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INTERLIB

Journal of the Liberal International British Group



2020 Isaiah Berlin Lecture

Turkey Ethiopia Balkans

Nuclear Weapons Brazil

EVENTS

7th December LIBG Forum The US Elections: Has the international liberal order been saved? 6.30pm by Zoom. See page 3.

7th December Hong Kong: The Decline of democracy and how young Liberals can help. 6.00pm by Webex. See page 21.

20th December IFLRY – 47th General Assembly Online – 2.00pm Berlin Time.

18th- 21st February - Young Liberals online conference.

19th-21st March – Liberal Democrats Spring Conference.

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Photographs: Liberal International, Christine Graf



LIBG 2020 PROGRAMME



The US Elections: Has the international liberal order been saved?

LIBG will hold an online forum at 6.30pm (UK time) on 7 Deember on The US Elections: Has the international liberal order been saved?

Speakers are David O'Sullivan, former ambassador of the European Union delegation to the United States and Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, director of the US and the Americas programme and Dean of the Queen Elizabeth II Academy for Leadership in International Affairs at Chatham House. The chair is George Cunningham, chair of Liberal Democrats Overseas.

To join please use the zoom link details below. Enquiries to: adrian.trett@gmail.com
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85676204475?pwd=VGhFd0lyckVyYUZFRnE5WktCdWhuQT09>

Meeting ID: 856 7620 4475. Passcode: equality

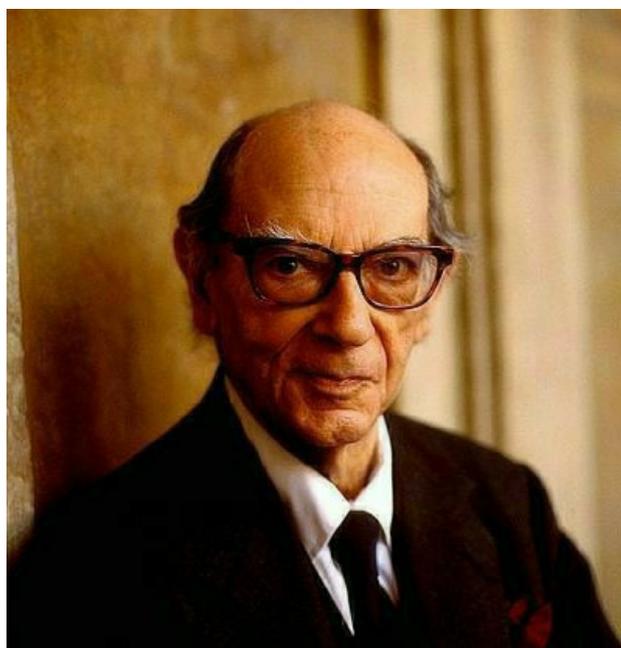
The Ten Commandments of Isaiah Berlin

Liberal International Isaiah Berlin Lecture, 2020

Henry Hardy

Who was Isaiah Berlin? And why is he important today, almost a quarter of a century after his death?

Berlin was a Russian Jewish thinker from the city of Riga. Riga is now the capital of Latvia, but was under Russian rule when Berlin was born there in 1909. His father was a timber merchant and his mother was an aspiring opera singer. From 1916 to 1920 his family lived in Petrograd, as St Petersburg was then called. In 1921, when Berlin was eleven, they emigrated to England to escape Bolshevism and anti-Semitism. Berlin rapidly became more English than the English, but all his life he identified himself as a Russian Jew. He enjoyed an illustrious professional career as an Oxford academic and public intellectual. He had a formidable personal reputation as a talker and as a connoisseur of people. His professional field was first



Isaiah Berlin

philosophy, then the history of ideas. He also wrote brilliantly, in wonderful essays and letters, about his contemporaries, about politics, about music, about literature – in short, about all human life. He died in Oxford in 1997.

Humanity was Berlin's constant theme. He was a wise and eloquent interpreter of human nature. He was himself an exemplar of humanity in one of its best forms, and a mesmerising presence in person. He was excited by ideas, and made them exciting for others. He discussed the deepest, most general human issues, which are of concern to us all: What should we be? What should we do? How should we live? He wrote without jargon in lucid English. All this makes him a powerfully attractive and significant figure.

He insisted above all on the central importance of our freedom of choice. By making choices we forge our own identities, rather than following the herd. He defended the political freedom that allows us to be free people. He celebrated the inescapable, but glorious, multiplicity of human goals, values and cultures. He opposed any attempt to reduce all our goals to one common denominator, all values to one super-value, such as happiness or usefulness. He rejected the claim that everyone should participate, still less be forced to participate, in a single worldwide form of life which claims to answer all moral questions with unambiguous certainty. All such projects, for him, are radically mistaken and lead to disaster. In every human sphere he was an enthusiast for openness, variety and complexity. He was hostile to oppression and oversimplification, especially in its authoritarian and totalitarian forms.

If liberalism is today on the defensive, Berlin is one of its most convincing and articulate defenders. His ideas are increasingly relevant and urgent in our own time. Globalisation and migration are not homogenising forces. They uncover and exacerbate the ethical differences that split humanity. They bring to centre stage exactly those issues of multiculturalism and mutual cultural tolerance that Berlin illuminated.

I don't want to exaggerate his merits. He wasn't a saint, or a genius in a narrow philosophical sense. But his legacy of insights and ideas is exceedingly fertile. To reduce them to ten commandments is ludicrous, but I hope provocative. Most of the commandments are related to each other, because they emerge from a vision

of human life that infuses them all. Of course, the idea that Berlin issued any commandments, let alone ten of them, is just a mnemonic intended to summarise some of the lessons we can take from his prolific writings. The first commandment makes clear that it shouldn't be taken literally. Here it is:

1. Thou shalt neither issue nor obey commandments

For Berlin the first question of politics is 'Why should anyone obey anyone else?'¹ Note that crucial word *should*. It is totally different to ask 'Why *does* anyone obey anyone else?' The answer to *that* question might be 'Because if they don't they will suffer or die.' Sheer power always plays a leading role in politics, but even the powerful seek to justify their power, and the use they make of it. People are more likely to obey if they are given persuasive reasons why they *should* obey, over and above the threat of force. Giving reasons for and against obedience is the beginning of political philosophy.

Because it searches for reasons, political philosophy is at odds with the unquestioning acceptance of authority. We should not blindly comply with commands, especially unreasonable ones, simply because they issue from a source that must not be challenged. A classic example of this kind of blind obedience, for Berlin, was Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac when God required this, even though killing one's own offspring is normally an especially heinous sin. Berlin wrote about this in a letter:

Abraham fully believed that, if need be, he had to sacrifice his son, and that that is the whole point of the 'trial' [as it is called] – that what the Lord commands has to be done no matter how deeply it offends against natural morality. That [...] is what religion dictates – [...] direct orders from on high [...] must be obeyed no matter what they are.

Berlin couldn't accept this form of obedience for himself:

*I was never favoured by this act of total commitment, which I think Jehovah surely demands.*²

So although the story of Abraham and Isaac may be moving, even noble, the principle of obedience which underlies it is one that Berlin rejects. This matters today because it isn't a principle that has disappeared into the mists of history. It is alive and well in our own time. It is alive and well in countries ruled by authoritarian governments, especially Communist or Islamist ones. These regimes expect and enforce conformity to rules that are often deeply unreasonable, and that defy our common humanity. Where political totalitarians or absolutist theocratic rulers hold sway, dissent and argument are repressed in favour of slavish adherence to the dictates of the leaders. The best, or worst, example of the religious variant of authoritarianism in the world today is provided by extremist political Islamism, now that the authority of Christianity has declined. The political variant is rife in many parts of the world that live under dictatorships of one stripe or another. It is also present in the doctrinaire factionalism of much of our own political life, which expects unthinking compliance with the party line. Extremists from both left and right substitute thuggery and direct action, mindless, self-righteous threats and abuse, for the civilised and open-minded democratic debate, majority decision-making, compromise, tolerance and moderation that Berlin championed. Unexciting virtues, Berlin conceded, but the right ones all the same.

2. Thou shalt not espouse a single vision of life as uniquely true

This commandment rejects one of the foundations on which illiberal regimes are based. It repudiates all claims to have discovered a definitive, universally correct, code of human conduct from which the right course of action can be read off as from a handbook. The reason no such handbook should, or could, ever be written is that human needs and desires, goals and principles, are multiple, various and often in conflict. By nature we pursue a wide variety of objectives, which can't be arranged in a fixed order of priority. They can't be fitted together to provide an authoritative, coherent, systematic guide to action, which applies in any circumstances. Each goal makes its own distinctive demands, which sometimes clash with the demands made by other goals. For example, liberty clashes with equality – 'Freedom for the wolves has often meant

¹ CC2 194; FIB2 1, 6; PSM 64; cf. PIRA2 21. (For abbreviations see <https://bit.ly/2VzEFR4>.)

² To Fred Worms, 3 December 1992.

death to the sheep’, as Berlin put it (L 38) – and order clashes with spontaneity. When a clash like this happens, there is no unquestionable way of measuring one goal against the other in order to decide which one to prioritise, and how far. How important a particular goal is to an individual or to a society depends on the overall outlook of which it forms a part, and on the specific context in which it comes up for consideration. My decision may differ from yours, but neither may be wrong. A Japanese decision may differ from a Javanese one. Choices have to be made, and when they are made, there can be a tragic loss, because the goal that is not chosen is left unachieved.

So we must reject any claim to have answered the basic moral questions of human life. There is no final solution for us to discover. Instead there is a permanent need for balancing contradictory claims, for careful trade-offs between conflicting values, for toleration of difference. We have to consider the specific factors at play when a choice is needed, and not rely on a universal abstract blueprint that claims to apply everywhere, always, to everyone. Berlin passionately rejects such panaceas. He writes:

Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups (or tribes or states or nations or Churches) that he or she or they are in sole possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be & do – & that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad: & need restraining or suppressing. It is a terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right: have a magical eye which sees the truth: & that others cannot be right if they disagree. (L 345)

Unfortunately human beings can’t help looking for such universal answers, whether religious or political, and the battle against them will never be over.

