# liberator


# PARTY REBEL SHOCK

## In this issue



**Issue 324 March 2008**

**£ 3.00**

Issue 324 March 2008

## SUBSCRIBE!

Liberator magazine is published seven/eight times per year.

Subscribe for only £23 (£28 overseas) per year.

You can subscribe or renew online using PayPal at our website: www.liberator.org.uk

Or send a cheque (UK banks only), payable to "Liberator Publications", together with your name and full postal address, to:

Liberator Publications
Flat 1
24 Alexandra Grove
London N4 2LF
England

## THE LIBERATOR COLLECTIVE



Liberator is printed by
Lithosphere 90 Queensland Road N7 7AS

## LIBERATOR

* was founded in 1970 and is produced by a voluntary editorial collective
* acts as a forum for debate among radical liberals in all parties and none
* welcomes written contributions on relevant topics, up to 1800 words.

We reserve the right to shorten, alter or omit any material.

## DATA PROTECTION

Liberator is registered under the Data Protection Act and subscribes to the data protection principles therein.

## YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS BY EMAIL

We accept your Liberator contributions by email to collective@liberator.org.uk

Please read our copy deadlines and style guidelines on the liberator website. Photos and adverts as JPG only.

## INTERNET

Email: collective@liberator.org.uk
Website: http://www.liberator.org.uk

# CONTENTS

# COMMENTARY

## AGORA OR ARGOS?

January's Liberal Democrat manifesto conference was significant in that it revealed a new ideological divide opening up within the party.

This division is not between Liberals and Social Democrats – twenty years after the merger, that fissure has largely healed. It is not even between 'social liberals' and 'economic liberals' – for most Liberals, the question of which sector should supply public services is essentially a pragmatic one, to which there can never be a general or settled answer.

The argument is more fundamental. It is about what it means to be human.

The division emerged in a good-natured debate between MPs David Howarth and Jeremy Browne on the provision of public services. The conference organisers had attempted to set up the debate in a stereotypical fashion, with Howarth arguing the state's corner and Browne the market's. Howarth rightly refused to play that game.

The issue is not whether the state or market should provide this or that service. It is how people go about exercising 'agency', the ability to determine their own lives.

Essentially, David Howarth argued that we should have faith in politics; that people achieve empowerment by acting politically. Jeremy Browne argued that people should exercise control more as individual consumers in a marketplace.

A lot depends on whether you believe there is a public interest in the provision of public services, or whether you think it is purely a matter for the individual consumers of such services.

For example, much of the recent debate about education has focused on the ability of parents to elbow their way into winning the best school places for their children. Relatively little attention has been paid to the consequences for the rest of us.

More fundamental, though, is the question of our identities. Are we primarily partners, parents and relatives; friends, neighbours and colleagues? Or do we define ourselves more in terms of the things we buy?

Are human goals primarily non-economic: the enjoyment of human relationships, the appreciation of beauty, and contemplation? Or are production and consumption ends in themselves?

In short, is there more to life than the bottom line?

There is a crucial difference between recognising a trend and embracing it. Jeremy Browne is right to identify a trend away from social relations towards economic relationships. The questions are whether this trend is healthy and where it will lead.

The atomisation of society is nothing for Liberals to celebrate. Nick Clegg, in one of his first statements as leader, identified people's growing sense of insecurity as the central problem of our age. The disintegration of human relationships is the chief cause of this insecurity.

The party should therefore make the fostering of social solidarity a central plank of its platform. Otherwise, if we believe that the only role for the state is to act as a supplier or broker of services to private consumers, why bother with a manifesto? The party may as well issue everyone with an Argos catalogue.

Jeremy Browne appeared in this debate as someone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. And quite apart from the dubious morality of his economic reductionism, there is also a practical question. No politician can ever hope to satisfy millions of individualised wants simultaneously. The inability of politicians to achieve this is the main reason for popular dissatisfaction with the whole democratic process. Promising the voters that you can provide 60 million bespoke services will only make the problem worse.

Elsewhere in this issue, Richard Kemp argues: "We politicians cannot solve all society's problems. If we want strong, self supporting communities, people are going to have to come out of their houses and help deliver it. Too many people expect to consume society rather than contribute to it. Society will only work when more people give as well as take."

So, it's decision time. Do the Liberal Democrats envisage a society of active citizens or supplicant consumers? Is there such a thing as the public interest or is everyone in it for themselves? Is there such a thing as society or do we prefer to embrace economism? Agora or Argos?

As this argument develops, the party leadership will instinctively seek to gloss over it for the sake of party unity. Others will doubtless claim that this is an abstract debate with little bearing on the real world.

But politics is ultimately about making moral choices. The party's policy regarding public services cannot be settled without the fundamental ethical issues being resolved. And the party must make a conscious choice – it cannot afford to sleepwalk into some default position.

Furthermore, the debate must be open and honest. A fudge will lead to a long-simmering dispute. Any attempt to fix the outcome by subterfuge or sleight of hand will backfire.

Just what are the party's values when it comes to defining humanity? Are people primarily social animals or atomised consumers? Until the party resolves this moral issue one way or the other, it can never develop coherent policies on public services.

# RADICAL BULLETIN

## DOING THE SPLITS

A mere 20 years late, the ludicrous post of party president is likely to be split into its constituent parts at spring conference.

The post is a relic of the SDP and the holder has been required both to be a figurehead of the party and to chair the Federal Executive.

Past and present holders have done each job with varying degrees of skill and success but it has been rare for someone to do both well. Indeed, there is no reason why they should; the skills needed for a successful FE chair are not necessarily those needed for a successful shaker of hands and muncher of rubber chicken at constituency socials.

The FE itself has tired of this arrangement and is proposing a constitutional amendment to the effect that it should in future elect its own chair and deputy chair from among its number.

Simon Hughes's record, whatever his merits as figurehead, has been one spark for this move, but so perhaps has been the prospect of Lembit Öpik standing for president this autumn and taking over as FE chair.

## STEEL OFF THE RAILS

Liberal Democrat peers are worried about Lord Steel who, true to the habits of his period as party leader, favours a non-democratic solution to the vexed question of how their house should be constituted.

Even the official summary of Steel's bill notes: "The Bill proposes changes to the House of Lords Act 1999 and introduces new measures that would effectively create an all-appointed House." It goes on to note that Steel introduced a similar bill last year, which received a second reading but "made no further progress".

Steel wants all life peers to be recommended by an Appointments Commission and, less controversially, the non-replacement of hereditary peers when they die and the ejection of peers sentenced to more than one year in prison.

Most Lib Dem peers think Steel's eccentric foray is a distraction from the case for reform and may set back the case for a mainly elected house.

## VOTE LIVER-AL

It is disturbing that Nick Clegg managed to pick a fight with the party's leading councillors barely weeks after taking office.

These people, unlike Clegg or indeed any other Lib Dem MP, exercise power over public money and policy, and so might at least merit being listened to.

The problem arose from a proposal by health spokesman Norman Lamb for power over the NHS to go to elected local boards.

It would have mattered less if this had come only from Lamb, but Clegg nailed his colours enthusiastically to the idea of directly elected local health boards – in one of the few specific policy statements of his campaign – when he spoke to the Social Market Foundation.

The councillors point out that local councils are already in place with a democratic mandate to take on the commissioning role in health.

Also, who would stand for election to a local health board? The numbers of people standing and voting for Labour's foundation trusts has been infinitesimally small, and the only people likely to be attracted to stand for health boards would probably be either councillors, or those who sought to win more funding for some particular medial condition at the expense of others.

Richard Kemp, leader of the Liberal Democrats at the Local Government Association, wondered whether Clegg and Lamb really wished to see the Colostomy Party fight the Liver Disease Party at the hustings.

A wider fear though lurks behind the councillors' unease. If there were separate local authorities for health, why not also for transport, the police, and what is left of local education authority work?

Once created, it would no doubt occur to someone to coordinate their activities by means of, er, the council. Indeed, that is what happened 120 years ago, when the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894 replaced a plethora of local boards with elected councils.

Work on various compromises was in progress in the run up the spring conference.

## BURSTING THE BUBBLES

The Mitcham and Morden Commemorative Gold Toilet is heading to Mid Sussex, which has won the sought-after prize for the worst motion submitted for debate at spring conference.

Some might think that the party has comprehensive policies on tackling global warming, but Mid Sussex thinks it has spotted a gap – the vexed problem of fizzy drinks.

It notes that the $CO_2$ used to carbonate drinks "is obtained from the brewing industry and from fossil fuels and 100% ends up in the atmosphere," though it does not venture an opinion on where it might go when drinkers' digestive systems grapple with the effects of the gas.

The motion advocates the consumption instead of "various forms of plain and flavoured drinks," with labelling on $CO_2$ emissions provided for those who prefer their drinks fizzy. Presumably Mid Sussex sets an example by not toasting its victories in champagne.

## OLDHAM IN THE WAY

The spat between party president Simon Hughes and north west MEP Chris Davies over whether the latter has brought the party into disrepute continues, for no sensible reason.

This is despite the Lib Dem group in the European Parliament having told Hughes in unambiguous terms that it sees no reason to take any action against Davies (RB 323).

The dispute has its origins in the discovery that a large number of voters of Asian origin had joined the Oldham local party, where Davies was once an MP, as the result of a recruitment drive conducted without the knowledge of its officers.

On investigation, the 120 members who joined simultaneously proved to include people who could not be traced, those who said they had never joined the Lib Dems, and those who said they always voted Labour. No-one broke any rule by carrying out this recruitment, but Oldham was concerned about it.

It has never been established whether this recruitment drive resulted from attempts by supporters of Saj Karim, prior to his defection to the Tories, to secure him first place on the Lib Dem European election list by recruiting people they assumed would support him, or from an attempt by persons unknown to influence a selection in Oldham itself, or from some other motive.

After Karim's defection, Davies circulated a document to Tory MEPs and the media that discussed this matter.

This led to Hughes asking group leader Andrew Duff to consider expelling Davies for bringing the party into disrepute, and Duff replying that the MEPs would do nothing of the kind.

Despite this, Hughes has not given up, and in late January insisted: "I can assure you that I am not alone in believing that the intentional sharing of this document with political opponents or the press, whatever its authorship and original purpose and in addition to any other consequences, could potentially bring the party into disrepute."

Hughes said that Duff "has factually reported to me on your group's deliberations," an unusual way of describing how Duff told Hughes to get lost.

The president insists he will still consider whether to refer the matter to the English party, or to Davies's local party, an eventuality that might prove fascinating.

## A CLOSE RUN THING

The result of last autumn's Liberal Democrat leadership election was remarkably close, with only 511 votes separating Nick Clegg from Chris Huhne. It has emerged that, had the campaign lasted another week, the result would have been closer still.

More than 1,000 ballot papers arrived shortly after the deadline, not as a result of the postal strike or any skulduggery, but simply because a significant number of members dithered until the last minute and posted their votes too late. RB understands that these late votes were weighted heavily towards Huhne.

