

Liberal Democrat Consultation Paper

Agenda 2020

Essay Collection

Consultation Paper 122



Autumn Conference 2015

Background

This collection of essays does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; the response generated will feed into the wider Agenda 2020 consultation process.

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Christian Moon, Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 8 – 10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE. Email: Christian.Moon@libdems.org.uk.

Comments should reach us as soon as possible and no later than 9 November 2015.

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1. Introduction

The Federal Policy Committee's 'Agenda 2020' process is designed to provide a framework for the party's policy-making throughout the 2015–20 Parliament. A key part of the exercise is to describe the Liberal Democrats' core beliefs, values and approach, and the Agenda 2020 consultation paper (available at www.libdems.org.uk/agenda2020) includes a concise definition of the Liberal Democrat philosophy, drawn up by the FPC.

Inevitably, as a paper agreed by committee, the Agenda 2020 document reflects a consensus view of Liberal Democrat thinking. By way of contrast, this short volume offers a diverse range of personal opinions expressed by individuals within the party.

FPC invited a number of people to write a short essay on their views on the Liberal Democrat philosophy, core values, beliefs and approaches – either how they saw it now, or how they thought it should develop or be better expressed. We asked them to write about more than just individual policies (though they were of course free to argue for the party to develop policy in any particular area as a demonstration of our core beliefs). We also asked them not to focus on party strategy or organisation or internal structures.

Our aim was to enable readers to focus on and discuss what we mean when we say '*I am a Liberal Democrat*' – what we believe, what we think is important, and what underlies our support for or opposition to specific policies. The thirteen individuals whose contributions are included here (one of the essays was co-authored by three people) have approached their task in very different ways, but we hope you find their essays stimulating in helping you to think through and articulate Liberal Democrat beliefs.

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Essay competition

Of course, Agenda 2020 is not just about telling members what we think – it's about involving as many Liberal Democrat members at possible. Thus, as part of the 'Agenda 2020' review, we are announcing an essay competition, open to any party member.

We'd like you to contribute to this process of thinking through the party's beliefs, values and approach. We invite any party member to submit an essay on the topic of '*What does it mean to be a Liberal Democrat today?*'

Essays should be no more than 1,000 words in length; the deadline is 5 October. For more information, see www.libdems.org.uk/agenda2020-essay-competition.

2. Two Stories from the Second Dawn of Liberalism

by David Boyle

Let's start with Stalingrad. If you read Anthony Beevor's classic account of the battle, the overwhelming impression is one of senseless waste. Two vainglorious dictators, who insist on taking every decision – and who are immune to human feelings of compassion for the men under their direction – simply waste their men in blood and suffering.

It is a terrifying vision of the sheer inefficiency of dictatorship. While it was taking place, the Viennese philosopher Karl Popper, a refugee from the Nazis, was working on the political implications of his philosophy of science.

How could you prove anything inductively, given that no matter how many times the sun rose in the morning it was no proof that it would do so again? Popper came up with an interim answer to the problem David Hume had set two centuries before: you may not be able to prove what you believe about the world, no matter how often an observation or experiment takes place, but you can disprove it.

Popper used the example of swans. It doesn't matter how many white swans you see, it still doesn't prove that all swans are white. But if you see a black swan, then you know they are not.

Popper's home city was in the hands of totalitarians, and he quickly found himself applying this insight to politics too. In doing so, he produced one of the classic twentieth century statements of philosophical *Liberalism, The Open Society and its Enemies*.

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He said that societies, governments, bureaucracies and companies work best when the beliefs and maxims of those at the top can be challenged and disproved by those below. That is how societies learn fastest: closed systems discourage learning – openness encourages it.

Popper was flying at the time in the face of the accepted opinions of the chattering classes. They may not have liked the totalitarian regimes of Hitler or Stalin, but people widely believed the rhetoric that they were somehow more efficient than the corrupt and timid democracies, rather as our own elite believe now.

Not a bit of it. Real progress required ‘setting free the critical powers of man’, he said. The possibility of Popper’s challenge from below – in what he called ‘open societies’ – is the one guarantee of good and effective government or management.

Those human beings at the front line, those most affected by policy, will always know better about their own lives or their own work than those at the top. The more open you are to them, the flatter the hierarchy, the more the critical information will be available to learn and move forward. It is, in its own way, the antidote to Stalingrad.

Popper provided the best explanation of why Liberalism works and why, in practice, we need to devolve power down as far as possible through society. Because that is the way we develop, have ideas: it is the justification for a more equal society, and an effective, more equal economy too – because we can’t waste the talent that otherwise moulders away unused.

Liberals spread power, not because it is nice – nor because it has an electoral appeal (though it does) – but because open societies can change and develop, and closed societies can’t. Hierarchical, centralised systems, by their very nature, prevent that critical challenge from below.

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The second story takes us to Chicago. It is now exactly four decades since the future Nobel laureate Elinor Ostrom carried out her ground-breaking research into the systems used by the Chicago police.

When she won the Nobel Prize for economics in 2009, it was doubly unusual: no woman had ever won it before, and she wasn't even an economist. She had been at Indiana University for most of her career, spending much of her time in the 1960s, by her own admission, getting her students out of gaol after anti-Vietnam War protests.

It was the period which saw the huge consolidation of schools in the US, reducing the number of school districts from 110,000 to just 15,000 in the four decades up to 1950. There was a similar consolidation of hospitals, police forces and companies. This was the emerging era of big organisations that has rendered so many of our public services so ineffective.

Ostrom was fascinated by the issue of scale. When she scraped up enough money to begin research, she decided she would look at the same phenomenon which was happening across the US of consolidating police forces into larger and larger units.

She had just enough money to hire cars for her research students to drive around Indianapolis for ten days, and test out the effectiveness of different styles of policing. It was pretty clear, after the results came in, that the smaller the police force, the better it was at responding to emergency calls. It is the same in the UK, even now.

This challenged conventional thinking, which assumed then – as it still does – that bigger is better. Her black students urged

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her to have a proper look at policing in Chicago, and sure enough, it was the same there. The small police forces in the black suburbs were just as effective as the huge police force covering central Chicago, which had fourteen times the funding.

The Chicago police were interested in her research and asked her why she thought the crime rate seemed to be rising when police shifted from walking the beat to driving round in patrol cars. It was here that she made her real breakthrough, understanding how much the police need the public, and how cut off they had become.

She needed a word that described that indefinable co-operation between police and public which was so easy when they walked around. She called it 'co-production'.

If the police forget how much they need the public, and disappear into technocratic systems, patrol cars or bureaucracy, then crime goes up, because the public come to believe their involvement is no longer needed. It is the same pattern with doctors: they need the co-operation of patients if they are going to make them well.

This is an extension of the implications of Popper's open society, and its implications are profound. Society, public services and the economy are the same in this respect: they work better if people are involved alongside professionals – not consulted (some people are not articulate enough for that; this is not about committees), but actually involved themselves as producers as well as consumers, as service providers as well as service users.

It implies the need for a basic mutualism – and Ostrom won the Nobel prize for her work on mutualism – which binds people together in the co-production of society, and blurs the traditional boundaries between givers and receivers, between professionals and patients.

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Both these stories imply that the tyrannies that Liberalism was developed to confront have adapted as time has gone by. They are not just about the injustice of imprisonment without trial or bombing indiscriminately or state sponsorship of torture. The modern tyrannies also now reside, often unnoticed, in economic structures that are designed to Hoover up money into the elite, or to hand over all decisions to technocrats, in the form of economists or medical professionals, or a whole range of ways in which people are sidelined and wasted.

The extension of Liberalism to cover our economic relations is not new, but it is unfinished. I'm tempted to say that, paradoxically, neither the 'social' Liberals nor the so-called 'economic' Liberals regard economic issues as the stuff of Liberalism. Even the 'economic' liberals tend to set the whole business aside in favour of an ancient laissez-faire, based on a defunct view of the market – while the 'social' liberals see little further than traditional welfare economics. Neither is actually looking seriously at the way the economy is changing, or how the market might change.

But strangely, Popper may have forged a way forward there as well.

One of the free-market founders of the Mont Pèlerin Society – the means by which Hayek and Friedman clawed back neo-liberalism from the jaws of Keynesianism – Popper's doctrine of the open society can combine both social and economic liberalism. The economy must allow challenge from below, just as society must.

That is the free market more as Liberals originally conceived the idea than as it has developed over the past century: what

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once began as a critique of monopoly has become an apologia for monopoly. Popper's open society implies an open economy, where the vast privileges of the big corporations and oligopolies have to be swept back, allowing enterprise and ideas to bubble up again in challenge.

