

liberator



Terrorism, liberty and community relations - time for Liberals to stand firm

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COMMENTARY

ANOTHER HARD TIME TO BE A LIBERAL

The 7 July bombs in London inspired many moving tributes to the victims and to the skills of the emergency services, and heartfelt condemnation of the perpetrators.

Politics rightly and understandably took a back seat in the immediate aftermath of this atrocity.

But it was not long in reasserting itself. After the 11 September attacks in America, *Liberator* (issue 277) ran a cover that declared it a “hard time to be a liberal”.

Now that Islamist terrorism has come to the UK, it will be hard here too, as calls grow for clampdowns and restrictions, and as minority communities feel vulnerable to revenge attacks.

Even while tributes were paid, a tidal wave of nonsense was spoken, chiefly by members of the government.

Londoners were praised for their stoicism, the mere act of getting on a bus was credited as defying terrorism, and the blitz of 65 years ago was repeatedly invoked.

People carried on with their normal lives because they have to go to work or they don't get paid. They carried on with normal activities because it would be impossible for most people to retreat indefinitely to their homes.

It was easy to see why the government might want to enlist bus passengers as warriors in the ‘war on terror’ - it feared being blamed for the bombs because of the Iraq war.

Obviously the blame lies with the bombers. But for prime minister Blair to pretend that the Iraq war had no influence is an extraordinarily blatant lie even by his standards.

As far back as February 2003, Blair's own intelligence services warned that invading Iraq would encourage international terrorism and make it more likely that terrorists would acquire chemical and biological weapons.

In July, the respected Chatham House think tank said that Britain ‘riding pillion’ to America had increased the danger to this country.

As Denis Graf explains in this issue, the Downing Street Memo, now causing a scandal in America, suggests Blair planned his war long before he went through the charade of seeking UN approval.

If these opinions were not enough, any thinking person can see that the unprovoked invasion of another country on a false pretext, leading to the slaughter of thousands of its inhabitants and to the creation of a lawless adventure playground for terrorists would, to put it no higher, make Britain less safe.

The questions raised go to the heart of Britain's place in the world.

Since the Liberal Democrats have a review of fundamental values, ‘narrative’ and policies in progress, let's start with a fundamental question.

Is it any longer sensible for Britain to try to be a world power? For 40 years, after more or less peacefully getting rid of an empire, Britain has continued with this fantasy. It maintained substantial armed forces, kept up the fiction of an ‘independent’ nuclear ‘deterrent’ and behaved as America's most unquestioning loyalist.

Do we any longer want to do this? Does this expenditure of blood and treasure actually buy anything of value? Even if the answers are ‘yes’ to both, it is a debate worth having rather than stumbling on regardless.

Considering Britain's place in the world leads naturally to its place in Europe. The alternative to being a full partner in Europe is not ‘independence’ but domination by America, an outcome which some Eurosceptics have been honest enough to welcome.

Will the Liberal Democrats have the courage to say, “forget Britain as an independent great power, it was over decades ago, though no-one would admit it, and we will have more influence (including more influence with America) as part of Europe than as America's sidekick, so get real about where the future lies”.

The bombings also raised some profound questions about matters closer to home.

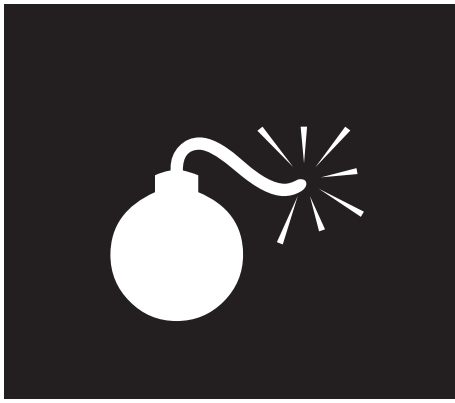
What is the future for multiculturalism? Liberals uphold individual rights, including the rights of those who wish to follow their own culture. Have we always recognised that there is an equally important right to turn one's back on a minority culture and that those who choose to do so require support?

Some liberals have become enthusiastic about choice in education provision. Do we wish to uphold that, or do we think that both Northern Ireland and some of the schools run by religious organisations are sufficiently poor advertisements for faith schools that we want to put integration ahead of diversity?

How do we uphold civil liberty in the post-bombs climate? Support for identity cards is sinking fast and we have the word of no less than home secretary Charles Clarke that they would have done nothing whatever to prevent the London bombs.

But other challenges lurk. Free speech is at risk, over both the legislation on incitement to religious hatred and the definitions of ‘indirectly’ inciting terrorism. The rule of law is in question, with some of the powers used or sought by the government to hold or deport people without due process.

The test of liberals is whether they can uphold freedom in bad times, when all around are calls, with whatever motive, for restrictions on liberty.



RADICAL BULLETIN

CHEADLE SAVES CHARLIE

“With friends like these,” might have been some Liberal Democrats’ reaction to the spate of newspaper stories just before the Cheadle by-election suggesting that Charles Kennedy’s leadership would be under threat were the seat lost.

Stories of this kind, invariably anonymously sourced, do not appear in newspapers by themselves. They would only have got there by one or more senior Liberal Democrats talking to political journalists, not least because there would otherwise have been no very obvious reason for anyone outside the parliamentary party to think Kennedy did face any threat.

But the fact that these stories resulted from leaks did not make them untrue. Far from it. The parliamentary party was rife with discontent around the time of the by-election over Kennedy’s post-election performance. The loss of Cheadle would have put his position in question.

The problem stretches back at least to the Southport spring conference in 2004 (Liberator 295), when rumours abounded that a coup was in progress to replace Kennedy because of his lacklustre performance, with Menzies Campbell to have been brought in as a caretaker leader.

Nothing came of what was probably an impractical idea anyway, and Kennedy thereafter got his act together.

Since the general election result, and the uncertain progress it represented (Liberator 303), there have been two main sources of discontent.

One was the reshuffle, which saw big names like Phil Willis and Paul Burstow sacked and half the 2005 intake given minor jobs and the other half not, leaving the latter feeling resentful.

The other was that Kennedy had lapsed back into masterly inactivity, caused, some said, by over-assiduous support for a key part of the Scottish economy.

Kennedy of course became a father during the election. If he had wanted some time off, he could have announced a period of paternity leave until conference, leaving the party in Campbell’s hands day-to-day, and no-one would have thought any the worse of him.

Instead, he stayed in charge but gave little leadership and direction, and did not capitalise on election progress.

Take all this with the resentments of those who never supported him anyway, and Kennedy has faced a whispering campaign in parliament, the most obvious manifestation of which was the ousting of his lieutenant Matthew Taylor as parliamentary party chair by Paul Holmes (Liberator 303).

With Cheadle won and the recess due soon after, this whispering will no doubt subside until conference.

But the mere fact that someone in Westminster saw fit to brief against him and that someone else, out of misplaced loyalty, told the papers that he had laid down the law to his colleagues about damaging briefings (a conversation no MP spoken to by Liberator can recall) shows the whole thing is unlikely to go away.

Who is leaking? As usual, one should ask who benefits. Of the most talked about future leadership contenders, Nick Clegg and Chris Huhne both need more time to establish themselves at Westminster, Ed Davey needs more time to make himself known to the voting public, and if David Laws really does harbour leadership ambitions he needs a decent interval for the Orange Book debacle to be forgotten (Liberator 298). The leaks could of course have been the work of misguided acolytes of any of them.

Only Mark Oaten and Simon Hughes would appear to have an interest in an early leadership election, and a Sky News report on the night of the by-election alleged that Hughes was responsible. It doesn’t sound like his style, but who knows?

SITUATIONS VACANT

One reason for doubting that Simon Hughes is the secret briefer is that, when Hughes has something to say, he is almost painfully open to the press.

He shared with the Guardian his belief that the party would make 27 gains at the general election (Liberator 303) and then in late July came out with the bizarre proposal that the Liberal Democrats should advertise for parliamentary candidates.

Such applicants would still have to be approved, he said, but surely if someone is interested in becoming a Lib Dem MP, a logical first step would be to have become a Lib Dem?

Hughes argued for his approach in the interests of greater diversity, something that is evidently a preoccupation of his, to judge from a constitutional amendment proposed to conference by his constituency party.

This calls for “in each constituency where the latest national census shows that 10% or more of the population is from black or minority ethnic communities, [parliamentary selection] short lists shall contain at least one candidate who is black or from a minority ethnic community, unless in exceptional circumstances the relevant state candidates committee has authorised otherwise.”

There is a major problem with this, quite apart from how a non-black minority ethnic community is defined (Irish? Polish? Cypriot?), or why choose 10%?

When the party adopted gender ‘zipping’ for the European elections in 1999, it did so after a full conference debate with a motion open to amendments. When it decided not to impose gender quotas for Westminster candidates in 2001, but instead to adopt the Gender Balance Task Force approach, it also did so after a full debate.

A constitutional amendment does not allow for a proper airing of issues, and feelings are likely to be as deep and divided on this as they were on gender balance.

Worse, if the chosen method proves unworkable, or to cause unforeseen problems, or simply outlives its usefulness, it remains set in stone until another amendment can be agreed to remove it.

IT’S YOUR MOUTH THAT’S FOR TALKING

Will nobody learn? Immediately after the general election, Charles Kennedy made himself look ridiculous by saying: “We must reconsider whether it should be possible to commit the party to specific and often controversial policies on the basis of a brief, desultory debate in a largely empty hall.”

It then emerged that all the Lib Dem policies that had given election ammunition to opponents had emanated from expert working group policy papers approved by the Federal Policy Committee, which he chairs.

They had been merely rubber-stamped by conference, and none had resulted from motions proposed by ordinary delegates (Liberator 302).

Now Simon Hughes is at it too. He told the Guardian (26 July): “There’s no willingness to let a few people get a wacky idea through”.

This may possibly have been a reference to the working groups. But since it was followed by a reference to preventing “a handful of grassroots activists [from approving] measures that come back to haunt the party”, it seems unlikely.

The problem is not the conference, it is the content of the policy papers put before it.

Policy working groups are handpicked by Kennedy’s policy committee, which in turn approves their conclusions before these are presented to conference, which has never rejected a policy paper.

When will Kennedy, Hughes, and others who ought to know better, realise that these idiotic comments damage the reputation of the whole party and devalue everything that happens at the conference, whether or not they approve of it?

FOLLOW THE MONEY

Newspaper reports of Charles Kennedy’s July pep talk to Lib Dem MPs made odd reading for those who had actually heard him speak or who had read the speech later.

Kennedy’s description of the work of the party’s taxation review was broadly neutral but was spun heavily (presumably by some MPs, as they were the only people present, or else by party spin doctors) as marking the demise of the policy of having a higher 50p rate tax band for those who earn more than £100,000 a year.

Those who want to get rid of the higher rate tax band policy apparently think the Lib Dems should be concerned about “the aspirations” of those who would like to each £100,000 a year but who have not as yet achieved this.

Since the number of voters who either earn this amount or have any realistic chance of doing so is tiny, pandering to them does not seem very convincing politics.

