

liberator



Is he pants, or does
he get a bum deal?

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24 Alexandra Grove
London N4 2LF
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Liberator is printed by
Lithosphere 90 Queensland Road N7 7AS

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* acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none

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COMMENTARY

WHISPER IT NOT

In the eighteen months since Ming Campbell was elected leader of the Liberal Democrats, his performance has not been everything one might have wished for.

Some of the wounds have been self-inflicted, notably the dithering over Gordon Brown's poisoned chalice of government posts for certain Lib Dem peers.

Other issues regarding the leadership are the consequence of deep-seated problems in the party, which predate Campbell's term of office and will take time to turn round.

And there has been the sheer bad luck of there being no major political event or issue that might have enabled Campbell to play to his strengths.

But however disappointed one might feel, there is nothing in Campbell's conduct that would remotely justify a second leadership election in as many years, with all the attendant traumas of an ill-tempered coup followed by another uninspiring leadership contest. It would make the party a laughing stock, and deservedly so.

Does anyone seriously believe that such an episode would lift the party out of the doldrums? Apparently some members do.

Anonymous 'parliamentarians' have been briefing the press with talk of a "pearl handled revolver". This whispering campaign may be a misguided attempt to benefit one of Campbell's possible successors, or it may simply be loose talk. Whatever the motives, it is doing no one in the party any favours.

Liberator is no stranger to criticism of the party leader. We've been doing it since Jeremy Thorpe's time. It has never been our business to issue bromides but, in our defence, Liberator's overriding goal has always been the successful promotion of Liberalism and our criticisms have at least been above-board and coherent.

But there is no point criticising the leader when you have no constructive alternatives and your proposed course of action would plunge the party into crisis.

And it is ironic that, yet again, the damaging publicity is emanating from senior members of the party rather than the 'grassroots activists', 'radical factions' and 'loony elements' that such leading figures habitually prefer to blame.

Perhaps the most ludicrous aspect of the current whispering campaign is that the criticism focuses on the leader's staid personality. What do people expect? Campbell is who he is, and the party knew that when it voted for him. Indeed, the avuncular 'steady pair of hands' was precisely what the party wanted after the downfall of Kennedy. There is no use complaining about that now.

Barring accidents, there will be no change of leadership this side of the next general election. It is an open secret that Campbell will stand down shortly after that election.

In the meantime, there is nothing to gain by stoking rumours of a leadership coup.

By all means, make constructive criticisms – Liberator will certainly continue to do so. But anonymous 'parliamentarians' ought to know better than to indulge in futile gestures that merely play into the hands of the opposition.

HANCOCK'S HALF-HOUR

One thing that has not helped Ming Campbell's leadership is the persistent rumour of a 'comeback' by his predecessor Charles Kennedy. It is never precisely clear what such a 'comeback' might entail, other than gratuitous publicity at conference that detracts from the party's goals.

Some media commentators still entertain the fantasy that Kennedy might one day resume the leadership. But Kennedy has shown himself incapable of leadership even when stone cold sober, and the idea that the party might invite him back is absurd.

Still, journalists at conference seeking some bogus controversy are bound to report whatever Kennedy says in terms of a "challenge" to the leadership. This wouldn't matter if Kennedy remained silent but unfortunately he has chosen to make waves.

Speaking at the 'Festival of Politics' in Edinburgh (23 August), he refused to rule out a future challenge for the leadership. Then BBC2's Newsnight (31 August) reported that the Liberal Democrats were divided over whether to back a referendum on the EU treaty. Kennedy was said to be supporting the pro-referendum faction.

The only Lib Dem MP interviewed in the programme was Mike Hancock, who stated not only that he supported a referendum but also that, if there were one, he would vote no.

Why? It is clear that a referendum on the treaty would be a proxy for the more basic issue of Britain's EU membership but without the force to settle that issue.

One can only assume that Hancock either (a) wants to remain a member of the EU but only if it is run inefficiently under the old rules, or (b) would rather withdraw from the EU altogether. Either way, it would seem that Hancock is out of tune with his party's internationalist spirit.

Kennedy and Hancock's behaviour suggests that Lib Dem MPs are all over the shop. The party would not be in this mess if it had the courage to be open and unequivocal in its pro-Europeanism. There is no mileage in competing for the UKIP vote and the party should stop trying.

If Campbell wants to demonstrate his leadership and silence Kennedy, he should make an unashamed bid for the votes of the one-third of the electorate that has remained solidly pro-European and which has no other party to which it can turn.

RADICAL BULLETIN

TAYLOR MADE

If Ming Campbell wishes to dispel the impression that he is too close to Gordon Brown, why does he keep on saying such stupid things at every opportunity?

First there was his inept speech at Harrogate, in which he appeared to set coalition tests for Brown, but none for Tory leader David Cameron, thus throwing away the party's negotiating position in any future hung parliament (Liberator 317).

Then there was the shambles over Brown's offer to take Lib Dems into his shadow cabinet – something it took Campbell an entire two days to see would destroy the party as an independent entity (Liberator 319).

Next came the row over Shirley Williams becoming an adviser to Brown on nuclear weapons, Baroness Neuberger an adviser on 'volunteering' and Lord Lester on the constitution.

Now we have Matthew Taylor advising Brown on affordable housing in rural areas.

Taylor's position is not as embarrassing as that of the three peers, since he appears to be heading a one-off review, rather than taking an open-ended advisory post, and some Tories have accepted similar roles.

Even so, the government has in the last year had two enormous reports on housing, from academics Kate Barker and John Hills, so what can Taylor's cover that theirs, with heavy civil service policy support, did not?

Since Taylor can merely advise, what will he be able to achieve in practice and will this review be allowed to set the Lib Dems' housing policy?

It ought to be obvious, and indeed it is obvious to everyone except Campbell, that Brown has made these forays to destabilise his opponents and cause dissension and confusion among them.

Yet Campbell said: "I am delighted that Gordon Brown has once again recognised the knowledge and experience that Liberal Democrats have to offer in tackling major policy challenges that the Government has proved unable to solve."

That is really likely to convince those who think he is by background, political inclination and personal acquaintance already far too close to the prime minister.

CHEEKY CHAPPIE

This time next year, the Liberal Democrats will need a new president, Simon Hughes having by then served the maximum two terms.

Since it is unlikely that the party will have had the wit to split this ludicrous post into its constituent parts of ceremonial figurehead and federal executive chair, it will no doubt continue with its tradition of choosing a figurehead who cannot chair.

Three years ago Hughes flattened his challenger Lembit Öpik, and last year Öpik did not oppose Hughes, despite having declared on live television that he would do so and use the presidency as a preparation to becoming leader (Liberator 308). But there are now expectations that Öpik will have another run at the job.

Öpik's perspicacious political judgement has been much on show, first by being the only MP to support Mark Oaten's preposterous leadership bid, and more recently by taking time out from his duties as shadow business and enterprise secretary to cavort on light entertainment shows with the Cheeky Girls (Liberator 320). Still, his private life is the concern only of him, his girlfriend and anyone who buys *Hello* magazine, or indeed *Closer*, in which he discussed the girls' boob jobs, leading to lurid coverage in the tabloids.

Öpik's only likely opponent as yet is Ros Scott, the party's transport spokesperson in the Lords, who enjoys strong support from those who know her local government record.

People whose blood runs cold at the idea of two years of the cheeky chappie in the party's second most prominent job are strongly encouraging her to run.

Perhaps the returning officer would say: "Scott, Ros, Sensible Party...".

KNOCKED UP

"I am a great believer in meeting people," Ming Campbell rather unsurprisingly informed party members when he launched the 'Community Canvass Week' to take place during the week following conference.

Consulting his crystal ball, he said: "Thousands of Liberal Democrats across the UK will be out calling on people, conducting surveys, hearing what people think on issues and recruiting new members and deliverers.

"Bringing a human face to politics and building a larger team of supporters and helpers is vital."

Indeed it is, but isn't the week after conference the ideal time to tell voters what the Liberal Democrats think, rather than inviting them to "get it off your chest"?

The exercise is intended to give a flying start to any snap general election, an eventuality that is possible but not probable considering the Labour Party's dire financial condition and Brown's likely disinclination to go down in history with the shortest ever premiership.

Having a week of activity is a decent idea in itself, but surely it should be for the purposes of selling a few clear messages about the party and what voters could expect were they to support it.

Instead, this sounds like a general election campaign reduced to a grumble sheet.

WE'LL KEEP AN OUSTING IN THE HILLSIDES

Expect a leadership election soon. No, not *that* one, the one for leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Welsh Assembly.

This position has been held since its inception by Mike German, who has since 1999 led a six-strong group.

That is the main problem: it started at six, and it is still six, and the failure to make any progress has been laid at his door by dissidents.

German's position was not helped by the bizarre on-off manoeuvres over the aborted rainbow coalition with the Tories and Plaid Cymru (Liberator 319), nor by the party's equally on-off attitude towards Labour.

South-West Wales AM Peter Black has written a pamphlet on the future direction of the Welsh party, and dropped barely veiled hints that he intends to contest the leadership. Montgomeryshire AM Mick Bates has also come out against German.

THEY'RE OFF AGAIN

Voting for positions on the Liberal Democrat party lists for next year's European parliamentary elections closes on 7 November, a date no doubt ringed in red on the calendars of party members who are already wilting under the e-bombardment of candidates' statements.

The campaign period officially began on 28 August, which was lucky for south-east MEP Sharon Bowles, whose annual report to members dropped onto doormats a week or so earlier, thus falling outside the jurisdiction of the returning officers who would doubtless have had something to say had this missive arrived during the official campaign.

Despite "a number of complaints about this mailing", including concern from the South Central Regional Executive, nothing could be done even though the report containing implied endorsements from Nick Clegg, Nigel Bakhai, Neil Fawcett and other assorted worthies.

The rows over the conduct of the recent election for the pointless talking shop that is the London Assembly were bad enough (Liberator 319). Expect the European Parliament ones to be far worse.

PARTY ON DOWN

July 18 saw hundreds of Liberal Democrats out on the streets of Ealing Southall and Sedgefield for the two parliamentary by-elections, their ranks perhaps swelled by members of the Parliamentary Candidates Association, which cancelled its scheduled piss-up.

This must have somewhat reduced the turnout at a party held that same evening by Lord Oakeshott, billed as 'summer drinks' at his Kennington home, and the only party social event thought to have occurred in London that night at which any large number of MPs were likely to have been present.

Did New Statesman and Daily Mirror contributor Rosa Price attend it? She wrote that a prominent Lib Dem MP, returning from campaigning in Ealing, "arrived at an eve-of-poll summer party thrown by a leading party member exclaiming: 'F*** – it looks like we might win this thing now.' He was consoled by several frontbenchers, at

least two prospective MPs, several backbenchers and various Lib Dem peers."

Why should this news require any Lib Dem MP to be 'consoled' unless they hoped that a bad by-election result would so damage Ming Campbell that he would have to go and be replaced by someone more to their liking?

Was Price there and, if so, who did she hear? Or was she not there, in which case who related the incident?

INVITATION ONLY

The Liberal Democrats' conference fringe continues to grow but most of the meetings held in Brighton this September are being hosted not by party bodies but by outside lobbies – an assortment of pressure groups, unions and corporate interests.

And given that there is so much competition for delegates' attention, one way to fill the room is to offer free refreshments. A culinary arms race has broken out and there is so much food and drink on offer that it is perfectly possible for delegates to eat breakfast, lunch and dinner at someone else's expense every day of the conference.

If a fish and chip supper and limitless wine are beyond your budget, the other technique for filling the room is to offer star speakers. North-West MEP Saj Karim has done just that. His fringe meeting scheduled for the Monday lunchtime promises as 'invited speakers' none other than Pascal Lamy, director-general of the WTO, and Peter Mandelson, the EU's trade commissioner.

Sadly, it would seem that these eminent people were unable to accept the invitation. A call to Lamy's office revealed that he will be travelling that Monday, and not in the vicinity of Brighton. A call to Mandelson's office revealed that the commissioner will be in New York that day.

FANCY DRESS

The Scottish press has had the opportunity of a good laugh at the expense of the new Liberal Democrat/SNP administration at Edinburgh City Council, where the Lib Dem leader Jenny Dawe has called for a report into the costs of reintroducing ceremonial robes for councillors.

These garments would, it appears, separate councillors "from the hoi polloi" on "important civic occasions".

Dawe has protested that her comments were taken out of context, but nothing published indicates that she has denied making them, nor is it easy to see in what other context one might discuss ceremonial civic robes.

Maybe the absence of such robes was the main issue raised by residents on grumble sheets at May's elections in the Scottish capital.

Many years ago, the more robust Liberal group on Kingston Council affronted the ruling Tories by refusing to wear the robes that were used during council meetings and adorned with a fur trim to denote seniority.

Legend has it that, at the subsequent election, the cry went up, "We've just beaten a Tory with three furry bits!"

LEAVE MING ALONE

Most of the complaints from within the party about Ming Campbell's leadership are misplaced, argues Simon Titley

The Liberal Democrats are slipping in the polls. Things need turning round if the party is to avoid being squeezed at the next general election. What is the best remedy?

Attack your own leader in public with little thought for the consequences and no coherent idea of what might be done instead? Raise the prospect of another leadership coup followed by a second leadership election in as many years? Assume that the outcome of this scenario is bound to improve the party's standing with the electorate?

One does not need to be a political genius to see that this is not a winning strategy. Yet this obvious point seems to have eluded some people in the party.

Take Federal Policy Committee member Linda Jack, for example. She declared publicly that Sir Ming Campbell had been "over promoted" and furthermore claimed to represent the views of "10% of the shadow cabinet". To be fair, Linda's proposed remedy was not the immediate defenestration of the leader. Instead, she recommended that he "raise his game", perhaps with some "training or coaching".

Linda's analysis suggests that she has little grasp of the party's strategic failings. Forcing the leader through some sort of re-education process does not address any of them. Still, she is entitled to her view and to express it. But there is a distinction between exercising one's rights and one's discretion. These gratuitous remarks gained a lot of media coverage, but for whose benefit? The only practical effect has been to help the opposition.

PEARL HANDLED REVOLVER

Linda Jack may be the only party office holder to have made attributable remarks but she is not the only culprit. As reported in *Radical Bulletin* (Liberator 320), one anonymous Liberal Democrat peer told the *Sunday Telegraph* (1 July), "We are hoping [Ming] will go off on his summer holidays with a pearl handled revolver in his suitcase." The same day's *Observer* reported a "whispering campaign".

The main source of disappointment about Ming seems to be his lack of passion. I share this feeling. It would be great if we could see him display some genuine anger instead of always presenting a desiccated, lawyerly façade. But he is not going to do that because it is not in his nature. We've all known that from the start. Ming has never pretended to be anything other than what he is (except briefly during last year's 'put the zing into Ming' PR fiasco, which shows what happens when you try to act out of character).

