

The Leader: Looking back at the European Elections

My regular blog has been disrupted by the Euro election campaign and its tumultuous, positive, aftermath as well as my decision to hand in my notice and trigger a leadership contest.

The Euro-campaign was defined, for me, by three rallies.

The launch of the campaign took place in Docklands, before the results of the local elections were known. The mood was cautiously optimistic; but there was some question about the impact of Change UK.

Nonetheless, **our launch** was very professional and suggested to the assembled media that **we were well organised and had a clear, simple Stop Brexit message.**

Then the spectacular 700+ gains in the local elections **transformed our image from also-rans to winners** and in my media interviews I picked up a tone of respect for the party which had long been missing.

Today we're launching our EU Election manifesto as we fight to [#StopBrexit](#)

We're fighting for Remainers across Britain who demand better than Brexit Britain. Join our campaign >
<https://t.co/dGh0Fbnixs><https://t.co/E71fH3l1qC>

– Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) [May 9, 2019](#)

Then, someone had the idea of using the slogan '**Bollocks to Brexit**'. Despite a certain amount of pompous, puritanical poo-pooing from our more priggish detractors, the **overwhelming feedback was positive** and we made this our theme. It was celebrated at the second rally in Shoreditch – **our manifesto launch** – where I caught a real sense of excitement and looming opportunity.

After that **the wind was behind us** and the issue became one of how well we were going to do.

I went to Bristol where the party activists couldn't quite believe how good their canvassing was; to Scotland where an impressive Change UK candidate had joined us; to Gibraltar for a well organised and highly satisfactory visit – rewarded by a 77% vote for the Lib Dems – and on the way was mobbed at Malaga Airport by a group of young women on a hen party: a first. Then a frantic rush round the country – Liverpool, Birmingham, Cambridge, Scotland again – meeting increasingly excited activists and spontaneously supportive crowds. **I hadn't experienced that since the General Elections in 1997 and 2010.**

There was a real sense of excitement around our campaign

The final rally was celebratory but I was nervous; I had a head-to-head debate with Nigel Farage the following morning, courtesy of the *Daily Telegraph*. Some party insiders were worried having seen Nick Clegg come off worse in a similar encounter and didn't see the point in taking the risk. I did. If we are to win the Brexit debate – and lead the Remain cause – ultimately, **Farage needs to be confronted.**

In the event, I got a good write up; Nigel was polite and avuncular, as I know he can be, becoming tetchy only when I reminded him of the hate and division his “Breaking Point” poster had sown.

The outcome overall was that no harm – and some good – was done.

Once I had been to vote at my local polling station in Twickenham, like everyone else we had to wait three days for the result. I went off to mid Wales; to speak at the Hay Festival of Light; to appear at an event in Crickhowell, in support of Jane Dodds' soon-to-be by-election campaign, and for some restorative walking in the Brecon Beacons. Rachel and I spent an idyllic weekend in a remote cottage, a B&B which was described in the literature as ‘the oldest house in Wales’ – a restored 15th century dwelling with characterful hosts who produced marvellous meals, which not have a disgraced a Michelin 5 star.

I woke up last Monday morning to read of our spectacular success: **20% of the vote and 16 MEPs** (and the courageous Alliance MEP in Northern Ireland, Naomi Long, will also join our ALDE group in the European Parliament).

Despite attempts by their spinners to portray the result as a victory for Brexit, **it was clear that the Remain parties, taken together, and won a clear victory.** It was then off to London to celebrate, with a big media scrum at Lambeth Bridge.

Better was to come. A day in Brussels last Tuesday, as part of a gathering of Liberal leaders, collectively buoyed up by all our UK results: the Lib Dems, no longer representing the British awkward squad, but being congratulated as the stars of the show!

And then the icing the cake: a **YouGov poll showing the Lib Dems on 24% for a General Election ahead of all other parties.**

I try not get carried away, but a pall of distrust and negativity that has hung over the party since the earliest days of the coalition, nine years ago, has gone.

That is a good note to go out on.

I said when I took on the leadership that I hoped to return us to fortunes nearer to those of 2010, and we are clearly now poised for such a position if a General Election is called.

Westminster voting intention:

LDem: 24% (+6)

Brex: 22% (+4)

Con: 19% (-5)

Lab: 19% (-5)

Grn: 8% (+2)

via [@YouGov](#)

Chgs. w/ 17 May

– Britain Elects (@britainelects) [May 30, 2019](#)

I spent last weekend on the South Downs with a visit to Glyndebourne with friends: a superior performance of the Barber of Seville with an amazing young Korean soprano (Hera Hyesang Park) as Rosina, a future star. And Sunday morning I spent lounging in the sun reading a Frederick Forsyth spy thriller, *The Icon*: a bit dated but finely crafted, and a reminder of what I have master if I go back to fiction writing.

