

liberator



- 🎧 Caught in a Kyiv air raid - Sarah Green MP
- 🎧 How to find a leader - Liz Barker
- 🎧 What on Earth happened in Rochdale - Jackie Pearcey

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THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE

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LIBERATOR

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welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

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CONTENTS

Commentary 3

Radical Bulletin..... 4..7

WHY PUTIN CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO WIN.. 7..9
Lib Dem MP Sarah Green joined a parliamentary delegation to Ukraine and saw a country still determined to resist a tyrant with whom negotiation is impossible

UKRAINE RESISTS - WITH SOME HELP FROM SHAKESPEARE..... 10..11
Nataliya Torkut is Ukraine's leading expert on Shakespeare and a professor at Zaporizhzhia National University. She was interviewed by Kiron Reid about Ukraine's continued resistance to Russia and the role in this of intellectual life

HOW TO LOOK FOR THE NEXT LEADER..... 12..13
With no Lib Dem leadership contest due, Liz Barker looks to the long term of how the party should choose its next leader

THE NORTH IS RED - AT LEAST FOR NOW 14..15
The Rochdale by-election showed the realities of fighting Labour where it is entrenched in its heartlands, even with the unusual circumstances of disowned candidates, says Jackie Pearcey

DOES A DECADE MAKE A DIFFERENCE? 16..17
It's 10 years since the death of Liberator stalwart Simon Titley. Jonathan Calder delivers into his writing and finds it alarmingly relevant today

TRAFFIC IN A JAM 18
Mark Smulian looks at why councils' installation of low traffic neighbourhoods can cause such rancour

LETTERS..... 19

REVIEWS 20..21

Lord Benkers22

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Pages 10-11 Kiron Reid
Pages 14-15 Iain Donaldson

COMMENTARY

KEEP THE FAITH WITH UKRAINE

Liberator Collective members Sarah Green and Kiron Reid bring different perspectives on the war in Ukraine in this issue. It is now more than two years since most people thought the Russians would quickly overwhelm Ukraine but the conflict has instead settled into something like the first world war, with both sides dug in and making sporadic advances and retreats without, at least at the time of writing, anything decisive happening.

This is one of those wars (unlike, say, the horrific civil war in Sudan) where it is clear which side a liberal should support.

It is also a war where it is hard to see how it ends. A victorious Vladimir Putin would pose a danger to the EU democracies along Russia's borders, but a defeated and humiliated Putin might also lash out in dangerous ways.

Since it is hard to imagine the Ukrainians marching on Moscow, a Russian rout is unlikely. It is regrettably possible that the Russians could march on Kyiv but if they did they would take control of a ruined country whose population hates them and would doubtless engage on fierce guerrilla resistance, tying down Russian forces for years and costing vast sums.

Most wars either drift into a stalemate with occasional flare-ups or end by negotiation. More rarely one side delivers a knock-out blow, as happened in world war 2.

Since Putin shows no inclination to negotiate and the Ukrainians are having little success in removing the Russians from occupied areas of their country, this war seems headed to stalemate.

The danger then - quite apart from the unpredictable possibilities of a second Trump presidency - is that the west simply becomes bored with the whole thing.

Western governments may start to see themselves as paying for a costly war in which little appears to happen and find their electorates - after the first outpouring of support for Ukraine and help for its people - have moved their attention elsewhere to domestic matters, or indeed to Gaza.

If western support falters the Ukrainians may be unable to keep up the fight, which might not mean a complete Russian occupation but enough Russian success to force humiliating terms on Ukraine with a pro-Putin puppet government installed.

It is possible there could be a negotiated settlement with Russia keeping some of the mainly Russian-speaking regions it had occupied but it is hard to see what would bring Putin to a negotiating table or whether he could be trusted to abide by any agreements reached.

The other possibility is change in Moscow, but given Russia's dictatorial government and opaque politics it seems unwise to count on that.

Even if the best the west can do is continue to arm and support the Ukrainians to keep them in the battle it should still do that, because losing interest and withholding support will produce even worse consequences if Putin were to win.

EUROPE AS A POSITIVE?

Has Ed Davey finally ended his vow of silence on Europe? Possibly either pressure within the party - or the realisation that most constituencies that can potentially be gained voted Remain - has driven a greater emphasis.

Davey had in recent years avoided the subject of Europe so thoroughly that it led to media comment about what he hadn't said rather than what he had.

The party's position on Europe was buried in four points plans and had been seldom mentioned.

But at spring conference in York Davey said: "And there's something else we can't afford not to tackle head-on... Even if the other parties think it's too difficult or too politically uncomfortable... Fixing our broken relationship with Europe.

"Ending the destructive cycle of conflict and confrontation the Conservatives have plunged us into with our nearest neighbours and biggest trading partners. Ripping up the pointless red tape the Conservatives have inflicted, to free British businesses and bring down prices in the supermarket. Tearing down trade barriers so our farmers and fishing communities can sell more of their produce in the EU again.

"Leave it to the others just to fiddle around with the fineprint of a bad deal we all know can't be fixed. Only Liberal Democrats have a clear plan to rebuild this relationship with a better deal for Britain. To renew the ties of trust and friendship, to set us on the path back to the Single Market."

Worth quoting in full as this goes further, at least in emphasis, than he has gone before.

Might there also be a dawning realisation that offending Leave voters doesn't much matter even in Tory marginals, as those prepared to switch to the Lib Dems are either so disgusted with the Tories that they will switch anyway, or were Remain supporters, or are Leave supporters who can see how badly wrong Brexit has gone. The most fundamentalist Leave supporters are never going to vote Lib Dem and seeking to appeal to them is pointless. There are however ample reasons to remind Remain supporters which party they should support.

RADICAL BULLETIN

PRIMARY COLOURS

It is rare for any local newspaper to hail a Lib Dem prospective parliamentary candidate as 'the people's champion' but former MEP Carol Voaden won that accolade after winning a primary election held in South Devon to choose a frontrunner non-Tory candidate.

Sources in the constituency say winning the primary - admittedly with only the Green candidate otherwise taking part, Labour being yet to select - brought Voaden a lot of goodwill locally as it appeared to be an endorsement from a neutral source.

Others were less impressed, leading to a trenchant email to local parties from English party chair Alison Rouse that threatened dire penalties for anyone who took part in such a primary including "having their approved status rescinded and the withdrawal of party support and resources".

The primary was organised by something called Political Primary Network, which appears to have its origins in South Devon and now wants to use the model elsewhere.

Under this, any elector who feels inclined turns up to a public meeting, hears from those non-Tory candidates who choose to take part and then votes on who is best-placed to beat the Conservatives. Those not chosen are expected to become paper candidates, though not to stand down.

Because the idea originated in the constituency, Voaden was under some local pressure to take part; in any event it has been public knowledge - presumably also to Lib Dem HQ and the English party - for a year that she intended to join in.

Party HQ though saw dangers in this model spreading, with second placed Lib Dem candidates finding themselves relegated behind Labour ones - or even Greens - just because supporters of another party chose to pack some public meetings.

There were also claimed to be complicated election expense implications if an external organisation helped a party's campaign. Others though argued that the only people in the firing line would be Voaden and her agent, who could take that risk if they chose, and the party itself would not be in danger.

This meant that during last year, party president Mark Pack, campaigns head Dave McCobb and others sought to get Voaden to pull out of the primary and in January HQ gained the impression that she would.

When Voaden then went ahead it provoked Rouse's letter, other choice extracts from which said: "Under no circumstances are you to take part. Taking part brings substantial problems with expenses, PPERA and other legal aspects which the organisers have not taken fully into account" and "This matter has been discussed with the Director of Campaigns, the Head of Compliance and Legal, the Party President, and the

Leader's Office. There is unanimous agreement that the Liberal Democrats must not be involved in any way with the Political Primary Network."

A group of English Council members was sufficiently affronted by the tone of this missive that they tabled in effect a censure motion.

This said: "All our candidates and local party volunteers deserve to be treated with respect and not subjected to threats of deselection or withdrawal of support without reasonable advance notice of a clear party policy position and an opportunity to make their case."

It added that a substitute letter should say: "The English party would only consider the exercise of its power to remove a candidate from the approved list following due consideration of the actual local circumstances and provided that a candidate had been given reasonable notice (i.e. at least 7 days) prior to the start of any set of any primary hustings in their constituency." That was lost 2:1 after some heavy warnings about expenses issues.

With Voaden being locally hailed as the victor of the primary it became hard for the party to de-select her, but attempts are likely to stop primaries spreading.

Meanwhile a further complication in the area has come from Julian Brazil, the Lib Dem leader of South Hams council, which covers part of the South Devon seat. Brazil has complained in the local press that he has been "stabbed in the back" by colleagues after being ousted from the Lib Dem group leadership role on Devon County Council. He hinted he might stand as an independent for Devon in 2025. That would make his role at South Hams a bit awkward but one local source told *Liberator* that Brazil's defection seemed unlikely.

GREEN, RED, AMBER

The formidable figure of English Candidates Committee chair Margaret Joachim is rarely associated with sudden rushes of blood to the head, but that appeared to be what happened after Labour disowned its Rochdale by-election candidate on grounds of anti-Semitism, provoking a baffling series of messages to Lib Dem activists.

