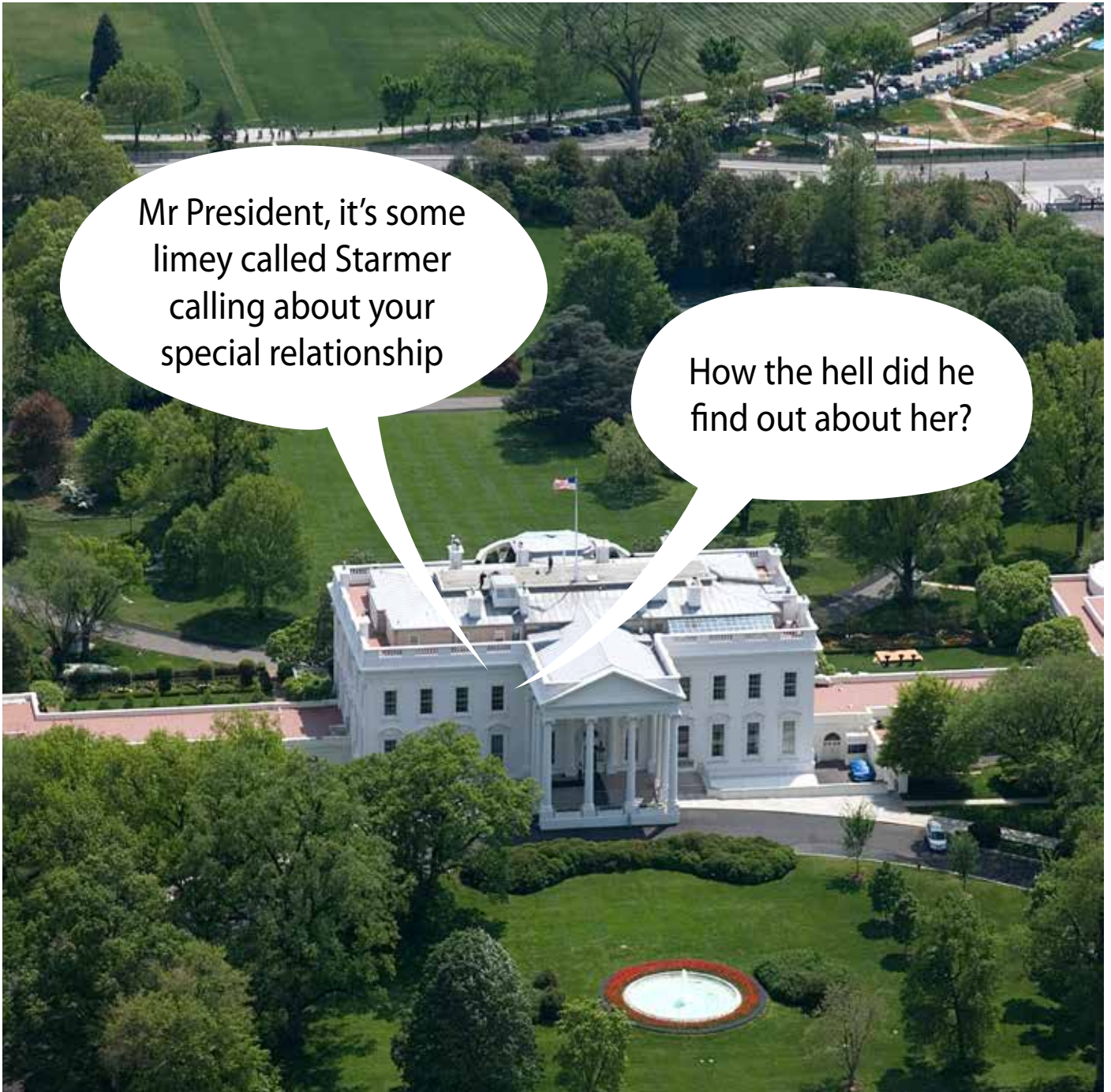


liberator



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COMMENTARY

TRUMP WON'T SAVE THE BREXITEERS

It used to be that when Brexiteers were challenged to say what they would put in place of the EU as the UK's main trading partner they would waffle about a special relationship with the United States of America.

Well, that option has gone with Donald Trump's re-election, if its ever existed. His stated intention to impose tariffs will harm British trade there and even if some special deal were agreed, Trump's unpredictability means no-one could rely on it.

If the American boat has sailed, the Brexiteers still have nothing to put in the EU's place, and the period since the referendum has shown that - far from being 'held back' by the EU - British industry and jobs have been hobbled by Brexit and found no substitute.

That should make it inevitable - as the Lib Dems have argued - that the UK government will have to rapidly mend its fences with the EU and restore as much as it can of the erstwhile advantages of the single market, even if Labour will have to pretend it is not doing this for fear of offending racists.

There is surely no need now for Labour or the Lib Dems to tiptoe around the issue of Europe. Polls now suggest majorities for closer relations with the EU - possibly even for rejoining - and the alternative of doing deals with Trump will be profoundly unappealing to almost everyone outside the ranks of Reform UK.

Ed Davey has been cautiously ending his previous silence on Europe, having presumably seen the party make gains in Remain voting areas and even inroads in Leave areas where a cautiously pro-EU stance seems not to have frightened the horses.

The problem is whether the EU wants the UK back. It is unlikely to start talks on rejoining while there is a danger that a future Tory government would pull it out again and while the UK has no internally settled stance on relations with Europe.

Since no-one else will do it, the Lib Dems must lead work on changing public opinion on relations with Europe, starting with what is possible and indicating longer term goals.

This year's general election results suggest there is nothing to fear from this and potentially much to gain. Trump's win closes off any American option leaving Brexiteers still with no convincing answer to 'who should we trade with instead'?

LABOUR'S LOW-HANGING FRUIT

Lib Dem supporters will have been so keen to see the back of the Tories that they felt some goodwill towards the new Labour government.

Who could possibly have guessed in July that Labour would end up in a floundering mess quite so fast?.

Its first misstep was to make a standalone announcement of means testing the winter fuel allowance - which drew more attention than had it been left to the Budget. We then had a series of episodes that were hardly to Labour's credit concerning Keir Starmer's free trousers and glasses, Taylor Swift tickets and football freebies.

There has also been the contortions over what constitutes 'working people' for the purposes of national insurance increases and retention of the two-child benefit cap.

This all suggests a government not really in control of itself, compounded by Rachel Reeves' summer of doom mongering about the economy.

Labour keeps saying the economy is awful and hard times are expected. Well, the Tory government will soon be forgotten and Labour will be blamed.

All governments get unpopular at mid-term and the unforced errors of this one - never mind the forced ones that will come - suggest it faces something very unpleasant at the next set of local elections and any by-elections that come.

Can the Lib Dems profit from this? Normally the answer would be 'yes' since the Tories tend not to be numerous in Labour's urban heartlands leaving the Lib Dems as the only alternative.

This now looks harder. Reform, local independents of one sort or another, and in particular the Greens are establishing themselves in Labour areas.

One unintended consequence of the general election targeting strategy is that it hollowed out the party in all but around 150 seats leaving demoralised rumps of activists in Labour areas to try to pick up the pieces in seats where the party now lies fourth or worse.

It may be the party does not want to bother trying. Some argue that the Lib Dems' role now is to replace the Conservatives and so, while welcome, gains in Labour areas are not essential.

On this argument the party can keep on beating the Tories so why trouble with difficult inner cities and old industrial areas, where the demands upon activists are higher and the results rarely lead to parliamentary seats?

The party has though to bother to try. It cannot seriously claim to be a national party when it only seriously fights half the nation, and Labour's troubles will present it with some low-hanging fruit next May if it knows how to pick it.

RADICAL BULLETIN

IT'S NOT IN THE CONTRACT GUV

Someone forgot a vital clause when candidates were chosen for the general election, with the result that Tithegate has engulfed the parliamentary party

The lack of any explicit obligation to tithe part of their salaries to the party has given some MPs an excuse not to do this. Normally 10% of pre-tax salary is expected and the practice is common among councillors, where it applies to allowances

All approved candidates were asked to sign a code of conduct by the Parliamentary Candidates Office, which include a non-specific reference to tithing, and then sign a 'candidates compact' when selected.

These compacts are signed with the local party and region but it's not clear who has responsibility for implementing them and nor is there any sanction for not following them.

The latest standard version is very short and doesn't contain any reference to tithing, but local parties can add terms.

Many new MPs have been councillors and so are accustomed to tithing but have now found a loophole because the compacts were not explicit.

Can the party do anything to make them cough up? Hardly. It could change the national candidate agreement to say that anyone wanting to stand at the next election agrees to tithe, but could the party enforce it if some refused? Threats to withdraw resources from non-paying target seats could prove self-defeating.

Some new MPs are paying voluntarily and some are setting up a general election fund to pay tithes into.

Others though are said to be swearing blind it's perfectly fair for councillors to tithe on their allowances and completely absurd to expect MPs to do it on a rather more handsome stipend.

ENGLAND THEIR ENGLAND

The English Lib Dems have got themselves in a fine mess over elections to the English Council Executive, with allegations flying of both conspiracy and cock-up.

For those not versed in party bureaucracy, the electorate for the executive is the English Council, which comprises representatives from each region. The executive is thus indirectly elected from about 150 people.

Election rules, which appears not to have been updated for a long time, allow for contact details of the council members to be provided to candidates for the executive and some objected to this on GDPR grounds, or feared they might receive unwanted correspondence.

The incumbent executive tried to resolve this,

but only after the election campaign had already started. It resorted to a process unknown to the party constitution and called an online referendum among council members on changing the rules to prevent the contact details being provided.

The rules were then changed part way through the campaign. Not only did this raise objections that the process was improper, but no-one thought to tell the deputy returning officer, the former MP Sue Doughty, who found out only at the same time as anyone else.

She then ruled that no-one could campaign at all as some candidates would happen to already know of some email addresses for voters but others would not. Cue further uproar from those with social media campaigns planned.

Doughty is deputy returning officer because the formal returning officer is Rahul Singh, chair of the English Appeals Panel, into who's lap this chaos will no doubt eventually make its way.

Sense eventually prevailed with Singh undertaking to issue campaign materials for all candidates

A LEAK IN WALES

The Nation Cymru newspaper carried a story in November that said Welsh Liberal Democrat leader - and sole Senedd member - Jane Dodds had committed a "grave error of judgement" while working as senior casework manager for the Church of England's National Safeguarding Team in 2016 by failing for months to arrange a meeting involving the sexual abuse of a young man by a bishop.

It attributed this to a report by retired judge David Pearl into historic abuse carried out by the late bishop Hubert Whitsey.

Be that as it may, what was striking about the story was that it said: "Although the [Pearl] report was published in 2021, a number of Welsh Liberal Democrats who are antagonistic towards Ms Dodds have only just become aware of it.

"They have drawn Nation.Cymru's attention to it and have made comments to us that are seriously critical of their leader."

It cited three unnamed Welsh Lib Dem sources and so it sounds like one or other side's position in the party will quickly become untenable.

A few days later, Ed Davey, in a BBC interview, came within an ace of calling on Dodds to resign.

Dodds though held her position after a strong statement of support from the Welsh party.

TWO LORDS LEAPING

Who will be the next Lib Dem leader in the Lords when Dick Newby stands down after an eight year stint?

Not that Newby or his chief whip Ben Stoneham are

going anywhere fast, having surprised peers by saying they think the changed situation in the commons means the leadership in the lords should stay unchanged for a 'bedding in' period of 18 months.

Lords leaders are supposed to have mysterious and intangible qualities such as 'standing' in the house, which no doubt rules out a few successors.

The most likely contenders are thought to be former MSP Jeremy Purvis, who is the foreign affairs spokesperson, or former energy spokesperson Jonny Oates. Although the lords choose their own leader, Ed Davey's opinion is likely to be important and Oates has the advantage of coming from Kingston. On the other hand, Purvis has secured a deputy leader post, with the second such slot going to Kath Pinnock.

It's a sure bet that the leader will be a hereditary peer given their uncertain future in the light of Labour's intention to abolish them.

John Russell is the only hereditary with a spokesperson role but Rupert Redesdale, Dominic Addington and the former MP John Thurso are hereditaries considered diligent and effective peers.

If the Lib Dems are offered some life peerages they could all return to the Lords by that route, which would probably leave no place for any of the other several hundred aspirants who have smelt new peerages in the offing.

SURREY WITH THE WHINGE ON TOP

Al Pinkerton, the new Lib Dem MP for Surrey Heath, probably did not want to have the start of his term marked by the defection to the Tories of a prominent councillor.

Sashi Mylvaganam was elected in 2019 just as the full extent of the financial horrors inflicted on the council by the Tories' reckless property investments became apparent.

This led to a rapid decline in local Tory support and saw Mylvaganam become council leader.

When his councillor term ended in 2023 he stood again but the election was delayed due to the death of a candidate.

Since this meant Mylvaganam could not be a councillor until the delayed election was held, David Whitcroft took over temporarily.

Mylvaganam was duly returned at the delayed election only for the ruling Lib Dem group to decide to elect neither him nor Whitcroft as leader but chose Shaun Macdonald - even though he had only been a councillor since last May. A severely displeased Mylvaganam then joined the Tories with an angry missive about the Lib Dems' abilities.

Mylvaganam's defection has though been balanced by a subsequent by-election gain from the Tories.

STAND IN THE CORNER

Liberal Voice for Women (LVW) was able to secure a stall at Brighton from which to mount its gender crucial arguments but only after threats from its learned friends overawed the party.

LVW had been refused a stall on the grounds that its presence would offend trans rights supporters, but it secured legal advice that - since gender critical beliefs are protected by the Equality Act 2010 - it could not legally be refused a stall staffed by party members.

Federal Conference Committee (FCC) then stuck to its guns with an 11-5 vote to keep LVW out.

Sudden panic broke out when some thought FCC had just voted to break the law and Federal Finance and Resources Committee chair Mike Cox intervened with a rarely used power requiring FCC to back down and allow LVW in, since he felt FCC's stance risked landing the party with large legal costs.

LVW's stall was placed in an obscure corner of the upstairs exhibition but members said they received steady traffic, including those puzzled by president Mark Pack's response to a question on the subject, in which he inveighed against LVW without actually mentioning its name or what it believed.

OIL AND WATER

Gender critical supporters might be well advised not to get their cause in the party mixed up with David Campanale's complaints that he was allegedly discriminated against as a Christian when removed as candidate in Sutton & Cheam.

That though happened at a meeting called near to the conference venue that had only some 15 people present.

It featured Campanale, Nigel Orchard - the subject of a complaint several years ago about homophobia which appeared to have been resolved - and Natalie Bird of controversial tee shirt fame (Liberator 425).

Bird had just won a legal case against the party over her claim she was discriminated against because of gender critical beliefs.

Her damages and remedies court hearing is not expected until December, but she is causing some nervousness as the Green Party has just gone down for about £90,000 in damages and costs in a similar case.

Campanale said that since his legal case was live he would not discuss it there, and embarked instead on a lengthy speech about the links between Christianity and social democracy.

He said the party had "played fast and loose with rule of law as nothing in the deselection rules says that can due to Christian belief" and he had "refused to recant my conscience".

Salt may have been rubbed into wound by Campanale's successor as candidate Luke Taylor winning the seat. Taylor will no doubt be gratified to learn that Campanale prays for him.

Sutton's case is understood to be in essence that members found Campanale difficult to work with and felt they had been told too little about his past role as leader of the Christian People's Alliance - a rival, if minor, socially conservative political party.

The Lib Dem Christian Forum is meanwhile trying to induce the Equality and Human Rights Commission to open a probe into the party over the Campanale affair.

The Bird/ Campanale/ Orchard meeting was chaired by Mark Johnston, who shortly after conference resigned from the Federal Policy Committee (FPC).

He said: "I'm making these changes to free-up some of my volunteer time to focus on what I see as corruption in party standards and governance.

"By this I mean within disputes, disciplinary matters, complaints and compliance both to the law and with our constitution. Recent vexatious disputes have, for example, run-up some very large legal bills for the party and so far there is little sign of this pattern abating."

This resignation also meant Johnston had to leave the Federal International Relations Committee, where he had been the FPC representative. Others say he would have had to go anyway for non-attendance for almost 18 months and so was eventually caught by the rule for party committees that members must attend at least every six months.

Johnston has argued that as an FPC nominee on FIRC he was not covered by this but has not yet appealed this point.

SITUATION VACANT

Who will succeed Mark Pack as president when he reaches his term limit next year?

One possibility is thought to be Lucy Nethsingha, who stood against Pack in 2022 in a campaign noteworthy only for being almost entirely invisible. Another is Eastbourne MP Josh Barbarinde, but few other names have so far surfaced.

Pack is the first president to have never been an MP or peer, but with 72 MPs - some of whom no doubt harbour leadership hopes - there may be many there who fancy using the presidency as a stepping stone to the leadership, as did both Charles Kennedy and Tim Farron.

SITUATIONS NOT VACANT

With 33 spokespersons and three select committee chairs, exactly half the parliamentary party have been given jobs by Ed Davey, which may leave the other half wondering why they have not.

The announcement came immediately after conference and so that event could not be used to introduce the MPs in their new roles, though Davey may have calculated that he did not want the other 36 potentially disappointed and mutinous MPs gathered in one place.

One move that caused comment was Sarah Olney's removal from the shadow Treasury role to the non-job of shadowing the Cabinet Office. Olney was generally thought to have performed effectively but has been replaced in the role by deputy leader Daisy Cooper.

