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INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



**YOUNG LIBERALS ACT GLOBALLY –
The Wave, London 5th December'**

EVENTS

11th January	Executive 7.00pm NLC
1st February	Forum on India 7.00pm NLC
5th-7th February –	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Welsh Liberal Democrats) Spring Conference. Grand Theatre, Swansea.
1st March	Executive 7.00pm NLC
12-14th March	Lib Dem Spring Conference, Birmingham
15th March	Diplomatic Reception 7.00pm NLC
24th May	Forum on Afghanistan 7.00pm NLC tickets £20.00
7th June	Executive 7.00pm NLC
10th June	Lord Garden Memorial Lecture, Chatham House.
26th June	Garden Party, Kensington
19th July	AGM, followed by short Executive & optional dinner - NLC
6th September	Executive 7.00pm NLC
18th–22nd September	Lib Dem Autumn Conference, Liverpool.

All events other than the Diplomatic Reception, the Garden Party & post-AGM Dinner are free for members. There will be a cash bar at the Russell Johnson Party.

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

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London SW1A 2HE
Underground: Embankment

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Letter from the Chairman

Dear friends,

I'm delighted that we have our new website up and running, thanks to Mark Smulian, who has put in a huge amount of work. All forthcoming events are listed and we will ensure that they are regularly updated. There will be further changes to the site over the coming weeks and months, not least a dedicated section for the Scottish Branch. The new site is at www.libg.co.uk. We would be glad to hear your thoughts so that we can continue to improve it.

We hope to improve our communications and in particular would like to be able to contact members by email where possible so that we can let you know about any additional events which we hope to co-organise with other Liberal organisations concerned with international politics. We will of course endeavour to alert those of you without email by post. Could I urge you all please to let our Membership Secretary, Moira Brett, have your correct contact details moiram-brett@aol.com or postal: 34 West End Lane, Pinner, Middlesex, HA5 1AQ).

LI Executive and Congress

I attended the LI Congress in Cairo (30-31

October) and the Executive Meeting in Alexandria (29 October), where LIBG and the Lib Dems were well-represented, with several members of the Executive participating. We had submitted some motions jointly with the Lib Dems. Most of the Lib Dem amendments were accepted with the exceptions of the paragraph on Georgia and our 10:10 amendments to a Swedish motion on energy policy. It was also clear that there was little support for the Natural Environment motion, which was clearly too narrowly focussed for a global body such as LI. It was therefore withdrawn before the final plenary. I believe that the lesson for LIBG is that we need to be much smarter about working up motions well in advance of Congress in order to ensure we have ironed out potential problems with sister parties in good time.

I have succeeded Jonathan Fryer as a Vice-President of LI and Robert Woodthorpe Browne has become a Vice-President and Bureau member.

Conference

We were really grateful to the LI Secretariat for manning the stall wonderfully for three days. However, we desperately need some-



one to offer some support for decorating the stall and ensuring that it looks interesting and exciting. If anyone feels able to take on this task, please let us know!

Unfortunately, we did not hold a conference fringe in Bournemouth. Normal service will be resumed in Liverpool, where we intend to organise a lively and challenging debate.

Forums

Our Forum on 9th November focused on emerging global powers and the Copenhagen negotiations with representatives from the Chinese and Indonesian Embassies. This event was not well attended, I believe because of problems with our email list, hence the plea for up-to-date contacts details. We will be using the website far more extensively to advertise events in future and will also use Flock Together, so do check if you have internet access. Plans are already in hand for the next Forum: Balan Sisupalan has been setting up a Forum on India to be held on 1st February.

I hope you all have a happy and peaceful Christmas and hope to see many of you at our events in the New Year.

With best wishes, Julie Smith



Simon Hughes and Julie Smith making waves.

Education in the 21st century: a Zimbabwean perspective

Senator David Coltart

When I last attended a meeting of Liberal International held in Dakar, Senegal, in October 2003 I never imagined that I would be speaking to you all today on the topic "Education in the 21st century". In that previous life I was a human rights lawyer. I am not an educationalist nor do I make any pretensions about being one and so to that extent I feel ill qualified to address this topic.

Since being sworn in as Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture on the 13th February 2009 I have become increasingly convinced that I was given the job because no one else wanted it! The job fell to me as a result of the long and tortuous mediation process facilitated by SADC which commenced shortly after the shocking torture of Morgan Tsvangirai in March 2007 and which culminated in the signing of what we term the Global Political Agreement (GPA) by Zanu PF, and the two MDC factions, MDC T and the MDC M, in September 2008.

The reason I was allocated education has much to do with the character of the three political parties and their interrelations. Zanu PF, which describes itself as a Marxist Leninist party, was only interested in the coercive ministries, such as defence, and ministries which would provide rich pickings for corruption such as mining. Our sister party, the larger formation of the MDC, is like the ANC a broad church, in that it includes a broad spectrum of political views ranging from socialists/trade unionists and workers on the left to some conservative farmers on the right. It was very much focused on ministries that would provide a strong counterweight to Zanu PF's powers such as finance, labour, home affairs and constitutional affairs. The party I represent, the MDC M, secured just under 9% of the vote in the March 2008 elections, is liberal democratic in outlook and controls the balance of power in the lower house of parliament with Zanu PF and the MDC T having secured an almost equal number of seats.

In that context it is not surprising that neither of the two major political parties would want education. The ministry carries very little political weight unless it can be operated efficiently and I'm sure the assumption of the two other parties was that the education sector was in such a mess that progress was a remote possibility. In contrast we saw education as a key ministry; whilst we appreciated that the challenges were enormous we felt that through the transformation of education we would be able to influence the coming generation in a unique way regarding our liberal democratic agenda. At this juncture I need to stress that as Helen Zille stated in her speech to the Liberal International Congress in May 2008 we also do not use the term "liberal" as it is also widely misunderstood in Zimbabwe and used pejoratively.

When I took office in February 2009 I knew that the education sector was in a mess but could not anticipate just how bad it was. My first day in head office was an education in itself! When I first

arrived at the reception area of the 18 story head office building I was confronted with the spectre of several women members of staff standing around waiting for the lift with buckets of water on their heads. It was reminiscent of a typical rural African scene where women have to convey water for kilometres to clean and feed their families. I was told that the reason they were carrying water was because there was no water in the entire building and there had not been any water for over a year. Only one of the three lifts was working; when I finally got to my office on the 14th floor I found that I had no computer, no internet and no access to any computerised database within the ministry. To compound matters the first order of business was a message lying on my desk that I should immediately go to the government transport ministry to collect a brand new Mercedes-Benz limousine! My first act in the ministry was to decline the offer. On the day I took office almost 7000 schools were effectively shut because over 80,000 teachers were on strike. I was aware that government coffers were bare and it was incomprehensible to imagine how I could negotiate in good faith with the unions if my first act was to continue the profligate behaviour of my predecessors.

What I found in head office was emblematic of virtually every school and other educational institution in the country. It is now clear to me that the education sector has been seriously underfunded for two decades. Whilst it is true that historically Zimbabwe obtained a reputation for having high educational standards and high literacy rates the reality is that educational standards and literacy rates have been plummeting for almost 2 decades. In truth I have inherited the mere shell of an education system, a situation which has been compounded by the fact that there have been minimal resources to remedy matters available to me since taking office. In the eight months since I've taken office, up to the end of September 2009, the entire ministry received from Treasury the princely sum of US \$ 1,962,057 to run over 7000 schools and educate some 3 million children! Because of deep concern in the international community about the slow pace of implementation of the GPA the international community has been extremely reticent in providing any assistance, even to the education sector.

In that context you will appreciate why as I approach this topic I have set some very modest goals for education in the short term such as the restoration of the basic education. Accordingly my view of education in the 21st century is predicated on vastly different assumptions to those that most of you present here today will have. The silver lining for me is that in some respects I have a clean slate to work with. Accordingly as we consider in this conference our collective vision for education in the 21st Century, and the role that education should play in a modern society, I believe that I have a unique opportunity to entrench certain liberal principles in the transformation of the Zimbabwean education sector.

The application of liberal principles in formulating education policy

Tolerance/Democracy

Despite the current chaos in the Zimbabwean education system it still has one of the best infrastructures in Africa. In addition the Zimbabwean education system has generated thousands of highly talented people during the last five decades who have achieved magnificently in the fields of science, business, agriculture, medicine and other disciplines throughout the world. Until recently we still had one of the highest literacy rates in Africa. However during the same five decades Zimbabwe has lurched from one form of authoritarian rule to another. The use of violence to attain political objectives is still widespread. There are high levels of intolerance in political parties against those who hold different views. In short we have a deeply rooted culture of violence and intolerance. What pertains in the political sphere is reflected in the personal and in the schools. A recent Zimbabwean study reveals that there are alarmingly high levels of bullying and sexual abuse taking place within our schools. In our wider society there are unacceptably high levels of domestic violence

A positive aspect of our schools is that most children are generally well disciplined. However my fear is that discipline has been taken to excessive levels in our education system; that the unquestioning respect for authority over several decades has resulted in a society which has allowed this culture of impunity and violence to become the norm. Furthermore the way that history has been taught in Rhodesian and then Zimbabwean schools over many decades has contributed to the notion that political leaders are demigods. That was certainly what was taught in white Rhodesian schools: Cecil John Rhodes and Ian Douglas Smith were elevated to the status of cult heroes. Little has changed since the advent of independence save for the fact that these political leaders have been replaced by Robert Gabriel Mugabe and other nationalist leaders. In other words I believe that one of the principal reasons why Zimbabwe has degenerated is because of serious flaws in our education system.

