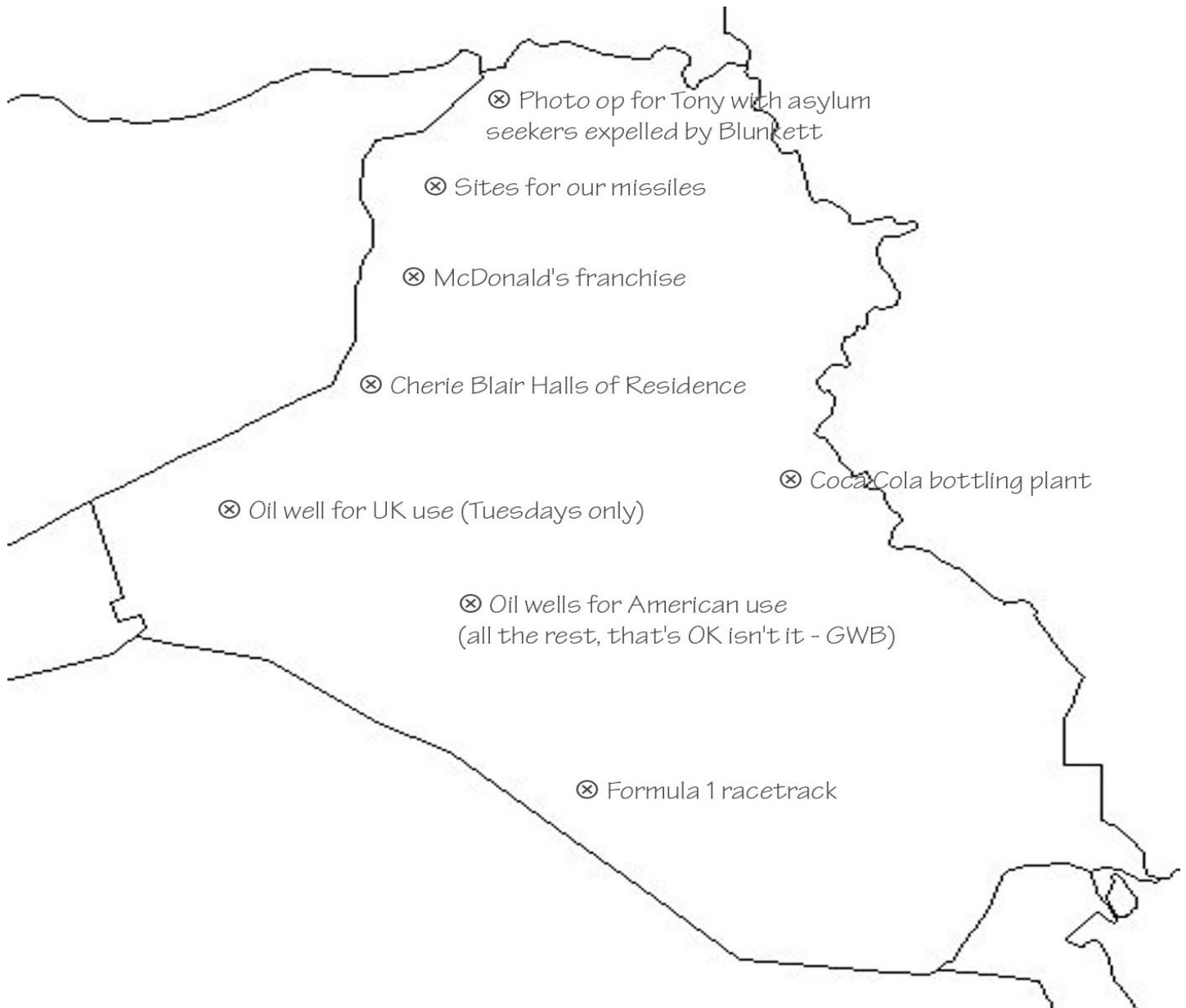


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Blair and Bush's aims in full



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COMMENTARY

WINNING BIGGER

What will happen to the Liberal Democrats if they fulfil their increasingly confident prediction to overtake the Conservatives during 2003?

And what if the Liberal Democrats overtake the Tories not as a result of Tory defections, but because of Labour ones?

If the Conservatives do start to look like the third party, the Liberal Democrats will have to be ready to capitalise on this.

But even were such a collapse the sole result of Tory malaise, it would emphatically not mean that the party should tailor its policies and pronouncements to appeal to those who still basically support the Tories but merely despair of their effectiveness.

There is no possible future for the Liberal Democrats in trying to become the main party of the centre right, a position that would alienate at least as much existing support as it attracts.

Looking unattractive to some former Tories should anyway not matter much when there will be rich pickings to be had from Labour.

Nor should it engage in a panicked rush to the political centre, trying to pose precariously somewhere between Tony Blair and Iain Duncan Smith. There is no 'between' between these two politicians.

In conventional terms the Liberal Democrats have ended up the left of Labour. This though is not because the Liberal Democrats have made any sudden policy lurches, but because Labour under Blair has marched off towards Thatcherism.

If commentators say the Liberal Democrats are to the left of Labour, and speculate that this might harm the party's appeal to ex-Tories, the party's answers should be an unabashed 'yes' and 'no'.

Blairite authoritarianism, the continuing failure of public services, the Government's persistent stirring of racial hatred toward asylum seekers, and the threat of conflict over Iraq, could all play well for the party among those who have historically voted Labour.

The Liberal Democrats are the most obvious place for them to turn to, given that far-left parties remain peripheral.

What is more, the party is already the main opposition in most Labour areas, though there has been a longstanding problem in converting this into general election support.

One key reason for the Liberal Democrat surge of the past few months has been the status of being the only mainstream party to oppose Blair over Iraq. If Britain does end up in an American-led war the Liberal Democrats must resist the temptation to national unity.

This would be the least popular conflict for decades, with a badly divided country and a large section of aggrieved public opinion that will need to be represented in parliament.

Doing so would benefit the party politically. More importantly, it would be right.

Jo Grimond built his own and the Liberal Party's credibility by opposing the Suez invasion. Further back, many Liberals had the courage to oppose the Boer War while it was in progress. The Liberal Democrats should be ready to continue to speak out against an unpopular conflict in which both Iraqis and British troops will die for the folly of George Bush and of his poodle in Downing Street.

Labour's voters, let alone its traditional members, did not in general vote Labour to see Britain engaged in dubious foreign wars.

War in Iraq may turn out to be the final straw that makes large numbers of Labour members tear up their party cards, and turns voters away. The Blairites never had deep roots in a Labour Party that made a Faustian pact with them in order to win in 1997. Is a programme of privatisation, top-up fees, assaults on civil liberties, unnecessary war and grovelling to any well-funded business lobby really likely to motivate Labour activists and keep their loyalty?

It is wrong to view a war from the perspective of its effects on party politics, but these will be unavoidable.

Labour's support could collapse over Iraq, on top of general frustration with the government, just as Tory support falls off a cliff too.

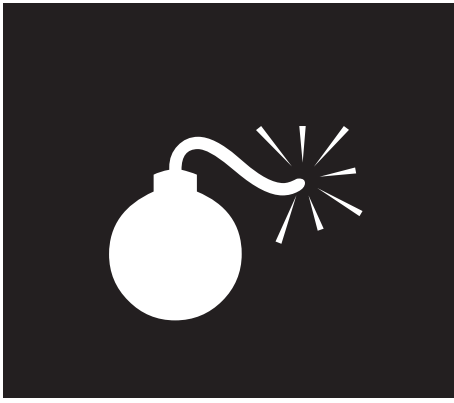
That could see the Liberal Democrats winning bigger than anyone now suspects. Building on that requires, apart from an infrastructure capable of suddenly absorbing new supporters, the willingness to stick the policies that have won that successes and the ability to lead public opinion in building and keeping support for them.

It is true that were the party to take a leap forward in 2003 it would, quite rightly, come under stronger media scrutiny and cease to enjoy the easy ride of the past few years.

At some point the contradictions of appealing to ex-Tories and ex-Labour at once may become irreconcilable.

But the party should have the confidence in these circumstances to be true to itself. The surest way to throw away such an opportunity would be to try to simultaneously please both, and end up pleasing neither while alienating Liberal Democrat voters.

Meanwhile, a happy and liberal new year to all readers.



RADICAL BULLETIN

A CHANGE OF HEART?

It is perhaps as well that the Liberal Democrats' latest Tory defector Harold Elletson did not join the party during Paddy Ashdown's time, or he might have faced a rather awkward interview with his new leader about the Balkans.

Elletson, former Tory MP for Blackpool North, was welcomed by leader Charles Kennedy as, "one of a growing number of disillusioned Conservatives who have taken a good look at the Liberal Democrats and realised that we stand for many of the things that they care about".

The BBC website quoted Elletson as saying: "The Conservatives had always had an authoritarian wing and a libertarian wing.

"Unfortunately, the authoritarian [side] has overwhelmingly won out in the country and now prevails in the parliamentary party."

This is bit much coming from an MP who on 3 June 1994 promoted a bill to bring in identity cards, a step from which even the previous Tory government shrank.

On that occasion, Elletson told parliament: "There is nothing alien, sinister or fundamentally un-British about the concept of an identity card."

It gets worse. This noted libertarian continued: "Smart cards are extremely difficult to forge. They are the size of a credit card, but can store images of palm prints, fingerprints, eye retina patterns and photographs, as well as a large volume of other information."

It gets worse again. Elletson seems to be one of those naïve people who think the state never abuses information, exceeds its power, or commits miscarriages of justice.

"After all, which of us here would be prepared to stand up and say that he would fight for the crimes of the fraudster to go undetected, or allow the terrorist to continue to go about his murderous business hidden behind a cloak of false identity for fear of abusing his civil liberties?"

Well, anyone can change their mind, so has Elletson's changed on this basic issue of civil liberty? Or indeed, on the Balkans?

Ashdown was well known as a supporter of an independent Bosnia and for calling attention in the west to atrocities carried out by the Milosevic regime in Yugoslavia.

However, Elletson was described by the UK-based Bosnian Institute as one of "Belgrade's circle of friends at Westminster" after his defeat in 1997.

He at one point asked the then defence secretary Malcolm Rifkind if he agreed "that the quickest

available short cut to a general Balkan war and an escalation of the conflict far beyond the borders of Yugoslavia would be to bomb Serbian positions?"

This is among a series of questions from whose wording one can only conclude pro-Serb sympathies at a time when Milosevic was in office.

Among Elletson's other accomplishments is authorship of an admiring biography of Alexander Lebed, the anti-western military strongman who briefly challenged Boris Yeltsin for power in Russia.

THIS PIGGY WENT TO MARKET

Winchester MP Mark Oaten is ever ready with pained letters defending himself against what he sees as inaccuracies in the media, so can we look forward to him putting The Guardian right, having twice ascribed to him the non-existent post of 'party chairman'?

Probably not, after all it sounds so much better than 'chair of the parliamentary party', the rather less exalted position that Oaten really holds.

The Guardian's misdescription came in two separate stories in December about Oaten's continuing efforts to woo former Tory voters by making the Liberal Democrats more like the Tories.

The first concerned Charles Kennedy's letter to voters in Tory-held marginal seats. This was an unobjectionable initiative, but it highlighted the need to walk a fine line between inviting these people to support what the Liberal Democrats are, and adapting the Liberal Democrats the better to appeal to them.

As any fule kno, Tory seats are won by squeezing Labour votes, and not by sounding so right wing that Labour traditionalists are repelled.

The other 'Oaten as chairman' example was more serious – an obviously deliberate leak to The Guardian of details of a private polling exercise carried out by Julian Ingram.

Ingram was active in Liberal student politics 20 years ago, and though his profile has been low since he has built a career in advertising and offers his expertise as the party's pollster.

His research suggested that the Liberal Democrats should target 'innovators', 'self-actualisers' (perhaps a condition once believed to cause blindness) and 'contented conformers'.

