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THIS ISSUE WAS PUBLISHED FOR THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS' AUTUMN CONFERENCE IN BRIGHTON, WHICH WAS CANCELLED FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF HER MAJESTY, QUEEN ELIZABETH II. IT REFLECTS THE DEBATES THAT WOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT THAT CONFERENCE.

CAN WE ASSUME THAT THOSE DEBATES WILL NOW TAKE PLACE IN YORK NEXT MARCH?

CHINA NUCLEAR WEAPONS

FOOD CRISIS? MYANMAR

FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

EVENTS

4th October – Paddy Ashdown Forum/ European Liberal Forum: How can cooperation strengthen food security? The 2nd of a series of webinars on the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement. 13.00-14.00 London time. Online - Register: <https://www.eventbrite.be/e/how-can-cooperation-strengthen-food-security-tickets-421265314897>

15th October – Liberal Party Assembly, St. Columba's United Reformed Church, 32 Priory Street, York, YO1 6EX

22nd October – National ReJoin March: 12-4.0 pm London – Assemble Park Lane 11.30am

28th-30th October – Scottish Liberal Democrats Conference, Town House, Hamilton.

1st-12th November - UNFCCC Climate COP 27 Egypt (Sharm El Sheikh)

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Food crisis? What food crisis?

Rebecca Tinsley

Why do so many poor countries with large rural populations depend on the Ukrainian harvest? A toxic mixture of Western agricultural subsidies, disinterested leadership in undeveloped nations, and a global market geared to the meat industry begs long term questions that won't be answered by a few grain shipments crossing the Black Sea.

Africa could feed itself and the Middle East if its land was brought into productive use. But that would need its leaders to shoulder responsibility. Western donor nations should require recipient governments to develop agricultural strategies benefiting their people and their balance of payments. But those same donor nations sabotage developing world efforts by subsidizing their own farmers for political reasons, distorting the world market, and then dumping their surplus on poor countries.

A Rich World Problem

The OECD reports that 54 countries (mostly OECD and EU nations) spend \$700 billion a year on agricultural subsidies. In Japan, 41% of farm income comes from the government, a level matched by Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. In some cases, surplus US wheat is dumped on the international market at 32% below its production cost, making it impossible for farmers in the underdeveloped world to compete.



Moreover, the US sends surplus produce to poor nations as “food assistance,” accounting for \$2.5 billion a year, of which 75% of the cost covers processing and shipping. This form of aid continues thanks to lobbying by huge US agricultural corporations and the shipping industry. For years, the American government aid agency, USAID, has urged Washington to send cash which could be used to buy locally grown produce. This would help farmers in the developing world, rather than shipping US surplus production around the globe at vast financial and environmental cost. However, food aid policy is driven by supply, not demand (explaining why

surplus California raisins were sent to Iraq, for instance).

A Poor World Problem

The World Bank reports that 70% of South Sudan has favourable soil, water resources and climate. It also has massive underemployment and crushing deprivation. Yet only 4% of this potential breadbasket is cultivated.

When South Sudan gained independence, I asked a government minister why so little land was farmed. He told me it wasn't “in the culture of South Sudanese to grow crops.” (Presumably it also isn't in the culture of South Sudanese to own smart phones and Savile Row suits, both of which the minister possessed). He implied it was the role of benefactors like the World Food Program and the British government to pay for Ugandan merchants to import food from Uganda into South Sudan.

The South Sudanese minister's response was symptomatic of a failure shared by the rulers of too many desperately poor nations. He rejected the notion that it was his government's role to encourage and train his citizens to farm efficiently. His attitude was in line with his administration's “nothing to do with us”

approach to public health, education and security. So long as the West bankrolls the kleptocracy in Juba, why will anything in South Sudan change? Sadly, this dereliction of duty is shared by the ruling elite in many wretchedly underdeveloped countries.

Twenty years ago, several Middle Eastern businesses leased vast tracts of Sudan, intending to grow food for their populations. At the time, this land grab was denounced by those paying attention. They feared that rural people living beside productive fields would starve while crops were exported to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, etc.

Yet, many of the fields now lie fallow. The Khartoum regime is so incompetent and corrupt, and the infrastructure is so appalling, that many foreign businesses gave up. It remains cheaper to ship food from Australia to Sudan than for crops to be driven from the farms north of Khartoum to Port Sudan, 500 miles away. The bribes necessary for an import license for fertilizer defeated even Middle Eastern executives familiar with the mentality of the bazaar. Added to this, political uncertainty and state-sponsored violence in Sudan has deterred the inward investment that might otherwise consider the benighted country ideal for agricultural development.



Much has been written about the grotesque waste of farmland in Zimbabwe, handed to ZANU-PF cronies who cannot be bothered to cultivate it. Despite the massive potential, only 5% of Zimbabwean farmland is equipped for the irrigation necessary to make it flourish. Agronomists believe that if Sudan, South Sudan and Zimbabwe were efficiently farmed, they could feed the rest of Africa, as well as the Middle East.

What Should Be Done?

The international community has the leverage to change this pitiful situation. Aid should be contingent on recipient governments producing and delivering sustainable agricultural strategies that respect the environment (using native varieties and species; prioritizing crops for human consumption rather than climate-destructive livestock feed or animals for export); feed its own people; provide them with the training and tools to exploit their land; and develop export markets for their surplus crops. Benchmarks could be attached to financial support, with incentives for fulfilment of agreed goals.

However, many development agencies dare not challenge the local autocrats in charge because they fear being accused of cultural imperialism. Too often, the bloated elites know how to manipulate Western donors, reminding them of historic colonial misdeeds, as if this were an excuse for the elite's personal self-enrichment. Donor nations continue to take repressive and corrupt leaders at face value, projecting onto them values they wish them to possess, such as caring about the peace and prosperity of their own people. This willful naivety ignores the power of ethnic favouritism over national identity.

An effective agricultural strategy also requires cultural change in many poor societies. Often, women do the farming while men reap what paltry benefit there is. President Carter tells of a visit to a farm in Nigeria, inspecting the Carter Center's agricultural assistance projects. He tramped through sundry fields, guided by the men who owned the land. Yet, whenever Carter asked a question, the men had to consult their wives who trailed silently behind. The former president realized nothing would change until women could own land and get loans for investment in inputs based on the land's value. So long as men make decisions based on ignorance, their farms will remain at subsistence level. Moreover, while men take the agricultural profits and spend them for their personal benefit, rather than on farming inputs or their children's education and healthcare, their families will be locked in a cycle of poverty.

Another cultural impediment is a distaste for doing work with one's hands. Hence proud men relegate their women to tasks involving farming, housework and caring for the young and old. Preferred male work is herding cattle. A Rwandan farmer once told to me that Bill Gates would count for nothing in Africa because he didn't have a herd of long horned cattle.



However, none of these suggestions – requiring agricultural strategies from aid recipient governments and placing the onus on leaders to use public education to challenge harmful and counter-productive traditions – counts for much if the West persists with its agricultural subsidies and dumping its surplus on undeveloped nations.

Nor will there be progress if China's demand for meat is not reversed through Beijing-led health education. In the 1960s, Chinese consumers ate an average of 5 kg of meat annually. That figure is now 63kg. China

consumes 28% of the world's meat and half of all pork produced. The appetite for meat, including beef, continues to grow as the population becomes increasingly affluent. China is not solely to blame, of course: Americans eat an average of 124 kg of meat a year, Australians eat 121 kg, and Europeans 80 kg. Just as we are belatedly acknowledging our stupidity in relying on Russia and China for energy and manufactured goods respectively, so we must demand global policies prioritising the food self-sufficiency of developing countries in places where geography allows it to flourish. Otherwise, this story does not end well.

Rebecca Tinsley

Rebecca Tinsley is Director of Waging Peace. Her novel about Sudan, "When the Stars Fall to Earth" is available from TinsleyRC@aol.com



Aspects of Brighton the Lib Dems missed...

A Response to Tony Blair's 'Strength plus Engagement' Approach to China.

Dr Yeow Poon

The Guardian on 16th July 2022 published a PA Media article¹ on Tony Blair's delivery of the 58th Ditchley Foundation Annual lecture. The title of his lecture was "After Ukraine, What Lessons Now for Western Leadership?" and his focus was on China².

"The biggest geopolitical change of this century will come from China, not Russia."

"We are coming to the end of western political and economic dominance. The world is going to be at least bipolar and possibly multipolar."

Tony Blair's diagnosis of the challenge facing the West is essentially correct, as Western imperialistic and hegemonic power over the last 300 years fades.

"It is the first time in modern history that the east can be on equal terms with the west."

His proposed solution though is questionable. Although he did say that China ought to be respected as a superpower, he perceived China as an existential threat to the West. His preferred approach to China is therefore to utilise a "strength plus engagement" approach.

"China will compete not just for power but against our system, our way of governing and living."

"We should increase defence spending and maintain military superiority..."

"... to protect our values and way of life in the era of China not rising but risen."

The PA Media article in the Guardian expressed Tony Blair's sentiment as "... the West needed to be strong enough to defend its systems and values". There is however one major flaw in Tony Blair's assertion of strength. In a multipolar world, where the East "can be on equal terms with the west", gunboat diplomacy no longer works.

Rather than building up more and more arms which will only result in an arms race and the risk of war, the West should instead build up its strength to live up to its values and democratic systems.

Another major flaw is the assumption that China is an existential threat to the West. To claim that superior military strength is needed to protect our values and way of life implies two things. Firstly, China through nefarious means is attempting to turn Western countries into vassal states oppressed by the Communist Party of China. Secondly, China would do so by military means, if necessary. However, compared with Western powers, besides border disputes, China has not invaded any country since 1979.

China is competing very successfully with the West economically and is challenging the West's soft power monopoly in global south countries.

Like all great powers, there will also be some meddling and jostling for influence in Western capitals (and this is no different from what Western powers do in other countries) but meddling and influence does not equate to cultural and political dominance.

For many decades, Western culture and soft power dominated the world. Partly due to post-colonisation ties and post-World War II multilateral institutions, and partly due to the projection of Western values through

print, videos and Hollywood movies. China's soft power is just starting, primarily through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is showing countries in the global south that there is another model of development and, without directly doing so, implying that there are other ways of governing.

The West is not the world, and the non-Western developing world now has sufficient agency to make their own choices. Tony Blair appears to be deluded when he said:

"We have a great opportunity. Developing countries prefer western business ... They admire the western system more than we realise."

Do developing countries really prefer Western business? Not according to a study by the Lowry Institute³, which showed that "two-thirds of the world trade more goods with China than with the US".

"In 2001, the year China acceded to the World Trade Organisation, over 80% of countries with data available had a larger volume of trade with America than China. By 2018, that figure was down to a little over 30%.

Europe appears to be holding its own as according to Wikipedia⁴ "for most economies in the world, their leading export and import trading partner in terms of value is either the European Union or China, and to a certain degree, the United States and Russia".

Do developing countries really admire the Western system more than we realise? This may be generally true in the past but not so in the present. The Democracy Perception Index (DPI) 2022⁵ highlighted that:

"While democracy is in decline around the world, the study shows that people still believe in it: 84% say that it is important to have democracy in their country. However, a growing number are disenchanted with the state of democracy, 41% feeling that there is not enough democracy in their country."

The problem is twofold. Firstly, the Western system of liberal democracy has not delivered fair distribution of wealth in recent decades. According to DPI 2022:

68% of respondents "view economic inequality as the single biggest threat to democracy around the world". Secondly, the hubris of the West in believing that its values and systems are superior and should be adopted by or imposed on to other countries.

When John Bolton remarked casually on CNN⁶ "As someone who has helped plan coups d'état - not here but, you know, other places - it takes a lot of work" like it is the most normal thing to do, the West loses credibility. When Western powers assert that the rest of the world must follow international rules set only by themselves or face consequences, they are perceived as post-colonial bullies. Worse, when Western powers ignore their own rules whenever it suits them, they are seen as hypocrites.

To conclude, in a vastly inter-connected world where information (and disinformation), it is no longer easy for one country, or even one bloc, to be the dominant global soft power. It is not whether Western or Chinese values and systems are better. Each has developed from its historical and cultural context and should not be imposed on other countries without considering their conditions.

We, in the West, ought to respect the sovereignty of other countries as they choose their own path. Our soft power depends, not on more military expansion, but on living up to our values and ensuring that our liberal democratic system works for the many, and not just for a few elites.

Dr Yeow Poon

¹ Tony Blair urges western powers to stand up to China | Tony Blair | The Guardian

² All quotations are taken from Tony Blair's lecture (Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture 2022 - YouTube), unless otherwise stated. The quotations are not presented here following the structure of his speech but mixed up to support the narrative of this article.

³ Chart of the week: Global trade through a US-China lens | The Interpreter (lowyinstitute.org)

⁴ List of countries by leading trade partners - Wikipedia

⁵ DPI 2022 - Alliance of Democracies

⁶ Former senior U.S. official John Bolton admits to planning attempted foreign coups | Reuters

Dr Yeow Poon

[Editor: the views expressed above are those of the author's and not of the Chinese Liberal Democrats.]
July 26, 2022

Geopolitics – The Conflict of the Pan-Pacific Region, and the Liberal Democrats’ policy position on China Affairs.

