

liberator



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COMMENTARY

WE KNOW THIS STORY

Liberal Democrats at Harrogate seemed upbeat about May's looming local elections, and not just because the hapless Tories will be defending gains from when they did well during the 'vaccine bounce'.

The Tories also have a strategic dilemma not faced by other parties - do they tack right to fight Reform and so lose voters to the Lib Dems and Labour, or tack left and lose people to Reform? It's true Labour has some trouble with the Greens and left wing independents, but not on this scale.

Never under-estimate Reform's ability to be embarrassed by candidates who are cranks, racists or idiots, but one should grasp what is driving its current strength in the polls.

And that is fairly easy for Liberal Democrats because it's not unlike past 'Lib Dem revivals' or (going back a bit) 'Alliance surges' or fantasies about 'we can win everywhere', when the party failed to find a core vote and relied on opportunist failings by others.

Voters dissatisfied with the Tories and Labour feel they might as well try something else, and in the fairly recent past the Lib Dems were the only 'something else' on offer, at least in England.

We know what drives Reform's 'something else' role because active Lib Dems have seen it - general voter disenchantment with other parties without any clear idea of what the recipients of their temporary protest vote actually support.

It's a fair enough point for Ed Davey to make that Nigel Farage harbours appalling views on the NHS and voters ought to know about it. However, as any Lib Dem campaigner should admit, people with the most extraordinary opinions have happily voted Lib Dem just to make a protest without knowing what the party stands for on, say, Europe or immigration.

So it is with Reform, which is now likely to pick up all kinds of random temporary supporters.

We also know this doesn't work long term. A successful party needs a core vote.

Reform has only a small one based on old UKIP supporters and socially conservative Leavers in the 'red wall', though little beyond that.

With the dust having settled from last July's success it now looks as though - probably without meaning to - the Lib Dems finally have a core vote too, but among the sorts of people and places that supported them then. Reform is unlikely to make much headway in the Remain-voting shires and suburbs that now dominate the Lib Dem parliamentary party.

If so, the Lib Dems may finally have moved on from the previous 'filling the bath with the plug out' approach of having to win most voters afresh each time.

TRUMP BOOSTS THE EU

Ed Davey used to be criticised, and quite rightly so, for saying nothing about Europe and appearing embarrassed by the whole topic.

Now though he can barely contain himself on the subject and in Harrogate gave a speech that was fulsome about the European Union and even talked about returning to the single market and customs union.

The change is of course driven by events in Washington, where an incumbent president now appears better disposed towards Vladimir Putin than to European democracies, the latter having suddenly been forced to collaborate on defence and security in ways not seen for decades.

Davey is right to grasp that Donald Trump is deeply unpopular in the UK - being viewed as a menace to peace and freedom - and that those who do admire Trump are so unlikely to vote Lib Dem that they can be ignored.

He has this to himself because Kier Starmer evidently feels a prime minister cannot offend Trump, while Nigel Farage and Kemi Badenoch are Trump supporters.

Since Davey has no need to cultivate Trump he can be as critical as he pleases and pick up battle honours in the shape of denunciations from Elon Musk.

The task now is to tie the two things together. Since Trump has upended assumptions about America and European security (and indeed trade relations), the obvious answer is closer links with the EU on these issues and others.

Farage's hero Trump has, rather ironically, made the most effective case yet for getting the UK closer to the EU, and co-operating more closely with it in the meantime.

This means the Lib Dems do not have to rely on complex economic arguments to bolster support for closeness to the EU and it also undercuts those who voted Leave on what they purported to be 'patriotic' grounds. How 'patriotic' would be to leave the UK outside any joint defence measures with Europe and at the mercy of Trump's passing whims?

If Trump's tariffs turn out to endanger parts of British industry it will be a personal tragedy for those affected but - in political terms - something further to hang round Farage and Badenoch's necks.

A patriotic case for getting closer to Europe to escape from an unpredictable US president? That ought to work.

RADICAL BULLETIN

OUT COME THE BIG GUNS

It was only a wonder that the party establishment failed to deploy an animatronic effigy of Paddy Ashdown on stage so desperate were they to ensure that changes to the candidates system passed through spring conference.

The bombardment of members included an email from chief executive Mike Dixon - not that those who took contrary view had access to the members' mailing list he has - a deluge of articles by the great and good on Lib Dem Voice and in further emails, and even a speech from the floor by Ed Davey. It easily passed the required two-thirds majority.

Such pressure was all in aid of putting a federal committee, rather than the three state parties, in charge of candidate selection and approvals.

This arcane matter arose from Tim Farron's general election review which pronounced the candidates system "broken" and called for a new committee - dominated by appointees - to run the operation instead and to timetable selections more publicly and effectively.

There was also an issue about giving equal weight to England, Scotland and Wales, though exactly why the latter two could not operate independently of the former stayed unclear.

Supporters of change made a fair point that more than 400 seats had candidates last July parachuted in late without any local involvement, though it was also unclear whether this was because the process was slow, or there were too few approved candidates willing to die in hopeless ditches, or both.

Farron clearly has not learnt from his misfortunes in the 2023 housing debate (Liberator 420) that insulting people is rarely the best way to win them over.

His strictures in the general election review thoroughly got up the noses of many of the volunteers who have sought to keep the candidates show on the road.

Brian Orrell, prominent for years in this, complained in his speech that such volunteers were "sneered at and demeaned".

There was a good deal of mutinous talk of resignations among such volunteers at Harrogate, opening the question of who will fill roles in the new system.

A federal committee cannot of itself magic up more candidates and returning officers - the scarcity of the latter being a major source of delays - so who will find them and where?

Claims were also made that the mere presence on the committee of vice-president for ethnic minorities Amna Ahmad would somehow magic up more diverse candidates.

Farron was also said to have made a variety of curious remarks in meetings with candidates

volunteers about the Lib Dems now being "a donor led party", which has raised fears of wealthy backers being able to parachute their mates into target seats.

SO THAT'S ALL IT WAS

As damp squibs go, the confidential chapter of Tim Farron's general election review turned out wetter than most.

Usually a confidential chapter in such a report hides some appalling embarrassment, but Farron's once revealed comprised only statements of the obvious about struggles with membership.

The party's media people wanted to spin the general election review as a good news story about last July's success and did not want the media fixating on the less good news in the membership chapter, so it was omitted from the initially published version.

Farron noted: "The party is continuing to experience a long-term decline in membership numbers, that was only briefly reversed by the influx of new members between 2015 and 2019, primarily around the Brexit issue" and that as in 1997 electoral success "has not translated into any increase in membership".

There were many volunteers but few were likely to join as "at a seat level our MPs and PPC would rather have an active volunteer than a dormant member meaning the incentives to sign up members are misaligned".

But declining membership "risks long-term consequences for the financial stability and the campaign capability of the party".

Problems also arose with the party's ability to "engage and retain supporters based on their preferences and motivations" and that the local party model constitution imposes similar requirements on all local parties, regardless of size, placing onerous burdens on smaller ones.

"There has never been an assessment of the effectiveness of the current local party model, but it is clear that time spent on local party internal-facing activity, draws time away from campaign-led activity to develop seats and win elections at every level and places a heavy burden on a small number of individuals," Farron said.

The recommendations were a bit thin, different operating model for local parties, training for local officers and 'more supporter-centric products and communications'. Maybe the other recommendations are confidential.

DROWNED IN RED TAPE

Liberal Democrat Friends of Seekers of Sanctuary is no more. Not because of any lack of enthusiasm among members for helping refugees but because of the bureaucratic demands made on bodies like this after the party decided in 2023 to oblige them

to become formal affiliated organisations.

This gives them a status like that of local parties and so bring them under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, which requires them to make complicated financial returns for the Electoral Commission.

LDFSoS has been unable to find people to take on these onerous administrative tasks and so has shut up shop, with its website now just pointing to the main party one.

The act's requirement to account for donors may though yield some interesting information elsewhere.

Anyone puzzled by how the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine could suddenly advertise a full time job at £30,000 may be enlightened in April, when the organisation says it will register the name of the donor concerned.

Meanwhile, the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel appears concerned about the requirement to name donors.

TWO-ONE AT FULL TIME

Since one cannot hold office in a political party from which one has been expelled, it is understandable that Mr Justice Fordham described Jo Hayes' one-out-of-three win in her High Court case against the Liberal Democrats as a pyrrhic victory.

Hayes had challenged her expulsion from the party on two grounds, and the ban on her holding office in it, but won only on the latter.

Whether this brings down the curtain on this interminable saga is unclear as Hayes believe she has avenues for appeal related to equalities legislation.

She has been ordered to pay the Lib Dems costs of £250,000 within 42 days, a sum the judge said was slightly over half the party's £501,911.03 costs. Hayes is a barrister and so, presumably, can represent herself for nothing.

The judge observed this would "probably be ruinous for Ms Hayes...in a case in which Ms Hayes has already caused the [Lib Dems] to run up a huge costs bill which there appears every prospect cannot be paid", and any further hearing on the matter would be "neither fair nor proportionate".

Fordham's judgment throws more light than anything previously on what happened and why Hayes - a well-known party member for decades and holder of many posts - was expelled. It also shines light on the role of party president Mark Pack.

At its heart is an alleged conflict of interest. Did Hayes seek information from the party to assist someone who was in the process of suing it?

The dispute goes back to the selection of a candidate for police, fire and crime commissioner in Essex in 2021.

There was no hope of the Lib Dems winning but when candidate Callum Robertson dropped out a replacement was needed and Hayes - as regional candidates chair - proposed Remain campaigner Jason Hunter.

As the judgment explains: "There were a series of disputes between members of the party which led to various complaints being made against some members, including against a Mr Jon Sheller.

"Mr Sheller, for his part, claimed that there had been an orchestrated social media campaign using

dummy accounts to damage other party members, including a Mr Jason Hunter. Mr Sheller said he had been in contact with the police in relation to the social media campaign, and that he was assisting the police in understanding the alleged manipulation of social media."

Fordham said Sheller's actual role and behaviour was a matter of dispute, and "Ms Hayes had dealings with both Mr Hunter and Mr Sheller about these matters, and formed the view that they were or might be the victims of malicious complaints.

"It is clear that Ms Hayes formed and maintains very strongly held views about the rights and wrongs of these events, and very adverse views of the way in which Dr Pack dealt with them."

Pack had made an anonymous complaint about Sheller concerning statements he made in a Zoom call with Bristol party members in August 2020 in which the judgement records it was suggested Sheller had misrepresented his role and/or authority.

Sheller's membership was suspended and he said Pack's complaint was an attempt to interfere with his dealings with the police "and clearly passed that view on to Ms Hayes, who was persuaded of it", the judge said.

Hayes contacted Neil Christian, then the party's lead adjudicator, "to express a number of concerns about the complaint against Mr Sheller and his suspension, suggesting that the complaints against Mr Sheller might be motivated by his assistance to the police (claiming Mr Sheller was a 'witness or potential witness for the prosecution')".

In February 2021 Hayes proposed Hunter as the Essex PFCC candidate. But Hunter had resigned from the party in September 2020, when there were multiple outstanding complaints against him, which had lapsed on his resignation, the judgment noted.

"The background to Mr Hunter's resignation was connected with the concerns which Ms Hayes had previously raised regarding the complaint against Mr Sheller, and indeed it was Mr Hunter who had put Ms Hayes in touch with Mr Sheller," Fordham said.

English Candidates Committee chair Margaret Joachim said Hunter was not eligible to be a candidate even after he rejoined the party in February 2021 because of the rule that required someone to be a member for a year before becoming an approved candidate.

This row culminated in Joachim telling Hayes: "Jason Hunter is not an approved candidate. Therefore you cannot appoint him."

Regional chair Lucy Nethsingha then wrote to members of the regional candidates committee and Essex County Co-ordinating Committee asking whether they had been consulted about Hayes' appointment of Hunter, as she "believed there are some concerns from the wider party as to Jason's suitability, as there are some unresolved complaints which have been made against him".

Email exchanges followed, in which Hayes suggested there were no outstanding complaints against Hunter, and others referred to five complaints.

Nethsingha's email then found its way to Hunter, and the judge noted: "It was Ms Hayes' evidence that she had not asked Mr Hunter who had sent him the email, and in the course of her evidence she suggested that Mr Sheller (who was not an addressee of the

Nethsingha Email) had later told her that he had provided the email to Mr Hunter.”

Hunter then sent a pre-action letter to Nethsingha complaining of breach of confidentiality, misuse of private information and damage to reputation.

He later filed a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office on the basis that the Nethsingha email was a breach of his data protection rights.

The issue of the ICO referral then surfaced at the Federal Board in August 2021.

Hayes said: “I am reliably informed that unless the party resolves Jason Hunter’s complaint of a Data Protection breach to his satisfaction (presumably including a public apology) by 5 pm today the ICO will fine the party at least £10k. I gather that the ICO ruling will be published on their website in a day or two. An aggravating factor was failure to communicate with Jason.” She confirmed this information came from Hunter.

Pack though had a report from head of compliance Kerry Buist that said the party had not conceded it had broken the law, no deadline had been set and it was simply waiting for the ICO to respond.

He told FB members he had “checked with staff, who have also checked with the ICO, and so can confirm that: we are not under ICO investigation; we have not received a £10,000 fine; our data protection officer has always maintained that the party has no case to answer; and the lead adjudicator does not believe we have broken the rules outlined in the complaints procedures”.

Hayes asked Buist for sight of the ICO correspondence but was refused, and said what Buist had reported was wrong.

The judge said: “It is clear from the meeting ‘chat’ exchanged between the participants that Ms Hayes was specifically asked whether she was accusing Ms Buist of lying, and that she did not take the opportunity to refute this, but nor did she say she was.”

This was taken by FB members as an attack on a staff member and Hayes was removed from the meeting.

Pack’s complaint against Hayes then came before a complaints process panel and the judgment states “it is apparent from the evidence of [chair] Ms Simpson that...the panel regarded the context as including Ms Hayes’ assistance of Mr Hunter to bring a claim against the party.

“In short, the panel concluded that Ms Hayes attempts to obtain sight of documents from Ms Buist relating to Mr Hunter’s ICO complaint was part of the assistance Ms Hayes was providing to Mr Hunter, and all the more unreasonable given what the panel found to be the obvious conflict of interest involved in Ms Hayes using her position on the Federal Board to obtain material to assist someone bringing proceedings against the party,” Fordham said.

There were many disputes about what the panel should have taken into account and on most of these the judge concluded proceedings were correctly followed.

Fordham rejected two of Hayes’ complaints that the party had acted improperly or unfairly, but did uphold that about the panel’s handling of questions about the

Nethsingha email.

The judge said Hayes should have had a chance to answer that complaint “given the rather oblique way in which this allegation had come to feature in the complaint process against Ms Hayes”.

Fordham explained: “Ms Nethsingha herself had no knowledge of whether her email had been leaked by Ms Hayes or not, merely a surmise. While I accept that the panel had a wide discretion as to how to conduct the hearing...the allegation of deliberate misconduct by Ms Hayes in leaking the email was a stark and serious one, which Ms Nethsingha was unable to give first hand-knowledge of, which Ms Hayes clearly did not accept, and yet which was not even mentioned at the hearing.

“I am satisfied that in these circumstances, the making of a finding on this issue involved a breach of natural justice on the panel’s part”.

Overtaking this aspect of the panel’s decision meant Hayes was no longer barred from party office but since she lost on her other two grounds remained expelled anyway.

Fordham concluded with wise words: “It is, to say the least, unfortunate that disputes between individuals who apparently share a common set of political ideals should generated such friction and ill-feeling, and that they have proved incapable of consensual resolution.”

Hayes said in a statement: “As a senior elected office-holder of the Liberal Democrats I have consistently sought to defend ordinary members’ right to lawful, fair and equal treatment.

“Regrettably, Federal Party President Mark Pack chose to bring a complaint against me rather than address the issues I was raising.

“In exhausting interlocutory battles in these proceedings, the defendants sought to restrict the scope of my claim as much as possible.

“The flimsy nature of the allegations against me on which the complaints panel based its decision is now in the public domain. One of the grounds was set aside as contrary to natural justice.

“As for the other two, I am considering the judgment carefully. I believe I have grounds of appeal.”

Meanwhile Hayes has been elected as an independent to the City of London Corporation The full judgment can be seen here: .

[https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/KB/2025/402.html&query=\(hayes\)](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWHC/KB/2025/402.html&query=(hayes))

TWO SEATER TOILET

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is off to Basingstoke & Deane in Liberator’s latest award for the worst motion submitted for conference.

