

liberator

Lib Dem strategy revealed



- 💣 How liberals won The Netherlands - Annalou van Egmond
- 💣 We need more than net zero targets - Roz Savage MP
- 💣 Diverting young men from Reform - Isaac Tucker

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COMMENTARY	3
RADICAL BULLETIN	4-7
MAN TROUBLE	8
Young men are drifting to reform but the Liberal Democrats could win them back if they only tried, says Isaac Tucker	
YES WE CAN!	9
Annelou van Egmond explains how a stricter immigration policy helped the social liberal party D66 come top in the Dutch general election	
REGENERATION GAP	10-12
Roz Savage MP argues Britain needs more than net zero targets and masterplans – it needs a great regeneration of nature, communities, economy and democracy	
EATING THE BIG APPLE	13-15
The triumph of democratic socialist Zoran Mamdani as New York's mayoral race has not been grasped by the Democrat establishment, says Rebecca Tinsley	
HAS THE FIGHTBACK AGAINST TRUMP STARTED?	16-17
Martha Elliott looks at signals that the American public has had enough of its president	
GIVE THE HIGH STREETS A HEART	18-19
The Liberal Democrat policy paper on high streets and town centres lacks ideas on how to rescue them from decline, says Roger Hayes	
MISSING MEMBERS	20
Why do the Liberal Democrats pay so little attention to membership? wonders Tad Jones	
WHEN TO FLY A FLAG	21
Labour imitates those spreading hate about asylum seekers instead of standing up to them, finds Gary Malcolm	
SEND FOR A TASK FORCE	22
The Liberal Democrats should move into areas where they are unrepresented, says Sophie Layton	
TWO WHEELS BAD	23
Power-assisted bikes are out of control and a danger to pedestrians, says Ken Gabbott-Rolph	
HARD ROAD TO KINDNESS	24-25
Compassion is not weakness but rather the foundation of liberal politics, argues Mathew Hulbert	
EMBEDDING DEMOCRACY	26
The UK is vulnerable to extremists without the constitutional democratic safeguards common in Europe, argues Jack Meredith	
OBITUARY: MENZIES (MING) CAMPBELL	27
Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to a former Liberal Democrat leader	
WHERE WE CAME FROM	28
David Grace looks at the Liberal Democrat History Group's new booklet on the history of liberal ideas	
REVIEWS	29-33
LORD BONKERS	34

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COMMENTARY

HORSE SENSE AND NEIGH-SAYERS

Liberator's cover shows two horses, contented in familiar surroundings, pottering around and in good health, but would they win any races?

The Liberal Democrats' approach to campaigning could be summed up as doing nothing to frighten the horses, in particular those that dwell in a semi-imagined place called Middle England.

This approach is designed to appeal to soft Tories, who - beholding the Reform-lite mess that is their former party - might be inclined to vote Lib Dem so long as the party doesn't appear to want anything radical.

While it's true the party has had a decent run of local by-election results recently, and a respectable if not spectacular poll rating, there are surely limits to how far the Lib Dems can go by leaving horses undisturbed.

For one thing, there are former Labour voters to be wooed, and possibly more of them than there are remaining soft Tories.

Historians will one day grapple with how Labour managed to win a colossal majority, oust a universally hated government, and in slightly over a year suffer dire poll ratings, mutinies and serious talk of replacing the prime minister.

Even those who deeply dislike Labour must have watched events since July 2024 with amazement as the Government sank into hostile internal briefings, policy disasters and collapsing popularity.

The last Labour Government - whatever its later faults - stayed so popular after 1997 that the 2001 general election was only a formality. Even with nearly four years to go it's hard to see that as the outcome of the next one.

Disgruntled Labour voters have other places to go besides the Lib Dem, whether that is nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales, the Greens of self-described breast enlargement expert Zack Polanski, or Jeremy Corbyn's party should it actually form.

If they are to turn to the Lib Dems they need reasons to, and if they are people who backed Labour on the basis that they wanted change they will be unimpressed by a lack of horse-frightening.

Using a windfall tax on banks to cut domestic energy bills is a good start but it's still rather 'beads without string' - individual initiatives not linked by any story about where the Lib Dems would take the country.

It may be possible for a while to appeal to both soft Tories and pissed-off Labour but doing so is hardly the way to a coherent long-term strategy or policy programme.

Lib Dems may soon or later have to choose where their political market lies and tailor their messages accordingly, even if that induces some neighing.

LABOUR PLUMBS NEW DEPTHS

Who would have thought that a year after a landslide victory Labour would be looking to Tommy Robinson for inspiration in its policy on asylum seekers?

Labour has plumbed new depths with proposals of a gratuitous cruelty towards asylum seekers.

Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey has called for asylum

seekers waiting on a decision on their status to be allowed to work so that they can support themselves and contribute to the economy.

Labour by contrast proposes to rob them of their possessions on arrival to - presumably - sell these to help finance their costs, a step rightly denounced by Lib Dem home affairs spokesperson Max Wilkinson.

Worst of all is home secretary Shabana Mahmood's intention to leave even refugees approved to stay in the UK in a legal limbo, in which their case is reviewed every 30 months, leaving them to wait for 20 years before being allowed to stay permanently.

Even supposing the notoriously incompetent Home Office could perform these checks on time, this would prevent them from settling, working, building careers and lives and allowing children to be educated as their status might be revoked every 30 months.

Mahmood also proposes deporting them to countries judged 'safe' even if - as with the wave of Ukrainian refugees welcomed here - they have settled and assimilated into British life.

She is talking about changes to the way the UK works with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to stop asylum seekers trying to use its right to family life as means to avoid deportation.

Leaving would pose difficulties for the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland and put the UK on a par with Belarus and Russia, the continent's only other non-signatories.

Davey and Wilkinson's statements were both welcome as far as they go but addressed details of Mahmood's shameful proposals rather than denouncing the whole approach.

Labour might be running scared of Reform but there is no need for the Lib Dems to fear them since polling has repeatedly shown almost no overlap between Lib Dem and Reform voters.

The Lib Dems need to speak up more loudly and comprehensively against Mahmood. We want secure borders but without a lot of cruel and unworkable measures designed to appeal to the Daily Mail.

RADICAL BULLETIN

QUOTAS UNQUOTE

As Liberator went to press the omnishambles of the Lib Dem internal elections had still not been resolved.

Results were declared for the straightforward president and vice-president elections but not for committees, where complicated legal arguments raged over whether quotas should be used for under-represented sexual orientations and gender identities.

Josh Barbarinde was elected president with 3,742 votes to Prue Bray's 1,608, on an embarrassing turnout of 9.1%.

The turnout for vice-president was marginally worse at 8.2% with Victoria Collins defeating Kamran Hussein by a closer than expected 2,788 to 2,012.

As for the committees, who knows? These were due to be counted as Liberator went to press.

The Supreme Court's ruling in *For Women Scotland v The Scottish Ministers* last spring should surely have flagged up possible legal trouble over quotas for trans and non-binary candidates.

This might have been resolved at conference had constitutional amendments been tabled to change the rules assumed necessary.

Nothing though happened, possibly for fear that even an amendment with leadership backing might not get a two-thirds majority due to vociferous opposition from LGBT+ members and supporters.

An amendment tabled by members of the gender critical group Liberal Voice for Women would have removed non-binary people from the 40% categories for women and men.

This though was not debated as 'next business' was moved, which must have then seemed like good tactics but meant the proposal was not formally defeated.

The consequence of this was that when returning officer David Crowther decided he legally had to disapply the quotas for trans and non-binary identities, party officers could say he did not - as some claimed - ignore a decision of conference since technically no decision had been taken.

Powers rest with the returning officer to alter the conduct of a count so that it conforms to the law. It is though implied this should be done publicly and in a timely way.

Instead Crowther removed the two quotas the day before voting began - though well after nominations closed and campaign literature had been prepared - and the party announced this in an obscure part of its website.

This was intended to conform with legal advice after the Supreme Court ruling and would recognise only candidates' sex at birth, although controversy still rages over how to apply what the court said.

Quite how the party proposed to establish candidates' sex at birth short of conducting medical examinations never become clear, but it sparked fury.

The first most members knew was a post from Bray on Lib Dem Voice in which she said she was: "So angry I almost can't type."

Bray said: "That change is to apply the quotas to people according to their sex at birth, so that trans men will be considered women and trans women considered men. If you are non-binary, who knows what happens!"

After a great deal of dispute in online party forums, Lucas North, treasurer of Lib Dems LGBT+, took a case to the Federal Appeals Panel (FAP), which perhaps should have been consulted by the party rather earlier and certainly more than a week before the close of poll.

The FAP then tossed a grenade into the proceedings by finding that Crowther did not have powers to disapply the quotas since that involved a change to the constitution, which was the prerogative of conference.

Crowther promptly resigned saying he had been placed in an impossible position and Crispin Allard hurriedly took over in a baptism of fire.

The FAP ruling will take some poring over by lawyers, running as it does to 16 pages of dense legal argument.

Its summary though is clear enough. The FAP found: "The Returning Officer cannot rewrite the constitution, however desirable that may be."

The constitution though includes ensuring compliance with the Equality Act 2010 "where that conflicts with and requires disapplication of [the relevant] quotas.

"This responsibility must be discharged in good faith on the basis of reasonable inquiry and relevant data, to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly in line with the constitution and the law of the land," it said.

The summary went on: "If the returning officer applies this ruling in line with his submissions as to the legal advice he says was received, then the effect may be that there is no lawful operative 'positive action' quota for biologically female candidates, for candidates with minority sexual orientations, or for candidates with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment".

It enjoined the Federal Board and party conference to resolve this as neither the FAP nor returning officer could.

A joint statement from North and the party elucidated this further, saying: "The FAP made clear that the rules as written in the constitution need to be reviewed by members as they can no longer be implemented as originally intended following the Supreme Court ruling..."

"The FAP has ruled that parts of quotas should be disappplied on a case by case basis, as the election count proceeds, in order to avoid discrimination. This requires a different approach to that originally set out by [Crowther]; it means that quotas will apply as written in the constitution until they lead to a breach of the Equality Act 2010 in any individual circumstance". Got that? The next row is therefore likely to be whether there should be any gender quotas.

Ed Davey was notably silent despite various calls for him to 'step in'. Davey had no formal power to resolve the dispute and appeared to decide to steer well clear of it.

Meanwhile, with legal advice still being sought, will the party

committees' composition be revealed by the time they take office on 1 January? And will a clear attempt to stuff them with party establishment figures work, such as MPs standing for Federal Conference Committee?

There were also some eyebrows raised at outgoing president Mark Pack endorsing various candidates, though Pack said he did this as an individual member and not as president.

Whatever eventually happens to the quotas will make only a marginal difference to the turnout problem. The 9.1% total was even worse than the 14.05% seen in 2022, as is the implied membership total (see below) at 59,780 against 62,751 three years ago.

Surely the first step should be to find out whether anything in the election process itself deters participation. Wading through some 150 manifestos for committees - all saying similar things - is not many people's idea of fun.

Meanwhile a further row impends over the English committee elections with a complaint from James Moore, group leader in Reading, that he was put on the ballot paper without his knowledge, and from others that notifications were not properly made.

VANISHING ACT

Membership of the Liberal Democrats is becoming something of a rarity if an account of party member data is correct.

The party has been shy about membership totals for several years and Reports to Conference contained only a brief and uninformative mention (Liberator 431).

Although membership neared 127,000 in the summer of 2019, this slumped after that year's disastrous general election and the 2022 presidential election showed the party with 62,751 electronic ballot papers sent out, and this year's one only 59,780.

A BBC report in early October said Lib Dem membership had halved in five years to around 60,000. It quoted Professor Tim Bale, leader of the Party Membership Project at Queen Mary University of London and Sussex University, saying the drop was surprising given the Lib Dems' electoral success, which would suggest "a party on the up, in which case you might get more ambitious people wanting to join it".

But Bale added: "There's an extent to which surges into parties are prompted by public profile... and they don't seem to have much chance of getting into government at the moment."

The report showed the party in September with 60,089 members of whom 54,743 are in England, with 2,901 in Scotland and 1,658 in Wales. There are 767 'federal' members.

There were also 21,534 supporters (who are not full members) and 2,277 members of the Young Liberals. There were 2,281 full members deemed 'at risk' of lapsing.

Net growth over the year to September was put at 980. Membership was highest in London, South Central, East of England and the South East, which between them accounted for a little over half of members at 30,613.

Top recruiter, slightly surprisingly, was Enfield with 16 new members, a borough in which the party has had no councillor since 1978.

FIGHTING UNEMPLOYMENT

Ed Davey's reshuffle of Lib Dem MPs left 46 of the 72 with jobs - including the whips - and some look to be much busier than others.

They have been organised into teams so while some departments like health and education are directly shadowed by a whole Lib Dem team, others are oddly lumped together.

Tim Farron gets to chair a team that embraces four entire

departments: Housing, Communities and Local Government; Transport; Energy and Net Zero; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The lack of shadow junior ministers leads to some anomalies. No one in the Lib Dem team specifically covers rail, water or public health, for example, even though these have their own ministers within the government.

Lisa Smart's wretched performance over ID cards has seen her moved from home affairs to the backwater of shadowing the Cabinet Office though with some unspecified role in preparing for the next general election.

The most controversial change was that Vikki Slade, former leader of the large unitary Bournemouth Poole Christchurch Council, lost the local government role, possibly for criticising the leadership too much internally on WhatsApp, though is replaced by the well regarded Zoe Franklin, also a former councillor.

In the health team there are shadows for primary care combined with cancer, mental health, and care and carers, but no-one except chair Helen Morgan appears to be covering hospitals or diseases other than cancer.

With two select committee chairs staying put and Staff Aquarone as parliamentary party chair that still leaves 23 MPs without roles, although they have select committee seats.

FERRETING AROUND

There's reverse ferrets, and then there's the Lib Dem position on identity cards.

On 3 September, home affairs spokesperson Lisa Smart out of the blue wrote a piece on Lib Dem Voice in favour or "rethinking" policy on digital ID cards, for which she was rightly condemned in a deluge of hostile comment.

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On 21 September Smart held a consultation session on ID cards at conference - well attended despite the 8am start - which again saw vociferous hostility with Orkney & Shetland MP Alistair Carmichael telling the meeting "If I have to bark at the tide on this, I will bark at the fucking tide", going on to dismiss ID cards as "ocean-going nonsense" and reminding the party of its campaigns against ID cards under the previous Labour government, before the Coalition abandoned the cards.

Later on 21 September, Ed Davey held a question and answer session hosted by BBC journalist Caroline Quinn. When a question came about ID cards Davey was rather half hearted, vaguely pointing to a scheme that supposedly works in Estonia. Quinn then asked for a show of hands on debating ID card policy again and got about one-third of the hall with hands up.

Quinn was there as a guest presenter so it is inconceivable that she would have blindsided Davey with this exercise; he must have known and approved it.

It all looked as though the party was being softened up for a change of policy in favour of ID cards with 'digital' ones somehow magically avoiding the problems identified 20 years ago.

But on 20 September prime minister Kier Starmer said he would tell Labour's conference that he wanted compulsory ID cards.

This - rightly - drew instant condemnation from Davey - though only a week after his vague responses to Quinn - and condemnatory statements from the party. Davey led the charge with science and technology spokesperson Victoria Collins but with not a word from Smart, who had caused the trouble in the first place.

On 30 September Smart found herself reshuffled from home affairs to the Siberia of shadowing the Cabinet Office.

TEETH EXTRACTION

The failure of an attempt to perform some dentistry on the toothless Federal Council led to an angry resignation letter from its chair Antony Hook, who also decided not to stand again for membership.

When all but three directly elected members were chucked off the Federal Board, the Federal Council was created as a scrutiny body with a theoretical power to call in and overturn FB decisions.

Overturning a decision though requires the votes of 27 members and since the party website lists 37 FC members this hurdle is almost impossible to surmount, since there will always enough party establishment hacks to prevent a challenge,

Hook's amendment would have allowed FB decisions to be overturned by a simple majority so long as at least 13 members voted in favour.

This provoked the whipping of platoons of MPs into the hall to speak and vote against, and the amendment's failure leaves the FC as an almost wholly powerless talking shop.

In his resignation letter, Hook wrote that the FC meeting that initiated the amendment had seen all but one member support it.

"It was, therefore, a surprise to me that more Council members spoke against than for it today," Hook said. "Indeed, I believe there was one member who supported the amendment at the FC meeting who then today spoke against it at conference."

He also objected to comments by Baroness Pinnock and Cheltenham MP Max Watkinson, "who has never shown any interest in FC matters as far as I know", with the latter appearing "to have been put up on behalf of the parliamentary party to speak given the number of MPs who came in to vote against it. If that is what MPs think of the Federal Council then I am very disappointed".

