

# SO, WHY DO YOU WANT THIS JOB SIR VINCE?

Liberator has sent a questionnaire to Liberal Democrat leadership contenders ever since 1988. This time, at least at going to press, Vince Cable was the only announced candidate and it seemed highly unlikely that anyone else would stand

A coronation impends, for the first time since Jo Grimond became Liberal leader in 1956 the post will go uncontested, which is either a tribute to Cable's talents or an indictment of the capacity of the parliamentary party, or both.

It's common for people to want to put very specific policy questions to would-be leaders but we've tried to get Cable (and anyone else had they stood) to think about what the party is for and what it should do to dig itself out of the political hole in which it at present resides.

The next leader inherits a mixed position - record membership but also a record low in vote share and a haul of parliamentary seats that would have looked indifferent even before the breakthrough of 1997.

They also inherit a position where the party has one very distinct position recognised by the public - being in favour of the European Union - but little else and not very much sign of the sort of intellectual flowering that helped to sustain it in previous hard times.

These are the questions. We hope you find Cable's answers illuminating, the more so if you do get a chance to vote on the next leader.

## **I THE GENERAL ELECTION HAS EXPOSED THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT CORE VOTE AT ONLY 7.4% OF THE ELECTORATE. THE PARTY CLEARLY CANNOT 'WIN EVERYWHERE', WHERE SHOULD IT LOOK FOR SUPPORT?**

The situation is even more challenging than the question supposes, because, even with our vote dipping in 2017, we were still – thanks to the combined efforts of superb candidates, dedicated local teams and expert support from party HQ – able to pull in tactical votes and support from people who would not view themselves as core Liberal Democrat voters. So I do not underestimate the challenge we face.

Yet at the same time there is a huge pool of liberally minded democrats in the country, millions of whom share our values even though they do not view themselves as Liberal Democrat supporters or voters. It is with this group – who, just like us, want to see a country engaged with its European neighbours, cutting inequality, delivering high-quality public services, engaged in protecting the environment, cherishing civil

liberties and promoting human rights across the globe – that we must start.

There will always be extra votes we can win from our campaigning and casework in local communities – and, of course, thanks to tactical voting in first-past-the-post contests. But the fightback started by Tim Farron, which I aim to continue, must focus on winning over more liberals to the Liberal Democrats for good.

## **2 TIM FARRON RULED OUT COALITIONS, DEALS AND PACTS. IF THE PARTY DECIDES NOT TO SEEK INFLUENCE THROUGH THESE CHANNELS, WHAT IS IT FOR?**

The Liberal Democrats are the only party promoting Liberal Democracy. We are here to win hearts and votes for our campaigns to improve people's life chances, strengthen our communities and protect our future, most immediately through the closest possible relationship with the UK's European neighbours.

No other party offers a Liberal Democrat future. Jeremy Corbyn's stance on Brexit, among many other issues, makes him a completely unsuitable partner. Nor could we support Theresa May's Tories and prop up a government driving the country headlong towards a hard and disastrous Brexit (with Corbyn's full support).

That said, we have long looked forward to a new politics featuring less tribalism and more cooperation across party boundaries; we rightly advocate an electoral system in which this behaviour would become the norm, not the exception. We made a real difference during our time in government, and the Coalition delivered far better achievements than the Conservative governments which have followed.

We frequently work alongside others in local government and devolved assemblies to the benefit of local people. In last month's election, several local parties – including my own in Twickenham – reached agreements with the Greens, to our mutual benefit. Now, in a hung parliament in which the outcome of most votes cannot be foreseen, naturally we are open to discussions with other MPs over any chances to deliver what we fought for in the election. To paraphrase the preamble to our party's constitution, where there is a real chance to help create a fair, free and open society



in which no one is enslaved by poverty, ignorance and conformity by working with others then of course we must grasp it.

### **3 IF YOU WERE IN THE SAME POSITION AS NICK CLEGG WAS OVER TUITION FEES (A PLEDGE MADE THEN BROKEN) HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THE PROBLEM?**

We should not make pledges which we may not be able to keep. If and when the opportunity comes again to form a coalition including the Liberal Democrats, clearly we cannot be expected to deliver every policy in our manifesto – in this scenario, we won't have won the election, after all – but the pledge that all our candidates made in 2010 was an unconditional promise to vote against an increase in tuition fees regardless of circumstances. Breaking that pledge damaged us deeply, and we have yet to recover. We should not repeat that mistake.