Strangely, there is no Lib Dem shadow chief secretary to the Treasury, a job which comes with its own cabinet seat.

Cooper's old health brief has gone to Helen Morgan, the only one of the 2021-23 by-election winners given a job.

There was also nothing for Andrew George or Tessa Munt, two experienced former MPs returning to parliament after nine year absences.

Excessive restiveness may have been solved by handing select committee places to the other 36.

HERTS TROUBLE

Is there something in the water in western Hertfordshire? Hard on the heels of former leader Sara Bedford deciding to sit as an independent in Three Rivers - and the resignation from the council of her husband Matthew Bedford and loss of control at the subsequent by-election (Liberator 425) - there is now uproar in nearby Dacorum. Mysterious allegations of bullying meanwhile persist in Three Rivers.

Local press reports - confirmed to Liberator - say eight female councillors quit the Lib Dem group in Dacorum accusing leader Adrian England of failing to deal with sexual harassment.

This is understood to relate to complaints made against his predecessor as Lib Dem leader Ron Tindall - who was a councillor in Bermondsey 40 years ago in the wake of Simon Hughes' by-election victory.

What Tindall was supposed to have done has not become public, but he was cleared by the council's standards committee.

The eight councillors have left the group but not the party, and have put the council into no overall control.

There is now a Lib Dem group of 18, of whom six are female, 17 Tories, four Labour and the council website shows 10 councillors sitting as independents, which includes the eight former Lib Dem women plus Tindall. Regional officers are thought to be trying to resolve this.

FLYING FOOTWEAR

Prominent Young Liberal James Bliss indulged deeply in the refreshments at the 2023 conference Glee Club, which led to him removing someone's shoe and throwing it, where it struck another attendee.

He was ejected by hotel security and then banned from conference for a year by the Federal Conference Committee (FCC).

Bliss then appealed, which led to Federal Appeals Panel chair David Graham telling conference that - deplorable as the incident was - FCC had exceeded its powers in banning Bliss.



Graham said any case made against Bliss should have been handled by the party's complaints and disciplinary process, not by FCC holding a meeting and especially not one at which Bliss was unrepresented.

FAME AT LAST

Liberator Drive is one of Market Harborough's newest streets. A tribute to this magazine by the Liberal Democrat-led coalition that runs Harborough District Council?

No, writes our Market Harborough correspondent, it's a tribute to a horse. The National Hunt Chase Challenge Cup is run every year at the Cheltenham Festival, but it first took place in 1860 at Farndon Field, Market Harborough. That's where this new estate is being built, and Liberator Drive and the streets around it are named after runners in that race.

And Liberator won't be commemorated by a dead end for long. Any road called 'Drive' that heads for open fields is going to be extended soon.

ERMINE CONTROL

Ed Davey should look for new peers who can scrutinise bills and help update the party, not policy experts, says Liz Barker

2024 has been a rollercoaster year for Liberal Democrats. The elation of our result in the UK general election in July followed by the hammer blow of the American result. Now we need to focus on what both of these results mean for us, set a strategic direction which makes us distinctively liberal and build a programme which is credible and popular with voters. To do that we need to take a long hard look at all aspects of our work as a party.

The things which makes us distinct are our values set out in the preamble to our constitution. Policies change to suit political economic social and technological developments, but values endure. Our commitments to liberty and justice for individuals within societies which afford everyone equality of opportunity are non negotiable. So too are our support for universal human rights, internationalism and environmentalism.

All of these are under attack from religious nationalist forces, originating most notably from the USA and Russia. The next few years will be very difficult, testing times for Liberals, but rarely have our ideals and policies been more needed. So now would be a good time for every constituency, state party and AO to think about defending the inevitable accusations of wokeness which will come from the Tories.

We also need to capitalise on our election result. Being the third largest party in Westminster our leader has a weekly opportunity to hold the government to account publicly at PMQs. At some stage broadcasters, particularly the BBC, will be held to account for their indefensible over-promotion of right wing minorities and repeated failure to include Liberal Democrats in the main news and political discussion programmes.

For the first time since 2010 we are an attractive proposition for young people and innovative thinkers who see us as a forum for progressive, inclusive policies and with growing influence at UK level. However, with a Labour government which is cautious to the point of timidity and scared of Reform, we must focus ruthlessly on policies which benefit young people. To do that we need to update our communications skills and strategies as an add on - definitely not a replacement for - our ground war.

The next local elections and the Scottish and Welsh campaigns will be extremely important. With the nationalists imploding there are many voters looking for a new political home. That is why Reform are targeting Wales, and is why we have to make the economic case for Liberalism relevant in post industrial communities.

To do that we must use all our resources wisely. The injection of new researchers and policy officers is great, as are the new MPs.

It also means that we have to think about our group in the Lords who since 2015 have led on most portfolios and maintained relationships with different sectors and lobby groups. The Lords will continue to be the home of detailed legislative scrutiny, and we have lots of experience and expertise, but there will be change and we must think about how to optimise that.

Labour have promised Lords reform, though getting rid of hereditaries falls far short of meaningful reform. They could do is get rid of the archaic titles and replace them with ones that reflects the job we do. That could cut the queue of people who see it as preferment, and concentrate the minds of the leaders and their staff responsible for nominations.

Ed should learn from previous leaders. Paddy Ashdown used his power of appointment wisely, choosing people who not only brought skills and experience but who were also members of diverse communities which were not represented by our then mainly white and male MPs.

Paddy also chose people who would strengthen the party's campaigning capacity throughout the UK. In stark contrast Nick Clegg appointed people who weren't members and didn't stay long on our benches.

In anticipation of there being more Liberal Democrat peers campaigning is well under way. Names are being mentioned on the basis that they have particular policy expertise, and different factions within the party are building up their favoured candidates.

Ed should have none of this. We do not need experts in any one policy area in the Lords; they can and should be encouraged to act as advisers. We need people who can do the job of legislative scrutiny, but also contribute to the programme of updating Liberal Democracy, and strengthening the Liberal Democrats across the UK over the next 20 years.

Ed has made a very good start by appointing Caroline Pidgeon. A formidable campaigner, who knows her stuff on key policy areas and who builds effective teams.

The case for abolition of the Lords has been strengthened by the appalling abuses of patronage by Johnson and Truss. However, for as long as we are there we should use the Lords group as the focal point around which to build the programme of renewal of Liberal Democracy, a project in which the Young Liberals can and should play a key role.

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

DIARY OF A BLACK MAN AT PARTY CONFERENCE

Six years on the Lib Dems have still ignored proposals to improve their standing among ethnic minorities. That will soon cost them dearly at the polls, says Rod Lynch

I have been in the Liberal Democrats for over 22 years. I joined the party in the Camberwell and Peckham and Bermondsey & Old Southwark constituencies.

I arrived at this year's Liberal Democrats conference venue and was shown to the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality (LDCRE) stand by event staff. I asked for two tables, two table cloths plus two chairs. My order was fulfilled within 30 minutes.

It took us three hours to set the stand up. When it was done, we drove to our supplier to collect our branded merchandise.

We were gone for about an hour. When we got back we found the LDCRE stand dismantled along with some of our equipment.

The table and the table cloth was gone. I was not pleased, three hours down the drain. I was totally knackered as I had cancer treatment the day before. Now this. How did it happen?

Two burly gentlemen told me "we have taken back what is ours". I was like what? He said I had taken equipment from his stand and used it on our stand, I could not believe it, I had been racially profiled as a Black thief. I was shocked.

RACIALLY PROFILED

Hang on a minute, this is a Lib Dem party conference. I'm being racially profiled. "This can't be right"

I told them that they need to contact the event staff and order their equipment. I gave them two minutes to return the equipment or I would take direct action.

These are the people who have a say on the treatment of how race equality is handled in England being associated with the English party.

I was exasperated, but my welcome to conference was not finished, far from it.

Went to collect my ID Badge, there was a queue. The steward greeted me and directed me to the seat in the middle. When I got there I said hello to the lady in front of me, she didn't answer me. She looked up from texting on her mobile phone and said, "you go down there". I looked at her and said the steward said to come to you. She said "just go down there", I said where and she said the end. I have never been so humiliated in all my life. I was spoken to like I was something under her shoe. Two of her colleagues had their mouths open. Welcome to Lib Dem Conference 2024

The elephant in the room for the conference was race equality and how as a party we become more racially diverse. The reason I have chosen race is because It's abundantly clear that it's not good enough to just

espouse the virtues of liberty and freedom, we have to reflect it, in everything that we do, in everything that we are supposed to be.

People say we are moving in the right direction. Are we? You must be thinking, not that 'old chestnut' again, why do they keep banging on about it. Because those who can affect change are not listening.

So, LDCRE commissioned a, 'where are we now?' review,

'Alderdice six years on'. It was a deep dive into the recommendations of Lord Alderdice's report looking to see if the recommendations have been implemented. The research found that very few had, and things were happening too slowly to make any meaningful impact.

Before the launch of the LDCRE review, two visitors came to the stand to tell us at the top of their voice that the review was not fair to them and we could have sorted out any issues before these made their way in to the review. They had six years to do that and did nothing.

I consider their actions smack of desperation, bench warmers and 'race equality blockers' in denial.

It's sad to say, but I was not alone. A black visitor to conference was brought to the LDCRE stand by an ally at Green Lib Dems who he had confided in that he is disappointed how he is being received by some of those on the party stands. I felt disappointed and embarrassed to listen to what had happened to him. All so very sad.

LDCRE held a fringe meeting on the Sunday with 140 guests. We had a stellar panel of Vince Cable, Baroness Hussein Ece, Victoria Collins MP and party president Mark Pack.

There was a presentation was by the author of the LDCRE Review Janice Turner. People were in shock.

During the debate people expected more solutions from the party. People were looking at one another asking was that an answer to the question I asked.? Answers from the party president told us nothing.

Cable told the audience that he'd give the party four out of 10. We need to put things in place pretty quickly. We need to be more diverse. Thank you for marking the party's homework, was his last remark.

Sir Simon Hughes former minister and former party president told the current president in no uncertain terms that something needs to be done and fast.

We can't go out to the big cities that are becoming more urban with all white activists, all white Councillors, and all white members of parliament.

Thankfully, there were grown ups in the room who understood what those experienced politicians on the panel were saying. Sitting on our hands and doing nothing is not good if the party is seeking to be the

official party of opposition. Equality is a right not an option.

Thankfully all is not lost. Collins told us how the Stellar Project has helped her to win. She had help with training information advice and guidance to become the excellent MP she is today. The same can be said of other success stories of the Stellar project, such as Carshalton & Wallington's Bobby Dean MP and Eastbourne's favourite son Josh Babarinde MP.

When you talk about race equality to members of the party who can affect change they become defensive and hostile. The "how dare you question me hostile", stance becomes evident, with a face like thunder to match. I call them the bench warmers and blockage of change.

Baroness Hussein Ece said the party needed a race action plan. Her suggestion was unanimously agreed by those in the room. She served as the party's spokesperson on equalities from 2011-2019. She was also a Equality and Human Rights Commissioner.

In 2020 I sat on the General Election Review by Baroness Dorothy Thornhill. Race equality being a top priority came out loud and clear from the review. We could have been a lot further forward if we followed the review recommendations to the letter. The naysayers chose to do things differently.

Now we have Kemi Badenoch as leader of the Conservative Party. Kemi is very dangerous if she pivots to attack the Liberal Democrats. How will our members counter any attack from the Conservatives? The ill informed will be accused of racism as they simply have not had the training as they and their representatives have been in denial.

I would like to know what would be the best vessel to use to start teaching, training our MPs and councillors on issues of race equality and the language used.

The so called organisations and experts say they are doing it, however, where is the proof? What are they taught? Time to go out to an external organisation with nationally accredited certificated training?

BLACK VOTING INTENTIONS

Within the black community, their voting intentions have Lib Dem's in 4th/5th place behind the Greens and neck and neck with the Reform party. We all need to be careful what we wish for.

What do I think the party should be doing? Accept that there is a problem. It is only then that we can collectively deal with the issues at hand.

You must be thinking this dude is 'barmy' we now have 72 new MP'. What's the problem? The problem is we are not reflective of the United Kingdom electorate. Sir Vince Cable said he used to give speeches and all he could see is a sea of white faces.

If we have illusions of being the official opposition then we will need to target the big cities, they are becoming more urban. Some people think we drunk the kool aid and have cracked it.

"We can't go out to the big cities that are becoming more urban with all white activists, all white councillors, and all white MPs"

In 2029 we are there to be shot at. We need to hold what we have won and put on 15% to 20%. With Mike Dixon as chief executive and Ed Davey as leader anything is possible. You have to admit they played a blinder. They marshalled their teams like clockwork. The message was clear. With the creator of the Lib Dem manifesto Lord Newby in the Lords and hopefully an experienced president coming in next year we have the makings of a united front.

The one thing to gel all facets together is to take on board the recommendations of the LDCRE review. Ignore them at your peril.

We need to get away from the suggestion box mentality. Instead of kicking it in to the long grass open all those reviews and do something about the recommendations.

External training is a must. Show and tell people how to do it, which was a good suggestion from Sir Simon Hughes.

The race equality agenda is not for the swift, it is for those that can endure it. You are painted as a monster or trouble maker when all you're trying to do is stand up for people that look like me.

I leave you with this. It's quite clear the structures in the party are broken. People who are chosen to operate with the structures are not listening.

Halt the short lead time for PPC candidate selection that would leave BAME candidates no chance of competing fairly until 2034.

The English Party must go through radical change. Those that have been there before Noah need to be moved on.

How can we take the fight to Labour, when to do that we have to understand who we are talking to, show them respect and greet people in to our family with open arms. We can win against Labour. I campaigned hard with Southwark Lib Dem'. We bucked the trend because we bothered to listen and talk to people who did not look like us. I'm afraid your going to have to do it too

I want a few things done before cancer takes me to my resting place. Most of all a more diverse party.

My diary is not meant to beat up any one person or organisation within our party. We just need to understand that with 72 new MPs we now have the target on our backs. Next time round it's going to be tough. Are you listening.

Rod Lynch is the vice chair of LDCRE

BLUE STATE POST ELECTION BLUES

How did American come to elect a felon and how authoritarian will Trump be able to get? Martha Elliott considers what went wrong

I was so wrong.

When Biden was in the race and increasingly seeming frail, I was terrified that he would lose. I was convinced - perhaps I was also delusional - that after President Biden bowed out of the presidential race, Trump could be beaten and vice president Kamala Harris could win.

Kamala, young, brilliant, and positive, was going to unite the Democratic party and attract Independents and Republicans who couldn't bring themselves to vote for Trump. I didn't think Americans were stupid enough to vote for an ageing man who was not only a convicted felon but also a lying, thieving, misogynistic racist with no moral compass.

LOCKSTEP LEMMINGS

But I overestimated my fellow Americans. They either believed his lies or ignored the threats to our democracy that he has openly embraced. Then they marched in lockstep like lemmings over the cliff and voted for a wanna-be dictator.

To make matters worse, the voters gave the Republicans control of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, though as I write there were half a dozen races that have not been called though too few for a Democrat majority.

However, Trump has already tapped a few representatives and senators to serve in his cabinet. That could mean that the balance of power may not all go to Republicans or their margin would be razor thin and it would be more difficult to keep all Republicans in line since some are moderates, not MAGA devotees.

So why were the Democrats and the polls so wrong in this election?

The perhaps overly-inflated view of the strength of the party comes from Biden beating Trump in 2020 and the huge victory Democrats had in the 2020 midterm elections.

Usually, the party in power loses seats in Congress. Instead, they gained seats in the House and took control of the Senate. Most of Trump's hand-picked candidates lost their election. So many - and I include myself in this assessment - thought the country was tired of Trump's bitter rhetoric and refusal to admit he lost the 2020 presidential race.

He left the White House in disgrace after the violent 6 January attempt to stop the certification of the vote. It seemed as if his power over the party was waning. Then he faced 71 indictments in federal and state courts, was successfully sued for defaming a woman he may have raped and ordered to pay \$82m, and was convicted of fraud in New York.

His sentencing on his conviction for using hush money to keep embarrassing information about an extramarital affair was scheduled for later this month, but that has been delayed and may not take place because a custodial sentence would interfere with his presidential duties. I wish.

But one of the big reasons for the loss was that Trump's hardcore supporters never abandoned him. And Republican politicians knew that as long as that base backed Trump, they needed him to get elected. He controlled the big Republican donor lists as well. So, one by one Republican leaders went to Mar-a-Lago to kiss the ring. Even a disgraced president can keep power over his party.

Many Democratic strategists thought that Trump's base was not enough to elect him president and that he'd lost control of the party.

The rationale or perhaps rationalisation was that most people had had enough of his constant haranguing and his increasingly rambling and irrational rhetoric at rallies.

In the closing weeks of the campaign, he made remarks about the size of golfer Arnold Palmer's male anatomy and enacted a crude performance of fellatio on a microphone at a rally. He lost track of what he was saying. He brought up random topics like fear of sharks for no apparent reason and without a point. His antics seemed to indicate that he was suffering from mental decline, if not dementia. But a lot of people just shrugged, said, "that's just Trump being Trump" and voted for him anyway.

I blame President Biden. I was wrong in my previous assumption and prediction that eliminating primaries avoided the inevitable backbiting and would make it easier for Harris to win.

Additionally, Biden went into office saying he was a "transitional president." The implication was that he was a one term president and would not run for reelection, but he reneged on that campaign promise.