The belief in a single answer to moral questions Berlin calls ‘monism’, as against ‘pluralism’, which is his term for the more truthful attitude he champions. Our main political parties show the traces of monism in their very names. Conservatism prioritises traditional political and economic structures at the expense of reform; Labour focuses on the interests of one portion of the population at the expense of the rest. For me, one attraction of the Liberal Democrats is that their name and identity are more to do with the way in which political decisions are made than with particular substantive policies. But this may also be part of the explanation of their poor performance at the polls, because fair procedures are less inspiring to voters than exciting partisan reforms. This admittedly somewhat simplistic reflection on party names may be tendentious, but a political movement that favours one interest group to the exclusion of another is touched by monism, and can’t easily command the consensus required for stable government.

3. Thou shalt always be an explorer first, a missionary second

Because no vision of life can be uniquely true, no such vision can reasonably be urged, still less forced, on those who don’t share it. This is what missionaries do. I mean missionaries for both religions and political systems, which may not be transplantable into places where traditions are very different. Because of this, the first step when encountering an unfamiliar outlook is to do one’s best to understand it in its own terms. This may cure the potential missionary of the desire to impose an alien system. But to understand is not always to forgive, and empathy has its limits. All the same, to go in blindly with all guns blazing, taking no account of long-established viewpoints unlike one’s own, is dangerous and stupid. This is one of the most important lessons of pluralism, which can turn missionaries into explorers, terrorists into diplomats, despots into democrats.

4. Thou shalt always respect our common humanity

We must reject not only monist views, but also views that defy or deny human nature. Otherwise anything goes, which is a predicament often called subjectivism or relativism, and a license for inhuman behaviour. There will always be dispute about what the basic requirements of humanity are, but even if we can’t agree on all of them, we may be able to agree on some. Again, for Berlin the most basic human attribute is freedom of choice, the ability and the need to form our own identities and lives by choosing freely among the options open to us, deciding for ourselves what to be and do, how to live, without interference by others. Any attempt to constrict that freedom, to compel needless obedience, to enslave people to an ideology, is a degradation and denial of humanity. And the ultimate source and touchstone of morality is the individual, not the collective, let alone the unknowable divine. This is why we must resist paternalistic despotisms such

as Communism. If the Chinese government argues, for example, that certain human rights are a local, Western matter, and form no part of oriental culture, we are right to refuse to accept this. These are human rights, not Western rights. Humans everywhere need certain rights in order to reach their full potential as human beings.

5. Thou shalt never unnecessarily restrict any individual's freedom of choice

The protection of individual freedom is the foundation of liberalism, as its name makes plain. According to Berlin, once more, the most basic freedom we need and possess is freedom of the will, freedom of choice. And hot on its heels comes the political liberty of non-interference. This is called 'negative liberty', because it is based on an injunction *not* to impede anyone. Again, individuals must be allowed to make their own decisions, not dictated to about how they should live their lives. Of course there are exceptions – many of them – but the onus of proof is on those who would curtail freedom. John Stuart Mill's formulation of the principle of negative liberty is well known:

*the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.*¹

This principle is routinely broken by authoritarian rulers of various stripes. Authoritarian or totalitarian governments typically assign a more important role to collective entities than to individuals. The same might be said of unofficial pressure-groups from the left or the right, including the bullies of groupthink encountered on social media, in journalism, in parliament, in universities and elsewhere. So-called 'cancel culture' is preferred to open discussion. This attitude has been well labelled 'coercive progressivism'.²

6. The first public obligation is to avoid extremes of suffering

In our world of competing and irreconcilable visions of life it may sometimes be hard to agree on positive shared goals, though we do need to do this. It is far easier to agree on what we wish to avoid, and at the top of the list comes pain and suffering. A liberalism that stresses the avoidance of these ills above the pursuit of goods has been called 'the liberalism of fear'.³ In the spirit of that liberalism Berlin wrote:

The first public obligation is to avoid extremes of suffering. We may take the risk of drastic action, in personal life or in public policy, but we must always be aware [...] that we may be mistaken, that certainty about the effect of such measures invariably leads to avoidable suffering of the innocent. [...] The best that can be done, as a general rule, is to maintain a precarious equilibrium that will prevent the occurrence of desperate situations, of intolerable choices – that is the first requirement for a decent society [...]. A certain humility in these matters is very necessary. (CTH2 18; PSM 15)

7. Thou shalt not commit a social science

This wording belongs to W. H. Auden, who wrote in a 1946 poem:

*Thou shalt not sit
With statisticians nor commit
A social science.*⁴

But it is a good formulation of Berlin's seventh commandment, which is based on his rejection of scientism. Scientism is the claim that science is the model for all forms of enquiry, that only the scientific method can establish truth. But for Berlin the humanities, including politics, are radically different from the sciences. Their aims and methods differ. The humanities study human conduct and experience, and draw on a crucial source of information that is irrelevant to natural science, namely our own experience of purposive

¹ *On Liberty* (London, 1859), chapter 1, 'Introductory', 22.

² Stephen Daisley, 'The Rise of Coercive Progressivism', *Spectator*, 28 June 2020.

<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-rise-of-coercive-progressivism>

³ By Judith N. Shklar: 'The Liberalism of Fear,' in Nancy L. Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

⁴ W. H. Auden, 'Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times', *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* 48 no. 17 (15 June 1946), 707; quoted from *Nones* (New York, [1951]), 64–70 at 70.

behaviour. Humanists seek insight into particular events and people, scientists look for general rules. Far from being the poor relation of science, the humanities offer a deeper and richer form of understanding and knowledge. We study physical nature from outside, human nature from inside. This means that it is a cardinal error to ape science when we wish fully to understand human beings. Berlin wrote:

What scientific method can achieve, it must, of course, be used to achieve. Anything that statistical methods or computers or any other instrument or method fruitful in the natural sciences can do to classify, analyse, predict or 'retrodict' human behaviour should, of course, be welcomed [...]. However, it is a far cry from this to the dogmatic assurance that the more the subject-matter of an enquiry can be assimilated to that of a natural science the nearer the truth we shall come. (L 19)

COVID planners, please note.

8. Thou shalt never sacrifice living human beings to abstractions

This is a principle that goes right back to Berlin's witnessing of the first Russian Revolution in Petrograd in 1917. He saw a tsarist policeman being dragged off by a mob to his death, and recoiled in horror. From that day forward he had a visceral antipathy to political violence, the sacrifice of real people today in the name of an imaginary state of future felicity. It was a tragic mistake, for him, to prioritise an unknown future over a known present. To do so breaks several Berlinian commandments, but none more than this one. He expressed it memorably:

The one thing that we may be sure of is the reality of the sacrifice, the dying and the dead. But the ideal for the sake of which they die remains unrealised. The eggs are broken, and the habit of breaking them grows, but the omelette remains invisible. Sacrifices for short-term goals, coercion, if men's plight is desperate enough and truly requires such measures, may be justified. But holocausts for the sake of distant goals, that is a cruel mockery of all that men hold dear, now and at all times. (CTH2 17; PSM 14)

The choice of the term 'holocaust' is not accidental. In our world, where fanatics terrorise free societies in the name of an allegedly single true creed, and dictators force their subjects into conformity with a repressive ideology, these are real, live considerations. Berlin's hero, the nineteenth-century Russian social thinker Alexander Herzen, wrote a sentence which serves as a perfect antidote to the neglect of this commandment: 'The purpose of life is life.'¹ What we do is justified in the here and now, not in terms of some mythical distant goal.

9. Thou shalt not treat other people merely as a means to an end

This is a commandment derived from Kant, and thoroughly endorsed by Berlin. It is also linked to the Golden Rule, 'Do as you would be done by.' In a letter to a friend Berlin expressed his horror of the neglect of this commandment by oppressors who imprison their victims:

the jailer knows what he is doing, and why, and plays upon the victim, [that is,] treats him as a mere object and not as a subject whose motives, views, intentions have any intrinsic weight whatever – by destroying the very possibility of his having views, notions of a relevant kind – that is what cannot be borne at all. (L 339)

He was thinking of the Nazi Concentration Camps in the Second World War.

Jesus of Nazareth gave priority to two commandments, first the injunction to love God, and secondly his version of the present Berlinian commandment, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' 'On these two commandments', he said, 'hang all the law and the prophets.'² If I had to choose two of Berlin's commandments to speak of in this way, I should nominate this as one of them, and no. 2, the rejection of monism, as the other.

¹ Diary, 28 June 1842: A. I. Gertsen [Herzen], *Sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Moscow, 1954–66), ii 217.

² Matthew 22:37–40.

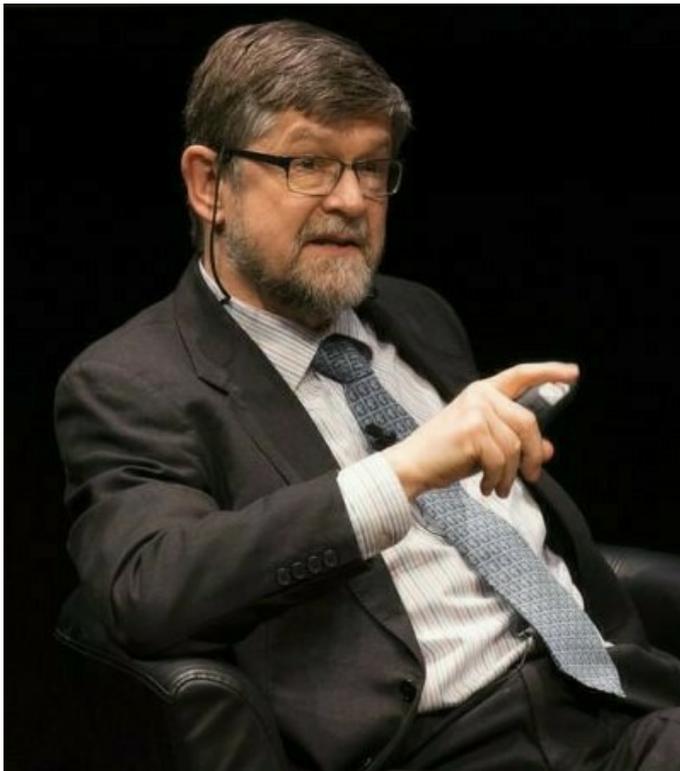
10. Thou shalt always think for thyself.