Ming does not have, and has never claimed to have, either Paddy Ashdown's physical dynamism or Charles Kennedy's chat show affability. Indeed, the party chose Ming precisely because of who he is rather than what it

hoped he might be. The members wanted a 'safe pair of hands' and consciously rejected excitement. So it is both pointless and hypocritical of party members to criticise Ming for being himself.

The critics also need a sense of proportion. However great the disappointment, the situation is not so bad that it would remotely justify another messy coup and another uninspiring leadership election. After all, Ming is Ming, not Iain Duncan Smith (or Charles Kennedy, for that matter).

And the critics need to realise that most of the troubles besetting the Liberal Democrats are the result of deep-seated problems that existed long before Ming became leader. They would have been a problem whoever won last year's leadership contest and they would remain a problem even if Ming were replaced next week.

FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

There can be no better illustration of these fundamental problems than the party's 'Community Canvass Week' being organised the week after this September's party conference. On 30 August, party members received an e-mail from Cowley Street announcing this latest wheeze: "Thousands of Liberal Democrats across the UK will be out calling on people, conducting surveys, hearing what people think on issues and recruiting new members and deliverers."

Can you see what is missing? At no stage is it proposed that we should promote ourselves, our values or our policies. This initiative is devoid of political content. It isn't democratic or empowering but is a vacuous exercise in 'press the red button now' politics. If any further proof were needed that the party's 'we can win everywhere' strategy is exhausted, this cheap stunt is it.

I was reminded of a recent radio comedy sketch by Mitchell and Webb, which satirised the BBC's similar 'tell us what you think' approach: "Are you personally affected by this issue? Then e-mail us. Or if you're not affected by this issue, can you imagine what it would be like if you were? Or if you are affected by it, but don't want to talk about it, can you imagine what it would be like not being affected by it? Why not e-mail us? You may not know anything about the issue, but I bet you reckon something. So why not tell us what you reckon. Let us enjoy the full majesty of your uninformed, ad hoc reckon, by going to bbc.co.uk, clicking on 'what I reckon' and then simply beating on the keyboard with your fists or head."

Yet again, the party is making empty gestures instead of taking a moral lead. This is a consequence of a deliberate strategy of avoiding the creation of a sharp image or saying anything controversial for fear that somebody somewhere might be offended. This problem has existed since the merger in 1988, long before the last leadership election.

Because the party believes that it can ‘win everywhere’, it subordinates policy to short-term tactical expediency, and fails to target and cement the loyalty of a core vote. Hence support is so shallow that the party must campaign for most of its votes afresh at each election.

Still, a lot of people in the party have turned this vice into a virtue, through a ritual activity they call ‘campaigning’. The party maintains that it can keep the show on the road indefinitely solely through the device of incremental gains won by exploiting transient local grievances – a strategy with inherent limitations. The party has failed to develop a complementary ‘air war’ (with the honourable exception of the campaign against the Iraq war – and even that advantage wasn’t pressed home).

And the show is kept on the road indefinitely. The party’s total number of councillors has remained more or less the same for the past twelve years.

Ming cannot be blamed for this depoliticised culture and excessively tactical approach. But he must openly acknowledge that his party’s prevailing strategy has reached the end of the road. He should feel under no obligation to respect the shibboleths of clapped-out tactics and slogans. He should be leading a debate about how the party can develop its strategy into something more appropriate to its circumstances.

If the party is to develop a successful ‘air war’, it needs a clear brand image. The closest the party has come to developing such a brand has been its policies on Iraq and tuition fees. For several years it has traded on these diminishing assets but, as these issues fade, the party has done little to create sufficiently powerful replacements. The only initiative that comes close is the new climate change proposals. But it is significant that, instead of choosing to campaign on that policy, the party will spend the week after conference going round the country with a blank sheet of paper.

DISPLACEMENT ACTIVITY

The party has no shortage of policy initiatives and campaigns, but they seem to lack any strategic focus or impact. Almost every month, one frontbench spokesman or another launches a new ‘campaign’ while the rest of his colleagues churn out several press releases each day. Most of this effort sinks without trace.

Just who or what is all this campaigning aimed at? There seems to be no target audience and no defined objective, other than to keep busy. It is displacement activity rather than political action.

Again, this problem does not originate with Ming. The party has been engaging in this sort of ritual for years (and how ironic that such unfocused activity should go out under the banner of ‘Focus’). While it is not Ming’s fault, it is something he could reform, by ensuring that the party focuses its limited resources on campaigns that have a point.

Ming should argue for the party to do less but better. The party’s campaigning should aim to build and cement the loyalty of its core vote, which electoral and polling evidence overwhelmingly shows is (potentially) the younger, better-educated and more cosmopolitan demographic. It is not the ‘middle ground’, a fallacious concept based on the illusion that most of the electorate shares the same ‘sweet spot’. Converging with the other parties on the same ground would make the party seem indistinguishable and consign it to oblivion.

Unfortunately, there are influential voices in the party who believe that the party should compete for the imaginary ‘middle ground’. They argue that the party’s situation is analogous to that in the Labour Party during the 1980s. The Lib Dems are repelling the middle ground, they claim, because the party is “too left-wing”. Ming must therefore emulate Neil Kinnock and show who is boss by staging a ‘Clause 4 Moment’, to take on and defeat his own party.

Anyone with an ounce of sense can see that this analogy is entirely false. Despite this, the leadership gambled a disproportionate amount of its prestige on two conference motions, on post office privatisation and on Trident, that were deliberately contrived as wedge issues to provoke a fight with the membership. Ming is clearly getting dud advice. He should clear out all the ‘Clause 4 Moment’ merchants from his office without further ado.

If anything, the Liberal Democrats need to be more radical, not more right wing. Politics today is dominated by the failure of right-wing ideology. Financial deregulation has led to the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market, the consequences of which threaten a global recession. PFIs are failing to deliver in the health service and have left NHS hospitals with £12bn of private debt. Billions have been squandered on useless defence weapons. ‘Fat cat’ pay and bonuses are causing widespread moral outrage. The Iraq war has been such a failure that a British general has recently described neo-con foreign policy as “intellectually bankrupt”.

BATTLE OF IDEAS

Perhaps the most useful service Ming could therefore render as leader would be to engage the party in the battle of ideas. The Liberal Democrats produce a lot of policy initiatives and statements, but most of this activity seems to exist in a parallel universe. Whenever there are big debates in the real world on controversial issues, it is rare to find a prominent Lib Dem making an effective intellectual contribution.

Consider the big moral issues of the day, for example the question of life-work balance, the argument between multiculturalism and integration, the moral panic about paedophilia, or the looming issues of generational politics. The Lib Dems are simply not at the centre of these debates. On the rare occasions they put in an appearance, they deliver sterile dissertations rather than passionate arguments that would rally support.

The basic problem with the party is not Ming but its strategy of incrementalism, its failure to cement the allegiance of a core vote, its failure to create a clear brand and its failure to engage effectively in the battle of ideas. Changing the leader will not necessarily solve any of these problems, therefore most of the internal criticism of Ming is misplaced.

But Ming has a duty as leader to leave the party in a better state than he found it. He must show that a process for addressing the fundamental problems is underway otherwise the grumbling will grow.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

TEXTS FOR THE NEW CENTURY

Michael Meadowcroft applauds ‘Reinventing the State’ and urges Liberals not to fear internal debate

One task of the reviewer is to set out a critique of the work under review. However, before getting stuck into the diverse chapters in this book of essays, I want to encourage all Liberals to buy the book, even if they do not get beyond David Howarth’s brilliant opening chapter. At a time when superficiality in politics reigns supreme and its current excrescence, the focus group, dictates policy, a book of essays as substantial as this deserves much applause.

Having spent a great deal of the past seventeen years trying to enhance democracy in thirty odd different countries, I really hadn’t appreciated how the framework of British politics had shifted in that time. Not that the underlying philosophic values had changed, nor that the need to apply essential liberal values to society’s ills was in any way diminished, but that the area in which the unequal struggle is taking place is very different to what it was when I was bundled out of parliament twenty years ago.

Being confronted with *Reinventing the State – Social Liberalism for the 21st Century* in such a vulnerable state has its advantages. First, it means that I cannot adopt an attitude of high-minded complacency. The *Orange Book* has clearly been a great catalyst. Even if alone amongst the major parties, at least the Liberal Democrats have reinvented internal political debate without, apparently, being overly put off by inevitable accusations of party disunity. I have always believed that healthy internal debate is the foundation for confidence in taking the debate outside the party.

Herein also lies a significant difference with the past. My meagre efforts at producing a series of booklets for *Liberator* thirty years ago were designed to equip Liberals who had an instinctive grasp of their faith with the tools to defend it in varying antagonistic circumstances – what in theological terms is called ‘apologetics’. *Reinventing the State*, on the other hand, appears to be focused on the step before such a plateau – to determine where the party is, to establish a firm base in the current shifting sands of what passes for political identity these days. As such, it does an excellent job, with a confidence that belies the earlier years of relative vagueness.

No doubt the Liberal Democrats have always had armfuls of policy papers but the benefit of publishing a coordinated set of essays (as, say, the Liberal Party did with *The Unservile State* way back in 1957) is that it establishes a solid base, which both gives confidence to activists and helps steer them away from the ever present community politics tendency towards ‘mindless activism’.

If the party can grit its collective teeth and withstand the inevitable media efforts to brand constructive internal party debate as splits and divisions, it will do a service to politics generally and, as an important side effect, it could drag party leadership styles towards experience and judgement and away from the obsession with spin and glamour.

DARK YEARS

Inevitably, some chapters have more resonance than others and it is certainly the case that David Howarth provides a powerful and rigorous analysis of the differing historical strands of liberalism. That in itself is valuable but his greater service is to demonstrate that the strands are nothing like as far apart as the opponents of liberalism like to suggest, and that it is the methodology by which the aims of liberty are secured within the parameters of the different policy areas – security, health, mobility, for example – that leads to a genuine argument on where the line between market and state should be drawn. There is a sense in which many of those who stayed in the Liberal Party in the dark years did so because they perceived that public and private monopolies were essentially no different in their effects. Hence it was necessary to oppose those who were in love with private enterprise just as much as those who had a naive view of the benevolence of the state.

One huge difference today is that the many bizarre privatisations of the Thatcher era, such as water, gas and electricity – and, in relation to railways, the Major government – require state regulation which, in effect, admits the dangers of the process and, significantly, enables the pernicious failings of privatisation to be hidden, and the tripling of state aid to the railway system to be explained away. David Howarth is quite right to draw attention to the political implications of regulation that have hitherto been a neglected sphere of legitimate political action.

I invariably get furious whenever the Royal Mail is further undermined by creeping privatisation and by its attempts to compete through increased ‘efficiency’. It was a Liberal administration that introduced the ‘Penny Post’ in 1840, encompassing for the first time the principle that postage should be the same whatever the distance. Now the right of those living in rural areas to pay the same for a letter as those in inner cities is being eroded more and more. Of course, the likes of TNT will be able to undercut the Royal Mail when the latter has to deliver to the Outer Hebrides at the same price as to me in Leeds. Liberals should regard the postal services as a natural monopoly.

Howarth is also right to stress that local government is the best way of avoiding the dangers of excessive

concentrations of power. In the new era of opposition politicians being involved in government advisory posts, perhaps local councillors of all parties can at last unite to demand the return of powers to municipalities. We have had sixty years of the destruction of local democracy, largely because councillors of the same persuasion as central government were never prepared to oppose their colleagues in Westminster, who were thus able to remove power after power.

Paul Holmes's exposition of the possibilities open to innovative local authorities adds to the case for the development of municipal independence with substantial financial resources. Mark Pack and Chris Huhne extol similar virtues of localism, albeit from different angles. Neither explicitly acknowledges that the encouragement of diversity inevitably diminishes uniformity and will require Liberal Democrats to argue in favour of different provision in different areas, in other words to advocate the positive benefits of the 'postcode lottery'.

Duncan Brack makes a powerful case for promoting equality of outcome as a liberal value. A great deal of public persuasion is required if the tide of selfishness encouraged by Margaret Thatcher is to be reversed. It is not enough to impose redistributive laws on an unwilling well-off sector; there is a need to persuade those who will have to foot higher tax bills that there is an advantage for them in having a society that is more secure and more at peace with itself as a result of being more equal and more socially mobile.

REMARKABLY LIBERAL JUDGEMENTS

There may not be an abundance of natural liberals amongst the richer half of the population but there are many that can be persuaded to support 'right thinking' views. The liberal jurist Patrick Devlin made this case in his excellent book *The Enforcement of Morals* in 1965, by pointing out that juries do not vote for their prejudices but often make remarkably liberal decisions based on the legal process played out in front of them. Devlin argued from this that politicians should treat the electorate as a huge jury and adapt the legal process to the democratic sphere. There have been partial examples of this in recent years. One such was the gradual abolition of mortgage interest tax relief. Another, as Simon Titley points out, is Ken Livingstone's congestion charge. I sense that measures to combat climate change are becoming another, which is where Ed Randall's chapter comes in. Historically, the Liberal Party has been ahead of the field on green issues, and the forerunner of the Green Party actually debated whether to disband and to join the Liberals! Alas, liberals have tended to be frightened by their own foresight and have hitherto backed off under attack from the selfish brigade. That luxury is no longer available.

Matthew Taylor brings us back to Beveridge's 'giants' and helpfully compares their current status in the UK with their levels globally. Here is another area of policy where the argument needs to be pushed consistently, not least to that constituency that has already put its hand to the international plough. Human individuals have deep wells of compassion that are touched by what they see on television. Michael Buerk's film on Ethiopia, for instance, produced a remarkable response.

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Simon Titley and David Boyle address issues that in party terms are uniquely liberal. The conjunction of the personal with the political, and the context of promoting human values above economics, cannot by definition

fit comfortably into political philosophies that are economically determinist. Boyle's case for the recognition of those with a spiritual dimension as potential liberals is a timely rejoinder to fundamentalist secularists. Bob Holman's recent biography of the evangelical preacher F B Meyer, which highlights his political radicalism, chimes well with Boyle's non-conformist panegyric. He also writes about the vital need to revive the voluntary sector but fails to mention the appalling nationalisation of voluntary funding via the lottery.

Elsbeth Attwooll's contribution on rights and responsibilities is certainly sound enough but, in quoting Conrad Russell as considering the premise that rights come with responsibilities as being 'unexceptionable', fails to appreciate that there are those such as mentally handicapped men and women with rights but for whom responsibilities are largely impossible.

Almost as an afterthought, Richard Grayson hits the NHS nail on the head: the total absence of funding other than by handouts from central government. Unless the power to tax and the power to spend are in the same hands, there will not be the means of resolving the essential problems of funding the health service.

Nick Clegg, in an otherwise sympathetic contribution on tackling terrorism, suddenly starts talking about the criteria for banning individuals or organisations. I remain unconvinced that there is an advantage from any bans. The liberal task is to permit all views to be expounded, however provocative, and to enter the debate with confidence in the refutation of violence and extremism.