Questions are being asked about how Nick Clegg's leadership campaign, whose candidate was initially assumed to be a shoo-in, managed to come within a hair's breadth of losing the contest. Amidst the shambolic organisation (reported in RB 323), might one explanation be a shortage of extra-long bargepoles?

During the campaign, Clegg went to great lengths to stress that he was not associated with any faction of the party. Despite this, two of the campaign's PR advisers are understood to have been Ian Wright and Gavin Grant. Such names are hardly likely to have reassured doubters worried by allegations from the Huhne camp of Clegg's partisan sympathies.

Wright is a former Owenite who has been a central figure in right-wing factional activity within the party. He was a founder of the organisation Liberal Democrats in Public Relations and Public Affairs, exposed some time ago as a right-wing front (see RB 300).

Grant, meanwhile, will be familiar to RB readers. He has been an unusually enthusiastic supporter of the Iraq war. So much so that, when the war broke out in 2003, he attached a map of Iraq to his office wall. As the war progressed, Grant could be seen moving pins around the map to mark the advance of allied troops.

Grant was also the brains behind Mark Oaten's disastrous bid for the party leadership (RB 308). When that campaign collapsed in ignominy, it was Grant who masterminded the high-profile PR campaign intended to rehabilitate Oaten, but which served only to infuriate members of the parliamentary party and the local party in Winchester, two groups with good reason to believe that a period of silence on Oaten's part would have been preferable (see RB 311 and 312).

And Grant was the prime mover behind the 'Liberal Democrat Shadow Communications Agency', set up early in Ming Campbell's leadership. This organisation secured only two notable achievements – an implausible media story about Ming eating fish and chips while watching *Strictly Come Dancing*, and the 'Put the Zing into Ming' PR fiasco. This group finally had its wings severely clipped by Ed Davey (see RB 318).

It is unlikely that such partisan figures as Wright or Grant would have shared Clegg's ecumenical concerns. Just what was going on?

## LIB DEMS – NUL POINTS

David Heath's controversial decision to defy the party whip and support a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty is one of the chickens coming home to roost from the party's unwise commitment, made during the 2004 Euro election campaign, to support a referendum on the EU constitution.

That decision, made over the heads of the party's MEPs, was a cop-out intended to appease the sort of Eurosceptic opinion then flocking to UKIP. Had the party decided to make a more honest pro-European pitch to its natural constituency, the subsequent problems would not have arisen. As it is, first Ming Campbell and then Nick Clegg have inherited a commitment that must somehow be finessed, given that we now have a treaty rather than a constitution.

Their solution is to propose a referendum on the more fundamental question of Britain's EU membership. But this is another cop-out, which the party can propose only because it is confident its policy would never be implemented.

In the unlikely event that there actually were an in-or-out referendum, imagine the panic in the party.

# A RIPE OLD AGE

## A universal care guarantee would offer older people a fairer deal, says Greg Mulholland

I was out canvassing recently with a friend and activist and we were chatting about our proposed new policy on older people's care. I can't believe you are suggesting ditching free personal care, he said. Why on earth are we doing that?

Because our new policy is fairer, I replied. Fairer? How can it be fairer? Don't you mean cheaper. No, I repeated, because it is fairer.

The new Liberal Democrat health policy paper was published in January and will go to the party's Spring Conference in Liverpool. It includes a new policy on care for older people.

The new policy is to introduce a universal 'care guarantee', which would entitle all people over 65 to a personal care payment that would cover two-thirds of the care they are assessed to need. People would then be able to top up their care package, which would be matched pound-for-pound by the state. The poorest would have the whole cost covered by the state.

Free personal care was the right policy at the last election. But times change and solutions need to change with them. We have, of course, seen the implementation of free personal care in Scotland, a success of eight years of coalition government. But is anyone saying that we can't improve on this, or that we shouldn't?

We have learnt lessons from Scotland, which the new policy has built upon. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that free personal care has made social care fairer, but it questioned this policy's sustainability and there have also been unforeseen consequences. As well as huge pressure on local authorities and insufficient central funding, there is evidence that care home fees increased following the introduction of free personal care.

Also, because payments to those in care homes are capped, while payments to those at home are not, there is a perverse incentive to encourage people to move into a care home rather than stay at home. Above all, in Scotland the personal care policy turned out to be less than 'free' as the payment has been frozen since it was introduced (at £145). So in reality, it has been a contribution, an entitlement, but without it being clear what people get and what it can be spent on.

Actually, the new policy is not only fairer; it is more truly in line with Liberal Democrat principles. It is fairer because it gives everyone an entitlement to the majority of their care costs, but does not entirely fund the better off who can (and actually are prepared to) contribute to their care. But it also empowers people, which is the central theme of the health paper. People can determine what their care entitlement is spent on, for example, respite care, daily support or help with the garden or with shopping.

It is also clear and honest, which as a straight-talking Yorkshire MP I like. It is a universal guarantee of a minimum standard of care for all. It is a policy that will do what is says on the tin.

OK, so it is fairer and more empowering, admits my friend, but it won't be as easy to sell on the doorstep! Well that is the challenge we have. It may be a little harder than selling (the theory at least) of free personal care, but it is more important that we have the right policy than the right slogan, so this is a challenge to which we must rise.

This is the right thing for the party, because it is the right thing for older people. Older people's organisations have as good as said so. Everyone gets a minimum standard of care, everyone can tailor their own care and everyone knows their rights and entitlements. If that isn't Liberal Democracy in action, I don't know what is.

The Care Minister Ivan Lewis doesn't like it, which to my mind means it must a good thing. This government's policy on older people's care has been one of its great failures. The Liberal Democrats have the opportunity to get back to leading the debate on this, to being the effective opposition, but to do so they must have the right policy. To do so we must look forward, not back and if the party wants to do this, it will welcome this new policy in Liverpool.

---

Greg Mulholland is the Liberal Democrats' spokesperson on older people, a shadow health minister and MP for Leeds North West

---

# TIME TO RETURN TO OUR ROOTS

## Empowering people means giving power away, says new Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg

During the leadership contest, I pledged to spend at least one day a week outside the Westminster bubble, listening and talking to people about the issues that really matter to them. Since becoming leader, I've delivered on that commitment, touring the country to hear about the concerns of voters.

In England, Scotland and Wales I've already held town hall meetings where members of the public ask me about whatever is on their minds. These aren't political rallies or Lib Dem events. These are a chance for me to listen and learn. Sometimes people agree with what I have to say; needless to say, other times they don't. But one way or another, we have a genuine debate in which passions often run high.

The contrast with Prime Minister's Question Time could not be greater. It is a contrived and outdated process designed to bring out the worst in politicians and journalists alike. Seeing David Cameron and Gordon Brown trade carefully scripted insults across the dispatch boxes is not what our politics should be about. I've tried to bring the concerns I've heard from people in the town hall meetings back into parliament, where they deserve to be heard.

In my first few PMQs, I've asked about fuel poverty, home repossessions, the accommodation and medical services for our troops, and the increasingly invasive surveillance state. These are all issues that it is easy for politicians and journalists inside the cosy Westminster bubble to ignore. After all, they don't often affect them and they don't necessarily lend themselves to a cheap soundbite or jibe. But how much it costs to heat your home in winter, or to prevent your home being repossessed, or whether or not your son or daughter in the army has a decent place to live, or why your child is being finger-printed in school, are all issues that rightly concern voters.

And for me this is what our party is all about. We have a great talent for getting out there and engaging with the things that matter to people on a day to day basis. It represents the very best traditions of our party; traditions of community politics and local empowerment.

Local government successes are rightly a showpiece for our party. There are great examples of Lib Dem councils achieving impressive things in power. Just as importantly, many of our councils from Eastleigh to Islington have a proud track record of handing power away from town halls and to local residents. It is important to remember that for many people the politician or bureaucrat in the Town Hall can appear just as remote as the politician or bureaucrat in Westminster and Whitehall. We must pioneer the devolution of power to all levels, not just from Whitehall to the Town Hall.

Our approach contrasts starkly with the callow commitment to empowerment from the Labour and Conservative parties alike. Under their administrations, the man in Whitehall is almost always deemed to know best. So when the old parties talk about community politics and empowerment, it is imperative that we are able to point out how the Liberal Democrat version is the real deal and theirs is just a pale imitation.

We can do this because we are fundamentally different from the other parties. Liberalism at its core is an optimistic belief that our society works best when individuals, families and communities are given the power to choose what is best for themselves. Labour is rooted in a pessimism that believes that social progress is only possible if things are decided for people, not by people. And the Conservatives have always been about the hoarding, not dispersal, of power in the hands of the few not the many.

> *"We should gain power in order to give it away"*

And that means that, when we win power at whatever level of government, we must not forget Alan Beith's entreaty that we should gain power in order to give it away. Our goal must be to show the British electorate that we are different, that we can deliver change in our political system. That means changing politics whenever and wherever we get the chance. That is our great challenge, our goal, in British politics today.

Nick Clegg is leader of the Liberal Democrats and MP for Sheffield Hallam

# THE CHOICE AGENDA

## Will the 'choice agenda' in health and education promoted by Nick Clegg actually deliver, asks Paul Holmes

This year is a landmark year for the Liberal Democrats. It sees a new leader and the start of the 12-24 month campaign countdown to the next general election – an election with the greatest statistical probability of a balanced parliament in post-war history. It also sees the 100th anniversary of Lloyd George's introduction in 1908 of the first old age pensions, closely followed in 1909 by the first unemployment pay.

That same ground breaking Social Liberal Government went on after the Great War to introduce the Housing Act, which paved the way for creating decent council housing for whole generations of poor, private sector, slum dwellers. An Act drawn up by a Liberal civil servant, one William Beveridge, who went on to write the blueprint for the introduction of the NHS.

During such a landmark year, and as we face the prospect of being able to make or break government legislation in a balanced parliament, the need to clearly define and agree our radical stance is more important than ever before. The recent manifesto conference at the LSE saw over 400 members spend a day discussing detailed policy options for the future of our country. A welcome reminder for many of just why we spend so much of our time pounding the streets, delivering leaflets and knocking on doors in all weathers.

Nick Clegg made the most of his first speech as party leader with an excellent delivery to an appreciative audience.

The core of his policy proposals was met with enthusiasm. A massive decentralisation of power from Westminster to locally elected and locally accountable bodies has long been party policy. Local Income Tax is a well documented and credible alternative to parsimonious Whitehall handouts with strings attached.

In Stockholm, I have seen how locally elected politicians rather than unaccountable quangos successfully run the Swedish health service. When new Alzheimer's or cancer drugs become available, local voters are asked if they want to raise their taxes to pay for them or not. It's their direct choice.

In Missouri recently, I visited a 'city' of just 23,000 residents (not households), which ran its own schools, highways, 17 parks, fire department and police force with 54 police officers for an area a quarter the size of my constituency! This degree of local community control is the norm, as I have seen across Southern Illinois, Nebraska and Kansas as well as in much of Europe.