He should not have run and should have allowed the political process to pick a candidate. Yes, there would have been infighting and finger pointing, but at least the people would have chosen the candidate, and not felt cheated.

As a result, Harris had only 107 days to conduct a campaign. It wasn't enough. And because she was loyal to Biden, she didn't distance herself from his policies. This especially hurt her with young people and those concerned that Biden did not do enough to stop the carnage in Gaza. When she was on television programme *The View*, she was asked what she would have done differently from Biden. After an awkward

pause, she replied, “Nothing comes to mind.” That was a big mistake.

Perhaps the Democratic messaging was wrong. Instead of calling Trump a fascist, Harris and others should have focused on explaining how the administration had helped the economy - one of the primary concerns of the electorate. Dan Rather suggested that the Democratic Party has been preaching to the choir and needs to figure out new messaging and new ways to reach the middle class and blue-collar workers.

Political pundits have been theorising about why Harris lost when the polls seemed so close. Apparently, some people just didn't like Harris. Some have suggested that people lied when pollsters asked who they were voting for because they were embarrassed to say they were voting for Trump. Some say it was sexism or racism that caused her to lose. Certainly, more men voted for Trump than for Harris - even Black and Latino men. The day after Trump won,

TALIBAN CONGRATULATIONS

Afghanistan's Taliban congratulated the US for “not handing leadership of their country to a woman.”

I think there is some truth to all of those theories but I think the main reason Democrats lost was that they just didn't go out to vote. Harris received 12 million fewer votes than Biden, but Trump also got fewer - by almost one million than he did in 2020. T

his was unexpected because millions of new people - more Democrats than Republicans - registered to vote in 2024. Harris underperformed in key areas such as Black people (-2), Latino people (-13), young people (-6) and even women (-3). One of the reasons that Democrats did so well in 2020 midterms was the question of abortion access because Roe v. Wade had just been overturned by the Supreme Court and women went to the polls to voice their disapproval. Interestingly, in states where abortion access was on the ballot this year, more people voted for abortion access than voted for Harris.

The Democrats had millions of workers on the ground, but they just didn't get their party to turn out. So, what's in store for us?

We should expect mass deportation of either all illegal immigrants or illegal criminals, depending on what campaign promise you believe, higher tariffs for all imports - meaning that inflation will return, lower taxes especially for the rich and corporations, cuts or elimination for the war in Ukraine, and prosecution of Trump critics.

Shockingly, on 13 November, Trump announced his nomination of Matt Gaetz for Attorney General. Gaetz immediately resigned, in an attempt to block an embarrassing ethics report that was due to be released two days later. It's been reported that it will accuse Gaetz of sexual misconduct (including having

“I didn't think Americans were stupid enough to vote for an ageing man who was not only a convicted felon but also a lying, thieving, misogynistic racist with no moral compass”

sex with minors), and misusing campaign funds for his own personal use. Gaetz is a Trump lackey. If he became Attorney General, he would almost certainly prosecute Trump's critics and perceived enemies. The one saving grace is that many Republicans who were disgusted with Gaetz' sexual behaviour might vote against him.

Maine's Republican Senator Susan Collins has already said she expects an extensive FBI check as well as intense questioning at his proposed confirmation. She said: “I am shocked by the announcement - that shows why the advice and consent process is so important.”

(The constitution requires that the president nominate appointments to the executive and judicial branch, but it must be done with the “advice and consent” of the Senate, meaning they must vote to confirm.) Other Republican senators, such as Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, have also said that Gaetz' confirmation is not a done deal.

And foreign policy will be a joke since he's nominating Senator Marco Rubio as Secretary of State. That means being tough on China and Iran and would probably force Ukraine to cede Russian-occupied territories to end the war. Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee was nominated to be ambassador to Israel. Huckabee believes that the Palestinians have no claim to any part of Israel. And Elise Stefanik, who is in lockstep with Trump, was named UN ambassador. That means we may be less supportive of our allies and siding with Putin - and probably much more reversal of current policies. Tulsi Gabbard, a loyal Trump soldier who switched parties, has been named Director of National Intelligence, and she has no experience.

Robert F Kennedy Jr. has been nominated as head of Health and Human Services. He does not trust vaccines (say hello again to measles and polio) and he also wants to fire Food and Drug Administration employees who did not want to support unproven treatments for autism and dangerous stem cell therapies.

Throughout the campaign, the Democrats warned of project 2025, but those warnings got little traction from the electorate. In the closing days of the campaign, 24% of voters said their major concern was American democracy. The reason for many people's concerns is Project 2025, a detailed plan created by the Heritage Foundation to increase the power of the president.

The Supreme Court had already made him virtually untouchable by saying that a president could not be prosecuted for official actions while in office. Plus, Trump can't run for re-election (although he could

refuse to give up power and use the military to stay in office) so he has no reason to behave as he should under the constitution.

But Project 2025, if adopted would wipe away the traditional checks and balances in our democracy.

It proposes weaponising the Department of Justice against political opponents of Trump. Traditionally the DoJ has been independent of the president, not his personal attack dogs. Of course, a lot depends on who is the new attorney general, but it seems doubtful that Trump would keep anyone in that job who didn't do his bidding. The one way Trump could get Gaetz in is by a recess appointment which can be done when the Congress is in recess for more than ten days. Under that process, Trump could avoid the confirmation process and put the nominees in for up to two years.

Another proposal is making sure that the Secretary of Defense and military leaders are loyal to him. He has threatened to use the military against Americans. And if the secretary and the generals balk, Trump could fire them. That's when I get on a plane out of the US. On 12 November, Trump announced he was nominating Pete Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense. His only credentials are that he was a combat veteran and he is weekend host of Fox and Friends. He has said that women should not be in the military and that diversity in the military is "woke."

Trump's transition team has suggested that he sign an executive order that would set up a committee of retired military leaders to decide which senior military personnel are unfit for leadership. One can assume that this means they wouldn't go along with Trump's idea of using the military against American civilians. That's what Stalin did in WWII. It's also scary to note that the secretary would have access to nuclear controls. If you think that's okay, watch Dr. Strangelove.

The president He has promised to eliminate the Department of Education and put schools entirely under the control of the states. He supports allowing vouchers for parents to use to send their children to religious and private schools, which would undermine the country's public school system. It would also mean no government grants for low-income students to go to college.

However, Trump's campaign promises included putting prayer back in public schools and having schools teach 'The American Way of Life' - whatever that is, but I'd bet it includes eliminating anything being taught about America's former transgressions such as slavery. It's not clear how he could accomplish these things without federal oversight and an education department.

SACKED CIVIL SERVANTS

Project 2025 would, also weaken or eliminate protections for civil service employees. The civil service was established in 1883 to have federal jobs based on merit, not political party. Before that, whichever party won an election would fire the existing federal employees and hire political loyalists. This meant many incompetent people would fill jobs - and it meant that no one had expertise in their jobs whenever a new administration took over. The federal government was much smaller then. Now there are 2.2 million civil service employees. If Trump eliminates civil service,

it could be chaos. It is also what Victor Orban did to cement his dictatorship in Hungary. No opposition means extreme power.

It would also end Affirmative Action - which has already been weakened by Supreme Court decisions. Diversity is threatened in higher education admissions, but it seems that it will also end in government.

Other Project 2025 measures include reversing decisions on greenhouse gases and withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accords. This would mean more dependence on fossil fuels and reducing or eliminating wind and solar projects. The US already produces enough oil for its own use and is exporting it. So why the need? Even the chief executive of Exxon Mobil has opposed changing climate policy. He said that it would hurt the US economy.

There would be limits on access to abortion medication by stopping shipment through the mail (which is contrary to what Trump promised on the campaign trail). The women in states where abortion is virtually banned would no longer have access to abortion without traveling hundreds of miles. In addition, theoretically, a Republican Senate and House could mean a national abortion ban.

Lastly, there is closing the southern borders and deporting all 12 million illegal aliens. (Tom Homan was just made immigration czar.) It could mean a return to separating families in detention camps. In an interview on Fox News, Homan told sanctuary states and cities to "get the hell out of the way." Will the national guard invade?

That's just a taste of what could come if Trump carries out the 800-page roadmap that conservatives have drawn up.

Perhaps the real question is who will be running the office of the President. Trump seems less and less capable. So, JD Vance? Steven Miller, Trump's closest advisor and an ultra-conservative? Elon Musk donated \$100 million to the Trump campaign and with the help of Vivek Ramaswamy, also a billionaire who donated heavily to the Trump campaign, is supposed to be leading a new Department of Government Efficiency that would clean the US government of waste and save trillions of dollars.

He wants to cut, restructure, and even dismantle parts of government. Musk has been camped out at Mar A Lago since the election and in on calls to foreign leaders and has weighed in on appointments. That's what happens when the Supreme Court allows unlimited campaign donations. God help us.

This is not the first time Democrats have seemed in a devastating defeat. Nixon crushed George McGovern in 1972, by 520 electoral votes to 17. Reagan also trounced Walter Mondale by the same margin in 1984. Nixon had to resign from office over Watergate and Reagan came close to being impeached over the illegal funding of the Contras in Nicaragua.

Both times the Democrats eventually came back with victories. But we've never had a candidate who so proudly said he was going to ignore the US constitution—probably because he has never read it.

Unlike Trump, I am well-versed in American history and taught it and American Government for decades. I know we have had some shady characters who have occupied the White House and who were members of

the United States Senate and House of Representatives.

WORST PRESIDENTS

Most of my former students could tell you that I think Andrew Jackson was one of the, if not the, worst president in our history. Before becoming president, as a general, he illegally invaded Florida and executed three British citizens for minor reasons. After his election, he ignored decisions of the United States Supreme Court and reportedly said, "The Supreme Court has made their decision. Now let's see them enforce it." He ordered that thousands of peaceful native Americans be marched from Georgia to Oklahoma. Half of them died on what would be infamously known as "The Trail of Tears."

Part of his reason was that he would gain financially from the sale of their lands in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. He didn't trust banks so he destroyed the Bank of the United States which caused the panic of 1837, a recession that lasted seven years. Without a stable central bank, The US economy was unstable for 100 years. In 1835, Jackson worked with the Postmaster General to censor any abolitionist mailings. Why? Because he owned slaves and hated abolitionists. I could go on, but I think genocide, economic disaster, and censorship should give you a picture of a popular US president who was evil and corrupt. His face is on the \$20 bill. He was elected because the electorate was expanded to include all white males over 21. Before that election property ownership was required to vote. We had a lot of weak presidents after Jackson left in 1837 and didn't elect a strong one until Abraham Lincoln in 1860.

Jackson was not alone in being corrupt or evil. Many of the presidents owned slaves. John Quincy Adams became president by a shady deal and was known as "Your Fraudulency." Rutherford Hayes made a deal to withdraw all the troops from the South so that he would get the presidency.

That led to the end of reconstruction and 'Jim Crow' laws that would take away the rights of Blacks for a century, make them virtual slaves with sharecropping and allow violence such as lynching.

Woodrow Wilson showed in the White House, *The Birth of a Nation*, a film that paints a picture of the Ku Klux Klan as heroes. He praised it, saying it was the most accurate picture of reconstruction that he had ever seen. He was an historian, but he was also a racist.

They are just a few of the immoral men who were elected to the highest office in the land. We survived them, but can we survive this one?

In her concession speech, Harris said, "Do not despair. This is not a time to throw up our hands. This is a time to roll up our sleeves. This is a time to organise, to mobilise and to stay engaged for the sake of freedom and justice and the future that we all know

"It's also scary to note that the secretary would have access to nuclear controls. If you think that's okay, watch Dr Strangelove"

we can build together... There is an adage a historian once called a law of history, true of every society across the ages. The adage is, only when it is dark enough can you see the stars. I know many people feel like we are entering a dark time, but for the benefit of all I hope that is not the case...let us fill the sky with the light of a brilliant, brilliant billion of starts."

There have been voices who have said, just keep fighting. Heather Cox Richardson, who writes the daily Letters from an

American on election day told a group of Democrats in Maine not to despair if we lose because we have something we didn't have in 2016, a network of people who will keep organising and fighting. She said, we just have to keep moving forward and keep doing "the next right thing."

In her column Cox Richardson later quoted Arash Azizi, an Iranian Canadian columnist for the Atlantic: "The essence of America has always been the battle over its essence. No one election has ever determined its complete or permanent nature, and that is as true now as it was in 1860 or 1876. If today's America is the America of Donald Trump, it is also the America of those who would stand up to him."

I wish I could be as optimistic as they are. Power and greed are dangerous drugs. Even Biden seemed to be under the spell of wanting to stay in power.

When a woman asked Ben Franklin what form of government the new constitution set up, he quipped, "A republic, if you can keep it." For the first time in my life, I'm not sure we can.

Martha Elliott has been a journalist for 45 years. She has produced hundreds of television shows on politics and constitutional questions. She has also written several books. Her last was *The Man in the Monster*. She lives in Maine.

NEW TO ALL THIS

York Member questions six new Liberal Democrat MPs who were prepared to tell him what makes them tick politically

JOSH BABARINDE, EASTBOURNE



threw himself off, without hesitation. But I was quaking in my boots when I got to the top, but there was no way out, so after a bit of a wobble I took the plunge.

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero?*

A *As a kid, I often heard the phrase "He's not doing anyone any harm, so leave him be". That's also the essence of John Stuart Mill's 'harm principle', which resonates strongly with me: "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it." I don't agree with all of Mill's stuff but he's certainly been a big influence on my liberalism.*

Q *What made you a Liberal Democrat?*

A *I had a challenging childhood but an amazing family, and great teachers and scout leaders, all of whom lifted me up. But a lot of young people don't have such a support network and get sucked into gangs and crime. Liberalism for me is all about supporting those people and helping them get as far as their talents allow them to, regardless of their start in life. That's why I'm a Liberal.*

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *It was local, local, local... and listening. Over the years I was a candidate we spoke to people in the tens of thousands about the key things they were worried about such as losing local services and sewage and we offered local solutions and local action.*

Q *Most memorable moment of the campaign trail?*

A *Doing a bungee jump in Eastbourne before the general election. Ed Davey went to the top of the 160ft crane and*

Q *Causes close to your heart and why?*

A *Securing the future of my local maternity hospital where I was born. I'm also passionate about criminal justice reform, and supporting the victims of crime.*

BOBBY DEAN CARSHALTON & WALLINGTON

Q *What made you a Liberal Democrat?*



A *I was drawn to liberalism philosophically. Its emphasis on empowering every individual to succeed means attention is paid to the balance between societal support and personal liberty.*

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *Working hard on the big council estates where people have started to lose faith in politics working for them.*

Q *Most memorable moment of the campaign trail?*

A *Going on the biggest ride at Thorpe Park with Munira Wilson. It started raining heavily on our way up the rollercoaster. When we returned, they shut the ride down because the rain had made it too dangerous. Sarah Olney missed this one as she was having a cup of tea.*

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero?*

A *Willam Beveridge. He understood that a strong state can be a great enabler of opportunity in society.*

Q *Causes closest to your heart and why?*

A *Economic justice. Growing up working class, I saw that hard work does not always pay off, and that our welfare system is not there in the way that it should be for those who fall on hard times through no fault of their own. I also moved into the care of my grandparents as a teenager, so have been fighting for better rights for kinship carers.*

MANUELA PERTEGHELLA, STRATFORD-ON-AVON

Q *What made you a Liberal Democrat?*

A *The party's belief in international cooperation, focus on social justice, and real action on climate change. Plus, we actually prioritise engaging with local communities and working with local people.*

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *Door-knocking, plain and simple, listening to people's concerns, and showing that I was in it for them. We had built up a good profile and reputation in Stratford-on-Avon, and winning control of the district council certainly helped, as did*



the unpopularity of the previous Conservative MP.

Q *Most memorable moment of the campaign trail?*

A *Definitely when Ed and I decided it'd be a good idea to tackle a local aqua jungle course. I fell in the water at least a dozen times - but we highlighted the important issue of sewage in our rivers. It was of those moments where you remember that sometimes politics needs a sense of humour.*

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero?*

A *Shirley Williams. She wasn't just a founding member of the Lib Dems - she showed that you could stand by your principles even when it was tough. Plus, she paved the way for women in politics when it wasn't the easiest place to be.*

Q *Causes close to your heart?*

A *Firstly, food poverty: no child should be worrying about where their next meal is coming from. Secondly, sewage in rivers: it's bad for public health, it's bad for wildlife, and it's just plain gross. Thirdly, the NHS: it's there for us when we need it most, so I want to make sure it gets the support it deserves.*

EDWARD MORELLO WEST DORSET

Q *What made you a Liberal Democrat?*

A *It was Nick Clegg's resignation speech. He said, and I summarise, that*



in the face of the politics of identity, of nationalism, of us versus them: it has never been more important to keep the flame of liberalism alive. I strongly agreed and decided then to join the party.

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *Fourteen years of Conservative chaos. More than anything else, it was a vote for change.*

Q *Most memorable moment of the campaign trail?*

A *My West Dorset seat is incredibly rural. I lost track of the number of times I hiked all the way to the end of some lane only to find they weren't home.*

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero?*

A *Paddy Ashdown because he was an essentially good man, who kept the party relevant and cut through with the public. His old constituency neighbours mine and even today people regularly stop to tell me stories about him. He embodies liberalism and decency for me.*

Q *Cause closest to your heart and why?*

A *The environment. Climate change is the single biggest issue facing our Country and humanity more generally. We desperately need urgent action.*

**STEFFAN AQUARONE,
NORTH NORFOLK**

Q *What made you a Liberal?*

A *I might be in a minority of people who read political manifestos, but I*

was genuinely sold on the line "The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity." I don't think any other political movements speak as precisely about their true underlying purpose, or as powerfully.