The party’s post-election polling showed that the 50p tax rate for those high earners was one of the most popular policies the party has ever had, with up to 80% of voters expressing approval.

Where does this spin come from? It is said that shadow chancellor Vincent Cable wants to get rid of the £100,000 band because of the relatively high number of rich people in his Twickenham constituency, but Cable’s own presentation to the tax working group was also fairly neutral on the point.

Not even Cable wants a single flat tax rate, but someone evidently supports this mad idea, since this was also spun to the newspapers as something that Kennedy allegedly wished to consider, when there is no evidence to suggest he does.

If the £100,000 band is removed from Lib Dem plans, either the party will have to pledge lower spending, or someone else will have to pay more. Or will it be left to our old friend ‘efficiency savings’ to make up the difference?

The tax review itself bears all the usual signs of what is wrong with Liberal Democrat policy making, and its eventual conclusions should therefore be viewed with due suspicion.

Not many people understand the intricacies of tax except for professionals and academics. Therefore who should dominate the list of those who expressed an interest in joining this group but those with professional axes to grind?

People who merely pay taxes or have a view about the role of taxation were presumably insufficiently expert.

The policy department chose the group members by its usual opaque methods and ended up with a group unreasonably dominated by those whose priority is low taxes.

It was only when the Federal Policy Committee erupted in protest that a few others were added in an effort at balance.

Still, whenever its conclusions are presented to conference, delegates will probably find the whole thing incomprehensible, not bother to read it, and as usual vote through absolutely anything proposed on the nod in a post-lunch stupor.

POLD AND IN THE WAY

Liberal Democrat chief executive Chris Rennard is soon to get his hands on management of the Parliamentary Office of the Liberal Democrats (POLD), ending the perverse situation in which some work was supervised by Cowley Street, some overseen from Westminster, while yet more fell down the cracks between the two.

And not a moment too soon, judging by what happened over the party’s response to the terrorist bombings in London.

First, all Liberal Democrat MPs were texted (by whom is unclear) to the effect that they should not comment on terrorism-related issues, a strange diktat given that some have seats in London and others seats with large Muslim electorates.

Then the party’s only Muslim parliamentarian, north west MEP Saj Karim, was contacted by various Asian media to ask him what he was going to say to prime minister Blair at the summit that was planned for leading Muslim personalities. He had to admit he knew nothing about it.

Karim called the POLD press office, only to be told: “Just because you are a Muslim doesn’t mean you have a right to be invited.”

He then phoned the leader's office, only to be told amid apologies that they had forgotten about him.

Baroness Falkner, who is of Muslim origin, then contacted the press office to ask them if they could place an article she had written in the press.

They promised to do what they could, but she heard nothing further and got the piece published in the Independent by her own efforts. That got her on Newsnight and also invited to the Muslim summit.

Combining POLD staff with the party machine should end the situation where they were notionally managed by the parliamentary party chair, who never had the time to do so, and could not reasonably be expected to.

SHORTLIST OF ONE

Concern over the way in which by-election candidates are chosen is unlikely to abate after Cheadle.

Congratulations to Mark Hunter, who is a long-standing friend of many people associated with Liberator and won against an especially nasty Tory campaign. He was the right candidate, but for any local party to be given no choice in the matter raises worries.

As reported in Liberator 303, Hunter was the only person approved from among five who were interviewed by Cowley Street, three of whom were former candidates in the north west.

Applications were open for barely 36 hours, and several other former candidates were among those not interviewed.

This time the choice was not a problem. Suppose in future that a single candidate is approved who is unacceptable to the local party, objected to an important faction within it, cannot withstand media scrutiny, or who holds some eccentric opinion that deters helpers from attending?

If the candidate concerned wins, they and the local party will be stuck with each other for a long time. Surely there needs to be some local input?

BRAIN TEASER

No part of the Liberal Democrats is more steeped in bureaucracy than the candidates department, a body notorious for producing an application form of such complexity that it had to run a training session on how to fill it in.

It has turned its attention to approved candidates who have not stood at either of the last two general elections, to whom it has sent a questionnaire accompanied by threats of removal from the approved list if it is not returned.

One perplexed recipient immediately noticed that the form lacked anywhere to write his name and address, making it hard to see how he could be recorded as having filled it in. He wondered if perhaps Cowley Street intended to identify him by means of handwriting analysis.

The form asked why he had not stood in 1997. In fact, he did, but it lacked any space in which he could make this known.

It then demanded details of which conferences he had attended between 1997 and 2001 before repeating the questions for the former year for the latter.

Our hero had fought the 2001 election too, a nomination that had escaped Cowley Street's notice and for which the form also gave no space to allow an explanation.

It then moved on to ask whether there were any party policies with which the recipient disagreed, with the instruction "if 'no', please elucidate".

One might have thought they would be more interested in candidates who disagree with party policy, but it required a detailed explanation only from those who agreed.

All bureaucracies invent an ever-expanding range of pointless tasks with which to justify their existence. In a party keen on cutting down waste, will Cowley Street get a grip of the candidates department?



POPULATION SURPLUS

There has been keen competition for its services, but the Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is heading to Manchester Central in recognition of its startling motion on environmental protection and sustainability.

This quite outclasses the Federal Executive's mangling of the English language over the rules for party committee elections (Liberator 303).

The motion, after some familiar observations about resource depletion and the demands made on the planet's resources by rich countries, goes on to recommend:

"That the UK takes steps to reduce its population by natural wastage over the next 50 to 150 years to a level at which it can be sustained by its indigenous available resources or by trading equivalent amounts of resources with other nations."

As though it would not be enough to commit the party to a policy of 'No Sex Please, We're British', the motion

also called for the UK to "promote policies for similar actions in all other countries".

The toilet, as regular readers will know, has been awarded since 1983 to honour the worst motion submitted to each conference, in commemoration of Mitcham and Morden's attempt to specify the exact intervals between public conveniences on each class of road.

KENNEDY NUDE SHOCKER!

We are indebted to the blog of Romsey MP Sandra Gidley for the news that Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy has graced the pages of that august publication, *British Naturism*.

According to Gidley, Kennedy "stood out" in this organ, but only because he was one of the few people pictured fully clothed.

Gidley receives this journal regularly but, she adds hastily, on an entirely unsolicited basis.

MAKE WAR HISTORY

Abolition of war seems an impossible dream, but a growing number of conflict-wracked countries are turning away from violence, says Caroline Hayman

Peace Direct is an early stage organisation that supports grassroots peacebuilding in conflict areas, and which seeks to raise the profile of this work and bring it into the mainstream of government policy and charitable giving.

This is an excellent time for an organisation such as ours because three trends are flowing together.

The nature of conflict is changing. All the major conflicts in 2004 were internal, or intra-state. Internal conflicts are particularly likely to reignite if conflict resolution and transformation has not taken place – half of conflicts break out in areas of former conflict, and conversely, there is a 44% probability of conflict recurring.

There is a number of growing networks of experienced and skilled peacebuilders, graduating from institutions such as Bradford University School of Peace Studies, and other similar institutions. Networks such as Action for Conflict Transformation and the Non-Violent Peace Force provide opportunities for peacebuilders to support each other and bring on new generations of peace activists.

Programmes such as Linking Policy to Practice and Reflecting on Peace Practice (Collaborative for Development Assistance) are defining the conditions and approaches that make for effective peacebuilding.

The controversial nature of recent British military interventions has created a substantial constituency of people interested in alternatives to the use of force.

In 2003, Peace Direct conducted an assessment of what we could offer peacebuilders. The responses covered resources, solidarity and lobbying.

Funding for peacebuilding at a grassroots level is hard to find – few trusts prioritise it and government funding tends to be too large-scale and too short-term, and to follow government priorities rather than those of local people. Peace activists therefore often leave their work to take paid employment with development agencies. As peacebuilding depends crucially on relationships, which take time to develop, long-term core funding is particularly necessary.

Peace Direct provides both long-term and rapid response funding to selected projects that have the potential to be effective locally and have a wider strategic impact.

Individuals and groups engaged in peacebuilding work, often against considerable odds, can feel isolated. Knowing that the work is recognised both by fellow peacebuilders and by people thousands of miles away, and is a source of inspiration, helps people to keep going. Achieving a public profile for this work boosts morale and can protect vulnerable peacebuilders from state sponsored violence.

Peace Direct links peace activists overseas with individuals in the UK and publicises their work through photography, film and the written word.

UK government practices and actions can exacerbate conflict, and there is often too little recognition of the value of using non-violent alternatives.

Peace Direct organises face-to-face meetings between officials and peacebuilders, and is building a database of non-violent initiatives to help governments partner with and support local peacebuilders.

A recent case study is the ending of violent conflict in Mandera in northern Kenya. This conflict flared up for reasons including electoral boundary changes, spillover from the Somali conflict in terms of clan rivalry and arms, and competition for resources. More than 60 people have died to date, with women and children being particularly targeted, and thousands of people have left their homes.

The government responded by deploying extra security personnel to keep the warring sides apart, and the Kenyan and Ethiopian presidents have met to map out strategies for cross border security and curbing of small arms trafficking. However, for there to be a lasting peace, work needs to be done at community level to develop early warning systems and mechanisms for resolving disputes without resorting to violence.

The conflict has similar causes to conflict in the 1990s in the neighbouring province of Wajir. Here, a remarkable woman, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, started by bringing women together from different clans. Women had to commit that, even if members of their family were killed in the conflict, they would continue to work for peace. The project developed to draw in the clan elders and created systems to ensure that conflict was addressed by negotiation, and that early warnings of tension were acted on.

With a small amount of resource, raised from Kenyan businesses and Peace Direct, Dekha was able to fund travel, training costs and mobile phone talk time, in order to share the learning from Wajir with different groups in Mandera. The outcome was a crucial meeting attended by all MPs in the district, government officials and community representatives, in March, which established the basic framework for action. Since April, a fragile peace has held and there have been no more deaths from this conflict.

If you think this sounds like the peace organisation you have been waiting for – geared to the conflicts of the 21st century, for something not against, celebrating and supporting local initiatives not imposing Western solutions, with a real chance to make a difference – then please join us, and help us to support peacebuilding. In the long term, it's our best chance of a more peaceful world.

Carolyn Hayman is chief executive of Peace Direct.
Information: www.peacedirect.org

TIME FOR LIBERALS TO STAND FIRM

The London bomb blasts have put liberal values under threat from both the bombers and the backlash, says Greg Mulholland MP, whose constituency was home to some of the terrorists

If someone had told me on 6 May that, within the first 10 weeks of my first term as an MP, I would be dealing with a terrorist bomb factory in my constituency, indeed one apparently used to carry out the worst ever terrorist attack on the British mainland, I would not have believed them.

I heard the news by text message. A former council colleague told me of a major operation in Hyde Park, in the south of my Leeds North West constituency, involving helicopters and armed police. As I rushed to catch the next Leeds train, I passed the heartbreaking “missing: please help” homemade posters and photographs outside Kings Cross station, a tragic reminder of the events of the previous Thursday. The dawning realisation that these shattered lives might be linked to my own constituency was hard to fathom.

