



Liberal **News**

Spring 2016
EU Referendum
Special.

Liberals

GRASSROOTS OUT
GO!



A Time to Choose. By Party President, Cllr Steve Radford.

No issue has divided British Politics more that the debates around the European Union. For Liberals the development of European institutions and continental forms of governance have presents difficult questions. We believe in the need for both international governance and powerful grassroots democracy.

The creation of the EU in the early 1990s started to call into question how democratic and internationalist these new institutions would be given their inflexible nature and narrowly defined approach to economics. From this time the Liberal Party has become more sceptical about the EU and called for a fundamental change to a more open, flexible and decentralised system we called the “Commonwealth of Europe”.

The last ten years have seen ever greater centralisation particularly within the Eurozone. The more wealthy parts of the EU have attempted to enforce their approach to policy over the Parliaments and democracies of southern Europe, to the point that the European Central Bank along with the European Commission have presided over a return to Great Depression levels of unemployment and economic decline across whole regions. For the Party of Keynes and Beveridge this contempt for the common welfare is intolerable. For this and many other affronts to democracy the Liberal Party has had as an element of policy the contingency of withdrawal from the EU by the UK as a first step to a better Europe.

Given the circumstances and the failed negotiation of the Tory Government it is my view along with that of the National Executive that our position should be to campaign for Leave during the Referendum on the 23rd June. As the Liberal Party we have been calling for this vote for many years and have been on various public platforms supporting the idea and the EU-critical message . Every member is constitutionally free to take any position they choose. We have been and always will be a Party of free thought and dissent where members differing opinions are respected.

See inside Daniel Woods outlines the development of the Liberal approach to the EU over the last twenty five years.

Daniel Wood, Acting Chair of the NEC, Sets out his views of the Liberal Party and the EU and how our polices have developed over the years. *A longer versions of this article was adopted by the NEC as a statement of the Liberal Party's EU referendum campaign position.*

PREAMBLE

The Liberal Party is traditionally opposed to the use of referenda, being committed to the principles of democratic and representative government.

The exception to this relates to the relationship between the UK and the European Union. The reason for the exception is that it is beyond question that the UK parliament has ceded sovereignty (via the Lisbon and Maastricht Treaties) to the EU without the British people having any say in the decision. That sovereignty was not parliament's to cede, it is given to parliament by the British people at every general election, not in perpetuity. The Liberal Party believes that so great have been the constitutional changes wrought by our relationship with the EU that the British people should have been given a direct vote on that relationship.

The Liberal Party therefore welcomes, in principle, the referendum of whether the UK should remain a member of the EU or should leave.

CURRENT PARTY POLICY

In determining what the Liberal Party's stance should be in the forthcoming referendum, it is helpful to consider the Party's current policy on the EU.

Traditionally the post-1988 Liberal Party has been strongly Eurosceptic, and for large parts of that period the policy was withdrawalist.

Post-1992 the Party welcomed enlargement of the EU into eastern Europe and the issue of withdrawal was not emphasized. The focus of policy called for remaining within the EU whilst looking for reform in the direction of a less centralised 'Commonwealth of Europe', always retaining its critical analysis of EU institutions.

The Liberal Party has long-standing and continuous opposition to the UK joining the Euro, the Lisbon treaty - certainly without a referendum, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, to give a few examples.

Following the 2005 General Election, the Liberal Party adopted a policy whereby it was committed to seeking fundamental reform of the EU. The Party recognised that the EU was (as currently constituted) illiberal. Crucially, the Party recognised that the UK may have to withdraw, or threaten to withdraw from the EU in order to obtain the necessary level of reform of the EU.

The policy was revisited in 2009, where the policy was essentially reaffirmed, but expanded upon by the statement adopted, including the assertion that:

'.....We believe that reform of the European Union is a necessary requirement of the United Kingdom remaining in the European Union.....'

The policy was again reconsidered in 2011, and the motion adopted by assembly was in essence a reassertion of the exiting policy.

THE UK RENEGOTIATION AND PROPOSED CHANGES - Spring 2016

The 2015 Conservative manifesto promised that a Conservative government would (amongst other things):-

Reform the workings of the EU, which is too big, too bossy and too bureaucratic;

Reclaim power from Brussels on your behalf;

Back businesses to create jobs in Britain by completing ambitious trade deals and reducing red tape.

By contrast to existing Liberal Party policy such modest goals appear to fall short of the 'fundamental reform' for which the Party calls. The Conservative agenda in respect of the European Union simply fails to address many of the Liberal Party's fundamental objections to the EU as currently constituted.