These are seen as parts of a new middle class with whom the Tories can no longer connect.

As The Guardian noted: "However, this new approach, with its marketing-style language, will concern some party members, who are wary of sacrificing substance to spin, so jeopardising a key plank of the party's appeal to voters."

Quite. Within 24 hours it had provoked a column from the Observer's Euan Ferguson pointing out that what had made the Liberal Democrats attractive and different was precisely that they had not taken a cynical approach to voters driven by marketing. Doing this had put people off Labour and would do the same for the Lib Dems, he predicted.

This was followed by a broadside in Liberal Democrat News from Tony Greaves, in which he denounced "pseudo academic silliness".

He went on: "Some will suspect that it will be used as an excuse for not just presenting our policies in a more right-wing manner, but actually changing the policies themselves."

This would mean that instead of targeting the vast numbers of disillusioned people on the progressive left who have lost confidence in Labour, the Liberal Democrats would target soft Tories.

"I have no objection to that if it is 'as well', and not 'instead of'. But it isn't," Greaves wrote.

This moved Charles Kennedy's vicar on Earth, Lord Razzall, to reply the following week that the party would never have its policies and values shaped by opinion poll findings.

Greaves also voiced his fears that the dominance of marketing techniques would see the Liberal Democrats "taken over a certain kind of young men in sharp suits", as has happened to Labour.

Oaten isn't that young any more, but it would be as well to check his wardrobe.

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS?

Simon Hughes' bid to become the Liberal Democrats' candidate of the London mayoralty sparked a great bout of head scratching.

After all, if Hughes lost the nomination to rival Susan Kramer (let alone to third candidate Donnachadh McCarthy) he would be humiliated. But if he won he would gain at best a temporary platform and one not much greater than he enjoys anyway as a senior MP and home affairs spokesman.

Winning would also antagonise the body of opinion in the party that wants to see more women in high profile roles, and which thinks Kramer deserves a second chance after fighting a good campaign in 2000.

The only logical explanation is that Hughes genuinely thinks he can beat Ken Livingstone, given that the lacklustre Labour candidate Nicky Gavron will have to defend the Government's unpopular privatisation of the London Underground, and that the Tories are probably now sufficiently mad that they will drop previous candidate Steven Norris in favour of some swivel-eyed ideologue.

What then are party members supposed to make of a curious communication sent to members of Hughes' local party in Southwark and Bermondsey in advance of their annual general meeting, arranged for 19 December? This said: "Local MP Simon Hughes has been put on the party's shortlist for London Mayor candidate. Simon has put his name forward to gauge support both in and out of the party. Let Simon know what you think by coming [to] the AGM on Thursday 19th".

Included later in Hughes' report to members was: "You will also no doubt recently have heard that I have put forward my name as a possible candidate for London Mayor. My application to go on the party's

shortlist is to test the level of support inside the party and outside, and is in no way a final decision. I hope you will come to the AGM to give me your views on me standing."

This is rather different to the spin put out in public, and before 19 December too, that Hughes was definitely in the race.

Why might he have adopted this half-in, half-not position? One reason might be the contest for the party's deputy leadership, from which Alan Beith is expected to step down.

The deadlines for nomination for this and the London post may overlap forcing Hughes into two polls at once.

He could not run for mayor of London if he were deputy leader, but he might not be taken seriously for that post if simultaneously seeking the mayoral nomination.

The deputy leadership is an odd post. The electorate is confined to MPs and the job is ill defined.

Beith made little of it and simply acted as an occasional stand-in for Charles Kennedy. Indeed, one has to go back 25 years to John Pardoe to find a deputy leader who used the post to give themselves a public profile.

Hughes is not alone in coveting the role. The other two likely contenders are Menzies Campbell, despite his recent illness, and Malcolm Bruce, who was ousted in the reshuffle and now lacks a proper job.

The smart money says that Kennedy wants a deputy leader who is older than him and so poses no threat – which makes Campbell and Bruce the favoured ones.

SOUND OF SILENCE

Politicians are usually taken to task in the press for what they say, not for what they don't, so it was something of a surprise when Guardian commentator Hugo Young attacked Charles Kennedy for his non-existent political profile.

Young complained that Kennedy had been an MP for 20 years, and leader for nearly four years, without a single memorable utterance to his credit, and was failing to give a lead to either the public or his party at a moment of rare opportunity.

With the Tories are falling to pieces and Labour's credibility plummeting, Kennedy has indeed been strangely absent from the media.

In some cases this is wise, for example he avoided the 'Cherie and the conman' furore, but to look serious about replacing the Tories as the main opposition the party needs a profile at least as high. In the nature of things nowadays a lot depends on the leader.

Those close to Kennedy point out that despite his near-Trappism, the opinion poll ratings are high and rising and the local election results are consistently good.

The awkward logic of this is that the less Kennedy says, the better the party does, which is presumably not what they mean.

Those whose job it is to worry about these things are well aware of the problem and think Kennedy will raise his profile slowly and steadily between now and the next general election.

Anti-Labour voters may after all be puzzled if offered a choice between a quiet man and a silent one.

THIS TABLE'S FREE

If Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats had more than 20 delegates on the Saturday morning of its Islington conference in December, they were very well hidden.

The previous night had seen a £50-a-head gala dinner to which all the party's parliamentarians had been invited.

Feeling an understandable wish to support the party's ethnic minorities, the great and good forked out and found themselves talking to each other at the dinner, at which they outnumbered any members of ethnic minorities by about three-to-one.

They were then startled to find that they were expected to lead a discussion at each table on a different policy theme between each course.

Chair Nasser Butt's annual report noted: "My experience and analysis suggest that those in control of resources are timid in their priorities for ethnic agenda and show lack of political willingness on their part...the FE only delivers indecision and throws everything to do with the ethnic agenda into the longest grass it can find and this despite an Indian president and chair of FE".

The latter is a reference to Navnit Dholakia, whom Butt later suggests, "has been used to justify HQ having done something and thus not needing to do anymore".

The experience of the dinner and conference is unlikely to have changed many minds about how much of the party's resources should go to EMLD.

Butt's report refers to the previous conference having been difficult "given a large proportion of the EMLD membership is lazy when it comes to attending the conferences. Attending conferences seems to be a cultural hurdle for members from ethnic minorities".

There is also an old saying about not running before you can walk.

RULES TO BE BROKEN

As an example of how not to run an internal election, it would be hard to beat the London region's behaviour over the nomination for the London South West seat for the Greater London Assembly.

Candidate Stephen Knight found himself disqualified for the crime of distributing coloured leaflets, something that was banned for the last election but on which the rules for this one were silent.

Knight's supporters then complained that rival Dee Doocey was claiming an endorsement from Twickenham MP Vincent Cable, a practice that is prohibited.

A complex series of appeals saw Knight reinstated on the leaflets issue, disqualified again for distributing leaflets to members without knocking on their doors, and then reinstated again only to be told that Doocey's winning margin was sufficient over both him and third candidate Geoff Pope to leave the election in no doubt.

Meanwhile, the region had handed over its e-mail lists to everyone seeking a GLA nomination.

This meant that while candidates were being challenged over idiotic infractions like the colour of their leaflet, or highlighting the wholly unsurprising support of an MP for whom they were once agent, the regional party was content to see members across the capital bombarded with unsolicited e-mails from aspirants.

It ought not be beyond anyone's wit to let candidates distribute whatever they like to members within an

expense limit, and to allow endorsements so long as the candidate can produce signed proof from the endorser, but to disqualify those who use regional e-mail lists for purposes unrelated to their candidacy.

The top four places on the top-up list went to Lynne Featherstone, Graham Tope, Sally Hamwee and Mike Tuffrey, thus proving the power of incumbency in internal polls.

TAKE AWAY THE NUMBER YOU FIRST THOUGHT OF...

Perhaps some of those Liberal Democrats who are used to grappling with local authority budgets might offer their expertise to the party's Federal Finance and Administration Committee.

The saga began last September all the specified associated organisations were given indicative figures for their subsidies. These were: Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors, £125,000; Liberal Democrat Youth and Students, £28,000; Women Liberal Democrats, £3,100.

Chief executive Hugh Rickard then put forward a list of cuts to FFAC in October designed to get a budget surplus in line with the target the committee had previously. This included a complete cut of the WLD grant and the withdrawal of the London region desk subsidy.

London has space in Cowley Street, though no headquarters of its own, and receives a subsidy viewed with envy by other regions.

The abrupt cut in WLD's subsidy prompted objections that while this organisation is fairly useless it was no more useless in October, when offered nothing, than it had been in September when it was led to expect £3,100.

WLD had enough time to organise a lobby comprising Susan Heinrich, Karen Friel and Joan Walmsley. Predictably FFAC could not look them in the face and delete their budget, so it contented itself with a cut of the oddly precise amount of £1,117 and had to find another victim.

London region chair Jonathan Davies, who is on FFAC, predicted doom and disaster if the desk subsidy went, so that option was closed.

The committee looked around, but only at budget heads for bodies outside Cowley Street, and lighted upon the Scottish and Welsh parties. But Welsh member Chris Lines defended his patch, so the FFAC turned to G8, the fund that supports key seats.

This was cut by £5,000. A horrified Federal Executive promptly reinstated this cut, leaving FFAC looking silly and the budget with no evident surplus.

WLD is angry that in the letter informing it of the proposed ending of its grant, the existence of the Gender Balance Task Force was given as a reason. Did conference really intend that when it voted for an adequately funded task force it was also voting to remove all funding from WLD?

HOW THE DARK LORD HAIDER FELL

Three years ago Austria frightened Europe by putting the far right Freedom Party into government. This winter, voters rejected it, explains Ulrika Docekal

The 2002 elections after the premature end of the unwelcome black/blue coalition in Austria brought surprising results.

The chancellor's conservative People's Party (ÖVP - black), third in the 1999 elections, have now overtaken the long term number one party, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) who had played the leading role in Austrian politics since the days of Bruno Kreisky in the late 1970s.

The not-so-big surprise was the dramatic losses of Jörg Haider's Freedom party (FPÖ - blue), which is not to be mistaken for the Liberals), who had been the unofficial main player since his rise in 1986.

What made people turn their backs towards him? Opinions are broad ranging and differ widely - here are just the main theories:

Participation in the government with the ÖVP after 1999, and the taking over of responsibility, "tamed" the FPÖ. This was a merit of chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, the first one to bravely, and in a rough climate of sanctions of the EU, as well as international rage against Austria, put an end to the ineffective tactic of former socialist-led governments to try to marginalize the FPÖ. His strategy bore the risk of an unstable and very unpopular government. It has to be mentioned that before February 2000 such a coalition was considered unimaginable. After decades of ÖVP/SPÖ governments, a generation of voters had never experienced a government without the SPÖ, so that hardly anybody would have bet a cent on such an outcome. The question remains, and applies also to far right opposition parties, as they can also be found in France, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, already they carry their expiring date from the beginning?

To put the question more simply - do the others have to be very bright to stop such a party or will these parties act in a stupid way and destroy themselves sooner or later anyway?

The international reaction blocked Jörg Haider's career as a statesman in government and kept him far out of reach of real power in the country.

Most of the FPÖ representatives in government acquitted themselves well with the effect that already in August 2000, according to exit polls, the future of the party was not regarded as directly connected to Jörg Haider any more. Since the party had always been perceived primarily as a Haider-project, this can be taken as an extraordinary change in public opinion.

Haider's "abstention" from federal politics, as a "simple party member" turned out to be public relations mistake. However, until then he was already weakened due to the lack of actual power (beyond the borders of the Carinthian lands where he is governor) and decreasing media interest. His declared dream to become chancellor seemed far out of reach. According to the latest polls, 80 per cent of Austrians believe that his disastrous result was the fault of Jörg Haider.