Local democratic control and local power over taxation work. We also though need to decide how we would deal with Gordon's PSBR control freakery, which has dictated bad value PFI for schools and hospitals and the forced privatisation of council housing against tenants' wishes, all so that borrowing for public investment can be kept off the books. It's the same money, the same debt, the same taxpayers' cash that is paying the bills (although at a higher cost due to higher private sector borrowing costs and profit margins), but a voodoo economics sleight of hand pretends it is not part of the PSBR. All to the mantra: public investment, bad; more expensive private borrowing with loss of democratic control and accountability, good!

*"There are many unanswered questions to resolve"*

As a former teacher, I was delighted with the bidding war over education funding between the two recent leadership contenders. The UK has just reached the Western European average for investment in education and health for the first time after 23 years of cuts from 1976 to 1999. It was good therefore to hear Nick reaffirm his commitment to the 'pupil premium' policy developed by Phil Willis when he was education spokesman in the 2001-2005 parliament. At last, we are advocating policies that could see a real fall in class sizes and the targeting of extra money to those schools with the most challenging intakes rather than to the most successful with 'best' pupil intakes.

So far then so good, as Nick expounded our commitment to the greatest decentralisation of democratic and accountable power since the extension of mass democracy in the nineteenth century. Desperately needed policies in this most centralised of western states. However, Nick then argued that monumental local democratic empowerment of this kind was not enough and we should pursue a choice agenda for health and education.

Later in the day, Professor John Curtice pointed out that this was hardly the issue to give us clear delineation in voter's minds when Tories and New Labour have been promoting it endlessly for many years. The politics of

principle and practicality concerned me even more, however.

On the NHS, Nick suggested that any patient not treated within a pre-set waiting time should be able to go private and have the bill picked up by the NHS, as in Denmark. Having spent years condemning micro-management and the distorting effects of central government health targets, are we now to set a waiting time for every medical condition? How else could this policy work? Until now, we have criticised New Labour's Independent Treatment Centres for being paid at 140% of the NHS rate. Do we now really want instead to extend this to all NHS treatments?

A new mantra is that, now that huge amounts of extra cash have gone into the NHS, it is "how this money is spent rather than the amount of investment that matters." No one would dispute that much money has been wasted in recent years due to central government dictat over IT systems, dentists' contracts and doctors' salaries, for example. A reality check may be needed, however, before blithely calling in aid the example of other countries to support the introduction of the market as the answer to the ills of the NHS.

In Denmark, for example, spending on the NHS as a proportion of GDP (both total spending or public spending in isolation) was significantly greater than in Britain for every single year from 1970 to 2005. Denmark's health system therefore starts from a very different investment base, making glib comparisons dangerous. The UK's current record high of 7.8% of GDP invested in the NHS during 2007/8 is only 0.1% higher than Denmark's was back in 2005 and is well below that of France (8.9% in 2005) or Germany (8.2% in 2005).

Sweden is another oft quoted example but there the experiment has not in fact involved direct competition between private and public sectors. In Stockholm, for example, I visited an A&E hospital that had been put under private management to see how it compared with the six NHS A&E hospitals in the area. There were strict limits, however, and no preferential higher tariffs as in Britain. No private patients allowed. No top-ups. No charging of any kind. Just an experiment to see if private management was more efficient than purely public. It should be remembered too that Sweden's NHS has also received more investment, as a percentage of GDP, than the UK's in every year since 1970. It starts therefore from a well resourced historic base and is not playing catch up after 23 years of gross under-funding as in Britain.

## HOW WOULD IT WORK?

Nick also proposed creating 'free schools' – taxpayer funded but set up by "parents, educational charities, voluntary and private organisations". How exactly would this work?

Would there be a new pot of money so that such schools could be set up anywhere regardless of already existing local provision, or would their funding come at the cost of existing schools as happened with Thatcher's opt- out schools?

Will there be any criteria to do with viable pupil numbers or just a bottomless subsidy for small schools that is denied to the mainstream sector (which is currently under strong pressure to close and merge in order to remove 'surplus' places rather than cut class sizes as pupil rolls fall in line with demographic changes)?

How will social and 'behavioural' selection of the kind documented as operating in many faith schools, CTCs and academies be prevented? If academic selection is to be banned in all new schools, why not in existing ones?

If the whole point is to allow "... the freedom from unnecessary political and bureaucratic interference to innovate in the best interests of their pupils," why not just let state schools have that freedom in the first place?

Who exactly believes that there are armies of parents out there with the time, knowledge and desire to set up and run schools? In reality, these 'free' schools would largely be run by faith organisations and private companies, as has been seen in the Swedish experiment. I visited one such school in Sweden and was told that there could be no selection and no top-up fees as a requirement of state funding. I was also told that as yet unborn children had their names on the waiting list and that no pupil was accepted until after they and their parents had attended a total of seven evening and weekend 'orientation' meetings, so no selection by the back door then!

This personal impression has since been confirmed by research by the Swedish National Agency for Education, which found that: "... school choice reinforces segregation both ethnically and in terms of performance."

## WEIGHT OF RESEARCH

This of course simply reflects the overwhelming weight of research in the UK, including that by OFSTED. More recent still is the newly published research by the University of London, which argues that the application of choice and the market to the school system is problematic and notes: "There is good cause for concern that choice and competition does not work in favour of those from low socio economic groups."

Or read the even more recent research undertaken for the government and published by Sheffield Hallam University in Nick's own backyard. Or the overwhelming evidence submitted to the Schools Select Committee on 30 January.

There are many unanswered questions to resolve before the party can accept that going down the road of market competition in these areas is the way to marry economic and social liberalism without harming social justice. The Huhne Commission in 2002 rejected this approach for health and education after taking extensive evidence. All the research since simply confirms that conclusion.

Now if Nick really wants to be radical, how about introducing a network of well-funded, non-selective (by academic or backdoor methods) community schools. They could be modelled on those in Finland and South Korea, the two highly diverse nations that dominate the international PISA studies of educational attainment every time. We have never had such a system before, bedevilled as our schools have been by under-funding and both covert and overt selection methods. We could even call them comprehensives!

Paul Holmes is Liberal Democrat MP for Chesterfield

# A LETTER TO NICK CLEGG

## Richard Kemp offers some advice to the new party leader

*Dear Nick*

Those awfully nice people at Liberator have asked me to write to you giving you a few tips about how to be a leader and what you should be doing, etc. As all my friends know, I am always reluctant to give advice – particularly when no-one seems to take any notice of it. Certainly, I can trace only a little success in the suggestions that I have made to the six predecessors of yours that I have worked with! So here goes!

First, the way we deal with policy production is an absolute mess. We can no longer survive with small cabals of people who are able to spend time in London spending up to 18 months producing a 30-page report that no-one reads. We need to be far more nimble in how we proactively produce papers for both policy stimulation and adoption, and how we react to policy initiatives and opportunities. I believe that to best achieve this we need to link up the work of parliamentarians and councillors (with others) in a much more imaginative way.

As we discussed recently, your job is different from our job as councillors. Your job is to promote new policies and to challenge the existing policies of government. Our job is much more constrained to service delivery. We do have increasing powers to give our own vision and direction within our communities but our job for the foreseeable future is to make sense of what is sent down to us from Europe and Westminster. That difference needs explaining better. You might be asking for things for the future that we can only refuse to do today. Those standpoints are not inconsistent but can be made to appear so.

I suggest that we establish a standing committee around each of your parliamentary teams. We will match your teams with councillors who deliver in those areas. The party could appoint people to those committees from a panel of interested people elected by Conference. Those committees would:

- Promote discussion within the party in their areas of competence
- Provide rapid assistance to parliamentarians and council leaderships in developing reactions to policy developments in Westminster and elsewhere
- Develop policy papers to be brought to Conference on a cyclical basis for adoption.

> *"The way we deal with policy production is an absolute mess"*

Second, you need to get out more! The Westminster village can be seen to be an exciting place where the glitterati assemble and the world looks on. Unfortunately, the world no longer looks on so much. Increasingly, Westminster politicians talk to themselves and their in-house poodles from the BBC and other media organisations. For you and your MPs and Lords to spend hours on a bench when there is no clear output from that seems to be a considerable waste of effort. So what can you all do?

- Rally the troops – morale has recovered over the past few months but is far from strong
- Take our case to a wide variety of organisations. Many people are thirsting for change but still hear little from us. Let them become our advocates by working with them
- Learn from others. Paddy Ashdown spent days anonymously working within communities. I remember the time when I was told that my boss was in the post office in my ward. Paddy had overnighted and was spending the day with the sub-postmaster and his family, and was seeing things from their perspective.

Third, reform our press and public relations work. Do you know which Lib Dem got most publicity in 2007 for green taxation polices? No? Well it was Serge Lourie who, as leader of the council in Richmond, proposed radical changes in parking fees based on engine size.

The press office spends vast numbers of hours ensuring that we get at least three inches of exposure in the Guardian for parliamentarians. Serge and his colleagues kept getting double page spreads in most of the papers in the country. We need to coordinate better our publicity so that your thoughts on the future are linked to what we can deliver today, so that you are seen to have relevance and deliverability.

Fourth, promise to reduce the amount of legislation that parliament produces. Can we really say that the vast number of criminal justice bills (at least one a year for the past ten years) have made much of a difference in the fight against crime? What made the difference was the solid application of the police and councils using enhanced resources to deliver the goods. Legislation is too often seen as the panacea for problems. Instead it often creates

uncertainty and considerable delay as organisations adjust and train to meet legislative requirements.

Fifth – and this is clearly linked to the above – ensure strong delivery from existing service providers. We waste a fortune every day on poorly performing deliverers both in our own staff and from the contractors to whom we have often contracted our outputs. Public services would improve more if they were left in place for a reasonable length of time and made to work properly. Local government is the most efficient part of the public sector and has improved its efficiency most by managing its services well.

*"People just want to see an honest person at the top of a party"*

Sixth, and however! There are far too many quangos and many of them should be abolished. A quango – per se – is not a bad thing. They are particularly needed to give impartial advice in areas like science and finance. But they can be a bad thing when linked to service delivery rather than advice. My pet hates are Connexions and the Learning and Skills Councils. The emergence of two regionally funded, remote bureaucracies is severely hampering our economic development activity and the development of locally led initiatives to deliver local solutions to shortages in skilled labour and the problems of the long-term unemployed. A cut back in quango bureaucracy could save more than £1 billion a year, which could be ploughed into front line services.

Seventh, put not your trust in the private sector – it is no better and often worse than the public sector. As Gordon Brown stumps up £1.8 billion of our cash to make up for private sector incompetence on London's tube system, we well remember the Northern Rock fiasco and the failure of Network Rail's contractors to get the West Coast main line open on time after Christmas. The private sector has some skills and some abilities that are better than the public sector – but there are many areas where the public sector could do better than the private sector if there were a level playing field for access to long-term borrowing. It cannot be right that a capital bill for a council to borrow money for long-term investment in facilities can be treated as public borrowing, while a private sector borrowing to meet the same capital requirement funded by the same public sector revenue is not. Too many of the balance sheets of the public and private sectors have become 'Enronised' in recent years – a problem that will surely come back to bite us all.