Taking this commandment at its word, I say no more about it, but leave the last word to Berlin himself:

IB [film clip]: *Thank you.*

Henry Hardy

Liberal International's Isaiah Berlin Lecture was held on 14 October 2020. It can be found at <https://liberal-international.org/news-articles/liberal-international-isaiah-berlin-lecture-2020-dr-henry-hardy/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hr9tRObhc90>



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Erdogan and Turkey

Guy Burton

The prospects for liberals and liberalism in Turkey is relatively poor and shows little sign of improvement in the short to medium term. Turkey's politics are currently dominated by the figure of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, an increasingly authoritarian and nationalist figure who has been prepared to throw his weight around at home and abroad.

Erdogan's assertiveness has grown in the past few years, even though he has been part of the political establishment in Turkey for nearly 20 years. Back in 2002 he and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) reached national power for the first time when they won the most parliamentary seats and formed a government with Erdogan as prime minister. The AKP is a conservative and nationalist party, with strong overtones of Islamic sentiment. While not an explicitly Islamist party in the sense that it wants to establish a theocratic state, it does hold up the importance of Islam in public life.

During his first decade, Erdogan had to share power with other leading figures in the AKP. But in the period since he has surpassed them, a status which was officially recognised when he made the move from prime minister to president, along with a number of constitutional changes which increased the powers of the office.

With the shackles largely removed, Erdogan has let rip in the political arena and demonstrated a willingness to be confrontational, even autocratic. He has challenged rivals and moved against them, having undertaken purges against the army, most recently in 2016 when a failed coup against him was attempted. That event, provided an opportunity to move against real and perceived enemies. His government had already moved against critical journalists and academics; since then there have been tighter controls placed on mainstream and social media.

The Kurds were also targeted. Back in 2013 he opened the door to a peace process. Although I was living over the border in the Kurdish region of Iraq at the time, the news was significant. Such was the hope that it was possible to visit the Qandil mountains in the border region and not face the threat of being caught up in a Turkish military incursion. But that opportunity soon passed in 2015 when Erdogan concluded there was no progress and supported moves to remove immunity from Kurdish Mps.

Such has been the impact that political scientists have noted Turkey's switch from democracy to autocracy over the past decade; in 2011 the Polity database gave Turkey a near perfect democratic score of 9 on the -10 to 10 scale; by 2018 it had fallen to -4.

Erdogan's illiberal streak has also been felt on the economy. Previously, Turkey was seen as an attractive place to invest. But in the past few years – and especially since Erdogan's powers have increased – that has become less so. GDP growth has slowed down while the introduction of various financial requirements and restrictions has reduced the free market nature of the economy. Inflation had started to rise, but the Central Bank was unable to impose higher interest rates owing to Erdogan's strong and public opposition. That prompted further doubt in international markets and which has seen the value of the Turkish lira fall by nearly a third this year. In an effort to bolster its value, some have predicted that Turkey has spent nearly \$100 billion in foreign reserves.

Erdogan's poor management of the economy has also been compounded by the covid pandemic. There have been over 650,000 cases in the country and 14,000 deaths over the year, with most of the cases emerging in the past month. Like elsewhere, the government has taken measures to contain the spread of the virus, by imposing movement restrictions and curfews. In its most recent forecast, the IMF predicts that the Turkish economy will contract by 5 percent this year.

With the economy in a poor state, Erdogan has recently appeared to see the light. He sacked and replaced both the governor of the Central Bank and his finance minister – the latter who is also his son-in-law. Investors will hope that this will lead to a change in course and a push towards more orthodox economic policies.

Economic uncertainty and deterioration happened at the same time that Erdogan has been pursuing a more forceful foreign policy. He has placed greater emphasis on national self-interest over international cooperation. As a result, he has arguably made Turkey a more problematic state actor. That is in stark contrast to the claims of the AKP back in 2002 when they reportedly wanted to have good relations with key international partners, including the US, Europe and the Middle East. The last was captured in one of the AKP foreign minister's slogans of "zero problems with the neighbours".

Illustrating that Turkey's foreign relations have become more problematic rather than less have been a number of instances over the past year. Relations with Europe have become increasingly fraught. At the beginning of this year Turkey became an active participant in the Libyan conflict, providing assistance to the Tripoli government as it sought to counter an offensive by eastern forces against it. More recently, it has also backed Azerbaijan during the recent fighting against Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. And it has crossed swords with several countries in the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, over maritime limits – a sensitive subject given the existence and interest in drilling for gas in the area.



In picking fights with the Europeans, Erdogan has not been above using the presence of Syrian refugees and other migrants in his country. The country hosts more than 3.5 million Syrians who have escaped the war in their country, as well as 400-500,000 refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran. Many of them have been supported with European financial and humanitarian assistance following an agreement between Turkey and the EU in 2016. But back in February Erdogan threatened to open the borders and let them pass to Europe if the EU did not provide greater funds.

Turkish pushiness has also been evident in Erdogan's dealings with the US. Last year Turkey, a NATO member, took delivery of the Russian S-400 missile defence system. That upset the military establishment in Washington, who were disconcerted and threatened sanctions should Ankara operationalize it.

Erdogan was able to get away with it, partly because of difference at the top of the American government. Despite the suspicion against him, he has had a good personal relationship with President Donald Trump. Trump's embrace of Erdogan echoes his tolerance for autocratic leaders and strongmen elsewhere. He has also been receptive to Erdogan's demands, which reportedly including pulling US troops out of the predominately Kurdish region of northern Syria in October 2019. The move effectively left the place open for Turkey to expand and strengthen its influence alongside Russia.

Last month's election of Joe Biden as the next US president may clip Erdogan's wings. Biden is believed to be less likely to accommodate Erdogan's excesses. At the same time, any recalibration of Turkish foreign policy is as much likely to be influenced by Turkey's uncertain economic prospects as by changes in political personalities.

Whether individual or structural reasons force Erdogan to adopt a more conciliatory tone in the coming year, it is likely that we will have to live with him for some time to come yet. A couple of months ago some of the political opposition hoped to push for early elections next year rather than in 2023, when they are scheduled. They hoped to capitalize on the economic problems to weaken and possibly beat Erdogan and the AKP. However, that is an optimistic view. While public opinion supporting Erdogan has dipped since the last elections in 2018, both he and the AKP still remain strong, receiving support from around 40 percent of the population. In second place is the Republican People's Party (CHP) – a more social democratic and pro-European party – which is trailing behind with around 25 percent. After them comes the People's Democratic Party, a more left-wing party, which around 10 percent.

Given the circumstances outline above then, the prospects for centrist liberals is not promising. Currently there are two parties in parliament – the Democracy and Progress Party and the Democrat Party – which have a seat each. Two others, the Liberal Democratic Party and the True Path Party, also call themselves liberal, but neither has a seat in parliament. Moreover, while they identify as liberal, it is not clear that they share the same understanding of the term as the Liberal Democrats, since they may be more accurately described as centre- to centre-right parties.

Guy Burton

Dr Guy Burton is an adjunct professor at Vesalius College, Brussels, where he teaches on global governance. He has previously held research and teaching posts at universities in Dubai, Malaysia, Iraq and Palestine. He researches on the politics and international relations of the Middle East and is the author of China and Middle East Conflicts (Routledge, 2020) and Rising Powers and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1947 (Lexington, 2018). Before taking up an academic career he was a researcher for the Liberal Democrats in Parliament and local government.

International Abstracts

Liberator 404

International contents, beyond the north of England as a foreign country are on the US elections, Martha Elliott follows on her analysis with Will Trump Go Quietly? Well we know the answer to that one; John Martin writes on the western Balkans, Sue Simmonds reviews Rupinder Singh's article on Belarus, On His way Out, and Adrian Hyyrylainen-Trett's Who Will They Come for Next, on LBGT+ rights in Hungary and Poland (interLib 2020-10 & 9 respectively). John Kelly's (Secretary of the Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine) letter, Virtually Silenced, on the workings of the Liberal Democrat's Federal Conference Committee will resonate with anyone who has tried to get international affairs discussed. Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy is alive and thriving in Liberal Democrat Central (Cowardly Street was such an appropriate epithet).

USA/UAE/Iran

US Senators and activists push to block huge arms deal with UAE, by Ali Harb. Middle East Eye 2nd December 2020

We all hold our breath until Joe Biden actually takes the reins in January; when Trump's envoy visited Israel, the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the immediate wake of the election, one could only fear the worst... his going out with a bang over Iran.

[US senators and activists push to block huge arms deal with UAE | Middle East Eye](#)

UK

The Constitution. Dominic Cummings and the unchained ministers. The Economist 19th November 2020.

Do you remember Dominic Cummings? Well good riddance, but the damage he started goes on. The Economist gives its usual insight into the problems of the UK and its constitution. Unsurprisingly, British Liberalism has the answers. Parish council stuff, of course, but you might have missed it.

<https://www.economist.com/britain/2020/11/19/dominic-cummings-and-the-unchained-ministers>

CONFLICT IN ETHIOPIA – LIBG BRIEFING

An armed conflict between the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front and the federal government in Addis began at the start of November when Tigrayan forces allegedly attacked a federal military base in the Tigrayan region. The conflict threatens to impact neighbouring countries (Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan). It is causing a humanitarian disaster and a constitutional crisis for Ethiopia, a former aid darling, which has modernised extensively since 2000, thanks largely to Chinese investment and loans.

Paul Reynolds, who has worked for the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance and with other governments in the region, outlined the background to the current conflict. He noted that Ethiopia was the only African country not to have been fully colonised; it was ruled by emperors with the status of deities, until Emperor Haile Selassie (ruled 1930-1974) was assassinated. He also emphasised that, as an ‘empire’, the regions furthest away from the capital, were assimilated by force in the late 19thC, but retained their language and customs; among the deeper roots of the conflict today.

The brutal and repressive Communist Derg (“the committee”) regime assumed power with Soviet backing from 1974 until they were overthrown by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front in 1991. The EPRDF was dominated by Tigrayans who placed their members in leadership positions in institutions and the armed forces. The elite capture of the wealth generated by modernisation caused widespread resentment among non-Tigrayans, (similarly by non Amharans after 2018).

From 2000 onward, China began to invest heavily in Ethiopian infrastructure, transforming the capital, and building a rail link between Djibouti and Addis. Paul suggested that the US (backed by the UAE and Saudi) is wary of China’s military and commercial footprint in the region, especially the port of Djibouti and its new military base there, and the role it is playing in Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. The US may have a vested interest in stoking instability in the region.