Hook concluded: "In light of everything this afternoon the appropriate and only honourable course open to me is to resign now, which I do both as chair and as local government representative on the council."

OH NO AOs

Relations between party HQ and affiliated organisations have not run entirely smoothly since the latter were given a status similar to that of local parties. This has meant often small AOs with few resources have had to cope with the full bureaucratic demand of PPERA while so far having received in return a single email from headquarters to all party members alerting them to the AOs' existence.

Among problems, Lib Dem LGBT+ has complained that its HQ-designated email won't work preventing it from holding an AGM, for which it has then been criticised.

A report to the Federal Board said there are 23 AOs, all of which had provided reports of their activities except for Liberal Democrat Friends of the Armed Forces, Liberal Democrat European Group, and Operation Social Equality, the latter being in the process of relaunching.

Six AOs had failed to submit accounts: Liberal Democrat Christian Forum, Liberal Democrat European Group, LGBT+ Liberal Democrats, the Liberal Democrat Campaign for Race Equality, the Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel and Operation Social Equality.

The Young Liberals were missing four compliance reports and the Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong one.

Liberties Rights Justice faces being "chased and will have to formally apply for AO status".

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GOING FOURTH

Continuing Liberal Party leader Steve Radford threw his hat into the ring for the post of deputy leader of the Local Government Association Independent group. The pro-Brexit party said rather optimistically: "Steve's campaign increased our visibility to other independent and minority party councillors."

Not visible enough though. Radford came fourth out of four with a mere 34 votes against 409 for the winner Andrew Cooper, a Green from Kirklees.

The Liberal Assembly in October debated a bizarre motion on changing the party's name from 'The Liberal Party' to 'Liberal Party', which would supposedly get it further up the ballot paper for the Scottish Parliamentary elections.

How this played out is unclear as the party website vanished in mid-November.

PROTEST NON-VOTE

Is Ed Davey's shadowy adviser Jonathan Jones influencing what gets taken at conference?

The very low profile Jones is understood to have advised the Federal Conference Committee (FCC) not to ballot members on an emergency motion proposed by Liberator Collective member Gareth Epps on the right to protest over Palestine.

Epps was told that instead of balloting this motion, or a separate one on Israel's actions in Gaza, there would be an emergency debate but without a motion to vote on. He then appealed, noting that conference standing orders for emergency motions only allow for non-acceptance in limited circumstances, and he had been told the motion was in order but then that the topical issue discussion was "similar in effect".

It wasn't, since the discussion concerned events in Gaza and Epps' motion the right to protest in the UK.

Epps moved suspension of standing orders, which failed when FCC suddenly said his motion hadn't been in order.

So who was really so determined to avoid any vote related to Palestine, and why? The Federal Appeals Panel is due to consider the matter.

DARK AND WET

Some fast damage limitation was needed by the party after Angus MacDonald, MP for Inverness Skye and West Rosshire, shared his thoughts with the BBC over a plan to house asylum seekers at Cameron Barracks in Inverness.

MacDonald said: "Why is it a bad idea? Well, 300 young men

arriving there, not able to speak English, will get very bored. It's get dark by four where we live and it's been known to rain.

"I think they'll congregate in the town centre... I think putting it in a town centre camp is every bit as bad as a town centre hotel. To all intents and purposes this barracks is a town centre accommodation, like a hotel."

MacDonald's suggestion that it would be better to house the asylum seekers out of a town centre was reasonable, but there are ways of handling such an emotionally charged subject.

GHOSTLY PRESENCE

It's hard to make a tasteful advertisement for legacies but it was rather unfortunate that the party illustrated its legacy page with a picture featuring the visibly elderly former leader Ming Campbell even before his death.

Worse, it was still there in mid-November some two months after he died. Most members of the party legacy society are no doubt elderly, so are they really impressed by offerings of "aa Legacy Society membership card" and "a Legacy Society limited-edition pin badge"?

KEVIN WHITE

Liberator regrets to record the death of Kevin White, a long term activist in particular against nuclear weapons.

White claimed a small place in history at the Bootle by-election in 1990 when he was the candidate of the continuing Liberal party, of which he was briefly a member. It's widely known that David Owen's continuing SDP was put out of business by being beaten there by Screaming Lord Sutch. Less well remembered is that White beat Owen's lot too.

MAN TROUBLE

Young men are drifting to reform but the Liberal Democrats could win them back if they only tried, says Isaac Tucker

A recent trip to Prague with some old school friends reminded me that the great political realignment among young men isn't happening in the abstract but happening in front of us.

Over a beer during the day, one of my friends started talking admiringly about Nigel Farage, Andrew Tate and an assortment of online pseudo-masculine 'influencers' whose entire appeal rests on selling resentment disguised as strength. When I challenged him, he fell back on the usual online clichés about 'snowflakes' and 'weak men'. It wasn't a row, but a glimpse of a cultural shift liberals have barely begun to confront.

Polling now shows Reform leading among men aged 16–25 and they outpolled the Conservatives among under-30s at the general election. These aren't isolated anomalies but indicators that a cohort of young men, politically homeless and culturally insecure, are drifting towards the hard right because it is the only political force speaking directly to them. Not thoughtfully, not honestly, but loudly and incessantly.

The primary accelerator is social media. X, since Elon Musk's takeover, has become an algorithmic sewer. I do not follow hard-right nutters such as Tommy Robinson, Nick Tenconi (Leader of UKIP) or Nick Fuentes, the American far-right and white nationalist political commentator and live streamer known for leading the 'Groyper' movement, but the platform dutifully serves them up to me anyway. TikTok is a little better but not exactly angelic. It can be a conveyor belt of hyper-aggressive influencer masculinity designed to hook adolescent boys before they've developed the confidence to ignore it. The far right has built an entire emotional economy out of young men's anxieties, and I would argue that liberals have largely left that battlefield uncontested.

UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH

And here is the uncomfortable truth for the Liberal Democrats: we have not taken any of this seriously enough. Too much of our recent online output has been gimmick over substance, the political equivalent of desperately trying to win over the sixth form by quoting memes half a decade out of date.

You cannot counter the hard right's appeal to male insecurity with ironic TikToks and dance-off challenges. The problem is too deep, too widespread and too urgent.

The reality is that we have the resources to fight back. We have real, grounded, decent male role models who embody precisely the values young men are starved of. These values include responsibility, empathy and emotional resilience.

Josh Babarinde's work on tackling male violence against women should make him a national figure for young men. Ed Davey's openness about caring for his disabled son demonstrates a model of masculinity rooted not in dominance but in compassion, something the Tate industrial complex cannot begin to comprehend. Carl Cashman's leadership in Liverpool shows that young northern men can be both rooted

community leaders and proudly liberal. These are powerful stories, but we do almost nothing to push them into the feeds of the very demographic losing itself to reactionary posturing.

Liberals should be defining masculinity on our own terms but to do that, we must first acknowledge the scale of the problem. A generation of boys is being raised on content that teaches them that empathy is weakness, misogyny is normal, and liberalism is emasculation. I hear from friends of mine who are teachers that they are battling it in classrooms. The party barely talks about it at all.

LIBERAL INTERVENTION

International Men's Day on 19 November offers a chance to start a serious liberal intervention. We should be speaking directly to young men about purpose, belonging, responsibility and how to build a meaningful life that doesn't rely on belittling others. We should be telling the stories of our male MPs and activists who embody a better way to be a man. And we should be doing it consistently, not only when a focus group remembers that young men exist. I strongly feel that this will make a difference.

Because if liberals don't engage young men, the far right is more than happy to and it already is. And unless we start offering a compelling alternative rooted in dignity rather than dominance, we risk losing a generation that should have been natural allies to liberalism but is instead being seduced by people who thrive on their insecurity and frustration. After all, who would most women find more attractive between someone like Harry Styles, a compassionate, open, culturally aware man or Andrew Tate, a loud, angry man who's provocative and talks down on women. I think we all know the answer to that...

Liberals don't need to imitate Farage or Tate. We need only remind young men that there is a stronger, kinder, more confident model of manhood than the resentful caricatures pushed at them online. We already have the stories and the values that can cut through. The algorithm may not be on our side, but culture is not fixed. If we choose to engage seriously, we can help a generation rediscover its better self.

Isaac Tucker is the senior parliamentary assistant to Roz Savage, MP for South Cotswolds

YES WE CAN!

Annelou van Egmond explains how a stricter immigration policy helped the social liberal party D66 come top in the Dutch general election

When the exit polls came out for the elections in The Netherlands it took my Lib-Dem friends just minutes to realise something special was going on across the Channel.

Democrats66, D66, had won the national elections beating the far right anti-Islam Freedom Party of Geert Wilders by a small, but not too small, margin of some 30.000 votes. We did it!

Besides congratulations the messages quickly turned to questions; can you tell us how it's done?

So let me explain what we did. Being a member of the Election Evaluation Commission of the Lib Dems in 2010-2011 I realise full well that both the Dutch electoral system and our culture and tradition of campaigning differ immensely from the UK so not everything will apply but let it at least be an inspiration.

DISMAL RESULTS

We started our preparations the day after the last elections. Our dismal results in 2023 called for some serious soul searching. Not only had we lost but the far right had won. Over the last decades D66 and the Freedom Party had been political opponents but also each other's favourite enemy, so to speak. The clashes between the political leaders making it clear to each group of followers where we stood and balancing each other out. This no longer worked and we had to change tactics – not politics.

Our policies have not changed. We are strong advocates of the rule of law, the right to self-determination, free market where it works and government intervention when needed. We focus on education, climate, health and more recently the housing crisis.

What we have added is a stricter approach to immigration. Being the antagonist of the far right who are always railing against immigrants as the cause of all evil we had been lured into the corner of those who seemed to have no eye for the negatives of unrestricted immigration.

This made it easier to frame us as naïve and not willing to defend the interest of 'the proper Dutchman'. We do see the problems that uncontrolled immigration brings to our cities and are willing and able to address them.

We have also reclaimed the definition of national pride and 'Dutchness', for lack of a better word. The far right, both in The Netherlands and elsewhere have been very successful in using (ancient) national symbols in their campaigns. They have taken ownership of national histories and destinies, parading with national flags and stating that they are the true defenders of national interests. By definition this means that their opponents are not frivolously neglecting the needs of 'the real Dutch' in our cosmopolitan illusions or even being part of an evil conspiracy of the 'élite'. No thank you. The Dutch national flag, next to the EU one, is now proudly exhibited at all our events and as far as we are concerned this stands for tolerance, respect for the rule of law and enthusiasm for our country as an

innovative place of well-being for all who reside there.

This became all the more obvious when mid September, during a far right demonstration in The Hague anti-immigrant protesters assaulted the D66 Party office, broke the windows and torched the place all the while sporting nationalist flags and screaming 'We are The Netherlands!'. Rob Jetten, our party leader, stood in the debris talking to national and international journalists less than an hour after the event rejecting the claim that this attack had anything to do with 'loving your country'. "This is not The Netherlands." The image was clear. The stakes in this election were also clear, both to our 'old' and our 'new' voters.

The most important lesson we learned from our evaluation was: we have to stop preaching, stop being academic smart asses with our 'I told you so-comments', we have to be more practical in our solutions and much more positive in our tone of voice.

Hence the *Het kan wèl!* (Yes, we can) slogan. When our political opponents in this election campaigned with doom ours was a message of optimism.

This made for a much more coherent campaign where Jetten's character blended in seamlessly with the message. A 38-year-old, athletic and optimistic guy; young enough to appeal to new voters and experienced enough as a former cabinet minister for climate and energy and vice prime minister to be trustworthy in the eyes of others. There was an effortlessness to the whole campaign that contrasted with the kerfuffle our opponents had to deal with. Making it look easy is a lot of work, mind yoTV

TV QUIZ

There's also an element of luck. Some fortunate TV moments helped, both during televised debates where Jetten exceeded expectations and as a participant in the very popular TV quiz *The smartest one*. This was filmed before the elections were called but aired in the final weeks of the campaign. Rob made it all the way to the last episode, gracefully losing the finals – nobody likes a smart ass – and sharing his plans to marry his boyfriend next year. Luck and happiness personified.

Annelou van Egmond was on the National Board of D66 from 2011 to 2017, responsible for campaigns. From 2017 to 2024 she was a vice-president of ALDE, and now works on fund raising for D66 and the negotiations to build the next coalition government

REGENERATION GAP

Seafarer Roz Savage MP argues that Britain needs more than net zero targets and Westminster masterplans – it needs a great regeneration of nature, communities, economy and democracy

When I rowed across three oceans, I had no wi-fi, no online shopping, no screens, and no distractions – just water, sky, wind, salt, and the support of text messages to my satellite phone from friends and strangers back on shore.

In those days I felt deeply alive, intimately connected to nature, and brimming with purpose. It taught me something simple: once basic needs are met, real joy and meaning often come from the non-material, from relationship, from place, from purpose.

Yet most of our politics is structured the opposite way: material accumulation, GDP growth, high consumption. I'd like to advocate instead for regeneration, across multiple domains – regeneration of nature, our communities, our economy, and our beleaguered democracy. Regeneration is a richer, more resonant, more hopeful idea than sustainability or net zero. It promises renewal, agency, dignity and rootedness.

LIBERAL MISSION

This is a liberal mission, to restore flourishing at every scale. But to do so, we must shift how we prioritise nature, communities, livelihoods and power.

Too often, especially under the current government, political discourse reduces “green policy” to climate targets, carbon budgets and large infrastructure such as carbon capture or mega solar farms.

Those are part of the picture, of course, but they leave out nature, which is a vital and indispensable part of the equation, the other side of the climate coin.

Climate change destroys nature, yes, but destroying nature affects climate – and conversely, restoring nature helps the climate to self-regulate.

Trees, soils, rivers, wetlands, meadows, hedgerows and pollinators – all of these are the living systems that clean water, sequester carbon, regulate flooding, support food and sustain biodiversity.

Nature is not ornamental. It is material. And people experience it as life-enhancing when they tune into its benefits and beauty – in patches of urban green, in gardens, through trips to the countryside – or, for those of us fortunate enough to live in a rural setting, as the backdrop to our daily lives.

That is why the gateway drug to caring about our environment is nature, not climate. When you restore a river,

create a wildflower meadow, gain access to a patch of woodland, or widen a local walking trail, people see, smell and feel the benefit. That reconnection builds ownership and pride.

The Climate and Nature Bill (which I sponsored in Parliament last January) is an important step. It explicitly links climate targets and nature recovery, rather than treating them as separate silos. Too many laws treat forests and wetlands as secondary to decarbonisation, when in fact they are both essential.

Regeneration means going beyond grand schemes to the local grassroots – literally. It means community rewilding projects, local river restorations, tree planting by residents, pocket meadows, urban orchards, rewilded verges and securing rights of access for everyone. It means tackling litter, fly-tipping and broken benches – not just as municipal nuisances, but as indicators of how little we value our places.

Community clean-ups are acts of civic care and nature regeneration together. They rebuild dignity in public space.

We must make nature accessible. According to Natural England, 38% of the population in England do not have access to a green space, or a ‘blue’ space like a river or lake, within a 15-minute walk of their home. This year's People and Nature Survey for England found that around a third of people had not visited a green and natural space in the previous 14 days, yet we know that time in nature is good for both physical and mental health.

Too many people live in concrete deserts, unable to reach a patch of wildness within affordable transport. We must expand small nature reserves in towns, subsidised transport to countryside green spaces and legal protections for green corridors in all development. The goal: everyone, however deprived their postcode, must have nature nearby.

Regeneration is not only ecological – it is social. In

many parts of Britain, communities have been hollowed out: shops closed, high streets boarded up, networks dissolving, people disconnected. We have a crisis of loneliness. That is not inevitable. It can be reversed – while also reducing environmental impact.

Tool shares, repair cafés, community gardens, bike- and seed-swaps, repair hubs and local allotments – these are the backbone of renewal and connection.

They are bottom-up infrastructure for autonomy, resilience and waste reduction. A community repair hub means your

Too many people live in concrete deserts, unable to reach a patch of wildness within affordable transport



broken toaster need not be discarded. Tool shares mean you do not need to own a drill you will use twice a year. A garden plot means neighbours share food, compost, conversation, education. These are also pro-poor: low-cost, low-carbon, high dignity.

But they need support: small grants, flexible regulation, seed (no pun intended) funding and local facilitation.

The Liberal Democrat way is decentralised: give power to local councils, community groups and cooperatives – not central mandates. Let communities define their priorities, then back them with microfunding. The multiplier effect is extraordinary: a few hundred pounds invested in a tool-share often yields thousands of pounds in reuse, repair, skill-building, reduced waste and social capital.