The sense of real shock and horror was palpable as soon as I got back to the constituency to find a police cordon and the international media camped out in droves. Rather ironically, Hyde Park is called after its more famous London counterpart, and there could not have been a more shocking way to bring home the atrocities in the capital than finding out that the bombers had been operating in our midst. The focus of police operations in this part of the city, alongside raids in the Beeston area, was 18 Alexandra Grove, a very unremarkable flat in a set of drab housing association blocks. As all the other residents said when I visited them a week or so later, how could this have been happening here?

Even before the shock had died down, the soul searching had begun in earnest. Eyes trained on the Muslim community at pains to stress that this is not only not of Islam, but against Islam. But the sense of bewilderment pervaded all sections of the community: How could we not know this was going on in our midst? And of course, most fundamentally, why did these Leeds lads decide to blow people to bits in our, in their, capital city?

Then, of course, two weeks later it all seems to be happening again, though this time thank goodness the attack fails. This time it was not disaffected West Yorkshire men sucked in by fundamentalism; it was that favourite bugbear, asylum seekers. Indeed, the revelation that the 21 July attackers appear to be foreign asylum seekers claiming benefits from the country they attacked is a truly awful one. The BNP could scarcely have dreamt up such a scenario.

As liberals, we face a serious challenge here. The terrorist attacks are not only an attack against our country and our way of life. They are also a challenge to the tolerance and

mutual respect that we champion in a society that, in many areas, is unrecognisable from the Britain of even 20 years ago. This is a serious boost for those who have been telling us that multiculturalism does not work.

While this is a challenge for multiculturalism, it is even more of a challenge for Islam to find its place in 21st century Britain. There is a hard transition still going on between the generations, from being (in this case mainly) Pakistani/Kashmiri Muslims to being British. And at the same time, there is a challenge for Britain to realise that Islam is now an important part of its society.

What is almost unfathomable, and perhaps the most evil reality of the act after the slaughter itself, is that the terrorists would have known that their actions, especially if successful, would leave their families broken and their own communities living in fear and at risk of both revenge attacks and draconian actions by the state.

So little wonder that, after the terrible revelation of 12 July, there were two very different responses from Muslims locally. Many wanted to reach out and tell the world the truth about Islam and its peaceful message, while others were understandably afraid and bewildered, and wanted to hide away.

But this can only fuel the sort of suspicion that gives such ammunition to those who will seek to exploit this whole situation to divide society. It is time for the Muslims of West Yorkshire and the rest of the country to feel they are an integral part of modern British society and do even more to show us all they have to offer.

But it is largely for Muslims to work out how Muslims respond to all this. The question we must ask is how do we as liberals respond to this? One thing is absolutely clear – respond we must or we will be regarded as almost complicit at least in the circumstances that have led to such attacks taking place.

The tabloids, of course, suggest that any attempt to defend civil liberties is to put the bombers’ human rights above those of the victims. And what of the oft-heard cry to deport the terrorists and the preachers of hate to “where they came from”. What about when that is Beeston or Dewsbury?

We can take some heart that the government has not rushed into the kind of knee jerk reaction demanded by some. As for ID cards, helpfully Charles Clark has at least admitted they would not have prevented the 7 July attacks nor has a lack of them proved any hindrance to very swiftly

tracking down and arresting the suspects from the failed attacks on 21 July.

Another dimension of the whole difficult experience is the media and how they have responded to all this. One of the hardest things to accept as a liberal is the reality of a free press. Indeed, this episode showed at times the very worst side of the international media, desperate for racial conflict, for divided communities, for religious apartheid.

A remarkably inaccurate and offensive article by Doug Saunders in the Toronto Globe & Mail has caused justifiable outrage in Leeds. It was as hateful as it was nonsensical. As well as claiming that “It was Leeds that attacked London,” he also goes on to describe Leeds, the fastest growing city in the UK, as “the other England, the impoverished, hateful, culture-devoid”.

Should someone, anyone, be able to present as fact such extraordinarily ill-founded and highly provocative drivel? The answer of course has to be “yes”, albeit through gritted teeth, but in a supposedly respectable newspaper? It is therefore for all of us to be equally outspoken in our views and comments and also not afraid of attacking such reprehensible nonsense and the contemptible moron who penned it. That’s my right to free speech.

So the message from liberals must be loud and unequivocal: We must not give up the free and tolerant society that the terrorists are seeking to destroy, or they will have succeeded. But nor must we duck the difficult issues. We must address the failures of modern British society that led to these attacks and face the reality of them, however unpalatable.

So, as well as being liberals, how do we respond as Brits? The tabloids want to “declare war” on terror and terrorists but are at a loss as to how to deal with the fact that some were British. Boris Johnson has suggested that children should pledge allegiance to the flag the way Americans do. Is there an answer to the failure of these young Britons not wanting to be British by wrapping ourselves in our flag? Personally, I love to see the cross of St George flying on English parish churches. But flags in schools? How terribly un-British. This suggestion shows once again just how out of touch many Tories are. How adrift from the needs of Britain today, and it is that reality that we must grasp and move forward with if we are to overcome the challenges we are having to face. We can and should rejoice in our Britishness, without of course ever having to imply that all that is done in the name of our country is right, but we must now look again at what it means to be British.

And, as true patriots, we must stand up against our government when it does things not in the interests of our nation. We must continue to have the courage to push the government and the country to face the facts about our foreign policy and above all Iraq. While there can never be any excuse for such acts of evil perpetrated on 7 July, we must accept how our foreign policy is perceived in the Arab

and Muslim world, which not only fuels terrorism but also causes division within British society where we need to build more cohesion. In short, our country must end a foreign policy that is perceived to be anti-Muslim. It is high time to look to Europe and away from America. At least, away from America under George Bush.

The operation at 18 Alexandra Grove, briefly one of the most infamous addresses in the world, is coming to an end. No longer are the television satellite vans lined up the road. The media are no longer asking local people incessant questions. But it is time for local people to do that for themselves.

The answers (some of them, at least) to the questions posed as a result of this will indeed be found in Leeds, in Dewsbury, Bradford and other multicultural towns and cities. Muslims must reach out more but equally whole communities have to work out how we can move forward in a more concerted way. The truth is, that all the anti-terror legislation in the world will ultimately be futile if we cannot live together in Britain.

This could be a time for hand wringing amongst those who believe in freedom and tolerance. But no, instead we must lead the response to this, and join with right thinking people from each and every section of our communities. This is when liberals must stand firm. We must stand shoulder to shoulder with good and tolerant people of all faiths and all cultures and none, both in condemnation of the terrorists and those who seek to use their existence to breed hatred and fear.

The Saturday after the discovery of the Leeds links to the London bombings, there was a march of all sections of the community dubbed ‘Peace and Unity in our Community’.

In Hyde Park, multiculturalism does work. Tolerance and respect do exist and the fact that a handful of people from outside the area used a flat for such a terrible purpose cannot change that. As I told people at the march, we must now use the terrible events of the last few weeks as an opportunity to increase understanding and integration of our different but complementary communities. To do all we can, together, to ensure that no one from our area ever again decides to attack the country they grew up in.

The message is loud and clear, peace and unity in our community. Here in Hyde Park, in Leeds, in London. And then one day across a fairer world. That is the only way ultimately to beat the terrorists, wherever they may come from.



Greg Mulholland is Liberal Democrat MP for Leeds North West.

WHAT NEXT FOR LIB DEM CRIME POLICIES?

Liberal Democrats must not be afraid to campaign on the issue of crime, says Lynne Featherstone MP

The months after a general election in which the party's crime policies, specifically its sentencing policies, came under much attack from Labour and especially the Conservatives is a good time to pause and take stock.

Much as we might dislike the testosterone-fuelled macho game of "my prison population's bigger than yours", it does strike a chord with the public. Fed up with crime? Blame someone, beat 'em up – oops no, we're meant to be civilized, so just lock 'em up instead.

There seem to have been two responses to this in the party since 5 May. The first batch is easy to deal with; people say we're soft on crime because of policy X so ditch policy X. My answer to that is simple: no. For example, should we really have to start believing that a cold-blooded and pre-meditated killer should have the same minimum sentence as a battered wife who lashes out in a moment of desperation?

The other response is wrong too; that we should therefore spend more time campaigning on issues such as opposing mandatory life sentences for murder. It's a beguiling logic; other parties raise the issue, it's an issue which goes down badly on the doorstep - until we explain it - when the experience of many canvassers is that it is easy to persuade people to back it. (A task that's been made easier since the election, with the Director of Public Prosecutions coming out against mandatory life sentences. I await the Tory leaflets attacking him for not understanding crime or being soft on it... !)

But it is a political dead-end - dancing to the tune of the other parties, and spending up those valuable nanoseconds

when we actually get to talk to floating voters on topics which, whatever we may think, are in substance peripheral for most voters.

They want fewer crimes, and aren't really bothered with the niceties of sentencing problems. Because the real issue is not the detail of the policies but the overall impression some have that the Lib Dems don't take crime seriously. And that's

not about the details of our policies on sentencing so much as our usual silence about crime in year-round campaigning.

Yes, at election time we roll out the fully costed specifics - X thousand more police most times - but if the rest of the time we're largely silent, it suggests we are soft on crime.

"Silent" may be a harsh term, but then so are the horror stories of candidates in our target seats who didn't want crime in their leaflets in the run-up to a

general election because "crime's not a big issue round here."

If we genuinely campaign on crime issues all year round, then we build up credibility and trust with the public. And that brings insurance against the attacks for being soft on crime. Such attacks don't sound so horrible when the voters know we've helped set up a neighbourhood watch, got new street lighting, had a dark and dangerous passageway redesigned and so on. Credibility based on track-records means people are more likely to give you a second chance or the benefit of the doubt when an attack from another party comes up.

Getting that credibility also means being more imaginative about campaigning against crime. It shouldn't simply be a matter of dusting off a few well-worn phrases about "X



demands Y more police in place Z". It's about using all those levers we have - real power in so many councils - to help tackle the conditions in which crime thrives; to make improved street lighting as important a part of pavement politics as potholes, and to support seriously youth facilities.

It's about working together with the local police. Most police are willing to listen seriously to complaints about particular areas being neglected. They are as aware as anyone of how imperfect policing based on crime statistics is, particularly given the high level of under-reporting of crimes like graffiti, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

But it's also about thinking more deeply of the connection between the police and the community. One of Sir Robert Peel's nine founding principles of policing, laid out when he created our country's modern police force, talks of the relationship between the public and the police, "the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen, in the interests of community welfare and existence."

Fighting crime isn't just something you can pay for through your taxes and then ignore. It's something all of society has to do. Unless we want a police state with policemen and cameras on every street corner, there will always be a role for the eyes and ears of non-policemen. And unless we have every room, phone line and open space bugged and filmed, there will always be a need for evidence seen or heard by members of the public.