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *We spent years door knocking, and getting to know the issues that mattered to people. Then we campaigned on those issues, relentlessly and with clear message discipline. And we held the sitting MP to account on his voting record, and how it went against the interests of the constituency. It's easy to say "well, Reform helped" but in truth I think we lost one vote to Reform UK for every two the Tories did.*

Q *Most memorable moment of the campaign trail?*

A *The overwhelming relief and sense of possibility on the first weekend in January 2024 when I turned up to a canvassing session and was joined by six colleagues - two of them other parliamentary candidates from elsewhere.*

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero?*

A *I know there were a lot of great Liberals of the past, but it seems a bit unreasonable that I should have to wait for them to shuffle off their mortal coil first! I'm happy to say that mine,*



Norman Lamb, is very much alive and well, and currently writing a book on what needs to be done differently in mental health service delivery.

Q *Causes close to your heart?*

A *Delivering better rural health and social care services, stopping sewerage being discharged into the sea, and transforming the fundamental way government is structured to go about its business.*

LISA SMART, HAZEL GROVE

Q *What made you a Liberal / Liberal Democrat?*

A *Reading the Lib Dem preamble. Growing up, I remember my dad saying the penny in the pound on income tax for education being the key reason he was voting Lib Dem that year. The Lib Dems were also the only ones who talked any sense on proposed ID cards. I'd always voted Lib Dem but didn't join the party until my late 20s. But I felt that I needed to do something more constructive than shouting at the television. So I read the preamble and realised this was what I wanted to be part of. My first conference made me realise that I'd found my people.*

Q *Key factor in winning your seat?*

A *Having been the candidate since 2015, I'm sure that some would say stubbornness! In 2019 when I was knocking on doors, everyone was either voting based on Brexit or Corbyn. Being a local candidate who had worked hard in the community wasn't a factor. This time, people were interested in what I could do for the community, and had already done. What got that across was putting out as many pieces of paper as possible, knocking on thousands of doors and having that conversation as many times as possible. We also had a great team of local volunteers from Hazel Grove and beyond.*

Q *Most memorable moment from the campaign trail?*

A *I didn't know the result until the team called me from the count to say that we'd won - I hadn't wanted to jinx things and so hadn't even thought about an acceptance speech. The moment that really sticks in my mind*



though was pinning my rosette onto my jacket. The rosette was special as it was a giant Liberal orange one that Michael Winstanley's wife had made for him when he was elected in the 1970s. Their grandson had given it to me in 2019 – and the magnitude of what we'd done, and of the shoulders we were standing on, hit me as the pin went through the fabric.

Q *Who's your Liberal / Lib Dem hero and why?*

A *My predecessor as the most recent Lib Dem MP for Hazel Grove, Andrew Stunell - he was that rare kind of politician who gave politics a good name. As an MP he set the standard for all who followed him, and he was interested in doing something, not just being something. As a minister, he delivered the Localism Act. But more than that, he was one of the warmest, kindest people I've ever met. He's hugely missed.*

Q *Causes close to your heart and why?*

A *For me, it's important to remember those things that brought me into politics and where I can deliver the change that is needed. Suicide prevention is one; electoral reform is another – that's why I am on the APPG on Suicide and Self-harm Prevention, and the APPG for Fair Elections. Financial education is another topic close to my heart.*

York Membery is a journalist and a contributor to the Journal of Liberal History. He is a member of Twickenham and Richmond Liberal Democrats. The gender imbalance here reflects the responses received.

THE GOVERNMENT NOBODY REALLY WANTED

And it's one that very few voted for, lacks political courage and is ripe for being taken on, says Roger Hayes

The adage goes, 'we get the government we deserve.' Well, after suffering 14 years of the government nobody deserved, we've now ended up with the government nobody really wanted.

Over 40% of registered voters did not bother, and of those who did, two-thirds did not vote Labour. That means that, even with its enormous majority, this government represents less than 20% of the British electorate. If this was anywhere else in the world we would be calling into question the legitimacy of such a government to take office.

Some of us suspected this would happen, and that much of it would get overlooked as everyone would be just so grateful to see the back of the Tories. However, this Labour government has three fatal weaknesses which will eventually combine to bring about its downfall. Liberal Democrats should be exploiting all these and preparing to take Labour's place.

ELECTORAL FRAGILITY

For the past couple of years, after each May local elections, and the parliamentary by-elections, and with help from the data analysis of John Swarbrick, I have pointed out that Labour has mostly done well when it gets its usual vote out and others stay at home. In marked contrast, Lib Dems do well when they convince others to switch their vote and the turnout remains the same or even goes up.

It is easy for people to become fixated on the size of Labour's parliamentary majority to the point that even commentators, pollsters and other politicians miss what is hiding in plain sight.

Labour maybe losing support since the general election, but the significant thing is that its support is dropping from an already very low base. Its national vote was always fragile and its MPs are in precarious and vulnerable positions in many seats. Since the general election 13 new Labour MPs have resigned the council seats they held before the election. Nine of those 13 council seats were lost at those recent by-elections. This continuing and deepening fragility, of course, represents an opportunity.

However, outside of its 72 held seats, and maybe as many again where the party is properly active, say about 150 constituencies in total, the Liberal Democrats are an unknown quantity to the majority of the British electorate. These are the forgotten areas where the Liberal voice and campaigning passion is in desperate need of being heard and felt. The party lost 229 deposits this year. That's an eye-watering £114,500 down the drain. Not to mention the needs of those areas where, not only have over half the electorate turned their backs on both Labour and the Tories, but are in danger of giving up on democracy entirely.

With Labour on a low and falling fast, and the Tories still lost in denial and missing in civil war action, we desperately need to build a national party, once again capable of attracting the left of centre, liberally-minded citizens that have forgotten (or never even noticed) we exist.

Despite more than 400 seats, Labour won just 33.7% of the popular vote and on much lower turnouts. See stark details here from the House of Commons Library [<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2024-turnout/>]

As a quick example: The constituency with the highest turnout was Harpenden and Berkhamsted (75.2%) - Victoria Collins's gain from the Tories. Seven of the 10 seats with the highest turnouts were Liberal Democrat gains, and 14 of the 20 seats with the highest turnout were Lib Dem wins, all above 70%. The lowest turnout was 40% in Manchester Rusholme (Lab), and 19 of the 20 constituencies with the lowest turnout were Labour-won seats – the other one was the Speaker. In a recent Welsh council by-election, where the Tories gained a seat from Labour, just one in ten electors bothered to vote.

So fragile are Labour's popular prospects that it is adopting an increasingly full-on 'traditional' conservative approach to policy. Not just with its thinly disguised, austerity spending plans in the recent budget, but now on environmental, employment and social policy too.

The timidity with which it is dipping its toe into the progressive policy water is disappointing to say the least. Without any guiding principles, it appears afraid of offending the small minority that positively voted for it, and indeed everyone else too. Like the proverbial rabbit in the headlights, it seems terrified to actually do anything, other than small tweaks, as the mighty juggernaut of reality bears down on us all.

Here are just a few examples from the past few months, sadly there are many more.

With COP29 underway, Ed Miliband talks a good tale but struggles to square a truly green energy policy that can turbocharge a future green economy.

Friends of the Earth's take on the Budget is: "Today's announcement falls staggeringly short of what's needed to address climate and nature emergency."

The Guardian a few weeks ago: "What has been missing so far are clear plans from the rest of the government to make their own contributions to net zero. From transport, ... to industry and housing, ..."

The Independent reported a couple of weeks back: "Current national climate plans 'fall miles short' of what is required to avert the worst impacts of global warming, the UN has warned."

Local government, the nation's provider of the vast majority of day-to-day services, and where the Liberal

Democrats punch well above their weight, has long had an inequitable funding system. Since Thatcher broke it in the 1980s the Tories have only ever made an unfair system worse. Labour has never shown any interest in even attempting to repair local government funding, and the many essential services that it provides and that millions of citizens rely on, let alone reforming a system decades past its use-by date.

Labour's House of Lords reform is merely the weakest of token gestures which the Lib Dems have tried to make meaningful and transformative with a fully elected second chamber. Despite the Labour's conference voting decisively for proportional representation, Starmer has turned his back on fair votes and other constitutional reforms, cynically believing that our demonstrably broken system serves his purpose – for now.

Like Blair before them, and on issue after issue, this Labour party has overriding, play-it-safe Tory tendencies. Real reform will not be forthcoming. It will be down to Liberals to campaign pluralistically for the changes we know are needed, meeting people in the communities where they are, facing the issues that matter today, and finding solutions that work village by town, by city, by region. There is rarely a one-size-fits-all answer and it should never be a timid, wrong-headed, or conservative answer.

Under Starmer, Labour has morphed into a simplistic, minimalist, centre-right party with no philosophical grounding. It may like to talk bold about the iniquities and failings of the past Conservative governments, but when it comes to it they offer nothing more than warm words, with no real ideas for sustainable, transformative change.

POLITICAL NAIVETY

I find it baffling that Labour seems so ill-prepared for government. What have they been doing for the past few years? The Tory party may have collapsed into pathetic chaos, but the intelligent people running Labour, who must have known what was waiting for them. A hyper-critical right-wing media was always lying in wait, but even so Labour has got off to a very poor and faltering start with endless self-imposed errors.

The numerous freebies and handouts, accepted with wild abandon, may have been perfectly legal but were hopelessly naïve and foolishly taken. Surely, someone advises them that perception is often more important than reality. It doesn't matter what it is, it matters what it looks like. And particularly when you and your son go off to the football for free every week, and to Taylor Swift concerts, while those who ought to be your natural constituency are treated like children left out in the cold with their noses pressed to the window. As someone said to me, "why should I trust a prime minister who can't even buy his own trousers?!"

"So fragile are Labour's popular prospects that it is adopting an increasingly full-on 'traditional' conservative approach to policy"

The continuation of the two-child allowance cap; the folly of the cut-off point for the winter fuel allowance; the continuing Sue Grey fiasco; the promise not to increase personal taxation, only to admit the day after the budget that employers' NI increase is likely to impact employees. And now unemployment is rising and the holy grail of growth stagnating – all these point to a government that either can't think things through or doesn't care about the consequences.

Labour is likely to improve over time, but this degree of political naivety has set a tone

early on that won't be forgotten – if for no other reason than we (and others) can always point it out. They may be turning to old Blairites to steady the ship, but this smacks more of hankering after a rose-tinted past than aiming for a bright new future. These are all the hallmarks of a leadership out of its depth with no political philosophy to guide it.

I am as keen as anyone to finally have done with the Tories. Next year's county elections will be another opportunity to hole them beneath the water line, and we should of course continue to harry them all the way to the next general election.

But that can't any longer be the Lib Dems only ambition. If we are to grow from a 'not-the-Tory-party' of opposition to become the main opposition party and on to form a government in our own right (which I actually now believe to be possible within my lifetime - just) then we must become a national party once again capable of representing the aspirations and hopes of everyone, in every part of every nation and region across the country.

I liken the Tories to a coiled spring – we can suppress them, but release the pressure, even for a moment, and they will spring back as if they never went away. In many so-called Labour-facing seats the Tories are part of our competition, along with, increasingly, the Greens, Reform and apathy, and we must tackle them wherever we find them. Conservatism must be overcome in all its forms if we are to build a Liberal society and sadly those Tory traits are now far from confined to the Conservative Party.

Roger Hayes is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Kingston-upon-Thames

THE SILENCE OF THE ARABS

Arab rulers may criticise Israel but their real concerns are doing business and staying in power, says Rebecca Tinsley

There is a popular theory that Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023 hoping to provoke a disproportionate reaction from prime minister Netanyahu and the Israeli Defence Force.

Hamas's leaders assumed that the Arab and Muslim world would be so outraged by Israel's heavy-handed response in Gaza that an alliance of nations would rally to defend the Palestinians. Hamas predicted they would apply maximum pressure to make the establishment of a Palestinian state the only realistic option for Israel. The reality? Not so much.

Opinion polls show that 89% of Arab citizens are now against recognising the state of Israel. There have been mass protests, an uptick of anti-Semitism and concern that there will be more violence like the Amsterdam soccer clash.

Merissa Khurma of the Wilson Center in Washington says of the 30-year-old Wadi Araba Treaty between Jordan and Israel: "If there's one thing Jordanians of all backgrounds are calling for in unison at the various demonstrations held since the war started, it is to annul this treaty once and for all."

Yet, Arab and Muslim leaders restrict themselves to denunciations of Israel's actions in Gaza and Lebanon, but none of the Abraham Accord signatories who normalised relations with Israel have suspended their cooperation. In mid-November, Saudi Arabia hosted a summit of Arab and Muslim leaders who labelled Gaza "genocide." A year ago, the same gathering condemned Israel's "barbarity." Yet, any plan to stop selling oil and gas to Israel was not discussed. Someone should do something to stop the suffering in Palestine, was the group's message: just don't look at us expecting action, was the subtext.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

Arab and Muslim leaders escape scrutiny because of the double standards of Western leaders who lecture the world about human rights as they offer toothless expressions of concern about events in the Holy Land. The difference is that autocratic leaders of Muslim and Arab nations have spent decades using Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to deflect from popular domestic demands for accountability and democracy.

Over the years, Arab rulers have often manipulated and diverted unrest on the so-called Arab Street by ramping up the rhetoric about "the Zionist entity," while doing nothing meaningful to change the facts on the ground. Since the Arab Spring, those same autocrats have lived in fear of where mass gatherings in their cities could lead.

Where are the offers of refuge to their Palestinian coreligionists who have nowhere to escape daily bombardment? The excuse given by Arab countries is that the Palestinians must hold their ground, and that even temporary evacuation would be a victory for Israel. To which the obvious response is, "How's that

working out for civilians in Gaza?"

Washington is pressuring Arab and Muslim leaders to tone down their outrage about the suffering of the Palestinians and Lebanese. America dangles the promise of security guarantees, sophisticated weaponry, and technology transfer to incentivise autocracies to fall in line. But much more is going on beneath the surface. A bipartisan bill is making its way through the US House of Representatives, providing for 'military partnerships' between Arab nations and Israel, with a 'military expert exchange program' and connections between senior Israeli and Arab commanders.

The Arab Street probably understands this cementing of Arab military ties with America and Israel, just as Arab citizens know how their rulers cream off massive bribes in the weapons procurement process. They have also noticed that although their governments buy enormous quantities of military hardware, they seem incapable or unwilling to fight their own battles, as with Yemen, when the Saudis hired mercenaries from Sudan to shoulder the risks of military engagement.

But it is just as likely that there is no elite Arab or Muslim outrage about Gaza and Lebanon, beyond performative condemnation in United Nations meetings. Nor is the indifference of Arab and Muslim leaders something new. Rather, it is part of a pattern, reflecting the cynicism and racism of the men holding power in many Muslim majority nations.

Twenty years ago, Muslims were being slaughtered by other Muslims in Sudan and Nigeria. There was silence from Arab and Muslim leaders, embarrassed that people who repeatedly cast themselves as victims were the ones doing to persecuting. As President Erdogan of Turkey commented on Darfur: "It is not possible for a Muslim to commit genocide."

Yet, their silence was more than mere embarrassment. Those same leaders also preferred not to spotlight the suffering of non-Arab Muslims in Nigeria and Sudan whom they see as "the wrong type of Muslim" i.e. Black. Ditto Arab and Muslim indifference to the Serbs' efforts to eliminate the Bosniaks (Muslims) or the persecution of Kurds (Muslims) at the hands of Iraq during Saddam's rule and Turkey under Erdogan.

This absence of solidarity applies to Beijing's campaign to eradicate Muslim culture in Xinjiang province. President Xi put a million Uighurs (who are Muslim) in reeducation camps, and systematically destroyed mosques. When the UN Human Rights Council debated Michelle Batchelet's devastating report on China's oppression of the Uighurs in 2022, Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia, Somalia, Pakistan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates backed Beijing, while Malaysia abstained.

Business deals with President Xi matter more than the most fundamental human rights of China's 18 million Muslims. In Kazakhstan there were demonstrations against Beijing's policies, but they were swiftly crushed by the authorities in Astana who prioritise cosy relations with China while their own ethnic Turkmen group is persecuted across the border in Xinjiang.

There is a profound silence from Arab and Muslim leaders (barring Pakistan) regarding the way in which prime minister Narendra Modi has stirred up Hindu mob violence against India's 172 million Muslim citizens. Again, business links with the supercharged Indian economy take precedence over sentimental coreligionist brotherhood.

There is also a sliding scale of worth among Arab leaders themselves, although it must be stressed that the compassionate attitudes expressed by Arab citizens in opinion polls are in no way reflected in the actions of their corrupt and autocratic rulers.

When President Assad of Syria began murdering his own people in 2011, he provoked a mass exodus to Turkey, Jordan and beyond, where millions of Syrians remain. At any given time, there are a million tents in Saudi Arabia, ready to be occupied by pilgrims making the haj. Yet, at no point did the Saudis offer to take a single Syrian refugee. While Muslims are recruited to labour in the Gulf in questionable conditions, there is no refuge for those fleeing persecution. Now, Indonesia and Malaysia are welcoming Palestinian refugees, while the door to the Gulf remains closed.