Joachim sent out an email headed "urgent message from the chair of the English Candidates Committee" in which she urged all hands to the Rochdale pump as the seat now offered "the chance to do something extraordinary" and "just think how a win will help our campaign in the local and the general election whenever that may be."

Less than an hour later, bemused recipients got an email from the Rochdale candidate Iain Donaldson (though appearing to in fact emanate from the campaigns department) telling people to do nothing of the kind but to stick to an agreed strategy where those

working in target seats would stay in them.

That was rapidly followed by an email from Rochdale council group leader Andy Kelly which said those without pressing demands elsewhere should come and help Rochdale.

A message then went out from Baroness Pinnock, chair of the Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee, which said “some members” - though without specifying who - were “getting rather carried away” and that both Donaldson and campaigns head Dave McCobb agreed there was not the capacity to suddenly scale up a campaign that had barely 100 voter contacts at that point.

Meanwhile, the Greens had also disowned their candidate Guy Otten for tweets from some years ago that that party interpreted as anti-Muslim.

The offending tweets are understood to date from when Otten was a Lib Dem member, and he and the party had duly parted company in a process that became public knowledge in the north-west and so rather spurs the question of why the Greens adopted him in first place?

Donaldson says he agreed to stand only as more or less a paper candidate but helping with activity in some targets wards, and duly did just that.

He did however have the chance to take on George Galloway at the hustings accompanied by only a couple of independents, as by this time, the Labour and Green candidates had been disowned, the Tory had gone on holiday and the organisers refused to admit ex-Labour MP and now Reform candidate Simon Danczuk over his ‘sexting’ past.

Concern now in the area arises over whether Galloway or one of his acolytes will stand for elected mayor of Greater Manchester against Labour’s Andy Burnham, who would otherwise be a likely shoo-in. Even if Burnham won, thousands of Galloway supporters who might not normally vote would suddenly have local election ballot papers to hand, and no-one has any clear idea how they would use them.

MATTER OF JOYCE

And staying with offensive tweets, Federal Board member Joyce Onstad has left the party - possibly with some encouragement - over tweets on Gaza and Ukraine.

Onstad said in a statement: “Certain people in the party have taken great offence at the vehemence and ferocity of my stand in the fight to end genocide in Palestine and have conflated my anti-Zionist position with anti-Semitism, which is clearly absurd.”

Rather more unusual were Onstad’s re-tweets on Ukraine, one of which said money should not be sent to Ukraine as “they are literally Nazis”, and others that “our money is being stolen/laundered”, “the US/NAATO started the conflict” and “all foreign aid is a scam”.

The party was thus able to bear the loss of Onstad’s membership with fortitude, though it does leave Southend West - where she was expected to become the prospective parliamentary candidate - looking for someone else.

Onstad’s posts though were positively restrained compared with those of former North Yorkshire Lib Dem councillor Pat Marsh whose posts on Gaza, quoted in local media, included : “This is atrocious and is a war crime, no wonder people are becoming anti-

Jewish and “I hope you Jews feel proud of yourselves, you are a disgrace to the world.”

Marsh was suspended by the Lib Dems and sat as an independent before she resigned from the council having in the meantime been arrested over allegations of anti-Semitic tweets. Although she was released a police statement to local media said investigations “were likely to take some time”.

BADGE OF HORROR

Liberal Democrat conference badges changed last year from the old laminated ones to paper, presumably on environmental grounds.

The problem was that people’s photographs rapidly faded making it impossible for security staff to easily compare the pictures on credentials with the real thing.

Those who found they looked as though they had been recently irradiated at Bournemouth last autumn were told a cock and bull story about the pictures fading in salt sea air. At York, some 40 miles from the sea, the same thing happened with representatives finding themselves progressively faceless.

WAITING ON A NATIONAL PLATFORM

When Social Liberal From (SLF) chair Gordon Lishman raised concerns with Ed Davey about little happening outside of target seats and dangers of the party withering in these areas, he eventually received a reply from Baroness Pinnock - who at least in name leads the general election campaign though some suspect communications head Baroness Greender is really in charge.

Lishman reported to SLF council on “a robust but friendly argument, unsurprisingly, not culminating in agreement”.

Pinnock’s letter noted areas of agreement but then said: “It seems, though, that we differ in what a Liberal approach to winning votes, and elections, looks like. I am proud of our party’s focussed strategy. It is one developed by those with exceptional success in forming winning campaigns.”

This strategy was designed to restore the party “to third party status in the Commons so that we can have more of a national platform from which to communicate our Liberal Democracy”.

It was also “showing voters in our empirically selected target seats that the Liberal Democrats are ready and willing to listen to their concerns and with a clear plan for the future”.

All this is no doubt true but it does little to explain how the party can be revived and grow in the rest of the country.

COUNTING ON IT

Disputes about the most abstruse aspects of the single transferable vote system are like catnip to certain Lib Dems, and the row over the count for a Federal Council vacancy promises almost unlimited mind bending detail to pore over.

When a member resigned, Liberator has been told a rerun count should have taken place for the whole committee, excluding only those now ineligible or withdrawn.

Additional rules state that anyone elected in the original count must not lose their place as a result of the recount and the various quotas for protected characteristics must be successfully filled.

The FC has 21 places to elect but the count report was headed “Number of positions to fill: 1”

It appeared that instead of just eliminating those now ineligible or withdrawn, all candidates originally elected were eliminated.

This in effect created a fresh election for one seat and where an elector’s higher-preference vote had successfully elected someone already on FC, their lower preference vote was still counted as a full vote – and so was effectively been counted twice (keeping up with this so far?)

A separate dispute has arisen over Ian Franks being accidentally excluded from the count. He was not elected originally but was still eligible. There was also a failure to make a timely disclosure of the result.

Complaints have gone in to chief returning officer David Crowther, who *Liberator* has contacted for comment.

CHEAM TICKET

A message goes out from London Liberal Democrats: “Breaking news - Sutton & Cheam will be advertising later this week for a Parliamentary Candidate which will be the final selection for London Region. Applicants need to be on the Approved Candidates List - for further details contact the Returning Office.”

This presumably means that Sutton & Cheam’s former prospective parliamentary candidate David Campanale has finally been ousted from that role after an interminable series of appeals that began last summer when the constituency first sought to remove him.

Although Campanale was originally a Liberal Democrat he left to join the highly socially conservative Christian People’s Alliance and rose to be its leader and author of its 2010 general election manifesto. Some of this was unexceptionable but it

also said: “A new hierarchy of rights has put the needs of sexual minorities above religious freedom” and inveighed against “sex in view of families enjoying parks and open spaces” (*Liberator* 416).

He stood as a Lib Dem candidate in Spelthorne in 2019 - though few outside the area appear to have noticed - but Sutton & Cheam is a rather more serious proposition as the party held it from 1997 to 2015,

Some Sutton members felt they should have been better acquainted with Campanale’s past by the party before the original selection meeting and were unimpressed to be told they should have looked on Google.

NO CONFERRING

Amid the disputes about whether to cancel the autumn conference in Brighton - and if not what form it should take ahead of a general election - several people have gained the impression that communications head Baroness Grender wants it cancelled, as does party president Mark Pack. They are thought to fear something embarrassing things being said there, which sounds rather like an argument party managers could deploy to scrap conference altogether.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Reader Steve James kindly sent *Liberator* copies of the October and November 1970 issues, now the earliest we have. These turned out to contain a forgotten essay by former Liberal leader Jo Grimond on the nature of ‘power to the people’. At the time *Liberator* was run by the Young Liberals and getting Grimond to contribute was surely something of a coup for them, but without electronic storage in those days it must have rapidly slipped from notice not being mentioned in Grimond’s biography.

It can read in the *Journal of Liberal History*: <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/journal/latest/>

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WHY PUTIN CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO WIN

Lib Dem MP Sarah Green joined a parliamentary delegation to Ukraine and saw a country still determined to resist a tyrant with whom negotiation is impossible

The ceiling was low and the room was dark. The names of those who had been held here were etched onto the peeling walls. A discoloured Winnie the Pooh toy sat on top of the pile of items left behind in the haste to get out. This was the cramped basement of the local school that villagers from Yahinde wanted to show us.

It was here that 368 of them were held cheek by jowl, with no heating, no sanitation and limited food for 27 days. More than 50 of them were children.

These villagers wanted us to know what happened to them when Russian forces occupied their border village in March 2022.

It was harrowing testimony. The space was small and dusty. There was no chance of privacy. There was nowhere to go to the toilet and people had to use what space they had to relieve themselves. They told of children playing next to a corpse. In total 11 civilians died during those 27 days. These were not random individuals but neighbours, friends and family members of the remaining villagers.

This was the final day of a four-day visit I joined as part of a cross-party delegation of British members

of Parliament. We were there to mark the second anniversary of Putin's full-scale invasion and see the current situation for ourselves. What we heard and saw was both sobering and inspiring.

BRAVERY AND RESILIENCE

The bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people is in evidence at every turn.

For the past two years they have stood united against Putin's brutal invasion. In those early days there were plenty who simply assumed the Russian army would overwhelm Ukrainian forces in short order. The fact that they failed to do so is in no small part down to the Ukrainian people themselves. They have suffered a great deal, and the attacks continue - but Ukrainian citizens remain resolute.

Our visit had four separate aspects: Marking the second anniversary; receiving an update on the military situation; seeing the ongoing reconstruction efforts and; hearing about the work taking place for post-conflict justice and accountability.

