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INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**YORKIE AMBULANCE...
ITS NOT FOR STOPPING**

EVENTS

EVENTS

24th May	Forum on Afghanistan 7.00pm NLC
7th June	Executive 7.00pm NLC
10th June	Lord Garden Memorial Lecture, Chatham House.
26th June	Garden Party, Kensington
19th July	AGM and India Forum followed by short Executive & optional dinner - NLC
6th September	Executive 7.00pm NLC
18th-22nd September	Lib Dem Autumn Conference, Liverpool.
15th-17th October	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru/Welsh Liberal Democrats' Autumn Conference 2010 Castle of Brecon Hotel, Brecon

All events other than the Garden Party & post-AGM Dinner are free for members.

For bookings & other information please contact the Organising Secretary below.

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Letter from the Chairman

Dear Friends,

As we head into the general election, we were delighted to welcome a large number of diplomats to our Annual Diplomats Reception, with many keen to hear about the prospects of a hung parliament. Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ed Davey, spoke to the gathering, as did LIBG President Malcolm Bruce and former LI President David Steel. David also spoke at a small gathering in December at which we commemorated the late Russell Johnston. It was good to see a number of old LIBG friends at both events.

On the assumption that many of our members will be actively involved in elections this spring, we haven't scheduled any events for April or the first part of May. However, from late May onwards we have an exciting series of events, including two Forums, the Tim Garden Memorial Lecture and the annual garden party, which will this year be back in London. Further details can

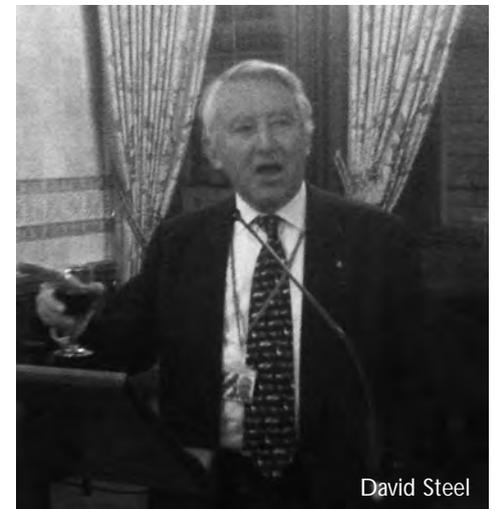
be found elsewhere in this edition of InterLIB and on the website www.libg.co.uk).

Looking further forward, we are exploring ways of increasing membership of LIBG, which will include finding ways to make our activities attractive to a wider audience, including younger people. If you have any suggestions about improvements you'd like to see made please do drop me an email, ideally by 20th May, so that I can feed them into our discussions.

With best wishes,
Julie



Photos - Mark Smulian



David Steel



Ahmad Mallick, Abdulrahman Ghanem Almutaiwee, Ambassador of the UAE and Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa, Ambassador of Bahrain, Malcolm Bruce.

Malcolm Bruce, Ed Davey, David Steel & Julie Smith

Ed Davey & Julie Smith



Gaza-convoy of hope

Mike Gwilliam

Our journey to Gaza began under a blanket of snow in York. The first part of the journey, through Europe consisted of long drives, often in the dark, to cold camping sites, often with little in the way of facilities. A small reminder of the discomforts that the Gazans have to endure on a daily basis!

Our team of four people [Nick, Steve, Heather and Mike] were driving a second-hand Mercedes ambulance, filled with medical supplies. We were part of a much larger Viva Palestina Convoy, which initially consisted of nearly 100 vehicles.

Driving in convoy is a different experience to normal travelling. The vehicles had different capabilities, and the drivers had differing personalities, all of which made it difficult to hold together and work in cohesion. Over time however, we gradually adjusted, and with some readjustments of formation, began to work as a bigger team.

As we passed through Europe people showed some support, and the local police were helpful, but it was all pretty low key. This changed dramatically, when we entered Greece. Suddenly we were acclaimed by ordinary people, standing in the streets in all weathers, applauding our passage. We became the subject of intense media interest.

The welcome grew exponentially as we entered Turkey. We were joined by volunteers from the Turkish aid agency, IHH [International Helping Hand], who brought 60 vehicles and 150 people to join the convoy. We were welcomed by the Mayor of Istanbul, and interviewed by four [!] live TV stations, including press TV and Aljazeera TV. We became the main item on the news, and the crowds of well-wishers increased further.

After a long tiring drive through eastern Turkey we crossed into Syria, where the welcome was even stronger. In Damascus we were given excellent hospitality, in smart hotels, with hot food and warm showers. How welcome that was!

At the Jordan border however, the atmosphere changed. Jordan is a buffer zone with Israel, and it was quite clear that the Jordan authorities did not welcome our presence. We were held for hours waiting



Loading the convoy onto the ferry at Lattakia, Syria

for custom clearance, and as we drove to Amman tried to impede our progress. We showed resolution that we would not be intimidated, and eventually the Convoy was able to proceed through Amman to Aqaba. Despite the attitude of the authorities however, the Jordanian people were very supportive, clapping and cheering as we passed.

Our original Plan was to cross the Gulf of Aqaba on a short ferry crossing, then drive the 100+ miles to Gaza. The Egyptian authorities, who were throughout extremely hostile to the convoy's presence, now decreed that this route was 'verboden'. We were stuck, but thanks to the strong support of the Turkish Government we were able, after 5 days of negotiation, to make an agreement, signed by both Governments, that that if the convoy entered Egypt at the port of El Arish [on the north coast, only 25 miles from Gaza], it could freely proceed to Gaza.

The closest port that we could arrange to ship the vehicle from was Lattakia, in northern Syria, over 400 miles away. But we were determined not to be thwarted so we retraced our steps, back



Protest at el Arish airport

through Jordan and Syria. We chartered a large Turkish roll-on-roll-off ferry and loaded the vehicles. The ferry was not licensed for passengers, so we had to fly separately to El Arish, to rejoin the vehicles.

Despite the earlier written agreement, the moment we landed in Egypt we were subject to hostility. Firstly, our passports were taken and stamped with EXIT visas, meaning that we would have to leave Egypt without reaching Gaza! We noisily protested and after two hours of saucepan banging and bench thumping the Egyptians relented.

We were reunited with our vehicles, only to find that we were now effectively held prisoner at the port. The Egyptians suddenly announced that they would renege on the written agreement. 59 of the vehicles would have to be handed to the Israelis before rest of the convoy would be allowed to proceed to Gaza! We had NOT driven over 4000 miles to hand vehicles over to the Israeli oppressors as George Galloway, our leader, made clear. A vigorous protest followed. The Egyptians reacted in a way which showed considerable premeditation. Over 1000 riot police quickly arrived supported by water cannon and armoured personnel carriers. Gunboats patrolled offshore. The protestors were attacked and over 50 people were injured and seven arrested.

Thanks partly to Turkish efforts at mediation, things eventually calmed down and a compromise was negotiated whereby the 59 vehicles would be driven to the Turkish Embassy, shipped back to Turkey and delivered to Palestinian refugee camps.

And so, after 31 days of travel and repeated delays, we were finally allowed to ENTER GAZA. We later learned that the Palestinians had been following our every move in the media and their welcome was rapturous. As we crossed the border there was a sudden whoosh as bunches of carnations were showered on us, covering the windscreen and filling the cab of the vehicle.

