

THE OULD JOURNAL

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What is the OULD Journal?

The Oxford University Liberal Democrats are launching our journal this term in order to shine a light on the diversity of liberalism, both around the world and within our student body. We hope to continue the tradition of our Blog, which ran 2017-19, in giving society members a more enduring platform than weekly Spirited Discussions. The Journal also recognises that OULD does not have a monopoly on progressive or liberal ideas and so welcomes contributions from non-members. There is nothing more liberal than an open discussion. Whilst the articles within may not all speak directly to each other, their collation should create a more rounded overall picture than the isolated pieces on our old Blog.

OULD's current main platform are the weekly Spirited Discussions. Whilst our Communications Officer diligently documents debate on our social media platforms, the arguments given are situated within an ephemeral atmosphere. Once an SD is over, it is over. The speeches given there, serious or otherwise, are of immense value in the context of an inherently social event. SD attendees firmly abstained on approximately a third of all motions this term. The society's strength is in bringing a diversity of opinion together in an open forum. In that sense, the Journal looks to continue the work of SD to a more enduring and serious platform. We hope that as the reflections and ideas of young people in a party (and wider progressive movement) that has always prided itself on having many of those, the ideas contained in this and subsequent volumes might provide some food for thought for those who come across it.

We hope to build on this small volume in coming terms. As more students come in contact with OULD, they will hope to leave their mark on our output. What we present now is only a first look at the range of thought the society looks to encourage. We fully anticipate continuing debate in the future.

If you would like to help contribute to this journal in future terms, or get involved in OULD in other ways, then please contact the incoming President:

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Ben Phillips
OULD Journal Editor HT20

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The Market: A Guarantor of Freedom

We live in tumultuous times for *laissez-faire* liberalism. There is no denying to it. The ship of state, throughout an unfortunately wide number of polities, has come hazardously close to the dark tides of populism – a threat now coming down against it from the right and the left alike. Once again, the dangers of collectivism seek to undermine stability, democracy, and freedom.

However, all is not lost. Or, for the time being at least, not yet. It has to be accepted that the only model that truly stands as a protector of these democratic is, indeed, *laissez-faire* liberalism. It is, in many ways, a story as old as time. It is impossible not to correlate the application of truly liberal policies and economic success throughout history. Of course, populists, radicals, and demagogues have sought to create the unsurprisingly successful narrative -needless to say, a fallacy-along the lines of 'the rich are getting richer, while everyone else is getting poorer and poorer'. Dear reader, this could not be further away from the truth. Whenever implemented, market liberalism has accomplished one great and truly laudable thing, the creation of prosperity and opportunity for all peoples. And while this could be dismissed by critics as cynicism from my part, such is not the case. These statements are backed by evidence and history, by the factual story of success such a model promises to all.

The number of people living in poverty has, throughout the course of the 20th Century, done nothing but take an undeniable nosedive. Isolationist nationalists have been discredited entirely by the great and wonderful benefits of a globalised world, where individuals in every single corner of this Earth are capable of engaging in business, guaranteeing profit for themselves and, by extent, their communities. Free trade around the globe has done nothing but offer great rewards to those venturing into it, raising millions out of poverty, offering equal opportunities and creating a tranquil space for those of entrepreneurial spirit to run free. Socialists, with their narratives of struggle and pseudo-equality have, on the other hand, discredited themselves. Don't they see the fruits of their endeavors? Don't they see their fellow ideologues in Venezuela and the global south delivering nothing but poverty to their people? Thanks to their vitriolic despise for freedom, human ingenuity and individualism, socialists throughout the world have brought about not only misery and poverty, but abject suffering and death as well.

These models stand in clear contrast to the benefits guaranteed by free market liberalism, a model which has managed to raise 700 million individuals from poverty in the 21st Century alone. The creation of wealth allows for the sound distribution of wealth, and the safekeeping of individual freedoms, human creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit has allowed for millions throughout the world to get up from their backsides and stand with their own 2 feet, creating the vicious cycle which justifies keeping this model running – a model standing as the one true guarantor of freedom.

Santiago Bedoya-Pardo
OULD Social Secretary HT20

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Anglo-French Relations: It's Complicated

From frog-eating Frenchmen incapable of winning a war, to poorly-dressed Englishmen incapable of cooking an edible meal, the Anglo-French relationship has generated its fair share of stereotypes. Fluctuating between disdain, admiration, suspicion, outright hostility and, at times, toleration, the two countries have shared a long and complicated relationship. Countless English words have French roots and today the Académie Française is fighting a battle against the increasing adoption of English words into the French language, asking why the French insist on borrowing the word “rooftop” from a country notorious for its incessant rain. With the Eurostar allowing you to eat lunch in Paris and dinner in London, the two countries are physically closer than ever before, making the reality of Brexit harder to manage.

