

FOCUS ON FREEDOM

The Case For THE LIBERAL PARTY

By Michael Meadowcroft

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Introduction

Our world faces a far deeper crisis than politicians have so far dared to admit. It is not simply the ecological clock, remorselessly marking off the time still left to us after our exploitation of the earth's resources, but the erosion of the unique qualities of human existence and the progressive breakdown of civilised values. These two facets are linked: if men and women define success as acquisition, and thereby diminish the infinite diversity of human potential, then it is hardly surprising that society increasingly lacks the capacity for people to live together in peace and harmony, locally or globally. 'Ethnicity' has become the latest catchword for a very old scourge. Old scores are exposed and settled by violence between people who have been neighbours for decades, often in the name of an ethnic entity which cannot be clearly defined. 'Ethnic cleansing' is merely a cynically coined phrase, thought to sound better than 'pogrom' or 'expulsion', applied to vicious acts which are not confined to Bosnia or to Kosovo but which have also taken place in relatively recent years, albeit more quietly but no less shamefully, on our own doorstep in Belfast.

Politics have aided and abetted this decline in true standards of living. The politicians have tacitly assented to a definition of success measured in economic not human terms and have encouraged the fallacy that more and more cash can find its way into people's pockets if only the economy is manipulated aright. It is a seductive illusion but an illusion nonetheless and all three main parties in Britain, and the nationalists, have not only fostered it but have done so with increasing unanimity. Their appetite for power encourages a belief that it is impossible to tell people the palpable truth about the disasters ahead if to do so risks losing votes. Liberals reject the politics of selfishness and envy, of race and state, and of class, gender and privilege. We believe that in the Liberal philosophy alone lies the vision to enable our world to guarantee its future and the potential to draw people together to discover the means to make it happen. We are not so naïve as to believe that human nature can be changed but we do believe that individuals do not necessarily choose narrow self interest if the broader case for stability, security and sensitivity is argued persuasively. It is not that the case for Liberalism has been rejected, but rather that it has hardly had a hearing at all. There may be few 'natural' Liberals, but there are many more who will support Liberal solutions. If, as the merest observation makes all too evident, human beings are a combination of altruism and selfishness, then the politician's task is not to ignore reality, but to provide cogent reasons to enhance altruism and to diminish selfishness.

The influence of Liberalism in any society will always be diminished if its politics and its politicians resort to sloganising and to superficial answers to complex issues. The politics of the ‘focus group’ so beloved of new Labour, with its stress on finding responses that resonate with the public and then feeding them back to the electorate en masse, may initially win votes, but it will build neither understanding nor commitment. The eminent judge, Patrick Devlin, pointed out in a series of lectures published as *The Enforcement of Morals*, that juries do not act on prejudice but are respected and supported for their ability to come to sensible and rational judgements. This was, he argued, a direct result of three aspects of the judicial process: first, members of a jury are interdependent and reach a common verdict out of collective discussion; second, they hear the arguments expounded and tested in front of them; and, third, what they decide has a decisive effect.

Lord Devlin then compared this with an election, in which there was also the potential for the electoral jury - the voters - to come to a similar ‘right thinking’ decision, whatever the individual voter’s inherent prejudices. To create a mature and responsible politics, this wider jury required the same conditions on the grand scale as the jury had in the courtroom: the conditions in which there is discussion and debate of key issues, rather than voting being as if casting a solitary opinion poll vote; an election campaign in which the great issues of the day are treated as being worthy of intellectual rigour, and the electorate as deserving of intelligent consideration; and an electoral system in which the elector’s vote has real influence. Liberals will always take their chance in such a forum, in which their commitment to explain and their capacity to argue is always influential. However, the three main parties subscribe to a conspiracy in which argument is downgraded, news interviews are shorter and shorter, and where there is an almost total absence of inter-party debate. All this plays into the hands of those who rely on tactical voting to win the key seats, and who do not need to worry about the others, but it creates a culture of disinterest and uninvolvedness, which, in turn, restricts the opportunities for debate and discussion in which Liberalism thrives.

The end never justifies the means, and securing a majority in the House of Commons is an empty success if that victory is secured on the back of an increasing disillusion and cynicism with the whole democratic process. Voter turnout is at an all time low and the alarm bells ring loudly when one cannot even achieve a 30% turnout for a parliamentary by-election, when some local elections sink below 10%, and the European Parliament election turnout is derisory. Certainly, there are vital practical steps that can be taken, such as the introduction of an electoral system that eliminates safe seats and which enhances the accountability of MPs to their constituents, but a much more fundamental change of attitude is needed. It requires an acceptance of fallibility, an acknowledgement

that some problems do not have comprehensive solutions, and, above all, a return to political philosophy so that differences in their attitude to society become the ground for debate between the parties rather than the barren mudslinging which passes for campaigning today.

Liberals have always taken a very different view of society. We reject the Conservative and Socialist belief that the economic structure is paramount. We therefore reject attempts from both Right and Left to rely overwhelmingly on ensuring economic success, thus forcing individual men and women to conform to economic values rather than enjoy genuine human values. For Liberals, economics must always be the servant of society rather than its master. Fiscal policy is essentially pragmatic: how best to raise the resources required to pay for social policy, protection of the environment, and all the other requirements of government, whilst minimising the pain to the payers and the damage to industry. Of course, there will always be arguments on economics, but to elevate them to the expression of ideology is to fall into the false trap set by parties of the Right and the Left over generations. For Liberals the formula is “the market where possible, the state where necessary”. An unexpected opponent of market forces is George Soros, the manipulator of the international financial market and the founder of the Open Society Fund, who wrote in *The Guardian*:

I now fear that the untrammelled intensification of laissez-faire capitalism and the spread of market values into all areas of our life is endangering our open and democratic society. The main enemy of the open society, I believe, is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat.

What single initiative could encapsulate the eighteen years of Conservative rule more vividly than one of its final flings, the National Lottery? How typical of Conservatives to find a way of getting so many poor people to tax themselves voluntarily each week in order to make a few individuals rich, whilst virtually nationalising gambling, harming the ability of charities to raise their own funds, and making good causes increasingly dependent on a grant from national public bodies. Joe Rogaly, of the *Financial Times* summed it up:

There is nothing of worth in this crap game, no net gain for charities, no work of art saved or building erected that could not have been financed by less preposterous means, no true promise of glory for the millennium, no benefit to anyone save perhaps the shareholders of Camelotta Suckers, plc.

The debilitating philosophy of the lottery, with its seductive slogans, has by now permeated virtually every level of our society. It has the illusion of free choice

with the reality of control, and it hides behind the good causes helped through the lottery, as if their gain was achieved without damage elsewhere.

One could not have expected the incoming Labour regime, even if old Labour rather than new, to abolish the lottery but at least it could have been reined in and used more equitably. Instead Labour has permitted more draws and has subverted a substantial tranche of funds into projects which are clearly within the remit of government, and therefore outside even the lottery's own flexible rules. This is only one of a number of examples of the new government being so much in the same style as its predecessor that disillusionment is already beginning to set in amongst an electorate initially prepared to give it the benefit of a great deal of doubt. Labour must be relieved that the Conservatives are still in such disarray.

New Labour's failure is not simply that it has an eye to the main electoral chance nor that it has deliberately eschewed the path of grasping whole swathes of the legislative agenda to undo every Conservative mischief. Nor is it because it is as vicious as its Conservative predecessors - if anything it was overall marginally more humane early in its reign, before it realised it could get away with oppressing asylum seekers and other vulnerable people. It was doomed to disappoint from Day One because its sole great virtue of not being the Conservatives was grossly inadequate as an intellectual basis for political sustenance. As Education Minister Estelle Morris said on BBC2's *Newsnight* programme, "the Labour party does not have guiding ideology". Prime Minister Blair certainly meant well but without an underpinning political philosophy rooted in a consistent view of society and providing the frame for policy development, he is forced to resort to mere sloganising and to ever greater control of the agenda, and of his party, as a substitute for rigorous thought and for challenging debate. Professor David Marquand summed it up in the *New Statesman*:

... ideologically speaking, this is a Cabinet of zombies. ... New Labour became entirely self-referential. It existed in order to exist. Its purpose was to win and to go on winning. Hence the pagers, the focus groups, the incessant briefing and the obsession with control.

It is hardly surprising that it is all beginning to unravel. Individuals, particular the political activists amongst them, find that control and discipline from the top soon begins to chafe. The attempt to impose the leadership's candidate on to the Welsh Assembly - in direct contradiction to the very concept of devolution - backfired disastrously as the electorate gave its thumbs down verdict in the ballot box. In the aftermath of a lost vote of confidence in the Assembly, the unfortunate Alun Michael recognised the untenability of his position and honourably resigned, leaving the field to Rhodri Morgan, the original popular party choice.

Then, as if to demonstrate the truth of the old adage that those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it, the Labour leadership did precisely that in London. Another electoral college to deliver another selection ‘fix’ for Millbank’s choice. This time it delivered an even swifter and more disastrous retribution, with Ken Livingstone as the candidate widely perceived to have been cheated out of the official nomination, trouncing all the opposition as an independent. One awaits with interest Frank Dobson’s memoirs, though if they are ‘expletive deleted’ it is likely to be a somewhat slim volume.

Of course, much - too much perhaps - was expected of Labour in office by the electorate as a whole, and swift has been its disillusion, accompanied by apparent Labour bewilderment at this turn of events. Labour has wilfully squandered its opportunity to take the electorate into its confidence and to confront the great issues of the day. The euphoria of its election victory led to complacency rather than to statesmanship. This modest publication seeks to explain why new Labour could win votes but not hearts and minds, and to set out what the Liberal response is to our current debilitating political malaise.

A key aspect of political pluralism is the possibility of alternance in government. What is the electorate to think when it changes the party of government but ends up with much of the same? Without an electoral system with the potential of transforming Britain’s polity, that is, the way we are governed, the present cynicism about politics in general will increase the threat to our democratic future. The Liberal view is directly opposite that of new Labour. Power is not to be grasped and used as a manipulative tool, but is instead a necessary evil, to be watched carefully for its tendency to corrupt. Liberals recognise the danger in all concentrations of power, whether economic, social or political. The increasing abuse of power in Britain, both by central government in dictating to local government and manipulating the appointments to quangos, and by local government in imposing the ruling party’s will on all aspects of policy, has diminished pluralism to such an extent that democracy is now largely incapable of functioning under our present electoral system - a system which puts one or other party in office, however small their vote. Labour’s landslide parliamentary majority belies the fact that it obtained only 43.2% of the votes cast - only a slightly higher proportion than that obtained by the Conservatives in 1992 under John Major.

Today’s Giants

In 1944 Beveridge identified the domestic ‘Giants’ that had to be slain in order to build a better post-war society. Almost sixty years on, there are four new global ‘Giants’ which have to be tamed if democracy and civil society are to enter the new millennium with any prospect of worthwhile survival.

First, the advance of technology and of mechanisation has contributed enormously to the disappearance of jobs for millions of workers who could once have looked forward to apprenticeships in key trades and, with pride, to practical jobs in productive industries. This transformation of the past twenty-five years or so has had serious consequences for society. Unemployment, and, specifically, the lack of hope of future employment, has contributed significantly to the alienation of a whole sector of society, particularly amongst young people. It is not helped by the bewildering mismatch between optimistic economic figures and forecasts and the evidence of job losses on the ground. It is in the interest of the whole society that the means to offer a worthwhile and productive future to all are available.

Second, the ecological imperative requires urgent global action. It is clear that past and present policies of the developed world have caused immense damage to our environment, probably with permanent consequences. It is irresponsible and dangerous to continue to encourage consumption at levels which compound this felony, presumably in the belief that a party which tells the electorate the unpalatable truth will risk losing its support and, therefore, its chance of office.

Third, the desperate needs of the billions of people in the developing world cannot be met without substantial assistance from the rich countries. Thanks to the pervasiveness of international communication, the distress of those in extreme poverty, often without recourse to the basic needs of food and shelter, is no longer hidden from sight. Nor can the plight of refugees under inhuman regimes now be concealed from us. It is shaming to civilised societies that, for instance, in broad terms, the top quarter of the world can expect to live twice as long as the lowest quarter - a gap that is actually increasing as a consequence of the lethal effects of AIDS in Africa and South-East Asia. The campaign to cancel all third world debt in millennium year had a seductive charm and had a deserved measure of success, but it is crucial to ensure that the benefits go to local communities rather than to the central bureaucracy, not least to avoid lining the pockets of corrupt dictators still further.

There is an economic price to be paid to tackle these three 'Giants' and the cumulative bill will inevitably mean that first world countries cannot continue to expect to see economic growth. This itself has serious consequences for the future of western democracy, which currently shows no sign of being able to cope with economic decline.

The dependence on economic manipulation is not only wrong in principle but is also impossible in practice. The facts of modern life are that no country can determine its own economic future in isolation; that ecological imperatives outlaw economic bribery; and that global inequalities of resources destabilise global stability and security. To pretend otherwise is to ignore the obvious.

The fourth modern ‘Giant’ is somewhat different. In an increasing number of places the Liberal society is threatened by religious fundamentalism which would seek, in effect, to impose a form of theocratic rule. Such fundamentalists, whether in Iran or Israel, in India or Ireland, in the southern states of the USA, or in Afghanistan and Algeria - amongst the most dangerous countries in today’s world - wish to force the whole of society to adopt that which otherwise they are perfectly at liberty to persuade the individual to accept, on the legitimate argument that it is crucial to his or her personal life. It is, however, illegitimate and counter-productive to seek to impose by force what one cannot gain by argument. Such beliefs, mediated through fallible human beings, do not ultimately rest on the backing of reason and logic and are therefore unable to gain the willing consent of the wider public. The inevitable consequence is a recourse to repression and force. Consent is essential to the survival of democracy and can only be sustained within a civil society based on rational debate and democratic decision making. Paradoxically, it is also in the interest of religion that the state itself should be secular: beliefs enforced by law will not be rooted in hearts and minds. Liberals believe that civil society is not only the means of arriving at sustainable policies for communal living and of promoting pluralism, but is also the means by which individuals can be guaranteed their personal beliefs and the right to express them.

In addition to this crucial distinction between an individual’s faith and society’s rationality, there are also individual human rights which are clearly sometimes contravened in the pursuit of submission to religious orthodoxy. Liberalism insists that where religious rights are in conflict with an individual’s rights, such as in the abuse of women in some traditional muslim societies, human rights are paramount. Liberals’ defence of religious freedom does not extend to the denial of human rights in the name of an otherwise worthy cause. Nor is it a defence to state that such abuses are not formally sanctioned by the religion in question; if this is the case, it is up to those who bear high responsibility for that creed or denomination, to act to bring the abuse to an end.

Liberal Values

The answer to these challenges lies in Liberalism. For Liberals, the test of any society and of any economic policy is whether it enhances ‘life chances’; that is, does it give individuals greater opportunity to influence their own lives, to care for their families and friends, and to share fully in the life of the community? The capacity to answer these questions is, of course, affected by available resources but it is not intrinsically determined by them. Ours is not an economically determinist party. Quality is far more important than quantity. Our position was expressed in a 1974 Liberal Party Report:

Once the basic needs of food and shelter are met, the individual’s greatest satisfactions are to be found in love, trust

and friendship, in beauty, art and music, and in learning, none of which are served by the mythology of growth for its own sake.

It is because no-one else, and no other party, represents or advocates this crucial belief that the Liberal Party continues to exist as an independent and dedicated political party.

Politics and Parties

The past decade has seen remarkably parallel developments by the Labour and Conservative parties. Initially the Conservatives in office nationally dragged power back to the centre and forced their ideology on local government, and on the economic structure, by the sale of national assets and by the destruction of integrated education, housing and transport policies. Labour, where in power locally, centralised power in the local state and forced its ideology on the voluntary sector and sought to control all aspects of municipal life. As Professor Nicholas Deakin, head of the National Council for Voluntary Organisation's commission on the future of the voluntary sector, and himself a Labour supporter, said

Some of us started our voluntary sector lives dealing with old Labour local authorities, and what they wanted to do was to basically bash the life out of us.

For a time the two parties slowed down their parallel moves to the political extremes and, in pragmatic terms, began to move back towards the centre ground. Briefly they both sought to promote a similar air of moderation and respectability. But even now, under Labour, all the apparatus of political control remains in existence and continues to be used. The introduction of draconian laws to enforce the registration of political parties, the first time in the UK we have had an electoral system - at the European Parliament elections - without voting for candidates, the growth of appointed boards, the insidious use of publicly funded propaganda, the employment of 'place' people in key jobs, and the careful use of grants to entrench the ruling party's power, are all still being used. In their attitude to power there is nothing to choose between them and, sadly, the Liberal Democrats are increasingly members of the same closed Westminster shop. In an analysis of Labour's 'Third Way' in the *New Statesman*, Ralf Dahrendorf pointed out its lack of attention to liberty:

The Third Way is not about either open societies or liberty. There is indeed a curious authoritarian streak in it., and not just in practice. When [Professor Tony] Giddens speaks of a "second wave of democratisation" he has the deconstruction of

traditional democratic institutions in mind. Parliaments are outmoded; referenda and focus groups should take their place. Third Way reforms of the welfare state not only involve compulsory savings but above all the strict insistence on everyone, including the disabled and single mothers, working. Where normal employment - let alone desired employment - is not available, people have to be made to work by the withdrawal of benefits. The Blair-Schröder document contains, among others, the following curious statement: "The state should not row but steer". It should not provide the wherewithal, but determine the direction, in other words. It will no longer pay for things, but tell people what to do. Certainly the British experiment provides worrying illustrations of what this might mean.