The problem goes beyond the content that is taught in the classroom. The method of school governance is as important as what is taught. School children imitate in their adult lives the ways in which Headmasters and teachers and prefects conduct themselves in school. In fact the role that prefects are handed in schools where they are present is not that of leadership apprentices; prefects are handed the role of discipline, and all too often are allowed and even encouraged to be cruel and brutal, victimising younger children. Although corporal punishment is in theory illegal except under strictly controlled conditions, it is widespread at all levels of primary and secondary education. Our schools, instead of developing ideas of democratic leadership, are breeding a new generation of tyrants and bullies.

Furthermore we have inherited a colonial system of classroom learning practice which we have not seriously attempted to change. The teacher and the textbook are the authority and children are taught not to question, not to think creatively or imaginatively. Fear does not just govern issues of discipline – it governs the very learning process and rote learning still holds sway, discouraging children from taking responsibility for their own learning or attempting to think for themselves

In an effort to reverse this trend I am in the process of implementing two policies:

1 I am working in conjunction with human rights groups in Zimbabwe to develop a new curriculum which will teach schoolchildren democratic principles, their rights as enshrined in the constitution and UN conventions, the virtues of tolerance and the

use of nonviolent methods to resolve conflict.

2 I am in the process of revising subsidiary legislation to democratise the governance of schools. In terms of this legislation school heads will be compelled to be more transparent in their work. The same legislation will encourage greater parental involvement in schools with the aim of opening up more debate regarding, and community participation in, the way in which schools are run. We need to create a school environment in which children are encouraged to develop whatever potential they have in an open atmosphere which will produce the best results both academically and developmentally. I should stress that my intention is not to lessen the amount of discipline in our schools. My objective is to achieve the fine balance between maintaining orderly, disciplined schools and allowing freer debate and democratic practices. It is my hope that if these policies are successful we will spawn an entirely new generation of Zimbabweans who will cherish democratic practices and ensure that Zimbabwe never again goes through the horrors it has experienced in the last five decades.

Small Government/ Devolution of power

I have inherited a ministry of education which is highly bureaucratic and top-heavy. As indicated above we are headquartered in a large 18 story building. In the past the bureaucracy housed there tightly controlled all aspects of education in both government and non-government schools. Indeed my predecessor waged a virtual war against private schools and in the process severely undermined confidence of the business sector in our educational system. That in turn accelerated the flight of professionals and other highly mobile citizens.

The high level of control extended beyond elite private schools. Excessive bureaucracy was used to prevent the emergence of private schools for poorer people. The maintenance of these controls in turn has resulted in a top heavy budget. Since taking office in February I have noted that the bulk of the little money that we have received from Treasury has been spent in maintaining the work of head office and there has been very little trickle-down of resources to schools themselves. The problem does not appear to be confined to Zimbabwe; Australians complain of a "top heavy, inefficient, and self-serving system"¹.

It is also clear that given the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy even with the best will in the world the Zimbabwean government is not going to be able to educate everyone. In the last few years the dropout rate, especially in the transition from primary to secondary schooling, has reached alarming levels. The infrastructure in most government schools is crumbling and textbook/pupil ratios are appalling. In short in the next decade it is going to be very difficult for government to expand education and our work is going to be cut out simply maintaining what we already have.

In these circumstances it seems to me that the only way we are going to be able to educate all our children is if we liberalise the education sector and allow parents to establish their own private schools at village level, subject of course to compliance with certain basic standards. In this regard I have been inspired by James Tooley's book published this year called "The Beautiful Tree"². Tooley describes his book as a personal journey into how the world's poorest people are educating themselves. The "beautiful tree" refers to the system of village schools set up by Indians prior to British colonial rule, uprooted by the British when they came to India, as described by Mahatma Gandhi in a speech he delivered at Chatham House, London on October 20, 1931.

In that speech Gandhi concluded:

"And the schools established after the European pattern were too expensive for the people. I defy anyone to fulfil a programme of compulsory primary education of these masses inside of a century. This very poor country of mine is ill able to sustain such an expensive method of education. Our state would revive the old village schoolmaster and dot every village with a school both for boys and girls."

Tooley points out that the concept of village schools was not confined to India: Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of independent Kenya, published *Facing Mount Kenya* in 1938 in which he argued that African society had its own tradition of universal education that "begins at the time of birth and ends with death. The parents take the responsibility of educating their children until they reach the stage of tribal education... there is no special school building... the homestead is the school". Kenyatta believed that this education system had some advantages over the British system in that, for example, it emphasised acquiring practical knowledge in its context.³

In many developing countries many parents are turning to small private schools to educate their children. As Buckingham points out even in developed countries such as Australia there has been a steady drift out of the public sector. Research has shown that providing parents with the means to send children to the school of their choice has significant academic benefits for children and private schools overall outperform public schools consistently in academic achievement.⁴

In the Zimbabwean context this does not mean the end of government education. However if we are going to extend a quality education to as many children as possible the following policies are necessary:

1 A reduction in the size and scope of the ministry of education which should concentrate on the administration of funding, providing professional support to education providers, and being responsible for developing and administering minimum standards and public examinations.

2 A devolution of power to all schools, both government and non-government, to enable them to operate virtually autonomously according to the wishes of the parents and communities that support them.

3 Legislation that will allow and facilitate parents to establish their own independent schools without having to go through the many bureaucratic hoops present today.

4 A change in budgetary policy which ensures that a much greater percentage of government funding is spent in schools themselves rather than in a top-heavy administration.

National and International Budgetary priorities

For all the rhetoric about the Zimbabwean government's commitment to education the fact remains that during the last two decades there has been a steady reduction in the amount allocated to education both in real terms and in terms of a proportion of GDP. Sadly even since the formation of the transitional inclusive government in February the amount of money allocated to the Ministry of Education has been much lower in percentage terms, and in some respects in real terms, than many other ministries. For example the Office of the President and Cabinet and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce have both received more money in real terms since February this year than the Ministry of Education has.

In other words successive governments have merely paid lip service to the notion that it is important to invest heavily in education. I suspect that this is the case in many countries throughout the world.

There are some exceptions. Finland for example has arguably the best education system in the world; but to achieve that Finland has invested heavily in education for decades. One of the most remarkable aspects of the Finnish education system is that the minimum qualification for all teachers in both Primary and Secondary schools is a Masters degree – the cost of achieving that standard must have entailed a massive investment and cut backs in other areas. In Zimbabwe during the last two decades we have spent heavily on our defence forces, the secret police, excessive foreign travel, luxuries (such as Mercedes-Benz vehicles) for Cabinet ministers and other leaders and a bloated bureaucracy including a Reserve Bank with a voracious appetite. During the same period education has been starved of funding.

If we are to restore a quality education in Zimbabwe we are going to have to cut back drastically on the spending mentioned above and reallocate the money saved to education. Even if we do so in the short to medium term we will not have sufficient resources to provide even a quality basic education to all our children. In this regard the international community itself needs to decide whether education for all is a fundamental pre-requisite to international peace, stability and development.

For example if we move away from Africa and Zimbabwe for a moment it would be interesting to know what proportion of the money spent on Iraq and Afghanistan by the international community has been invested in the education sectors of those countries. It seems to me that only a tiny proportion of the billions of dollars spent on Iraq have gone to education. It seems self evident to me that the best guarantor in the medium to long term of world peace and stability is a well educated new generation of people in every country in the world. This will only be financially possible if defence budgets are slashed throughout the world and swords converted into laptops and textbooks.

The environment

The threat presented by environmental degradation and climate change to man's very existence is not only global; it exists within our region of Africa and it exists within every nation including Zimbabwe.

In the last 50 years Madagascar, for example, has experienced a 10% increase in its mean average temperature and a 10% decline in its rainfall. There has been so much erosion that the sea is coloured red around all its river mouths. It is perhaps one of the starkest examples of the effects of global warming and poor land management and farming practices; nevertheless many other countries' environment is under severe threat and Zimbabwe is no exception. Aside from the chaotic land reform programme implemented in Zimbabwe in the last decade, crop yields in communal areas, which have been unaffected by the land reform programme, have been steadily declining. Much of that is due to massive erosion and the depletion of nutrients in our soils. Dams are silting up and the Kalahari desert is rapidly encroaching in the south west of Zimbabwe. The situation is further compounded by the rapid deforestation of indigenous trees caused by the shortage of energy in communal areas and the wanton chopping of trees by "new farmers" who have stripped the land they acquired of resources for sale rather than engage in the hard work of farming.

Despite this gloomy scenario there have been some encouraging developments in the last two decades. In particular an organisation called Foundations for Farming has been spearheading the concept of conservation farming and zero tillage agricultural practices in

Zimbabwe. The organisation's work has been focused on the poorest communal areas and they are achieving remarkable results. For example last year whilst the average crop yield countrywide was 275 kg per hectare, the average crop yield in plots using conservation farming practices was 3 tonnes per hectare. Aside from the increased crop yields erosion has been dramatically reduced and these farming practices do not need imported tractors, diesel and vast numbers of plough oxen. Indeed if we can persuade the coming generation to embrace these farming practices Zimbabwe will be transformed in a variety of ways; not only will our pastures be restored but Zimbabwe will once again become a net food exporter - irrespective of what happens in former lands owned by white commercial farmers. The challenge is to teach the coming generation about these remarkable farming practices.

With the environment in mind I am now implementing the following policies:

1 A new conservation farming curriculum is being developed and the first training programme for teachers from throughout Zimbabwe has already been held. In the course of the next five years our intention is to roll out the conservation farming programme which will result in every single rural school teaching a four-year curriculum and every school having its own plot which will at the same time supplement the food requirements of these schools. Our intention is to include local communities so that the schools spearhead much more widespread knowledge of conservation farming.