So there is the challenge for Liberals now. It is to end the artificial division that has been allowed to develop inside Liberalism, to develop a renewed commitment to bottom-up enterprise, capable of creating and spreading prosperity – and to create the conditions where it can sweep the old order of monopoly power and privilege aside.

That is the purpose of Liberalism. Actually, it always has been.

David Boyle *is a former Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate and member of the FPC. He is co-director of the New Weather think-tank and the author of a number of books including The Human Element, The Tyranny of Numbers, People Powered Prosperity and Broke.*

3. British Liberalism: Political, Social and Pragmatic

by David Howarth

British liberalism is fundamentally about politics. It starts from the view that political authority should rest only on law and that law should only be made by democratic institutions. It has developed in struggles against extra-legal and non-democratic claims to authority. In past centuries it fought against claims to authority based solely on deference and tradition. Now it fights against claims based solely on security and fear.

The commitment to democracy distinguishes British liberalism from, for example, German *ordo-liberalism*, which prioritises economic freedom protected by a state strong enough to resist democracy. In terms that might be better understood in the rest of Europe, British liberalism is committed not to 'neo-liberalism', which is utterly alien to it, but to radicalism. For British liberals, no amount of additional economic prosperity can justify denying or renouncing basic democratic rights. The party's task is constantly to challenge violations of these principles. But it is also constructive – to build democracy and the rule of law both domestically and internationally.

Markets, Quality of Life and Economic Equality

British liberalism asserts the priority of political considerations over economic considerations. Its assessment of markets, like its assessment of all social institutions, is ultimately political, not economic. For example, liberals approve of free international trade because free trade contributes to international peace and because it recognises the basic equality of different peoples, and liberalism advocates economic competition because monopoly, whether private or public, results in an unacceptable concentration of power.

Nevertheless, as a practical matter, modern states have, perhaps unrealistically, assumed responsibility for the material welfare of their citizens, and liberals have needed to develop an approach to that responsibility. That approach is, essentially, pragmatic and evidence-based rather than dogmatic. The evidence suggests that market economies are more productive than state-dominated economies, but it also suggests that market economies have distinct tendencies to undermine themselves.

One example of market economies undermining themselves is macro-economic instability, whether through insufficient aggregate demand or the creation of systemic risk in financial markets. Another example is how labour markets can degrade individuals' quality of life, whether through the physical dangers of work, regulated since the nineteenth century, or through psychological dangers only now becoming clear – for example the mental health consequences of job insecurity, long hours and bullying management styles.

Other examples include under-investment in innovation and environmental problems, especially long-term problems such as climate change. But the most important example is inequality. For liberals, the main problem with economic inequality is its effects on political equality and its corrupting effects on democratic institutions. But inequality also has adverse economic effects: a loss of willingness to co-operate and, in acute cases, threats to public order.

In each case of markets undermining themselves, the purpose of liberal intervention is not to edge towards replacing markets with state domination, but to preserve the market economy by saving it from itself.

Democracy

Democratic institutions have two characteristics liberals prize. The first is political equality: democracy starts from the assumption that everyone is entitled to the same degree of political power. The second is discussion: democracy is not merely counting heads but rather a way of coming to decisions by listening and speaking.

Political equality

One person, one vote is the starting point for political equality but not the end. In practice, one person one vote is no guarantee of political equality. Enormous inequalities of power exist even in European democracies. Some political inequality is, of course, tolerable. For example, in representative democracies members of parliament have more power than other people, but that inequality is tolerable as long as it flows from democratic election. Equally, judges wield more power than individual litigants, an inequality justified by the need to maintain the rule of law.

But political inequality arising from other sources is, for liberals, deeply suspect and a constant target for reform. For example, political inequality that arises from wealth, whether through buying access to politicians or through indirect means such as control of the media, needs to be fought against. The political consequences of inequality can be offset to some degree by regulation (transparency, spending controls and so on), but there are limits to what regulation can achieve and ultimately liberals' attention must turn to inequality of wealth itself.

Political equality is much harder to achieve and maintain in centralised states. Centralisation increases the power of those who govern over those who are governed (the 'iron law of oligarchy') and also automatically restricts the number of people who can plausibly claim to be influencing those who govern.

Government by discussion

Some political traditions see democracy as merely a more egalitarian version of markets. They see markets as a way of delivering what individuals want and democracy as a different way of doing the same thing, using one person, one vote as opposed to one pound, one vote. British liberalism from the time of John Stuart Mill has rejected that view. The value of democracy derives not from delivering what people want but from the human process by which collective decisions are reached, a process whose purpose is not merely to transfer information about pre-existing desires but to create new conceptions of what we collectively want.

Democracy is a process through which we think about what we ought to want – a conversation that brings us into contact with other people and confronts us with their desires, interests and arguments. Markets can be efficient but they operate through the silent signals of price. Democracy, in contrast, is not necessarily efficient – indeed, it can be exhausting – but it is, or at least it ought to be, intensely social.

The emergence of the global super-rich presents a particular challenge. Individuals who can get their own way by threatening states with moving their assets elsewhere have taken themselves beyond any need to take part in democratic discussion on the basis of equality. They exercise a form of unacceptable extra-legal power.

Community politics

Combining political equality and government by discussion yields the characteristic liberal enthusiasm for community politics – that people should have the power to solve their own political problems on the basis of discussion amongst themselves. But democracy of this sort does not just come about by itself. Strenuous effort is required to create and

sustain it. The duty of a liberal politician is to bring people together to facilitate such discussions and to build and maintain institutions that make them possible.

It is also the duty of a liberal politician to remove barriers to discussion. That includes opposing political movements and ideas that tend to divide people into non-communicating groups, for example politics that fosters division on ethnic, religious or class lines, treating people as members of groups, not as individuals.

Liberals have tended to adopt community politics on a localised, geographical basis (where it has unfortunately sometimes degenerated into an electoral tactic) but its lessons are broader. For example, the aim of resolving conflicts on the basis of equality and discussion lies at the heart of liberal ideas of workplace democracy.

The Rule of Law

The rule of law is not a technical matter but an important liberal political ideal. The central idea is that people should be able to plan their own lives on the basis of clear, publicly ascertainable rules and should not be subject to arbitrary power. Putting that ideal into practice yields a number of other ideals – for example that the state should have no power to act except insofar as it has been legally authorised, and that it should only be allowed to impose obligations on citizens by means of comprehensible general rules set out in advance.

One might have thought these ideals achieved in countries such as Britain, but in reality parts of the British state have never fully accepted that their authority rests solely on the law, believing instead that it derives from extra-legal sources such as national security and from obfuscations such as the Royal Prerogative. And British governments are constantly tempted by violations of the rule of law, including retrospective

legislation and legislation comprehensible only to a small number of officials.

Democracy and the Rule of Law

The relationship between democracy and the rule of law constitutes the central problem of liberalism. In important respects, democracy depends on the rule of law. How otherwise can we stabilise rights to participate in politics on the basis of equality except through comprehensible, publicly ascertainable rules? But Liberals should recognise that democracy's dynamism will always to some extent conflict with the stability and predictability sought by the rule of law.

Resolving that conflict drives liberalism towards constitutional checks and balances and human rights. Constitutional checks and balances – bicameralism, judicial review and so on – not only ensure broader discussion in advance of change, and so to that extent are inherently democratic, but also slow down change, mitigating the destabilising effects of democracy.

Human rights constrain democracy more fundamentally, delegitimising even democratically agreed state action. Some human rights guarantee the structure and functioning of democracy itself, for example the right to vote and the right to free expression. Equally, some human rights guarantee the rule of law, for example the right of access to impartial courts. But other human rights are more controversial. They restrict democracy in substantive ways – for example the rights not to be tortured, executed, or expropriated without compensation and the right to a private life of one's own choosing. The aspects of life protected, however, could not be more fundamental or politically significant.

Freedom, Democracy and Resources

One way in which social liberalism goes beyond classical liberalism is the connection it makes between democratic freedoms and access to resources. For social liberals,

freedom and democracy are meaningless in a society characterised by poverty and gross economic inequality. People in a constant state of anxiety about the basics of life – somewhere to live, health, food on the table – are in no position to take part in democratic deliberations as political equals. Their participation will be limited to intermittent protest. That fact alone justifies state guarantees of housing, healthcare and income. And who should pay for that provision? Those with more than enough to ensure their own freedom and ability to participate.

The most important government programme required to make democracy work is education. The principal liberal justification for state expenditure on education is not economic – even though the pragmatic argument for education spending is overwhelming – but political. For democratic discussion on the basis of equality to work, citizens need to be able to inform themselves about political issues and to assess critically what they find. The quality of democracy is improved not just by raising the capabilities of all to a basic minimum level but also by maximising the capabilities of each citizen.