I'd like to offer you this detailed account of what I saw.

A special session of the Ukrainian Parliament (Rada)

was held to mark the second anniversary of the invasion. Representatives from many parliaments across Europe and beyond made the journey to take part in this poignant ceremony.

The chairman (Speaker) of the Ukrainian Parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk, read out the exact statement he made to MPs on that fateful day, as they met in an emergency session in the early hours of the morning. He had asked them to approve the introduction of martial law just hours after the invasion had started.

Perhaps the most moving moment was hearing the national



anthem sung defiantly by these MPs, some dressed in military fatigues in their parliament chamber.

That evening I experienced, in a very limited way, an occurrence that has become all too normal in Ukraine; a conversation I was having was interrupted by the air raid alert and we all went down to the shelter for several hours. A reminder that this is a country under sustained, daily attack.

Air raid alerts are mostly transmitted through a mobile phone app (Air Alert!), which you can set to update you from any part of Ukraine you happen to be in. I foolishly forgot to disable it and received some strange looks when the siren came booming out of my phone at Krakow airport on the way home.

While in Kyiv, we heard reports directly from soldiers on the front line at a special international conference, taking place to mark the occasion. We heard about the lack of equipment and ammunition affecting Ukrainian forces right now. Of lives lost because equipment isn't reaching where it is needed. Of territory lost because of it.

TODDLER'S GRAVE

One commander told the audience of a battle where she crouched down behind a stone to shield herself only to realise it was the recently dug grave of a toddler. She also shared her discomfort that she had told her troops, running out of munitions, that more were coming, that Ukraine's allies had promised them, only for them to be killed waiting.

Later we visited a rehabilitation centre and spoke to veterans. One female soldier shared her determination to return to the front line despite losing her husband in the conflict. She had also watched helplessly as a fellow soldier she couldn't rescue chose to shoot himself in front of her, as he didn't want to be captured by the advancing Russian army.



“She also shared her discomfort that she had told her troops, running out of munitions, that more were coming, that Ukraine's allies had promised them, only for them to be killed waiting”

It was while we were at this facility that I learned of the blood donation challenges the Ukrainian authorities have to overcome. We are used to blood donation being a routine act for many in the UK, but this is not the case in Ukraine. I was told that one obstacle is the fear of HIV transmission. Another is the fear of being added to a database and the authorities coming to enlist you (despite the authorities already knowing where you are if they do want to come calling).

One mobile phone operator, Kyevstar, explained how they recovered from a cyber attack in December that destroyed 75% of their network in a few short hours. They managed to get core services re-established within 48 hours and most others reinstated in seven days. I'm still astonished at this extraordinary achievement.

We saw the many visual scars left on the landscape by the conflict - bridges that had been destroyed to prevent their use by invading forces, buildings with colossal and catastrophic damage. There are reminders at every turn.

We visited the Chernihiv region in the north, bordering Belarus and Russia, which is still under attack. The regional leaders we met were keen to tell us how they are trying to maintain services for their community. How they are rebuilding homes that have been destroyed and resurfacing roads damaged by the various attacks. Indeed, the roads were remarkably well maintained.

But some buildings cannot be repaired, they are just too damaged. We were shown a residential area where not only were the apartment blocks targeted, but so too was the pharmacy alongside it. More than 50 people were killed when that pharmacy and the queue snaking out of it was hit.

An elderly resident saw us from across the street and came over to see who these people standing around like disaster tourists were. She told how her apartment block (that we could see right next to the bomb-damaged pharmacy) was deemed unsafe to repair and she had been staying with family ever since. She was at pains to tell how she wanted her own home, her own kitchen, her own space again and for those who targeted her community to face justice.

SEVEN SECONDS WARNING

The biggest concern for the leaders of the Chernihiv region was for their children's education. Most schools do not have basements and cannot therefore provide a bomb shelter. Not that having one would provide much protection in some of the border communities, where there might only be seven seconds warning of an imminent attack. There are attempts to provide education remotely but the internet access is not reliable. The leaders were quite upfront about their concern for children who, for two years now, they have not been able to provide an education for.

And they could not have been more grateful to the

many here in the UK who have provided shelter to families who had to flee. They were particularly keen to pass on their gratitude to the families hosting them, the schools educating children here in the UK and, the wider communities making them feel so welcome.

We also joined the Halo Trust at one of their sites where they are working to clear landmines. These dangerous devices can still maim and kill years after being set.

We were shown the different types of devices being cleared. While technology helps, it is still a painstaking and meticulous process that has to be done inch by inch. It is inevitably a slow and time consuming enterprise.

Ukraine used to be known as the breadbasket of Europe. But landmines have made vast amounts of agricultural land unusable, which is a key area of concern as it's such a vital part of the Ukrainian economy. Clearing these agricultural sites is crucial.

The Halo Trust prides itself on training and employing local people to join their projects. Initially this proved problematic as women were not allowed by law to undertake such work. The Ukrainian Parliament has now changed this law. Given the number of sites that need clearing, the task is likely to be one that will need to be undertaken for generations to come.

During our visit we met with the prosecutor general who told us about efforts to record and document the various crimes being committed. These include multiple examples of sexual violence being used as a weapon of war. He also outlined the systematic kidnapping of children who have then been taken to Russia and in many cases, 'adopted'. Most are still there. This was a form of cruelty I had not previously heard of and found it hard to hear of its devastating consequences.

These reports are being documented so that every effort is taken to secure justice for these courageous and traumatised communities. Indeed, they aren't waiting for the war to conclude. A Ukrainian court has now convicted 15 Russian soldiers of war crimes in absentia for what took place in Yahinde outlined at the beginning of this article. An entire village, crammed into the school basement, deprived of sustenance and used as human shields.

Recent weeks have seen a renewed effort to maintain international support for Ukraine. This is in part driven by a fear of the unpredictable nature of a possible second Trump presidency in the United States. It is imperative that Ukraine gets the military support it needs.



At home in Buckinghamshire, I continue to be moved by the ongoing support extended to those that have fled the conflict. While this reflects the very best of our community, I know from the conversations I've had that many Ukrainians living alongside us are desperate to return home.

WAR ON DEMOCRACY

We shouldn't think of this as 'the war in Ukraine'.

Putin has been quite clear that he is waging war on the West and on western democracies. Ukraine is the front line in containing Putin's aggression - because he won't stop at Ukraine. He cannot be negotiated with. The consequences of him succeeding are unimaginable - which is why it is so vital that we continue to help Ukraine to defeat him.

But more than that, I suspect we have a great deal to learn from Ukraine. We know that necessity is the greatest motivator. What I was struck by time and again in my few days in their midst was Ukrainian initiative and innovation. It was everywhere.

For example, last year Ukraine Railways were more reliable than TransPenine Express. They were rightly proud that "95% departed on schedule and 96% arrived on schedule" - despite coming under sustained bombardment.

The largest mobile phone network in Ukraine withstood an unprecedented cyber attack in December and was up and running again within days. Roads that were bombed are repaired astonishingly quickly.

Yes, they are in the midst of a gruelling and punishing war and need our help. But in the months and years to come, don't be surprised if it isn't our Ukrainian friends and allies that we will be turning to for help with our own challenges.

Sarah Green is the Liberal Democrat MP for Chesham & Amersham and a member of the Liberator Collective

UKRAINE RESISTS - WITH SOME HELP FROM SHAKESPEARE

Nataliya Torkut is Ukraine's leading expert on Shakespeare and a professor at Zaporizhzhia National University. She was interviewed by Kiron Reid about Ukraine's continued resistance to Russia and the role in this of intellectual life

We are very disappointed by the latest decision of America on aid, but we are thankful that Europe has awakened, France, Europe and the British people; we are very grateful for our firm friends.

I grew up in the Soviet Union, and we never imagined that there could be war between Russia and Ukraine. This is an imperial war. Unfortunately the brains, the mentality of Russian people are infected with the virus of imperialism and imperial thinking and nowadays we have to face the consequences of this propaganda, of the negative influences of literature and culture during the Russian Empire period and during the Soviet Union period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union they have been victims of their own propaganda, the idea of their superiority, their superior position in the world.

GENOCIDAL WAR

So we have to fight. We have no way out if we want to be. This is a genocidal war – genocide against the Ukrainian people. Their former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev said if someone (in the occupied Ukrainian territories) refuse to take a Russian passport this person should be killed. There is only

one chance for us to survive in this war – to be strong, to struggle to protect our values, our identity, our children, our population and our country.

Since 1991 we have been living independently and have been tasting the smell of freedom – we realised we will have to fight for it. And we understand that freedom is a real value for all Ukrainians. We don't want to be a colony of Russia any more. We will fight for our right to be free, to live in a democratic state.

People in the Western countries do not understand what this barbaric state means. It is really difficult to imagine how cruel, how immoral people can be. We have to face these things with our own eyes.

Countries that are totalitarian in nature can be combined together to make war. In the US Congress there are procedures, in a totalitarian state you just give order, and there will be the next bombing. The way out for civilisation is for Ukraine to survive this barbarism.

Our national identity as a European nation was structured in the 1870s with the help of Shakespeare. Ukrainian scholars decided to translate Shakespeare into Ukrainian. The tragedies first. By two orders of the Tsar European classics could not be translated into Ukrainian, only domestic light plays.