Having a glance at parts of his sensational activism before the dramatic end of the coalition, this seems to be obvious, for example: his building up an apparently close friendship with the world's outcast Saddam Hussein, neglecting any diplomatic considerations and without even informing his own party about his Iraq trips; the plans to found a European party together with other right-wing partners like Vlaams Blok; provoking conflicts within his own party, which finally led to the withdrawal of two popular ministers; and the end of the coalition. Still, the decline of the FPÖ had started already very soon after February 2000 with losses at elections in Burgenland and Styria, as well as in Vienna. These were accompanied by difficulties in the Styrian party and various changes of leading personnel.

These, as well as several scandals concerning the filling of official posts with party members, incompetent ministers, and the discussions about EU enlargement and tax reform were overlapped by the growing internal crisis and the favourite summer discussion topic "Haider's state of mind, or, has he gone mad now?"

The ÖVP/FPÖ coalition has failed, but due to the chancellor's excellent tactical skills (including the principle of "divide et impera") and timing the ÖVP managed to win over former FPÖ voters.

Regarding the developments preceding the elections, it was internal fights and the split into a traditional right-wing fundamentalist wing, and a more moderate - but still far from liberal - wing that caused the poor FPÖ result.

For the long term, most people voted FPÖ on a promise of renewal and for hopes of a Robin Hood effect. These hopes have been disappointed. The performance of the other competitors, especially the ÖVP, must not be neglected, especially if you look on the high percentage of flexible FPÖ-voters and the fact that the ÖVP/FPÖ coalition has never gained high popularity. There might be hundreds of explanations, however, they will all be found closely linked to each other.

LOSING CONTACT WITH THE EURO CONVOY

The EU has become distant, impersonal and bureaucratic. Andrew Phillips argues that Liberal Democrats must apply consistently its principles of support for grassroots involvement and opposition to centralisation of power

So that there should be no misunderstanding, let me briefly clarify my position. I was expelled as prospective Labour parliamentary candidate for North Norfolk in 1973, inter alia for publicly opposing the Labour Party conference resolution of that year to withdraw from the EEC (as it then was). I subsequently fought four parliamentary elections in Liberal colours, including the 1979 Euro-election.

Though against our joining the single currency, and against any further moves towards political union pro tem, I remain powerfully committed to staying in the EU. But the polarisation and partisanship around the related issues are making that middle ground more difficult to maintain.

Having said that, I understand, I think, where inexorable globalisation is taking us (though its consequences seem to me to pull in opposite directions vis-à-vis the EU – commercial and personal). I admire the industry and talent of most of our MEPs, whilst sympathising with Nick Clegg's reasons for standing down. I respect the fact that the Liberal Party raised the banner of Europe before anyone else. It has become, perhaps dangerously, our single most distinctive feature. So what's my grouse?

In a phrase, I think that the EU is an economic giant and a democratic pygmy. Pygmy, that is, in doorstep reality; in the fact that its institutions have not come anywhere near capturing the hearts and minds - and hence political allegiance - of the mass of so-called ordinary citizens. Nick Clegg neatly summarised the dilemma by saying that the EU's "authority and legitimacy have grown apart."

It remains an essentially centralising, bureaucratic and managerialist project. It is demonstrably top-down and hence out-of-touch. The manifest proof of all this is in public response to the EU, whether in opinion polls or elections.

I believe profoundly that, in this country at least, economics are the servant of politics, not their master. Rather naively, you may think, I really do stand by the key commitments in the preamble to the party

constitution, namely dispersal of power and participation, and popular sovereignty.

Charles Kennedy was spot-on in the pre-manifesto of September 2000 when he said "freedom is about promoting independence for individuals and communities. That means a distinct shift of power from today's over-centralised and authoritarian state, to decentralised decision-making. Doing that promotes trust between government and people." That echoed the Gladstonian 'trust the people' stance. The decline of that in Britain – and elsewhere – is rapid and cancerous.

Precisely because most ordinary citizens' perception and experience of the EU is that it has damaged their independence and shifted power away from them is there widespread scepticism, and worse, towards EU rhetoric. The tabloids could not make such easy and often unfair capital out of the occasional nonsense of the EU if that were not so.

With hindsight one sees that, from the outset, some of the drivers of integration within the EU have taken a cavalier, some would say deceitfully arrogant, view of the right of people to understand and be involved in relation to pooling - of - sovereignty issues. This failing has been continuous and is now all but endemic, sadly extending to our party no less than anyone else.

A current example is the Giscard d'Estaing Convention, supposedly aiming to bridge the gulf between electors and Brussels. When I asked for a plain man's guide to what they were doing in the summer to distribute at some public meetings I was convening in Suffolk, I was referred to the Laaken declaration! So consideration of its vital agenda will be confined to the usual closed circle.

Since we as a party have made our name in domestic politics by taking individual voters seriously; by being willing to listen to and learn from them; by responding to what may seem to others as petty or 'pavement' problems, we have rightly made brilliant gains, first in local government and, on the back of that, at Westminster. We have exemplified the notion that, as

Blake put it; "He who would do good must do it in minute particulars."

En passant I note that our lamentable performance at the last Euro Elections (where fewer than 5 electors in 100 supported us) was on the basis of an election address wretchedly evasive about our championing of the single currency. With the other two parties having also played party games with Europe, Britain is in a shameful mess over the single currency. The latest chapter in this inglorious history is ministers endlessly repeating that it is a purely economic decision for which there are five purely economic tests (hang the political and cultural implications).

Whereas the "the democratic deficit" in the early years of our membership was probably inevitable, it is really no good, nearly thirty years later, parroting the same old excuses. Any business would long since been bankrupt. In that sense, the EU is.

Today, public ignorance is as profound as ever, but energised by widespread resentment. Few even know the name of their MEP, let alone have any ownership of the so-called union. How many, I wonder, will have ever heard of the new Labour leader in Europe? How many Liberals, indeed, know their leader? The notion that it is the fault of the media ignores journalistic realities and the informational overload that already prevails.

The nadir of our willingness to betray our own values came in our support for closed party lists for the last Euro Elections. For us to favour a system which does not allow individuals to stand, which only allows a single vote for single party's list, which deprives the voter of the right to order his or her preferences (let alone select candidates across party lists) makes our protestations about the inequity of the first past the post system a sick joke.

It is even worse than that because, in the huge euro constituencies made up of fifty-plus Westminster seats, party chiefs (as with Labour) or members (as with us) in effect fix the results of the elections. No wonder the public gave the lot of us two fingers.

Incidentally, when last Autumn I moved an amendment to the Nice Treaty Bill that would have required the Government to send a summary of "the constitutional and governmental effects of the Treaty of Nice to every household in the United Kingdom "... which shall be (a) In writing (b) In plain English (c) In popular form (d) and Impartial", you may or may not be surprised that my colleagues were whipped to vote against it.

A year ago, the first report of the Electoral Commission warned that Parliament "needs to address, urgently and radically, the decline in public participation." However, the widespread belief in Westminster/Whitehall as regards the EU is that, by and large, people aren't interested, don't care or can't understand it anyhow. Few materials produced by the European Commission are written for the ordinary citizen. Few euro zealots care if contact has been lost with the euro-convoy.

This summer I experimented by organising four public meetings across Suffolk. The opportunities for advertising were minimal and simply read, "Suffolk has its Say on the European Union", inviting people to come and express their hopes and fears. There were no platform speakers.

Average attendance was over sixty people, made up of all sorts. There was gratitude for the chance to

discuss the EU, and contributions were civil and often passionate. There was universal resentment at the failure to be involved, whether via government or the parties. If we held such 'open' meetings across the land, we might start to restore our public credentials vis-à-vis the EU.

But what of the single currency? I view the issue within the broad political context, believing it is nonsensical to do otherwise. There is surely no more fundamental right in our ancient democracy than the right to have one's say where Parliament is taking irreversible steps towards "ever closer union."

My fear is that, with the EU failing democratically, it could easily create the opening for a revival of far-right or far-left politics, which would trade off the deepening public alienation towards what is felt to be a distant, impersonal, bureaucratic 'master'. In any case, people want to run their own lives – whether as, individuals or communities, and would rather make – and learn from – their own mistakes.

It is an irony that at Westminster we weekly oppose the unrelenting centralisation of power. Apart from the principle involved, central government is so often incompetent. That is not just a British sentiment.

My expectation, therefore, is that when the first prolonged economic crisis comes, the internal party political pressures and differential policy needs within and between Member States will become politically unsustainable.

Instead of being able to adjust policy sensitively to the needs of hard hit member states, the European supertanker will only be able to sail on one course, and be unable to let any passengers off the ship.

In that event, the rage against the EU, for (as will be unfairly claimed) ignoring the needs of those countries suffering most, may reach fever pitch.

It is then only too likely that a contra-puntal effect will develop, whereby national parliaments become a focus for internal discontent over and against the European institutions whose diktats (as they will be perceived) are held to blame.

In that hour of need, and on current reckoning, the EU will not be able to call on any substantial popular loyalty to see the crisis through, as by major transfers of funds from the better off to the more hard-hit member states. That will be the more likely if the big boys are seen to bend the rules their way (vis the 'stupid' stability pact) whilst continuing to for example milk the CAP (differentially applied).

In such circumstances, one must anticipate a recrudescence of the very xenophobic and racial animosities, which the founding of the EEC was nobly designed to allay. We have already seen signs of it in the substantial rise of proto-fascism in five member states, at a time when the scenario I am painting has not begun to materialise.

To most people, a certain continentalism is innately incompatible with the dimensions of their own lives and with, dare one say it, the parochialism which has in many ways been the secret of the success of the British way of life, in which the small battalions can find a voice and an identity, and out of which has come a modus vivendi of freedom and tolerance.

It is to chime with this realisation that I believe the Liberal Democrats need to searchingly review their policies towards the EU.

WHY THE EU MUST EXPAND

Including new states from south and east Europe will cost existing members cash, but benefit everyone in the long run, argues Jeremy Hargreaves

The European Union is in the process of carrying out the biggest 'enlargement' in its history, bringing in ten new member states to its east and south, to take it up to 25 member states.

In central Europe there are the former Warsaw Pact countries of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak republics. From the south comes the first of the former Yugoslav countries, Slovenia (which is much further developed than its erstwhile confederates).

For the first time, former parts of the Soviet Union are joining: the Baltic trio of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and there is also the Mediterranean pair of Malta and Cyprus.

The EU summit in Copenhagen in December 2002 agreed their accession, with Accession Treaties expected to be signed around Easter. The first of the candidates, Hungary, has announced a referendum for March, and the ten are expected to become members of the EU in the first half of 2004, in time for the European Parliamentary elections that June.

There are, however, some dissentient voices. There is a slowly rising tide of those in the current EU, including in the UK, who challenge the wisdom of enlargement. Two key pillars of scepticism about enlargement concern funding, and the state of development of the new member states.

On the first, sceptics point out the likely financial cost of enlargement to the EU. At present, the EU distributes cohesion funds or structural funds to its least economically developed areas. Clearly, under any economic analysis, large parts of the applicant countries will qualify for this kind of support. So who is going to foot the bill for this? And if all the money is going to the east, will those parts of the current EU that receive them, which include most prominently the Mediterranean south, but also several parts of the UK, cease to benefit?

Secondly, sceptics point to the failings of the applicant countries. Clearly, in general, the economies of the eastern countries are less well developed than in the EU. Just thirteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, their democratic culture is also less well developed than, say, the UK. And there are concerns about their underlying administrative competence and capacity.

All this leads some sceptics to attack the process of enlargement. There is no need to hurry, it is said. The applicant countries are simply not yet ready to join the EU. We should not force the pace – but simply continue to wait and see what transpires on our eastern border

before committing ourselves. Those who say this fundamentally misunderstand the importance of EU enlargement.

Thirteen years ago, the Iron Curtain came down, the West had 'won' the Cold War, and the countries of the former Soviet bloc expressed unreserved enthusiasm to join western society. In the West, we urged them on, and pressed on them the methods and systems of Western Europe, which they accepted pretty much without question. The history of the last decade in former Soviet bloc is the history of these countries falling over themselves to implement the systems we told them we required of them.