David Howarth *is Professor of Law and Public Policy at the University of Cambridge. From 2005 to 2010 he was MP for Cambridge and Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Justice. From 2000 to 2003 he was Leader of Cambridge City Council. In 2007, with Duncan Brack and Richard Grayson, he co-edited Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century.*

4. An Accidental Liberal Democrat

by Fiona Hall

I'm an accidental Liberal Democrat. Student politics, of both the debating-school and hard-smoking NUS varieties, left me cold. But through the 1980s I got more and more concerned about the degraded condition of our planet and the unequal lives of those living on it. The neighbours were Liberal Democrat and out of curiosity I started to watch their party conference on TV. Here was the debate I had missed as a student: thoughtful, caring, constructive. When I finally joined the party I warmed to the preamble to the constitution on my new membership card because the ultimate goal of freedom and opportunity globally is the fundamental reason why we need to protect our environment.

Fast-forward to 2015. What does Liberal Democrat philosophy say to the bystander wrestling with today's problems?

The world in the 21st century is already much smaller. Every country is on our doorstep – and we on theirs. Today, the Dick Whittingtons seeking freedom and opportunity come from Syria and Eritrea. Understanding what drives them is the vital base step to building a fair and workable policy on migration. In the Google Earth century, turning our backs on the quarrels in far-away countries between people of whom we know nothing is simply not an option. We all stand in a tangled heap of connectedness on a small planet, hemmed in by national borders drawn by 19th century rulers – indeed with a ruler, in some places. There is a great knot to unpick here in pursuit of freedom and opportunity and it will require calmness and compassion to accomplish the task.

At the same time, like the drag of a deep current, climate change has accelerated and become the number one threat to

global peace and security. We have already seen how drought-driven changes to farming and rapid urbanisation have fuelled conflict in North and East Africa and the Near East. A continued rise in global temperature will cause sea level surges threatening a billion people living in low-lying areas.¹ What this implies for freedom and opportunity globally is almost beyond our capacity to comprehend. Only the most stringent and immediate measures can now hope to keep global temperature rise below 2°C above the pre-industrial level.

As far as climate change is concerned, the sometime Liberal Democrat dilemma of freedom of the individual v. freedom of society can only be resolved in one way. The freedom of all of us would be so crippled by out-of-control climate change that some restriction of personal freedom is a small price to pay: if we are henceforth required to drive zero-emission cars and live in well-insulated houses, cramping our right to waste our money how we wish, then so be it. Moreover, leaving it entirely to the market to decide the winners from a basket of low-carbon technologies is not an option: there is no precedent for the market deciding in time to meet a deadline – and on climate change, time is what we don't have. So our liberalism must be pragmatic and bend to the measures it is necessary to take in this crisis, if we are to achieve our higher goals of freedom and opportunity for everybody.

Nine out of ten Britons now say that climate change is happening and two-thirds of Britons are concerned about it.² Yet those same Britons elected a Conservative government that has killed off nine green policies in its first three months. How can that be? A big reason is the UK's unfair voting system. Only 36.9 per cent of those who voted in the general election voted Conservative. Nearly two out of three people did

¹ US Geological Survey, cegis.usgs.gov/sea_level_rise.html

² Cardiff University Understanding Risk team www.understanding-risk.org/

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not want the government we now have nor the policies it is introducing.

This massive disconnect between how people vote and the government they get is a major cause of the disenchantment people feel about politics. Liberal Democrats have always recognised the importance of bringing in a fairer voting system. The difference in 2015 is that people on the doorstep are proactively telling us that they want their vote to count. We have a responsibility to stay focused on that end goal of fair votes and to be flexible about the means of achieving it.

But an even bigger cause of disenchantment has been the style of political parties – our own included. The concerned bystander knows that there are some very big issues out there that really require politicians to work together. These normal people know from the conversations they have with their mates that there is a lot of common ground in the thinking of people who vote Liberal Democrat, Green, Labour or Nationalist. But unfortunately for normal people, most politicians and political activists are not used to finding common ground. They are tribal, and under tribal politics you must always choose. You support Man U. or Man City. Never both. Tribes fight each other and are excused from normal civilised niceties.

It's time to return political debate to being a genuine discussion focussed on finding solutions, not a point-scoring game. Liberal Democrats should lead the way in moving away from tribalism to a new way of doing politics, an approach that is fit for the 21st century, with its big new threats but also its new opportunities. We must lead by example and pioneer a positive, receptive, collaborative attitude to politics. We must also facilitate and encourage interactive approaches, so that politics becomes not just something done by a few elected leaders in the name of others but an activity engaged in by many people. We are all the leaders we have been waiting for.

Coming to the here and now, three issues stand out as ones where this constructive, non-tribal approach is urgently needed: climate change, the forthcoming referendum on EU membership, and fair votes. Today's concerned bystanders are watching the Liberal Democrats as I once did. We need to show them by our approach that we do not necessarily think we have all the answers, but are committed to leading the way on finding solutions by doing politics differently and working together.

Fiona Hall was the Liberal Democrat MEP for North East England 2004–14 and leader of the UK Liberal Democrat MEPs 2009–14. In 2013, she contributed to *The Green Book: New Directions for Liberals in Government* (edited by Duncan Brack, Paul Burall, Neil Stockley and Mike Tuffrey). As an MEP, she played a leading role in shaping EU legislation on energy efficiency, renewables and carbon reduction. She now works as an advisor on energy efficiency.

5. Four-Cornered Liberalism

by David Laws

The Liberal Democrats exist to help enable every person to lead a fulfilling life. This requires individuals to be free from oppression, free from prejudice, free from poverty, enabled to develop all of their talents, and able to participate fully in society.

This aspiration for every person isn't bounded by geography, race, class, income or generation – that is why liberals are internationalists, why we want to see a more inter-connected world, and why we are concerned about the future of our planet.

Liberal Democrats believe in liberalism in all its forms – personal, political, economic and social.

Personal liberalism means the freedom of the individual from all forms of oppression – including by the state, by the tyranny of majorities, and from ignorance, intolerance, prejudice and conformity. Our freedom should only be limited where its exercise seriously compromises the freedom of another person.

Political liberalism is the belief that power should be exercised through accountable and democratic structures, as close to the people affected as possible, and therefore with the maximum decentralisation of power and decision-making. Economic liberalism is the belief in the power of free trade, free markets, open competition and consumer power to create wealth, reduce poverty, meet need and empower free individuals. Economic liberalism is suspicious of monopolies and of replacing the individual decisions of citizens with the collective economic decisions of the state.

Social liberalism recognises that people cannot be truly enabled or free if they do not have the opportunity to develop their talents, and if their lives are blighted by poverty, unemployment or illness. Social liberalism recognises that collective action is sometimes justified and necessary, in a free society, to avoid exclusion and to ensure that freedom is meaningful and participation in society is real. Social liberalism should be pursued while carefully respecting the other forms of liberalism. Liberalism does not pursue equality for its own sake, because in a free society the pursuit of complete equality would necessarily involve coercive measures which would undermine freedom.

It is worth considering what challenges there will be for liberals and Liberal Democrats over the next decade, in promoting the forms of liberalism which are set out above.

Personal liberalism: there have been significant advances in the personal liberal agenda in the UK over recent decades. But there are still some major challenges for the years ahead:

- The State's ability, and that of other organisations, to monitor citizens' activities is now unprecedented. The potential personal and public policy gains from some forms of data-sharing, and the need to prevent terrorist activities, will create a serious case for mass state surveillance and sharing of data. Liberals must ensure that these activities are properly controlled, and that the power of new technology is used to liberate and not just to control.
- It would be wrong to think that recent major steps to reduce intolerance and prejudice have ended sexism, racism, and homophobia. In the UK and abroad, strenuous efforts are needed to counter these forms of prejudice.

- In principle, and with appropriate controls, liberals will tend to favour an extension of personal choice around end-of-life issues. Current legislation in this area constrains the freedom of individuals, for a variety of reasons. Liberals will reject some of the illiberal arguments used to justify the current law, while understanding some of the practical concerns about the pressures which could confront some people if this option was more widely available. But liberals should be leaders in this debate.
- Liberals recognise the benefits of immigration, and do not accept prejudice against people based on their race, colour, creed or language. But no country in the world has accepted uncontrolled immigration, and for good reasons. Liberals need to think more clearly about the limits to open borders, in a world where ease of travel has increased and understanding of the vast gaps in the living standards between countries is greater. The expansion of the European Union has brought in more low-income countries where the incentives to travel across borders are much greater. Liberal Democrats need to give more thought to how and whether rights to travel, work and claim benefits should be qualified.