SHARED FEAR

America has identified the magic potion that dissolves any animosity between the Arab world and Israel: a shared fear of Iran. It is estimated that since the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Gulf's Wahhabi monarchs have spent \$100bn on spreading their austere version of Sunni Islam across the globe. They have funded thousands of madrassas and mosques, filling schools with textbooks that drip with bloodcurdling hatred of Shia Muslims (as well as the dehumanisation of Jews and Christians).

Iran's leaders have not won any Arab elite friends, funding proxies in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and further afield since 1979. By covertly promoting disruption, trying to export revolution, Tehran has stoked paranoia among Sunni monarchies. America, still smarting from its humiliation during the hostage crisis of 1979-81, has pulled together an informal alliance united in its desire to contain the mullahs of Qom. Hence there are 30,000 US troops stationed in the region, and the world's arms exporters do a roaring trade with Iran's enemies. For a Gulf monarch wishing to prevent a loss of power to his own civilians or clerics, as incited by Iranian proxies, the Palestinians do not matter.

“Arab citizens may focus their anger on the kleptocratic, hypocritical and oppressive elites who have denied them power and accountability for decades”

While working briefly on the West Bank, I was told repeatedly by Palestinians, “If these Arab leaders cared about us, don't you think they might have done something about it by now? It's been a long time since the Nakba, and the Gulf kingdoms are armed to the teeth. We're just an inconvenience for them.”

Since Israeli citizens will no longer countenance a two-state solution, it is hard to detect any sunlit uplands on the horizon. The Palestinian authority has little credibility in Gaza, and there are persistent rumours that Israel will annex the West Bank

and the Gaza strip, sending in the settlers. Israel is thought to be backing the United Arab Emirates to replace Qatar as the power they would prefer to win the lucrative contracts to rebuild Gaza.

Donald Trump has openly called on Netanyahu to “finish” operations in Gaza and Lebanon any way he chooses by the 20 January inauguration. It is safe to predict that Palestinians will nurture a profound grievance which will manifest as terrorism in and beyond Israel for generations.

Netanyahu may be less happy about Trump 2's approach to Iran. The Israeli leader is reputedly aching for a hot war with Iran, while Trump has repeatedly said he doesn't want conflict with Tehran. The word in Washington foreign policy circles is that Trump wants a quick, headline-grabbing deal with Iran along the lines of “only Nixon could go to China.”

Saudi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman is already preparing the path, making overtures to the Iranian leadership, who are keen for the removal of damaging economic sanctions. If such a rapprochement between the Sunni autocrats and Tehran is possible, the Palestinians will probably be sidelined.

Arab and Muslim leaders may continue to wail and gnash their teeth about Gaza, and if the hot war there ends, as Trump demands, they may sign cheques to fund reconstruction, especially if they take a slice of the bounty in kickbacks.

But at some stage there may also be a delayed reaction on the Arab Street, when citizens, disgusted at their leaders' behaviour over the Palestinians, may focus their anger on the kleptocratic, hypocritical and oppressive elites who have denied them power and accountability for decades. The Arab Spring may have been only the first act. It is likely that any popular uprising will be crushed promptly and with even more brutality than it was before. Perhaps that's why they want all those weapons the West is selling them.

Rebecca Tinsley is the founder of Waging Peace

LEFT BEHIND BY THE GREENS

The Green party made deeper inroads than the Lib Dems in most inner city areas at the general election. Urban activists Dave Raval, Charlie Clinton and Scott Emery look at what should be done

DAVE RAVAL IS CHAIR OF HACKNEY LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

I'm writing as the chair of the Lib Dems in Hackney, an inner-city area of London. We had lots of councillors in the 1990s, but numbers gradually diminished and we lost our last one in 2018. Labour has 49 councillors and the Green Party (I try not to call them "The Greens") now have three, all in different wards. I thought I'd write this piece instead to talk about what we have tried and how the Green Party has grown.

The Green Party is a broad church nationally. I would say that many of their members in Hackney are what is sometimes colloquially known as "watermelon greens", ie green on the outside, red on the inside. That has an appeal in Hackney, where Labour traditionally does well in elections.

Some local Lib Dem parties have worked together with the Green Party, even creating electoral pacts. We have not gone that far but, over the years we have worked with them on single-issue campaigns, most notably to protest against the closure by the council of a women's refuge, where we also coordinated with the Women's Equality Party. The relationship often felt a little one way; some Green Party activists were happy to engage with us, but others were not. I sense that many of them view us as less agreeable than Labour. Some probably think that they don't need to work with us. In recent years, the relationship has fizzled out completely.

The Green Party in Hackney is a well-oiled campaign machine. They run textbook ALDC-style campaigns; they definitely have learnt a lot from us, and probably have all our templates to boot. Indeed, sometimes their leaflets are almost identical to the best our party produces, just green at the top. They are also well-coordinated across London, so they send in activists from other parts of the city in local by-elections (of which there are many in Hackney). The Lib Dems are rightly proud of how well we campaign in parliamentary by-elections; the Green Party does just as well in local by-elections in Hackney. We also have access to ALDC templates of course, but we have fewer activists than they do, and by the time we've got one leaflet out, they have delivered several, all of which say "The Lib Dems can't win here", "It's the Greens or Labour around here" etc.

More recently, the Green Party locally seems to have set up some sort of alliance with pro-Palestine activists; in a recent pair of by-elections, each party stood down in favour of the other in one ward. This proved successful as the Green Party candidate won,

and the winner claimed that this was his party's first by-election win in London in 16 years.

We've also seen something similar in a recent by-election in next-door Islington; there the Green Party didn't stand down but they didn't actively campaign, in order to boost the chances of the pro-Corbyn/Palestine candidate, presumably.

In wider elections, for the directly-elected mayor of Hackney or for our two MPs, the Green Party usually comes second to Labour.

I think many people in Hackney vote Green on the basis of their values system - caring about the environment etc. But I think very few people really understand Green Party policy which is often a bit crazy or unworkable - good for bringing attention to important issues but not for implementing solutions. We never managed it effectively, but highlighting exactly what they would do, or their lack of a plan, might have some impact.

CHARLIE CLINTON WAS THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CANDIDATE IN 2024 IN HOLBORN & ST PANCRAS

Many votes for the Greens at the general election were protest votes, but as a result, in too many seats they now have the 'bar chart' advantage over us and we risk being squeezed.

We cannot ignore them. It would be dangerous to assume that their vote will simply melt away again.

They have key strengths: a clear brand (no one ever asks what they stand for...), and a position on the left without the baggage of a Tory coalition, to take votes off Labour on issues like Gaza, gender, housing, and more. Importantly, they are stronger among 18-34-year-old voters than us.

Our manifesto does include strong positions on the environment, housing, human rights, Europe and other policies which matter to these voters, but we need to bring them into our campaigning.

Being great local champions - and fixing many potholes - is a vital part of who we are and will continue to win us lots of votes. But it won't win over a young, idealistic voter who's more worried about the future of the planet, or children dying in Gaza.

On climate change especially we need to be much clearer that we are a green party. Nationally we need to be unequivocal on oil and gas especially - that is our biggest policy weakness. Locally we need to actively champion sustainability initiatives - and not fall into the trap of opposition.

When a sustainability policy is proving unpopular – such as the ULEZ expansion – the phrase “good policy done badly” works well. It shows we support the goal but would implement it differently, minimising the impact on people. We can be community champions without compromising our green credentials – in stark contrast to the top-down, ideological approach of the Greens and Labour.

We have so much to say to a young, green-leaning audience – but we need to actually speak to them. We need to paint a positive picture of the future we have to offer – and we can learn from the Greens how to do it. Here are three facts for you.

During the election, the Greens spent comparable amounts to us on digital ads (£240,000 to £260,000), but concentrated in fewer areas, suggesting higher ad density. They’re talking to young people where they are.

Their ads were more emotive and policy-focused, while many of ours were aimed at membership recruitment and activation. They told a better story than we did online.

Social media mentions of “#VoteGreen” outpaced “#VoteLibDem” by 6.5 times (according to IPSOS). They generate more word-of-mouth support than we do.

While we excel at reaching people who engage with local issues and leaflets, the Greens have been better at mobilising people online and generating passion for their party.

If we are going to reverse the rise of the Greens and take the fight to Labour, we need to combine the best of what they do, with the best of what we do. Our classic community focused ground war, combined with their stronger values led, digital campaigning. We need to be Greener, bolder, and louder.

SCOTT EMERY IS A LIBERAL DEMOCRAT COUNCILLOR IN HARINGEY AND FOUGHT HAMPSTEAD AND HIGHGATE AT THE GENERAL ELECTION

After several years of steady growth in the number of councillors, the Green party have capitalised on that success by quadrupling their number of MPs. In future elections, it’s highly likely that they will continue to attract votes from Labour, positioning themselves as an appealing alternative for left-wing voters who feel Starmer’s vision for Britain isn’t bold enough and is, in fact, too similar to the Conservatives.

As the Liberal Democrats, we have broadened our appeal, trading some of the left-leaning support we took from Labour for centrist votes from former Conservative supporters. This strategy has proven successful, giving us our largest number of MPs to date, while leaving the Green party as the solo surfer, riding the wave of left wing support.

Rather than trying to muscle in on the Green party, it’s clear that our best course is to stay true to the path we’ve set. Fighting against the tide would be a wasted effort. Instead, we should focus on our own story - one that has already brought us considerable success. Remember, success breeds success. If we emphasise our victories and the progress we’re making across the country, we’ll continue to build momentum locally as well.

In Haringey, we’re going for a ‘local champions’ strategy. This is all about focusing on what we deliver for residents. While it’s important to highlight the flaws of our rivals, we should also focus on what we have accomplished as local councillors - the victories we’ve had and the ways we stand up for what residents care about. This could mean anything from saving local bus services to planting more trees in partnership with the local gardening group.

Of course, we won’t ignore our green credentials; we just need to communicate them effectively. Instead of diving into policies that the public aren’t familiar with - like the Coalition’s Green Investment Bank, a great initiative that only a tiny fraction of the public understands. We should highlight the successes they already associate us with.

Take, for example, the issue of sewage in our waters - a topic we’ve made headlines for nationally. While Haringey doesn’t have a beautiful coastline, like some other parts of our country, issues with the water companies are still felt strongly among our constituents and we’ve found that there is a strong current of local frustration with Thames Water. The key is to find how the issue impacts the local community and build your messaging around it.

If we continue to ride the wave of our recent successes, there’s no doubt we can keep growing as a party. The goal is to maintain our momentum and not to sink while the Green party sail ahead. Let’s focus on what works, stay true to our story, and keep winning where it matters.

BADENOCH OPPORTUNITY IF LIB DEMS CAN GRASP IT

Disarray in Conservative ranks will only take the Lib Dems so far, the party leadership must articulate a grown-up alternative to Labour, says J Frasier Hewitt

The Conservative Party has spent the last four months trying to figure how best to proceed. Despite the election of a new leader in Kemi Badenoch, they are no nearer an answer today. To move forward at the next election, their party needs to win back voters from both sides of a coalition that returned them to power in one form or another between 2010 and 2019. Failure to do so could prove costly.

What are some of the challenges that Badenoch now faces in rebuilding such an electoral coalition?

121. That is the total number of parliamentarians that Badenoch has at hand to communicate a central narrative that will be crafted between now and polling day.

Given that Jeremy Hunt, James Cleverley, Tom Tugendhat, Andrew Mitchell, and Rishi Sunak have all stepped back from front line service, Badenoch must rely on some less experienced hands to do the heavy lifting. 121 might sound like a lot of MPs to Liberals but it's not, and for the leader of a newly minted opposition it will be a challenge to cut her cloth according to her means.

Badenoch needs to field a front bench that is capable of holding the Government to account; she needs a deep enough bench to substitute in fresh blood when scandals, disagreements, and general foolishness leads to shadows going overboard; Select committees need diligence, time, and hard work; and from the shadow cabinet, a competent group of spokespersons need to be identified that can take the party's campaign to the country.

STARK NAKED

Being the leader of the opposition is a challenging job, particularly if that leader has only previously known political life in government. Whereas previously the former minister might mutter anything they liked and someone in the press would pick it up; the leader of the opposition could stand stark naked atop Methodist Central Hall belting out Prince covers on a see-through Stratocaster, still the lobby would prefer to cover a story about the Minister for Tiddlywinks bunking off to get a Brazilian wax on a workday.

Generating cut-through is hard and requires dogged determination. Sometimes it pays off, usually it does not. None of this is to say that a political party should live and die by stunts – please take note Ed.

Being leader of the opposition is all the more challenging without a solid base of support among the ranks. Take 121 and multiply it by 0.347. You get 42. That is the number of MPs who supported Badenoch's candidacy. If you take into account a widely held

perception that MPs were playing silly buggers in the final parliamentary round of voting, it possibly wasn't even 42 supporting MPs. Badenoch went on to win the membership ballot with the lowest vote share for a winner since the inmates were given a vote over who runs the asylum, 56.5%.

She is not on the surest of grounds and there is a justifiable need to tread carefully.

Another problem is that for four months the Labour Party was left alone to talk-up black holes in budgets and economic legacies while the Tories focussed on picking a new leader. The lack of visibility around the party's response to these charges speaks to the difficulty of cutting through and, whatever people think about the budget, the narrative around economic competence and honesty will make it harder for voters to trust the Conservative Party at a future election.

Perhaps most importantly, those 121 MPs must learn how to act as an effective opposition. A very large proportion were not in the house before the election. Those who were present need to learn that the press and public no longer care so much about what they think and start to work out how to challenge a government with a majority larger than the Conservatives' whole parliamentary party; they must learn to be relevant again. Those who are new must learn how to be effective MPs, how best they can represent their constituencies, and how they might go about helping rebuild their party's case for government.

All of the above is before we consider the start that Badenoch has made to her job.

When forming her shadow cabinet, Badenoch offered her defeated opponent Robert Jenrick several positions before he eventually agreed to serve as Shadow Secretary of State for Justice. What went wrong?

The initial offers were of a low quality and represented a bad miscalculation by someone who doesn't appear to understand how the game is played. Even David Cameron, who roundly spanked David Davis back in 2005, understood that he needed to offer something substantial. In that case shadow Home Secretary;

Badenoch didn't have the wisdom to embrace her rival, or the strength to cast him aside. Equally, Jenrick didn't have the courage to walk away after the first counteroffer. If the leader of the opposition wasn't prepared to offer something of substance one of the two should have shown some strength, instead they spent half a day bartering back-and-forth, both looked petty and both are the weaker for it;

All of this was leaked and a party official stated: "Kemi just doesn't rate Robert". I ask you, with friends

like these...?

In addition, Badenoch has put colleagues' backs up in her reshuffling of responsibilities, moving experienced hands from portfolios they knew, had a fondness for, and could speak to. Are there always grumbles from those who didn't want to move? Of course there are. But for a new leader beginning their tenure with barely one-third of their parliamentary party supporting them, perhaps salvaging rather than irritating would be a better starting point.

Are these small issues in the wider scheme of things? Perhaps. But it does speak to political nous and approach, and several small things can turn into a big thing if not handled properly.

The Conservatives are going to spend some time thinking about policies ahead of the next election, there is certainly merit to this but the leadership team should not expect voters to reward their party for this. It runs the risk of looking unmoored from ideas and belief and this provides opportunities for other political parties, perhaps more assured, perhaps less scrupulous.

What of the road not travelled? Would the Tory future have been more secure under Jenrick?

I don't believe so. Jenrick has taken on a mantle of foulness left vacant by another regrettable former secretary of state, Suella Braverman. The difference between the two is that 'Bobby J' has the low intelligence and basic malign capacity to bide his time. Though his opportunism undermines his policies and he isn't smart enough to know when to walk away. Also, he only had one-third of the parliamentary party's backing, so same problem there.

So, back to Badenoch. What is left for her to lead and in what direction will she march?

Like all modern Conservative leaders, Badenoch has a half-decent party headquarters operation. She has put two lieutenants in there to get things moving; one is likely to be the campaigns attack-dog face of CCHQ, the other more likely to be the money magnet. This is combination that has worked in the past.

Badenoch needs to decide who she is talking to, trying to recover the 2019 coalition of voters is unlikely to pay dividends as the alignment of Beaconsfield and Bolsover always brought the dangers of schizophrenic political positioning. So, does she want to regain the middle, or the fringe anti-politics vote, or is there a third way?

That leads to decisions on a local election level. Badenoch's challenge next May will be the seats that are being defended and those they need to regain. In both cases, many are in areas that the Conservative Party had regarded as safe for generations but now lie in constituencies that flipped at the general election – these now have eager MPs who are keen to show how hard they are working.

To start the fightback Badenoch needs to stop the rot on a local level, reversing the decline in councillor numbers in recent years and forestall the galvanising

“Badenoch went on to win the membership ballot with the lowest vote share for a winner since the inmates were given a vote over who runs the asylum, 56.5%”

effect that the last election will have had on opposition parties in once safe wards.

As such, areas that would have once been more or less uncontested will now need resources and time dedicated to them. It isn't just eager new MPs that represent a challenge, if smaller parties start working hard on a local level, the Conservative fightback becomes much harder to begin or maintain.

That point should keep Conservative campaign directors awake at night.

Reform UK and the Greens appear to have started to understand ground war and, if that is the case, then the days of these parties being single issue leaflet and protest-based campaigns won't be long for the living.