The welcome increased as we drove north to Gaza City. Throngs of people, young and old were waiting late into a dark January night, just to catch a glimpse of us and shout their welcome. At times it seemed like the whole of Gaza had turned out to welcome us. Time and again the throngs halted our ambulance. A journey that would normally take 30 minutes, took nearly 2 hours.

In Gaza we saw ample evidence of the poverty and wanton destruction that the Israeli war and terrible siege had inflicted. We saw the heaps of rubble from destroyed buildings, unable to be rebuilt because the Israelis refuse to allow the import of cement and other building materials. We saw the port and airport, built with European money, but systematically destroyed. We saw and heard the Israeli gunboats shooting at small unarmed Gazan fishing boats. The second night in Gaza we were suddenly awakened by a thunderous rumbling boom. Israel had just dropped a cluster of bombs on a refugee camp, killing several Palestinians. Something largely unreported in the west, but a daily occurrence in Gaza.

We visited refugee camps and community centres where the Gazans resolutely offer support and counselling for the bereaved. Those who would justify Israel's behaviour should visit the New Horizon Refugee camp, as I did, and see the tragic group of little 5 and 6 year olds, many of them orphans, standing so withdrawn in an otherwise empty room, so uncharacteristically unwilling to engage. I shall never forget the haunting look in their eyes, as if they had seen things no child should ever see.

The Gazans are a warm and resilient people and in some ways they manage their situation well. The streets are clean, well ordered, the people simply but neatly attired, .But make no mistake their suf-



Protest at the port of el Arish



A rapturous welcome by the people of Gaza



Garlanded by carnations inside Gaza

Handing over the aid in Gaza City to Dr Mona Al Farrah, Director of the Red Crescent in Gaza





Israeli destruction, but a field is being re-cultivated from the desolation

engage. I shall never forget the haunting look in their eyes, as if they had seen things no child should ever see.

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fering is very real and it is growing. Unemployment tops 85%, the economy has been almost totally destroyed by the siege, and they are only kept from starvation by the UN and NGOs. Medicines are increasingly scarce and seriously ill patients are routinely denied permission to travel out of Gaza for treatment.

The only relief from the siege is the goods that are smuggled through tunnels dug between Egypt and Gaza. But this is soon to stop, for the Egyptians are currently constructing a new "steel wall" between Gaza and Egypt, with 25 metre foundations, closing all the tunnels.

All too soon our visit ended, for the Egyptians had only allowed us to stay 36 hours. Sadly we departed, and our return through Egypt was as fraught as our original entry, but that is another story.

On a positive note we did succeed in delivering the York ambulance and all the supplies we had brought into accredited hospitals and refugee groups. We did give the Gazans a psychological boost and remind them that they were not forgotten. But we did not weaken the stranglehold of the siege on 1.5 million people. As the noose tightens a slow form of genocide is taking place before our eyes. It is utterly immoral, yet western governments stand idly by and seemingly accept Israeli behaviour, presumably for fear of being labelled anti-Semitic. Is no one except perhaps the Turks prepared to take a stand against this racist behaviour by Israel and its appeasers?

Mike Gwilliam was part of the York Ambulance crew on the recent Viva Palestina Convoy to Gaza



A mountain of destruction in Gaza

International Development

David Hall-Matthews

Hundreds of billions of pounds have been spent on development over the years, with significant increases since the creation of the Department for International Development (DfID) in 1997. What have we got to show for it? Well, quite a lot actually. Many African countries are growing steadily in spite of the recession and showing signs of sustained economic take-off that could mirror the successes of Asian nations like Vietnam and

Thailand, not to mention India and China. Though not all of the Millennium Development Goals will be met in all countries, some will. Primary education levels, for example, are much higher than they were ten years ago. Crude generalisations that development spending does not work, or is not worth the money when public resources are tight, are simply false. It is time to start talking more positively about development and communicating its achievements

better to the British public.

At the same time, there is a need to be honest about the difficulties of development. Managing expectations is essential to prevent people from exaggerating the significance of development failures. A new business set up in the UK today has a 60% chance of existing as a going concern a year later. Why should we expect a better performance from development programmes that necessarily take place in the most difficult and risky circumstances? Development is a huge, complex, contested and messy set of objectives. So while it is necessary to be smarter and clearer in what the UK tries to achieve in developing countries, we must not fall for dangerous bureaucratic mantras such as only funding “what we know works.” That would be guaranteed to bypass what Paul Collier has labelled the “bottom billion” people, who face huge obstacles to progress.

DfID has a strong track record in several areas and is admired around the world as a leader in pressing for important goals such as debt reduction. However, there is much more it could do to capitalise on this goodwill and global influence. Its 2009 White Paper acknowledged that setting development priorities should ideally be the outcome of political processes within developing countries, but there is little sense of how the UK would encourage this. Liberal Democrats would be much clearer that development is political. It cannot be achieved through aid alone. Indeed where philanthropic aid reinforces unequal power relations between and within nations, it can be part of the problem. The Liberal Democrat policy paper on International Development, to be debated at the Liverpool conference in September, will therefore argue that DfID needs to focus much more on the politics of development, in four ways.

First, DfID should focus its research on obstacles to development. There is already a great deal of knowledge around the world, from the past practices of many agencies and from academic research, about effective policies. But we need a far better understanding of why they sometimes don't work so well. Sometimes the barriers are physical – it is harder to export from land-locked countries with poor transport infrastructure, for example. But many obstacles are social or political. There are people who have an interest in opposing change. Sometimes this includes poor people themselves, who associate development interventions such as new crop varieties with risk, which they cannot afford to take. Often social hierarchies hold back marginal groups. And sometimes obstacles are created, accidentally or deliberately, by governments at different levels. States can be assumed to act in their own interests, but not necessarily in the interests of the poorest.

This brings us to the second – and perhaps most important – way in which a Liberal Democrat DfID would emphasise the politics of development. Democratic institutions need significant funding in order to increase the transparency and accountability of politicians to poor people. This could include a range of measures, from training for parliamentary committees to strengthening local government. The main aim must be to give a meaningful local voice to people who are currently disempowered. This would require better and deeper democracy, stronger and wider civil society and decentralised decision-making: all long-standing Liberal Democrat aims. Whether formal democracy is the best way to achieve this will depend on circumstances – hence the need for good local research into political systems. However, it can be assumed that people want to be heard – to be able to make claims and demands – everywhere. In many countries the biggest obstacle to effective democracy is the lack of resources available to opposition parties. Where voters feel the need to elect those with the greatest capacity to

spend their own money, policy debates about the best use of state resources cannot thrive. Self-evidently care needs to be taken about direct funding of political parties, particularly if focused on oppositions. However, Liberal Democrats would favour increased spending to strengthen political debate, where necessary, via the Westminster Foundation for Democracy.

Recognising that development and poverty reduction will best be achieved by strengthening the social contract between poor citizens and states necessarily implies a changed relationship between developing country governments and DfID, too. First, the process of supporting governments' own priorities and budgets, rather than funding externally-conceived programmes, needs to be persisted with. Monitoring needs to be improved, but trust can often best be engendered by trusting people. Second, donors should encourage effective governments to plan exit strategies from aid. Locally raised taxes, in particular, would also strengthen bonds between states and societies. Global levies such as a Tobin tax on currency transactions could also help. Of course, there are some countries where governments are unlikely to be able to stand on their own feet for a very long time – for example where there is conflict. But it is not too early to conceive of future relationships based on political alliances and partnerships of equals, rather than philanthropy.