Hamlet was staged on the amateur theatre in Kyiv. Panteleimon Kulis proclaimed that Shakespeare will be the father of intellectual activity to help Ukraine join the family of European nations.

Soviet Ukrainian director Les Kurbas staged Macbeth at the end of the 1920s. Its anti-totalitarian message saw Kurbas arrested by the NKVD secret police and killed in a gulag in 1937. Translators of Shakespeare into Ukrainian in the 1920s and 1940s were accused of nationalism by the regime. In 1943 in Nazi occupied Lviv there was the first professional performance of Hamlet. Ukraine was caught then between two evils. Our national identity closely correlates with the reception of Shakespeare. Hamlet symbolises Ukraine.

President Zelenskyy asked at the start of the full scale war: "To be



or not to be?” We Ukrainians have answered it “to be”. It is not only symbolic, it is our life.

The support of European and other scholars is very important to us. British professors Michael Dobson (director of the Shakespeare Institute) and Nicola Watson have helped us scholars in Ukraine continually throughout the war.

We have also had help from academics from the UK, Canada, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Poland, Denmark, Hungary and Bulgaria.

They invited out scholars to their countries but nearly all of us refused as we decided to stay here to do what we can.

A Shakespeare volunteer group has supported us since the start of the war – with money and donations for our warriors and civilians, especially medicines, for example in Zaporizhzhia in March 2022 when they were very hard to get. Later there was fundraising for cars, drones and night vision equipment. Each week necessities are sent from Ternopil in western

Ukraine, to Zaporizhzhia, to Kharkiv and to the front. Scholar Patricia Parker constantly sends donations, so we can buy cars and tourniquets thanks to her. Michael Dobson gave his prize from the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival so that we could buy a drone. My son, Igor’s unit, received this on the front and put the name Shakespeare on the drone.

Intellectual volunteering is equally important. We are supported by the European Shakespeare Research Association. Our university festival Shakespeare Days in Ukraine has continued during the war online and including foreign colleagues.

Kelly Hunter of the Flute Theatre in London came to Bulgaria to help Ukrainian refugee children with autism and PTSD and 300 Ukrainian professionals were able to view her training sessions in Zoom. Dobson and Hunter also collaborated on workshops of Pericles.

A project has just finished by British academics on a theatre reviewing masterclass and so Ukrainian reviews will now be published in famous international theatre journals.

In 2024 there will be the International Shakespeare Festival in Ivano-Frankivsk in western Ukraine (which is relatively safer, though nowhere is safe from



“Unfortunately the brains, the mentality of Russian people are infected with the virus of imperialism and imperial thinking”

the Russian missile terror). We have a kind of challenge that air raids and air sirens may prevent us watching performances. Eight theatres will send people to Ivano-Frankivsk. The international Shakespeare community are supporting this festival from 17 to 23 June and American Shakespeare author David Livingstone had helped boost morale by visiting Ternopil in western Ukraine.

We also appreciate the support of our Georgian friends at the beginning and throughout the war. We collected literature to be sent to the Georgian Legion (volunteers fighting for Ukraine) from Georgian writers with their perspectives in the war.

FRONT LINE SON

Since the first day of the full scale aggression my son has been on the front line at Kharkiv. Igor Cherniak is a lawyer, a city councillor in Ukraine’s second largest city, and a renowned anti-corruption campaigner. He posts on Instagram regularly his current work with drones to attack the enemy. He was a soldier, now he is a drone pilot. His district was bombed first. Igor had volunteered to help the defenders of Ukraine since 2014, and now he decided to evacuate his children and go to the front. I can say that in his city, in Ukraine, the democratic group and the representatives of power were in conflict before. Now the war has made them almost friends. He takes part in meetings of the city council remotely. Now Igor’s proposed reforms in the city are being accepted.

Shakespeare is not only about values but also about positive thinking. Every week at least three Shakespeare events help us survive.

Kiron Reid is a member of the Liberator Collective and has taught at Ukrainian universities. His pictures here show a unwanted state fo Lenin

HOW TO LOOK FOR THE NEXT LEADER

With no Lib Dem leadership contest due, Liz Barker looks to the long term of how the party should choose its next leader

The question of what makes a good or outstanding political leader has been debated since the time of Aristotle. Anyone who is remotely interested in politics, and many who are not, will have read Machiavelli. From Shakespeare to Aaron Sorkin writers have sought to elucidate political leadership through drama.

Liberal Democrats are not (at the time of writing) having a leadership contest and I hope we won't for a long while. Nor do I have views on who Ed Davey's successor should be when he decides he wants to stand down.

However, leadership itself and leadership campaigns have changed dramatically, as disasters in our own party and others have shown. So now is a good time to think long and hard about the qualities, skills and experiences any leader must or should have.

HARDEST JOB

I've long thought that being the leader of the Liberal Democrats Scotland, Wales or England, and the Alliance leader in Northern Ireland is one of the hardest jobs in politics. It is never easy as the leader has to establish and maintain the Liberal Democrats as a distinct political entity advancing Liberal values and do so with few resources and a hostile media.

To do all that while being alive to the tensions and nuances of politics within the four nations of the UK is tough at any time, but in an era when right wing nationalism is exploiting economic and environmental hardship to destroy the post-war rules based international order it is especially tough.

Over the centuries many a list has been written setting out the list of skills any political leader should have. None have been definitive, and they are often ignored – how else do you explain Trump? But the following is a useful checklist:

- intellectual ability – the capacity to understand complex information and ideas;
- empathy – the ability to understand where other people are coming from, the lack of it often leads to poor judgement about people and situations and poor communications;
- a strong work ethic coupled with good time management;
- a clear strategic direction which they inspire others to follow;
- personal integrity which aligns with the values of the party they lead;
- the resilience to deal with setbacks and defeats;
- charisma

There may be leaders who have all of those qualities

and experience of leading successful teams or organisations, but most will either have some, or be stronger in some respects but not others. Good leaders recognise their own weaknesses and recruit teams who compensate and work together to make a dream team. Yet at times in different political circumstances some factors take on an importance

I joined the party when David Steel had succeeded Jeremy Thorpe. Years later supporters of John Pardoie were lamenting David's victory as a lost opportunity to set a radical course for a Liberal party, but members at that time craved stability. Paddy's leadership was highly successful, although not perfect and Charles's was deeply flawed, but both were in their own way inspirational. Ming's leadership began in difficult circumstances from which it never recovered. Vince's stewardship of the party was admired because it gave us an economic credibility which we had often been thought to lack previously. Although each one was different they all had basic political judgement. They all knew that the strength of their party lay in local government and tended their own teams and the party's campaigners. Throughout those years Labour and the Conservatives chose leaders who could articulate a vision of hope and prosperity for the nation, but also never took their eyes off the aspirations of their own membership. And both had charismatic leaders followed by what was expected to be a safe pair of hands.

Nick Clegg's leadership is the one most written about, and perhaps least understood. How could so impressive a campaigner be so inept in office? Some commentators have suggested that the experience of being deputy prime minister and a junior coalition partner was simply impossible. It is certainly true that as a party we took our obligation to make the coalition government work seriously, to the extent that we held no resources back to devote to our re-election. The Tories did. My observation was that Nick was brilliant communicator, at least at the start, but that masked a lack of campaign experience which led to a lack of political judgement. Moreover, there were a lot of 'yes' people on the team.

It is tempting to forget the Tim Farron and Jo Swinson episodes, but we must not. Nor should we be fooled by the subsequent attempts to relieve them of responsibility for the debacles. Farron's book dodges the fact that his personal beliefs are incompatible with the liberal values on which the party stands. In this day and age you cannot be a member of church which refuses to allow any woman any leadership role and lead the Liberal Democrats.

In an astonishing interview in the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* (108) the problems of Jo Swinson's leadership were entirely put down to other people from

Nigel Farage to Ed Davey. Nothing whatsoever to do with her having no idea of being perceived as hectoring or that the circumstances had changed since 2010 so there was no prospect of her being prime minister.

Tim and Jo won the leadership because they campaign brilliantly for things which they care about. In addition they are tech savvy and were way ahead of their rivals in use of social media. Bandwagons are easily built these days.

From both we should have learned that being an effective campaigner is one thing, being a leader is something else. Our party is full of dedicated campaigners, but without an effective leader we will go nowhere. The good news for us is that Labour and the Tories not only did not learn from us, they made the same mistakes with David Milliband, Jeremy Corbyn, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. Each of them (with the possible exception of Truss) were strong on a few aspects of leadership. Corbyn had the human and financial backing of Momentum. Truss was, and still is, drip fed ideas from American organisations such as the Heritage Foundation and the Alliance Defending Freedom. All those assets could not disguise a lack of political judgement.

So when thinking about our next leader what do we need?

To start with, evidence that they have led successful teams, preferably through difficult times and their judgement and resilience has been proven. A key part of that is building a team around you with the right skills and experience. Our best leaders have been able to attract people with knowledge and experience outside parliament, but never to let them get in the way of developing a clear and coherent political agenda.

They have to be able to set out a vision and for the peoples of the UK which is realistic and hopeful. The Tories squandered so much of the country's finances and political trust that future politicians will have to work very hard to regain it. They should start by what Charles was, an MP who seemed like a fully paid up member of the human race.