The exact wordings of two offending motions are too tedious to set out but Federal Conference Committee has thoughtfully issued a list of reasons why motions were not taken.

Most politely express regret about lack of time or covering similar ground to subjects recently debated.

Basingstoke & Deane though found its motion on ‘increasing government revenues’ rated as “insufficiently detailed, lacking clarity, ambiguous, underdeveloped”. Similar criticism was directed at its other motion on ‘proportional property tax and national council tax benefit scheme’.

Coming up on the rails for a future toilet award, the Young Liberals got the same response as Basingstoke & Deane for their motion on 'prescription for progress: a controlled medicinal market for psychedelics'. Faaar out, as hippies used to say.

Action for Land Taxation and Economic Reform (Alter) got the same drubbing for its motion on 'fair council tax'.

The thought of Alter submitting anything 'insufficiently detailed' is mind boggling given its usual fare.

HERTS BREAKING

Further mayhem in parts of Hertfordshire, where former Three Rivers leader Sara Bedford has gone independent and then resigned as a councillor (following her husband Matthew in the same ward) and Dacorum's leader Adrian England has resigned after a brief spell in office.

Three Rivers turns on personal disputes involving allegations of bullying, and both Bedfords' departures have seen Tory by-election gains.

Dacorum's woes concern complaints from female councillors about how they have been treated (Liberator 426).

Eight female councillors quit the Lib Dem group accusing England of failing to deal with sexual harassment allegations made against his predecessor Ron Tindall - who was a councillor in Bermondsey 40 years ago in the wake of Simon Hughes' by-election victory.

It has never become public exactly what Tindall is accused of having done, but according to the Local Democracy Reporting Service England decided to step down following the findings of the regional investigation, which have not been disclosed.

Allegations against Tindall were rejected by the council's standards committee, despite an independent report concluding that a councillor "didn't feel comfortable being left alone in a room" with him, the reporting service has said. This was followed by the investigation by the regional party.

The service quotes a Lib Dem spokesperson: "As a result of the investigation's findings and evidence about Ron Tindall's conduct, [Cllr Tindall] has been barred from standing as a candidate in the upcoming [county council] elections and remains suspended from the local Liberal Democrat group.

"These serious allegations will now be carefully considered by the party's national independent complaints process to decide what further disciplinary action should be taken."

VISITORS FROM ABOVE

The fashion for naming roads after this magazine has spread from Market Harborough (Liberator 426) to West Oxfordshire, where a road in Stanton Harcourt now bears our name.

A speech given for the unveiling of a nearby RAF memorial suggests this road is named after our namesake World War 2 bomber. The speech also contains the extraordinary claim: "Some visitors have been a little stranger, in June 2019 we had some extra-terrestrial visitors when a UFO was discovered crashed on The Green."



50 YEARS ON

Congratulations to Camden stalwart and long-time friend of Liberator Flick Rea, who marked her 50 years in the party with a splendid bash attended by Ed Davey and Alastair Carmichael among many others.

Flick was a Camden councillor for many years and is a former actor whose talents were put to good use in the Liberal Revue in 2008 as Margaret Thatcher (left), appearing with Harriet Sherlock.

LOOKING AFTER THE PENNIES

Liberator Collective member Richard Clein has gained unexpected praise for his chairing of Liverpool City Council's audit committee from Labour leader Liam Robinson. Unexpected as the two parties are usually at each other's throats in the city.

Robinson said Clein's chairing of the committee meant "we've been able to make sure that the past five years' worth of accounts have been fully audited."

Clein responded politely but also pointed out that the Lib Dems were "helping to clear up the chaos and financial mismanagement of successive Labour administrations.



TRUMP DRIVES US BACK TO EUROPE

America's pivot away from Europe got noisier under Trump but is a long term policy change. Time for a European Defence Union, says Nick Harvey

After Donald Trump's election victory in November, and well before the world started turning on its head after his 20 January inauguration, I urged anxious members and colleagues at the European Movement UK to judge Trump on what he does, rather than what he says.

The lurid outpourings in his first term were (at least marginally) more extreme than his executive actions.

In these early months, however, his rhetoric has become so constantly unhinged that words may be causing as much chaos as any actions which might follow. He has talked of colonising Canada, seizing Greenland and the Panama Canal, turning Gaza into a plaza and expelling those living there, and ending military support to Europe dating back to World War 2.

Deeds like voting with Russia, Iran and North Korea at the UN seem almost as absurd as his words, potentially disproving my theory – though mercifully for now more symbolic than substantive.

In his 1987 book *The Art of the Deal*, Trump explains that before any negotiation begins, his tactic is to throw wild cards to confuse his counterparts. So, having promised he could resolve the Ukraine war in 48 hours, we see him destabilising Zelensky by threatening to remove military assistance on which Ukraine is dependent, while dangling before Putin the salivating prospect of an end to sanctions and rehabilitation to the international community and the G7.

HEAVY LIFTING

It is devoutly to be hoped that his bombast about European security is likewise a tactic to soften us up before a serious drive to recalibrate the trans-Atlantic defence partnership. In fairness to Trump, he has a strong point that we in Europe have been too content to let America do the heavy lifting on our security since 1945.

Europe has built successful economies without investing adequately in the security which underpins prosperity. President Kennedy was the first to say this in the early 1960s, when Europe's economies had substantively recovered from the war and should have been ready to shoulder more of the burden. US presidents have said it ever since. America's strategic pivot on security – from their Atlantic to Pacific seaboard – was announced candidly by Obama, then pursued noisily by Trump, less noisily by Biden and would have continued whatever the result had been in November.

Helping ourselves to a complacent peace dividend after the fall of the iron curtain, collectively we have been slow to wake up and smell the coffee as to what America's pivot means. Perhaps it has taken Trump's shock therapy to bring us to our senses? The brutality of his treatment of Ukraine, contrasting so sharply with Biden's stout support, has sent panic waves. His readiness to deny support and cover to European forces if they take on a peace-keeping role after a peace deal in Ukraine has left us gasping.

Even if America were to elect a more conventional president in 2028, things have been said which can never be unsaid, doubts cast which can never be entirely forgotten, certainties undermined which can never be restored with complete confidence. In truth, we have developed strategies, configured forces and made procurement decisions (not to mention contracts) based on the belief that America would always be a dependable partner and ally.

Some of this now looks rather foolish. The reality that we could not send a viable force into post-war Ukraine and protect and co-ordinate it without American help is embarrassing. Europe's population, GDP and regular uniformed forces all comfortably outstrip Russia's. But if you were designing a force laydown for Europe, it really wouldn't look much like what we have. In truth, 30-plus nations making largely separate decisions for decades, has resulted in duplications, incompatibilities and gaps.

The situation is not hopeless. There are co-ordination mechanisms and technical specifications, both within NATO and the EU, but all European nations have too readily put their own interests first.

I doubt we could really muster enough troops between us to sustain a challenging peace-keeping mission across a country the size of Ukraine with a frontline as long as it now defends. But even if we can, basic force protection, supply logistics, air cover and real-time aerial and satellite intelligence (some of that enabling us to use the full capabilities of high-end kit we have bought from the US) would all depend on American support. At a conservative estimate it would take 10 years to develop totally self-dependent European forces to undertake such a task.

So, Starmer, Macron, von der Leyen and other European leaders are right not to alienate Trump more than they absolutely have to, and at times must swallow their pride and bite their tongues. It is easy but naïve to characterise this as appeasement. In truth, even if we are to become effective in protecting our own continent, we remain dependent on America for now – so we must at least 'string them along'. And

we dearly hope that a more productive relationship than that, going forward, can yet be salvaged with the US – whoever is in office.

All of which leads inexorably to the question, where exactly does the UK sit in all this? We have warbled on for decades about our special relationship with America and since 2016 have chosen disastrously to distance ourselves from Europe. We have supported the US militarily, sometimes when we should not have (Iraq), and diplomatically – sometimes holding our noses while casting votes at the UN.

We have shared highly sensitive intelligence and invested in their hardware (and jobs). We have partnered with them in sustaining our nuclear deterrent. We could probably just about operate it on our own for a while – maybe less accurately targeted but, if anyone were mad enough to fire it, that would be of minor significance relative to the carnage which would follow. We have bought their F35 jets which, without American real-time intelligence updates, would function at only a fraction of their (expensive) capability.

But for all that, they see us as part of the European problem and simple geography does not lie: we are in Europe. European security is our security – whether in Ukraine, the Atlantic, North Sea or Arctic, and the Americans won't always have flesh in our game. On ministerial visits to Washington, I was struck how politicians, Pentagon officials and uniformed officers all talked about NATO in the third person, as if American wasn't in it. In Europe, we think of NATO as America – with a few of us giving minor support (90% America, 10% Europe if you like). Over there they think of NATO as Europe, with them patting us on the head (90% Europe, 10% America if you like). Talk of leaving causes barely a ripple.

Now we see Starmer playing a bold lead in Europe, partnering France in corralling a coalition of the willing. This is good news for our future relations with Europe and is well received by our partners – particularly we seem to be volunteering help without demanding anything in return. This is shrewd, as we have much ground to make up after our behaviour over the last decade (longer if one remembers Thatcher's handbag). After Labour's faltering start in office, it is also Starmer's first decent shot across Farage's pro-Trump and Putin bows.

On 19 May there was a UK–EU Summit in London, the first in a hereafter annual fixture. The most likely headline to emerge is that we either have agreed – or at least agreed to agree – a strategic partnership, predominantly but not exclusively focused on security.

This was promoted pre-Brexit by Theresa May and anticipated in the Political Declaration accompanying the Withdrawal Agreement. But once Johnson's oven-

“We have been slow to wake up to what America's pivot means. Perhaps it has taken Trump's shock therapy to bring us to our senses?”

ready deal had secured the 2019 election, the hopeless Lord Frost dropped the idea, compounding the initial folly of Brexit by ensuring the worst possible outcome. Many other countries have such agreements with the EU, notably Canada and Norway, but including many others beyond.

This should herald the start of a much deeper relationship – on security certainly, and hopefully on a wider front. It will also be key to British participation in any European Defence Fund (running into trouble at the time of writing –

and of course, if we hope to draw out of such a pot, we will have to pay into it). Ideas of a Defence Bank, being promoted by Lib Dems Ed Lucas and Guy de Selliers, may come into the foreground, based more on the 'coalition of the willing' principle.

We also need agreements facilitating British involvement in the European Defence Agency and EU Common Security and Defence Policy missions – several other countries have both. In short, we see emerging a European Defence Union, of which we simply must be part. Of course, the EU must be at the heart of such a defence union, but does the defence union need to be at the heart of the EU? Perhaps its being rather more an adjunct to the EU would help circumvent Hungarian vetoes and several states' neutrality (rows about defence funding are already showing this).

Where does this leave NATO? Ideally, a European Defence Union would operate inside NATO as its new European pillar. NATO structures and systems are well proven. If we must be outside, then let's model it on NATO and ensure compatibility. Better though – and why should even Trump object to this? – sit it inside, but with operational freedom and the hope that one day the sane people will recover control of the asylum.

Every time the British public hears its prime minister talking about, “we in Europe must... [etc],” and sees him actively rebuilding relations with our closest neighbours, the centre of gravity in UK public opinion over the Europe issue inches back in the right direction.

LABOUR PRISONERS

But Labour remain prisoners of their self-imposed red lines, which one might think recent events open a good case for loosening. Growth will prove an elusive goal without both borrowing and taxing more and restoring free access to our biggest export market – Europe.

We should acknowledge that even a decision taken today to apply to join the single market would take years rather than months to execute in practice. It would involve a 31-way negotiation between the UK and each European Economic Area member. The customs union is an easier goal but has other complications (scrapping the few feeble deals we have made since Brexit, and abandoning a US trade deal, among them). [continued on Page 29]

GIVING UP ON SOFT POWER

Deliberately cruel actions by the Trump administration mean the end of international development aid and the influence of its former donors in developing countries, says Rebecca Tinsley

Foreign aid is unpopular with many voters in the comparatively wealthy white world, and now, politicians are delivering on promises to slash government spending.

They cite domestic economic necessity (the UK), punishing ungrateful recipients and 'left-wing' projects (the USA), or reluctance to enrich corrupt foreigners.

US government foreign aid is less than 1% of the federal budget. In the UK it has shrunk from 0.7% (Blair) to 0.3% (by 2027) of GDP, of which about half will pay for housing asylum seekers in the UK. Besides diminishing the West's soft power, our geopolitical retreat emboldens Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf States as they compete for resources, military bases and cronies in the developing world.

And so it came to pass. When the Trump administration issued a stop-work order, the media focused on USAID, founded by President Kennedy in 1961. However, also gone are hundreds of State Department projects like Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), which train and protect courageous civil society groups in repressive regimes, as well as think tanks like Chatham House.

FAILING AND UNSUSTAINABLE

A rethink of aid is certainly overdue, with more responsibility and power shifting to beneficiary nations. But do charities or recipient countries have the stomach for such a reframing? While aid NGOs in the UK and USA tread water, fighting each other for private foundation funding, the optimists believe Trump is an aberration. Yet, it is likely this is the new normal. The development minister Anneliese Dodds rightly resigned as her budget was shredded, but our approach to tackling poverty, climate disruption and conflict is failing and unsustainable.

The Trump-Musk-Starmer foreign aid bloodbath has brought abrupt change to two groups: international NGOs with headquarters in the West, and the projects they support in poor countries. Here are just a few examples of the impact.

Seasoned NGO staffers in Washington DC suspect cuts are permanent. Most staff are furloughed, unable to find work as the sector shrinks.

David Miliband, paid \$1.2m annually at The International Rescue Committee, takes a 20% cut while 17,000 in-country staff, living one week's wages from living in a tent, are furloughed.

BOND, the UK umbrella group, suggests charities put their egos aside, merging to survive. Will they spend less on plush HQs and advertising, focusing instead on keeping local projects alive?

Some 10,000 US government aid contracts are void, and money already spent (\$350m in DC-based NGOs alone) will not be reimbursed. The Supreme

Court reversed this executive order, but at the time of writing, there is fear the Trump administration will not comply.

Another US court order reinstating essential programmes is being ignored. Vice-President Vance says Trump's electoral mandate nullifies any court or Senate pronouncement. Democrats are relying on class actions and the constitution to constrain Trump-Musk. But does the Southern District of New York district attorney have an army?

Federal agencies, corporations and Hollywood have acquiesced to Trump's will: people are afraid of losing their jobs. Members of Congress fear MAGA mobs will attack their families if they criticise President Trump.

A US foreign aid chief executive told me she was summoned to the State Department where an official read her Musk's announcement like an automaton. There was no discussion. Although her work directly counters the power of a terrorist group, her funding is gone. When hundreds of children turned up the following morning to learn English and computing, the premises were padlocked. More than 16,000 displaced survivors of terror (in a country which I cannot name for fear of retribution against the NGO from the State Department) are without classes teaching skills, psychotherapy for raped women, legal help or other support. The guards keeping resurgent local terrorists at bay are gone.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said aid must pass three tests: does it make America safer, stronger and more prosperous? Yet, constraining violent extremists around the globe clearly doesn't count.

Most emergency aid is not covered by State Department exemptions. In Sudan, the world's worst (if unreported) conflict, 637,000 are in 'famine conditions', and 8.1m are "on the brink of starvation" as two rival military groups fight for control of the country's natural resources.

When the fighting began, Sudan's civilians established emergency food and medical stations in people's living rooms. The diaspora provided funding, then Biden stepped in. Trump stopped this lifeline overnight. The diaspora cannot make up the difference, so 80% of the kitchens are closed.

Any clinic offering sexual and reproductive health services will close, thanks to America's Taliban contingent. An estimated 200,000 African women will die during pregnancy or childbirth this year.

Anti-retroviral medicine is locked in storerooms. In Uganda alone, 40 newborns a day will get HIV. In Haiti, the 40 women raped each day will go without emergency HIV medication.

Some 1,500 scholarships at the American University in Beirut are terminated. Elsewhere, local journalists and NGOs risking their lives to expose corruption have

lost support, all malaria supplies protecting 53m people, mostly children, are terminated and food worth millions of dollars rots in warehouses.

Democracy workshops in China training civil society are terminated as is the collection of data on Al Qaeda in West Africa.

Diversity, equality and inclusion and gender material may be deleted from NGO websites, and job titles changed, but it won't save most of the sector from the Department of Government Efficiency which, we are told, is wise to such tactics.