In moving in this direction, a Liberal Democrat government would also seek to influence other donors. The third political aspect of DfID policy should be to use the high esteem in which it is held internationally to persuade the rest of the world to share its principles. Ideally a far higher proportion of development assistance should come from multilateral agencies rather than individual nations. However, many currently have a terrible record of self-interested giving. Since DfID was created, UK aid has not – at least in principle – been tied to UK interests. It should be pushing harder to ensure this is true of EU aid, for example. If it were, development goals could be much more effectively achieved through EU coordination. For example, DfID could specialise in delivering access to clean water around the world – in which it once had world-leading expertise – while leaving other European partners to focus on different Millennium Development Goals. At the moment, however, EU aid is divided and some member states still argue for tying, which benefits themselves more than recipients. The new EU External Affairs Service creates the potential for reform – and for development to be given a higher priority. DfID could, should and, under the Liberal Democrats, would push much harder for this, along with structural reforms of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, to make them more representative and stop them setting discredited policy conditionalities. To do this credibly would of course require proper investigations into the UK government's role in supporting the corrupt activities of British companies, notably BAE Systems.

The final arena in which DfID should get political is at home. Though represented in cabinet and relatively well-funded – especially if all parties stick to their pledges to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on development, DfID is often seen as a rather marginal department in Whitehall. Indeed, there appears to be a trade-off between its welcome independence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and its ability to influence other government departments. Yet if, as argued here, development is political and not all about aid, significant cooperation with them will be needed. Alliance building will best be delivered by the FCO, support for mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change will have to come from the Department for Energy and Climate

Change. Reducing the impact of conflict and linking reconstruction to development will need better teamwork between DfID and the Ministry of Defence. Getting rid of corporate corruption and encouraging greater private sector investment in poor countries and risky sectors like agriculture will need the help of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Making trade rules fairer by removing subsidies and tariffs will require DfID to bring pressure to bear on the European Commission.

This is not easy to do. Liberal Democrats will also keep a close eye on how much of the 0.7% of GNI is spent by DfID, on poverty reduction. Where there is a need for MoD spending in the developing world, it should be counted separately, as should climate change commitments. There is a real danger that an incoming Conservative government may meet its pledge to spend 0.7% on development broadly defined, while reducing poverty reduction budgets. Cooperation is nonetheless vital and that means give and take. As development processes and politics are different in every nation and region, the ways in which UK government departments work together will also have to differ. Country-level collaboration is key:

but DfID needs to take the lead in London to make sure that that happens, and that the focus is on getting the poorest involved in their own development.

Hundreds of local conversations are needed; between people, civil society groups, non-government organisations, businesses, investors, local governments, national governments, donor agencies and different UK government departments. The list could go on. Development is complex, messy and political. It's about giving a voice to local communities and empowering them by facilitating them to make connections and claims. It's what the Liberal Democrats are already best at.

David Hall-Matthews is chair of the Liberal Democrats' International Development Committee and will be standing for Hemsworth in the forthcoming General Election. He is a senior lecturer in International Development at the University of Leeds and amongst his publications is the chapter Globalisation and the Role of the British State . In: Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century

Obama and the Middle East

Brian Beeley

President Barack Obama took office a year ago amid optimism on a number of domestic and foreign fronts. Today many of his stated ambitions have run into difficulties. In some cases matters have been made worse for the President by bad luck. Disappointment hit hopes for health care reform and climate change control at home as much as conflict resolution in the Holy Land and the improvement of relations with Iran.

Obama's inauguration heralded the start of a turn-around in America's view of the world. In place of the clenched fist of post-9/11 Washington, he promised a nuanced approach to dealing with US interests and challenges across the globe. He re-established meaningful links with the United Nations, sending the well respected Susan Rice along with the rank of ambassador. He appointed to high office people with knowledge and experience of the Middle East such as George Mitchell and Dennis Ross and he put the well-known figure of Hilary Clinton in as Secretary of State. The high point of all this was the President's speech in Cairo in June in which he set out his new approach to the world in general and to the Islamic part of it in particular. He was cheered to the rafters in the Egyptian capital when he identified the right of Palestinians to justice and some sort of peace settlement. And in place of cold suspicion towards Iran and memories of hostage humiliation there was to be the offer of a new understanding in the search for better relations with the Islamic Republic.

Obama had the bad luck to inherit the end-game for America in the occupation of Iraq. It was up to his administration to try to get the best possible mix of stability and sense of renewed national pur-

pose in Baghdad and in the three main parts of the country, each of them now more sharply defined and anxious to preserve what they could for themselves in their post-conflict national future. In the US and UK current debate focuses on the legality of the invasion of Iraq but a crucial practical outcome has been the removal of a regime which was as opposed to Al-Qa'ida and 'Islamic' militancy more generally as much as anyone in Washington or London. The main regional beneficiaries have been Israel, which no longer has to reckon with Baghdad's support for Palestinian resistance, and Iran, which has greatly enhanced its position in Iraq and in the Gulf area.

Certainly bad luck entered the scene insofar as Iran has, during the President's first year in office, been locked in increasingly acrimonious wrangling within the governing establishment in Tehran. Not a counter-revolution against the government of the ayatollahs so much as a demand for a re-direction, opposition to Ahmadinejad has been exacerbated by an unfair election and subsequent repression of opposition. Obama found himself concerned more with Iran's nuclear ambitions than with opening up of avenues of dialogue. Voices calling for sanctions against Iran plus threats from Israel of direct action against suspected nuclear installations have seen the American fist clenching once again, with US missile-launching installations planned for the Gulf states.

Whereas Iraq was, for President Obama, in some degree concluding business, Afghanistan demanded new thinking and new initiatives to reverse the fortunes of NATO and the Kabul government forces in the lengthening struggle against the Taliban. After prolonged consideration, Obama chose to increase the US input rather

than to withdraw. A strategy involving trying to hold territory cleared of militants by working more closely with local people and greatly increasing numbers on the ground in key areas is now in place. One very key area is Helmand province which, along with neighbouring Kandahar, is a centre of Taliban strength and of poppy cultivation. Obama recognizes more clearly than did his predecessor in the White House, that the Taliban constitute an Afghan-led insurgency whereas their allies in Al-Qa'ida operate in scattered cells with an international dimension and purpose – including presumed responsibility for the attack on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001. The Obama administration, along with Britain and other contributing powers, face increasing opposition within their home constituencies to the fighting in Afghanistan. This is about casualty levels as much as costs and is exacerbated by problems in the government of Hamid Karzai ranging from doubtful election procedures to apparently endemic corruption in the national administration. Karzai's recent comment in London about a fifteen-year prospective for foreign military involvement in Afghanistan only added to concerns in those countries sending troops and war materiel.

While the war on the Taliban continues in Afghanistan, there is growing support for the suggestion that Osama Bin-Laden has relocated from the hills south-east of Kabul over the boundary into Pakistan's north-west frontier area. At the same time Pakistan Taliban in those areas come under attack from Islamabad's powerful army. But this is happening in the context of growing opposition to the country's pro-West governing establishment. Whereas the US-led forces in Afghanistan are leading the campaign there, over the border in Pakistan official nervousness as well as popular resentment are both fuelled by foreign military action – including the use of weapons such as pilotless drones likely to kill civilians as well as targeted militants. As if this geographical expansion of the problems facing President Obama is not enough, he has to take account of ongoing difficulties between Pakistan and India – both of them nuclear powers.