Eighth. Don't be a politician. Two sets of words can make you different from other leaders – "I was wrong" and "I am sorry". No-one expects you to be either omniscient or omnipotent but that is the very image that politicians now strive to give. The manly jaw, the strong leadership, the perpetual spin are seriously putting people off. Admitting that you don't always have the answers is no bad thing – even more so suggesting that there are some areas that politicians cannot have answers to, or if they have answers cannot achieve them just through the political process, is just reality. Society has made many changes in the past thirty years – not all of them good. John Major conjured up a dream of old ladies cycling to Holy Communion past the village green where the cricketers were drinking a pint of warm bitter. Such times, if they ever existed for most people, have gone for good. We politicians cannot solve all society's problems. If we want strong, self supporting communities, people are going to have to come out of their houses and help deliver it. Too many people expect to consume society rather than contribute to it. Society will only work when more people give as well as take.

Lastly, don't take too much notice of people who, like me, want to give you advice. I am sure that you have been inundated with advice in the past few weeks. Some will want you to be a Paddy-like leader; some will want you to be a Vince-like leader. Well, I want you to be a Nick-like leader! You have a real advantage in not having been part of the Westminster machine and coming to your leadership early in your parliamentary career. That gives you the opportunity to be different. Radical is great – visionary is acceptable – but it is too easy to turn both into a never- ending spin search and a quest for headlines à la Cameron.

You can be the anti-politician's politician! People just want to see an honest person at the top of a party who can speak for them. They don't spin; they don't pretend to have all the answers; they don't like the 'ferret in a sack' atmosphere of Westminster; they think anyone with simple answers to society's problems is lying.

So which leader would I most like you to resemble? Jo Grimond. He was everyone's friend, his integrity was respected, he saved our party from oblivion and, with far fewer MPs than you have, brought liberalism as well as the Liberal Party to the forefront of political consciousness as a distinct and recognisable third way of thinking. Given where we are in the polls and our number of elected representatives, all you have to do is be as well regarded as Jo.

There you are – easy isn't it!

*Kind Regards,*
*Cllr Richard Kemp*

Richard Kemp is leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Local Government Association

# A FARMERS' MARKET?

## Britain's livestock farmers need fair trade not free markets, says Tim Farron

If you want to see hard evidence of the failure and unfairness of the free market, then you need look no further than rural Britain. At the same time, it is interesting to note that rural Britain is traditionally Conservative and that the Conservatives are the party of the free market.

A minority – a significant minority, but a minority nonetheless – of people living in rural areas are engaged in agriculture. But don't be fooled into thinking that farming is somehow a declining anachronism.

In my constituency, which includes much of the Lake District and the Yorkshire Dales, farming accounts for less than 5% of the workforce. However, farming is responsible for just about 100% of the landscape. Without farming, the fells would not be attractive and accessible, but unkempt and out of reach. The hills and fields look the way they do because they are grazed – to coin a phrase, 'no cows, no countryside'.

The well-kept paths, the gates, stiles, dry-stone walls, scrub-free fellsides, drained fields, protected woodlands and the rich bio-diversity of the Lakes and Dales are not accidental features. They are there as a result of farming. It is estimated that in England alone each year, farmers contribute £400m in maintaining our countryside. They are barely paid for this work at all.

*"Our obsession should not be to create free markets, but to ensure fair markets"*

To value farming is to value our environmental culture, our landscape heritage, our need to establish security of food supply, our position as world leaders in animal welfare standards and the hugely important British tourism industry, which depends in large part on the beauty of our farmed landscapes.

## CRITICAL EVENTS

This summer, two critical events took place that could have a defining impact on the future of farming in the UK. The first is the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and the second is the conclusion of the Office of Fair Trading that there had been price-fixing and collusion between major supermarkets and the big dairy processing companies, and that this price fixing had led to profiteering to the value of £270m at the expense of consumers and farmers.

Let's look at foot and mouth first. The outbreaks in August and September may have been contained to the south east of England, but their impact has been felt right across the country. The outbreaks in September came at the worst possible time, just a few days before the start of the most important part of the year for livestock sales. The animal movement ban and the export ban meant that farmers' incomes were decimated. Most of the farmers I represent are tenants, they had small incomes to start with and on average they have lost well over £10,000 apiece over the last few weeks.

Some of them will leave farming over the coming months. Their farmhouses will end up as second homes for wealthy Mancunians, who will rarely use them. Their farmland will be absorbed by neighbouring farmers, who will do their best to tend that land but, with no more pairs of hands available, consequently, the land will be less well looked after. The result will be overgrown countryside and stiles, dry-stone walls and other landscape features in a state of disrepair and an increase in the number of footpaths that become flooded or inaccessible in other ways.

Of course, this trend was happening before the foot and mouth crisis, but the crisis is quickening events. That is why Liberal Democrats need to demonstrate our genuine commitment to farming as opposed to the Conservatives, who like to pose as the party of rural Britain, but who champion an economic system that has led to its decline.

Livestock prices have fallen by around 30% due to foot and mouth. You may have noticed, however, that prices on supermarket shelves have not dropped.

In other words, the processors and retailers have exploited the weak position of farmers who were already in an economically marginal position – to pay less for animals but charge just the same for the end product. Foot and mouth has been good news for the supermarkets and the processors because they are big enough to call the shots in the market place. The farmers have to take what they are offered and, in most cases, they are being offered prices well below the cost of production.

Well, that's the free market for you. Adam Smith talked about the 'invisible hand' in the market place, rooting out all imperfections and creating balance and harmony.

I'm afraid that this is pure fantasy. The only natural force in the market place is something akin to gravity that resources and power accretes to those bodies that already have plenty of resources and power, at the expense of those that do not. If you are a Conservative, you celebrate this. If you are a Liberal Democrat, you do not – our obsession should not be to create free markets, but to ensure fair markets. We are the party of fair trade at home and abroad.

So, foot and mouth created a situation where buyers including the supermarkets chose to exploit and abuse their market power to detriment of farmers, the consumers and the countryside in general.

This leads me to the second big event of the summer of 2007: the outcome of the OFT's inquiry into claims of price-fixing and collusion. In short, the OFT concluded that several of our large supermarkets, including Asda, Sainsburys and Morrisons and several large dairy processing companies, were guilty of collusion over prices. They were found guilty of keeping prices artificially high and the OFT concluded that this cost consumers and farmers in the region of £270m.

This conclusion was pleasing. We finally had evidence of what we all knew, that the powerful oligopolies on the retail and processing sides were exploiting the powerless producers. However, we are entitled to ask why it took so long for the OFT to be called in to look at these obvious abuses and why – at the time of writing – no serious sanctions have been set out?

Hefty fines should be levied on those companies that abused their market power, but that is not enough. Government should accept the Liberal Democrats' demand for a market regulator who would ensure fair prices at all points in the chain, helping to prevent market abuses rather than belatedly rectifying them after the damage has been done.

## MORAL AND LEGAL CASE

Going back to foot and mouth, government should acknowledge its responsibility. After all, foot and mouth escaped from a government-funded laboratory.

There is an overwhelming moral and legal case for compensation as a result. The current compensation package comes to £12m in total, worth about £850 per head for a hill farmer and close to zero for everyone else. Yet the average hill farmer has lost between £10,000 and £20,000, and other livestock farmers have also lost thousands of pounds each. The industry overall has suffered a £200m hit – so to offer £12m is close to an insult. The recently announced Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs budget cuts, amounting to £300m, demonstrate that the government has no intention of improving farmers' lot and playing fair.

The government could choose to weigh in by providing price support and ensure a fair floor price by buying up some of those animals that would otherwise have gone to export.

It hasn't done so, because this government has a similar disdain for rural communities to that displayed to industrial communities by the Thatcher government. The Conservatives wouldn't do this either if they were in power because, for all their posturing about supporting the countryside, they are essentially the party of the 'haves' and to support farmers against the supermarkets would be to champion the 'have-nots', and that would never do. The best hope for rural Britain is a Liberal Britain.

Tim Farron is Liberal Democrat MP for Westmorland and Lonsdale

# LIBERALISM IN A RECESSION

## If a serious recession develops, the Liberal Democrats must learn to communicate differently, warns Simon Titley

British politicians have got used to prosperity. Poverty hasn't gone away but, for the majority, material prosperity has never been better. Unemployment rates, interest rates and inflation remain low. Many people seem to take second homes, third cars and fourth holidays for granted.

But what if this were to change radically? What if unemployment and homelessness were to soar and many people were to lose the trappings and security of a comfortable middle class lifestyle? The political climate would alter dramatically and the Liberal Democrats would have to campaign and communicate differently.

No-one knows whether the current global financial crisis will cause a serious recession in Britain. It could be a relatively mild economic downturn, with a full recovery within three or four years. Or it could be comparable to the deep recessions in Japan and Argentina in the 1990s, an economic trauma lasting a decade or more. All anyone can say with any confidence is that events will probably lie somewhere between these two extremes. However, any recession now, irrespective of its severity, will be qualitatively different from previous ones.

The main economic factor that will make the next recession different is the high level of consumer debt. This is not necessarily a problem while people believe that things will improve for them economically. When that belief changes, the level of debt magnifies the changes in economic behaviour. Every recession is accompanied by a collapse in consumer confidence. In an economy such as Britain's, where the recent boom has been sustained by debt-fuelled consumer spending, the pain will be greater than in most Eurozone countries, where people have tended to save rather than borrow.

Consumer confidence is a psychological phenomenon. We tend to think of recessions primarily in economic terms but the next one will be essentially psychological in character. The recent boom has been based on faith, optimism and trust. Once people lose those beliefs, they will lend and spend less.

But the psychological effects will also be exaggerated by the way in which society has changed. The depression in the 1930s caused greater material hardship than any recession now is likely to cause, yet people today may find it harder going. In the 1930s – and even in the 1980s when manufacturing industry collapsed – there were systems of social solidarity available. Despite the hardships, people could fall back on the support of their extended families, settled geographical communities and trades unions.

These social relationships have badly corroded as society has atomised. People will not enjoy the same degree of social support in the next recession because they have increasingly seen themselves as consumers rather than social animals. They want it all and they want it now – even when they have no use for it. An ICM poll published in the Guardian (30 September 2004) revealed that "Britain's homes… are bursting with some £3bn worth of gadgets which nobody ever uses. Top of the list comes the foot spa. According to ICM, the total value of unused foot spas in British homes is around £450m."

The resulting spiritual poverty and lack of social cohesion is bad enough in the good times. When retail therapy is no longer an option, many people will feel bereft. The damaging effects will be more psychological than material because of the extent to which people have invested their identities in the things they buy. One wonders, for example, how the venal crowd addicted to 'property porn' such as *Cash in the Attic* or *Location, Location, Location* will cope.

Most British people have little or no experience of the four horsemen of the apocalypse. No-one much under 70 has any memory of total war or a world without antibiotics. No-one much under 60 has any memory of rationing. Most people have experienced an unprecedented era of material comfort and have lost the capacity for deferred pleasure. They will find it much harder than previous generations to endure even moderate levels of discomfort or to accept personal burdens for the good of others.