More than that, engaging with and making use of the public doesn't just mean policing can stop short of a police state. It also makes for better policing. Want to prioritise tackling crime hotspots? Well, you need the public to report crimes, not just the rare violent ones but the more mundane day-to-day ones too. Want to have a police force representative of the communities it polices? Well, that's far easier if you have consent and support for policing, so a career in policing isn't a choice that ostracises those who take it.

And want to tackle the fear of crime? Well, you need people willing to tell you where their fears lie and what can be done to assuage them, things that bare crime statistics only hint at. That dark alleyway may not have any crime, but it may leave many scared. Fear of crime and crime itself are often only loosely connected but, just as that means fighting crime shouldn't be solely driven by sometimes outlandish or misguided fears, it also means decisions on tackling fear of crime can't only be driven by pouring over crime statistics.

All of this means having a police force that is closely rooted in the communities it polices. A force that inspires confidence that it is safe and productive to talk to and engage with.



In its own small way, my campaign to get the front counter reopened to the public at one of my constituency's police stations shows what we should be thinking about.

Public services need to be local and rooted in communities, both to reflect those communities' needs and to gain support for the bills they run up. In policing, that means local police stations, not far-off isolated super-centres. It also means making it easy for people to report 'minor' crimes, so that policing can truly reflect the range of abuses taking place. And that means, as well as having the phones answered promptly, having front counters at those local stations where people can call in.

In the case of Muswell Hill police station, it has meant the police training volunteers from the local populace to staff a re-opened front counter. The volunteers mean the police station has a front-counter that is open, letting the public pop in and, by making it easier, encouraging more contact than we had before when the police station's front to the public was a closed door on the main road. When the public do pop in, they see neighbours from their own community serving behind the front counter. Properly screened and trained of course, but it's clearly a service being provided by the community for the community.

Of course, a few dye-in-the-wool Tories in the area said, "It's outrageous. I pay my taxes. Why on earth should I now have to do anything else?"

The answer is simple: "Sorry, we believe in a community where everyone works together. If you want just to leave some money out and then hide yourself away, we're not the party for you."

Getting volunteers isn't about finding a way of making the sums add up to reopen a public service; it's about having a public service that is closely connected to the community.

You don't just get better public services that way; you also get communities that better understand the reality of best delivering those services, and which are thereby protected against the shock-horror cheap theatrics of the 'lock 'em all up and throw away the key' brigade.

Lynne Featherstone is Liberal Democrat MP for Hornsey & Wood Green, and a Haringey Councillor

WHAT IS A NARRATIVE – AND WHAT IT ISN'T

The word 'narrative' is in vogue among Liberal Democrats. It must be rescued before it loses its meaning, argues David Boyle

It is an amazing thing – not to say an amazing blessing – when almost everyone agrees what the Liberal Democrats need to take them into government.

Nearly everybody you run across inside and outside the party, at least in London, agrees that the urgent requirement is for what they call a 'narrative'.

Exactly what this elusive beast is, and how you bag yourself one, is never explained. What the narrative ought to be, of course, still leads to some debate. But the fact that we need one seems to be undisputable.

I shouldn't be too flippant about this. I agree as well.

Whatever the merits of the last election strategy, and whatever might have been most effective in the past, we are no longer able to base a campaign on a handful of unconnected policies that happen to be popular with key groups.

That approach might keep us bouncing along with an impressive number of MPs compared with what we once had – but it will not win for us the electoral breakthrough we need to deliver real change.

Small ideas do not move the tectonic plates of politics; big ideas do – hence the requirement for this mystical 'narrative'.

But what is a narrative? Last time this came up at a party meeting, it was clear around the table that we all had rather different ideas.

So, as my contribution to the debate, I thought I would set out – generously, and in a purely unbiased way, of course – what it is, and what it isn't.

'Narrative' is a marketing buzzword, and it still has some leverage because it has only been doing the rounds for a few years.

It is a response to people's growing resistance to marketing of all kinds. They are exposed to subtle and clever messages almost all the time they breathe: they don't trust slogans, they ignore advertisements – but they do listen to stories.

That's why 'viral' marketing, or blogs, or 'authenticity' are now the stuff of marketing debate – because there is something real at the heart of it, a person, a place, a tale to tell.

But of course – and here's the clever bit – the story might not be explicit. But if we can understand it from what we are told, then we trust it more as a result.

Let's be clear what a narrative doesn't mean. It doesn't mean, for example, a unique selling point – the marketing buzzword of the 1970s.

A political party might be completely unique but still wholly unelectable. Many of them are, let's face it.

Also, looking for a USP is not very good for politicians. It encourages them to think like supermarket managers, as if people actually search manifestos for unique or interesting policies, and vote accordingly.

They may think that's what people do, but actually they don't.

People react to political parties morally: their reaction to policies may be basically self-interested, but it is expressed in terms of right and wrong. That's why people care, sometimes at least.

They have a moral stance towards a party, informed of course by whether they agree with what is said, but it comes before any idea of what policies they hear about – and may have nothing to do with them.

The second thing a narrative is not is a slogan, the marketing buzzword of the 1920s.

Politicians spend a great deal of time worrying about slogans, and usually compromise with three random words stitched together in no particular order.

Actually people have long since become immune to slogans. They have no meaning any more and carry no conviction.

The only other enterprises still addicted to slogans are some evangelical Christian churches that paint them up on big billboards in the road. One just near me says: 'We've got to talk – God'.

They mostly look crass these days, because they seem patronising to us. They look glib, because they are.

The exception to this in politics is slogans that somehow imply a narrative behind them: 'Don't let Labour ruin it!' had a kind of oafish power to it, simply because a whole story was implied.

Even Stanley Baldwin's uninspiring 'Safety First!' implies a tale whereby his predecessors had driven the country wildly down narrow roads without looking where they were going.

So, a narrative is not a slogan and not a USP. It is – for a political party at least – an idea or set of linked ideas that lies behind what we say and believe.

It provides an explanation for the policies we have, a way of remembering and believing them.

Supermarkets can sell anything, after all. Political parties are there for a purpose – get that purpose across to people and they might begin to hear what we say.

Four other things about a narrative:

1 - IT IMPLIES A STORY

Narratives have an implied beginning, middle and end. Mrs Thatcher's narrative was about victory won in 1945, thrown away again through three decades of permissiveness, laxity and inflation, restored by iron will.

Do we have a Liberal Democrat view about the past half-century in the UK? If so, how does it go? Not quite enough public spending, not quite enough tax?

Neither carries much real conviction because both assume the basic narrative of other parties.

Wouldn't we tell the story completely differently? That a nation of enormous diversity lost its heart, soul and sense of responsibility during endless rounds of centralisation – leaving us with a legacy of inevitable inefficiency, centralised bullying and technocracy?

Well, we don't all have to agree now anyway. The point is that we need something like that – and even that needs a back story too: that a party dedicated to individual freedom emerged in the 1850s and provided the only periods of good government the nation has had since – and will do again.

Or something similar.

2 - IT FRAMES THE DEBATE

When you abandon the battle of narratives, the danger is that you just have to accept your opponent's.

Remember Mrs Thatcher's narrative? We might have had a few things to say about inflation; we did have a few things to say about nuclear weapons, I seem to remember, but the basic assumptions of the debate were hers.

Even now, we endlessly attempt to intervene in a debate which assumes the basic issues are about tax or spending – as if the reason for the inadequacy of our public services and infrastructure was simply money.

And of course, once the general election has been called, all these debates are pretty much set in stone. Narratives count in the years before, in the assumptions about problems and explanations.

When think tanks and commentators alike share these narratives, then we get to manage the debate.

When they do not, we struggle along with frustration while the umpteenth BBC interviewer seems to miss the point in exactly the same way as the last one.

3 - IT REQUIRES A BIG IDEA

Or a series of big ideas, which it connects in a coherent way. A narrative without a big idea is just like a story for toddlers. We woke up, we strung together a number of policies we believed were popular, we offered them to the electorate. That's a story without an idea: it's a narrative, but a very unimpressive one.

Barely any more impressive is the one that goes: we started small, we worked hard, we won key by-elections, more and more people believe we are credible, and so on. It is a useful narrative, but it doesn't answer the question of why we are doing it in the first place.

It may be that any Liberal Democrat narrative borrows a little from the big idea that has driven our tradition. Unlike socialists, who believe that the problem with the status quo is that it tends towards poverty, we believe the status quo tends towards slavery. They believe the underlying problem is wealth; we believe it is power.

That is not to say that we don't think poverty is important – quite the reverse – but we believe it is primarily an issue of freedom. Conservatives believe freedom is the means – but only for the rich and powerful; we believe it is the end.

Those big ideas must be in there somewhere.

4 - IT EXPLAINS BIG IDEAS

Political campaigners are a little wary of big ideas these days. So are ministers, but that's another story. If they are not widely shared, they can make you look like a crank. There is a fear that they offend people and make you look a little less than suave.

But equally, if all your ideas are small – a small shift in the national budget here and there – why should anyone get excited about you? How can you generate the loyal following and income you need? Big political changes require big ideas to drive them.

If you have a narrative that explains the problem, a back story that articulates the basic crisis, then big ideas can slip into the debate and start uniting a constituency of interest round them.

Narratives make them safe. They explain why the big ideas are important.

Occasionally in discussions around these issues, a slightly sceptical voice pipes up. Did Labour and Conservative have a narrative in 2005? If they did without one, why can't we?

The answer is first that they need to tinker with their narrative far less than we do. If you want more public spending, there has been in previous generations a tendency to vote Labour. If you hate foreigners, then you vote Conservative.

Blair and Brown made do with a mini-narrative about their own mutual confidence and competence that carried some dubious conviction at the time. It implied a story about their predecessors, which is widely shared.

Of course, the lack of a big narrative for New Labour is increasingly obvious and will be a major Achilles' heel for them at a later date.

But Liberal Democrats are the outsiders in the race. Despite everything, a worrying proportion of the population does not understand where we are coming from and why.

Without that, they don't disagree with us; they never hear us in the first place.

So let's knuckle down and articulate, shall we? We have a narrative already, of course. We just locked it away somewhere some years ago and have to find where we hid the key.

David Boyle is a member of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee and *Meeting the Challenge* policy review group. He is the author of *Blondel's Song* and *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life*. Website: www.david-boyle.co.uk

BUSH STARTS TO WILT

The magic touch has deserted the president in an increasingly sceptical America, says Dennis Graf

We are back in Minnesota after a four-month sojourn in France.

What seemed of major importance in Europe – the British election, the rejection of the European Constitution, the release of the Downing Street memo – all these were not really noticed by most Americans or discussed at any length by the popular American media.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the American corporate owned mass media has fallen under the control of the Bush administration. It's not just the empire of Murdoch, either – Fox News and the various papers he owns.

The Washington Post, one of the three major national newspapers (along with the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times) and the paper which, 30 years ago, courageously uncovered Nixon's Watergate scandal, is now, with rare exceptions, following every rhetorical twist and turn issued from the White House.

The Post did not discuss the Downing Street Memo for weeks until readers started complaining. The editors were originally enthusiastic supporters of the war and it's obvious that they've tried very hard to be positive about the Bush administration.