Of all the conflicts in the Middle East the one involving Israelis and Palestinians is the most intractable. As long as it persists those who attack America in the name of their vision of Islam have a massive propaganda weapon. Unlike his presidential predecessors (who have often neglected the Holy Land conflict until late in their administrations because they saw it as a vote loser), Obama made it clear early on – and in Cairo in June last year – that he proposed to try to cure this festering sore on the political landscape. His bad luck was to attempt this when a hard-line Likud-led coalition assumed power in Israel. In October, the no-compromise minded Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that we must

“learn to live with” the lack of any chance of an early resolution. In the previous February, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu had warned against returning territory to Palestinians because it would be “grabbed by extremists”. This posture contrasted with that of Ehud Olmert, leader of the previous Kadima administration, who had proclaimed, in late 2007, that “if talks fail, Israel will be finished”. Also warning his country of implications of Likud's current posture is military-man Defence Minister Ehud Barak who said in February that failure to make peace with the Palestinians could turn Israel into an “apartheid state”. Obama waded into the new Israeli political scene last year where Likud was proceeding with the building of settlements on Palestinian land and was continuing to put settlers into Palestinian homes in occupied East Jerusalem as part of a policy of expanding the proportion of Jews in the population there – protests from Israeli groups notwithstanding. Palestinians watch the land potentially available for their anticipated state shrink relentlessly. In January President Obama acknowledged to Time magazine that he had failed to pressure Israel's Likud leadership into ending the construction of illegal settlements for Jews or to get them to enter into realistic negotiations with Palestinians. The latter indeed, for their part, strengthened the Likud ‘no concessions’ hand by re-affirming the intra-Palestinian split between Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza where Israel obstructs reconstruction after its onslaught in the last weeks of the Bush administration. Many Arabs and Muslims more widely who had cheered the declared intentions of Obama only last June find his apparent inability to pressure Israel unfathomable. Levels of bitterness towards the US and its western supporters can be expected to grow... Even now Al-Qa'ida seems to be establishing itself in Gaza thanks to a welcome from Hamas militants there.

Another possible growth location for Al-Qa'ida appears to be Yemen where divisions between the one-time British ruled south and the more traditional ex-Imamate in the north are reasserting themselves. Tribal and religious discord and cross-border trouble with Saudi Arabia further undermine national unity and so offer scope to outsiders. Although Yemen has been regarded with circumspection for some time the growing instability there amounts to a major concern to be added to the list of challenges facing President Obama. Meanwhile across the Gulf of Aden much of Somalia shows growing discord and violence with parts of the country under angry Islamist rule offering scope for pirates ...and Al-Qa'ida...

Delivered at the Wednesday Luncheon Circle of the National Liberal Club, 3rd February 2010. Dr Brian Beeley teaches at the Open University.

Otto, Graf Lambsdorff (1926 – 2009) - a tribute:

As 2009 drew to a close, world liberalism was robbed of its second great German Liberal in just six months. Ralf, Lord Dahrendorf had been unwell for some time when he died in mid-June 2009, but on Saturday December 5th 2009 the Honorary Life President of Liberal International, Otto, Graf Lambsdorff, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 82. Count Lambsdorff left not only a grieving wife (Alexandra)

and family, but his party the German Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP) and all his colleagues in Liberal International were shocked and felt the loss very keenly. The new President of LI, Hans van Baalen MEP rightly described Lambsdorff as one of the most inspiring liberal politicians of the past century and a courageous statesman who was one of the architects of post-war Germany. “He was,” said van Baalen, “one of the most open, direct and when necessary bold political fighters for a free market economy and civil liberties, and because of this he earned the name ‘Marktgraf’ [Market Count].” Indeed he was all of this and much, much more.

Otto Lambsdorff was born in Germany in 1926 the son of a very distinguished Westphalian family that traced its roots back to the 14th century. It had provided many royal and public servants – one had been Foreign Minister to Tsar Nicholas II and another a

General in the Imperial Russian Infantry. Late in World War II the German army called up Otto, then only 17 years of age, and months later he was seriously wounded and had a leg amputated. He was a prisoner of war until 1946 but after his release he studied Law and Political Science at the Universities of Bonn and Cologne and was admitted to the bar at the local and district courts of Düsseldorf in 1960. Already (in 1951) he had joined the small but influential FDP and in 1972 was elected a Member of Parliament (Bundestag). He quickly rose to prominence as Minister of Economics in several cabinets under Chancellors Schmidt and Kohl from 1977 to June 1984, when he resigned as Federal Minister of Economics. From 1984 until 1988 he was the FDP Parliamentary Spokesman on Economic Affairs and was then elected leader of the FDP, serving until 1993. He was also President of Liberal International from 1991 to 1994, and in June 1996 he was elected Honorary President of LI. He also served with great distinction in many other capacities, notably as a Chairman of the Trilateral Commission and of a German commission that successfully sought reparations and the return of property confiscated from Jews during the Nazi regime. While these facts show his great ability, courage and achievement, they are only a pale reflection of the reality.

He was a man of great style and sartorial elegance. His war injury made walking an effort, but with his silver topped walking cane he turned his disability into an aristocratic trademark. His eloquence was peppered not only with the sharpest analysis and insight, but also with a forensically sarcastic humour which he used to expose the dangers and deceptions of the politics of both left and right as well as any superficiality of thought he encountered. For me as a young internationalist liberal he was never less than inspirational, and while he did not suffer foolishness or shallowness, he was always encouraging of young people who were genuinely committed to the liberal cause, and understanding of their mistakes, though never hesitant to point them out as a learning point. He was an aristocrat and one of the world's most highly regarded liberal economic ministers, but one of my fondest memories is of campaigning with him as he handed out leaflets and stopped passers-by in the shade of the punctured Berlin Wall, playing his part in street politics, and trying to pull a few extra votes for our East Berlin FDP colleagues in their

first venture into the electoral fray in a newly freed East Germany. When I needed support for the Alliance Party in a still troubled Northern Ireland he flew into Belfast just to address a meeting of businessmen that I had brought together to persuade of the seriousness of the Alliance economic policy. Needless to say, they were both charmed and challenged, and I basked in the reflected glory – his tongue as silver as the top of his cane, no less in English than in German.

Not only during his years as a Minister but even as an ordinary Member of Parliament he fought for lower corporate taxation and against state subsidies and bureaucracy, helping to deliver the FDP one of its most successful periods of widespread appeal among the German electorate, and contributing hugely to the German economic powerhouse. All of this gave him a well deserved reputation as a free-marketeer, but I knew him well enough that when I was asked to write a chapter for the 'Festschrift' in honour of his 80th birthday, I entitled it "Human Rights is Everybody's Business". He was amused at the pun, but alert to the commitment to corporate and individual responsibility in the struggle for human rights. He wrote not only to thank me and to say "I couldn't agree more", but then went on to deliver a thoughtful, detailed and supportive commentary on the chapter as well as warm personal regards. He was as committed to human rights as any other liberal, and this often led him into conflict with authoritarian regimes, not least the Chinese Government. They were so furious with his support for Tibet and the Dalai Lama that they closed the Beijing office of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, of which he was President. He wore the attempted snub as a badge of honour and continued his support for human rights in China in general and in Tibet in particular.