Political liberalism:

Liberals are not nationalists, but we do believe in devolving power so that it can be exercised as locally as possible. International organisations such as the European Union have been notably unsuccessful in securing public support because they are often seen as distant and interfering. Our future as a planet must involve more globalisation in some senses – open trade, more open borders, more cultural homogeneity – while seeking to preserve the sense of local identity and local self-

determination. This is a challenge for liberals. Liberal Democrats must also accept that today's citizens do not want ever-more layers of politicians – they seek more personalised control and freedom, and not just a more powerful local council. The political reform agenda has too often seemed like an agenda for politicians and not for the people.

Economic liberalism:

The 20th century is likely to have seen the high-water mark of state activity in the economy, and in the share of national income taken in tax and spent by the state. Liberals and Liberal Democrats will welcome this. We do not believe that governments are best placed to run airlines, car companies or telephone operators. And we understand the risks when the state controls a large share of total economic activity. There are, however, some clear challenges for Liberal Democrats:

- How do we use efficient market mechanisms to prevent global warming and resource depletion?
- How do we tackle worklessness based on disability, including mental health problems? In most of our country today, the number of people on Jobseeker's Allowance is very low. But worklessness based on illness remains extremely high – which is bad for individuals and for the Exchequer.
- How do we ensure that our economy has higher productivity, and competes on the basis of skills and innovation rather than low pay?

Social liberalism:

Our country continues to be a place where opportunity, income and wealth are highly unequal. We are increasingly a meritocracy – but a meritocracy in which the chances of

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acquiring merit depend on who your parents are and what their incomes are. Poverty is likely to increase over the next few years, as private-sector incomes increase, while welfare is cut in real terms. Public services will be under pressure from Conservative spending plans, including the cap on public sector pay – which could lead to a recruitment crisis in areas such as teaching.

The Labour policy of mass means testing to reduce poverty was unaffordable, diminished incentives to work, and doesn't command public support. Liberals do not believe in reducing inequality by pushing marginal tax rates to 50 per cent and beyond, as this involves a degree of state interference and coercion which can be both economically counter-productive and contradicts the key liberal principle of protecting every single individual from excessive state interference.

So the challenges are:

- How do we improve educational opportunity, particularly for the poorest children? This may well require improved-quality early years' education, rather than just a focus on childcare for working families.
- How do we raise the quality of schools, particularly in the poorest areas? This means going beyond the lazy assumption that autonomy automatically delivers higher standards. It means more focus on improved leadership and governance, better quality teaching and swift but fair intervention.
- How do we find the resources to invest in improved public services such as education, the NHS, mental health and social care, at a time of constrained public finances?

- How do we improve work incentives and rewards for those on low pay? This may involve removing national insurance contributions for the low paid, as well as focusing on better progression through improved training.
- How do we meet the public expectation for higher spending on goods such as education and health services, while reducing the share of GDP that we spend on crime, defence, justice and that part of the welfare budget which relates to the costs of economic failure?

David Laws was *Liberal Democrat Policy Director* from 1997 to 1999. He was *MP for Yeovil constituency* from 2001 to 2015. He co-edited *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* (2004) and in government he was *Chief Secretary to the Treasury* (2010) and *Minister of State for Schools and the Cabinet Office* (2012–15).

6. On becoming a Liberal and not a soft leftie

by Sarah Ludford

I guess I've been asked for a sort of 'Why I'm a Liberal Democrat' article, though technically the brief asks for 'my views on Liberal Democrat philosophy, core values, beliefs and approaches'. Gosh! This request put me into a mild panic, because I've never before had to analyse, explain or justify being a Liberal Democrat. My favourite phrase from our constitution's preamble is, as for many others, "*no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity*", and frankly that's been enough for me.

But looking back, I can trace some key experiences which shaped my politics, which is now rooted in the potential of human beings to achieve for themselves and others, in a dislike of concentrated, inherited, arrogant and unaccountable power whether in the public or private sectors and in Europeanism and internationalism.

It has always stayed with me that the main reason why my parents went to teacher-training college in the 1930s was because it was shorter and cheaper than university, for which they would have been academically qualified. I on the other hand had five years of university-level education (yes, yes, with grants and no tuition fees, but that was when only 5 per cent went to uni). So I care strongly about education and social mobility, and believe that Liberal Democrats should continue to make investment in nursery and primary education a top priority, as we did in the Coalition. There's a lot more to do to combat ignorance and empower people to make decisions for themselves, and we should strongly support citizenship, financial and sex education in all schools.

The other strong commitment I attribute to the influence of my parents is my unshakeable Europeanism, formed on delightfully long (well, they were teachers!) camping holidays in France, Spain and elsewhere. I believe that being European and international is a positive addition to my multiple-layered identity; it most definitely does not steal my British identity, as many others seem to fear. It's extremely important to me that the Liberal Democrats want to manage the challenges of globalisation, not hide away from them. Being fervently European and international puts us in pole position on reform of the EU and UN.

University, and subsequent life in Islington, taught me to dislike lefties and to have contempt for the Labour Party, because of their cynical and exploitative attitude to people. Although I never joined it, I canvassed for the Labour Party in the 1970 general election, as a first-year LSE student. Jolly hard work it was too, with the houses in streets off Tottenham Court Road in Holborn & St Pancras then mainly high-turnover bedsits with a register 50 per cent out of date. Lena Jeger won, but I never got thanked and there was no activists' party.

Years later, in 1997, I was in the division lobby in the House of Lords next to her and only just restrained myself from telling her that it was Labour's 'take people for granted' attitude – as well as their utter unreliability on Europe, as we are seeing again today – that made me reject her party. LSE lefty student politics in 1969–72 turned me off all forms of socialism, because I realised it rarely delivers any practical improvements in people's lives.

As a councillor in the London Borough of Islington from 1991, my dislike of Labour's failure to respect and value individuals and treat them decently hardened into anger. Due mainly to the formation of the SDP, there was significant success against Labour in Islington in the 1980s, but as the Social Democrats in our borough largely refused to join the Liberal

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Democrats, we started again with just one ward in 1990, and began our steep climb to control nine years later.

I was disgusted by the arrogant, patronising and neglectful way Labour behaved towards even 'its people', with lamentable council housing repair and other services because of the politically corrupt grip of the town hall unions on their party, and their huge debts to the City, and high local taxes because of wasteful spending. It was, of course, the poorest and most vulnerable people who were worst affected, so I learned never to take any lectures from Labour on concern for the poor. I think some in our party and commentators who have never lived cheek by jowl with the worst of urban Labour, and think we should be natural friends with them, don't really get this sufficiently.

My experiences observing Labour have made me hostile to centralised and statist political forces. I am also no fan of the kind of corporatism that characterises some continental political parties and which can morph into patronage, clientelism and corruption, with appointments depending more on the right political connections than individual merit. I think the Liberal Democrats should have more to say about how to bust cosy introverted networks, whether in banking, trade unions or indeed in 'community champions' patronised by politicians, often at the expense of the voices of the young and female. One of my proudest moments as a councillor was persuading lots of people on an estate to attend the Tenants & Residents Association to vote out the bullying chairman who was fiddling the books but whom Labour refused to challenge. Liberal Democrats should be in the forefront of the fight against all forms of corruption and abuse of power.

I much prefer competition and information for consumers to regulation if at all possible, as regulators are always several steps behind, and even then not necessarily responsive to consumers. There is of course a need for regulation to protect safety and the environment and sometimes to provide a level

playing-field (reasons making me wary of taxi deregulation and Uber).

But I was astonished when working in the European Commission's competition department that some colleagues bought the perfume houses' argument that their products could only be sold through price-maintaining 'selective distribution', not through discounters. I was proud to work to remove the barriers erected by manufacturers to British consumers wanting to buy cheaper right-hand drive cars in Belgium. Liberal Democrats need to be much more obvious as the party championing genuine entrepreneurs.

Liberal Democrats should also question regulation and advocate smart regulation based on necessary protection, but not pursue either slash-and-burn deregulation or protectionism; I am a strong supporter of the EU-US trade agreement (TTIP) and don't think Liberal Democrats should cave in to its demonisation.

Abuse of power, disrespect and vested interests are at the root of discrimination. The bias towards pensioners like myself in the welfare system is a disgraceful form of political corruption! I'm very proud of what Paul Burstow and Norman Lamb did in government to address discrimination against those with mental ill-health.

It's a puzzle why the Liberal Democrats have not achieved more in gender and ethnic diversity, to match what we have delivered on LGBTI issues, since we have the right values and most of the right policies. I don't like quotas, although I have to acknowledge being a beneficiary of positive action (zipping for the Euro-list in 1999). I do think we have to think harder about how to make our party more diverse and make politics and business better reflect our country's population. But I am no libertarian on equalities issues: on women's rights, I firmly

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support the current Abortion Act rather than a simplistic 'woman's right to choose'.