Experienced charity staffers in Washington ask, "Are US contributions to UN agencies next?"

STARMER APPEASES

During Starmer's trip to Washington DC, he and Ambassador Mandelson repeatedly briefed the media that they form a bridge between the USA and Europe. This is delusional. In the 35 years I have been a part-time US resident, I have never met a single educated person who had heard of the so-called special relationship.

Does Starmer's foreign relations ignorance or his vanity explain his appeasement of Trump? Perhaps he was looking for an excuse to chop the already besieged UK aid budget. UK overseas development charities had been shrinking as foundations paused grant-giving to plan their "decolonisation policies". Public confidence in the effectiveness of aid had also been eroded by years of media coverage of wasteful projects. There has been less attention paid to Blair era cronyism, as Department for International Development staff became consultants producing reports on countries that could have been written by a local for a fraction of the cost.

However, randomly shredding everything arbitrarily, Musk-style, is "deliberate cruelty," to quote an US NGO trustee. Yet the cruelty is popular: "We won't be made to look like fools any longer, taken for granted," they say. The aid-haters in the UK framed development as handing millions to bloated kleptomaniac authoritarians without asking for receipts, while getting lectured on colonialism – and, indeed, this did happen under Blair. Yet, supporting nimble, resourceful local projects run by civil society is an effective way of checking the power of dictators, while getting funds to deserving people. However, even this approach isn't sustainable. To quote an aid worker in a central African country, "These cuts show how fragile it is for countries to be so reliant on aid."

What now? Many developing world rulers have no interest in filling the gap being left by Western aid. This is not a teaching moment for them. Their countries are poorly run, but not necessarily poor. They rule through fear, and they'll simply hire Russian mercenaries to guard their presidential palaces as their people lose clinics and schools.

Until these leaders are made to tax their own citizens to pay for the services now provided by international charities, there will be no accountability or reform.

"Members of Congress fear MAGA mobs will attack their families if they criticise President Trump"

Western donors could use soft power tools to bring about that transition. Instead, as the West withdraws, China, Russia, Turkey and the Gulf nations will offer loans (not aid) in exchange for military bases, discounted access to minerals, and building contracts for more vanity projects (useless ports in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, empty Kenyan railways and Angolan cities, Sierra

Leonian roads to nowhere).

Paradoxically, many Trump-voting farmers sold crops to USAID. This was good for American agriculture while making it impossible for developing world farmers to compete with the subsidised crops being dumped on their markets. It was also profitable for American logistics companies. Most US foreign aid spending never leaves the USA. It buys US products and employs many thousands of dedicated, compassionate Americans, directly and indirectly. Another own goal for the Republicans, it seems.

The atmosphere in DC is one of shock and disbelief. Even the evangelical Christian charities who benefited under George W Bush are closing. These are new times.

Who Benefits? The world's dictators will be relieved that funding has stopped for the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Democratic National Institute (NDI). Both NGOs monitor elections, training and supporting civil society groups holding autocrats to account. Gone will be the brave little local NGOs training journalists, lawyers, and election officers; the activists who called for transparency and accountability will be locked up or worse when the IRI and NDI no longer have their backs.

American-funded female empowerment programmes around the globe are finished: the fundamentalists running countries in the Middle East and North Africa will be delighted that women return to their traditional servile, powerless positions.

Those women and girls will be illiterate, forced into early marriage and dying in childbirth in high numbers as they did only twenty years ago. This is Trump and Musk's message to dictators and fundamentalists everywhere: crush your ethnic and religious minorities, invade your sovereign neighbours, steal your nation's wealth, revert to cruel and medieval traditions, and eliminate any nascent open society.

Meanwhile, all hell is breaking loose in incipient conflict zones (the DRC-Rwanda-Burundi, South Sudan, Eritrea-Ethiopia) because the USA has lost interest. Thailand expels thousands of Rohingya, Nicaragua edges closer to full-bore authoritarianism, fighting flares in Syria: whereas a stern phone call from the State Department used to keep the lid on situations, it is now every tyrant for himself. God help us all.

Rebecca Tinsley is founder of Waging Peace

THE CRUEL CONMAN IN THE WHITE HOUSE

Martha Elliott explains Donald Trump's assault on America's constitution and separation of powers

Chaos, confusion, cruelty and constitutional plunder. Those words describe the first two months of Donald Trump's second term.

In rapid fire succession, he began his 'reign' by signing a flurry of executive orders that would, in effect, erase the checks and balances that form the bulwark of the American constitution - more than 80 orders in two months.

In his first 10 days in office, he signed more orders than any recent president did in his first 100 days. The sheer volume of the orders coupled with the questionable constitutionality of many of them has created confusion and what many legal scholars are calling a constitutional crisis.

But that may be exactly what was intended - overwhelm the opposition until they can't decide what's important and then surrender.

To give an idea of the executive orders that were put forth in the first days of the administration, Trump ordered that the US would no longer recognise citizenship for people born here whose if their parents were here illegally, a clear violation of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution that made all people born in the US citizens. He 'created' a new executive department - something that can only be done by Congress - called the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and run by Elon Musk.

Immediately DOGE began laying off thousands of people in most departments. Some of the first people fired were 18 inspectors general in various departments whose jobs were to investigate fraud, waste, and corruption. (Legally, they can't be fired without a 30-day notice to Congress and grounds for the firing - all of which Trump and Musk ignored.)

He froze funding for international aid and domestic programmes, even though that funding had been authorised by Congress. When President Richard Nixon tried to do the same thing, the Supreme Court said he could not impound funds allocated by Congress.

DRASTIC DROPS

What's even more confusing is that one day an order is given and the next it's rescinded or delayed. For instance, the 25% tariffs that were ordered to be put on Mexican and Canadian goods, have been put on and off several times - perhaps in response to the drastic drops in the stock market, although Trump says he doesn't pay attention to markets. Some economists are predicting a recession may be inevitable.

Trump clearly doesn't understand tariffs because he insists that they make other countries pay us. In reality, the importers pay the tariffs and pass the costs along to consumers. So, tariffs will ultimately cause inflation. And every country upon which we've imposed tariffs has reciprocated.

There have been many unpopular and disastrous tariffs in US history (which Trump doesn't know), but I just want to point out one. After World War 1, President Calvin Coolidge insisted our allies pay us back for the arms we had given them during the war. Then he and Congress levied a 60% tariff on all imported goods. That was, in effect, waging economic warfare on Europe because they couldn't pay us back if they couldn't sell their goods in the US. The result? Economic disaster that led to the rise of fascists and World War 2..

To understand Trump's gameplan, it's important to understand the broad goals of Project 2025, the



Heritage Foundation's 900-page report, which is a detailed blueprint for how to seize control of every aspect of American Government and destroy America's constitutional framework for democracy by concentrating power in the presidency, a concept known as 'unitary executive theory'.

The Heritage Foundation is a conservative think tank that has been setting policy goals for presidents since Ronald Reagan, although never before have those policy agenda been followed in such lockstep.

During the campaign, Trump claimed to never have read the plan and know nothing about it, but his executive actions show that someone read it for him (since he doesn't read) and is dictating executive actions that mimic the goals of plan. The document set out hundreds of goals, but here are some highlights:

- ☛ Dismantle the government by putting the entire federal bureaucracy directly under the control of the president. This would cut the American system of checks and balances enshrined in the constitution.
- ☛ Drastically cut federal spending by slashing budgets of all departments and agencies and eliminating protections for thousands of civil service employees. (To accomplish this, Trump created DOGE) The hidden goal of this seems to be to decrease spending so that the Trump tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy can be renewed and expanded.
- ☛ Put the country back to a 'family centred' focus which means limiting abortions by stopping access to the abortion pill mifepristone either by banning it or by stopping it from being shipped in the US mail; and dismantling the Department of Education and putting control of education back into the state and local governments. This would also slash federal support of early childhood programs and K-12 education. It would also threaten government grants to poor students as well as federal loans.
- ☛ Expand Trump's America First agenda by increased funding for border enforcement such as a wall on the southern border and while deporting millions of undocumented immigrants. In addition, weaken our ties to our allies by distancing the US from NATO, eliminating the foreign aid such as USAID, withdrawing from the World Health Organisation and the Paris Agreement on climate change, and freezing support for Ukraine.

Of course, there are many more goals outlined in 900 pages that are too numerous to detail here.

Trump also has his own agenda: an 'enemies list' of people who don't agree with him or have voted against him. The list includes anyone who voted to impeach him or who voiced opposition to him in the past or in

"There is a detailed blueprint for how to seize control of every aspect of American Government and destroy America's constitutional framework"

the present administration.

For example, I live in the state of Maine. During the recent state governor's conference in Washington, DC, Trump singled out my state because at least one school district is allowing a transgender female to participate in women's sports.

Governor Janet Mills spoke out and said she would follow the rule of law in the state and federal government rather than his directive to keep out transgender females. The state's association of principles also voted to allow transgender athletes. Since then, Trump

cut off funding for support of fishermen and for the agricultural programs in the University of Maine and other state funding, although some of this has been at least temporarily reinstated.

Every day there are more petty retributions. In addition, he has eliminated security clearances for people such as Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris, and even taken away security detail for some, including General Mark Milley.

UNQUALIFIED LACKEYS

In his first term, Trump put qualified people in his cabinet who restrained him from doing anything illegal or unconstitutional. But this time the primary qualification for his nomination was loyalty to him. He put unqualified lackeys at the heads of the executive branch, and the Republican Congress rubber stamped them into office.

This includes people such as Pete Hegseth, a former Fox News weekend anchor who lost his jobs as heads of a nonprofit veterans' groups because of his drinking and his womanising, and Robert F Kennedy, Jr, an anti-vaccination conspiratorialist who has no expertise in medicine, as head of Health and Human Services. Kash Patel, who has said that the FBI was used to weaponise the Justice Department, was made head of the FBI. Almost none of his picks for heads for cabinet posts have qualifications other than complete loyalty to Trump.

But the most terrifying problem is how Trump is trying to destroy the US Constitution.

To grasp the gravity of what's happening in the United States, one has to understand the fundamentals of the American constitutional system. I'm fairly certain Trump has never read the constitution even though he's sworn to uphold it twice.

During the American Revolution, the leaders set up a framework of government to be used after independence. The first attempt failed and in May 1787, the leaders gathered in Philadelphia to try to solve the problem. They decided that the federal government needed more power, but also knew that power corrupts, so they wanted safeguards to ensure that no one or no branch of government could go unchecked.

They set up three separate branches: the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. The legislature or Congress consisted of the House of Representatives and

the Senate (and legislation couldn't be passed without consent of both houses), the executive was led by the president, and the judiciary by the Supreme Court.

Each branch had checks on the other. For instance, Congress passed the laws, but the President could veto them, and then the Congress could override a veto with a 2/3 majority of both houses.

The Supreme Court could declare a law unconstitutional. The president was commander-in-chief but only Congress could declare war. Some powers were given only to the federal government and others were retained by the states. The president could not make laws but only carry out the laws that were passed by Congress. Congress had the power of the purse, so it was up to it to levy taxes and decide how that money would be spent. The president had to ensure that the money was spent as congress had directed. In addition, the departments of the executive branch were to be created and funded by the congress, not the president.

Article 2 of the constitution, which describes the powers of the President, is relatively short compared to Article 1, which outlines the power of the Congress. The President's primary job is to carry out the laws that are passed by Congress. He is commander-in-chief and in charge of foreign policy in that he can negotiate treaties with other countries, but they must be ratified by a 2/3 vote of the Senate; he can appoint ambassadors, but they must be approved by a majority Senate vote. He can nominate judges to the federal judiciary, with the consent of the Senate. Other than that, he has little or no power - although presidents have increased their power with executive orders bypassing Congressional legislation.

Many of Trump's executive orders are of questionable constitutionality. But the Republican party controls both houses of Congress and have done nothing to assert their powers. Only the courts have stood up and said, "No, you can't do that."

Because the Republicans control the government, Trump could ask Congress to do it constitutionally.

For instance, he wants to get rid of the Department of Education that was created and funded by Congress, so he could ask Congress to eliminate it, and he would sign it into law. Instead, he is trying to dismantle it and other agencies by allowing Elon Musk, who put \$250m into Trump's campaign, to fire employees and defund programmes such as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion or threaten any department, state, or even university that doesn't. do likewise.

On 11 March, half of the staff of the education department was fired. Some federal judges have ordered that these and other firings be halted and the civil servants be reinstated because they violate the power of his office and usurp powers from the Congress. But Republicans in Congress are not protesting.

So why go about it in an unconstitutional way rather than pass legislation that would accomplish the same thing?

Legislation needs to be proposed and passed. Congress doesn't always work quickly especially since the identical legislation must be passed in both houses and not all of his orders are popular. All of this takes time and effort. It's much easier to simply write out an executive order. What's more, if you issue order after order, the opposition is overwhelmed. If Republicans

in Congress aren't complaining, the only other branch of government that can stop him is the judiciary - and even that takes time - briefs, hearings, and court decisions.

On 16 March, Trump defied a federal court order saying that without due process, Venezuelans who were alleged members of a gang could not be deported to prisons in El Salvador under the Alien and Sedition Act, a law passed in 1798 that gave the president broad powers to deport non-citizens. The law has only been used three times before; the last time was when Japanese Americans were interned in World War 2.

A federal court ordered Trump to turn planes around and bring them back, but Trump ignored the order. Now government lawyers are refusing to give details of the deportations, saying that it would violate national security.

Even before taking office, Trump suggested that he might defy court orders because in his mind, he is the interpreter of the laws, even though that is the job of the Supreme Court as ultimate arbiter of the Constitution.

He seems to think that whatever the president says is law, and if the president does something it can't be illegal. Those notions were shot down by the Supreme Court when Nixon tried to assert them. Perhaps this Supreme Court gave the Trump notion that he could do anything he wanted when they said that a president could not be prosecuted for things done in his official capacity while he was president.

But Chief Justice John Roberts, in his annual report on the federal judiciary, said that even if court decisions are unpopular or go against the administration, other branches of government should be willing to enforce the rule of law. "Attempts to intimidate judges for their rulings in cases are inappropriate and should be vigorously opposed," he said. "Violence, intimidation, and defiance directed at judges because of their work undermine our Republic, and are whole unacceptable."

JUNIOR ENGINEERS

Meanwhile, Musk and his junior coding engineers are ploughing into agency after agency and demanding access to sensitive information and firing people or cancelling programmes. At a meeting of conservatives, Musk held up a chainsaw, symbolising what he's doing to the US government. He isn't a government employee, and DOGE is not an agency created by Congress so neither should have power, but he and his merry men have gained access to sensitive information including citizens' social security numbers and tax returns.

Simply put, Trump and his handpicked lackeys are ignoring the constitution. However, recently in an untelevised cabinet meeting, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Musk got into a fight and the result was that Trump said that each cabinet secretary would be able to decide who would be fired, but if they didn't do it, Musk would. Again, the confusion and chaos has reigned because people are fired, then rehired, the fired again.

As President, Trump is the chief diplomat and in charge of shaping foreign policy and nominating ambassadors and receiving foreign ones. But he can't just cancel programmes, shut the doors of agencies such as USAID, and fire everyone. Those programmes

were created and funded by Congress. USAID probably seemed like an easy target because most people don't know what it does and Trump via Musk claims it's giving away money for no reason. But he has no power to freeze its funding without Congress's authorisation. Perhaps one reason that USAID was a target was that it was investigating Musk.

To demonstrate the agencies goals, the acting head Nicholas Enrich became a whistle blower and released a memo citing what the cuts would mean in human terms. Among them:

- ☛ 200,000 children paralysed with polio each year and hundreds of millions more infected;
- ☛ One million children not treated for malnutrition, many who would die;
- ☛ As many as 18 million new cases of malaria each year with 166,000 deaths;
- ☛ More than 28,000 new cases of Ebola and other infectious diseases.

Enrich was immediately put on administrative leave. Subsequently, the Supreme Court told Trump to unfreeze the funds because any contractors who were owed money must be paid. In a rare move, conservative Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Amy Coney Barrett joined with the liberals to order that the contracts be paid.

It's impossible to try to summarise all the damage that Trump has tried to accomplish in these first two months in office.

Perhaps one of the most disgraceful moments of these first weeks was his televised meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelinsky in the Oval Office. Trump attacked Zelinsky, accusing him of starting the war with Russia, but everyone knows Russia invaded Ukraine.