This week, it has been back to Parliament, with a fair stretch of coverage on our opposition to the Trump visit, and yesterday I was with colleagues from across public life commemorating those who lost their lives on D-day.

A high point for me was Macron's reading of a 16-year old French resistance fighter's letter to his parents before execution. **It was a privilege to meet the veterans whose legacy is the luxury of a free and peaceful Europe.** We are deeply in their debt.

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Author:

[Wishing everyone a joyous Eid](#)

So you've sat there wondering how that one Muslim colleague has managed to go nil by mouth, not swear, smoke or get involved in office gossip for a whole month, and now there's a conversation about some event called Eid. There are 2 Eids in the Islamic calendar and this one, Eid-ul-Fitr is the festival to celebrate the end of Ramadan. Muslims will have made a point of rereading the Qu'ran, given at least 2.5% of excess wealth to charity and many will have fasted daily to support, what I call, the "resetting to our humble selves." **Eid involves prayer, food and communities getting together.** Fasting and giving charity are 2 of the 5 pillars in Islam.

The ethos in Islam is grounded in equality, freedom of choice, respect and diversity

Muslims come from many countries around the world and Eid is a particularly exciting time to discover a whole variety of dishes to celebrate this joyous event. A variety of foods and customs from across the Asian and African continents feature heavily and are likely to be coming to an office near you soon! One of the best things about our country is the diversity and richness infused in our society. Whether mathematics or medicine, a good chicken tikka masala, modern colloquialisms or the people who lead in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, scientific, technology and finance.

We are, however, living in troubling times. **Our society is divided with groups of people being played off against each other by those on the extremes, the media and people who should know better, such as senior politicians.** Hate crime is on the rise, especially towards Muslims. Other parties have let this country down whether fanning the flames of Islamophobia, misogyny, anti-Semitism and homophobia or talking about immigration, whether wishing to cap it or scrap it as if it is a bad thing. The discourse in this country has in some quarters, disintegrated. People are talking with each other in ways we were never raised to do so. **The respect and accountability for the words used seems to have evaporated.**

[#EidMubarak](#) A wonderful time of year following a month of reflection on our lives and those who have life challenges different to our own. Every Muslim will give at least 2.5% of their wealth to charity. Today families and friends will come together to meet, eat and celebrate <https://t.co/f6p0CUhJVf>

– Cllr Humaira Ali (@cllrhumaira) [June 4, 2019](#)

People often look surprised when I talk about Islam as a liberal religion. **The ethos in Islam is grounded in equality, freedom of choice, respect and diversity** – no compulsion in religion and each individual is accountable for their own actions to God and to those they interact with. When the Prophet Mohammed created the Charter of Medinah, he was signing into law the protection of the rights and security of all people regardless of religion, colour, socioeconomics etc and setting the standard through his own conduct on how civil society would behave. In his final sermon he also declared, **“an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor does a black have any superiority over a white, except by piety and good action”**

Liberal Democrats are proud to be citizens of the world.

Liberal Democrats are proud to be citizens of the world. **We embrace immigration, diversity and equality in all forms.** We know that the solutions to our key issues such as the climate crisis, poverty, trade, jobs and

security need us to work collaboratively with our European and international colleagues. I am especially proud that we as a party have adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia – but we need to do more. Taking a stand to Islamophobia is no different to taking a stand to anti-Semitism, homophobia, chauvinism, disability inequalities or the multiple isms which lead to intolerance.

Now is our time to stand for equalities across the board and against hate. **Let's fly flags of all colours, and seek those in our country, who share our values, to join with us.** We're already hearing disillusionment on the doors and here in Southwark, our values-based campaigning is having a huge impact in switching voters over to the Liberal Democrats.

I want to wish everyone a joyous Eid Mubarak whether you celebrate or not. And in answer to a frequent question I receive, "Yes please do ask Muslims about anything you want to know about Islam." Because knowledge breaks down the barriers.

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Author:

[We're leading in the polls! ☐](#)

YouGov and the Times released a huge new poll last night. **And for the first time since 2010, they had the Liberal Democrats in first place on 24%.**



That's right. We're fast becoming not only the biggest, strongest party of Remain, but **the biggest, strongest party full stop.**

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Chgs. w/ 17 May

– Britain Elects (@britainelects) [30 May 2019](#)

People are tired of the Tories trying and failing to force Brexit through. They're tired of Labour helping the Conservatives every step of the way. They're demanding better from politics. **They're demanding better than Brexit.**

And they're joining us in droves – we've had over 11,000 new members in May! Our momentum from our amazing local and European election results is becoming something special. We're building up into a stronger and stronger liberal movement. **The Liberal Democrats are now, without doubt, the biggest, strongest Remain party.**



So why not join us?