In 2018, Abiy Ahmed, a former intelligence chief, came to power, following a popular uprising against Tigrayan dominance, and due to the marginalisation of other large ethnic groups such as the Amhara and the Oromia. Abiy tried to balance ethnic leadership positions among institutions, strengthening central federal government against restive regions. He wanted to move toward a unitary, pan-Ethiopian society. He fired senior security officials who were mainly Tigrayan, bringing corruption charges against some. There are accusations that Abiy is purging Tigrayans from peacekeeping force in Somalia, and they are being racially profiled elsewhere in Ethiopia.

Abiy dissolved the EPRDF, merging its former coalition parties into a new Prosperity Party. The Tigrayans boycotted the new party. Abiy also tried to open up media space and the privatised state firms, most of which had been purchased by the same family. He signed a peace deal with Eritrea, earning him a controversial Nobel Peace Prize. Tigrayans were against Abiy’s deal to bring their long-time enemy, Isaias Afwerke of Eritrea, in from the cold. From 2018 onwards, there was a lack of dialogue between the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF, who rule the Tigrayan region from Mekele) and Abiy, while tensions grew. Abiy rejected having inclusive talks because he feared it was a trap to overthrow him, getting all the states together against him. Abiy bypassed the TPLF and went to local governments, stopping funding going to Mekele. The TPLF authorities responded by withholding federal taxes raised in Tigray. Abiy saw Tigrayan defiance as a challenge to his authority. But he was also popular with many people; he has nevertheless polarised Ethiopia.

In June, there were protests after a popular Oromo singer was killed. There have been mass demonstrations elsewhere in Ethiopia, put down violently. Non-Tigrayans are also unhappy by the strengthening of central powers at the expense of regions, which for some, including Tigrayans, has echoes of the DERG and ‘Red Terror’.

Abiy postponed 2020 elections due to Covid, but the Tigrayan region went ahead on Sept 9, declaring the federal government illegitimate and withdrawing its members from parliament in Addis.

On November 4th, the TPLF (with a 250,000 strong military) allegedly attacked a federal military base, and the government responded with what the International Crisis Group considers to be disproportionate force. Since the conflict began, Abiy has used Amhara troops/militia to crush the Tigrayans, which has heightened the ethnic tension. Eritrea has allowed Ethiopia to use its airports to attack the Tigrayans. In response, it is believed that the Tigrayans have bombed Asmara airport. The UN estimates that 45,000 refugees had fled to eastern Sudan over 4 weeks.

The TPLF leadership is at large and will not likely surrender, as Abiy demands. Central government may occupy Mekele, but that is not the same as having peace. There are fears of an insurgency, but Abiy refuses to hold talks because it will “legitimize” the TPLF. Abiy portrays the military action as a surgical operation to get the Tigrayan leaders, but this will more likely become a protracted conflict.

Dr Catherine Royce has been involved in medical work in Ethiopia for many years and knows the country intimately. She pointed out that there has been a massive population growth recently (now 116 m, the 2nd biggest African country after Nigeria), and there is a vast percentage of young people, increasingly well-educated. Under the leadership of Meles, (a Tigrayan) Ethiopia went from having 3 universities to 50. A new middle class has emerged, determined to push out the old guard.

Catherine is more optimistic than Paul because she believes many young Ethiopians have a stake in society and will not wish the gains since 2000 to be destroyed by conflict. Whereas when she first started working in Ethiopia most young people wanted to leave, the Diaspora are now returning, building meaningful lives for themselves. She has witnessed a remarkable change in the quality of life and the infrastructure in Addis. Young Ethiopians are unlikely to stand by as this is frittered away due to ethnic conflict.

David Chambers visited the region in January, meeting Tigrayan leaders. He commented on the strength of ethnic feeling and the importance of ethnic identity to the Tigrayan people. They proudly display Tigrayan flags, rather than Ethiopian ones. He remarked that Abiy faced a Yugoslav situation, and that by freeing political prisoners and loosening the restrictions on free speech, he had unleashed long suppressed grievances. There are fears that in a protracted conflict, Ethiopia may have to withdraw its peacekeeping troops from Somalia, meaning Al Shabab could take advantage. Added to this, Ethiopia is in conflict with Egypt and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam which will reduce the amount of water in the Nile, on which countries downstream depend; which could lead to military conflict.

Those attending the briefing hoped that Liberal Democrats in Parliament will appreciate how complex roots of the Ethiopian conflict are, and will press HMG to provide the appropriate aid and encouragement for all sides to seek a diplomatic solution, and press the EU, the African Union, China and US to promote peace; and not pursue short-term partisan political or commercial advantage.

Rebecca Tinsley

LIBG's Emergency Briefing on the Crisis in Ethiopia took place by Zoom on Thursday 3rd December 2020.

Honduras and the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

On October 24, 2020, Honduras became the 50th country to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). With this 50th ratification, the treaty will enter into force on January 22, 2021, at which time it will become illegal to possess, use, and threaten to use nuclear weapons.

Jamaica and Nauru have also recently ratified the treaty. A complete list of countries that have signed and/or ratified the treaty can be found at https://www.icanw.org/signature_and_ratification_status.

The TPNW opened for signature on September 20, 2017 at the UN headquarters in New York. Article One of the treaty prohibits states parties from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. It also prohibits them from assisting, encouraging or inducing anyone to engage in any of these activities.

The treaty is a major advance toward creating a safer and more secure world. Rick Wayman, CEO of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (NAPF), a Santa Barbara-based non-profit that works for the abolition of nuclear weapons, played a key role in the initial negotiations leading up to the nuclear ban treaty in 2017. Wayman was thrilled at the ratification, saying, “Today the world has moved a big step forward to finally eliminating the long-standing existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.”

While the United States chose to boycott the negotiations in 2017 and has refused to sign the treaty, the treaty still has the potential to significantly impact U.S. behaviour regarding nuclear weapons issues. Previous weapon prohibition treaties, including the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, have demonstrated that changing international norms leads to concrete changes in policies and behaviours, even in countries not party to the treaty.

Wayman went on to say, “International law and legal norms are vital to changing nations’ behaviour. The upcoming entry-into-force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons makes it clear that nuclear weapons are illegal.”

This effort to ban nuclear weapons has been led by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which is made up of over 500 non-governmental organizations from 103 countries. NAPF has been a Partner Organization of ICAN since the campaign began in 2007. ICAN received the 2017 Nobel Peace for their efforts to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and their ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons.

The treaty expresses in its preamble deep concern “about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would result from any use of nuclear weapons.” It further recognizes “the consequent need to completely eliminate such weapons, which remains the only way to guarantee that nuclear weapons are never used again under any circumstances.”

Another important aspect of the TPNW is that it creates obligations to support the victims of nuclear weapons use and testing and to remediate the environmental damage caused by nuclear weapons. Wayman further commented, “The upcoming entry-into-force of the TPNW marks a huge milestone in using the law to end nuclear weapons. At NAPF, we are educating and training people of all ages to address the tangles of trauma that fuel and sustain the desire for nuclear weapons in the first place. The root causes of nuclear weapons are in many cases the same root causes that lead to wars, mass shootings, racism, and many other serious issues.”

The treaty is a clear indication that the majority of the world's countries no longer accept nuclear weapons and do not consider them legitimate. It demonstrates that the indiscriminate mass killing of civilians is unacceptable and that it is not possible to use nuclear weapons consistent with the laws of war.

So, with that said, it's time again! Motions for the LibDem Spring Conference have to be submitted soon and, once again, Liberal Democrats Against Trident will be trying to get the Federal Conference Committee to place a motion on the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons no to the Conference Agenda. Your support would be much appreciated.

SIGN THE TREATY

This conference

Recalls

1. That the Liberal Democrats have long been committed to pursue the global elimination of nuclear weapons, seeking to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used, and ultimately put beyond use;
2. That the United Kingdom's undertaking under Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT) "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament" has not been fulfilled after fifty years and the current government shows no sign of action to fulfil it but instead remains committed to full renewal of Trident.

Notes:

1. That the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), now signed by 84 states and ratified by 50 and entering into force on 22nd January 2021, prohibits signatory states from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing and otherwise acquiring, possessing or stockpiling nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices;
2. That more than 30 Church of England bishops, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, as well as leaders of other churches have called on the Government to accept the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.
3. That the United Kingdom's debt exceeds £2 trillion, is bigger than annual GDP and will either continue to grow or only fall very slowly over the next few years as the combined costs of COVID-19 and Brexit have their full impact;
4. That the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee estimated in 2016 that the lifetime cost of the Trident renewal programme would be £179 billion but that estimate increases every year.

Recognises

1. That the majority of countries in the world protect their citizens from attack without possessing nuclear weapons;
2. That the UK's nuclear arsenal plays no significant role in the global balance of nuclear arms;
3. That the UK's nuclear weapons serve no objective of the UK's foreign policy;
4. That the real and present threats to the security of the United Kingdom and the world are Climate Change and pandemics.

Therefore calls upon the government of the United Kingdom to sign and ratify the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and commits the Liberal Democrats to campaign to that end.

Members of the Liberal Democrats are invited to support the motion and can contact Kevin White on kwhiteso081@gmail.com Members of other parties in countries that have not yet signed the treaty might consider motions on similar lines.

The treaty can be read in its entirety at <http://undocs.org/A/CONF.229/2017/8>

Sandy Jones - Nuclear Age Peace Foundation
Kevin White - Liberal Democrats Against Trident

Blowing his Trumpet in the Balkans

John Martin

Whatever happens in the US elections (writing on 1 November) Trump's US administration may have some unlikely fans in Serbia and the Western Balkans.

The 'Western Balkans' (former Yugoslavia countries and Albania not yet in the EU) is a relatively unstable and less integrated region on the boundaries of the European Union. EU diplomacy had effectively stalled here in trying to get Kosovo and Serbia to normalise relations, while a dispute on different historical interpretations of Slavic history has come into the open between politicians and some people in Bulgaria and North Macedonia. This has risked upsetting progress in the region spearheaded by the courageous effort to solve the 'Macedonian name dispute' (of Greek and Macedonian nationalists) by now North Macedonian leader Zoran Zaev and Alexis Tsipras of Greece. And the apparently surprisingly good personal relationship between Edi Rama of Albania and Aleksandar Vučić of Serbia.