I am pretty agnostic on the public/private split, having a 'whatever works' approach as long as there is transparency and accountability for public spending. But I am not indifferent on wealth: taxation of wealth should be much more effectively targeted, with inheritance taxed on the recipient, non-dom privileges further restricted, and 'buy-to-leave' property purchases (a curse on London) dissuaded through taxation if possible. I oppose George Osborne's recent giveaway on inheritance tax (even though my own heirs might gain from it). The provision of affordable housing is a crucial issue on which Liberal Democrats need to continue to campaign.

So what's my conclusion, then? I think our priorities should be to make sure the education system gives kids a leg up, to provide affordable housing, to expose and tax wealth and offshore profits without discouraging productive enterprise, to liberate everyone from prejudice and discrimination, and to stay in the EU and make a mark internationally. Small agenda, heh?

*An LSE graduate and qualified barrister, Baroness **Sarah Ludford** has been a peer since 1997, was an MEP for London 1999–2014 and is now Liberal Democrat spokesman on Europe in the Lords. She has worked in Whitehall, in the European Commission, and in the City for Lloyd's of London and American Express.*

7. Putting Liberalism into Practice

by Stephen Tall

Liberalism is an optimistic creed. How else to explain the influx of some 20,000 new Liberal Democrat members in the aftermath of the party's worst ever election performance? For many, the trigger was the dignified but downbeat resignation speech of Nick Clegg:

“One thing seems to me clear: liberalism, here, as well as across Europe, is not faring well against the politics of fear”.

Such a gloomy assessment was understandable given our eclipse, overtaken by isolationist UKIP as the UK's third party and all but wiped out by the nationalist SNP in Scotland. But was his ominous warning justified?

Liberalism is winning. So should we!

Not according to *The Economist*: ‘Mr Clegg lost not because liberalism is under threat but because it has become mainstream.’³ And I think it has a point. Many Liberal Democrats will harrumph at this, pointing out (reasonably enough) that neither David Cameron's insular Conservatives nor Tony Blair / Gordon Brown's centralising Labour governments have shown themselves to be especially liberal.

Yet a form of liberalism (albeit a bastardised version) won the twentieth century: Britain became considerably more socially and economically liberal. Poverty, ignorance and conformity – the three enslavements our party's constitution commits us to

³ ‘Not dead yet’ (*The Economist*, 16 May 2015).

tackle – have not been banished, but they have been weakened. We are a more prosperous, healthier nation, our citizenry is better educated, society more diverse and tolerant, and individuals are freer to live their lives as they choose. From R.A. Butler’s Education Act, introducing free secondary education for all, to the creation of the modern welfare state through Clement Attlee’s implementation of the Beveridge Report, to Roy Jenkins’ ushering in of the ‘permissive society’, to Edward Heath’s push for British membership of the Common Market, to Margaret Thatcher’s ending of the closed shop, to Tony Blair’s devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and London, to David Cameron’s commitment to same-sex marriage – such reforms have transformed Britain.

This is, I guess, a triumph for the liberal diaspora of ideas. What has proved to be a weakness in building a Liberal party big enough to win by itself has proved a strength by embedding itself in the Conservative and Labour parties that have governed Britain. We shouldn’t, of course, be complacent. It is possible the current Conservative government could (for example) lead Britain’s retreat from the EU and withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights.

However, it appears unlikely that this liberal age is about to slam into reverse gear. If anything, it shows signs of gathering pace. The structural changes underpinning it – accelerating urban growth, mass participation in higher education, the boom in ethnic minorities – are, as Jeremy Cliffe has observed, ‘together forging a more plural, open, fast-moving, post-industrial country where the political assumptions that held true for the post-war decades no longer do so.’⁴

⁴ ‘Britain’s cosmopolitan future’, Jeremy Cliffe (Policy Network, 14 May 2015) – www.policy-network.net/event/4002/Britains-cosmopolitan-future-challenges-and-opportunities.

The challenge then for the Liberal Democrats is clear. If liberalism is winning, why shouldn't we?

Sticking within the liberal mainstream ...

Perversely, the election disaster offers us an opportunity. For as long as the Liberal Democrats were a party of government and wished to continue as such, we faced an unappetising prospect: to do a deal with either the right-leaning Tories or left-leaning Labour. Our circumstances placed us inescapably in the split-the-difference centre, focusing on policies which might be acceptable to either potential partner. This partially explains our misplaced enthusiasm for continuing to raise the personal allowance to £12,500, a tax-cut we claimed would help low- and middle-income earners, despite clear evidence it was a riotously expensive policy (eventually £5bn a year) which would benefit wealthier households more than the poorest.⁵

However, our crushing experience of coalition makes it unlikely we will embrace it again in 2020 (should the voters give us the chance). This liberates us to pursue vital liberal causes even and especially when they clash with the 'Labservative' consensus – and, indeed, even and especially when they are minority positions. Just as we succeeded in shifting mental health from the fringes of public debate to centre-stage, so can we endeavour to position new liberal campaigns squarely in the mainstream.

Before highlighting such edgier policies, though – the ones I think speak to our liberalism and will help differentiate us in the now-crowded political market-place – I want to be crystal clear:

⁵ See 'Five things you need to know about the personal allowance increase' by Adam Corlett (Resolution Foundation, 17 March 2015) – www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/blog/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-personal-allowance-increase/.

the Liberal Democrats should stick resolutely within the liberal mainstream.

As with most political choices, I'm motivated by two reasons: pragmatism and principle. The pragmatism is probably least contentious. Elections are won from the centre and parties which forget that invariably lose. As Danny Finkelstein has noted of the voters who delivered David Cameron his unexpected majority:

*"It is wrong to think of them as Tories. These are people who just want a moderate, competent government which keeps the economy on track. One which ensures that there are decent public services that don't cost the earth."*⁶

A political party which doesn't persuade such people to vote for it — for 'a stronger economy, a fairer society', to coin a phrase — is destined to banish itself to the fringes. What of the principle of remaining within the liberal mainstream? To answer this, let me first pray in aid a quote from Edmund Fawcett's brilliant book, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea*,⁷ which reinforces how persuasion, compromise and tolerance are at the heart of the liberal ideal:

"Liberal politics aspires to openness and toleration, to settling matters by argument and compromise, to building coalitions rather than creating sects, and to recognising the inevitable existence of factions and interests without turning them into irreconcilable foes".

⁶ Danny Finkelstein, "'Shy Tories' are not really shy ... or Tory' (*The Times*, 13 May 2015).

⁷ Edmund Fawcett, *Liberalism: The Life of an Idea* (Princeton, 2014).

As for putting this pluralism into practice, Liberal Democrats have (1) long advocated free markets tempered by regulation to keep them competitive, protecting the rights both of workers and consumers, and (2) long been open to a mix of state and/or private provision of local and national public services, never dogmatic, often preferring a combination if that's what works best.

By definition, then, our approach on the two issues which matter most to the voters – the economy and public services – is liberal, rational, pragmatic, flexible, grown-up, balanced, centrist. This is, I suspect, the outlook which inspired so many of the party's new members to sign up.

And it is precisely this sane and judicious disposition which gives us the voters' permission to have a hearing on those issues – wealth and land taxes, civil liberties, drugs, the European Union, environmental sustainability, localism, immigration, prisoner rehabilitation, constitutional reform – where our radical ambitions, so fundamental to us, are either unpopular with, or irrelevant to, vast swathes of the population.

We are not only liberals, we are also democrats: let's not fixate on our own outlier enthusiasms to the exclusion of the liberal mainstream where we share a great deal of common ground with the voters.

...While championing a distinctive liberal offering

So what are these edgy policies which allow us to flaunt a bit of liberal leg to attract the growing constituency of cosmopolitan voters and enable us to live out our philosophy?

The party's new leader, Tim Farron, has said that we need to be realistic about the amount of public attention we'll now get and focus on three policy areas to champion. He's identified

housing, civil liberties, and climate change.⁸ Each has particular salience for the younger, more urban and educated voters, whose live-and-let-live spirit combined with a belief in progressive internationalism chimes with our party's values.

There are a further two areas – both of them touchstone issues for the mass of voters – on which I would hope the Liberal Democrats can make some noise in the next five years.