The issue is of major importance at a time when there are too many authoritarian temptations in any case. [...] I wonder whether the curious silence about the fundamental value of a decent life, liberty - old, very old liberty if you wish - will not involuntarily make this political episode one further element in a dangerous development.

The end does not justify the means, whoever is in control, and it is false party solidarity to cover up the abuses of power by one's own colleagues. Pluralism is being ground between the millstones of party hegemony and the abuse of political power which threaten the survival of democracy locally and nationally.

During the 1992 parliament the most common new word in political circles was 'sleaze'. The reputation of MPs generally has been harmed still further by the highly publicised greed of the few who used their position to make money, and by the knowledge that a high proportion of MPs have (legitimate) paid consultancies. British politics has come to a sorry state of affairs when MPs have to be asked to give evidence on oath to a Parliamentary committee. Even the Liberal Democrats were foolish enough to hint to businessmen paying £195 for a lunch with local government representatives at its 1996 Conference, that it could help their introductions to those with council contracts to award. In government, despite its official hair shirts for all line, Labour has had an increasing amount of scandal, with Peter Mandelson, Geoffrey Robinson, Lord Irvine and Keith Vaz, to put it mildly, all involved in errors of judgement. Liberals support the Neill Committee and its recommendations and can see no justification for MPs making representations other than on behalf of an elected interest. Liberals also wish to strengthen the powers of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in order to enhance the reputation of parliament.

Increasingly the three main political parties are also dominated by their leaders. Internal party democracy is reduced and power is dangerously concentrated in the leader's office. Throughout the years of his leadership the Liberal Democrats publicised their party as 'Paddy Ashdown's Liberal Democrats', and Charles Kennedy shows no sign of changing the style. Tony Blair, in Hugo Young's words in *The Guardian*:

... seeks a reliable uniformity which the public cannot misunderstand: a party run from the centre, by the centre, for the centre, with a growing mass of faithful supporters content to be led where he wants to lead them.

As Paddy Ashdown's diaries show, he carried on with his 'project' with Tony Blair even when he had lost the support of his closest party allies. Tony Greaves has pointed out:

... both leaders were engaged in an audacious but fundamentally flawed attempt to manoeuvre their parties into a wholly new long-term strategy without the slightest attempt to gain the prior consent of those parties or even tell them what they were doing.

Such cavalier treatment of their respective parties and of their colleagues is symptomatic of today's political malaise. Political parties are important and they have a key role to play in promoting debate and discussion and in selecting candidates democratically. People are hardly going to commit time and energy to a party if the party is not respected and encouraged by its leader.

What of the Conservatives? To keep up with the times, they try to hype William Hague. Perhaps the Conservatives' predicament demonstrates with painful clarity the same malaise, when William Hague's perfectly workmanlike performances on the floor of the House of Commons are undermined by the embarrassing fact that he simply does not look like a party leader. He himself encourages the unhealthy trend from party to leader, not least by stressing, recently on BBC Radio 4, "we don't claim to have an ideology - the Conservative party is not based on ideology". But then perhaps there is no alternative. Former Conservative Minister, George Walden, put it bluntly:

Maybe there is no way forward for Conservatives in the foreseeable future, other than to whack the tin drum of nationalism till the drumsticks break in their hands.

A Hybrid Party

A party's policies should be based on its philosophy and should set out the process by which its aims are to be achieved. Unless means and ends are thus united, a party's integrity is fatally flawed. It is this that undermines the Liberal Democrats in their attempt to merge two competing philosophies. Social Democracy belongs within the socialist group of parties whereas Liberalism is part of the libertarian family of ideas. Because Social Democracy is itself a compromise, it is Liberalism that is inevitably most diminished within this hybrid party - however much it may try to cover up its past by eliminating the weasel word 'Social' from its name. Given its Social Democrat component it is hardly surprising that, with some honourable exceptions, the party barely exists in areas where Labour is dominant. Only one MP - Simon Hughes - is from a constituency where Labour would be the natural electoral threat. Nor is it surprising that the party has joined with Labour in support of a number of government measures to centralise power, such as the national curriculum, and the removal of further and higher education from local government. Interestingly, from comments by Phil Willis MP, who writes of "dictatorial impositions of national curriculum", the Lib Dems may at last be edging away from this millstone. Now that 'new' Labour has taken up the centre and has occupied the Social Democrats' territory - and, in so doing, drawn a stream of defectors back from the Liberal Democrats - it is Liberalism which needs to be stressed and which the very basis of the Liberal/Social Democrat merger prevents.

Accepting a need to join with Social Democracy on an equal basis within a single party involves an admission of weakness. Such an attitude of mind is not conducive to forcing the very different Liberal approach on to the current political agenda. There are, of course, those Liberals who as yet choose to stay within the Liberal Democrats, although, being apparently prepared to put up with whatever illiberal posture is adopted, their Liberal sensitivities appear to have been somewhat eroded. Their presence may suggest a veneer of Liberal respectability but a party must be judged by its record and by where it places itself politically. What is one to think when formally forthright radicals such as Gordon Lishman and Nick Harvey MP back Charles Kennedy and Menzies Campbell respectively in the post-Paddy leadership election? The election of 46 Liberal Democrat MPs in 1997 was, understandably, much hyped, but the curious fact is that, despite the luxury of a semblance of diversity this bestowed, the party appears to have no independent 'backbench' thought. If the unusual consensus this implies was of a Liberal hue one could indeed rejoice, but all the evidence is of support for illiberal electoral systems, assent to Labour's use of Downing Street seduction techniques, and backing for the NATO war machine. The Liberal Democrats remain flawed in principle and in practice.

All politics and all parties involve a measure of compromise. No individual wishing to be politically effective can achieve influence on his or her own. A political party must be sufficiently broad to be effective but sufficiently narrow to be cohesive. The traditional Left-Right spectrum was never relevant to Liberals and it remains today a dangerous barrier to political change. It dictates an economic view of politics which is inimical to Liberalism and to the changes in individual aspiration which are necessary for survival. Liberal Democrat terminology is revealing; Paddy Ashdown talked of having abandoned 'equidistance' between the two parties - a tactical error in itself - but since when have Liberals defined themselves in relation to the other parties?

The abandonment of 'equidistance' turned out to be a ploy to enable 'The Project' with Blair and with 'new Labour' to fledge. An enterprise so redolent of risk can only be justified by what it delivers and, sadly, the gains have turned out to be minimal. Constitutional reform is definitely welcome but it has been tainted by the adoption of flawed election systems which give the party bureaucracy still more power over candidatures. Similarly with the European election: the proportional system adopted was considerably less Liberal than even first-past-the-post. Not one of the new electoral opportunities has been endowed with preferential voting - supposedly the Liberal Democrats' preferred system. Was none of this foreseen by the party, nor by its enthusiastic leader? It is odd to embark on the political high wire act without assurance that one can reach the other side of the abyss.

The Ashdown leadership will in retrospect be seen as genuinely well-meaning but lacking in judgement; brave on Bosnia but flawed on philosophy. A decade of often capricious strategy seemingly lacking a foundation in a coherent set of beliefs that alone can provide a frame of reference and confidence in innovation. A dedication to risk taking in the interests of influence, politically legitimate in itself, but which has brought no lasting benefit to public policy nor to Liberal Democrat fortunes - and not even a formidable successor. The election of Charles Kennedy to the party leadership may well turn out to be a considerable error. The leadership vote was very illuminating. Of a Liberal Democrat membership now well below 100,000, only 60% were enthused sufficiently by any candidate to bother to vote. Four opponents of solid Liberal pedigree not only failed to dent the lead of the one candidate with an SDP background, but more of the transfers from excluded candidates went to Kennedy than to Simon Hughes in the final run off. To see the party objectively as any kind of Liberal Party requires credulity and compromise on an Olympian scale.

The lack of a radical Liberal presence on the mainstream political stage is not only stressed by the Liberal party, but has been commented upon by leading commentators. Hugo Young wrote in *The Guardian*:

There is a gap in the market for serious radicalism. No mainstream party dares have a truly radical idea about any environmental question. All confine themselves within a frightened consensus that refuses to challenge the philosophy of economic growth, however it touches on the non-economic aspects of society. None is capable of applying to the future of traffic a creativity that measures up to the coming crisis.

More glaring is the absence of a coherent challenge to large corporations. Corporate power is the prime beneficiary of Labour's evolution into a party of capitalism. [...] A gap in the political market opens up. Segments of the electorate await it. There's space for a forceful attack, rooted in ideas not gestures.

Will Hutton's highly pertinent piece in the *The Observer* also deserves repeating:

Liberalism has never had fewer public defenders or advocates. The conservative ascendancy established by Lady Thatcher has not been seriously challenged. The notion that New Labour has established a new consensus for higher public spending on health and education, and so begun to change the political weather rests on a confusion. There always was a consensus for higher quality public services. The issue was whether they should be financed by higher taxation or a greater role for the private sector; here the liberal case remains unheard, with its proponents on the defensive.

So, I am a liberal, but. ... there is no liberal elite. Rather, there is a liberal diaspora that lacks leadership. No politician speaks for us consistently and bravely; few articulate or defend the values in which we believe. Our alleged political friends hold us in as much contempt as our enemies.. ... Liberalism is a large constituency. In its commitment to fairness and democracy, it defines the best of what it means to be British. The pity is that so few are prepared to say so.

Tinkering with economic systems cannot produce the changes in attitude and the awareness of the need for changes in behaviour necessary in today's troubled world. It requires a philosophy that sees society in a different light entirely. Liberalism alone contains the answers to the world's problems and is urgently needed in our society today. Liberalism can only come through a Liberal Party championing a consistent and forthright liberalism. The chapters that follow attempt to set out the reasons why the Liberal Party and its candidates should be supported.

Chapter One

Constitutional Issues

The key to rescuing our world and our society from its suicidal course is the enhancement of the political process in order to make it possible for the greatest possible number of men and women to involve themselves in discussion and in decision making. In one sense politics is very straightforward, in that it is simply the means by which we enable children to learn, families to be housed, and individuals' health needs to be met. However, it is also extremely complex, in that international power relationships, for instance, require the bringing together of potentially irreconcilable demands for self-determination and for co-operation. Even social policy requires an understanding of the regular tension between legitimate personal aspiration and society's wider interests. Without a willingness to enter into debate and discussion, plus a commitment towards intellectual rigour - practical and academic - at every level, there is little chance that our deep political malaise will be resolved.

None of these issues are capable of resolution outside of a participative democracy. No society that exists under dictatorship or other type of authoritarian regime can ever be stable. Nor, in the long run, can a society flourish that is manipulated and marginalised by its electoral system as we are in Britain today. The British political system fiddles the election result usually in favour of the Conservative party, hitherto with the assent of the Labour party which hopes occasionally to benefit from its vagaries, as it did in 1997. Even some Liberals, temporarily suspending their critical faculties and ignoring historical evidence to the contrary, looked forward to the new Labour government's constitutional reform proposals. Alas, lacking an anchor in genuine participatory and accountable democracy, new Labour has been blown about by every passing wind of change, pausing only to make sure that the electoral systems for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the European Parliament elections, the Mayor of London and the new London authority, plus, one imagines, the proposals to be put in any eventual referendum on electing the Westminster parliament, will all ensure the continuation of sufficient party hegemony to placate the control freaks who keep the Labour show on the road. Only Northern Ireland where, presumably, politics are so fierce and democracy otherwise so fragile, that a genuinely healthy electoral system is essential, will have the benefits of the Single Transferable Vote - the only electoral system which effectively marries proportionality and accountability.

Electoral Systems

The present electoral system actively discourages intellectual thought, thereby inhibiting the very process which would undermine its continued existence. A simple plurality, or first-past-the-post, electoral system not only distorts the result nationally but also has two detrimental effects in each constituency. Either the seat is 'safe', in which case the Member of Parliament is effectively chosen by the dominant local party's nominating process, or it is a marginal seat, in which case the electors are urged to vote tactically and negatively, *against* the candidate or party most disliked, picking the candidate most likely to defeat him or her, rather than risk voting for their first preference.

The seriousness of the situation faced in this country, together with the immense international problems of fundamentalism, nationalism and exploitation of resources, cannot be overestimated. We shall not overcome the current problems, nor build a safe and sensitive civilisation, unless we have an electoral system which encourages debate and discussion and thus brings the electorate into an awareness of the problems and draws out their consent to the policies required for progress - however draconian. A reluctant and resentful populace, excluded from the decision making process, eventually makes the exercise of good government impossible. Liberals reject the elitist and patronising attitude which implies that only a certain select few know what is best for the rest of us. We seek an alert and involved citizenship, aware of how precarious is our current society and prepared to play its role in transforming the local neighbourhood into a strong, secure and co-operative community.

Parties themselves are increasingly part of the problem rather than of the solution. Political parties are crucial to democracy. Without parties, providing a home for those of like mind on broad political philosophy, and underpinning a participative but disciplined structure which can select and present candidates and manifestos, democracy would be ineffective, enfeebled and in hock to the loudest voice, the most charismatic leader, or the cynical bureaucrat. However, our party structure owes far more to the nineteenth than to the twenty-first century. Asking the existing major parties to welcome the diminution of their influence is akin to asking a poker player to turn in four aces.

The necessary reform of the style and structure of political parties to equip them to face the wholly different demands of the new millennium requires a level of courage and confidence on the part of party leaders that is not immediately apparent in the present occupants of high office. Given this natural reluctance to venture into the political unknown - at least in Britain - it is perhaps unsurprising, though deeply depressing, that Roy Jenkins' Independent Commission on the electoral system - in theory to be put up against first-past-the-post at the referendum promised in the 1997 Labour manifesto - had no confidence in the

ability of the supposedly sophisticated British electorate to cope with the Single Transferable Vote. The most promising opportunity for reform in seventy years was missed. Given the almost totally mute failure of the Liberal Democrats to understand the question, let alone the answer, it is small wonder that the Liberal Party recognises the need to continue its vital mission to maintain its witness to the values that have invested its stand throughout its history. The Liberal Democrats' abandonment of STV, and all that it implies in the style of parties and politics it favours, is its greatest flight from Liberalism. Electoral reform is not the same thing as proportional representation. Liberals want the former, the Liberal Democrats the latter.

The 'soundbite' culture, in which mere seconds are allotted to even the most complex issues, demeans the whole democratic process. The slanging matches of Parliamentary Question Time are often the only moments ever broadcast from the House of Commons and serve only to confirm the electors' cynical opinion of our elected representatives. But, alas, MPs know that attacking their opponents does them no *electoral* harm, whatever it does to their esteem, because the electoral system actually encourages the voter to vote negatively *against* the party he or she dislikes most rather than for a preferred candidate. The right change in the electoral system is the single act most likely to catalyse political change in Britain.

Liberals insist on the Single Transferable Vote (STV), with multi-member seats, in which the elector indicates his or her preferred candidates in order. Arithmetically, votes not required to elect a popular candidate, or votes otherwise 'wasted' on a candidate with no chance of winning, are re-distributed *pro rata*. This system, currently in use in the UK for European Parliament and municipal elections in Northern Ireland, as well as in countries as varied as Ireland, Australia, Malta and Estonia, produces the maximum amount possible of proportionality of outcome, coupled with accountability of the elected to their electors, equal value of votes, and effective choice between competing philosophies and potential governments. To win support candidates and their parties have to engage in serious discussion of the issues of the day and the implications of their policies. Because it is virtually impossible to vote negatively under STV, electors have every encouragement to ponder the candidates' and parties' views constructively. Because candidates want to secure the later preferences of those supporting others, STV also encourages consensual rather than adversarial politics. Seats would no longer be safe, nor would there be the blatant distortion of the result that exaggerates a government's majority and allows them to think that they can get any legislation they want through Parliament.

What is the use of ‘strong’ government in the House of Commons if, for instance, it only enables a party to enact the poll tax which the majority in the country refuse to accept? Effective government, whether single party or coalition, is that which reflects opinion in the country. All governments are coalition governments - some are open coalitions, under more proportional electoral systems, whereas others are closed coalitions, like our own in which the ‘first-past-the-post’ system requires large ‘broad church’ parties made up of different tendencies which the party tries to hide in the struggle to present itself as a united and uniform party. The Conservatives’ current divisions over Europe vividly illustrate the problem.

The Liberal Party opposes changes in the electoral system which simply emphasise proportional representation at the expense of accountability. Party lists systems - including the mixed ‘Added Member’ system used in Germany - remove the direct constituency link between the MP and the elector, and place far too much influence in the hands of the central party bureaucracy. The Liberal Party is unhappy with the present rigid whip system in Parliament, but party list voting systems give even more power to the whips, as the MP’s seat depends where he or she is placed on the list by the party, not on his or her support in a constituency. A whip system is essential for the effective management of Parliament but, given that STV gives the individual Member more authority, party solidarity needs to be earned, not imposed.

The further advantage of the Single Transferable Vote is its adaptability to different levels of government and to consultative bodies. Whereas under STV the House of Commons constituencies (varying between three and five MPs each, as in Ireland) could follow closely the natural local community boundaries, an elected second chamber to replace the House of Lords (with perhaps a total of 250 members) could easily have much larger constituencies, given that its primary purpose is as a revising and consultative chamber.

Labour may have been ‘new’ in enabling Scotland to have its Parliament and Wales its Assembly, but it has been decidedly ‘old’ - aided and abetted by the Liberal Democrats - in its imposition of electoral systems. The use of mixed list and constituency systems in both countries gives too much influence to the party over the executive whilst proffering the semblance of plurality. Still more unregenerate - ‘antique’ Labour perhaps - was the closed list adopted, again with Liberal Democrat support, for the European Parliament election. Not only did it enable Labour party bosses to get rid of a number of sitting MEPs, it also instituted the first British election ever in which the electors could not vote for any individual candidate.