Though English lovers of Wellington might claim that the French are “cheese-eating surrenderers” who always keep a white flag tucked into their pocket, Anglo-French relations started with a French invasion back in 1066. After the Norman Conquest, French was adopted as the official court language and the law was practised in French for centuries afterwards. Even today “Law French” has an influence over English judicial terms; for example, “de son tort” which describes persons assuming a responsibility without authorisation meant “by his wrong” in French and “culprit” is derived from the French word “culpable”, meaning guilty. From 1066 onwards, Anglo-French relations were often characterised by war and open hostility, such as during the Hundred Years War and the Napoleonic Era. However, the 20th century seemed to usher in a new era of cooperation, with the signing of the Entente Cordiale in 1904 and Anglo-French collaboration in the Normandy Landings of 1944. Despite Charles de Gaulle blocking the British attempt to join the EEC on three separate occasions, saying that Britain would never fully be able to commit to Europe as they would always have one eye on the USA (hindsight seems to suggest that he had reason) Britain joined the EEC in 1973, marking a new era of cooperation. Since then, travel has become easier and today both countries have strong British and French communities, with London constituting France’s sixth largest city whilst around 400,000 British people live in France.

One of the most pervading stereotypes is that French culture is inherently superior to English culture, in particular the food. With many French expats hopping across the channel to stock up on decent food or gritting their teeth and buying a £2 baguette in Paul, the stereotype that English food epitomises the British aversion to pleasure continues. Former French President, Jacques Chirac, summed it up when he told Tony Blair that “La cuisine anglaise, au début, on croit que c’est de la merde et après, on regrette que ça n’en soit pas” which translates as “English food, at first on believe that it’s shit and afterwards, we regret that it wasn’t.” A glance at the food served in Hall supports this statement. However, though stereotypes surrounding the English food and vulgar fashion trends demonstrate the perceived superiority of French culture, many French philosophers and political theorists have long-since admired English institutions.

Writing in the 18th century, Voltaire, father of the Enlightenment movement, wrote about his admiration for the liberty of English institutions, in particular the relative religious toleration and freedom of the press. Meanwhile, Tocqueville, whose text *L’Ancien régime et la révolution* is still taught at Oxford, wrote favourably about the English love of “liberty” and the ability of the English Constitution to evolve slowly over time in comparison to the revolutionary nature of France at the time. Tocqueville, who wrote in the 19th century at a time when revolutions and military coups had caused the political regime to change with alarming regularity, described the French revolutionary spirit as constituting a national malaise. However, though it could be argued that the French are perhaps a little too fond of taking political causes to the streets, as evidenced by the long-lasting metro strikes seen in Paris this winter, the British perhaps don’t do it enough. Therefore, the two countries linked and divided though they may be can learn from one another to find a “middle way”.

As Brexit draws ever-closer on the horizon, Anglo-French relations have become more important than ever. The close economic, political and cultural links between the two countries are impossible to undo and we shouldn’t even try. True, there are large differences which separate the two nations but ultimately they’re linked in a way that few other countries aren’t. So, the relationship between Britain and France, which at times resembles that of siblings who love one another deep-down, is something to be celebrated and renewed because in a post-Brexit world, Britain will need all the allies it can get.



Natasha Voase
OULD Communications Officer HT20

Die Mitte lebt?

A Look at our Troubled Sister Party: The Free Democratic Party of Germany

On Sunday 23rd February, Hamburg went to the polls. This was to be the big test of the Social Democratic-Green coalition that had been running Germany's second city. The results were a clear victory for the government, with over 60% of the vote going to the Social Democrats and the Greens. The big losers of this election were the conservative CDU, the far-right AfD, and our German sister-party, the FDP, which failed to cross the 5% hurdle required for a seat in the Hamburg Parliament.

This was the culmination of a nightmare month for the FDP. It began with the election of the FDP's Thomas Kemmerich to be Prime Minister of the State of Thuringia in former East Germany. While this superficially might seem to be a great result for the FDP, the reality is far from this. The FDP received a mere 5% in the State Election in November 2019 and had no way of forming a stable government. Kemmerich was only put up as a candidate so that the Left Party's candidate, Prime Minister Bodo Ramelow, would not simply be opposed by the AfD's candidate. The AfD decided, much to the FDP's horror to abandon their candidate and vote for Kemmerich, who was then promptly elected Prime Minister by the Thuringian Parliament. The FDP allowed themselves to be played by the far-right and nearly brought a party right of the CDU to power for the right time in post-war German history. This of course begs the question: what is wrong with the 'liberal' party of Germany?