2 As and when funding is available our intention is to work with local industry to manufacture solar cooking apparatus which will be installed in every rural school. Once again the intention is to use good practices in schools to inspire entire communities in an effort to reduce deforestation and to promote the use of alternative and sustainable means of energy.

3 As and when funding is available our intention is to work with local nurseries to develop indigenous tree nurseries in all schools. Once the nurseries have been established schools will embark on the planting of indigenous trees throughout Zimbabwe with the same hope that surrounding communities will adopt similar practices. In this regard real business opportunities exist through carbon credit schemes now being promoted in the West. If the programs can be implemented on a large scale throughout Zimbabwe my hope is that income which can come through participation in carbon credit schemes will be used to subsidise education costs.

Practical basic education/Vocational education

Several mistakes were made in Zimbabwe in the development of education after Independence. One was to think that we could do everything at once; many educationalists at the time of great expansion in the 1980s who had some knowledge of the relationship between education and development knew that it was wrong to expand without adequate resources, mainly human but also physical. Standards were bound to fall drastically even if the economy had not collapsed. Donors themselves did not appear to appreciate the problem. Hundreds of millions of dollars of Western aid was poured into erecting educational infrastructure most of which has fallen into disrepair and some into complete disuse. Government had a "can-do" attitude, believing when there were few teachers that failed school leavers could be let loose in the classroom without any training, little maturity and minimal interest. Numbers became the Holy Grail and quality of education was overlooked.

A second serious mistake was to embark on an almost exclusively academic educational curriculum. This approach arose from a misin-

terpretation of the idea of "equality" to mean that everyone must have the same education and that must be academic. Very little attention was paid to vocational, practical training, and existing facilities were actually dismantled and abandoned. Once again in this regard I am struck by the Finnish education system which pays equal attention to academic and vocational education facilities. Zimbabwe did not do this and in the last two decades has generated several hundred thousand school graduates with academic qualifications who stand no chance whatsoever of getting appropriate jobs within Zimbabwe. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that these same graduates have come out of school with no practical skills which would enable them to become self-employed.

While we will aim at educating every child, the nature of their education must be altered to ensure that it is relevant to economic development; especially within their own communities. Children must learn skills that are needed by the economy or can enable them to create their own work. Then the money put into education becomes a genuine investment rather than a costly consumption item.

In an effort to address this issue the following policies are necessary:

1 Our emphasis, in honouring every child's right to education, must be to teach children the basics of literacy and numeracy. Every child should receive a basic education which in my view should enable every child to speak, read and write their mother tongue and English, to have fundamental numeracy skills and to come out of school with at least one practical skill.

2 An important curricular theme must be to teach survival techniques - at the personal, family, societal and global level. Children must learn individually and collectively to survive - this means practical learning in areas of productivity for food security and employment, health, care for the environment, strategic thinking and planning, adaptability, co-operation and imagination. Good "survival teaching" should take place in a specific physical environment and education must help children to relate to that environment rather than dreaming about being somewhere else.

3 Whilst technology is an important component of a modern education system, appropriate technology is more important than rushing for the latest from the developed world.

4 To carry out these policies we will need to aggressively expand the number of schools offering vocational education.

Identifying and nurturing talented disadvantaged children/The Girl Child

One of the dangers of focusing almost exclusively on the provision of a basic education for all children is that talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds may be lost in the mediocrity of a basic education. Whilst Zimbabwe has exceptionally good church and independent schools they are beyond the financial reach of the vast majority of Zimbabwean parents. One of my deepest concerns as I seek to stabilise and rehabilitate Zimbabwe's education system is that an entire generation of highly talented potential academics, sports persons and artists will be lost. If this happens Zimbabwe will not get the necessary throughput of these talented children to our universities, sporting, artistic and cultural institutions. Without that throughput Zimbabwe's economic development will be severely retarded. Private schools simply do not generate a sufficient number of talented students which the country will need in future.

This problem is apparently not only confined to a developing country like Zimbabwe. Buckingham notes that in Australia the emphasis on identifying and assisting children at risk of failing to achieve basic education may be necessary for valid personal and

public reasons; but it has resulted in children who have the potential to excel rarely getting a look in. The concern is that in all levels of government and in most schools, interest in underperforming students eclipsed the need to provide a high-quality education for highly capable students. In America Charles Murray in his new book *Real Education: Four simple truths to bring American schools back to reality* argues that more effort needs to be expended on thinking about the kind of education needed by the young people who will in future run a country.⁵

Another very troubling development in Zimbabwe is the disproportionately high dropout rate of the girl child, especially in the transition from primary schooling to secondary schooling. Research the world over shows that when the girl child's education is neglected birth-rates continue to soar and development is severely retarded.

With these problems in mind I am implementing the following policies:

1 We have entered into a public private partnership agreement to initially rehabilitate 20 Government secondary schools, one boys' high school and one girls' high school in all of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces. The schools targeted already have extensive infrastructure and boarding facilities which have however deteriorated over the last 20 years. At the same time a program will be initiated to identify academically, sporting or artistically talented children in the poorest rural and high density urban schools. A scholarship fund will be created which will ensure that these children can then be channelled into the rehabilitated government schools which will become known as Academies. Some of the Academies will have particular centres of excellence to teach particular academic, sporting or artistic disciplines. It is envisaged that approximately 40% of the intake at these Academies will be reserved for talented disadvantaged children. The balance of places will be filled by children whose parents/guardians can afford to pay higher fees than those pertaining at standard government schools. It should be emphasised that there will be strict gender equality in granting scholarships to ensure a steady throughput of girls.

2 Government budgetary policy is being reviewed to ensure that as many government resources as possible are directed to programmes that encourage the girl child to go to school and that at the very least all girls obtain a basic education.

Conclusion

I am aware that these are lofty and highly ambitious goals. Our human and financial resources are severely depleted and as a result we have limited capacity to implement most of these policies successfully. Indeed without substantial international support most of these policies will remain stillborn. However it is vitally important that we succeed. Zimbabwe, as is the case in so many African countries, is a land of great potential. It is richly endowed with natural resources; it is a stunningly beautiful country with wonderful people. Despite these great attributes Zimbabwe has been a drain on the entire region in the last decade. That does not need to be the case; indeed Zimbabwe has the potential to contribute significantly to the wealth of southern Africa. Arguably the most important element in achieving this is the re-establishment of a quality educational system

This can only happen if, firstly, the Zimbabwean government takes education seriously and invests heavily in the sector, secondly, if the international community joins suit and does the same, and thirdly if we get the content and management of education right. Whilst Zimbabwe's challenges in education are unique in one sense, many of the issues raised today affect us all. Education has an important

role in moulding the 21st Century and in dealing with the challenges presented by it. If we do not educate the coming generation to be tolerant, to cherish democracy and to find practical solutions to issues such as poverty, environmental degradation and global warming which threaten the very existence of mankind, the future will be bleak. However if we transform this generation then the great technological advances of the 20th Century may be matched by a more humane and earth friendly 21st Century.

Speech to the 56th Congress of Liberal International: Cairo 30th October 2009, by Senator David Coltart, Minister of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture Zimbabwe.

¹ "Schools must be truly public." Contained in "Schools of Thought" a book published by the Centre of Independent Studies in July 2008 authored by Jennifer Buckingham.

² Published by the Cato Institute 2009.

³ Tooley at page 241.

⁴ Buckingham at page 2.

⁵ Buckingham at page 65.

EU - Back to the drawing board

The Liberal party held their Assembly in Wolverhampton on 26th September. It would be fair to say that attitudes towards the European Union have been a source of division within the party, and this year they revisited it with a discussion document 'EU - Back to the drawing board.' The Liberals feel that internationalist political parties need to be much more robustly critical of the failings of the EU. Failing to identify the faults of the EU and hoping things will 'turn out alright in the wash' is just playing into the hands of UKIP and the BNP.

There are four recommendations in the discussion document, aimed at redressing the democratic deficit of the EU.

1 That the power to agree legislation be put in the hands of the European Parliament where it is subject to open debate and public scrutiny.

2 That the EU be re-formulated as a federal structure in which there is a presumption that power resides with the nations of the EU and can only be exercised by the EU where the nations agree there is a need for strategic level action at the European level.

3 The number of MEPs be reduced to approximately half the current number. them to answer for their actions would reinforce the idea that they are

4 That there be a Committee of the UK Parliament to which the MEPs are required to attend. At this Committee Members of Parliament could question them on the decisions they are, making and on their voting record.

Document, which was written by party president Rob Wheway aims to reflect the two issues with wide agreement within the Liberal party, that they are internationalist and are critical of democratic deficit in the EU. The simplistic "for" and "against" ended just there and was preventing people considering any radical ways forward - hence the discussion proposals.

The full document can be viewed on the Liberal party website at <http://www.liberal.org.uk/discdocs/index.htm>

Liberals must embrace power politics to define the 21st century.

Hans Van Baalen

After the fall of the Berlin wall, the American philosopher Francis Fukuyama concluded that the only remaining viable ideology was Western liberalism. In "The End of History and the Last Man", Fukuyama predicted an end to history, continued economic improvement and global prosperity. Poverty, oppression, environmental pollution and religious strife would be problems of the past. We would be living in a constant present. Besides the question whether a constant present would be desirable, the past decade has proved Fukuyama wrong. Although the danger of a massive global conflict has decreased with the fall of the Iron Curtain, threats to international security have increased significantly. Liberalism has lost its defining characteristic of engagement, and is now on the defensive. Liberalism, with its emphasis on civil liberties and the free market should be, by all rights, the defining ideology of the 21st century.