To argue for a preferential voting system is not to split hairs between one proportional system and another. Liberals are not some quaint breed of obscurantists who are obsessed with a particular arithmetical exercise. There is a chasm of difference between preferential systems and both party list and first-past-the-post methods of electing MPs. Only preferential voting, under which, in effect, the elector makes up his or her own list, effectively provides both accountability and proportionality - and not only party proportionality but also gender, ethnic and any other sort of proportionality the electors may desire. Because the issues involved are so fundamental, the outcome of the Jenkins Commission on electoral systems was particularly disappointing. Inventing a totally new electoral system was fatal and gave an unsympathetic Government an excuse for delay. It is hardly surprising that there is no further Labour manifesto commitment and that the whole issue has been shelved for at least three years.

Electoral reform is urgent. The longer the present voting system continues the more there will be demands for referenda. Such demands are often based on the argument that parliament is unrepresentative of the electors' views. Being able to demonstrate that the electors' views are translated into representation within the House of Commons and other elected bodies, and that MPs are more accountable to their electors, will enhance the status of representative democracy and diminish the calls for referenda. In contrast to the Liberal Democrats who have called for a referendum on a common European currency - among other things - the Liberal Party opposes referenda in principle, believing that the democratic forum is the crucible of debate and decision making and that one referendum opens the door to demands for others and would dangerously undermine the democratic process. In addition, as pointed out by Ralf Dahrendorf, "governments cannot afford to lose them, Referenda are therefore only partly about the issue and largely about the popularity of the government at a brief moment in time".

Representative democracy is based on the concept of the consent given by the elector through the ballot box to be represented for a set period of time - up to five years in the case of the House of Commons. Those thus elected know that it is possible to take necessary but unpopular decisions early in the life of a Parliament, in the belief that their judgement will be proved right by the time they have to go back for a renewal of their mandate. Opening the door to referenda will increasingly make it impossible to take unpopular decisions, as one sees demonstrated in the USA.

Spreading Power

At the heart of Liberalism is the belief that concentration of power is invariably dangerous and that spreading power is the best guarantee of democracy and participation. Unlike other parties we are not obsessed with uniformity and we

envisage a devolved government structure which accords with the needs and desires of different countries, regions, and communities. Scotland, Wales and Cornwall need their own assemblies with varying levels of autonomy which reflect their strength and capacity in order to acknowledge their distinctive Celtic heritage. Scotland and Wales now have a measure of autonomy, but Cornwall's distinctiveness is as yet diminished. Many regions of England are also proud of their distinctive character and heritage and are well able to take over domestic powers from the existing regional arms of national government, if they so wish. Regional budgets, offices and officers already exist, but their accountability is to Ministers in London rather than to elected regional assemblies. The mish-mash of unitary local authorities has, in some areas, led to more appointed boards to cover strategic functions. Regional assemblies would be in a position to take over these key tasks.

Even within local government constitutional changes are taking place which militate against the 'mutual' basis of local councils and which institute structural changes in the name of efficiency without corresponding checks and balances. Centralising executive power, particularly in a directly elected mayoralty, without a strong legislature, is not going to enhance local democracy. Indeed, the Labour government has gone way beyond the Conservatives in emasculating democratic local government - even, apparently, under the Code of Local Government Conduct trying to prevent elected Councillors from campaigning on issues before they formally come before the Council! We now see privatisation of all education in particular local authorities as a result of a critical report from OfStEd, the government's monitoring organisation. Liberals are by no means opposed to the existence of a professional, fair and sensitive system of school inspection, but the resulting reports must be regarded as evidence on which the performance of the political administration of the education authority stands or falls at the ballot box rather than as an excuse to remove local responsibility. There is no point in local government, nor any incentive for men and women of ability to stand for election, if services are unilaterally removed from the arena, rather than encouraging the electors to exercise their judgement following local campaigns vitalised by relevant information.

Even the political process itself has been centralised by the current government. The registration of political parties - itself an unfortunate corollary of the European Parliament electoral system - has given considerable regulatory powers to party bureaucrats and introduced an overbearing bureaucracy into financial accounting. This, coupled with the increased use of financial deposits rather than reliance on supporting signatures, cynically gives unwarranted advantages to the present mainstream parties enabling them to bolster artificially their waning

public popularity.

To entrench a federal structure and to safeguard individual rights requires a written constitution and a Bill of Rights. Liberals recognise that no document can either fully encompass rights which are intrinsic to citizenship or enforce constitutional principles through a supreme court presided over by fallible human beings. Nevertheless it is our belief that the threat to individual rights and to democratic principles is now so great that the benefits of such legislation greatly outweigh the risks, and we supported the enactment of the Human Rights Act.

Also essential to participative democracy is the availability of information on which to base informed debate. British Government is by temperament highly secretive. The inclination is always to avoid the release of information. Liberals take the opposite view: every possible item of information should be in the public domain, exceptions being made only for material genuinely crucial to public security, for rare cases of legitimate commercial secrecy, and for the protection of personal privacy. In addition, in order to safeguard the independence and integrity of key facts and figures, Liberals would ensure that the country's statistical service was responsible to Parliament and not to the Government. A Freedom of Information Bill was one of the first promised pieces of Labour legislation to be postponed, and later diluted, by the incoming Labour government.

Alone of the political parties, Liberals on principle opposed the legislation outlawing so-called twin-tracking which prevents many able local government officials from being elected councillors in neighbouring authorities. We believe that any abuse must be dealt with by the local authority concerned and that to deny an individual's civil rights because of abuse by a minority is unjustified and illiberal. This is a classic Liberal issue, as was eventually recognised by Lib Dem MP Jackie Ballard, who publicly regretted having supported the legislation and wanted it repealed. Our aim is to encourage more men and women to be involved in local politics not fewer.

Constitutional reform, including changing the electoral system, devolution of power, community involvement, and freedom of information, is the key to the healthy democracy without which no other policies can be effective.

Chapter Two

The International Context

For Liberals it is wholly inadequate to relegate foreign affairs to a footnote or a tag-end chapter. Internationalism, and still more important, transnationalism, are the context within which all our thinking is viewed. We regard the lines on maps as being hindrances to world peace and world co-operation, indeed Liberals often have difficulty in recognising that the lines exist. Our eventual aim is a world authority, democratically elected with constitutional safeguards against the abuse of power, and we have traditionally seen the expanding European Union as the starting point for a wider union rather than as a super state. It is not inevitable that an international organisation has to be backed by state power in order to be effective. The arrangements for international mail are an example of mutuality in practice. Every country agrees, via the Universal Postal Union, the appropriate postal rates and then each respects all mail legitimately stamped in the other's country.

There is an appropriate level for the exercise of power. Liberals believe that it should always be at the lowest possible level, but for some issues, including the preservation of world peace and the protection of the global environment, transnational political organisation is crucial.

Alone of the parties the Liberal Party has always supported and campaigned for European unity, even though it has been disappointed with the illiberal nature of many key European institutions. Even from the beginning, in the 1950s, we did not see the then EEC as a rich man's club, formed to keep out challenges from the world outside. Instead Liberals saw the political opportunities as the key priority and had the vision to see in Europe the example of former enemies committing themselves to ever closer political and economic union. Today, with all its faults, the European Parliament is still the only democratically elected Assembly spanning more than one country. The idea of the nation state, self sufficient, culturally distinctive, and with natural boundaries is a dangerous myth and is inimical to world peace. Virtually no European country, including the United Kingdom, has had the same boundaries throughout even this century, and the concept of a natural right to defend national sovereignty is born of weakness and insecurity. The Liberal aim is for a Commonwealth of Europe, and divergent views of how this is best achieved have latterly led to demands to abandon the existing European structure, rather than to work from within.

The nonsense of the concept of sovereignty was beautifully illustrated by the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn in a story he told on the BBC's *Desert Island Discs* programme:

A man from Berehovo/Bergsasz arrives in heaven and they say to him that before he can come in he has to tell his life story. "Well", he says, "I was born in the Austro-Hungarian Empire - educated in Czechoslovakia - started work in Hungary and was for a time in Germany - spent most of my adult life in the Soviet Union, and the end of my retirement, just before coming here, in the Ukrainian Republic. "My goodness," they said, "You must have done a lot of travelling in your lifetime". "Not at all," says the man, "I never left Berehovo!"

Liberals welcome the growth of continental groupings, such as the OAS and the OAU and will encourage the movement away from dependence on the nation state. In its acceptance of appropriate levels of authority for different functions of government, and of the need to maintain a proper tension between them, the concept of federalism is essentially Liberal and it is a pity that the Maastricht Treaty does not advance it. Liberals opposed Maastricht first because it was too nationalistic and, second, because it promoted European Monetary Union at the expense of wider European unity. A single European currency is emotionally attractive for convinced Europeans but far more important is the expansion of the European ideal to the east. It was Liberals' stated wish to see the number of members of the European Union reach the target of twenty five by the millennium. This will not be achieved, and by thus lifting the threshold for entry ever higher, the obsession with the euro as the single currency has been part of the delay. In the words of Ralf Dahrendorf, "EMU erects a huge barrier between the 'ins' and the 'outs'". It is vital for the stability and security of Central and Eastern Europe to draw the new democracies into a genuine federal union on an equal basis.

Ireland

In the long run, it is within the context of federalism generally, and European unity specifically, that the continuing problem of Ireland can best be addressed. The increasing physical division of the community in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years, and the accompanying erosion of civil rights, created a desperate urgency for political action. Terrorism, from whatever quarter, should never be a cause of, nor a barrier to, political initiatives. The question was whether policies were just and whether they could be effective. The Prevention of Terrorism Act was never successful in its aims and had become itself a hindrance to progress. The presence of British troops was always divisive and was bound to inhibit policing by consent but the demands for the unilateral removal of British troops,

leaving a vacuum, could not of itself have assisted the situation, given that there are upwards of 40,000 Northern Irish men already trained by the UDR or the RUC who would still be there, the majority of whom are 'loyalists'.

Liberals acknowledge the commitment of all those who signed the 1998 Good Friday agreement and note how far the peace process has advanced. We are, however, concerned at evidence of its fragility and urge a continuing emphasis on formulae for de-commissioning which will enable staged abandonment of weapons and materials rather than accept the present compromise as permanent. We called for changes in the Republic's Constitution in order to remove obstacles to the settlement of the Irish problem and are delighted that this was done.

In the longer term Liberals see British adherence to the Schengen agreement, which removes internal border controls within the EU as a means of bringing an important new dimension to internal constitutional arrangements in Ireland. Healthy European unity is a further opportunity for reconciliation between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and for progress towards unity in Ireland. Liberals wish to see the erosion of the divisive educational system in Northern Ireland which ensures that the majority of children grow up without broader, informal contacts with those outside their own community.

The burden borne by the people of Northern Ireland is heavier than most people outside the island realise. In *pro rata* population terms, deaths from terrorism alone would be the equivalent of 120,000 in the whole UK - or over half a million in the USA. It is inconceivable that such figures would have been permitted there without consistent and innovative intervention. The current peace process must succeed.

Development Aid

For Liberals the gross imbalance between rich and poor regions of the world is not only a human scandal but also a destabilising cancer. If the richer nations continue to defend their wealth and to preserve their privileges, the urgent task of rescuing the planet from ecological collapse will be fatally postponed. There is no real possibility of the developed countries increasing their material wealth without exploiting natural resources beyond their capacity to regenerate. And there is no way they can preserve their wealth without risking revolution by those thereby denied the basics of life. So long as material well-being is regarded as the criterion of human success so long will the world put at risk finding real and lasting fulfilment. Liberals have always recognised that the uniqueness of human society is to be found in a different dimension to the mechanical pursuit of wealth and power. The party's famous *Yellow Book* of 1928 put it clearly:

We believe with a passionate faith that the end of all political

and economic action is not the perfecting or perpetuation of this or that piece of mechanism or organisation, but that individual men and women may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.

In many parts of the world men and women are still without the resources for meeting basic needs. Liberals would increase official aid to such countries to 0.7% of GNP (from the current 0.4%) and would negotiate the cancellation of Third World debt which is absorbing disproportionate amounts of those countries' resources, thereby inhibiting their development. It has to be negotiated, rather than simply cancelled universally, in order to avoid further funds going into the personal pockets of those leaders who have exploited their own countries' meagre resources. Liberals consistently opposed the extension of the protectionist Multi Fibre Arrangement and instead supported firmer WTO regulations against the 'dumping' of finished products at prices below their cost of production.

The Conservative government's squalid legislation made it harder for refugees to secure a safe haven in Britain - including, for instance, banning the offer of permanent housing to those seeking asylum. Now the Labour government plans to increase the hardship and misery of refugees. Their changes have include the replacement of financial assistance by food and clothing vouchers. It has been estimated by those involved in refugee work, that refugees will be expected to survive here on 30% less than the Government's own level of income support. Sadly, many parts of the world have regimes that exact retribution on political opponents or on those from different backgrounds. It is important that Britain welcomes its share of refugees, particularly those who have Commonwealth links with us. Liberals see freedom of movement as an important right and we welcome the ending of barriers within the European Union as a prelude to their eventual but gradual disappearance worldwide. Because there are currently so many restrictions on movement between countries, their removal overnight in a single operation would provoke immigration to Britain at an artificially high level. We would therefore timetable a planned removal of barriers. If there is any validity in the argument that there would be a flood of economic refugees, it simply highlights the huge gap between rich and poor. It is far more important to bridge that gap at source than to push it out of sight by maintaining draconian immigration laws.

The incorporation of Hong Kong into mainland China has gone relatively calmly. The tardy introduction of representative democracy there by Britain provided an excuse for the dismantling of much of what was formerly in place. Liberals note that the Basic Law, agreed with Beijing, envisaged the eventual election of the whole Legislative Council, and we call on China to implement this agreement. The compromise on the mixed electoral base of the new authority for Hong Kong

is undemocratic and unsatisfactory. It is clear from the election results in the section conducted under a full franchise, that Hong Kong residents still have confidence in the same democratic principles as before, and it is wrong that their wishes should be thwarted by the authorities. We also note that Hong Kong within China will contribute no less than 17% of China's Gross Domestic Product and that it is not in China's interests to undermine the basis of Hong Kong's economy. Now that the transfer has gone ahead it is still incumbent on the United Kingdom to permit any Hong Kong citizen resident there before the incorporation to come to Britain if he or she is discriminated against.

Common Security

Liberals saw 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, as an opportunity to look again at the requirements of the world and to consider the UN's role in preserving global peace and survival. Five years on from that anniversary, the Millennium is a further opportunity to transform the way the world manages its global imperatives. We envisage a more democratic UN, with a broader based and more accountable Security Council, and with a new and democratic Second Assembly based on people rather than governments. We wish to see the introduction of a genuine World Court, to which all UN members subscribe, able to enforce UN decisions instead of leaving it to individual countries to risk war and annihilation. The recent moves to establish an International Criminal court may well be a worthwhile first step.

In contrast to other European governments, particularly the French, Labour has been supine in the face of aggressive American policy. This was alarming enough with the Clinton administration but it will become extremely embarrassing with President George W Bush in the White House. We particularly oppose the Bush administration's renewal of support for the National Missile Defence project. Not only is it technically discredited but it is highly provocative to the Russians who wish to be, and who need to be, drawn closer into co-operation in European defence and foreign policy, particularly in regard to the Balkans.

The situation in the former Yugoslavia reflects little credit on Western Europe. The German pressure on the EU to recognise Croatia, and the failure of Britain and other EU members to withstand such pressure, made the ensuing ethnic debacle more likely.

Liberals support the continuation of the UN presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina to support the provisions of the Dayton Agreement, to ensure the effective implementation of successive elections, and to guarantee security for future elections. We recognise also the importance of the OSCE role in the Balkans as the only organisation to which all European countries currently belong on an

equal basis, and we support the strengthening of its involvement in the enhancement of democratic institutions and human rights.

The Kosovo situation continues to be appalling. When Milosovic came to power he presided over a country that stretched from Germany to Greece. When finally voted out of office, he had only Serbia and a reluctant Montenegro left - and not even 'Greater Serbia' at that. His intentions towards the huge majority of Kosovars of Albanian background had been clear for years, and yet nothing effective was done to prevent him from turning threats into action. Eventually, faced with the evidence of brutal ethnic cleansing by the Serb Yugoslav security forces, NATO acted. No UN mandate was possible, given the historic and emotional sympathy of the Russians for the Serbs, and therefore NATO acted on its own authority, and commenced an aerial bombardment. As many of us warned in advance, this proved counter-productive. It unified Serbia behind Milosovic and enabled him to accelerate ethnic cleansing and thus add to the trauma of the Albanian Kosovars. It is putting great stress on Albania, and its aftermath is now destabilising Macedonia. An understandable view that 'something must be done' became transformed into 'anything must be done', and the 'anything' has proved disastrous.

The vast might of the whole NATO armoury was visited daily on this small European state for week after week without apparent political or even geographic gain. NATO still faces the immense problem of how it can extricate itself without appearing to lose what it sought to gain by bombing. Peace-making and peace-keeping forces are still required on the ground in Kosovo but it is a difficult terrain to secure. The key to the solution of the Kosovo situation always lay in the hands of the Russians. A deal brokered with Milosovic by the Russians, with a large UN force containing a substantial Russian contingent, was always the only chance of bringing some sort of peace to the region and was only resorted to far too late in the day. It has not been possible to bring any kind of 'peace' without some painful de facto partition of Kosovo - whatever that partition is called. Now the Serbs domiciled in Kosovo require protection from the Albanian majority. The European Union must urgently find a constitutional process which enables the former Yugoslavia, if not the whole Balkans, to enjoy at least some of the benefits and security of a federal structure encompassing all the disputed areas.