When people are meaningfully involved in regenerating their community, they build belonging. Alienation diminishes. The tendency toward polarisation softens. Instead of being passive consumers, people become active stewards.

Regeneration must include the economy – but not as before. We must move toward a post-growth paradigm that respects ecological limits while enabling human flourishing.

I want to be clear: I'm not saying that we can't have economic growth without increasing our usage of energy and materials - I'm just saying that we never have, in the entire history of humankind. We have never yet decoupled growth from material throughput at scale. That means we must shift the priorities: instead of GDP first, we need to put well-being and ecological balance first.

This government uses "growth" as a proxy for rising living standards. Yet in the last 40 years much of the economic gain has gone to the top one per cent. According to ONS data, the wealthiest one per cent of households hold about 10 per cent of all household wealth – roughly the same share as the poorest 50 per cent combined. That is not a minor detail, it is a defining structural flaw that is creating space for the rhetoric of the far right.

Regeneration must redistribute – not through taxing the rich (although there is a strong moral case for this), but by unlocking the potential of millions of small entrepreneurs, cooperatives and micro-businesses.

Research consistently shows that job satisfaction and sense of

purpose are often higher among self-employed people and those in small firms than in large corporations. People thrive when they experience autonomy, variety, meaning.

So our goals: remove blocks to entry – excessive red tape, gatekeeping regulations, tax complexity, lack of access to capital – and instead provide microfinance, low-overhead workspace, mentorship, subsidised business accelerators and community enterprise hubs. Support local supply chains, local procurement, social enterprises and cooperatives. Let towns build local manufacturing, repair economies and artisan clusters. Let every place, right across the UK, have the tools to generate its own livelihoods. That is regeneration in economic form.

If 1,000 small firms launch and survive in struggling towns, they hire locally, keep multiplier spend local and anchor people instead of chasing capital into cities. That is distributed, resilient wealth.

CRISIS OF TRUST

Political regeneration must go hand in hand with ecological, social and economic renewal. The current crisis of trust in institutions stems partly from seeing government as distant, overbearing, bureaucratic and unaccountable.

The liberal answer is to re-imagine government as enabler, not blocker. Regulation should be light-touch, funding should empower communities, oversight should be local and transparent. For example, rather than centrally dictating which community projects receive grants, a government could allocate broad resources to local authorities, letting them use their discretion within frameworks. Less micromanagement, more trust.

When you put modest capital and support in the hands of energetic people who currently have little opportunity, you get a high multiplier. A community can turn a £5,000 grant into a thriving repair hub, garden project or renewable microgrid that pays dividends in utility savings, local jobs, skills and health.

Such bottom-up investment rebuilds trust: people see that their ideas are taken seriously, that their voices and their places matter. This is decentralised democracy and participatory power. Democracy from the ground up.

To make it real, we need new political infrastructure:



community assemblies, participatory budgeting, co-management of green spaces, local regeneration agencies with real authority and devolved decision-making on environment, planning, energy and transport.

Spending months alone at sea changed my understanding of what matters. Out on the ocean, stripped of so-called civilisation and distraction, I learned self-reliance, patience and humility. I also learned how precious connection is – the short messages from friends on shore, the quiet knowledge of being supported.

It is impossible to tell that story without recognising a darker parallel. I chose to cross oceans in a small boat, setting world records and winning plaudits. Others, forced by desperation, cross the Channel in small boats and meet only suspicion and hostility. That contrast should shame us – and remind us that dignity and safety are preconditions for hope.

My voyages taught me something political. Beyond shelter, food and water, what sustains people is belonging, purpose, and the beauty of the natural world. Those are not luxuries, they are the conditions of a flourishing life. No amount of material stuff can substitute for them.

Regeneration is about building those conditions for everyone. It is about safe homes and secure food supplies. It is about education and access to nature. It is about empowering people to create, to connect, and to shape their world. That is how we measure real progress – not by the tonnage of goods consumed but by the depth of lives fulfilled.

Regeneration means renewal at every scale – nature, community, economy, democracy. It is not a top-down diktat. It is a plural, dynamic, bottom-up blossoming. We rebuild natural resilience, civic pride and democratic trust not by imposing grand schemes from Westminster but by empowering local people, projects and places.

The Liberal Democrat way is decentralised, participatory and facilitative. We trust citizens, we devolve authority, we support experimentation, we fund audacious ideas at micro scale. We scaffold, we monitor, we scale what works – not by coercion, but by inspiring.

Imagine a Britain where every community has the tools to repair, grow, renew and shape its own future, where people feel agency over their place, where nature is embedded in everyday life, where small enterprise and creativity flourish, and where democracy is lived, not just voted for every few years.

This is the great regeneration. As Lib Dems we have the

heritage, the ideas and the moral purpose. Let us begin the long work of renewal, from the ground up – and in doing so revive a Britain people cherish, not endure. Let us plant the seeds of flourishing together.

Roz Savage is the Liberal Democrat MP for the South Cotswolds

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LIBG also publishes a free online magazine – InterLib – which carries information on liberal activities worldwide.

EATING THE BIG APPLE

The triumph of democratic socialist Zoran Mamdani as New York's mayoral race has not been grasped by the Democrat establishment, says Rebecca Tinsley

"Trump and his Republican puppets call us communist terrorists whatever we do, so we might as well choose the guy who inspires young people and the working class."

So says a stalwart of Democrats Abroad in London. She shrugs off the suggestion that New York's new mayor, Zoran Mamdani, will frighten moderate voters.

But New York City is not America, so the triumphs in Virginia and New Jersey were more significant, although they attracted fewer eyeballs beyond the USA. Equally important were the defeat of Republicans' gerrymandering propositions.

FATAL PATTERN

Democrats boasted that Trump Talk was on trial nationwide. Their complacency is worrying, and part of a fatal pattern: they previously assumed that popular anger at Republican anti-choice policies would persist. The result was losing the House of Representatives and Kamala Harris's failed presidential run.

There were six days of party unity. The chasm within the Democratic Party reappeared less than a week after Mamdani was elected: eight Democrats in Congress joined Republicans in ending the government shutdown.

Progressive Democrats are furious, wanting Trump to "own this hot mess". Those who cling to a sentimental yearning for bipartisanship (seen as weakness by the Republicans) were Dick Durbin of Illinois, 80; Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, 78; Angus King of Maine, 81; Jacky Rosen of Nevada, 68; both Tim Kaine of Virginia and Maggie Hassan of New Hampshire, 67. Cathy Cortez Masto, Nevada, 61 - concerned Vegas is hit by cancelled flights - and increasingly Trumpy John Fetterman of Pennsylvania.

Meanwhile, Senator Chuck Schumer's recent recruits to leadership are Janet Mills, 77, in Maine; Sherrod Brown, 73, in Ohio; and Roy Cooper, 68, in North Carolina.

Democrats: where's the love? Exit polls found that although



people voted to defeat Republican candidates and propositions, the Democrats are not popular. Mamdani is far from corporate-aligned establishment figures like Schumer, Pelosi, Jeffries, and Hilary. Clinton. Instead of Hillary's 20-point policy papers, Mamdani borrowed from Trump's playbook: choose two or three grievances, use simple language, and offer simplistic solutions.

The 34-year-old Mamdani achieved recognition by posting short videos walking the city, interviewing residents about their concerns. Meanwhile, no one knew the policies of his main challenger, former governor Andrew Cuomo. His corporate backers threw \$40m at the race, funding adverts linking Mamdani to 9/11. Yet, Mamdani spent less than \$10m, and had 90,000 volunteers.

Instead of cosy up to Wall Street, Mamdani proposed free bus travel, public child-care, LGBTQ rights, subsidised food stores in deprived areas, and rent freezes on stabilised housing.

Endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America, he supported increases in corporation taxes and on people earning more than \$1m a year. (He didn't poll well on the Upper East Side of Manhattan). In America this amounts to Marxism.

Although Mamdani comes across as a down to earth, he did not

emerge from the mean streets of Queens. His mother is the award-winning filmmaker Mira Nair, and his father Mahmood is a professor at Columbia University. He was born in Uganda and he is married to the distinguished artist, Rama Duwaji (whose work appears at Tate Modern).

ROTTEN APPLE

Someone needs to do something about New York City. Covid-19 reduced its tax base as companies moved to low tax places like Nashville, or went virtual. Restaurants, cafes and stores closed for good. Commuters who have used the subway all their lives now avoid it because of the vulnerable people with



the way for a presidential candidate like the tough-talking JB Pritzker, the governor of Illinois, who looks reassuringly like a sanitation worker (although he's a billionaire), unlike the other front runner, California governor Gavin Newsom, who has the aura of a movie star. However, your correspondent elicited laughter from a battle-worn Colorado Democrat when Pritzker's name was mentioned:

"America isn't ready for a Jewish president, any more than voters will accept a woman."

Across the USA, Republicans were also road-testing Trump Talk in these elections, while avoiding mentioning the current occupant of the White House. They threw everything at restricting the ability of voters to cast ballots. In Maine, they proposed reducing early voting by two days, requiring photo ID, banning pre-paid return envelopes and limiting ballot drop boxes, (probably in districts with Black and other ethnic groups). In effect, Maine Republicans were asking if voters believe Trump's claims of election fraud. The measures were defeated with 64% saying "nope".

Local posts known as 'down ballot' are also important, although the Democrats have overlooked them until recently. Those elected to school boards can ban books by ethnic minorities and women, fire gay teachers, and demand the teaching of creationist theories – and they do this, all over America.

A Democrat in Virginia, known to your correspondent, was in a vicious and expensive battle for her daughter's school board. She had to pay for TV advertising, and received threats to her safety. In the end she was defeated because she was pro-choice.

The New Jersey governor race tested Trump Talk, but not

Trump. The Republican, Jack Ciattarelli, didn't mention the president but he aligned himself with anti-vaccine groups. The Democrat, Representative Mikie Sherrill, successfully campaigned on the cost of energy, pointing the finger at Trump. She got 56% of the vote to Ciattarelli's 43% on a high turnout. Significantly, the heavily Hispanic Passaic County which went for Trump by three points last year switched to Sherrill, who won by 15 points.

In the Washington DC suburbs of Virginia, there are thousands of federal employees, an endangered species, terrorised by Musk acolytes. Democrat Abigail Spanberger campaigned on the cost of living, getting 56% of the vote to the Republican's 42%. (Less discussed is that the Republican, Winsome Earle-Sears, is Black, and although she's MAGA, MAGA won't vote for a Black woman).

In 2024, Trump won among non-college educated Virginians by 19 points: now, the Democrats are level pegging in this demographic.

In California, Newsom's ballot initiative creating five new Democrat districts was passed with 64%, defying the Republicans' campaign of gerrymandering in 20 states (and counting). Newsom has raised \$114m in the past three months, \$38m of which comes from small donors in response to his emails, texts and mocking social media presence.

mental health issues who seek shelter there. With uncollected garbage piled on the sidewalks, and the whiff of dope in the air, it resembles Blade Runner more than On the Town these days.

Yet, for Mamdani to achieve his aims, he needs the cooperation of the state governor, Kathy Hochul, who refused to endorse him. The post of mayor comes with more megaphone than power.

Mamdani's humiliation of the gerontocratic Democratic National Committee (DNC) vexes the establishment. He exposes their timidity and impotence in the face of Trump's all-day-every-day assaults on the constitution. Most anti-Trump action has been at local level, through non-DNC organisations like Indivisible and the No Kings protest which brought seven million people onto the streets across the country.

Yet, progressive activists should also take note: Mamdani brought the party back to class issues, not the woke warrior race and gender themes.

According to a Democratic activist in Missouri: "Mamdani didn't win because of Socialism, he won because too many voters think the rest of the Democratic Party no longer stands for them."

Grassroots love for Mamdani is not universal. His position on Gaza worries many Jewish Democrats who roll their eyes at the mention of Mamdani; others are fearful of what they perceive as growing American anti-Semitism. It would be more accurate to say it is a return to anti-Semitism which was widespread until the 1970s. The "restricted clientele" signs on hotels all over America applied to Jews as well as African Americans.

If Mamdani's term in office is seen as successful, it may pave

The chasm within the Democratic Party reappeared less than a week after Mamdani was elected



TOO HOLLYWOOD

Is Newsom too Hollywood? Democrats have an abysmal record (Mondale, Dukakis, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton, Harris) in second guessing what “the people we fly over” want in a president.

The Republicans in Congress fear Trump will ‘primary’ them. But after lobbying from Big Farming, they voted against importing Argentine beef (Trump’s gift to soul mate Janvier Milei). Consumers, who buy 80% of their Christmas toys from China, may get a shock on their next trip to Toys R Us, thanks to tariffs. Hence pressure from corporate donors might also outweigh fear of Trump if he is perceived as losing his vote-winning appeal.

However, cases before the Supreme Court should concern Democrats because of their impact on the US constitution. In recent judgments, the ‘supremes’ have allowed the president to expand his power, draining authority from Congress and the court itself. He threatens to remove federal spending from places where people are rude about him, declaring comedians who mock him “illegal”.

His NSPM-7 executive order instructs the FBI to investigate grassroots activism as “domestic terrorism.” He stopped Human Rights Watch submitting evidence gathered in Gaza to the ICC; and a top ICE official says protesters can be arrested for verbally criticising Trump’s mass deportation campaign. None of this is legal, but there hasn’t been a peep of dissent from Republicans, and not much noise from the status quo Democrats.

Trump needs to keep the House, Senate and Supreme Court to achieve his goals, and MAGA is ready to exploit Democrat post-mid-term hubris. As Steve Bannon declared after the vote, Republicans must seize the institutions of government or “we’re all going to jail after 2028.”

Voter suppression will now move into high gear, with ICE

agents at polling places in 2026 and 2028, frightening minority voters. The ‘supremes’ may tell states they no longer need to consider minorities when redistricting, and Trump may declare a state of emergency in the Democrat-leaning places he claims are fixing the vote. The Civil War has never ended, as a friend in Chicago remarked to your correspondent.

And never underestimate Trump’s skill at tapping into dissatisfaction and grievance, even if he doesn’t fix things: his voters don’t expect him to.

A final thought: if Mamdani remains popular and is reasonably successful in New York, Republicans will have to explain to voters why democratic socialism is a terrible idea for the rest of America.

Rebecca Tinsley is founder of Waging Peace



HAS THE FIGHTBACK AGAINST TRUMP STARTED?

Martha Elliott looks at signals that the American public has had enough of its president

Has Trump - and all his toadies in Congress - been trumped by his/their own hubris and refusal to follow the Constitution of the United States and the rule of law?

I think the answer is yes even though there are some who would disagree. So, what's happened?

Since taking office, Trump has issued hundreds of unconstitutional and illegal executive orders. Many of them have been an attempt to seize power for the executive branch (the President) from Congress. For instance, only Congress can tax. It is also Congress' job to regulate tariffs—except in a national emergency. His stated national emergency is trade deficits from other countries. Those tariffs are now being considered by the Supreme Court, which was sceptical of his authority to issue them during oral arguments, but we may not hear their ruling until June, when they typically issue their most controversial cases.

Another of his orders declared emergencies in cities - most of which are Democratic and run by African American mayors - and tried to send in national guard troops.

It is clear that there is no danger or rioting in any of these cities, just citizens expressing their constitutional right to nonviolently express grievances against the government. So far federal judges have blocked Trump's ability to deploy these troops.

And his 'One Big Beautiful Bill' was designed to get controversial budget cuts in things like medical insurance in a bill that also gave tax cuts to billionaires and millionaires.

So far, only the courts have tried to stop the president from enforcing his executive orders because Congress, which is controlled by Republicans, has refused to defy him. And the courts that have defied him are the lower federal courts: the District Court judges and appeals court judges. The US Supreme Court has either delayed the checks on the presidency or even given it more power.

REIGN OF TERROR

Besides the courts, the first concrete sign that Trump and his band of sycophants were about to see their reign of terror come to an end came on Tuesday 4 November, when there was what looked like a blue wave of Democratic victories drowning Republicans.

Virginia elected its first woman governor, 46-year-old Abigail Spanberger by 15 percentage points. Spanberger, a naval academy graduate, said in her acceptance speech "You all chose leadership that will focus relentlessly on what matters most: lowering costs, keeping our communities safe, and strengthening our economy for every Virginian — leadership that will focus on problem solving, not stoking division...."

In nearby New Jersey, 53-year-old Mickie Sherrill was elected by nearly a half million votes She was the first Democratic woman to hold that office. Until results started coming in on election night, it seemed that the race would be close, but she

won a crushing victory of 13 percentage points. Her Republican opponent embraced Trump and said in a debate that to date his first term earned an 'A' grade. Clearly hitching his horse to an increasingly unpopular president was a tactical error.