The FDP was highly successful throughout the second half of the 20th Century. The first President of the Federal Republic, Theodor Heuss, was a Free Democrat and the FDP were part of 17 governments, forming the coalition partner of either the CDU or of the Social Democrats. The new century has been less kind to them. Despite forming part of the government from 2009-2013, the FDP failed to reach the 5% hurdle in the 2013 Federal Election and was voted completely out of the German Parliament. The party's hopes in 2017 rested on their charismatic new leader, Christian Lindner. Christian Lindner represents the extreme business-friendly wing of the party, himself having founded his own business while still in 6th Form. He is an impressive orator and is highly articulate. The FDP hoped to use this new young, 'sexy' image to create a campaign à la Macron in 2017. They did, indeed, do well and more than doubled their vote to 10.9%, becoming the 4th largest party behind the AfD. Lindner then made headlines later that year when he pulled out of coalition negotiations with the CDU and the Greens, stating that it was better 'not to govern than to govern badly'. Since then Lindner has been a figure on the sidelines and the FDP have been stuck at around 7% in the polls.

The FDP feels like a spent force. Their brand of liberalism is a form of classical liberalism with a focus on European unity. While they might have some very interesting policies in reforming the EU, for example by having EU-wide Spitzenkandidaten ('head candidates') to increase citizen participation in EU politics, their other policies are particularly bland and not very radical. They are a party for rich people in many Germans' eyes.

Image description: A FDP placard in the Außenalster in Hamburg



The FDP might be our sister party, but we should not be taking our example from them. Germans seem to be throwing their support behind the non-traditional parties. Leading the way, the Greens.

Edward Peckston
Ex-President, OULD

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

Since April 2018, the Liberal Democrats have been aligned with the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland through the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party and the Alliance Party is listed as one of the sister parties of the Liberal Democrats. As with many aspects of Northern Irish history and politics, this fact is not widely known. With the current political climate as it is, it is vitally important for us to learn about these links and build upon them.

The Alliance Party grew out of the New Ulster Movement, a movement that emerged in 1969 which aimed to build cross-community relations between Catholics and Protestants and to promote non-sectarian policies. The Alliance Party was then formed the following year. This came at the beginning of the period known as the 'Troubles' where both militant Nationalists and Unionists fought over Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. In this period bridge building between the two communities – Nationalists, mostly Catholics, and Unionists, mostly Protestants – could not have been more important. However, the Liberal Party did not support the New Ulster Movement. As a United Kingdom-wide party, Liberals at the time did not have the organizational structures or the local historical knowledge vital for fielding candidates in Northern Ireland. The Liberal Party members who attended the inaugural meeting of the NUM were expelled from the party. After this, the Liberal Party did not receive much electoral success – nowadays, the Liberal Democrats do not run candidates in Northern Ireland, but instead support the Alliance Party.

The Alliance Party supported a devolved Northern Irish assembly, as we currently have in the form of Stormont. It condemned internment immediately and foresaw the potentially dangerous consequences, which came to pass. With the entry of Sinn Féin into electoral politics and the subsequent shift towards increasingly more extremist and bitter political discussions, the Alliance Party remained non-sectarian and aiming towards peace. It supported the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 despite opposition from its traditionally unionist supporters. After the Prior Assembly fell apart, the Alliance Party went to talks in West Germany with members of the SDLP, the UUP, and the DUP; the kind of cross-party talks that they had always aimed for. Similarly, they attended in 1888 the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. They also participated in the Good Friday Agreement, supporting power-sharing, despite how this would negatively impact their electoral success. They chose peace and what was good for the people over party politics, something that perhaps we can all learn from.

What all of this demonstrates is that the Alliance Party survived escalating and de-escalating violence, without losing its values and remaining well organized and non-sectarian. If anything in the above paragraph does not make sense, I highly recommend going to learn about them! Ignorance about Northern Ireland has in recent times caused political embarrassment for the current government and further ostracization of people in Northern Ireland. Therefore it is our responsibility to learn – with knowledge comes the ability to make a difference.

Rormentum

No one can accuse Rory Stewart of campaigning like a conventional politician. During last year's Tory leadership election, his antics of startling unsuspecting members of the public caused a brief sensation. He has since garnered bemusement with an offer to kip on the assorted sofas of the London electorate as part of his mayoral campaign. His zany twitter videos have left the media not quite sure how to handle him. A BBC News tweet from when he resigned as International Development Secretary read 'Rory Stewart appears to confirm resignation as international development secretary with horse tweet', a somewhat uncomfortable attempt to square his cryptic twitter pronouncements with standard forms of politician speak. London's appetite for Rory's campaign will demonstrate whether the 'Rory Phenomenon' extends any deeper than a few thousand likes from centrist Tories on ex-Twitter and somewhat ironic Oxford students.