A new leader will need to reinvigorate our policy making to deal with the major challenges of our time, such as the climate emergency. Bringing academics, scientists and businesses into our thinking and not leaving them to Labour should be a top priority. We lost a generation of people post-2015 and we need a concerted effort to reengage.

Connecting with young people has always been a key to our party's success; something that suffered after 2010. There is now sufficient distance and we can regain that ground especially by focusing on issues such as housing and employment.

Ed had done a lot with local government colleagues

to address these issues, but we need to do much more. And we won't win over those voters by using communications that have not succeeded in the past.

POOR COMMUNICATIONS

Our communications departments need a complete overhaul. We do have good young people who join us to work on communications and campaigns. The good ones never seem to stay. We should work out why, sort the problem and grow new teams which can innovate and flourish. While we are at it, we should refresh the governance of the party, by getting rid of the kingmakers and bringing on new campaigners and organisers.

The next election, and probably the next few thereafter, will be heavily influenced by the alt-right/Christian nationalist campaign which is, for the most part, organised and funded by American foundations. Channelling their funding through a web of organisations, they run well funded campaigns which are anti-abortion, anti-LGBT, anti-relationship and sex education. The campaign has different emphases in different parts of the world; anti-trans in the UK, anti-abortion 'pro-family' in Hungary, anti-gay in Uganda. But they all originate from the same source and they have a single aim, namely to destroy human rights legislation and the bodies which exist to protect it.

The campaign has colonised the language of human rights in order to protect ordinary people from a liberal elite. It is therefore essential that the next leader of the Liberal Democrats must be able to articulate to anyone and everyone that human rights are a necessity, not a luxury, for them.

Moreover they must be sufficiently resilient to withstand the constant denigration by many in the media of anyone who stands up for minorities. To do so, and win elections, will not be easy, but if the Liberal

Democrats don't do tis it is not guaranteed that anyone else will.

The Tories in opposition seem likely to head off into nationalistic populism. Labour will have a singular focus on fiscal credibility. It will fall to the leader of the Liberal Democrats to re-establish us as the force for international, economic sustainability and justice. To whoever our next leader may be, good luck.

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

“It is tempting to forget the Tim Farron and Jo Swinson episodes, but we must not. Nor should we be fooled by the subsequent attempts to relieve them of responsibility for the debacles”

THE NORTH IS RED - AT LEAST FOR NOW

The Rochdale by-election showed the realities of fighting Labour where it is entrenched in its heartlands, even with the unusual circumstances of disowned candidates, says Jackie Pearcy

It's been hard to get across to people in Tory-facing seats just what it has been like fighting Labour in the north since the Coalition days. We're not talking about Tony Blair's New Labour, but the same old Labour that has been in charge of too much of the north for a century.

To fight Labour in the north we've always had to campaign ten times more than Labour have had to do. We got some traction when Labour were in government, but it was always hard work. Labour have relied on people being loyal to them while ignoring their needs once elected.

WIPED OUT

Since 2010, places like Rochdale and Manchester have had to come back from having a Liberal Democrat MP and a decent local councillor base to being wiped out between 2010 and 2015. In northern metropolitan seats, wipeout happened in thirds, with elections for

three years out of every four.

It wasn't due to lack of hard work, but we still lost pretty much the lot. As we lost our councillors, many of our supporters faded away, leafleting networks vanished. Between 2011 and 2014 we lost 26 councillors and were reduced to one. It is hard for a group to keep cohesion under those circumstances.

When the Rochdale by-election was called, some people were expecting great things – after all we only lost having an MP in 2010. That's 14 years ago. The reality on the ground was different.

The fightback started in in 2015 when we gained another seat back on the council, which was built up to all three in the seat over the next set of elections. In the 2022 all-out elections, all three seats were held and we scored 27% across the borough – second place overall, but still lacking the numbers on the ground to convert them into council seats, though that infrastructure is being developed, ward by ward.

Rochdale is rebuilding. A local strategy in place to build up target wards and rebuild our local government base. When Rochdale MP Sir Tony Lloyd sadly died (somebody who was respected across the political spectrum), the plan was to concentrate on our target wards with a view to winning them in May and grow the group. For various local reasons, we were grateful that Iain Donaldson agreed to stand.

Of course we expected George (Iain refused to use his surname as that's his brand) to show up – he has a habit of turning up to by-elections wherever there's a substantial Muslim community and milk it for all it is worth.

I encountered him in Manchester Gorton - the 2017 by-election that was and then wasn't -

How to vote for Lib Dem IAIN DONALDSON by post:

- Step One** Complete your ballot paper
- Step Two** Seal your ballot papers in the smaller envelope
- Step Three** Fill in your date of birth AND sign the declaration
- Step Four** Seal the smaller envelope, put it in the larger envelope and Post right away!

DO NOT GIVE YOUR BALLOT PAPER TO ANYONE ELSE!

Dear Neighbour,

This is an out of the ordinary election here in Rochdale! When you get your postal vote, the Labour and Green candidates will still be there despite their parties withdrawing their support from them.

Put simply, the Labour campaign is in chaos.

I live here in the borough of Rochdale. I know the problems we face. The cost-of-living crisis is crippling local people and businesses, and the mismanagement of our NHS is creating real problems for local people.

We need an MP who will stand up for local people, not get dragged into chaos, confusion and division. I would be that MP.

Our Lib Dem councillors on Rochdale council were the first to call for a climate emergency to be declared. We've called for a stop to sewage dumping in local rivers. And we were the group who called for an immediate bilateral ceasefire in Gaza so that work can start on a two state solution in the region.

This election will not change the government, it will not even change the party leaders, but it will change the representation we have in Westminster, a local voice representing local people campaigning for a fair deal for Rochdale.

When your postal vote arrives, please back me as a strong voice for Rochdale in Westminster.

With best wishes

Iain Donaldson

Iain Donaldson
Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate

At the all out local elections in May 2022, almost 80,000 votes were cast.

Across the Rochdale constituency the Lib Dems were in a strong second place.

LAB	LIB DEM	CON	OTH
53%	27%	16%	4%

VOTE TODAY!

Iain DONALDSON

Liberal Democrats

Return your postal vote TODAY!

Put an end to sewage in our rivers.

Proposing a fair deal for Rochdale with an immediate bilateral ceasefire.

Fighting for safer and a brighter future for Rochdale.

where, when in front of a largely Muslim audience, he always started speaking like a translation of the Qu'ran full of exclamation marks, starting many of his sentences with "O!" The equivalent of somebody trying to impress Christians by making their speech sound like the language of the King James translation of The Bible. His campaign is best summed up by the leaflet he put out in the predominantly Muslim areas talking exclusively about Gaza and in the non-Muslim areas, not mentioning Gaza at all but claiming that he could save the local football club. A rescue package was already underway, which he had nothing to do with but the day after the election claimed full credit for.

The Liberal Democrat strategy remained: keep working the target wards and build up for the local elections and don't take resources away from the regional target seats.

Of course the first signs that this by-election was different was the disowning of the Green candidate due to some very unwise social media postings going back some years. Suffice it to say, the social media checks that the Liberal Democrats now do for would-be PPCs now seem a lot less intrusive and a lot more necessary given what happened to the Greens. The Green non-candidate has a long previous history with the Liberal Democrats and it's fair to say that the discovery of the social media postings came as no surprise.

LEAKED FOOTAGE

The defenestration of the Labour candidate was another matter. That it was footage leaked from a Labour meeting is interesting in itself and is a useful guide to the current state of Labour unity. After a weekend of defending him, despite his claims that Israel were behind the 7 October attacks, he was ejected just two days before the postal votes were due to arrive. Sadly too late to do much ramping up of the Liberal Democrat campaign and in the end, the postal votes made up 43% of the total votes cast.

The campaign had to stay focused on the local elections and resisted the temptation to pull people in from everywhere, especially the target seats. Meanwhile the Conservative candidate went on holiday.

At this point, it became impossible to judge what would happen. There was a large number of "can't vote Labour though we usually do" votes floating around and the big question of where the "sod 'em all" votes would go. The end result was that those votes went to George from the wards with a high Muslim population, went to Iain in the Liberal Democrat top targets and went to a popular local independent in the other non-Muslim areas. Iain ended up with the same percentage as we gained at the previous general election and held the deposit, which given many recent by-elections was a very good result.

There were two excellent press releases provided by the federal party during the campaign, one on

"So, while the party is concentrating on the 'blue wall' we need to have messages which have traction in Labour areas"

burglaries - 36 unsolved a day in Greater Manchester - and the other on United Utilities charges increasing by 9%. However these did not have enough traction with the national press to filter through to the local campaign. The only proper cut-through was from Layla Moran who articulated a clear and moral line on Gaza which was appreciated and understood by the electorate, even those voting for George.

So, while the party is concentrating on the 'blue wall' we need to have

messages which have traction in Labour areas. We can't wait for a Starmer government go get unpopular, though that will almost happen sooner rather than later. Seats like Rochdale and Manchester Withington were originally held against Labour. We need seats like that back in the future.

Jackie Pearcey is chair of the Liberal Democrats north west region and an activist in Manchester

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PLEASE PASS THE LINK FOR LIBERATOR ON TO OTHER LIBERALS

DOES A DECADE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It's 10 years since the death of Liberator stalwart Simon Titley. Jonathan Calder delivers into his writing and finds it alarmingly relevant today

Simon Titley was fond of claiming that he joined the Liberator editorial collective in the 1980s because it was the only way of ensuring that his articles were pasted down in the correct order.