Larry Ngan.

Back in December 2020, an article titled ‘China is Gnawing at Democracy’s Roots Worldwide’ was published by Foreign Policy¹. It concluded ‘China is silently undermining the roots of democracy throughout the world like a river systematically erodes the bank – until even the mightiest tree must fall... Democracies can no longer afford to rest on their laurels.’

United States and its allies were once again at odds with China not only in economy, foreign policies, but also on political values. Before 2020, China attempted to expand its influence through One Belt One Road and the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), but these attempts backfired in a number of aspects in these 2 years.

In democracy’s doctrine, nowadays, association with CCP has become overly toxic. The use of populism by simply denouncing Vladimir Putin, however truly evil he is, but without presenting more than abstract thoughts, and most politicians particularly those in America used the ‘China’ card (hence how to prevent China to expand its sphere of influence) as a vote winner in political campaigns. When we are discussing this matter, we should cover at least 3 key areas.

1. The security of Taiwan as a political entity, and its importance in American Defence strategy

Taiwan is for a long time a very important issue when it comes to American military and diplomatic policies in APAC region. Being situated on the edge of Pacific Ocean, and naturally secures two maritime chokepoints, it conveniently became a key area in the first line of defence (Or 1st Island Chain as some military strategists put it) against the potential threat of Chinese military force. The phrase ‘Quemoy and Matsu’, outlying islands of Taiwan, were brought up in the 1960 presidential election. Richard Nixon once said during the debate Quemoy and Matsu were in the area of freedom and ‘they should not be surrendered to the Communists as a matter of principle’.

Since the beginning of Sino-American trade war in recent years, Taiwan was once again elevated in the political agenda. The most significant recent development was Nancy Pelosi, the outgoing Speaker of the House of Representative in the United States, Taiwan visit. This surprise visit would be the landmark to the 21st century history as it symbolised American support towards Taiwan government and its liberal regime, even though there are rumours about Biden’s reservation on the visit. The escort of US navy and air force of Pelosi’s flight also resounded the resilient of American military force on supporting Taiwan in the time of crisis.

Beijing authorities tried their best to stop Pelosi from visiting Taiwan, including asking President Biden to intervene. When President Xi learnt Pelosi successfully landed in Taiwan without hindrance, the Chinese Liberation Army reacted with military exercises and missile testing around the coastline of Taiwan, in the days since Pelosi concluded her visit.

Soon afterwards, the Chinese government published an updated version of the White Paper on its policy towards Taiwan. The most alarming change in the White Paper was to erase any reference of ‘reunifying Taiwan with China through peaceful means.’ Some political commentators highlighted this as clearing the way for China to use military force to achieve its aims in the White Paper without declaring war, just like how Russian initiated its ‘special military operation’ towards Ukraine.

We should keep in mind, Taiwan is one of a few liberal democracies in APAC region, and the ruling party is our sister member in the Liberal International. Even rarer in APAC, the Taiwanese have a critical view on party politics and a visible choice in parliamentary opposition. Yet, the existence of the regime is constantly under threat. It was increasingly precarious according to the current hostile policy of Peking authorities. Supporting Taiwan is not about the debate of sovereignty, but one to protect our Liberal values and political system we treasured in the APAC region and already held by the people in Taiwan.

2. More cooperation with our allies, and more robust and well thought through sanctions

The stance of our party on trade sanctions cannot be clearer. Our foreign affairs spokesperson Layla Moran MP said on Oct 2020, “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.**”



Larry Ngan campaigning for HK

But we should keep in mind, trade sanctions have its limitations. To make it works it would require cooperation with major powers in the world. Take the recent sanctions on Russian oil, when it was adopted in European countries and our allies, India actually took advantage by buying Russian oil with a big discount. India Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman literally told Wall Street Journal on 27th June 2022, ‘My national interest tells me I should buy it where it is cheaper.’² Russia also got around the sanctions by selling its oil products to the third country, mixing it up with oil products from other countries, and sold the mixed products to our allies.

Without international cooperation, implementing sanctions simply becomes mere pleasing to a domestic audience but achieves little to national security or assistance to our allies.

China had developed an entrenched trading ties with our allies, particularly Germany. China was China’s biggest trading partner and technology exporter in Europe from 2017 onwards. Increasing Chinese leverage in Europe is one circle of Xi’s concentric circles of interest. Although it is trying to change its strategy on China, major

corporates in Germany are still hesitant to redirect its investment in China elsewhere.

The loans to projects initiated by China could also be a major hindrance to any meaningful sanctions to be enforced. A number of countries in Asia, Africa, South America and even Europe took loans from China for their infrastructure projects. 3 of the Commonwealth members were the major benefactors under this scheme, and enjoyed a substantial economic growth in the 2010s, but when COVID hits, all these countries fell into ‘debt trap’ with China.

Sri Lanka accepted nearly USD5 billion of loans from China, mostly to finance its infrastructure projects which turned to be white elephants, including the largely unused port facility in Hambantota, which was effectively ceded to Chinese control after Sri Lanka authorities recognised that they could no longer pay off the loans. ³

Pakistan had a similar project in Gwadar as part of the One Belt One Road project and it is controlled by China Overseas Port Holding Company. Unfortunately, Pakistan authorities overestimated its potential, not only it was described as a corridor leading nowhere by Bloomberg, the city was also suffered from Chinese illegal fish trawlers, shortage of water and electricity, and civil unrest. ⁴

Kenya received USD4.7 billion from China to build infrastructure projects, including the highspeed railway from Mombasa to Uganda via Nairobi, but due to underestimate cost and mismanagement, not only the rail suffered from a loss, the section between Nairobi and Uganda was not able to be completed due to the lack of funding, and stopped just outside Nairobi. Some in Kenyan government including presidential candidates even campaigned for renegotiating the debt with China. ⁵

China can easily use these debt traps as leverage to stop countries from supporting sanctions of any kind. Another issue we need to resolve is how to break China loose from our supply chain in case any sanctions were adopted. China was the world factory since 2000s, and we relied Chinese products and raw materials in our every way of life, particularly rare earth (which amounts to 60% of the global supply on 2021). One article in Mining Technology even suggested China' stranglehold of rare earths supply chain will last another decade. Unless we change our target on carbon emission (by changing our automobile to Electronic Vehicles), rare earth supply could be a potential issue in case we wanted to enforce any meaningful sanctions towards China.⁶

We may be in a time of uncertainties and it was obvious that Russia and China will not respect human rights. They consistently ignore its international obligations and treaties. It is only the question of when and how we enforce the sanction, not whether we should. Therefore, we need to develop a sophisticated policy on under what circumstances we should enforce the sanctions, how they are enforced, and how we cooperate with our allies, particularly our European partners.

3 Political infiltration via donations and social media campaigns.

Our Intelligence Services took the rare step to notifying Parliament that Christine Lee, a solicitor based in London, was an agent working for CCP, and infiltrated political parties in the United Kingdom by providing massive donations on early 2022. My local MP Barry Gardiner⁷ was a focus of attention by the British press, since he was uncovered to receive more than £500,000 from Christine Lee, mainly to cover the cost in his office for over 6 years, and employed her son as his diary manager.

In fact, when this story was widely publicised, it should not be a surprise at all. Clive Hamilton and Mark Ohlberg published a book titled 'Hidden Land: How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World' in 2020. They provided a detailed account on how Christine Lee and the Group 48 insinuate political parties in our country by providing huge donations, establishing networks within major UK political parties with various organisations of CCP, and lobbied for commercial contracts on behalf of Chinese state-controlled companies. Not only Barry Gardiner was highlighted in the book; a number of other politicians in the UK such as Edmond Yeo and Lord Michael Bates were mentioned as close contacts of Christine Lee and CCP organisations.

The social media incursion by Chinese companies should also be brought under more attention. A few days ago, Wall Street Journal published an article 'How China's Propaganda Influences the West'. Seth D. Kaplan the author detailed how Beijing tried to utilise Chinese language TV broadcasters, newspapers, messaging and video broadcasting apps (Such as Tik Tok, WeChat) in order to influence millions of Chinese speaking Americans, Canadians and Australians, and tipped the political discourse into the CCP favour. Some major CCP critics such as Kenny Chiu the Canadian MP were defeated in the last election by

a swing of 15 points, due to negative campaign on Chinese language social media. The article concluded by saying 'If Beijing's propaganda campaign remains unchecked, all Americans will suffer.'⁸

To campaigners on China and Hong Kong affairs, that is not something particularly new. Back in Sept 2019, Freedom House published an article on its Media Bulletin titled 'China Central Television: A long standing weapon in Beijing's Arsenal of Repression'. The article provided details on how CCTV (National TV Broadcaster in China) spreads disinformation in order to demonise the protestors during the 2019 Hong Kong anti-extradition protest, and misled public in the west by releasing videos and graphics on YouTube and Facebook that 'likened protesters to Islamist militants.' These images were then echoed by social influencers in China in order to sway the public opinion. The article concluded 'Foreign governments and regulators should vigorously monitor the content being aired in their countries by CCTV and CGTN in local languages. They should be ready to enforce any broadcasting regulations that might be violated, as Ofcom is now contemplating with regards to Hong Kong coverage and forced confessions.'⁹

On 4th Feb 2021, Ofcom did withdraw the license of CGTN. Yet the broadcast of both CGTN and CCTV are still available on YouTube on British domains, and it can be slipped into public via social media through algorithms. Our government needs more drastic measures to tackle the issue in order to stop CCP propaganda inflicting damages to our liberal values in the British society.

What should the Liberal Democrats do?

Here comes the question: The press and all major political parties reported or talked about Chinese influence on global political spectrum, there is little, or in the case of our party, no official policy or solution on the matter. Thanks to our Foreign Affairs Spokesperson including Layla Moran MP and Alistair Carmichael MP, we have some principles over trading and human rights issue towards China, yet we are still in lack of an official policy in our manifesto.

The lesson we should learn from Russo-Ukrainian war is that in the time of global political upheaval, particularly when we had to be at odds with an authoritarian regime, we need to take drastic measures on our national security policy, in order to safeguard our values on being a liberal democracy, and our neighbours who shared our values. Diplomatic isolation is not an option and we need to work with our ally to achieve our aims. We need to have a clear policy on authoritarian regime, and act swiftly in the time of crisis.



It is never a consideration of whether Britain power but as a global citizen we are always a global player. Likewise, it is never the consideration of historical "faults" for this country re-shape into multicultural. Some in the party suggested we should restore the UK's international development budget. Indeed, we can use this to provide financial assistance to the British Commonwealth states. It can potentially alter the sphere of influence in these countries, and truly instate our 'Global Britain' national agenda.

Some of our allies started this initiative by offering a much more affordable alternative financial arrangement. Philippines once received a loan of USD4.9 billion from China with 3% interest rate for its 2018 rail projects. However according to Philippines government, the Chinese Government failed 'to act on the funding requests.' The further the projected delayed, the more interest Philippines government needed to pay. Therefore, the Filipino authorities considered to withdraw all these projects and renegotiate the loans on 2022.¹⁰ One of the reasons why Philippines took a drastic action was that Japan offered a loan of 253 million Japanese Yen for underground metro in Manila, with a repayment period of 40 years and a very low interest rate of 0.1%.¹¹ Japan also signed another loan agreement of 30 billion Japanese Yen with Philippines on tackling COVID with an interest rate of 0.01% with a repayment period of 11 years.¹² With such an attractive alternative provided, we can help these countries out from their 'debt trap' with China,

and bring these countries back to be our allies.

To sum up, Britain is in danger under the current geopolitical instability; our party should set a China policy and it can be our first step to show our stance. More importantly as coalition partner of any governing party in the future, this policy can set a clear stance of our party towards China and national security.

Larry Ngan

Larry Ngan is a founder member of Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong.

¹ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/12/18/china-democracy-ideology-communist-party/>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/indias-finance-minister-defends-increased-purchases-of-russian-oil-11656324356>

³ <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/understanding-chinas-role-in-sri-lankas-debt-restructuring-efforts/>

⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-03-02/a-china-belt-and-road-project-becomes-a-corridor-to-nowhere>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/07/world/africa/kenya-election-train.html>

⁶ <https://www.mining-technology.com/analysis/china-rare-earths-dominance-mining/>

⁷ Labour MP for Brent North. In 2017 The Times revealed, from September 2015 to February 2017, Gardiner had received £182,284 in disclosed cash donations from Christine Lee & Co, a firm of solicitors which acts as the chief legal adviser to the Chinese embassy.

(<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/money-influence-and-the-beijing-connection-h9vjtsk9f>)

⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-chinas-propaganda-influences-the-west-state-media-cable-censorship-wechat-social-media-hong-kong-election-russia-ukraine-newspaper-11661108182>

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/article/china-central-television-long-standing-weapon-beijings-arsenal-repression>

¹⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-marcos-wants-renegotiate-loans-49-bln-china-backed-rail-projects-2022-07-16/>

¹¹ <https://www.railjournal.com/financial/japan-loans-yen-253bn-for-underground-manila-metro/>

¹² https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/press/2022/20220426_10e.html



Aspects of Brighton the Lib Dems missed...