We lost an inspirational father figure on 5th December 2009, but he influenced some of us so deeply that he not only lives on in our memories, but in the life commitments he inspired in us, especially to the liberal freedom and human rights that were the guiding principles of his extraordinary life.

John, Lord Alderdice FRCPsych

Immediate Past President of Liberal International

House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW

events for its members, both political and social. It is situated in Central Westminster, overlooking the Thames and offers luncheon, dinner and bar facilities as well as splendid rooms for private lunches, dinners, conferences, etc.



HOW TO JOIN THE CLUB

Your first step is to contact the Membership Secretary at the Club, Miss Rosemary Tweddle, telephone 020 7930 9871, or email her membership@nlc.org.uk and look at our website www.nlc.org.uk
The National Liberal Club
Whitehall Place

London SW1A 2HE
www.nlc.org.uk

THE NATIONAL LIBERAL CLUB AND THE WEDNESDAY LUNCHEON CIRCLE

Members of the Wednesday Luncheon Circle of the National Liberal Club meet on the first Wednesday of each month to enjoy a two course luncheon in the elegant surroundings of the Lady Violet Room. Luncheon is followed by a speaker on a wide variety of subjects, after which there is a short question and answer session. The event is usually over by 2.30pm to allow those who work to return to their offices. Attendance at these very popular luncheons is open to all Club members and their guests.

In addition, the Club arranges a varied programme of special

Fighting Globoliath

Michael Breisky

*Leopold Kohr, 1909-1994, was an economic philosopher whose major work *The Breakdown Of Nations* influenced on the development of Community Politics in the 1960s and was the catalyst for EF Schumacher's 'Small is Beautiful' economics.*

David's fight against Goliath is a wonderful story every century loves to re-enact. For me, the 20th century's fight was between David Leopold Kohr and Globoliath, crown-prince of the Philistine empire of Globalisation. The fight began in the mid-1950s, when David Leopold, the Austrian born philosopher, wrote his „Breakdown of Nations“. Using this book like a slingshot, he hurled three simple ideas against Globoliath:

One: At any time, every man and every woman is good for a big surprise (and not to speak of children!).

Two: The complexity of things increases with the square of their size.

Three: Man's capacity to understand complexity is limited. If complexity rises beyond this limit, surprises are likely to get nasty and nastier.

Globoliath laughed at these ideas and would not stop ridiculing David Leopold, calling him an obscure social romantic. And indeed, for many, many years there was no indication that these three ideas had made any impact at all. After claiming victory over the other big empire, the Soviet Union, Globoliath had even become emperor of Globalization (in fact, most people believe now it was David Leopold's germ that caused the Soviet demise).

But David Leopold always knew his fight would be in slow motion. His ideas were as hard as a diamonds, but had also other qualities: taken together, they develop into a germ, forcing everything bigger or more complex than Human Scale recommends either to perish or to split up. So David Leopold just continued to drink at his various „Academic Inns“ in Puerto Rico, Wales and Austria, had a lot of fun with the ladies and friends and passed away peacefully in 1994.

In 2008, however, just one year before David Leopold would have turned one hundred, something strange happened: In the wake of a global financial crisis, many people began to feel and act like the fairy tale's orphaned child and started to shout: „Emperor Globoliath is naked!“ And indeed, now everybody could see and admit freely that David Leopold's germ had not only destroyed the emperor's shiny cloths, but had also cut deep wounds into his body. I am not a prophet and don't know whether Globoliath's wounds are fatal, but I doubt that an empire as big as Globalisation can endure for long, if its people believe that their ruler is naked, with nothing to hide his gigantic ugliness.

In a nutshell, that is what even fourth-graders should know and remember about Leopold Kohr. Of course, the philosopher of the Human Scale had much more to say, and he elaborated his theories with the greatest wit and clarity. Some of his quotes tell us also in all briefness how he loved to argue tongue-in-cheek:

I am a romantic anarchist The greatest stupidity becomes a solemn hymn, if sung by masses in a choir.

Governmental concern, like marital fidelity or gravitational pull, tends to diminish with the square of the distance

Other things being equal, territories will be richer when small and independent than when large and dependent.

Man comes from dust and shall return to dust. Inbetween, for the materialist there are only expenses – but for the romantic there is the rainbow between beginning and end.

Returning to the three ideas of Human Scale, they are obviously the bare bones of his philosophy only. With some flesh on it they would look like this:

Idea No. One tells at the one hand of his deep concern with the well-being of individual man, as opposed to all sorts of collectivism, be it state, party, nation or even mankind; and at the other how he believed in the unfathomable creativity of man, but also how susceptible man is to all kinds of errors and mistakes.

Idea No. Two explains why the costs of growth of a living system are at some point certain to exceed its benefits; and why nature handles this issue by splitting up cells, organs, herds and similar organic entities into smaller units, once their upkeep becomes too expensive. By applying this insight to human society, Leopold gave history and politics a new understanding: "There seems only one cause behind all forms of social misery: Wherever something is wrong, something is too big." With other words, for every animal, institution or system, there is an optimal limit beyond which it ought not grow. Needless to say that the optimal size of human societies cannot be expressed by one figure alone, but depends on various aspects, in particular the society's tasks. As an economist, Leopold elaborated this view by an analogy with inflation theory: According to his Velocity Theory of Population, the physical mass of a population increases not only numerically, by birth and immigration; but also by the velocity with which it moves people and goods (Not only „Small is Beautiful“, but also Slow!). Similarly, Leopold demonstrated that the quality of life deteriorates in economies that have grown beyond the critical point: the share of GNP for individual expenses spent on luxury will go down, while expenses for collective costs („density goods“) will go up.

Idea No. Three has an optimistic backside: if complexity is kept at bay, man's surprises are likely to be more creative than destructive. To that end he should always try to be in good social company, where his acts and intentions are discussed in all fairness. But besides staying away from masses, he should avoid anonymity (where too many people love to hide themselves and others) and avoid all positions of unrivalled power, as this would destroy his ability to give and receive human trust.

Idea No. Three holds also another truth: If man's talent to deal with complexity is limited, then one should be particularly careful with efforts to simplify complexity by means of abstraction; after all, where one looks only at the pure "essence" of things, every abstraction deliberately excludes part of the entire reality. And how long can one continue to ignore parts of the reality? Of course, abstractions are necessary in life; even animals use them, when they recognise "patterns" of the outside world as basis for their actions. But

experience tells us that deliberate neglect of parts of a (admittedly complex) reality bears high risks. Leopold had this in mind when he quoted Paracelsus, the great Swiss doctor of the 16th century: "All medicine is poison- what matters is the dosage". He applied this experience to nationalism, socialism, capitalism or similarly demanding "great ideas", denying these abstractions all claims to absolute authority, while conceding them a limited value "in relation" to a specific context.

Unfortunately, Leopold said much less about the limits of "great ideas" than about the issue of size in society. So we can assume – while still staying perfectly in line with his thinking – that something like the "critical point" of growth in living systems (biological or social) should also apply to all "great ideas"; i.e. that following such ideas and abstractions will always produce "at some point" more disadvantages than benefits. In my view, the admission of such a "critical point" of ideas yields the greatest revolutionary dynamics the world has seen since the early days of Enlightenment. Leopold's interpretation of the Paracelsus-quote reduces all the (much too often violent) arguments and counter-arguments about the absolute authority of abstractions into Byzantine squabble; instead, our intellectual energies can now be spent on the question, whether an idea or abstraction is still helpful for a specific issue and context – or whether things have already developed beyond its critical point.