The housing market is where the effects will be most keenly felt. In the UK, a mortgage is a major commitment that is as much emotional as it is financial. It seems to consume not only people's money but also their souls (as any middle class dinner party conversation will demonstrate). A slump in house prices will therefore have a significant effect not only on people's economic welfare but also on their identity and sense of self-worth. These psychological factors are the ones to watch.

Once consumer confidence collapses, people's spending habits change. They switch to spending more of their disposable income on staple goods at low prices. As a recession takes hold, this spending pattern is accompanied by rumours of shortages in such goods. This last happened in the UK during the 1973 oil crisis, when shops were stripped clean by panic buying of basic commodities such as sugar, on the basis of the flimsiest of rumours.

The difference between now and 1973 is that, this time, the phenomenon of rumours and panic buying will be fuelled by a high tech grapevine supplied by the internet and mobile phones. Rumours will spread much faster and

will not be confined to one locality. Shortages will also be exacerbated by more anti-social behaviour, experienced recently in the nasty black market in mineral water that sprang up during last year's floods in Gloucester.

The loss of social cohesion will mean that, in a recession, there will be not only more anti-social behaviour but also a more generally intolerant climate. Traditional forms of social cohesion exposed people to different interests and other points of view. People instinctively grasped the need to reconcile competing interests. Nowadays, people are more likely to select their own peer groups and acquire an increasingly one-eyed view of the world, as 'narrowcasting' and the internet make it possible to filter out different voices and listen only to like-minded views.

So long as everyone's material needs are met, social atomisation does not necessarily spill over into political conflict. The problems arise when isolated groups compete for scarce resources. The economic tolerance that is the hallmark of growth will disappear. The quality of political discourse is likely to deteriorate and become more vituperative, because it will be taking place between mutually uncomprehending groups.

The greatest of these conflicts is likely to be generational. The 'baby boomer' generation, disgruntled that its private pension schemes are not delivering the expected levels of affluence, and reluctant to release the capital tied up in its property, will use its voting power to demand that a greater share of state resources is used to make up the shortfall. The younger generation still actively engaged in creating wealth may resent that such a large proportion of this wealth is going to an older generation that raped the planet, got rich quick and created for itself a nice little earner that somebody else must pay for.

A political consequence of such economic conflict will be a growth in pressure groups representing the various parties in these disputes. People's immediate economic welfare will take precedence and there will be a corresponding decline in the fortunes of pressure groups representing more altruistic goals. One major effect will be a decline in environmental concerns. The fuel tax protests in 2000 are a sign of things to come. There may be mileage in environmentalism where it can be seen to be of direct benefit to people struggling to make ends meet, such as measures to promote fuel economy. But on the whole, it will be thin pickings for the organic alfalfa sprout brigade.

Economic conflict will rapidly give rise to the 'blame game'. For example, signs are already emerging of a populist movement opposed to 'fat cats' in the boardroom (and it is significant that the Daily Express, Britain's most right-wing daily, is in the vanguard of this movement). Meanwhile, there is a heightened public sensitivity to corruption in politics, even though British politics is relatively clean by any objective standard. Given that these trends have been evident in times of prosperity, it is easy to see how much more vicious it could get when people believe they have been deprived of what is rightfully theirs.

This perception – of rights deprived – will lead to a desire to apportion blame. The view will gain ground that those in power did well for themselves financially during the good times, but have left others to suffer in the bad times. The stage is set politically for the emergence of populist movements based on blaming others – the 'fat cats', immigrants, foreigners or any other scapegoats that are readily to hand. The recent TV drama series *The Amazing Mrs Pritchard* provided one scenario of a more volatile political climate. The emergence out of nowhere of a charismatic, right-wing populist leader, such as Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, is perhaps a more instructive model.

A key political demand of such populist movements is protectionism. Gordon Brown's statement last year about "British jobs for British workers" shows that the prime minister recognises a political bandwagon when he sees one. But the experience of protectionist policies in previous recessions is that they always make things worse.

Brown was simply demonstrating the reluctance of most politicians to tell people home truths. The replacement of a capacity for deferred pleasure by a desire for instant gratification has created a political culture devoted to satisfying and sanctifying that desire. People are reluctant to believe that there might be limits to their good fortune. They are also increasingly reluctant to cope with the complexity and judgements needed for the rational assessment of evidence, encouraged by the deliberate rejection by feminism of rationalism, and the corresponding exaltation of 'feelings' and personal testimony. In this atmosphere, it becomes imperative for politicians to reassure the public that nothing bad will happen. The culture of 'spin' is what happens when all communication must be attractive.

If the experience of the 2004 Euro elections is anything to go by, in a recession, Nick Clegg will face considerable pressure from Cowley Street to subordinate policy to short-term tactical considerations and engage in a pissing contest with the other parties to pander to a populist agenda. Nick should resist such demands.

This is the time to say something honest and distinctive, not leap aboard the next bandwagon. The first thing the party must do is tell some home truths. This practice has been the hallmark of Vince Cable's statements about consumer debt, the housing market and Northern Rock, and his moral clarity has served the party well. The Lib Dems should leave the spin and the pandering to unreasonable demands to others.

Second, at a time when the other parties will be rallying to the cause of pulling up the drawbridge, the Lib Dems should renew their commitment to internationalism. They should not be afraid to support free trade and oppose demands for tariff barriers or drastic cuts in immigration. This is not some woolly-minded Liberal sentimentalism – the fact is that, in a recession, the country needs more trade and more skills, not less.

Third, given that the UK will suffer more in a global recession than its continental neighbours because of its levels of indebtedness, the performance of the Eurozone will continue to improve relative to the UK economy. Before long, Britain's decision not to join the euro will look like yet another of its 'missed chances'. When the gloating about the economic difficulties of Germany and France stops (and it soon will), and Britain starts to look ruefully at its neighbours' success (as it did in the 1970s), the Lib Dems will be better placed to promote a hard-headed case for their pro-European policies.

The market is there for a party that is honest about what it stands for and 'tells it like it is'. If the Lib Dems decide instead to leap aboard the populist bandwagon, they will be wiped out in the rush.

Simon Titley is a member of the Liberator Collective

# PRIMARY COLOURS

## Dennis Graf reports on the unusual state of the US presidential race following the primaries on 'Super Tuesday'

In the great race for the United States presidential nomination, Tuesday, February 5, 2008 was a key date. 22 of the 50 American states held primaries or caucuses. These included some of the very largest states – California, Illinois, New York. And a host of medium sized ones – Georgia, Missouri, Connecticut, New Jersey, Arizona.

The idea behind 'Super Tuesday' was to give the established and favoured, better known candidates a strong advantage against any popular insurgents.

American nominating procedures can be very confusing and complex, even for professionals. Each state party organization determines how the delegates are selected and who can vote. In general, Republican winners usually take all the delegates in a state while Democrats tend to have proportional distribution. Republicans will probably accumulate delegates faster; it is said that they like to find a strong man and then settle things early. Democrats like to fight and squabble; at least that's the popular belief. Some of these electoral events were caucuses, slow moving open meetings attracting more politically involved voters. Most were primaries, 'pre-election elections', where people can quickly go in to vote and then leave.

Well before Super Tuesday, it was widely believed that the results would allow Hillary Clinton to win the Democratic endorsement and that Arizona Senator John McCain, a Vietnam war hero, would receive the nod from the Republicans. Most of Mrs Clinton's opponents had already dropped out. John Edwards, a defiantly left-leaning Democrat and the Vice Presidential candidate in 2004, was unable to win outright in any state. Two senior Senators, Joe Biden and Chris Dodd, had been completely unable to interest the early voting public. Two men on the fringe, Dennis Kucinich, a true European-style left winger with a small, but committed following conceded his hopeless quest; and Mike Gravel, an aged left wing former Senator from Alaska, our most unusual state, quickly vanished into obscurity.

On the eve of Super Tuesday, there were still two Republicans fighting for the top spot, John McCain and former one-term Massachusetts Governor Willard 'Mitt' Romney, a financial wizard who was easily able to pay for much of his own campaign (our Supreme Court has ruled this permissible).

McCain is unpopular with many Republicans and especially with the highly influential right-wing talk radio hosts. They say that he would split the party and it seems that there are some who would rather have the party go down in defeat than turn it over to someone like McCain. There are monumental challenges facing the next president and some on the right relish the idea of a Democratic president trying to grapple with them.

McCain's opponents in the Republican Party detest his early vote against the original large Bush tax cut; he felt that, without a corresponding cut in spending, it would mean increased government borrowing, which of course it did. He has since changed course and embraced it. He now wants these tax cuts to be permanent, but he doesn't explain this change of position very well. McCain also teamed up with the most leftish Democratic Senator, Russ Feingold, to pass a bill to curb the influence of the vast sums of money available to politicians. Conservatives consider this an infringement on free speech, and it probably does restrict those who can afford to spend huge sums of money.

McCain also cooperated with Edward 'Teddy' Kennedy, a man despised by the Republican base, to introduce an immigration reform 'package' that recognized that we have great numbers, ten or fifteen million, of illegal immigrants, mainly from Mexico, who quite obviously can't all be sent home. McCain's bill would allow most of them to eventually become citizens. Amnesty, his opponents call it, but it's hard to think of any realistic alternatives. This bill has made many ordinary Republican voters furious. Some, in fact, have tried to paint McCain as a secret 'liberal', a charge that can be the kiss of death in American politics. Actually, on most issues, McCain has been very conservative.

McCain on television seems much older than his 71 years. He has a legendary temper and a salty tongue, which up to now in the campaign has been kept under strict control. Much of the time, though, he has seemed angry and even vaguely sarcastic. In the general election, the opposition will probably try to portray him as a man with a brave past but who is now psychologically unstable.

The only other man still battling for the Republican nomination is a former Governor of Arkansas, a successor to Bill Clinton and, in fact, from the same small rural village. Mike Huckabee is a Baptist minister who has an enthusiastic base of fundamentalist Christians but very little money. Yet he has done quite well, probably as well as the very rich and elegant Mr Romney. Huckabee is a most entertaining speaker, certainly the best in the Republican party. It's not clear why he continues. He has no chance of getting the nomination and he's unlikely to even have the Vice Presidential nod. Among other problems, he doesn't believe in Darwin's theory of evolution and, while this may not hurt him in the South, it would be a disaster in the more secular Northeast and West Coast.

Mitt Romney presented a quite different image. Compared with the rather rumpled appearance of Reverend Huckabee, Romney was highly polished. He was wildly successful in business and he posed with an attractive wife and five handsome sons. Romney was disappointing in the

Super Tuesday primaries. He won his state of birth Michigan as well as Massachusetts, his state of residence. He also won a few states, some with a large Mormon population. Romney's Mormon religion was not publically discussed, though two days before Super Tuesday one of the major American television networks had a hostile story on this church. Romney had been in many ways an attractive candidate, but a few days later he dropped out of the race, possibly to wait for another and better year.