Both Democratic women won on platforms of opposition to just about everything that Trump has done in his first year in office. They were freshman US Representatives to Congress in 2018 when Democrats took over the House of Representatives. Both had previously held jobs often viewed as masculine: Sherrill, a navy helicopter pilot and Spanberger, a CIA agent. Some political commentators suggest that they had to lean on their former national services. Perhaps because it is often an old boys' network that helps pick candidates.

Of course, since this was an off-year election that typically doesn't attract a huge voter turnout, the old boys might have set them up as sacrificial lambs. Perhaps they unknowingly handed over an anti-Trump victory to both women candidates.

Of course, if you look across the Hudson to New York City, you see the mayoral victory of 34-year-old Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist whose only political experience was in the state legislature. Although there were many candidates in the Democratic primary race, the election was less competitive, Andrew Cuomo, former New York Governor who resigned in disgrace because of charges of sexual misconduct, and Republican candidate Curtis Sliwah, a founder and executive officer of the former Guardian Angels volunteer anti-crime organisation decades earlier. He garnered less than ten points and in many respects has become a perennial joke in elections.

Both women governors-elect are relative moderates in the Democratic party. So how do you square a young, Democratic Socialist with a slightly older moderate? The answer is simple. They all ran on a platform of affordability in everything from groceries to health insurance to utilities.

Less than a year into Trump's second presidency, they were beating him at his own game. He had run on the untrue premise that President Joseph Biden had mishandled the economy and caused inflation. The truth was that Biden and his cabinet had been able to soften the effects of the disaster that Trump had left with his mishandling of the Covid pandemic.

Mamdani had run on a wide-range platform that included freezing rent prices, building affordable housing, city-owned grocery stores, free buses, and no-cost child care. He had emphasised that New York- and that included all five boroughs - was too expensive and something had to be done to make it more affordable.

Another big victory for Democrats came in California where Proposition 50, that would allow the state to have more congressional districts which were designed to elect Democrats. To understand this, you first have to know that each state has a number of Congress members based on population.

The Constitution requires that there be a national census every ten years so that the number of seats in the House of Representatives can be reapportioned to each state. In the early 20th century, the number of seats in the House was limited to 435. After each state knows how many seats it gets, it has to draw the lines of each district so that they are approximately equal in population. There have been many Supreme Court cases questioning how the lines are drawn. This dates back to the early years of the republic when a district in Massachusetts was drawn to elect Eldridge Gerry. The new district looked a lot like a lizard, and this practice of drawing lines for party gain was called “gerrymandering.”

The Supreme Court has ruled in the past that it was not unconstitutional to draw lines to help one party—with the exception of drawing them to totally exclude one party. However, when lines were drawn to limit minority representation, the court ruled this was unconstitutional.

At present the House has a razor-thin majority of Republicans, and the Senate is 53 to 47, with majority Republicans. Because Trump knew that the party in power often loses the midterm elections, held every two years as opposed to the presidency every four, he asked Texas to redraw the congressional map this year instead of waiting until the 2030 census. It did, and made the lines to favour more Republican representatives. To counter this, California held a vote to allow it to draw new district lines that would give Democrats more seats in Congress. It passed by a wide margin.

All of this needs to be superimposed over the government shut down forced by US Senate Democrats on 1 October. Although both the House and the Senate are controlled by the Republicans, the Senate has a check on the majority party called the filibuster. When this rule is invoked, it takes 60 votes to allow a bill to be voted on.

Democrats said they would keep the government shut down until the Republicans agreed to reinstate the tax supplements for Obamacare that had been increased during Covid. They also wanted to have the Medicaid payments that would have been wiped out in order to offset tax cut for millionaires, billionaires, and corporations.

While the budget bill was going through the congress, Trump spent \$94m to have a military parade to celebrate his birthday. In addition, millions had to be spent to repair the streets of Washington DC torn up by military vehicles. Since returning to office, he has spent nearly 25% of his time golfing, which has cost taxpayers more than \$100m. If you count all the trips to Mar-a-Lago, it's been millions more. Yet the government has laid off hundreds of workers and decimated government programmes designed to help Americans and needy people around the world including children who need vaccines or have been infected by AIDS. He gilded the lily of the White House with gold bathroom fixtures and tore down the East Wing to make way for a 9,000 square foot ballroom - without permits and saying that the White House would not be damaged.

And every time he sends his sons to do a golf course deal with a foreign nation, especially in the Middle East, he gives them special tariff deals and makes millions or billions off the deal, or gets a luxury air force one plane that will cost the taxpayers billions to make suitable for the president's plane.

BIGGEST SCAM

I don't know exactly how much he has personally gained from this presidency, but it is clear that it is the biggest scam in history.

Many Americans are fed up, even his base who are losing from his policies. There have been ;No Kings in America;

protests that meant millions of people took to the streets.

Where I live in rural Maine, citizens line the bridges every Wednesday to protest. People of all ages come out, from toddlers to geriatrics.

Trump's approval ratings have dropped to below 37%, the lowest ever. Although he thought he could wrangle a third, unconstitutional term, it seems more and more unlikely.

But part of the Big Beautiful Bill was to pour billions into the Department of Homeland Security to fund hiring more balaclava-wearing thugs to deport nonviolent, non-criminals off the street. Even the people who voted for him don't like the tactics. All of his policies have tanked in popularity and most have been banned by the federal courts.

The government shutdown lasted 43 days. Neither side appeared to be ready to capitulate. However, eight Democrat senators voted with the Senate Republicans to lift the shutdown.

*Less than a year into
Trump's second presidency,
they were beating him at
his own game*

What's most interesting from that is that Democrats of all regions and political persuasions were livid that their colleagues broke ranks. Perhaps it was because none of the eight were up for reelection in 2026. Perhaps it was because food assistance payments had been cut off or because soldiers and other federal workers such as air traffic controllers were not being paid and others had been laid off without hope of being paid. Some had taken jobs to try to make ends meet.

My hope is that the country realises Trump has been saying: “let them eat cake” when he is making billions off his presidency. He's eroded his base because they are the ones who need health care and food assistance. I hope he and his incompetent lackeys will be out before 2028.

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

GIVE THE HIGH STREETS A HEART

The Liberal Democrat policy paper on high streets and town centres lacks ideas on how to rescue them from decline, says Roger Hayes

I'm sure you all know the perennial problem with teams – there are four members of a team: Anybody; Everybody; Somebody and Nobody. Anybody could have completed the task, so Everybody waited for Somebody to do it, and in the end Nobody did it.

I wonder if we are now witnessing a similar problem with the bland Lib Dem consultation paper on town centres and high streets? Everywhere is declining into Anywhere, while the opportunity to be Somewhere risks ending up Nowhere.

It is not that the party's high streets consultation paper, or that the questions it poses, are wrong – it's that there is very little in there that is new or innovative, but most of all where is the Liberalism? Much of the language reads more like Readers' Digest, or the pages of a Waitrose magazine.

BLEEDING OBVIOUS

It's heavy on sloganeering and stating the bleeding obvious, but is very light on suggesting ideas for betterment, or new policy options for sustainable funding, fair taxation, or, well, anything really. 38 pages that amount to little more than, "High Streets eh, what you goanna do?"

I know we are only half way through the process and no one was expecting a finished piece of work, but frankly the consultation paper begs more questions than it addresses, let alone answers.

The working group is charged with 'developing three headline policies'. I would suggest adding an overarching vision statement that embodies liberal values would also be useful. I'll come on to that shortly.

If we are to avoid our high streets becoming redundant, 'dead-end' cul-de-sacs, and to make sure our town centres do not turn into sideshows instead of being the main event, then a combination of, more of the same, a return to the 1950s and a heavy dollop of wishful thinking will be nowhere near enough.

What is required is a wide range of vibrant, creative, innovation; each eventually and uniquely shaped by local people and businesses; and brought to life by Lib Dem community politics. Here are just a few examples I have been involved with over the years:

Some of you may know Heddon Street, off Regent Street in London, as the location of David Bowie's phone box from the iconic Ziggy Stardust album cover. When the street was pedestrianised 20 years ago I came up with the concept of the street concierge, a single point of drop-off and collection for all the street's deliveries and services. Even Madonna was dropped off there when she visited her favourite London restaurant.

Another idea could be a TownApp for the collective online purchase and delivery from local independent traders. In 1999 I

came up with the towntrip.com concept. Sadly an idea ahead of its time then, but quite achievable now I expect. This would allow small independents and start-ups to have an affordable yet advanced and well promoted online presence, merchandising facility and marketing opportunity, cooperatively owned and managed by those in the town who would benefit.

A flexible and updated reimagining of our 25 year-old Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) could be a good way to reconnect your community by combining local council services with local businesses, cultural, leisure and sporting events, with tourism, visitor attractions, student life and local opportunities. Kingston was the UK's first ever BID and we are now looking at taking the next steps of progress and see our BID expand into a host of new possibilities.

Kingston's 'Voice of the River' initiative has also brought together more than 20 disparate organisations along our reach of the Thames encouraging different councils and riparian owners to work collaboratively with each other and with the many river users, environmental groups and regulatory authorities. Through this we have standardised regulatory practice and enforcement, coordinated environmental protection and enhancement, and brought together dozens of sporting, leisure and educational groups who wouldn't have otherwise talked to each other.

Around the country there will be thousands of ideas like these which the first stage of the working group's thinking should have uncovered and expanded on.

I represent the market bit of an ancient market town. A trading centre for ideas, as much as goods, for almost 2,000 years, the first bridge across the Thames upstream of London, with its Royal Charter dating from King John in 1200 and the home of aircraft manufacturer., among so many innovations over the years. Kingston has always been much, much more than a shopping centre. Yet it is alarming how often over the past half century we have had stand against the conservative urge to dumb it down and concentrate on private interests over public good – and the campaign goes on.

These have been some of the lessons I believe we have learned, the opportunities we have grasped and, with sweat and determination, that has built the strong and successful community we have today. People often say: "Oh, it's alright for you in Kingston you have ... [insert your envy of choice]". We aren't special, we have no magic wand, everything has come from bold ideas, hard work and obstinacy, and, essentially, people working together.

I think the party could do worse than to follow the Kingston model. Not to copy what we have done, you must all do what is best and right in your unique circumstances, but to adopt and

adapt our methodology.

If we are to inspire our members, and in turn get them to inspire and campaign with their local communities, then we need to enthuse the debate with ideas and leadership, not just a produce a list of (rather obvious) questions and ask others to do the heavy lifting.

I am sure the party is quite capable of offering something new, different

and exciting so, to help the debate along, how about these as an outline for the three headline policies the working group is charged with developing. Three big policy areas from which a host of specifics could be hung, and from which a myriad of uniquely local examples can be developed.

First, every town and community will be engaged, encouraged and enabled to create and maintain a fair and sustainable economy based on local needs, desires and talents and supported by fair funding and just taxation. Long-outdated business rates will be replaced by a Commercial Landowner Levy based on updated valuations, and supported by non-competitive capital investment, infrastructure and improvement funding fairly apportioned at regional and local levels.

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

Second, liberals believe that all communities should be supportive, sustainable and safe. All community policy areas must ensure our town and village centres are welcoming to visitors as well as locals, helpful and supportive of all in need whatever their situation. All places need to be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and therefore policies must be holistic and do the joined-up thinking. Everyone should feel safe and secure whoever they are, wherever they are and whenever they are there.

Third, sustainability needs to feature as part of any proposals. New developments, or redevelopment, and the massive task of retrofitting existing property must all form part of providing resilient, affordable and climate-conscious environments, sustainable for the people, wildlife and nature they serve... and all uniquely shaped, formed and maintained by the people who live, work, play, visit, study and make their lives there.

If the working party can use it, here's how I might have introduced the consultation document ...

Let's start with an acronym to really make our high streets and town centres the HEARTS of our communities – home, health and help; employ, entertain and educate; arts, architecture and articulating our aspirations; retail, rates and renewal; travel, trade and trust; sustainable, safe and special

In a Liberal society our town and village centres and local high streets will be the HEARTS of our communities:

H – they will provide our homes, our health services, wellbeing and support networks that offer help and mutual aid on a wide variety of matters and interests;

E – they will employ us and inspire us and enable entrepreneurial opportunities; entertain us and stretch our imaginations; and extend our skills and interests, and educate and inform us throughout our lives;

A – they will offer opportunities for art, culture and creative pursuits; conserving the best architecture and heritage from the

We need to enthuse the debate with ideas and leadership, not just a produce a list of (rather obvious) questions and ask others to do the heavy lifting

past as well as encouraging the very best for the future; and importantly, they will help articulate and embody our aspirations for the future and the generations yet to come – done by us and not to us;

R – retail, and all local trades, local crafts and manufacturing, and community and professional services should all be cooperating across a local area. Rates and commercial levies may be directed nationally and regionally, but they should never be dictated or controlled beyond the reach and democratic influence of the local people they serve. Local and regional planning, renewal and development should always be a bottom up, engaged and collaborative process and, in this regard, what Labour is currently proposing may prove to be far worse than anything we feared under the Tories

T – our centres can only ever serve local people if we are able to travel easily to them, through and between them. Active travel and public transport options must be conveniently and affordably available where people choose to live, not just in big cities; our High Street and markets must trade in ideas and cultural enrichment as much as in goods and services; and people must be able to trust the value, provenance, authenticity and regulation of everything on offer and those who trade there

S – sustainable and safe have been addressed above but, to end with, every town, every village, every centre, hub and High Street should be special. These are our spaces. They speak to us and for us, and they are the embodiment and expression of those who live and choose to be a part of each community.

For Liberal community politics to work well we need to meet people where they are, in their communities. A harmonious, supportive, diverse and integrated community is the essence of a Liberal society.

For it to work well all its citizens should be encouraged to come together, and feel welcome in, any part of our town centres and high streets, and to feel, and be, safe when they do. If our centres are to be the beating hearts of their communities once again then all the community must want to be there, and not just for economic reasons but for all life's fulfilling and sustaining needs. Anywhere is not good enough, we should all live somewhere, and somewhere should be our home. That's the Liberal society I've been trying to build in Kingston. One day maybe ...

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

MISSING MEMBERS

Why do the Liberal Democrats pay so little attention to membership? wonders Tad Jones

When we debated amending the constitution earlier in the year, I thought I should probably take a look at it before I voted. It didn't take long before I came to something in the objects that didn't sit quite right with me, more specifically something seemed to be missing. And it's not just missing from the constitution but from the party more widely.

The first article refers to pursuing the objects set forth in the five lengthy paragraphs of the preamble, and to getting people elected. Essentially, we have liberal values and will get people elected to pursue those values.

Regional constitutions get a bit more specific, adding the aims of supporting local groups, promoting diversity, and contributing to policy. The objects stated in the model local party constitution get quite detailed in having seven sub-clauses on what local parties should do in pursuit of our values. The problem is that we seem to have forgotten that political parties are made up of people.

Only clause 3.1b(ii) of the model local party constitution really addresses this, saying we should recruit and retain party members.

That's it. There's nothing else really on how we treat our most valuable resource, our activists. My region did a survey of local party chairs a few years back asking them what they thought they needed to succeed. Some mentioned training in campaign methods, a few asked for help with fundraising, but almost all thought the most significant barrier to success was not having enough activists. If that's the case, why do we place so little value on work that encourages members to become active in the party and their communities?

With party training, there appears to be a preference for sessions on technical aspects of campaigning rather than building teams. When we do have training on membership development, the main message is that local parties should be checking Lighthouse regularly, contacting new and lapsing members and maybe doing a few social events.

In terms of the party structures, the ones with the most clout to my mind are the campaigns department at HQ and ALDC. Both with a strong focus on winning elections.

But how well resourced is the team working on membership development? Even with internal party slogans like "Pick a ward and win it", and "Where we work we win", the team is either absent or secondary to success. Think of the most engaged or ambitious member of your local party, and I bet you're not thinking of the membership secretary.

Our members are already doing more than meeting us halfway in joining the party, we need to be reaching out to them more effectively to get as many engaged in political life as Liberal Democrats.

What we should have learned from the surge in membership after Brexit is that members rarely become spontaneously active, and if they don't feel engaged they will likely drift away. Although the numbers are that less than 1% of the population become party members and perhaps 10% of those get active, the Brexit membership surge (in addition to the rise of UKIP/

Reform, SNP after the referendum, and the enthusiasm in response to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership) shows there is a greater appetite for political engagement than we might think. More than one million people marched to stop the war in 2003. The Brexit petition attracted six million signatures. We can get more people involved if we get our approach right. There is low hanging fruit out there, and we are refusing to pick it.

Perhaps it's natural for liberals who place a premium on individual liberty to overlook the importance of the group. However, if you think about it, the whole point of being in a political party is not that we have values; it is that we can enact those values together. Together we have more impact than a bunch of unconnected people with a liberal mindset.