Nuclear Weapons – a Liberal Democrat rethink.

Keith Melton

(The prospect for the human race is sombre beyond all precedent. Mankind is faced with a clear-cut alternative: either we shall all perish, or we shall have to acquire some slight degree of common sense.)

Bertrand Russell, August 1945, written just after Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been bombed

The war of aggression Putin has been waging for the last six months or more (arguably a full eight years, in fact!) has thrown into stark relief that Liberal Democrat `20th Century policies` on nuclear weapons are no longer fit for purpose and, indeed, our approach to defence policy, as a whole, needs to be looked at in depth, in the face of a much-changed geopolitical environment.

The political and economic response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, has been remarkable in its unity of purpose and speed of decision-making. The fact that the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky – the leader of a sister Party in the European Liberal Democrat family – has been heroic and steadfast in standing up to the Russian Bear in defence of Liberal Democracy, has helped to affirm, perhaps reaffirm, cultural Western views and values of Liberal Democracy per se.

There may be, indeed there will be, those who argue that it is the deterrent threat of the West's nuclear weapons that has kept Putin from even greater expansionist ambitions, but, in truth, it has been the determination and solidity of the Liberal Democratic Alliance of the West and its preparedness to supply conventional weapons and intelligence to our heroic proxy in Ukraine. Beyond that, there has been an equally remarkable unity of economic sanctions that have been applied remarkably quickly against Russia and Russian Oligarchs, that may have helped keep the Bear's claws trimmed.

Let us, for the moment, allow the argument that the MAD certainty of Mutually Assured Destruction has been the thing that has stopped Putin from using his nuclear weaponry, we still have to ask the question of what comes next. Whilst nuclear weapons exist and the countries that own them insist that they may use them "if necessary", there will always be a risk that a perfect storm of human and/or machine error could trigger Armageddon.

Close Calls



- with apologies to the website `Future of Life`

I am the same age as the United Nations, and I can recall as a teenager what seemed to be the very real possibility of having to cover classroom windows with brown paper against the depredations of nuclear weapons during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Professor Anthony Aguirre, a board member of the Future of Life Institute (<https://futureoflife.org/background/nuclear-close-calls-a-timeline/>) suggests that the "... constellation of incidents around (and including) the Cuban missile crisis..." were, for him, the scariest of close calls.

Aguirre concluded that "(a) when tensions escalate, it becomes dramatically more probable that unfortunate coincidences etc. will conspire to create big problems and (b) we were very lucky to get through the Cuban Missile crisis, and we have no good reason to be confident that we would make it through any similar flare-up in tensions."

One of the biggest dangers comes from the fact that the accepted protocol for western nuclear weapons is that they are `always on`. The military call this protocol “Prompt Launch” – the idea being that if (apparently) being attacked, nuclear weapons can be launched to ensure they are not obliterated by incoming missiles. The Union of Concerned Scientists call this the “Hair Trigger Alert” and believe it should be scrapped for the safety of humanity. So far, we have been lucky that the protocol has not yet been applied – though it has been a close-run thing on many occasions.

There is no question that the Russian war against Ukraine with its fake news and disinformation provides a clear opportunity for *‘tensions to escalate’*. And it is in this situation we must be clear about where we should be headed *after this conflict* is resolved – even if resolution still seems a (far?) distant hope.

Position of UK Liberal Democrats

So, it is in this tense context that our debate in Brighton is set. Unfortunately, the position presented by the motion, chosen (*by a relatively small margin of the twenty or so voting members*) within the Federal Conference Committee, provides something an `establishment-knee-jerk` response to the clear and present danger represented by Putin`s Russia. It portrays a viewpoint as if Liberal Democrats were part of the current Government and therefore should be presumed to support the status quo. Indeed, it goes further and suggests we would, if in power now, spend a huge sum on building a fourth submarine to ensure “continuous at-sea deterrence”. (*Nuclear proliferation is against current Lib Dem policy!*)

The financial consequences of that would be twofold:

We would be hard-pressed to provide the continuing advanced conventional weaponry needed by Ukraine (and materiel replacements) if funds were taken up with building a new sub.

We would not be able to retain (nor yet increase) the size of our current standing-total of armed forces which are severely threatened with reductions already.

It is our view, as the movers of the proposed amendment to Motion F10, that the debate should concentrate on consideration of the position we should take as a Party after the next General Election.

Off the record...

Although it is not directly related to the wording of either the Motion as printed, or the likely amendment, it would not be surprising to see an attempt by the movers of the motion to suggest that any potential *‘hesitation in sticking to the status quo’* might be picked up by Putin and his allies as a *‘weakness in Western Ranks’*?!

I would just point out that probably the biggest *‘weakness in Western Ranks’* was demonstrated by the Tory Government`s toleration of corrupt Russian finances flowing into London unchecked over many years. Maybe, even, the close relationship former PM, Boris Johnson, appeared to have with the KGB!? Or, failure to react over Crimea?

Global Geopolitics

As far as Putin`s war on Ukraine is concerned, there are two aspects of Global Geopolitics that have been relevant. One has been the economic and political positioning of Ukraine as an aspiring member of the European Union and the economic consequences that entails. The second is the strength of NATO and its increasing *‘heft’* given the proposed accession of Finland and Sweden earlier this year.

Having ruled ourselves out as member of the EU by our Brexit vote, we really are not in a position to offer any advice or comment on the EU aspirations of Ukraine and other countries, formerly in the orbit of the USSR or imperialist Russia.

However, we feel that the Motion F10 has seriously underplayed the role, and potential role, of NATO and the new commitments the UK has recently made to defending its Eastern borders, which will require

conventional weaponry and, potentially, boots on the ground and will NOT require mass-destruction weapons of a supposedly-independent UK nuclear force.

Disempowerment by Deterrence in Reverse?

One of the more concerning aspects of the Ukraine situation is that Russia's nuclear weapons are under the control of an unpredictable rogue tyrant in Putin. We did nothing when he took Crimea, effectively disempowered by deterrence in reverse – so Putin took that as a signal he could get away with anything. China is watching to see what they can get away with in Taiwan and we are walking on eggshells, hoping our `luck` will hold. As former Tory PM, John Major, said recently, “...*not every nation is led by men or women of good intent. Democracy has fallen back...*” <https://www.englishcathedrals.co.uk/latest-news/john-major-conference-speech-full-transcript/>

This also raises the issue of the morality (*actually, immorality!*) of weapons of mass-destruction and whether any person who believes in liberal values and democracy can ever sanction the potential use of such weapons. Personally, I cannot. In the early 1980s Paddy Ashdown was also “... *wholly opposed to nuclear weapons ... I agree with the Liberal Party, which is the only British political party that has always opposed a British nuclear deterrent.*” (Paddy Ashdown, writing in CND magazine, Sanity, in 1985.)

Significance

It is estimated that over 90% of the world's nuclear arsenal belongs to either Russia or the USA and that the UK's nuclear weapons represent less than 2%. And, as far as Trident is concerned, when the maintenance, design, and testing of UK submarines depend on Washington, and when the nuclear missiles aboard them are on lease from Uncle Sam, very little of that 2% is actually “independent”.

Let me take you back to the assumption we made in the fourth paragraph of this article, that if Putin is holding back from use of nuclear weapons, on the basis of Mutually Assured Destruction, it has patently nothing to do with Trident and the UK's so-called independent nuclear deterrent.

Therefore, we believe that Liberal Democrats have a significant opportunity to use our ownership of nuclear weapons to create an opening into the area of “*common sense*” that Bertrand Russell wrote about so eloquently in 1945 – *as per the quotation under the title of this piece*. That opportunity arises as a result of a multilateral treaty established by the United Nations referred to as the “UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons”, launched in July 2017 and which has already been signed by 86 countries and ratified by 66 countries.

Relevant text from this treaty says, of nuclear weapons, that signatories “...*should immediately remove them from operational status, and destroy them as soon as possible but not later than a deadline to be determined by the first meeting of States Parties...*”

Multilateral action

In order to make this Treaty about *truly* multilateral disarmament, therefore, it needs to be signed by more than one state which actually *has* nuclear weapons in the first place. This will always be the most difficult step to achieve and will undoubtedly require a strong dose of *uncommon* sense to prevail. Nevertheless, in circumstances where multiple potential combatants are standing in a circle with loaded weapons in their hands ready to fire on a hair trigger, perhaps the bravest act will come from the warrior prepared to **be the first** to put down his weapon.

This is at the root of the amendment's stipulation that Liberal Democrats would undertake “... *to sign this UN Treaty within the life of the Parliament following the next UK General Election...*” We need time to be able to apply some leverage on other nuclear powers to act with us – but act we must. We cannot continue to rely on luck to save humanity from close calls that might just as easily go the wrong way as the right way.

Clearly, 'realpolitik' will determine whether this is possible, perhaps depending upon our status with the next Government, whether Liberal Democrats are part of a coalition or supporting a 'confidence and supply' arrangement. It is, however, a statement of intent, which we anticipate should provide the catalyst for the development of that '*uncommon sense*' required for change.

Summary and Conclusion

I have tried to cover, here, some of the main arguments we might use to amend what started as a rather waffly motion on nuclear strategy. In brief, we are saying:-

- Nuclear weapons are immoral and illiberal.
- Nuclear weapons cannot prevent armed conflict among states and in all likelihood heighten the risk of miscalculation that could end life on Earth.
- There is an excellent UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons we should support and sign during the next Parliament after a GE, already signed by 86 nations and ratified by 66.
- We should remove Trident from operational status and use the leverage of diplomacy to bring more nuclear powers into the UN Treaty.
- With the additional defence budget released, we should boost person-power and materiel in our armed forces to support the additional NATO commitments consequent upon Putin's aggression.

The Federal Conference Committee made it clear that to be acceptable, any amendment to the motion could not simply take a "Delete all and replace" tactic, so the approach has had to be more nuanced. In order that you can see the effect of our whole amendment, therefore, the following version shows how the motion in full would appear after amendment.

Keith Melton

Keith Melton is chair of the Green Liberal Democrats

So the final motion* would read as follows:

Conference reaffirms

- (A) That each generation has a responsibility to protect the planet, its ecosystem and all its peoples.
- (B) The universal liberal values of internationalism, human rights, the pursuit of peace, and the rule of law.
- (C) The duty of the United Kingdom to keep its people safe.
- (D) Our long-held desire to negotiate towards a world where nuclear weapons are put beyond use.
- (E) The United Kingdom's long-standing legal and moral obligations to pursue global disarmament.

Conference notes:

- I) Our 2017 policy on nuclear weapons, 'Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons', which recommended a change in the UK's nuclear posture from Continuous At-Sea Deterrent (CASD) to a medium-responsiveness posture with no continuous deployment.
- II) That the global security environment is characterised by increasing instability, including the fragmentation of nuclear arms control agreements, and has deteriorated following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.
- III) Russia's veiled threats as to its readiness to use nuclear weapons, on the battlefield or elsewhere.
- IV) That the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) includes a comprehensive set of prohibitions on participating in any nuclear weapon activities. These include undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons. The Treaty also prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State in the conduct of prohibited activities. Signatories should immediately remove them from operational status, and destroy them as soon as possible but not later than a deadline to be determined by the first meeting of States Parties.

V) That the present UK Government and its predecessors have refused to sign and ratify the UN Treaty and, instead, has prioritised developing a replacement for the Trident nuclear weapons capability with a negative impact on conventional weapons spending and the armed forces.

VI) The failure of many NATO allies, including the UK, to properly resource their conventional armed forces in order to be ready to respond to conventional military attack.

VII) That it is estimated that over 90% of global nuclear weapons are held by the USA and Russia, thus making the UK nuclear weapon stocks insignificant (less than 2%) in global terms.

Conference believes that:

a) Vladimir Putin's Russia poses a clear threat to our national security and that of our NATO allies.

b) Nuclear weapons do not make anyone safer and, in fact, pose an existential threat to all.

c) Nuclear weapons cannot prevent armed conflict among states and in all likelihood heighten the risk of miscalculation that could end life on Earth.

d) We must accelerate our efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons.

e) The challenging security environment and rising nuclear risks should embolden the UK to make a renewed push for global disarmament, and while the strategic context is challenging, opportunities which arise in the future must not be squandered.

f) The UK Government's approach to global disarmament has been at best counter-productive and at worst in breach of legal and moral obligations.

Conference therefore calls on the UK Government to:

1) to meet its commitment under Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue effective measures towards nuclear disarmament.

2) immediately cancel the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons system.

3) halt plans to reduce the size of the regular Army from 82,000 personnel to 72,500 by 2025.

4) urgently review the overall scale of all branches of UK armed forces in light of newly established NATO commitments.

Conference urges the UK Government to pursue global disarmament, including by:

I. Reversing plans to increase the cap on the stockpile of nuclear weapons; and associated reductions in transparency commitments;

II. Publicly recommitting to the UK's obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty;

III. Making global disarmament a diplomatic priority for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office;

IV. Looking to engage further with non-Nuclear Weapon States on disarmament initiatives, including the Stockholm Initiative and the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – whilst undertaking to sign this UN Treaty within the life of the Parliament following the next UK General Election

Furthermore, given the unlikelihood of disarmament developments with Russia under the present Russian Government, Conference believes that the UK Government should also explore opportunities to pursue disarmament initiatives with other Nuclear Weapon States, including:

(i.) Engaging with other Nuclear Weapon States regarding bilateral adoption of transparency measures.