William Wallace conflates a view of community with a sense of nationhood. I am far from convinced that there is a 'Britishness' or even an 'Englishness' that commands a widespread instinctive assent. I suspect that for many individuals – possibly even a majority – the natural sense of identity is both narrower and wider than the nation state. For instance, my Leeds neighbours have a warm affinity with other Yorkshire folk but would find little in common with most people in Surrey. On the other hand, cultural identity is very European, whether it is footballers from EU states, composers such as Mozart or Beethoven, dramatists such as Shakespeare or Molière, opera composers such as Verdi or Puccini, or choreographers such as Diagelev or Fokine. It is particularly perverse to be emphasising nationhood when more and more communities within the EU, such as Scotland and Catalonia, are emphasising their 'sub national' identities, and when terrorism is certainly supranational.

Cramming a review of this important book into two Liberator pages does not do it sufficient credit. It deserves to be developed into a lively debate towards a second edition – even before the ink is dry on the first!

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GRIST TO THE MILL?

Reading ‘Reinventing the State’ provokes Jonathan Calder to revisit Mill’s ‘On Liberty’

More than 200 years after his birth, John Stuart Mill remains the most important philosopher for Liberal Democrats. It is fashionable to name check L.T. Hobhouse and T.H. Green, but I suspect that few who do so have really read their works.

Hobhouse’s *Liberalism* is approachable, but hardly profound when set against Mill, while Green is next to unreadable. In part this is because Green’s heyday came during that brief period in the late nineteenth century when Idealism was the dominant force in British philosophy, and it is hard for we 21st-century realists to make much of him as a result. Equally, however, there was a tension in Green’s thought between his espousal of liberty and the enthusiasms, such as temperance, which he derived from his religious views. The suspicion must be that he sometimes found it convenient to take refuge in obfuscation.

The greatest 20th century liberal thinkers are Karl Popper and Isaiah Berlin, and both are splendidly lucid. It would be wrong to dismiss either as a Cold War philosopher, but the fact that (perhaps unwisely) we no longer feel the same urgent need to defend democracy against tyranny means that their work is not as compelling as it once was. More recently, Richard Rorty made an attractive attempt to reconcile the most avant-garde postmodern theory with a defence of the institutions of the Western liberal democracies, but the Mill of *On Liberty* still reigns supreme.

Yet something strange has happened to the way we remember *On Liberty*. Reading the new collection *Reinventing the State*, for instance, I came across two references to the work, and from them one could be forgiven for thinking that Mill was chiefly concerned with delineating the ways in which liberty must be circumscribed.

Writing on liberal environmentalism, Ed Randall cites Mill’s harm principle. This holds that what individuals do, as long as it does not harm others, should go unregulated by the state. He then argues that our modern understanding of the effects of economic activity on the environment means that the boundaries of the area of life that can be left to individual decision must be drawn more tightly than Mill imagined, but he seems unsure as to whether to claim Mill’s blessing for this new interventionism or to dismiss him as naïve.

It is true that there are good reasons for seeing Mill as an early advocate of environmental politics. In his *Principles of Political Economy*, he looked forward to the

coming of the ‘stationary state’ – not to be confused with the stationery state, which would be a dictatorship run by manila envelopes – where the expansion of the economy would cease.

He wrote: “I am inclined to believe that it would be, on the whole, a very considerable improvement on our present condition. I confess I am not charmed with the ideal of life held out by those who think that the normal state of human beings is that of struggling to get on; that the trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other’s heels, which form the existing type of social life, are the most desirable lot of human kind, or anything but the disagreeable symptoms of one of the phases of industrial progress.”

Yet we should remember that there are those in the green movement who never much liked liberty in the first place and are happy to seize upon anything which gives them a pretext for curbing it. In an earlier generation, they would have been Marxists and preached the need for centralised planning as capitalism was bound to collapse through its internal contradictions.

A second author in *Reinventing the State* quotes John Stuart Mill.

Writing of the tolerance that

liberalism has inherited from its Nonconformist roots, David Boyle says: “It is a tolerance that believes people’s conscience, and therefore their freedom to act, is sacrosanct – limited as always by the philosophy of John Stuart Mill.”

This is only a throwaway remark, and it comes from one of my favourite modern liberal writers, but it is odd to see Mill’s philosophy remembered for prescribing limits to liberty.

It seems we have become obsessed by Mill’s harm principle. Yet it is only a small part of *On Liberty*: the essence of that work is not concerned with curbing liberty at all but is a glorious hymn in favour of its expansion.

Writing in *Prospect* magazine last year, Richard Reeves put it well: “... for Mill, liberty consists of much more than being left alone. It requires choice-making by the individual. ‘He who lets the world... choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation,’ he writes. ‘He who chooses his plan for himself employs all his faculties.’ For Mill, a good life must be a chosen life.”

Or as The Levellers said more recently: “There’s only one way of life, and that’s your own, your own, your own.”

The other problem with the harm principle is that it is often not clear which decision it should lead us to in

“It seems we have become obsessed by Mill’s harm principle”

practice. We have already seen that Ed Randall thinks it can be extended to justify wider government intervention in the economy, and Reeves notes that Simon Jenkins appealed to it while arguing against a ban on smoking in public places and Chris Huhne appealed to it while arguing in favour of one.

So let's set the harm principle aside and look at Mill's arguments in favour of an expansion of liberty.

He first looks at liberty of thought and discussion, and offers two pragmatic arguments in favour of it. The first is that the opinion of the authorities wish to suppress may be true and that, even if it is true only in part, then its assertion and the subsequent debate will help move prevailing opinion nearer to the truth. Karl Popper made this insight the basis of his philosophy, arguing that the institutions of a free society and the growth of human knowledge are intimately connected.

Mill's second argument is that a failure to examine and argue for the beliefs we hold can render them mere dogma and lead to their meaning becoming enfeebled or lost. This shows great practical insight. A large part of the reason that the Labour Party was never able to mount an effective challenge to Thatcherism was that, in the 1970s, it had become impossible in Labour circles to question the party's programme without being called 'anti working class' or 'racist' or insulted in some other way. It was an early form of what we now lazily call political correctness. When the Conservatives directly challenged Labour's views, the party's members found it difficult to argue for them. Those views had become, in Mill's eloquent language, "a mere formal profession, inefficacious for good, but cumbering the ground, and preventing the growth of any real and heartfelt conviction, from reason or personal experience".

In a similar vein, Nick Cohen has written: "When conservatives complain about the undoubted liberal bias of the BBC, they assume some kind of socialist plot when it is geography not ideology driving attitudes. A young middle-class BBC type in London is unlikely to meet anyone socially who is, say, against abortion or pro-war. Because they don't confront opposing ideas, they can't put themselves into the minds of people outside their consensus and ask questions from another point of view."

Mill then moves on to argue the need for individuality of character, with the emphasis on the freely chosen life that Reeves notes. Here the arguments are less pragmatic: for Mill, as they should be for all liberals, authenticity and autonomy are good in themselves:

"If it were only that people have diversities of taste, that is reason enough for not attempting to shape them all after one model. But different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all the variety of plants can in the same physical atmosphere and climate."

And in the third of the substantial theoretical chapters, Mill looks at the collision between individuality and wider society. He looks in particular at questions around the sale of alcohol and is critical of those who seek to curb its sale because of the disorder it causes and the costs it imposes on the taxpayer. He accuses them of holding the view that:

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"... it is the absolute social right of every individual, that every other individual shall act in every respect exactly as he ought; that whosoever fails thereof in the smallest particular violates my social right, and entitles me to demand from the legislature the removal of the grievance."

MONSTROUS PRINCIPLE

As Mill says, "So monstrous a principle is far more dangerous than any single interference with liberty; there is no violation of liberty which it would not justify."

You can see that behind the rolling Victorian prose, which it is so tempting to quote at length, lie very contemporary concerns. Mill's suspicion of social rights can be taken far beyond questions of licensing laws and seen as a condemnation of Labour's current authoritarianism.

There is another aspect of *On Liberty* that has contemporary resonance. We are inclined to think of the Victorian age as one of great confidence and perhaps the last in which it was possible to believe in 'Great Men' in an uncomplicated fashion. Was it not an age of mighty public intellectuals – Ruskin, Carlyle, Mill himself – who have no equivalent today?

Yet if you read *On Liberty*, you find a very different tone. Mill is deeply pessimistic about the way the times were heading and feared the extinction of individuality altogether. He wrote of the tendency of public opinion in those times to prescribe a standard of conduct and expect everyone to conform to it:

"And that standard, express or tacit, is to desire nothing strongly. Its ideal of character is to be without any marked character; to main by compression, like a Chinese lady's foot, every part of human nature which stands out prominently, and tends to make the person markedly dissimilar in outline to commonplace humanity."

The Victorians were a lot less 'Victorian' than we moderns tend to believe – they did not cover up piano legs out of a concern for decency and they were a lot more relaxed about male nudity, at least, than we are in the 21st century – but maybe Mill was right in that he was seeing the passing of the more relaxed Georgian era. It was, after all, Melbourne, Queen Victoria's first prime minister, who said, "This damned morality will be the death of us all."

And there is no doubt that Mill speaks to us today in a world of mass culture, chain stores and reality television when liberals are again tempted to be pessimistic about the prospects for individuality. So read Rorty, Popper and Berlin. Read L.T. Hobhouse if you want and pretend to have read T.H. Green if you must. But above all, read the Mill of *On Liberty*. Then you will see how wrongheaded it is to plead his name in aid of attempts to curb our liberty. Mill's is the most powerful voice ever raised in support of the expansion of liberty.

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IF YOU'RE LIBERAL, YOU'RE INTERNATIONAL

Jonathan Fryer finds ammunition for pro-Europeans in 'Reinventing the State'

Fortuitously, the publication of *Reinventing the State* coincides with the 60th anniversary of the founding in Oxford of Liberal International.

There is to be a great gathering in Hamburg – dubbed a Liberal Thinkers' Meeting – in November, when not just politicians but also academics and writers from the worldwide Liberal family will come together to examine the principles behind our policies: our philosophy, in other words. So this book is a timely contribution to that debate.

The membership of LI – and indeed, of the European Liberal grouping, ELDR – is heterodox, testimony to the fact that Liberalism is a very broad church. As David Howarth reminds us, in the late 19th century, it divided into two main schools of thought, which he labels 'classical liberalism' and 'social justice liberalism'.

In countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, this led to distinct political parties being formed, sometimes on opposite sides of the government-opposition divide. Yet within LI and ELDR, they find enough common ground to be able to work together amicably.

Following the publication of *The Orange Book*, some political commentators argued that this indicated a serious ideological rift within the Liberal Democrats. One could almost hear them salivating at the prospect of 'splits'. But one of the most interesting impressions to emerge from this new volume is that it does not refute *The Orange Book*, but rather complements it.

It is not a question of 'either/or'. Even the most ardent economic liberal in the party is also a 'social liberal'. Crucially, none believes in giving free rein to the power of the market, à la Thatcher. There will be occasions when the state has to intervene.

Steve Webb, who is in charge of the Liberal Democrat general election manifesto preparations, explains, "the sort of freedom that motivates liberals is the freedom to achieve all that you are capable of. Liberals recognise that to do

nothing in the battle between the strong and the weak is to side with the strong.

"Intervention, when it can be shown to be effective, is justified by an enabling state that seeks to empower its citizens and not simply to stand by as a passive spectator and occasional policeman."

The editors of the book argue that one of the great challenges facing Britain today is to reinvent the state to

make it more creative and enabling, rather than centralised and stifling. Radical devolution has happened elsewhere in Europe, and it works. The task now is to apply it to the UK. As Chris Huhne points out in a chapter on localism, more taxation goes through central government in Britain than in any EU member state other than Malta.

There is no contradiction between localism and internationalism, however. As David Hall-Matthews rightly asserts, 'Think global, act local!' could have been a Lib Dem slogan. Moreover, he maintains that local communities that feel secure and in control of their future prospects have nothing to fear from

globalisation. Indeed, they are more likely to be outward looking.

A favourite LI slogan has long been 'If you're Liberal, you're international', and Ming Campbell in his preface endorses this notion, when he stresses three elements of liberalism: political freedom, social justice and internationalism. William Wallace expounds the internationalist doctrine: "Liberals are instinctively internationalists and individualists, opposed to the closed communalism that nationalism encourages, with its sharp distinction between 'us' and 'them', between nationals and foreigners. Nationalism goes with war and mercantilism, and liberalism with peace, free trade, open frontiers and international understanding."

Tim Garden, in a chapter that was one of the last things that he wrote before he died, makes a persuasive case even for the internationalisation of our defence and security.

"Nationalism goes with war and mercantilism, and liberalism with peace, free trade, open frontiers and international understanding"

We need to reassess how far state-based defence policies are appropriate, he writes, especially as so few of the threats we now face now come from other states. The obvious alternative is collective security, whether through global institutions such as the UN, or regional security arrangements. “We need more effective international organisations, rather than US-style unilateralism,” Tim avers (cheering is allowed).

Those Liberals who have doubts about the desirability of a more coherent European common foreign and security policy should read this chapter carefully. “The new enlarged EU must be able to contribute to international security as a major global player,” Tim affirms. Not that force is necessarily his method of choice in confronting the challenges of today’s world. “There is little evidence to show that military intervention can produce rapid, low-cost, effective transition to better governance.” Central and eastern Europe has demonstrated how economic and political developments can lead the way.

Pro-Europeans will find plenty of ammunition in this book, to deploy in the run-up to the 2009 European elections when UKIP, the Conservatives and other Euro-sceptics will doubtless once again indulge in a bout of Brussels-bashing. There are plenty of examples of why greater European integration is a good thing, while at the same time underlining the need for continuing reform of the EU itself, to make it more efficient and democratic.

Hall-Matthews argues: “It is self-evident that the EU must not behave like the kind of distant, unaccountable institution that liberals have always opposed. It must be responsive, helping to solve problems that cannot – or do not – get solved locally. It is therefore legitimate to move beyond trans-border issues such as pollution and crime into aspects of social policy where the setting of minimum standards does not restrict reasonable national or local government.”

Huhne, in a chapter on climate change, pays tribute to the way that the EU – in the shape of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel – played a crucial role in persuading Russia to sign up to Kyoto Protocol, and argues that the EU must now shoulder some of the responsibility for getting rapidly developing economies such as China and India on board the post-Kyoto process.

“Climate change is the most serious threat to our national prosperity and security,” he says, “and requires a co-ordinated response across the private and public sectors unlike any other policy challenge that we have faced in peacetime.”

Huhne hopes that it may be possible to avert some of the worst environmental consequences of economic development in the developing world by technological leap-frogging. Just as in Africa many societies went from a situation of no phones to mobile phones, missing out all the expense and infrastructure of landlines, so maybe it will be possible for economies to develop (through IT, for example) without relying too heavily on polluting industries. As Nick Clegg declares, “Liberalism is optimistic.”