If all of this helps Liberals sleep easier at night, it shouldn't. I have heard bold young chaps and chapettes of the liberal parish boasting of blowing the Tories away; newsflash, you didn't. They folded like a cheap suit and your mob happened to have candidates who didn't look and sound like Fred West in the local vicinity. Labour made similarly spectacular and unexpected gains. Your voter base is wide and shallow.

TORY FIGHTBACK

You are going to be prime targets for the Tory fightback. It will start at the local elections in May and proceed, one way or another, from there. To keep the seats that you were gifted by Rishi Sunak, your party needs to say what it is you are for. Being a void of policy thinking when you have 11 MPs is do-able but as the third party, with seats on every select committee going, it is neither sustainable nor acceptable. Your leadership needs to grow up. You cannot always be the party of the NIMBY and however much you might whinge that this misrepresents your party's 'localist' credentials and philosophy, we all know the truth because we've all seen your 'local' campaigns.

It seems to me that the leadership teams of both the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats are starting from similar places. Both teams are dealing with shocking and frankly unexpected results from the general election. Both are coming to terms with how to manage their new situations and are having to learn to wield their newfound power, relative to 3 July. In this way, your leadership team needs to address some of those questions that the leader of the opposition and her team need to answer.

They need to articulate a grown-up alternative to the Labour Party. They need to challenge Badenoch and her Conservative Party, driving them back further if they possibly can.

There is an opportunity to be taken. If your leadership team don't develop the nous, we'll end up with the same cycle all over again. And in that event, I honestly ask you, what is the point of the Liberal Democrats?

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

ANSWERING BACK TO THE 'POST-LIBERALS'

Benjamin Wood explains how a forthcoming book on radical liberalism seeks to help liberals recover some forgotten politics that could help them today

The last fifteen years in Britain has witnessed the rise of a vast political literature, which we might call 'post-liberal'.

It was first heralded by the publication of Philip Blond's *Red Tory: How Left and Right have Broken Britain and how we can Fix It* (2010) and Maurice Glassman's *Tangled Up In Blue: Blue Labour and the Struggle for Labour's Soul* (2011). Both books are notable for popularising arguments that have long preoccupied political theorists, theologians and public ethicists, but up until then possessed very little traction among political commentators.

Their common thread is the contention that liberal politics, with its attendant ideas of individual rights, autonomy and individualism, has produced a society both careless and bureaucratic, inattentive to community, solidarity and sense of place. Blond and Glassman both detect in liberalism a selfish mode of individualism which has produced a state, lacking solidarity (a cash-machine, not a 'community of communities') and an extractive corporate capitalism which is indifferent to the dignity of work, people's uncomplicated feelings of patriotism, and the concrete needs of parents families.

As Matt Godwin expressed the thesis last year: "Over the last half-century or so, the British people have been subjected to a profoundly destabilising political, cultural, and economic revolution.

"It came in two stages. First, on the right, the one political party that's supposed to care about our national community, the place we call home, ushered in a radical and relentless economic liberalism. And then, on the left, the one political party that's supposed to care about ordinary working people accepted much of that legacy while ushering in a radical and rampant cultural liberalism."

SURPRISINGLY MUTED

Compared to the energy of the Right, the response of liberals to these post-liberal positions have been surprisingly muted. Arguments about addressing people's 'fears of immigration' have been rehashed, alongside the insistence that only greater material equality can drive social cohesion and defeat the

authoritarian Right.

The difficulty with these arguments is that they sidestep the very issues of community and solidarity, which animate post-liberals. This unwillingness to argue with post-liberals on their terrain can and does lead to the damaging impression that liberals have little to say about love, belonging, and community. There is little effort to counteract the caricature of liberals as effete cosmopolitans or materialistic hedonists. Cheap shots perhaps, but they must be addressed, and done so with an unflinching directness.

This desire to knock down a legion of straw men is the guiding impulse behind the forthcoming essay

collection from the John Stuart Mill Institute, *When We Speak of Freedom: Radical Liberalism in an Age of Crisis*.

As JSMI trustee, Michael Meadowcroft, notes in the introduction: "We need social breathing space to ask ourselves why we strive and what we strive for.

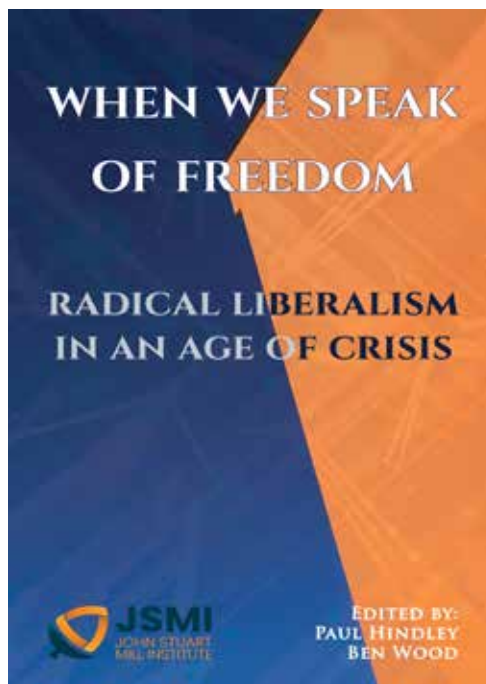
"For liberals, there is no greater intellectual mission. Freedom cannot thrive in a community obsessed only with 'means'. We need grand ends and compelling principles to make a better life and make a better politics."

Much of the first part of the book addresses the negative stereotypes, which have become the stock and trade of post-liberal commentary. Timothy Stacey, the most self-consciously post-liberal of our contributors, encourages opponents of

liberalism to recognise its moral and public virtues. To be a liberal is to be in possession of a burning desire for justice, to reject chauvinism, bigotry, sexism and homophobia.

Neither says Stacey, are liberals by and large amoral hedonists. However, he suggests, liberals need to do more to uncover their lost traditions of community, passion and belonging if they are to have any hope of fulfilling its most cherished ideals.

One thinks of the wandering Benjamin Constant, a man who was in love with love, or the electricity of the Obama campaign of 2008. Freedom needs poets as much as it needs formal constitutions to thrive. We need, as Shelley said: "The hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration", for they, as it turns out



are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

Instead of identifying themselves with a faceless state or an anonymous marketplace, liberals must re-learn the wisdom of fraternal/sororal connection and the power of visionary politics.

What resources do liberals need to accomplish this recovery? The chapters of Helena Rosenblatt and Helen McCabe introduce us to a version of Mill that few post-liberals know, and many liberals have forgotten.

Instead of fixating on ‘individualism’, this Mill stresses individuality. Instead of emphasising self-interest, Mill emerges as a champion of generosity, solidarity, and social justice.

These themes are much expanded by the contributions of Stuart White and Matt MacManus. Both stress the collectivist impulses of Mill’s liberalism, particularly Mill’s insistence in old age that while forced collectivism is always intolerable to a liberal’s conscience, it is possible to construct a ‘Liberal Socialism’ rooted in the dispersion of wealth and power through co-operatives and various worker-owned firms.

However, Mill (both John Stuart and Harriet) are not the only source of philosophical inspiration in this volume. In their chapter exploring the relation between land and democracy, Christopher England and Andrew Phemister, familiarise us with a liberal politics that few now know.

Through repeated struggles for land justice throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, radicals and liberals developed an account of both individuality and freedom, which assumed the common good of society and the needs of concrete communities.

REFINED DRAWING ROOMS

Far from the refined drawing rooms of Edwardian philanthropists, we are presented with a radical conception of social life born of scarcity and suffering. At its heart is the claim that the affirmation of human dignity should always exist prior to any dogmatic commitments to either capital or property. As Jo Grimond was fond of saying (quoting the Leveller Thomas Rainsborough), “the poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the greatest he”.

The second part of the essay collection endeavours to explore what this liberalism of solidarity and generosity means in the arenas of practical politics, in areas as diverse as welfare and mental wellbeing, to constitutional reform and defence.

Perhaps the most refreshing aspects of these interrogations is that the individual human being (their ideals and aspirations) is never far below the surface of even the most complex topic.

Emmy van Deurzen aptly demonstrates this holistic approach in her chapter exploring democratic vibrancy and mental wellbeing. For van Deurzen, there can be no liberal democracy if citizens are lonely, distrustful, misinformed and fearful. There is, she suggests, no genuine freedom without trust, and no politics

“There is little effort to counteract the caricature of liberals as effete cosmopolitans or materialistic hedonists”

without empathy. The volume’s two chapters on constitution reform (David Howarth) and devolution (Ross Finnie) show us some practical routes for renewing both trust and empathy in our public square. Only by fashioning politics at a human level, they conclude, can be hope to preserve a sense of humanity in our politics.

Throughout our book, there is a stimulating tension between the many historic failures of liberalism, and those stunning moments

when we have successfully lived up to our ideals.

On the side of failure, these essays remind us of liberalism’s historic acceptance of colonialism, dispossession and lethal environmental degradation. On the side of the angels; these essays have recovered a rich vision of mutual care, community, and reciprocity.

This rich multi-sidedness is beautifully demonstrated in Vince Cable’s chapter on asylum and migration. Cable accepts that global migration flows poses complex logistical and moral challenges for a modern post-industrial economy like Britain. However, he has an inspiring message for us. Despite the maliciousness and folly of the past (and social poisons of the present), the UK has been relatively successful in building a liberal, tolerant, multicultural country. While racial prejudice continues to blaze in parts of our society, this chapter wishes us to consider the existence of a widespread liberal reflex among the public, one, which rejects much of the simplistic, ‘them and us mentality’ behind so much of the populist Right.

By attending to such verdant liberal shoots, this collection suggests that hope for a better future is neither folly nor infantile utopianism. Instead, we learn that so much of the liberal future already exists within many of the institutions, practices and ideals we already possess.

In this respect, this book follows Michelangelo’s dictum: “The sculpture is already complete within the marble block, before I start my work. It is already there, I just have to chisel away the superfluous material.” In assembling this volume of rich, radical, and generous liberal voices, we have aimed, not at the deconstruction of liberal politics, but opted instead for a stripping away of superficial differences so that the distinctive dimensions of liberal politics can become clearly visible.

The watchwords of this book are liberality and fraternity. Far from the grim travesties of Blond and Glassman, this volume reveals a radical liberalism, fit to face an age of crisis.

The book will be published early in the New Year, with an initial launch at the National Liberal Club followed by launches in Edinburgh and in Leeds.

Benjamin Wood, is co-editor with Paul Hindley of *When We Speak of Freedom: Radical Liberalism in an Age of Crisis*, published by the John Stuart Mill Institute

GEORGIAN DREAM TURNS SOUR ON EUROPE

Does a disputed election with a surprising loss for pro-EU forces spell the end for democracy in Georgia, asks Alex Scrivener?

On 26 October, an election took place in one of the world's most pro-EU countries. Polls consistently put support for EU membership above 80%. EU flags adorn all public buildings and are often seen hanging outside windows and on graffiti. Since 2022 these flags have often been joined by Ukrainian flags too, and huge crowds came out to support Kyiv's resistance against the Kremlin's war machine.

After all, in 2008 Georgia had fought its own war with Russia, which maintains troops in two of the country's breakaway regions.

It would seem an enigma then that the presumed victor of this election, the ruling Georgian Dream party, is overwhelmingly considered the most anti-Western (and cryptically pro-Russian) government in Georgia's post-independence history.

Georgian Dream came to power in 2012 on a pro-EU manifesto, but is effectively run by a billionaire, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who has turned sharply against the West over the past couple of years.

This feels to many like Georgia's Yanukovich moment – albeit one that has come at the worst possible time when the long-sealed gates of the EU seemed like they could finally be opening to Georgia. After all, Georgia finally gained EU candidate status last year.

But unlike in Ukraine under Yanukovich, neither

is there a core demographic (as there was in Ukraine prior to 2014) of pro-Russia voters, and nor are there protests of the scale seen during 'Euromaidan'.

So how did we get here?

The opposition (and much of domestic civil society) has its own answer to this question: the government cheated.

These groups claim that the election was stolen through a combination of vote-buying, intimidation, and outright fraud. They point to exit polls that showed the four main opposition blocs clearly collectively beating the ruling party down to between 40-42% of the vote, as opposed to the 54% the official results show. They point to statistical evidence of a so-called "Russian tail" [<https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-election-manipulation-russian-tail/33183374.html>] in turnout patterns that tends to be indicative of ballot fraud. And they allege that ID cards were taken from citizens and used by ruling party operatives to vote multiple times [<https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/134430-salome-zurabishvili-armenian-carousel-was-used-to-falsify-the-elections-it-was-possible-to-vote-approximately-17-times-with-one-id-card/>] – so-called 'carousel voting'.

These allegations, although serious, remain subject to further investigation. But there are also strong indications of concern from the various international observation missions present in Georgia for the election.

The OSCE ODIHR's preliminary assessment of the poll did say it was "generally procedurally well-organized and administered in an orderly manner" and that the election "offered voters a wide choice" of parties to choose from. Certainly, this was not a total sham election along the lines of what happens in Putin's Russia or Lukashenka's Belarus.

SECRECY COMPROMISED

But the assessment also highlighted "concerns about the ability of some voters to cast their vote without fear of retribution"



and found that “in 24 per cent of observations, vote secrecy was potentially compromised”. Overall is said that election day was “marked by a tense environment and several incidents of physical altercations and widespread intimidation of voters, as well as citizen observers”.

Particular concerns have been raised by the presence of video cameras in polling stations, manned not by election officials but by the ruling Georgian Dream party.

The head of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) observation mission, Iulian Bulai, put it most starkly when he said: “The presence of cameras of the ruling party in the polling stations, and people in front of polling stations tracking and possibly controlling voters, led to a widespread climate of pressure and party-organized intimidation and the feeling that Big Brother is watching you”.

But while the question of how free and fair the election was is important, it is also the case that the opposition failed to attract the sort of decisive level of support that would have rendered any alleged election irregularities insufficient to change the result.

It is also the case that the ruling party managed to retain a significant degree of support, even among those who, when polled, say they support EU integration.

Part of the explanation is that while the ruling party’s actions have moved Georgia further away from Europe, the party’s campaign materials continued to feature the EU flag prominently and carried the slogan “towards the EU with dignity”.

In this case, “dignity” is code for what the ruling party calls defending traditional values, but is actually a prospectus of illiberal, homophobic, and authoritarian policies. This includes an anti-LGBT propaganda law not unlike the UK’s Section 28 under Margaret Thatcher.

It also includes legislation, dubbed the ‘Russian law’ due to its similarity to some Russian legislation, that forces civil society organisations that receive foreign funding (in Georgia that is almost all of them) to register as nefarious “vectors of foreign influence”. This law was the subject of mass protests in the spring that may have been some of the most large-scale in Georgia’s history.

But perhaps the most effective tactic used by Georgian Dream was its argument that only it would prevent the outbreak of a new Russia-Georgia war. Images of destroyed Ukrainian monuments and buildings were juxtaposed with intact Georgian equivalents with the message “No to War – Choose Peace”.

“The presence of cameras of the ruling party in the polling stations, led to a widespread climate of pressure and the feeling that Big Brother is watching you”

Georgia may not harbour much pro-Russia feeling, but there is little appetite for another war, especially in a country whose military prowess is nowhere near what Ukraine has been able to muster.

The passing of these laws and the anti-liberal messaging used by Georgian Dream is part of a playbook used by Hungarian leader Viktor Orban and it is no coincidence that Orban immediately flew to Tbilisi after the election, congratulating the government before the results were even finalised.

LIKE BREXIT AND TRUMP

But the tactics are also not dissimilar to those used by Trump and supporters of Brexit. All of these campaigns succeeded in turning back the tide of liberal democracy through an appeal to older, socially conservative voters using a combination of disinformation, populism, and a portrayal of the opposing side as being traitorous and somehow ‘foreign’. The difference in Georgia is that the authorities may have used intimidation and perhaps a sprinkle of outright fraud to season their right-wing populist soup.

It remains to be seen whether Georgia’s flawed democracy can survive this latest setback. The divided and badly organised opposition is failing to muster the level of public protest that shook the country earlier in the year in reaction to the Russian Law. Civil society organisations are busy finding legal ways to continue operating in this more difficult environment. Some non-profits are registering abroad to avoid the Russian Law, and others are registering as commercial organisations to circumvent it.

But overall, the atmosphere in Tbilisi is more akin to that of 27 June 2016 in the UK than one in which revolution is about to break out. Pro-Europeans seem defeated, depressed, and fear that they may have lost hope for their EU membership prospects, and therefore their country’s very free existence, for good.

Alex Scrivener, is executive director of the Democratic Security Institute in Tbilisi

NOW OR NEVER

The combination of factors that drove Lib Dem success in July won't come again and must be exploited quickly for the next election, says Sophie Layton

None of us could have predicted just how much the Liberal Democrats were to achieve this summer. After weeks of crazed stunts from Sir Ed Davey, Daisy Cooper combatting the stalwarts of British politics in Penny Mordaunt and Angela Rayner, and a dramatic snap campaign, the exit poll at 10pm on 4 July was a celebration the Liberal Democrats could never have predicted. 61 seats were to go their way. And this celebration turned into jubilation two days later when an additional 11 had also been claimed, with '72' forever branded into the party's history. The party, its members and supporters were ecstatic, with the architects of such a success already planning their next targets.

But reservations, modesty and cautious optimism were not the only things discarded that night as seat after seat turned orange. Because there's another quality that seems to have disappeared in the wreckage of the blue wall, at least for now. Reality.