Quite often, their very choice of words, the words chosen by the Republican 'spinmasters', gives them away. The usual explanation given by a compliant media is that they need access to the administration and access is given only to those reporters and papers who are 'friendly'.

George W Bush no longer has a golden touch. His approval rating, according to a very recent poll, has fallen to 42%, an historic low for a president at this point in his term. 65% of the public feels the war in Iraq is hopeless and support for it is weakening. Few voters would like to see more American troops sent, an action which would clearly be needed to achieve any real chance of 'victory'.

One big problem is that the all-volunteer armed forces are not getting enough new volunteers and a military draft is out of the question. There was great euphoria in America after the admittedly impressive video coverage of Iraqis going to the polls last winter, but this feeling has evaporated.

The president came into office four years ago with a very radical agenda. The regime change in Iraq was, as we know now, a high priority, but dramatic tax cuts were what his powerful supporters really wanted. These tax cuts were sold to the American public as an issue of 'fairness'.

The progressive income tax has never been accepted by the right wingers and the result of Bush's tax cut has been to give vast amounts of relief to the wealthy and a very small amount to ordinary people. The average family received an

initial refund of a few hundred dollars and they were, of course, very pleased.

The other tax law that was attacked was the estate tax, or the 'death tax' as the Republicans cynically described it (a lot of people thought that this was literally to be a tax which had to be paid when grandma died). The removal of this tax was surprisingly popular.

Although the estate tax affected only a very tiny slice of the population, people who would have to be considered seriously rich, the Republicans were able to convince ordinary people that eliminating it was in their interest.

Polls show that ordinary American voters are very ill-informed. A large number, nearly 40%, actually believe that they are part of the richest 1%. Most young people think that there is a very good chance that they will be 'rich' someday. One meets middle aged folk who tell you that their plan for retirement income is eventually winning the lottery. Republicans say that this shows the optimism of the American public.

This may help to explain the acceptance of the Bush economic policies. Continuing to be misled by the Bush people, many voters still believe that Saddam Hussein was largely responsible for 9/11, that we have found WMD in Iraq and that Iraq was the centre of terrorist activity against us. This is something that was suggested by the White House, though never actually stated. As people put it, "we can fight the terrorists in Iraq or we can fight them over here."

There is a 'hard' core – maybe 25% – solidly and probably permanently behind Bush. Many of these are Protestant fundamentalists who see America as a people selected by God to fulfil His plans for history. Israel, of course, was God's original 'chosen' people, and America must protect them. The only real obstacles they see are the liberals, people that they identify with trade unions, Democrats, Europeans, gays, Blacks, university people and most residents of large cities. These extreme right wing fundamentalists control the Republican party machinery in a fair number of states.

The ideas of the Christian Right are not, of course, those of the extremely rich and powerful people who really run the national Republican party. The Christian Right is given a few political crumbs and tossed a great deal of raw meat rhetoric, and at the same time their pockets are being cleaned out.

These ordinary and usually well-meaning people are frightened of terrorism – they were deeply affected by 9/11 and the subsequent manipulation of the Homeland Security warnings. They're even more troubled by what they see as a breakdown of social order. They focus, though, on symbolic side issues – gay marriage, legal abortions, 'Creation science',

stem cell research restrictions, medical marijuana use, and the flash of a popular singer's naked breast during a televised football game, rather than the increasingly severe economic problems of the workers. Their quite genuine feelings are whipped up by television preachers, far right wing talk show personalities and some politicians.

The key goal of Bush's agenda is the destruction of the long established welfare state programs. These are pretty weak by British or European standards, but the Republican leadership hates them all. Our national old age pension system, social security, is especially hated by the right wing extremists.

Bush knows that he can't eliminate it – it's extremely popular throughout the country, but he hopes to allow workers to opt out of it, at least partially, and in doing so, to eventually weaken public support. He claims, of course, to be 'saving' it. In short, he wants something like the current British system.

The third major element of Bush's revolution is the appointment of judges who embrace extreme right wing legal thinking. Here, the public is somewhat confused and Bush seems, in this case, to be more successful. Since judges serve

for life, this will probably be his long-term legacy. Democrats are fighting this, but they don't really have the power to stop it.

America does face some severe problems. Our expensive and inefficient health care delivery system needs to be overhauled. Our medical system, at its best, is very good, but many people, including some in the middle class, do not have insurance coverage and thus easy access to it. Illegal immigration seems to be out of control and Congress will probably grant eventual amnesty to the millions who are already here.

Private pension systems are in deep trouble, as are entire industries. The airlines and the automotive companies are near bankruptcy. We have lost much of our manufacturing base and the end is not in sight. We are borrowing incredible sums of money to pay for, not only a costly war, but needed social programs. A majority now feels that we are headed "in the wrong direction," though there is no agreement as to what the destination should be.

Dennis Graf is a political activist in Minnesota

A Different Country Now: the Liberal Democrat Vision for Britain

A Fringe meeting based on the new *Passports To Liberty* booklet
"A Different Country Now"
available from the *Liberator* conference stall at Blackpool

Speakers:

Adrian Sanders - Liberal Democrat MP for Torbay and author of
the *Conspiracy of Spin* chapter in the booklet

David Boyle - *Liberator* contributor and author of the book
Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life

Aperitif Room - Imperial Hotel - Blackpool

Sunday 18 September - 1pm

THE NEW ASBESTOS?

There is a powerful mobile phone mast heading your way. Janice Turner explains why the health threats involved can get communities campaigning

It's funny how mobile phone masts grab you. There you are one minute, an anonymous resident minding your own business, never having given them a second thought. Then you wake up one morning to discover you've turned into your official neighbourhood ecowarrior with statements in the local papers and people stopping you in the street to discuss the campaign. How did that happen?

Until four months ago, I'd never thought about mobile phone masts. If anything, they ranked with site value rating as someone else's hobby. Then T-Mobile sent me and my neighbours in Finchley a letter telling us that we lucky people had been selected to have a Third Generation (3G) mobile phone mast stuck on a 50ft pole outside our houses.

Suddenly, mobile phone masts were a matter of intense interest. Should we be bothered by them? This is what we found out.

First, don't think this issue isn't going to concern you. The new 3G mobile phones, which only came on the market this year, are the ones that let you download information from the internet and see videos. This higher level of service requires stronger beams transmitted from these masts and for the masts to be closer together – the masts for the bog standard mobile phones have a greater range. I rang a few companies to ask just how close and was told several completely different figures ranging from 150m to two miles. The answer I believed was that a really powerful expensive 3G mast would transmit up to a mile and a half, but they have “smaller, cheaper, less powerful ones that we put in residential areas” and they need to be as close as 500m.

Just stop and think about this. The mobile phone companies want 100% coverage for their phone networks right across this country of 94,500 square miles. So one phone mast every 500m or mile or so, multiply that by the number of mobile phone companies who are supposed to share masts but don't. How many masts does that get you? Half a million? Wherever you live, at some point your neighbourhood is going to receive an application to put up a 3G phone mast, if it hasn't already.

How worried should you be? Not at all, according to the government and the mobile phone companies. Very, according to Dutch government studies, French and Spanish studies and Swiss, US and Australian safety limits. The dispute is over what kind of risk you're facing.

The British government has safety limits on the amount your temperature is allowed to rise (1 degree Celsius) as a result of exposure to microwaves. This 'thermal effect' limit was set after servicemen stood in front of radar systems to keep warm during the Second World War and developed cataracts, tumours and temporary sterility.

But the big issue is the 'non-thermal' effects of microwave exposure. The UK recently adopted guidelines on this which are 100 times slacker than those of Switzerland.

The people worried about this say that there are short term and long term health effects from phone masts. They argue that the effects are caused by the masts sending out continuous low level pulsed microwave radiation 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A growing number of studies have shown the effects in the short term.

For example, Santini surveyed 530 people in France in 2002 living at different distances from masts. Complaints ranging from sleep disruption, headaches, nausea, dizziness to depression were mainly made by those who lived up to 200m from masts, with more complaints the nearer they were to the mast.

Dutch studies in 2002 tested 72 people under exposure to 1800 MHz, 900 MHz, 3G and a placebo. 3G gave worse scores and some people were more sensitive to signals. Spanish studies in 2003 (Navarro and others) on masts up for two years also show that around 1 volt/metre gives rise to increased illness. This figure is apparently 1/50th of the guidelines adopted by the UK. And in case you think it's all psychosomatic, a study in Bavaria on cattle showed that cattle in a field near a mobile phone mast developed a range of health problems including difficulty sleeping and reduced milk yield. Moving them away from the mast reversed the symptoms.

In Finchley, once it got around the local Liberal Democrats that I was running a campaign, an activist forwarded an email from residents near the main road that has phone masts scattered along it. They were extremely worried that the nearby masts were affecting their health. Several neighbours were suffering headaches and problems sleeping, symptoms that have been reported in the above studies. Scientists are calling this collection of symptoms – fatigue, concentration loss, appetite loss, heart and blood pressure problems, sleep disruption, headaches, nausea, dizziness and depression – microwave sickness.

The problem with microwave sickness is that it's a collection of symptoms that could easily be ascribed to other causes. However, a lot of sufferers say that their symptoms get better whenever they are away from the mast or when it's switched off for maintenance. The symptoms come back when they return or it's switched on again.

What is rather more disconcerting is that studies are claiming to show long term damage from living near mobile phone masts. The physicist Dr John Walker used specialist software to produce maps showing where ill-health clusters appear in relation to mast emission levels, using data from Powerwatch and Sutton Coldfield Residents Against Masts. Dr Walker's emission maps appear to indicate that, the

longer a mast is up, the higher the number of cancers. He has reported that all illnesses are within the area covered by the lobes on the mast, not outside that emission area. These illnesses included cancer, brain haemorrhages and brain tumours. Some of the findings were weird – two identical brain haemorrhages in two neighbouring houses.

You can see this report at the website listed below. Other observations include that continuous low-level microwave radiation could have a disproportionate effect on children because their brains are still developing. The same study alleges that there were nine children with leukaemia and seven adults with cancers in a place in Northern Ireland that had two masts near a primary school.

The reason being suggested for these ill-effects is that, as the human body has its own weak electromagnetic field, it follows that EM fields emitted from electrical or electronic equipment will interact with and affect the human body's own field and therefore interfere with the body's healing processes. The point about mobile phone masts is that they are on all the time, 24 hours a day, for years and years. And the more powerful 3G masts with their closer spacing increase any risk there is since more people would live close to them.

There have been precious few, if any, British government studies of non-thermal short-term and long-term effects and much of the research is funded at least partly by the mobile phone industry. While they're at it, why not ask the tobacco industry to fund a study of the long term health effects of smoking.

In our community, I and a couple of other parents took what felt like an extreme step of calling a public meeting of local residents, and leafleted every road near the mast site and got a press release printed in the local paper. To our amazement, more than 70 people came and, when we suggested organising an action committee, 24 households joined it. The campaign we then ran was an astonishing success: the poor bloke in the council's planning office received more than 100 letters of objection and threw out T-Mobile's planning application.