Whatever the truth of that, his individual take on politics soon became central to the magazine. He was well informed about machinations inside the Liberal Party and then the Liberal Democrats, interested in new thinking from well beyond those parties and aware of the continuing importance of social class in British politics, when a more common view among his fellow Liberals and Lib Dems was that, yes, class existed, but it was rather bad manners to mention it.

Now that, incredibly, it is approaching 10 years since Simon's death, this seems a good time to look back at some of his contributions to the magazine. You can find a collection of them on the Liberator website at <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/simon-titley/> and I'll give the issue number of those I mention so you can read more for yourself.

Let's start with a characteristic article. In Liberator 351 Simon looked at Liberals' fondness for the words 'liberty' and 'freedom' and asked what they mean to us in concrete terms. He begins by quoting Ralf Dahrendorf's account of being held in solitary confinement by the Nazi regime as a teenager and how he had found himself feeling "a visceral desire not to be hemmed in, neither by the personal power of men, nor by the anonymous power of organisations".

It is that feeling, Simon goes on to say, that Liberal Democrat talk of 'freedom' consistently fails to convey:

It is because the Liberal Democrats have such difficulty talking about freedom in meaningful terms that I have been regularly referring to the concept of 'agency' in my writing. By 'agency', I mean the capacity of individuals to make meaningful choices about their lives and to influence the world around them. I define freedom in these terms because it is better to think of freedom as a practical ability than as a theoretical abstraction. Unfortunately, 'agency' is jargon in some professional circles but I shall stick with it because it encapsulates the meaning I seek better than any other word I can think of.

Defining freedom in these terms forces us to realise the extent to which the maldistribution of power is at the root of most of our political ills. It also forces us to realise the relationship between exercising freedom and wellbeing. We can then incorporate freedom as an integral part of our policies across the board, rather than tack it on as an afterthought or omit it altogether.

An insistence on agency also counteracts the classical liberal argument that market forces are the only legitimate means by which people may exercise power.

This emphasis on the importance of the lived experience of abstract ideas can also be found in an article about social class that Simon contributed to Liberator 345. In this case the experience was his own:

Rarely have I encountered worse snobbery than within the Liberal Democrats. The symptoms are wearily familiar; the snide put-downs, the supercilious smirks, the casual discounting of one's skills or arguments. The low point came when a 'fellow' party member once addressed me as 'your sort'.

My own experience is more benign. If I transgress the unwritten rules in something I write online, then I'm generally told a particular comment "is unworthy of me", with the implication that I pass muster the rest of the time. I'll admit the speed with which public school and Oxbridge ranks close is impressive, but it tells us much about why British society is the way it is.

Sometimes Simon chose less ostensibly political subjects. Here he is in Liberator 331 on the tyranny of 'cool', and in particular the British middle-class take on the concept, which gives us:

A world where it is no longer permissible to have hobbies or intellectual pursuits. A world where enthusiasm or erudition earns contempt. A world where, if you commit any of these social sins, you will immediately be slapped down with one of these stock sneers: 'sad', 'trainspotter', 'anorak', 'anal' or 'get a life'.

The phenomenon of 'cool' has been examined thoroughly in a pioneering book, Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude by Dick Pountain and David Robins. Cool is essentially about narcissism and ironic detachment. Its modern origins can be traced to American black culture of the 1940s, when young black men adopted a defiant posture as a means of defence. It was then picked up by rebellious white icons of the 50s such as James Dean. During the 60s, 'cool' began to be exploited by advertisers as a means of selling consumer goods and in the 70s it moved from the counter-culture into the mainstream. But while 'cool' people today affect an air of rebellion, in reality they are conforming to commercially-driven norms.

Because he moved back to Lincoln a couple of years before he died, I was able to meet Simon three times in the East Midlands before he fell ill. Our last meeting was at a very Tittleyesque event – the Melton Mowbray Food Festival – and it will be no surprise to anyone who knew him that one of his last articles (Liberator 354) was concerned with the decline of the dinner party, suggesting that a turn taken by some television cookery programmes might be in part to blame:

The BBC's Masterchef ("cooking doesn't get any tougher than this") promotes the mistaken idea that, for any dinner party host, nothing less than Michelin-starred restaurant standards will do. It makes people feel ashamed to offer a homespun casserole, even though that is much more practical for a domestic dinner party than Masterchefs labour-intensive, cheffy food. Another disincentive is provided by Channel 4's 'Come Dine With Me', which creates the impression that the average dinner party consists of incompetent cooking shared with a bunch of arseholes.

If you want to see Simon's approach to politics summed up in a single piece of writing, then I recommend 'Really Facing the Future' (Liberator 349), which he wrote with another of the party's original thinkers, David Boyle. It was written in response to Facing the Future, a paper from the Liberal Democrats that had failed to live up to its title. David and Simon described their article as:

an attempt to encourage Liberal Democrat policy makers to think more radically – partly because the challenges that lie ahead require more radical thinking and partly as an antidote to the idea that party policy is at its most effective when it tentatively suggests a few tiny changes that don't threaten the status quo.

Liberal Democrats believe the opposite is true. The justification for the party's existence is to think radically, to force the political establishment to recognise the real world, and to put radical change into effect. If the party does not do that, it will find that people lose interest and the supply of committed activists begins to dry up.

The Simon Tittley articles I enjoyed most were the ones that revealed the machinations of those on the right of the Liberal Democrats who saw political success much as Jeffrey Archer's novels see success in business. To them, it was the result, not of new thinking and hard work, but of a clever trick, a new alliance or a bit of clever positioning. As many of these people work in public relations, as Simon did himself, he knew whereof he wrote.

So his review of Mark Oaten's forgotten memoir *Screwing Up* gives us a pretty brutal portrait of the author:

Oaten ... appears to have no fundamental political values but merely jumps from one bandwagon to another. In the 1980s, he joined the SDP but can justify his choice only in terms of it not being Labour or Conservative. In the 1990s, he was an überchampion of the Blairite 'Project' but can justify this only in terms of admiring Paddy Ashdown's leadership. In

the 2000s, he became defender of the classical liberal flame when he founded Liberal Future and the Peel Group, but can justify this only in terms of opposing the 'nanny state' (having presumably taken the opposite view in the SDP). In a Guardian interview on 8 January 2005, he admitted "I only really got a philosophical belief about three years ago" (i.e. nearly five years after being elected as a Liberal Democrat MP).

But Simon also discusses the book's strange failure to mention Paul Marshall or Gavin Grant, who were important backers of Oaten's varied projects. He also reminds us of the name of the Guardian journalist who penned a succession of articles which questioned the competence of various Liberal Democrat MPs while praising Oaten as a 'rising star'. Who can have briefed her?

Simon also contributed a telling account in *Liberator* 339 of the reaction of some to the outbreak of Cleggmania that followed the first leaders' debate in the 2010 general election campaign:

As Lib Dem opinion poll ratings soared, one cheerleader for the right-wing cabal running the campaign wrote on Facebook: "So... 26-34% in the polls, almost all the boost down to media skills and leadership not leaflets and target seats... I've got to ask... anyone missing Rennard...?" The complete collapse of the 'surge' to 23% on polling day, just 1% more than the party won in 2005, suggests there was no basis for such conceit.

To end, let's go back to 2001 and the very first article by Simon on the magazine's website (issue 277). Not for the last time, we find him asking why Liberals are so fond of apologising for being Liberal:

Liberals are often pilloried as timid and petty-minded. We sit on the fence and wring our hands. When we rebel, it is through self-indulgent individualism (for example, calling ourselves 'Jedi Knights' on the census forms) rather than confronting what matters.

We have only ourselves to blame for acquiring this reputation. Why are Liberals so embarrassed? Why do we lack the courage of our convictions? One of the main reasons is our faith that everyone is reasonable like us. All we have to do is sit round the table and eventually we can reach agreement. If only that were so. In fact there will always be many people, probably a majority, who are not Liberals, who will never be Liberals, and whom we must confront. Beyond that, however, are groups so violent in their hostility that to tolerate their behaviour is to invite our own demise.

The contempt for Jedi Knights is an authentic Tittley touch, but beyond that, I don't know whether to be depressed or lost in admiration that his words are needed just as much today as they were all those years ago.

Jonathan Calder is a member of the *Liberator* Collective

TRAFFIC IN A JAM

Mark Smulian looks at why councils' installation of low traffic neighbourhoods can cause such rancour

I live in a low traffic neighborhood (LTN), areas that have become riven with vituperative controversy in recent years as councils have sought to expand their use.

My street has been in an LTN for decades and I've no idea how or why it was created but it works well in closing off an obvious rat run and I've never met anyone who wants it removed.

Short distances away, things are very different. Local newspaper letters pages fill with angry assertions that LTNs either bring healthier air and quieter streets, or that they make it impossible for car-dependent people to easily leave home and divert traffic onto clogged nearby main roads.

Because the recent proliferation of LTNs arose in response to the pandemic to encourage active travel, the restrictions on driving inevitably became conflated with other Covid-19 restrictions. The usual "we know what is good for you" attitude of inner London's Labour councils did not help.

As Liberal Democrat London Assembly Caroline Pidgeon has wisely remarked, people came to see LTNs as something done to them, rather than for them.