So instead of arguing whether competition and international division of labour is good or bad for the planet, one should ask whether it is good for a specific people. Likewise, one should not argue about an absolute right to immigration or even asylum, but whether the cry "the boat is full!" is justified for this country and not for the other; whether there are categories of strangers that should be admitted even into a rather full boat; and what people in a "full boat" could do to ease the fate of the strangers that could not get in.

One issue remains, however: there must be rules for when to start discussions about the critical point of "great ideas", even if it were for practical reasons only (all social life were to collapse, if such a discussion could be initiated by everybody at any time and on any subject). Such a debate must be reasonable, but reason alone will hardly find the right moment to begin this discussion; with other words, we must consult also other sources of cognition, be it religion and spirituality, aesthetics and the arts, consistent traditions or just "common sense". The relevance of this issue can be illustrated with the outbreak of the current financial and economic crisis by the American subprime mortgage crisis: while "rational" projections of well-established financial ideas spoke in favour of separating loans from their respective subprime mortgages (and selling them to oth-

ers), at least one or two of the "irrational" means of cognition just mentioned spoke still in good time heavily against it. On the same line one could find many more arguments against market-fundamentalism, Globoliath's pet toy.

In summing up the issue of "great ideas", it is only fair to state that Leopold's understanding of the Paracelsus-quote became the first step in a new phase of Enlightenment: While its first phase was ruled by rational intelligence and science alone, the new and second phase will have to admit also the "secondary" means of cognition I have mentioned before; in most instances it is up to the latter to ask the questions and to rational intelligence to find the answers. If this revolution succeeds, one will with all likelihood see one sequence of events reversed, which Leopold seems to have envisaged: Instead of the breakdown of nations leading to the demise of "great central ideas", it will be the end of such ideas that will enable small political entities to take up more and more responsibilities.

I hope Leopold forgives me for forcing his philosophy into the three ideas thrown at Globoliath. I have tried to take up Leopold's torch in my own way and put his ideas in my book "Welcome to Post-Globalisation" – published in London on the occasion of Leopold's 100th birthday – into the context of our times. Hence my own concept of an Economy of the Mind deals with the physiological problems of data overflow in an advanced information society while supporting Leopold's Human Scale theories very appropriately. Naturally, I had to shift the emphasis on some of Leopold's points: if he said little about religion and spirituality, I suggest some practical measures to overcome the increasing spiritual void in Western societies. While he hoped for the break-up of nations into a multitude of small states, I favour a way for the many NGOs to take up much of their roles. We differ also with regard to European integration: If Leopold was rather skeptical, fearing most of all a repetition of rivalries between the big member-states and a constant over-ruling of the small, I see how the small members fare very well and praise the European Union's institutional drive towards open process, ethic decisions and soft power. But we both believe in the rainbow.

Dr Michael Breisky, Former Austrian Ambassador and Consul general in New York, writes extensively on post-Globalization. We reprint this extended version of an article published in The Fourth World Review, 26 The High Street, Purton, Wilts, SN5 4AE

Welcome To Post-Globalization: The Politics of the Second Enlightenment, Human Scale and the Economy of Mind by Michael Breisky, New European Publications.

Blood on the Ballot papers

An election is due in Sudan in April that is set to plunge that country into fresh conflict, says Becky Tinsley

In the early years of the Bush Administration elections in the world's troubled regions were declared "a good thing," because the Americans rather optimistically assumed moderates would triumph. It seems no one in Washington DC imagined that Palestinians,

sick of Fatah's corruption and incompetence, might vote for Hamas. Nor that voters across Latin America, impoverished by the IMF and World Bank's voodoo economics, might lean to the left.

Thereafter, the US lost its enthusiasm for democratic ballots, but

Union. Some, like Liberia, are thought to have gone well, while others, like the Democratic Republic of Congo, don't seem to have changed the already dire status quo. The 2009 Afghan elections confirmed the pointlessness of holding a ballot in an insecure and corrupt environment.

Yet, in April 2010, there will be elections in similar circumstances in Sudan. Already, before a single ballot has been cast, the legitimacy of the Sudanese poll is in question, prompting predictions of a repeat of Afghanistan's problems.

Sudan will vote because the US insisted elections be included in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between north and south Sudan, theoretically ending two decades of bloodshed. Both parties to the CPA went along with it to keep the Americans happy, knowing they held the purse strings. Of greater importance to the Sudanese was the high contentious referendum on southern secession promised by 2011.

Now, only weeks away from the presidential and parliamentary poll, donor nations realise the election may trigger bloodshed, instability and even more suspicion between the north and south. For months election monitors and human rights groups have warned that Sudan's vote will not meet the benchmark of free and fair elections. Given the Khartoum regime's track record, it would be surprising if it did. Freedom House gives Sudan its worst grade for both political rights and civil liberties, declaring it 'not free.' Transparency International ranks Sudan as the fourth most corrupt nation in the world.

The National Islamic Front, re-branded as the National Congress Party, has been in power since a coup in 1989. Its rule has been marked by long-running and bloody conflicts between its power base in the capital and the marginalised regions, particularly Darfur and the south.

Politicians and faith leaders in the mainly black African south cite several reasons why the election will not be transparent and peaceful. Their doubts are rooted in distrust of the mainly Arab regime they believe has oppressed them, cheated them of oil revenues, and ethnically cleansed them for two decades. Their fears are exacerbated by a recent comment by Dr Nafi Ali Nafi a senior advisor to the President of Sudan: "This government is not going to be changed by peaceful means or otherwise."

Journalists who stray from the official line live in fear of arrest, torture and worse. Public gatherings are broken up, and civil society groups are hounded by the ubiquitous 'security'. The Carter Center and the International Crisis Group are among those questioning how opposition candidates will get their message across to voters under these circumstances.

Another stumbling block is the highly flawed population census determining the size of constituencies. Southern politicians claim that if boundaries are based on an inaccurate census, it will vastly over-represent mainly Arab northerners and under-represent mainly black African southerners.

The same applies in Darfur. The census director in West Darfur conceded there had been no census in the camps where half the population lives because they were "not accessible." Since Darfuris make up 17% of the Sudanese population, their exclusion has repercussions for the legitimacy of the election, and the credibility of any

future peace negotiations. Quite how the international community imagines an election can take place in a war zone remains to be seen.

Voter registration took place in November 2009, but with 80% male and 92% female illiteracy in the south it was hard to mobilise the population. It did not help that the regime's officials put unexploded mine tape around registration centres to frighten people away.

Why didn't the donor nations intervene at an earlier stage? One possible answer is that there are insufficient international election law 'wonks' there to spot potential problems. Instead of bringing the dubious census process to a halt early on, the international community looked the other way, desperate to get Sudan off its plate.

More puzzling is why southern Sudanese politicians were not more engaged in the 'process' issues. Observers suggest the election is of little interest to them when the prize is the referendum on secession. The semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan is willing to allow the northern junta to claim legitimacy because it isn't planning to be part of Sudan anyway, so the argument goes. Such confidence is based on informal polling showing 90% of southerners wish to split from Khartoum.