John McCain was the clear winner in these primaries and he's almost certain to be the Republican nominee and, very possibly, the next president. He is an unusual politician. He's the oldest man ever to run for the presidency. Everyone knows that he was a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War and he's been able to remind the public of that. He was an authentic war hero though anyone with an understanding of American politics can easily imagine that image being shattered by smear merchants.

McCain's most controversial position, though, is his staunch advocacy of continuing the Iraq war. His recent public pronouncements have suggested that we might be there for a hundred years or more. He speaks with what some have thought a disturbing enthusiasm about the likelihood of other wars in the future. Iran is probably what most people have in mind when they hear that.

> *"There is a studied imprecision in everyone's statements"*

We're assuming that the Bush people will soon fade into history and, when they do, the very real problem of 'healing' the various factions in his party will fall to McCain. As of now, it's hard to see how he can bring them together.

The Democratic results from Super Tuesday were inconclusive. There are two candidates left, Senator Hillary Clinton and Senator Barack Obama. Hillary has inherited the Democratic organization of her husband, Bill Clinton, and it's clear that she's a wily politician in her own right. In the public mind, she's widely thought to be tough, smart, an emotionally cold woman with a spine of stainless steel. She's also mysterious and secretive. Her base seems to be the older voter, the working class woman and now, the Hispanics, mainly people of Mexican descent.

Her opponent, Barack Obama, is a remarkable young man. Obama came out of nowhere without an obvious political base and within a short time built a political system able to compete with the traditional Democratic machine now controlled by the Clintons. He's also better at raising money. Obama is of mixed parentage; his father was a non-practicing Muslim from Kenya and his mother was a white woman from Kansas, the most American of our states (think of Judy Garland and the Wizard of Oz). Barack was brought up as a small child by his mother in Indonesia. Later he lived with his white grandparents in Hawaii, certainly the least typical American state. He is well educated (as is Mrs Clinton). Barack went to Columbia University in New York and then to Harvard Law School, where he graduated with the highest honours. He married another black graduate of Harvard Law, a woman darker than himself, a fact that has endeared him to many black women.

Obama moved to Chicago and became a community organizer in the Negro ghetto of the South Side, a tough and dangerous area. He entered politics on the state level in Illinois. Four years ago, he ran for the US Senate from Illinois and was elected with an unprecedented majority. He can be a mesmerising public speaker, something not all that common in the States. He wrote his memoirs, *Dreams from my Father*, when he was a virtual unknown. It later became a best seller and drew him national attention. His résumé is quite thin, even more so than Mrs Clinton's. Americans, though, don't always demand much and, in some cases, long experience in government can be a disadvantage. Mr McCain is a good example.

There is a studied imprecision in everyone's statements. Both Democratic candidates have broad agreement on the political issues. They favour a measured exit from the Iraq war, but reserve the possibility of later intervention. The state of our healthcare delivery system is a big political issue and both senators have similar views. They each allow a major role for the current private insurance companies and rule out a simple and efficient European-style system. McCain says very little about his plan.

Since the Democrats tend to agree on issues, they try to attack or provide 'contrast', as they say, on personality differences. Clinton claims to have 'experience', which qualifies her to be president on Day One, though it's not clear what this experience really is. Obama holds up the banner of change and promises that he will be able to work with the opposition more effectively. There is a longstanding hostility between Hispanics and blacks in many parts of the United States and Barack, as a black man, suffers from this bias. Obama appeals to men, the young people of both sexes, the vast majority of the blacks and the better educated whites. To everyone's surprise, he seems to have been competitive with Mrs Clinton for the white male vote in the American South.

There are a large number of primaries and caucuses remaining. A few are in major states – Ohio, Texas and Pennsylvania – in addition to some smaller ones. Two major states, Florida and Michigan, held unauthorized primaries and they may be declared invalid.

Another consideration is the 'superdelegates'. Most people have paid little attention to them hitherto, but this year they might well be decisive. These are additional delegate slots reserved for party dignitaries and elected officials, and these votes are at their discretion. Most superdelegates are probably Clinton supporters, but it is unlikely that they would award the prize to her if Obama shows greater strength.

---

Dennis Graf lives in Minnesota and is Liberator's US correspondent

# THE MAPLE LEAF RAG

## Canada's federal system unites disparate races and cultures in a way from which Europe could learn, says Wendy Kyrle-Pope

The idea of a federal Europe is not a vote winner. Even the Federal Union organisation describes a federal Europe as "a direction, not a destination", implying that it will be a long time coming. At the moment, the argument for a federal Europe is on the back burner as far as the vast majority of people in the UK are concerned, but all political parties will have to address the issue, sooner or later.

Pro-Europeans will be faced with the monumental task of drawing a picture of how a federal Europe might work in voters' imaginations. What is in it for the UK, which is only beginning coming to terms with the decentralisation of power through the process of devolution in Wales and Scotland, and rejected any such devolvement of power outright in north east England?

While closer economic ties are accepted, albeit with reluctance, by most as the inevitable result of the global economy, and even (one day) the need for more unified foreign and defence policies, people fear that a federal union would rob them of sovereignty over their own affairs, and power would be centralised in some nebulous place in Europe.

But what they fear most is loss of a national identity, of who they are. How could a federal union made up of so many countries, cultures, histories, empires and peoples (both the indigenous and the recently arrived) establish an identity to which all the citizens of Europe would be able to establish some connection?

Could we learn from the Canadian model, which is discovering that only by federalism can Canada establish a Canadian identity out of its multicultural, multiracial and multinational population, and ensure the inclusion and participation of the Quebecois and the native peoples who, for historical and cultural reasons, cling to their sovereignty and separateness?

Canada is not Europe. It is still building itself as a nation and, to do this, it relies on the participation of its diverse peoples in the democratic process to create an identity which all can share.

## TWO SEPARATE CULTURES

Canada's political system developed as its population grew, from a few thousand to the 33 million today. But it did start off with the problem of having two separate cultures, both of which had to be accommodated to make the country work.

Canada has been a federal democracy since it became self-governing in 1867. A country of such vastness (the distance between Vancover and Prince Edward Island is the same as between London and Outer Mongolia), with a harsh climate and a sparse population, had little choice, but the principal reason was this biculturalism. Wolfe may have won Quebec (and thus control of Canada) from the French in only 20 minutes in 1759, but that victory had no impact on Quebec's Frenchness, and it remains totally French to this day.

Fear of invasion was also a driving force towards a speedier adoption of a federal system. In 1867, the world's largest army of the time stood just south of the border, rattling its sabres. The presence of this powerful and populous neighbour has always overshadowed and informed everything the Canadians do, culturally, economically and politically.

Pierre Trudeau's remark in 1969 that "Living next to the US is like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even tempered the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt," still rings true today. All Canadians dread being taken for Americans, and this factor is a major unifying force, and one which drives the nation in its search for a distinct identity. And not only do Canadians have to contend with the shadow of the elephant; its 10% (300,000) per annum growth in population is made up almost exclusively of immigrants from around the globe.

Unique among OEDC countries, Canada has three forms of ethnic groups. The first are the aboriginal people, who make up about 4% of the population. Of these, 350,000 are Native Indians (People of the First Nation), 30,000 Inuit and some 400,000 Metis, of mixed Indian and European decent. The second is European; about a quarter of the population is descended from the original French settlers, one-third are of British descent, and Germans, Ukrainians, Dutch. Italians, Greeks and Scandinavians have been settling since the nineteenth century. In recent decades, a third group, comprising immigrants from Asia, especially China, with smaller numbers from the Caribbean, Africa, Eastern Europe and South East Asia, has helped to double the population since 1951.

In the 1960s, the government began to move away from the symbols and trappings of the predominantly British cultural dominance. The Maple Leaf flag was adopted. The 'royal' in titles was dropped (the Royal Canadian Airforce became the Canadian Airforce). British Canadians at the time were horrified, but it was a prescient preparatory step to the new Canada that would emerge.

The federal system ideally provides a welfare state and a federation based on the ideals of diversity and shared citizenship. It is designed to provide multilevel governance, supranational economic institutions, pressure

to ensure responsiveness (at all levels) to local cultures and to cope with the growing ethnic diversity and multiple identities of its peoples.

The federal parliament operates on the Westminster system, with a cabinet, as do the provincial governments. All provinces have substantial independent power to raise taxes, make their own laws in certain areas and, since 1970, own their mineral rights. The latter makes some provinces substantially better off than others on a per capita basis (Alberta has oil, for example), so equalisation grants have to be made to those less naturally endowed with riches. There is a Governor General for all Canada, but also one for each province, each of which has its own flag.

Provincial courts with provincial judges deal with most criminal and civil matters, with more serious cases being dealt with by federally appointed judges. A separate system of federal courts operates alongside the provincial courts to try cases arising under the constitution or any federal law or treaty, including cases against the government.

Language has always been a key issue. Canada is officially bilingual in French and English, in all its ten provinces and three territories except Quebec, which is only French speaking. One in six people speak a language other then English or French, and the pressure of recent immigration in Ontario has seen the introduction of Mandarin in many schools, as Toronto will become 50% Chinese-speaking by the next decade.

But how do the various peoples feel about Canada and being Canadian? This is where the federal system comes into its own, to accommodate those who do not feel Canadian first, and have distinct cultural allegiances. Quebec is the reason Canada decentralised from the very beginning, so that the province could have equal power with the others. A high level of self-government and a legal system based on the Napoleonic Code helped contain nationalist aspirations and, in 1995, the Ottawa parliament took the largely symbolic but conciliatory step of recognising the Quebecois as a nation. Federalism enables Quebec to exist as a parallel society, a sovereign society, a part of yet apart from the rest of Canada.

*"Federalism is the mechanism that allows nations to exist within a nation"*

And this works the other way round, too, with the people of the First Nations, the indigenous peoples. They frequently mistrust their provincial governments, and look to the federal government to be the guarantor of their rights.

The Indian peoples live in areas (not exactly reservations) all over the country and enjoy certain tax breaks such as duty free cigarettes and the right to grow their own tobacco, but poverty, alcoholism and mutual suspicion between them and their 'second' nation neighbours still exist, though relations and conditions, especially in education and cultural support, are generally better in Canada than south of the border.

The creation in 1999 of the Nunavut, a massive territory in the far north, which was carved out for an 85% indigenous, mostly Inuit population, was a method of nation building within a nation, only possible in a federal system. Were Nunavut a country, it would be the 13th largest in the world, again demonstrating the vastness of Canada.

Quebec is suspicious of immigration, as it is perceived as a threat to its cultural heritage, but in the rest of Canada immigration is welcomed. Like its native reptiles and birds, the majority of people live along its southern border, going further north a little way on each coast. There is so much uninhabited terrain, albeit a high proportion of which is uninhabitable, that there is room for all.

## IMMIGRATION TO SURVIVE

Canada depends on continuing immigration to ensure it survives economically and as a nation, and to do that it must embrace and manage its multiculturalism and multiple identities, and somehow forge an identity for Canada from it.