- Education is the closest thing we have to a silver bullet, a public policy which can lever open opportunity for all. For far too long, our party fixated on the wrong priority: abolishing tuition fees. As Vince Cable's 2010 reforms have demonstrated, it is possible to create a higher education finance system which is both fair to students and ensures our universities have the funding they need to thrive. Our focus and investment instead should have been on the early years, providing high-quality nursery and primary education which gives all our children the chance to succeed. The attainment gap separating rich and poor kids – which is in evidence at pre-school, then widens and perpetuates into later life inequalities – is a stain on our society, and one which Liberal Democrats must commit to ending.
- Immigration should be a source of pride to Britain: we attract some of the brightest and best from around the world because of this country's high international standing. And they put in – through their taxes and entrepreneurial drive – far more than they take out. So why not, as the think-tank British Future has proposed, create an 'Immigration Fund', hypothecating the financial gains from increased migration to directly manage some of the pressures communities and their

⁸ 'Tim Farron – Full Interview' (Liberal Reform, 15 June 2015) – www.liberalreform.org.uk/leadership-2015/tim-farron-full-interview/.

services face as a consequence of new arrivals?⁹ It is necessary, but not sufficient, simply to defend immigration from the scare-mongering of UKIP, the Tories and, increasingly, Labour. We need also to show we have fresh ideas which can respond to voters' concerns.

Conclusion

British society is moving in a more cosmopolitan direction, one attuned to our liberal philosophy. Our task is not simply to observe this phenomenon, but to shape it, applying our liberal values in practical ways to better the lives of those we seek to represent. We will need all of our optimism; but it's our realism that will matter most.

Stephen Tall was (Co-)Editor of the *Liberal Democrat Voice* website from 2007 to 2015. He edited the 2013 publication, *Coalition and Beyond: Liberal Reforms for the next Decade* and is a Research Associate at the think-tank *Centre Forum*. Stephen was a councillor for eight years in Oxford, 2000–08.

⁹ 'High net migration needs practical response, not distractions' (British Future, 20 May 2015) – <http://www.britishfuture.org/articles/net-migration-distraction/>.

8. Why I'm a Liberal Democrat

by Teena Lashmore

“The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.”

The preamble to the constitution sits neatly on many membership cards and is often quoted as the core value of being a Liberal Democrat. In this regard, in this personal essay in 2015, where I aim to briefly explore the meaning of being a Liberal Democrat through the lens of my own personal and political identity, I am relieved to find the statement sufficiently vague but philosophically open and inspirational.

In the wider context, the flexibility in the preamble is a blessing. It allows the party to breathe and reflect members' views. It allows people like me to bring my 'lived experience' to political debates. From a social position that is all too often absent from the internal and elected process, a position of historical and continued disadvantage, the Liberal Democrats hold a value that no one should be limited by the circumstances of their birth.

'What are Liberal Democrats fighting for and why', is both general and specific. Like many in the UK, I'd like a world where everyone is able to participate in the progression of their societies and cultures – where 'no one is enslaved by poverty'. To achieve this we have to prioritise our planet because without our universal home, our future and our children's future is unlikely to have the luxury and space to aspire to the same or any other social objective. Liberal Democrats have a track record of delivering policies that support our transition to energy systems that take us well into

the future and many of these are found in *The Green Book: New Directions for Liberals in Government* (2013).

This sustainable world-view naturally lends itself to challenge the violence bequeathed upon ordinary people who are displaced from country to country through war, climate change or corrupt political systems. Whether through courageous leaders like the late MP Charles Kennedy, who rallied against the Iraq War, or the party's current leader, Tim Farron who has expressed his commitment to ensure that those forced to migrate by such regimes are not vilified by our society, Liberal Democrats are at the forefront of these debates.

As an educated woman of colour faced with continued poverty and having to navigate sophisticated institutional racism in places of work and services, participating in a global city (London) that lacks homes for ordinary people earning 'ordinary salaries', I have a voice within the Liberal Democrats' movement for social justice and equality.

I challenge our economic and banking systems that favour privilege. These systems reward those who have more at the expense of those on 'ordinary' salaries – for example, banking systems that deliver lower interest rates on mortgages when you have bigger deposits. It is argued that these systems are preventing my generation from moving into home ownership (should we wish) and is also exacerbating the rental markets, especially in London. Do such systems enslave me to poverty? Not on their own, perhaps, but when added together there is a direct correlation with myself and my peers and our continued struggle to realise our full potential. This debate is captured in *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (2010).

Liberal Democrat's commitment to 'open markets' is seriously challenged by such economic systems because we aspire to fairness but know these systems are inherently unfair. Our

current banking systems allows for the continuation of a housing economy that is so far removed from our productive economy that it is an affront to our human dignity and incomes. Furthermore, many politicians are unaware of how these banking systems work. In 2014 Positive Money's poll revealed that only 1 in 10 MPs was able to explain how banks created money for our economy. Our capacity to 'objectively' debate alternative banking systems – ones that could operate for the 'greater social good' – is limited by our belief that open markets are best. Ironic, when you consider we have only five big banks running our economy!

Within social justice we have the loss of legal aid to challenge criminal matters in the courts. We are now seeing fines and other financial charges escalate to bailiffs and service fees within hours of the court orders being stamped by the clerks. It is extra punishment for those too poor to maintain a bank account to support their direct debits because their incomes are too low. Liberal Democrat trailblazers such as Vince Cable successfully pushed to increase people's salaries before they paid income tax, in an attempt to mediate economic disparities like these and although commendable, we have to do more.

Liberal Democrats are not homogenous in their views – for example, over the slicing and dicing of debts repackaged and re-sold to investors and the reselling of existing housing stock. This is the overly simplified outcome of our quantitative easing (QE) strategy after bailing out the banks. The benefits of QE, which was essentially used to stimulate financial markets, made very little impact upon my salary, my local economy and others on low incomes. Such QE strategies are argued to benefit the few (Positive Money, 2015). Despite knowing that these distortions are inherent in our financial systems and inflame social inequality, our commitment and values to 'open markets' brings forth our paralysis – how do we promote social good within distorted open markets?

Liberal Democrats aspire to equality within our own structures, and like most political parties, we struggle to achieve it. I suggest this is fundamentally because we have a limited reference point. We cannot look to others. To our credit, Liberal Democrats don't allow the 'race equality paralysis' to stifle internal and external debate and our SAO, Ethnic Minority Liberal Democrats (EMLD), is a progressive tool, constantly acting to challenge and push our party to achieve more.

For example, as a Vice Chair of EMLD, I stood against fellow peers to represent our party in local elections in London. I listened as my white male peers talked of the importance of equality, the benefits of equality, the desire to have greater participation within politics generally and within the internal party structures – ultimately their personal commitment (if elected), to ensure they would actively strive for equality. Given that we all had similar views about society and similar life skills, in true liberal-democratic style I pitched that as my peers are so committed to equality, which one of them was prepared to step down to allow me to go through? Although clumsy, the challenge for race equality was made, stimulating further debate about how we achieve it. At the leadership hustings in London in June, both Norman Lamb and Tim Farron spoke of their commitment to work with EMLD to achieve better equality precisely because it is 'illiberal' to continue the party structures as they are. London has the largest BAME communities and therefore the party cannot continue to be white and male.

As Liberal Democrats we constantly reflect, review and re-evaluate our broken pledge on tuition fees. We are acutely aware that education has the greatest return for lifting those born in poverty out of it. In this regard, I believe that student fees are a contradiction to our core values. From a party membership made from many teachers, it is clear that most Liberal Democrats support free education. When faced with the cold economic argument that education costs money but is

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a social good, Liberal Democrats made a pledge. But once the debate shifted into valuing education within a market-driven economy, Liberal Democrats negotiated for least harm.

When this is looked at in more detail and due to the differing earning patterns between men and women, most student fees taken by men will be paid back but only half of all women will pay back theirs. It can be argued that Liberal Democrats achieve our commitment to gender equality by hammering all students. Pushing education further into commercial markets is not just a gamble for the party but our country; this is explored further in *The Great University Gamble* (2013).

In closing this 'snap-shot' of what I believe it means to be a Liberal Democrats, I have exercised some critical reflection on my membership and my values, hopes and aspirations. I have chosen not to place my observations in the philosophical space that often dominates political discourse but to speak from a position of self, acutely aware that my views may not be shared. My political lens is unique to me and is informed by my experiences of exclusion and inclusion.

Being a Liberal Democrats is about constantly striving for dreams of equality and social justice and living within a society that improves every single day in some areas but moves backwards in others. Ultimately I am suggesting that we are aware of our contradictions. In summary, we are Liberal Democrats because we believe in freedoms and markets but we know that those systems need leadership and that that leadership should be informed by Liberal Democrats core values of equality and social justice.

Teena Lashmore is a criminologist living in Hackney. She campaigns hard for social housing in London and greener technologies globally. She has more than ten years' practice in rehabilitation services and safeguarding children and her ongoing doctorate looks at how justice systems are delivered

in communities. She is an anti-racism campaigner committed to the values of social justice.