For Liberals, defence is subsidiary to foreign policy. For far too long the defence machine has dominated policy making and has inhibited peace making and the development of transnational political linkages. Even when the circumstances have disappeared on which huge belligerent structures have been based, the defence industry simply moves the goal posts to preserve its hegemony of fear. NATO was needed, so we were always told, because the Warsaw Pact was a threat. The Warsaw Pact has now been formally disbanded and there is no

military threat from Eastern Europe. But NATO and its nuclear weapons remain as an embarrassment and a shame to all intelligent and caring individuals in the west. We would disband NATO and move instead into a combined European Security Force as a means of contributing to the United Nations' responsibilities for international policing and peace keeping. Liberals support the proposals of Brigadier Michael Harbottle and The Centre for International Peacebuilding for an entirely different perception of the holistic use of the armed forces an international means of preserving and building peace.

We wish to maintain only conventional forces, professional, well equipped, well trained and sufficient only to fulfil our legitimate roles. We put the greatest emphasis on the rule of law, international as well as national, and would therefore follow every avenue of diplomacy, non-military action and negotiation, including recourse to international arbitration and enforcement, before embarking on military force.

The Liberal party has always supported the rights of the Palestinians to peace and security within Palestine. We support the key United Nations resolutions and urge members of the UN to act to make them effective. This applies in particular to the USA whose economic support of Israel has encouraged it to maintain its colonial and expansionist policies in the West Bank and Gaza. The initial Oslo peace initiative, which included the Palestinians' acceptance of Israel's right to exist, had - and, for that matter, still has - a real basis for a permanent agreement for the region. Alas, it was undermined by the continued expansion of Israeli settlements and the building of protected 'by passes' to preserve their presence. The existence of Israel is an acknowledged fact and, given Liberal views on freedom of movement, immigration into the area is acceptable in principle, provided it is not to the detriment of those already discriminated against in the area. The present violent situation is catastrophic. Israel's actions are hugely provocative, and the Palestinians' response is extreme. There is, alas, no possibility of peace until Israel ceases to continue, let alone extend, actions which are perceived by the Palestinians to be those of a military occupation force. 'Maquis' have always felt justified in taking action against those who occupy their land and who enforce draconian and oppressive measures. This is not to justify any act of terrorism but to point to the sad reality that prevents moves towards peace, security and mutual respect.

The Liberal Party was opposed to the launching of the Gulf War. We condemned the invasion of Kuwait and the Iraqi regime's tyranny over its own people, but we did not believe that UN sanctions and non-military pressure had been exhausted, nor that military action would resolve the future of the Gulf. The results have justified that position. The cost of restoring Kuwait to the Al-Sabah family's undemocratic regime was immense, both in lives and in ecological damage.

Meanwhile Saddam Hussain still remains in power in Iraq, and the Iraqi people, and particularly the Kurds in the north and the Shi'i'a in the south, are still suffering.

The plight of the Kurds is an international scandal. 22 million people are at best second class citizens and at worst an oppressed and physically threatened minority in the different countries they have for centuries inhabited. Liberals support the active role of the International Red Cross under Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, underpinned by the power of the UN Security Council, to guarantee the safety and eventual self-government of the Kurds.

The Kurds' situation is but one example of the disastrous consequences of the belief in the nation state and in national sovereignty. In Europe, the break up of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia are far from being examples of the progressive onward march of human civilisation. They are, in fact, the result of a narrow and selfish nationalism that would seek to defend the cultural purity of the majority and, by extension, to discriminate against minorities. No culture worth its name, particularly if dominant numerically, needs the state to provide a guarantee for it to flourish. No culture worth defending can be undermined by opposition or by criticism. The state's role is to guarantee the freedom of belief and of expression. The right to religious faith, even fundamentalist belief, is individually protected, even if collectively expressed. Thus the Liberal state is a pluralist, civil state, and Liberal politics must be secular and be based on reason and on logic. The Liberal society is one in which all faiths and beliefs can be practised and expressed without fear or favour.

Nationalism and Racism

Equally, Liberals reject all forms of nationalist or racist discrimination. History is littered with the bloody consequences of attempts to assert the supremacy of one race over another. It is impossible either to categorise racial groups or to draw exclusive lines between one group and another. Attempts to do so, and to blame minorities for the common ills of modern society, undermine the linkages that exist naturally within human society and prevent the possibility of resolving the very real problems that threaten the survival of democracy.

The current 'in' word is ethnicity, incapable of any precise definition, but able to justify, for those who profess it, any atrocity in the name of 'purity' and 'security'. There is no future in any emphasis on separate identity, however defined, which relies on the fatal doctrine of 'might is right' to impose the dominance of one community over another. It is impossible, never mind illiberal and inhumane, to devise a way of compartmentalising territory. Mobility and intermarriage ensure the blurring of any attempt to secure 'homelands', as even

the previous apartheid South African regime had eventually to recognise.

Liberals welcome the worldwide trend towards pluralist democracy and are pledged to assist its entrenchment. We support the United Nations, the Commonwealth, regional groupings such as the OAU and the OAS, and recognised NGOs, in their supporting and enabling roles. We support the provision of technical assistance and of international monitoring teams to new and emerging democracies but are concerned to offer continuing assistance *after* polling day in order to help in the political development of the country.

Chapter Three

Ecology, the Economy and Work

Perhaps the most artificial - and dangerous - political debate is whether one party or another can organise the British economy to enable it to grow and to provide material benefits to a majority of the population. It is artificial in that less and less can be done by a single country to promote its own economy at the expense of another; it is dangerous in that the ecological price of ever greater western affluence is global disaster.

Other British political parties have come closer and closer together on economic policy. The Labour Party has abandoned any pretence that a socialist planned economy is possible, and, as the Conservatives under John Major quietly cast off elements of the Thatcherite mantle, the Liberal Democrats opportunistically rushed to put it on, espousing what Professor David Marquand (before he rejoined Labour!) called 'free market fetishism'. The Liberal Party, unlike the Liberal Democrats, still believes in "political liberalism and not ... what is claimed as economic liberalism by latter-day Conservatives in Britain and the United States". (*Liberal Values for a New Decade, 1980*)

None of these other parties is apparently prepared to risk possible electoral unpopularity by telling the electorate the unpalatable but necessary truth that the world's resources cannot even support a continuation of the present rate of economic consumption let alone cope with an increase. Given that millions of the world's poorest people lack even the bare necessities of survival it follows inexorably that global survival requires a reduction in consumption by the richer nations - including Britain.

The green imperative poses an immense political problem: human society is intrinsically anti-ecology. Virtually every human activity, from house building to medical intervention, runs counter to the natural order. We go to great lengths to keep ourselves alive and to dominate and organise the natural world. The global means of feeding this voracious human appetite have virtually been exhausted and yet, in the face of overwhelming evidence, the politicians shy away from telling the electorate the unpalatable truth. However, whether electorally damaging or not, reality has to be faced: this planet can no longer sustain the desire of materialistic human society for ever more consumer goods. For the sake of future generations we must collectively decide to concentrate on essentials, to be increasingly involved in cultural and social activities, and to opt out of the rat

race.

Democracy and/or Sustainability?

The political challenge posed is immense. Will electors willingly vote to reduce their personal standard of living? Is any western democracy able to plan for longer than one parliament? As Robert Hutchison asked Liberal colleagues way back in 1988: “Democracy and sustainability may not be compatible but if we cannot reconcile them, who else can?” Whether it is possible or not should not deter those who believe they have to be reconcilable. Liberals will continue to make the case for survival and for human values. Architect Richard - now Lord - Rogers put it very clearly in an interview:

The crisis we now face is that our scientific and financial potential has outstripped our ethical and social resources. To live in harmony, our tremendous advances in science must be matched by an ethical and culturally-equivalent development. The scramble for profit and power must not be allowed to erode our civilisation and destroy our beautiful planet. Humankind has created art, philosophy and science. They are the most beautiful, most enlightened and most enduring achievements.

Frankly, it is a question of either materialism or survival. The choice we make affects future generations more directly than ever before. It is all too easy for those comfortably off to preach poverty to everyone else. Survival will depend on producing a sufficient economic surplus, with as little ecological damage as possible, to enable everyone to enjoy the basics. This will require the comfortably off to forego a measure of comfort. In return we may all be more attuned to human rather than economic values. In the end this cannot be a loss, but getting there may well be traumatic.

The ecological disaster facing us requires significant changes to lifestyles and to material expectations generally, but at the same time we recognise the need to take pragmatic measures towards eliminating pollution and for the protection of the environment. This includes the principle of taxing industrial polluters, investing in research into ‘clean’ technology, and enforcing rigorous policies to protect land quality and reduce soil erosion.

The dire warnings and the rigorous prescription might suggest a warmth towards the Green party. Emotionally, perhaps, but intellectually, no. Paradoxically, the stronger a green party, per se, the more dangerous for the environment. A party whose entire existence is predicated on the ecological imperative is as

economically determinist as any socialist or Thatcherite party, albeit in a more benign direction, and has all the authoritarian tendencies and the diminishing of personal choice that come with the territory. Human beings have to be persuaded, not forced, and any attempt to enforce, for instance, a draconian population policy - often argued as necessary in strict ecological terms - would run slap up against civil liberties and human rights. Even more stark is the challenge a green party in government would pose to the crucial democratic principle of alternance. If ecological verities resided only in a green party, which would need to be the case for it to have a high level of support, how could that party relinquish power to any party opposed to that fundamental truth? The ecological reality must imbue all political parties, and invest all their policies, for as Ralf Dahrendorf has pointed out, the Green party is the party to end all parties.

International Interdependence

It was once possible to pursue a successful, albeit selfish, economic policy by exploiting weaker countries, notably one's colonies. That view led Conservative and Labour parties, and, sadly, the Liberal Democrats, to support measures such as the Multi Fibre Arrangement which hindered the export of third world textiles into Britain. The Liberal Party believes that honesty compels one to oppose protectionism in practice as well as in theory. In reality the end of imperialism, the continuing relative economic strength of South East Asia, and the interlinked structure of the modern world makes such exploitation virtually impossible - unless, with callous disregard for future generations, one plunders further the rain forests and other essentials to global survival. In stark terms the choice before the British elector is to turn rapidly to very different - human - values from the economic values that have for so long been Western capitalist society's measure of success. Otherwise we risk accelerating the breakdown of key resources that are essential to survival. The historic division between Left and Right that has dominated politics for virtually two centuries has been based on two opposing economic systems, socialist and capitalist - 'command' and 'demand' - and is now vividly obsolete.

The Liberal Party has always seen how power is exercised as its political touchstone and has therefore never been an economic determinist party, i.e. it has rejected a view of politics that makes individual human beings conform to an economic system rather than the reverse. It therefore regards economic policy as essentially pragmatic rather than doctrinaire. The accuracy and relevance of this position is clearly seen today: just as the failure of the command economies of Eastern Europe and much of Africa have demonstrably failed, so the viciousness of unfettered economic competition has been recognised. Liberals believe that it is necessary to accept the interdependence of national and international economies and that it is legitimate for government to intervene both to ensure that basic needs are met and to take economic action to ensure optimum performance within

accepted global ecological limitations. Such international measures are essential for stable and secure progress in the developing world.

There is no intrinsic guarantee that a particular country - or the world as a whole - will necessarily ever emerge from recession nor avoid falling into it again. The interdependence of the western developed economies ensures that no single country can so manipulate the different economic levers as to gain sufficient advantage over its competitors. Also no American or European government has yet had the political courage to admit the impossibility of indefinite economic growth or the inevitable and horrific consequences of an ever-increasing national debt. Liberals accept that the change in lifestyle and in expectations necessary for survival are not going to come overnight and that it is necessary to find ways of softening the short-term economic blow. The only significant available source of public money lies in drastic reduction of military expenditure. For the UK, just as for the USA, it is imperative that the opportunity to cut the money spent on defence without risk to security be grasped immediately. In this context it is untenable for the UK government, supported by both Liberal Democrat and Labour parties, to commit £42 billion on the new Eurofighter aircraft.

In looking forward to a united and integrated Commonwealth of Europe, probably, and eventually, for good or ill, with a single European currency, the economic consequences that that entails have to be accepted. The price to the existing members of bringing Central and Eastern Europe within the European Community will be high, but it is essential to recognise that there is little likelihood of pan-European stability emerging without substantial economic assistance from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia.

The unification of East and West Germany was only achieved with a massive subsidy from West Germany, still being paid as an extra tax of around 7.5% per annum. There are still substantial imbalances between the former East and West German states but at least there was a commitment and a determination to make unification work. Alas, in the rest of Central and Eastern Europe there has been very little similar commitment to ensuring a stable, secure and, above all, united Europe. The postwar Marshall Plan was, of course, of benefit to the USA, but the American investment in war-ravaged Europe for Europe's benefit was vast. Where is today's George Marshall? Where is today's visionary able to see the urgent need for financial underpinning of the former Soviet Union and its satellites? Certainly pan-European stability is in the interests of the West, but it is, above all, crucial to the survival of healthy democracy in the East. Whilst he was a Conservative MEP Sir Fred Catherwood made the case in the European Parliament, arguing that the amount of cash required was around 10% of what NATO spends annually on weapons. Now, the only individual who comes close to fulfilling this prophetic task is George Soros, who, by skilful manipulation of western economies is able to put substantial sums into projects in Central and

Eastern Europe, as a kind of latter-day Robin Hood. Soros recently commented:

.... tremendous progress is being made at the same time as tremendous mistakes are being made - opportunities missed, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was one of the great opportunities for a transformation similar to the one that occurred in West Germany and Japan after the Second World War. When I look at that I get, well, not despondent, but impatient.

Creating Employment

One of the most destabilising and debilitating facets of the past two decades in Britain was the existence of up to four million men and women without paid employment, more or less existing on state benefits. Happily the currently quoted figure is much less than this but it is difficult to determine with any certainty quite what the true figure is of 'unemployed wishing to be employed'. At the same time as we have unemployment there has been a deterioration in public services and a serious decline in manufacturing. It demonstrates a massive failure of political will and of innovation that it has not been possible to bring together public needs and private skills. The total cost of each unemployed adult to the public purse, taking into account loss of tax, increased health costs etc, is around £12,000 per year. At this figure many unemployed men and women could create their own work if encouraged to do so.

Investment in training, with the reintroduction of recognised trade apprenticeships, the improvement of independently managed district training boards, more flexible working patterns and properly funded schemes to bring the long term unemployed back into mainstream economic activity are all urgently required.

Liberals would also support the simple and straightforward principle that any group of unemployed men and women able to come forward with a scheme for new work would be supported financially if the gross cost was less than the estimated national gross cost of unemployment. In other words, if a group produced a scheme for a craft workshop, an environmental improvement project, a neighbourhood warden scheme, a community drama programme, or any similar idea, for which the gross costs were currently less than the £12,000 or so per year cost per person unemployed, it should be examined to ensure that it was beneficial to the community generally and that it was neither job substitution nor undercutting existing production. If it passed these simple tests the scheme should be able to go ahead with support and monitoring from a local unit bringing

together the Chamber of Commerce, the Trades Council and the main voluntary agencies.

A further way of assisting people into employment is to raise drastically the 'disregard' figure, i.e. the income point at which an unemployed person begins to lose benefit. At the moment it is at a derisory figure and should be lifted. This would remove the disincentive to do part-time work and legitimise much work currently done 'on the side' in the informal economy. The so-called 'black' economy provides many examples of the resourcefulness of unemployed men and women. It is all too easy to condemn this activity, rather than seeking ways of bringing it into the 'white' economy.

Liberals wish to link the social security and taxation systems into a single 'Tax Credit' scheme so that basic anti-poverty measures are automatically applied when income drops below prescribed levels, and tax is deducted when income rises into the different tax bands. This would remove the need for multiple form filling and the latest self-assessment for income tax could be extended. Additional benefits relating to special needs should be applied on a discretionary basis, subject to appeal by the client on the grounds of reasonableness.

Although some such local projects might well grow into larger enterprises there will still always be a need for development assistance to existing manufacturing. Without a vibrant manufacturing sector there will, in the longer term, be a decline in jobs in the service sector. Liberals support the provision of preferential capital, on a longer term than banks can often provide, where local professional assessment indicates viability and appropriate development prospects.

Even a cursory glance around our neighbourhoods shows up a myriad of beneficial tasks that need doing. Liberals believe that there is no shortage of work but a shortage of employment. The task of the politicians is transform work into employment for all those who seek it. The ideas and proposals above will go a long way towards building a society in which individuals, and the community generally, find employment of the widest possible variety and in which every individual's work contributes towards the economic and social life of the whole community.

Chapter Four

Security and Stability

Despite all past evidence to the contrary, there was still a faint residual glimmer of faith that Labour in office would instinctively favour a progressive line on at least some law and order issues. That was, of course, before Jack Straw, whilst still Shadow Home Secretary, began to focus on street corner ‘squeegee kids’ as a legitimate target for the whole weight of establishment wrath. Having then gone along with the Conservatives in agreeing that Chief Constables should be empowered to authorise the surveillance and bugging of suspects - rescued only, for once, by the Liberal Democrats and the law lords - his subsequent performance in office is no surprise. What is a surprise is the alarmingly reactionary instinctive reaction of Tony Blair towards delinquents and young criminals in the face of overwhelming evidence on the ineffectiveness of repressive policies.

