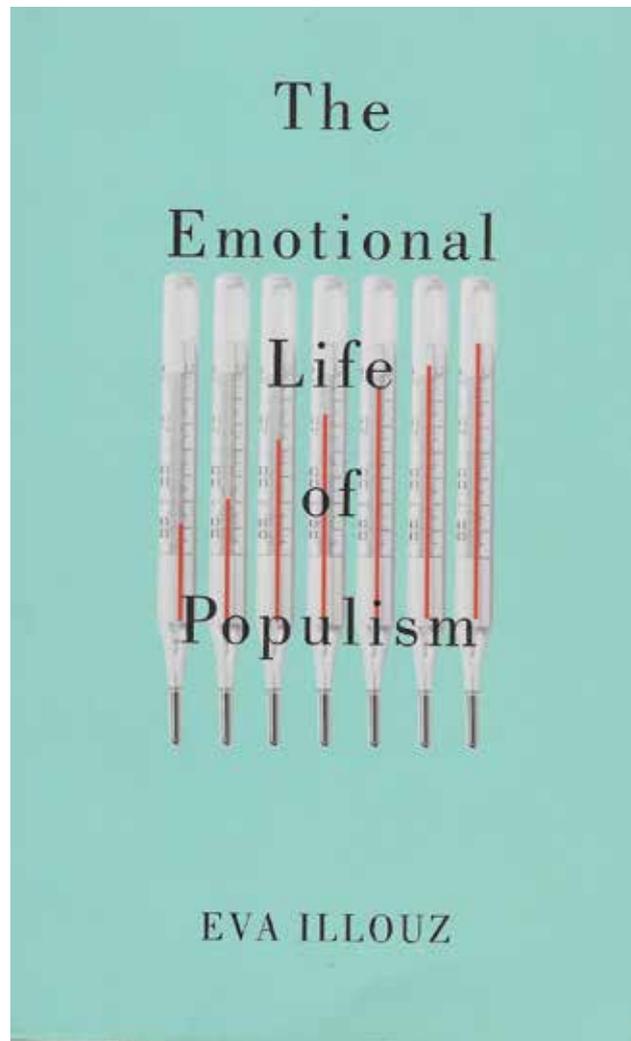
The book, small but perfectly formed, sets out the huge task ahead for any reforming government in only 122 pages.

A huge task, given that an incoming government will also have to start to clear up the unholy mess the Tories have made. Public services smashed to pieces in the name of tax cuts, a cost of living crisis etc. The authors set out the state of things. A broken system of government, the dubious electoral laws, the mess which is political party funding; a Parliament in dire need of setting its own agenda and timetable as the European Parliament does. The list goes on, the strengthening of parliamentary committees to include a criminal offence of contempt of parliament with fines, and the authors add rather marvellously, ultimately detention in the Tower of London! Pause for a moment to list all those one could send to the Tower.

Like everything the ministerial code needs strengthening to say the least. The authors remind the reader the ministerial code is published at the start of every administration with each new prime minister setting out their personal thoughts by penning an introductory forward to the Code.

In August 2019 just after taking office Boris Johnson, presumably with a straight face started his introduction as follows:

"We must uphold the very highest standards of propriety..." Later in his introduction he wrote: "The precious principles of public life enshrined in this document – integrity, objectivity, accountability, transparency, honesty and leadership in the



public interest must be honoured at all times".

The concern must be whether any of the urgent suggestions for reform set out in this book will see the light of day.

They must do. This book deserves to be widely read and used as reference tool for everyone interested in, and campaigning for constitutional reform so urgently needed. A need that is made more vital every day this current government remains in power.

Peter Johnson

## **Drop the Dead Donkey: the Reawakening [play] Richmond Theatre by Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin**

Did Princess Anne ever defecate on the steps of the Cenotaph? If one watched the (fortunately imaginary) Truth News channel this kind of story would have appeared as deepfakes and a dictatorial algorithm add to the chaos of the newsroom

Drop the Dead Donkey originally

ran as a television sitcom in the early 1990s and started as a vehicle for topical satire but quickly morphed into a character comedy based on the personalities staffing the little-watched Globe Link News.

Bringing it back on stage 30 years later with all the living members of the original cast had obvious risks - can they still do it and will the audience inevitably measure it against their memories of the early 1990s?