The last election showed we have a lot going for us as a party. We have a great philosophy, attractive policies, impressive candidates, and the party has developed the skills and strategy to challenge the two-party system. Changing the culture towards developing activists and teams may help us take the party to the next level.

Tad Jones has been a Liberal Democrat activist and candidate in Nottinghamshire for 18 years

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WHEN TO FLY A FLAG

Labour imitates those spreading hate about asylum seekers instead of standing up to them, finds Gary Malcolm

Ever since asylum hotels made the news with the associated coverage on TV, a number of my friends and colleagues have said they feel less safe.

There are many people in attendance at protests or riots who hide behind masks and balaclavas while chanting their racist slogans. With the hate filled comments from many right-wing political parties this adds to the fear that has increased recently. I get that sense of fear I had when I was caught up in the Ealing riots in 2011. I felt trapped, as people set bins alight and was lucky to escape when a gang of people threw bottles at my head.

The Enoch Powell stickers seen in Ealing recently give rise to the fact we are seeing more people who clearly are hateful of others who are not white. Over the past few weeks more of the stickers have been posted and I have reported a possible suspect to the police. I even knocked on the person's door but no one answered.

Ealing is a melting pot for different cultures – there should be no place for hate in our society.

Being patriotic is not just about flying the flag but is also about what a person does in their community like helping to drive a vulnerable patient to the hospital, helping someone inform to cross the road when it is icy or volunteering at an Ealing food bank.

The prime minister and previous home secretary should not pander to the extremists by out-doing each other about how many flags they have up in their home but instead make a clear public statement on TV that terrorising asylum seekers is not acceptable. The new home secretary appears to be speaking like an old right wing Conservative government would have.

The police need to get on and arrest those shown to be racist or involved in violence, graffiti or criminal damage of property and our public spaces.

The prime minister needs to get a backbone.

The truth is that asylum hotels are a massive cost to the taxpayer, and are a shameful legacy of the Conservatives. Liberal Democrats have long called to end their use. The asylum backlog has been far too large for far too long, and the Labour government needs to urgently get a grip on this crisis - stopping dangerous channel crossings and speeding up asylum processing to bring down the backlog and end hotel use once and for all.

But asylum seekers awaiting a decision should not be terrorised. Full stop.

What I want to see is the Government speeding up the processing of applications so that those with no right to be here are sent back swiftly and those who do have a valid claim can get a job, integrate and contribute to the community.

As we saw in Epping the far right will seek to take advantage of peaceful protests for their own aims - spreading fear and hatred. At these types of events we so often see damage to local businesses such as shops or damage to local infrastructure.

We will always defend the right to peaceful protest, but we must stop the intimidation from those causing fear in person or



on social media and those looking to incite fear. Far-right extremists are seeking to undermine our British values of decency, tolerance and respect for the rule of law. We saw it last year in the lawless riots following the horrific murders in Southport. Liberal Democrats will always stand firm against hate, violence and racism in all its forms.

On the related topic of flags, the Union Jack and St George's Cross are meant to be symbols of national pride and unity. Recently though we have seen many people defacing flags or placing them in positions to create disharmony. Any abuse or racism is totally unacceptable.

While the prime minister seems to be either turning a blind eye to these issues, or in some cases to be supporting those with extreme views, we must ensure that those people creating disharmony are arrested and dealt with by the courts.

As a Liberal Democrat politician, I believe decent politicians should be standing up and calling for the many bigoted views to be challenged so we can bring our society closer and make it safer.

Gary Malcolm is the Liberal Democrat leader of the opposition in Ealing

SEND FOR A TASK FORCE

The Liberal Democrats should move into areas where they are unrepresented, says Sophie Layton

Each of our national, traditional parties has its own unique stories about their history and journeys through British politics. The Liberal Democrats are included – after entering the Coalition 15 years ago, wiped out a decade ago, and struggling to re-find our feet until 2024, the party has undergone a significant resurgence. Even now, during a time of such turbulence in the political landscape, the party tends to enjoy modest gains in council by-elections and came second in this year's local elections.

That's the headline, anyway. But despite those very significant developments, it can often hide the other reality. Our progress is minuscule, on a grand scale. According to the current Nowcast predictions, the party would enjoy a very modest net gain of three MPs if a general election were held tomorrow.

Council by-elections with 40%, 45%, 50% or more voting for the Liberal Democrats can be paired with others with 5%, 4%, 2% or even less for our candidates. While this isn't exactly abnormal for any party, the trend is often replicated in parliamentary elections, especially in Labour-held areas.

Take the Runcorn & Helsby by-election, for example. Labour won the general election with 52.9% of the vote, before it was overturned by Reform UK with 38.72%. And the Liberal Democrats? 5.1% and 2.88%, respectively.

NEWFOUND STRENGTH

It can be easy to disregard such results as 'not a Liberal Democrat area', or choosing to focus where we are winning. But given the potential in our party, the newfound strength of the parliamentary party, our positioning largely consistent with popular views of the public, we should be driving these numbers higher.

Looking at the areas in which the party achieved its most successful results in 2024, the areas we saw such a surge in May, and the type of by-elections we are winning, compared to those we are not; there is a general, and somewhat unsurprising, correlation: The Liberal Democrats tend to be most successful in areas where we already have a presence, or have a history.

So let's use that logic to look at the reciprocal case – the Liberal Democrats tend to be least successful where we don't already have a presence, or no history. It is this viewpoint that we need to focus most significantly on to start boosting our prospects in a time of significant political change that we simply are not benefitting from as fully as we should.

We pride ourselves on our localism, being the people 'who fix church roofs', and in many cases, this pays off significantly – many of our seats are considered 'safe' because once our candidates are elected, they tend to be entrenched in their communities. And therefore, it's fair to say that without that, people are much less able to appreciate the Liberal Democrats as a force for good, especially given our rarity in the media.

So I've just told you that the Liberal Democrats aren't present everywhere, and being in more places is a good thing – not exactly breaking new ground. I think we need a better acknowledgement of this alongside a tangible plan to turn it

around, and boost our vote share from the most Conservative heartlands to the Brightons, Abderdeens and Bristols of the country.

We need a taskforce, to find our way into these communities where we are not represented or even considered, and to find out why.

Consider it a targeted and long-term canvassing operation. We need to get into these areas and figure out why the everyday voter is lending their loyalties elsewhere – is it they don't like our policies or our people? Is it that they specifically like, or dislike, their local incumbents and will do whatever they can to keep them in, or out? Do they simply not know about the work we're doing and would rather go with the devil they know, or think they know?

Once we know we can start to work on our weaknesses, become a greater part of the communities that don't currently feel that we are the ones for them. If we're not in their local elected offices, then we must work even harder to show them the benefits of having local Liberal Democrats as so many areas have already felt. We can't wait until elections to show up – trust me, that never goes down very well.

The Liberal Democrats are fantastic at representing their local communities. Once we have a few local council seats, we tend to grow our presence significantly. Once we have a strong council presence, we're much more likely to take the constituency. But it's getting those first few council seats that we struggle with so much, and it's here that we need a regimental focus.

Leadership must consider creating a strong initiative to begin this crucial work to make our case well ahead of the game. Hundreds of very safe seats are about to become perilous for their current occupants. We must be primed and ready to take them, even in areas that currently wouldn't give us a second thought.

Sophie Layton is an international political communication graduate from the University of Sheffield

TWO WHEELS BAD

Power-assisted bikes are out of control and a danger to pedestrians, says Ken Gabbott-Rolph

Pedal-assisted bikes are now a major commercial force. Companies like Lime promise low-carbon transport, sustainability, and convenience – and councils, eager to meet environmental and low traffic neighbourhood targets, have embraced them as a solution. But behind the slick marketing and eco-rhetoric, serious concerns are mounting.

Lime may dominate the UK market and promote strong climate credentials, yet key information – such as the number of bikes deployed on our streets – remains hidden. Their self-reported carbon reductions are impossible to verify. Meanwhile, in 2024 alone, Lime paid £51.3m back to its US parent company as a ‘reseller payment’, almost half of its operating costs, while contributing only £1.71m to the UK. For a company that benefits heavily from public space, transparency is the very least we should expect.

Lime stresses recycling, sustainability and reduced emissions – but without clear data, these claims risk sliding into greenwashing.

Each bike contains plastics, silicone, rubber, lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, copper, rare earth elements and PCB components. These materials carry major extraction, manufacturing and transport emissions. Lime refuses to disclose the carbon footprint of the aluminium and steel used in construction, calling it “protected commercial information”. Yet we are expected to take their environmental claims at face value.

Even their new tyre policy omits mention of PFAS, PAHs and 6PPD-quinone – chemicals linked to toxicity and long-term environmental harm. Pedal cycles and walking do not bring these risks.

Anyone walking through Hackney can see the consequences: bikes strewn across pavements and crossings, blocking dropped kerbs and yellow lines, or being ridden through parks and pedestrian areas. The behaviour often mirrors the worst of cycling culture but amplified by the scale of a major commercial fleet.

The Highway Code was updated in 2022 to protect walkers and cyclists, yet in practice has been widely ignored. A proposal by London Councils in 2024 could have empowered boroughs to fine operators for parking breaches and require full data disclosure – but Hackney and Havering chose to cut separate deals, weakening collective leverage. Unsurprisingly, conditions in Hackney have deteriorated further.

A recent question submitted to the Council puts it plainly: “Hackney residents are plagued by underinsured Lime riders speeding and ignoring the highway code on our public parks, pavements and highways. Without docking stations, there is noisy chaos at the designated parking spaces; the agreement with Lime and Voi has not alleviated these issues. What further steps will Hackney Council take?”

So far, we wait for meaningful action.

Lime bikes weigh 38kg – compared with around 9.5kg for a pedal cycle. Their set speed of 15.5 mph means collisions are no small matter. Emergency responders refer to electrically assisted pedal cycle (EAPC)-related crush injuries as “Lime Leg” – a term now cited in Parliament. When uninsured, underage, intoxicated or criminal riders use these bikes, responsibility falls



into a legal grey area. Lime’s insurance must be robust and transparent, matching the operational reality of what is effectively a hire-moped system.

Lime’s glossy “Journey to Net Zero” highlights scooters more than bikes – a convenient deflection from harder truths. Every day, vans and trucks collect, redistribute, and recharge bikes across London. This third-party logistics operation is far from carbon-neutral.

A £2 penalty for bad parking is derisory when wheelchair users, prams and visually impaired pedestrians lose access to pavements. Bikes are routinely dumped in canals and rivers, leaving the Environment Agency and Canal and River Trust (CRT) to fund costly recoveries.

Environmentalists should not be fooled by green branding without evidence. A powerful multinational operating on public land should meet the highest standards of transparency and responsibility.

Here is what must change: EAPCs should carry number plates. Mopeds do – and these bikes perform similarly; fines for Highway Code violations should go directly to Lime. They have the tracking systems to pass them on appropriately; all bikes should end their hire in a physical dock. Pavements must be returned to pedestrians; Councils, park authorities, CRT, EA and Lime need a unified recovery system with enforceable penalties.

Without these steps, Lime will continue to act like an unregulated, private fleet using public space while avoiding responsibility.

Separate from EAPCs, the surge in uninsured, unregistered delivery riders speeding through parks and pavements poses its own urgent danger. These motorbikes – often travelling at 40mph through pedestrian zones – are a direct result of exploitative pay-per-delivery models. London Fields appears so frequently in routing apps that it is barely recognised as a park.

Legislation must break the link between speed, risk and earnings. Until then, parks will remain unsafe – and even my border collie knows it.

Ken Gabbott-Rolph is Secretary of Hackney Liberal Democrats

HARD ROAD TO KINDNESS

Compassion is not weakness but rather the foundation of liberal politics, argues Mathew Hulbert

There's a certain sneer you hear too often in politics these days-that compassion is naive, that empathy is indulgent, that to care too deeply is somehow to be unserious.

It's nonsense, of course, but it's dangerous nonsense.

Because when public life loses its heart, when cruelty becomes performative and cynicism becomes a badge of honour, something fundamental breaks.

I've seen it in the way some people talk about refugees, about the sick, about the poor.

We reduce people to problems, not neighbours; to case files, not stories.

Yet the truth is that kindness - real, deliberate, courageous kindness-is the foundation of any politics worth having.

And for Liberals, it's time we stopped apologising for that. We've been taught, subtly and relentlessly, that toughness is what leadership looks like. That strength means keeping emotion at arm's length. That to show empathy is to risk being seen as weak.

It's a lie that corrodes public life-because strength without compassion quickly curdles into cruelty, and compassion without courage never gets the chance to change anything.

GRACE AND COURAGE

The best leaders, in any era, have known how to hold the two together. Jacinda Ardern (when prime minister of New Zealand) did that with grace and courage after the Christchurch terror attack, when she chose to comfort the grieving before she did anything else. It wasn't a photo opportunity; it was leadership rooted in humanity.

Justin Trudeau, too, when the Liberal prime minister of Canada, tried to model a politics that spoke of empathy, reconciliation and inclusion - not always perfectly, it's fair to say, but nonetheless sincerely.

Yet both of them, at different times, faced the backlash that inevitably comes when empathy is mistaken for indulgence, and kindness for weakness.

In a political culture that rewards bluster, the language of care can seem foreign.

But the problem isn't that they cared too much - it's that too many of their opponents cared too little.

What Ardern and Trudeau both showed-and what liberals in Britain must remember is that compassion isn't a substitute for resolve. It's what gives resolve its purpose.

Governing, campaigning, representing: these things are not about winning arguments or scoring points, but about improving lives. You can't do that if you've forgotten how to care.

At the heart of Liberalism lies a simple, yet radical, belief: that every person has worth.

Not worth defined by productivity or status; not contingent on birthplace, income or postcode-but inherent worth as a human being.

That conviction demands compassion, because once you see every individual of equal dignity, indifference becomes impossible.

It's what distinguishes liberalism from the managerial centrism that treats people as data and from authoritarian populism that treats them as threats.

True liberalism, as I understand it, starts with empathy. It asks not only what is fair, but who is left behind.

It recognises that freedom means little without the security to exercise it, and that communities flourish only when the vulnerable are not forgotten.

When we as Lib Dems say "no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity," we're not reciting a slogan - we're affirming that compassion and liberty are inseparable.

Freedom without fairness is hollow. Fairness without empathy is bureaucratic. Compassion, in its deepest sense, is the bridge between them.

In that sense, Ed Davey's leadership of the Liberal Democrats (while far from ideal) has been quietly, and profoundly, shaped by care. Not as a slogan, but as a lived experience.

He has cared for both his mother, when he was still a teenager, and now for his disabled son.

That gives him a moral authority when he speaks about the pressures on family carers or the failures of our social care system-because he isn't theorising; he's lived it.

But what's most important about Ed's example is that his compassion hasn't made him timid. He can still be robust in debate, direct when challenging injustice, and utterly clear-eyed about the failures of government.

His kindness doesn't blunt his edge, it sharpens his purpose. When he speaks about care, he's not talking about sentimentality-he's talking about a social contract that respects every individual's dignity.

That, in essence, is liberal compassion: not the avoidance of difficult conversations, but the insistence that those conversations start from humanity.

Whether we're debating how to save the NHS, how to handle asylum claims, or how to respond to poverty in our own communities, the liberal approach should always begin with the person-not the stereotype.

To borrow from my faith, everyone is my neighbour. That includes the migrant crossing the Channel, the asylum seeker waiting in limbo, the pensioner choosing between heating and eating, the young person priced out of housing, and the carer holding their family together through exhaustion.

Compassion in politics means recognising that all of them-all of us - belong to one moral community.

That doesn't mean avoiding difficult truths. It means approaching them differently. Instead of treating migration as a problem to be solved, we should talk about people's hopes, talents, and the shared humanity that binds us.

Instead of scolding those who are struggling, we should ask what systems failed them-and how we can fix them.

Liberalism, at its best, resists the easy cruelty of scapegoating. It reminds us that moral strength lies not in who we exclude, but in who we include.

And that, in turn, makes for stronger communities - because societies built on fear will always be brittle, while those built on compassion endure.

One of the most damaging myths in public life is that kindness is somehow passive. It isn't. True compassion is active, sometimes confrontational.

It means calling out cruelty, even when it's popular, it means standing up to prejudice in your own ranks, not just your opponents.

And it means staying in difficult conversations long after the angry voices have left the room.

Kindness is also courageous because it asks us to imagine lives other than our own. It demands empathy over ego.

For a politician, that can be exhausting-but it's also transformative. The late, great Charles Kennedy understood that instinctively.

He was often underestimated because he was gentle, because he laughed easily and treated political opponents as people rather than enemies.