(ii.) Continuing engagement with Nuclear Weapon States which are yet to sign the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, which Russia has already signed.

(iii.) Encouraging remaining countries which have not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty, which Russia has already ratified, to do so.

*(*There may yet be modest drafting changes to the proposed amendment)*

To echo what President John F Kennedy said about his plans to go to the moon in the 1960s – “We choose to do these things NOT because they are easy, but BECAUSE they are hard”.

Let us sign the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, not because it is the easy option – but because it is the brave option, the morally right option. Let us take this small step and help to create a huge step for mankind.

And Mikhail Gorbachev, who died very recently, said, “As long as weapons of mass destruction exist, primarily nuclear weapons, the danger is colossal. All nations should declare — all nations — that nuclear weapons must be destroyed. This is to save ourselves and our planet.”

TURKEY IS AT THE CROSSROAD.

A. KURT

As it was stated in FT¹ (first weekend edition in August), Turkey is moving closer to a crucial crossroad which could end up snatching the country away from Western democracies completely. Geopolitical issues are not, usually, part of everyday conversation among the people. Everybody is so busy with trying to cope the cost of living and 80 percent inflation (official figure). Some independent economist argue that real number is much higher (goes up almost 160 percent) last pay and benefit rises already vaporised under huge inflation number. In theory next general election will take place less than a year in time. With this soaring prices and hard living condition Tayyip Erdoğan will almost certainly lose the election. According to every single opinion poll he is losing. His coalition partner the Nationalist party (MHP - Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) will lose more heavily.

The opposition coalition on the other hand is fast gaining popularity among every segment of the population. The problem is whether Erdoğan accept the results or not? Corruption is so deep, only a very small group of businessman and part of Islamic clergy seems to get richer. Recently Erdoğan chose a new head to the country's only judicial institution which inspects state expenditure. The person who was chosen is a close ally of Erdoğan; as a result of this selection Erdoğan aiming to bury the evidence of massive corruption. Also, he needs cash to keep everything running. for example, Turkish CDS² has risen to 900 which is the level of bankruptcy of the state.

Looming election disaster, general discontent of people and the urgency of keeping the corruption

wheel running; he is trying to find solutions. In his mind the only solution is to sit at the table with Russia, get a go ahead from Putin to start a new war against Kurds in Syria (Kobane and elsewhere) and organise a nationalistic wave so that an election would lose its importance or even it could be postponed. He might even go live and say that he won even while the ballot still ongoing, as he has done before.

There is another advantage of moving closer to the Russia and maybe BRICS that none of those countries would criticise him of being undemocratic or anything such. Having said that whether western democracies want a democratic Turkey is another question. Western Europe uses Turkey as dumping ground for refugees and because of this they become deaf and blind to what is happening in Turkey.

Turkey has become something of a broker between Russia and Ukraine. It might be said that they have a foot in all three camps; a member of NATO but increasingly flirting with Russia despite conflicts in Syria. Turkish supplied drones were used effectively by Ukraine early in the renewed phase of the invasion (for which Turkey apologised to Russia, but come off it, the Russian invasion started in 2014). Negotiations on prisoner exchanges and grain shipments took place in Turkey. It is most possible that the demand came from Putin because he can easily control and manipulate the Turkish government. Erdoğan met Putin at Sochi early in August with a view to trying to lure Russian capital into Turkey. Since the war started life has been particularly tough for Russian money. So Erdoğan might make it very easy for Russian capital to park in Turkey. There is also work on some kind of special card which Russian citizens could be use in Turkey.

Another important announcement by the Turkish foreign ministry was that the Turkish foreign minister and the Turkish state intelligence chief had a meeting with Ramzan Kadyrov (the head of the Chechen government); I gather they are planning something with the involvement of Kadyrov either in Libya or



The Bosphorus, from the coast road at Yeniköy - once again an internationally important stretch of water as Ukrainian grain seeks to fend off global food crises.

Syria. Kadyrov has not featured much in the Turkish media since the assassination of separatist Chechen leader Medet Ünlü in 2013.

The main thorn between Turkey and Russia is Syria. The west has all but forgotten Syria, and will only wake up when Erdoğan once again has refugees knocking on their door. Erdoğan's Ottomanism is at odds with a solution. He might say he has no claims on Syrian land, but as reported some years ago in interLib, after the seizure of Afrin and Idlib infrastructure was laid down linking them with Turkey – this is beyond an attack on the Kurds. Russian and Iranian involvement in Syria may have thwarted Erdoğan's wider aims but there are no clear signs that they have changed.

By transferring Russian funds to the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey, Putin hopes to tie Erdoğan to a policy change in Syria. The Tesnim News Agency says that Putin plans to bring Erdoğan and Assad together at the Samarkand summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on September 15th-16th. How compatible is this?

Assad requires Turkey to stop occupying Syrian lands and to stop supporting factions of the Syrian opposition. Turkey wants Syria to join its war against the Kurds; whilst Assad might not be happy with the de facto Kurdish autonomy, backed by America this is a step too far for the present. Turkey's wish to involve the Syrian opposition in any peace process is also a step too far as Assad regards them as terrorist organisations. Jihadists have already been relocated into Turkey, somewhat uneasily; the West turns a blind eye to this. Erdoğan also wants a share in Syrian reconstruction, prior to the return of refugees and a 32-kilometre safe zone along the border in which the Turkish army could operate.

How will Turkey sell all this to the West? When you put all these things in right order the FT article makes more sense. Will there be more blackmail with refugees on the EU's border? Will the NATO card be played? If so, hasn't Turkey been an uneasy and unreliable partner for too long – or will Erdoğan continue to bluff his way with the West and say I'm still with you, relying on short-term dictates like Ukraine to carry that through?

Erdoğan now keeps saying " how important Turkey is, the whole world watches us, how we solve an international problem". He is using these events for domestic political purposes. The Russian press keeps saying Erdoğan's health is worse than ever. One way or another the next twelve-months will be the most important period in the history of Turkey.

A. Kurt

¹ Financial Times, 6th August 2022. Putin and Erdoğan pledge closer ties.

² Credit default swap

Various articles by Fehim Taştekin in Gazete Duvar throughout August informed this piece, notably 9th & 22nd August.



Aspects of Brighton the Lib Dems missed...

Myanmar Executions - What Now?

Merlene Emerson and Dr Yeow Poon

After the initial burst of news, there have been few updates in the UK press on the situation in Myanmar following the military coup in February 2021. This was till recently on 25th July 2022, when the military rulers announced that 4 democracy activists were executed. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), these four executions "were the first carried out among some 117 death sentences handed down by military-run courts since the coup".

Based on our research, we have gleaned the following:

Myanmar is in early stages of civil war. The pro-democracy groups have set up a National Unity Government (NUG) and has established a People's Defence Force (PDF). Other armed groups are the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAO) and the Sit-Tat (Myanmar Armed Forces belonging to the Junta). Myanmar is fragmented along conflict lines. Some areas are under NUG control, and others by the various EAOs and the SIT-Tat. Some areas would be in conflict as between government and rebel groups. There is also a breakdown of national institutions (i.e., the military government) with some villages establishing their own administrative bodies.



In July 2022, China's foreign minister during his first visit since the coup, "called for Myanmar's junta to hold talks with its opponents". The Junta would of course want to retain power as far as possible and is currently set on destroying the NUG despite calling themselves a transition government. The NUG on the other hand is far from united with some seeking the replacement of the 2008 Constitution without any power sharing arrangements. The execution of the 4 political activists can only stiffen the resolve of the NUG to defeat the Junta.

Ye Myo Hein, Director of the Tagaung Institute of Political Studies, in his report to the UN considered 4 possible scenarios:

(a) Junta wins, (b) there is a negotiated settlement, (c) Pro-democracy forces attain victory or (d) Myanmar fragments/balkanises.

To us the viable road map forward is clear. We have to avoid scenarios (a) and (d) and work towards (b) or (c). What then can the West and the international community do to help?

In every conflict situation, especially one as complex as that in Myanmar, one needs to embark on the twin tracks of conflict resolution and transition to a democratic government. In this regard we have relied on studies by Constitutional law expert, Prof Christine Bell of Edinburgh University who has drawn lessons from past conflicts (including in Iraq, Congo and Afghanistan). What then are the possible trajectories of having parallel governments and what can international actors practically do to de-escalate the current violence?

The executions have drawn condemnation from around the world, including from the UK and EU in their joint statement.

Some are calling for more sanctions and for an arms embargo but as far as we are aware there have been no offer of incentives of financial or military assistance to NUG or rebel groups.

ASEAN agreed a five-point consensus in April 2021 on Myanmar calling for cessation of violence, dialogue with all stakeholders, humanitarian aid, a special ASEAN envoy to conduct talks, and visit by a special envoy to meet all parties. To date the special envoy Prak Sokhonn has made 2 visits and is planning a third. Further, Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, "speaking at the side of the United Nations' Special Envoy on Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer at a press conference in Kuala Lumpur said the executions would be a focus of the upcoming meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations foreign ministers in early August.

As ASEAN has come out strongly in condemning the executions, it is hoped that ASEAN will be taking a more forceful stance rather than its usual cautious approach. Perhaps ASEAN should not try to go it alone but in a partnership with the UN Special Envoy to Myanmar.

Action is needed now, not mere words.

Merlene Emerson and Dr Yeow Poon

This article first appeared in Libdem Voice August 3, 2022

Chinese LibDems posted two articles on Myanmar previously - [Standing with Myanmar - Military rule and the struggle for democracy in Myanmar](#) (interLib 2021-03 page 7) and [Myanmar's Simmering War and UK's moral duty](#) (LibDem Voice June 2021). Given recent developments, it is perhaps timely to give an update on the situation.

FRANCE HAS JUST GOT TO SUCCEED IN AFRICA. RENAUD GIRARD

For the second international trip of his second term, from 25 to 28 July, Emmanuel Macron has decided to visit Africa (Cameroon, Benin, Guinea-Bissau). The President of the Republic rightly believes that the destinies of France and the African continent are closely linked.

What does this mean? The answer is simple: when France succeeds in Africa, it is good for Africa and when Africa develops, it is good for France.

Is the policy of the "*pré carré*", which consists of Paris' priority interest in the countries of the former French West Africa and Equatorial Africa (AOF and AEF), reprehensible? Absolutely not. The historical, political, economic, linguistic, cultural and, let's face it, emotional ties forged with these territories since Jules Ferry have forged a magnificent common human heritage that it would be shameful to leave untouched.

Other powers, such as China, Russia and Turkey, are interested in Africa. They are never unhappy to oust the French. **But under a veneer of altruism, they do a poor job of hiding their overriding objectives. The Africans eventually see through their game.**

The Chinese have a predatory attitude towards Africa's mineral, forestry and fisheries resources. They are not interested in Africans as such. For Putin's Russia, Africa represents a military playground where it can challenge the West with less risk than in Ukraine. Turkey under the Erdogan is only interested in spreading the puritanical yet modern Islam it embodies.

France is the only power that sincerely wants African development to succeed. Its long-standing policy of military, economic and cultural co-operation is proof of this, despite its occasional blunders. Moreover, it is in France's best interest to know that if African agricultural and urban policies fail, it will see millions of migrants rush to the Mediterranean.

In Africa – and particularly in Benin and Cameroon – France is expected to act on three levels: security, economic and cultural. The first is the most difficult. It must be acknowledged that, for the past eleven years, France has been at odds with success on this front.

In 2011, it undertook the military destruction of Gaddafi's Libya – a country that was very popular in Africa – trampling on an African Union mission in Tripoli and ignoring the warning expressed in *Le Figaro* by the president of Niger.

This mistake, which remains to this day the most serious in foreign policy of the entire Fifth Republic, was unfortunately not limited to Libyan territory. It spread chaos throughout the Sahelian strip.

With Operation Serval in Mali, and then Barkhane, France has embarked on a second war to try to repair the consequences of the first. Unfortunately, it cannot be said that this has worked well. The French army has not prevented Islamist gangs from proliferating and carrying out ever deeper raids in sub-Saharan Africa.

It is estimated that Islamic terror now affects three quarters of a once very peaceful country, Burkina Faso (the former Upper Volta).

In Mali, France has unwittingly fallen into the colonial trap. It lurks in all long-term military installations in Africa. The French soldier is initially perceived as a liberator. But the longer he stays, the more perceptions change. In a classic scapegoat dynamic, he is gradually held responsible for everything that goes wrong in the country. In the long run, he is no longer perceived by the youth as a good Samaritan – which he actually is – but as an occupier.

France cannot take the place of states that have been independent for more than sixty years and ensure the security of entire regions of their territories. It can only support those states whose political objectives it shares: by training officers and non-commissioned officers, by supplying equipment, by providing occasional relief.