The Labour Government has essentially continued down the Conservatives rightward and repressive path. The restriction of access to legal aid, the abandonment of the right to jury trial in a wide range of cases, the fruitless pursuit of World War II war criminals, the attack on privacy - including CCTV in public places and the move towards internet surveillance - the tacit acceptance of the wholly counter-productive witch-hunt of paedophiles, the inhuman treatment of asylum seekers, the proposal to build up and retain a bank of DNA samples from those suspected of offences, curfews, and the abandonment of the principle of double jeopardy, make up a sad commentary on a once radical party.

Of course, recorded crime rose faster over the last ten years of the Tory Government than at any comparable period in history. We still have the highest ever ratio of police to population and the highest ever crime rate. It was arrogance of an astonishing order for the Conservatives to claim that they were the party of law and order in the face of the clearest evidence to the contrary. Despite manifest proof that draconian sentencing and harsh penal regimes have neither a deterrent effect nor contribute towards rehabilitation, the Conservatives persisted in pandering to public opinion, which believes the opposite, by countering each new crime of the moment by introducing even tougher penalties. Such blatant cynicism and disregard for the obvious in the pursuit of power demeaned the reputation of those who know better and debases a party that can rely on such effrontery. Ann Widdecombe, with her “something of the night about him” speech

dishing of Michael Howard's leadership chances, at least did the country a favour by ending the career of the most opportunistic Home Secretary in a long time.

The Big Issue, now sold weekly in many northern towns in addition to London, is the most visible innovation able to prove that constructive responses to homelessness have greater potential for success than repression and exhortation. With its associated practical initiatives it illustrates the Liberal belief that the voluntary sector is often the most fruitful source of innovation.

The only effective deterrent to crime is the high likelihood of being caught, a key aid to which is the active opposition of a neighbourhood to anti-social behaviour. The awareness that the identity of the burglar or thief or robber or worse is not only known but will always be willingly supplied to the police ensures the impracticality, if not the immorality, of crime. Traditionally most crime detection has been by the public and an increasing fear of reprisal and retaliation is undermining public confidence with disastrous consequences. Self-policing of the community by the community is crucial. Not in a narrowly repressive or capricious way but through a healthy and confident neighbourhood inspiring co-operative attitudes and inhibiting exploitation and viciousness. Crime thrives in the atmosphere of anonymity and fear that has been bred and planned into our communities over the past thirty years of foolish and illiberal development policies of both Labour and Conservative administrations in Whitehall and Town Hall. The wanton demolition of close knit communities and their replacement by often bizarre arrangements of houses, with a lack of communal facilities or even of any obvious focal point, has enabled criminal elements to thrive. It is important to commence policies for the longer term which will support strong neighbourhoods with facilities for community activities and action.

If Conservative cynicism was deplorable, Labour's blinkered reductionism is almost as dangerous. Crime cannot be put down to social conditions quite so simplistically as Labour would pretend. Of course they play a part, as does the Thatcherite motto of having an eye to the main chance - and its leader's highly significant incantation that "there is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families" - but to over-emphasise social conditions denies both the element of individual culpability and the need to maintain and enhance those neighbourhood linkages that are vital for the promotion of the community's highest aspirations.

Community Politics

Because it has an awareness of the centrality of human values in politics, and the role of the community in enhancing them, rather than being based on an economic imperative, Liberalism has always understood the need to assist rather than to

retard the dynamism of the community. This view does not require an idealised view of individual motivation, indeed, Liberalism has the most rational view of the duality of human nature and of the competing tendencies towards both altruism and selfishness within each of us. However, even with the awareness that a local neighbourhood can all too often engender wildly illiberal prejudices, Liberals see the collective spirit of the community as providing the best guarantee of the promotion of the altruistic element within us and of the inhibition of selfishness.

At its best the Liberal philosophy of Community Politics is much more than a technique for winning local council seats and is a means of enabling the community to take increasing responsibility for its own affairs. To reverse the current trend towards a siege society in the face of increasing lawlessness will require an immense commitment on the part of those who care. In particular it requires a determination to identify with the community by living within it and sharing its life. At the moment virtually everyone who 'serves' those areas that have the worst social and physical conditions commutes to them. The doctor, the social worker, the teacher, and the politician usually live elsewhere, arrive first thing in the morning to tell everyone how to live and then dash back to their leafy suburbs. Even the shopkeeper and the church minister increasingly live away from their patch. The Community Constable, who is vitally important to the security of an area, invariably has far too big an area to cover to be able to have a sufficient personal effect on it and also often commutes to it. The rapid turnover of Community Constables is a further handicap: they need to be sufficiently long 'in post' to build up confidence within the community. It is the immersion in an area that comes from belonging to it by residence that is the key factor.

The Inner City

Even 'good' education has contributed to the disintegration of our urban communities. Educational 'success' has very often provided the means by which young people have been able to move away. Indeed the schools themselves have all too often fostered such an image of achievement. Good examination results have perforated society so that a handful of children can climb through the holes, leaving behind a community bereft of many of its natural leaders. An *Economist* article dating from the 1981 urban riots is still highly relevant and should be read in full. Nick Harmon, himself then a Brixton resident, wrote:

One common aspect of the riot areas is that all have suffered for decades because politicians and their planning advisers have removed from them their natural community leaders. Local councils have used central government funds to buy up, often compulsorily, anyone with a financial stake in the community -

home-owners, shop-keepers, landlords, small businessmen - to add their property to the council's land bank pending comprehensive redevelopment. Such individuals are the first to be offered the money and favourable housing nominations to move out of the area, if only because they are the most independent and mobile citizens. The effect has been to break the economic and social ties which bind the community together, ties which also help to police it.

It is these 'ties', he argues, which are far more significant than the massive infrastructure investment which, he points out, has gone into these areas. In the same article Harmon writes about the "unofficial network of vigilance" of locally accepted figures of authority or "recognised people 'occupying' the street". He goes on:

Without these people, policing is in effect an act of urban colonialism and mass hooliganism requires a police invasion to suppress it. It was this secondary control which. .. broke down in a number of cities.

Planning policies, financial assistance to underpin key services - preferably by grant aid to voluntary bodies rather than direct council administration - community transport, recognition of the vital importance of premises run by the community, and democratic representative democracy at local level, are all ingredients of a Liberal policy for a secure, aware and relaxed society.

The Liberal society, and the Liberal community are no easy options. They demand considerable commitment from all their citizens and great sacrifice from their leaders. But there is no alternative. The choices are stark. Either we continue down the miserable cul-de-sac of the siege society in which every house and every flat has to be a fortress against the intruder, and in which people turn inwards on themselves and cease to believe in a future without anxiety. Or we have an outward looking community, confident of its ability at best to deter those who might seek to undermine it or at worst to know and identify those who break society's vital code of personal privacy and security.

The latest panacea is the closed circuit television camera watching our every movement. There are already 150,000 and around a million elsewhere in the country, and the Labour government has put £150 million into their further provision by local authorities. We are regaled with newspaper stories of how the existence of CCTV assisted the detection of a particular crime. It is, of course, quite possible that a specific crime is resolved thanks to CCTV, but at what price? There is no evidence that CCTV overall contributes to the improvement of law

and order, though there is support for the logical view that it contributes to a displacement of criminal activity to areas without surveillance cameras. The inevitable consequence of dependence on this technique is the presence of surveillance cameras everywhere. If followed, George Orwell's nightmare would be only some twenty years late. A new £1.9m camera system in Liverpool will enable "Police and council officials to monitor almost every person and car leaving the city centre". To depend on CCTV is to deal with symptoms rather than the disease itself, and deflects attention from positive policies.. There is no ultimate solution to crime and to anti-social behaviour without tackling its causes and without inhibiting it by community pressure and community policing.

It needs to be stated clearly that, even if CCTV were shown to be highly effective, Liberals would continue to oppose its presence root and branch. The presence of surveillance cameras in public places is an unacceptable and intolerable intrusion into the every day life of every citizen. The potential for misuse is palpably clear to anyone who knows their way around the internet - or indeed their way to video stores where tapes compiled from CCTV are sold under the counter. And, even taking the pragmatic argument at face value, the cameras are a miserable and counterproductive substitute for genuine community involvement in the prevention and detection of crime. The Liberal imperative is that "in all spheres it puts freedom first"; in their active support for surveillance cameras in public places, the Liberal Democrats demonstrate their distance from this essential Liberal value. Not surprising in a book remarkably weak on civil liberties as a whole, William Wallace advocated "the increased use of closed-circuit television" in his 1997 election book *Why Vote Liberal Democrat?* Why indeed.

The breakdown of law and order does not arrive on one single night on each of our doorsteps fully-fledged in all its malign vigour. It creeps up imperceptibly and incrementally. It begins with litter left in the streets and then graffiti on shop walls. Next comes the mindless vandalism of the smashed bus shelter windows and petty theft. If these become commonplace it is but a short step to burglary and robbery. 'Zero tolerance' is a highly plausible but deeply flawed slogan. It fails to differentiate between wilful culpability and naïve mischief, and has no understanding of the need for police discretion and judgement. It fills penal institutions with the mad and the sad, as well as the bad, and gives the prison staff an impossible task, which very quickly drifts from rehabilitation to containment. There is no time left to dawdle on these matters. Every urban community, and many rural communities, will already recognise how far down this spiral they have slipped. The naïve and cynical mental straitjackets of Labour and Conservative have failed. The future life of our cities depends on the Liberal strategy of building upwards from the strong neighbourhood and the confident community.

Chapter Five

Health, Housing, Education and The Arts

Health, housing and education are rightly regarded as essential services. Indeed, a civilisation can, to a great extent, be judged by its commitment to ensuring the quality of such key services for its people. A country's lack of resources to guarantee them is one crucial reason for development aid from those who can. Though every politician must be committed to health care, to individual dwellings, and to educational programmes for all, there can never be an absolute right to a specific provision. Unlike the right to, say, equality of treatment under the law, the individual's needs vary from one person to another and the state has the right to balance the community's wider needs against the individual's demands. For instance, the desire of an infirm person to have a detached bungalow has to be measured against the need to protect the environment from losing every square inch of open space to housing.

HEALTH AND THE NHS

Health service provision is a political minefield. Though it has produced some of the most heated political debate over recent years, there has been an almost total failure to acknowledge the truth about this key issue. In short, the National Health Service has never delivered what the public believes it has, and nor can it ever fulfil the aim of equal availability of treatment for all, free at the point of delivery. It is partly, but not entirely, a question of resources. A great deal of medical provision is hugely expensive. Innovation is particularly costly. New surgical techniques, particularly relating to transplantation, use up a disproportionate amount of available resources. It is simply not feasible to suggest that every amazing new technique can thereafter be available to all.

No budget is infinite and if the brilliant consultants engaged in glamorous hi-tech work are able to secure a disproportionate amount of financial support, it can in the end only be at the expense of other patients requiring less dramatic work. Given that this latter work is usually far less expensive there will be many more such patients denied treatment. The media, and some of its best respected personalities are, alas, very culpable. It makes exceptionally good television to spotlight a child likely to die for want of some possible, but not necessarily appropriate, massive intervention. The media concentration on the scandalous or the miraculous is disastrous for the NHS. It is impossible to resist such 'shroud

waving' and, inevitably, the health authorities capitulate, or a donor or benefactor comes forward, and the child is whisked off for treatment here or in some other country. Rarely is the outcome justified but the media is far less interested in the trauma caused to the patient by such intervention and on the often deleterious effects on his or her family. It is the brief moment of outrage at the apparent insensitivity of the NHS which makes good television, not the long patient counselling of the bereaved which all too often has to follow the ephemeral triumph of hope over clinical judgement and professional care.

Sadly, those who die as a result of this skewing of resources are not around to debate the issue of priorities with the individual whose life has been prolonged by some amazing new technique. It is all too easy to command television time and many column inches in the newspapers for the remarkable innovation that can only help the few rather than the routine work that many more desperately need. It is also inevitable, given the current decision making structure, that pouring more finance into the present health service structure would simply mirror this skewed perception of need and widen the disparity between services for the few and for the many, and between cure and prevention. Politicians have to grapple with the legislative consequences of technological medical advances increasingly running ahead of nature. It may well be exceptionally difficult - and electorally dangerous - to determine the framework of law within which tough decisions can be made, but it would be cowardice to dodge the issues.

At the heart of the problem of health provision is the separation of the power to tax from the power to spend. The individual clinician orders the treatment for the patient but has no means of producing the resources to carry it out. The last Conservative Government's highly flawed idea of giving some general practitioners control over their own budgets was one attempt to deal with this problem. However, not least because there is very limited scope for GPs to increase the sums available, it does not prevent cries of 'scandal' when one person rather than another is treated. Nor does it encourage assessment of priorities for health spending. Nor is the 'NHS Direct' initiative helping the situation, being described by Dr Ed Walker, an Accident and Emergency specialist in Yorkshire, as "the 21st century's health service equivalent of the Emperor's New Clothes. ... a complete fiasco. An expensive scam designed to fool the majority of the populace".

The Labour Government has at least recognised the flawed aspects of GP fund holding but has gone down the tired old road of throwing money at the hospital waiting list. Temporarily reducing the time spent waiting for treatment may well produce the occasional headline but it is hugely expensive, and, taken in the round, ineffective. It encourages the manipulation of figures by NHS executives,

the curtailing of important, and often vital care in hospital, and penalises the good consultant whose lists will, and no doubt should, be longer than the less good.

The political dilemma was sharply focused by Polly Toynbee in an article in *The Independent*:

People react in an infantile way to any hint of shortages in the NHS because politicians have treated the debate in an infantile way. The Opposition relishes every scare story about a child who is not getting some fantastically expensive, painful treatment with very low odds of recovery. The Government is too cowardly to be honest about the dilemmas.

The present system clearly inhibits public discussion of extremely delicate but important health issues. Science has increasingly extended the limits of medical possibility so that many patients who would once have died can now be saved. This is, of course, good news - until ethical decisions are involved about continuing life beyond the 'natural' point at which questions on the quality of the subsequent life have to be faced. Statistics do not always encourage constructive discussion of such difficult questions and it is always easier for politicians to use the figures to bang the drum for more resources, particularly if their area appears to lag behind. The most traumatic and personal area is probably that of perinatal mortality. The general rate has been improving for some time but it is not changing uniformly. As is often the case with health matters, social conditions clearly play a part in determining the rate of such infant deaths, but the question is increasingly being raised of whether there is, in effect, a level below which it is not generally ethically justified to go in saving tiny lives, even though science possesses the medical ability to do so. Parents and others who know the effect of such skills at first hand are amongst those raising the question - in, for instance, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's journal *Search*, giving information about children and their parents receiving help from the Family Fund. These are immensely delicate and difficult issues but it is political cowardice therefore to avoid discussing them.

Another example is that of prescribing medicines. There is considerable evidence that many current prescriptions are unnecessary and that some are even damaging health. Doctors fiercely guard their clinical freedom to prescribe even though they may well prefer to wean their patients away from a belief that they are not receiving proper treatment unless they leave the surgery with a prescription. Basing the payment of pharmacists so much on the number and value of prescriptions dispensed actually encourages over-prescribing. Liberals would change the basis of payment to reduce the over-dependence on dispensing prescriptions, thus also recognising the pharmacist's important front-line role in

the provision of health advice. We would also extend the limited list for NHS prescribing, which would both benefit patients and save money.

Liberals believe that it is time to engage the public in an extended and serious debate on health in which these and other matters can be addressed. Liberals pioneered the National Health Service and the Liberal Party is appalled at its present condition and at what passes for political debate on what is literally a matter of life and death. One way or another, rationing of provision will take place; the choice before us is basically whether to make deliberate decisions on priorities or to hide behind the waiting list. 'Positive Health' is the objective of our health policy, with the NHS as the primary provider of medical care and advice. Private practice cannot be outlawed but, with changing attitudes towards health, and consequent improvements in the NHS, it ought to supplement the NHS rather than provide an alternative for the better off. Public health, prevention of illness, allergy testing, and basic care services that benefit the many must generally take priority over technological advances which at best can only help the few.

Preventative Care

Liberals support the concept of care in the community, as opposed to care in large institutions, but it is vital that such care is adequately funded. We recognise that more funding is required for the care of elderly, disabled, and mentally ill people, and for the rehabilitation of the increasing numbers of those - and their families - suffering from drug and alcohol abuse. Care in the community, on its current basis, has blatantly failed a number of vulnerable or even dangerous individuals. Historically the concept of 'asylum' was not pejorative, and nor should it be today. If society is unwilling or unable to provide the quality of community care to guarantee 'asylum' for those who need it, quite apart from the great potential for their personal development outside of institutional care, then it is of no benefit to the individual, nor the community, willy-nilly to force them out of an otherwise secure environment. Liberals would encourage more partnership arrangements with the voluntary sector which can usually provide more diverse and flexible opportunities for individuals needing residential and day care.

There has been a dramatic increase in drug abuse and addiction over the past two decades. To some extent this has been caused by the prohibitive attitude towards drugs that was implicit in the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act. Inevitably, as with alcohol in 1920s USA, prohibition simply forces users into prostitution or into a criminal sub-culture. Much of drug peddling is done by addicts adulterating their own supply and selling part of it on in order to finance the next fix. Liberals take the view that the only practical way of dealing with drug addiction, and to break this chain, is for the state to control the supply of drugs, thus making the

traffickers redundant. As a police officer wrote in *The Guardian*:

The only long-term solution is to legalise drugs. Legislation would take the trade out of the control of criminals.. .. Legislation would reduce the level of crime. It would destroy the revenue and power base of many criminals while freeing police resources.

The success of the handful of examples of such therapeutic good practice was demonstrable. The action of the Government in ending them can only be put down to culpable political cynicism in the face of ill-informed voter antagonism rather than pragmatic sense. The appointment of the curiously named drugs ‘Czar’ - as if the Romanovs were shining examples of effective action against social evil - is a typical example of appearance triumphing over reality. No ‘supremo’, however charismatic or forceful, can ever resolve a deep seated social problem if the cool, rational analysis of the situation does not lead inexorably to appropriate action, however unpalatable. Keith Hellawell’s position is untenable. Condemned to roam the airwaves in search of an honest policy is deeply unedifying and painful to observe.