During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union as the two global superpowers coexisted in a state of carefully constructed equilibrium. Conflicts were fought by proxy on the fringes of the two power blocs: in Cuba, Chile, Korea, Vietnam, Africa and Afghanistan. These two superpowers prevented the Cold War from turning from a conflict of détente to a full scale military clash. There were policies of containment from both sides. With the implosion of the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union, only the United States remained powerful enough to prevent global conflicts, fight organized crime and combat international terrorism. In "The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000" Paul Kennedy wrote, just before the Berlin wall came down (1987), how previous world powers had faced the same problem of being overstretched. This was one of the torments of the Soviet Union in its final phase, and now looms large as a serious problem for the United States. The United States has taken on the role of international police officer after the Cold War, and has overextended its resources rendering the country less effective. The Europeans have left efforts of stabilizing the world (Iraq, Afghanistan and the international struggle to fight terrorism) to the United States itself. The European Union restricts itself to using soft power policies, like international development and peace management; mostly in places where peace has already been achieved. The EU does not use hard power, nor is it strongly committed to peace enforcing and peace keeping. This means that the united West is not able to fulfill an exemplary role to the rest of the world.

The rivals of the West do not advocate the adherence to universal rights such as human and civil rights, freedom and democracy, good governance and rule of law. Russia and China are at best authoritarian regimes, who deny their citizens basic and fundamental human rights and engage in outdated 19th century power politics to reach their goals. China has enshrined the control of strategic resources for its industries to as a central tenet of its foreign policy. For China,

dealing with dictatorships and weak states is easy. Africa is essentially being colonized a second time. Russia uses its enormous potential of energy resources as a political weapon. The increasingly important economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China, the so called BRIC-countries, are either authoritarian like China and Russia, or fail to reach a more equal distribution of wealth, leading to the inability of great segments of their society to take part in the economy and the governing of their countries.

Economically speaking, liberalism seemed the sole remaining dominant force after the Cold War. Privatization and liberalization thrived throughout the world, but the notion that the open market economy needs rules and mechanisms of control was not fully realized. Reaganomics and Thatcherism have broken the backbone of unions and bureaucracy, but have at the same time weakened the basics of the economy. The current financial and economic crisis has not been caused by liberal free market policies, but by failing legislation and a lack of control. A strong economy is a structured economy that offers opportunities for many instead of riches for few. The structuring of markets has to emphasize individual responsibility by having room for private initiatives and calculated risk taking; both serve the general interest, and not short term self interest. The political elite carry a great responsibility for the functioning of the government and markets. Noblesse oblige: this is what the barons of the port of Rotterdam knew when they rebuilt their city of the devastation of the Second World War. Not to make short term profits, but for long term stability. The encouragement of scientific education and the construction of public works in Rotterdam were made possible with the help of private initiatives. Exactly these notions of serving the public interest and of social responsibility were lacking on Wall Street, in the City of London and the Damrak of Amsterdam in the nineties.

The power of liberalism is the combination of civil rights, social responsibility and the free market. In short: freedom in its broadest sense. The liberalism that created the social laws of the nineteenth century, realized universal suffrage and that emphasizes private initiative offers solutions for international stability and economic prosperity. The West, consisting of the United States, Canada, the European Union, New Zealand, Australia and Japan, should not sit quietly while human rights are being trampled and countries become increasingly protectionist. It needs to conclude new alliances with developing countries that are moving towards democracy in Latin America, Africa and Asia. African countries like Zimbabwe, Senegal, South Africa and Morocco are at crossroads between democracy and autocracy. In Latin America Chavism is on the rise, but there are still numerous civil society actors and political parties who resist that tendency. The Arab world is fixated on Israel and uses the country as an excuse to oppress their own populations and deny their people freedom and prosperity. The Arabs have a lot to offer to the world if

they decide to enter the 21st century with an unconditional embracing of freedom, instead of continuing to play the role of global victim. It is not a coincidence that in all before mentioned countries and regions liberal political parties play an important role. Liberal politicians in the free West have to support their colleagues in these regions. The construction of democratic constitutional states has to be our biggest export product once again. Only democracy and free trade can bring stability and prosperity. A lot will depend on the German FDP that finds itself presently in the centre of European power, and of the American Democratic Party, that has to start using power politics. The eloquent words of President Obama cannot be the only tool of the United States in an increasingly chaotic world.

Liberalism is unique in its combination of civil and economic freedoms. The Liberal International has to be at the forefront of freedom and must strive for the separation of church and state, freedom of expression and freedom of the press, education and quality health care and free access to the market for all. Liberals should not want to be admired by their opponents, but should want to be seen as integral political actors.

Politics is not a game of tennis. Liberals have to take the initiative

again when it comes to financial and economic recovery on the basis of the free market. Liberals have to be prepared to defend their values with strong defense policies, a strong constitutional state, an emphasis on education, fair health care and an efficient state, that dares to make choices. The defense of the separation between church and the state creates an environment which can fight against extremism and intolerance without the oppression of religious groups as a whole. The law is equal to all and all are equal to the law.

Discrimination is unacceptable to liberals. Emancipation of minorities and their rise to free citizenship is our right of existence. Liberalism has a long journey ahead to establish itself as a valid and enduring ideology on a global level. Liberalism has to seize the public arena again. When Frits Bolkestein was elected President of Liberal International in Noordwijk 1996, he stressed his ambition that liberals would regard politics as a game of rugby, and would be prepared to fight. Political correctness should not be a liberal issue. As President of Liberal International I want to continue with this ambition of Frits Bolkestein

Hans Van Baalan, President of LI

Speech to the 56th Congress of Liberal International: Cairo

REPORT ON 56TH CONGRESS OF LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL

The Liberal Democrats have 15 delegates to LI Congresses and LIBG has 5. To these are added one vote each for the leader of the LibDems or his designated substitute (hitherto Charles Kennedy) and the Chairman of LIBG. The delegation to the unlikely venues of Alexandria – where an Executive Committee was held in the state-of-the-art Biblioteca Alexandrina – and Cairo was more than enough to allow the exercise of our full voting strength.

The Theme of the Congress was “Education in the 21st Century”, and distinguished speakers from many countries spoke on different aspects of Liberal ideas in this respect. The moderator of the Theme Resolution was Senator David Coltart, the Minister of Education of Zimbabwe.

Our delegation led by Ros Scott, who was a keynote speaker at one of the sessions. I, as International Relations Committee chairman, was the delegation co-ordinator. We had one delegation meeting to discuss the various resolutions and their amendments, but there was nothing contentious, the teams led by Jonathan Fryer and Julie Smith having conceded in the few cases where there was overwhelming opposition to our proposals (see below). Other UK Parliamentarians who contributed much were former LI President David Steel and Graham Watson MEP. Sadly Richard Moore, an LI Patron and former Secretary General, missed his first Congress in decades due to a recent fall. Ros mentioned him fondly in her speech. This is not to ignore the role of John Alderdice, the outgoing President whose work in expanding LI to make it less Euro-centric and in worldwide conflict resolution was praised.

Resolutions are divided between “The World Today”, in which LI’s positions on situations in different regions and countries around

the world are set out. (The various regional groupings (CALD for Asia, RELIAL for Latin America, ELDR for Europe, ALN for Africa, and the Network of Arab Liberals) ensure accuracy and topicality); and the diverse resolutions, of which more below. The negotiating sessions were conducted by Wilf Dirksen of D66 and RWB respectively, and the plenary session for their adoption was similarly co-chaired.

A new Bureau was elected (no positions being contested). There is a constitutional provision for there to be co-options to ensure that all regional organisations are represented, as well as the youth organisation, IFLRY. Gordon Lishman joins Bureau meetings as Chairman of the Human Rights Committee.

Hans van Baalen MEP of the VVD, who had been Deputy President, moved up to the Presidency for the first of a potential three 18-month terms. He is an anglophile and we have worked well with him in the past, despite his affiliation! The Andorran Foreign Minister Juli Trinquell Minoves is his deputy. I replaced Charles Kennedy as the UK Bureau member, nominated by Nick Clegg for the post. At a Bureau meeting immediately afterwards I was asked to assist in building up a Liberal presence in India using our contacts with the Indian diaspora in the UK, as well as continuing with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy to be responsible for the Africa Liberal Network, where fluency in French is



Wolfgang Gerhardt (FDP), John Alderdice, Hans Van Baalen, Ros Scott



LI met in Cairo (which accounts for ... the Sphinx's inscrutable smile)

essential.

The only major row at the Congress was the embarrassing one of an attack in the *Washington Post* authored by two young Egyptian journalists attacking the three Egyptian Liberal parties for anti-Semitic and Holocaust-deniers, basing the latter on an article allegedly penned by a female journalist who is vice-president of our hosts, the Democratic Front. The Swedes were the most frenetic about this, followed by the Germans who feared a blot on their new Foreign Ministerial copybook. An impassioned retraction by the lady concerned in addition to a written endorsement in a letter to the pro-Israeli van Baalen calmed all nerves and our hosts (whew!) were duly admitted to full membership of LI, and the El Ghad party became an observer member. Interestingly, their Leader, Ayman Nour, who has just been released from 3 years detention following international pressure, could not address the Congress, which he attended, as he is banned from speaking in Egypt....

Turning finally to the resolutions, the Swedish parties had a good resolution on privacy and free communication, which accorded with LibDem policy. Phil Bennion worked with them on a motion supporting the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) in agriculture; there was a long motion on the financial crisis, which was completely in accord with Cableism; a motion on women's rights

from the Swedes was in the motherhood and apple pie class; our motion, reflecting our Conference motion on the Global environment, was deemed to UK/Euro-centric and had to be withdrawn – it should have more success at the ELDR Congress in Barcelona later this month; the Swedes also had a resolution on promoting an “eco-efficient” economy - we tried to attach our 10/10 campaign to this but received no support; another Swedish resolution on energy efficiency won unanimous support; a VVD resolution on democracy education in the Middle East was hacked to pieces by the LibDems and passed unanimously when it became inoffensive to the Arab delegates – one of our members pointed out that when it comes to civic education the Brits cannot throw stones.