The government regularly measures 'national pride' (pride in being a Canadian) and finds that, the longer an immigrant lives in the country, the more he participates in elections, and the more proud he feels to be Canadian. Quebecois vote more than any other province, and members of the First Nations the least.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which became part of the constitution in 1982, states that these rights and freedoms apply to everyone in Canada, irrespective of citizenship or legal status, and even illegal immigrants have the same rights as Canadian citizens.

Federalism is the mechanism that allows nations to exist within a nation; and the sense of belonging and of identity come from participation in the democratic process and mutual defence of those civil rights enshrined in the constitution. Those two factors provide the glue of nationhood, and not the variable geometry of ethnic attachments and allegiances. This may seem a little thin as a classification of identity but, in such a huge and diverse country, it is a start. Canada's democracy is not perfect – many criticise the Westminster cabinet system for its lack of transparency – but federalism does at least provide the checks and balances that prevent power being centralised.

A successful federation depends on many factors, but a democratic system that is transparent, efficient and, above all, trusted, provides its bedrock. Europe's institutions are none of the above yet and, if we are to move towards federalism, and a version of the Canadian model, these must be reformed.

The Canadian experiment is a nation building one, and is far less shackled by history than Europe. Hopefully, this experiment will strengthen and expand, and not fragment as all the European empires of the past have done. Canada's brave new world might show the more craven older one a way forward.

---

Wendy Kyrle-Pope is a member of the Liberator Collective. She thanks Professor Keith Banting and the Canadian High Commission for their input to this article

# LETTERS

## EXCLUDING NORMAL PEOPLE

*Dear Liberator,*

Having recently rediscovered my November edition of Liberator (322), I was most interested in Jeremy Hargreaves's article 'High Speed Line' about further streamlining and speeding up the process for making party policy.

I have always agreed with Jeremy that the system of green and white papers can be overcumbersome and slow, but found a number of the suggestions that Jeremy made could well be at the expense of the grassroots involvement in the policy making process, which, whilst imperfect, has surely to remain intact. These are, Jeremy admits in the article, purely informed suggestions at this stage, and I hope he will take these comments on board.

Jeremy calls for all of what would have been the green paper debate to take place via an internet comments page. Here I think the important differentation between consulting and being able to debate what is in the green paper is possibly lost. He also considers the possibility of having no consultation (green) paper, asking "how many new ideas are normally generated?" Here I suspect it perhaps could be more a question of ideas in the past have actually having been seriously considered by either the working group or the FPC, and perhaps a growing realisation by party members that this is not an effective way to influence the policy making process. If I am right here then surely the FPC shold be taking steps to make the consultation process more effective rather than giving up on it.

However, the two of Jeremy's suggestions that I felt were least in the tradition of our grassroots democracy were:

Firstly in calling for a system where time constraints are so tight it would need "a small working group that is highly available..." (in Central London?)... "and able to give a lot of time to working very intensively." This would in effect exclude from our policy groups normal people living busy lives. What teacher would have the time to attend such an education working group, for example?

And secondly, his suggestion to allow the final policy paper a much later deadline to be sent out. This would give very little time for local parties to debate and amend them and, more importantly, no real time to publicise any amendment in advance of the conference. Thus greatly diminishing the chances of a policy paper ever suffering an amendment of any substance.

What perhaps Jeremy has forgotten is that more immediate policy ideas that do not confict with the broad thrust of other policies do not in fact need a working group. That there is an immediate way to propose policy by way of a direct motion to conference, which is open to the FPC, party members and constituency groups alike. It is perhaps the growing tendency for the FPC to want a policy working group for even the most straightforward yes/no issues such as the future of Trident, rather than a simple motion for debate, that is creating such a bureaucratic backlog.

When the party gets back to just using policy groups to ensure joined up thinking rather than (hopefully inadventantly) stifling all grassroots policy initiative, we will be well on the way to cutting back on the unnecessary policy paperwork that Jeremy rightly wants to curtail.

John Fraser

## IN OR OUT?

*Dear Liberator,*

Amidst all the hoo-hah about the rights and wrongs of a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, I was fascinated to hear that the Liberal Democrats propose to up the ante by calling for a referendum on the bigger question of whether the United Kingdom should be in Europe.

I'm all for participatory democracy but can the people really vote on geographical facts? What if Britain's physical location were rejected, then what? Would we tow our islands further out into the Atlantic?

And anyway, surely a vote on Europe is putting the cart before the horse. Many of us would first like a say in whether England should be in Britain. A 'no' vote would involve not only moving our islands but also sawing them into pieces, but where there's a will there's a way.

Indeed, round where I live, there is a lively argument about whether Dollis Hill is really in Brent. Personally, I would vote to move it to Derbyshire, since it would save the expense of travelling to the Peak District for my annual rambling holiday.

If we can put men on the moon, I see no reason why mankind cannot vote to ignore geography and move one's territory to a more congenial location.

Len Possett
Dollis Hill

## Get it off your chest!

**Liberator welcomes readers' letters.**

**Please send them, maximum 500 words to:**

**collective@liberator.org.uk**

**We reserve the right to edit or omit anything long, boring or defamatory**

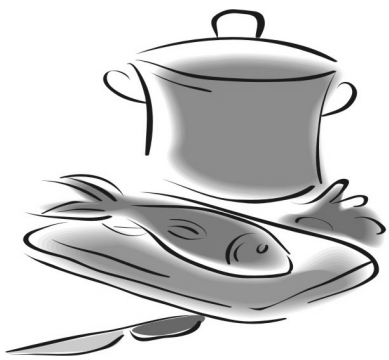
# REVIEWS

## The Indian Mutiny by Julian Spilsbury Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2007 £20.00

Spilsbury's book is full of the glories and gore of war. It is clear that the Indian Mutiny, or the First War of Independence as it is known in India, was a bloody event, with regard for humanity scarce on either side. While Spilsbury chronicles this, drawing on contemporary sources – I presume for example that he would be familiar with George Forrest's 1904 account, which undoubtedly drew on the recollections of that author's father (there is alas no bibliography) – he seems weak on analysis. Why did it happen? We all know of the cow or pig fat greasing rifle cartridges – there seems to be an element of truth in that, although steps were taken to correct this early on. The rumour proved stronger.

That the conquest of India had been completed with the defeat of the Sikhs in Punjab and the annexation of Oude were probably catalysts, as were the rate of western progress in India and the fear of forced Christianity (earlier the East India Company, which administered British India, had kept missionaries at bay but, as Victorian morals marched on, this policy had to be reversed). None of this really explains the ruthlessness of the rebels, which in turn was used to justify the ruthless response of the British. Nor is the aftermath really dealt with in any detail.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, in his 1909 book *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, wrote, "it was the holy passion of love of their country and religion that inspired the heroes of 1857"; we have a sympathy with their not wanting to be a subject people. Spilsbury often refers to British officers' amazement at the mutiny of 'their men', while reflecting that the older style of officer/administrator who had 'gone native' was increasing replaced by a newer, perhaps more evangelical breed as Victoriana replaced the Georgian ethic.



Wellington famously remarked that his men scared him. Whatever the behaviour of the officer class, it is well documented that the behaviour of the (British) ranks was frequently bad off the field – a factor that had helped turn the American colonies against the Crown 75 years earlier.

I enjoy Spilsbury's obituaries of military figures in the Daily Telegraph; he has a flare for heroism. Thus his book is Boy's Own stuff, but the event was such that I wonder if it is just a bit too much of it. The lessons of the lives chronicled in the Telegraph might have made a better read.

Stewart Rayment

## The Woman Racket by Steve Moxon Imprint Academic 2008 £19.95

Moxon, who wrote the exposé of the Home Office's immigration service in 2004, returns to his preferred theme of the sex war, in which he maintains that policies to promote female 'equality' are misconceived and damaging.

At first I recoiled from this volume but on second thoughts I attempted to give Moxon's arguments a fair hearing. On third thoughts, however, having read the book I was relieved to find that this really is a load of rubbish. I will allow that, for example, 'PC' fascists have perverted many gender equality issues, that men often now get unfavourable treatment in family courts and that insufficient attention is given to domestic violence committed by women. But Moxon drowns every half-reasonable point with such a deluge of unsupported contention, wild generalisation and simple errors of fact (e.g. on breast cancer treatments) that the end result is laughable. The book's claim that it is a 'serious scientific investigation' of the issue is ludicrous; although various 'academic works' are quoted, these are of course chosen selectively.

There is not enough space in the whole of Liberator to enumerate the idiocies in the book but perhaps one point will suffice. Moxon's view is that women are naturally less inclined than men to pursue their careers with ambition and dedication – therefore lower pay and other discrimination against them in the workplace is justified. The point he misses is that, even if this were true of most women, the few who did not conform to this stereotype should not be discriminated against simply because it was assumed that that is how they would or should behave. As a former Lib Dem, he should at least realise how fundamentally wrong it is to treat individuals on the basis of a generalisation about the group to which they belong. (Moxon appears to be unaware that not every woman has or wants a man to provide for her!). This might seem banal but unfortunately it is the level at which the debate in this book is pitched.

Essentially, Moxon's viewpoint is redolent of that which maintains that it is acceptable to drink and drive or to send children up chimneys. Society has moved on – and he himself appears to accept this when in a particularly wimpish conclusion he states that there is nothing to be done about the present situation – we simply ought to be aware of it!

One for the pulp pile.

Gwyneth Deakins

## The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith Harriman House 2007 (1776) £19.99

I frequently urge you to read an economics text a year, but isn't this going a bit far? Actually, I was interested to see what George Osborne (who wrote the foreword for this edition) would have to say about the Inquiry and was duly disappointed. I'm sure Vincent Cable would have had much more to say.

Osborne points to the universality of Smith, the advocacy of free trade, that self-interest serves the wider public interest. He goes on to say, "the response of too many to globalisation is to erect trade barriers…" He talks of the fight to abolish agricultural subsidies, "combat economic nationalism in Europe and battle against higher taxation and regulation at home."

"Unfettered markets tended towards monopoly… so proportionate government action is needed to create a clear and stable framework that enable free competition to take place." All good A-level stuff, but I'd like a bit more meat on the bone, especially given the rather selective reading of Smith that is commonplace amongst Tories.

As Jonathan Wight (author of *Saving Adam Smith*, Prentice Hall, 2001; Associate Professor of Economics and International Studies, University of Richmond, Virginia) states early in his introduction, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is essential to the understanding of Smith, particularly *The Wealth of Nations*. From these two books, one can trace a theoretical development in Liberalism, both as a political philosophy and in practical economic theory down to today. Whereas the social liberalism espoused by the British Liberal parties is clearly in this tradition, one has to have doubts about the Conservative chameleon.

Falkner gave the corrective to Thatcher's embrace of so-called neo-liberal economics in a John Stuart Mill Institute publication of those days. Have the Tories learnt and can they? Protectionism is in many ways more natural to them and when Osborne speaks of 'globalization', is it the commonwealth he seeks to benefit or the narrow interests of the few who already possess wealth?

The conservatism of Blair and Brown followed down the Thatcherite path, adding Labour's own insidious paternalism. Is this enough for Cameron and Osborne to see the error of those ways? I don't think so. It is possible that Cameron and his circle may be well meaning enough, but can they rein in their backwoodsmen in the final analysis? The high points of Tory reform have always relied on a Liberal consensus to see them through.