It all works. The team has been secretly recruited by managementspeak-spouting boss Gus Hedges to a new news channel with mysterious backers (who turn out to be North Korean).

Hedges was hopelessly unable to manage a news operation 30 years ago and can now even less do so as he is both infatuated with digital technology yet utterly ignorant of how it works.

This does give a serious undertow on occasions as the characters debate the nature of truth in news and whether

it matters if television news is true or just invents tales to chase the ratings.

But this play is not the place for a debate on the nature of television news, let alone on the meaning of truth.

Jokes come thick and fast, mostly the sharp cynical one-liners in which the old TV series excelled, but also with set pieces in which a talking coffee machine persecutes George, a (filmed) Sir Trevor McDonald is electrocuted live on air on Truth's debut night and Sir David Attenborough is publicly accused of an over-familiarity with animals.

The characters have stayed intact too although Dave is now allegedly a reformed drunkard, gambler and womaniser, Damian pretends to be confined to a wheelchair to milk sympathy and Joy is - alarmingly - head of human resources.

It's great fun, and just as the original series turned on the tensions of trying to run Globe Link as a serious news operation while chasing ratings on paltry resources and with feuding staff, so Truth News 30 years later has

the same problems magnified and complicated by the digital world.  
Mark Smulian

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**The Emotional Life of Populism, how fear, disgust, resentment and love undermine democracy**  
by Eva Illouz  
with Avital Sicron  
Polity Press 2023

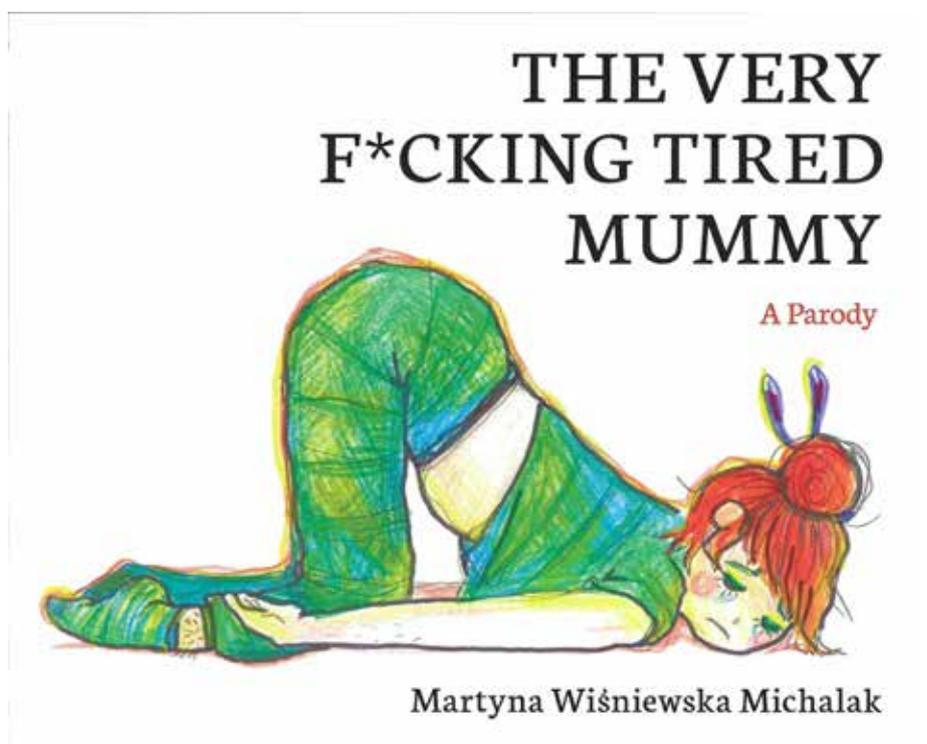
This book had its genesis well before 7 October 2023, indeed it was researched and written long before the Israeli constitutional crisis of March 2023 onwards. It is a horror story, which while one never takes sociology to be a neutral study, goes a long way to explain the present situation in Israel.

I wish someone with more knowledge of the country had come forward to review it; I haven't been there for nearly 40 years. That is also roughly the length of time that Likud has been the natural party of government in Israel, usually in coalition with various parties further to the right often representing religious minorities.