Almost any article on Rory will gallop through his life before politics, which can tend to read somewhat like an obscure Trollope character's backstory. His political career is marked with exceptions—He became a minister in 2015 after David Cameron didn't fancy him continuing as chair of the Defence Select Committee. In the continuing chaotic mess of Brexit, he has consistently chosen unpopular, unpredictable, and isolated positions. He entered the cabinet after being one of the few senior Tories to enthusiastically support May's deal. He then became one of the Conservative rebels against no deal and a general thorn in Boris Johnson's side. After losing the Tory whip, instead of fighting his seat as an independent, he announced a somewhat quixotic bid for London mayor. At each turn, his decisions have seemed distinctly idiosyncratic.

But can Rory add any policy substance to British politics—is there a serious politician behind the memes? Several of his policy positions dovetail with his unconventional campaigning. He advocated for a 'Citizen's Assembly' to solve Brexit, an attempt to convert 'Stewartist' twitter outreach into a serious policy proposal. He didn't hang up his walking boots as environment minister, trotting the length of a sewer 200 feet below London. His policy plans for the mayoralty, however, have hardly thrown the established policy book out of the window—he would involve the Mayor's office in directly building more housing, triple the number of police on patrol, and establish a 'London Youth Corps' to plant a million trees.

To ask who is the real Rory Stewart is a difficult question. Should we rally behind the ex-Cabinet Minister attempting to reshape how politicians interact with voters? Or is it right to be scornful that his contribution to British political life ends with some amusing twitter interactions and what seems to be self awareness? Indeed, vague pledges to restore civility in politics and listen to the electorate are hardly innovations in politics. Perhaps the Rory phenomenon serves its highest purpose as a light digression for disaffected centrists, desperately reaching for what seems like a herald of an impending return to political normality.

What's Next for the Liberal Democrats?

At the start of 2020, the Liberal Democrats are at a crucial juncture. After coalition and our fight against Brexit, our fortunes are mixed – low in the polls, but with a strong council base after last year's local elections. We have, however, struggled to establish a clear 21st century liberal identity for ourselves. Aside from Brexit (which is rapidly becoming less salient), the public isn't sure what we are for. Here I argue that in 2020 we must create a new progressive identity for our party, as one that hands real power to people and communities, to fight the nationalist and statist visions of the Conservatives and Labour respectively that are backward-looking and devoid of new ideas.

Our position on Brexit was temporarily successful as an attempt to define a distinctive identity for our party. Our message over the past year, seeking to build a broad-based liberal movement based on shared values of openness and internationalism clearly had an appeal for a chunk of the electorate – the 'bollocks to brexit' moment cemented an idea of what the Lib Dems are about in the eyes of many voters.

But come December, other issues took priority in the election campaign, and the appeal weakened – among many reasons for this, we must appreciate that voters did not have a clear perception of our policies on economic and fiscal policies that dominate public discourse. YouGov polling from November 2019 of which party was most trusted on the issues had us no higher than 7% on taxation, unemployment, the economy and housing even while our national support was 13%.

Going forward, we must be clear on what the Lib Dems are about on these issues as well. For many voters, the Lib Dems are seen as nothing more than 'centrists' on these issues. How can we replace this perception with an inspiring, liberal answer to our country's greatest problems? To do so, we must choose a decisive position that cannot be mistaken for that of another party, or for a 'centrist' compromise between two extremes. Without becoming 'left' or 'right' we must become radical and distinctive.

What position should this be? In 2020, the signposts all point in one direction. Aside from Brexit, our country's greatest issues – homelessness, poverty, inequality, strained and underfunded health and education services – tell a story of a country where people's power and autonomy to live their lives freely has been systematically eroded, and the support that government can offer has either been either cut or taken so far away from people toward the centre in Westminster that it is no help at all. Meanwhile, the Labour party has utterly failed to convince the British people of its old-fashioned state socialism and has become mired in anti-Semitic racism, whilst even the Conservatives have rhetorically tacked left, promising to 'rebalance' the economy. These signs tell us that it is now right, both morally and politically, that our 21st century liberalism should be about taking from the powerful and helping the vulnerable – from rich to poor, homeowners to Generation Rent and from Westminster to our communities.

What would this programme look like? It would not be a departure from our party's traditions. Redistribution through a wealth tax and universal basic income are a 21st century advance on the first New Liberal death duties and unemployment insurance, while a radical housebuilding programme reminds us of Britain's first social housing programs under a Liberal minister in 1919. Even when not in government, we have championed the power of local government, and radical devolution fits in with our long tradition of community politics. We should adopt all these measures while strengthening our traditional commitments to battling the climate crisis, fighting for an open and internationalist Britain, and standing up for marginalised groups in the justice and immigration systems.

Such a programme would not only be the right thing to do in Britain today, but also carve out a new place for Liberal Democrats as the party that stands up for the power and freedom of ordinary people and against those who would rather dictate our lives from the centre. Failing to do this leaves us to be perceived as little more than Brexit-hating centrists, without a persuasive story of what liberalism in 2020 is really for.



Nick Brown
OULD President HT20