Not only do you become part of the biggest pro-EU family in the country, but you also get a say on our future too. **Everyone who's a member by 7th June gets a vote in our leadership election** – helping shape the future both of the party and the country.

Membership starts from just £1 and it only takes 5 minutes to sign up – **become a Liberal Democrat today.**

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Author:

Support new mothers to give them and their children the best life prospects

Today is Global Day of Parents – a day proclaimed by the UN to honour parents throughout the world. The birth of a child is a life-changing event. For many mothers, this will be the happiest time of their lives, but this is never the whole story. **New mothers can often experience mental health problems before and after birth, cope with the trauma of pregnancy and birth, and struggle with societal expectations of motherhood.**

On International Women's Day in March, I presented my second Private Members Bill to Parliament. **This bill seeks to enshrine a mother's right to mental health checks into legislation** – demanding that all mothers in the UK be given a six-week post-natal mental health check.

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Research from the National Childbirth Institute shows that 60% of new mothers feel unable to talk to a health professional about their emotional state. Some said they were embarrassed, ashamed, or worried that medical staff would think they couldn't look after their own baby. And 22% of new mothers were never asked about their emotional wellbeing at all.

Since 2004, the six-week baby check has been included as a mandatory requirement in the General Medical Services (GMS) contract. Yet the mother's mental health and wellbeing check was omitted from the contract – despite being advised by NICE guidelines. **This has led to a postcode lottery, where some women receive a thorough mental health check while others can find check-ups rushed or even skipped.**

With around one in five women experiencing a mental health problem during pregnancy or in the year after birth, **it is vital that we ensure mothers are supported.** Not only is this important for the future health of the mother, but by ensuring appropriate and early mental health support is provided for mothers the impact of mental illness on babies and young children can be reduced or removed completely.

The wider conversation around parity of esteem argues that without

mental health, the physical health of a person suffers.

The Conservative Government has said it is committed to supporting mental health services for people across the country. However, their lack of action calls this claim into doubt – **mental health services cannot exist in a vacuum and support must be threaded through our health service.**

The Liberal Democrats have long championed improving mental health support. **The wider conversation around parity of esteem argues that without mental health, the physical health of a person suffers.** This is plainly obvious in the case of a mother and her new-born child.

Motherhood and birth have too long been the remit of myth and common misconception. This Global Day of Parents we need honest conversations with mothers about what they should expect and how they may be feeling. **To allow mental health to be side-lined is a dereliction of duty of care to new mothers and their babies.**

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Author:

[Today is World No Tobacco Day](#)

Over 70,000 people still die every year in the UK thanks to smoking-related illnesses. **Lib Dems demand better preventative care measures to prevent this.**

Over fifty years on from the discovery of the true health consequences of smoking, smoking has been reduced **but still costs the lives of over 70,000 people in the UK every year.**

Public health – **preventative ways to ensure we do not just live longer but that we live the best life we can for as long as possible** – has long been a key health priority for the Liberal Democrats.

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In 2012 it was Liberal Democrat MP Paul Burstow who ensured the creation of Public Health England – to address health inequalities and ensure more delivery of public health through local authorities.

All well and good but within no time at all after the General Election in 2015, **the Conservatives had made cuts to Public Health England and year on year grants to Councils were slashed.**

We want to put public health back on the agenda. That is why public health is one of the four strands of the new Liberal Democrat Health and Social Care Policy going for debate at Autumn Conference.

[Sign up now](#)

If you stop smoking ...

After the General Election in 2015, the Conservatives had made cuts to Public Health England and year on year grants to Councils were slashed.

- Your body reacts within half an hour.
- Your blood pressure and pulse return to normal almost immediately.
- Within 24 hours your body rids itself of carbon monoxide.
- Within 48 hours your sense of taste and smell begin to return.

All of this could be achieved on World No Tobacco Day!

In five years, your risk of both heart attack and stroke drops by 50%.

The NHS understands now more than ever the role they can play in supporting people to quit smoking. Every time you see a health professional you will be asked if you smoke and if you say “yes”, you will be offered help to stop. Smoking cessation classes are the most effective in the long term and **that is why the Liberal Democrats are prioritising public health.**

Join us at Autumn Conference and help decide our future health policy

[Sign up now](#)

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