The USA is seen by many in Serbia as pro-Kosovo as it spearheaded the NATO bombardment in 1999 that ended Serbian state ethnic cleansing but put in charge the former guerrillas, Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA; Albanian: Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës – UÇK) viewed as terrorists by many Serbs. Trump being anti the American establishment is therefore seen as being more pro-Serbia by some Serb nationalists (who tend also to be Putin fans), while many Kosovo Albanian commentators are definitely pro-Democrat and Biden. Incidentally while Serb people give the impression of feeling aggrieved that Britain took a large part militarily in resolving the Kosovo conflict, they often speak fondly of the historical alliance in World War One that most people in Britain do not remember. A feeling of victimhood is exaggerated by 200,000 Serb (and Roma) people displaced from Kosovo after the fighting, most of whom have not returned. The failure of the Serbian state, presided over by a leader who was Minister of Information under the Slobodan Milošević, and popular media to acknowledge the scale of atrocities allows nationalist to continue a climate of misinformation and denial.

Strange headlines.

Readers may have seen some strange headlines about talks between Serbia and Kosovo at the White House on Thursday and Friday in early September and a signing ceremony on Friday 4 September. The Serbian President and Kosovo's Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti were shown meeting to the assembled media. This commentator summarised "The US diplomats have pulled off something on economic ties for Donald Trump to sign in the White House. Probably good news . . . Extremists on both sides would have exploited any suggestions on exchanges of territory between Kosovo and Serbia." 'Swapping' largely Serbian populated parts of north Kosovo, for largely Albanian populated parts of southern Serbia has long been touted as a way to solve ethnic tensions. Ignoring the fact that many of Kosovo ethnic Serbs do not live in the North Mitrovica area concerned, and that Kosovo Albanian nationalists and patriots only talk about gaining territory not giving any up. The US diplomats' and Trump administrations' emphasis on normalising economic relations as the top priority, to improve economic prospects for all, was inspired. The EU led talks had been stalled in intractable pre-conditions put by both sides, especially the Kosovo side that Serbia has to recognise Kosovo (which it does not) before other problems can be solved, and the failure of the Serbian authorities to implement earlier agreements on people movement (including identity documents), economic and educational issues. Now there may be some further normalisation and investment. Mutual recognition of qualifications between the two countries is one regional issue that is important for graduates of the main minority populations, if implemented as it wasn't after commitments made to the EU in 2013.

It's about Israel, silly.

The strange headlines were because talks brokered by the White House between two European countries were presented as being about Israel. The putting in stuff about the Middle East and Israel was bizarre, not

very constructive and obviously for Trump's re-election campaign. Trump team presenting the 'deal' as Muslim country recognises Israel so helping peace in the Middle East. And Serbia agreed to move its Embassy to Jerusalem. That the US insisted on putting content about Israel in an 'agreement' (separate papers signed) between Kosovo and Serbia is the part that got most of the media coverage and is universally recognised as being solely for the benefit of Trump's re-election campaign. Kosovo Albanians are often secular and largely cultural Muslims as was mostly the case in post War Yugoslavia and Albania. Many international critics and some domestic commentators complain that the changed stance of Serbia regarding Israel is denying the positive attitude towards Palestine inherited from Yugoslavia.

Likewise geopolitical pressure about relations with Russia and China are unhelpful even given the appallingly illiberal nature of those states. Bullying Serbia to take sides in economic disputes with China - not to use untrusted telecoms providers - & Russia, on that it is to diversify from Russian gas & open up the market, is damaging to the country's more neutral stance. The Serbian President Vučić has played off China, Russia and the EU and USA, especially regarding arms deals. Receipt of Russian aid is widely celebrated by official voices in Serbia but not far greater amounts from the EU. Though I'm implacably opposed to the Chinese & Russian regimes, it is not edifying that smaller countries are bullied in to taking sides in geopolitical economic disputes. The EU however does the same as part of the expansion of its role into foreign policy, which is one area where it has become detached from regular domestic politics of its member states.

Elections in the time of COVID.

The Serbian elections took place when the country had quite successfully tackled the first wave of Coronavirus. As in Britain with relaxing restrictions this undoubtedly contributed to a second wave, and the third is now ongoing as in many countries. At first Eastern Europe implemented precautions more effectively than many Western European ones. The other big regional news was elections in Montenegro meaning the incumbent President losing power for the first time in thirty years. Ironically a pro-EU voice lost narrowly to an opposition split between more liberal reformist and 'pro-Russian / pro-Serbia' parties. A peaceful and relatively swift transition to this unlikely coalition took place, with the leader of the latter party promising not to derail pro-EU and NATO aspirations. This balanced approach was presumably choreographed with Belgrade and Moscow. The leaders in Montenegro had alienated the still influential Serbian Orthodox Church allowing Serb nationalist rhetoric to influence the result in a country with a large ethnic Serb population. Montenegro's formation of a government (and North Macedonia's after earlier elections) contrasted favourably with an absurd situation in Serbia where elections two months earlier, 21 June, led to a Government formation four months after that date, with Parliament not working in the meantime. The Opposition had largely boycotted the elections (there were protests at the results for a few weeks) meaning the President had to decide which of his many followers to give jobs to. The only official opposition is made up of three Bosniak and three Albanian party MPs and one independent. The group leader, Albanian party MP Shaip Kamberi, made a blistering speech in Parliament on the formation of the largely old 'new' Government.

The Leaders of Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia have resumed working for a mini-Schengen zone including Bosnia Hercegovina and Kosovo as well. This was supported by the US but is in line with the aim of EU diplomacy. Many media commentators, trolls, bots and some politicians have presented a rivalry between the USA Government and the European Union leaders / negotiators. Whether this is true or not the small but real achievements of the American diplomacy appears to have reignited work of the EU negotiators in the Western Balkans region. With the US Embassy and others working behind the scenes, poster boy for Trump diplomacy has been his special envoy Richard Grenell. A prominent libertarian Republican LGBT figure and Trump diplomat, Grenell is prone to aggressive or bizarre tweets like his leader but in the complex politics of the former Yugoslavia his shoot from the hip approach seems to have given his leader some small foreign policy results. Cynics abound but normalisation of economic relations, could be good for everyone, as over the same time period they have largely been as well on the island of Ireland and for British – Irish ties.

'John Martin' has worked in several countries of south eastern Europe on elections and politically sensitive work.

Biden, Brazil and Bolsonaro...

& COP26

Keith Melton

Perhaps there were some of you who thought I might have been getting ahead of myself when I excitedly `toasted` Trump`s loss the minute the Pennsylvania count started to turn blue last week. Indeed, there may still be some who are saying let`s wait and see what transpires. Biden has claimed victory, but Trump has yet to concede. However, I shall stick to my belief that the US system is robust enough to see Trump off the premises by January 20th next year.

So, I now think we can begin to look ahead and see what this all may portend for us Green Liberal Democrats. Let me first of all declare an interest. I think many of you, perhaps most of you reading this, may know that I am married to a Brazilian, so that may partially explain why I have chosen this topic to run with as my first since Biden racked up a win in the States.

Truly, however, that is only the `trigger factor`. My environmental base for this article is the consequence of the Biden win for the `lungs` of our planet, the Amazon rainforest and the fate of its indigenous peoples.

Even that has a personal dimension, however, as one of Fatima`s great grandmothers was a South American Indian. By all accounts she was something of a beauty and family history has it that she was "lassooed" by the Portuguese man who was to become Fatima`s great grandfather. It is a sort of mix between imperial misogyny and a story of true love, I think.

But let me get back to the environmental consequences of Biden`s win.

Bolsonaro`s isolation

Brazilian President, Jair Bolsonaro, more even than Boris Johnson, is a Trumpian clone. Indeed, he is probably more Trumpian than Trump himself. He has a similar disdain for democracy. He tells lies like Trump and Johnson and he surrounds himself with `yes` men (and I do mean MEN - he is a misogynist who believes a woman`s place is in the kitchen!)

He also has a very low approval rating, although that has, paradoxically, risen during the coronavirus pandemic and I struggle to understand why. He and his family are also incredibly corrupt and his son, Flavio, a senator, was charged a few days ago with embezzlement, money laundering and criminal association, "...*the culmination of an investigation that began almost two years ago*" as reported in the Financial Times.

Part of the reason Bolsonaro has managed to keep his political chin above the waves, of course, has been his vassal status with `The Donald` and the strange `loyalty` Trump has shown him for doing "great things" in Brazil. But that prop, that pillar, has just crumbled away. Although Bolsonaro has, so far, kept supporting Trump`s erratic attempts to challenge the legality of Biden`s victory and is one of relatively few international leaders not to congratulate Biden on his win, I am sure he must realise Trump is a busted flush.

Joe Biden has been very outspoken in his condemnation of the Bolsonaro contempt for the special world status of the Amazon rainforest and has warned the Brazilian administration that there would be severe economic consequences if they did not start to protect the rainforest and its indigenous people. But Biden`s approach also has a carrot as well as a stick and he has suggested \$20 billion support to Brazil for "protecting" the rainforest against illegal fire-raising.

As environmentalists, however, we may need to suggest a caveat to the US offer as it is apparently predicated on opening up the Amazon to US businesses, but without any of the destruction by fire that is

happening currently. So far, Bolsonaro has rejected Biden's approach saying Brazil would not accept "...*coward threats towards our territorial and economic integrity*". That rejection, however, was during the recent campaigning. Whether Bolsonaro may be forced to change his tune now that Joe Biden is President-elect will unfold in time of course.

Vice President-elect Kamala Harris

It will be interesting to see how much influence Kamala Harris might have on this issue as time goes by. Within the new administration she is, perhaps, likely to be the stronger influence on Climate Change being moved up the political agenda, as she has a strong record of intervention on Climate Change.

It is worth noting that Bernie Sanders' strong performance in the primaries was one of the factors pushing Climate Change upwards as a key issue in the election. And Kamala Harris has been seen as representing the environmentalist wing of the Democrats to some extent. So, there is now some expectation that she will lead the charge on this issue.

There is also a link with the Black Lives Matter movement that may come into play as far as the Amazon is concerned. One of the leading speakers for the "Articulation for the Brazilian Indigenous Peoples" (APIB) Sonia Guajajara has spoken publicly about Martin Luther King's declaration that "*No one is free until we are all free*" and made a direct connection between the BLM movement's demonstrations over the summer and the struggle for security of the indigenous people of the Amazon See her short comment here <https://amazonwatch.org/news/2020/0625-no-one-is-free-until-we-are-all-free>

Her reference to "Joao Pedro" in the video relates to the, "supposedly accidental", shooting of a 14-year-old boy in a police operation in Rio during the summer. Sonia Guajajara was named in October as one of the 100 most influential people in the World.