However, if the current regime claims victory after a flawed poll, it will be in a stronger position to delay or sabotage the referendum. Unity is in Khartoum's interest, not least because it wants the oil beneath southern Sudan. Disrupting the vote on secession would be easy enough for a regime that has used tribal proxies to cause mayhem for decades.

Bizarrely, the southern Sudanese leadership has allowed the Khartoum regime to impose rules making it almost impossible for the south to split from Sudan. They acquiesced to Khartoum's demand that no referendum on secession would be

valid unless 60% of registered voters participated, of whom 51% would have to vote for secession. This will be challenging in a vast region without paved roads or public transport.

Khartoum is also pressing for a complicated form of wording on the ballot. There is an international precedent that should be of concern: in Quebec in 1995 the secession referendum was narrowly lost after a long-winded and confusing proposition. It is safe to assume the literacy rate in Quebec is somewhat above southern Sudan.

There are other potentially inflammatory questions, akin to the mother of all divorce battles, if the north and south separate. Yet the parties to this hornet's nest have not even worked out where the border is. Instead, both sides are rearming as fast as they can, violence has escalated dramatically, and as usual, African civilians will pay the price.

The role of the international community should be to guarantee a free and fair vote, and the security to allow people to participate. Otherwise, why bother?

The voters of Sudan will not be fooled into accepting the illegitimate as legitimate. Just because people are illiterate, it does not mean they are stupid. Sooner or later, there will be a price to pay for simply going through the democratic motions. And paradoxically, an election that was supposed to cement a peace deal already on life support, will probably precipitate a return to war.

Becky Tinsley is director of the charity Waging Peace and has observed general elections in Mozambique and Liberia.



Of course not all parts of England are renowned for the veracity of their elections. This replica of a hut from Darfur stood in the grounds of the Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green.

LD Spring Conference Afghanistan fringe meeting –

Afghanistan seems to be the war about which few can come to a definite view. Former Liberal Democrat leader Lord Ashdown debated the war with Guardian journalist Seamus Milne at the party's spring conference in Birmingham at a fringe meeting organised by Centre Forum. The uncertainty on both sides was striking.

Milne argued that the war was a doomed enterprise, that no-one had ever succeeded in subduing Afghanistan and that, far from making Britain safer, the resentment caused by the presence of foreign troops made it less so. He did not though simply want an overnight withdrawal but called for the rapid conclusion of a negotiated pull-out, so that the west was no longer seen to be in the country against the will of its people for the purpose of propping up a corrupt and ineffectual government.

Ashdown conceded that the war's strategy had been badly planned and executed and that the UK government had failed to properly explain why the country was committed in Afghanistan.

He admitted the NATO mission might be close to failure but argued that withdrawal would lead to a loss of credibility for both NATO and the UN and would also endanger Afghan democrats who not want to see the Taliban back in power.

Both speakers noted that while the three main political parties support the war, the bulk of UK public opinion does not, and recognised the dangers that could arise for democracy if anti-war sentiment could not find a mainstream political voice.

Contributions from the audience included two from the partners of serving soldiers, who said their partners did not doubt their mission but were concerned about the poor state of equipment provided.

A party member of Afghan origin told the meeting she had been born in Kabul and that as she was growing up the country had been under a moderate form of Islam until the west armed, encouraged and trained violent fundamentalists to overthrow the Afghan Communists and their Russian allies, since when her country had known no peace.

Mark Smulian

We must rebalance our foreign policy that is over-reliant on the US

Nick Clegg

In a speech to Chatham House today, Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg set out what is at stake in foreign policy at the coming General Election.

Nick Clegg said: "Gordon Brown and David Cameron want to pretend that foreign policy is not an issue at the General Election. Gordon Brown doesn't want to remind voters of the disastrous decision to go to war in Iraq. David Cameron doesn't want to remind voters that he is friendless in Europe.

"The real truth is that the future of British foreign policy is as

much in the balance as the future of our economy, or the future of our political system.

"This election is an opportunity to turn the page on the Labour-Conservative consensus on foreign policy which has been in place since the Suez crisis: one of following what the White House wants rather than leadership in Europe and the world.

"Of course our relationship with the US is of immense importance, but that should not mean that Britain unquestionably does what America wants when it is not in our interests to do so. On Iraq, on Russia, on the Middle East, on the interrogation of torture suspects and many other issues our strategic interests have differed.

"Baroness Manningham-Buller's admission that the US kept our security forces in the dark about unacceptable interrogation techniques only confirms the impression of an unbalanced and unequal relationship.

"That is why, in the same way we must rebalance an economy that is over-reliant on bankers, we must rebalance foreign policy that is over-reliant on the White House. It is time to repatriate British foreign policy by standing tall in our European backyard and pursuing a policy of partnership – not followership – with our friends in the US.

"At this General Election only the Liberal Democrats realise what is at stake and are prepared to spell out what a different foreign policy would look like."

Speech delivered at Chatham House, London on Wednesday 10th March 2010.

ON LIBERTY

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* was recently translated into Arabic, having never previously been available. However, in order to make it widely available to Jo Hayes has discovered it would be possible to have an improved translation done and parallel texts available in English and Arabic as PDFs, hopefully promoted by LI. The original translation produced by the Atlas Foundation in Washington DC sold out immediately and they are keen to produce a new, higher-quality translation. Total cost is 9000 euros and the Foundation is seeking a contribution of 3000 euros in return for which LI/LI(BG) would be permitted to distribute the text. Jo is therefore hoping people will support this by making donations. On thirty pledges of 100 euros apiece would do it. A few of us have already pledged to do this, and we're inviting members to consider whether they can contribute. The initiative is also advertised on the website – www.libg.org.uk The Arab world is deficient in democracy, at least by western standards and Mill's work would be a valuable tool to the growing number of Liberal parties emerging there.

Julie Smith

Nicaraguan Democratic Caucus rejects Ortega's "coup d'etat"

The Nicaraguan Democratic Caucus (BDN) — a liberal parliamentary group composed of MPs from the Movement "Vamos con Eduardo" and Partido Liberal Independiente,

strongly rejected yet another dubious presidential decree by Daniel Ortega prolonging the mandate of the magistrates.

According to the Nicaraguan liberals, the decree is unconstitutional and a flagrant breach of their country's legal system. They also called for the removal of President Ortega from office, and for all elected officials to step down when at the end of their constitutional mandate. Furthermore, they objected to the economic policy of Ortega, which leaves Nicaragua with a massive tax burden that increasingly damages the country's economy and has further aggravated the living conditions of Nicaraguans, a majority of whom live below the poverty line.

The struggle between liberal forces in Nicaragua and their extreme left-wing President has continued after Liberal International President Hans van Baalen MEP succeeded in uniting Nicaraguan liberals through the Pact of Managua last November. The attitude of Daniel Ortega was also condemned by the European Parliament in a special resolution proposed by the ALDE Group.

Sam Rainsy sentenced in absentia

Vay Rieng provincial court has convicted opposition leader Sam Rainsy of racial incitement and destroying demarcation posts on the border with Vietnam, a verdict rights activists have labelled "ridiculous". In a closed-door session on Wednesday, Judge Koam Chhean sentenced the Sam Rainsy Party (LI member) president to two years prison and fined him 8 million riels (around US\$1,927) in absentia, said Sam Sokong, the defence attorney of two villagers convicted on similar charges.