After the meeting, Trump cut off military aid that had already been approved by Congress and President Biden. He has the power to conduct foreign policy but not to override allocations made by Congress. But every action Trump has taken seems to be favouring Putin over Ukraine. For 80 Years the US has consistently tried to check the power of Russia (or USSR), but Trump has totally changed that.

RUSSIAN ASSET

This exchange with Senator Joseph Merkley during a confirmation hearing to vet Trump's proposed ambassador to Mexico demonstrates the dramatic shift.

Senator Merkley: "Mr. Landau, is President Trump a Russian asset?"

Landau: "Absolutely not, Senator. He's the President of the United States, duly elected by the American people."

Merkley: "Well, the reason I ask is many people back home have been asking me this question. And they

"It's impossible to try to summarise all the damage that Trump has tried to accomplish in these first two months in office"

say, 'If he was an asset, we would see exactly what he's doing now.'"

Merkley said Trump had expressed Russian propagandahat Ukraine started the war and that Zelensky is a dictator, gave away key things before the negotiations even started, cut off the arms shipments to Ukraine completely, undermined the partnership with Europe, a major goal of Putin's, and demeaned Zelensky on the international stage.

Another disgraceful moment came recently when he turned the White House into a sales showroom for Tesla. Trump got in and out of cars parked in the driveway, and said he was going to buy one. He said Musk had been treated unfairly, ostensibly because Tesla stock has been tumbling due to Musk's unpopularity.

Ironically, Musk's unpopularity and his total access to Trump and unlimited authority, may be the death knell of his power. Trump's ego is fragile, and Musk is continually referred to as the 'co-president', which may lead to him being reined in or even fired..

Trump needed Musk's money to get elected and will need it for the midterm elections, but he won't be able to tolerate looking like a figurehead.

But what haunts me most is a comment Trump made the day after the election. In introducing Musk, he praised him for campaigning in Pennsylvania, saying Musk had won Pennsylvania for him.

"He knows those computers better than anybody. All those computers. Those vote-counting computers. And we ended up winning Pennsylvania like in a landslide." What did he mean by saying that Musk knows those vote counting machines? Were those machines compromised? Perhaps Musk assigned his mini-me engineers to reprogramme voting machines. Did Trump really win? Or was Kamala Harris cheated out of the election?

So maybe we have a president who won by having his financial backer fix the voting machines and who is acting like a puppet for Putin. Can American democracy survive the next four years? If Congress doesn't act, maybe not.

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

IT WON'T WORK THIS TIME EITHER

Labour is set to follow a series of failed planning reforms that will erode local democracy, weaken nature protection, and fail to deliver sufficient homes, says Bridget Fox

A new Government, new year, and a new Planning Bill.

It should no longer be a surprise: in an ironically unplanned way, successive Governments keep trying to overhaul the planning system.

In 2020, under Boris Johnson, came the short-lived idea of locally designated growth zones with blanket permission to build.

By 2022, under Rishi Sunak, a plan-led system had returned. Ministers claimed reforms would cut bureaucracy, speed up the planning system, and hold developers to account.

In 2023, Michael Gove announced the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act “will deliver more homes for communities across the country and unleash levelling up in left-behind places”. Instead all it unleashed was a wave of confusing targets and guidance that left many local authorities putting their plans on hold.

As the Commons Select Committee noted: “Contrary to the Government’s objective of facilitating plan-making, the short-term effect of its announcement of proposed planning reforms has been to halt the progress of local plans in a number of local authority areas”, concluding, optimistically, that “Government must see the merit in pausing plans for further reform, in order to allow for a period of stability in which reforms already introduced can be properly implemented, and any lessons from that implementation learned.”

Now we have Labour’s Planning & Infrastructure Bill. Governments change: the appetite for planning reform does not.

After all, unlike any other part of the economy, the planning system is almost wholly within legislative control. Local councillors and bureaucrats are easy targets to blame and the housing crisis is still with us.

Labour’s rhetoric of being ‘builders not blockers’ is little different from Liz Truss’ attacks on the ‘anti-growth’ coalition. Once again, the central idea is that it’s the planning system that is primarily responsible for the lack of housing, and that fixing it will release a tide of new homes.

The Starmer version comes with bold promises to build 1.5 million homes in this Parliament, but, like so many before it, names the wrong issues and comes up with the wrong solutions.

The Lib Dem motion on second reading was scathing, attacking the Bill for failing to deliver on infrastructure, resourcing, energy or nature, while taking an overly centralised developer-led approach, undermining local democracy.

The goal of getting more housing built in a nation where one in 160 are homeless and tens of thousands

more are poorly housed is one liberals should support; but nationalising the planning system is the wrong way of going about it.

The backlog of applications awaiting decisions is a hangover from the pandemic years combined with chronic under-resourcing of planning departments and a shortage of trained planners. Lifting the cap on planning fees is welcome, but what’s really needed is increased core funding for planning authorities: dull, expensive, and unappealing to a government with more dash than cash.

Instead, we have a micromanaging approach to planning committees. The Bill, we are told, will ensure that they “play their proper role in scrutinising development without obstructing it”, requiring more decisions to be delegated to officers and stricter member training. Given that 90% of planning decisions are already delegated, it’s hard to see what’s left.

Councillors will be limited to making decisions “where controversial development is proposed that has not been planned for”. If a site is in the local plan, consent is presumed, with no opportunity to amend, update or scrutinise.

The idea of ‘brownfield passports’ shows the Government’s centralising instincts in full. Whereas Johnson’s growth zones were identified locally, this national policy would declare development on urban brownfield land is acceptable, with “a clear expectation that compliant schemes be approved.”

Local government reorganisation is set to abolish the current district and borough planning authorities in favour of much larger unitaries: devolution of strategic planning from Whitehall to regions is welcome, but not if it strips out local planning accountability.

Those of us who have sat on or followed planning committees will have had moments when we questioned our life choices. Debating glazing treatments after closing time is not for everyone. Nor is facing the fury of rejected applicants or defeated objectors. But councillors add real value when they ask questions, deploy local knowledge and don’t simply rubber stamp every officer recommendation, however unpopular that may be.

JUMPING SPIDERS

Meanwhile the jumping spiders of Ebbsfleet have joined bats, newts and voles being cast by ministers as terrorising housebuilders and choking the economy with extortionate demands for fancy accommodation.

Oblivious of their role in the debate, these creatures are simply trying to survive in the few areas where there is suitable habitat. And the green tape that protects them is not spun by the spiders: it’s embedded

in decades of legislation to protect endangered species and the habitats on which they depend.

We are already one of the most nature-depleted nations in the world. We have the lowest tree cover in Europe. Nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction. Once familiar wildlife like hedgehogs, sparrows and ladybirds are now in steep decline.

Successive governments have committed to a national nature recovery network; mandated biodiversity net gain for developments; and pledged to see 30% of land managed for nature by 2030. Building on the climate change movement, councils are starting to declare nature emergencies. All of this is positive, but meaningless if basic nature protections are eroded. Recent decisions to approve airport expansion and the Lower Thames Crossing suggest this Government is only willing to defend nature when convenient.

Their big idea is to create a Nature Restoration Fund: developers pay into the fund for nature projects elsewhere and focus on their core business of building new homes. The same approach has been applied to affordable housing for years. Environmental groups have given a cautious welcome to the prospect of more funding, but stress it's needed now, especially with the sudden end to the Sustainable Farming Incentive. Plus irreplaceable habitats are just that. There are some things money can't buy.

There's no need to erase homes for nature to get more homes for people. By definition, the most precious habitats are the rarest. Ancient woodland, for example, is just 2.5% of UK land (2.5% of Surrey alone is golf courses). Overall on the latest national statistics, less than 10% of England is built-up: contrary to belief, there is plenty of land to go round.

So if the problem isn't the 5% of planning decisions taken by councillors, or the handful of protected habitats, what is it? And what should a liberal response be?

People can't live in planning consents. Driving through more approvals doesn't create a single new home until they are built. Currently, there more than 1.4 million consented homes are unbuilt, just short of the Government's 1.5 million new homes target.

Some of this is due to an estimated shortfall of 50,000 skilled building workers (another Brexit dividend) and some to normal cash flow and project pipeline issues for developers. But there are few incentives for developers to speed delivery, other than their business needs.

Currently up to three years are allowed before an unimplemented consent lapses, and a minimal turning of the soil counts as starting work. Reducing the timescale or upping the threshold for starting works would be simple and effective incentives to use it or lose it.

The Government is focusing on reducing delays to implementation from planning conditions – risking simply letting developers off meeting requirements set by the wider community. Delays caused by legal compliance are a resourcing issue, not a system failure.

Liberals love a fiscal solution. The Liberal Democrats' 2023 housing policy proposes introducing council tax on unsold homes and consented but unbuilt homes, and a Commercial Landowner Levy on the undeveloped land.

Local government reorganisation is a perfect opportunity for new fiscal devolution, allowing local

authorities to consider introducing land value tax or another form of land value capture and avoid the downsides of applying it nationally across urban and rural areas alike.

The Government proposes to revive development corporations with wide powers to buy sites and deliver new towns. Why not also give democratically elected councils the power to intervene, by taking back sites where permitted homes are left unbuilt, allowing smaller firms the chance to do the work, while giving the original applicant a percentage of the revenue?

Lack of infrastructure is too often a cause of delay before building – and a lasting grievance afterwards, with what have been nicknamed 'cowpat' developments landing in fields far from local services and no safe walking or cycling routes into town.

Instead of being pushed to build on the green belt, councils should be given stronger powers to densify development around existing towns and public transport hubs: reviving high streets, creating jobs, reducing carbon emissions and protecting the natural environment.

BAD JOKE

None of this helps address the problem of affordability. On average, house prices across England are more than eight times average earnings: in London, the figure is 11 times average earnings. With mortgage loans typically a maximum of four-to-five times borrowers' salaries, the problem is obvious. Increasing a supply of unaffordable homes only serves those already on the housing ladder or profiting from it. 'Affordable rent' at 80% of market prices is widely seen as a bad joke.

Lib Dem policy proposes setting social rents based on local incomes and adjusting Local Housing Allowance accordingly. We also need fiscal incentives for approved private landlords to offer long-term tenancies: and similar disincentives for second homes and short-term lets – even those owned by nice Liberal Democrats.

Help to Buy has been an expensive and inefficient subsidy: shifting stamp duty from buyer to seller instead would give first time buyers a break, discourage inflated selling prices, and go some way to taxing inheritance windfalls. Ringfencing the proceeds for affordable homes would be a positive move too.

John Stewart Mill favoured taxing inherited property and other unearned wealth, seeing "nothing objectionable in fixing a limit to what any one may acquire by the mere favour of others."

Maintaining private property values is a dubious goal of public policy. Any challenge to this increasingly unjust status quo attacks one of the largest vested interests of our age. From the mansion tax to the spare room supplement, attempts to tax real estate or encourage its more efficient use have been loudly resisted.

With its huge majority and a constructive opposition, Labour in government could have fought that fight. Instead they are eroding local democracy, weakening nature protection, and still failing to deliver the homes people need.

Bridget Fox is a former lead member for planning in Islington and fought Islington South in the 2005 and 2010 general elections. She now works for environmental charities on land use policy. She writes in a personal capacity.

SPEAKING OF FREEDOM

Jonathan Calder delves into a new book on radical Liberalism

When We Speak of Freedom, as a football commentator would put it, is very much a book of two halves. The first is historical, philosophical and a little quirky in its approach: the second has chapters by policy experts with concrete proposals for government action in their fields.

The editors, **Paul Hindley and Benjamin Wood**, write that the project began over wine and sandwiches at the home of Elizabeth Bee and Michael Meadowcroft, where a small group talked of “contemporary politics, memories of liberal triumphs past, and our hopes for the future”. Their hope that the book is “suffused with the warmth, intellectual curiosity, and hospitality of that first meeting,” is met in many of the 20 chapters of this engaging collection

I had thought of writing an elegant essay that drew together the diverse themes of the book, but so diverse are they that I decided to go against every canon of book reviewing and tell you what’s in the book.

One complaint: there’s no index. I’m sure the John Stuart Mill Institute, who publish *When We Speak of Freedom*, didn’t have the budget for a professional indexer, but Mill himself does pop up in many chapters, and it would be good to be able to compare what different authors have to say about the old boy. You can ask contributors to a collection like this to highlight the names they quote or discuss, and produce an index of sorts from that.

And so to the 20 chapters...

Michael Meadowcroft has expanded his introduction into a pamphlet – see the note at the end. Here he writes of a “crisis of democracy” and does not see its resolution coming from economic growth or any other of the policy prescriptions that dominate political debate. Rather, he looks to another Victorian sage, John Ruskin: “There is no wealth but life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration.”

Benjamin Wood looks to two Liberal heroes: Jo Grimond and Hannah Arendt. He sees them as students of Classical Greece who, inspired by a vision of the Greek city-state purged of slavery, sought a politics that is more human in its scale and less obsessed with getting and spending. Wood concludes in language they would approve: “Citizenship must mean more than a flag and a passport” and be “an invitation into a shared project of civic betterment.”

Helena Rosenblatt writes on Mill and *On Liberty*, reminding us that there’s more to it than the harm principle. She emphasises Mill’s championing of individuality and the flowering of character – both a long way from the atomistic individualism of which Liberals are often accused. Rosenblatt also writes of Mill’s awareness of social tyranny: he said, “the yoke of opinion could often be heavier than the law” – Liberal Democrat habitués of social media please note.

Christopher England and Andrew Phemister contribute a fascinating chapter on liberalism, land and democracy – Henry George, the Diggers and radical crofters are all there. My only regret is that

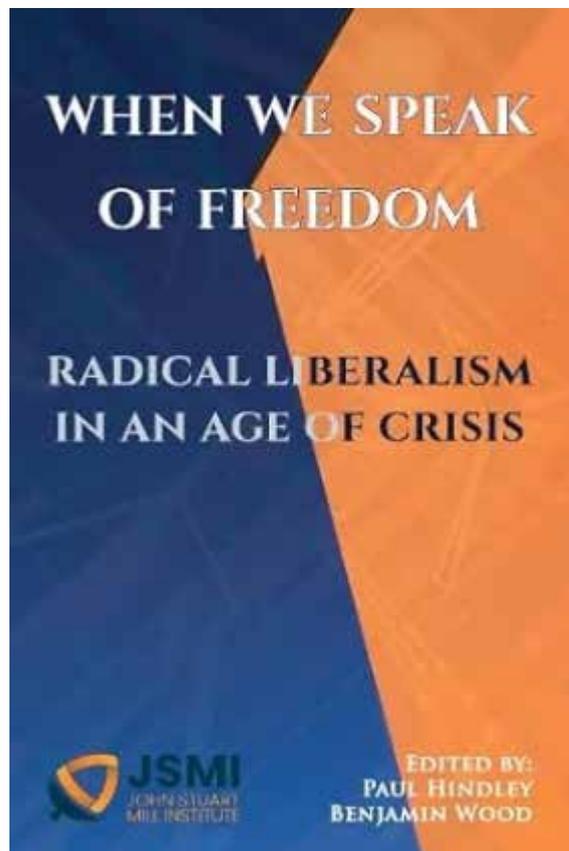
they had to end so soon in the story, as issues like the quality of food, and access to the countryside for health, wellbeing and recreation, will only grow in importance. Let’s take this history as an inspiration.

Emmy van Deurzen looks at the tensions today between individuality and people’s need for community. These can give rise to individual mental health problems and to social problems, such as a widespread withdrawal from engagement in politics. She seeks a cure for both kinds of problems through political change and bringing more philosophy and psychology into our politics. Interestingly, both Mill and Hannah Arendt turn up here too.

Helen McCabe usefully reminds us that there is far more to Mill than *On Liberty*. She looks at his support for women’s suffrage, and for their liberation more widely, as well as his opposition to domestic

violence. Then there is Mill’s advocacy of workplace democracy and producer cooperatives – causes that were still dear to the Liberal Party when I joined it, but are now little discussed.

Timothy Stacey offers a diagnosis of modern liberalism’s ills. He sees it as lacking “that *je ne sais quoi* that makes us fall in love with political visions”, and as inclined to fuel the divisive public debate that it hopes to dispel. His answer is that we should seek to foster liberal virtues. This I’m happy to agree with, even though I’m not convinced by the list of them he gives, as our view of ethics today is so dominated by rights, with the concomitant duty falling upon the state, that we offers little sense of what the good life looks like to a liberal.