Advertising campaigns on drug abuse are counter-productive. Drawing attention to drugs - however unattractive the context - merely increases use. This is yet another policy area where the practical solution may well be deeply unpopular with the electorate - except, of course, with the relatives of addicts who know the anguish of seeing their loved ones getting more deeply involved with the criminal world, hooked on black market drugs whose impurities are often more dangerous than the drugs themselves. The published figures on drug deaths in recent years are highly revealing. Tobacco and alcohol kill around 120,000 men and women annually, whereas all other drugs between them kill less than five hundred individuals. As police officers working to curtail drug abuse and related crime are well aware, even the well publicised successes of the Customs and Excise officers in catching attempted importation of drugs is counter productive. The less supply on the streets, the higher the price; the higher the price, the more crime is committed to raise the money to feed the addiction. It is a crazy vicious circle which needs to be cut at the source of the demand - the individual addict.

The demographic history lessons need to be absorbed by all those involved in health politics. The dramatic improvements in the general expectation of life were never achieved by clinical procedures, however beneficial to the individual able to qualify for such intervention. Consequently Liberals recognise that prevention of ill health is better than reliance on cure and would promote measures which encourage a healthy and balanced diet, reduced consumption of fats, sugar and salt, and increased consumption of fibre. Healthy eating is the vital next step in a

long line of public health initiatives that have included the provision of pure water, sewage treatment, clean air, and vaccination, all of which have transformed standards and extended the expectation of life over the past century. Good diet must be given high priority and the dominance of food manufacturers in the regulatory bodies must cease. The changes made in the membership and powers of consultative bodies in relation to food safety are to be welcomed, in particular the inauguration of the Food Standards Agency in April 2000.

We would increase research into the links between diet and disease. Also we accept that smoking is now the largest single avoidable cause of ill-health, so we would enforce a complete ban on all promotion of tobacco and would institute regular increases in tax on tobacco to discourage consumption. Even the tobacco industry now admits that cigarette smoking is highly addictive and damaging to health. The case for an advertising ban is overwhelming.

The consequences of the spread of HIV and AIDS are extremely serious. Liberals oppose any discrimination against the sufferers - however they acquired the disease - and stress the need for appropriate support for those caring for them. HIV and AIDS are certainly lethal and the need for better and earlier sex education must, alas, come before an over protection of innocence.

Liberals would end the separation between the power to tax and the power to spend which is the chief single inhibition to the development of a better health service in each region and district. The existence of appointed bodies, packed with members of the government party, and responsible only for health provision, prevents the proper accountable assessment of priorities across the broader field of social provision, including housing, education and social services. Liberals would establish regional assemblies, with powers to tax, which would take over health powers. This change would greatly improve the democratic accountability to patients and other users and would improve grant aid facilities for self-help groups, such as 'Well Woman' clinics. Introducing democracy into the health service would solve the problem of the inherent weakness in Community Health Councils. Even so, pending the introduction of such bodies it would be wrong to scrap the CHCs as proposed by the Labour government.

In the short term we recognise the need for a real increase in funding to ensure equitable levels of pay, especially for ancillary staff, and for adequate resources for the provision of mainstream services. In the longer term, however, there is no alternative to the implementation of these Liberal measures for the radical transformation of the NHS and for the consequent restoration of morale in the service. It is high time that the political hypocrisy of sloganising is ended and replaced with open, transparent and frank debate on the stark truths of health policy realities.

HOUSING

The present housing crisis is the product of political dogma, with both Labour and Conservative parties imposing their opposing 'solutions' on an area of practical provision that cries out for pluralism. The available choice in housing should be as wide as possible, in order to enable people to make their own decisions as to how much of their income they wish to devote to their home, what kind of dwelling they prefer, and whether, for instance, they wish to buy or to rent. The wholesale postwar demolition of improvable older houses has not only reduced the total number of available dwellings but has also removed the initial step on the housing escalator for many first-time buyers. The lack of smaller, less expensive houses has forced many couples either to stay in rented accommodation or to commit themselves to crippling mortgage repayments. Liberals believe in the continuous renewal of residential areas, with improvement rather than demolition, to preserve the integrity of the neighbourhood and to avoid exacerbating the housing crisis.

Many problems in many different fields are related to a lack of adequate housing. The overall shortage of property to rent forces families into accommodation which is wholly unsuitable, whether through overcrowding, lack of privacy or health hazards etc.. This in turn leads to stress and all too often to family breakup, increasing ill health and underperformance in education for want of private study space - all of which cause problems and expenditure elsewhere. The country needs an immediate investment in housing - both new and modernised - whose knock-on benefits in reducing unemployment in the building trade would be considerable. The housing associations have shown themselves well able to build and improve properties with but a modicum of resources. In addition the raw materials for the building trade are almost all available within Britain and consequently an expanding house building programme will have no adverse effects on the balance of payments.

There is clearly a shortage of available dwellings, particularly in London and other cities. Economic and political devolution away from the capital will in due course assist in reducing the pressure on accommodation in London but there will be a residual need for more accommodation for many years to come. The existence of properties visibly empty over considerable periods is, of course, inflammatory but even with the most efficient management there will always be a percentage of properties empty for legitimate reasons. This must not be used as an excuse to avoid a public authority house building programme, indeed the methods currently used to pressure local authorities to divest themselves of their current housing stock are neither equitable nor democratic. Empty property in the national government sector should be transferred to small, locally run, housing associations or community groups. Empty property in the private sector should be vulnerable to compulsory purchase action by local authorities, either to take over management or ownership.

Land Values

The huge increases in house prices during the 1980s, only partially and temporarily abated in the early 1990s, were due to increases in the value of land - the cost of bricks and mortar can hardly be held responsible. The increased value of land is almost invariably a consequence of public policy and action. Planning and development policy, drainage and other infrastructure provision, transform the value of land. Taxing land values not only legitimately recoups for the community that which the community has created, but is also beneficial in that it encourages the maximum use of land up to its permitted planning permission, reduces land and house prices and provides a key independent source of funding for local government.

The introduction of the taxation of land values will require changes in the planning law, first to allow 'community benefit' as a criterion for determining applications and second, to permit legitimate appeals against the granting of permission rather than simply against refusal. All too often today a planning authority seeks permission for development from itself and there is no adequate public check against possible abuse.

The use of land taxation as the major source of local finance will significantly reduce the cost of housing over a period of time but there will be a residual need to subsidise housing costs, particularly in the early years. The phasing out of Mortgage Interest Tax Relief was correct but some assistance to house buyers based on need is still required. A Unified Housing Benefit is needed, applicable whether renting or buying. This entitlement should extend to those now denied help if they are in, or establish, *bona fide* separate households. The reintroduction of fair rent assessments, to include private accommodation, will be required until house prices and increased availability themselves reduce private rent levels.

Homelessness is an increasing scandal. The regulations governing the 'intentionally homeless' definition are inadequate and insensitive. They need to be varied. Individuals in need are often caught between different local authorities, each disclaiming responsibility. Liberals would introduce an arbitration panel empowered to determine which authority is responsible for offering accommodation, the degree of urgency, and whether responsible members of the individual's family could reasonably provide at least short-term accommodation. Given that a high proportion of homeless people are also mentally ill or otherwise disabled and in need of special provision there is a need for more sheltered accommodation and for special needs grants for the adaptation of premises. There is also a need for central government to ensure that 'follow on' housing is available for people leaving hostels, local authority care, or prison.

The development of housing associations has been a success story, particularly where they have used their voluntary status and their local base to encourage tenant participation. The Conservative government exploited the skills and goodwill of the housing association movement by constricting their finance and placing ever tighter restrictions on their actions. This has still not been fully rectified and Liberals would increase the financial assistance to housing associations, including co-operatives and self-build schemes, and also for rescuing private owners who through mortgage repayment problems are imminently threatened with repossession. We also wish to see housing associations participating in programmes to replace the large soulless estates with mixed ownership/tenant communities.

The Conservatives' 'Right to Buy' legislation was successful for the few who bought with huge discounts, but detrimental to the many for whom the reduction in the number of decent local authority houses prevented from securing better rented accommodation. Liberals support home ownership but would restore to democratically elected - under STV - local authorities the power to determine areas where the continued forced sale of council properties would seriously unbalance the local housing provision. We would also concentrate the discounts on those properties difficult to sell rather than have them generally available, even on currently highly desirable properties.

There is still a great deal to be done to improve housing management and to avoid the creation of bad housing ghettos into which unfortunate or incompetent people drift or are placed. Our key policies will do a great deal to improve the present disastrous housing situation and to relieve the pressure on public housing which is itself one cause of much of the aggravation between those in poor conditions and those frustrated at being unable to resolve their problems. A pleasant and secure home is the cornerstone of a civilised society.

EDUCATION

Education policy, locally and nationally, has been bedevilled by the power struggle between those on each side of the political divide to force rigid perceptions of the purpose of education on unwilling staff and unknowing pupils. The damage done to a generation of young people is incalculable. The purpose of education is not to produce cogs for this or that economic machine but to liberate the potential that is latent in every life. The basic tools for this liberation almost always are literacy and numeracy but even such key subjects are not easily susceptible to a rigid national prescription for achievement and testing. Liberals recognise the importance of equipping young people for the world of work but vocational guidance and training must never be the reason for stifling the enquiring mind and for inhibiting the realisation of inherent individual interests and talents. The task of the school and college is to equip their students for the

world by enabling them to be alert, aware and adaptable, not channelled and constrained. Liberals believe that twenty-first century employers will prefer - and need - to employ lively, progressive young people rather than robots.

At the heart of the Liberal philosophy is the belief that abuses of power are best avoided by its being spread. It follows that the Liberal Party opposes the principle of the National Curriculum. To give the Secretary of State - any Secretary of State - the personal power to determine what every child should learn is a highly dangerous act in a very delicate area. It is amazing to us that not only should Conservative and Labour parties support this but that the Liberal Democrats even claim to have thought of it first. It is wrong in principle and wrong in execution. Amongst the handful of countries also to utilise a national curriculum have been 1933-1945 Germany, and the Soviet Union and its satellites. Eugenia Potlaska, a senior academic from the Polish University of Poznan, came on assignment to study the 1988 Education Reform Act here. From her experience in Poland she recognised it as totalitarian and 'very dangerous'. Having spent decades trying to end it in Poland, she was astonished to find it being instituted in Britain. Teachers are sinking under mountains of instructions and background literature. Their ability to apply their expertise and their training flexibly to assist children individually is now undermined by the need to follow through the detail of the state imposed manuals.

Liberals do not believe that it is possible to produce value free methods of testing children on a national basis. The results will inevitably be flawed by a variety of factors, above all the social conditions in the school's neighbourhood, but also the resources available to a school, the quality of the headteacher and the staff, and the condition of the building fabric. And yet, according to the government, the results thus obtained will be published to provide a means of establishing league tables of comparative school achievement. It is a recipe for ill informed confrontation under which, due to lack of available places, parents will either be unable to move their children or, if places are available, 'good' schools will become better and 'poor' schools worse. It also disheartens teachers. League tables are akin to taking the patient's temperature regularly rather than giving a much needed blood transfusion. Judgement as to the individual development of a child is never easy and is always partly subjective. Nevertheless between parent and teacher it is usually possible to judge whether a child is happy, is developing and is being stretched academically - and to act accordingly. It is much more urgent and important to improve the status and morale of the teaching staff rather than to carry on the obsession with and the dependence on national inspection, rigid testing and league tables.

One of the few widely accepted tenets of education is that high expectations of a child produce higher achievement and vice versa. The imposition of the present

rigid and artificial educational rules ignores this. What is worse, there are now moves to reduce the number of examination boards, a move which would centralise still further control over education. With a single National Examination Board, lacking by definition any alternative comment or critique, every Secretary of State will be able to complete the circle of determining the curriculum, overseeing the schools' performance via OfStEd, and having a single unopposed judgement on the levels of absorption by the pupils of his or her directives. Don Foster MP, the Liberal Democrats' then Education spokesman, was in the vanguard of calling for a single Board. How anyone with any pretence of Liberal values can be in favour of such dangerous centralisation - and personalisation - of power is baffling.

Liberals have always been in the vanguard of support for the comprehensive principle in education. It is educationally damaging and socially divisive to separate children into different schools at a vulnerable age. All methods of so doing are flawed and we prefer to encourage the local community, through its school governors and educational authority representatives, and the staff, to decide what school arrangement best suits their needs, and what mix of subjects should be taught, within an overall comprehensive framework. It follows that the power to opt out of the local education system undermines mutual aid and flexibility within an area and should no longer be permitted.

As with law and order the Labour Party has become bizarre in its pronouncements on education. Not content to call for school uniforms and national levels of homework, David Blunkett MP, Labour's Secretary of State for Education, abandoned all previous policies and any future attempt to make the remaining 161 grammar schools into comprehensives, even before he arrived in government. This provoked *The Independent*, into a forthright leading article:

Those old enough to have taken the 11-plus will remember it for the rest of their days - the glory of passing for the few, the ignominy of failure for the many. Families were split asunder, as one child made the grade and another failed. The secondary modern children felt branded for life: though enough subsequently passed A-levels, or moved on to better schools or colleges, to illustrate just how bad a predictor of intelligence and later success in life the 11-plus was.

... the trouble with the grammar schools is that in the areas they survive there can be no proper comprehensives, deprived as they would be of the brightest third of 11-year-olds. Grammar schools never wither on the vine. They will only ever be

removed by some brave education minister decreeing that it shall be so. But political bravery is not the dish of the day.

Amen!

By the fourth year of the Labour government, the Secretary of State had abandoned any support for the comprehensive principle, was pressing on with proposals for performance related pay for teachers, which debilitate still further an already embattled teaching force, and moved way to the right of the Conservatives by removing the local democratic control of schools and transferring in its entirety to private companies where the government's inspectorate had reported adversely on the local service. One might well ask what was the point of the 1997 General Election. Clearly, as admitted by Education Minister, Estelle Morris MP, on BBC2's *Newsnight* programme, "the Labour party does not have a guiding ideology".

As with private medicine, Liberals do not believe that private education can be prohibited but rather that it can be progressively rendered redundant by making the public sector provision more attractive. Parents need to be persuaded of the inherent values of a Liberal society, which are inimical to the privilege that private education seeks to buy.

Continuity

We have concentrated so far on schoolchildren but education is, of course, a lifetime entitlement and access to it should not be limited by age. Liberal policy reflects this belief. There should be the expansion of pre-school education to make it available to all those who need it. Also, each individual, as part of our Tax Credit proposals, should have an educational entitlement for further and higher education, able to be spent at any time, either as a block, say to study medicine, or as a series of credits over a long period of time, perhaps to study arts subjects.

Our universities have been squeezed and constrained by governments that appears only to enthuse over research and courses that enhance capitalism or the defence industry. Knowledge and research are not necessarily always best suited to immediate external needs but may well be highly significant in the cumulative educational excellence which is one mark of a civilised society. Liberals believe that it is crucial to reverse the trends of the past two decades and to demonstrate that there is a party that treasures its academic life and academic freedom and seeks to support its work.

Education is highly labour intensive and is inevitably expensive. We believe that it will not be possible to reverse recent trends without a substantial increase in public expenditure. The status of teachers has been diminished in recent years to

the great detriment of education generally. Liberals would rectify this by enabling them to concentrate on teaching - rather than be overwhelmed with administrative duties - by providing better in-service training and by a new pay structure. Local Management of Schools (LMS) is fine within those schools large enough to be able to cope with it without detracting from direct teaching time, but its imposition on smaller schools, particularly at the primary level, has lumbered head teachers with an immense bureaucratic burden - added to by the ill conceived idea of nursery vouchers. To Liberals, education is not some separate subject able to be put in a building and duly labelled 'school' or 'college'; it is part of the community and the community's values both affect it and are affected by it. It follows that an ideologically centralist government will always be able to get away with imposing its narrow values on education unless the community itself recognises the value of a pluralistic educational provision, which is mutually beneficial to the individual and to the community, and is prepared to fight for it.

THE ARTS

To Liberals the arts are no optional extra, to be acknowledged if and when a minute or a pound can be spared, but are crucial to the awareness of our human society and of the possibility of surmounting its problems. The Thatcherite heresy of believing that concentration by our academic institutions on scientific specialises is necessary, is contrary to the Liberal perception of the wholeness of the human personality and of community needs. Just as a holistic approach to health care and to education is distinctively Liberal so it is essential in the arts.

Parties based on economic determinism inevitably have a defective attitude to the arts. Labour collectivism has always placed more emphasis on achieving a greater equality of economic distribution. The more that growth made this possible, the less important became non-material things. The more constrained the economy the more the arts were a luxury. Conservatism has been equally dismissive, believing that the depth of one's purse should dictate arts provision rather than recognising that music, for instance, has never prospered without patronage.

Both Labour and Conservative in power have shown themselves to be hostile to pluralism in the arts as elsewhere. There is a desire to assist only the drama that fits their politics and to prevent anything which challenges it. Liberals reject this attitude: the test for support should be quality not content, believing that the power of the arts to challenge received views is an essential part of their appeal. We believe that the transformation of the individual's horizons is vital to the community's vision. Human society cannot be compartmentalised. Liberals agree with Albert Camus' comment:

By itself art could probably not produce the renaissance which implies justice and liberty. But without it the renaissance would

be without form and, consequently, would be nothing. Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect is but a jungle. That is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.