In addition to his introduction, Wight has also thoughtfully provided us with a section of Notable Quotes from *The Wealth of Nations* – a substitute for deeper reading of the book, but a useful aide memoir to call to hand. This is a fine edition to replace that Penguin whose pages are getting rather brown and crumbly; inexpensive in its 600-odd pages, it will keep the door open in more ways than one.

Stewart Rayment

## The Streets of East London by William J Fishman with photographs by Nicholas Breach Five Leaves 2006 £12.99

Originally published in 1979, nostalgia apart, it is good to reflect on Bill Fishman's book. The East London of his book is very much Spitalfields, Whitechapel and Stepney. He wrote, "a crime has been committed against the past. In the race for functional conformity, and the pressing needs for rehousing the people, the little streets and their ancient communities have fallen before the demolishers – a development now recognised, too late, as an error of judgment. Juxtapose the new high-rise Bastilles against the residual one-up-one-down Victorian cottages, and one can sense the loss in human terms."

And the same socialists who made those errors continue to replicate them under the guise of New Labour (same old corruption) – every postage stamp of open space will be built on to brown-nose political favour with no regard to the communities they supposedly serve. The brief Liberal renaissance in the East End was a last fight against this, lost to the vanities of the parliamentary leadership. It is a universal problem – people think they know better, whereas true Liberalism would tell them 'the wearer knows best what fits'.

Stewart Rayment

## Cultural Amnesia by Clive James Picador 2007 £25.00

Never believe it when you hear someone claim that witty people are popular. Wit is the personal quality most likely to provoke spite in others, which may explain the vague disdain in Britain for Clive James.

For Clive James is not only one of the wittiest writers working in this country today, he also commits

another cardinal sin in British eyes – he is "too clever by half", a well-read and highly erudite man, with wide-ranging intellectual pursuits.

Further, he resists easy pigeon-holing. He first came to fame as the Observer's TV critic in the 1970s, when he single-handedly reinvented the genre. He is best remembered among the population at large as the presenter of TV shows that made fun of Japanese game shows in which contestants put live cockroaches down their underpants. Such a man cannot also write intelligently about Diaghilev or Proust, surely?

Actually he can, and in spades. This book is subtitled "notes in the margin of my life" and is almost a primer in the intellectual history of the twentieth century. Forty years in the making, it is a compendium of short essays about over 100 historical figures – intellectuals and artists mainly, but also some political leaders – ranging from Hegel to Tony Curtis, from Louis Armstrong to Thomas Mann, from Beatrix Potter to Charles de Gaulle.

But these are not potted biographies, more intellectual digressions. An essay about director and former Python Terry Gilliam, for example, turns into a dissertation on torture and terror, prompted by Gilliam's movie *Brazil*.

James sets the tone with an introductory essay in which he laments the destruction of Vienna's intellectual café society by the Nazis. Indeed, if there is a constant theme running through these essays, it is James's aversion to dictatorship in all its forms, and more particularly his contempt for the intellectuals who indulge it. The key essays concern Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron, respectively France's leading intellectual apologist for, and critic of, Marxism. James is no anti-intellectual but is aware that intellectuals are just as capable of being credulous or plain wrong as ordinary mortals – more so, since they have a ready platform to promote their views and the ability to make the weather.

It is a cliché of such books to say that they are the kind of things one dips into rather than reads from cover to cover. It is true of this book, but then many essays here will awaken your curiosity and encourage you to seek out further reading.

It is another cliché to describe compendious books as 'toilet reading'. If so, I can only say that this is toilet reading of the highest order. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

Simon Titley

## Coalition
## by Mark Oaten
## Harriman House
## 2007 £14.99

It is an enduring myth that British politics has been about the regular alternance of comfortable majorities in the House of Commons for either of whichever happen to be the two leading parties of the day. And while thumping great majorities have often occured, we tend to forget that hung parliaments are not that unusual.

The most recent close result was in 1992, when John Major's small majority was whittled away by a succession of by-election losses. Before that, we had the inconclusive result in February 1974 and the narrow majority for Labour in October the same year. 1964's Labour majority was even more wafer-thin, as was 1950's. And the 1920s saw a succession of inconclusive results.

Meanwhile, coalitions are all around us. They have become commonplace in local government, they have been a fact of life in the Scottish and Welsh parliaments, and are the norm throughout most of continental Europe.

As things stand, a hung parliament is the likeliest outcome at the next British general election. Yet political discourse rarely explores this territory and, when it does, treats the prospect as a bizarre aberration.

As the next general election looms, Nick Clegg will come under relentless media pressure to say which of the other parties he would prefer as a coalition partner. Indeed, this will really be the only question the media will want to ask him. So much so that, paradoxically, the more a hung parliament seems likely, the less it is actually likely, since voters will not want to risk inadvertently voting in a party they do not want in government.

So, some interesting questions. Why are the British, uniquely in Europe, averse to coalition government? What can the experiences of Scotland, Wales and local government teach us about the conduct of coalition government at the UK level? How should the Liberal Democrats play their hand if the next general election produces a hung parliament?

Oaten considers many of these issues but raises more questions than he answers. The bulk of his book is an entertaining but lightweight historical romp through a series of exclusively British case studies, beginning with Peel in the 1840s, and covering both the Lib-Lab pact and the abortive Blair-Ashdown 'project'. Oaten also looks at the possible scenarios in the next general election.

Oaten is not an incisive enough writer to draw out serious lessons from his chosen historical examples, leaving us with a breathless succession of who did what to whom stories. Meanwhile, in his consideration of the next general election, he seems too obsessed with the mechanics and tactics to see the wood for the trees, and too keen to express his personal preference for a deal with the Conservatives.

If the Lib Dems are serious about coalition government, they must of course be prepared to consider either major party as a partner. But if recent history has taught the party anything, it is that (a) any pre-electoral statement of preferences, never mind a pact, undermines one's negotiating position, and that (b) a coalition or hung parliament should never be expressed as an objective. Hung parliaments must instead be interpreted as the will of the people, to be dealt with as the circumstances arise, otherwise one is effectively parading the limits of one's ambitions before the electorate.

Simon Titley

# Lord Bonkers' Diary

## Monday

I am pleased to see young Clegg has made such a promising start as our party's new leader, albeit that it was sheer good fortune that I happened to be in Westminster on the day of his debut at Prime Minister's Questions and was thus able to persuade his advisers that it would not be a good idea for him to lead on the problem of schools with inexperienced heads. In particular, the contract he has been awarded to model Barbour jackets will stand us in good stead with the voters here in Rutland – and quite possibly as far afield as Market Harborough. I just pray that he will have the good sense not to dismiss Constable Heath because of his Doubts over Europe. Our village bobby is a dab hand at escorting old ladies across the road, proved himself an adept detective and clipper round the ear during last autumn's unfortunate outbreak of scrumping and, arguably more importantly, commands respect on all sides of the House when he rises to speak.

## Tuesday

Last year I was again pipped at the post for the Liberal Democrat Moustache of the Year Award by John Thurso. I am not one to bear a grudge, as my readers will know, but I think it worth recording that while my moustache spends the summer as nature intended, grazing in the Welland Valley – the finest pasture in England – Thurso's facial appendage is packed off to the Atom Plant at Dounreay, where it is bombarded with gamma rays or something equally beastly to make it grow to an unnatural size. It was when I noticed at the Brighton Conference last year that the normally dapper Thurso also sported a beard that I realised something was wrong. Late one evening in the bar, he confessed that the radiation had affected more than his moustache: he is now covered with luxuriant hair from head to foot and has to shave his neck and wrists before going on television. As I say, I am not one to gloat, but I was not surprised when Clegg failed to find room for him in his first shadow cabinet.

## Wednesday

The morning post arrives bringing with it the usual circulars, bills, appeals to me to speak at constituency dinners, appeals to me not to speak at constituency dinners and so forth. One letter, however, stands out. It appears to have been written with the end of a burnt stick on the inside of a banana skin and reads: "Help! I am being held against my will in Inverness Zoo. They think I am a gorilla. Please come and rescue me. Thurso." My duty is clear. I have the Bentley loaded with thermoses, sandwiches and a supply of orchard doughties (those rugged staffs that every gamekeeper swears by) and point its nose towards Brig O'Dread, which for centuries has been the Highland retreat of we Bonkers.

## Thursday

In all honesty, it is chiefly for the sake of Thurso's grandfather, my old friend Sir Archibald Sinclair, that I am undertaking this journey. He led the Liberal Party between 1935 and 1945, and was altogether a splendid fellow. He was orphaned at the age of five but (despite my family's best efforts) was brought up at Thurso Castle by his own grandfather Sir Tollemache Sinclair. He too was a splendid fellow, who had pulled down the sixteenth century castle and had a new one built to his design. He had a passion for the orchestra – a superior sort of mechanical organ – and could often be heard belting out some such tune as 'Ride of the Valkyries' on the latest model. I have to confess that the steam organ here at the Hall – which Professor Webb once managed to blow up with too enthusiastic a rendition of Kumbaya – was installed after I heard Sir Tollemache's machine in full voice. Yes, the Sinclairs are altogether splendid fellows and I shall do whatever is needed to rescue poor Thurso.

## Friday

I arrive in Berwick upon Tweed, only to find it besieged by the hairier members of the Scottish National Party. I am told that they are plotting to seize the town and bear off Alan Beith and Lady Maddock so that they can exhibit them in Edinburgh, forcibly dress Beith in a kilt and oblige the lovely Diana to spend the rest of her life cooking porridge for SNP backbenchers at Holyrood. Well, the Nationalists shall not have Berwick nor Beith nor Lady Maddock: they are as English as cricket and corporal punishment. I hand out my supplies of orchard doughties to the brave Berwickians, together with some Bonkers Patent Exploding Focuses (for use in marginal wards) that I happen to have in the boot, and the Scots are soon put to flight.

## Saturday

To Inverness Zoo at last, where I find Thurso disconsolately shelling peanuts while being groomed by a charming lady gorilla. "I've told them that I am the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross," he says, "but they just laugh." I complain of his treatment to a passing keeper, but he very reasonably replies: "Sir, if I believed every hard-luck story I heard from an animal in this zoo, our cages would soon all be empty." Having sacrificed my orchard doughties to help raise the Siege of Berwick, I am forced to employ guile rather than brute force, but a couple of crisp Bank of Rutland notes soon have the desired effect – once I have obtained an undertaking from Thurso that he will not be putting up for this year's Liberal Democrat Moustache of the Year Award. I also secure the release of the charming lady gorilla as I have her in mind as our candidate in a ticklish council by-election in Lincolnshire – the voters like the touchy, feely approach nowadays.

## Sunday

I write these words in the trophy room at Brig O'Dread with a tumbler of Auld Johnston at my elbow. The charming lady gorilla occupies the armchair on the other side of the roaring fire and Thurso is doing the washing up after our well-earned dinner. I felt it was the least he could do.

---

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