9. Unlocking Liberalism

by Robert Brown, Nigel Lindsay and Gillian Gloyer

Our Philosophy

Charles Kennedy, in his typically generous foreword to *Unlocking Liberalism*, which we published in 2014 said, with regard to the ferment of ideas which is Liberalism:

“That essence must be recaptured because it is not on offer anywhere else in ... politics. It is grounded in our instinctive sense of radicalism and an inherent understanding that if we’re not prepared to live a little dangerously then the greater threat is that we end up not living at all.”

Liberalism is a cause and a movement, as well as the inspiration for political programmes. At its heart is a belief in the boundless potential of the human spirit. The philosophy of Liberalism covers a spectrum of interlocking concepts – freedom and the value of the individual, the importance of communities, equality before the law, a rounded conception of opportunity, a belief in the general and public interest rather than vested interests, a sense that politics and government are held in trust for the people, and that excesses of power and wealth are damaging to society and should be challenged, broken up or constrained.

Perhaps above all, Liberalism inspires and is infused by what used to be called ‘the spirit of a free people’ – the innate sense of generosity, optimism, fair play, cussed independence and respect for free speech which characterised Britain at its best.

Much of this rests on an understanding of the importance and nature of liberty. We need to recognise that one person’s liberty can sometimes impede that of others. A crucial challenge for us is the need to articulate social liberty, political

liberty and personal liberty as core parts of Liberalism, while rejecting vigorously the economic libertarianism that underlies current Conservative political thinking.

Freedom and the defence of personal and civil liberties – including the right of freedom from intrusion into one’s personal life by corporations or the state – have always been the bedrock of Liberalism. However, once the key basic freedoms have been made effective, Liberals must work to create the conditions in which each person can most fully exercise them and realise their own potential. As J.S. Mill emphasised, liberty is not merely an end in itself but a means by which a person can develop their own potential as a unique individual. So individual freedom is vastly diminished if people don’t have sufficient education, income and opportunity to make it effective.

Moreover, modern Liberalism embraces a concept of the individual that sees people not as isolated units but having ties and responsibilities to others in society. Hence our stress on localism and the importance of community politics, whereby grassroots campaigning for Liberal objectives is backed up by political action in elected bodies. The Liberal concept of citizenship is therefore one of active engagement, recognising that people when embedded in social relationships are not only more likely to contribute to the public good but are also more able to ‘exercise a full range of capabilities in a rounded life’.

These ideas place Liberalism unequivocally on the radical side of politics, challenging established views and complacency, fighting for those who are marginalised, supporting the liberating power of education, challenging arbitrary power, and insisting on accountability and ethics in our government and our society.

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Some of this poses awkward questions for Liberals. If we believe in using the power of the state to make it easier for citizens to realise their aspirations, what do we do if the state itself is controlled or heavily influenced by corporations whose aims are not concurrent with this? How can we create the conditions in which liberty exists and can be made valid, when interests more powerful than the government we hope to form are opposing action of this sort?

Founding principles of the constitution:

The stunning success of the SNP has cracked the constitutional basis of our country and threatens the very existence of the United Kingdom. Over the years, Liberal values have defined and moulded the UK, delivered a modernised concept of the social contract under the influence of Beveridge and Keynes and propagated a Liberal view of our history and our institutions which dominated our national story.

The United Kingdom now needs a fresh and more diverse narrative, not just of its own future shape and purpose, but of the way in which our political life is organised and understood – with a federal constitution which balances communities, state and federal rights within a partnership structure that aims to eliminate the evils of squalor, ignorance, poverty, lack of work and ill-health.

Federalism has, however, not yet breached the bastions of Westminster and Whitehall. Failing significant change in UK structures, the independence issue will come back to haunt us within a generation, just as Irish independence followed from the failure of Home Rule there over a century ago.

Contemporary Challenges

There is a sense today that some other contemporary challenges are also being sidestepped or found too difficult.

These include:

- The moral decay of an economic system that tends to widen the gap between rich and poor – and to justify it by appeals to ‘freedom’, as if freedom adhered to and was the right of markets, corporations and global institutions rather than of people.
- The unbalanced and inequitable nature of income, wealth, opportunity and reward, with its two equally obnoxious extremes: at the top, the obscene grossness of top executive pay – where the link between effort and reward has been entirely abandoned and there is little connection to people’s economic contribution or the broader public interest; at the bottom, the damaging and illiberal emergence of an underclass. Lack of life opportunities particularly damage and demotivate young people, with the demoralisation of repeated failed job applications, the loss of power and control over lives, the sense of worthlessness.
- The deficiencies of a global market economy, which allow the development of cartels and are a major cause of inequality, corruption, injustice and oppression in the world.
- The need to rebalance the nation to support the more human-scale values of more sparsely populated areas and reduce the over-dominance of London in our economic, social and financial policies.

- The central importance of human rights as a framework and test of our values, both at home and abroad.

Developing a New and Winning Narrative

We need urgently to renew a values-led political narrative that matches Liberalism to current challenges. We have a story to tell about breaking down unaccountable concentrations of power, about effective ways to challenge inequality, about expecting a more rigorous sense of public and personal ethics. Liberal Democrats have always believed that the way to redistribute resources is first to redistribute power. If power is shared fairly, a fairer distribution of wealth is likely to follow.

We believe this argument resonates with the public and that the party should again seek to become a voice for empowering communities, putting the general interest much more at the heart of the ethos and practice of companies, and standing on the side of those whose life chances are compromised by the actions of the greedy and the powerful and the social trends they produce. These things are the essence of Liberal democracy, the fulfilment of our defence of the rights of the individual.

We should also build on the concept of 'Locke Plus' – the aim of environmental, economic and political sustainability – giving body to the mandate of the state to hold public power on behalf of, and as trustee for, the people.

Above all, the narrative should help the debate be fought on our territory, not someone else's. It is perhaps not surprising that a party which spent sixty years in positioning itself as a party of the centre-left had some trouble in retaining support and membership in a coalition regarded as on the centre-right. But, beyond that, we must eschew the lazy and soggy thinking which saw us campaign as the halfway point between Labour and the Conservatives, a place without political values, the

ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* of the concept of the centre party.

Russell Johnston captured the essence and importance of Liberalism.

“Freedom simply for the self to do as he or she wants, if it is not joined with a responsibility to care for the freedom of others, is no more than the pursuit of privilege, the badge of Conservatism through the ages. There is no freedom for the poor.

... Liberalism has within it the dream that the good and the courageous spirit that resides within mankind can be given release.

It is for these things that we walk the wet streets; it is for these things that we commit our time and treasure; and it is these things that we will one day bring to pass.”¹⁰

Robert Brown, Gillian Gloyer and Nigel Lindsay were editors of The Little Yellow Book (2012) and Unlocking Liberalism: Life after the Coalition (2014).

*In 1977, **Robert Brown** was elected as the first Liberal councillor in modern times in Glasgow. He was Liberal Democrat MSP for Glasgow 1999–2011 and Deputy Minister for Education 2005–07. He is now lead candidate for Glasgow Region for the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections and a councillor on South Lanarkshire Council.*

***Gillian Gloyer** held various positions in the Scottish Young Liberals throughout the 1980s, including Chairperson 1985–*

¹⁰ *Just Russell – The collected speeches of Sir Russell Johnston MP 1979–1986 (Scottish Liberal Party, 1987) p. 56.*

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87. She has run voter education programmes, trained national and international election observers, advised national election commissions and observed electoral processes in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, the former Soviet Union and the Balkans.

Nigel Lindsay became the first Liberal member of Aberdeen city council in modern times. Fourteen years later, Liberals took control of the council and he became its Convener of Leisure and Recreation. He is now a member of Aberdeen University's Business Committee and is Treasurer of the European Movement in Scotland.

10. Charting a Liberal Course

by Jo Swinson

Why did you join the Liberal Democrats? Everyone has their own reasons. For me as a 17-year-old, it was two things: the party's focus on education, and commitment to a fairer voting system to fix our broken politics. I saw how our democracy wasn't working; I was angry that the constituency I lived in (Clydebank & Milngavie) would seemingly never elect anything but Labour MPs, even if the proverbial donkey with a red rosette were the candidate. Ironically, due to boundary changes and the seismic shift in Scottish politics, I ended up being the Liberal Democrat MP for my home area for ten years, and it is now represented by the SNP. Nonetheless, achieving a fairer voting system is still fundamentally important, an essential change for the foundation of a healthy democracy – simply, to make votes count.

A penny on income tax to increase spending on education was our flagship policy when I joined in 1997. It was less about the specifics of that particular policy – I was attracted by the big, bold message that education is the answer to so many of society's problems, and that's what government should prioritise. Whether it's building a thriving economy, reducing crime rates, achieving better health outcomes or enabling every individual to reach their full potential, improving education is a key part of the solution. I'm proud that in government we put this key principle into practice, with the pupil premium channelling billions extra directly to help the poorest pupils, and by extending free nursery education to ensure that we start early and make the biggest impact. And on tuition fees? Well, we should absolutely have somehow found the money to keep our pledge and not raise fees – and had it been later, once we were more experienced in how government budgets work, I don't think we would have made that mistake. However, for improving social mobility the early

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years is exactly the right place to target funds. Education should continue to be the cornerstone of our liberal offer, because it is about empowering individuals and is the best way the state can level the playing field in terms of life opportunities.