No one can honestly say what the Liberal Democrats achieved this summer was other than monumental, and the people who made it possible, from activists to campaign managers and local parties should rightly be elated. But we seem to be ignoring a whole cadre who made these figures possible.

When we celebrate the 72 wins, there's people we keep forgetting to thank for their significant role. Boris Johnson, for one, whose lockdown parties and moral ambiguity set the ball rolling. Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng, who treated every opposition campaign to their famous mini budget. Rishi Sunak for muddling his way to the election only half-controlling the MPs he was supposed to lead. We should also thank the Labour Party leadership for being suitably dull and uninspiring enough to turn people away from the two main parties in record numbers and the SNP for playing fast and loose with their finances in the past few years. Each of these characters played their integral parts, alongside Liberal Democrat figures.

Let's be blunt – we may have done well in July, but a significant proportion of our success came from external factors. Our messages cut through during the campaign, when so many had stopped listening to one side after years of mismanagement. Our candidates were better perceived than other options but following widespread disillusionment for the larger parties.

We did well, but one of the biggest reasons for this is that our major opponent in many seats had mortally wounded themselves, leaving us to leapfrog over them. Our vote share barely changed between 2019 and 2024. We've not become suddenly popular, only suddenly more concentrated from an anti-Tory sentiment and the rise of tactical voting in 2024.

If we continue to ignore the fact that good fortune and circumstance allowed us to claim such a success, we will simply be condemning the Liberal Democrats to remain oscillating between third and possibly fourth place in Parliament. We did well, but our opponents did worse. Much as our 72 MPs warrants a celebration, we must take stock of how we got here now, before we lose this momentum.

Sir Ed Davey and other key party figures have said repeatedly following the election, and particularly since party conference, that they want the Liberal Democrats to be the "credible" and "serious" opposition, that they believe the Conservatives will simply fail to be. And there have even been whispers that at the next election, the Liberal Democrats have their eyes set on becoming the official opposition. But this is a long shot, and we must recognise that the only reason this can even be seriously contemplated is because of the implosion of the Conservatives since Johnson's ousting from office.

If the Liberal Democrats want to continue to progress, begin the road to official opposition or even, potentially, into government, the time is now or never.

The state of the Conservative party, the unpopularity of Labour and the disillusionment with the both of them by so many people is a once-in-a-generation occurrence, and I daresay one we will never see these factors arise simultaneously again. If we want the Liberal Democrats to escape the role of the 'third party' in the two-party duopoly this is our one and only chance to take advantage of the Conservative fall and climb further in our democracy.

If we fail to make even more gains in 2029, and continue to use the momentum we have been lent by the electorate, we will never have another chance as ripe as this to change the game for the better.

So let's celebrate the result in July, and the momentous work that went into achieving it, but let's not fool ourselves at the same time.

It's do or die at the next general election. We continue to make significant gains, or we condemn ourselves to the Tory-Labour binary in government for the rest of British democracy, because we will never be given such an opportunity again. We must break through now, not rest on our laurels and assume we've suddenly become much more popular.

Sophie Layton is an international political communication student at The University of Sheffield

SPACE TO GROW

If the Liberal Democrats don't campaign for the UK's neglected regions Reform will, warns Louis Kent

British liberals have a strong tradition of regionalism that has endured for more than a century.

From Gladstone's embrace of Irish home rule to Paddy Ashdown's role in pushing devolution during the late 1990s, British liberals are firmly rooted in this federalist tradition. Further, the Liberal Party during the post-war period made proposals to revive the UK's depressed regions, appearing in manifestoes as far back as 1966, and recognising a structural issue with the country that has detrimental effects on our economic growth and social cohesion.

The Liberal Democrats must now bring this back to the forefront, accompanying their success on the previously ignored subjects of social care and the water scandal.

Both the Conservative and Labour parties have failed to address the endemic regional inequalities that have plagued the UK's centralised political system for centuries. This is best conceived of through the famous north-south divide; during the 2010s, the north's GDP per capita was 18% below the national average, with the south's GDP 18% above.

When London is added to the mix, the situation grows more worrying, with the city being far and away the most prosperous area of the country, almost carrying the rest on its back.

During the post-war period, Butskellism and the associated economic policies reduced regional inequality through policies of welfare and full employment, suppressing the underlying issues but not fully solving them due to the overall greater centralisation of decision making.

With Thatcher, however, came sweeping globalisation and deindustrialisation that further depressed these regions, centralising the economy into the hands of London financiers. Alongside this came further centralisation of decision-making.

While there have been glimmers of hope since the 1990s, these policies have been somewhat toothless in the face of the growing problem.

New Labour made some fundamental changes to the UK's government structure. This includes the establishment of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments and the nine former English regional development agencies. Decision making in England was not successfully devolved, and place-sensitive redistribution policies were not pursued. The coalition also established the combined mayoral authorities, but these came alongside austerity measures that gutted local government. While Johnson's 'levelling-up' initiatives raised awareness for this key issue, this again lacked any federalist or redistributionist credentials. Finally, while Starmer met quickly with the metro mayors, regional inequality is not considered high on the Labour government's agenda.

Regional inequality has a detrimental effect on the British economy, meaning tackling it is likely to be key in pursuing any meaningful policy of economic growth. Especially since austerity, regional disparities have been associated with lacklustre levels of educational

attainment and quality of social care. This has a detrimental effect on Britain's workforce, which is slowly grinding our economy to a halt.

Further, social mobility is endangered by regional inequality, drastically increasing the cost of social advancement and migration to more prosperous regions, leaving enormous numbers of people stuck in a kind of twenty-first century serfdom. It's simply absurd that such large numbers of people and the resources of the vast majority of the country should go so underutilised, especially as the major parties seem to be so dedicated to economic growth. Any serious growth policy must address regional inequality.

Social cohesion is also rotting away in depressed regions. The lack of investment and opportunity spirals into a lack of community sport, arts, enterprise and recreation, which eradicates the community itself.

This eventually leads to the success of the right-wing populist movements among the forgotten unemployed and resentful young people deprived of opportunity. Reform UK succeeds primarily among those in the north-east, east, and midlands, whereas in the US, the rust belt has become a key constituency for Donald Trump. As such, the fight against regional inequality is inextricably tied to the fight for democracy in a world increasingly torn apart by authoritarian regimes and far-right movements. By giving power back to these regions, we can prove that democracy works for everyone.

The fight against regional inequality will involve rethinking the structure of the UK. Essential is a policy of federalism and a radical devolution of powers that gives local and regional governments their own independent tax bases, and true power over social care, education, public transport and utilities.

The establishment of regional assemblies in England will also allow more place-sensitive decisions by those who live there, increasing engagement and improving the quality of regional policy. The government's role should be to redistribute among the regions, using equalisation grants to help those with less revenue-raising capacity. This will allow the UK's regions to grow independently, but in parallel.

Not only is this essential for our country to grow and succeed, it's a tremendous opportunity for the Liberal Democrats. Despite their electoral success in 2024, the party is increasingly locked to the south of England, not yet regaining their footing in many Brexit-voting depressed regions. With Labour's approval rating lowered significantly, and an emboldened far-right threatening democracy, revitalising their record on this issue could allow the Liberal Democrats to make their civic liberalism competitive across the whole country.

Louis Kent is a member of University of York Liberal Democrats and Director of Journals at York Student Think Tank

LETTERS

CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

Dear Liberator,

The general election resulted in the Liberal Democrats for once gaining a fair share of parliamentary seats from the votes cast with around 12% of the votes getting approximately 11.1% of MPs. It was Reform that has a genuine grievance about the electoral system having gained 14.3% percent of the votes with only 0.8% of M.P.s.

The Liberal Democrats targeting strategy was able to get the maximum result with the existing system whereas the Reform's vote was more evenly distributed resulting in only five MPs.

Were any system of proportional representation introduced our campaigning strategy would have to change in that claiming that a vote for another party is a wasted vote would no longer work. Likewise, the old graph trick claiming we are the runners up usually using the results of whatever election gives us the best result. Other parties have taken up the two horse race claim, which is now wearing thin: the people more likely to vote tactically are usually capable of coming to their own conclusions. I remember in one election delivering three separate leaflets aimed at convincing Labour supporters that a Labour vote is a wasted vote which was probably counter-productive as most recipients will have got the message the first time.

One of the reasons why proportional representation is not likely to be introduced in the near future is that once parties find that they can win under the first past the post system they lose any incentive to change the system. This is which is why the Labour party has toyed with electoral reform although more often in the form of the alternative vote. There is however the possibility that a party having won a working majority will make a disingenuous conversion to electoral reform when they begin to lose popularity as the French Socialist Party did in the Mitterrand era to no avail.

The more immediate issue is the future of the Conservative Party. While their poor result may look like a reason to be cheerful it is premature to anticipate their extinction. They have been remarkably resilient with a habit of recovering. In 2001 there were campaigners gleefully talking of a Tory meltdown yet they recovered unwittingly assisted by our going into coalition in 2010 starting off the process that lead to

Brexit.

It could be that they tear themselves apart through infighting. It is more likely they will adopt a populist right programme which will make them unelectable resulting in their merging with Reform. Currently they seem to be in the phase where the lunatics have taken over the asylum as Labour were in the Corbyn era. What may have occurred is the death of one nation conservatism. If that is the case it will have consequences for us as it won't just be the one nation conservative voters that we pick up but there may be an influx of members from the Conservative party in sufficient numbers to have implications for policy.

After the schisms of 1931 a group of Liberal MPs allied themselves with the Tories with an electoral truce and sat as National Liberals standing as National Liberal and Conservative candidates.

The National Liberals lasted until 1968. It is not unconceivable that there will be a substantial number of disaffected Tories will seek a home in the Liberal Democrats something the SDP failed to achieve. Be careful what you wish for.

Andrew Hudson
Ulverston

RUM, EGG AND MUCK

Dear Liberator,

Mark Smulian's article 40 years on (*Liberator* 425) provides a nostalgic reminder of the now much missed *Liberal Revue*. Quite apart from its internal 'family' references, many of which were only fully appreciated by those colleagues in the know, it was marked by maintaining the high standard of its writing.

However, it was not the first *Liberal Revue*. I recall young Liberals putting on a revue at the 1961 Edinburgh Liberal Assembly based on the fictitious constituency of Rum, Egg and Muck, with many delightfully snide comments on the then party hierarchy.

One line I recall came when an individual was described as a "prospective Liberal parliamentary candidate". "What is that?" enquired the innocent newbie. "Oh, it's like an MP in the other parties."

Also one ought not to forget the individual performances of Adrian Slade. His debut as solo performer was at a club run by Clement Freud. Adrian told me that on his very nervous first night there, Freud introduced him simply as "This is Adrian Slade - he does things with a piano."

Michael Meadowcroft
Leeds

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Truss at 10
by Anthony Seldon and
Jonathan Meakin
Atlantic Books £22

When I reviewed Anthony Seldon's book *Johnson at 10* (Liberator 417), I observed that the next volume in his series of prime ministers' periods in office would be likely to be a short pamphlet on Liz Truss.

In fact, he devotes over 300 pages to Truss and her 49 days in office so is there a lot of padding or does the Truss Government merit examination in such depth?

The book is subtitled 'How Not to be Prime Minister' and Seldon takes as its basis an article he wrote in *The New Statesman* shortly before she took office in which he identified 100 key attributes which a prime minister needs if they are to succeed.

He then examines her time in office in the context of these 10 and finds her lacking in all of them. With a decent majority, a clear view of what she wanted and, entering No 10 with more ministerial experience than any prime minister since John Major, why did it all go so wrong and so quickly?

The 10 attributes which Seldon lists can be divided into three categories: the importance of keeping a power base; evidence of character and judgement; and the need for a coherent and well-executed plan of action.

Truss entered No 10 without the majority support of her MPs and assumed that her mandate from the membership meant she did not need to win over the MPs who had opposed her.

She failed to appoint a cabinet which could unite the party ("I have beaten the fucking establishment. I'm not going to bother to build bridges", she is quoted as saying) or create an experienced team in No 10 and her team leadership skills were consistently shown to be woefully lacking. She took her MPs for granted and alienated them so much that by the end "nobody even bothered to count the number of letters of no confidence, because they so far exceeded the 15% threshold".

Truss was intolerant of others, handing out blame for matters when she had herself either failed to define her wishes or changed

her wishes. She was dogmatically convinced of the right course of action, unable to consider – let alone accept – the merits of alternative arguments and the brutal sacking of the Treasury permanent secretary left a vacuum at the top when the shit hit the fan after the mini-Budget.

(His sacking may harken back to her time as Chief Secretary at the Treasury when she was seen as the leaker-in-chief to such an extent that she was kept out of major policy discussions).

In a key chapter Seldon examines what it takes to be a prime minister. They need to be optimists – but that is different from enthusing others. She may have been intelligent but crucially "lacked the intellectual confidence to have her ideas challenged", seeking affirmation rather than contradiction, and her work ethic could not be faulted.

He says she was politically savvy (questionable) and could be decisive (not always a good thing – after all, the order for the Light Brigade to charge was fairly decisive) and that she displayed moral seriousness and dignity.

However, the shortcomings in her character comfortably outweigh any strengths with her inability to be generous and inclusive ensuring that, fatally, she antagonised senior colleagues and those on whom her prospects depended.

"She regularly told her personal staff to shut up or simply blanked them ... [with] little awareness of social space ... she could be unpleasantly caustic in her sense of humour." An aide is quoted as saying "she never said sorry and hardly ever said thank you" – another adding "While Dominic Raab was unpleasant to everyone, Liz would pick out individuals". Seldon concludes "her vanity, neediness and willingness to trample over others was of Johnsonian proportions."

The third key aspect of statecraft is the need for a well-executed and

coherent plan of action. That there was a plan cannot be doubted. But Truss was not able to see that no significant economist, commentator or academic could explain the principle behind the mini-Budget. This was not because of some great conspiracy – it was because the plan was bonkers.

Having sacked the permanent secretary to the Treasury, there was a resulting vacuum in the department which might have provided support for the measure. Seldon writes that U-turns are always seen as a sign of weakness, but can be survived if handled properly. Truss handled the post-Budget U-turn in about as humiliating a way as can be imagined, culminating in a cringe-making press conference after sacking Kwasi Kwarteng and then sitting awkwardly next to Jeremy Hunt as he unpicked her and Kwarteng's entire Budget – fatally undermining her credibility and rendering her resignation inevitable.

Even when she might have been able to perform well, she messed it up. On the foreign stage, she seemed more interested in promotion of herself rather than Britain – being pictured in a quasi-Thatcherite pose in a tank – and antagonising European leaders at European political community meeting two weeks before her resignation. Even in a short space of time, she drew withering scorn from the White House and at home, she missed the chance given by the Queen's death to unite and speak for the nation as Blair did after Princess Diana's death.

Mind you, Truss never had political antennae as astute as Blair in his early years and it must have infuriated her that her rival Penny Mordaunt (whom she beat by only eight votes in the final ballot of MPs) was seen as the dignified face of Government during the period of national mourning.

Truss wrote in her book that she had been brought down by a



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conspiracy of “the deep state” – the establishment, the Treasury, the Office of Budget Responsibility, the media.

Seldon comprehensively debunks this theory. “o fall so quickly was careless and eminently avoidable,” I am not sure this is right. I think that the inherent flaws in Truss’ character meant that her fall was almost inevitable – her failure to relate to others, her instinctive rejection of alternative views, her poor public speaking and her lack of ability to build, care for and create a team of dedicated supporters all meant that, when push came to shove, no-one of substance was motivated to fight her corner.

With the next book in her series – presumably to be called Sunak at 10 – Seldon will have chronicled five successive Tory prime ministers. It will be hard for him to claim that any of them have been among the best prime ministers we have ever had, but – whether you use Seldon’s 10 attributes needed for a prime minister or indeed any given benchmark – it is hard to conclude anything other than the fact that Truss must rank among the worst in British history.

Nick Winch

Precipice by Robert Harris Hutchinson Heinemann 2024

Precipice takes place between early July 1914 and May 1915, less than a year, but a year which changed the Western World, and Britain, irrevocably.

It is the story of the last Liberal Government and its last prime minister Herbert Henry Asquith, a man in his 60s so obsessed with a 26 year old woman that he risked scandal and neglected his office. Affaires of political leaders are commonplace through history. As is pillow talk. But in this story state secrets, papers, telegrams, letters etc are shared so carelessly, so wildly, it is breathtaking.

You couldn’t make this up, and, what is astonishing, Robert Harris didn’t have to. “All the letters quoted in the text from the prime minister are... authentic, as are the telegrams... and official documents, along with correspondence between Venetia Stanley (his amorata). “

The strong, tall, highly intelligent

Venetia Stanley was the daughter of Lord Sheffield, a former Liberal MP. Her family background was anything but run of the mill grand. Her late uncle converted to Islam and had sat in the Lords as a Muslim peer; another uncle was “a plump and worldly Catholic bishop”. And her mother was a very clever woman, but “even in the Stanley household, unconventionality had its limits, and a 26 year old daughter suspected of having an affair with a 61 year old prime minister fell definitely beyond the boundary of what was acceptable”.

Unlike Venetia, Asquith was no aristocrat. He was a lawyer from “dour northern Nonconformist” stock. The King thought him “not a gentleman”. He was widowed and left with five children (one of whom was Violet, who married his PPS, Maurice Bonham Carter).