Along the way, we discovered many unsettling facts. Council planning departments claim that they are not allowed to consider the potential or perceived threat to health of phone masts. Recent legal judgments overturned this position, but planning offices still insist this is the case so residents have to fall back on "out of keeping with the amenity of the area" objections.

It is apparent that we can now use the Human Rights Act to oppose phone mast applications – but still council planning departments prefer to use standard planning objections.

We also learned about the reality of mobile phone companies' 'best practice'. The Mobile Operators' Association drew up 'the 10 Commitments' to set out best practice when trying to put up masts.



These included consulting the community, consulting schools before trying to put up masts near them, and sharing masts with other companies. This is often honoured more in the breach; for example, the most powerful beam from the proposed mast in our neighbourhood was planned to point at two nurseries and a primary school and the consultation was a sham. When I asked the Mobile Operators' Association about their complaints procedure, they said they didn't have one. Surely there can be no connection between a planning and safety environment tilted in favour of the mobile phone companies and the £22bn the government received from auctioning the 3G mobile phone licences.

The great thing about running a campaign in your own neighbourhood is that it really makes you rediscover why you're a Liberal. Through the campaign, people have got to know neighbours living in the same road for the first time. And its success has shown a lot of people that it really is worth fighting to defend your community's interests.

In our case, we are fortunate that the Liberal Democrats on the council, led by Monroe Palmer, have been vigilant on the mobile phone mast issue, and he gave us a lot of advice.

Make no mistake, you will shortly have to decide whether you're going to campaign against mobile phone masts.

One thing is absolutely clear to me: all over this country, in every town and city, there are little groups of frightened people who don't want a phone mast near them and don't know how to stop it. This is not just a nimby issue: the issue is whether mobile phone masts are the new asbestos. Remember how everyone thought it was safe until it became obvious that it wasn't? Until we know for sure, we've got to keep mobile phone masts out of residential areas.

Janice Turner is member of the Liberal Democrats in Finchley. Further information: www.mastsanity.org

GENERATION X

The reason the Liberal Democrats didn't attract more votes from younger educated people was a manifesto skewed to baby boomers and retired people, says Gareth Epps

As New Labour presses on with its latest attacks on the vulnerable and on our basic rights and freedoms, and as it continues to pander to racism, it is easy to forget the election just past.

I spent possibly one of the more depressing election nights, split between Maidenhead and my Oxfordshire council patch. We lost both seats, and saw what appeared to be a Tory revival at our expense. This experience was tempered only by the joys of Manchester Withington, the tantalising narrow miss in Oxford East (Liberator 302) and its smaller echo in Reading East, where Old Labour Stalinism met New Labour and contrived to gift the Tories a seat they never should have won.

The desire on the part of voters of every leaning to give Tony Blair a good kicking, contrasted with the perverse election result, was reflected in the national mood even before the terrorist outrages.

A summer mix of Pyrrhic messianic zeal wrapped around rock stars while Iraq burns, and with ID cards are rammed down our throats, makes for more than a few hangovers. And the tensions about why the party did not do better will rumble on. This should not be a surprise; the 2005 intake of MPs is very able, and brings the useful twin qualities of impatience and a willingness to question.

With every advertising billboard, it was clear this was a significantly higher-profile campaign than anything the party has mounted in my political lifetime. Policy messages were got across – successfully for once. Research has shown the 50p top tax rate to be hugely popular across the political spectrum, and even the ill-communicated local income tax won more votes than it lost. In some areas seats were won – spectacularly so. But plenty of the same old troubles remain.

When I saw on polling day the numbers of Tory activists in what should have been their black hole areas of Reading East, I realised both that they knew they could win and how much they were targeting on so few seats.

In too many places, people need to recognise that 'Focus-by-numbers' is not a good campaign technique – no matter how many leaflets are written, they actually need to say something. And our candidate selection and approval procedures are woefully inconsistent (some candidates stood who should never have been approved, despite allegedly improved numbers on the approved list).

Again the Tories went – in a more determined and targeted way – for their core vote of geriatrics, racists and the credulous (although I didn't see any sign of people taking the bait over their bizarre claims about some Lib Dem home affairs policies).

Labour covered its creaking local campaign structure with a surprisingly effective national campaign. Nobody knows what a 'hard-working family' really is, but many seemingly

thought it was them, and Blair's clear paranoia about the Lib Dem vote was somewhat dissipated. The next campaign, with its tranche of Lib-Lab marginals, will be fascinating.

The election also saw a subtle rise in the 'me vote'; the selfish vote, interested in taxation and policy effects on people's wallets. While not of 'Loadsamoney' proportions, the Lib Dem policy of a local income tax was an easy target for the party's political opponents, especially in the South East.

Some knees seem to be jerking in the direction of more far-reaching changes to taxation policy, such as the ditching of the 50p top rate tax commitment. This would be a silly mistake; the policy is universally popular, there are enough top earners voting Liberal Democrat already and, had the party's media operators perhaps been a little less timid, it might have formed a useful plank in the election platform.

Ditching such policy is a flawed strategy. For one thing, older voters are innately and naturally more likely to stick to tribal loyalties, and also to vote Conservative. For another, they are less likely to see election offerings as providing anything for them. The numbers of retired voters who still are unaware of what local income tax is, insofar as they would not have to pay anything, indicates considerable work remains to be done on communicating some key policy messages. In this way, it could be argued that the Liberal Democrat manifesto was comprehensively counter-intuitive.

One point which the bulk of Lib Dems have missed altogether is that of 'generational justice'. Along with other parties, the game of percentages (a minority of a minority that is modern-day British electoral politics) caused 'strategists' to put together a tax programme that consisted in almost its entirety of cash breaks for the over-65s. Even the pledge to scrap tuition and top-up fees for university students had as significant an air to it of 'grab a granny' as it did of grabbing young people.

The Liberal Democrats were no different in this, although they failed to reap any significant reward from it. As many within the party now know, the grey vote stuck to its tribal allegiances, or was fooled by paranoia over imagined crime epidemics, or snapped up one of the race cards on offer. The taxation working group and other initiatives now offer the party a way to break out from this moribund and somewhat cynical manoeuvring.

Perhaps, even, there is a way of cementing something for long-term political gain. Many of the under-35s are making Liberalism, and voting Liberal Democrat, into something of a habit, and seats full of this demographic recorded some of the best swings in the general election. Meanwhile, in the absence of any signs of sense in this year's Tory leadership contest, other generations – especially the baby boomers, spoon-fed a constant diet of subsidies by the state – can

continue their rise towards the whinging, bloated doyens of political expediency.

For the baby boomers – and those born around that time – have perpetrated a simply colossal amount of ‘generational theft’. It is they – the first generation born within a fully developed state that provides healthcare, pensions and welfare protection – who have profited far more from the generosity of the state than other generations. And it may or may not be by chance, but the same generation has also massively reaped the benefits of successive property booms and can afford the luxury of buying properties theoretically designed for today’s first-time buyers – to let.

Let’s try putting it another way. If a government brought in a set of property taxation that had the effect of ratcheting up house prices by several hundred per cent, abolished the welfare state amid the creation of total chaos in the pensions free-for-all that replaced it, taxed education and whacked on several specific sales taxes on top, that governing party would be electorally crucified, probably permanently so.

But this is the reality facing many younger people in Britain today. Unless you had the wherewithal or funds to get on the property ladder by the mid-1990s, you are left with the privilege of seeing the rungs disintegrate above your head. Those with the current, pernicious form of graduate mortgage (up to £20,000 and rising) don’t even have the enjoyment of a disposable income before getting to the stage of such envy.

The basic pension will not exist in any recognisable form in 30 years – although taxpayers are now asked to support the bribe for the baby boomer generation. Council tax (and most of its mooted alternatives) makes little allowance for the subtleties of housing stock. Threats are issued that the pensionable age will be increased – not, of course, that there will be any state pension when today’s thirtysomethings turn 67. And, of course, there are any number of issues where young people are taxed informally – such as, for example, the premiums on car insurance, especially for the under-25s. (And would a flat tax policy cure any of this? Of course not).

Many of these policies were set in place by the Tories, which is why Tory support increases in line with people’s age. However, one striking trend from the election was that the vote of ‘hard-working families’ stuck firmly with Labour, as the Liberal Democrats failed really to make any effort to win them over. Even if we cannot out-gimmick New Labour with flash if empty ‘new initiatives’, then a clear commitment to increasing prosperity would chime well – and provide a bulwark against many of them bucking their instincts and going Tory.

In a similar vein, lazy laissez-faire assumptions that Britain’s employment culture of long hours is perfectly acceptable for individual and family life must change. In an era where a young couple needs each to earn high wages to get on the property ladder (or even to rent in many places), a genuinely Liberal party should be talking both about the idiocy of current housing policies, and of the rat-race which damages people’s well-being and frequently their health. This also happens to be a pro-European message.

Look through much campaign literature, though, and the same old themes come through. It is targeted at the elderly, rather than at building a base among the growing population that is younger, active and Liberal. We run the risk of functioning on a base of ever-diminishing returns. The *Meeting The Challenge* exercise, whatever it is, cannot be allowed to be an exercise in merely reinforcing old prejudices. If it does, it is wasting our time.

However, if a fresh vision of a strongly Liberal, genuinely community-driven and generationally-neutral agenda emerges, then perhaps we will have something akin to the breath of fresh air that is desperately needed in British politics at present.

I am grateful to Ed Vickers for inspiring part of this article – his thoughts are spelt out at www.outwiththeold.org.uk

Gareth Epps is a member of the Liberator Collective and a Liberal Democrat councillor in West Oxfordshire

LIBERATOR 305

The next issue of Liberator will be published at the Liberal Democrat conference in Blackpool. Those who brave the usual ice cold winds, vile food and decrepit hotels should come to the Liberator stall to collect their copy and renew their subscription for a mere £20 if it is due

Copies for subscribers who are not at Blackpool will be posted in the following week

We will also have on sale the new Liberator Songbook and, for discerning clientele, something special under the counter...

SOUTHERN MAN

Dear Liberator,

In commenting on the over-optimism in some quarters about the election result, Radical Bulletin (Liberator 303) asks what was behind 'leaks' to the press that we were so confident of holding seats like Guildford that we were diverting help away from them.

This is a reasonable question to ask and I don't know what was behind this 'leak', if it came from our side at all. What I do know is that we did not divert help away from Guildford or any of the other seats we were defending with small majorities in my patch.

What is not reasonable is to misrepresent completely South Central region's approach to targeting. Your commentary was wrong both about targeting of resources within the region and with regard to sending help to target seats in neighbouring regions.

You stated that members in the region were told not to go and help in Newbury after the first week of the campaign. This is untrue. Several local parties were asked to help Newbury from months before the election; the level of help was not reduced at any point and in fact significant effort was put into encouraging extra help to go to Newbury in the last week of the campaign.

You stated that the region "poured people into Maidenhead" (tell that to our team in Maidenhead!), even though "it was obvious with a week to go that it would not be won". You clearly have access to more information than I do because that was not what either the canvass data or reports from the ground were saying.