Yet he was one of the bravest political leaders of his generation, standing against the invasion of Iraq when it was deeply unfashionable among the political class to do so.

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes it listens. Sometimes it weeps. Sometimes it simply refuses to accept that cruelty is inevitable.

Look at our politics today and you can see how badly that courage is needed. We've built a culture in which cruelty is performative. Ministers compete to sound the harshest on migration or welfare, arguably trying to out-Farage Farage.

Some commentators mock empathy as weakness. The public is encouraged to sneer rather than understand.

The culture doesn't just demean those on the receiving end - it diminishes all of us. It corrodes trust and makes cynicism seem sensible.

The result is a politics that feels cold, transactional, joyless. People retreat, tune out, give up. And when good people withdraw, the bullies win.

Liberals can't afford to mirror that cruelty and, of course, neither would we want to.

We must be the antidote to it. That doesn't mean being soft. It means being strong in a different way: strong enough to resist the easy soundbite, strong enough to hold a line on human dignity even when it's unpopular, strong enough to care.

So how do we reclaim compassion in public life?

Partly it's about language - speaking human again. Remembering that politics is about people, not tribes or metrics.

The local campaign that helps a community save its bus route is an act of compassion. So is the councillor fighting for better mental health provision, or the MP standing up for refugees in a hostile climate.

Kindness - real, deliberate, courageous kindness - is the foundation of any politics worth having

straw in life.

It would see welfare as a safety net and a springboard, housing as a human right, and education as the route to opportunity. And crucially, it would never confuse sympathy with appeasement.

We can and must argue fiercely with those policies hurt people-but we should never forget why we're arguing. Not

to humiliate, but to persuade. Not to divide, but to heal.

My own faith teaches that to love your neighbour is not a suggestion; it's a command. And in public life, that means seeing every person as more than their label.

Faith and liberalism are, to me, not in tension - they're intertwined. Both demand, at their best, that we value every individual, and that we reject the cruelty of indifference.

In an age when populists claim moral clarity while dealing in hatred, liberals must find the courage to speak morally again - not in dogma, but in decency.

We can't fight darkness with cynicism. We fight it with light. When I look around at our movement-at the volunteers who deliver leaflets in the rain, the campaigners who help residents facing eviction, the carers who still show up even when exhausted - I see compassion in action every day. It's not abstract, it's lived.

The next time someone dismisses kindness as weakness, we should smile and prove them wrong. Because kindness isn't the absence of strength; it's its highest form.

It takes strength to care for someone who's struggling. It takes strength to stay hopeful in a cynical age. And it takes immense strength to build a politics that chooses understanding over anger.

So let's reclaim compassion-not as a soft option, but as a moral stance. Let's show that liberals are strong enough to care, brave enough to hope, and determined enough to build a society where everyone-from the most powerful to the most marginalised-is treated with dignity.

Because, in the end, politics isn't about winning the shoutiest argument.

It's about answering the oldest question in humanity: who is my neighbour?

Mathew Hulbert is policy officer for Bosworth Liberal Democrats, a former councillor, and co-host of the Political Frenemies podcast.

SHORT STRAW

But it's also about policy. A compassionate liberalism would treat care - in all its forms - as infrastructure, not as an afterthought. It would invest in carers, value public service, and ensure that no one is left behind because they drew the short

EMBEDDING DEMOCRACY

The UK is vulnerable to extremists without the constitutional democratic safeguards common in Europe, argues Jack Meredith

Liberal democracy is too often spoken of as an idea, rather than an institution. Like Parliament, the courts, or the press, democracy is something built, maintained and vulnerable to attack. And like any institution that works for the common good, it must be defended from those who seek to dismantle it.

History bears witness to extremists who exploit democratic freedoms to gain power, only to dismantle those very freedoms once in control. From the spectre of fascism in Europe to the rise of authoritarian populism today, the pattern is unmistakable. Liberal democracy can no longer afford to remain indifferent to those who seek its destruction.

The challenge, at this point, is definition. Where should the line be drawn between an extremist platform and legitimate radical dissent? Too broad, and we risk stifling democracy; too narrow, and we leave it defenceless.

The solution is to establish transparent, constitutional safeguards that are precise, impartial, and grounded in liberal principles.

I propose a democratic safeguarding mechanism grounded in three principles.

Parties should only be barred if their platforms explicitly advocate abolishing free elections, removing fundamental rights from any group and establishing authoritarian rule, whether fascist, communist, one-party, or theocratic.

Decisions should not be left to ministers. Instead, an independent tribunal, should adjudicate whether a party meets this threshold, ensuring impartiality and protections against governments abusing the mechanism. For example, a wholly new independent tribunal could be appointed by parliament, but only with a cross-party supermajority. In this case, two-thirds of parliament would need to vote on the appointment to ensure no single governing party could stack the tribunal with loyalists.

Additionally, each tribunal member would serve a maximum of 10 years, or two parliamentary terms, to reduce the incentive to seek political favour for reappointment. The removal of tribunal members would also require a two-thirds vote of parliament and only for misconduct or incapacity. The former would need to be considered first by the standing parliamentary committee, with clear evidence presented and the accused member given the right to respond.

The latter would require confirmation from two doctors and a board of medical experts.

To ensure the tribunal's independence, its powers would be enshrined in a constitutional statute, preventing ministers from altering its remit at will. All decisions would be published in full, with reasoning, to avoid hidden political bias. There would also be a limited right of appeal to the Supreme Court, to provide an additional layer of oversight. A standing parliamentary committee, comprising an equal number of representatives from each party, would be created to monitor, but not control or interfere with, the tribunal's operations.

The key purpose is to build appointment and tenure rules that prevent capture by governments while ensuring democratic legitimacy through parliamentary involvement. The tribunal must be both insulated from short-term political pressures and accountable to the rule of law.

Restrictions would only apply if a party's official programme advocates anti-democratic goals, and/or there is evidence of organisation, incitement, or activity aimed at implementing those goals.

Not every anti-democratic party would be banned outright, depending on thresholds. Additional measures could include restricted access to publicly funded broadcast platforms or a mandatory constitutional oath for candidates, affirming commitment to democratic rights.

To ensure these rules remain fair and objective, they should be subject to review every five years by the Supreme Court. A party that reforms, accepts democratic norms, and ceases extremist activity could then re-enter the process. This would prevent bans from becoming permanent exclusion where reform is possible, and it underscores the need for adaptability and evolution in safeguarding democracy.

This theory is grounded in reality. Germany's Basic Law empowers its Constitutional Court to ban parties threatening the "free democratic basic order". Spain has outlawed parties linked to terrorism. And Italy's post-war constitution included explicit bans on fascism. These examples show that liberal democracy can draw firm lines without abandoning pluralism. The alternative would be disastrous: democracies collapsing from within.

Britain, with its unwritten constitution, is vulnerable. There is no entrenched mechanism preventing extremists from gaining a foothold. Our system relies on convention and precedent, both of which have been under strain in recent years. The introduction of a democratic safeguarding mechanism is a necessity to reinforce Britain's liberal democratic tradition, protecting rights, elections and institutions from erosion. This is not illiberalism, but liberalism in practice: defending the framework that allows freedom to flourish.

This proposal rests on a simple truth: safeguarding democracy is not authoritarianism, but democratic self-preservation. To allow those who hold liberal democracy in contempt to use its institutions as tools of its own destruction is a betrayal of liberal principles. If we treat democracy as the institution it is, then, like all institutions serving the common good, it deserves protection. Liberals must be at the forefront of building those safeguards.

Jack Meredith is a member of the Welsh Liberal Democrats and social security spokesperson for the Centre think tank

OBITUARY: MENZIES (MING) CAMPBELL

Michael Meadowcroft pays tribute to a former Liberal Democrat leader

Before politics Ming Campbell had successful careers as an international athlete and as a highly regarded Queens Counsel specialising in criminal law. He became one of the most consistent, solid and reliable Liberal advocates over the past fifty years. He himself described his commitment to Liberalism as deriving as much from instinct as from reason and he recounted how from the age of fifteen he found himself instinctively taking a Liberal stance on all the key political issues, from opposing Suez in 1956, through being appalled by British colonial policy in Central Africa in the early 1960s and supporting Scottish home rule as part of a federal UK within a united Europe and a better managed United Nations underpinning peace and security. From early on in his student life at Glasgow University from 1959 he gained a great reputation as a highly skilful orator and debater.

However his Liberalism was not confined to intellectual pursuits and he accepted office in the Scottish Liberal Party and was the unsuccessful Liberal candidate in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency at the two parliamentary elections in 1974. Two years later he moved to become the prospective for the East Fife constituency, a seat with a Liberal tradition going back over sixty years to the time of Asquith as its MP. In the difficult election of 1979 he came second. Then, with typical persistence, he increased his campaigning in the new North East Fife constituency almost winning the seat in 1983. In 1987 at his fifth election he gained the seat and then held it at every election until his retirement in 2015. It says a great deal for his impact there that it has been held since 2019 by another brilliant Liberal: Wendy Chamberlain.

Ming's key specialism was foreign affairs on which he was the party's distinguished spokesman and on which he was widely acknowledged to be an expert. He was regularly asked to comment on radio and television.

As its spokesman he led the party's principled opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Sometime after the key vote I asked him how he managed to get every Liberal MP to be present and to vote against the war - the only party with such a record. He responded that it was very straightforward: I simply advised them that an invasion would be contrary to international law and for Liberals that was sufficient.

In 2003 Ming became the party's deputy leader under Charles Kennedy. Sadly Kennedy suffered from alcoholism and inevitably he was increasingly erratic and prone to intermittent absences. In such circumstances Ming provided a crucial gravitas and stability. In 2006 Kennedy realised he could not continue and Ming was elected leader against Chris Huhne and Simon Hughes with a substantial majority on the second ballot.

He immediately steadied a party that had been struggling to maintain a reputation as a serious and purposeful presence. However, he was not temperamentally suited to the rough



house of the House of Commons and he struggled to portray himself as a serious and thoughtful party leader, particularly at prime ministers' questions. Although such ageism was completely illegitimate, bit by bit his age became an issue, particularly when a much more youthful David Cameron became Conservative leader.

Ming was typically generous in deciding that the age question was hampering the party and, when in 2006 Gordon Brown put off an expected general election, Ming resigned the leadership, being succeeded by Nick Clegg who was 26 years younger. There is however a strong argument that, had his party been determined enough in its support rather than treating him so very illiberally, Ming's maturity and judgement could well have had a powerful appeal to an electorate facing extreme economic problems.

He retired as an MP at the 2015 election and was immediately made a life peer as Lord Campbell of Pittenweem. In the House of Lords he maintained his distinguished and respected contributions particularly on foreign affairs. His wife Elspeth who was a great companion and supporter died in 2023. Ming died, aged 84, on 26 September 2025.

The Liberal Democrats owe a great deal to Ming Campbell for his over half a century of consistent and dedicated service, for his significant intellectual advocacy of the Liberal position and for his role as the party's leader at a particularly difficult and stressful time. His obituaries in the national press pay tribute to his contributions in other, less political spheres and detail his many honours.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983-87

WHERE WE CAME FROM

David Grace looks at the Liberal Democrat History Group's new booklet on the history of liberal ideas

There's an old joke about a taxi driver who says to his passenger, "Here, I had that Bertrand Russell in my cab and I said to him, 'You're a clever bloke. What's it all about?' and do you know, he couldn't tell me."

If he'd wanted to know about Liberalism he would have done better asking Duncan Brack and his colleagues. This volume, the third edition, based upon original entries in the group's Dictionary of Liberal Thought (now sadly out of print) is a masterly summary of the "The Ideas that built the Liberal Democrats" as its subtitle proclaims. This was pleasing to an unreconstructed Liberal like me as my prejudices have always told me that all the ideas of the party came from liberalism and not social democracy. The pamphlet goes a little way to correcting me.

Unsurprisingly it's a history of liberal ideas, not of parties, but it does explain how parties grew and developed through the evolution of those ideas. The history begins with John Locke and the Whigs and goes right up to the Conservative/Liberal coalition 2010-2015. It is built around six themes: liberty, equality, community, democracy, internationalism and environmentalism.

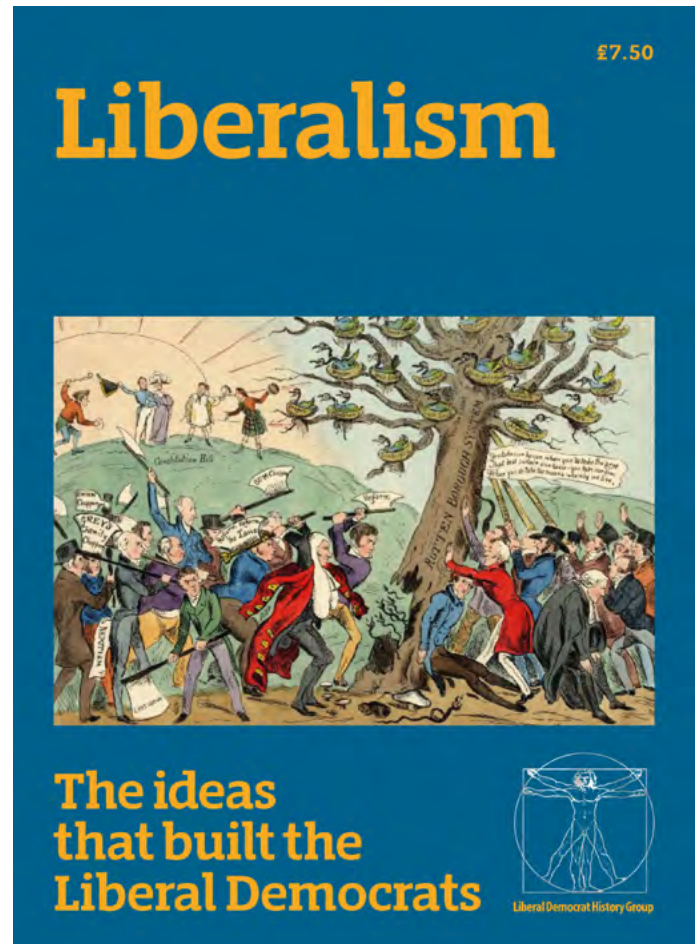
The longest section is the introduction which shows how all these are woven into the fabric of liberalism. It concludes with a short but crucial section on Liberal politics.

We have to decide how to reconcile conflicts between the themes case by case but there will be no general reconciliation. In doing this we will always favour the individual against concentrations of power, whether state or private; we will be open to new thinking, pluralist, seeking co-operation not confrontation. I have to say recent quarrels in the party have not lived up to this description. The section also says we will not be afraid to put forward unpopular policies. I fear that does not characterise the Liberal leadership from 2019 to the present day.

There are sections on Whiggism, Radicalism and Peelites, the three threads which created the Liberal Party in 1859.

These are followed by excellent summaries on free trade, classical liberalism / economic liberalism, social liberalism and the new liberalism, feminism, Keynesianism, co-ownership, localism, devolution and community politics, internationalism and environmentalism and, yes, even social democracy. That last summary mentions the early use of the term by rather left-wing parties across Europe and the later use by a faction of the Labour Party which became the SDP. It is the same term but describes utterly different politics.

This pamphlet is particularly good on the differences between economic liberalism and social liberalism but reminds us what they have in common. On this distinction it rejects absolute opposites and argues that all Liberals find themselves on a spectrum between the two. It rightly asserts that since the early twentieth century the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats have been Social Liberals. I would have liked to see more on the difference between social liberalism and social democracy which is just mentioned. I was glad to see a section on co-



ownership, which dates back Liberal support to John Stuart Mill but which has been curiously absent from party campaigning for at least 40 years.

I have only one criticism. This is very much a history of the evolution of liberalism in the UK. There are occasional references to other countries but nowhere a suggestion that British liberalism ever learned anything from liberal ideas abroad. Maybe that's true but I'm not sure. There is a quote from Lloyd George, "British Liberalism is not going to repeat the errors of continental Liberalism". I don't know if Lloyd George explained what he meant but this pamphlet does not, with very little information about continental liberalism.

● Liberalism, the ideas that built the Liberal Democrats. £7.50.
From: <https://liberalhistory.org.uk/product/liberalism/>

David Grace is a member of the Liberator Collective.

**Downing Street Downfalls:
The Misadventures of
Britain's Prime Minister Since
Thatcher. By Mark Garnett
Agenda, 2025, £20**

It's not a novelty for British prime ministers to leave No 10 without having lost an election: Churchill, Eden, Macmillan and Wilson all did so. What is new, says Mark Garnett, is for them to be bundled out of power when they are still in good health.

He dates this trend to the fall of Thatcher in 1990, and it's tempting to put its acceleration in the years since then down to Brexit. As Garnett says: "The 2016 referendum, and its consequences, accounted directly for Cameron and May; and while Johnson and Truss found means of self-sabotage, arguably neither would have earned the chance to showcase their ineptitude for leadership without Brexit."