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Constructive partnership with the developing world is a recurrent theme in the book. Ed Randall argues that sustainable development is at the heart of Liberal environmentalism, uniting notions of responsible stewardship, justice between generations, and the proposition that environmental obligations

should be indifferent to national boundaries. He believes that environmentalists should welcome the advocacy of fair trade and debt cancellation, while accepting the premise that empowering the poor, particularly women, is the most effective antidote to poverty and environmental destruction.

Matthew Taylor conducts a useful exercise by re-examining William Beveridge’s ‘five great evils’ – want, squalor, disease, ignorance and idleness – not only in the domestic context, but also internationally. Though a Labour government brought in the welfare state in Britain, its ideological foundations were Liberal. Moreover, as Duncan Brack underlines, the preamble to the Liberal Democrat constitution says, “we support the widest possible distribution of wealth”. Britain has become an increasingly segregated society in terms of wealth distribution, and to a large extent, the same is true globally.

Of course, were Beveridge alive today, he would have somehow had to incorporate a sixth great evil: environmental degradation. Green issues suffuse much of this book, just as they are now a leitmotif of much of Liberal Democrat campaigning. But the environmentalism of the book – and of the party – is one that strikes a balance between freedom and responsibility.

By now it will be obvious that there is much in *Reinventing the State* to please social liberals who are internationalist, pro-European and green. But does it do what Webb and Jo Holland maintain in the concluding chapter of the book: set out a distinctive social liberal narrative?

I’d give it 8 out of 10 on that score, as there is some meaty and thought-provoking stuff in the book, but it needs to be distilled into a communicable message. The tone and style of the chapters is uneven, which is probably inevitable when you ask a mixture of politicians, academics and think-tankers to write individual chapters. And there are some odd lacunae; most notably, there is no chapter on the media, one of the key battlegrounds of market-driven versus social liberal forces.

Nonetheless, this is a fairly comprehensive and extremely constructive collection of essays that supplements existing literature, and moves the Lib Dems further along the road to having a coherent set of value-based policies in which they can not only believe, but also promote on the doorsteps.

I shall certainly take along copies to Hamburg.

Jonathan Fryer is chairman of Liberal International British Group, and an elected member of the ELDR Council and the Liberal Democrats’ International Relations Committee.

BRITAIN MUST RECOVER ITS REPUTATION

Involvement in the Iraq war has damaged Britain around the world and, to avoid any repeat, the country should concentrate on its 'soft power' and be open about its foreign policy making, says Mark Hunter

Many people remain unconvinced that a change of prime minister at home will lead to a substantial change of policy abroad, despite the reported 'cooling' of the relationship between the United States of America and the UK in the last two months, culminating in the withdrawal of British troops from the Basra Palace base.

Shortly after Brown's takeover, and despite the warning voices from, among many others, his newly appointed Foreign Office minister Mark Malloch Brown that Britain should no longer be "joined at the hip" with America, Brown's almost unseemly haste to meet Bush left many people disappointed and believing that the special relationship – or should that be subservient relationship – will be just as much a constant of Brown's foreign policy as it was of Blair's.

Those of us who supported the transatlantic alliance while demanding the use of our critical faculties to state the case for a more independent foreign policy have often come under very strong criticism for being somehow 'anti' the United States.

This is, of course, nonsense: it remains perfectly possible to remain a firm ally of the USA without blindly following in the wake of every new foreign policy adventure it decides upon. In fact, all the evidence suggests that Britain's best interests are better served by an independent approach to foreign affairs, and not one seemingly almost always aligned with the USA.

The Liberal Democrats should be advocating the need for an independent and ethical foreign policy particularly strongly in the run up to the next election.

As a party, we have strong international credentials, with our history of a principled stand on the Iraq war, a close relationship with a large group of sister parties, and of course our ethical positions on international issues from tackling the arms trade to dealing with the situation in Darfur.

MORE VOTER AWARENESS

The electorate needs to be reminded of this. International issues are now one of the most significant drivers of voter turnout both nationally and, I know from my own

experience, locally. People are becoming more aware that their lives are affected by the rest of the world through global markets, the internet, climate change and international terrorism, and most believe that many of the problems facing this country can only be solved in concert with other nations.

Talking about international issues can also engage younger voters, and can prove to both them and others that apathy is not the only option, that the Liberal Democrats are willing and able to tackle the big issues facing the world today.

Recent foreign policy has been anachronistic, harking back to the days when Britain could act unilaterally and without democratic involvement in the policy-making process. We no longer live in a world where politics can be conducted like this.

MULTI-POLAR WORLD

We are undergoing a transfer from a uni-polar to a multi-polar and interdependent world, where international institutions as well as countries can act as a focus for power and influence. Because of these changes, within the UK there is no longer a clear distinction between internal and external policies, if there ever was one. We need a foreign policy and a foreign policy-making process that reflect these changes. We should not aim to re-create the past but re-imagine a new role for the UK in a modern multi-polar world.

To adapt to this world, we need to play to our strengths and accept our weaknesses. We have excellent diplomatic networks, close working relationships with many countries, influential positions within international institutions, and can exert influence on a variety of arenas through the 'soft' powers of negotiation and constructing international norms governing both human rights and state behaviour.

We should concentrate our efforts on developing these skills and working through international channels to rebuild our reputation as an independent, unbiased and innovative broker in the many conflicts, disputes and problems facing the world today.

There are areas, however, where because of our colonial history it might be less appropriate to become involved. In these cases, we should use our unique influence to engage with our many connections and encourage them to be the mediators, for example South Africa in Zimbabwe.

Some people have argued that this would be a good method by which to establish the UK as a world power of the old imperial variety. These people are, I believe, missing the point.

The so-called 'soft powers' should not just be the interim measure on which to build the way forward, but should be the end to which we are aiming. We should be looking to fashion a role for the UK as a key independent, un-biased, trustworthy and effective international mediator.

There will, no doubt, be criticism of this option as taking the easy way out, that limiting ourselves to 'soft' power is a sign of weakness. Again critics will be mistaken – creating a new international identity for the UK will be anything but easy. It will need hard work, after the Iraq war, to convince our friends, let alone those less friendly, that the UK can act not only independently but ethically. We will achieve this only by being consistent over a long period, ensuring that any action taken is based on the principles of international law and has the most unimpeachable of motives.

For a change in foreign policy to seem credible both at home and abroad, the government needs to reinforce this change by establishing a more democratic and accountable foreign policy-making process. It would be impossible to preach democracy to the world if our foreign policy were still created and carried out in an autocratic and anachronistic fashion.

POLICY MADE IN SECRET

At present, it is far too easy for the government to avoid scrutiny before or after foreign policy decisions. The royal prerogative allows the prime minister to do just that by acting without consent or discussion in parliament. Often, foreign policy is discussed only in annual debates or in adjournment debates called by individual members. It is the only area of policy for which this is the case and, with so many aspects of foreign policy affecting the day-to-day lives of citizens, it seems antiquated that they and their representatives should have so little say in the way in which it is developed.

While we understand that policy on foreign affairs often needs to be reactive and requires a degree of confidentiality, this does not preclude some changes being made to the process.

Brown's recent proposal that treaties and military action should be ratified by parliament does not go far enough. There needs to be a public role in shaping government policies as they evolve. Consultation and white papers should be created on a regular basis, while other areas of foreign policy such as trade agreements, input into international institutions and international development should also be agreed by parliament with time for debate. In this way, accountability would not merely be retrospective and transparency improved, but there would also be

democratic involvement in the creation of new foreign policies.

The need for a fresh approach to foreign policy is vital; our involvement in Iraq has tainted the UK's reputation with our international neighbours and friends. This reputation needs to be rehabilitated. We need to prove to the rest of the world that we can act independently, that we can work with all our allies, not just the US, and that we value international law and the rules of the international institutions above national interest. Only then can we create a new role for the UK suited to today's world, one of mediation, of positive influence and a role of which we can be proud.

Mark Hunter is Liberal Democrat MP for Cheadle and shadow foreign affairs spokesperson

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TALL TALES FROM THE ECO-FUTURE

Green transport does not mean no transport, says Chris Huhne

Not surprisingly, the tabloid press picked up the transport part of our climate change paper when we launched it at the end of August. No one can accuse us of pulling our punches – the climate change plans are radical, and are also the first truly comprehensive programme from any political party – but the media line of attack was bizarre.

The Lib Dems plan to abolish the petrol engine and hence the car! What we propose is in fact that the EU's gradual decline in average emissions should not just extend to 2020, but that we should provide the certainty that carmakers crave by pushing it out to 2040. By that time, the EU should ban the sale of new carbon-emitting vehicles.

In fact, I would be surprised if the petrol engine had not gone long before. Over the last year, the Tesla electric car in the US has abolished all the preconceptions about milk floats. With Li-ion batteries, it has a range of 200 miles, charges overnight, and will warm Jeremy Clarkson's petrol-head heart by going from 0 to 60 in four seconds, which is about as quick as you get and is a lot quicker than is good for you.

Altairnano has gone further: the company's new nanotechnology allows a much greater surface area to be packed into a small battery, both extending life and speeding up a charge. It claims its battery will give a 250-mile range on a 10-minute charge, and the British-based Lightning car company has signed up: its car will have a top speed of 130 miles per hour and a similar vroom to the Tesla. And if people want to drive around in cars that do not damage the environment – either hydrogen fuel cell, or battery powered from renewables – then why not?

Our green policies are just J.S. Mill's harm principle applied to a new field: we should be free to do as we will so long as we do not harm others. Individuals should be free to travel however they wish. However, this must not be at the expense of fellow human beings or the next generation, who will face the worst effects of climate change if we do nothing. Using economic instruments, taxation and regulation, the purpose of our climate change proposals is not to prevent choice or stifle freedom, but to create a fair and level playing field that takes account of

the full consequences – now and in the future – of our behaviour. I make no apologies for tough proposals on sustainability: it is the height of selfishness to rob future generations of life chances.

The only way of moving the carmakers to sustainability is through green taxes and longer-term regulation. In the short run, our road policy builds on our existing policy for Vehicle Excise Duty, where gas-guzzlers would pay £2,000 a year while the cleanest cars pay nothing. In the long run, the EU's single-market rules need to set mandatory targets to cut vehicle emissions through

technical measures, from the current average of 163g/km to 130g/km in 2015 and 95g/km in 2020. The carmakers are screaming but they do not have a leg to stand on, since they promised to deliver with a voluntary code and lamentably failed.

As well as the obvious carbon dioxide savings, electric cars are quieter than petrol vehicles and emit no dangerous fumes. With our cities and countryside enjoying fresh air and quiet streets, would we have the same objections to cars?

As liberals, our answer is surely – as long as the social costs of maintaining and managing roads are

met – that people should be free to enjoy them. A key condition, of course, is that the electricity is generated from renewables, and the climate change paper commits to zero carbon electricity too, using German-tested feed-in tariffs to boost wind, wave, tidal and solar power. Subsidies should be directed at infant industries that will eventually become economic when they reach sensible scale, not at ageing and failed technologies like nuclear.

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Aviation is harder both politically and technologically. Our package of proposals for aviation also seeks to ensure that air travel is put onto a level playing field with alternative means of spending money. Currently, the prices paid by air travellers do not remotely match their economic and environmental costs. With passenger numbers and carbon dioxide emissions doubling over the past ten years, this cannot be left unchecked. This is particularly important as emissions from aviation have a much greater effect on climate change than ground level emissions due to a process called 'radiative forcing', which is generally

“I make no apologies for tough proposals on sustainability”

judged to increase their impact by a factor of between two to three.

Last year, we made a start with our green tax proposals on capturing these costs. We would reform the Air Passenger Duty with a pollution charge based on the emissions of the aircraft, rewarding fuller and more fuel-efficient planes. Our new Climate Change Charge would also raise money, ensuring where possible that domestic public transport alternatives to air travel are attractive enough to encourage substitution, while protecting those life-line routes where it is essential.

But we have to be realistic about the limits of national action, something that the Tories forgot with their now-abandoned green air miles scheme. Nothing could be simpler than avoiding being charged for long flights by changing planes in Dublin or Paris-Charles de Gaulle. So the focus of measures that might merely relocate the activity must be international – or at least at European Union level. It is a farce that, while petrol and diesel for your car are subject to substantial tax and duty so you may pay 95p a litre, aviation fuel is exempt from these charges and you pay just 25p a litre. We should press the EU to set a minimum tax rate on aviation fuel, as well as applying VAT to air tickets and charges. Aviation should also be included in the EU emissions trading scheme.

This would have a real impact in slowing the growth of air demand, and also in encouraging far more research into environmentally friendly propulsion. The University of Exeter currently has a jet engine working on bio-fuels in the lab, but getting it into the air with a fuel that stays liquid at very low high-atmosphere temperatures will take time.

INVESTMENT IN RAIL

By contrast with air travel, rail travel went into vertiginous decline between the 1960s and 1990s and was often treated as the Cinderella budget for public spending. Since 1996, the decline in rail travel has been reversed, with a 40% increase in passenger kilometres. The railways are now carrying more people than at any time since the 1940s. There has been an even greater increase in rail freight which, tonne for tonne, produces 90% less carbon dioxide than road freight. On current numbers, however, the existing network for both passengers and freight is expected to reach capacity by 2015.

A step change is needed if our railway infrastructure is to keep up with demand. Our proposals would see the income from our motorway freight toll and Climate Change Charge funnelled into a Future Transport Fund (FTF) to catalyse investment in rail. The fund would have flexibility to support the projects with the greatest passenger and environmental benefit, and could choose to ‘front-load’ its funding, which would allow a release of up to £12 billion, effectively doubling government rail investment in the 2009-2014 period.

Some, such as John Redwood in his economic competitiveness review to the Conservative shadow cabinet, have argued that inter-city rail links should not be a priority. Clearly the FTF would have to assess each project on its merits, but we believe that there is a strong case for a high-speed rail link. High-speed rail can shift the most demanding inter-city trains onto dedicated track, releasing capacity for freight and commuter lines. Moreover, only high-speed rail will kill domestic aviation stone dead. But the FTF should have enough funding to overcome remaining local bottlenecks, improve stations and

signalling, and even embark on a new network of freight lines.

Nor do we ignore the less glamorous aspects of transport, whether it is cycling to work or walking to school. If we are serious about tackling congestion and pollution, we must start encouraging a shift away from short car journeys by making the alternatives more attractive. Short car journeys are among the most polluting, with the first half-mile producing 60% more fumes than normal while catalytic converters are not fully working for the first three miles – the distance of around half of all car journeys.

Promoting walking and cycling is not just good for the environment but also improves public health and helps to re-invigorate our communities. Studies have shown that increased walking in our towns and cities leads to increased social interaction, as people meet their neighbours on their way to work. Our streets and parks become safer when more people use them, and neighbours notice what is happening to each other, discouraging the anti-social behaviour that can terrify vulnerable individuals. Local shops and businesses benefit too from passing trade, securing jobs and sense of community.