Not a lot to campaign on. The main thrust was that LI is as green as we are (despite the best efforts of the VVD) and agrees with our views of the causes and solutions of the economic crisis, without the LibDems having to amend anything.

On a final note, having achieved Eric Avebury's award of the 2009 Prize for Freedom, our nominee, the Iranian Human Rights Lawyer Shirina Abadi, was accepted by the Bureau. However, we had not obtained her consent. If we are able to do so, she will be confirmed at the next Executive in Germany in late May.

Robert Woodthorpe Browne

MAKING WAVES

The Lib Dems plainly invested quite a lot in the Wave demonstration (5th December) prior to the Copenhagen Summit, not only in London, but also in Glasgow. The punters received emails from Simon Hughes, an effective one from Tim Farron and Nick Clegg inciting them to join the march. A high risk, since it would have been embarrassing if only a handful had turned up. But this is the sort of issue that many Liberals take quite seriously. Susan Kramer was of the view that there were between 600 and 800 Lib Dems collectively on the march, and many others like myself elsewhere.

So who else attended? Many observers would note that the march was predominantly Christian in its composition. The Co-op also invested quite a lot in it. Labour was scarce collectively – only a small contingent of Labour Youth, and nobody of note. The Tories (for all their new-found greenness) were conspicuous by their absence. I didn't think the rent-a-trot SWP Students were that strong, but only saw a small section of the march and the Green Party would certainly have had a greater presence than I noted.

So did it work for the Lib Dems? I'm surprised that nothing new appeared on their website immediately after the march, nor in the next few days. This was plainly a mistake; I was probably not the only person seeking to turn out copy. There may have been something on Twitter or Facebook or in blogs, but who is going to trawl through those? They speak to their own audiences.

The Lib Dems have a problem – they have some of the best green credentials for a party in action, but nobody seems to notice these. People who tend to the green left are put off by market-oriented economics. There are of course good reasons for this, but like they aren't easily explained to the Fair Trade crowd. The simple socialism is more easily grasped and they forget the tyranny it inevitably brings – that most of the cheap goods we might enjoy from China are made by de facto slave labour for example.

I think I'm right in saying that Green votes didn't transfer to Lib Dems in London GLA elections nor in the Euro elections, where the voting systems may have shown some symbiosis. On top that is the problem of the Lib Dems simply being viewed as another 'establishment party'. Will Nick Clegg's marching change that? It may be a start.

The observation that it was a predominantly Christian demonstra-

tion is one point to note. Tony Blair had certainly realised that the Church of England was no longer the Conservative party at prayer when he swept to power. But a decade on many in such congregations – even Labour supporters, have been dissatisfied with the government. The same is almost certainly true of other denominations and these are people likely to vote to put it crudely. It is a community worth cultivating and typically has a much wider network than church-goers alone.

Did the Co-op notice the Lib Dems and if so what did they make of them? I've never particularly understood the connection between the Co-operative Movement and the Labour party. Strands of thought such as Guild Socialism never had more than a handful of adherents and they never made any significant impact on Labour. The Liberal party has of course major policy platforms for worker co-operation, but surprisingly (not least because Labour Co-operators tended to be on the right of Labour and several joined the SDP) these were not adopted by the Liberal Democrats.

It might be assumed that syndicalism and worker co-operatives died under Maggie Thatcher; all trace of those policies certainly disappeared within the Liberal Democrats; yet as the early co-operative movement often shared a common heritage with Liberal activists it may be time to revisit such policies. There is certainly a case for exploring the commonality of ideas between the Co-op and the Lib Dems. Wouldn't it be a breakthrough if they could be persuaded to endorse a few appropriately minded Lib Dem candidates instead of meekly accepting the short-change they invariably get from the Labour party?

Stewart Rayment



The Worm has turned...



The Wave surges past the National Liberal Club

REPORT FROM LI CONGRESS: Cambodia's deadly fight for Freedom

Today's European liberal mind is hotwired to remember both our struggles in the 1930s and 1940s to assert basic democracy across Europe and also the subsequent suppression of democracy through long Post Cold War decades in Central and Eastern Europe under Communism and in Spain and Portugal under fascism.

The World's liberals meeting in Cairo had a number of reminders that the struggle for freedom in many countries is global, current and dangerous.

Perhaps the single most powerful account came from the 2006 Freedom Prize Laureate, Cambodia's Sam Rainsy, the leader of the eponymous Sam Rainsy Party.

He opened his speech by noting that other recipients of the Freedom Prize had included Aung San Suu Kyi, Vaclav Havel, Benazir Bhutto, Corazon Aquino, Mary Robinson, and Martin Lee, leaders he greatly respected.

While observing that one recipient of the prize was the current president of Senegal, Mr Abdoulaye Wade, two of those still alive were in jail or under house arrest, including of course Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi.

He was, however, at his most moving discussing the position in his own country.

Stating his view that in his case, the Prize had been given to the defence of liberal values in Cambodia rather than to him, he said he considered he had received it on behalf of countless known and unknown colleagues and friends who had made sacrifices while serving the cause of freedom.



Sam Rainsy

The Congress sat in total silence – one could literally have heard a pin drop – when he described how more than eighty members of his party had been assassinated, sometimes in front of his eyes. He said he would always remember these people as well as the countless others who had been injured, arrested, jailed, or forced into hiding or exile.

He believed that the LI Prize for Freedom was a valuable recognition of the legitimacy of his Party's fight for freedom in Cambodia and that it both spurred on his supporters and also provided a warning to the Cambodian Government that Cambodian liberals had global support.

And since the Cairo Congress?

Sam Rainsy's parliamentary immunity in Cambodia was removed on 16 November for the second time this year. This followed his participation in a religious ceremony on 25 October close to the Vietnamese border where he had also been lobbied by villagers whose long held land – and, therefore, livelihood – had just been arbitrarily expropriated. Sam Rainsy, who denies the charges against him, expects to be prosecuted and has since fled to Paris.

For Sam Rainsy this is history repeating himself. He went into exile following a similar removal of immunity in 2005. On that occasion immunity was restored only after heavy pressure from the USA and other countries.

Might working with Secretary of State Clinton for freedom in Cambodia and restoration of Sam Rainsy's parliamentary immunity be an early test of the European Commission's newly appointed Vice President Ashton?

Dirk Hazell, Secretary LIBG

NICK CLEGG AT BOURNEMOUTH – THE INTERNATIONAL BITS...

From Nick Clegg's speech to the Liberal Democrats at their Autumn Conference in Bournemouth .

The international bits of Nick Clegg's speech to the Liberal Democrats' Autumn Conference mainly concerned Afghanistan and Climate Change, both major issues on the British political scene.

In the last eight weeks, 28 British soldiers and Royal Marines have been killed in Afghanistan. However easy it may be to forget, we are a nation at war. Already more than 75,000 British men and women have done tours of duty in Afghanistan.

Thousands upon thousands of our compatriots, putting their lives on the line in the burning heat and the frozen winters of a country on the other side of the world. I want to pay tribute, on behalf of all of us, to the tenacity, bravery and extraordinary professionalism of every one of them. Their families, too, have borne with incredible fortitude the separation, the fear, and the anguish of bereavement. We salute them.

I'm afraid the hardship has been deepened, for all of them, by the enormous difficulties of this war. After nearly 8 years, victory not only seems more distant than ever, failure seems inevitable unless we change course.

I know some of you believe we should call for British troops to withdraw now. If things continue on the present disastrous course, then sooner or later that is a judgement which we may need to make. That is why we must change course. We have one more chance, one only, to turn things around.

Success cannot be secured through military means alone. Development assistance must be bigger and faster. Talks with moderate elements of the Taliban network must commence. The international community must at last agree to a single plan in place of the present patchwork of duplication, disunity and muddle.

The threadbare legitimacy of the government in Kabul must be strengthened by reaching out across ethnic and tribal divisions. And here at home Gordon Brown must change gear, too. He must now show the leadership and conviction that has so far been so disastrously lacking in making the case to the British people.

You cannot win a war on half horse power. We owe it to the young men and women serving in Helmand to give them all the political leadership and all the resources they need to do the job. We should either do this properly or we shouldn't do it at all. So I say to the Prime Minister: time is running out.

Unless you change course, there will be no choice but to withdraw, and that would be a betrayal of the servicemen and women

who have already made such enormous sacrifices on our behalf. I do not want British troops to come home defeated by political failure. I want them to come home, mission successfully completed, with their heads held high...

The Beginning of Real Change for Britain

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our age, no doubt about it. But it's also, very much, a challenge of our age. Like so many of the problems governments have to deal with. From financial regulation to terrorism and internet crime. It crosses borders.

You can't stop the weather at the cliffs of Dover. That's why the big deals, the ones that matter, are struck at international forums – like Copenhagen this December. A summit that must, must agree an international plan of action to keep global warming not just below 2 degrees, but below 1.7 degrees. Because that's what the best science tells us is now needed to prevent catastrophic climate change.

Who do you want representing Britain at a crucial summit like that? Labour? They have let us down internationally. It wasn't just Iraq. It was their disregard for European colleagues, refusing to attend summits, grandstanding about how superior they were. It was their disregard for international law. Their backroom deals with Saudi Arabia over BAE, with Libya over Lockerbie, with America over torture. Labour has undermined Britain in the world.