There is little (if anything) to address the utter lack of democratic accountability within the EU. There is no proposed reform or exemption from the common fisheries policy, the (reformed, but still hopelessly bureaucratic, wasteful and fraud-ridden) common agricultural policy - which remains a uneasy trade-off between France and Germany.

Having said that, much would turn on the promise to 'reclaim' powers from Brussels, and what that actually amounted to.

The '**Cameron**' renegotiation has failed to achieve anything like its own objectives. Much of the proposed 'reforms' are aimed at pandering to right-wing prejudices as to 'benefit scrounging' migrants - whilst actually doing nothing to address the issue of migration.

The 'reforms' propose to exempt the UK from 'ever closer union' - but this is little more than the meaningless redrafting of a form of words - utterly irrelevant if the **reality** is that whether we have the words or not by its actions the effect is to draw the UK into ever closer union - **Cameron has secured no real safeguards against the substance of ever closer union.**

Perhaps most importantly the '**red card**' proposal is itself wrapped up in bureaucracy and 'ifs and buts' and is nowhere near the reform promised.

In simple terms EU legislation can be 'red card-ed' **if** 55% of member state parliaments object to the draft legislation **and** that 55% threshold is achieved within 12 weeks of the publication of draft legislation.

There is then an obligation/commitment to drop such proposed legislation **if** the concerns of national parliaments are not met.

The reality of such a 'reform' is that the 55% threshold and the 12 week window mean that in reality the 'red card' procedure is likely to be rarely, if ever, utilised.

By any analysis, the Conservative government promised fundamental reform; asked for modest reform - and failed.

It is telling that the so far almost none of the in / out debate has concerned the proposed reforms.

Cameron asked for next to nothing and failed to obtain even that!

Our Party therefore should seek to reaffirm it's internationalism as we campaign to Leave the EU and once again GO Global with a progressive spirit. Not to be limited as little Europeans with constrained democracies but a nation free to choose from all the world has to offer!

FOCUS December 2015

LOCAL LIBERALS

DERWENT WARD
LOCAL ELECTION SPECIAL
 Introducing
Mike Potter



**Community
 campaigner**

- Mike worked tirelessly for a "slow the flow" flood defence system
- He has campaigned against fracking for the last 2 years
- He is the Chair of Pickering Civic Society

My Promises:

- To work hard
- To be honest
- To ask the awkward questions

**Time
 for a
 Change**

POTTER MIKE, LIBERAL x



Ryedale By-election Breakthrough Gives Liberals Early Christmas Treat and Tories Lump of Coal!

In late November 2015 one of the Tory Councillor for Derwent Ward, Ryedale, North Yorkshire resigned so causing a By-election one week before the start of the festive season. Ryedale Liberals led by Cllr John Clark leapt to this challenge despite the limited time, variable weather (Liberals really do go canvassing in the snow) and few hours of light each day. Community campaigner Mike Potter took up the role of candidate after recently being profiled on national television for leading the efforts to get flood defences improved in and around Pickering. Residents reacted with approval as this was the first time the Ward had seen a serious effort against the Tories in some years.

The LD's with their usual clarity claimed to be on the ballot but a little bird told Liberal News that they may have fouled up their

nominations causing the LD bird not to be seen on the ballot but a former independent candidate did appear without description.

Derwent Ward, Byelection, 17th Dec, 2015.

	Votes Cast
Mike Potter (Liberal)	283 (elected)
Conservative	278
Independent	124
No Description (LD, maybe?)	81
Yorkshire First	32
Rejected.	4

This was a Liberal victory through the efforts of a dedicated team and a willingness to have a go in a Ward where not very much groundwork had been done in the recent past. The incumbent Party was complacent and an opportunity presented itself for Ryedale Liberals to show how our ways are different and better to those of the so-called mainstream Parties.

It has been said before:

Where we Work we Win.

Don't Forget Thursday 6th May, 2016 is Election Day for many Local Councils around the Country. If you have some free time please contact your local or nearby Liberal Team to lend a hand. Our Councillors make the Liberal Party a reality on the ground in dozens of communities and allow for liberalism to be put into action. Contact details can be found at www.liberal.org.uk.

The Assembly may be six months away but it's never too soon to start working on policy motions. There are many areas of Liberal Party policy that could benefit from updating and at the 2015 Assembly questions were raised about how we might look to the future of comprehensive education, the role of an English Parliament within a UK federal system but what do you want debated this year?