Matthew McManus takes us back to Mill's wider political views, finding in them an answer to our discontents under neoliberalism. He points to Mill's support for worker cooperatives, a welfare state, representative democracy with universal suffrage, and his strong commitment to liberal rights. This he terms Mill's "liberal socialism", arguing rightly that it's more useful to use the plural 'socialisms' than to see socialism as the monolith it once was.

From here on, the chapters are less philosophical and more devoted to particular policy areas and what Liberalism can contribute to them.

Edward Robinson on Liberalism and the environmental crisis is the first of these, and he commends three writers to us. First, Mark Stoll, an economic historian who has studied the British economist William Stanley Jevons. Jevons grasped in the mid-19th century that extractive industries would not last for ever and wrote about the moral implications. Second, Brett Christophers, who argues that energy cannot be produced and traded like a conventional commodity. Third, Dieter Helm, who argues that the marketisation of public goods has been a mistake.

Denis Robertson Sullivan argues there has been market failure and policy failure in the provision of housing, meaning government intervention is needed. Home ownership is in retreat, so there need to be policies for providing the sort of rented accommodation that people want. Banks and pension funds must be encouraged or forced to invest more in social housing, and there needs to be new urgency in the fight against homelessness, with government setting targets and publicising the progress made.

Stuart White looks for practical means to bring about the economy of cooperatives that Mill advocated. He discusses the role of trade unions and a sovereign wealth fund, and suggests, I think fairly, that modern Liberals are slow to recognise the existence of structural inequalities in society or the need to organise to challenge them.

Paul Hindley writes on spreading ownership through society, throwing in a good quotation from GK Chesterton: "Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists." He sees this spread as a way of countering the effects of insecure employment and an increasingly punitive welfare state, and repeats the traditional Liberal call for more taxation of wealth and less of income.

Gordon Lishman examines some dilemmas Liberals face around community, diversity and nonconformity. He doesn't offer neat problems or neat solutions – in a way his point is that there aren't any – but he is surely right to conclude that the decline of voluntary associations and the rise of the internet have made it hard to conduct community politics in the way that Liberals learnt to do in the 1970s.

Bob Marshall-Andrews looks at current and not so current challenges to civil liberties – there's a lot about his opposition to his own party's more draconian proposals in his years as a Labour MP between 1997 and 2010). He is very good on the way that governments generate fear in order to win support for repressive measures.

Andrea Coomber and Noor Khan write well about prison policy: "The cliff edge on which the prison system finds itself was not approached at speed, but

one that we slowly but surely trudged towards." They argue, unfashionably, that excessive punishment damages not only the individuals concerned, but also the fabric of society, and call for a reduction in the number of people in prison.

Vince Cable, like several other authors of these later chapters, looks to have been given more space. This may be out of deference to his standing or out of a belief in the importance of his subject of immigration. Vince writes very much with his economist's fedora on, concluding that Enoch Powell was completely wrong about the social and political consequences of immigration, but that a rising population means we must face both our chronic inability to expand the housing stock sufficiently and our decaying infrastructure.

Ross Finnie takes us through Britain's experience of federalism and looks at its possible future. He is billed as writing from a Scottish perspective, but much of what he has to say is relevant to England. How do we deal with this whale in the bathtub of British government? Ross is an enthusiast for devolving power to England's regions, as Jo Grimond was before him, but it's never been clear that the English share this enthusiasm. Still, as Ross points out, the idea has its English enthusiasts today.

David Howarth frames his proposals for constitutional reform as a way of easing Britain's return to the European Union, or at least of making it possible. Since he wrote this chapter, events in the US have made us wonder how secure our present constitutional arrangements are. Would we have much defence against an executive that usurped powers that did not belong to it? You fear not, given Britain's dependence upon the 'good chap' theory of government. We saw during Boris Johnson's time at Number 10 what havoc someone who is not a good chap can wreak. As ever with David, his chapter is well worth reading.

Lawrence Freedman writes on Liberals and war, and those same events in the US make you wonder if his chapter should not have been placed first. Yet his conclusion holds: "After Iraq and Afghanistan, and because of Ukraine, there is less interest now in taking the military initiative in the name of liberal values and much more of a focus on the need to defend those values against aggressive states."

And then **Paul Hindley and Benjamin Wood** return to sum up the book's arguments, quoting Wordsworth and William Morris as well as Mill.

Some will question the relevance of parts of *When We Speak of Freedom* – and I'm aware that those are probably the parts that appealed to me most. But I urge you to read this book. The Conservatives are showing us every day the gruesome fate that awaits a party that forgets its own history and its philosophy.

When We Speak of Freedom is available from www.beecroftpublications.co.uk, £15 plus £4.50 p&p.

Michael Meadowcroft's pamphlet *Confronting Illiberalism and Disillusion: The Task for Liberals* is available from the same address.

Jonathan Calder is a member of the Liberator Collective

WOULD PADDY DO THIS?

The ‘Yorkists’ who annoyed Ed Davey with a Guardian letter on party strategy in 2023 are back, invoking the spirit of Paddy Ashdown to inspire the party’s choice of message at the next general election

Paddy is back! Well, he’s not really – his premature death from bladder cancer in 2018 still leaves a gaping hole in the Liberal world, but his name has been invoked by the Yorkist group of party activists in an attempt to focus minds on where the party needs to go from here to the next general election.

Remember that letter (see *Liberator* 421 <https://liberatormagazine.org.uk/recent-issues/>) in *The Guardian* in November 2023 that called for the party to stand for something?

Ed Davey didn’t like it, in fact the night it was published he fired his Lords spokesperson for Europe, signatory Sarah Ludford, and would probably not enjoy re-reading a transcript of what he said to the Federal Policy Committee. That letter was the work of the Yorkists, who went quiet after that, but they always promised they’d be back once the general election was over, and now they are. The ‘Yorkist’ name comes from the group’s first meeting at spring conference 2023 in York – it has no wider significance.

In early March 2025 they published an 18-page discussion paper *What Would Paddy Do?* <https://newliberalmanifesto.org.uk/217-2/> – ostensibly as input to the party’s policy review, but as much a means of stimulating debate within the party on what we want the public to think over the next four years when they hear the name ‘Liberal Democrats.’

So why Paddy? And who are the Yorkists? Both are central to what the discussion paper seeks to achieve and what’s in it.

The Yorkists, of which I am the unofficial convenor or coordinator, came together in early 2023 as a couple of dozen frustrated campaigners, worried that the party just didn’t seem to stand for anything.

We had complete understanding for the leadership’s electoral tactic of keeping a low profile on all but the three core issues of highest public concern (cost-of-living crisis, the state of the NHS, and sewage in rivers and coastal waters), and fighting all our target seats on local issues. But in this justifiable process, we felt a fundamental tenet of a political party was being lost: if you want the public to vote for you, and supporters to campaign for you, you have to give them at least an outline of what a vote for your party means in broad policy terms.

A group of people coming together solely because they’re all dissatisfied with something doesn’t guarantee widescale unity. The Yorkists were a group of people wanting a clearer identity for the party, but what that identity should be was not extensively discussed.

GIVEN KITTENS

For the group’s first public success, this didn’t matter. It came at federal conference in Bournemouth in September 2023 when the meeting it organised, ‘Shouldn’t we be doing better? – the need for bolder messaging’, gave the health and safety brigade kittens because three times the number of people who could fit in the room turned up to hear Layla Moran, John Curtice and Dick Newby speak about the Lib Dems’ disappointing poll ratings.

That was safe territory, because it played into the Yorkists’ belief that the party needed a clearer message. In fact Curtice’s conclusion, that the Lib Dems’ poor showing in the 2019 election was not because of our ‘Revoke’ policy on Brexit but because we hadn’t been seen to have any other policies, was music to Yorkists’ ears.

Newby, sort of representing the leadership, promised to take the fringe meeting’s concerns back to base, yet nothing seemed to change. So two months later, the Yorkists formulated a letter to *The Guardian*. It was ultimately signed by 30 people but it could have been a lot more – only party functions (like being PPC) stopped many more from signing.

Formulating the letter required more finessing, as it involved calling for greater clarity on policy, the area the Yorkists hadn’t massively explored. The letter focused mostly on Europe, being the most uniting issue within the Yorkist group, and the letter was ultra-diplomatically phrased so as to cause minimum difficulty for the leadership.

Its publication elicited massive support, some members even calling for it to be turned into a petition. More significantly, virtually every top-level Lib Dem politician interviewed by the mainstream media in the subsequent couple of months was asked about “the 30 party grandees who had signed the letter calling for a clearer identity”.

The Yorkists deliberately went quiet after that. If you want to achieve something, you have to make it safe for those who can make it happen, and we didn’t want to push the leadership into a corner in the run-up to a general election. But we made it clear the party did have an identity problem, and while we weren’t looking to solve it before the election, it would have to be addressed afterwards.

Therefore, the Yorkists were always going to contribute to the post-election policy review. Our submission involved more than just feeding in some ideas to a policy review – it forced the Yorkists to say what sort of party we wanted, and how we should lay

the foundations for the next four years leading up to the 2029 general election.

The 40-or-so members of the unaffiliated group had an online meeting to canvass opinion, as well as the ongoing exchanges on WhatsApp (the main format in which the Yorkists currently exist).

Out of this emerged What Would Paddy Do? The reference to Paddy was an attempt to evoke the fact that the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats have done best at critical moments when they have been bold, sometimes counterintuitively.

There are examples from Grimond, Thorpe, Steel, Ashdown, Kennedy and even the Farron/ Cable/ Swinson trio of the 2015-19 parliaments where the Lib Dems have been bold, and have improved their standing. But Ashdown juts out most, partly because he was the first leader of the Liberal Democrats, and partly because his call for Hong Kong residents with British passports to be allowed to come to Britain in 1989, plus his penny on income tax to fund education improvements, captured the public imagination in a way that gave the party an identity.

The underlying assumption in What Would Paddy Do? is that the 2029 general election will be a battle between the 'pro-system' parties (Labour and Conservatives) and the 'anti-system' parties (Reform UK, Lib Dems, and in some places Greens, SNP and Plaid).

Therefore, the Lib Dems have to be a more attractive 'anti-system' option than Reform. In 2024, the attraction of Labour was that it was a way of getting the Tories out. By 2029, the Tories are unlikely to have expunged all memory of their disastrous stewardship of government in the years up to 2024, while Labour will be tarnished by having to deal with a horrendous legacy, regardless how well they will have handled it. So the Lib Dems need to be a socially compassionate party with sound economics. Or to put it another way: to revitalise the somewhat neglected creed of Liberalism. And be noticed by the public.

The Yorkists' recommendation therefore seeks to mix dynamic, outside-the-box thinking while at the same time being solid about the affordability of our ideas. There seemed no point in choosing policies in every area; much better to focus on policies that can give the Lib Dems a distinct identity, and leave the manifesto to sort out those where we are in broad agreement with Labour and/or Conservatives.

What Would Paddy Do? therefore picks six core policies, and three eye-catching, more creative ones. The core policies cover Europe, defence, wealth inequalities, housing, environment, and social care. The eye-catching policies cover championing immigration (celebrating the non-Brits who contribute to British life), changing the culture in education so we teach more critical thinking as a guardrail against populism, and developing a new economic model using the thinking of Keynes and Beveridge that underpins liberal democracy rather than undermines it. In a move many drafters would consider reckless, a near-

“The Lib Dems have to be a more attractive ‘anti-system’ option than Reform”

final version was offered to all members of the Yorkists for comment – and survived largely intact.

Of course it wasn't easy to finalise a policy document that seeks to map out a policy and messaging platform for the next four years during a period when the whole post-WWII order is crumbling at the whim of unstable presidents in

America and Russia.

But even if our next general election takes place in the early months of a post-Trump US president, there is no guarantee America will return to its paternalistic role in Europe. Nor is there any guarantee that the populist bubble will have burst, so it's vital we know what we're about. Invoking the spirit of Paddy Ashdown in a heavily militarised political climate feels even more appropriate now than when we first settled on the idea before Christmas.

I was able to plug What would Paddy do? at the SLF's fringe meeting "What's the point of the Liberal Democrats – local heroes or national party?" at spring conference in Harrogate. My one objection in the meeting's title was the word 'or' – we have to be both local heroes and a national party, as it's localism that will re-engage confidence in politics but we need a national profile. The fact that the future of democracy is likely to be an issue in 2029 is frightening, but it also gives us a massive opportunity.

What Would Paddy Do? is just one suggestion about how the party should pitch itself over the next four years, but if the response to it within the party is anything like the response to the Guardian letter, it will have a lot of support. The submission itself is simply that: a submission to an open party consultation that seeks input. As such, it should be less troubling to Ed than the Guardian letter was.

RIGHT GENERAL?

It is also not a challenge to him, although it might be sensible for the party to question sometime around the mid-point of this parliament whether the general who did so well in the last battle is still the right general for the next battle. That might depend on how comfortable Ed is with whatever direction emerges from the policy review that he himself is chairing.

It has become a truism to say there's a lot at stake at the next election (when is there ever not a lot at stake at a general election), but if the last few weeks are anything to go by, there will be an air of 1945 about the election due in 2029. The world could well be very different, but the fate of democracy will still depend on whether there is enough support for a system of elected governments. Much of that will depend on whether there's an offering on the table that inspires voters with hope and optimism, one that looks like delivering the improvements to everyday life that people crave. If the Lib Dems can't offer that platform, then you have to wonder what the point of us is as a political force.

Chris Bowers is convener of the Yorkist group and a former parliamentary candidate

SNAKES AND LADDERS

Benefit rules are too complex to encourage claimants back into work, says William Tranby

In 2019, there were 3.2m working-age people in the UK receiving health-related benefits. By April 2024 There were 4.2m, 10.2% of the working-age population. This number is expected to rise to 5.4m by 2028–29.

The Department for Work and Pensions reported in January 2024 there were 6.3m people receiving Universal Credit. Added to those receiving state pensions and other benefits, and some 20m people receiving benefits of some type.

Starting work can be scary for those who receive health-related benefits. The Scope website offers guidance about permitted work while claiming various benefits and provides highlighted warning: “Get Permission - You do not need a doctor’s approval to do permitted work, but you must tell Jobcentre Plus. They will ask you to fill out a permitted work form.”

Scope explains: “You have to send the completed form to the Jobcentre Plus office that deals with your benefit. They will tell you if the work you want to do meets the permitted work conditions. To find out what your conditions are, speak to your Work Coach.

“The permitted work lower limit allows you to earn up to £20 a week for an unlimited period. Any earnings over £20 will be deducted from your Income Support.”

One intriguing variation to the number of hoops someone trying to get back in to work has to jump through, is the regulations for Personal Independence Payments. It is well catalogued that someone claiming this payment undertakes a telephone interview to receive this, which appears to be more generous than other benefits.

Another website - Turn2Us - clarifies what happens if a PIP recipient finds work – “No, you do not need to tell PIP if you start working; you only need to inform the DWP if your medical condition changes, not your employment status or income level.

The website lists the key points to remember: “No need to report work changes; starting a job or changing your work situation does not require notifying the DWP when claiming PIP; report medical changes only; the only time you need to inform the DWP is if your health condition worsens or improves significantly.”

“Consider potential implications: While you don’t have to report work, if your job suggests your condition has improved, it could be considered during a PIP review.”

Another website clarified, “Your income does not affect your Personal Independence Payment (PIP) because it is not means-tested. You can receive PIP whether you are working, studying, or unemployed.”

Given that PIP continues indefinitely if you do not report your work, or indeed if you work in the informal economy there must be an unknown number who have completed their telephone assessment and are working precariously without the protection of minimum employment rights, and workplace pensions, while

the Government misses out on NICS and income tax receipts.

It is in the interest of all caught up in this, and the Government, to help settle people whatever their situation into decent paid employment.

The Liberal Democrats should be campaigning to rationalise health benefits, and their application processes, to ensure they do not incentivise those on the margins to remain vulnerable indefinitely.

There are other bureaucratic hurdles that put off people trying to secure employment. If you get a job but are receiving some benefits, they should be continued until you receive your first work payment, but you need to check that these extensions are in place before your first day at work.

Frankly I sympathise with those who are sceptical that the DWP and councils will react in a timely fashion to make the transition to work easy.

Other barriers to taking a job are the new costs involved in working. Travelling to work can be a nightmare where public transport is unreliable, expensive, or non-existent.