But what's the alternative? William Hague? David Cameron and William Hague think the nineteenth century state still makes sense in a twenty-first century world. They simply do not understand that in an age of globalisation power must be exercised by nations together, not squandered by nations going it alone.

William Hague gives speeches about the enduring importance of the English speaking world. When everyone knows the new power centres are China, India and Brazil. A Cameron-Hague foreign policy would be the most insular and self defeating in modern times. How much influence would they have in Berlin, in Paris, in Brussels? Not a gram. Or even an ounce. And because they wouldn't stand tall in Europe, they would count for little in Washington too.

But there is a third option. Imagine Liberal Democrats around the negotiating table.

Ed Davey, our outstanding shadow foreign secretary. Drawing on the wisdom of Shirley Williams. Paddy Ashdown. Ming Campbell. We would secure Britain a stronger role in the world. By putting us at the heart of the European Union and committing us to abide fully by international law.

The beginning of real change for Britain.

Go with Your Instincts: Vote Liberal Democrat

You know, before I went into politics I managed development aid projects in Central Asia. I led negotiating teams on international trade deals with China and Russia. I worked on new rules to help create the largest single market in the world, here in Europe. I've seen how different things could be if Britain would only play its cards right.



Alan Beith MP (President, LDFI); Cllr Monroe Palmer OBE (Chair, LDFI); Greg Berry (Minister Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in London).

The main speaker was Greg Berry, Minister Counsellor for Political Affairs at the US Embassy in London, who has deep diplomatic experience of the Middle East. In a 30-year career, Mr Berry has served in Tripoli, Amman, Jerusalem and Beirut, as well as having been Director for Egypt and North Africa.

Speaking the very night before the UN meeting between President Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian President Abbas, Mr Berry outlined the US Government's "clear and straightforward policy" on Israel/Palestine. This policy is centred on what Mr Berry called an "unshakeable" commitment to Israel's security.

"A two-state solution is the only viable means of bringing a comprehensive peace to the region," said Mr Berry, pledging his government's "continuing engagement" to bring this about. Mr Berry stated that the US sees "a peace agreement resolving all outstanding issues, bringing the conflict to an end", as "a when, not an if".

Regarding the next day's UN talks, Mr Berry said: "We fully expect contacts tomorrow to move us in the right direction". On relations between the Obama administration and Israel, he said: "It is not a question of pressure between friends." On Iran's nuclear programme, he said that, while the current policy of engagement must be given time to work, his government could eventually grow "impatient" and move to support tougher sanctions against Iran (as stated in Secretary of State Clinton's recent speech to the Brookings Institution).

Also speaking were Talya Lador-Fresher, the Israeli Deputy Ambassador, and the Right Honourable Sir Alan Beith MP



Nick Clegg MP (Party Leader); Cllr Monroe Palmer OBE (Chair, LDFI); Matthew Harris (Secretary, LDFI); Ed Fordham (Lib Dem PPC for Hampstead & Kilburn).

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT FRIENDS OF ISRAEL'S FRINGE MEETING

Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel's (LDFI) 2009 Conference fringe meeting was about President Obama's efforts towards Middle East peace.

(President, LDFI). The meeting was chaired by Cllr Monroe Palmer OBE (Chairman, LDFI).

Ms Lador-Fresher told the meeting that Israel's approach to the peace process with the Palestinians is three-pronged: economic, security and political. Drawing attention to the West Bank's economic growth rate of 7%, she said that 12 out of 14 major West Bank road blocks are now open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Welcoming Tuesday's UN meeting, she pointed out that PM Netanyahu's opinion poll rating had risen after he had committed to engaging with the peace process, demonstrating the Israeli public's ongoing support for peace.

This was a welcome opportunity to hear more about the efforts that are being made to bring peace, justice and security to Israel, the Palestinians and the wider Middle East.

Matthew Harris

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT FRIENDS OF PALESTINE AT BOURNEMOUTH



Ed Davey and John McHugo

The Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine have had a very successful year. The Party's spring conference took place in the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead and the carnage in Gaza. We had input into the motion the conference passed. This called for the establishment of a UN war crimes tribunal and the complete suspension of Israel's EU Association Agreement until the Gaza blockade is lifted. It also endorsed party leader Nick Clegg's own call for an arms embargo on Israel and reaffirmed existing party policy which had called on the EU to review whether Israel was in enduring breach of its Association Agreement because of failure to comply with the obligations concerning human rights and the principles of democracy in Article 2 of the Agreement.

At our annual conference in Bournemouth in September, Ed Davey, the party's foreign affairs shadow minister, addressed us on developments in the Middle East, and praised the new approach of President Obama. Since then, at the British-Palestine All Party Group Annual Reception on 9 November, Mr Davey called on the UN, as well as Israel and Hamas, to act on the Goldstone report. He

described the report as 'balanced' and called some of the attacks on Goldstone 'quite wrong'. He movingly recalled his own visit to Gaza in February. He said that it was an understatement to say it was 'one of the most harrowing visits' he had ever made, and condemned attacks on economic targets, including a destroyed ice-cream factory which he had visited personally.

Two of our members, Baroness Jenny Tonge and Baroness Lindsay Northover, were part of a parliamentary delegation to Damascus which visited Khaled Masha'al, the chair of Hamas's political bureau. In the course of his conversation with Jenny Tonge, Mr Masha'al repeated that Hamas is willing to accept a Palestinian state consisting of the Palestinian territories Israel occupied in 1967, by implication accepting an Israeli state on a de facto basis behind the 1949 armistice lines.

We are a small organisation which exists on an annual budget of less than £2,000. At our AGM in September, we elected our officers for 2009-10. They are:

Chair, John McHugo,
Secretary, Sally Fitzharris,
Treasurer, Ahmad Mallick,
Membership Secretary, Peter Dulieu,
Press officer, Jonathan Fryer.

John McHugo

LIBG CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM

There can be a perception that developing countries undergoing rapid industrialisation are not greatly interested in action against climate change, seeing it as something that threatens their drive to prosperity.

Not so, LIBG members heard at their November forum from representatives of the Indonesian and Chinese embassies.

Both countries recognise that climate change poses a threat and have initiated actions to reduce carbon emission.

Tumpal MH Hutagalung, counsellor for economic affairs at the Indonesian embassy, pointed out that his country is an "archipelago surrounded by the ocean" menaced by rising sea levels.

He hoped for an effective agreement to arise from the Copenhagen talks, pointing out that "we cannot ask the climate to allow us more time, we have to act".

Indonesia hosted the UN's 2007 climate change conference in 2007, which Mr Hutagalung said had reached somewhat vague initial conclusions after which negotiations had continued leading to the adoption of an action plan. Copenhagen need not therefore be an end to a process even if the initial agreements reached is underwhelming, he suggested.

He said Indonesia would seek to reduce carbon emissions by 26% by 2020. Much of its emissions come from forestry fires and the country intends by 2030 "to reverse this and turn our forests from an emitter of carbon into a carbon sink".

Changhua Fu, first secretary for political affairs at the embassy of the People's Republic of China, joked that he had "expected lots of under-35s because they are the most concerned", instead of LIBG's somewhat older audience.

He said China was acting on climate change since the country had a "very fragile ecological environment". Desertification is an

issue in a country one-third covered by desert, he noted.

China seeks a 20% improvement in power generation and greater use of solar heating and photovoltaic power, aiming to reach 15% non-fossil energy by 2020.

Liberal Democrat shadow energy and climate change secretary Simon Hughes told the meeting that he favoured a new treaty arising from Copenhagen, rather than an adaptation of the Kyoto one.

He stressed that it would be important to secure an agreement by the early part of 2010, since the USA would be essential to the effectiveness of any plan.

Mid-term elections due there in November 2010 would mean that if Copenhagen dragged on into next Spring the US government would be unlikely to support anything radical, since it would fear that the Republicans would turn this into an election issue.

Hughes also called for international agreement to tax aviation and shipping fuel but warned, "Some other name is needed, a levy or contribution or something since no politician will want to be seen imposing a new tax on something the public likes".

Mark Smulian

The LIBG Climate Change Forum was held at the National Liberal Club on 9th November 2009.

THE LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

The LI Bureau has been considering the role and function of the Human Rights Committee in future. The two key questions are: what is the Committee for; and who and where is the market or target for its work?

We are a standing committee of the LI; that reflects the importance of human rights as a core part of the liberal agenda. Individual and civil liberty is a necessary condition for a free and open society. Other groups around the LI respond to the need for answers on particular policy areas. However, the concept of inalienable human rights is part of the bedrock of liberal values.

We are setting out:

To influence the rest of the world on behalf of the LI in the promotion and protection of human rights. This includes UN and other global and regional bodies, governments, political parties and civil society; To support our member parties by sharing information, ideas and good practice in relation to the institutions and initiatives which promote human rights, regionally and nationally; and to influence and encourage our member parties to understand and maintain the centrality of human rights in the liberal message.

The Committee

The Committee has been a meeting associated with LI events rather than a defined group. We are now going to identify a key group of participants on a regional basis who will be the core of the Committee. This group will address the services which LI provides to its members, priorities for policy and the structure for representing the LI and its members in relevant bodies. We will encourage and facilitate members to play a role directly within national and regional bodies in promoting the LI's approach to human rights. This will include a core mailing list of Parliamentarians and key party activists who are interested in human rights.

The Human Rights Newsletter is an important LI output in

informing and engaging members. We intend it to build from information about threats and abuses of human rights towards a greater emphasis on experience in promoting and implementing human rights at regional and national levels through constitutional, judicial, legislative and executive systems and through the engagement of civil society.