"I cannot accept the trial today, because it did not take evidence and proof into consideration to find justice," Sam Sokong said. "The court did not base its decision on the evidence." After the hearing, Long Ry, an SRP lawmaker who attended the trial, scorned the verdict, saying the proceedings were a farce. "The decision was prepared beforehand and everything was decided in advance. The court 'acted' very well," he said afterwards.

Wednesday's proceedings were closed to members of the public, and the gate to the provincial courthouse was guarded by a phalanx of police and military police officers.

LI Cairo congress documents online

All documents regarding the 56th Liberal International Congress in Cairo can now be found online on our website. Liberal International is proud to share last congress's key note speeches, the adopted resolutions and press releases on its website www.liberal-international.org. You can find the documents you are looking for by checking the Cairo Congress topic on the front page of www.liberal-international.org/editorialIndex.asp?ia_id=1821 or in Newsletter

www.liberal-international.org/editorial.asp?ia_id=1886
Also, we encourage you to take another look on Liberal International's <http://twitter.com/liberalinternat> Twitter and Facebook accounts, to relive memorable moments of the congress or just to get a general impression of our latest successful event in the ancient Egyptian city of Cairo.

Cadiz – La Pepa

The official celebrations each year of the first ever Liberal Constitution are held on 19th March. This year was special as it marked 200 years from the start of the special Cortes with representatives from the Latin American colonies, Spanish landowners, clergy and bourgeoisie, which met in San Fernando and after, with the approach of Napoleonic troops, moved the fortress island of



Cadiz. On 19th March 2012 a Constitution was proclaimed which included the word "liberal" and was adopted in Spain, its newly independent colonies and even, I believe, Norway, although that must have been somewhat later.

It was in Cadiz too that the Duke of Wellington was named as head of the joint British and Spanish army.

Napoleon forced the restored Fernando VII to abandon the Constitution, which was restored under his enlightened daughter, Isabel (Elizabeth) II, a liberal monarch.

As 2012 will be crawling with dignitaries, Liberal International decided to celebrate the bi-centenary this year at the famous monument in the Plaza de Espana, where troops dressed in early 19th century uniforms paraded together with Gaditanos of all ages in traditional dress. LI President Hans van Baalen and many members of the LI Bureau attended and were photographed at the monument with the leading members of several of the Liberal Clubs, the Cadiz 1812 one having been on the podium with the Mayoress of Cadiz, who was later to receive a liberal prize even though she, as well as many members of the defunct CDC party of Adolfo Suarez (a former LI President) had decamped to the conservative Partido Popular's liberal wing.

The LI Bureau met later in the day, and this was followed the next day by a seminar sponsored by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the ALDE Group in the European Parliament, attended by many representatives from Latin America – from Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Panama and Honduras. This took place in the Moorish splendour of the Casino Gaditano (not a gambling club!). We heard harrowing tales of the threat to democracy caused by Venezuelan petro-dollars and the antics of Hugo Chavez and his friends in the movement for "21st century socialism", or the Bolivarian revolution. Simon Bolivar would turn in his grave to learn of what is being done in his name.

RELIAL, the LI associated organisation for Latin American, chaired by recent Costa Rican presidential candidate Otto Guevara,

is leading the fight, and urged European liberals to counter the propaganda of European socialists, including the Spanish premier in favour of Chavez and his anti-democratic pals.

Several representatives of Spanish and Portuguese embryonic parties met following the seminar to discuss ways of making liberalism a force in Iberian politics again. Only the Catalans, who look likely to form the next government in their country, have a realistic chance of short term success.

*Robert Woodthorpe Browne
Vice President of Liberal International and Member of the LI Bureau*

SINGAPORE DEMOCRATS LEADERS JAILED AGAIN

The Singapore Democratic Party, LI Observer Member, has seen its leading members jailed after being convicted for distributing flyers critical of the government. Dr. Chee Soon Juan, Chairman and Gandhi Ambalam, Secretary General were jailed for a week after being convicted of assembly without permit.

Previously, another leading SDP member, Chee Siok Chin, was convicted on the charge of illegal assembly and taken to prison in a high security. While jailed, all three were treated appallingly, were refused to exit their cells, their cells lacked lights and Mr. Ambalam, who suffers from a heart condition, was refused adequate medical attention.

These are worrying developments in relation to disrespect of democracy and human rights in Singapore. Last LI Congress sent clear message to the Singapore authorities: "LI strongly urges the Singapore government to work towards true democracy by ensuring its citizens full democratic rights, including the right of expression, the right of assembly, and the right for opposition to hold peaceful protests. LI expresses support for Dr Chee Soon Juan and his Singapore Democratic Party"

CHINESE GOVERNMENT TO SET UP "ELECTORAL SCHOOL" IN DRC

The government of Communist China is in the initial stages of setting up an electoral training school in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Representatives of the People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy, the governing party of the DRC will soon travel to China to be provided with further training to be passed onto local facilitators within the African nation.

Not surprised by this news, leader of LI full member, ANADER from the DRC, Elli Kumbu-Kumbel said: "Let's not forget what the People's Republic of China is: a one party state with an autocratic, harmful political regime that does not concern itself with human rights and has created the concept of a socialist economy based on production for export in order to amass significant

amounts of revenue while exploiting its workers and restricting their liberties...The last thing the liberals in Congo want is for the Congolese to share the faith of the Chinese".

By targeting African nations with large debts, China has been willing to hand over large sums of cash, aid and political support in return for access to resources and international support of the Communist regime.

Call for full investigation into use of EU funds in Afghanistan

On March 23rd a new investigation by French newspaper La Libération highlighted the misuse and —management of EU aid funds in Afghanistan. Pino Arlacchi, European Parliament rapporteur on Afghanistan (ALDE Group) was not surprised. Based on his experience during a fact finding mission to Kabul earlier this year he said that "70-80 percent of the \$34 billion in aid to Afghanistan via international organizations in the past eight years never reached the Afghan people". He added that 'Further to what I observed first hand in Kabul, and now confirmed by La Libération's investigation, this is a case of bad mismanagement and waste of public funds that makes the implementation of stringent and rigorous form of control more urgent than ever. I believe it is necessary now to investigate thoroughly all EU expenditure in Afghanistan.' An estimated €27 million has been spent over four years by the EU to ensure security for its mission in the country, and in total \$34 billion have been invested in the country's rebuilding by international organisations.

Highlights from the LIBG Calendar

The General Election and for many of us local elections will be on us before the LIBG calendar cuts in again.

The Forum on 24th May 2010 will be on Afghanistan, again at the NLC.

The now **annual Lord Garden Memorial Lecture** will be held at Chatham House on 10th June, and our Garden Party is to be held in Kensington this year on 26th June. Tickets will cost £8.00. Please apply in writing, with a cheque made out to "Liberal International (British Group), to the Organising Secretary, 1 Brook Gardens. London SW13 0LY. Places are limited, so please book early.

We are sorry the planned **Forum on India** had to be cancelled, but we are delighted to announce that we have rescheduled this for Monday 19th July, at the National Liberal Club, right after our AGM.

Finally, at this moment at least 18th - 22nd September sees the **Liberal Democrat Conference in Liverpool**. LIBG needs members to assist with our stall and fringe events. The conference is also important as our best chance to recruit new members, so please help if you can.

Do please email the Organising Secretary to let us know you are coming to any of these events - w.kyrle@virgin.net

Wendy Kyrle Pope