Economically, the state should not be afraid to help French champions in Africa. In 2018, the courts sought to harm Bolloré, the major logistics and port group in West Africa, which had done a lot to open up the territories of this region.

Vincent Bolloré preferred to throw in the towel. Not to mention the Chinese and Turkish groups, our German and Italian competitors do not have judges in their own countries who dream of nailing them for “corruption” at any time, without regard for the quality of the investments they make in Africa.

Culturally, Africa is our last chance to maintain the status of French as a world language. The European ground has unfortunately been lost (since 1957, when we failed to make French the sole working language of the Common Market). Paris should not be reluctant to subsidise all schools, books and equipment involved in learning French.

France must succeed in Africa! It is in the interest of both the French and the Africans.

Renaud Girard

This article was first published in Le Figaro and Radix 29th July 2022

reviews

Conservatism the fight for a tradition, by Edmund Fawcett.

Princeton University Press 2020

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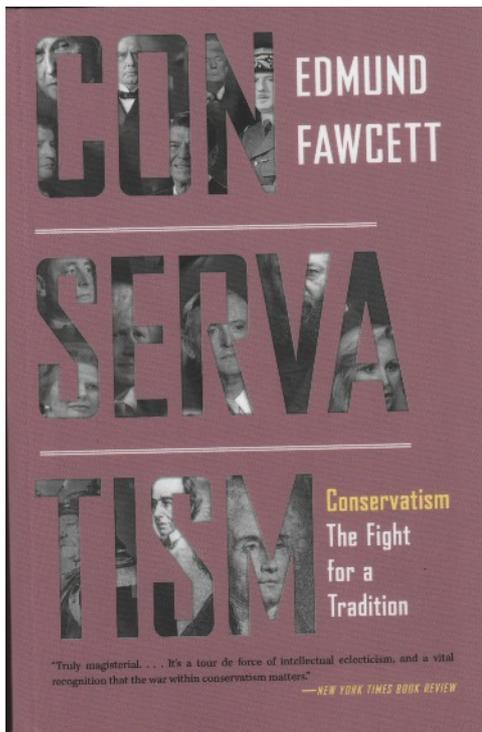
Edmund Fawcett is faced with a dilemma in *Conservatism the fight for a tradition*, a dilemma we all face in this country and across the pond. Where is Conservatism going, and indeed, is it still Conservatism? With Donald Trump's seizure of the Republicans in the United States and the unspecified post-Thatcherism, best represented in the inanity of Boris Johnson and that ilk in the UK there is good reason to doubt. In France and Germany there are other reasons to doubt, as Angela Merkel clearly demonstrated the differences between Christian Democracy and Conservatism and a hardening of the Right as a reaction to this.

I would expect all readers of this magazine to have Fawcett's *Liberalism the Life of an Idea* on their selves already, I cannot commend it highly enough, and so be familiar with his basic mode of operation, taking the development of a political philosophy from its beginnings around the French Revolution through to the present, primarily through key individuals. This is not say that there were not proto-Liberals or Conservatism before this point, but that they had an essentially different nature. The early Burke would be a good example, clearly within the Liberal canon, yet goes on to be the backstop of Conservative political thought, but one might ask to this day? Just as conservative libertarians are selective in their reading of Adam Smith, I doubt if Burke would have empathised with the mean spirit that runs through contemporary Conservatism.

If pre-Revolutionary political thought might be summarised as an imperfect dialogue between Crown and Country – each aristocratic, Liberalism and Conservatism emerge from this as attempts to reconcile themselves to those horrors in a meaningful way to go forward; much as either might not want to they have to adjust to the developments in capitalism and the pressures for democracy. Liberalism essentially takes the lead in this, the necessary corrective to democracy; Conservatism will be dragged to follow suit, an ongoing rear-guard action, which, so far as Britain, France and the USA are concerned, have reached some compromise, but with Germany, despite its advance in other fields, will still have some catching up to do in politics at the end of the 19th century. Because Germany comprised of a multitude of petty states the development of its body politic might best be summarised in Weber's opera *Die Freischütz*, the lure of a prince or a leader to pull the national project together. Despite many great thinkers, Humboldt most notably, German Liberalism never quite got it together. German Liberals often found it easier to work through other channels, hence perhaps, the rarefied academicism of Berlin, Popper and Hayek, the latter too easily seduced by economic liberals within political Conservatism. Most of Fawcett's book does for Conservatism what his earlier book did for Liberalism. But peppered throughout, in view of this as a rear-guard response to the forces of Liberalism and later Socialism are references to 'Right-wing Liberalism' and 'liberal Conservatism.' Some of these perhaps reached their apotheosis in Britain with the governments of Harold MacMillan and Edward Heath, whilst Margaret Thatcher was clearly an economic liberal within a Conservative political framework. Here things start to slide.

One of the things that is frequently alleged of conservatives is that they do not have an ideology or that they are anti-intellectual in political thought. This is not strictly true, but the ordinary conservative may not think about such things as much as the ordinary liberal. 'NHS good, privatised NHS bad' the sheep may bleat as they go on chewing the grass without much thinking beyond that. In the absence of any serious political debate post-Thatcher conservatism has become very much the politics of greed and selfishness, in a world where the advances of the post-war settlement have increasingly been clawed back by wealth. Brought up on this, the outlook of the new generation of conservatives is shallow. The workings of the invisible hand aside, governments have acted in the interests of the few rather than the many; the masses are fobbed off with scapegoats of the otherwise necessary EU and immigrants. A very nasty conservatism has developed

indeed, and parallels can be found in the United States. Things did not quite come home to roost in 2008 but with the cost-of-living crisis we have them in spades. How will the populism that masquerades as conservatism deal with this, apart from cancelling politics whilst they have another leadership crisis? Fawcett summarises the present position thus: *Liberal-democratic society suffers grievous ills that need urgent repair. Populists of the hard right claim to be messengers of that grievance, but their credentials are thin. They speak for interests that cannot be obviously reconciled: globalist liberals and national-minded locals; border-blind capital and left-behind neighbourhoods; businesses that want less regulation and the religious faithful that want more moral controls.* These contradictions cannot be resolved; it is not difficult to see who will lose out. For some reassurance to us, Fawcett adds: *Missing from the hard right's appeal or well down its list of promises are liberalism's twin demand for protection from power and respect for all, whoever they are.* There will be a lot to claw back.



In contrasting recent conservative thinkers, of whom only Scruton is likely to be widely familiar, Fawcett suggests that the liberalism that conservatives have adjusted themselves to is now so pervasive that going back may be an impossible road. Whilst homophobia persists, few in the UK would put homosexuality back in the closet; society has moved on in fifty years – as I write, Gay Pride is being celebrated as just another carnival.

Of the American Patrick Deneen for example, Fawcett follows Stephen Holmes in the accusation of ‘antonym substitution’ – taking a liberal argument and substituting it with a conservative outcome. Fawcett’s repost is *Liberals do not contrast personal choice with moral choice but with choice that an arbitrary authority claims is moral. They do not contrast personal liberty with acknowledgement of authority but with submission to arbitrary, unchecked authority. They do not contrast a person’s sense of themselves with their roots in a community but with unchosen, often subordinate membership in a clan or social group. Liberal reluctance to use coercive law in enforcement of morality is not a denial of morality.*

My unawareness of most of the recent conservative thinkers presented by Fawcett is symptomatic of his remark of how little the two sides of the debate appear to talk to each other. I do not think I have read a Conservative tract since trying to make sense of David Cameron’s idea as a new Tory leader – I concluded that if he really believed all of that he was leading the wrong party. Scruton, from 1982 when he launched his *Salisbury Review* mourned that conservatives were thinking less of ideas that of policy and practical repairs to the status quo. Yet this is what practical politics are about; managing day-to-day affairs, rising to the next crisis or problem as the last is resolved or recedes. What has been absent in British politics since at least 1997 is a dialogue – we have had conservative governments of one shade or another. One might to further and say that the dialogue between Liberalism and Conservatism has been at best imperfect since the 1920s. As another of Fawcett’s recent conservative thinkers David Brooks puts it, most of what appals him in modern society has taken place on their watch. Brooks calls on conservatism to *find a moral purpose large enough to displace the lure or blood-and-soil nationalism* and to *restore standards of professional competence and reassert the importance of experience, integrity and political craftsmanship.* I regret that I don’t see it happening.

I put the question, would it be true to say that the party that calls itself Conservative in the UK is no longer conservative?

Stewart Rayment

Dragon's Teeth – Tales from North Kosovo by Ian Bancroft.
Ibidem, Stuttgart 2020 £20.00

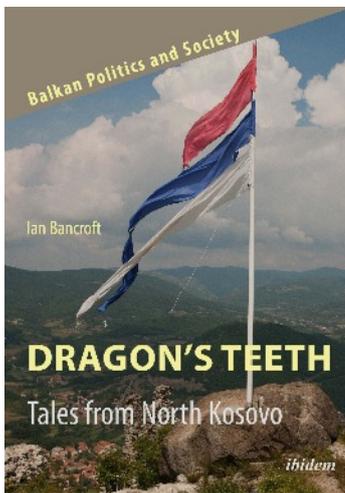
The Kosovo war of 1998-99 was the last major part of the wars in former Yugoslavia. Well known to the British public as it played out on tv screens, many Kosovo Albanian refugees came to Britain (and then returned home after) and Britain played a key part under Tony Blair's government in the NATO bombing of Serbia and deployment into Kosovo that ended the war. The international community largely administered the province (at one point Liberal Democrat Iain King was head of planning for the UN there) until Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia in 2008. After that, Albanian areas developed rapidly, mostly due to investment from the huge diaspora living and working in Western European countries. The north part remains largely occupied by Serbs, the north side of the town of Mitrovica, Leposavic, Zvecan and Zubin Potok the main towns. It is not widely promoted (even in Serbia) that half of the small remaining Serbian ethnic population of Kosovo live in other parts. The northern districts resisted integration into independent Kosovo institutions, and there is currently a stalemate where Serbian state institutions in effect run in parallel to official ones.

When a well-known British political commentator on the Balkans published a book specifically on North Kosovo I thought this was amusingly delusional. Why on earth would anyone want to read a book about a small part (like a few districts) of 'a small country half the size of Wales'; a small 'country' in fact not even recognised by many other countries. And why was such a niche book published by a respected scholarly publisher, Ibidem?

Ian Bancroft's book is well worth reading not only for insight on a small part of a small land half the size of Wales, but because this book by research, anecdote, vignette & personal experience is interesting & relevant for anyone interested in the western Balkans. There are many points that will be familiar to people who have travelled in the former Communist countries, especially the non-EU and variably democratic ones in south eastern Europe. Many common themes stand out from across former Yugoslavia, in particular the southern parts that I know to some extent, and Albania. Furthermore, *Dragon's Teeth* is a good read. It is conversational and thoughtful in style, a bit like one of my favourite little books on the region, Tony White's *Another Fool in the Balkans* (2006) which is more travelogue, largely between Croatia and Belgrade.



It seemed a bit pretentious that Bancroft, in his mid-30s?, describes himself as a writer and diplomat, but this flamboyant English / Manx man and Evertonian had already worked for the OSCE in Bosnia, and in Serbia, and crucially for several years ran an office in the north of Kosovo for the EULEX, the European Union's (support to) Rule of Law mission. On top of this Bancroft has travelled extensively in the region, for work, out of curiosity, with family and in pursuit of excellent wines. He is probably the most prominent promoter in English of wines from Serbia, and knowledgeable about the native grapes of the former Yugoslav countries (check out Autochthinos.com web site, and @Autochthinos on Twitter, as well as @bancroftian for Ian's regular profile). Autochthinos was a word I never knew until I went to Serbia to work two years ago. And found it used (unspellable and unpronounceable) first by wine enthusiasts but then noticeably by each people (ethnic, national group) to say that they were the original inhabitants of the land so the State (whichever State) should adjust to them. A reasonable argument but one as the famous British



historian Noel Malcolm has pointed out that depends on when you start. And I do not believe you can solve the problems in the Balkans (or Ireland) by concentrating on who was in the land centuries (or even many decades) ago. A Liberal democratic approach of human and constitutional rights for all is what wisest commentators advocate to prevent any new unravelling.

Kosovo has been back in the news due to confrontation over number plates and identity cards. In pursuit of Serbia recognising its sovereignty, the government of Albin Kurti has pursued a policy of reciprocating measures (for Serbs living in Kosovo basically) that Serbia implements - not recognising Kosovo number plates and ID cards. The European Union for a decade has been unable to negotiate an agreement (on almost anything), mainly because the two sides want to stand on their positions, as defenders of their States, rather than solve in north

Serbia, or the also affected Albanians in south Serbia, and Serbs living outside the north of Kosovo. The latter are the forgotten majority in fact. One of the points that Bancroft makes repeatedly is that the living conditions in the post-industrial underdeveloped regions of former Yugoslavia are actually very similar, the same in remote villages, and that the people have the same issues in common. I expected a myth or legend or particular statue to be the 'Dragon's Teeth' of the book's title, but in fact the writer uses this imagery to show many times features (manmade, old and new, and natural) that resemble giant dragon's teeth.