Governments have risen and fallen because they implemented modernisation programmes that often made them profoundly unpopular with their own publics. And why did they do all this? Because the west in general, and the European Union specifically, made it clear that we saw the east as part of Europe as much as the west – that we wanted these countries to join the EU.

At every stage we said we saw the eastern countries' EU accession as just over the next horizon. Those who think the grand statements of prime ministers and presidents about enlargement in 2002 are rash and hasty should look back at the summits of the early 1990s, when almost exactly the same language, the same promises, were time and again made.

The EU has strung its eastern cousins along for a decade, and it is time to make good on this promise. But this is not just out of some vague sense of moral duty. There are harsh reasons of realpolitik for urgent enlargement. The cost of the modernisation programmes that have taken place across the eastern half of the continent has had a tremendous impact on public opinion in these countries.

Many millions of people have lost their jobs, their homes and their stability as a result of the changes. They miss the social securities which capitalism in an economically uncompetitive area does not provide. Many people in Eastern Europe who in 1989 thought capitalism meant BMWs now realise it means unemployment centres as well. There are increasing numbers of opinion polls that give majorities in these countries for not joining the EU. It is by no means certain that even once the treaties are signed, the referendums in all these countries will confirm their desire to join.

As these countries move towards deciding that they do not want to be part of the EU after all, Europe's window for support for re-unifying itself is slowly closing. If it fails to do so it really will be a historic failure. The division of Europe into a more developed West, and a less developed East which is positively antagonistic to the EU, will be institutionalised.

And the dangers of creating permanently an excluded, economically less developed class of 100 million people on Europe's immediate doorstep, are clear. Deprived of the opportunity to participate in the European economic project, they would constantly have the wealth and excess of the EU – promised them for a decade and then snatched away at the last minute – dangled before their eyes. The potential consequences for creating conflict of the sort of resentment and economic envy this would engender are obvious.

It would also surely have great consequences for their own internal stability. Removing the *raison d'être* of the increasingly unpopular reform programmes would certainly see western economic orthodoxy challenged, and it is not very clear what countries exhausted by forty years of communist government and ten of whirlwind capitalism would turn to instead.

It is true that the democratic culture does not have the same bedrock of support in these countries as it does here – and the best way of encouraging and consolidating it is to bring it inside the EU where it is part of a common European democratic system, and it is seen to be successful. A functioning but fragile democracy on our doorstep is much more secure inside the EU than outside it.

There are also straightforward trade and economic reasons why western countries such as the UK should want another 100 million or so consumers within the European single market. The benefits in trading to the UK of its EU membership over the past 30 years are well established, and significantly increasing the size of that

market by incorporating the 10 new countries will benefit us as well as them. Anyone who listens to the Archers will recognise the benefits even to fairly small businesses of trading with central European countries.

The EU is founded on the principle of bringing the countries of our continent within a common legal system, so that differences are resolved by law rather than by force. Promoting British trading opportunity and consolidating democracy and human rights in these countries are best achieved by extending this principle to our eastern and southern neighbours.

We should not forget that both the first and the second world wars started with conflicts that are now outside the EU, but which very rapidly engulfed Western Europe too. Europe must take its historic opportunity to unify itself and both extend the benefits of peace and prosperity to the new members, and guarantee it for ourselves.

This is the real reason for enlargement. It is not a question of us doing a favour to our neighbours because we sort of vaguely feel we ought to. It is very concretely in our own interest to ensure successful and rapid enlargement of the EU.

Those who talk about the costs of loss of structural funds to ourselves, make reasonable points. Yes, there will be parts of the UK (and especially countries like Spain and Greece) that do not get a grant because of enlargement. And yes, too, the political and administrative systems in these countries are far from perfect – although probably rather less so than we sometimes imagine.

But we must not forget the prize of enlargement, or the costs of failing to do it. Division in Europe made the twentieth century the century of pan-European wars. We have, for a short time, a choice: institutionalise that, or prevent it. Yes, I am going to use that word: 'historic'.

LDYS is holding a series of events in 2003 to commemorate the centenary of the founding of the Young Liberals. A book will be published containing essays and anecdotes. This could be dangerous if unfortunate photographs in greenhouses near Crewe and of footprints on the ceiling at Great Yarmouth come to light.

Anecdotes, copies of YL publications and offers of help can be sent to Veena Hudson at ldysadmin@libdems.org.uk or on 020 7227 1387

LDYS is also seeking an auction of YL memorabilia at a party to be held in July - all donations are welcomed.

THE COURAGE TO BOAST

Liberals won the battle of ideas in the twentieth century, so why are they so modest in the face of socialism's claims, asks George Watson

The most surprising fact about the twentieth century, a historian remarked the other day, is the unexpected triumph of liberalism. But then liberalism was never a theory of history, and that made it durable. It cannot be disproved by history, as socialism was. It can falter, as it did between the wars and then came back, and that is what has happened. Liberalism has come back.

The collapse of the Soviet empire, by contrast, left socialists without a story to tell, and they know it, since socialism was supposed to be inevitable as well as just. A theory of history was disproved by history. Capitalism was supposed inevitably to give way to socialism, and socialism gave way. The free market is back, competition is back. Even conservatives and communists seem to want them. The twentieth century is the only century you can think of to trace a full circle; its emblem might be a serpent with its tail in its mouth.

So why aren't liberals feeling triumphant, and why aren't socialists wiping egg off their faces? Somehow the world is not like that. In the European Union, socialist parties are in office in most of its fifteen states: they lost the war and went on winning battles. Liberals won the war of ideas but (in Europe at least) almost none of the battles. There is only one liberal government, in Belgium, only one or two conservative ones.

Nor are socialists much embarrassed at having got it wrong. Tony Blair will tell you that politics is not about policies but principles, if you ask why he gave up Clause Four; or why Denis Healey wastes no time in apologising for having joined the Communist Party.

Mid-century Europe tried out a lot of dud ideas such as Tory protectionism and socialist public ownership, and found out the hard way that they do not work. The liberal solution of free institutions sustained by a free market and welfare provision is widely in place - back by default.

Socialists still control the past, however, and remember it as they want it to be remembered, and there were spin-doctors long before New Labour. Some of them are called historians. Nationalisation may have been a mistake, but it is still taken for granted that the modern world owes state welfare to socialism, although socialist leaders opposed it, from the time of Bismarck to Beveridge.

Thatcherites and Reaganites took over the free market in the 1970s and were called neo-liberals, as if liberals had ceased to exist, and it is now common to hear the market called right-wing. Liberals are notably unboastful. In fact, the free market was a liberal idea

opposed by protectionist conservatives for a century and more, and globalisation is a fancy name for free trade. The welfare state, too, is a liberal idea, at least in Britain, and socialist leaders (as Beveridge has borne witness) were against it. Blair and Schröder would like us to believe that social reform began with socialism, and they do not deserve to succeed.

Up to the Second World War, socialists were commonly against humanising capitalism through welfare. They wanted to abolish capitalism, not reform it, and welfare was a natural enemy. There are no proposals for a national health service in the writings of Marx and Engels, Ruskin or William Morris. State welfare began in 1883 with Count Bismarck, a conservative monarchist, some weeks after Marx died. Prussia was the first welfare state.

The British welfare state began in 1908, when Asquith introduced old-age pensions. A small Labour parliamentary party showed no interest whatever in the idea, only in amending trade-union law. So with Beveridge and national health. When his report appeared, George Orwell remarked in a New York socialist journal that it was well received even on the Left, so the Left was known to be hostile to state welfare. Except for a tiny interested minority, everyone is pro-Beveridge, including left-wing papers, which, a few years ago, would have denounced such a scheme as semi-fascist.

So the Left knew that the Fascist dictators had introduced welfare provision. A few months earlier, in a letter of December 1942, Beatrice Webb felt the Left could relax, as the new plan was very unlikely to be carried out. It might, she wrote, "increase the catastrophic mass unemployment which will happen here as in the USA... The better you treat the unemployed in the way of income, without service, the worse the evil becomes, because it is pleasanter to do nothing than to work on low wages and in bad conditions."

Socialist hostility to Beveridge contrasts sharply with the reactions of other parties. Winston Churchill, who had helped Asquith to found the welfare state after 1908, backed it at considerable length in the Tory 1945 manifesto, which devoted over a hundred words to the NHS.

Alone among the three parties, the Liberals supported Beveridge when his report first appeared, and laid their chief emphasis on the freedom of patients to choose their hospitals. The Labour manifesto of

1945, by contrast, paid almost no attention to the NHS; it assumed it would happen whoever won and gave it less than a single sentence - a mere 20 odd words. Socialism was stingy from the start and known to be so, and socialist welfare-to-work and cost-cutting are not new. Ruskin and the Webbs believed in all that and the Soviet empire practised it. Socialism was draconian and, when the two Germanys united in 1990, the welfare provision of the East was found to be less than half that of the West.

How did socialists get away with it? Voltaire called history a trick the present plays on the past and, by the 1960s, the trick was well and truly done and most people believed welfare was socialist. How was it done? I suggest by the double device of repetition and suppression. If you repeat often enough that socialism is about welfare, you will eventually be believed.

By a historical accident Britain was the only large country in the Western world with a socialist government after 1945, when welfare was widely in vogue among Canadian liberals, among American Democrats with Truman's New Deal, among religious coalitions on the Continent and (most embarrassing of all) with General Franco in Spain.

When Michael Foot, as ex-leader, was asked by a radio interviewer whether his hero Aneurin Bevan had ever protested in public against the opposition of his cabinet colleagues to the health service in 1947-48, he lowered his voice to reply: "No, I just heard him talk about it."

So neither Bevan nor Michael Foot wanted to talk publicly about socialist hostility to welfare and, when I asked him what Bevan has specifically said, he did not reply to the question, nor does he reveal it in his extensive life of Bevan.

So these are dangerous truths, and Labour knows they are dangerous. I once asked Lord Longford about Labour's wartime opposition to Beveridge, quoting Beveridge's own account, and he replied briefly "crap." But Beveridge himself, in his years of retirement, never ceased to be bitter about Labour's hostility to his plans, and would quote Ernest Bevin's dismissal of his report as a "Social-Ambulance Scheme."

Meanwhile the business of historical mystification goes on, supported not only by socialists but also by those who should know better. It is still widely accepted that socialism was a humane doctrine in intention, ruined (as woolly idealisms often are) by severe practical difficulties. In fact the sincerity of Hitler's socialism is well attested, by himself and others, and in its early days socialism was not necessarily seen as left-wing at all.

Its first historian, Alfred Sudre, was a radical Parisian lawyer whose *Histoire du Communism* won a French Academy prize when it first appeared in 1849. It is the first history of socialism in any language, and its discovery was my Eureka moment in writing *The Lost Literature of Socialism*. Sudre saw socialism as a conservative doctrine, an obstacle to progress, harnessing itself backwards to the chariot of civilisation. Humanity had advanced in spite of it. It had achieved none of the great reforms of mankind like ending slavery, or the Reformation, or the scientific revolution, or the abolition of feudal privilege. It was super-Tory in an age when conservative parties were compromising with the triumphant cause of liberalism and conceding

vital principles such as suffrage, free trade and competitive entrance into the higher professions.

Many Victorians such as Ruskin and Morris believed in it because of its conservatism, and a lot of Marx's Communist Manifesto of 1848 reads like *Brideshead Revisited* in its lament for ancient traditions brutally throttled by the New and Vulgar Rich. The bourgeoisie was heartlessly radical, indifferent to race, to community and to family values, creating a rootless society of entrepreneurs where nothing is fixed. "Everything melts into air...". Ruskin, who advocated forced labour for the idle, believed in a Britain that was racially pure, "still undegenerate in race, a race mingled with the best northern blood." All very Aryan, but then socialists were often racists before Hitler came.