### **4 THE RECENT GENERAL ELECTION WAS FOUGHT ALMOST ENTIRELY ON THE SECOND BREXIT REFERENDUM. WOULD YOU HAVE EMPHASISED SOMETHING DIFFERENT OR ADDITIONAL, AND IF SO WHAT?**

I do not believe we should regret making the Brexit issue central to our campaign. Along with climate change, it is a paramount challenge, and the way in which government and Parliament handles it will determine what sort of country we bequeath to future generations.

The Liberal Democrat message did not cut through, however – partly because of the timing of the election, before the Brexit negotiations had begun, which meant that in fact the campaign hardly featured any serious debate over the details and impacts of Brexit. On top of this, the Labour Party cleverly managed to put itself over as simultaneously pro-Brexit and anti-Brexit, a stance which is now beginning to trip them up.

Clearly we need to do better in the future. I believe that the lesson we need to draw is that the party needs to powerfully and clearly articulate a positive vision for the future – one in which policy mechanisms such as referendums or tax rises have their place, but where they are not supported for their own sake but as the means to liberal ends, which we communicate with passion and verve. A fairer, freer and greener society is our aim, and our policies are the means to it.

### **5 WOULD YOU REGARD YOUR ELECTION AS LEADER AS A MANDATE TO TAKE THE PARTY IN A PARTICULAR DIRECTION, AND IF SO WHAT?**

I will be setting out my vision for the party in my manifesto, to be published after the close of nominations. I see the over-riding priority of the next leader as to rebuild the party as an effective

political force, in elections, in campaigns on particular issues and in local councils, devolved assemblies and Parliament. We need not only to make the case for our beliefs – for the UK remaining in the EU, for the need to build an economy which delivers prosperity for all its citizens, for high-quality health, education and social care, for a political system which values the views of everyone – but to make the case for the party as an effective vehicle to deliver those goals. That’s the direction we need to go in – and by working with all my colleagues in local parties, in councils, in the party structure and Parliament, I hope to take us there.

## **6 THE COMBINED TORY AND LABOUR VOTE IS AT ITS HIGHEST FOR DECADES. HOW WOULD YOU CHALLENGE THIS AND WHAT IDEAS WOULD YOU WANT TO GET ACROSS TO THE ELECTORATE?**

The answer to this question is essentially the same as my answers above, particularly to questions 1, 4 and 5. I do not believe that the election’s apparent return to two-party politics is permanent – particularly as the divisions over Brexit within the Labour Party become more clear – but we have to fight to demonstrate our relevance. I believe I have the experience and profile to act as an effective advocate for the party and for Liberalism.

## **7 WHAT POLICIES SHOULD THE PARTY PUT FORWARD IN THE NEXT MANIFESTO TO ADDRESS THE INTERGENERATIONAL DIVIDE AND HOW SHOULD IT PROPOSE TO TAX THE WEALTH OF RICH PEOPLE AND CORPORATIONS?**

Generational inequity represents a great social injustice. Young people seek the same standards of living and the same opportunities as older generations and can rightfully feel cheated when they do not get it. Young people were among the worst affected by the economic downturn – and will suffer more from the impacts of Brexit, limiting their aspirations and harming their future.

Tackling generational inequity must be an important element in our programme. For too many, the dream of owning a home remains just a dream because the country has not built enough houses. The rental market is weighted against tenants. We must address both. I agreed with the policies in our manifesto to reverse housing benefit cuts and to raise the minimum wage for young people, but this is only a start. I aim to work through the Federal Policy Committee and the membership at least to focus on this area as a matter

of urgency. The FPC has already agreed to schedule a policy paper on taxation, to be debated at a future conference, and I look forward to participating in its discussions on the issue.

On wealth inequality, I opposed the Conservatives’ tax cuts for the rich, for example through inheritance tax. As a minister, I pressed for action against corporate tax avoidance and evasion. The sums of tax avoided by some large companies is a scandal that must be addressed. A liberal society is one in which everyone makes a fair contribution. We are still a long way from that.

## **Vince Cable - the biography**

Sir Vince Cable was re-elected as MP for Twickenham in June, having served as the constituency’s MP from 1997 to 2015. During the coalition government he was secretary of state for business, innovation and skills. He has also served as the party’s treasury spokesman (2003–10) and deputy leader (2006–10).

Employment before Parliament included the Government of Kenya, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Glasgow University, Chatham House and chief economist at Shell. In the 1970s he was a Labour councillor in Glasgow; in 1982 he joined the Social Democratic Party and stood for election to Parliament in 1983, 1987 and 1992.