The post-industrial and post multi-ethnic / cultural nature of the districts is something sadly common across much of the Western Balkans. Tales of the Trepca mine (written about by Rebecca West) as a huge employer and whole community, show how important and relatively prosperous Mitrovica was during the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and then Yugoslavia. (Mitrovicë – Albanian; anglicised spellings are used in this article). The mine employed 23,000 people at its height. Bancroft discusses its history with expert Mina, of course in an Irish pub in Leposavic. The book covers a pen portrait of the formerly multi-ethnic Bosniak Mahala, football, music (brass band, jazz, blues, rock), boundaries, barricades and the attempts to reopen the main bridge over the Ibar river between the two parts of the town. Open now to pedestrians but not traffic, Ian's recent suggestion is to turn it into a social space. And Bancroft writes about his friendship with Oliver Ivanovic, a reformist Serb politician who was murdered in January 2018. Still unsolved. Religion and religious buildings is also covered. It should be noted that while mostly culturally Muslim, Kosovo Albanians are largely secular, as in Albania itself. And there are Christian Orthodox Albanians as well as Catholics, the latter especially in the north of Albania. Other ethnic groups like goranje, Bosniaks, Turks, Montenegrins and of course Roma complete the mix.

Britain traditionally takes an active foreign policy interest in the western Balkans (very active diplomatically there now) and British tourists (like Serbs) are flocking to Albanian beaches, but these parts of Kosovo are not on the tourist trail yet. The book may interest you in the region as a starting point or someone who knows it already.

Paper tigers & Russian provocateurs.

No one seriously thinks that there will be war in the Balkans again, as the US Ambassador in Belgrade Christopher Hill (and earlier BBC FOC correspondent Guy De Launey) said not likely over number plates. However, a wise long served Norwegian diplomat in the region has cautioned that there can be miscalculations if people engage in provocations, with serious, even fatal results. And the possibility for miscalculations abounds when people are fed propaganda constantly that they are the victims, that others are preparing to use force against them, and that they will be protected by military force. Many politicians suggest that Germany vetoed attempts to 'exchange territory' between Serbia and Kosovo, which at one point the Trump administration seemed keen on but later under Special Envoy Richard Grenell concentrated on practical economic development steps. Unfortunately, both States (and many of their populations) are obsessed with their patriotic nationalism. This is understandable for Kosovo Albanians given what they went through but not helping sustain development. The Russians certainly do not want any progress in peaceful relations in the Western Balkans and want to keep 'frozen conflicts' between Serbia and Kosovo and in Bosnia running to derail peaceful coexistence and stability, hinder efforts to reform politically and

economically, and pursue stated goals (of most politicians and many people) to join the European Union. Russian Putin war propaganda is genuinely popular in Serbia, and the Russian bots, Ambassadors and henchmen targeted on the area exaggerate and promote the risk and fear of conflict, to keep things tense. I even found the Russian propaganda that there was fighting in the north of Kosovo repeated to me by a highly intelligent Ukrainian professional contact (there has been no fighting) and published on a Zaporizhzhia news site. The NATO Kosovo force, retains 3,500 personnel on the ground and has increased its deployments in the north to try and diffuse tension. Just as the small EUFOR in Bosnia has increased its capacity (and recently the UK sent a small number of military specialists to Bosnia and Herzegovina to reinforce the NATO Mission there).

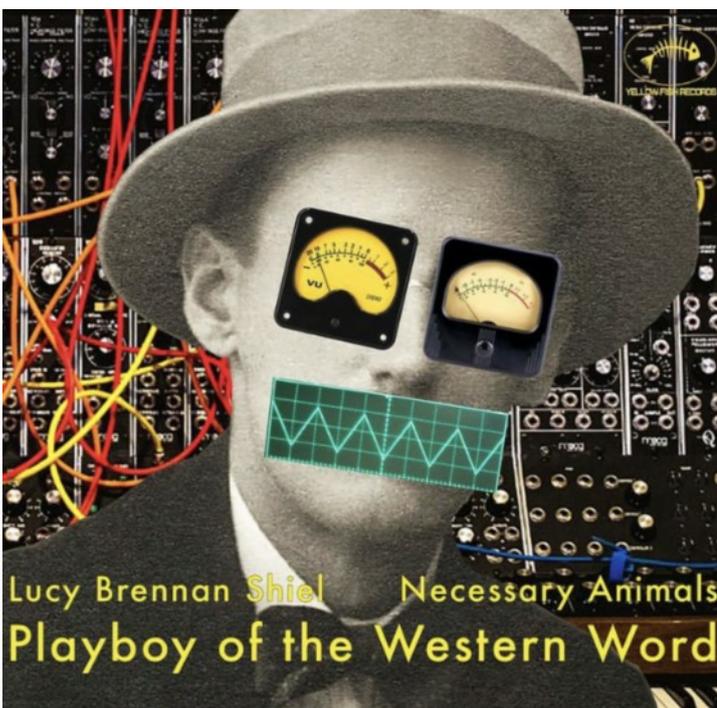
When countries (or rather politicians or local leaders) reject the Russian sphere of influence then we know that the Kremlin physically tries to discredit those politicians and destabilise politics – as seen in Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania. Russian ‘journalists’ and ‘tourists’ are turning up in some surprising restricted places. Meanwhile Belgrade is full of Russians who have fled the war, maybe to move businesses and families. It is obvious of course that Russians do not go and live in the paradises of Republika Srpska (Bosnia) or north Mitrovica that Russia would like to make mini-Tiraspol, just as all the pro-Russian ‘Christian brothers’ Slav patriots who support the war on other white Christian Slavs, go and work in decadent Western or Central or Northern Europe, mostly in EU countries. A significant number of Serbs and Albanians also come to Britain (legally to study and to work) despite Britain’s nasty expensive capricious visa policy doing its best to keep out the type of legal migrants, students, professional visitors and tourists from south east Europe (non-EU countries earlier, now them all) that are exactly the kind of hard working skilled educated migrants that the UK can do with.

Russia is both destabilising and keen on keeping destabilised both Bosnia (using the mini-Orban leader of Republika Srpska, Dodik) and Kosovo Serbia relations through promoting talk of conflict in north Kosovo. This is contrary to the Americans and British - who directly opposite to official propaganda - are continually emphasising the need to keep peace and stability.

While I recommend buying a paper copy of *Dragon's Teeth*, you can also buy an e-copy, and courtesy of Amazon and the Balkan Insight news site you can read introductory extracts online. This includes on life in the shadow of its new border/boundaries following Kosovo's declaration of independence from Serbia. Due to recent controversy in the north there is a link to a free extract here:

[Life in the Shadow of Kosovo's new Border/Boundaries | Balkan Insight](#)

John Martin



Playboy of the Western Word Lucy Brennan Shiel & Necessary Animals

Tarkovsky called Olga Sergeeva’s voice “a sign of the Russian.” That’s more than a sound, as this recording is. This album based on readings from Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ in the deft custody of Lucy Brennan Shiel – an enthusiast who hosts regular gatherings of passionate Joyceans for the sole purpose of sharing the joy of Ulysses – can be justifiably described as ‘a dalliance of the Irish’ but in no predictable pre-configuration. Brennan Shiel infuses the cunning of Molly Bloom with a winsomeness and unexpected innocent relish, giving her a childlike excitement, not always afforded the portrayal of her bold experienced controlling character. Anyone who has known the true nature of Irish women, whether independent or shackled to convention, will recognize the richness

of this inner dialogue. “Women were like rivers that flowed in their own ineluctable way” (James Joyce – Edna O’Brien) and it was such an independent innocent twenty-year-old runaway that Joyce fell for, to set Ulysses on their very day of meeting. Lucy Brennan embraces all of this, invoking her synergetic relationship with nature. This is apt, for Joyce’s predilection was to greedily devour the everyday realities and hypocrisies being swept under the carpet and for such remains distinct in an ever-disguising world.

‘Playboy...’ is equally challenging and playful. It may derive more from the analogue synth emergence of the 70s and 80s rather than Irish traditional folk, yet it is not even slightly dated but modern, groundbreaking and timeless. Chilled groove, acid jazz and evocative as the more experimental sequential music of say Weather Report’s ‘I Sing The Body Electric’ embracing dissonance amidst surreal sinuous harmonic reflections - it is accompanied by similar trippy percussion and cheeky abstract guitar licks, weaving the sublime and ridiculous through the intimate and brash fabric of Joyce’s visionary life-scapes.

Regular listeners to Verity Sharp’s Late Junction (BBC Radio 3) may recall the fox barking in ‘Fox n Clock’ – recorded from Keith Rodway’s midnight balcony. The skewed bass and jaunty guitar chords and Lee Igglesden’s gymnastic scales and lead convey the spontaneous instincts Joyce poetically caught in a hunting dog biting off more than it could chew. ‘Weaver of the Wind’ as a cool groove is “not to be thought away” – especially when overlapping synth glissando transcends Amanda Louise Thompson’s understated and melting trippy Rhodes, all deliciously enraptured by the harmonised trumpet of Sebastian Greschuk. Always cool with a hint of Hassell. In ‘Who’s Who In Space’ it even gets a little Finnegans Wake. Abstract-acid befitting its off-kilter lyricism. Here is where Thomson tilts the head and Igglesden delights us in the sonority of a single note. ‘Sky Blue Clocks’ remains as obtusely angular, tamed by pulsating ripples from sonic pebbles dropped into the fluid mix and Lucy’s reminiscing reflections, never too far from nature. The constant arpeggio of ‘Flies Come Before’ are exquisitely modulated by the spontaneity of Ryan Bollard’s percussive nimbleness, reminiscent of Erskine on a quiet day. This dexterity continues in ‘Molly’s Soliloquy’ with tiny touches on hollow toms - like fingers tickling a Bodhran - and the softest pillowy kick. Brennan excels here in her introspective mirror-gaze, wooed by Greschuk’s effervescence. ‘Song 7’ is initially misleading, bringing us slightly back to earth, or within perusing distance, with the kind of sounds that would accompany aerial views of futuristic cinematic citadels; pausing for a cybernetic scan of its environment. ‘Wonder woman who can deliver the goods’ treats us to more intellections before the Atlantis submerges and re-wilds, transforming to Joyce’s redolent muddy terra-firma; “slow music please.”

But these descriptions and all following comparisons only approximate and somewhat discredit it. The taste of all players and production values of Fritz Catlin and Keith Rodway’s craftiness in timbre-blending and genre-bending, consummately unconventional, are never sensationalistic but sensitive. The sculpted esotericism of a Rodin, or Moore. Colourful as Klimt and full of Klee – inKandinsky. It beautifully encapsulates all the character of that red revolutionary that indulged, transcended and immersed us in the



rich sensuality and raucous rancidness of a staid and polluted, murky, embittered and fist-fought proud community, engulfed by its primal panorama. If this is sounding effulgently McKittrick Ros now, maybe it's the infectious lilt.

I had the pleasure of being present when 'Fox n Clock' and 'Molly's Soliloquy' were first played in public. Lucy Brennan's intuitive velveteen vocals were at once deliciously playful, seductive, audacious, enticing, empathic and comical with an acute sense of place and space. Her articulation places you within the mise-en-scene of Joyce's imagination, from pensive euphoric consort - the persuasively manipulative voluptuous Molly - to the bared teeth and tensile flea-bit follicles of a hair-back dog on the chase. Brennan is extremely Mollyable.

<https://necessaryanimals.bandcamp.com/track/mollys-soliloquy>

In forty-four years of music-making and serious listening, from Be-bop Deluxe and Jefferson Starship, through Mahavishnu, Mode Plagal and Morricone, Paco De Lucia, Royksop, Scott Walker, Miles, Ana Brun, Soft Machine to Bran Van 3000; Ceramic Hobs to Olga Sergeeva; Tingle In The Netherlands to

Leanne Le Havas - you get the picture - it is eeeasily one of the most exquisite and imaginative compositions I have ever heard. What I find unique about Necessary Animals and Keith Rodway, especially, is that I've rarely heard sounds that are usually quite brutalist mated so effortlessly to all other electronic and acoustic environments with an emotional receptiveness that never seeks to foist itself upon anyone. This album is a panoptic example of that.