Our climate change paper includes imaginative proposals to promote cycling. In Paris, the innovative new ‘Velib’ scheme put 10,000 bicycles on the street on 15 July. This massive programme has 750 hire points dotted around the city, meaning that in central Paris you are generally never more than 150 metres away from a hire bike. There are plans to double the number of bikes and add another 600 hire points by the end of the year.

The idea of city bicycle hire is not new in Europe. What makes this scheme different is both the scale and the management. The first half hour of each ride is free, encouraging short journeys and maximising the usage of the bikes, each of which is being used an average of six times a day. Parisians must register using a credit card and pay a €150 deposit, and all bikes are electronically monitored, helping to deter the thefts and misuse that were common in previous attempts. Unlike previous schemes, in Paris there is no direct cost to the taxpayer. It is run by a private company, whose income is generated through advertising and hire fees for longer rides.

The transport side of our climate change policies can help kick the image that green living is going to be tough and full of hair shirts.

Yes, we need to be firm about policy if we are to drive the market towards eco-friendly products and solutions. But a green future should not be painted as all abstinence, hardship and self-sacrifice. Saving energy at home can keep us just as warm: why spend £385 a year more on energy in each British household than the Swedes, when their January temperatures are 7 degrees below ours? Cheap warmth is just as warm.

Whether it is cycling to work in a higher density and more liveable city, or whether it is roaring away on a longer trip in the Clarkson-approved electric-mobile, a green future can be healthy, responsible – and fun.

Chris Huhne is the Liberal Democrat MP for Eastleigh and shadow environment, food and rural affairs secretary.

WE MUST MARCH TO THE SOUND OF GUNFIRE AGAIN

So what do we mean by ‘community politics’? My sad conclusion from looking at the local election results and talking to scores of councillors and activists all over the country is, “precious little”, says Richard Kemp

Few in our party now remember the imperatives that lead to the development of community politics.

In the 1970 general election we were all but wiped out. If there had been 2,500 votes in the wrong places, it would have meant that our parliamentary party would have consisted of no MPs and about 20 peers. The party would have been seen as an irrelevance, and any remaining membership as a footnote in history.

However, the membership was not prepared to let that happen. Many had joined under the charismatic influence of Jo Grimond. We followed his political urge and instinct to “march towards the sound of gunfire”; retreat was not part of the catalogue. In fact two things happened to which most members can now ascribe the existence of our party.

The first was the adoption first by the Young Liberal conference and then by the Liberal Assembly of a resolution on the ‘dual approach’ to politics.

A DIRECT CHALLENGE

The dual approach committed us to fight for continued election to parliament and councils. No one who is a democrat can believe that you can make some of the major changes in society without representation and preferably control in such places. The other approach was a direct challenge to the party to prove what it meant by decentralisation, empowerment and liberty by working within communities to show that our policies worked, were relevant and that you could change society from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

The second thing that happened was a chap called Trevor Jones, a predecessor of mine in Liverpool’s Church Ward. Trevor was a bouncy, inspiring Scouser with Welsh roots who owned Liverpool’s oldest ship’s chandlers.

Starting in business by making and selling rope ladders, he had joined the Liberals when the Labour/Tory duopoly that ran Liverpool threatened massive upheaval with inner city motorways that would destroy his business and the jobs he had created.

He turned to the Liberal group on the council – a very easy task because it consisted of just Cyril Carr – and a partnership was born that by 1970 had increased the Liberal group to six members out of 160. A tiny little

group you might think now, but at that time a big one, as we had only 330 councillors out of the 50,000 principal councillors that then existed in England alone.

Trevor linked his business experience – particularly of selling – to politics and he did it through the community politics route, which had already gained favour with the party. This was the start of what we now describe as the ALDC style, which used to be the ALC style but originally was the ‘Jones the Vote’ style.

Regular ‘Focus’ looking at real issues; ‘Good Morning’ leaflets (and do we love those!); petitions; ‘bring it with you when you vote’; resolutions in council linked to campaigning on the streets; direct action in defence of and support for local communities. These all came to prominence because of the style of Jones and the intellect of Gordon Lishman and Bernard and Tony Greaves.

For years, that has led our party forward. As we campaigned, we discovered that community politics is much more complicated.

There is politics in the community; working as a political party to get elected by being seen regularly and talking about issues that matter to them and not to us.

Then there is politics for the community standing aside from party politics but still campaigning in our communities to effect change, and the politics of working alongside community groups and individuals to campaign.

On top of that, there is politics by the community; supporting the community as they took the campaigns forward and politics within the community; complex relationships between and inside organisations that can make party politics look absolutely straightforward

COUNCILLORS LIKE GLADIATORS

Have you ever seen those pictures of ancient gladiators with the reins of five horses in their hand as they dart round the arena?

That is what being a councillor now means, trying to understand which of the five to lead on or though on each issue and subtly combining all five to ensure that you and your community get the resources and attention that it deserves.

But as I travel around, I see that our opponents have caught up with some of this. They understand politics in the community well and in many cases they have fresher ideas and more money so that they can do it better than us. But we cannot change what our opponents do. They have had 30 years to catch up with us and in some parts of the country they have done so. We can, however, change what our party does.

As I go around, I see much campaigning that is commendable but too much that is deplorable.

In parts of the country we have established a ritual approach. "If we put out five leaflets a year; an A4 and A3, a blue letter and a 'good morning', we will win". Often we do, but the content is miserable with little understanding of the basic contents that Focus should have and the effects that it should be reproducing.

Those are still the good parts. How many ex-councillors do I meet who didn't need to put out a Focus – everyone round here knows me and what I think; or who thought that the municipal offices would collapse if they weren't in them at every conceivable meeting; or who invested all their time in developing good relationships with officers rather than their constituents; or who went to the town hall or indeed took control without any clear idea of what they wanted to do when they got there. I shall return to this.

I'm a great believer in EARS, in the use of IT to campaign better; in telephoning canvassing; in using text messages and e-mails and the web. I believe in targeting of voters according to their interests and getting more of our people out through the postal vote system.

All good stuff – all logical extensions of the principles of Jones the Vote. However, they are not a replacement for community politics but a supplement to them and a way of making that politics more focussed and more effective.

We must still be selling our individuals as people who work in the community and for the community. We must still be seen physically and not just electronically; we must still remember our core values of decentralisation and empowerment.

But my greatest concern is for the people who struggle for years to achieve power, get it, and then do not use it to introduce the liberal democracy for which they have signed up.

These are the Liberal Democrat councils that concentrate on things that are immediately important to things that will leave a better society behind.

Council groups that are rightly concerned about levels of tax, the comprehensive performance assessment regime and the development of the senior management team are legion. But their aspirations can be shared by almost all councillors from almost every party. What will make a long-term difference are commitments to: decentralisation from the town hall; inform residents about activity and involve them imaginatively in decision making; create communities that are clean, safe and well managed and, where they choose this, for this to be largely self-governing; the elimination of postcode lotteries for the delivery of basic services; the integration of people of all ages and backgrounds into balanced neighbourhoods; driving up of educational achievement to ensure that families and communities are not left behind; and ecological issues leading to enhanced sustainability and reduced carbon footprints.

In other words, we should demand of our councillors the introduction of Liberal Democrat policies. Frankly, if we get in and don't do this, we need to ask why we bothered. If we just want to sit in the seats of power, it would be so much easier to do this inside another party.

Earlier this year, the LGA Lib Dem group produced *Power Actually*, a book crammed with good liberal ideas being introduced by good Liberal Democrat councils (reviewed in *Liberator* 319).

We have now commissioned David Boyle to produce a similar document looking at all those types of 'community policies' that I wrote about above.

This will be launched later this year. But in essence, it can all be summed up in one theme – in one sentence. Liberal Democrats do best and are at our most natural when we remember that we are the representatives of the community in the town hall and not the representatives of the town hall in the community.

Richard Kemp is leader of the Local Government Association Liberal Democrat group and a councillor in Liverpool

REINVENTING THE STATE

Social Liberalism for the 21st Century

Edited by Duncan Brack, Richard Grayson and David Howarth,
and featuring 22 essays by influential Liberal Democrats

Current political debate has focused on market orientation in economics, social and democratic policy. The 2004 'Orange Book' set out such a policy. 'Reinventing the State' is intended to redress the balance. It shows how there are distinct limitations to the market, and that there is still a very clearly designed role for the state.

Published by Politico's on 10 September, price £14.99 and available from all good bookshops. The book will be on sale at the Westminster Bookshop conference stand. Or order online via the Liberal Democrat website (www.libdems.org.uk – click on 'Amazon deal' at the foot of the page).

THE REFUGE OF SCOUNDRELS

American democracy has been undermined in the name of the 'war on terror' in a way that should alarm liberals everywhere, says Ed Randall

There can be few things more disturbing for liberal democrats around the world than the decay of democratic institutions and culture in the United States.

That decay has many causes but, like rotting fish, the decay is now most apparent at the head of the US system of government. The claim that the United States is a society of laws – strictly governed by a liberal and democratic constitution – insistent on the separation of powers has become less and less credible under the joint presidency of George W Bush and Dick Cheney.

In their very different ways, Greg Palast (*Armed Madhouse*, 2007) and Al Gore (*The Assault on Reason*, 2007) have analysed why it is that a society with an extraordinarily open, liberal and democratic culture seems to have been losing the battle for accountable and responsible government.

A little known, in the UK at least, heroine of the US blogosphere, Marcy Wheeler (*Anatomy of Deceit*, 2007), in a penetrating analysis of the Scooter Libby case, has, by digging deep into the entrails of the Plame affair, revealed the ways in which accountable government has been undermined. Belatedly and reluctantly, the US press establishment (the New York Times and the Washington Post) has begun to tell the real story of Bush/Cheney.

Palast is an investigative journalist and author of *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* (first published in 2002). His investigations have exposed New Labour hypocrisy and corruption in Britain as well as electoral malpractice in the US. Palast makes the most convincing and detailed case in support of the proposition that Bush, under the direction of 'Bush's brain', the electoral fixer Karl Rove, stole both the 2000 and 2004 elections. Palast also reveals how Rove and others have been busy, during Bush's period in office, preparing a fix for the 2008 presidential election.

A FORM OF ETHNIC CLEANSING

He concentrates his fire on caging. Caging is a form of ethnic cleansing. It is designed to sweep those most likely to vote Democrat from the electoral rolls. While other critics of US electoral processes express their dismay about such things as redistricting, electronic voting fraud and specific voting irregularities in key swing states, such as Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004, Palast has shown that something more pervasive and ultimately more destructive of democracy has been going on.

America's Republican electoral fixers have been making it harder and harder for African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans to vote.

Gore believes that some of the most important anchors of liberal and democratic society have been dragged out of place. It is not simply a case of Gore's alarm at the failure of the Bush/Cheney executive to take climate change seriously. That is bad enough, but there is something yet more fundamental that needs to be addressed about the weakening of electoral accountability and declining public engagement with the political process itself.

Though Gore's focus is on the United States, the points he makes, about the poor condition of the democratic conversation, have wide application. The rise of television as the principal channel of popular communication, and the decline of literate exchanges between representatives and their electors, makes it much easier for those with exceptional wealth and media access to manipulate and manage popular opinion.

Something that is especially important in societies where television advertising plays a critical role in electoral contests is that concentrated media ownership, mass marketing techniques and cynicism about electoral competition among electors – not just party strategists – has been eating away the sinews of liberal democratic society and most especially the democratic conversation. Unless the quality of public debate can be improved, liberal democracy is, in Gore's view, imperilled.

Gore believes that the decay of the democratic conversation can be, and is being, fought by a growing number of US citizens who make use of the internet. He presents the internet as a bright spot for liberals and democrats, at a time when the forces of unreason have been steadily gaining ground. The net has enabled many of those who have interesting and important things to say – but little hope of reaching a wide audience – to enter the marketplace of ideas.

The internet should be celebrated just as democrats celebrated the printing press in the 17th and 18th centuries. The net enables many more of us to share information and opinion at modest cost; it enables us to win an audience because of what we have to say rather than who we know. We have a new public square and a square in which it is becoming possible to respond intelligently to one another's knowledge, insights and views.

While there is a great deal of internet dross, there are genuinely new, strikingly intelligent and well informed communicators. These communicators enthusiastically

encourage replies from their readers; a readership their work has spawned in a remarkably short space of time. One of the new communicators, Marcy Wheeler (aka 'emptywheel') has helped develop a politically engaged community of liberals and democrats. They have joined her forensic examination of how the Bush Administration used the media to sell the Iraq War and out the spy Valerie Plame.

DECEIT IN HIGH PLACES

The analysis of deceit in high places has not only informed and angered thousands of US citizens; it has empowered and stimulated them and they have become more active and better informed citizens. They have also come to understand how news is manipulated by a political elite operating across party and by media barons who have little respect for main street America. What the US blogosphere now refers to as the MSM (main stream media) has been exposed as lazy, dishonest and serially incompetent. A new and healthier – for a liberal democracy – scepticism about the great media organs such as the New York Times and the Washington Post has begun to erode their arrogance, and challenge the collusion and complacency that has become so evident in the making of mainstream news.

One recent and remarkable product of the challenge to the MSM from the blogosphere has been a series of articles in the Washington Post. These articles confirm much of what the liberal blogosphere had previously asserted about the role of the dark lord of US politics, Dick Cheney. Four well-researched pieces – headlined *Angler: The Cheney Vice Presidency* – rest on journalistic enquiries going back over many years. The results of those enquiries finally appeared in print in June and July this year. Angler is Cheney's secret service code name.

The Angler, according to Washington Post staff writers Barton Gellman and Jo Becker, has played the leading role in gaining presidential approval for enhanced interrogation techniques (torture to you and me), secret rendition and data mining. The latter breaches constitutional protections for US citizens but a compromised Congress has, until very recently, failed to assert the rights of citizens or exercise its authority against the executive usurper.

The Washington Post pieces have carefully documented, years too late, the ways in which the Angler played the decisive role in US fiscal policy, favouring the wealthiest. They also showed the Angler claiming the lead role in subverting environmental protection regulations; overturning, in the process, a very modest Republican commitment to control of carbon emissions. When the Angler found obstacles to his energy policies, such as Christine Todd Whitman, the former head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, he was able to exclude them from government with little or no congressional fuss. Indeed, almost all of Cheney's power and influence has been exercised unaccountably. He has been extraordinarily successful at keeping judges, congressional representatives and independent journalists at arms length. His modus operandi, indeed his very existence at the heart of the US executive, is an affront to the US constitution and a canker on democracy.

So deep has the abuse of power by the US vice president gone that it is tempting to regard his removal from office as the answer to America's deep democratic malaise.

It is not. The dangerously weakened condition of US democracy requires liberals and democrats to challenge what is, for many, a convincing reason for supporting authoritarianism: "We have no choice but to set liberty aside in order to protect it." The war on terror, a war we are told must last a lifetime, perhaps several, means that, to defend liberty, liberals must acquiesce in compromising it or leave fellow citizens defenceless.