You also stated that the region "objected strongly to constituencies sending help to Watford" and conclude from this that an "obsession with regional boundaries" was hampering sensible targeting decisions. This is also untrue. In fact Milton Keynes local party - one of the strongest teams of activists in the region - was paired with Watford and provided as much help as any seat anywhere did.

Other seats in South Central also helped in South West Surrey and Guildford.

All the decisions about where help should be sent (and it is worth noting that the amount of help available to go round is actually very limited) were based on an assessment of the strength of campaign being run in each target

LETTERS

seat, the degree to which outside help would make a difference to them, the amount of help available and, as the campaign went on, on canvass returns.

As it happened, the results in most of the seats where we fighting the Tories turned out to be worse than the available evidence suggested, and the results against Labour significantly better.

There are lesson to be learned from this, and a review of our approach to targeting resources should certainly be part of this. But let's base such a review on what actually happened, shall we?

Neil Fawcett

Liberal Democrat Deputy Director
of Campaigns, South East

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Dear Liberator,

Radical Bulletin (Liberator 303) is right. Liberal Party results in the general election were disappointing. But some credit might have been given for the party's survival over 17 years, a survival based on deep belief.

There have always been individuals who have gone over to the Lib Dems and the reverse is also true. But, despite the admiration in which some Liberal Democrats are held by most Liberals, there is unlikely to be a mass exodus, for the very reasons discussed in the same edition.

People attracted to a party, albeit a small one, because of its commitment to ideas, are unlikely to defect to another in which the main internal issue seems to be where to position it to appeal to the biggest number of voters, whose leader seems to hold its supreme decision making body in contempt, and where by-election candidates are parachuted in by its head office.

Now I know that's not the whole story and many Lib Dems have a sincere and long standing commitment to an ideology, but the main narrative

seems a pragmatic and opportunistic one.

Roger Jenking
Oxford

WOLF AT THE DOOR

Dear Liberator,

Presumably the 'Wolf Salad' enjoyed by Mark Smulian at the Liberal International conference in Bulgaria (Liberator 303) was largely if not wholly concealed by the sheep's dressing?

Gwyneth Deakins
South Woodford

SAUSAGE MACHINE

Dear Liberator

Simon Titley (Liberator 303), who is a large man, wants more sausage and less constitution. He argues that EU special protection for the Lincolnshire sausage would unite Lincolnshire butchers behind the European project in a way that the constitution does not.

One of the many very good things about the constitutional package now rejected by the French and Dutch was the ways and means it prescribed to improve the quality and to reduce the quantity of EU regulation.

I am not sure that the route to constitutional legitimacy lies through the specialist butcher. And if the EU were to move to protect the Lincolnshire sausage, what about the Newmarket variety on which I often re-fuel before particularly arduous EU constitutional negotiations? Can it really be sensible to let the union discriminate between sausage recipes in order to foster the European identity? I doubt it.

Andrew Duff
Liberal Democrat MEP
East of England

TORIES TARGETED

Dear Liberator,

If RB (Liberator 303) wants to highlight issues in the targeting strategy of the Liberal Democrats on a local level, it should probably talk to people who were actually there.

The 'message' was never given to leave Newbury alone. Indeed, my local party actually woke up during its lacklustre election campaign and offered help after the first week of the campaign, no doubt partly as a result of a kindly nudge from on high. The same was true of fellow South Central members in Oxfordshire. Perhaps if certain parts of Newbury had not been doing their best impression of Fraser from *Dad's Army*, more help would have materialised.

Maidenhead was certainly not the beneficiary of help at Newbury's expense, or very much help bar a small but dedicated set of volunteers from neighbouring parts of Berkshire. Certainly its campaign was weaker than Watford's, but it lacked both the energy of many local councillors and the zeal shown by some in the central party. It had a first-class candidate and good team, but was faced with vast amounts of Tory resources and the folly of those who cried 'decapitation'.

It may be right to speculate on how we were unaware of events in some seats, but the results in Oxford East and Guildford should be the focus of this, not Newbury where we lost by several thousand.

The far more important and wider lesson from the general election is the astonishing extent to which the Tories targeted and the Lib Dems did not.

I could reel off a significant list of local parties who lifted not one finger to help in neighbouring target seats, many of which did not even have local elections. I only hope that if the party is to suffer from such Tory targeting in future, these parochial fiefdoms will be first in line.

**Gareth Epps
Reading**

REVIEWS

Liberals: the History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties **by Roy Douglas** **Hambledon & London** **(2005) £25**

Roy Douglas's book follows hot on the heels of David Dutton's *History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century*, which was itself published not long after an updated edition of Chris Cook's volume covering exactly the same period. We have also had David Walters' *The Strange Rebirth of Liberal Britain*, covering the post-war years. So Dr Douglas's volume, which not so long ago might have filled an important gap, now risks appearing superfluous.

Unfortunately, the Liberal Party has no equivalent of the excellent multi-volume Longman History of the Conservative Party, or even for that matter anything along the lines of John Ramsden's weighty single volume overview. This book covers 150 years of Liberal Party history in just over 300 pages. While it keeps up a brisk narrative pace, there is little room for detailed reflection or analysis. Roy Douglas writes from the viewpoint of a committed Liberal Democrat (and Liberal) and I can imagine that his partisanship will grate with the impartial reader.

At times, the author reaches strange and idiosyncratic judgements. His praise of Gladstone fails to recognise the appalling state in which the Grand Old Man left the party when he resigned as leader.

An apparent absolute opposition to links with other parties leads to a rather unbalanced account of the relations between Labour and the Liberals in the Edwardian era and likewise relations between the Liberals and SDP in the 1980s. In dealing with the dispute over the Croydon North West by-election candidature in the early days of the

Alliance, Douglas defends the ludicrous Bill Pitt at the expense of Shirley Williams, a position that even many of the most partisan of Liberals would shrink from with hindsight. Likewise his dismissal of the Young Liberals' the 'Stop the Seventy Tour' campaign as damaging to the Liberal Party, with no reference at all to its importance in the struggle against apartheid, is truly bizarre.

Nonetheless, this book gives an accessible overview of the party's history and will be a good starting point for the non-specialist who wants to learn more about the history of the Liberal Democrats and its predecessor parties. I found it a lively and stimulating read, however much I balked at some of the author's judgements.

Iain Sharpe

1968 - the Year That Rocked the World **by Mark Kurlansky** **Vintage 2005 £7.99**

"Shows us how we got to where we are today," is the rather large claim in the cover blurb.

Obviously, the events of every year shape those that follow and singling out any one of them as of particular long-term influence is an exercise fraught with difficulty. In modern history, there is fair claim for 1973 – with the oil price shock – explaining a good deal of how we got to where we are, and maybe one day people will look at 2001, with the 11 September attacks, in the same way.

Kurlansky's point about 1968 is that it saw grassroots protests, largely led by students, erupt across much of the word and with long-term consequences.

Britain, which saw no more than a few sit-ins and demonstrations, is barely mentioned. The big events of

this book are the campus protests against the Vietnam war in America (many of which overlapped with protests about issues of university administration), the May 'events' in Paris (as students, briefly joined by workers, fought the riot police in the streets), and the Russian suppression of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia.

Less predictably, he covers the massacre of demonstrators in Mexico by a regime that preferred to have the Olympic Games overshadowed by bloodshed rather than mere protests, disturbances in West Germany, and a student protest movement that shook but did not dislodge the Stalinist government in Poland.

Clearly these events overlapped in time and there was an element of protesters in one country being emboldened by the actions of their peers in others.

The 'generation gap' was a favoured theme of social commentators at this time and Kurlansky suggests that there was more like a generation chasm between those who grew up in the inter-war years and fought World War Two, and those who grew up in the post-war decades.

Every generation's experiences of growing up differ from those that went before, but the differences in attitudes and assumptions between these two generations were so profound that something was bound to break when the baby boomers grew up and asserted themselves, Kurlansky suggests.

In this he is probably right, but I was less convinced by some of his larger assumptions. To argue that the suppression of the Prague Spring so fatally damaged communist prestige that the Soviet Union eventually unravelled seems a large leap, especially as this unravelling took another 20 years, during which countless other events impinged.

The politics of the '68ers' come over as confused. There was a general anti-authority streak running through it in every country but, beyond that, it was fairly incoherent. Things may have looked different at the time, but it is not difficult now to be struck by the irony of the same people campaigning against the Stalinist reassertion in Czechoslovakia and also brandishing the Little Red Book of the notorious communist mass murderer Mao Tse-Tung.

The one claim that seems incontestable is that 1968 marked a

fundamental shift in American politics. It was the year that the civil war hangover (in which the south had forever voted Democrat) ended, with Nixon targeting these essentially right-wing voters for the Republicans.

Since then, no Democrat has won the White House unless he was a southerner (Carter and Clinton) who played to the prejudices of that region, and it has become a Republican bastion with consequences all too obvious in the era of Dubya.

Kurlansky is never less than readable, and some of 1968 sounds as if it must have been fun and did indeed forever blow away the cobwebs of the post-war era.

The author was 20 in 1968, which explains a good deal of his attitude towards it. Whether those who came later will consider it equally important is questionable.

Mark Smulian

Eleanor Rathbone and the politics of conscience by Susan Pedersen Yale UP 2004 £25

Eleanor Rathbone is not quite a forgotten figure. She is recalled primarily, and rightly so, for her work which led to the introduction of Family Allowances, and not least that they were paid to the mother rather than the father. This was a sticking point for many years, as the Labour party and TUC were jealous of the man's pay packet.

Rathbone's career is exemplary. From a Liverpool Liberal family, she came under the influence of T.H. Green at Oxford. She involved herself in local politics, representing the Granby ward in Liverpool, was a prominent suffragist and the only such to become an MP - sitting as an Independent (which she genuinely was) for the Combined English Universities seat from 1918 to 1946.

Her early career involved surveying poverty in Liverpool and this fixed her view on the need for the woman in the family to have an independent source of income. Having such means herself enabled her to finance the family allowances campaign and many others that she became involved with. An early critic of fascism, her later campaigns rolled through opposition to the invasion of Abyssinia, the Spanish

Civil War and Hitler, with the refugee problem looming largely in these. She nagged ministers and civil servants, often most effectively.

Her relations with the Liberal Party, particularly its progressive wing, seem to have been cordial in the main, but while Liberator readers might identify with most of her political views, the party in her days was too factious to hold much attraction. Beveridge was attracted to her work on family allowances, and Sinclair, her opposition to Hitler. Although an admirer of Lloyd George, she despaired at his remarks on meeting Hitler and though she participated in his Council of Action found it to be a council of inaction in confronting the dictators. She remains thus a reminder that the sum total of Liberalism is not found in parties that call, or even describe themselves as 'Liberal'. This is a thorough biography of a person who should be an inspiration to all of us. Read it.