However, the Government’s withdrawal of the £2 cap on bus fares is a retrograde step that punishes those seeking to get out of poverty through employment, education or training.

The Liberal Democrats should be pressing the Government to sustain lower bus fares everywhere to help ‘level up’ regional economies.

Another potential barrier to taking a job offer could be the lack of appropriate clothing. Someone unemployed for an extended period is unlikely to have clothes for an office setting. Turning up in jogging bottoms, worn out trainers and a hoodie might not go down well. Work coaches in Job Centres should have the discretion of offering clothing allowances.

A final potential barrier is the need for new recruits to eat more regular meals to sustain themselves in the workplace. Skipping meals may become routine when stuck on benefits but the extra energy required for the working day is another consideration, to prevent the newly hired dropping out because they are not fit or healthy enough to last the first week.

Small investments in people during their transition to work will be repaid many times over if the total number of people on benefits is lowered by the careful consideration of what individuals need to take up job opportunities.

William Tranby is a member of the Liberator Collective

WAR ON SQUALOR

Starmer is shirking his responsibility to the disadvantaged, time for Liberal Democrats to act says Louis Kent

One of the most refreshing aspects of Ed Davey's campaign during the 2024 general election was his championing of marginalised groups. His somewhat divisive election stunts brought attention to key issues that continue to have enormous implications for many, not least his primary focus on social care, but also on the NHS, water scandal, and championing of local communities.

Indeed, one of the major issues of the campaign was the state of our social services, on which Liberals have a very positive record. During the early 20th century, Liberal governments established our welfare state. Further, the Beveridge report played a key role in the 1945 Labour government's rapid welfare expansion, including making the case for the establishment of a National Health Service.

The Thatcherite era of politics, however, has created a political establishment that has endlessly cut our essential welfare services. This has been underpinned by a fundamental shift in the national attitude; no longer are the disadvantaged morally deserving of help, rather, they are shirkers who are absolving themselves of their responsibilities.

Using the strikes of the late 1970s as a moral basis, the Conservative government of the 1980s privatised most of Britain's nationalised industries and began to gradually chip away at our social services, characterised as "death by a thousand cuts" – a project that continues to this day. It has created a sort of 'social Darwinism', in which everyone fights for themselves, and the strong must prevail. As Thatcherism penetrated the national consciousness, the British establishment is now, markedly, anti-welfare.

While the Liberal Democrats were in the coalition that introduced austerity, they did so as a junior partner that was forced to deal and compromise with the Conservatives, stopping many negative pursuits and winning several policy concessions.

The Labour Party, however, often with supermajorities, has perpetrated much more damaging reforms to our social services, despite being the party which introduced many of them.

New Labour's record on public services sees very few challenges in political circles, despite introducing tuition fees and increased privatisation of social services through their PFI schemes. Starmer intends to wage an even greater war against welfare, most notoriously refusing to lift the inhumane two-child benefit cap and robbing many deserving pensioners of their winter fuel allowance.

It is bad economic sense not to invest in social services, as is being seen with Labour and the Conservatives' inability to foster growth. Britain's workforce is plagued by higher social care costs, longer waiting lists, increased rates of disability, lower educational outcomes for children, and unprecedented

rates of child poverty. These are robbing people of their disposable income, and robbing children of the opportunity to pursue a meaningful and productive career.

It is of foundational importance to ensure the social infrastructure is sufficient to mobilise our population into productive and responsible individuals. Further, the rapid decline in quality among our schools and hospitals provides an opportunity for redevelopment through a widespread infrastructure project, providing work for many in a much-needed Keynesian approach.

However, economic arguments are not enough for such an issue. It must be generally recognised that able-bodied individuals have a duty to disadvantaged groups, whether they be children, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, or the poor. Liberals must forge this change in mindset, and the social contract should be invoked to do so; the question of what makes the state legitimate.

Hobbes argued that the state existed to provide security, Locke argued that it was to protect individual rights, and Rousseau argued that it was to protect the individual from societal vices. Most importantly, Rawls argued that it was also to ensure a minimum standard of living for all individuals, based upon the theory of the "veil of ignorance"; that, without any prior knowledge of their circumstances, any pre-social person would choose a society that supports the unfortunate. This should underpin a new national mindset. All people are young, elderly, or sick at some point in their lives. Indeed, all have the potential to be disabled or poor. One point of the state's legitimisation is that it exists to help those who can't help themselves.

As such, several reforms must be implemented. Funding, paid for by the super-rich, the bankers, and the gas and oil profiteers, must be used to increase the number of doctors, nurses, and teachers, reducing waiting lists and providing more educational resources.

The social care system must be overhauled, introducing free personal care and improving conditions for carers. For students, maintenance grants must be reintroduced to reduce the financial burden of university. These are not necessarily radical; rather, they are merely a correction against an economic system that is falling perilously into a few private hands. However, what is needed most is a unified offensive against squalor and need, as was forged during the days of Lloyd George and Beveridge, through a public works project intended to fix our crumbling infrastructure and social services.

We must get away from the poisonous, Darwinist national mindset that brands the disadvantaged as shirkers, and instead recognise that it is both Starmer and the political establishment that is shirking their responsibility to these groups.

OBSERVING AS SOMALILAND VOTES

Michael Grange reports on his experience in the unrecognised democracy that has broken away from Somalia

On announcing that I was selected to be an international election observer for Presidential elections in Somaliland I was asked several questions out of concern by family and friends. Including is Somaliland a country or is it part of Somalia, 'is it safe' and why do they need election observers. This article will address those questions and give my impression of Somaliland.

To understand modern day Somaliland, we need to step back into history. Prior to independence in 1960 it was called British Somaliland. It had been established as a British protectorate in 1884 when Britain formally took control from Egypt. The concept of a protectorate is interesting and involves an element of consent for protection against perhaps more malign actors.

Not everyone was happy to enjoy 'protection' in British Somaliland leading to the Dervish uprising in 1899. This was an anti-colonial movement rejecting the involvement of British, Italian, Ethiopian, and other forces in the affairs of Somalia people. This uprising was eventually suppressed in 1920 when the Dervish stronghold at Taleex was bombed.

WIND OF CHANGE

For a brief period in World War 2 British Somaliland fell into the hands of Italy. After the war Britain resumed control. However, the international context had moved on. In February 1960 the famous Wind of

Change speech was delivered by British prime minister Harold Macmillan to the Parliament of South Africa. Later that year the British Government announced that it would be prepared to grant independence to the then Somaliland protectorate. Finally, in June 1960 British Somaliland became independent. A few days later Italian Somaliland became independent. The two newly independent states agreed to unite and form the independent Republic of Somalia.

Unfortunately, the new state fell under dictatorial rule from October 1969 until January 1991, ended by a very bloody civil war waged by clan-based guerrillas. In May 1991 Somaliland declared itself free from the Republic of Somalia. They argued that as they had joined Republic of Somalia as an independent country they could also exit as an independent country.

To answer the question of whether Somaliland is an independent country we can say de facto that Somaliland is independent since 1991 and is well run. It has its own army and can raise its own taxes. However, de jure it is not recognised by the international community as an independent state who view it as part of the Republic of Somalia.

It is a disadvantage for Somaliland not having independent recognition. They are hopeful that situation may change. One reason for this hope is the return of Trump to the White House.

Inherent in any trip abroad is a degree of risk.

The overall security situation in a country needs to be considered and especially for travellers. Most people conflate Somaliland and Somalia. Somalia is considered dangerous to travel at all. While there appears to be some welcomed improvements in Somalia, the security situation remains dynamic.

In contrast the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) only discourages non-essential travel to Somaliland. Election observation is considered essential travel.

The security situation



in a country is one factor that means it is safe or not. Given Somaliland is a developing country, travellers need to seek out medical advice. I went to a travel vaccination bureau in Dublin. I had a detailed consultation with a doctor who provided some essential vaccines and prescribed antimalarial tablets.

International election observers only attend elections where the government invites them. Credible observer organisations comply with the UN Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.

A key principle is that observers are neutral and impartial. Observers are required to obey the laws of the country and always operate to the highest professional standards.

The advantage to a country that runs clean and professional elections is that this is what election observers will see and report on. This is useful in attracting aid and investment. In the case of Somaliland, it can add to their argument that they should be recognised as the world's newest country.

Internally it can be useful to a country where levels of trust are low in the electoral system and where some parties may jump to the conclusion of election fraud to explain the outcome. If fraud was the issue that is likely to be detected and reported on by international election observers in their report. On the other hand, it can be reassuring for the losing side to know that democracy worked and rather than engage their energy in complaining they can focus on getting ready for the next election in four to five years.

Another advantage of the election observation process is it acts as a quality control highlighting good aspects and areas that could be improved in the future. While traditional international election observation was carried out in developing and post-communist countries there are solid reasons that all countries can benefit from it.

It might be useful to say that what international election observers are not. They aren't there as advisors to the election authorities. I have been in situations around the world, where for example the local election administration would ask whether a voter could vote or whether a ballot is valid. Tempting as it is to answer such questions, that was not my role and I would just suggest that they consult their managers.

I left Dublin Airport at 11 in the morning, after three uneventful Ethiopian Airlines flights I arrived in Egal International Airport, Hargeisa the capital of Somaliland. It is a small airport. After paying the visa fee of \$61 in cash, I was then happily to collect my suitcase. Thankfully no luggage of observers went astray.

The election mission core team greeted us and ensured a smooth transfer to our hotel. The core team

“While traditional international election observation was carried out in developing and post-communist countries there are solid reasons that all countries can benefit from it”

consist of a chief of mission and experts that deploy in advance of the arrival of short term observers STOs.

Coming from Europe, I must confess shock with the state of the streets and roads. Thankfully we were transported in four-wheel drive jeeps. Somaliland is one of the poorest developing countries in the world and lacks the budget for good roads.

We freshened up and had lunch. All our meals were without alcohol as Somaliland is a strict Muslim country where the sale of alcohol is illegal. After lunch we went straight into training.

Training for short term election observers is essential and follows a predictable format. There are sessions on the political and security situation, the election campaign to date, the electoral system and counting, details of deployment plans through the country and general administration.

The next morning our training continued. Later that day we were hosted by the Somaliland Election Commission to a fine presentation on their work and the electoral system. This helped reinforce our training.

The next part of the mission was the deployment of election observers to other parts of Somaliland. This is to ensure that as far as possible the election is observed throughout the country, so that overall balanced conclusions on the election would be reached.

I was deployed to remain in the capital to observe the elections there. As is common with all election missions the observers who remain in the capital city envied those observers getting to see another part of the country while those observers envied those that remained.

The day before the election I was teamed up with observers from Italy and Spain. Short term observers always deploy in pairs to ensure balance and a degree of security. We were introduced to our driver and a language assistant. We travelled to the location of polling stations and where possible introduced ourselves to the polling staff. This groundwork allowed us to prepare a route plan for the polling stations we would visit. One piece of good news that we got was that normal cars were banned on election day, thankfully we had special authorisation for our jeeps. Not having to battle traffic cuts down travel time moving from polling station to station.

Finally on 13 November, election day arrived. We drove to our first polling station to see ‘the opening’ of the station to voters. My experience is that if a polling station gets off to a good start generally everything else goes well through the day. A good opening includes where all staff turn up, that they have all equipment and supplies that they need, and that staff are properly trained with a mix of experienced and new staff.



SHEER ENTHUSIASM

The sheer enthusiasm of voters was remarkable. There were long queues of voters waiting to vote. One for men and the other for women. Somaliland is a traditional Islamic country, and all women wore head dress and had long dresses. Black was not in fashion rather lively colours were to be seen. Our female observers adhered to the dress code out of respect for the host country.

The processing of voters may have appeared slow by western standards, the emphasis seemed to be on doing it right rather than fast. Voters did not seem to mind the slowness of polling stations. Many voters greeted us asking where we were from. They all expressed a pride that they were citizens of Somaliland, that it was a democracy where governments changed at the ballot box.

There did not seem to be many older voters on the day. Tellingly the life expectancy in Somaliland is 50 years of age. We noticed lots of young voters, people can vote from the age of 15. The rationale is that at that age most have left education and are working.

For observers from the UK and Ireland there is a black swan moment when the polling station closes and rather sending the ballot boxes to a count centre they start to open and count the ballots. This again is a slow process. Our polling station did not finish counting and recording the votes until three in the morning.

Over the next few days, the national votes were all tabulated. This was also observed. The outcome was that opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, won the presidential election. Power changed peacefully.

It was a pleasure to have observed the election in this youthful and resourceful country. I expect Somaliland will make great progress in the years ahead as a democratic country.

Michael Grange is a barrister and an election observer who works in the Irish civil service

REAPING WHAT WAS SOWN

Dear Liberator,

Many excellent points were made in Issue 427 by Paul Hindley, Martin Wrigley and Gareth Epps regarding current and future policy. I do, however, think that one of the policy fundamentals that was missed out was the type of economics and, specifically, the type of capitalism we want to see.

This is also a huge problem for the Labour party though I think we are in a much better position to tackle it. Basically, after Thatcher's three wins followed by Major's, the Left and Centre panicked and embraced laissez-faireism uncritically. The predicted result, which many forecast, was shouted down by intellectual simpletons and cronies namely asset stripping, running down of public services and the growing wealth of robber barons, fat cats and city wideboys and 'entrepreneurs'.

Now we're living with the consequences (reap what you sow) and still we run around like rabbits caught in headlights ready to sacrifice everything at the altar of the 'market'.

There is, always was, another way. If we want a fairer society, if we want a just society then we need to be honest and say we're going to tax wealth and make the case for why this is a good thing. We need to stop running scared. And frankly, we're pushing at an open door given that Labour are doing their best to out-Tory-the-Tories. Taxing wealth would not stop the fair working of markets where markets naturally operate nor would it stop people getting rich (if that's their goal) but it would stop the obscene and immoral (and still growing) chasm that we now have between rich and poor.

What could we do? What would fair and just policies look like? Well, for a start let's put land value taxation front and centre - already party policy. Let's banish rentier capitalism - no more tax breaks for buy to let, councils to build new homes, rent controls, no property as investments, all housing to be offered to British citizens first. Tax capital gains at the same rate as income as well as taxing all income from unearned sources. Charge VAT on financial services. Ban dodgy corporate takeover practices like leveraged buyouts.

And while the rich should pay more tax, we also need to rebuild HMRC so that they are able to chase and collect taxes. There's plenty more. I've only touched the surface but a good starting point would be Richard Murphy's 'The Taxing Wealth Report 2024'. It's clear we can't go on as we are but does the party, does the leadership want to change?

Andy Bennett
Croydon

PADDY'S ALTERNATIVE

Dear Liberator,

Gareth Epps is wrong in his otherwise good review of David Laws' recent book (*Liberator* 427) to interpret my role around the 1997 general election as being supportive of coalition generally.

As my own memoirs (*Winning Here, Biteback* 2018) clearly show, I spent the period 1992 – 97 trying to prevent Paddy making a coalition with Labour our principle public aim for the 1997 general election campaign. It took much effort to persuade him, and those closest to him, that this would be entirely counterproductive in winning our target seats from the Conservatives.

I also sought to persuade him that coalition would be something that we could best seek after a general election conducted on a PR basis. After the election, and when Blair failed to deliver on a PR referendum or even on AV+, I make no apology for having argued that we should settle in the meantime for AV when it was put on the table.

AV then would not have meant a coalition, and we would have preserved our independence. Although it is very imperfect, AV would have meant that we won considerably more seats in 2001 and subsequently. We might then have been able to use the balance of power properly to demand PR in 2010. If AV had been in place in 2015, we would have retained a significant presence in the Commons instead of losing 85% of our seats through poor handling of the coalition with the Conservatives.

Chris Rennard
House of Lords

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OBITUARY: ADRIAN SLADE

Tributes to the former Liberal president, satirical songwriter and tireless campaigner

Former Liberal party president Adrian Slade, who had died aged 88, threw himself into campaigning in Richmond when he stood for the Greater London Council in 1981, never less than 150% enthusiastic and energetic, bursting with ideas, applying his professional advertising and marketing expertise.

He won by 115 votes. The Tories were furious and he had defeated the sitting member, Edward Leigh. They launched an election petition, which they pursued down to checking on every paperclip used in the campaign, or so it seemed.

The hearing was in the council chamber, well-attended by local Conservatives, and Adrian was completely vindicated but for a finding of a technical error. The strain on Adrian and on his agent Pat Wainwright was enormous, and so were the costs.