The politics of fear – the politics of Bush, Blair and Cheney – has become the refuge of scoundrels, leaders who have lost all perspective. The defence of liberty and democracy depends on our being utterly uncompromising in saying so.

Ed Randall lectures in politics at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and is a former Liberal Democrat councillor in Greenwich

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TURKEY VOTES FOR REFORM BUT NOT FOR LIBERALS

The Turkish general election saw a landslide for the Islamist-based AK Party, as secularists failed to connect with voters. But the new government is not about to turn Turkey into a theocracy, says Meral Ece

There were 43 million voters in Turkey's July parliamentary elections, an 80% turnout, in what was one of the most crucial and closely watched election campaigns in the history of modern Turkey.

The outcome could not have been clearer. The ruling AK (Justice and Development) Party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won 46.6% of the national vote, gaining 341 of the 550 assembly seats. The result was seen as a landslide, with a 12% increase in the vote from the previous election results, and was the first time in half a century that an incumbent party increased its vote.

The old-guard secularists of the Republican People's Party (CHP) were left with even less political clout than before.

This result has been warmly welcomed by the west, including the EU and the Bush administration.

Democracy was certainly the main victor, and the result should be seen as a new chapter to pave the way for a consolidation of Turkey's secular future, together with the continuing reform agenda.

BOOMING ECONOMY

Erdogan, in his victory speech, proclaimed that the reforms and the long road to EU membership would continue. His campaign focussed on the booming economy and his ability to portray the AKP as a centrist party, successfully countering the charges that he was endangering secularism and national security by not fighting the Kurdish separatist group, the PKK.

The crisis that triggered the early election was Erdogan proposing his foreign minister, Abdullah Gul, as the candidate for president. Gul was thought to be a less provocative alternative than Erdogan himself, who, although widely regarded for his economic reforms, was viewed with suspicion because of his ties to the outlawed Islamic party.

This was seized on as promoting a prospective head of state with a distinct Islamic background together with a wife who wears the headscarf, which is banned in all public buildings.

STRONG SECULAR TRADITIONS

The move was also seen as a direct challenge to the country's strong secular traditions, by both opposition parties and, crucially, the army, which regards itself as the guardian of the constitution established in 1923 by Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

Electoral battle lines were drawn partly on this issue. The campaign was presented, certainly in the western media, as a clash of civilisations between Islam and the west. Secularists took to the streets of Istanbul and Ankara to defend what they believed was the legacy of Ataturk, while Erdogan's party argued that it had no ambitions to introduce Islamic law, and that it would abide by the constitution. The party insists that, although it comprises personally devout Muslims, it is also politically inclusive, citing the Christian Democrats in Germany as a model.

Erdogan stressed that he would continue to support Turkey's role in NATO while pressing ahead with EU membership.

The AKP is without doubt a conservative, religious-based party, but has been a force for modernisation since coming to power in 2002. The government has deregulated the financial markets and introduced a progressive liberalisation of the law.

The success of the AKP was also due in part to the failure of the other two main parties to produce an effective counter argument. The CHP failed to capitalise on the opposition and demonstrations by millions of people it helped to orchestrate in May, and sought support from the army and the judiciary. The secularist parties are also opposed to membership of the EU and economic liberalisation.

It is argued that, if the majority of the people thought Erdogan would endanger secularism and national security, they would not have voted for him. The secular centre left parties thought that the AKP would be defeated purely on the grounds of its lack of secularism, but Erdogan successfully countered these arguments.

One of the most significant achievements of the AKP was to defeat the DTP (Democratic Society Party) in eastern and south-eastern Turkey, which ran on a Kurdish

nationalist platform, but led only in six of the 22 provinces. There were 23 Kurdish MPs elected, a significant number, which will assist the improving dialogue for a liberal approach to Kurdish rights.

Women have also seen successes in the men-only politics of Turkey, with 50 women elected to Parliament, the highest percentage since 1935, with the highest number (30) from the AKP. Since the 1990s, women have been actively participating in politics, inspired by Tansu Ciller who in 1993 became the first woman prime minister.

Worryingly, the MHP, the right-wing ultra-nationalist party, compared by some to the BNP, won 14% of the vote, and became the third largest party.

Turkey's other faith minorities, Jews, Greek Orthodox, and the spokesperson for the Armenian Patriarchate, were reported as being satisfied with the result.

Silvio Ovadio, the head of the Jewish community, told the media that he was not concerned about claims that the AKP would Islamise Turkey.

He said: "The Ottoman Sultans had always been very friendly to Jews... we have no concerns about the Jewish lifestyle here. Turkey is not Iran. There are no mullahs here. True, there are religious communities, but that is not the same thing. The secular section in Turkey is also very strong."

So has the result resolved the issue of the presidential nomination, which sparked the crisis? – well not really. Gul has not ruled himself out as presidential candidate.

This is why this important election leaves the biggest question unresolved. Although winning more popular votes than in 2002, the AKP actually ended up with fewer seats, because more opposition parties were able to meet the 10 per cent threshold to be represented in the Parliament. The AKP is therefore even further from having the two-thirds majority needed to approve the election of the president, or to amend the constitution.

While Turkey's electorate has sent a clear signal that it has confidence in the AKP's ability to continue with economic prosperity and be moderately Islamic, the office of the president, although largely symbolic, has powers of appointment in the very areas considered to be bastions of Turkey's secular democracy: the general chief of staff of the military, high court judges, and senior members of the state's bureaucracy. The post also has powers to veto laws presented by the parliament.

Many commentators think Erdogan would be wiser to choose an independent candidate with no Islamic history. Several candidates have come forward. Turkey's Chief of Staff maintains the position that led to the election, that the army would intervene if necessary to uphold the constitution.

LIBERAL PROGRESS?

So what can we as liberals glean from the results? Has the liberal cause been progressed in any way?

For the first time, the Liberal Democrat Party stood candidates right across the country, achieving 0.1% of the vote. Not enough to gain any seats where a 10% threshold is required of all parties.

The present Liberal Democrat Party in Turkey, a member of Liberal International, was founded in 1994 by Besim Tibuk, a consultant to the late prime minister and president, Turgut Ozal. He felt it was important that a new party was needed to emphasise the neo-liberal movement in Turkey.

Turkey had no liberal tradition until Ozal, who, even though he was the leader of the traditional Motherland Party, became known as a liberal politician. Ironically, he is also known as the premier who brought capitalism to Turkey, shifting the state-dominated industries to a privatised economy, which led to the expansion of the middle-classes.

LIBERALISM IS A VERY NEW CONCEPT

In 2006, the present Liberal Democrat Party president, Cem Toker, brought together an umbrella alliance of nine political parties from both the left and the right, with the basic values of the republic against the AKP. His party failed to make any inroads into the AKP's successes. Liberalism is still a very new concept to a country with such strong secular and national traditions.

In the end, the Turkish electorate voted for what it saw as the real priorities – better schools, more jobs, better healthcare and a hopeful future. For many, whatever their ethnic background or political orientation, they want a share of the country's economic boom, which has not trickled down to the many workers.

Many people have asked me what the result actually means. Is it a good result? I would give a qualified yes, with a number of caveats. It was a victory for moderate Islam. Reforms will continue, demonstrating that the new government is committed to a pro-west liberal agenda. Turkey remains the only democratic secular Islamic country in the Middle East, but it has been kept in the waiting room of the EU for decades, and in reality it will be at least another decade before there is any possibility of being considered as an EU member.

The obstacles facing Turkey are considerable. Opposition from Germany and an outspoken President Sarkozy, among others, have led to many Turks, previously enthusiastic about joining the EU, cooling to the idea. I have yet to meet any Turk, either in Turkey or the UK, who believes that the EU will ever accept Turkey. I am one of them. The overwhelming view is that the EU will never accept Muslim Turkey into a mainly Christian club.

A decade is a very long time in any country's politics, not least for Turkey, which has huge issues to contend with – the Kurdish question, Cyprus, the economy, Islam, the army, and its controversial penal codes.

The mandate given to Erdogan is clear: the people want more prosperity, progressive reforms and for their country to move forward. He would be wasting political capital if he becomes sidetracked in futile conservative policies like banning alcohol or criminalising adultery, issues he tried and failed to tackle a while back. For the next five years, Turkey's fate is in the hands of the AKP.

Meral Ece is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Islington and chair of Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats

FORGOTTEN PHOBIA

Jen Yockney asks why transgender hatred remains accepted

In 1997 and 2001, the Liberal Democrats' agenda on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality was easy to understand and clearly distinctive from those of Labour and the Conservatives. The Tories had fought tooth and nail against equality measures; Labour was fighting shy of any commitment or legislation that might lose them the invaluable support of the *Daily Mail*. By contrast, our policies reflected the key priorities of the LGBT equality movement.

It is easy to think that the battles have been won. The first couple of years after the 1997 election saw Labour stonewalling on gay rights, but the last eight years have seen a transformation that any liberation campaign would be proud of: equalising the age of consent for sex between men; scrapping of Section 28; armed forces ban lifted; parenting rights; registered civil partnerships (RCP); improved immigration rights for partners; employment and goods and services protections; and the Gender Recognition Act (GRA). A few of those measures Labour can claim some credit for; in the main they were forced upon us by Europe.

Much of what is 'left to do' is the kind of social change that we cannot legislate for. Even in Lib Dem circles, transphobia goes unchallenged, which would, if similar statements were made on race grounds, be almost guaranteed to get a member drummed out of the party. Whether in high-profile cases such as that of Jody Dobrowski or the daily low-level grind, social homophobia and transphobia remain a part of our ordinary lives just as racism and sexism still pervade our culture even decades after equality laws were passed.

However, that is not to say we have done all we can as (would-be) legislators, and there is still plenty to make up a prospective Lib Dem LGBT manifesto. In July, Lib Dem equalities spokesperson Jo Swinson unveiled a three-point plan for what still needs doing. She called for:

- Better action in schools, including age appropriate sex and relationship education, and measures to tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying.
- Consistent and comprehensive legislation, with a Single Equality Act using current race legislation as a template to protect people on the grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
- A public sector duty to promote equality.

These three steps make a strong Lib Dem manifesto on LGBT matters for the next election, but we could follow our liberal principles and go further. Four further direct legislative items might be:

- Treating asylum seekers from countries which persecute LGBT people as equivalent to those seeking asylum on political grounds. We should not be telling people fleeing homophobic regimes that they will be fine if they go home, change their name, live in a different town and never have sex.
- Abolishing the artificial marriage/civil partnership divide and allow any couple to choose either: we would not accept a separate kind of marriage if it had been proposed for black or disabled people. The current division means that where one member of a married or civil partnered couple applies for recognition of their gender under the GRA, they must go through a divorce process and re-marry.
- Hate crimes legislation, for homophobic, transphobic and biphobic actions and incitement – Labour has already started to move on this and we should be pushing them to be as progressive as we can, since the homophobic 'religious' lobby will again be pressing hard for their chosen prejudices to be exempted from the law.
- Extend the goods and services discrimination act to cover trans people, and related equalities legislation to cover the broad range of pre-, post- and semi-operative transgender people as well as those genderqueer people who do not neatly belong in either of the main gender blocs. While it was a great step forward, the GRA offers only a limited recognition of a small subset of the trans population.

There are also areas directly affecting the LGBT communities which cannot be clearly legislated away. The mental and physical health of LGBT people tends to be significantly worse than that of the population as a whole and, especially for trans people, access to sexual health services is shockingly poor.

Indeed, arguably the best thing Labour has done for LGBT health – albeit unintentionally – has been to bring forward the smoking ban. While in any decent-sized town or city there is a range of social spaces for the wider population to choose between – cafes, smoky pubs, family-friendly pubs and so forth – most gay scenes are too small to offer such choice. If the only social spaces in which you can safely be yourself are smoky bars with an alcohol-driven culture, there are inevitable long-term health impacts.

Jen Yockney is Chair of Delga (Liberal Democrats for LGBT Equality)

TEMPERANCE FUGIT

Andrew Hudson says that liberals should shun calls to ban alcohol sales

There was a time when temperance was a political cause espoused by the left, temperance being moderate use of alcohol, not prohibition.

In those days, the Tories were aligned with the landowners, the Church of England and the breweries while the Liberals were aligned with the industrialists, non-conformist churches and sections of the trade unions largely representing the better off skilled workers.

Wages were often paid in public houses and often went rapidly into the pockets of the landlords and brewers, which was a contributory factor to family poverty, and is why temperance was supported by many of the left.

Alcohol-fuelled violence is nothing new. Local history books about Waltham Forest describe East End day trippers to Epping Forest wrecking trains on the way back until rising affluence lead them into venturing further afield to Southend.

Although there were anti-drink campaigners, demands for prohibition never really took off in Britain as they did in the United States. There was a strong movement to regulate drinking, although it took a war for large scale licensing laws to come in.

Licensing regulation was introduced by Lloyd George during his spell as minister of munitions largely because of accidents occurring among munitions workers arriving at work under the influence of alcohol.

There are beneficial uses of alcohol (other than for the purposes of intoxication). Moderate consumption of alcohol for medical purposes has been acknowledged since ancient times. More recently, it has been acknowledged that moderate drinking, particularly red wine, can be beneficial.

Attempts to control drinking didn't end with the prohibition era. There has been a nanny state puritanical element, particularly during Labour governments, for example with a middle class elite trying to impose 'café culture' on working class people. More recently, binge drinking has come under criticism, some of which can be put down to women increasingly drinking to excess, and so the criticism is to some extent sexist.

Binge drinking has always been with us in some form or other, particularly in certain environments that were traditionally male.

The recent change in licensing laws came under criticism as encouraging excessive drinking, yet its advocates argued it would have the opposite effect.

In practice neither has happened. Licensing laws were deregulated some time ago in Scotland and it did not particularly increase drinking.

The likeliest consequences in England will be a lot of pubs opening for an hour longer on Friday and Saturday nights and a few venues opening to the early hours. People will drink slower and set out later and prices will rise to cover labour costs.

One of the main beneficiaries seems to be the supermarkets, many of which have applied for 24-hour licences.

As Liberals, we should not oppose the relaxation of licensing laws on principle, because it is for individuals to decide on whether they wish to risk their health.

The Labour approach is to micro-manage people's lives while supporting the increasingly commercialised brewers and ignoring their pressures for increased alcohol sales.

The continental café drinking culture will not come about through a minor change in licensing hours and its promotion is an example of New Labour forcing its lifestyle on ordinary people. There is also an element of middle class people trying to inflict their values on working class culture in calls for a 'café society'.

Would-be reformers of pub culture also often seek to allow children in pubs, not realising that some people go to pubs because they are child-free.

The present set-up works reasonably well in that there are many child friendly places suitable for family lunches with an evening watershed, just as there are pubs where muzak blares and ones that are music-free. As Liberals we should welcome this diversity.

The problem occurs in small communities where there is only one pub, with the tendency of chains to impose a degree of uniformity.