I have, over the years, made myself unpopular in trying to explain the demographic make up of Israel and its impact on the country's policies.

While we in the west tend to associate the creation of Israel with the Nazi Holocaust, there was another holocaust when very long-established Jewish communities were persecuted and unrooted from Arab countries in response to that creation and the Nakba.

These refugees from Iraq, Morocco, Yemen and elsewhere were largely Sephardic Jews, the Mizrahim, and were despised by the largely Ashkenazi Jewish elites who were the engine of the creation of the state of Israel. I hadn't particularly been aware of this, since my East End impression among Jewish friends was that the Sephardi tended to be the toffs (coming primarily from Spain and Portugal, centuries ago). I had been aware that there were Jewish groups that tended to be looked down on in Israel (those pre-dating the Zionist colonisation for example). One might have extrapolated an orientalism in that



with more thought.

So, without going beyond the last 90 years (where Illouz and others will find it institutionalised) you have fear, and in terms of the Mizrahim, fear of Arabs. From fear it is easy to move on to disgust, particularly of a conquered people, who, let alone the circumstances that many of them live in (Gaza was a shit-hole before 7 October), have their own culture and habits. The resentment might come from the underdog fighting back and also be directed to those who defend or seek to ameliorate that fight back, likely to be from a more privileged background, another cause for resentment.

Although their parties have held (and manipulated) the reins of power for the last 40 years, there is a lingering (cultivated) sense of victimhood. Populist politicians like Netanyahu, Trump, Farage, exploit that sense of victimhood – their own 'victimisation' by liberal elites extrapolated to their supporters. The paradox is that the policies promoted by these politicians often most hurt those who support them; the retreat from a welfare state to neoliberalism has largely been under Likud-led governments.

I've skipped patriotism, not necessarily a problem, an obvious need in the context of Israel, but Illouz outlines its manipulation, particularly by the religious right, whereon it becomes dangerous. All of this paints a very disappointing view of Israeli society. Does the

work resound beyond Israel's borders? Whilst much of the analysis is Israel, there are elements do have a wider play and need to be challenged.

Eva Illouz holds the Rose Isaac chair of sociology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and helped write and co-signed the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism [<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>] in response to the controversial working definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

Stewart Rayment

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**Enough**  
by Cassidy Hutchinson  
Simon & Schuster 2023  
£20.00

Sometimes the little people make the best witnesses. They're the ones you don't normally notice because they're in the background, just doing their jobs. Always there but inconspicuous. The Miss Marples of the story.

Enough is the account of one such person, Cassidy Hutchinson, a special assistant to President Trump and his chief of staff Mark Meadows.

She tells of her working-class background in a Republican family, her rise from summer intern to assistant to Meadows and close to the Oval Office in the White House. She was well organised and efficient, and had a way of chatting

with people, putting them at their ease, quickly getting on a first-name basis with other aides and even with Meadows.

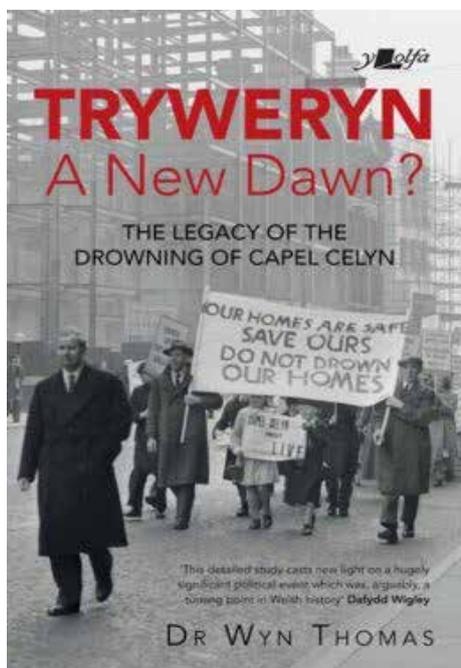
In Washington DC, the 6 January committee into former President Donald Trump's actions on that day in 2021 called many witnesses to testify. There were the police, the front line against the savage attack on the Capitol: several of them lost their lives as a result of that day, and many are still disabled. One of them, Michael Fanone, was beaten and tased: he had a heart attack and brain injury, surviving only because he managed to blurt out "I have kids."