Green Liberal Democrats and the Amazon

So, where has this article been leading up to, you may ask!? To answer that rhetorical question let me direct your attention to **COP26** - the 'Conference of the Parties' follow up to the Paris Accord of 2015 (*and doesn't THAT seem a long time ago!*)

As I am sure you will know, COP26 was supposed to take place in Glasgow this November, but, due to the coronavirus pandemic lockdown it was postponed until November 2021. Due to the postponement it seems to me that COP26 will take on a completely different dimension now that there will be a positive US input following Biden's accession to the presidency. A meeting which Donald Trump would have ignored, but which Joe Biden will grasp with both hands, will have a completely different dynamic than if it had been held this November.

So, my "Big Idea" is that we should be organising to '*punch above our weight*' next year by organising a high-level 'Fringe' meeting *for* COP26, *during* COP26. We should also have a preparatory session of our own as part of the Green Liberal Democrat "Summer School" next year after the local elections have been fought and generated a positive vibe in the Party!

Keith Melton

Keith Melton is chair of the Green Liberal Democrats and this article first appeared on their blog on November 12, 2020.

<https://greenlibdems.org.uk/en/article/2020/1383033/biden-brazil-and-bolsonaro-cop26>

New LIBG Executive

Following the AGM last month, the new LIBG executive is

Chair Adrian Hyyrylainen -Trett

Treasurer - Wendy Kyrle-Pope

Secretary - Mark Smulian

Ordinary Members - Ahmed Mallick, George Cunningham, Jo Hayes, Rabi Martins, Paul Reynolds, Steven Kuo, Jonathan Fryer, Phil Bennion

Three Co-opted Members - Rebecca Tinsley, Ruth Coleman-Taylor and Hussain Khan.

Young Liberals International Officer

Mathilde Boecker is the new International Officer of the Young Liberals; we look forward to working with her.

Mathilde's executive duties include managing relations with the Young Liberals' international affiliates and the youth wings of liberal political parties across the world and with groups within the Liberal Democrats with an international agenda. She advises their Executive or members on international issues where relevant, and co-ordinate international trips for members, including to events run by international affiliates (one of the big perks of youth politics – how many of those who regularly write for interLib first cut their teeth internationally in this way? – but a word to the membership – don't let the hacks grab all the plum trips).

Mathilde is originally from Germany but has lived in London since the age of 10. She joined the party in 2019 and has campaigned in European, local and general elections for the Liberal Democrats. In her free time she studies public health and counts down the days till the next Eurovision.

She can be contacted on mathilde.boecker@youngliberals.uk

The new Co-chair's are Callum Robertson and Jack Worrall.

Hong Kong: The Decline of democracy and how young Liberals can help. th December, 6pm by Webex

Co-chair Callum Robertson will be joining Alistair Carmichael MP, Layla Moran MP, and a representative from Fight for Freedom: Stand with Hong Kong. They'll be discussing how the Liberal Democrats can best support Hong Kongers – in particular those who will take the brave decision to leave their homes to settle in the United Kingdom, and those who decide to stay behind and stand against the Chinese Communist Party in a bid to restore democracy and freedom to this formerly autonomous city.

Register at

https://thewhitehouseconsultancy.my.webex.com/mw3300/mywebex/default.do?service=1&siteurl=thewhitehouseconsultancy.my&nomenu=true&main_url=/mc3300/e.do?siteurl%3Dthewhitehouseconsultancy.my%26AT%3DMI%26EventID%3D1144241002%26UID%3D0%26Host%3DQUhTSwAAAATWl6eGzCUaYSyG4XJ4p4L6yWxMUpfyI9uXiPJjXhc7MkP8R1cPJFjUArhpRqZjhJN5l-cNLxy2C0jg-_L-5oF0%26RG%3D1%26FrameSet%3D2%26RGID%3Dr162a445364d530a4952cd5b4fea8ef29

Tightening the Grip of the Iron Fist Rule: The Arrest of Pro-Democracy Camp Legislators and Activists, and what we can do as a liberal in the United Kingdom

Larry Ngan

When I was being asked by the editorial to write an article on the arrests of the pro-democracy legislators in Hong Kong a few weeks ago, I was planning to write something about my predictions on what China would do next on their Hong Kong policy. Since much transpired in the city which are beyond astonishment. The development is on the path of my worst prediction to the fate of the city. So instead of making any prediction, I would like to make a brief review on what happened for the last couple of days in the city, explaining the implications on actions taken by the Hong Kong government, and suggested as a Liberals in the United Kingdom what we can do to support those who are fighting for civil liberties in Hong Kong.

Political Arrests

In the days passed, the Hong Kong government arrested a number of civil rights activists and politicians, including owner of Apple Daily Jimmy Lai, and a number of legislators of the pro-democracy parties. Some of them are former pro-democracy legislators, and some prominent opposition members. They were charged with minor offences but with disproportionate sentences or treatments. In the case of Jimmy Lai for example, the authorities charged him on fraud, but he was detained by the authorities straight away and was not granted bail. That means he was sent to the prison without any trials until the first trial will is scheduled 5 months later. The same happens to Agnes Chow, one of the young opposition leaders, as on her 24th year old birthday, she was charged with unauthorised public gathering and was sent to the prison for 7 months due to her “repeated offence”.

These arrests prompted some politicians and activists to seek political asylum overseas. Most notably Ted Hui the former legislator from Democracy Party, and Baggio Leung the former legislator from Youngspiration (A localist political party). Meanwhile, mass media institutions which are relatively less pro-government started to face the pressure from the authorities. They were either forced to disband their news departments which produced insightful news analysis and reporting programs, or they fired those journalists who were supporting the protest movement or even those who were claimed “not critical enough”.

Among all these incidents, the most alarming is the case of Ted Hui. He was forced to seek asylum in Europe under the pretext of an official overseas visit under the name of the Democratic Party, and could not officially announce his asylum till his family members arrived in the United Kingdom. The most striking issue is that the bank accounts of his family members and himself in Hong Kong were frozen immediately afterwards, even though the Hong Kong/Beijing authorities did not press charges on him or any of his family members at all. Despite their accounts were partially unfrozen on the following day, the victims no longer trust the banking institutions in Hong Kong and moved their deposits elsewhere.

It is important because it shows the Hong Kong and Beijing authorities are trying to tighten the grip of political and economic control via their influence in the financial sector. None of the relatives of Ted Hui offended any law in Hong Kong, but their bank accounts were frozen only because they are families of the political oppressed. In his interview with BBC, Chris Patten, the last Governor of Hong Kong, said the actions of the Hong Kong/Chinese authorities is ‘another grim example of China’s determination to put Hong Kong in handcuffs’. Actually, this chain of actions has an even more everlasting effect on the prospects of the city: it can be catastrophic to the reputation of the city as one of the most important global financial centre, and the very core livestream of the existence of the city. It shows even without the government pressing charges on individuals, financial and mass media institutions in Hong Kong can impose ‘self-censorship’ such as frosting bank accounts

on any individuals or businesses, or firing individuals, even for those who are law abiding, or only one of their relatives expresses discontent towards the government.

What makes Hong Kong to be the global financial centre was its freedom of movements on goods and capital to be guaranteed by its judicial independence and certain degree of freedom of expression, hence a safe haven for investors to deposit the wealth in the city. When these criteria became obsolete, the special status of the city would be gone too. We should bear in mind that a number of countries provided special preferential terms on trade deals/treaties to Hong Kong because the uniqueness of the city mentioned above, most notably the United States. (Due to the Hong Kong Relations Act, and other related legislations on Hong Kong affairs) The chain of actions taken by the Hong Kong government in recent days shows it is no longer safe for individuals to deposit their wealth in the financial institutions. The immediate effect can be devastating: capital could be withdrawn from financial institutes within a short period of time, job losses could be followed within the financial sector, huge amount of skilled labour in the financial sector could leave the city as well, and the status of Hong Kong to be the global financial centre could be in serious threat.

So as a liberal in the United Kingdom, is there anything we can do to support those in Hong Kong?

There are a few things we can campaign on. There are not that many policies that our party shared a common ground with the Conservatives, but on the issue of Hong Kong, we are on similar grounds. The Tory government changed its policy on BN(O) since the beginning of this year and this really provided a lifeboat for those Hongkongers who wanted to live in a society which embraced civil liberties as its core value. However, during the protest on 2019, it was those born after 1997 who made huge efforts in participation in the protest movements. They are in grave danger of being arrested. In order to show we support the civil liberties movement in the city, we should grant the right to abode for those non-BNO holders who wanted to seek political asylum in our country.

Meanwhile, we as British faced a huge challenge on Brexit. Hence we have a big challenge on negotiating trade deals with other countries in the world. That means inevitably we would face the challenge on whether we would negotiate a trade deal with China. During the event organised by Democratic Party (Hong Kong) on 21st October 2020, Layla Moran, our spokesperson on Foreign Affairs, said ‘We are liberals, we believe in world trade where people trade with each other, because the heart of trade is the cooperation, is the value of understanding each other, and the value of communication.... I don’t want to advocate dial down trade with China, but I don’t think it should be no restraint trade. One of the things many on the conservative side of the house said **this is an opportunity for us to be even more robust on human rights clause in any trade agreements.**’ For any future trade deals with China, we need to make sure that the securing the rights and civil liberties of Hong Kong citizens along with those for Tibetans and Uyghurs should be conditions on the trade deals. They should be non-negotiable and constant reviews would be required for whether we will uphold the terms on the trade deals as long as they are still in effect.

If the trade deals cannot be made, one option the British government can consider is sanctions. When I was invited to be the guest speaker for Royal Holloway University Liberal Democrats on 23rd October 2020, I raised the questions on why China is not on the expanded sanction list after the withdrawal of EU took into effect on 30th December while our list of sanctions will be expanding from barely 5 to 24. For the countries on the expanded list, they included a number of countries which had a poor record in civil liberties such as Sudan, Syria and Venezuela. So if we can include these countries on the list, we should include China on the list, or alternatively we should issue sanctions on individuals in the Hong Kong government in order to show our solidarity to the civil liberties movement in the city.