No other political movement in Europe proudly and publicly advocated genocide as Marx and his followers did. "The lesser breeds cannot endure," wrote Jack London, the American socialist, in a letter of April 1899. "I cannot but hail as unavoidable the Black and the Brown going down before the White."

The Fabian leaders Sidney and Beatrice Webb feared that the higher race, as they unashamedly called the whites, might lose their world-hegemony by failing to breed, going down before "the Negro, the Kaffir or the Chinese," and proclaimed that self-government cannot come to our colonies "for many generations to come - in some cases, conceivably never."

Socialists could be proudly imperialistic. Democracy they thought sentimental; power goes to the fittest, with the new eugenics on hand as a guide, and in 1935 a Social Democratic government in Sweden began sterilising gypsies as well as the backward and the unfit, and kept the programme going until the 1950s.

So what liberals now need is the courage to boast a little. The war of ideas has been largely won. Now they need to reclaim their ancestry. The free market is not a conservative idea, and for most of its history the Conservative Party was openly against it. It was a radical idea. Try asking any Tory leader to point to a single social effect of the market that is conservative. Of course there are none, and in their hearts they know there are none. The market encourages new wealth; it threatens community and family; and free trade is not to be dismissed by renaming it globalization. Or try asking anyone in the Blair government what is socialist about a welfare state.

Or, if minded to press harder, try asking why the stock market from the mid 1960s down to the early 1990s, in the heyday of nationalising and privatising, advanced more than twice as fast under Labour: 31 per cent a year up, on average, as against a mere 12 per cent under the Conservatives. When you nationalise you push funds into the stock market in compensation: when you privatise you draw funds away into a new issue. So you would expect socialism to favour the rich investor, and it did.

"We can change the past," said Jorge Luis Borges, "but the present is very stubborn." Nowadays socialists, incompetent at changing the present, want to change the past. But why on earth should we let them?

The writer is a former Liberal candidate, former secretary of the Unservile State Group and author of *The Lost Literature of Socialism* (Lutterworth Press, Cambridge). This is a shortened version of an article in *European Review*, vol. 10, issue 4.

WE MUST REJECT 'MODERNISM'

Tony Beamish argues that political parties are failing to latch onto a new world-view

Matthew Platts's article 'The Defence of Apathy' (Liberator 282) reminded us of the importance of poor voter turnout. He is absolutely right to "defend apathy on the account of liberty. It is a legitimate act of protest." He is right, too, to link the low voting turnout in many countries with increased 'extreme right' voting.

But neither low turnout nor right-wing success can be countered in a democratic system unless there is, for each voter, at least one 'plausible' candidate who is seen to represent their views. While low turnout may be the result of genuine apathy, it is much more likely to result from a feeling that parties are all the same.

This explanation is supported by the latest survey into British Social Attitudes conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (see The Guardian, 4 December 2002): "People did not vote because they could not tell the difference between the main political parties and they will return to the voting booths when politics becomes more competitive."

Many non-voters, apparently, have found no party on the ballot paper that seems to them worth voting for; and the underlying reasons for this, in my opinion, are our electoral system and the failure of the mainstream parties to realise that there is a growing number of people whose world-view differs significantly from that of the majority.

In other words, the politicians are failing to keep up with changes in public perceptions.

In this country and in the USA, where first-past-the-post electoral systems are used, the two major parties are seen to be two sides of the same coin. The effect has been to alienate much of the electorate from the political process, so that not voting is the only way to make their voice heard. One of the most significant areas of concern is the deterioration of the environment - in which I include both the local environment in which people live, and the global environment about which ever more people are becoming very worried.

Resurgence magazine (issue no.201, July/August 2000) asked 50 green writers and activists: "Do you think our political system is equipped to deal with the environmental problems it faces?" Three-quarters thought it not so equipped. Only 20 per cent thought that it is, and few had much faith that it would, or could, change.

Richard Mabey diagnosed, "a reluctance to think long-term, to pay more than lip-service to environmental problems, or to put the market and big institutions and corporations under democratic control."

However, some correspondents blamed voters rather than governments; Paul Ekins: "the problem is not the political system - it is the political will of the electorate. If people wanted real change, and were prepared to change their life-styles... the political system could deliver".

Here is the root of the problem. The media and the politicians are, almost without exception, still locked into the materialist world-view - as are the majority of the public. As James Robertson commented, "We need to speed up the evolution of democratic political institutions, with leadership coming from people outside the professional mainstream of politics... That has always been true of fundamental social change."

All this confirms my own proposition - that the political process is unable to cater for the new world-view that is arising because it does not understand it, or even acknowledge its existence; and because the new world-view itself regards the existing political parties as irrelevant to its major concerns.

The new world-view is still 'in the making.' The point made by Paul Ekins ("If people wanted real change, and were prepared to change their life-styles... the political system could deliver") is tantamount to saying that those who have adopted the new world-view are not yet numerous enough to make any difference to the decision-making of our elected representatives.

The fact that many of our decision-makers are in the pockets of big business does not mean that the democratic process is dead - only that the shift in values has not yet reached critical mass.

What evidence is there of this shift in values, or rise of a new world-view? In the same issue of Resurgence (July/August 2000), there was a summary of a public opinion survey performed by NOP.

Here are some of the conclusions, with the comments of Resurgence:

Perhaps as a symptom of financial insecurity, people opted by a ratio of three to one for more pay as opposed to more leisure-time but, asked how they would spend a whole free day off, their responses showed little desire to spend money.

One of the most revealing ways to discover people's true aspirations is to ask them how they would like to be remembered. Only 2 per cent of the people questioned wanted to be remembered as a "wealthy and successful business person" - the model held up for us all to aspire to. All the other preferences implied a wish to be remembered for some kind of do-goodery or unselfish behaviour.

“Which of the following do you personally think is the best way to protect the environment?” By boycotting products 32 per cent; public protest or personal action 24 per cent; by writing to your MP 15 per cent; nothing can be done 15 per cent; by leaving it to big business 5 per cent; others 8 per cent.

These answers suggest that ‘Writing to your MP’ is the only way the public can use the political process to protect the environment. There is no suggestion that one party might be ‘greener’ than another, or that casting one’s vote with discrimination might help the environment - although these options certainly should be among the most useful.

The environment is still not seen as a party political issue - or perhaps those members of the public who regard it as really important do not associate the mainstream parties with it.

In some countries with electoral systems involving some kind of PR, green parties can make a difference; the relative success of the UK Green Party in the European elections proves the point, as does the remarkable upsurge in support for the German Green Party.

Indeed, it is arguable that the Green Party is the only one in the UK obviously seeking to represent those who have adopted the new values. For these are not only to do with environmental matters; the rise in recent years of feminism and the greater interest in international equity on the part of many voters, and the opposition to large-scale economic entities, are all different aspects of this shift in values throughout the developed world.

So what are these new values? The survey commissioned by Resurgence was one very small exploration; and the larger survey into voting patterns by the NCSR seems to show that the electoral process is being eroded by the failure of the political parties to respond to something other than the old left/right dichotomy.

More importantly, Paul Ray has carried out surveys in the US between 1975-95. He found that there are three subcultures cohabiting. Each has its own world-view. They are respectively the ‘Traditionalists’, the ‘Modernists’, and what Ray calls the ‘Cultural Creatives’.

Traditionalists are the religious conservatives, pre-modern, about 24 per cent of the US population and shrinking. Until recently they used to share the scene only with the next group, the Modernists, who constitute the dominant subculture embodying the official ‘Western Way of Life’.

The Modernist viewpoint, which has shaped the industrial age, and even as its percentage slowly falls over time, the Modernist viewpoint remains exclusively the one reflected in the mass media.

It regards as ‘modern’ the values and technologies which oppose themselves to the ‘backward’ ideas of the past. This view developed in reaction to the over-simplifications and excesses of the preceding religion-dominated world-view, but it retained one of its key premises: that man is to be master of the world. In fact, it encapsulates what is often called ‘Materialism’.

The ‘Cultural Creative’ sub-culture is now emerging in reaction to the blindness and excesses of the Modernist tradition. It shares with the Traditionalist culture a profound distrust of naked materialism. At the personal level, its main concern is self-actualisation, - inner growth, as opposed to exterior social prestige.

At the collective level, one of its main concerns is the deterioration of community and the environment. It does not regard continual economic growth as an essential pre-condition of progress.

I prefer the term ‘Post-Materialist’. My point is that the two-party systems in the USA and this country represent the Traditionalist and Modernist viewpoints; both of the mainstream parties and almost the entire media in both countries simply cannot envisage any alternative.

The situation is complicated by the fact that the majority of the Post-Materialists do not see themselves as a new cultural grouping.

There is also quite a lot of evidence that Post-Materialists are on the rise elsewhere in the world, and in the UK there is the Green Party and our own, which both have more than a passing resemblance to them.

But there are problems connected with both: the Green Party is perceived by the voting public as being concerned solely with the environment, and thus does not carry as much weight as it deserves - for it does really share the Post-Materialist world-view.

We, on the other hand, are trying to ride two horses at the same time: we are very much concerned with individual rights and freedoms (‘self-actualisation’), and can justifiably claim to be the party favouring small businesses and local communities.

We have our determined commitment to the environment. We are strongly internationalist. We are very suspicious of large-scale economic entities. But we are very reluctant to modify our Modernist views on manufacturing, productivity, efficiency, and international trade.

We are, in many ways, a Materialistic party. There is still a majority in the party - as there is in the country at large - which would, by and large, agree with Clinton’s remark “It’s the economy, stupid”; whereas many Post-Materialists would say “it’s the stupid economy!”

In this respect we do not differ much from the two conservative parties - the Tories and New Labour. The latter is firmly wedded to the Modernist world-view; the Conservatives don’t know whether they are Traditionalist or Modernist, and neither even acknowledges the existence of the Post-Materialists - which we do.

Tories, Labour, and the Lib Dems are all striving to obtain for themselves as much of the Modernist vote as possible.

As for the Post-Materialists themselves, what they perceive as the Modernist approach of all three major parties makes many of them discount our Post-Materialist aspect. Some of them may vote for us, or for the Green Party; but many will make their political statement by abstaining.

If readers accept my case, and the linked argument that the Post-Materialists are on the increase, they must also accept that our party is in a dilemma. If we continue to trumpet the ‘un-shifted’ materialistic values of Modernism, which many of us still do, we will certainly not persuade many Post-Materialists who currently vote for the Greens or for no party to decide to vote for us.

If we want to do so, we must show that we reject Modernism - including its emphasis on maximising trade, and regarding material productivity as more important than human welfare.

THE APEX OF ANXIETY

There never was an 'A level scandal', and with less snobbery there would be room for all who can go to university, says Matthew Huntbach

The wider world often assumes that the position of admissions tutor must be a terribly important one in a university department. In academia, however, it is often considered a dogsbody job, to be given to a junior member of staff.

This quiet area of life has hit the headlines recently, first with stories of supposedly snobbish admissions tutors rejecting well-qualified applicants, and then harder with the 'A-level fiasco' contributing to a cabinet minister's resignation.

As admissions tutor for the university department where I work, I have been able to observe the old adage that the closer the media gets to areas of which you have independent knowledge, the more unreliable they seem. My experience suggests that what has appeared in the media and public discussion on these issues bears little resemblance to reality. No admissions tutor can afford to be snobbish. In fact, given the unpopularity of the job, those who volunteer for the job or stick with it tend to be those who have a particular interest in it through being first generation graduates themselves.

An admissions tutor wants to obtain those students who will cope best on the degree programmes he or she teaches on. Since admissions tutors are also university teachers, they are best placed to judge that. Government ministers and civil servants are not. If applicants with particular qualifications are turned down, it is likely to be because experience suggests students with those qualifications struggle on the degree.

For example, a minister or civil servant declaring that 'vocational' and 'academic' qualifications are 'equal' will not make them so. If an admissions tutor turns down applicants with 'vocational' qualifications, it will not be through snobbishness but because students with those qualifications do badly on the degree.