However, we should support legislation to deal with the effects of alcohol abuse on others. We should support residents where they object to late night licences.

Alcohol is a dangerous drug. The growth of the 'vertical drinking' establishments, designed for the purely commercial purpose of selling as much alcohol as possible, is dangerous as it effectively encourages excessive drinking and is far more worrying than extended licensing hours.

The best means of discouraging excessive alcohol consumption lies with taxation, though to be effective any heavier taxation might have to be introduced across the EU. Alcohol has become cheaper in comparison with earnings, and is fairly easily available from supermarkets, making licensing laws to some extent irrelevant.

The vast majority of people do not become alcoholics and sensible drinking is the solution we should support, not prohibition.

Andrew Hudson is a member of Leyton Liberal Democrats

OBITUARY: TIM GARDEN

Tim Garden, Liberal Democrat defence spokesman in the House of Lords, died in August after a short illness. Tom McNally pays tribute

You would expect someone with the titles Marshal of the Royal Air Force, professor, the Lord Garden to be, at the very least, a little self important if not downright pompous. I had not met Tim Garden before Charles Kennedy nominated him for a place in the House of Lords in 2004, so I was not prepared to meet so fully a paid up member of the human race.

My sense of humour can veer towards the schoolboy, so calling one of the highest ranking officers in the Royal Air Force ‘Biggles’ could have tried the patience of lesser men. But Tim Garden was instantly one of the boys, without ever losing his dignity or a certain sheen of quality about everything he did.

Let us be frank, when the party recruits a star attraction, there is a temptation for that newcomer to have a “aren’t you lucky to have me” attitude. It was quite the opposite with Tim. He served on party committees, he was president of the UK section of Liberal International, he was president of Camden Liberal Democrats, he played his part as a local activist, he attended conferences. He was, pure and simple, one of us. I start with that part of Tim’s character and approach because, quite naturally, the outstanding obituaries which followed his untimely death on 9 August concentrated on his brilliant military and academic career. What I want to make clear is that Liberal Democrat activists have lost one of their own.

So too has the House of Lords. The place is, of course, a complete anachronism. It is also a shrewd and worldly wise place. It can sniff out a phoney. It can also recognise the genuine article. It certainly recognised the genuine article in Tim Garden. It is hard to believe that his parliamentary career lasted only three years. The attention he received whenever he rose to speak was recognition by



the whole house that it was about to hear an honest opinion from someone who knew what he was talking about. To no one was the term ‘woolly liberal’ less suited. For that reason, when he challenged the Labour government on Iraq or Afghanistan or some technical detail of defence procurement, the House knew that it was listening not to a knee-jerk reaction, but to a carefully analysed and thought out opinion.

I have found it interesting how someone whose death could, in the usual order of things, be remote from ordinary party members has left all of us with a genuine sense of loss. Defence spokesman in the House of Lords is not

the usual material for genuine party affection. What I think was recognised was that, in a life that won many of the glittering prizes, Tim Garden remained true to a set of beliefs: radical, liberal, internationalist, which are our beliefs as well. If such an able, successful clever person can share our values then we cannot be getting things too badly wrong.

I have been in politics now for almost 50 years. During that time, I have met some good men and women as well as my share of rascals. There are a select few for whom I retain a pride at having known them and from whom I continue to gain inspiration and strength. Tim Garden was one such. We are all the poorer for his passing. We are also the better for having had him with us, all be it for all too short a time.

Tom McNally is leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords

This obituary first appeared on Lib Dem Voice:
www.libdemvoice.org

ETERNAL VIGILANCE

Dear Liberator

Thanks to Liberator for being as vigilant as ever. But even so, I was flattered that you cared enough about me to devote a whole RB item to me in Liberator 319. Mind you, it was about time I got some value from my years of subscription to your esteemed organ.

It was of course due to your famously alert antennae that you spotted there is an issue about me (or any peer) standing or restanding for the European Parliament elections in June 2009. The EU law about not being able to be a member of a national as well as the Euro-parliament was after all only passed five years ago.

But I do now have some good news to report (I am sure you will think it is that) about a resolution of the problem of the so-called 'dual mandate' issue.

I am informed that the government accepts it has an obligation to ensure that peers can be free to stand for election as MEPs in 2009. One route would be through wholesale Lords reform, and thus the February 2007 white paper had a specific mention of resolving this problem. But if comprehensive reform does not happen in time, the intention is to have a specific piece of legislation which enables peers elected to the European Parliament to put aside their Lords membership.

It is one of these typical, complete failures of government that it sadly doesn't seem to work to the selection timetable of the Liberal Democrats; shame! But what is important in this context is the election timetable of the European Parliament and thus the focus is on having the necessary changes in place before nominations close in 2009.

Sarah Ludford
Liberal Democrat MEP, London

MANY NARRATIVES

Dear Liberator,

John McHugo attacks Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel (LDFI), and myself in particular, in the strongest possible terms (Liberator 320). He even suggests that there is "something sinister" about my previous article (Liberator 318) about Israel/Palestine, in which I urged liberals to consider the pro-Israeli narrative on the Six Day War.

John is right that there are many narratives, including a pro-Arab one, and we should consider them all. The point of my article is that liberals' worldview is diminished if we fail to consider the



pro-Israeli narrative along with all the others.

I'm not a lawyer, I'm a politician and so I won't get into John's semantics about whether the Palestinian territories are 'occupied or disputed'. Are they not occupied and disputed? John poses many questions for LDFI and demands answers. My answer is 'yes'. Yes, we do want the Geneva Conventions applied in Israel and the Palestinian territories, and we care deeply about human rights across the Middle East and beyond. Yes, we do passionately agree with the Lib Dem policy of a two-state solution that gives peace and justice to Israelis and Palestinians alike.

That policy is the whole point of LDFI, and we stand strongly by its expression in our party's last general election manifesto.

I first joined the Liberal Party as a 15-year old in 1986, so I am a true Liberal Democrat, whatever disagreements I have with some colleagues about some policies.

So, LDFI sometimes puts a minority view in our party's debates. Since when was that out of place in a party that is both liberal and democratic?

Matthew Harris
Secretary, Liberal Democrat
Friends of Israel

MORAL COURAGE

Dear Liberator,

I have just returned from Israel and the West Bank and was struck by the acute awareness of Israelis on how foreign nations perceive their government's occupation policies.

Part of understanding the seeming fixation on British views of Israel is to realise that, unlike most Brits, Israelis are avid consumers of news.

In public transport and in most public places, folk tune in to the

hourly news broadcasts and listen seriously.

And reading the two mainstream daily newspapers 'Jerusalem Post' and 'Ha'aretz' shows that public and editorial opinion is almost hypersensitive to international, especially British, views and opinions about the nature of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. There is almost daily reportage, features and analysis on how gentiles perceive Israel regarding the occupation.

It was rather unsettling to note that the majority of Israelis at bus stops, shops and cafes, on learning I was from the UK, criticised Britain, and indeed the EU, for being 'anti-Semitic'. They quote the 'British boycott' of Israel as evidence of our anti-Semitism.

I pointed out, largely to deaf ears, that the boycott was largely unheard of in Britain and that, for those who were aware of it, the boycott was motivated by a growing protest at the nature of the Knesset's occupation policies, and not as an expression of dislike of Israel or Jews. Sadly my explanations did not appear to fit with the prevailing perceptions.

Which brings me to the Lib Dem Friends of Israel's secretary Matthew Harris's comment in Liberator 318: "It is nonsensical to extrapolate... that all critics of Israel are being accused of anti-Semitism".

Listening to Israelis' views in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during Blair's visit, and recalling the venomously hostile reaction by the British Board of Deputies and its supporters at the formation recently of the Independent Jewish Voice, and mindful too of certain Lib Dem MPs and MEPs being accused of anti-Semitism, it is patently clear that Mr Harris's above claim has no credibility.

It is widely accepted that it is a long-standing pro-Israel PR lobby

device to nip criticism of Israeli occupation policy in the bud by gently raising the danger of anti-Semitism among potential critics, editors and others, who seek to draw attention to the nature of the Israeli occupation, if they persist in publicising their concerns.

The latest emergence of this is to accuse those who voice concerns at the forcefulness of Zionism (whether secular, nationalist or religiously interpreted), of being guilty of 'politically correct' anti-Semitism.

And when tracking online blogs, anyone who supports the boycott or who criticises Israeli occupation policy, is, regardless of Mr Harris's protestation, roundly accused of being anti-Semitic.

Our autumn conference sees the launch of the Lib Dem Friends of Palestine as well as a motion on the Israel/Palestine issue. Such debate is long overdue and it should not take place with folk treading on eggshells, cowed by the fear of the anti-Semitism accusation merely for drawing attention to the Israeli government's occupation policy.

Kerry Hutchinson

Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine

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REVIEWS

The Blair years: the Alastair Campbell Dairies **by Alastair Campbell Hutchinson** **2007 £25.00**

A survey by Travelodge revealed that the book most frequently left behind by their customers this summer was Alastair Campbell's diaries. Having forced my way through more than 700 pages of a very partial and self-serving memoir, I can see why.

My own market research in August was based upon leaving my copy in the bathroom of the house I shared with a large group of friends in France. The two-week experiment confirmed that nobody else found the book interesting enough to borrow it – or even to flick through what should have been the key episodes.

I still hope, however, that the full (unedited) diaries may be published one day. Political historians may then find things of value in Alastair Campbell's perspective on the period leading to the defeat of the Tories in 1997 and the first six years of the Blair government.

Nobody would read these diary extracts for the purpose of being enlightened about the political events of 1994-2003. Of course, there are some interesting glimpses into his personal feelings that survive the obviously heavy editing.

Tony Blair's manner is frequently described in terms suggesting that petulant tantrums were all that could be expected from him in relation to the build up to his delivery of Alastair Campbell's fine scripts.

Constant war with Carole Caplin features all too frequently in repetitive episodes, as the author appears to want to say, "I told you so" to Blair as often as possible.

The battle for the affection of the

Great Leader suggests some justification for the Little Britain sketches. A 1995 conference speech planning episode features a Campbell and Mandelson row about what Blair should wear for a meeting with Young Labour activists.

It describes a confrontation in Campbell's hotel room: "[Peter Mandelson] started to leave, then came back over, pushed at me, then threw a punch, then another. I grabbed his lapels to disable his arms and TB was now moving in to separate us and PM just lunged at him, then looked back at me and shouted: 'I hate this. I'm going back to London'."

To save the Labour Party embarrassment, the result of editing leaves Gordon Brown featuring with the same prominence that Stalin credited Trotsky with in taking forward Lenin's dreams.

The book is probably worth some psychiatric study. Perhaps the real battle that Campbell fought was against the constant stress, tiredness and exhaustion that exacerbates depressive symptoms and can lead to demands for recognition to help address problems of lack of self esteem.

The tremendous hard work that Campbell clearly devoted to the job caused strains in his family life beyond those that just resulted from the almost incestuous internal politics of it. Few people outside politics appreciate the sacrifices sometimes made.

The Tories clearly hated Campbell. Some of us may think that a good thing in some ways but my own view is that it actually limits effectiveness to become such a figure of hate.

All those who wanted to see the Conservatives lose the general election of 1997 ought to recognise that they owe something to Alastair Campbell. But the book leaves me firmly with the conclusion that he did

not serve anybody (including himself) very well in the latter period and over his role trying to justify the Iraq war in particular.

Chris Rennard

Gordon Brown: Past, Present and Future by Francis Beckett Haus 2007 £10.99

Beckett wrote a book in 2004 called *The Blairs and Their Court* in which every paragraph exuded his loathing for his subjects. This does the reverse for Brown – it is not uncritical but is a highly sympathetic work.

Beckett, a longstanding Labour supporter, although one in despair under Blair, clearly thinks the party is coming home.

He admits in his introduction that this was rather a rush job, written in three months with the benefit of a conversation, though not an interview, with Brown.

The great mystery about Brown is of course why he failed to stand for the Labour leadership in 1994, and Beckett advances two theories that go beyond an assumption that he would have been humiliated by losing.

The first is that Brown could only have beaten Blair from the left and would have had to unleash “terrible forces” to win, which could have sunk the modernising project to which both were committed.

The other is that Brown has throughout his career never rushed anything but has waited until he judges the time right. His first parliamentary nomination, first government job and first nomination as Labour leader were all second chances, taken after he shunned his first opportunities as premature.

Brown is part of the Labour tribe in a way that Blair never was – he grew up seeing his clergyman father trying to help people in an impoverished mining town and then became a Labour activist set on a political career as soon as he was at university.

Beckett suggests that the poverty Brown saw (even if it did not directly affect him) in his early life has remained a motivator throughout his career and that his government will tackle this with more energy than did Blair’s.

Blair of course was not born Labour, and could as easily have been a Tory, or not involved in politics at all. Brown could never have been anything else and that was one difference between them that was to poison relations at the top of Blair’s government.

The real difference, though, lay deeper, Beckett suggests. Although there is only two years’ age difference between them, Brown went to university very young and is essentially a product of the early 1960s when “student radicals were serious-minded, tweed-jacketed, Labour-voting and strongly aware of being the first generation with the chance to go to university”, Beckett says.

Brown, whatever one thinks of his politics, comes across as a serious person with strong commitments. No one could ever have accused Blair of either of those things.

Mark Smulian

International Relations: A Very Short Introduction by Paul Wilkinson Oxford University Press 2007 £6.99

The *Very Short Introduction* series is just that – a very short introduction to a complex area within history, philosophy, religion, science and the humanities.

This volume does the job well. But then it should – its author is professor of international relations at the University of St Andrews and has acted as advisor to the UK government’s Inquiry into Legislation Against Terrorism.

It covers the theory involved in working within international relations, defines its terms, explains the actors and key players on the world stage and gives us much history and perspective as its 137 small pages allow it.

And therein lives the problem. Inevitably, trying to produce a volume like this means making compromises. There was scant mention on the role of international law and human rights conventions in international relations, which I felt were under-theorised in this volume. And if he had had a longer and harder

assault on post-modern deconstructionists, then I would have considered that time well spent.

Wilkinson’s style is highly readable and relentlessly liberal.

Scanning the remainder of the VSI series, there are volumes on Locke, Democracy, Engels, Hume and Socialism. Nothing on Liberalism. A vacuum waiting to be filled, I’m sure.

Sue Simmonds

Set the People Free by David King Past Tense 2006

Subtitled ‘the opposition to ID cards in north London, 1950 (and 2006)’ you’ll be very pleased to know.

King provides us with a sober account of Harry Winlock’s brush with the law and the campaign against ID cards in the early 1950s. We generally understand the benefit of such things in times of major war – and as Registrar Sylvanus Vivian pointed out, their ‘parasitic vitality’ was very much related to the rationing system, which persisted for some years after the Second World War. One is suspicious of socialist governments’ infatuation with these things.

Best of all, the pamphlet provides a blueprint campaign against ID cards, which I would heartily recommend all Liberals to give a try. Get out there on the streets.