Former Liberal Leader, Jo Grimond, wrote more directly:

There has always been a connection between the word 'Liberal' and the arts. Any political creed. .. should be sensitive to its effects on civilisation.

Liberal support for arts and for leisure provision stems from a deep belief in diversity of expression of the human spirit and of the need to liberate human potential. The arts have a vital role to play in this task.

We saw a determined assault on our cultural heritage during the Thatcher era, with financial restrictions affecting the opening of museums and with charges hitting their availability; with damage done to archive repositories; and with an assault on the library service at both national, repository level and local, lending level which fails to acknowledge the educational and cultural benefit provided by our library service. Labour has rectified this to some extent but there is still a sense of the arts being an optional extra, not least with the over-dependence on funding from the National Lottery.

Confused administration and under-funding threatens art forms in which this country excels. Accordingly Liberals wish to see the Department for Culture, Media and Sport clearly co-ordinating the government support for the arts through independent agencies, such as the Arts Council, the Film Finance Board, the Museums Council, and similar bodies; a new Central Broadcasting Authority responsible for local and national broadcasting and telecommunications, including satellite and cable TV; national libraries and publicly owned art collections; and the preservation of our architectural and environmental heritage. As long as the National Lottery funds are required to supplement Government support, it is important that they are available to fund the broadest possible range of arts endeavour. We support the continuation of the BBC as a publicly supported, independent service.

The arts must belong to everyone or the danger is that they will belong to no-one. We intend to open them to all and to enable far more people to participate in events and activities.

Chapter Six

‘Living’ and its Support

Politics is rarely seen as the art of ensuring the continued survival and organisation of human society in order to enable individual men and women to live their own lives within their local communities, even though for Liberals this is very much the case. As set out in earlier chapters, there are great demands on finite resources and considerable difficulty in satisfying the rising expectations of the materialistic developed world and the desperate developing world. This chapter looks at a number of further issues which are important to society.

Energy

The world faces a growing energy crisis. If demands for energy continue to increase, unless some miraculous scientific benison shortly arrives, it will either mean the accelerated extraction of non-renewable mineral resources or the imposition of nuclear power, though there is as yet no safe way of disposing of its waste. Both these propositions are opposed by Liberals. We have first and foremost to reduce our demand for energy. Energy conservation is straightforward in theory but is often complex in practice. For instance, in terms of narrow economics, some of the schemes for recycling waste materials actually use more energy to convert the items than is required to make them from raw materials. There are, of course, other vital considerations, including the ecological impact of denuding the world of raw materials. Far more research is needed into making products durable and repairable, and designed with recycling and reduction of pollution in mind. Combined heat and power schemes, and district heating projects, need financial encouragement. With government intervention innovative technologies could be introduced now, such as the recent initiative to locate wind turbines out at sea. We would also fund increased further research into the development of renewable sources of energy.

Water

Many of the above arguments apply to the use of water. The global population increase, already taking us beyond six billion, will press most heavily and potentially most violently, on the supply of water. The demand for water continues to increase in Britain and, despite recent years of increased rainfall, the only reliable current way to meet the demand is to bore deeper holes or to flood more valleys. Neither solution is acceptable to Liberals. It is clearly urgent that the public be educated into using less water and that drastic - and expensive -

steps be taken to conserve supply. Although the water companies have tackled the problem and reduced wastage, an estimated 18% of the supply is still lost through leaks in the mains system. This is clearly a ridiculous situation and requires a nationwide programme of investment to reduce this figure substantially. Liberals also favour a phased programme of desalination plants along the coastline and an eventual reduction in the use of boreholes. Of all the current privatisations, that of water is the least defensible. It needs to be brought back under public control, possibly through the apportionment of government stock converted at the original purchase price.

Environment

Human beings are astonishingly casual in their attitude to the environment. From dropping sweet papers in the street, to pumping sewage into the sea, and spewing foul emissions into the atmosphere, there is a remarkable lack of awareness of the damage being done. In their overseas aid projects the developed countries urge civic education programmes in the developing world; programmes are urgently needed in our own countries to bring home the seriousness of the situation. Greater public consciousness would enable increased legislative action against polluters. In addition, the basic principle that the polluter pays needs better enforcement. Liberals believe that the safeguarding of our environment is vital and that it is the job of the government both to take direct remedial action itself and to persuade the public to be aware and vigilant in its own interest.

Dumping of waste at sea must end. Hi-tech incineration plants must be developed to deal with domestic refuse, to replace the non-biodegradable high density compacting and burying. Wildlife habitats must be preserved and protected. Liberals favour the use of a 'Green Audit' for every proposal, detailing its impact on the environment. We would also create a 'Pollution Inspectorate' with powers to investigate alleged and potential causes of pollution.

Farming and Fishing

British farming is in crisis. The cumulative effect of international trends, of supermarket dominance of markets, of the mishandled BSE outbreak, and a lack of government determination to tackle the implications of the health regulations and the complexities of the subsidy system were serious enough but the 2001 foot and mouth disease outbreak has brought the situation into crisis. Over many years successive attempts to improve the agricultural situation have brought related problems. Worthy policies to improve slaughtering standards caused the closure of a number of facilities and a consequent increase in the transportation of animals around the country, which in turn exacerbated the attempts to deal with foot and mouth. Farmers have an important role in the country and particularly in the countryside. There is no benefit to the environment to have a farming community

struggling to survive because ways and means of assistance are no longer sufficiently attuned to their needs. The foot and mouth disease outbreak, and the extreme measures required to combat it, should be a catalyst for a comprehensive review - at European as well as national level - of how best to ensure a healthy agriculture industry and a fair return for farmers.

Human beings are the only species that spends time preparing and cooking food for enjoyment rather than eating solely for survival. How odd, therefore, to have food subsidies related more to quantity rather than quality. The problem is very clear: we have considerable over-production of food; European community subsidies - currently amounting to around £1 billion a year - promote even higher production; cost-effectiveness requires the use of intensive methods of animal husbandry, plus pesticides and chemical fertilisers; soil erosion is an increasing ecological threat - not least through the use of nitrates; and the experience of milk production would not commend the further use of quotas. The consequence is large quantities of mediocre food that nobody buys - even in Britain where supermarket requirements are based on looks rather than on taste. Even to give it to other poorer countries would undermine their own development plans. Producing appropriate quantities of high quality food would make more sense for everyone.

Liberals believe that a far more flexible system of subsidies is needed so that there can be a financial advantage in moving to organic farming and ending the encouragement of over-production. Flexibility is also needed to recognise the difficult conditions some - such as hill farmers - have to work in, where preserving the traditional countryside is also important. There must be a recognition of the importance of farming and of the rural community, and the legislative and financial support that is needed for both to survive. In agriculture as in so many other spheres, bigger is often far from being better. Liberals would encourage smallholdings as being vital to the social and economic structure of the countryside.

The long running BSE crisis is instructive. The odds against the transmission of CJD to humans as a consequence of mad cow disease are extremely long - bizarrely so in comparison to smoking or crossing a main road - and yet billions of pounds have been spent on culling herds in order to persuade the European Union to allow the marketing of British beef. The fault lies with the original acceptance of the non-natural practice of feeding offal to herbivorous cows in the interests of higher profits, and the breaking of an identifiable link in the 'farm to food' chain through recourse to large-scale slaughtering facilities. The only likely gain from the whole BSE affair is a beneficial reversion to an identifiable line from farmer, through abattoir, to butcher - at a price, of course!

Equally, it is vital to learn the lessons from the foot and mouth disease outbreak. The eradication of the disease from the UK must be accompanied by stricter rules to prevent the importation of meat and meat products from areas of the world in which foot and mouth is endemic. It is also important to review the need to transport animals great distances to abattoir and to market. At very least it is vital to ensure the tracking of animals in transit.

We are also concerned at the dangerous over-fishing of our coastal waters and support measures to achieve firm control over such matters as dredging licences, large boats fishing within the six mile limit, the dumping of waste at sea, and a reduction in shellfish fishing with an increase in size limits. More research is needed into fish stocks around our coast coupled with better marketing of fish and by-products, with the aim of achieving a greater diversity in consumption.

Transport

The desire for mobility generally and the increased interest in travel puts great strain on the transport system. The development of the car has been one of the twentieth century's mixed blessings. It has produced a new dimension of personal freedom for some but has added to the mobility problems of the rest. It has improved the quality of life for a minority but has damaged the environment for everyone. The untrammelled use of the motor car simply cannot be accommodated, otherwise our countryside would suffer, our cities would become concrete jungles, and pollution would increase still further. There have to be limitations on the use of the car and these are never popular - even though there is general recognition of their validity. The Liberal Party recognises the need to balance personal freedom to travel with the need to provide travel facilities for the community. The two are often in conflict, competing for the same space and the same resources. The Liberal Party believes in a co-ordinated transport system rather than the free for all that characterised the last Conservative government's policy and which the Labour government has so far failed to tackle. We believe that it is crucial to see different forms of transport as parts of an integrated and interdependent whole. Liberals believe that our transport system must be environmentally friendly, and provide the vital link between and within communities which is not necessarily measurable in simple monetary terms. We have a detailed transport policy and can only set out the main principles here.

We welcome the development of technology that can enable business to function effectively from different sites, thus reducing the need for much long distance commuting. 'Conferencing' facilities via Internet are increasingly sophisticated, as are the means of easy access to the vast Internet 'library'. We also favour inducements to firms to relocate out of the south east which would not only bring a better economic return and balance but would also reduce the demand for

transport. We see the development of better public transport as a means of reducing dependence on the car but we would not shirk the use of fiscal measures to inhibit unnecessary car use in city centres if all else fails to deter.

Liberals see the railway system as the core of its integrated transport plans. The railways have the potential to provide Britain with a network of regular, fast interconnecting services, divorced from the free-for-all on our roads. British Rail was never able to realise its full potential because it received only a fraction of the government support that continental railways enjoy. The lack of investment in British railways means that when all is well with new services, such as the electrified East Coast mainline, it is excellent, but when there are problems, it tends to fall apart. It has been running on a knife edge for many years and the collapse of the system following the Hatfield derailment in October 2000 came as no surprise to those who have been warning of its imminence for years. Liberals recognise that a railway system, and the type of traffic it is best suited to carry, needs to be operated as a national network with adequate investment. The privatisation and fragmentation of the railway system was an act of official vandalism which is already seen as the dangerous nonsense it is. Liberals believe in an integrated transport system and we support moves to reunify the network and the reopening of lines and stations. The steps taken in April 2001 following the Selby accident, including an increased role for the Strategic Rail Authority, are a good start.

Peter Rainer, a former British Rail senior operations manager, wrote in *The Guardian* of his concerns about safety under privatisation, stating:

The culture of co-operation one with another has been destroyed. Loyalty to one railway is no more. Staff are encouraged to compete with one another, rather than co-operate. Pieces of safety documentation have been put in place to paper over the 1000 or so extra legal interfaces.

We support the involvement of local authorities, British Rail, railway companies, and other providers in local transportation committees designed to develop liaison of road and rail services. We particularly wish to see the development of tramway and metro systems in all our major cities. Bus deregulation has failed to reverse the decline in the use of public transport and has instead resulted in the loss of many evening and Sunday services. Only local communities can determine the bus services they require.

Liberals supported the Channel Tunnel as an important psychological contribution to a united Europe and as potentially a way for Scotland and the North of England to export direct into Europe without having to tranship goods in London. We are

appalled at the incompetence and shortsightedness of the government and those responsible for the abandonment of the possibility of direct running from the North, and for the belated development of British links with the tunnel. It is important that the rolling stock, the lines, and the stations are available to make the best use of this hugely expensive and important project, and that steps are taken to demonstrate improved safety measures.

Liberals believe that the commercial potential of our canal and inland waterway system has been ignored. There has been increased tourist use but further refurbishment is needed to provide a network, linked through distribution centres to an integrated road and rail system, able to take a greater proportion of goods. The Liberal public transport programme will enable proposed major road building plans to be scrapped, thus greatly reducing the programme's net cost to the public purse. An effective transportation system is economically essential and socially important; it has to be achieved with the minimum of environmental disturbance; and it needs to integrate the different networks so that the most appropriate method is available to the user. The transport system has been shamefully run down over the past thirty years and it will take a new approach to rectify past neglect. The Liberal Party is committed to the public investment required to implement its radical approach.

Chapter Seven

Rights and Responsibilities

For Liberals rights and responsibilities are interlinked. The claiming of individual rights presupposes a means of guaranteeing them. This, in turn, requires acceptance of the authority of the guaranteeing body. That acceptance is unlikely to be willingly given unless the individual is a participant in its formation and development. This requirement for a democratic, co-operative and collective authority demonstrates the error of Margaret Thatcher's comment that "There is no such thing as society - only individuals and their families". Without 'society' there can be no definition of rights and no responsibility for ensuring their enforcement. The cost of her unguarded comment in social disruption in the succeeding years has been immense. Without 'society', and the common purpose and collective identity it implies, there is no compelling inhibition on an individual's anti-social behaviour. Why not rob, steal, break in, or smash, in the furtherance of 'individual and ... family' needs?

The centrality of this principle for the underpinning of policy formulation is so clear to Liberals that the failure of the Labour government to develop policies based on it, is perhaps the biggest disappointment we have had with that government. Tony Blair's 'Third Way' - rightly described as 'cosmetic nonsense' by Roy Hattersley - is simply a social democratic rehash of the politics of selfishness that marked and marred its Conservative predecessors. For instance, privatisation is still continuing and the government is in conflict with London Mayor Ken Livingstone over future financing and control of London Underground, and is going ahead with the sale of air traffic control, both of which are operations with a natural monopoly and with a crucial priority for safety over profit. Under Labour the creation of competition against the Royal Mail is also going ahead - which even Mrs Thatcher balked at - contrary to the 160 year old principle that internal postal rates should be the same for every destination in the UK. To allow private firms into this market to 'cherry pick' with cheaper rates for urban letters, runs the inevitable risk of forcing Royal Mail rates up substantially as and when the percentage of rural post it carries is greatly increased. The trend away from mutuality is also continuing, with building societies still transforming themselves into plc's. Even in the field of education Labour has no apparent awareness of the value of a close link between school and community. Labour Ministers have set an extremely bad example by sending their own children away from their neighbourhoods to 'good' schools elsewhere, and the rules for the conduct of a ballot on the future of the local school system do not involve the wider community and are loaded against the comprehensive option.

In a Liberal society the role of the state is to ensure, to protect and to enlarge the conditions of liberty. By that we mean the social, legal and political environment within which individuals can both be protected from interference and be enabled to fulfil themselves. The Liberal state does not permit the exploitation of the vulnerable nor the selfish exercise of one person's rights to diminish another's. The Liberal society must be a plural society in which the extent to which each recognises the other's individuality and diverse needs and talents determines the level of harmony, security and co-operation within each community.

The Conservative Government's abandonment of its plans for a national identity card was a rare success for progressive views, even though it probably resulted from the opposition of the police chiefs, who were rightly concerned at the effect that a law enabling the police to demand the production of an identity card would have on their relations with the public. The Liberal Party alone opposed the introduction of ID cards root and branch, stating that, if introduced, party members would refuse to carry them and would call on other Liberals and radicals to do likewise. In contrast the Liberal Democrats' conference had great difficulty in narrowly carrying a motion opposing ID cards!

At different times and in different circumstances there are many groups to which laws protecting their rights have to be applied. Children must be protected from abuse and exploitation and guided towards responsible adulthood. We see advantages in recognising the earlier *de facto* independence of many young people by lowering the voting age and the common age of consent to sixteen. We oppose the continued discrimination against women and would ensure equality of treatment in taxation and remuneration. We welcome the many gains to the cultural and social life of society that come from the diverse and varied experience and perceptions of those who are not conventionally heterosexual. We are concerned at their continued harassment and we have long sought to repeal 'Section 28' and 'Section 25' and would examine other potentially discriminatory legislation with a view to amendment or repeal.

The gypsy and travelling communities are a constant point of friction. The current prejudice against their way of life and the haphazard provision of facilities contribute to the confrontational attitudes often taken up on both 'sides'. We wish to see a nationwide plan for permanent and transient sites, with a common educational provision for children. We believe that this is necessary to bring travelling people within the ambit of a mutually acceptable legal framework which would also enhance attitudes of responsible citizenship from the travellers themselves.

Liberals reject the patronising and often discriminatory treatment of older people. We do not believe in inflexible age limits either to retirement or to pensions. We

seek a flexible system of part-time work and job sharing which would provide a more sensitive transition to complete retirement and assist in paying for better pensions. We favour properly resourced care in the community wherever possible for frail elderly people and would support more sheltered housing schemes and the 'Staying Put' project which, by making often minor alterations to their properties, enables individuals to stay longer in their own homes. The most immediate - and also cheapest - means of helping elderly people are the home help service and meals on wheels; these must be maintained and improved. Liberals supported the Disabled Persons Act of 1986 and welcome its full implementation but call for sufficient resources to make it effective. Liberals particularly value the contribution of voluntary agencies and urge their better support through grant aid. Liberals recognise that disabled people are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and support the extension of anti-discriminatory laws to disability. Liberals would also develop self-advocacy by disabled people.

The latest increase in racism and in racist attitudes is alarming. Britain is a diverse and multi-cultural society which owes much to the peoples of many different ethnic origins who choose to live here. It is essential to match the application of strong laws against discrimination with exposition of the case for cultural diversity and with warnings of the fearful consequences for all of racial intolerance. The legitimate expression of different languages, cultures and religions must be protected and enhanced, but Liberal pluralism can only thrive in a civil society which does not accept the imposition of laws and rules other than those which apply to the whole community.