The situation in Hong Kong is dire and the citizens are facing a lot of uncertainties. Our country has the tools to help out these people. As Alistair Carmichael mentioned during the Autumn Conference 2020 in support of the Hong Kong motion and the private members bill ‘Hong Kong Bill 2019-2021’, ‘I said that to you Prime Minister again, now it’s the time for your actions to match your rhetoric. There is a bill in the parliament supported by the millions... Stick it up, give your time, and turn it into law.’

Larry Ngan

Since this article was written, the bank accounts of Ted Hui and his family members were frozen again.

reviews

Conservatism, the Fight for a Tradition, by Edmund Fawcett.
Princeton University Press 2020 £30.00. isbn 9780691174105

Go down to your nearest independent bookshop as soon as they reopen and buy this book. Your Yuletide reading will be taken care of. Do not buy it on Amazon, they do not need your money. Abe (though owned by Amazon, but dealing with bookshops) or Alibris may be permitted, but a phone call to your local bookshop should suffice.

I do not claim to give a full review this book here; it arrived nearly two hours ago, and I have just put it down. Edmund Fawcett is a reliable author, his *Liberalism, the Life of an Idea*, which all of you should have read by now (interLib 2016-07 & 2018-07e) shows him to be a liberal, now a left-wing liberal (preface). He hopes to have achieved objectivity rather than neutrality. Politics is a dialectical practice, so Fawcett's turning to Conservatism is a natural continuation, completing the circle. Know your enemy.

The structure of the book broadly follows that of *Liberalism*; we are dealing with Britain, France, Germany and the United States from the French Revolution. Italy? My first thoughts when opening the book was 'Hobbes? Bolingbroke?', they are mentioned of course, but I look forward to the justification of this starting point. Recollection of Samuel Johnson's whispered 'Are you a Jacobite?' might aid explanation. So, amongst works consulted we have Burke's *Reflections*, obviously, but not Tocqueville's *Ancien Regime*.

Within these geographical constraints the book follows a historical course, the starting point making Conservatism a reaction to the French Revolution; men (mostly) and minds in their context. Given that anti-intellectualism is a conservative trait, do Conservatives think, or merely react? We shall see.

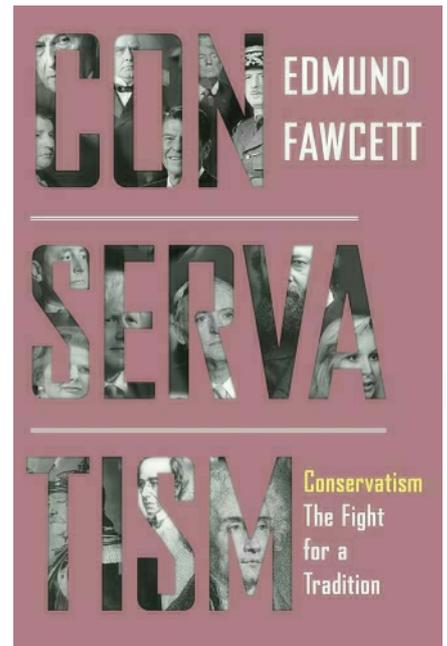
The appendices, *Conservative Keywords* (a glossary), *Philosophical Sources of Conservative Thought*, *Conservative Lives* (divided between politicians and thinkers) and *Works Consulted*, are a joy; idle the time away just flicking through them.

But don't take my word for it, yet, at least. Edmund Fawcett has a podcast on Princeton's website at <https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/podcasts> enjoy.

Stewart Rayment

Beyond the Red Wall, why Labour lost, how the Conservatives won and what will happen next?
By Deborah Mattinson.
Biteback 2020 £16.99
isbn 9781785906046

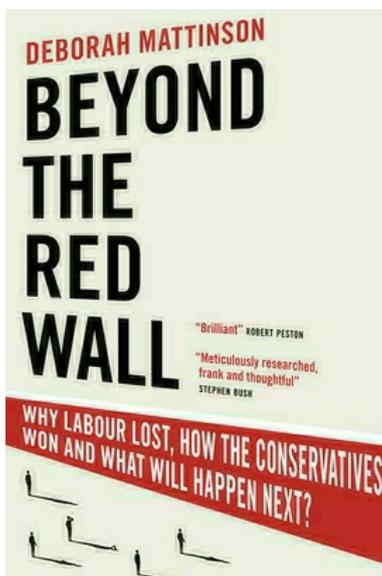
On the 4th October, Lord Ashcroft, the Tory pollster, told us that 79% of Liberal Democrat voters polled would prefer a government led by Sir Keir Starmer, to 21% led by the incumbent. No surprises there. The Liberal Democrats barely feature in Mattinson's book, Only fertile territory when worked hard, one might count Birmingham Yardley (2005-2015, now 3rd to Labour), Bradford East (2010-2015, now 3rd to Labour), Burnley (2010-2015, now 3rd to Tory), Cheadle (regularly – 2015, now 2nd to Tory), Chesterfield (2001-



2010, now 4th to Labour), Hazel Grove (regularly - 2015), Leeds North-West (2005-2017, now 3rd), Manchester Withington (2005-2015, now 2nd to Labour), Redcar (2010-2015, now 4th to Tory), Rochdale (regularly 1972-2010, now 4th to Labour), Sheffield Hallam (1997-2017, now 2nd to Labour), Solihull (2005-2015, now 3rd to Tory), Southport (regularly – 2017, now 3rd to Tory).

Not all of these seats are typically Red Wall and if they are, some might be cast as predominantly middle class. I don't need to reiterate that the Coalition was the killer in the majority of cases, but this is somewhere around 20% of the seats that the Liberal Democrats have held this century. The term Red Wall is fairly obvious, the belt of seats stretching across the industrial Midlands, Lancashire and Yorkshire which traditionally returned Labour MPs from the 1920s. Mattinson credits Tory strategist James Kanagasooriam with inventing the term, but includes the North-East as a traditional Labour fiefdom. Mattinson herself, is a bit of a Labour tankie, advising the party through most of her career.

In 2019 Adam Waller-Stack contested the Hyndburn seat in the Liberal Democrat interest, coming fourth with 2.9% of the vote. The Conservatives had previously held the seat from 1983-92 perhaps making this less surprising as a Tory gain. Accrington, the former seat was last held by a Liberal in 1923; it might be better known by that name.



Hyndburn Borough Council has 25 Labour members and 8 Conservatives, one of them, at least for the time being, the local MP. The Council's website lacks electoral data that I could find of any kind.

In Darlington, the writing was on the wall for the Labour party in the May Borough Council elections, when the Conservatives took 22 seats, to Labour's 19. There are 4 independents and 3 Liberal Democrats in a Confidence & Supply agreement with the Tories, whilst the 2 Greens are in opposition. The Liberal Democrats made a clean sweep of the North Road ward, in what must have been a nail-baiting count to the end. Anne-Marie Currie, leader of the Liberal Democrat group on the council, took 4.8% of the vote in the general election.

Stoke on Trent City Council comprises 11 City Independents, 15 Conservatives, 15 Labour (1 Labour & Cooperative) and 2 independents and 1 non-aligned. The Liberal Democrats did not contest the 2019 city elections.

It is currently a City Independent-Conservative coalition, having previously been Labour apart from 7 years on no overall control since 1973. The 3 MPs are all Conservatives. Stephen Pritchard came forth in Stoke Central with 3.6% of the vote in the 2019 general election. The Liberal Democrats had come a distant second in the seat through the first decade of the century. Peter Andras was similarly fourth with 3.2% of the vote in Stoke on Trent North. Rosalyn Gordon came third with 4.1% of the vote in Stoke on Trent South; the Brexit Party did not contest this seat, which the Conservatives won in 2017.

Beyond or not, the writing was clearly on the wall for Labour in all of these seats. It is my experience that voters will leave Labour whenever a plausible alternative presents themselves to them – hence the Liberal Democrat wins in most of the seats that we held above. As Mattinson demonstrates over and over again, the cause is arrogance and neglect; taking the voters for granted. I doubt they'll change. Whatever it was, the Labour party is merely an engine for getting people who've chosen a career in politics into Parliament, their social conscience perhaps a little more benign than the other machine, the Tories, though I'm not necessarily convinced. Sir Keir Starmer – a smarmy technocrat, is a typical product of this, if he has, at least, had a real job (though there are too many lawyers in Parliament). That said, it now looks like Labour has replaced Trotsky with Stalin.

The question that Mattinson poses is can the Tories hold their Red Wall seats or can Labour win them back. Written around June 2020, there has been a lot of water under the bridge since; Covid-19 is, of course, a poison chalice. The Tories have done perceptibly badly, too little, too late, and now too confusing. Labour, at the Starmer end, appears to play straight, but then there is the double game from the likes of Andy Burnham, mayor of Greater Manchester. We have a long hard winter of discontent ahead of us. The Labour

rag, the Daily Mirror, was calling for a reinvestment in factories in the Red Wall earlier this month; frankly, I'd love to see a return to the workshop of the world, but times have moved on; if Brexit Brits won't bring in the harvest, I can hardly see them forming a competitive workforce in a globalised labour market. Liberal Democrats only feature twice in the book (sort of). Jo Swinson is rated above Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn in a Britain Thinks study, but below Johnson, Nicola Sturgeon, Farage and Sadiq Khan, yet undoubtedly had the least profile – leader since July 2019, of any of them. Elsewhere, Nigel Farage was thought to be leader of the Liberal Democrats... well, it just goes to show how little the average punter really thinks about politicians – but average punter, unless you take the reins of power yourself you will always be shat upon, and neither Labour, nor the Tories are going to give it to you, because they like that power far too much for themselves to want to share it.