Playboy of the Western Word can be acquired as a CD from lucybrennanshiel@icloud.com (£10.00 + p&p) or a download from Bandcamp (£6.00)

<https://necessaryanimals.bandcamp.com/album/playboy-of-the-western-word>

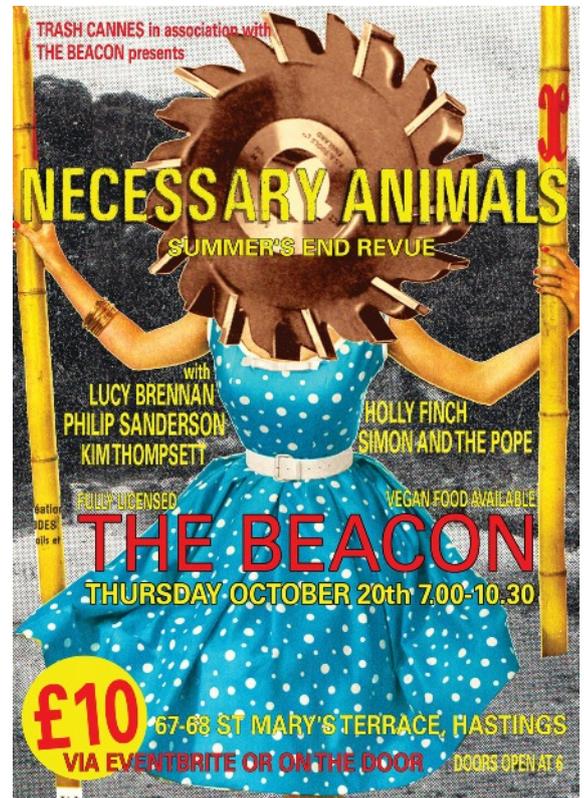
Kendal Eaton - (soundingoffuk.com)

This review first appeared in International Times, September 2022

Occult features of Anarchism, with attention to the Conspiracy of Kings and the Conspiracy of the Peoples, by Erica Laglisse
PM Press 2019
isbn 9781629635798

At their conception, freemasonry and Liberalism were closely intertwined; 200 years later, they were highly suspicious of each other; as the chair of an educational authority in the 1990s, and in terms of the budget under my control at least, one of a handful of the most powerful Liberals in the country, my collar was felt, and promptly let go. There were three Lodges within my borough council, perhaps some of the former Labour councillors that joined us we members, but I don't think any others; we did not fit.

I had hoped that this book would be reviewed by Michael Hunter, whose *The Decline of Magic, Britain and the Enlightenment* (Yale UP, 2019 *interLib* 2021-02) is likely to be the last word on the subject in academia for the next generation, as Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* was for mine. Michael had encountered too many books on magic and anarchism, most of them silly, he said; his acolytes did not wish to take up the challenge. So, the book found its way back to me. I should add that the definitive review of Michael's book might have come out of New Year's Eve 2019... we were incredibly drunk, but Yale failed to provide the review copy, so a much more restrained appraisal appeared in *interLib* later that year. Magic doesn't work that way.



So, a 33rd grade freemason (good grief) reveals that Christ was just a man on his deathbed. Well apart from an understanding of the hostility of the Roman Church to Freemasonry, what does that tell us? The obvious (I take it as the balance of probability that Jesus did exist, Michael Moorcock notwithstanding).

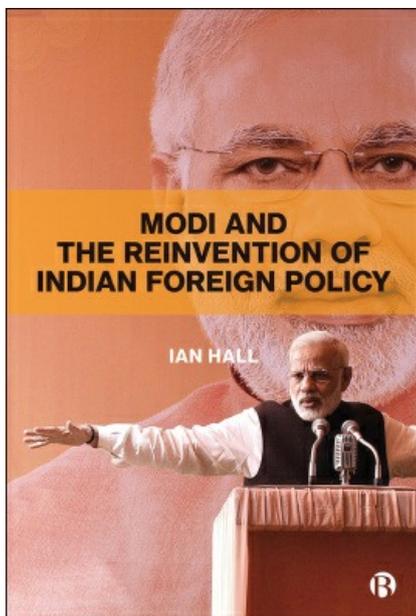
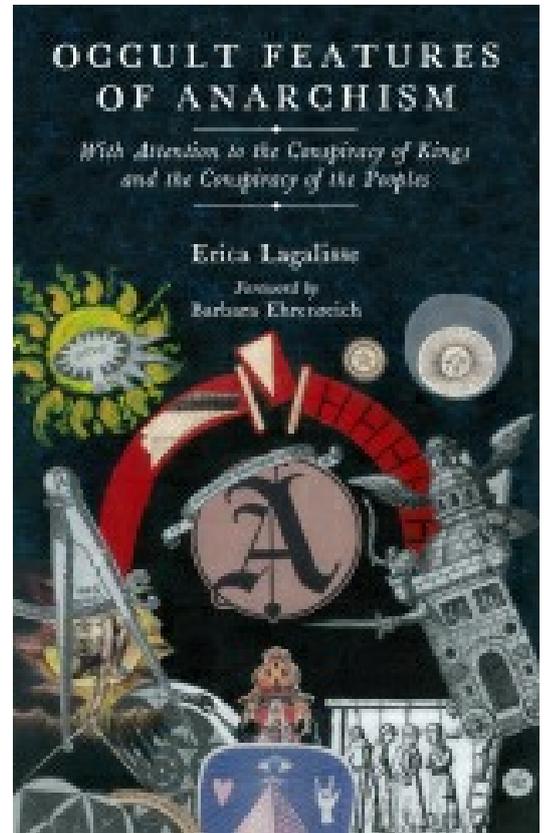
The book looks at the mystical roots of Anarchism, power relationships, and conspiracy theories. None of this is particularly startling if you are familiar with the genre. To many on the left, or progressive politics are in the thrall of Marx; interesting as an analyst of Victorian capitalism, but mistaken in his interpretation of Hegel, as are Marxists and Marxians in their thrall to Darwin, more specifically Huxley in their anthropology. I would recommend Sorel's *Decomposition of Marxism* and George Watson's *Heresies & Heretics* (reviewed 2015-01 pages 29-30) to burst the bubble. Kropotkin's riposte to Huxley, *Mutual Aid*, is frequently cited. PM Press also do a nice graphic edition of *Mutual Aid* by the way.

Starting as an investigation as to why anarchists from different cultural backgrounds (Zapatistas and college-based Americans specifically) might have misconceptions about their ideas (adherence to conspiracy theories or spiritual beliefs) and ends up with some kind of synthesis. - tolerance and getting to the bottom of such assumptions rather than down-right dismissal (which also extends into the politics of academia). Insert whatever you like for 'anarchists' and one can generalise the point. Otherwise, the romp through esoterica is familiar to those who've travelled that path, an introduction to those that haven't.

The essay *The Conspiracy of Kings and the Conspiracy of the Peoples*, is to some extent an add on, more directed to conspiracy theories. One of our Turkish correspondents had need of it, refuting the strange marriage of American Christian evangelist conspiracy theories with Islamic fundamentalism – topping and tailing virtually, in the pro-government *Takvim*, a daily newspaper that went digital after the AKP lost the municipal elections in İstanbul. So, it is in the post. La lutte continue.

Stewart Rayment

There is a podcast of Erica Laglisse speaking of this book at <https://www.lse.ac.uk/lse-player?id=4676>



Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy by Ian Hall Bristol University Press 2019 £9.50 isbn 9781529204629

The book's scope covers Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term in office, from 2014 to 2019. It lays out Modi's agenda for reinventing Indian foreign policy on Hindu nationalist principles. This translated into, for example, increased muscularity with Pakistan. His doctrine, if there was one, was an apparent shift towards realism, coupled with a focus on efficient and effective implementation. But Hall makes the case that rather than behave as a pragmatist or realist, Modi acts as a self-consciously transformational leader with a clear ideological agenda. Foreign policy delivered less in terms of building India's power and influence than was aimed at. This was due to a lack of process and consultation and lack of focus on implementation. Moreover, Modi's reinvention of foreign policy was undermined, Hall argues, by the upsurge in communal violence under Modi's watch.

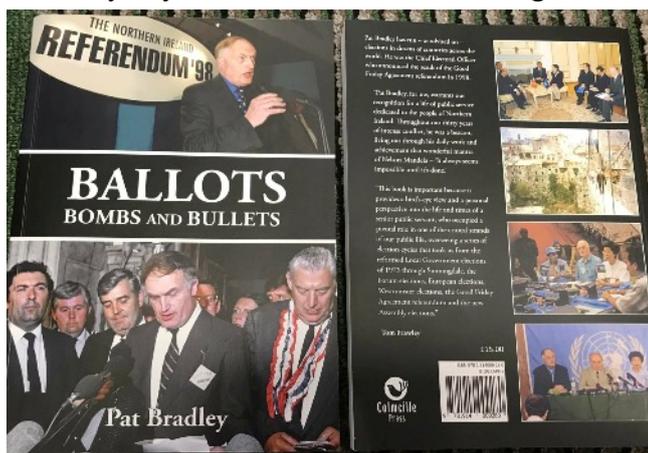
The impact on foreign relations was less important to Modi, however, than the *appearance* of making a positive impact on India’s foreign relations. While there is little concrete evidence that Indian voters choose their representatives based on foreign policy, the principal target of foreign policy messaging was domestic, not international; the author argues that Modi was convinced that personalising India diplomacy would prove electorally advantageous with his majoritarian right-wing base of supporters. He aimed to create the impression that if he as India’s representative was lauded and listened to by world leaders, then India itself must stand tall. Summits and bear hugs for world leaders were aimed at portraying himself as a statesman, elevated above the normal political fray. Polling shows that on the domestic front, Modi succeeded in making the majority of citizens perceive an improvement in India’s image abroad.

Imaduddin Ahmed

Ballots, Bombs and Bullets, by Pat Bradley
Colmcille Press 2022 £18.00
isbn 9781914009280

‘Ballots, Bombs and Bullets’ was recommended recently by Lib Dem President Mark Pack in his regular newsletter, and is the memoir of Pat Bradley CBE - who is an unsung hero of British democracy. Bradley’s remarkable career had two distinct and overlapping phases which the book outlines in detail. The first saw him in charge of running elections in Northern Ireland throughout The Troubles - where he kept electoral democracy going in a society teetering on the edge of civil war. As a result of his work and experiences there Bradley became a recognised global expert in elections and conflict resolution. That saw the UN, EU and UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office beat a path to his door to solicit his help in running elections in troubled hotspots and emerging democracies around the world. So commenced the second phase of his career, where he served as a senior/lead technical advisor in elections in 30 countries and five continents – from South Africa to Saudi Arabia, Kosovo to Hong Kong, and Russia to Lebanon.

The first part of the book outlines how Bradley secured a job in 1973 as a Deputy Electoral Officer for a large region in Northern Ireland essentially by accident, and despite his clear lack of relevant experience or prior knowledge for the role. He was based in his home city of Derry, which at that time was badly affected by The Troubles and was a challenging place in which to run elections – with paramilitary groups determined to undermine or stop the democratic process. A previously untold insight revealed in the book is that - at this very period when it was essential to ensure that democracy worked and was seen to work in NI - organisationally its electoral infrastructure was a shambles. When Bradley started his job, he was given next to no training and discovered that most of the other Deputy Electoral Officers across NI had only taken on the role to see out their years in the public sector - with little intention of actually doing much work. Bradley also found he had insufficient staff support and no suitable offices to work from, and that the basic materials needed to run elections (eg: ballot boxes etc.) were stored in a rusting shed 40 miles away from Derry. Within weeks of starting the job – and still without any training, backup or facilities - he was thrown in at the deep-end by the sudden announcement of the February 1974 General Election. It was to be the first of many elections Pat organised in challenging circumstances over the next 26 years. In 1980 he was promoted to the role of Chief electoral Officer for all of Northern Ireland, with the buck stopping with him for many key elections over the following two decades.



‘Ballots, Bombs and Bullets’ offers many fascinating insights and anecdotes into what was involved in running elections in Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles – from a 200 lb bomb left opposite Bradley’s office desk, to the time he evacuated his staff by armoured car from a polling station that was under continual attack before taking their place to ensure it remained open so the election could be deemed valid. The book also tackles the issue of voter fraud and ‘personation’ in NI - outlining the lengths some people went to indulge in the practice, and the constantly evolving responses required to tackle it. It also shines a light on the informal ‘gentleman’s

agreement' that existed between nationalist and unionist parties in NI with regards voter impersonation – with both sides engaged in the act - until the practice grew to an almost industrial scale that enabled Bradley to persuade Westminster to take action. Bradley (who was officially an independent public officer) also challenged and won a legal tussle with Margaret Thatcher after she declared to parliament that he would follow a particular course of action which he didn't agree with.

Of the many elections Pat Bradley worked on, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement Referendum was undoubtedly his magnum opus. It was crucial to the entire Peace Process that the referendum was run in a way that was beyond reproach, especially with high profile political figures and parties opposed to the Agreement's success (such as Ian Paisley and his Democratic Unionist Party). Bradley went to great lengths to ensure that the referendum was run in a watertight manner – even agreeing to sleep overnight with the completed ballot boxes to assuage Ian Paisley of his paranoia that the State might seek to interfere with them. To Bradley's credit the legitimacy of the referendum and its result has never been questioned – either at the time or since – in a part of the world where pretty much anything political gets challenged. It was a not insignificant contribution to ensuring that the path towards peace could continue to be followed within NI.

'Ballot's, Bombs and Bullets' then goes on to describe how the knowledge and expertise Bradley had acquired in NI was highly sought after by key international organisations seeking to introduce or enhance democracy in areas of conflict – particular after the Iron Curtain collapsed in the 1990s. Both before and after he retired as NI's Chief Electoral Officer in 2000, Bradley spent a number of years advising on elections in over 30 countries. He was a Technical Advisor in the first full democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 in which Nelson Mandela (who Pat met twice) was elected, as well as in the first democratic elections in post-Communist European nations like Russia. In the process of his work Pat rubbed shoulders with the Presidents of South Africa, Bosnia and Kyrgyzstan, and was even shot at in East Timor. An outline of his experiences in 20 countries is provided in the book, complete with details of various comical situations and close shaves he encountered in the process.