Stewart Rayment

The Devil's Advocate by Iain Morley Sweet & Maxwell 2005 £12.95

The opening line claims "This book will take you two hours to read." Admirable, and not far off the mark, though I didn't time myself. It is about advocacy; Iain Morley is a barrister. As politicians we are frequently advocates. Rhetoric was indeed part of our basic training in the past - attacked from Plato's day onwards when too narrowly applied. Apply the guidance in this book to project your principles and you should be more effective - even in these days when reasoned argument has been practically driven out of politics.

Stewart Rayment

Lord Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil by Leo McKinstrey John Murray 2005 £25

Despite serving as a Liberal prime minister, Lord Rosebery does not figure high in the Liberal pantheon. It is no wonder really, since his time as premier lasted less than 15 months, had few if any lasting achievements and culminated in a landslide defeat for the

party in 1895, followed by 11 years in opposition.

Reluctant to take office, and when he did fond of threatening to resign or actually resigning, he was in many ways an impossible colleague. As his one-time close colleague HH Asquith commented, "He was afraid to plunge and yet not resolute enough to hold his determination to stay aloof."

Rosebery was blessed with many gifts, but fatally undermined by certain flaws of character. Wealthy, aristocratic, an able administrator and outstanding public speaker, he became prime minister at the age of 46. But he was also overly precious about his own dignity and unwilling to get his hands dirty with the grubby business of party politics. Because he inherited his seat in the House of Lords from his father while he was still at Oxford, he never even got to contest a parliamentary election and sit in the House of Commons. He wanted political success on a plate.

After he resigned the leadership of the Liberal Party in 1895, he spent 10 years on the fringes of the party, threatening to make a political comeback, but never quite doing so. The cause he espoused was 'Liberal Imperialism', which amounted to ridding the party of the unpatriotic image it had acquired under Gladstone, renouncing support for Irish Home Rule and ditching many of the fringe policies that the Liberal Party had supported.

The 'Limps', as they became known, espoused social reform and were concerned to improve the condition of the working classes. Yet their programme managed to sound impressive through not being too specific and, when it came to it, Rosebery opposed the higher taxation required to pay for the incipient welfare state.

In some ways, Rosebery can be seen as one of a line of revisionist politicians, including Hugh Gaitskell, David Owen and Tony Blair, who have attempted to create a moderate opposition to the Conservatives and who in doing so antagonised many of their more radical colleagues. He can perhaps be most closely likened to Owen. Both fell out with their original party and both ended up in the political wilderness, even though the sort of ideas they espoused ultimately proved electorally successful for their erstwhile colleagues.

It is 40 years since the last biography of Rosebery by the late Robert Rhodes-James, who was for many years Conservative MP for Cambridge. Leo McKinstry also writes from a conservative viewpoint. A former aide to Harriet Harman and Islington Labour councillor, he is now a Daily Mail writer of the 'why oh why?' type.

The book has both the vices and virtues you might expect from such a quarter. It is very readable, the story is told at a lively pace. Perhaps because the author has not previously written on Victorian and Edwardian politics, there is a sense of sharing his discovery of his subject. On the other hand, for all his thorough research, McKinstry is prone to lapses into *Daily Mail* prejudices, inconsistencies and wild judgements that are not supported by the evidence provided. For example, he appears to praise Rosebery's successful attempt to mediate in an industrial dispute in 1893 but then says this paved the way for, among other things, 'beer and sandwiches at Number 10' and 'trade union domination of the British economy' in the 1960s and 1970s. There is also a note of disapproving prurience in McKinstry's treatment of various sex scandals, although he is interesting on the role of Rosebery's government in the 1895 prosecution of Oscar Wilde.

It was time for a new biography of Rosebery, because of the various sources that have become available since Rhodes-James wrote. McKinstry manages to empathise with Rosebery while having a very clear sense of his faults. Indeed, one can sense and share the author's frustration at a subject who had the gifts to be a great prime minister and political leader, but a temperament that prevented him from fulfilling his potential.

Iain Sharpe

Electoral System Design by Andrew Ellis, Andrew Reynolds, Ben Reilly IDEA 2005

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, based in Stockholm, turns out to be the latest port-of-call for Andrew Ellis, the former Liberal Party secretary-general, who has sent the past 16 years helping

to bring democracy to what seems like the four corners of the Earth.

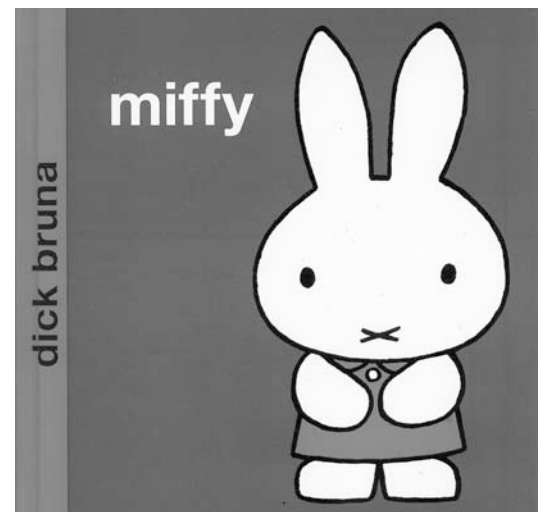
Most people would not consider the intricacies of STV, the party bloc vote, Borda count and Hagenbach-Bischoff quota to be light reading (though plenty of people at the next Lib Dem conference will no doubt find it a real page turner).

However, if elections are your thing, it is all here – clear explanations of how each systems works, its advantages and disadvantages, where it is used and what results it has delivered.

There is even a map showing where uses which system, and STV enthusiasts may be disappointed to discover that only Ireland uses it. On the other hand, it is encouraging that, thanks in part to the efforts of Ellis and others, just eight countries are shown as lacking any electoral system.

Details (and Manual can be downloaded from) at: www.idea.int

Mark Smulian



Miffy by Dick Bruna Egmont 1997 £3.99

Did you know that Miffy is 50 this year? It hardly seems believable that the little rabbit has been with us for so long. Simple lines, bold colours and flowing verse - how can you beat it? Don't intellectualise - you'll probably get it wrong. These are books that children pick up while very young and nudge them gently on the road to literacy. And they don't stop there; 'Miffy at the gallery' introduces all sorts of art concepts, not least visiting a gallery.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

Our own Charles Kennedy – whom every fair-minded observer will admit to be Trying His Hardest – has been heard to complain that, whilst the other parties' leaders receive the full-throated support of their troops during Prime Minister's Questions, our chaps tend to sit back and judge his performance with a critical eye. This is true only up to a point: while from the Government side one does hear cries of "Thus perish all enemies of Newism," "Attaboy Ant'ny" and "Can I have a job please?", the contribution from the Tory benches is more mixed. One often hears such ejaculations as "I thought he had retired," "What happened to that bald chap?" or "Is this IDS or the other useless one?" Besides, what Kennedy cannot see is that these days, after he has asked his questions, it is not unusual for the Lib Dem members to hold up a 7 or even an 8.

Tuesday

As I was taken from doorstep to doorstep by fast bath chair at the last election, I found that our plans to do away with the Council Tax were extremely popular – particularly when I informed the voters of the impending revaluation. These property taxes can be a terrible burden, as I gave more cause than most to know, and we householders can be forgiven for making every effort to reduce their weight. When the council valuers comes to the Hall, I generally have the West Wing hung with camouflage nets and have the fast-growing Rutland leylandii planted in front of many of the monuments which dot the park; I think in particular of the triumphal arch I had erected to celebrate Wallace Lawler's victory in the Birmingham Ladywood by-election in 1969 and the statue of David Austick receiving the tribute of the captured Conservatives at Ripon. Meadowcroft may grumble, but I think it a tolerably profitable investment of his time.

Wednesday

Have you seen this programme *Grumpy Old Men*? I cannot imagine what the chaps at Alexandra Palace are thinking of. It consists entirely in a group of old men moaning about the way the world is going. Who wants to watch that? I simply can't stand the thing. It's typical of today's society that we have to put up with such nonsense. You will say that every viewer has his or, indeed, her "remote control" or twelve-bore shotgun with which to turn off the set, but I do not see why we should be obliged to suffer this rubbish for a moment. Who wants to listen to an old man banging on about something he doesn't like?

Thursday

Each general election sees the Liberal benches receive an infusion of new talent, and I am happy to report that the class of 2005 appears to have the Right Stuff in it. Take, for instance, this fellow Hemming from Birmingham: realising in his youth that the electric computer was here to stay, he invested heavily in valve and Bakelite futures and has lived to reap a rich reward. It also clear that he has grasped the importance of having his name appear regularly in the newspapers. One also applauds the contribution of Susan J. Kramer whilst, of course, regretting that none of the Dakotas was returned for the seats they fought in the Lancashire coalfield.

Lord Bonkers' Diary

Friday

One of the great disappointments of the twentieth century was the failure of the airship to maintain its early promise as a means of mass transportation. I remember with fondness those great ships of an earlier age: the *Graf Zeppelin*, the *R101* and, here in Rutland, the *First Lady Bonkers*. The problem that saw the downfall of these graceful galleons of the sky was an uncertainty over what should be used to fill them. Some favoured hydrogen, but it had the unfortunate habit of going off pop at the most inconvenient moments. The choice

therefore fell upon helium, but this gas had the effect of making everyone on board speak in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. I recall that it was this affliction that reduced the effectiveness of the Address to the People of America that I gave in New York upon disembarking from my first flight. Nevertheless, I did receive a letter, years later, from a chap named Disney who told me that my words had been an inspiration to him throughout his career, so all was not in vain.

Saturday

On a rainy afternoon when no play is possible, I like to visit the pavilion close by the Hall and look through my trophies in the Lord Bonkers' XI Museum (coach parties by arrangement). Here a signed photograph of Frank Byers and Alma Cogan after their century stand against the visiting Australians; there a bat autographed by the Flying Bellotti Brothers to mark their athletic running out of Dame Kiri Te Kanawa that turned the match against New Zealand. Here an oil of an exciting episode during our match against the National Liberals at Worksop; there my own cap, pierced by an arrow after an appeal for lbw was turned down during a closely contested match against the Gentlemen of the Apache Nation. When you add to these treasures a tearoom, a souvenir shop and the only stuffed first-class umpire on permanent public display, I am sure you will agree it offers a splendid day out for all the family.

Sunday

I call at the Vicarage after the service for a glass of sherry and find the Reverend Hughes full of his plan to appoint a new curate. Though I josh him about his working only one day a week, I am all for the idea. I am surprised, however, at the way he and the Parochial Church Council intend to fill this post: rather than send a circular to the University of Rutland at Belvoir's Department of Grace and Bedtime Prayers, they intend to advertise it in the press. As if that were not outré enough, he tells me the journals they are to patronise: *The High Leicestershire Radical*, the *Melton Mowbray Courier*, the *Cropwell Bishop Shuttle*, the *Woman's Friend*, *Put Your Feet Up!* and *Soduku Challenge*. When I express some surprise at his intentions, he tells me: "We in the Church of Rutland have to get out of the mindset whereby only people who have been believers for 15 years and have said a million prayers can be clergymen." I have to tell him that, while I am all for innovation, I have no willingness to let a few people get a wacky idea through as policy.