Richmond Liberals hadn't reckoned on having to deal with the petition as well as the campaign, but hadn't reckoned on a candidate with Adrian's remarkable talents and connections.

He was not just a performer but the moving spirit behind a Sunday night fundraiser for his legal costs at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

Perhaps Adrian's most popular role in the party was as a pioneer of the Glee Club where for many years he perfumed a set of his satirical songs.

He had started this activity while doing national service in the mid-1950s and in 1956 went to Trinity College Cambridge, and became head of the Footlights student revue in which role he discovered Peter Cook and gave him his first gig, though he turned down David Frost. Significant members who Adrian worked with included John Fortune, John Bird, Eleanor Bron and Geoff Pattie

At Drury Lane Adrian pulled together a hilarious evening that included the star Peter Cook, and then unknown comedians Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders. His recording Party Pieces, Liberal Sacrilege in Song, sold alongside the lyrics. As the consummate Glee Club performer sang: "It's been a quite a year to be a Liberal ... What a swell party this is" (pun intended).

Adrian had a tough time on the GLC, initially alone until joined by two SDP members and then by Mike Tuffrey, elected in 1985. Adrian as leader welcomed him, politically (theatrically milking the moment) and personally. Generously he stood down from various of his committees, as Labour wouldn't give the opposition any extra places for Tuffrey despite having lost a seat.

By then the GLC's abolition was a done deal and discipline in the Labour group was breaking down. Adrian was in his element, making the Tories squirm at what their government was doing while

equally pinning the blame on Livingstone whose antics opened the door to Thatcher, and astutely working with Labour rebels to get majorities for critical motions against their own administration.

Adrian could have contented himself with championing Richmond's interest, but he spoke out for London and for the Liberals.

Adrian's presence on the GLC meant London Liberal Party (LLP) could use County Hall for committee meetings and for its rather raucous conferences.

In the early 1980s LLP had declined into irrelevance under an old guard and a takeover was organised, led by future Liberator Collective member Colin Darracott.

Since those behind this coup appeared to be dangerous radicals someone more respectable was needed to front this operation and Adrian was happy to take this role, initially as president and later as chair.

Given LLP's role at the centre of the party's awkward squad during the 1983-87 parliament this further increased Adrian's profile, helping him become the Liberal party's last serving president.

This coincided with the merger and Adrian felt he had to use his role to make a success of this, a stance that caused some temporary friction with his largely anti-merger supporters in LLP.

His loyalty to the party leadership over merger gave Adrian little in return as he lost favour with the Liberal Democrat establishment in the late 1980s and for the next 30 years was a foot soldier, quietly clocking up 200 miles of walking at every election.

Given his professional life in advertising Adrian had been a fixture in campaigns before that.

He fought Putney in 1966 and both 1974 general elections, and Wimbledon in 1987, gaining disproportionate swings and helping lay the foundations of later success.

Adrian wrote the 1966 general election manifesto and was responsible for the 'spot the Tory' poster featuring Harold Wilson and Edward Heath and for the iconic poster with Thatcher and Callaghan pointing guns in opposite directions.

Neither GLC abolition nor loss of establishment favour stopped Adrian campaigning. He was an indefatigable deliverer and threw himself into every campaign until really quite recently, complaining only when he was sent off with bundles of leaflets; he much preferred canvassing.

Material for this obituary was contributed by Rupert Slade, Baroness Hamwee, Mike Tuffrey and Mark Smulian

OBITUARY: SUE WILLIAMS

Janice Turner pays tribute to a former Liberal party HQ staff member

Sue was born in Cardiff in 1947. She delighted in the fact that she had seen local boy Tom Jones perform in Pontypridd, long before he hit the big time.

She studied English at Cardiff University and after graduating began working for the Liberal Party Organisation, based at the National Liberal Club in the 1970s and 80s.

Liberator's Catherine Furlong worked with Sue in the LPO days: "We used to share the speaker timings and other duties at the party conference. We always missed the leader's speech [at the time David Steel] and go for a fancy ice cream."

Liberator paste-ups took place back then at LPO on Saturdays: "As we got high on Cow Gum Sue would be typing away, working on party council business," recalls Peter Johnson. Sue was far quieter than the Liberator crowd who on one occasion left LPO, locking up behind them, only to hear Sue shouting that she was still in there and they'd accidentally locked her in.

Party staff and members frequented the NLC bar: one group began congregating regularly around one particular table and that's where I met Sue. I always got on very well with her. She was kind, gentle, highly intelligent, sensitive and had a great sense of humour. She was a very supportive friend.

After the party moved out of the NLC 'The Table' continued in spirit, with the annual Table Day Out and the Table Awards. Sue was a regular attender at both.

Sue left LPO to become a scheduler for the BBC World Service newsroom. Her job was often stressful, yet she was unfailingly kind and patient, whether dealing with freelancers struggling to get shifts or reporters begging for days off. A rota organiser can hold huge power, but Sue always used it to help and to do good.

As well as her career, Sue's other real passion was the arts. She would often go to the Royal Opera House and enjoyed nothing better than reviewing and critiquing the singers with her friends' post-performance.

Sue supported Catherine Furlong's choir Eclectic Voices, and "she was also a Prommer and we went to The Last Night of the Proms together in the 80s." Table member Ravenna Moncreiff recalls she went to see MGM double bills of the Fred Astaire movies on the South Bank.

Sue was not a fan of flying, so on one occasion we visited New York with Sue cruising the Atlantic while I jetted across. We had a whale of a time, and returned with more suitcases of clothes than we went with.

Sue retired at the beginning of the pandemic. Her niece, Bethan, was a source of tremendous support during what were undoubtedly difficult times for Sue adjusting to life after work, and post-pandemic. Sue often mentioned Bethan and greatly appreciated her company and help and advice during these times.

Sue was a good friend for more than 40 years and we will miss her.

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(Continued from Page 9)

It would, however, sidestep freedom of movement, which is at the heart of Labour's paranoia. We constantly hear that 90 Labour MPs look over their right shoulder at Reform in second place. Perhaps we can prize them out of their cul-de-sac by giving them a second headache - trouble over their left shoulder. Leaking votes to the Lib Dems on Europe will be a luxury they can't afford. But it could at least give them pause for thought.

Nick Harvey was Liberal Democrat MP for North Devon 1992-2015 and a defence minister in the Coalition government

Where The World Moves, Chronicles Of Migration
by Dinesh Dhamija
www.romillypress.com
(£14.99) or Amazon
(£19.99)

A book on migration, arming you with facts, statistics and history, but readable. No difficult statistic tables, but many stories, personal and from others, littered with facts.

As Dhamija says, “we are all migrants, and all have our own experiences”. He illustrates his own journey from being here for education, going back to India, back here running a small business which grew to be very successful (employing many migrants and then becoming a Lib Dem MEP.

Dhamija starts by highlighting the benefits of migration, and the sheer hypocrisy of people who condemn migrants but who benefit from them or are even one themselves

He lists 20 benefits of migration on which he expands throughout the book.

In a world where false news is perpetrated, the chapter on Fact v Fiction is good, 11 myths are listed, then demolished with facts.

Looking at demographics and the climate change bomb, he gives

examples from around the world. In Britain, while there was the largest population growth for 75 years in 2023, the fewest births for 21 years were registered – the smallest “natural change” (births minus deaths) since 1978. Professionals explain how this is going to lead to higher taxation on those who work, unless you can drive up growth and productivity, and advise on inward migration.

On climate change the book relates relevant instances but also warns of the impact. As climate migrants are growing in number, they seldom have the protection that those fleeing war or persecution have. There are startling predictions on numbers needing to move from various sources, and climate change knows no borders.

The chapter on Integration emphasises the importance of this and the positive role that religion plays in this, despite right wing Christians in some places demonising migrants. An example is given of how Germany has put a lot into integration and has reaped the economic benefits. UNHCR cites that countries doing the most for integration are doing the best in positive outcomes. Places with hostile atmospheres make integration and its benefits less likely.

The History of Migration chapter goes through what has happened over thousands of years. It reminds us of our and some other countries’ colonisation policies and cites other reasons for migration over the centuries, such as war, climate change, religious persecution and just seeking a

better life for themselves and families. While migration is now top of the political agenda, we are reminded that it has remained at 3% in relation to population growth.

An interesting section on the Statue of Liberty reminds us that it is a symbol of American freedom of ideals of equality of opportunity and sanctuary from oppression and discrimination.

Diaspora examples are given, with information on Jewish ones, but starting with the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt in 1,300 BC to today.

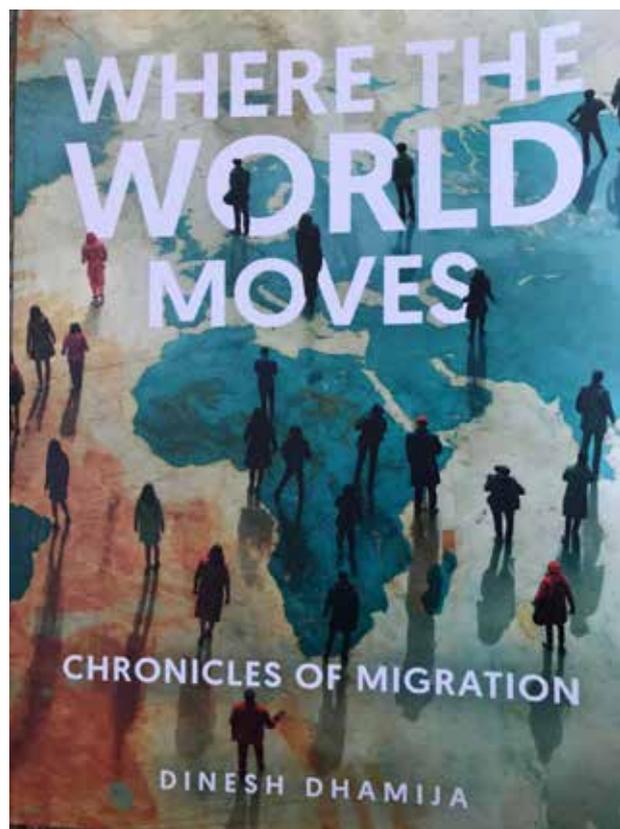
Migrants who Changed the World has a short biography of many, starting with Buddha and Jesus Christ through to Einstein and Elon Musk, who was a migrant from South Africa to Canada, and then to USA.

The American Dream is explained with the history of the Mexican / USA border and moving onto several moving examples of hopes (many dashed) of citizenship and a future for their children. A strong case is made for businesses in the USA needing access to workers, but economists predict that with present policies (a month or so ago) against migrants GDP will fall, prices go up and there will be an impact on poorer countries who will not have money sent to them from families working in the US.

Looking to the way forward, Dhamija lists three things that people can agree on. Enriching culture: even rabid racists cheer on their favourite team with immigrants in it; doing unpopular jobs, which can be seen everywhere; being entrepreneurs, creating jobs. He suggests that we do more to celebrate popular roles.

The World Economic Forum has four recommendations for the future, and it is worth reading the detail. They are more legal migration, underscoring positive benefits, highlighting the positive impact in the world of remittances sent back to home countries and stopping stereotypes.

REVIEWS



While the book is bang up to date in January 2025 events have overtaken Dhamija's suggestions for how the Illegal Immigration Act can be repealed; better ways to "stop the boats" and dealing with the Mexican/USA border.

He concludes: "Cooperation between people, communities, countries, business and organisations makes the world a better place. As a planet we are more than a sum of our parts".

Suzanne Fletcher

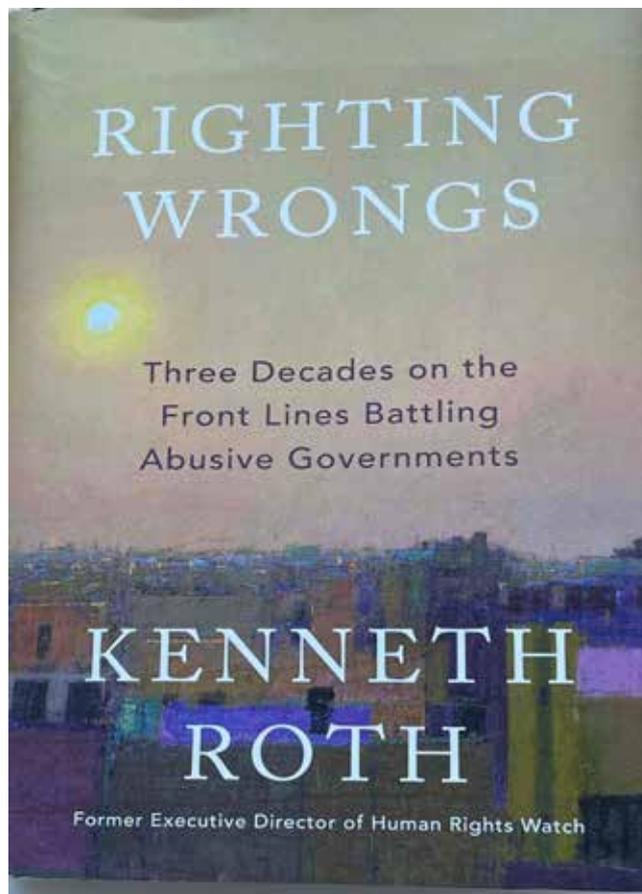
Righting Wrongs – Three decades on the front lines battling abusive governments by Kenneth Roth Penguin Random House

"People, of course, want human rights, at least for themselves." So begins Kenneth Roth's excellent survey of his 30 years at Human Rights Watch (HRW). He saw his NGO's role as increasing "the price of oppression to shift a regime's cost-benefit calculation so that abuse no longer seems so desirable." In 330 readable pages, Roth provides an authoritative guide to the ways in which tyrants can be held to account for their atrocities.

Presenting well-researched facts and shaming leaders, rather than delivering pious lectures and street protests are the key. "Human rights abusers may feel no personal remorse," Roth writes, "but they would prefer to avoid the opprobrium of others....An abusive official always wants something from the international community, even if it's just to be invited to a major summit so they can be photographed with respectable leaders."

Roth provides a world tour of horror, from Cambodia to Syria to Ukraine, illustrating how HRW gathered evidence and located points of leverage that could be used by friendly governments and institutions to apply pressure to stop slaughter and persecution.

He is particularly withering when demolishing the argument used



by successive British governments that trade will lead to liberalisation in China or anywhere else. The UK still supplies "technical support" to dictatorships in the vain hope that security services will change their torturing ways if we provide quiet seminars rather than exposing their misdeeds.

Roth's technique has been criticised for being too elite, taking well-documented examples of human rights abuses to leaders, and persuading them that it is in their personal interest to desist. "The idea of building a human rights movement ignores how rarely popular mobilisation occurs, how difficult it is to sustain, and how few issues the public will address." He also points out that Mandela or Navalny figures are required for such movements.

He describes meeting President Biden to brief him about China, but being talked at by an arrogant man who was uninterested in listening or learning. He observes that Biden avoided confrontations with fellow leaders about human rights, placating the likes of Mohammad bin Salman of Saudi Arabia with little effect. Roth is dismissive of the current UN secretary general Antonio Guterres for his timidity and desire to keep the lines of communication open with monsters

(fruitlessly) rather than holding them to account for failing to uphold the conventions they have signed.

The son of German Jews who escaped the Holocaust, Roth endures particular criticism from Israelis who hate HRW's consistent even-handedness when it comes to the misdeeds of Israel and Hamas. For anyone seeking an introduction to human rights law and practice, Roth's book is a good place to start.

Rebecca Tinsley
Dragon's Teeth – Tales from North Kosovo. By Ian Bancroft. Ibidem, Stuttgart £20.00

The Kosovo war of 1998-99 was the last major part of the wars in former Yugoslavia. Well known to the British public as it played out on television screens, many Kosovo

Albanian refugees came to Britain (and then returned home after) and Britain played a key part under Tony Blair's government in the NATO bombing of Serbia and deployment into Kosovo that ended the war.

The international community largely administered the province (at one point Liberal

Democrat Iain King was head of planning for the UN there) until Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008. After that, Albanian areas developed rapidly, mostly due to investment from the huge diaspora. The north part remains largely occupied by Serbs. It is not widely promoted (even in Serbia) that half of the small remaining Serbian ethnic population of Kosovo live in other parts. The northern districts resisted integration into independent Kosovo institutions, and there is currently a stalemate where Serbian state institutions in effect run in parallel to official ones.