Media coverage of universities tends to be obsessed with just two of them. When a bright student is turned down by Oxford or Cambridge, is it surprising that those of us who teach elsewhere do not join in the outcry? The implication is that the degree programmes on which we teach, and of which the Oxbridge rejectee will have the pick, are somehow substandard.

Oxford and Cambridge, along with some departments in a fairly small number of other universities, face the problem of a superabundance of very able applicants. For most admissions tutors, however, the problem is finding enough able applicants at all. One might not guess it from press reports about

sixth-formers facing enormous examination pressures to get into university, but the reality is that there are more than enough university places to go round.

Particularly in the less popular subjects and the less popular universities, admissions tutors have a rather desperate struggle to fill all the places they have been given. They are caught between demands from their academic colleagues for able students, since no one wants to dumb down their degree programmes, and demands from university management to recruit to full capacity.

University departments up and down the country face closure for under-recruitment, and now whole institutions have been threatened by the government. In particular, university applicants tend to rank universities in a fixed pecking order, encouraged by newspaper league tables. Expansion of the number of places at those universities higher in the pecking order will empty universities lower down.

It seems clear to me that there has been an over-expansion of higher education. Universities have been forced to take on more students but have not been given the resources to cope with them. Higher student-staff ratios inevitably mean poorer quality teaching. University staff grumble that, despite a remarkable increase in productivity in terms of graduates produced, we have been given no financial reward: our salaries have fallen relative to almost all other professions over the past couple of decades.

The production of more graduates means jobs that were happy to ask for school-leavers now ask for degrees, it is simply a way of filtering applicants. But many students are taking degrees simply "to get a job". We should question a situation where students are taking degrees just to get a job that asks for degrees just because there are more graduates.

It would be better, surely, to have a smaller number of students who are taking degrees because they value the educational experience. Degrees would be a better educational experience if the students on them really want to be there and resources were not spread thinly over sullen students interested only in the bit of paper at the end.

So on to the A-level 'fiasco'. From press reports, one might suppose that universities higher up the pecking order were left half-empty due to so many students "not making the grade", while universities lower down faced a bonanza of unexpectedly low-grade students forced to "slum it". This did not happen, and anyone familiar with

how university admissions works would know it would not happen and know why the A-level 'fiasco' was just a storm in a teacup.

University departments do not set a fixed grade and recruit however many or few applicants reach that grade. Rather, admissions tutors are given a fixed number of places to fill and recruit students of whatever grade is necessary to fill those places. Although the UCAS university entrance system uses a 'conditional offer', where students are set a grade target to reach and are guaranteed a place if their A-levels meet that target, no university department could afford to under-recruit because fewer than expected of its applicants reached their grade target. So, in order to fill up, an admissions tutor will take however many it is necessary to take from those who fell below the target until all the places are full.

It follows from this that regrading A-levels will have little effect. There are still the same students to fit into the same university places. If a university department which usually takes grade B students finds half its places are empty because half its applicants who were expecting grade B were downgraded to grade C, then in order to fill its places the department will have to take applicants with grade C. Quite likely, these will be the very same applicants who were downgraded in the first place.

While it is not quite as simple as this, since the regrading was not uniform, I hope it illustrates the reality that large numbers of students would not have "lost their places." The marginal differences in ordering of students would have meant that a student of very similar ability would have replaced any students who lost a place. The losing student would almost certainly gain a place in a university department of very similar standing. This is not the major scandal it was made out to be.

Regrading itself was justified if the number of students gaining grade A was unexpectedly high, resulting in those university departments which ask for grade A having more students than they could cope with.

Reports suggest this actually was the case: an unexpectedly high number of A grade A-levels did leave those universities at the top of the pecking order finding so many students had met the grade that they had overshot the number of students they were equipped to accommodate.

Those of us involved with university admissions know A-levels are rough-and-ready assessments, just as are the examinations we set for our degrees. Grades can be moved up and down by very minor factors. The decisions we make on deciding whether or not to offer places have a good deal of randomness about them. In the face of this, any minor difference in who gets a university place where is of no deep significance.

We are left with the paradox of a widespread belief that students are under immense pressure to work hard at A-level in order to "get a university place", while the reality is that many university departments, even some very good ones, are having huge difficulties recruiting sufficient undergraduates.

Some have said that English students are over-examined, and have called for changes to the examination system. It ought to be the case that the more exams taking, the less importance each exam ought to have, and hence the less pressure.

Some of us supposed that if A-level exams were spread over two years, it would reduce the pressure caused by having all assessment at the end of two years. My belief is that the real problem is a mixture of middle-class anxiety and snobbishness. The snobbishness insists that not only must all middle class children go to university, even if they are not suited to academic study, but also only certain universities (in some cases, only two) are suited for them. With these assumptions, nice-but-dim middle class kids are always going to be pushed too hard whatever system is used for university entrance.

One thing admissions tutors must draw a line on is any suggestion that taking more than the standard number of A-levels should confer an advantage, which was at the centre of summer's 'well-qualified Oxbridge reject' row. If an applicant with six A-levels is treated preferentially to one with the standard three, then nice-but-dim kids all over the country will be forced to take six, a horrendously cruel prospect.

If the pattern was that everyone went to their nearest university, then with equal demand for all universities, since there are enough places for every applicants, all that would be needed for entrance anywhere would be just to pass A-levels at any grade. It is the unequal demand that causes the pressure.

However, I do not believe the answer is to dumb-down courses at the higher-ranking universities to decrease their attractiveness. Even if this were done, snobbishness would still dictate that some universities would be in much higher demand than others. In any case, it would be an outrageous attack on academic freedom.

All I can suggest is less anxiety, and less attention paid to league tables. As in other areas of public service, the league tables published for universities are seriously misleading and easily fiddled. It happens that UK universities vary from those who put on very challenging degree programmes designed for those with high A-level grades they are able to attract, to those who cater for students with low grades and hence put on less challenging degrees. But the league tables are only a rough indication of which is which, and the gradation is gentle. No-one's life will be ruined by taking a degree at a university a few places below another in some newspaper league table. There are good specialist courses taught at lower-ranking universities, there is sloppy teaching in higher-ranking ones.

The universities are at the apex of the whole system of anxiety. There is anxiety over getting children into the 'best' primary schools as measured by league tables, in order that they can get into the 'best' secondary schools as measured by league tables, in order that they can get into the 'best' universities as measured by league tables. Maybe there are some parents who just need to be reminded to lighten up.

NO CHANCE

Tony Blair's vision for public services renewal is right, but the problem is Labour cannot deliver it, says Jeremy Browne, Liberal Democrat PPC for Taunton

A British supermarket shopper, transported back 20 years, could be forgiven for thinking that their time capsule had accidentally ended up in the Soviet Union.

Opening hours were hopelessly restrictive, especially for working people. There were no loyalty cards and very little out-of-season produce. Most supermarkets had no car parking.

The range of goods was tiny, not just with food, but with music, or electrical items, or magazines, or children's clothes.

Britain has undergone a revolution in consumer choice. But, like watching friends and relatives growing older, despite it happening under our noses, it is not noticeable from day-to-day. It is only by looking back that the scale of change becomes apparent. And this revolution is still happening.

Of course, it is possible to overstate the scale of the consumer revolution. Anyone who has waited for furniture to be delivered, or the gas engineer to call, will know what it is like to feel their life drifting away. To have paid for a service, and then not to have it tailored to your requirements, is a deeply irritating experience.

But nowhere is this more evident than in Britain's too-little-transformed public sector. Most people will have phoned for appointment with their doctor, only to be told that there is no slot available for a week, and none at the most convenient time for a fortnight. Most parents will have worried about being able to find a suitable school. Most passengers will have banged their heads against a brick wall over the availability of public transport.

Yet these are services that we, as taxpayers, are paying for. If we go to a restaurant, we expect the food to arrive in a reasonable time and taste edible. We want to be able to go to a supermarket when it is convenient for us. We have ever more television channels, and holiday destinations. We are now used to choice, and we are used to having services that are responsive to us as consumers.

When nothing much was consumer responsive, we made do with our lot, because that is all we expected. But now, everyday, just by going to a supermarket, we can see what good service looks like, and expectations have risen. It is no longer enough for public services to be doing their best; they need to be working for us, the consumer, the people who paid for them.

So Tony Blair, when he talked to Labour's conference in Blackpool about revolutionising public services, was spot on. To most people he was only stating the obvious. There are not many people arguing for monolithic public services that are unresponsive to the consumer.

But Tony Blair's difficulty is that he leads a party that is totally unsuited to delivering the public services revolution that he has diagnosed as being necessary. The Labour party is, by ideological preference and by instinct, more comfortable with the collective than with individual choice. This is the party of the block vote and the electoral college.

Labour is a centralising party, whether Old or New Labour. It regards Government as being what it does to people, not what people can be empowered to do for themselves. So there are endless Whitehall targets and diktats. Endless ring-fenced financial programmes. The intentions are often noble, but the outcomes too often fail. In the era of consumer choice, Labour still thinks like Henry Ford, metaphorically selling people any colour car they want, so long as it is black.

And Tony Blair himself, although he no doubt despairs of the inability of his party to understand the consumer revolution, instinctively fails to understand it himself. He talks about individual choice while running the most centralised Government in peacetime history. No one who truly believes in being responsive to individual needs is also vulnerable to the charge of being a 'control freak'.

In the Labour party, MPs are better off being wrong and in a majority, than being right and in a minority. Most of the Cabinet spent decades being wrong but found safety in numbers. There is an inbred suspicion of individual creativity or belief.

But the new politics, as Tony Blair appears to now be realising, is about giving people opportunities, as individuals, to run their own services. It is about enabling communities to make their own decisions, rather than making them cowering recipients of Government largesse. Sometimes people will make mistakes, but on other occasions they will exceed expectations.

There should be more choice in public services. They should be designed around the needs of the consumer, not around the needs of the producer. Decisions should be made by the consumers, and in their communities, not imposed upon them by Whitehall.

The Labour party's suspicion of individual choice holds us back. We should trust people, and give them responsibility, and power. Rather than embracing conformity and orthodoxy, and regarding deviation from the centrally determined norm as being a threat, government should be encouraging invention and choice.

After five-and-a-half years, Tony Blair has begun to see the problem that confronts him. But, in a cruel twist of fate, he must know that his instincts, and those of his party, prevent him from delivering the solution.

BELOW THE BREADLINE

The success of the campaign to end of the voucher system for asylum seekers has not solved the basic problem of low income, argues Jonathan Ellis

If an award were to be given for the most draconian action taken by this current government, while there would certainly be many contenders, my money would have to go on the now discredited asylum voucher scheme.

It was an odious scheme for so many reasons: it allowed asylum seekers to shop only in certain stores; they received no change when they used their vouchers and the vouchers encouraged discrimination. The campaign against vouchers developed wide political support including, in the later stages of the debate, the speaker of the House of Commons.

And when the voucher scheme came formally to an end on 8th April 2002, there was wide rejoicing, if only as a sign that the government would yield to public pressure on their asylum policy.

Yet, while campaigners may have rejoiced back in April, one central objection concerning the support received by asylum seekers remains: they continue to live on around 70% of income support.

In the wider campaign around vouchers, this point was often lost in the face of the absurdity of the voucher scheme. But how can we justify a substantially lower level of support for asylum seekers than is received by the rest of the population?

A recent joint report by Oxfam and the Refugee Council (Poverty and Asylum in the UK 2002) vividly demonstrated that, despite the success on vouchers, most asylum seekers were still living in poverty.

Amongst the key findings were that 85% of survey respondents reported that their clients experienced hunger, 95% reported that their clients were not able to afford to buy clothes or shoes, and 80% reported that their clients were not able to maintain good health.