Losers always shout louder than winners about any policy change but near my corner of London that shouting has been loud even where - like most of the capital - there are some of the county's lowest car ownership rates.

Oxford has even seen vandalism and arson against planters and 'bendy' bollards used to block off streets.

At the other extreme, Luther Rahman, the elected mayor of Tower Hamlets - who now stands as the local Aspire party - wants to remove the borough's LTNs and faces a judicial review brought by campaigners who want to keep them.

Opposition tends to come from car owners no longer free to use their vehicles as they choose, people with mobility problems who feel yet more restricted, businesses losing trade and fears over increased traffic on nearby unrestricted main roads.

Whether LTNs lead to an absolute reduction in traffic - rather than the same amount displaced from side roads to main ones - is hotly disputed.

What has made this worse is that many LTNs were paid for by the Government's £250m Emergency Active Travel Fund, which hurriedly sought to promote walking and cycling during the pandemic.

Councils were required to spend this quickly and so created LTNs under temporary provisions.

This meant consultation on whether they should become permanent began only after they had been in place for a while, offending members of the public who expect consultation about local changes before they happen, and seeing - probably correctly - that a council that spent a lot of money installing an LTN would be unlikely to spend even more ripping it out again no matter what problems it had caused.

There have been many academic reports on LTNs, the bulk of which found the benefits outweighed the disadvantages.

A report by NatCen Social Research for the European Climate Foundation, for example, found little initial understanding of LTNs and the reasons for their introduction in London and Birmingham.

Once explained through, participants generally expressed openness to efforts to reduce traffic, but felt "the theory of how LTNs should work" and their benefits had not translated well into their day-to-day reality.

Older people, disabled people and others who are less mobile were highlighted as negatively affected by LTNs but there was "a general opinion that LTNs were seen to deliver quieter, safer and more pedestrian and cycle friendly streets".

Researchers suggested for future LTNs that consultations must be informative, evidenced, representative and inclusive, and local authorities were more likely to enjoy public support if they demonstrated positive outcomes for health, road safety and the environment.

A report in 2021 by the consultancy Kantar for the Department for Transport found that among residents of LTNs, 90% agreed Government should act to increase road safety and 89% both to improve air quality and reduce traffic congestion. Those with mobility issues were less likely to support a reduction in road traffic at 74%, than those without at 84%.

A report for the Local Government Association (LGA) by the University of Westminster and Fern Consulting looked at why, given this general level of support, LTNs generate such hostility towards councils that implement them, regardless of who runs them.

It suggested lack of prior consultation made needless enemies for LTNs and while consultations carried out after installation were supposed to give a 'real world' test of the concept "the unfamiliarity of the process meant that councils faced an uphill struggle convincing their communities," the report said.

Feelings were further inflamed as people "were shocked when works commenced on their doorsteps, sometimes with very little warning".

LTNs can also cause conflicts with public transport, with Transport for London having complained that a Southwark one in Dulwich village obstructed buses, raising the question that if an LTN encourages active travel but snarls up public transport is the former worth having?

Some will always oppose LTNs, but councils that work with their communities, consult first and own up when they get it wrong may lessen the hostility.

Mark Smulian is a member of the Liberator Collective

IS THAT ALL CLEAR?

Dear Liberator

There is though a small factual error that crept in to RB's award of the Golden Toilet to the Federal Board (Liberator 421).

Currently half Federal Appeals Panel members come from names that the board picks, and which then are voted on individually by conference one by one. They only get to be on the panel if conference votes for them.

Under our proposed amendment, that stays the same - the board comes up with half the names and conference still votes on them one by one. Likewise, the other half of the FAP would continue to come from the state parties, and not from the board.

Mark Pack
President, Liberal Democrats

WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE

Dear Liberator,

Discussion of the curious incident of the 'water throwing woman' has unfortunately eclipsed more significant facts about Lib Dem Christian Forum's fringe event at the last autumn conference (Liberator 421 and 420).

Entitled 'Disagreeing well', the name of the event was a nod to Willie Rennie's Lib Dem Voice article of the same name which he wrote in the wake of the Scottish government's now thwarted Gender Recognition Reform

bill. In it, Willie laments that Lib Dems' ability to debate and disagree well has "been at risk of being lost in the recent debate on gender identity" with activists preferring to call for members who disagree with them to leave the party rather than debate them.

Willie was clear: "It is certainly reasonable to question the wider policies and laws that allow a rapist, who identifies as a trans woman, to be considered for a place in a women's prison."

While ostensibly inspired by Willie's call for debate, the organisers of the LDCF event sadly erred on the side of timidity when it came to managing their own debate. Indeed, participants were asked (as I learnt to my slight embarrassment having turned up too late to hear the intro) that the subject of 'disagreeing well' was only to be discussed in the most general, abstract terms. Having all agreed that yes, we should absolutely seek to disagree well, and with all tangible examples off-limits, there was little scope for anyone to disagree about anything at all!

Perhaps it's expecting too much of modest sized AO such as LDCF to host the debate that no other party platform has thus far been capable of hosting. But as long as 'the sex and gender debate' is stifled within the Lib Dems we will continue to go into elections encumbered by difficult-to-market policies such as abolishing women's single sex spaces. And Ed will continue to be asked whether he still thinks women have penises.

Like Willie, Ed has called for an open, mature debate on these matters. The question remains: who will be brave enough to host with it?

Juliet Line
Cornwall

What next for the LibDems?

Whatever the result, Liberal Democrats will need a new strategy after the Election. It must include strong distinctive messages which emphasise our Liberal identity and our offer to all our citizens. Liberal Democrats are a national Party with big ideas and a lot of ambition.

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Come and Join us for a Great Day

Norman Fowler, The Best of Enemies Diaries 1980–1997 Biteback Publishing

I approached this review with some trepidation. First, the literary efforts of members of the Blair government designed to show how instrumental they were to its success scunnered me so much that I have avoided political diaries ever since.

Second, because HIV/AIDS hit my friends in the early 1980s, I have worked with Norman for 20 years and therefore read his earlier books on the demise of Mrs Thatcher and John Major (A Political Suicide 2008) and AIDS (Don't Die of Prejudice 2014).

They are both crisply written accounts of major political events written by an acute observer. Incidentally, I would recommend the former as an especially good read for now. Clearly no current member of the Tory party has bothered to do so because the book ends with a list of lessons in what not to do. They are busy doing them all.

The question for me is that since Norman has already covered much of this ground rather well what, if anything, would be left to glean from these diaries? The answer is in fact quite a lot.

The first revelation is that in 1975 Ken Clarke, Leon Brittan and Norman, three youngish Conservatives from different backgrounds unimpressed by Ted Heath's replacement with Margaret Thatcher met to work out how the Tories could beat Labour without resorting to the monetarism and non-intervention being proposed by Keith Joseph which they feared would be wildly unpopular.

They were therefore surprised to be in the shadow cabinet, albeit in positions which they would not have either chosen or expected.

There are the usual revelations about the private personalities of public figures. Mrs Thatcher is temperamental and at times wilfully obstinate, not the cool detached scientist in a succession of Saatchi staged stunts. The Margaret Thatcher who in 1990 pronounces televising Parliament a resounding success was one who thought it would be a disaster.

Possibly the most interesting



REVIEWS

aspects are the discussions in cabinet perhaps because, while speeches and other meetings are now all over the media pretty swiftly, the details of cabinet discussions tend not to emerge until very much later. The Thatcher obsession with cutting public expenditure, is met with varying degrees of enthusiasm by the cabinet when it comes down to hard decisions about to achieve it in practice.

Another thing of note is what doesn't feature (Simon Hughes on a 1988 episode of Question Time, missed the train and plane). In 1984, whilst the miners' strike merits two paragraphs, the dominant subject is review of social security, that is until 12 October. The experience of the Brighton bomb is drawn by inclusion of small details such as M&S opening early to kit people out and Norman's refusal to talk about his subsequent visit to the hospital where victims were treated.

Forty years on the strife over the demise of Mrs Thatcher has been pored over in several documentaries and gave Meryl Streep something to get stuck into. Of far greater interest is her reaction to being ousted. Norman, having witnessed the judgment and tenacity with which John Major won the 1992 general election offers to try to build bridges between Major and Mrs Thatcher's band of disaffected supporters.

While Major battles to fulfil his promises and get the Maastricht Treaty over the line, Mrs Thatcher uses the Lords to call for a referendum; something she would not have countenanced as prime minister. Going back over familiar events through the lens of these diaries I am struck by how the turmoil and drama of that time pales compared to the madness of the May, Johnson, and the never to be forgotten Truss government. Back then cabinet colleagues could see that while Michael Heseltine's ambition might be unattractive but

bearable, his impetuous style and lack of judgement would make for a poor prime minister. Back then ministers, however junior, went into government departments with hopes of developing policies and implementing plans for which there was, at least in their minds, some evidence that public good would ensue. Not now.

There are other good stories in this book. Not least is the detail of how Norman persuaded a famously right wing politician not noted for sympathy with gay people to back a hard hitting information campaign about HIV/AIDS. The development of public health policy with Archie Kirkwood saved lives.

This book rekindled an appreciation of political diaries and should be read by anyone who harbours dreams of ministerial office.