Ian Bancroft's book is well worth reading not only for insight on a small part of a small land half the size of Wales, but because this book by research, anecdote, vignette and personal experience is relevant for anyone interested in the western Balkans. There are many points that will be familiar to people who have travelled in the former

Communist countries, especially the variably democratic ones in south eastern Europe.

Many common themes stand out from across former Yugoslavia, in particular the southern parts that I know to some extent, and Albania. Furthermore, *Dragon's Teeth* is a good read. It is conversational and thoughtful in style.

It seemed a bit pretentious that Bancroft, in his mid-30s?, describes himself as a writer and diplomat, but he has worked for the OSCE in Bosnia, and in Serbia, and crucially for several years ran an office in the north of Kosovo for the European

Union's (support to) Rule of Law mission. Bancroft has travelled extensively in the region, for work, out of curiosity, with family and in pursuit of excellent wines.

I do not believe you can solve the problems in the Balkans (or Ireland) by concentrating on who was in the land centuries (or even many decades) ago. A Liberal democratic approach of human and constitutional rights for all is what wisest commentators advocate to prevent any new unravelling.

Kosovo has been back in the news due to confrontation over number plates and identity cards.

In pursuit of Serbia recognising its sovereignty, the government of Albin Kurti has pursued a policy of reciprocating measures (for Serbs living in Kosovo basically) that Serbia implements - not recognising Kosovo number plates and ID cards. The European Union for a decade has been unable to negotiate an agreement (on almost anything), mainly because the two sides want to stand on their positions, as defenders of their states, rather than solve problems for people actually living in north Kosovo, or the affected Albanians in south Serbia, and Serbs living elsewhere in Kosovo. The latter are the forgotten majority in fact.

One of the points that Bancroft makes repeatedly is that the living conditions in the post-industrial underdeveloped regions of former Yugoslavia are actually very similar, the same in remote villages, and that the people have the same issues in common.

The post-industrial and post multi-ethnic / cultural nature of the districts is something sadly common across much of the Western Balkans. Tales of the Trepcja mine as a

huge employer and whole community, show how important and relatively prosperous Mitrovica was. The mine employed 23,000 people at its height. Bancroft discusses its history with expert Mina, in an Irish pub in Leposavic. The book covers a pen portrait of the formerly multi-ethnic Bosniak Mahala and the attempts to reopen the main bridge over the Ibar river between the two parts of Mitrovica. Open now to pedestrians but not traffic, Ian's recent suggestion is to turn it into a social space.

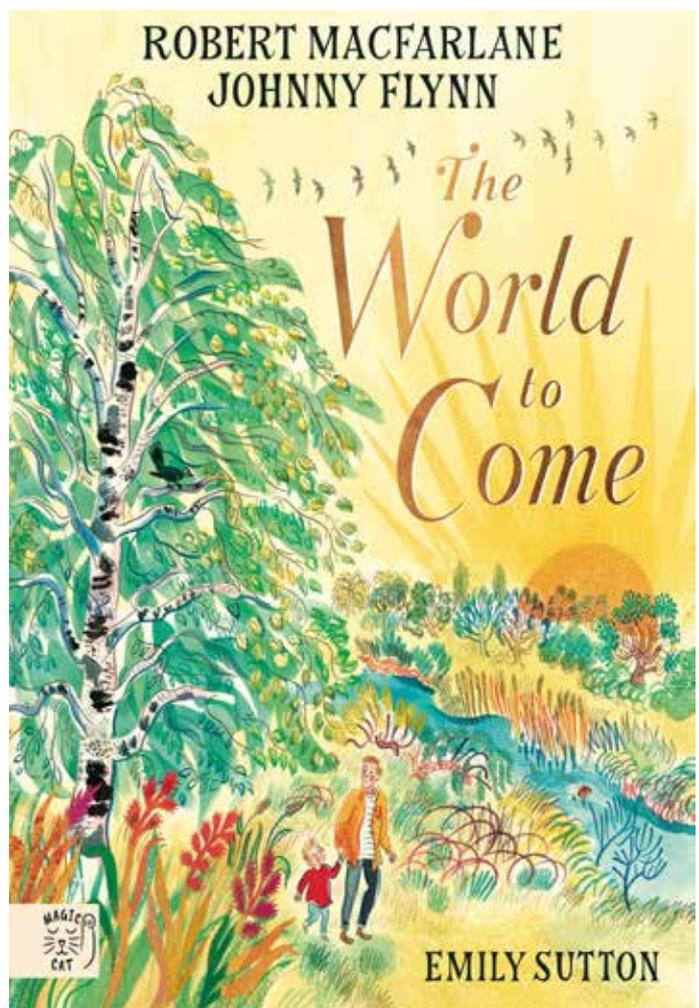
It should be noted that while mostly culturally Muslim, Kosovo Albanians are largely secular, as in Albania itself.

Britain traditionally takes an active foreign policy interest in the western Balkans (very active diplomatically there now) and British tourists (like Serbs) are flocking to Albanian beaches, but these parts of Kosovo are not on the tourist trail yet. The

book may interest you in the region as a starting point or someone who knows it already.

No one seriously thinks that there will be war in the Balkans again. However, a wise long served Norwegian diplomat in the region has cautioned that there can be miscalculations if people engage in provocations, with serious, even fatal results. And the possibility for miscalculations abounds when people are fed propaganda constantly that they are the victims, that others are preparing to use force against them, and that they will be protected by military force.

Many politicians suggest that Germany vetoed attempts to 'exchange territory' between Serbia and Kosovo, which at one point the



Trump administration seemed keen on but later under Special Envoy Richard Grenell concentrated on practical economic development steps.

Unfortunately, both states (and many of their populations) are obsessed with their patriotic nationalism. This is understandable for Kosovo Albanians given what they went through but is not helping sustain development. The Russians certainly do not want any progress in peaceful relations in the Western Balkans and want to keep 'frozen conflicts' between Serbia and Kosovo and in Bosnia running to derail peaceful coexistence and stability, hinder efforts to reform politically and economically, and pursue stated goals to join the European Union.

Putin's war propaganda is genuinely popular in Serbia, and the Russian bots, ambassadors and henchmen targeted on the area exaggerate and promote the risk and fear of conflict, to keep things tense.

When countries (or rather politicians or local leaders) reject the Russian sphere of influence then we know that the Kremlin

physically tries to discredit those concerned – as seen in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania. Russian ‘journalists’ and ‘tourists’ are turning up in some surprising restricted places.

Russia is both destabilising and keen on keeping destabilised both Bosnia (using the mini-Orban leader of Republika Srpska, Dodik) and Kosovo Serbia relations through promoting talk of conflict in north Kosovo. This is contrary to the Americans and

British who are continually emphasising the need to keep peace and stability.

John Martin

Bold as Brass? by Suzanne Fletcher

We don’t often think of where the idioms that roll off our tongues come from. We think too little of our Whig and more specifically our largely forgotten Radical antecedents.

Amidst the spin doctors and misreporting in the media, at least Hansard is there to report exactly who said what, but that has not always been the case. Until 1771 the press were not allowed to report the facts, and any that did were punished. Brass Crosby changed all of that.

Brass Crosby’s career echoes to us to this day; he was MP for Honiton, Lord Mayor of London but most significantly, in 1771 he dismissed the case against John Miller, a printer who had been arrested for publishing Parliamentary debates.

Crosby had to justify his actions before the House of Commons, who ended up sending him to the Tower of London. There was public outcry, and after he was released from the Tower when Parliament rose, from that day on publication has not been prevented.

Bold in actions as well as words against the establishment of the day, what could be the source of the idiom, Brass Crosby was an unflinching Radical who would sit comfortably with Liberal Democrats today.

Copies from: brasscrosby1725@gmail.com

Stewart Rayment

The World to Come by Robert Macfarlane & Johnny Flynn, illustrated by Emily Sutton Magic Cat Publishing 2024 £12.99

This is a well-observed book, optimistic. I particularly like the much under-estimated pylons in the natural environment, underling our co-existence, and the birch trees as the story passes through the year. Also, the father–son relationship in the book, refreshing; one wouldn’t necessarily call the publishing zeitgeist misandrous, but in attempting to balance millennia of patriarchy the baby might be thrown out with the bath water.

Macfarlane is primarily a nature writer, Flynn an actor-musician, perhaps accounting for the lyricism of the narrative. The book comes out of their earlier musical collaboration, *Lost in the Cedar Wood* (Transgressive 2021). Macfarlane co-edited the 2018 *A People’s Manifesto For Wildlife*, along with Chris Packham and Pat Barkham; he was heavily involved in the defence of Sheffield’s street trees, so must be deeply disturbed by the current government.

Emily Sutton’s work remains familiar and consistent (Clara Button and nature books with Nicola Davies). I imagine some of the trees to have been taken en plein air; narrow boats recur but no elephants this time. I think it’s a lady playing the guitar rather than Flynn (though he did play Bowie in *Stardust*, 2020).

The World to Come was the only children’s book to make the shortlist for the Foyles Book of the Year 2024, but Sally Rooney’s *Intermezzo* won, I daresay deservedly, but it is children we need to get reading (ages 3-8 in this case). Support your local independent bookseller; don’t buy online.

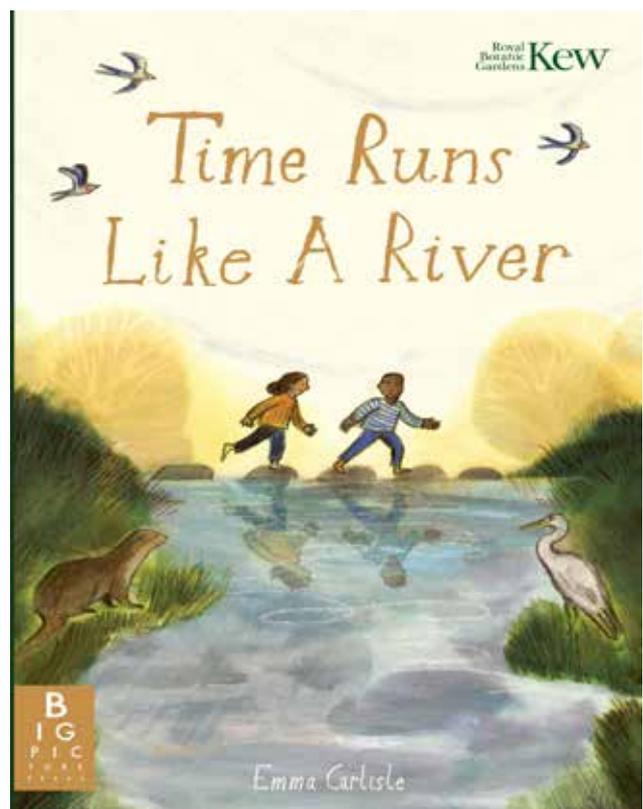
Stewart Rayment

Time Runs Like A River by Emma Carlisle Big Picture Press 2024 £12.99

Continuing the themes of time and nature and a river, Emma Carlisle’s book is perhaps for 6 to 10 age range? The children’s explorations are their own and there are plenty of guidelines to explore further. I confess that I have never seen a kingfisher, except insofar as I’ve seen a dark blur and was told it was a kingfisher... I live in hope, but some suspension of reality fits with a children’s book. Equally observed as *The World to Come* but a quieter pallet. Together they can form a progression in revealing the concepts of time and nature.

Carlisle works with the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, for whom she also asks What do you see when you look at a Tree? And answers also in their children’s guide (I wonder if it mentions that when Queen Victoria gifted Kew Gardens to the nation she set the admission charge at 1d (0.6p) – I went there on the last day that you could get in for that price, must have been 1973.

Stewart Rayment



Monday

"We're above the chimbleypots!" exclaims my young companion, taking in the view. Yes, you find me on the roof of St Asquith's with a Well-Behaved Orphan, he being more accomplished at shinning down a drainpipe to summon help than most of my acquaintances. For once, it's not suspicion of the Elves of Rockingham Forest that has driven me up here – I know they claim to be able to turn base metal (i.e. lead) into gold, and also have a

pretty shrewd idea where they find that lead, but they have not been seen selling their 'gold' jewellery around Rutland's less salubrious car-boot sales lately. No, it's the leader of His Majesty's Opposition I'm on the QV for, as I deduced from her disobliging remarks about people who mend church roofs that she's more the sort to rip them off. Well, we don't want her trying any of her tricks round here. Fortunately, the afternoon proves uneventful, and I am grateful for the newspaper I brought to while away the time. As I turn a page, the orphan catches sight of a photograph of Nigel Farage and remarks: "Blimey! Was 'is muvver frightened by a frog?"

Tuesday

To Oakham's cyber-quarter to record my weekly podcast with the Duke of Rutland. You know the idea: put together two chaps you'd expect to fall out and see if they can get on even so – Naomi Campbell and Patrick Stewart have been doing it for years. The first time the Duke and I recorded one of the things, conversation turned to the ownership of certain Stilton mines outside Cropwell Bishop, harsh words were exchanged and we fell to fisticuffs. I assumed we wouldn't be asked back, but the producers phoned a few days later to say it was their most downloaded offering ever and could we do it every week? And so we have, though I always take the precaution of wearing a cricket box Just In Case.

Wednesday

I descend to the Servants' Hall, where Cook is manifestly in charge of wrapping food parcels for our cousins in the US State of New Rutland: "No, that Stilton's not too ripe, my girl. Foreigners like strong flavours. And make sure you screw those jars as tight as tight – we don't want to give the poor Americans salmon-error and bolshevism. And write the contents on the parcel or the customs and exercise men will be after us." It's only fair that we should Do Our Bit: the Americans kept us going during the last war with their nylons, chewing gum and spam. As Cook would put it: what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the Gandalf.

Thursday

So the British government is again pledged to wipe Rutland off the map. I'm told that when a Labour junior minister discovered that councils are not All The Same Size, he started screaming and had to be sent home in a taxi. Well, we've been here before, and it remains the case that half a dozen sharpshooters dug in outside Uppingham can pin down an entire brigade. But other aspects of the international situation trouble me more, as Russia continues its occupation of Ukraine while Trump menaces Mexico, Canada and Greenland. We must therefore arm the Ukrainians (and the Eskimos, come to that) and flesh out our plans to retake the United States.

Lord Bonkers' Diary

Friday

This office over a tobacconist's in Wardour Street may not look much, but it was from here that I controlled my music interests in the heyday of Rutbeat. I still manage the odd artist: my first visitor is Bobby Dean who, before taking Carshalton and Wallington, enjoyed some success in the American charts. Like several dozen other young singers called Bobby, he was swept aside by the Beatles and the other groups of the

British invasion. Last time we met, I was frank with him about the need to modernise his image, and he's certainly doing his best to sound 'with it' this morning: "Hang out your hearing flaps, Daddy-o. My old platters came from lamesville, I dig, but this baby will make me a big barracuda again." He hands me a tape. The song is pleasant enough, but will the young people buy it? When I ask him, he is dismissive: "Don't hand me that apple sauce, Pops." This makes me wonder how much he took in when I played the Dutch uncle last time. (Incidentally Nick Clegg had a Dutch uncle – a charming fellow.) Then Roz Savage calls by. I first met her when she and her all-female punk band stopped at Miss Flowerdew's drapery in the village to buy safety pins. She is full of her plans to row across Rutland Water, having already bagged the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans, but until the Monster is in less playful mood, I shall not encourage her. The chief whip will give me beans if I cause an unnecessary by-election in a seat we hold.

Saturday

How sad that an innocent act by Jennie, quite the most sensible member of the new Liberal Democrat intake in my experience, has been blown up out of all proportion! There can be few MPs who have not crossed the floor at one time or another to have their tummy rubbed. I know I did. The whole affair has placed a hefty spoke in the wheel of my scheme to encourage government MPs to cross in the opposite direction. I had planned for Jennie to wander over carrying a copy of Labour's last manifesto in her mouth, lay it at the feet of carefully selected MPs and then give them her saddest look. I'm no Clement Freud, but if I know my human psychology, this would have had those MPs sobbing, begging for forgiveness and promising to take on an arduous Focus round within minutes.

Sunday

Back from St Asquith's, I am telephoned by Danny Chambers. I pretend at first to be a Chinese takeaway in Oakham, but when it becomes clear he's not trying to get me to foster more animals, I relent. He is after news of Sid, the penguin who chose to remain at the Convent of Our Lady of the Ballot Boxes rather than return to the South Atlantic with his fellow Spheniscidae. I am pleased to tell him that the Mother Superior makes a good report of Sister Sid, and is even thinking of recommending his inclusion in the next Penguin Book of Penguins.

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