The LI is accredited to the UN and, through the Committee's Vice-Chair, Andy Sundberg, contributes to the discourse in Geneva around the UN Human Rights Council. We are developing protocols for the ways in which the LI facilitates input by our members to the Council, both formally and informally. We need to balance the importance of the LI's own role and contributions and the interests of a range of our members, bearing in mind the conventions and protocols of the UN.

Human rights issues are part of the agenda of many national and international bodies. Through members of the Committee and electronic links, we will increase the profile of the LI in these contexts.

We will continue to organise events linked to LI Congresses and Executive meetings. Working with the Secretariat and members of the Committee, we intend to enable input to regional conferences within the LI family. We intend to develop the programme of events around a coherent and developing agenda.

The Ideas of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration is our starting point. Since then, there have been a large number of initiatives at different levels and with different approaches. UN Conventions, for instance on the rights of women and of disabled people and the currently proposed new Convention on the rights of older people are part of the debate. The Council of Europe's Convention has an accepted role above national judicial and legislative institutions amongst signatories. The development of Human Rights Commissions in Canada, South Africa and within the UK has further developed practice. There is a continued debate about the balance between international and national approaches (the national Bill of Rights approach). There is continued pressure to recognise social and economic rights as part of universal human rights, which may reflect motives as diverse as altruism and economic protectionism. There is also a wide range of approaches to the implementation of human rights and the machinery through which rights can be asserted and restored in particular cases. There are underlying philosophical debates which have involved thinkers including Berlin, Rawls and Dworkin amongst others.

Liberals should not lose our simple core focus on inalienable and universal human rights and liberties. However, we should also be involved in wider debates and we should help our members to think through their approaches in the context of wider thinking.

For instance, we need to consider the relationships between specific rights or privileges extended to defined groups and their members (usually to challenge structural disadvantage and inequality and often including women; racial categories including aboriginal communities; disabled people; older people; diverse sexualities; holders of particular beliefs); rights which accrue to individuals which are linked to being part of particular groups; and personal, individual rights. This is where debates about equalities, the comparative disadvantage of members of particular groups and individual rights need to be understood and disentangled. Michael Ignatieff, when Professor of Human Rights at Harvard and now Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada addressed these and other matters with liberal insight and intellectual clarity in his Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Massey lectures.

We should be clear that for liberals individual rights take prece-

dence over group rights, but that group rights and freedoms are an important means of addressing the underlying inequalities which arise because people are members of particular groups.

The Committee should play a role in enabling this wider debate. Without this core intellectual and political clarity, we will forsake the central role which liberals should play in this debate.

Gordon Lishman

Gordon Lishman CBE took over recently as Chair of the Human Rights Committee of the Liberal International.

LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT EXPELLED FROM NICARAGUA

The new President of Liberal International, Hans van Baalen, MEP, has been expelled from Nicaragua by the populist Sandinista President Daniel Ortega. Van Baalen heard of this action against him shortly after leaving the country for Costa Rica. The LI President confronted Ortega and called on him to respect the constitution which prohibits him from entering a new term as president. Van Baalen also reached an agreement with the leaders of the Liberal opposition parties BND, PLC and ALN, to combine forces against Ortega during the 2011 elections. He told Ortega: "Check out in 2011, Mr. President". While supporters of Ortega harassed the LI delegation during a press conference, liberals outside chanted: "Van Baalen, hombre con cojones". Van Baalen commented on the situation: "Ortega is trying to bypass this article in the constitution illegally. The violation of civil rights is not just a national matter that can be ignored." Van Baalen was in Nicaragua leading a high level delegation to several Central American countries. See coverage of the LI visit on the <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVPUh0M7C5M>

IRELAND MUST BE GIVEN REPLAY OR SHOULD CONSIDER SUING FIFA

Alliance Culture, Arts and Leisure Spokesperson Kieran McCarthy MLA Alliance Culture, Arts and Leisure Spokesperson Kieran

McCarthy MLA has said that the FAI should call for a replay against France to right the wrong which has cost Ireland the chance to play in the World Cup next year. He said that if FIFA does not sanction a replay the FAI should consider suing them for the loss of the revenue they would have gained from playing at the South Africa 2010 World Cup.

Kieran McCarthy MLA said: "This is an absolute scandal. Ireland should



be given a replay against France to right the wrongs and show that fair play is the only way. The manner in which Ireland were eliminated simply can be allowed to stand for the good of the sport. This is an exceptional circumstance and it calls for exceptional measures to maintain the credibility of this competition.

"Thierry Henry himself admitted to intentionally handling the ball so FIFA would not find it difficult to prove that wrong was done.

"The FAI should demand a replay in Paris for next week. If FIFA do not agree to this measure the FAI should seriously consider suing them for the revenue lost as a result of missing out on one of the most lucrative events in world sport.

"FIFA should do all they can to show that this type of behaviour will be punished. Sport can only thrive if fair play is protected."

The France vs Ireland second leg World Cup 2010 Playoff tie was held on Wednesday, November 18th, 2009. France led 1-0 from the first leg, which was played at Croke Park a few days earlier. Over 25,000 Ireland fans travelled the Stade de France in Saint-Denis for the match. Full time score :- France 1-1 Republic of Ireland (William Gallas 103?/ Robbie Keane 32?) which meant France won 2-1 on aggregate.

France grabbed Europe's final playoff spot thanks to William Gallas' extra time goal, but the Irish are feeling hurt after taking the French to extra time, and then losing to a strike that should have never have been allowed in the first place. French skipper Thierry Henry handled the ball before crossing for William Gallas to head in.

NLD-LA 6th Conference

The National League for Democracy, Liberated Areas (NLD-LA), who have recently become an LI member held its 6th Conference on the Thai-Burma border between the 15th and 17th November. Elected Members of Parliament from the 1990 elections (of which results were denied by the junta), NLD-LA Central Committee members, and leaders from international branches gathered and discussed future plans and activities for the 2010 elections. New leaderships of the Executive Committee was also elected during the two-day meeting. Its detained leader, LI Prize for Freedom laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, recently wrote letters to the junta leadership expressing willingness for cooperation "in works beneficial to the country." NLD-LA's newly elected Joint Secretary of the Executive Committee Moe Zaw Oo commented to the LI Secretariat: "It is high time for the military junta to reconsider their position on Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as Mr Obama called for in the APEC summit. By releasing her, the junta can show their real willingness for national reconciliation and real democratic change in Burma. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has already expressed her willingness [...] Now it is the junta's turn."

NEW WEBSITE

LIBG has a new website, which carries news of events and group activities. For technical reasons we have had to get a new site name. It is now www.libg.co.uk Please note that old website www.libg.org.uk is no longer being updated and should be ignored.

GOING TO GAZA

Lib Dem member Mike Gwilliam, is helping to organise part of the latest aid convoy to Gaza, which set out on 5th December. They have an ambulance and are now filling it with medical supplies. The above link shows some of it. They still need money or donations, of sterile dressings for example, and these can be sent via Janice Gupta Gwilliam, 8, Langton Road, Norton, Malton, North Yorkshire. YO17 9AD. Telephone 00441653690630 mobile 0447985365161



The White Rose sallies forth.

Progress of the aid convoy can be followed on Twitter - www.twitter.com/yorktogaza

The convoys are ultimately organised by Viva Palestina (www.vivapalestina.org). It is a sort of umbrella organisation, because each local group fund raises for their vehicle, fills it with medical/educational supplies etc, finds drivers and funds the journey. However VP organises the route and clears stops etc with various authorities. I think overall about 200 vehicles are going, the York ambulance is part of a subgroup of about 20, mainly from Bradford. George Galloway and the Respect office are involved, which I think

is why VP itself is a registered charity. People like William Dalrymple, as well as the usual suspects are backing it. I have to say that GG has had amazing success so far with the Egyptian authorities in getting previous convoys into Gaza.



Lord Mayor of York bids the Gaza Convoy bon voyage

As the convoy sets off reports from Gaza say that Israeli jets are constantly in the sky, and that leaflets are dropped threatening another invasion under the name Men will cry. Wouldn't it be typical of Israeli hawks to try something like this to derail Obama's limited initiatives.

Janice Gupta Gwilliam

Otto Graf Lambsdorff

We were saddened to hear of the death of Otto Graf Lambsdorff as we were going to press. A full obituary will appear in the next issue. Our condolences go his family.

Julie Smith

R E V I E W

Last Chance, The Middle East in the Balance by David Gardner

IB Tauris 2009

There is a problem. A number of Moslem friends saw this book and wanted to read it. They were shocked. They were not Arabs, but generally followed the politics of the Islamic world and were not aware of the depths of its problems. People that we rightly see as tyrants are taken much at face value from their carefully doctored television personas. Gardner has opened at least a few eastern eyes, if mainstream politicians in the west ignore his message.

The actions and inactions of the real axis of evil – George Bush Jnr. and Tony Blair mean that the sands of time are running out for a solution to the problems of the Middle East, which they have allowed to attain global proportions. Three of these problems are of paramount concern – a just solution to the Palestinian problem, a rapprochement with Iran – the sole beneficiary of the Iraq debacle, and the preference for tyranny over democracy in Western policy – Gardner's 'Arab exception', democracy having put down roots if not flourished in practically every other quarter of the world.

Regular readers of the Financial Times will be aware of Gardner's arguments but they are usefully collected here, along with an overview of the region since the Second World War. Since these articles have been studiously ignored by HM Government over the last decade, one can only hope that the book does end up in the hand baggage of Obama's negotiators.

President Obama's Cairo speech was certainly encouraging, more so than much past American rhetoric. But as one US diplomat puts in – judge us on what we do rather than what we say. America is culturally enmeshed with Israel, way beyond the holocaust guilt of other western powers, and the strength of the religious right in American politics stymies reality getting into the debate. Left to its own devices Israel may yet provoke the Armageddon that ends us all; not quite the second coming the Bible Belt looks forward to I suspect.