Liz Barker

The Rise and Fall of Boris Johnson Channel 4

One does not normally look to Nigel Farage for sound judgment but he got Boris Johnson perfectly in Channel 4's four-part account of his hero-to-zero trajectory.

Johnson in 2019 was widely personally popular at leats with Leave voters - as people enjoyed his antics and a style quite unlike that of most politicians - and had an unassailable 80-seat majority.

As Farage pithily remarked: "He had the world at his feet, and then he blew it."

It will be one of the great 'what's ifs' to debate about what would have happened to Johnson's government had the Covid-19 pandemic not overwhelmed it.

The answer suggested by this series is 'much the same as did happen'. Johnson's character flaws would soon or later have done for him - it happened to be Partygate but it would eventually be something else as his belief that rules did not apply to him would

cause him to do something that so outraged the public that he would fall.

There are other slightly surprising interviewees. Said Javid tells how he felt he had to resign and after discovering he had been comprehensively lied to by 10 Downing Street when sent out on media rounds, Matt Hancock explaining the panic when Johnson appeared to be dying of Covid-19 and Ken Livingstone saying that of all the politicians he had ever encountered Johnson was the one he trusted least but was “not really a politician he was a celebrity”.

We also hear quite a lot from Johnson’s family and friends, with the series suggesting his character flaws developed long in the past due to his strange upbringing with a mother who became mentally ill and a largely absent father.

Even more is heard from his enemies. Jennifer Arcuri, the American entrepreneur who mysteriously receives all manner of support when Johnson was London mayor - for reasons about which one can speculate - found herself cut off with Johnson either not taking her calls or pretending to be a foreigner on a wrong number once the scandal about her favoured status erupted and she was abruptly dumped.

Johnson was above all responsible for Brexit and given the close 52-48% result it seems likely that without his ebullient campaigning skills and popular touch the result would have gone the other way.

A wealth of detail and interviews backs up the long-held suspicion that Johnson did not really care one way or the other about Brexit. He cares only about himself. Brexit gave him an each-way bet - if it won he would be a hero to swathes of the Conservative party and in line for the top job, and if it lost he would still be a hero to these same people and able to bide this time.

An adviser interviewed said Johnson spent a day flip flopping from Remain to Leave before emerging from his house to announce he was backing Leave. It was pretty much the same with other issues, his guiding principle was “what’s in it for me”.

The programmes delved relatively little into Johnson’s strange relationship with Dominic Cummings, skating over why this disruptive and unpredictable man



was awarded a Rasputin-like status at Johnson’s court and widely thought at one stage to be the real power running the country.

Insofar as it’s explained at all, Johnson could not really be bothered with policy and ideas and wanted someone who thought for him. When the pair eventually fell out Cummings’ revenge was spectacular in what he laid bare about the workings of Johnson’s government.

Johnson eventually fell over Partygate, Pinchergate, Pattersongate and other scandals that outraged public opinion. Will he go though? The series sends with the thought that Johnson regards his ousting “not as a full stop but a comma” in his political career.

Mark Smulian

Planes, Trains and Toilet Doors, 50 places that changed British Politics by Matt Chorley illustrated by Morten Morland William Collin 2023 £20.00

Liberals and Liberal Democrats are often under-represented in entertaining glosses on the political scene, but this is not the case here. It opens for us, 39 pages in, with Ed Davey, as energy secretary confiding that he wore jumpers at home; I’ll leave it to you to decide

whether this was outrageous or not, but it reminds me of the cover of *Liberator* 421.

There is, of course, a chapter devoted to David Owen’s kitchen table in Narrow Street, Limehouse, and to Chard Guildhall, but not Willis’s Rooms (presumably nothing salacious there). Thorpe was acquitted of the charge of conspiracy to murder. Chris Huhne’s trousers were not so lucky... some misjudgements on his behalf there. Soak up the story of Vince Cable’s bath. Ashdown, Gladstone and Lloyd George crop up throughout, Tierney duels with William Pitt Jnr.

The Coalition is thought of as a bad move for the Liberal Democrats throughout; mishandled no doubt, but one of the governing principles in politics is *necessitas*, you do things because you have to do them, not because if you want to. Remember that when dealing with the Labour scum in the coming fray. It was a sacrifice in the national interest; from my experience of Irish politics, I was amazed that we came out of with as many MPs as we did – our sister party in the Republic, the Progressive Democrats was decimated by coalition, as was the Green party.

But back to the book... what a devious, shifty bunch all of us are... a jolly romp, difficult to put down once you start, and a boon if quiz nights are part of your social calendar.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

Home from a tour of our best prospects in the coming general election – insiders think it most likely to be on a Thursday, incidentally – I allow myself a lie in before tackling the eggs and b. My closest companion for the past fortnight has been the new edition (which is considerably fatter than the last) of Wainwright's West Country Marginals, but I have visited many other parts of the country. In Stockport I came across my old friend Hazel Grove; she does not look a day older than when she was in Parliament 14 years ago. From there I headed to Hebden Bridge for my yearly bathe in the Spring of Immortal Life that issues from the hillside below the former headquarters of the Association of Liberal Councillors. The Elves of Rockingham Forest and their elixir are all very well, but one likes to make doubly sure. After breakfast I pore over Wainwright, my own notes and the latest Timeform bulletin and come to the conclusion that we Liberal Democrats can look forward to an enjoyable evening whenever the election is called.

Tuesday

There I was the other day at Vincent Square – that's our party's London headquarters and not an unkind nickname for the former Member for Twickenham – entertaining the younger members of staff with recollections from my long career in politics. Conversation had turned to the great philosophers of the 20th century and I was giving my impressions of them – Bertrand Russell: "Terribly Clever"; Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Terribly Clever but Rather Hard Work" – when Freddie and Fiona hurried in. "Can you change the subject please?" one asked: "Ed doesn't approve of thinking," the other explained. I wasn't going to upbraid them in front of everyone, but what immortal rind! That pair have been in and out of think tanks ever since I first met them. At one stage they had one each. Besides, if we're going to get ourselves out of this jam, then we're going to have to think jolly hard. No one told L.T. Hobhouse not to think, did they? I draw the line at T.H. Green though: one paragraph of his and I'm out like a light. I much prefer his brother T.H. White.

Wednesday

A bitingly cold day at Uppingham as Rutland begins its campaign in the County Championship. These days, fixtures in domestic cricket's premier competition are played in early spring and late autumn so that The Hundred can be contested in high summer. Who could forget last year's final between the Cricklewood Crinkles and the Wolverhampton Wotsits? (Me for one.) Adapting to this schedule, we have this year recruited two slow-medium Eskimos to bolster our attack, and today they skittle Westmorland before lunch. This could be our year.

Thursday

An advantage of owning a large Estate is that one has the odd cottage tucked away in a remote spot where someone can lie low if they have need – I once put up the noted woman crime novelist Dame Agatha Mousetrapp while Fleet Street's finest were looking for her, and Violent Bonham-Carter made use of the same cottage on more than one occasion. Would you believe that when the

Lord Bonkers' Diary

time came to leave, Violent's boys wiped down every surface in the cottage? No wonder Violent was popular with my domestic staff! In the Sixties, there seemed an endless supply of pop groups wishing to 'get it together in the country' and I was happy to accommodate them too. Listening to their efforts, I sometimes thought privately that they would have done better to keep it apart.

Friday

You may have noticed – if you've had the window wound down you can hardly have failed to – the mountains of unsold Stilton beside the Great North Road in the Far East of Rutland. They have accumulated because Liz Truss failed to negotiate a trade deal with Canada that would allow exports to continue after Brexit; their size is a testament to how much the brave Mounties and lusty lumberjacks once enjoyed their Stilton sandwiches. We have tried promoting them as a venue for winter sports with, if I am honest, limited success. I can say now that I had my doubts about La Truss from the start. It took me hours to convince her that, however hard she wished and however sparkly her wand, she would never be a real princess. The very next day, in a fit of pique, she strode to the Conference rostrum to demand the instant abolition of the Royal Family.

Saturday

Did you see that picture of the prime minister shaking hands on a bet with the detestable Piers Morgan? Hardly statesmanlike behaviour, was it? You'd never have caught Mr Gladstone having a Yankee on the Berlin Conference on Africa, the Anglo Egyptian War, the Naval Estimates and the Panjdeh incident, would you? In truth, though, I have long been aware of a certain innocence in Sunak when it comes to gambling. When he was a newly elected MP, I invited him to visit my Home for Well-Behaved Orphans, and then made the mistake of leaving him alone with the young inmates. By the time I rescued him he had lost all his spare change at three-card brag and was about to surrender his shirt. Of course, I had to pretend to be furious, but there were extra buns for tea.

Sunday

What a pleasure it was to be in York for our Spring Conference! Though I devoured the debates and speeches, I will admit that I made the time to visit the pubs of Fossgate and enjoy some fish and chips by Walmgate Bar. And a good thing I did. While I was sampling said delicacy among the daffodils, Freddie and Fiona turned up with an orange bulldozer and then set about painting a stretch of the city's celebrated walls bright blue. "What are you two up to now?" I called across. "It's a stunt for after Ed's speech. Liberal Democrats knocking down the Blue Wall. The media will love it." "Well the Lord Mayor and the good people of York won't. Wash that paint off at once and then take the bulldozer back to where you hired it." I cannot resist adding: "Perhaps Ed should have thought about this first?"

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