Other parts of our party's key philosophy are also dear to me, in particular our internationalism and commitment to the environment. Looking outwards as a nation speaks to our history, and is essential for our future in an increasingly interconnected world. Our humanity does not stop at our borders; as individuals we all have a mutual responsibility to one another. It's not an imperialist, 'Britain knows best' world-view, just a recognition that we share a planet with 7 billion others and can achieve more together, no matter how frustrating international organisations can be.

Growing up in the 1980s, environmental challenges included the hole in the ozone layer, acid rain, and the emergence of global warming. International cooperation on CFCs was remarkably effective to address the ozone layer problem. That should give us cause for cautious optimism that with the right political will, solutions can be found to tackle water scarcity, decarbonisation and adaptation to the degree of climate change that will now inevitably occur.

I always love the gasp of horror when I explain to schoolchildren that I grew up before the internet. In just a few years so many aspects of our lives, relationships and societies have been transformed; it's a huge understatement to say that the internet has been a game-changer. It can be a positive, democratising force: helping individuals to have more control over their lives and making previously complex and time-consuming tasks simple, connecting people to create collective power, and disrupting outdated economic and political models.

As liberals, it also presents big challenges for us. The time-saving convenience that makes life easier for the individual also means vast data collection that could concentrate massive power in the hands of the state or corporations. In some ways the internet is a place of ultimate freedom, but a lawless wild west with few rules and little regulation can also be disempowering: witness the pervasive, extreme and unchecked online misogyny, racism and homophobia or the intimidation of individuals by a rampant Twitter mob that doesn't stop to check facts before destroying lives.

Our liberal philosophy applies to individuals, but also to how we believe the economy should function. Free trade, flexibility and innovation are the products of a liberal approach and tend to be the underpinnings of successful economies too. The mutual responsibility that we have to one another as individuals also applies to businesses, though in some cases this has been lost with devastating consequences in a short-termist and unethical boardroom culture. Increasingly business recognises this – one of the CBI's current key areas of work is on the issue of trust – and government should support and help to lead this discovery of a new way of doing business. Rebuilding our post-crash economy is not about recreating what went before. Equally, a flourishing society needs to be based on sound economics: you can't spend what you don't have indefinitely. We must resist the urge that some parties have succumbed to of putting forward populist plans that don't make economic sense. Our economic credibility – so hard-won in government – should be nurtured.

Finally – and vitally – as liberals we simply cannot be content with a world riven with such systemic gender inequality. We want every individual to have the opportunity to thrive; yet culture, attitudes and power imbalances are constraining the talents and life chances of the majority of the population. In previous centuries, liberals led the charge to break down the old feudal systems designed to concentrate power in the

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hands of the minority of landed gentry to the detriment of the majority of common men. In this century, we should be at the forefront of the fight to change the old systems designed by men for men, and the surrounding culture that seeps into every aspect of our lives. Our party has had strong policies for women, but historically we haven't matched that with our internal culture and leadership. Tim's early move in appointing a diverse team of spokespeople is welcome as a first step in the necessary revolution in how our party does business when it comes to women.

In wider society equality laws are crucial, but getting them right is not even close to half of the battle. Gender stereotypes and cultural norms perpetuate gender inequality in countless ways, meshing tiny instances of sexism on top of each other like links in fine chainmail, each apparently insignificant but together almost impenetrable, and so intrinsic in our society that we often don't even see it. This throws up big questions about the roles of women and men in the workplace and at home, about how we can change the culture of gender inequality when we are all products of it ourselves. The solutions cannot only come from government – there is an urgent need for the exciting fourth wave of feminism to become a tsunami – but equally the role of government should not be restricted to protection of rights and the legal framework. In this area, the state should play a role in shaping a culture of gender equality, particularly through education.

It was half my lifetime ago when I joined our party, and yet we face similar challenges now as then. Sadly our politics is still broken, and improving education is as important as ever. Different times, new challenges, and a pressing need to chart a liberal course to the solutions.

***Jo Swinson** was Minister for Employment Relations, Consumer Affairs, Postal Services and Women & Equalities from 2012 to 2015. She introduced shared parental leave, brought in the Consumer Rights Act and legislated for gender*

pay transparency. She served as MP for East Dunbartonshire from 2005 to 2015.

11. Practical Liberalism

by Julia Goldsworthy

For me, (and I am sure countless other members), nothing better captures our party's principles than the preamble to our constitution. But the principles at the heart of our outlook – liberty, equality community – are brought to life by another dimension to Liberal Democracy: our activism.

It was not academic inspiration that propelled me to become a member fifteen years ago. It was seeing Liberal Democrats in action on my doorstep. Ultimately, it boiled down to deeds, not words. Practical liberalism.

I could see no other political party either with a better grasp of the local challenges we faced or working anywhere near as hard to address them. This mattered to me. So I joined up and I joined in.

Pavement politics looms large in our heritage and identity. The Penhaligon mantra of 'stick it on a piece of paper and shove it through a letterbox' still amounts to a significant chunk of what being a volunteer means to many party activists.

But after defeat in May, and with a much-diminished electoral base both locally and nationally, we must ask ourselves tough questions about both the message and the medium. Are our values still relevant, and if so, how can we best express them? Who is listening? How do we counteract the powerful forces that threaten liberalism, not just here in the UK but across the world?

In many countries, the politics of fear has won over hope. Faced with the dizzying pace of globalisation, with huge economic, social, environmental and technological forces at play, there is an obvious political appeal to introspection. Erecting barriers – both literal and metaphorical – create the

pretence of safety and security, when in reality they deliver the opposite. Fear of 'them,' whether it's the Scottish, the English, the Europeans or migrants, is used as a tool to galvanise 'us.' It's dangerous and divisive.

I believe that a liberal response should both be practical and give a human-scale perspective.

Winning the argument on our continued membership of the EU will depend on whether people can get a sense of the impact of 'Brexit' on their own jobs and local economy. Our housing crisis is better understood if we can put a face to the people unable to afford their own homes, or living in terrible conditions thanks to rogue landlords. Because our working age population cannot be boiled down into two simple categories, 'strivers' and 'scroungers', we must show how the welfare system can be reformed without demonising those that rely on it. Where there is a drive from conservative political forces to cast a 'them versus us' narrative, we must lead the way in repelling it.

It's the human-scale view that links localism so intimately with liberalism. Realising the full potential of the different parts of the United Kingdom requires an approach that embraces difference rather than trying to create uniformity. It's a belief that public services will better suit the individuals and communities they serve by fitting around them, rather than the other way around. It's practical liberalism in action.

Championing the liberal causes of individual and community empowerment and equality of opportunity doesn't just benefit the disadvantaged and powerless, it benefits us all.

Practical liberalism need not rely on building a new library of definitive policy on every possible issue. We must be discerning about the priorities we choose, because our policy positions don't just tell us what a party thinks on a specific

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issue, they provide a window on to our collective character and world view. Our most resonant policy decisions of the past – from 1p on income tax for education, to our opposition to the Iraq War, to our support, in coalition, for tuition fees increases – mobilised more people (for good or ill) with more impact than a dozen policy papers containing exhaustive detail on every issue. We must make a virtue of necessity, focus on what's really important and then make it count.

We cannot solely rely on our local government base and parliamentary party to deliver our message. To ensure that we survive as a national force, we must find new ways to fully mobilise our army of new and existing supporters. The Liberal Democrats may be the only British political party that places members and our conference as the ultimate arbiter of policy, but there is still more to do in engaging our wider membership in the process.

We should do all we can to ensure that their experiences shape our thinking, using the full power of their social networks to extend our reach, in their own words and through their own channels – online, in person and, yes, on pieces of paper shoved through people's letterboxes. It's an updated version of pavement politics and policy-making that encourages all our members, new and old, to play their part in the fightback.

When I say 'I am a Liberal Democrat,' I think about how our values shape my desire to make a difference to my local community. It's practical liberalism – trying to achieve that magical combination of ideas and activism, and knowing that every single member has a vital role to play.

***Julia Goldsworthy** was the Liberal Democrat MP for Falmouth and Camborne from 2005 to 2010. She worked in the coalition government as Special Adviser to Danny Alexander in HM Treasury until 2014. She was elected to the Federal Policy Committee from 2012 to 2014 and served on the Public Services Working Group.*