Returning to the rhetoric – we invade Iraq to bring democracy (as a model for the region) then dislike the Shia electoral majority that this inevitably produces – ditto HAMAS in Palestine, and election results in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia (within their various limitations). Yet it is the support of tyrants who suppress civic and democratic institutions and leave liberals and other opponents of these regimes no other rallying points but the mosques.

From the Iranian revolution onwards America has distrusted Iran, damaged pride not least. This has been a misreading of Iran to say the least, and has projected itself into a naïve assumption that all Shia movements are the arm of Iran. Tyrants have used this to their own ends, persuading America that they are the only bulwarks against the Shia. Thus democracy goes no where in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and diplomacy is wasted in vacillation over Syria to the sacrifice of Lebanon.

Iran is the sole beneficiary of the invasion of Iraq. It has legitimate security interests (in the face of America mostly) and the west has no monopoly of the technology it has brought about (morally or practically). Paradoxically perhaps it may be the best bet for returning stability to the region, but both sides would have to open their minds and forget a lot of history.

Pakistan? Well we backed the wrong horse there didn't we and took it out on the poor old Afghans instead. Turkei meanwhile pro-

vides a beacon of hope with the prospect of an Islamic party developing into something like a Christian Democratic party.

Enough has been said about Palestine/Israel in *Liberator*, though I wasn't fully aware of some of the depths of western and Israeli policy, particularly pre-1967. Which underlines the point that we have here a thorough review of Middle East – Western political dialogue over the last 50 to 60 years, possibly unorthodox in its outlook, but one which chimes as common sense to one who has followed these events and has some experience of the area.

Stewart Rayment

TAIWAN'S BID TO TAKE PART IN UN AGENCIES

Graham Watson MEP has endorsed calls for Taiwan to participate in specialised UN agencies, particularly agencies such as the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). "Given that Taiwan is still recovering from a devastating typhoon then, yes, of course it should be allowed to participate in organisations like [the WMO]." He said he 'wholeheartedly' supports a growing European Parliament campaign calling for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations. In the European Parliament on 17th September Graham proposed that Taiwan should be allowed to take part in the WMO so as to help it to better deal with the natural disasters caused by a period of climatic changes stemming from global warming. Taiwan suffered the worst devastation in 50 years when Typhoon Morakot hit the country in early August. Taiwan has not been represented at the United Nations since 1971, when the Republic of China's seat was given to the People's Republic of China. Since 1993, Taiwan has been unsuccessful in its bid to enter the UN due to China's objections. It should, of course be a full member of the UN.

R E V I E W

Living with Hitler, Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich, by Eric Kurlander

Yale UP 2009 £25.00

German Liberalism has always been a problem. When reviewing Schie's *The Dividing Line* for the *Journal of Lib Dem History* a while ago I lamented that the collection neatly skirted around the problems of 1933-45. Reasons for the parliamentary decline of Liberal parties were given, but what happened to the Liberals and indeed liberals? Kurlander comes up with a set of answers. In doing so he demonstrates some of the limits of Nazi totalitarianism and a warning against the complacency that 'it could not happen here'. In the wake of a dumbing down of the currency of politics by New Labour, a general dumbing down of cultural and civic life by the gutter media, we have two BNP MEPs elected. There are a few shouts from the fringes, but it all happens rather quietly so far as most people are concerned.

A multitude of factors, of which political ideology is amongst the more esoteric, account for day to day political decisions. Liberals are

naturally part of the glue of politics and will be inclined to try to make the political system work. Unfortunately they sometimes find themselves dealing with people who operate a completely different set of ideas; understanding this can be difficult. The injustice of the Versailles Treaty certainly ranked uppermost in the minds of most interwar Germans. Success in challenging this gave Hitler credibility. Whilst his tactics were clearly the wrong ones, they worked. When does one realise that they will not work? 1939? 1941? 1943? Varying degrees of insight would reveal to people when the game was up (by which time the trappings of a totalitarian state were in place, though never to the extent of Communist Russia). Internationalist perspectives were often important in the timings of realisations.

Running through the book is the semantic battle to differentiate between Friedrich Naumann's 'National Social' and the Nazi's 'National Socialism'. It should be remembered that the Nazis made a serious attack on the class base of German politics and that in the 1930s at least the lives of many working class Germans improved. Some of the policies that achieved this were taken from Liberals and socialists. Since we tend to focus on the international political picture and the Holocaust it is easy to lose sight of this. The likes of Gertrud Bäumer would also be saying 'Yes, but No' in their publications.

It would have been great to discuss this work with Ralf Dahrendorf, part of the schoolboy resistance to the Nazis. Instead we must give thanks that he survived and for his enormous contributions Liberalism in his lifetime.

Saeed Rahman

Highlights from the LIBG Calendar

On 1st February 2010 there will be a **Forum on India** - 7pm NLC. Cash bar. Again, please email the Organising Secretary if you are coming. A number of us usually dine afterward after Fora, making the most of the splendid settings of the NLC under Mr Gladstone's benevolent gaze.

The 12th-14th March 2010 sees the **Liberal Democrat Spring Conference** in Birmingham, probably the last before the General Election.

The 15th March 2010 hosts our **Reception for Diplomats** - the highlight of our social calendar. Many members of both Houses and the cream of the Diplomatic Corp attend this annual event at the NLC (7pm-9pm). Tickets £20. 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.

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.

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

Bonkers World

Throughout my long career in the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats I have taken a keen interest in foreign affairs. This enthusiasm of mine has always met with warm encouragement: indeed, more than one leader has said to me that, as far as he concerned, the more time I spend abroad the better it will be for the party. People can be Terribly Kind.

This expertise of mine was most fully rewarded by Paddy Ashplant, the first leader of the Liberal Democrats, who appointed me as the party's spokesman on Outer Space. This was a post I was to hold for many years before relinquishing it in favour of Lembit Öpik, whose qualifications to hold it were clear to all.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to offer you, Liberals of all the nations, here the fruits of my many travels and wide reading.

One of the great disappointments of the twentieth century was the failure of the airship to maintain its early promise as a means of mass transportation. I remember with fondness those great ships of an earlier age: the Graf Zeppelin, the R101 and, here in Rutland, the First Lady Bonkers.

The problem that saw the downfall of these graceful galleons of the sky was an uncertainty over what should be used to fill them. Some favoured hydrogen, but it had the unfortunate habit of going off pop at the most inconvenient moments. The choice therefore fell upon helium, but this gas had the effect of making everyone on board speak in a high-pitched, squeaky voice.

I recall that it was this affliction that reduced the effectiveness of the Address to the People of America that I gave in New York upon disembarking from my first flight. Nevertheless, I did receive a letter, years later, from a chap named Disney who told me that my words had been an inspiration to him throughout his career, so all was not in vain.

It seems that the scientists have proved that, genetically speaking, men differ little from

mice. I am not surprised: I well recall the career of a colleague of mine in the '06 Parliament. Despite having been chosen as the Liberal candidate at the eleventh hour, he achieved one of our more startling gains from the Conservatives in that historic election. Of short stature, with a beady eye and luxuriant whiskers, he played his full part in the proceedings of the House, often making telling interventions in a rather high-pitched voice.

At one time he was widely tipped as the next-President-but-one of the Board of Cheese, but an unfortunate episode whereby he was obliged to resign from the Reform Club over some unsightly holes in the wainscoting cut short his career in public life. Nevertheless, I kept up our acquaintance, and he remained a regular guest at the Hall until he went for a stroll one evening in 1913 and encountered the stables cat. Strange the things one remembers.

For many, I know, the highlight of recent Liberal Democrat Conferences was the arrival of the Gurkhas and their bagpipes at Bournemouth in 2004. How proud I was, as Colonel-in-Chief of the Queen's Own Rutland Highlanders, to march at their head!

Besides, it is high time these doughty fighters (show them a doughty and they will waste no time in fighting it) were restored to their place at the centre of British politics. I can recall the days when I could not make a speech without some fellow from the back of the hall shouting "What about the Gurkhas?"

Mind you, I never went quite as far as the more advanced Young Liberals of the 1960s, who wished to bring about Gurkhas' control of industry.

I can't say I warmed to President George W. Bush. He did not strike me as a cultured or learned man, yet one accomplishment of his should be recorded with respect. He was the only head of state in my experience (with the possible exception of King Hakon of Norway) able to peel bananas with his feet

Incidentally, he may not have been so wide of the mark when he spoke about "the evil Islamic/Communist axis". For these two creeds have long been close bed-fellows. Trotsky was a practising Muslim, the Ayatollah Khomeini spent several years as a shop steward in the Clydeside shipyards and Marx used to hire his beards from a mosque in Muswell Hill. (When he was short of money he would pawn them, which got him in no end of trouble ("I'll give you 'opium of the people': we want our beard back.")

Two years ago there many events were held to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the passing of the Slave Trade Act, which had the effect of ending the wretched trade within the British Empire. (At the same time Napoleon was busy reintroducing the odious practice into France's dominions - something of which you should remind your Socialist acquaintances next time you hear them talk lightly of "revolution".)

I am proud to say that members of my family were to be found at Wilberforce's side speaking in favour of his bill and against this abnegation of all that is noble and generous in the human spirit that slavery represented. Nearer to home, slavers' ships were denied the use of any harbour on Rutland Water even before it was passed.

Slavery itself, of course, was not abolished until 1833. I spend the afternoon at the Bonkers' Home for Well-Behaved Orphans which, funnily enough, was opened the very next year.

Lord Bonkers was Liberal MP for Rutland South-West 1906-10. His literary secretary is Jonathan Calder.