Election workers in states that went for Biden were persecuted: Ruby Freeman and her daughter Shay Moss spoke of how, after being falsely denounced for election fraud by Rudy Giuliani, Trump's attorney, they were afraid to leave their homes. They received expletive-laden racist attacks from people who said they should be hanged for treason. This is the background to Hutchinson's decision to testify.

A young woman in her mid-twenties, she was the surprise witness, her identity kept secret until she appeared. Nobody outside the Capitol knew her name before she walked into the committee room.

Hutchinson had worked as an intern and later a special assistant in the White House, gradually assuming a dizzying array of duties, many of them assisting Meadows, who was closest to President Trump. She was a natural at this - she learned names and faces with ease, remembered birthdays, anticipated problems before they developed.

The book and Hutchinson's revelations about Trump's behaviour on 6 January would not have happened but for lawyers who agreed to work pro bono for her. After her job with the Trump administration ended, Hutchinson had nothing to live on but her meagre savings: she couldn't pay her rent, and she had no family members who would help. So when she received a subpoena and had to testify, she needed an attorney. The Trump organisation supplied one, Stefan, who told her "Just say you can't recall." And she did say that, for the first series of interviews, until her conscience



started to nag at her.

Dozens of calls to law firms later, she finally found Alston & Bird, and unlike the attorney who'd required a six-figure retainer before he'd represent her, the lawyers there agreed to work pro bono.

Her televised testimony before the committee gave us unforgettable images and moments in a presidency that many would like to forget: the ketchup dripping down the wall after Trump had hurled plates during one of his rages, when the news wasn't to his liking, the Covid mask stained with his orange-hued facial makeup - "bronzer" - that would stop Trump from wearing a mask in public. The president shouting that security should remove the metal detectors on 6 January, because, as he said of the mob, "They're not here to hurt me."

Trump's grabbing at the throat of the driver who refused to take him to the Capitol on 6 January, and his settling in for an afternoon of watching the riot on television as if it were entertainment, ignoring for hours the aides and family members who pleaded with him to put a stop to it.

Enough offers a valuable perspective into the Trump administration. It would be easier to use with an index and a glossary - I found myself wondering at times who various officials and aides, identified usually by their first names, were - but it gives us the point of view of an insider who for most of her time there didn't question anything she saw.

She was inspired by the examples of Liz Cheney, a leading Republican who lost her seat in Congress for opposing Trump, and decades before her, Alex Butterfield, whose mention of Nixon's secret tapes led to that president's resignation. The events of 6 January made her realise finally that her boss's outbursts, his "volcanic temper and egotism" had motivated the mob that attacked the Capitol with the goal of overturning the election no matter what, even if killing Vice President Mike Pence might be part of the process. With her knowledge of just how dangerous supporters of the Trump cult can be, Hutchinson's decision to speak out when so many seasoned Republican politicians remain silent tells us something about her character.

Christine Graf

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## 1979 [play] by Michael Healey Finborough Theatre London

Who is Joe Clark? I guess Canadians will know that he led a short lived minority Progressive Conservative Party government in 1979 only to fail to get his budget through parliament and then lose the subsequent general election to the Liberal Pierre Trudeau, who returned to power after this brief intermission.

Not perhaps the most obvious subject matter for a fringe play staged in London 45 years later, since only those most deeply interested in Canadian politics are likely now to care about Clark.

This means there is frequent use of projected information to read about who was who, the previous general election results, the back story of other politicians and so forth.

Clark is portrayed as an idealist determined on his own course but who cannot get his budget through in the absence of a majority and refuses to compromise on anything to give it a chance.

Colleagues implore him to delay the vote and cut some deals, but he won't and insists on going ahead even though he knows he will lose, mistakenly confident that he will win the subsequent general election.

Although the projected information explains a lot it is not entirely clear what it is about the budget that is so fundamental to Clark or why it is controversial.

Of course 1979 was also a significant year in British politics and there is a long (and presumably imagined) scene between Clark and a young Stephen Harper - who was to become Conservative prime minister 25 years later - who lectures Clark on how he thinks Margaret Thatcher understands the difference between policy and politics and on how Clark could also lead a 'Conservative revolution' like hers if he chose to.