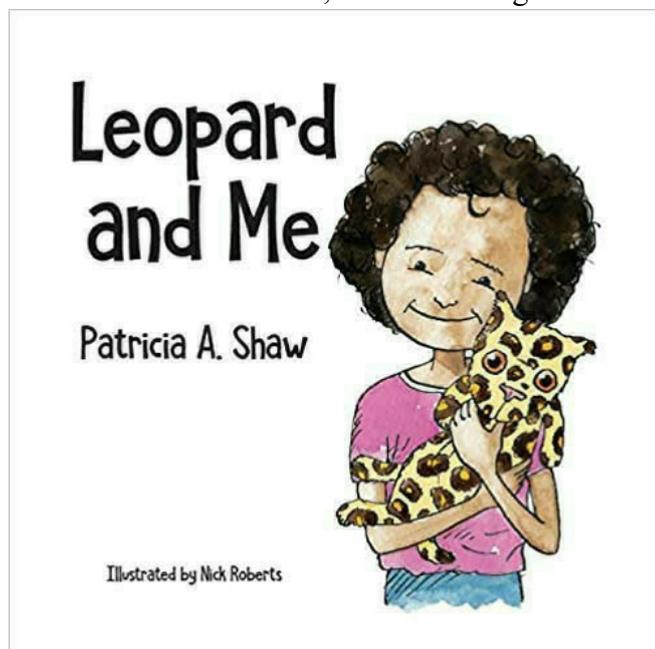
Saeed Rahman

**Leopard and Me, by Patricia A. Shaw, illustrated by Nick Roberts.
New Generation Publishing 2020 £13.95 hardback, £6.64 paperback,
£4.99 Kindle isbn 9781800316690**

Like all the best children's stories, this is, of course, true. Leopard had gone walkabout. Finding him should have been easy enough, I mean, Beanie Babies® were everywhere in those days, the mid 90s. A friend was going to Germany en-route to Copenhagen and obliged with a couple of postcards, told the story and it went (what we would now call) viral. On one day, postcards arrived from opposite sides of the world. But not a leopard to be found anywhere (well, obviously you'll say, he was on the other side of the world). My secretary Rachel, was a BUNAC student on her year out. She collected Beanie Babies and was anxious to acquire the rarity, Britannia Bear, only sold in this country, so between us we scoured the shops to no avail. Pooh Corner, the annual picnic for my god-children, was almost upon us, when both of us chanced upon the bear and leopard simultaneously. Rachel found them in Bath; I, in Tunbridge Wells, I think. A close call, but if you're ever in the same position, do it.

Fortunately, Patricia Shaw tells the story from the recipient's end, not mine, and a charming story it is, the kind of experience every three-year-old should have. A primary school teacher before Lockdown, Patricia Shaw has pitched her book at early readers – five-year olds - *The Jolly Postman* meets the *Velveteen Rabbit* you might say. Abbie is of mixed heritage, so I'm pleased to announce another book that represents our more diverse community. A fruitful collaboration with illustrator Nick Roberts; those of you around in the 1990s may recognise some of the characters, or at least, a National Liberal Club blazer.

And where are they now? 'Abbie' graduated from medical school, straight to the frontline fighting Covid-19 this year; Leopard is still with her. Andy is furloughed; the rest of us soldier on. Confronted with the sign 'Do not climb the fence', the unnamed girl in Nick Roberts' illustrations showed early promise as the



lawyer (and regular contributor to *interLib*) she now is, saying "Well, it says nothing about going under it" as she slid through for the annual clearance of Pooh Sticks that dammed the stream. The Pooh Corner Picnic didn't take place this year, for obvious reasons, but it will revive. It's only the second year missed (heavy rain a few years ago). Some of the children of earlier years now have children of their own for the tradition to thrive. Childhood is too brief and should be momentous, *Leopard and Me* will show you the way.

Stewart Rayment

Calligraphies of the Desert, by Hassan Massoudy.
Saqi Books 2020 £10.00 isbn 9780863561771

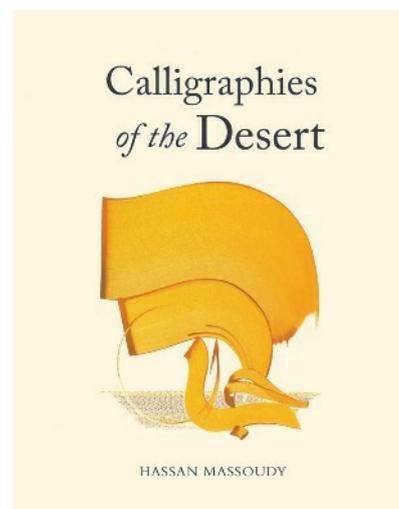
The desert has long exercised an almost mystical draw over Europeans, with its vastness, its beauty and its cruelty. As that great travel writer, Wilfred Thesiger, who wandered the Empty Quarter of southern Arabia, recorded, “No man can live this life and emerge unchanged. He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad, and he will have within him that yearning to return, weak or insistent according to his nature.” How I know that yearning, ever since my first glance of the Sahara as a student, later fed with Arabian sands, the Gobi, the landscapes of Mauritania, Namibia and more. Like the novelist Paul Bowles at times I have sensed the danger in its attraction; at others, greeted it like a friend, alongside Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869):

So in its silence and its desolation

The desert spoke to me far better than the crowd

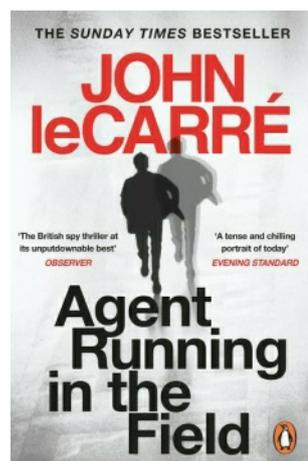
Most striking of all for me has been the variety. Each desert is different in form and colour. And it is that vibrant difference which the celebrated Iraqi calligrapher, Hassan Massoudy, explores so impressively in his exciting new volume of work, *Calligraphies of the Desert*. Each double-page spread has a quote or two, ancient and modern, (not just European but often Arab or Persian — even Chinese) while facing is Massoudy’s calligraphic representation. Just as an anthology of texts this book is a pleasure to dip in and out of, but savouring the artistry and tones of the calligraphy at the same time gives them so much added value. One can meditate on them for hours and, yes, be tempted back into the desert in one’s mind if not yet in person. Massoudy’s French wife, Isabelle, contributed a short but lyrical introduction that serves as a fitting doorway to what is beyond. This book may be small in size but it immense in vision, as limitless as the desert itself.

Jonathan Fryer



Agent Running in the Field, by John Le Carre.
Penguin 2019 £8.99
isbn 9870241986547

I bought Le Carre’s book at an airport to support Smith’s bookshop, because of the catchy title and to see if Le Carre was still good. I thought he might have retreated in to Jack Higgins (or Alan Furst) like formulaic repetitive plots (and I still like both those authors). This book set in Brexit era Britain sees a middle-aged spy, Nat, brought home near retirement, trying to settle with his high-powered activist lawyer wife and turbulent daughter, his main release being his prowess at Badminton. Given a small low-level north London Russian watching unit to nurse he is pitched by passionate young female subordinate, Florence, an operation targeting a London resident Russian oligarch. At the same time, he has one student sleeper double agent in York to look after. And he is challenged at badminton by obsessive loner Ed, who barges his way into a



challenge and whose dogged anti-Brexit anti-Trump and pro-European German rants appeal to our hero. But who is the double agent? The book is a slow burner in the style of a Richard Harris. It isn’t as exciting at the snappy title, which doesn’t really fit the plot for me, though I misread it all the time as *Agent in the Field Running* which sounds more, well active. Apart from observing Britishness (and some German, Russian and other Europeans), the book shows Le Carre’s experience in discussing well the main actual subject, a spy’s experience in running agents.

Kiron Reid.

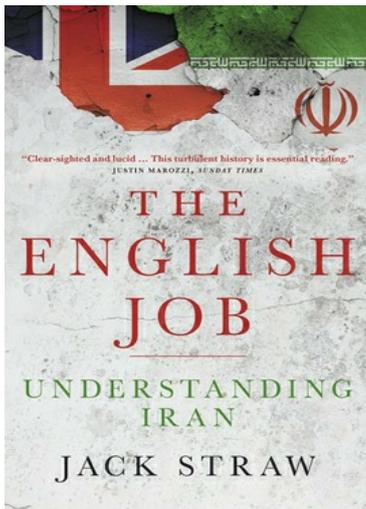
The English Job: Understanding Iran, by Jack Straw.

Biteback 2020 £12.99

isbn 9781785903991

The Labour politician Jack Straw first went to Iran in late September 2001, in the wake of 9/11. He had become Foreign Secretary earlier that year and had the delicate task of wooing Tehran in support of what would become known as the War against Terror. This proved less difficult than one might expect as the Islamic Republic understood the dangers posed by the Taliban in Afghanistan and their hosting of Al Qaida. Similarly, they had little love for Saddam Hussein in Baghdad; memories of the 1980s Iran-Iraq War, which cost hundreds of thousands of young Iranian lives, some from Saddam's deployment of chemical weapons, were still raw. However, as Mr Straw explains in the new, updated edition of his book *The English Job*, Iranians' collective memory goes much further back than the period since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Moreover, from an Iranian point of view, throughout much of the 19th and 20th centuries, the country was repeatedly exploited and victimised by the British. Hence the title of his book.

Perfidious Albion (in league with the United States, not for the first or last time) showed its claws notably in the removal of the founder of the short-lived Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Shah, and the installation of his ineffectual and luxury-loving son, Mohammad. London and Washington then schemed to overthrow the legitimate Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, whose crime in Western eyes was to nationalise the country's oil. The company that would rebrand itself BP had meanwhile despicably sabotaged much of the plant at Abadan as the expat employees were pulled out. With Mohammad Reza Shah firmly back in charge, the British turned a blind eye to the brutal excesses of his secret police and intelligence services, Savak. The Shah was a valued customer of British arms (in fact, £400 million of Iranian money is still being sat on in London, payment in advance for tanks that were never delivered because of the 1979 Revolution). No wonder Iranians popularly refer to Britain as "the cunning fox".



Over the two decades since his first visit to Tehran, Jack Straw has returned many times, developing a deep affection for the people of Iran and an appreciation for their rich history and culture. These visits have not always been easy, notably in 2015, when a holiday there with his wife and two friends turned into a nightmare as they were hounded and harassed by the Basij, the thuggish paramilitary force that is a law unto itself. The Basij even delivered a charge sheet to the Straws, outlining the crimes against Iran committed by Britain through the ages; the author is man enough to admit that they had a point. Fortunately, he has had many other, more positive encounters with Iranians, including Ministers and clerics, many of whom were Western-educated, urbane and nothing like the caricatures in the minds of the Trump administration or Binyamin Netanyahu. Mr Straw has also sought expert advice from experts such as Ali Ansari and Michael Axworthy, which

means that his analysis of events in Iran past and present, as well as his prognosis of what happens next, is based on sound sources. What I found particularly illuminating, however, were the accounts of his own Persian encounters and the warmth with which he approaches the many contradictions and paradoxes of contemporary Iranian society.

Jonathan Fryer