As well as outlining Pat Bradley's 30-year experience of running elections, the book also has a chapter giving technical background for the reader on types of democratic governance, voting systems, eligibility to vote, electoral boundaries, counting and announcing election results etc.

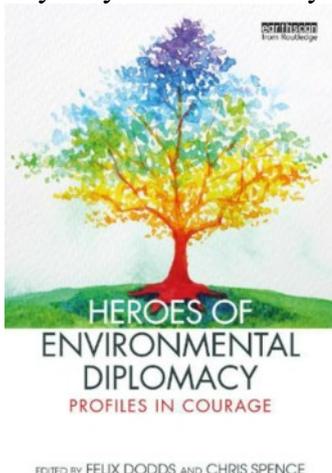
Pat was awarded an MBE in 1986 and a CBE in 1999, both 'For Service to the Electoral Process'.

'Ballots, Bombs and Bullets' will prove a fascinating read for anyone with an interest in elections, Northern Ireland or in international attempts to introduce democracy. The book costs £15 and can be bought from [Etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/1234567890) here = [Ballots Bombs and Bullets Book Pat Bradley 2022 | Etsy UK](https://www.etsy.com/uk/listing/1234567890). It is also available as an ebook on Amazon.

Steve Bradley

Heroes of Environmental Diplomacy, profiles in courage, edited by Felix Dodds and Chris Spence.
Routledge 2022 £19.99 pbk , £120.00 hbk, £17.99 ebook
isbn 9781032065441

It is frequently said that winners write history; if the people championed in this book don't win, will there be anybody to write history? The first question that the man or woman in the street might put, is Barack Obama



aside, who are these people? Cast your mind back to COP26. It certainly wasn't a triumph for Boris Johnson; he might have done better to have put Ed Davey in charge of it, the struggle of Climate Change has to be a cross-party issue and Davey at least demonstrates commitment, as well as experience of earlier COPs as Secretary of State for Energy & Climate Change. We didn't really get much information from the news coverage of COP 26, except that it wasn't really going anywhere, with China's opposition, but flip into Obama's chapter and you'll soon get a grip on the chaos behind the scenes, and why it takes the determination and commitment of these individuals to cut through the crap. As Raúl Estrada-Oyuela's Kyoto chapter testifies, the role of the chair is crucial; Alok Sharma (who?) wasn't up to it, even if he had been given the backing. Sidney Holt is a man who deserves more recognition; he died in 2019. Many older readers will have journeyed on Save the Whale demonstrations in the

1970s and 80s, but by his death there were only three commercial whaling nations, Japan, who had dropped out of the International Whaling Commission in 2018 but only pursue commercial whaling within their own 200-mile zone, Norway, and Iceland, which had resumed whaling. His book, with Ray Beverton, *On the Dynamics of Exploited Fish Populations*, first published in 1957 has remained a standard, and locally we are only beginning to address the issues with Marine Conservation Areas – short-term breaks in some waters notwithstanding.

Despite the editors' claim that their book is about people, and despite it being selective of events rather than a running narrative, it is still very much about process, and that is where its utility lies. In a few months' time, the COP moves to Egypt. I felt with Glasgow, last year, there was a failure by the media to really report what was going on, distracted by the side-shows of our own domestic politics. Whether public support or criticism can play a part in such proceedings is an open question, but one where we need to be better informed – journalists covering such events will find it eye-opening. Any of us who end up such events will find it doubly useful.

Felix Dodds will be familiar to many readers as the former chair of the National League of Young Liberals; he doesn't mention this in his biography, but it is good to know he is still fighting the fight. Chris Spence has equally good credentials.

Stewart Rayment

**Bold as Brass, by Suzanne Fletcher.
Suzanne Fletcher, 2022 £10.00 inc. Postage.
isbn 9781916464025**

Former mayor of Stockton, Suzanne Fletcher MBE, has had a long running fascination with one of the town's most important political figures since her time in office in 2006-07. However, for many, the name Brass Crosby would mean very little apart from former pupils of Grangefield Grammar/The Grange Comprehensive who might recognize it as the name of a house block.

Now, after thoroughly researching his history, Suzanne has written a book entitled *Bold As Brass?* which charts the story of a man responsible for one of the greatest changes in Parliamentary rules 250 years ago.

Brass Crosby was born in Stockton on 8 May 1725 “in one of the 430 houses there at that time”, the son of Hercules and Mary Crosby; the name Brass was inspired by Mary's maiden name. He was baptized in Stockton Parish Church. Admittedly Brass's career as a clerk, an Alderman, Attorney, Mayor and various other roles took him away from Stockton very early. His highest office was as Lord Mayor of London from 1770. Yet reading the book it is interesting to think that his origins and earliest memories were of his north east roots.

During his time as Mayor of London, the government was deeply unpopular and it was not permitted for the press to print any of what went on in Parliament. It was Brass's actions, covered partly in the chapter cheekily entitled ‘What happened in the bedroom’ (a nod at the fact he was laid up with severe gout during much of the time) which eventually led to freedom of the press to print full accounts of what was said and debated in Parliament.

Brass, who was also partly responsible for ending the press gangs rife in London that were abducting new members of the Navy, was sentenced to a spell in the Tower of London because the government were so incensed at his actions. It is Suzanne's belief that this important event in British political history deserves wider recognition, which is why she put pen to paper to write this book.

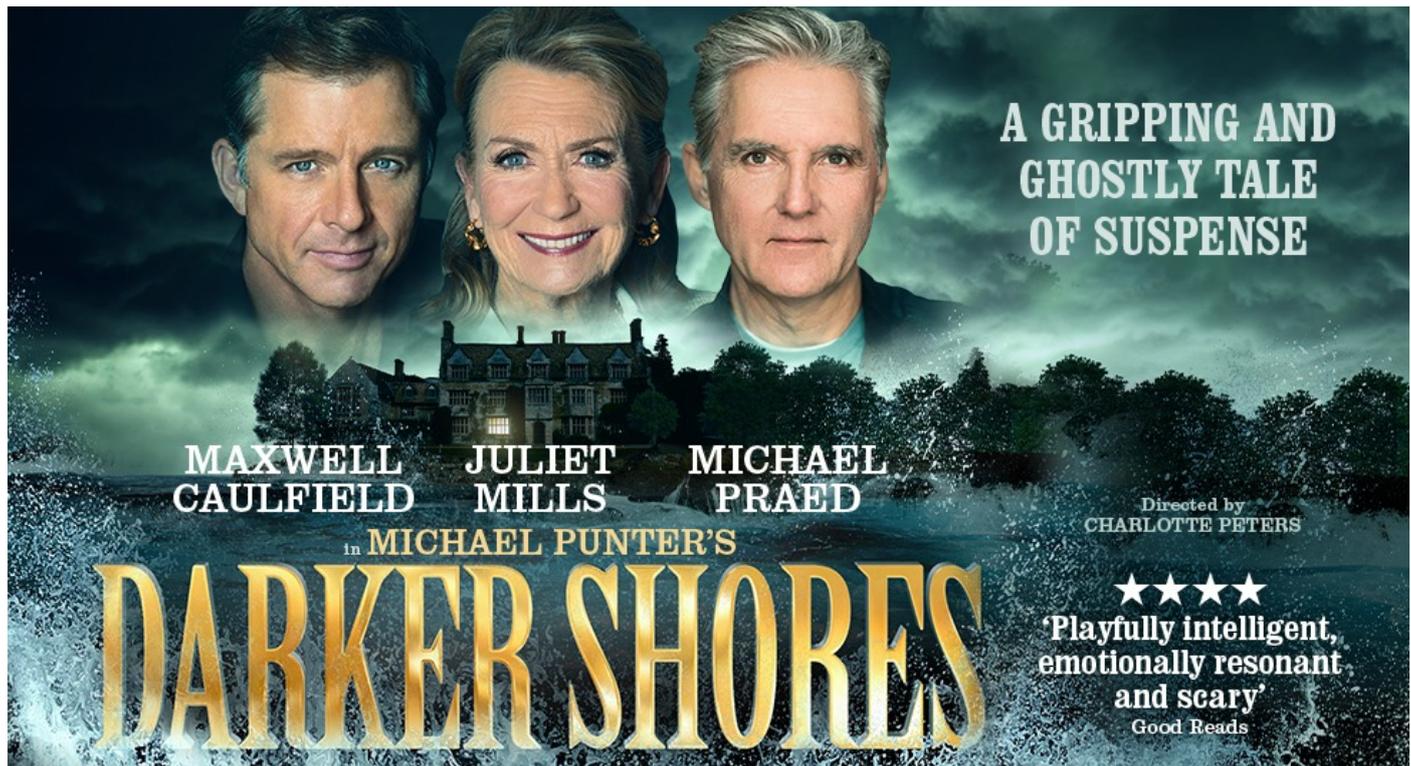
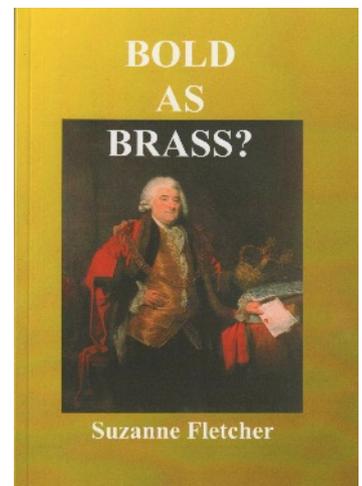
The book also looks briefly at Brass's private life, and how many cynically saw his wealth was as a result of marrying three successive wives who had fortunes which would naturally, at the time, pass to him. At the time of his death, on 5 February 1793, he and his wife Mary were living in both Chatham Place, London and Chelsfield Lodge, Kent.

Final chapters of the book look at what else was happening in politics, parliament, Stockton and the wider world at the time; what remnants of his life survive; and the interesting debate on whether he was actually *Bold as Brass* (and whether his actions actually influenced that phrase).

This is a thoroughly interesting book, charting the history of one of Stockton's less-well-known sons, who had a big impact on political life in Britain.

Copies may be obtained from Suzanne via Bold as Brass?
www.brasscrosby.co.uk or brasscrosby1725@gmail.com

Cleveland & Teesside Local History Society (<http://ctlhs.co.uk/>)



It's Christmas 1875 and Professor Gabriel Stokes (**Max Caulfield**) takes lodgings at The Sea House cared for by Mrs Hinchcliffe (**Juliet Mills**), on a desolate stretch of the East Sussex coast.

No sooner has he arrived than the troubled history of the house comes to the fore with unexplained and mysterious happenings.

Having enlisted the help of Tom Beauregard (**Michael Praed**) an American spiritualist, the two embark on a terrifying journey to discover the truth.

Following the traditions of the finest ghost stories, Darker Shores is a gripping and shadowy tale of suspense.

Opens at the Theatre Royal Windsor 12th October for 2 weeks, then one week at: Devonshire Park Eastbourne, Arts Theatre Cambridge, Malvern Theatre, Yvonne Arnaud Guildford. Tour ends last week in November.

<https://theatreroyalwindsor.co.uk/darker-shores/> 12th -22nd October

<https://www.eastbournetheatres.co.uk/index.php/events/darkershores> 24th-29th October

<https://www.cambridgeartstheatre.com/> 31st October -5th November (not on website yet)

<https://www.yvonne-arnaud.co.uk/whats-on/darker-shores> 15th-19th November

<https://www.malvern-theatres.co.uk/?s=darker+shores> 21st-26th November

Global SinoPhoto Awards 2023

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The Global SinoPhoto Awards 2023 is now open to all our previous submitting photographers and loyal followers, ahead of the official launch on 10 September 2022. The Awards invite all photographers of any background, location and nationality to tell their Chinese story; imagining, interpreting and inspiring connections between Chinese culture and values with the rest of the world. The Awards encompasses four categories, all of which need to include an element which represents photographer's view of Chinese culture. The winners will be selected by six expert judges, led by our art director Gemma Barnett.

Why you would want to enter the Awards 2023?

- The Global SinoPhoto Awards 2023 Awards Ceremony will be held in association with the British Library at its Knowledge Centre on 17th January, 2023, all submitting photographers are invited to attend online or offline.
- The Awards images will be exhibited in central London at the Fujifilm House of Photography between 17th January and 19th February 2023. We are working on announcing other exhibition opportunities throughout the year; please keep checking on the Awards' website or our social media channels.
- Your images will be presented to and judged by a prestigious judging panel. Most of them are continuing with us from previous Awards, with one new addition, Andrew Sanigar: Commissioning Editor for Photography and Design, Thames & Hudson, it is a privilege to have him onboard. Please refer to on the website for details on the judges.
- In our third year, the Awards has selected four categories: Portraiture, Food, Environment and Series. The new Series category will enable photographers to tell their Chinese story through a body of images that coalesce thematically, conceptually or aesthetically.

To submit, find out more about the Awards and to keep updated on the latest news, please visit www.sinophoto-awards.com; or to follow Instagram/Twitter: [@globalsinophoto](https://www.instagram.com/globalsinophoto); or WeChat:

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