He could only afford to enter politics on his second marriage to the wealthy aristocratic Margot Tennant, a spur to his ambition. He took happily to politics and the grand style which went with it and was known in Tory circles as “Perrier Jouet”.

HHA wanted to see Venetia everyday, and wrote to her, even at the height of the international crises, three times a day (wonderful post service in those days). But worse, he shared not just the secret details of the war, he y shared the actual documents “I enclose 2 or 3 little extracts from foreign telegrams” - one from the embassy in Vienna; another from the consulate in Odessa; and a third from Oslo regarding the movements of German battleships.

He had an enormous interest in the minutiae of her life and a high regard for her intelligence. He gave her a folder containing a file on all aspects of Irish Home Rule; “Give it back next time... perhaps you can see a solution”. She found the idea blatantly absurd. Throughout the book one asks oneself why she agreed to this affair; the answer seems to be in her own words “I have nothing else to do”

HHA would have his chauffeur pick up Venetia and they would conduct their tryst in the back of the Napier six-cylinder, driving round the outskirts of London, and it was because of what HHA did during the course of those romantic journeys that Harris introduces

a fictional character, a policeman called Paul Deemer.

Deemer is recruited by the fledgling secret service and ordered to find out why top secret documents, telegrams, letters - so secret that only members of the cabinet would have had access to them - had been found by roadsides around London.

Harris’s skill as a writer of pacy, racy stories is to combine different narratives, and Precipice does just that. He uses Deemer as the vehicle to describe the conditions of the different social classes, which are worlds apart. Venetia’s two country estates with their 60 bedrooms and glorious gardens, plus the Sheffield palace in Portland Place, and the humbler abode of the detective, his tiny garden of “north London soil... poor exhausted stuff”. The endless champagne dinners of the wealthy and the 3d an hour earned by their gardeners. And enormous domestic staffs - even Asquith’s No 10 had a live-in household staff of 17.

Deemer is sent out to find German spies. The advent of war led to a nation wide hunt for German spies, where anyone with a German sounding name was suspect (hence ‘Battenberg’ became Mountbatten, the ‘German Ocean’ the North Sea, and the Royal family the Windsors).

There are vivid and frequently disgusting descriptions of nursing in London at the very beginning of the War, a profession which was one of the first to become socially mixed as a result.

Harris also reminds us of how totally unprepared Asquith and his cabinet were for war. They did not see it coming “his (Asquith’s) mind was so concentrated on Ireland, so haunted by visions of civil war and the imminent collapse of his government ...when he took the call from the foreign secretary, it took him a while to grasp the significance of what he was being told “.

He paints vivid portraits of the great and the good from Asquith’s descriptions: George V was a gruff, unobtrusive, non-intellectual type, who had never had an original thought in his life. Kitchener terrified everyone, cold, aloof and without emotion, his eyes “fixed and staring ... like a hypnotist”. Lloyd George was emotional and lachrymose “the most ambitious man in government and his loyalty is always and only to himself”.

But it is Churchill, then the first lord of the admiralty, on whom Asquith unleashes his venom over his relentless, vain and appalling pursuit of the Dardanelles campaign. He simply would not back down - "wicked folly ...nothing can excuse Winston sending sheep to the shambles".

Precipice is well worth reading firstly as a fiction and a study in romantic obsession, but more importantly because most of it is based on fact, and brilliantly takes the reader through the build up to the outbreak of the First World War.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Bloody Panico (Or, Whatever Happened To The Tory Party?) by Geoffrey Wheatcroft Verso, £14.99

It's tempting to file this under 'overtaken by events'; my copy arrived just as the general election was starting to happen to us all. Nonetheless, as the title intimates, that saga will just act as a bookend. Written by a seasoned observer of the Conservative side of the fence, it is a companion or coda to *The Strange Death Of Tory England* by the same author in 2005.

A feelgood book for many readers of *Liberator*, this will be useful as a reference tome on their worst excesses over the ages, nonetheless there is a bristling anger at the accelerated corrosion of 'one nation' values. The occasional hobbyhorse can be forgiven, particularly for the insight into the effect of the rise of UKIP and its fagash figurehead on Tory leaders.

The premise is that the Tories, while flawed, have proved successful due to their ability to adapt and rejuvenate almost at will; except for the two long dysfunctions of their recent history, both underpinned by Europe. Otherwise the party has an ability to seamlessly shift shape from free trade to protection, from authoritarian clampdowns on trouble in Ireland to accommodation with its leaders.

The title dates from 1971 and the words of a Tory backwoodsman during the EEC accession debate. Succinct yet marked by copious reference from Tory-supporting

sources, the unhealthily thin gene pool of the Bullingdon Club and Oxford PPE course is unsurprisingly there.

Glossing somewhat over the 2017 and 2019 elections, the focus of the second half of the book is on the charlatan who led it to what may be its final electoral triumph. Johnson's misrule is voiced via the reportage of the *Torygraph*, scornfully highlighting its descent from a newspaper that could be carried with respect, at least, if the purchase were justified by being of a sporting journal. (Readers can guess what might be made of the Marshall takeover of the *Spectator*.) By contrast, Truss' disastrous cameo is damned by faint scorn, noting that her resignation occurred one hundred years to the day since the resignation of the last Liberal prime minister, Lloyd George.

Should be prescribed for anyone diagnosed as thinking of voting Tory.

Gareth Epps

Strike: An Uncivil War Netflix

The Battle of Orgreave marked the beginning of the end of the miners' strike 40 years ago, and, some might argue, the eclipse of the power of trade unions in the UK. Daniel Gordon's gripping documentary about the events of 18 June 1984 features interviews with participants, many of whom are still traumatised by the paramilitary tactics used by the police.

A secret government memorandum authorised a new and violent approach to subduing the 5,000 pickets who wanted to prevent coke being transferred from Orgreave to Scunthorpe steelworks. Senior police claimed their aggressive kettling and beating of strikers was in response to attacks from the crowd; yet, a constable on duty on the day said that he and his colleagues had their reports clumsily altered to reflect this version of events.

The film makes it clear, using archival footage, that the miners were almost all protesting peacefully, as they had been throughout the strike at Orgreave. Nevertheless, the media at the time faithfully reproduced the government's version of events,

casting the miners as a dangerous mob. It is a pity the documentary makers did not track down any of the journalists present that day, asking them how pressure was applied on them, and by whom, to present false accounts of events at Orgreave. The film's other shortcoming is its gentle treatment of the miners' leader, Arthur Scargill, who refused to allow a strike ballot of his members, fearing a democratic vote wouldn't go his way.

Many viewers might be appalled at the miners' working conditions, wondering why they look back fondly on their years at the coal face. However, those interviewed describe the strong sense of community, purpose and pride that bound their society together. The pit closures left a gaping hole that in many cases has never been filled.

Rebecca Tinsley

Undercover: Exposing the Far Right Channel 4

Hope Not Hate has been tracking Britain's racist groups for years, often campaigning at a local level to expose the extremist views of council and parliamentary candidates. Its staff has done so at great personal risk. It has taken even more courage to insert their supporters into far right organisations, posing as sympathisers, wired up and recording conversations with neo-Nazis.

What is refreshing about this documentary is the focus on following the money, rather than simply exposing the missing-link jobs who cheer on the likes of Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (who styles himself as Tommy Robinson, now in prison).

Hope Not Hate's undercover investigator mingles with the educated, prosperous puppeteers who direct the Neanderthals we associate with far right mobs. He attends international conferences where nerds present their quasi-academic research on eugenics, meeting the men (it seems to be mainly men) populating the internet with fake but slickly produced disinformation. These proponents of race theory have bizarre obsessions with penis size and sexual appetites. Watch the film to find out how far the network

spreads and who is picking up the bill. Great documentary making.

Rebecca Tinsley

Final Approach, my father and other turbulence **by Mark Blackburn** **Claret Press 2023**

Mark Blackburn contested Somerton & Frome in the 2017 general election. His efforts were part of the Liberal Democrat's slow recovery in David Heath's old seat but were hampered by the brief rise in the Labour vote under Corbyn. Despite Sarah Dyke's spectacular by-election win and her going on to win Glastonbury & Somerton in the 2024 general election, with Anna Sabine winning Frome & East Somerset, they should not be complacent following the massive boundary changes that created those seats; I don't doubt they have been carefully designed. The zeitgeist of the election was with them, but Reform UK polled more than their majorities in either seat; dig in ladies.

Blackburn briefly alludes to the 2017 campaign, where the sins of the father were used against him. One doesn't doubt that the Lib Dems would have done the same, yet 29% of all our MPs went to a private school, 11 to Eton and 15% of Labour MPs share this background, no change from the 2019 election in percentage terms. Naturally, one would like this to change; there are many groups over represented in Parliament, about 20% of adults in the UK are reckoned to have had private education. Slapping VAT on education fees à la Starmer seems more an indication of his spitefulness rather than an attempt to bring proportion into the process.

Blackburn had previously contested Westminster North in 2010, against Karen Buck, who would have been in the LSE Liberal Club with him back in 1977 before the dynamics drove her to Labour. He attained the standard Lib Dem vote for the constituency, improving on his predecessor's performance, and like the rest of us, has stood in countless local contests all over the place.

But returning to the 2017 election, dismissed in a couple of short paragraphs, this is something we might have wished to learn more

about, along with the similar events in the lives of Blackburn père et fils.

David Blackburn contested Brentford & Isleworth in February 1974, taking 17% of the vote but coming third. Dinners with Jeremy Thorpe are mentioned. Mark's grandfather, Cyril, fought Islington East in 1935 coming third with 2,670 votes; he was selected to fight the 1940 general election, had it happened, but the Liberals did not contest the seat until 1964. Cyril, instead, fought Tiverton in 1945 and 1950, again coming third, with respectively 7,418 and 6,885 votes (both of the former Tiverton & Honiton seats are now in Liberal Democrat hands).

What we really want to know about is David's relationship with the Liberal party after 1988; he was a major funder. This does not feature in the book, probably because Mark wasn't aware of it. I haven't probed this closely, not managing to speak with those in the know as yet. My own recollection goes back to the May 1997 general election. The Liberal party generally fought about a dozen seats, and in that year, for the first time Bethnal Green & Bow, where Terry Milson took 6.6% of the vote and thus held his deposit. This was a marked improvement on Steve Radford holding his deposit in Liverpool but their losing these everywhere else. Covering the assembly for Liberator I was told that this had been critical in retaining Blackburn's funding for another year.

However, this is incidental to the book. It is clever. Without thinking about it, it took two chapters for me to suss the chapter headings... I won't spoil it for you. It is a father-son relationship, cloudy from the outset for the predictable reasons, and how those clouds were navigated. The trials and tribulations of business adventures over the last few decades are a reminder of how tough it is for those who carry the torch of small business. You don't have to know the author to enjoy the book, read it as an adventure in modern life.

Stewart Rayment

Mission Zero, the Independent Net Zero Review **by Chris Skidmore** **Biteback 2023**

I hope I don't need to suggest that this book should be in the hands of the member holding the climate change portfolio in every Liberal Democrat council group. Even though the spending restraints of the last and probably this government don't give you full rein to implement its proposals, the book remain there to guide, to hone your arguments, and put forward practical suggestions.

Coming from a Tory-boy who kept pretty dodgy company in the Free Enterprise Group, this may be surprising, but he did oppose Brexit. Despite this, he progressively slipped up the greasy pole, then as Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, signed the UK's Net Zero Pledge into law.

Whether this was a step too far, Johnson moved him to another department within days, with a further move in the autumn, which we might take as a sign of the instability of the Johnson government. He was then culled in the St Valentine's Day Massacre of 2020 and eventually called for Johnson's resignation in July 2022.

Instead of twiddling his thumbs thereafter, in September 2022 Skidmore set up the Net Zero Review, which was published the following January. In the course of this Skidmore announced that he would not be seeking re-election and took up a consultancy with the Emissions Capture Company. Telling us he would vote Labour in the general election, we hope he isn't going to be disappointed in that decision.

The Institutional Investors' Group on Climate Change thought Rachel Reeves' first budget fell short of what was required, lacking a comprehensive strategy (and around an eighth of the commitment touted during the election campaign). Her £7.8bn over two years doesn't really cut it, and its up to the 72 in the house to state the case.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

A Well-Behaved if breathless Orphan arrives at the Hall. “Matron says it’s that Generic man off the television and he wants to paint over our murals and you’ve got to come,” is the burden of his message. Stopping only to summon a brace of stout gamekeepers with orchard doughties, I hurry to the Home. The murals – some say they’re the work of our own Joshua Reynolds: others detect the hand of the Dutch Master van Mierlo – depict famous scenes from Liberal history for the edification of the young inmates. There’s ‘The Defenestration of Ming Campbell, ‘The Confusion of Andrew Newton’ (he has travelled to Dunstable in search of Norman Scott, but found no trace of him there) and ‘Tony Greaves Pretending to Have Lost the Line to London to Avoid Endorsing David Steel’s Leadership’. I burst in to find Robert Jenrick holding a pail of whitewash in one hand and wielding a brush with the other. “You don’t want to make this place too attractive,” he counsels me, “or children will get themselves orphaned so they’re sent here.” I have him driven from the place, and for the first time understand why the Tories plumped for that Badenough woman instead.

Tuesday

“No,” I told Danny Chambers on the phone. “It’s out of the question. I’ve only just got rid of a colony of Hegelian beavers. I’m not taking in seventeen penguins.” “But if you could only see their sad little faces,” Chambers returned. “They’re living with no daylight, no fresh air and a pitifully shallow pool.” I was about to say it was no good setting them lose in the Frozen North of Rutland – they would get confused, walk round in circles and annoy the polar bears – when I had a brainwave. Which is why your diarist, Chambers and the above-mentioned flightless seabirds are crouched in a ditch just off the Great North Road. Sure enough, a familiar minibus – pimped with underglow lights and belting out Hildegard of Bingen at full volume – hoves into view. In no time, the Mother Superior has the penguins on board and is speeding to the convent of Our Lady of the Ballot Boxes. No one, as I observe to Chambers, will notice them among the nuns.

Wednesday

Despite my hiding behind a tree, I am accosted by Freddie and Fiona in Westminster. “Just the man!”, says one. “We need you to talk to the parliamentary party about our new campaigns: supporting private education and landowners,” says the other. I reply that if they’re after someone to say obliging things about schoolmasters then they’ve picked the wrong peer, but I do happen to have a talk (“A Ha-ha is No Laughing Matter”) on the burden of owning a country estate that I give to Women’s Institutes and the like here in Rutland. It goes down a storm with our MPs, though at one point I catch Jennie rolling her eyes and feel a little ashamed.

Thursday

To Bloomsbury for the launch party of Precipice – Robert Harris’s novel about those terrible days before the outbreak of the Great War. He proves chiefly interested in Mr Asquith’s dalliance with Venetia Stanley, but this tale is not new to those of us who were around at the time. Indeed, when I first heard that the prime minister

Lord Bonkers’ Diary

was having an affair with Stanley, I feared things were worse than they turned out to be. I prick up my ears when Harris tells me he has drawn heavily upon papers held by the Bonham-Carter family. If Violent got his hands on juicy gossip, you can be sure he turned that knowledge into hard cash. Some correspondents, incidentally, ask why Violent Bonham Carter had no hyphen when the rest of the clan do. The answer is that his was stolen from him one evening at Esmeralda’s Barn by Ronnie Kray, and this lack of respect

led to the gang warfare that so disfigured our capital in the Sixties.

Friday

His was a voice of calm, compassion and reason in this modern maelstrom of events, but now Gary Lineker is to stand down as presenter of Match of the Day. I also learn that Justin Welby has handed back his mitre after failing to ensure that awful confederate of Mary Whitehouse was hauled before the beak. You, however, will be wondering what’s happening with those beavers I steered towards the Duke of Rutland. To an extent, it has been a disappointment, in that they have failed to seize control of Belvoir Castle, but my agents tell me that a housemaid cannot open a linen cupboard there without finding a beaver inside – a beaver, moreover, that proceeds to lecture her on the philosophical theory of the state – with the result that the old boy can’t keep his staff. That should stop his gallop for a while!

Saturday

I was not surprised by the evil Trump’s victory. Having spent some weeks in New Rutland during the campaign, I was well aware that the cost of living was foremost in voters’ minds. “Have you seen the price of hominy grits,” they said to one another, and “I’m not paying that for a corn pone.” Set against this, the news that the delightful Kamala Harris had been endorsed by Beyoncé Knowles (or was it Cyril Knowles?) fell a little flat. We should not allow our revulsion at Trump to lead us to think badly of the whole population over the pond: I remain convinced that there is no finer fellow to poke a cow with than Johnny American. And no good Liberal will run down the labouring classes: if you’d tried that in John Burns’s hearing, he’d have given you one up the snoot.

Sunday

Over a post-service *amontillado*, I try to persuade the Revd Hughes to stand for Archbishop of Canterbury. He’s never happier than when on his hind legs, and would look good in the frocks, but I fear my blandishments fall on stony ground. After the roast beef and Yorkshire p., I hunker down in my library. I can’t get on with Dominic Sandboy’s *What My Housemaster Told Me About the Seventies*, but a telephone call brings good news. Sixteen of Danny Chambers’ penguins sailed from Oakham Quay this afternoon and will be home in the South Atlantic for Christmas. I say sixteen because one of them has discovered a vocation and chosen to stay at Our Lady of the Ballot Boxes. I feel sure he will prosper there.

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