Furthermore, the survey showed the huge unmet need, as asylum seekers were not eligible for the other wider benefits available to people on income support. For example, premiums available to families with children and the elderly, as well as the social fund payments to help meet the costs of winter fuel or other emergencies, are all denied to asylum seekers.

Thus it can be seen that only receiving around 70% of income support is just the tip of the iceberg. How are asylum seekers meant to cope? In addition, the survey also pointed to worrying cases where asylum seekers either did not receive the support to which they were entitled or received it late.

The government seems obsessed with introducing deterrents to potential asylum seekers, to the active

detriment of ensuring that asylum seekers who have fled from persecution are able to exist albeit on the breadline. The evidence suggests that, for many, they are slipping below the breadline.

The new government approach now centres on the proposed pilot of accommodation centres. Yet with initiative they would be offered no choice and find themselves increasingly marginalized.

The government has also proposed that only those asylum seekers who apply 'at port' will receive support, unless they can convince the Home Office that they could not have applied earlier. Yet the government's own figures in 2001 show that two-thirds of applicants apply 'in country' (i.e. not at the point of entry) and that 42% of these applicants receive a positive asylum decision. There is no justification for treating asylum seekers in this manner.

We need a fair deal for asylum seekers. In the continued absence of such a fair deal, we should surely receive from the government a proven medical and sociological justification as to how it is right for asylum seekers to be able to exist on around 70% of the current income support level.

The truth is that the government cannot offer any such justification and has made no effort to do so – it is another example of deterrents acting to the detriment of all other considerations. As a minimum, asylum seekers should be able to claim the full amount of income support and those with particular needs, such as families with young children and the elderly, should have the same level of benefits on the same terms as other citizens.

Asylum seekers are suffering in this country. Support levels should be raised to the same level as the rest of the UK, regardless of where they apply in the country – there is no other humane alternative. Despite the success on vouchers, this wider campaign must continue.

I DON'T BELIEVE IT!

Dear Liberator,

Your commentary 'Money for Old Rope' (Liberator 284) offers no radical alternative to having to work longer as a solution to the pensions crisis.

It also fails to point out that the ending of early retirement is going to have a detrimental affect on the party, in that the supply of local government activists will almost certainly be reduced. The days of early retirement deals may be coming to an end but everything is not yet lost on the pensions front, and employees are beginning to fight back against the termination of early retirement schemes.

The TUC has recently launched a 'Pay up for Pensions' Campaign which aims to place employers under a legal obligation to contribute to their staff pensions starting at 4 per cent and rising to 10 per cent over time.

The Amicus conference recently voted to support industrial action by members whose final salary schemes are under threat. Even the removal of the new accounting standards FRS17 may have some impact, although it has been used more as an excuse than a reason for the termination of final salary schemes.

It may even be that shortages of skilled labour will result in companies reintroducing final salary schemes.

Raising the retirement age to 70 or abolishing it altogether is a grim alternative, which at least you are not trying to pass off as 'empowerment', as did the working group that produced the Policies for an Ageing Generation paper.

If the alleged reluctance to pay high taxes to fund public services and pensions is genuine, it will be ironic if the 'me too generation', which was largely educated at the taxpayers' expense and is supposedly reluctant to pay higher taxes for current pensioners, that becomes the main victim.

The declining birth rate could be counteracted to some extent by managed economic migration, although this may only defer the problem to a later generation.

There is, however, a middle way whereby employees work part time in their final working years while drawing part of their pension.

LETTERS

The declining birth rate may have another effect on the political process in that the retired population or the proportion of the population above retirement age will grow and their voting power will grow with it.

'Meldrew Power' will be a growing political force in Britain and one that the Liberal Democrats have a good opportunity of harnessing. Or we will blow it by offering 'LiberalFuture'-type solutions?

**Andrew Hudson
Leyton**

FRESH THINKING

Dear Liberator,

The article 'The Wrong Bait' in Radical Bulletin (Liberator 284) states that the Swedish Liberals (Folkpartiet) "campaign[ed] on an outspoken anti-immigration platform" at the country's last election. In that case the English-language policy documents on the party's website (<http://www.folkpartiet.se>) must be badly translated, because they tell a very different story. They clearly show a policy that is pro-immigration and pro-integration. It is sympathetic to refugees and openly advocates encouraging economic migration.

The party did strongly emphasize integration of immigrants at the last election, which may be the source of the 'anti-immigrant' smear, but this means nothing more than compulsory state-subsidised citizenship and language classes for immigrants (as happens in other countries which rely heavily on economic immigrants, such as the US and Canada), and a refusal to tolerate illiberal 'cultural' practices such as forced marriage and female circumcision.

Denmark's Venstre party can be more reasonably accused of populist xenophobia, but

Folkpartiet publicly distanced itself from Venstre's election campaigns on immigration and its alliance with the Danish People's Party. Far from being anti-immigrant or xenophobic, Folkpartiet's immigration policy represents the sort of bold and uncompromising liberalism advocated by Simon Tittle (Liberator 277, 'Liberalism Works') and other Liberator contributors.

The immigration issue is one that needs fresh thinking by liberals. I would have expected better of Liberator than to parrot lazy accusations of xenophobia made against anyone who produces it.

**Alex Macfie
Abergavenny**

MORE INTEGRATION

Dear Liberator,

Standards of accuracy in Liberator's Radical Bulletin do not normally slip as low as those of the popular press, but your gluttony appears to have depressed your critical faculties in 'The Wrong Bait' (RB, Liberator 284).

The immigration debate across Europe bears careful scrutiny. Liberal parties, including our own, are not always above reproach.

In the case of the Swedish Liberals, however, they campaigned in the recent general election in favour of taking more immigrants.

Their criticism of their Social Democrat government's policy was that more needs to be done to integrate new arrivals into society; for example, they need to be taught Swedish.

Canada's Liberals have run a very successful policy of integration for many years. Blair and Persson should learn from it. The Swedish Liberals' vote share more than doubled.

**Graham Watson MEP Leader,
European parliament ELDR
group**

**The Political Animal -
An Anatomy**
by **Jeremy Paxman**
Michael Joseph £20
2002

Paxman's dissection of what makes a politician zips along amusingly and informatively. It does not, however, as the author freely admits, have all the answers, but should be added to the essential reading list of any would-be politico (or one who is a bit stuck and wonders why).

So, what makes a political animal, and, more especially, a very successful one? For a start, if you have reached the age of, say, 20, with both your parents still alive and in reasonable health, after a fairly happy childhood, and a wide circle of friends, it is statistically very unlikely that you will ever reach cabinet level, let alone the Top Job.

Paxman discovered that an astonishing 62 per cent of prime ministers from Robert Walpole onwards lost at least one parent in childhood; even during the slaughter that was the Great War, the national average was only 1 per cent.

Some were unsure who their father was (Walpole, Ramsey MacDonald). Others, whose fathers survived into their offspring's adulthood, cast such a shadow that they struggled all their lives to prove themselves equal to that parent (Churchill, Thatcher).

A miserable, tortured childhood seems to be another prerequisite. Salisbury, Churchill, Curzon and Lloyd George, to mention but a few, had lonely and bitterly unhappy childhoods. And as for being popular at school, a positive disadvantage in later political life - even the fat boy at Jeffrey Archer's school had more mates - loners alone make it to the top.

Being very bright academically (Harold Wilson, Enoch Powell) or leaving school with virtually no qualifications (Churchill, Major), it does not seem to matter as much as it might, but those who were lively debaters at school or university do have the edge in Parliament, especially at prime minister's question time (for example, Major versus Hague). "... being an accomplished speechifier. This has nothing to do with having any knowledge or expertise. Indeed any knowledge beyond the bare essentials may be a disadvantage,

REVIEWS

because it will cloud the vision and obscure the terribly simple solutions".

So, having survived early years, which would have driven most of us into the asylum, the political animal decides, either before or after having embarked on a first career, to go into Parliament.

Having managed to get selected and elected, they become the new boys and girls. Paxman believes that most would-be MPs genuinely want to change the world for the better, either because of ideology or in the simple self-belief that they can make a difference by force of their own personalities.

However, what do they find on entering Parliament? A life dominated by the whips, whims and wiles of their party."...the life of a mule harnessed to a wheel can have more excitement to it than that of a government backbencher in parliament".

Richard Crossman wrote "The whole of Parliament is geared not to help backbenchers criticise ministers, but to help ministers overcome backbenchers".

The day-to-day work of certain MPs is examined (including our own dear Simon Hughes), and Paxton finds that the majority do work extremely hard. Corruption (Archer, Hamilton et al) is rare, as is serious mental instability, although a psychiatrist Paxton consulted reckons there are one or two who are barking mad.

And when you reach the dizzying pinnacles of high office, was it all worth it? A few crosses in the wrong box on election day and the chauffeur and the red boxes vanish over night. Upset too many of your colleagues, and suddenly you have no friends left, the mirror shatters, and its goodbye Downing Street.

It has happened to everyone, except Harold Wilson, who went of his own accord. And are you

remembered? Some, like Churchill and Thatcher remain in the nation's collective memory, but not all.

Sir Alec Douglas-Home was walking by the banks of the Tweed where he met a lady who remarked what a tragedy it was that he (Sir Alec) was never prime minister. "As a matter of fact I was," replied Home. "But only for a very short time".

Paxman's conclusion is that politicians, albeit hardworking and dedicated in the main, are a dull, talentless lot today. Since they began receiving salaries early in the last century, their independence has gone out of the window.

Blame devolution, presidential-style prime ministers, the lack of a serious external threat to the country, or whatever. In his opinion the political animal ain't what it was.

Wendy Kyrle-Pope

**Stupid White Men by
Michael Moore**
Penguin 2002
paperback £7.99

The world knows that President George Bush was 'elected' because a Republican-appointed member of the Supreme Court halted the recount of ballots in Florida. Less well-known are some earlier vote-rigging activities chronicled in this book.

In 1999, Katherine Harris, the Florida Secretary of State in charge of elections, paid £4 million to Database Technologies, with the blessing of Governor Jeb Bush, to remove from Florida's voter rolls anyone 'suspected' of being an ex-felon. Ex-felons cannot vote in Florida. That eliminated 31% of all black men, some convicted of no more than parking offences. Of the remaining black voters, 90% voted for Gore.

Just to be sure, Database was instructed also to remove those with names similar to those of ex-felons or who shared the same birthdate. Database suggested this might produce a 'false positive'. Never mind; the procedure wiped 173,000 registered voters off the rolls.

A further 8,000 were removed when Texas kindly supplied the names of ex-felons who had moved from Texas to Florida. This scam was uncovered and publicised by the BBC but taken up only later by The Los Angeles Times and the Washington Post.

What next? The overseas ballots would, the Bush family knew, be predominantly military and likely to vote Republican. But these votes would be illegal unless cast and signed by election day. So Katherine Harris sent out a memo to say that this time overseas ballots would not need to conform to this law.

Vigorous campaigning went on to ensure that the overseas votes came in, of which 680 were received after the deadline but were still counted. When the Democrats questioned all this, the Republican PR machine got to work. General Stormin' Norman remarked that it was "a very sad day in our country" when Democrats started harassing military voters.

Yet more. While vote counting was still going on, Fox News Channel announced that Bush had won. Most of the other channels copied the statement without checking. Gore was thus pushed into calling for a recount. John Ellis owns Fox. Who he? Cousin of Jeb and George.

The Miami Herald, reviewing the whole event, concluded that a fair recount would have ensured that Gore won by 299 to 393 votes. In a nation of 200 million voters, 154 million did not vote for Bush. Anyone can become President of the United States, it seems, given a determination to subvert the democratic system, an ex-President father, a helpful brother who is Governor of a key state, a politically sympathetic Supreme Court and loadsa.

Can all this be true? Well, all the information Moore supplies is somewhere in the public domain. He has not been prosecuted. The original edition of this book was published by Regan Press, an imprint of the respected Harper Collins, a firm presumably not

anxious to publish anything that might lead to prosecution.