But he sees other forces at work. The social upheavals of the Sixties led to a decline in class consciousness and in strong identification with a particular party among voters. In this new world, the popularity and perceived strengths of party leaders became increasingly important, as seen from the fact that Margaret Thatcher is the last party leader to have won an election while being less popular than her main opponent.

This trend has encouraged a presidential style among prime ministers – a style that the public and press seem to have come to expect. When John Major tried to undo some of the changes of Thatcher's Boadicea years and restore the importance of the cabinet, it was widely seen as a sign of weakness.

It's no wonder, then, that politicians, journalists and voters alike now look to a change in prime minister to improve things when a government is in the doldrums. Keir Starmer had better watch out.

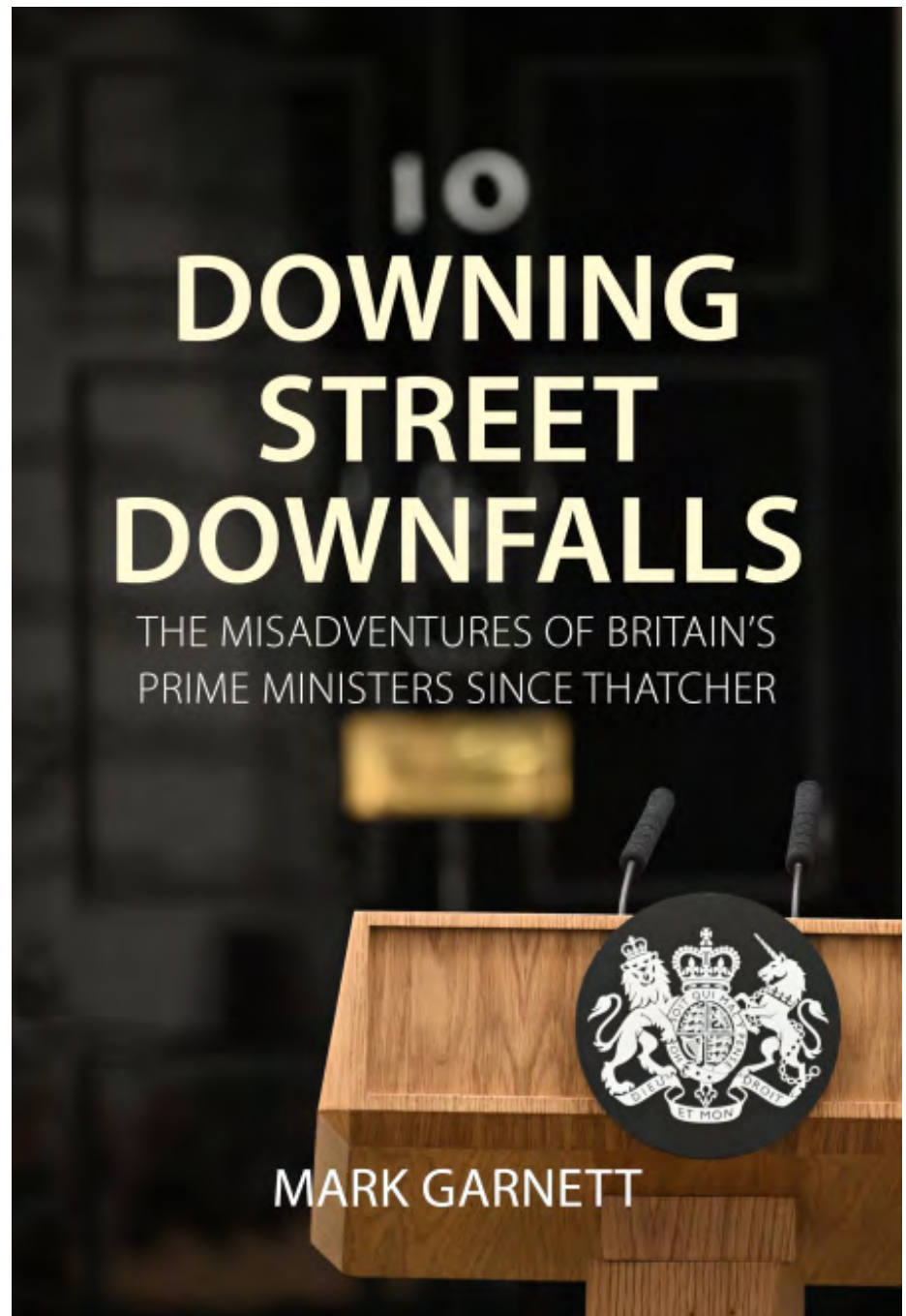
Garnett writes with wit and an eye for a good anecdote. David Cameron's courtship of the Liberal Democrats after the 2010 election "made Casanova sound like a tongue-tied ingénue". At her post-election party conference, Theresa May received "the kind of sympathetic audience response that, in bygone days, had greeted the arrival of the condemned at Tyburn Tree". The claim that Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng crashed the economy was inaccurate, "but it was certainly not from want of trying".

Downing Street Downfalls is an agreeable companion to contemporary political history and, when it turns to the last ten years, a reminder that there's nothing quite as strange as the recent past.

Jonathan Calder



REVIEWS

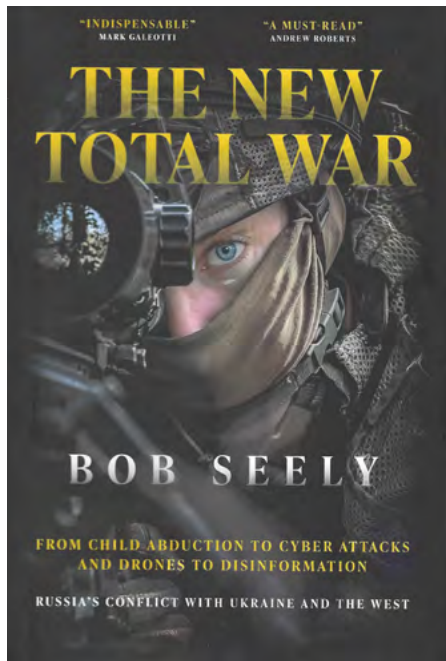


The New Total War. By Bob Seely. Biteback 2025 £25.00

Former Conservative MP and journalist Bob Seely has written a rousing call to arms for Ukraine. He argues that Vladimir Putin has used his 25 years in power to prepare Russia for total war in

an attempt to reclaim the geopolitical greatness frittered away by his feeble-minded predecessors.

Total war includes the covert cyber operations that target what Putin sees as dilettante, weak, woke Western society, as well as the more conventional meat



grinder approach evident on the front lines in Ukraine. Cutting undersea cables, financing media outlets that spread disinformation, and supporting extremist Western politicians, Putin has geared the Russian state and its economy to fulfilling his historic mission to reclaim the vassal states lost at the end of the Cold War.

None of these tactics are new (except targeting cables) as Seely points out. "...spies and blackmail, assassination, propaganda and disinformation, fake organizations, political 'fronts' and paramilitary groups, politicians and opinion-formers being knowingly or unknowingly manipulated by their adversaries, the use of economic and other forms of power, including language and religion." Putin's strategy is permanent struggle. Not much has really changed since the Bolsheviks, then.

Seely rehearses the reasons Putin cannot coexist with a free, democratic Ukraine flourishing under a pluralist system. Russian thinking and theory could not tolerate the fact that a people's uprising in 2004 banished Putin's stooge. But the author also points out that being in a state of perpetual war suits Putin's needs for control of the Russian population.

What is to be done, Seely asks? Even if Ukraine is victorious, Putin will not stop using "active measures" to undermine its survival. Ukraine's weakest link is its corruption which can be exploited by Russia. He urges membership of NATO "in everything but name", he wants Ukraine to use Russian language Ukrainian media to win hearts and minds, and he wants the West to support

Russian voices offering a sane alternative to endless total war.

He acknowledges that Putin will use negotiations to delay any progress toward an end of hostilities, relying on the gullibility of Western diplomats who take him at his word. For Moscow, a happy byproduct of the war is sowing division among the democratic nations.

Seely's shopping list includes partnerships between Western and Ukrainian defence firms, using the interest on frozen Russian assets, updating Western military practices as well as equipment, and protecting our own citizens from Russian active measures.

Seely intersperses his observations and recommendations with stories of astonishing bravery and resilience among the Ukrainians he interviews as he travels around the country. Although his tone is sometimes rather like a sergeant major barking orders at a dim squaddie, his narrative is gripping and well intentioned. The only disappointment is that the author stops short of endorsing the use of Russia's frozen assets to buy Ukraine the weapons it needs.

Rebecca Tinsley

Kingmaker, secrets, lies and the truth about five prime ministers. By Sir Graham Brady. Griffin Books, 2024 £12.99

When Sir Graham Brady took his realm to be the Chairman of the 1922 Committee (1922), no one would expect Britain facing political drama all the way towards his resignation. The 1922 had been in the middle of the storm of the political drama, since they played a major role in Brexit deal legislation, and electing five Conservative prime ministers during that period. So, what did Brady witness while all these dramas unfolded?

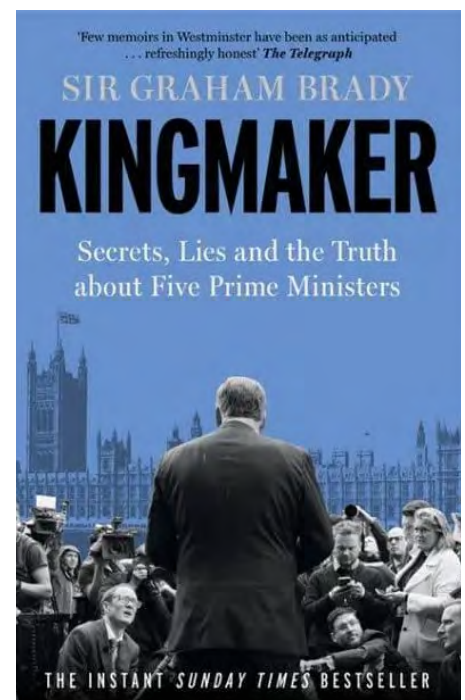
His autobiography tells us a lot of the behind-the-scenes stories, from his background all the way till the last 1922 executive meeting. It was the day when Rishi Sunak called the 2024 general election, when the rain poured.

He did make some reflections on the state of the Conservative Party. One could argue he was trying to defend the legacy of the Conservative government, but he makes many critiques on the shortcomings of the vote of confidence system, nomination process, and of course, how the Conservative Party operated in the last 20 years. His reflection, in general, remains rather

balanced.

For example, he criticises: "The Conservative Party did away with internal democracy a long time ago... simultaneously removed the democratic federal structure that existed before... The Conservative Party board is now technically sovereign, but in reality is too big and unwieldy to be effective."

Brady argues the Conservative party is not ungovernable because "I always found that the parliamentary party tended to support its leaders and give them benefit of the doubt. MPs think many times before calling for a confidence vote to be triggered. When the dam bursts, it has been in response to



intense pressure and often considerable provocation."

Despite his political stance Brady provided a unique insight on the dynamics of the Conservative parliamentary party, and the media. He explains extensively how 1922 is run and what kind of influence they can exert, in particular when the Tory leader is in trouble.

One key feature of the book is to trace how many letters of no confidence he would receive at different stage of political drama, and how the no confidence vote would trigger. When Brady explains what happened in the final days of Theresa May Premiership, he says: "Then on 23 November, another letter was taken out... 45; 28 November... down to 44. It turned out to have been a good call to snatch a few days away;

things were about to get very interesting. On 5 December, one of the earlier withdrawals were resubmitted. On 10 December, two more took back to 47. My nerves were shredded.” The no confidence vote would be triggered if there were 48 or more letters submitted at that term of parliament.

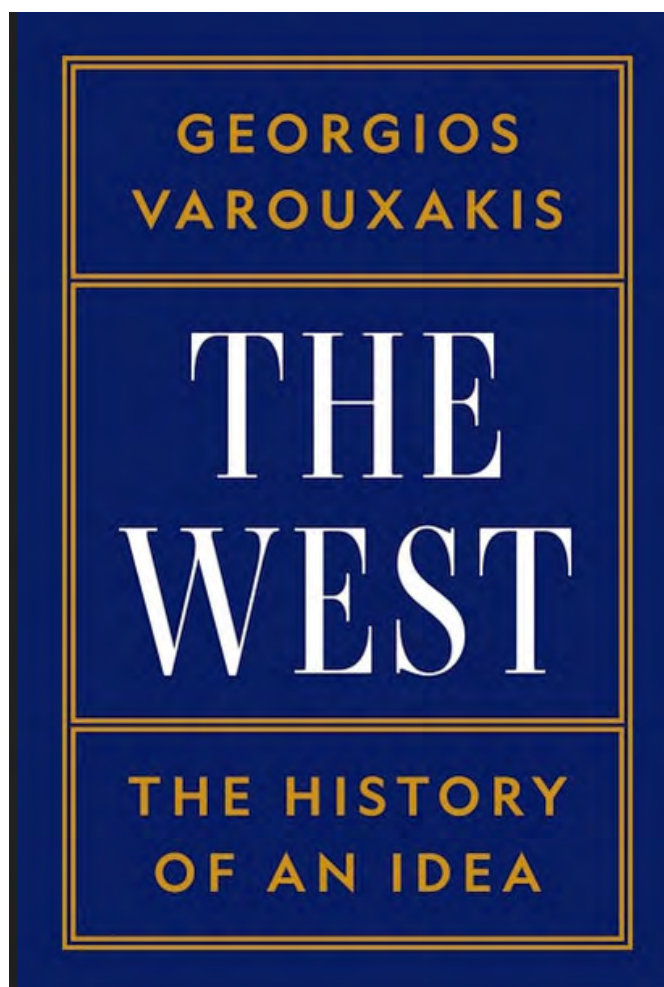
His storytelling is a mixture of fact - his recounts of dialogues with previous prime ministers, and his personal observations based on his experiences in 1922.

Brady recounts some interesting conversations on a range of political dramas. For example, he recalled he had suggested to David Cameron they should provide a third option for renegotiating the terms of EU membership on the referendum ballot papers; and how the attitude of No. 10 changed from the ‘Brady amendment’ during the vote of Theresa May’s withdrawal agreement. In the last chapter, he makes a reflection, based on his knowledge on the characters of all five prime ministers he served, on how things would play out differently if Boris Johnson was prime minister in 2016 while Theresa May was prime minister when Covid-19 started, the Conservative Party would have been a lot more successful.

Brady was technically a backbencher with senior positions in the parliamentary party, and he had his own political agenda and there is a lack of context on how some key political decisions being made.

Of course, he mentions his experience in providing advice on policy changes in other times, but it was more like reporting the sentiment of parliamentary party to the prime ministers. If you are expecting the book to explain how dramas unfolded during the decision making process (such as how Kwasi Kwarteng’s mini budget went wrong, or how Theresa May organised her famous Chequers Deal meeting), you would be disappointed.

Different parties have different party organisations, so do their dynamics. There is no doubt Brady had significant influence within the Conservative Party while he was chairing the 1922 Committee; as Rishi Sunak saw him as “embodying the stability of the Tory Party”.



The book provides a very useful account from an influential backbencher for those who want to understand how Tory parliamentary party operated.

Larry Ngan

The West, the history of an idea. By Georgios Varouxakis. Princeton University Press 2025

It was Comte wot dunnit. John Stuart Mill wasn’t keen on the idea But although it is a movable feast our present conception of the West starts there. Of course there are earlier conceptions, the western Roman Empire, the Holy Roman Empire, you might even go back to the battle of marathon and the Hellenes versus the Persians. Varouxakis acknowledges always but our starting point is really the rise of Russia under Peter the Great and most significantly after the Napoleonic wars and the Congress of Vienna.

The detail through which Varouxakis travels is awesome, more than most of us need to know but I’m pleased to see that he shakes off Eurocentricity and includes now Third World thinkers (wherein I include black Americans) such as Rabindranath Tagore, WEB Du Bois and

Alian Locke.

Could it have been different? Russia was key to the Allies success during the Second World War; after Glasnost and the fall of the Berlin Wall, might Russia have been welcomed into a closer relationship, if not membership of the European Union? If we forget Stalin’s socialist imperialism, I recall Russian economists arguing that the West might have done more for them in the transition from communism but unfortunately this coincided with our era where greed is paramount in capitalism, Russia’s crony capitalism in particular.

There is a bigger ‘battle’ already above the horizon – between the ‘developed world’ and the Third world, the South. It will increasingly become a matter of survival; expect more migration from the sub-Saharan region and consider how we are going to meet this challenge.