Clark appears uninterested in this and his political motivations remain hazy beyond a vague commitment to 'doing the right thing'.

The story is told by three actors, with the other two playing all the non-Clark roles. It's clever in the way this gives Clark multiple people with whom to discuss his troubles around the budget and political goals and outlook, and it's overall an interesting study of how backroom politics can work.

Mark Smulian

leader Clement Davies called it a "monstrous proposal" that would destroy a living community. The only Welsh MP who did not vote against the bill was David Llewellyn (Conservative, Cardiff North), who abstained.

Wyn Thomas has family connections with English water supply from Wales. As a young copper, his father regularly patrolled the Cym Elan pipeline, and his grandparent's farm felt under threat. Gwynfor Evans, who would become Plaid Cymru's first MP, was involved in the campaign against the reservoir, which was a seminal moment in the rise of Welsh nationalism.

Multi-talented, Wyn also has a newly-released album, Orion's Belt.

<https://drwynthomas.com/> <https://www.facebook.com/wyn.thomas.319>

<https://wynthomas.bandcamp.com/album/orions-belt>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOMODcqb9XY&t=18s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uKIkGwiFc0w>

Stewart Rayment

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## **Tryweryn: A New Dawn?** **by Wyn Thomas** **Y Lolfa 2023 £19.99**

In 1957, the Labour-run Liverpool City Council sponsored a private bill in Parliament for a reservoir in the Afon Tryweryn valley in north Wales. By so doing, they circumvented local planning consent and avoided the risk of a public enquiry. Welsh opposition was almost unanimous but to no avail. The village of Capel Celyn was flooded and its community dispersed. For what its worth, the Liberal Democrat-run Liverpool City Council issued a formal apology in 2005, but not for flooding the valley.

Roderic Bowen, the Liberal MP for Cardiganshire, was a prominent opponent of the bill. He argued in the House that it was an infringement of Welsh national rights and a violation of the principle of local government. He also criticised the lack of compensation for the displaced residents and the destruction of their cultural heritage. Liberal

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## **The Very F\*cking Tired Mummy** **a parody by Martyna Wisniewska Michalak** **Unbound 2023 £9.99**

Eric Carle's brilliant *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* first arched into our attention in 1969. Translated into at least 60 languages, including Polish, *Bardzo glodna g?sienica*; it has sold more than 50 million copies. To my mind, it is not unreasonable to speculate that every child born in the UK at least, will have loved the book at some time.

Martyna's book is also brilliant and is something every mummy, like her will empathise with; buy it for her and make her laugh.

My only criticism is the expletive. Although an exponent of foul-mouthed radicalism in the council chamber (it really gets into those middle-class wankers in the Labour party, try it), I made Herculean efforts to stop swearing when children arrived; teenagers, they now swear like troopers of course. So, when you are reading the book

to children you may want to edit in places.

Unbound's books are crowd-funded. Order it from your local independent bookseller, it could do rather well for them in the Christmas season.

Stewart Rayment

## Monday

These days I feel a little nervous opening my morning newspaper in case Ed Davey has called on me to resign. It's a particular hobby of his, you see. While leader of the Liberal Democrats, he has, with mixed effect, called for the resignations of, amongst other, Boris Johnson, Kwasi Kwarteng, Cressida Dick, Dominic Cummings, Chris Grayling, Priti Patel, Mark Field, Rishi Sunak, the former BBC chairman Richard Sharp, the board of Thames Water, Mauricio Pochettino, Nigella Lawson, Benedict Cumberbatch, Fatima Whitbread, Kirsty Wark, Kirsty Young, Jonny Bairstow, Rosie Holt, the late Dame Anna Neagle, the Rutland Water Monster and the Dalai Lama. Though he did score a bullseye with Margrethe II of Denmark the other week, I draft a memorandum this afternoon that advises him to knock these calls for resignation on the head and talk instead about the need for closer economic relations with our friends in Europe.