Michael Moore is a writer and filmmaker with several books and films to his name. Perhaps wisely, he does not live all the time in the United States. His book contains other information, sourced but not much publicised.

For example, he lists 48 reactionary measures passed by Bush in his first few months of office. The new President briskly cut funds for libraries, paediatric training, research into renewable sources of energy and cleaner cars, public housing repairs and programmes dealing with child abuse. All this enabled him to reduce taxes, 43% of which benefited America's richest 1%.

We know about pulling out of the Kyoto Agreement. Bush also cut half a billion dollars from the budget of the Environment Protection Agency and reduced powers to deny contracts to companies violating environmental laws and work place safety. He further pushed for development of 'mini-nukes' in violation of the Comprehensive Test Treaty ban and made John Bolton, an opponent of non-proliferation treaties and of the United Nations, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security.

Lest Moore be thought biased, he points out that in many respects, Bush carried on where Clinton left off. For eight years, Clinton resisted all efforts to reduce carbon dioxide in the air and arsenic in water. He presided over the first administration in 25 years not to demand higher fuel efficiency standards from Detroit. He waited until the final days of his presidency to sign 26 directives aimed at improving the environment, knowing they would have to be implemented by a new administration.

Other chapters tackle America's continuing deep-rooted racialism; its ignorance and insularity and its tolerance of appalling conditions in many public schools; the deteriorating state of the planet and America's contribution to its downfall; the slobby American male and the retention of the death penalty despite very low public support. "Even in the killing machine known as the state of Texas... 72% favoured changing the law..."

Not all these themes are equally well explored. The American male in particular deserves a better attack. But many targets are dealt what look like crippling blows. His exposes of people in high places deserve attention. His jolly, cynical, knock-about style will ensure enjoyment as well as shock.

The book is not reassuring for anyone alarmed by the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for President Bush's plans for world domination. Indeed, it stimulates suspicion. Since UK alignment with USA policies seems inexplicable in terms of national interest or trade, let alone ethics, what else is being cooked up? What deals can Tony be hatching with the corrupt Dubya?

Elizabeth Sidney

Body Worlds exhibition at the Atlantis Gallery Brick Lane London E1

"Plastinate" is the buzz word down Brick Lane- a definition invented by Dr Gunther Von Hagens to describe a "specimen of a human or animal, whose cells have been infused and hardened with reactive plastics".

Here, in the East End – a whole crowd of Gestalt Plastinates – "aesthetic, instructive whole-body specimens positioned in a life-like pose" are on exhibition – a crowd of people who believed and are now proving that they believe in the future of education and science and consented to this form of immortality and exhibition.

No longer the object of human grief, they have an anonymous and curious presence. A kneeling plastinate, cast with a crucifix pays tribute to the Catholic Church for its open-minded acceptance of the advancement of anatomical exploration virtually since the Renaissance.

For anyone wishing to remain plastinate, you can donate your anatomy to Von Hagens once you have seen the exhibition – 40 people had already done this down Brick Lane recently when I visited - 6,000 people are apparently on the waiting list world-wide.

If you are curious or interested in anatomy, this exhibition is a 'must see'. Body Worlds is for everyone, targeting schools and education in particular and is presenting itself

outside the elite privilege of doctors and pathological research.

Biology teachers wrote very enthusiastically about it in the comments book and many children were there with their parents or adults absorbing difficult and perplexing information on what they are made of and the workings of the body. Many medical and other professionals were similarly addressing the specimens from their vantage point. Tourists and teenagers alike were all mesmerised by the details and the extraordinary complexities and mysteries of our physicality.

Von Hagens is clear in his profession - he is an anatomist who has discovered a durable, easy accessible and 3D insight into the human body. He does not believe he is presenting art simply because "they have been created for the sole purpose of sharing insights into human anatomy".

There are however questions in this exhibition for everyone, whether religious, philosophical, political, moral or just weird! Most of the donors were smokers – a most harrowing fact, among many, on the physical internal reality of deliberate everyday abuses to the body.

Around the plastinates, the exhibition is stock full of plants, rocks and living material. I found it distracting and unnecessary given that the exhibits are close together and its high attendance rates makes it very crowded. Given its high marketing profile and its sensational graphics and hard sell – you may be put off by its commercialism. I went with many reservations. I emerged surprised that I found it an extraordinary, thought provoking and enriching experience.

Body Worlds runs until 9 February.
Details: www.bodyworlds.com or 020 7053 0020.

Lucy Brennan-Shiel



The Asquiths by Colin Clifford John Murray 2002 £25 (hardback)

One of the many tributes to Roy Jenkins remarked that:

"Asquith (like Jenkins) was 'the epitome of the Balliol man'; he was 'cultivated' and 'brilliant'. From the grinding toil of the Labour back-benches in the 1960s, with all that trade unionism and class politics, the wit and beauty of the 1900s was entrancing. From the drudgery of Labour party conferences, Jenkins transported himself back to the clubs, dinner parties and gossip of Edwardian England."

And the world of the Asquiths is entrancing. This book is filled with extraordinary characters with extraordinary names: Harold "Bluetooth" Baker, Kakoo Tennant, Bongie Bonham-Carter. Even Asquith's own children had nicknames like Beb, Oc and Puffin.

Clifford rushes through Herbert Asquith's early years, perhaps because the sources there are less complete, and I would like to have known more about his first wife Helen, who died leaving him with five children. Even so, the book comes to life with the arrival of his second wife Margot.

Like Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia, she was happiest when hunting the fox in High Leicestershire. So much so that we find Asquith writing to her in the following terms after their engagement: "Your remark that you didn't know the boys' names amused me, but why should you?" He also asked in passing if she would like to give his youngest child a different Christian name.

Such an attitude to family life would sound extreme on a sink estate, but Margot and her stepchildren got on well enough though she always seemed jealous of her indomitable stepdaughter Violet. In due course the boys – Raymond, Beb and Oc – went on to glittering careers at Oxford. Perhaps it is because I read that chapter on the train back from Somerset as a couple of Hooray Henries arranged their New Year's Eve party by mobile phone, but I felt that their time their merits neither the space it is given nor the seriousness with which it is treated.

But now the shadows were falling upon the Edwardian Golden Age. Asquith's eldest son Raymond was killed on the Somme and another son suffered terribly from shell shock. Raymond was mourned by many as a lost leader of his generation, and eventually it was Violet, as Violet Bonham-Carter, who emerged as the most remarkable of Herbert Asquith's children.

This book is great fun, but one serious point it touches upon is worth noting. Modern Liberals have grown up with the idea that Lloyd George's assault on the landed interest was the most glorious moment in the party's history. Yet at the time Margot Asquith was deeply critical, arguing that the vituperation he poured over the aristocracy was being presented by the Tories as an assault on all property owning and threatened the Liberal Party's broad social base. And who is to say she was wrong?

Jonathan Calder

Monday

As I look back upon the festive season, a wealth of warm memories crowds in upon me. Christmas Eve saw me dressing up in a red suit and cotton wool beard and letting myself down the chimney at the Home for Well-Behaved Orphans to collect the presents that had been put out for me. That was great fun, but I did not enjoy this year's nativity play half as much. On legal advice, the school had decided to wrap all the children from head to foot in stout hessian to avoid awakening the passions of undesirable elements in the audience. This seemed to me to be *Going A Bit Far*, and it had the unfortunate effect of muffling the lines; some of my favourite bits, such as "Oh look, a star!", were quite spoilt. On the positive side, the donkey was something of a stunner. Finally, Boxing Day saw the traditional contest between Lord Bonkers' XI and an Esqimaux XI here at the Hall. I am pleased to announce that, despite a stubborn seventh wicket partnership between Björk and Nanook of the North, my team emerged triumphant.

Tuesday

To Kent for a dinner to mark the fortieth anniversary of Eric Lubbock's victory in the Orpington by-election. I flatter myself that I played no little part in that triumph, but modesty forbids me to make more than the most passing reference to that contribution in my speech. The evening reminds me that in those days one heard a great deal about Orpington Man: he was quite the latest thing and we Liberals had great hopes of him. Unfortunately, upon further investigation he turned out to be a crude fabrication made up from the jaw of a Conservative and the skull of a gibbon. I think the ease with which he gained such fame says a great deal about the Britain of the day, don't you?

Wednesday

A new consignment of canvass cards arrives from Cowley Street. In place of usual Liberal, Probable, Socialist and so forth, the columns are headed with descriptions like "innovator", "self-actualiser" and "contented conformer". I telephone to complain and am put through to a fellow called Razzall. When I point out that none of these categories quite covers me, he points out that I could also be a "striver", a "traditionalist", an "esteem seeker" or "disconnected". Unfortunately, the line goes dead at this point.

Thursday

I read in this morning's newspaper that a dog has been killed by a panther at Llangadog. Of course, given that I am reading the Manchester Guardian it may well be that a panther had been killed by a dog at Llangapanther. Whatever the facts of the case, I note from the facing page that our own Paul Tyler has decided to stand down as Member of Parliament for North Cornwall. In view of events in Llangapanther, I think this wise. I first met Tyler in '06 when we were both new bugs in the Commons, and even then he was thought one of the brightest – though perhaps not the brightest – amongst the new intake and known affectionately to all as the "Beast of Bodmin". Like you diarist he had the misfortune to lose his seat in 1910, but unlike your diarist he did not have a peerage upon which to fall back. Consequently he fought every ensuing election before finally succeeding in returning to the Commons in 1992. Perhaps those long years of campaigning had taken their toll, but by then he had taken to roaming the moors by night with his characteristic loping gait,

Lord Bonkers' Diary

and the local farmers were beginning to complain. Let us now look to his successor and send our good wishes to Mr Robin Teverson, whoever he may turn out to be.

Friday

A steel grey dawn breaks over Rutland Water and there is no sound but the haunting cry of the wheway. As a Rear Admiral in

the Rutland Naval Reserve I have long taken an interest in fishery protection (I was instrumental in bringing into being the longer close season that the hedge carp now enjoys) and I am here this

morning to make sure that no Spanish factory ships have ventured on to Rutland Water. I fear the United Kingdom has husbanded its resources less carefully. The connoisseurs amongst you will be familiar with Jack van Geloven's Neptune's Tribute to Europa, which hangs in the Blue Dining Room here at the Hall. This striking canvass shows a naked Sir Edward Heath sprawled upon a bed of fish with his arm about the neck of a bull. Our own Ron Finnie does his best in Scotland, others run refuges for battered cod, but I fear for the future of this plucky fish if it does not have the good sense to move to Rutland.

Saturday

It is not only van Geloven who can paint: you will often find me engaged with smock, easel and model of an afternoon. Why, only last year my *Sunset over Bonkers Hall* was exhibited at the Rutland Academy! Thus it was natural that, when recruiting leading British artists to design covers for him, little Rusbridger at the Manchester Guardian should call upon my services. It seems, however, that my uncompromising offering was a little too red-blooded for the muesli-and-water types who read that organ nowadays. In view of the furore which ensued, let me at once make clear that I meant to no disrespect to Miss Polly Toynbee: my words, rather, were meant to reflect public exasperation at all those who write turgid columns praising every act of the appalling Blair and his wife, the Japanese property magnate. We true artists are so often misunderstood.

Sunday

How sad to I was to learn of the death of Roy Jenkins! We may have had our disagreements – notably over the European Underwear Directive – but I have the fondest memories of games of croquet at East Hendred and dinners at the Reform Club. My one regret was that I was not able to persuade little Steel to relent and allow him to join the Liberal Party. One week I was told that we were full up, the next that the members were still rather sore about Lloyd George and the time was not yet ripe. (I replied that he had to admit that Jenkins was trying his hardest not to be Welsh, but Steel was implacable.) The result was that Jenkins eventually gave up the attempt and founded his own "SDP Party" instead. Amusing as it was, I think my old friend deserved a more dignified end.

Lord Bonkers, who was Liberal MP for Rutland South-West 190610, opened his diary to Jonathan Calder.