Historically Britain has had a continued attachment to the 'two sides of industry' mentality, measured by victories for workers or management and aided by Conservative and Labour governments legislating to shift the balance of power in favour of their 'own people'. The erosion of the concept of permanent full-time jobs and the evolution of increasing automation in place of craftsmen in manufacturing industry has had a pronounced and pervasive effect on the structure and organisation of the workforce. Labour has rightly reintroduced the right of union representation where sufficient employees in a firm show their wish to join, but there has been no pressure for a return to the type of union 'triumphalism' that gave Mrs Thatcher the excuse to restrict union rights so fiercely. Globalisation has brought new challenges for workplace practices and relationships. European legislation is needed to protect employees against exploitation by multilateral corporations.

We wish to encourage the continued development of the trade union movement. It has a key role to play in workplace democracy, with its shop stewards, worker representatives and its involvement in training. Liberals favour a 'Workers' Charter' clearly defining and safeguarding workers' individual and collective

rights. Liberals also believe that the introduction of genuine workplace democracy can transform attitudes in the workplace. We aim for the participation of employees in decisions through democratically elected Works Councils and through Supervisory Boards elected by both workers and shareholders. We also believe in employee share ownership and in profit sharing schemes and would also encourage and support co-operative enterprises.

Liberals believe that animals have rights and that humankind should act as trustee of the natural world, rather than as its master. We believe that there is a need for this view to be promoted through education, particularly within primary and middle schools. We favour a Standing Committee for Creature Protection to monitor and advise on all types of animal welfare legislation and regulations. Liberals were alone in opposing the ineffective attempt to legislate in 1986 to protect laboratory animals. We believe that surplus farming capacity provides us with a unique opportunity to move from intensive to extensive and humane animal husbandry. The Liberal Party is opposed to the hunting, entrapment or shooting of any creature solely for sport. We also support dog registration and the provision of dog wardens.

Liberals recognise that it is difficult for those who feel vulnerable or under threat to participate in politics generally or in community activities. We therefore see the need to protect such individuals as a prerequisite for them exercising their responsibilities. Citizenship belongs to all those who wish to be committed to a country but this is not always recognised by those who feel vulnerable because of discrimination. The greater the active involvement in democracy - in all its many facets - the more healthy the society. The Liberal aim is to remove the obstacles, real and imaginary, that diminish democracy.

Chapter Eight

Political Action

This booklet does not seek to set out the case for the Liberal Party merely as an intellectual debate. The continuation of the Liberal Party is not simply for academic or psephological exercise. We maintain the Liberal arguments and we campaign for Liberalism because our society, and the world around us, desperately need more Liberalism rather than less. Any attempt to dilute Liberalism masks its clarity and delays the acceptance of Liberal values. The universal economic challenges to Liberalism mentioned in the Introduction above are so trenchant and so urgent that there is no guarantee that human civilisation on any recognisable level of tolerance and co-operation will survive.

First, the ecological ceiling to economic development has already been breached time and again. It may not be possible to conform to the green imperative in time to repair the damage. The starving communities of the world demand assistance while the better fed seek to exploit natural resources to preserve their standards, but only offer crumbs to everyone else. This is a disastrous policy which must be confronted with the utmost vehemence. Compromise on principles for short-term political gain is criminal. Reneging on the Kyoto Agreement on greenhouse gases as one of the first acts by President Bush for openly selfish reasons shows how powerful are the forces of national self interest.

Second, the rise of nationalism undermines the movement towards transnational co-operation and even threatens the stability of the world. The USSR and Yugoslavia have not split up as a consequence of progressive idealism seeking to build a closer and more interdependent world but in order to promote separatism and cultural exclusivity. This leads almost inexorably to a falsely protective nationalism within countries. Thus 'immigrants' are blamed for unemployment and ethnic minorities are accused of undermining the community's values. The conflicts that are going on in Central and Eastern Europe are increasingly replicated within western European countries. There is no way of building a secure and stable society without harmonious relationships between all who live in it, whatever their background. Liberalism recognises the dangers of compromise on such a delicate and crucial principle.

Third, the rise of fundamentalism threatens the civil society which is necessary for Liberal democracy. The response of political movements based on individual or collective materialism to the rise of Muslim fundamentalism across the Arab world, and its importation into Britain over the Salman Rushdie affair, has been

feeble. The lack of intellectual rigour supporting the case for a civil society and for demonstrating the impossibility of basing democracy on other than rational views has been most marked. The situation in Algeria exemplifies the problem, where the non-fundamentalist parties assented to a resort to militarism to prevent the FIS coming to power democratically. Since then a well supported and successful initiative to secure the election of an executive President has failed to prevent the continuance of violence and of assassinations by the Islamic fundamentalists. Subsequent elections in Algeria have excluded fundamentalist parties and resulted in the current President having only token electoral opponents. The malign influence of Protestant fundamentalism in Northern Ireland, of Jewish fundamentalism in Israel, and of Hindu fundamentalism in India, point to the ineffectiveness of compromise solutions. Paradoxically, the use of the state to enforce religious beliefs is evidence of the weakness of the religion rather than of its strength. As the Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks writes in his recent book *The Politics of Hope*, drawing on the seventeenth century writings of John Locke:

*Belief is a free act of the will. By definition it cannot be compelled. Those who persecute others to save their souls are guilty of a self-contradictory ambition. What they achieve is not worth having: forced assent rather than genuine conviction..
...The state is a society of men (sic) constituted only for the procuring, preserving and advancing of their own civil interests*

Fundamentalism ends up secularising the spiritual not vice versa. In the interests of the freedom of the individual to believe, to associate and to proselytise, and in his or her right not to, Liberalism defends and promotes the secular state.

Under its new leadership the Labour Party had the opportunity to pose a genuine alternative to the prevailing nostrums of the previous eighteen years but has shown no sign of identifying what it should be opposing, even though it was vivid enough. The Conservatives' heresy may be economic in motivation but its consequences are primarily social. Their espousal of a society lacking compassion, their destruction of the social structures which underpin neighbourhood life, their failure to understand the concept of public interest, their cultural philistinism, their political manipulation of public appointments, their cynical implementation of increasingly harsh penalties against rising crime, and their ideological obsession with fragmenting and selling off integrated public services, are all aspects of the same philosophy: to empower those individuals capable of seeing self interest, whatever the social cost, in an ever increasing number of opportunities. 'Empowerment', a word so beloved of progressives, is clearly not the Left's sole preserve. Alas, new Labour is little better. In its continuation of privatisation, its repressive penal policies, and its attacks on civil liberties it has gone beyond the Conservatives.

Labour has spent so much effort making itself safe to be elected that it has abandoned any radical and progressive credentials. The Conservatives' unpopularity may be enough to compensate electorally for Labour's lack of identity but neither are likely to inspire enthusiasm, particularly amongst younger voters. The key example of Labour's political impotence in opposition and now in office has been its total failure to force the removal from office of a single minister implicated by the Scott Report into the arms to Iraq affair. The indictment was available; the ammunition was on record; but Labour failed miserably to pursue those who should have been harried out of office. Ironically, it was the cross-examination by Tory MP, Quentin Davies that secured the resignation of the then Conservative minister, David Willetts.

The vital transformation of our politics will not come overnight, whatever the result of an election. Indeed, standards have declined so far that it is possible that it may never be achieved, but it must be attempted. Take, for instance, how society has come to tolerate and even to accept general levels of coarseness and crudity that would have appalled viewers, listeners and readers a few short decades ago. Even racism can apparently be tolerated under the guise of 'humour'. I am not referring to 'kitchen sink' drama nor to documentaries on current traumas, whose shock effect is usually constructive, but to the use of brutal imagery and obscene language in a desperate but futile attempt to be 'modern' and trendy rather than embarrassing and rarely humorous.

It is typical of this trend that television personalities on tour advertise their theatre performances as using material that is not permitted on television. A review in the *Yorkshire Post* of a Barry Humphries show in Leeds pulled no punches:

The programme warns you fair and square. ... that the show contains "brief moments of transcendental lyricism all but submerged in gratuitous vulgarity". For 'gratuitous vulgarity' read 'filth'. Of course, by this point you've spent your money.. ... [Sir Les Patterson's] brief appearances on chat shows only skim the surface of this scumbag lowlife. He has fans of his own but even they had their breath taken away by the portmanteau of sleaze that opened up before them.. ... Some of this lascivious rubbish might have been forgivable if it had been remotely funny.. ... It is hard to believe that anyone ever found it witty, or that someone had thought they could construct a stage show around such transparently thin and sick material.

Where does this trend end? It is not susceptible to a Mary Whitehouse style censoriousness which rightly provokes ridicule for its failure to distinguish between satire and sleaze. Nor should there be a body comprised of the 'great and

the good' to determine what lesser mortals shall and shall not see. The only effective response is one which stems from an awareness - instinctive or learned - that human society is demeaned by such spectacles and needs to emphasise the higher arts. Peter Millar made the point in an article in *The Times* in November 1995, referring to a television sitcom starring Rowan Atkinson and written by Ben Elton which was broadcast before the nine o'clock watershed and relied, allegedly, on double entendres offensive to gay men for its 'humour':

It is easy to go on about 'cossetting' and 'the real world' but we do not just react to the world around us, we are also responsible for it.

Censorship would only be a vain and artificial attempt to impose rather than persuade, and is certainly not the answer. Given that contemporary art is an expression of current cultural values it is the validity of those values that has to be addressed.

The Liberal Democrats - a Compromise Too Far

Whenever Liberalism is mixed with other political philosophies it inevitably slips into the traditional left-right political spectrum. So powerful are the vested interests within politics that wish to maintain that spectrum that a Liberalism diluted is a Liberalism compromised. There is no substitute for constant vigilance and for the continual promotion of the Liberal case. It may superficially seem a less exacting route to a Liberal society to promote it within a hybrid party but it is a seductive fallacy. The ultimate price of that error of judgement does not suddenly materialise in the sudden manifestation of an extreme policy or candidate, but it absorbs Liberalism gradually and cumulatively without alarming its adherents unduly. If Lib Dems define Liberalism as being what the Lib Dems believe then it is not surprising that more and more of them call themselves Liberals whilst espousing policies that are far from being Liberal.

We in the Liberal Party see this happening to the Liberal Democrats, even to some former colleagues whose Liberal sensitivities one would previously have thought unerodable. The Ashdown 'Project' with new Labour was certainly well meaning. Every leader understandably wants desperately to put his or her stamp on some great democratic enterprise, and they inevitably end up believing that their personal project is more important than their party's support. It was, however, doomed from day one because Paddy and the Lib Dems lack a secure foundation in Liberal values which enable a leader to be an effective interlocutor with another party.

For instance, the Liberal commitment to preferential voting - in common jargon, STV - is not some feudal curiosity to which we are attached out of narrow loyalty.

It is actually the only way to empower the elector and to match proportionality with accountability. It gives 'PRV' - proportional representation for voters - rather than 'PRP' - proportional representation for parties. Despite the introduction already of three new voting systems, for the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, and for the European Parliament elections, not one has preferential voting. The Lib Dem parliamentarians actually ended up being whipped into supporting the centralising, hegemonic, closed list electoral system for the European election. What has been gained for Liberalism by the Ashdown-Blair Project? Even the Jenkins proposals will not be voted on, if at all, until well into the next Parliament, by which time a significant number of the Lib Dem MPs may well have lost their seats - as acknowledged by both Charles Kennedy and Simon Hughes after their contest for the Lib Dem leadership.

All this emanates from the inevitable effect of the fond but misplaced belief that the Liberal and Social Democratic philosophies, though coming from very different political families, could develop into a radical political force for the next century. As a party its centrist stance is increasingly indistinguishable from new Labour, which in turn has moved ever closer to the Conservatives' traditional position. This curious tripartite osmosis has fudged many important topical issues and the Liberal Democrats' policies have increasingly become alien to Liberalism. Now we have the election of Charles Kennedy as Lib Dem leader, with only 40% support of the party members, so great - and significant - were the abstentions. The high rate of abstention was certainly indicative of the state of the party, but what was also noteworthy was that, faced with four clear Liberal opponents, the transfer of votes from the three excluded candidates actually favoured Kennedy rather than Hughes.

The catalogue of the Liberal Democrats' illiberal policies and pronouncements is extensive. Some have passed from the 'active' political agenda, some have been referred to earlier, and I list here only those which have a continuing effect:

- accepting any system of proportional representation, however illiberally they centralise party power rather than empowering the electorate, as does the Single Transferable Vote;
- the support by the party for, and the initiation by Liberal Democrat Councillors, of surveillance cameras in public places despite the formidable dangers of abetting a police state, and the likelihood of misuse;
- acceptance of the principle of the National Curriculum in education and the gift of power to the Secretary of State over what children shall learn;

- the promotion of referenda, including on European unity, which undermine the Liberal rock of active and representative democracy, and the key Liberal doctrine of democratic consent;
- the replacement of rates only by a local income tax rather than primarily by land value taxation, despite the weaknesses of local income tax on such a scale;
- advocacy of ‘hypothecation’, through which taxes would be allocated to particular spending services, thus destroying the integrity and holism of government, which guarantees the funding of necessary but unpopular services - prisons, gypsy sites, defence etc - out of the general ‘pot’, by the decision of those elected to make such decisions; also the ‘ring fencing’ nationally of the community care grant, thus denying elected Councillors the right to exercise their local judgement;
- support for the outlawing of ‘Twin Tracking’ thus denying many local government professionals their legitimate right to be involved in politics;

There has been a procession of former SDP activists returning to Labour but among the non-SDP defections from the Liberal Democrats is Tim Swift, an officer of the Association of Liberal and Social Democrat Councillors. He described the decision to support ring fencing of the Community Care grant as falling “for a simplistic argument which bears no relation to what is actually happening on the ground”. On the same issue Professor Robert Pritchard, leader of the Leicester City Council Liberal Democrats, said “I get close to despair at the inconsistencies between our professed beliefs and the actions of those who are in positions of influence both at local and national level”.

Historically the Liberal Party, even without office, has always been a fertile ground for ideas. Even this role is now eschewed by the Liberal Democrats. On Bosnia and on the infamous penny on tax for education, Paddy Ashdown was certainly brave, but on policy generally, safety is the implicit motto. Hugo Young put it thus in *The Guardian*, before the 1997 election:

.... this [Paddy Ashdown] speech “a bridge to the next millennium”, marked the transition of the Liberal Democrats away from being the party of new ideas. If political maturity is marked by philosophical inertia, the Lib Dems have at last attained it. On the substance of their message - tax, education, the environment, Europe - they have nothing new to say. It is a remarkable retreat from even the smallest whiff of originality.

A *Times* leader at the same time made similar criticisms but concluded: “Liberalism is an enduring creed. It deserves dedicated advocacy”. Alas, it is not likely to come from the Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats have got themselves into a very difficult situation. The leadership’s abandonment of ‘equidistance’ - the word itself is a giveaway of Liberal Democrat attitudes - and its cosying up to Labour has antagonised the three north west Liberal Democrat MPs and many constituency associations. The party has had a slow drain of high and low profile defections to Labour and has the embarrassment of its former leader in the House of Lords, Roy Jenkins, described - without demurral - as an advisor to Tony Blair. Lord Jenkins now even envisages the possibility of a merger between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party. On BBC Radio 4’s one o’clock news on 1st March 1997 he stated that he would not rejoin the Labour party but that he did not “preclude merger”.

The Liberal Democrats’ attitude to Labour was probably inevitable, given its own hybrid constitutional basis, but it has been tactically naïve as well as philosophically indefensible. In their policy development and in their campaigning, Liberals must maintain their political independence, not least by the clarity of their analysis of Labour and Conservative attitudes towards political hegemony. What happens immediately after an election is a very different matter; negotiations to maximise Liberal influence are, of course, legitimate, and it would be foolish to suppose that the party could have contemplated returning the Conservatives to office after eighteen years. But to close options in advance is rather quixotic.

What Next?

Acting on the arguments for Liberalism has never been easy, and backing the Case for the Liberal Party is tougher still. Those who have stayed loyal to the Party, those who have rejoined it in recent times, and those who have come ‘fresh’, have not done so out of some perverse desire for purity for its own sake, nor because they are somehow uncomfortable in a larger party. Far from it. All of us wish to see Liberalism re-united in a single party as soon as possible - and the larger that party the better! We ally ourselves with the Liberal Party because we are determined to stay in politics and because there is no other party which is currently filling that whole area of radical progressive politics which is the Liberal cause.

We make the case issue by issue, campaign by campaign and election by election. And wherever there are those prepared to think through why things are so dismal in Britain today and why the world is so unstable, we gain recruits. The tacit conspiracy between the media and the three parliamentary parties to pretend that

they have a monopoly on political opinion, and to put up the shutters against publicity for any other political initiative provides those parties with a comfortable political life - but at the high price of the country's discomfort. It is rarely the loudest shouters who carry conviction. Often it is the still small voice which commands attention. It is not the adman's glib slogans which stir the hearts and minds of the people who instinctively know that there is a better, more human future, if only they choose it. It is instead the persuasion of those who, without bombast or pomposity, are confident in their beliefs and thorough in their advocacy which rings true. Increasingly the noise of the political throng tries to drown out the independent thinker and the dissident voice, but there *must* be a better way, and those who dare to believe it and to campaign for it are in the great progressive tradition of radicalism and of Liberalism.

It is not enough just to assent to the views and policies contained in this booklet. **Focus on Freedom - The Case for the Liberal Party** is presented as a programme for action. We invite those who support the Liberal case, or would like further information about the party, to contact us. It is not enough in today's world to be a Liberal, one has to be a Liberal with principles - and one must put those principles into action.

Please contact The Liberal Party Office now - either by using the enclosed form, or by telephoning or writing to us at:

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