The West, territories aside, is an embodiment of ideas, ideas that liberals have developed, so it is unsurprising that Varouxakis turns to Raymond Aron in his conclusion, and if don’t read this book for anything else, read that.

His concluding lines are: “The baby must not go out with the bathwater. For if we are not careful... the precious heritage the freedom of speech, the secular state, the independent personality, the autonomy of science - which is not western or eastern, not human, will be snuffed out over the minds of men.” We as liberals are the guardians of that heritage and will fight for it.

Stewart Rayment

A Very Private School: A Memoir. By Charles Spencer. William Collins, 2025, £10.99

There used to be two prestigious prep schools near Market Harborough. Nevill Holt closed in 1999, shortly after the police arrived to talk to the deputy head about allegations of sexual abuse and he fled the building and hanged himself in some nearby woods.

A decade later, another former member of staff was jailed for ten years for 33 sexual offences against boys aged between eight and 12.



The second school was Maidwell Hall, which closed earlier this year and is the subject of Charles Spencer's book. He was a pupil there from 1972 to 1977, and reveals it to have been a nest of physical and sexual abuse.

The headmaster was skilled at keeping parents and even governors away from the school, which he had to be because his regime was geared to providing him, each evening, with half a dozen boys to beat. Some of Spencer's fellow pupils still bear the scars 50 years later.

Life was no better at Nevill Holt. In the school's last years, its sporting teams had to travel up to 50 miles to find other schools prepared to play them. Visiting teams had noticed that the facilities for showering and changing at Nevill Holt were designed to maximise masters' opportunities to ogle naked boys and declined to return.

Charles Spencer writes beautifully – this is no run-of-the-mill celebrity memoir – and what he brings out is the misery of being sent to board at the age of eight, even if the school is more benign than Maidwell Hall and Nevill Holt were. The child loses his parents, his home, his bedroom, his pets and his toys and is instead looked after by strangers those parents know little about.

Psychologists liken the experience to bereavement and some children never get over it. Others learn to dissociate themselves from their feelings, building a false personality that will please the school authorities. If you are reminded of some of our recent political leaders, I recommend Richard Beard's book *Sad Little Men*, which explores this idea further.

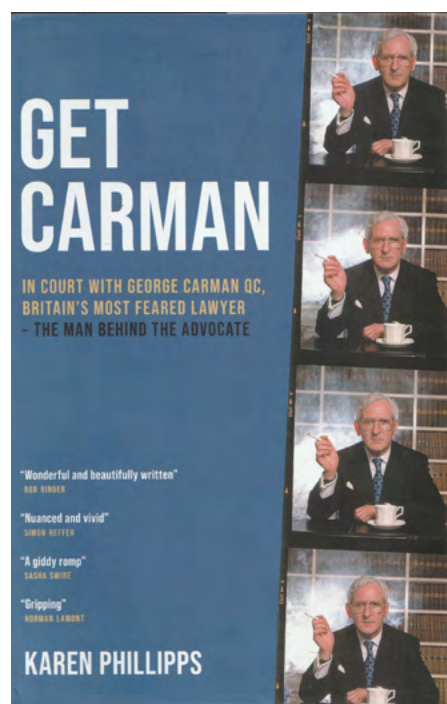
When *A Very Private School* came out, Maidwell Hall issued a statement saying that "almost every facet of school life has evolved significantly since the 1970s".

No doubt that's true, but it still comes as a shock to find that a group of parents who opposed the closure of the school lodged a formal complaint about it with the Charity Commission. What kinds of country has charities that exist to send children away from home at the age of eight? After reading Charles Spencer's book, you will feel we ought to have ones that campaign against the practice instead.

Jonathan Calder

Get Carman, in court with George Carman QC, Britain's most feared lawyer - The man behind the advocate. By Karen Phillips. Biteback 2024

The index to this book is awesome, five pages of names in a small typeface; a veritable who's who of the last 50 years or so celebrities. But you're not interested in those, you're only interested in one, Jeremy Thorpe. George Carman has fought a lot of cases, but you're only interested in Jeremy Thorpe. Well, I'm only interested in Jeremy Thorpe too, when it comes to it, so what does Karen Phillips have to say?



Phillips contests that the case was a major turning point in George Carman's Life. He was offered a very low fee, but the publicity would be immense, thereby enhancing his reputation. I'm pretty sure George Carman had a

reputation at that point, which is why Thorpe and his fellow defendants were found not guilty, innocent of the charges against them. The gutter press has never accepted this, but who believes anything you read in the papers these days? One wonders if Milton could write the *Areopagitica* now.

Carmen also took down Jonathan Aitken and Neil Hamilton, and defended Ken Dodd, whose defence for tax evasion was that there was no letter box at his Knotty Ash home, so he didn't receive letters from HMRC. At a by-election in Liverpool, I was unable to deliver a Focus to Dodd for want of a letterbox,

Stewart Rayment

Trailblazer, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, The first feminist to change our world. By Jane Robinson. Doubleday, 2024 Bodichon. By Mary Upton. Tradewinds Publishing, 2024

Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon; it's a bit like waiting for a bus, 27 years since Dr. Pam Hirsch's biography was published (Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon 1827-1891: Feminist, Artist and Rebel. Chatto & Windus 1998) then two turn up in 2024. Not quite the same, Jane Robinson's *Trailblazer* is a conventional biography, whereas Mary Upton gives us a fictionalised account mercifully without the need to sensationalise.

I would commend both. Upton's work weighs in at 243 pages, covers the main details of Bodichon's life, drawing from family papers provided by Charlotte Moore as well as Hirsch's biography. It has a readable style but benefits from a background in Bodichon's life.

Robinson provides a more thorough reading, a core 338 pages and another 30 plus of notes, bibliography etc. I regret not reviewing the earlier *Bluestockings*: The remarkable story of the first women to fight for an education, where she possibly first became aware of her subject.

There are probably three main reasons why Bodichon is not as well known as she ought to be. First, activities and friendships were wide-ranging (a recent biography of George Eliot does not mention her, though they were best friends).

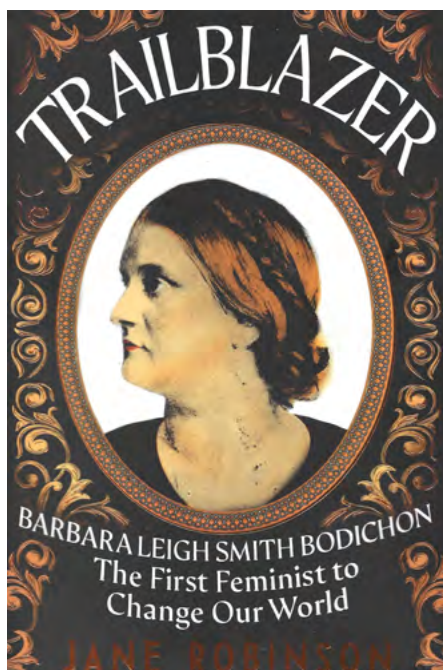
Secondly, after her marriage she spent part of the year in Algeria, detaching herself from the ongoing work she was supporting. Finally, there was the question of her legitimacy, her mother and father did not marry, something of a

taboo in Victorian society, where in promoting causes (er father ensured her independence she might be better kept in the background.

Her grandfather William Smith and father, Ben Smith, were both Whig MPs of progressive views, Robinson treats us to brief biographies of both of them, especially as her father interacts with Barbara. She enjoyed a much wider education than most women of her class at that time. She married Dr Eugene Bodichon, a French Radical deputy. By this time, she was already promoting women's causes, from her own experience as something of an outcast.

Early work was A Brief Summary of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women, which led to her working with John Stuart Mill to change the laws relating to married women's property. This was followed with a petition to Parliament for the enfranchisement of women property owners. Around these projects, the first feminist organisation in Britain grew. Concerned with women's education, she provided much of the funds to establish Girton College in Hitchin, later Cambridge. Alongside all of this she was a practising artist, who although a woman of wealth, felt she should earn a living.

I struggled a little with Robinson's style, where she interjects 21st century views and was thus more comfortable with Upton's account; however, you really need the one to inform the other; Hirsch's style is perhaps, more academic. I am interested in Bodichon on many counts, filling the gap (with Harriet Martineau and Harriet Taylor Mill) between Mary Wollstonecraft and Millicent Fawcett, alongside more local reasons - the late Richard Moore was a



descendant of her brother. Bodichon deserves to be better known, and I hope you will enjoy this flurry of interest in her; there is much more to say than is in this brief review.

Stewart Rayment

Round the Horne (play), by Barry Took and Marty Feldman. Jermyn Street Theatre

Why does radio comedy Round the Horne have sufficient appeal 60 years after it was first broadcast to become a stage show?

The answer is smut. As the Liberal Revue found in its 1984-2008 run at party conferences, audiences might get the clever, subtle or satirical jokes. They always got the innuendo.

Round the Horne dealt in innuendo on an industrial scale never previously

broadcast but was always clean on the page. It had to be, being beamed into the nation's living rooms at Sunday lunchtimes by what was then the Light Programme, now Radio 2.

For example, who could possibly take exception to compere Kenneth Horne announcing: "I've had a letter from a keen gardener who has been cultivating some American beauties behind the potting shed, as a result of which he has developed an unusual strain, which he supports with a bamboo pole."

Quite uncontroversial; it's all in the acting. The innocence of the scripts allowed BBC director general Hugh Carleton Greene, who liked the show, to keep it on air and face down self-appointed moral guardians like Mary Whitehouse.

Round the Horne also introduced two new languages. One was the vocabulary of supposed folk singer Rambling Syd Rumpo: "Hello me dearios I've just naggered my cordwangle", which meant nothing but sounded like it did.

The other was the gay slang Polari - not, I understand, previously very widely known beyond gay circles - used by Julian and Sandy, played by Kenneth Williams and Hugh Paddick.

These were the first openly gay characters ever regularly broadcast in the UK - and were depicted positively. At a time when gay sex was still illegal saying on radio that Julian was known for his (supposedly musical) "dexterity on the cottage upright", was fairly daring.

This review started with a question and so ends with some. Answers to an imaginary quiz in the previous week's show were a regular feature with Horne asking listeners to complete song titles such as "Over My Shoulder Goes..." and "I'm Gonna Sit Right Down and'...(and it's not what you said, athletic of Chatham)". It's all in the mind.

Fortunately Round the Horne's enduring popularity has made it easily available on recordings and frequent radio repeats.

Mark Smulian

LETTERS

SPEAKING RIGHTS

Dear Liberator,

Referencing your article Local Heroes in Liberator 431, I must say, as a member of the Federal Conference Committee, the nature of the complaint from our local government colleagues did rather surprise me.

It is well established precedent that one has to first apply for a speech, in

order to be overlooked for one. As no one in local government actually asked for a speech, it seems rather unfair to lay the blame at the door of the FCC for not local government not having been given one.

To quote Wayne Gretsky, you miss 100% of the shots that you don't take.

Callum Robertson

Member, Federal Conference Committee

Monday

Word has reached me that some of the backroom boys and girls at Buckingham Gate, to which the Liberal Democrats have recently moved, no doubt Freddie and Fiona are to the fore – have taken to awarding our elected MPs chocolate bars if they judge them to have done particularly well. I should not have put up with such patronising treatment in 1906, nor, I wager, would anyone else on our benches. It reminds me of the time when the then Matron at my Home for Well-Behaved Orphans took to playing favourites and dishing out tuck only to a select few. I wasn't having that, so I arranged for one of Violent Bonham Carter's boys to call by on her afternoon off to teach the little inmates the rudiments of lock-picking. After that they were able to share out the confectionary fairly amongst themselves – and several WBOs were able to turn this new skill into an adult career. Perhaps I should do the same for our MPs today? A minute to say: "No, naughty Ruttie! Put Meadowcroft down."

Tuesday

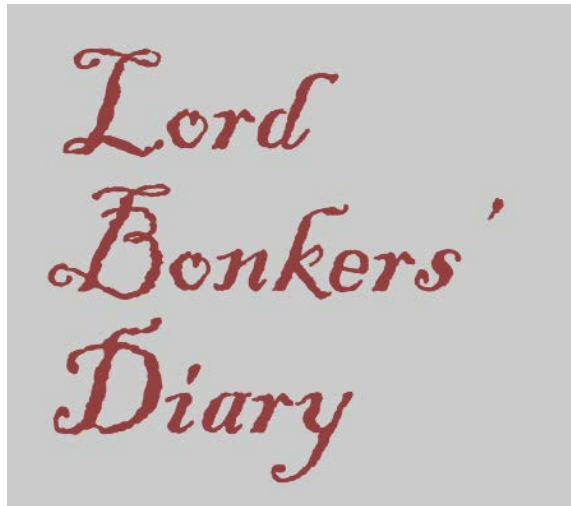
Perhaps you saw me on the sands at Bournemouth, making notes as some of our leading lights played cricket? I am, of course, always on the look out for new talents I can invite to turn out for my own XI, but this time there was more to it than that. For we Liberal Democrats have been drawn in the Group of Death at next summer's ALDE T20 competition, along with Democraten 66, Radikale Venstre and Liberals d'Andorra. If I am to lick a team into shape while the party copes with May's local elections, scrutinising a full Labour legislative programme and the St Pancras Day festivities, the sooner I commence net practice the better. The other approach, I suppose, would be to sign up some top-hole cricketers as party members. If anyone has a phone number for the Overton-Window twins, a postcard sent c/o the National Liberal Club will find me.

Wednesday

I don't know about you, but I find myself increasingly confused over this identity card business. Just before Conference the usually delightful Hazel Grove told us that we should all move with the times and get one of the things; and, though an unadvertised consultation held at four in the morning in a locked church hall in Branksome came out against them, Ed Davey was very keen on the idea at his question-and-answer session at Bournemouth too. There, a tame journalist called for a show of hands and claimed that 110 per cent of those present had voted in favour of cards – and that despite my running round the room to vote against from at least five different seats. (This new tonic I got from the Wise Woman of Wing is the cat's pyjamas!) Yet as soon as we got back to Westminster, everyone was launching petitions against the aforementioned cards. Faced with this confusion, I cleave to the words of the great Clarence "Frogman" Wilcock: "I am a Liberal and if you ask to see my card again, I'll fetch you one up the bracket."

Thursday

Talking of cricket, as we were, I remember the early years of the limited-overs game when the Liberal Party XI turned the world



upside down by scoring at the then-unthinkable rate of three runs an over. The lobby correspondents dubbed our approach "Jezball" in tribute to our new leader Jeremy Thorpe. Our outstanding results owed much to a young Marines officer called Ashdown who proved equally adept at illicitly obtaining the opposition's batting order before the toss and, if they threatened a successful run chase, at kidnapping their lower middle order. I often wonder what became of him.

Friday

When I heard a few months ago that they had an "artist in residence" at Belvoir Castle, I determined at once that no Duke of Rutland was going to outdo the Bonkers. I telephoned Joshua Reynolds and Freddie van Mierlo to see if they were interested in the gig, but both told me they were too busy. Then, or so I thought, fate dealt me an ace. I was putting the world to rights in the Bonkers Arms that very evening, when someone introduced me to a foreign fellow by the name of "Peter the Painter". Naturally, I engaged him on the spot and told him to turn up at the hall with his brushes the next morning. When he did, I was disappointed to find that he was a house painter. Nevertheless, he proved useful, tackling various jobs about the Estate. He had Advanced Views, but I've always found anarchists to be good company – unlike the average Labour MP – so I was happy to discuss politics with him over dinner. And then one morning he was gone, leaving a barn half painted. A strange episode.

Saturday

On Bonfire Night I was accosted at the village firework display by a white-bearded fellow who claimed to be a wizard. He said they were looking for a couple of chaps to trek into eastern Rutland and drop a ring into a crack that led to the earth's molten core. Did, he asked, yours truly and my gardener fancy the job? He could guarantee that the gardener would get to meet an elf. I'm afraid I gave him both barrels, pointing out that the existence of a pothole that deep reflected poorly on the ward councillor. I added that I had tried taking a holiday with Meadowcroft, but he had done nothing but complain that he had to sit at the rear of the tandem and I wasn't going to repeat the experiment. As to meeting elves, Meadowcroft was often be found chasing them out his herbaceous borders with a broom. My advice was that, if he was so keen to have a ring dropped down the dashed hole, he should ask an eagle to do it.

Sunday

These days every television celebrity thinks he's Dame Agatha Mousetrapp, but there's more to the whodunnit-writing game than meets the eye. I once had a shot at it myself; all went well until I sat down to pen the final chapter, only to find I had not included a butler among the cast of characters and thus had no murderer to reveal. My reason for mentioning this is that if the prime minister has been knifed by this own party by the time you read this, it will be like Murder on the Orient Express. They'll all have had a go at him."

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