## Tuesday

I was watching a Look at Life short about the Malayan Emergency on Talking Pictures TV when who should pop up as the Lieutenant in charge of a jungle patrol in Sarawak but a Jeremy Ashdown from Somerset? That's right, our own Paddy Ashplant – the finest leader the Liberal Democrats ever had. The film mentioned the splendid Dayaks, who only a few years before had been “unrepentant headhunters” but now supplied officers to the Sarawak Rangers – not a football team, but a feared regiment of the British Army. I met some of these fellows after Ashplant brought them back to Somerset following his adoption as PPC for Yeovil. By then, they could most fairly be described as “repentant headhunters”: they still lopped fellows' heads off but were Terribly Sorry about it afterwards. I never did find out how Ashplant won some of those early South Somerset District Council by-elections, and I'm inclined to think that is just as well.

## Wednesday

This modern habit of giving storms names does not appear well advised to me: it Gives Them Ideas. The last one that passed over Rutland did more damage to my woodlands than Mr Gladstone with his dander up. If they ever name one after the first Lady Bonkers, it really will be a signal to batten down the hatches.

## Thursday

Did you see Mr Bates vs The Post Office? It shocked me, I will confess. If they can get away with treating Toby Jones like that, is any of us safe? In London on business this afternoon, I make time to beard Davey in his Westminster Office. “Don't you think you should say you're sorry?” I ask him. “It's not as if anyone thinks it's all your fault.” “It's Freddie and Fiona,” he explains. “They won't let me.” “Then you'd better find yourself some better advisers,” I return. “I have to tell you that it went down very badly in the village when Mr Patel was dragged off to gaol.” On the journey back to Rutland, I reflect on our strange way of always blaming a leader's advisers rather than the leader himself. Parliament was saying Charles I was poorly advised right up to the day they cut his head off.

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

## Friday

I watch the aforementioned Talking Pictures TV from time to time in the hope of catching one of my own Rutland Studios productions. They were, if I say it myself, made in full knowledge of the latest developments in Continental cinema – “if not nouvelle then certainly vague,” as one critic put it. Films I remember with particular affection include I'm a Jihadi, Daddy, an examination of terrorism in the Middle East starring Helen Shapiro, Acker Bilk

and Kenny Ball and his Jazzmen. Then there was I'm a Spad, Dad, a tale of romance at Westminster across party lines; Carry On Chamberlain, a cheeky comedy about the travails of chief whip trying to whip her colleagues into shape; and Ice Cold in Oakham, a wartime adventure set in the deserts of Southern Rutland. Really the lengths some people will go to for a pint of that gassy Dahrendorf lager.

## Saturday

As ever, Christmas here at the Hall was a highlight of my year. The swelling of our parliamentary party through by-election victories saw some new faces around the table – I was, for instance, able to enjoy a valuable conversation with Sarah Dyke about the latest approaches to liver fluke. Yet, by the Library fire that evening, I could not help but think of past Christmases and old friends. Of how John Pardoe would come down from Cambridge to tell me all the bright young things in the Footlights were impersonating Selwyn Lloyd that year. Of how the Flying Belotti Brothers would entertain the village folk by throwing each other from trapeze to trapeze (and very often catching each other too – certainly, they flew through the air with the greatest of ease). Of Sugar Ray Michie, the best fighter, pound for pound, that the Parliamentary Party has ever produced. Of Geraint Howells – ‘The Big Friendly Geraint’ to all – and his delightful speckle-faced sheep, who were always happy to swell the numbers if a party committee threatened to be inqurate. Of Dutch Mulholland and all the other of 2015. Let us hope this year's election gives me more such endearing characters to write about.

## Sunday

You find me in the state sett of the King of the Badgers. Time was, I would have brought a bottle of Auld Johnston, that most prized of Highland malts, with me, but the Dowager's rosehip vodka blows a fellow's socks off (whether he is wearing sock suspenders or not). The King is in a dark mood: “I hear that Jeremy Corbyn has called for peace talks between the badgers and the gunmen who are culling us. I expect his followers think this makes him a saint. If there are talks, I know what will happen. In one year or perhaps two, the gunmen will turn their attentions to the foxes or the weasels. Then Corbyn will call for peace talks between them, and his followers will think that makes him even more of a saint.” Though the King is careful to keep the hotheads among the younger badgers in check, he has no intention of abandoning his guerilla campaign against the cullers. It happens that his mother's rosehip vodka makes an excellent Molotov cocktail.

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