Proceeds from the pamphlet go to Haringey Against ID Cards (www.haringey.org.uk/ID.html); I hope they are working with the Hon Member for Wood Green, if not the Blair flunky for Tottenham.

Available at Housmans or from the Radical History Network of North East London (RaHN), PO Box 45155, London N15 4WR, or can be downloaded at www.past-tense.org.uk

Stewart Rayment

Location Matters by Tony Vickers Shephard-Walwyn 2007 £8.95

Many years ago I took an economics degree. I have to say that it hasn’t done me much good since, but fortunately you won’t need an

economics degree to enjoy this book. Tony Vickers' short sentences, with long words mostly absent, and his uncomplicated yet informative writing style contribute to an intelligent explanation of land and property taxation systems.

Vickers is a regular speaker at Liberal Democrat conferences, almost always concerning the virtues of Land Value Taxation. He acknowledges his membership of the Liberal Democrats at an early stage, which is correct. Accusations of bias are unsound, however, as he also states that one Lib Dem policy "suffers from the same economic defect as others of this type" and the party's vaunted green tax switch as "extremely modest". This book is aimed at readers of all parties and none.

This book functions as a primer on different land tax systems, but its intention is to promote LVT, which is described in detail. The one question which is not answered is the one that millions of home-owners will ask; "how much will I have to pay?"

For the *Daily Mail* readers in the south-east, the idea that LVT would generate "some £75bn a year... about twice what is now collected from all existing property taxes" may not be comforting. And although Vickers asserts later that "most voters clearly 'win' with LVT," many will be thinking that 'most' does not include 'me'.

But that is to address the politics of changing to LVT, which in fairness the book properly discusses. It also scores highly in its use of world-wide examples of similar systems. It is also refreshingly up-to-date. Although Adam Smith gets his obligatory mention, as does an extract from Leviticus, many of the references and quotations are very recent.

The tax policy paper *Fairer Simpler Greener*, approved at the 2006 Liberal Democrat conference, included a discussion of the Danish property tax system, usually (erroneously, according to this book) described as charging 1% of the value of a property, before concluding that the idea would not work here.

Sure enough, by the 2007 May local elections, Conservatives were attempting to scare prosperous voters in large houses by stating that this was "Liberal Democrat policy". Before reading this book, I heard the BBC morning news programme suggest that the government was

thinking about introducing 'the Danish system'. Where discussion of property values is all-pervasive, the question of land taxation is more important than politicians think.

I learned more about taxation in two hours reading this book than in the 30 years since I did that economics degree.

Peter Jones

Die If You Must by John Hemming Pan 2004 £14.99

The author is not the Liberal Democrat MP, but is the John Hemming who was for many years president of the Royal Geographical Society and who helped to map part of Brazil's rain forests.

"Die if you must, but never kill" was the instruction given by the army officer Rondon as he set out in the early twentieth century to construct a telegraph line across remote jungle.

Rondon's exhortation to his men not to harm the indigenous people they met has been honoured only sporadically since, with assaults, murders, theft of productive land and importation of new diseases having laid waste to many of Brazil's indigenous peoples in the past century.

Although an Indian Protection Service was Rondon's main legacy, its effectiveness has varied wildly, having been run by everyone from noble idealists through to outright crooks, and it connived with white settlers to steal Indian land as often as it protected its charges.

Although Hemming does not explain much about the twists and turns of Brazilian politics, it is clear that in so vast a country local officials could menace and even kill Indians at will with minimal interference from distant governments.

It made little difference to the Indians' fate whether these governments were military or democratic, with both varieties having at times contained pro- and anti-Indian elements.

And it still goes on. Many Brazilian indigenous tribes are integrated with wider, indeed urban, societies.

But while parts of Brazil's cities would not look out of place in Europe, the remotest depths of the

country's jungles still contain, according to Hemming, at least 40 uncontacted tribes whose members have never, or only fleetingly, seen non-indigenous peoples.

The interests of indigenous groups were rarely allowed to get in the way of economics in the last 100 years, and the few anthropologists who know the whereabouts of the remaining uncontacted tribes guard their secret jealously.

Little in this interesting if lengthy book suggests these tribes will fare much better than their neighbours when and if they are contacted.

Mark Smulian

Buda's Wagon: A Brief History of the Car Bomb by Mike Davis Verso 2007 £12.99

Well they finally arrived – two car bombs near London's Piccadilly on 29 June and even more spectacularly at Glasgow airport the day after. And worse to come – the criminals' day jobs are as doctors!

According to Mike Davis, a horse-drawn cart in Wall Street in September 1920 is considered the first car bomb. While this has long been attributed to anarchist followers of Luigi Galleani, Davis follows the late Paul Avrich in naming Mario Buda, who seems to have had a record as a bomber, as the particular perpetrator. Buda acted in response to Galleani's deportation from the States, which was part of a general attack on the left in America.

There may have been other reasons for the Galleanist targeting of JP Morgan's offices in Wall Street. Thomas Lamont and other directors of the bank were reputedly enthusiasts for Mussolini, and Douglas Forsyth claims in *The Crisis of Liberal Italy* that "There is no question that... their loans buoyed up the regime in the mid-to-late twenties".

Lamont had co-founded the Italy-America Society in 1917 and the bank did much business in that country. Alvin Kreh's Equitable Trust (he was injured by the bomb) also had considerable Italian interests.

Davis seems somewhat nonchalant about the whole affair, despite 40

deaths, none it seems, the capitalist pigs, though some were among the 200 injured. I don't really like the tone of this first chapter.

While one could hardly expect a book on this subject to be pleasant, its casual matter-of-factness worries me. I acknowledge the right of the oppressed to armed struggle where other roads are barred to them (i.e. not the case in Northern Ireland). Respect for those organisations thereafter depends very much on the legitimacy of their targets, which by and large does not include civilians, still less children.

Somehow I feel that the poor man's airforce is viewed less critically in some instances than in others – especially where the intelligence agencies of the USA or organised crime are involved (though do Columbian drug cartels seem to have a case in the book? Obviously not).

The solution to these phenomena is not easy to define, because the causes vary from theatre to theatre – a more equitable global settlement with respect for each and every individual? Chechnya and Israel/ Palestine/ Lebanon would defuse much, with the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan once that is morally defensible. Davis says nothing of the Uighurs of East Turkistan, but then the People's Republic of China doesn't have much to say about them in public either – but that and Tibet (watch out for the next generation when the Dali Lama reincarnates) are major flashpoints.

So the inevitable prophecy comes home; car bombs in Piccadilly and at Glasgow airport. So far the government has been lucky, extremely lucky – the attempts were botched in more ways than one. Furthermore, Brown's government has proved more adept in handling the issue – a problem for the Liberal Democrats, especially with Gentleman Ming at the helm. It must not be forgotten that it is the policies of Tony Blair that have brought the car bomb back to Britain and that it will inevitably be used again.

As I've said, this is a thoroughly unpleasant book. It doesn't need to be read in full, it is too depressing, but you will be better informed for reading as much of it as you can bear.

Stewart Rayment

After Abolition by Marika Sherwood I B Tauris 2007 £19.50

An antidote to the film *The Amazing Grace*. Up to 1807, the account shows little divergence from the generally accepted history. We are informed that Wilberforce held racist views, believing that "Negroes' minds are uninformed and their moral characters are debased".

Afterwards there is considerable divergence, with Sherwood demonstrating that the slave trade continued and arguably more slaves were transported.

Initially only Britain was affected and the immediate effect was the transfer of ownership of slave ships from the British to flags of other countries where slave trading was still legal.

The widespread transfer of ownership of vessels for reasons of expediency and various ruses were used, such as decoy captains who were not British subjects, and sometimes dual log books and captains, with one being American and one British depending on which country had intercepted the vessel.

The author makes wide scale use of economic statistics to make the claim that the British economy was still heavily dependant on both slave trading and the products of slavery.

The ending of slave trading and slavery was gradually brought in to other countries; Sweden, Spain, France and Portugal soon followed Britain.

Emancipation followed more slowly with Cuba (then a Spanish colony) only ending slavery in 1880 and Brazil in 1888. The ending of slavery in the British colonies in 1833 is shown to be only partial, with the West Indies, Mauritius, Canada and the Cape Colony being affected.

Ceylon, India and the African coast were unaffected, with emancipation coming later and, in the case of one African colony, as late as 1928.

Sherwood describes the continuation of the lobbying. In the immediate period after the 1807 act, the work of Thomas Clarkson in collecting facts is acknowledged, as is the campaigning of Foxwell Buxton who spearheaded the parliamentary side of the campaign against slavery in the British Empire.

Wilberforce is shown to have had sexist tendencies leading the resistance to women being accepted as equals in the Anti-Slavery Society.

Much of the book is devoted to suggesting that virtually the entire economy was reliant on slavery and slave trading. With the exception of a handful of abolitionists, everyone else is shown to be either complicit through active involvement or through passive support.

The continuation of slave trading after 1808 has been dealt with by other authors including Michael Jordan in *The Great Abolition Sham*.

Jordan himself takes a cynical view of the motives for abolition but nevertheless accepts progress was made. Sherwood by her own admission accepts that many of her claims are conjecture, albeit often based on strong circumstantial evidence, and that more research is needed.

Perhaps a counterfactual could be constructed on the scenario of whether the industrial revolution could have taken place without slavery. Hopefully it will be carried out by people who have not already decided on the conclusions.

Andrew Hudson

The Children of Húrin by J.R.R. Tolkien HarperCollins 2007 £18.99

Not a 'new' book by Tolkien, the story is substantially told in *Narn I Chîn Húrin* in the posthumously published *Unfinished Tales*. Christopher Tolkien has re-edited the work, drawing the account of Nirnaeth Arnoediad from *The Silmarillion* for example and from notes, revisions and abandonings of his father. So the body of 'more or less connected legend' that Tolkien strove to create becomes more connected.

Darker and more pessimistic than the later Tolkien, this edition is an easier read than its more fragmentary predecessors and is something for Peter Jackson to run with.

Stewart Rayment

Monday

One of the finest sights I have ever seen upon the athletic track is the young Menzies Campbell. Like a Greek god, albeit one clad in singlet, shorts and plimsolls, he bestrode the cinders of the White City. His continued victories there were particularly impressive, for he frequently competed against Jeffrey Archer, who was known for his uncanny ability to anticipate the starter's pistol – often by several seconds. Once Archer hid a bicycle in the long jump pit and set off riding it, but Campbell still overhauled him. Is it any wonder that when the future Liberal Leader wed the lovely Elspeth, it was widely remarked that the fastest white man in the world had married the fastest woman?

Tuesday

The outbreak of foot and mouth disease earlier in the summer made it impossible to send any livestock to market, with the result that I had to keep all mine indoors (“It’s an ill-wind...” as a ewe remarked to me with mordant wit). Obviously, one has to keep the beasts occupied somehow, and my first thought was to encourage them to read improving books; but then I discovered that a copy of *Animal Farm* was circulating amongst them, whereupon I decided that board games and jigsaws might be a safer bet. I have to say that playing Scrabble with cows is of limited interest – unless they have an M and a couple of Os in their hand they are generally baffled – but I did lose a game of draughts to one. I still maintain, however, that it moved one of its pieces out of turn whilst I was away from the board recharging my glass of Auld Johnston.

Wednesday

I gather from my friends in the Green Liberal Democrats that this summer’s rain is the strongest possible evidence for global warming, just as last summer’s drought was. Indeed our predicament is now so great that it is impossible to conceive of anything that would not be strong evidence for the existence of global warming. Disappointing though the weather has been, it has not prevented the hardier holidaymakers thronging the beaches of Rutland Water. I myself insisted that the Well-Behaved Orphans’ swimming gala went ahead and was there in a warm woollen coat to cheer them on. Some disquiet was expressed when a photograph of a great white shark in those very same waters was published in the more sensational newspapers, but I was quick to reassure everyone that there was no need to worry and that they should continue bathing, surfing and so forth. My instincts were proved right when a naughty prankster admitted that he had taken the picture at Staines Reservoir.

Thursday

To Parliament Square for the unveiling of a statue of my old friend Nelson Mandela. I first met him when, as an aspiring young lawyer in Johannesburg, he helped me after my scheme to import zebra meat into Britain had led to a series of unfortunate misunderstandings with the South African authorities. (The Bonkers Zebraburger did not prove the success that I had hoped but, in the course of our work with the stripy beasts, my business associates and I did invent the barcode reader, which was later to revolutionise British retailing). I was impressed by Mandela’s eloquence and followed his career thereafter. Chatting to him after the

Lord Bonkers’ Diary

ceremony this afternoon, I am sad to learn that the cake containing a file that I had sent to Robben Island never reached his cell.

Friday

Matthew Taylor arrives at the Hall to pick my brains about rural housing. I am pleased to be able to tell him that there is a good turnover of properties hereabouts, with the result that people seldom have to wait long for a cottage. Only yesterday, for instance, I had to evict a labourer and his family after he had been heard making favourable comments about David Cameron in the

Bonkers’ Arms, and I am sure that my Bailiff will have seen to it that someone else is occupying the property by now. How time passes! Taylor a member of the great and good, and asked to chair some sort of Government inquiry! It seems only yesterday that he was sitting in parliamentary party meetings doing his maths homework. Nowadays, of course, one would simply toss it over to Cable or Webb or Laws for them to dash off in a moment, but when young Matthew was first elected it fell to me to help the poor child wrestle with the internal angles of a penhaligon. Before he returns to Cornwall, I take him on a tour of the Hall, and when we reach the kitchen Cook insists on presenting him with a long spoon (“I hear you are working with that Gordon Brown,” she says. “You’ll be wanting this.”) and I daren’t record what Meadowcroft says when we surprise him in the Orchard House. I thought the gift of a pitchfork was a nice touch, though.

Saturday

Browsing in Mr Patel’s shop in the village this morning, I come across a moving video called *The Queen*. Assured that it does indeed deal with our monarch, I take it home to watch. I have to report that, if Helen Mirren does not quite succeed in portraying Her Majesty’s raucous sense of humour, she nevertheless delivers a sterling performance. As to the fellow who plays Tony Blair, it is a patently insincere performance combining ham acting with the most unconvincing crocodile tears. In short, he has captured the man to a tee and deserves to win an Oscar.

Sunday

This year there have been many events held to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Act, which had the effect of ending the wretched trade within the British Empire. (At the same time, Napoleon was busy reintroducing the odious practice into France’s dominions – something of which you should remind your Socialist acquaintances next time you hear them talk lightly of “revolution”). I am proud to say that members of my family were to be found at Wilberforce’s side speaking in favour of his bill and against this abnegation of all that is noble and generous in the human spirit that slavery represented. Nearer to home, slavers’ ships were denied the use of any harbour on Rutland Water even before it was passed. Slavery itself, of course, was not abolished until 1833. I spend the afternoon at the Bonkers’ Home for Well-Behaved Orphans, which, funnily enough, was opened the very next year.

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