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INTERLIB

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**HARROGATE LIB DEM CONFERENCE
TURKEY TRUMP'S CHINA POLICY GERMANY**

EVENTS

21st-23rd March 2025 Liberal Democrats Spring Conference, Harrogate.

4th-6th April Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru/ Welsh Liberal Democrats Spring Conference, Holiday Inn, Castle Street, Cardiff, CF10 1XD

4th-5th April Scottish Liberal Democrats Spring Conference, Eden Court, Bishops Road, Inverness, IV3 5SA

20-23 September Liberal Democrats Autumn Conference, Bournemouth

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Photographs – Stewart Rayment, James Lewis, Bethan Williams.

Watson's World View

A remarkable few weeks have seen the world of global politics turned upside down by the change in policy ushered in by a new US administration. For Liberals worldwide, the change is deeply worrying. A civilisation which has been - for much of the time since its founding - a beacon for freedom, democracy and the rule of law has reverted to and perhaps exceeded the attacks on the freedom of its citizens last seen in the early 1950s.

Globally, the influence of the world's greatest economic power has been without parallel and often used for good. One needs think only of the global achievements of the Clinton Administration at the turn of the century. The current President has slashed overseas development aid, begun the illegal refoulement of refugees, started tariff wars with its major trading partners and pulled his country out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other important United Nations programmes.

Perhaps most urgently, he has given free rein to an aggressive Israeli government to conduct genocide against the inhabitants of neighbouring Palestine and cut military support to democratic Ukrainians defending themselves against invasion by Russia. In so doing he has undermined and put at risk the USA's democratic allies in Europe.

In short, American democracy is rapidly being replaced with autocracy, leaving Europe the only substantial bastion for freedom and the rule of law in what is (mis-)known as 'the developed world'. But in Europe itself, liberal values have been under a growing attack for almost two decades and liberal parties are suffering losses, as the recent election in Europe's most powerful country, Germany, shows.

An urgent and effective response is necessary to defend liberal values. It is good to see a rapprochement between Canada and the EU. The more limited moves by the UK to repair the fissures of Brexit leave much to be wished for. The Liberal International's Transatlantic Liberal Legislators' dialogue, to be launched in September in Toronto, is long overdue and desperately needed.

Sir Graham Watson
Chair, LI British Group
March 2025

From Limited Democracy to Dictatorship; the Sad Story of Turkey

Ahmed Kurt

As of this morning (19th March) Turkey has definitely walked into a dictatorship; main opposition candidate of the next election the mayor Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu has been detained along with more than hundred others, Mayoral officials, journalists and some businessman. There is talk of more arrest is on the way. As far as I understand he is accused of helping the Kurdish PKK and trying to overthrow the government. Because almost all the Turkish media owned by Erdoğan, now every TV channel is trying to convince the nation that İmamoğlu is guilty.

Turkish stock exchange lost more than six percent until it was shut down, also Turkish lira lost considerable value against major currencies. Istanbul is under police invasion. they have brought thousands extra police officers from other cities. Main tube stations are closed, some roads and areas closed to the public. I was told internet so slow and none of social media accounts are reachable including YouTube.

I don't think anybody will believe that there would be elections anymore. It is definitely a coup d'état. Under these economic conditions (which was bad anyway, now it's going to be much worse) the current regime could not win any election or convince anybody that they were doing good. If there is no change from the current situation (of what happened this morning) most probably Turkey will become an Islamic dictatorship or something very close.

This morning's move by Tayyip Erdoğan is a big gamble; because there is no road to go but dictatorship and that is certain after what happened this morning. Usually this would not end well. There are rumours that some of the biggest industrialists and businessmen will be targeted soon. This is the end of the Erdoğan's democracy fairy tales. He has shown his real face, his real intentions and his real route. Erdoğan never wants to leave the power that he holds. He will do whatever is necessary to keep himself in the palace even though that would cause the collapse of the country as we know it.

Ahmet Kurt

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5yren8mxp8o>

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Michael Meadowcroft

"A trashy rag run off on a photocopier."

David Steel, Lord Steel of Aikwood

And the Glee Club...

'You'll find this difficult to believe, I know, but for many Lib Dems the highlight of the party's autumn conference is not Nick Clegg's speech ("tough times... bold decisions... making a difference"). It is the Glee Club singalong.'

Atticus The Sunday Times 1st September 2013

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HARROGATE: THE INTERNATIONAL BITS

Fringe Friday mid evening 20.00–21.30

Rights Liberties Justice (Lib Dem Lawyers Association): The Domino Theory of Democracy. Is democracy and the rule of law in permanent decline?

John Sweeney, journalist and Ukrainian diarist, heads a panel to discuss whether democracy can survive oligarchy and autocracy. For full details and background reading: <https://bit.ly/RLJDemocracy>

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 6

Fringe Saturday lunchtime 13.00–14.00

Malaria No More UK: Health innovation in a changing climate: tackling disease on the front line

An event co-hosted by Malaria No More UK, Green Liberal Democrats, Liberal Democrats for International Development, and LibSTEMM, exploring the impact of climate change on global health, and the role of new technologies in preventing and managing disease outbreaks.

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 1

Liberal Reform: How the Lib Dems can re-establish themselves as the party of free trade?

Join Clive Jones MP, Tom Morrison MP and others as we discuss how the Lib Dems can re-establish ourselves as the party of free trade.

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite, Meeting Room 9

Saturday 22 March Conference Hall

16.10 Policy Motion: F14 The UK's Response to Trump Mover: Calum Miller MP (Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs). Summation: Daisy Cooper MP (Spokesperson for the Treasury and Deputy Leader).

Fringe Saturday early evening 18.15–19.15

Liberal Democrat Friends of Palestine: Hope for Gaza - Hope for Humanity The People Behind the Headlines – Join us to hear personal stories from Gazans caught in the conflict – families, doctors and charity workers speaking about their experiences but also the hopes they have for the future and how we can help.

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 2

Fringe Saturday mid evening 19.45–21.00

Liberal Democrat Friends of : Ukraine - helping in its future and its people in the UK

We will be discussing the future for Ukrainians in the UK and will have a short presentation by The Ethical Support Alliance, a UK not-for-profit, who have been working with the Lviv State University for Internal Affairs on counter corruption and professional standards interventions in Ukraine.

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 3

Liberal Democrat Friends of Hong Kong: Lessons from UN Resolution 2758 - How liberals must protect World Institutions

'What should Liberal Parties in Europe do to promote Taiwan Representation on the World Stage?' How can liberal parties work together for resilience networks not at the patronage of Beijing? Join our discussion and panel of experts from the political and academic field. *Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 4*

Liberal Democrat European Group (LDEG): How should we respond to the increasing threat and interference from Russia?

An important debate led by James MacCleary MP our Europe Spokesperson and politicians from our sister parties across Europe, where Russian interference in elections and manipulation of public discourse poses an increasingly daily threat to their future as liberal democracies.

Harrogate Convention Centre, Queen's Suite: Meeting Room 8

Fringe Saturday late evening 22.00–02.00

Glee Club

Join us for the ultimate end-of conference celebration! Pick up your copy of the Liberator Songbook at Stand 25 of the Exhibition and come 'raise the roof'!

The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Harewood Room

Reverse Kissinger and Trump's foreign policy: Why would it not work? Larry Ngan

The recent chain of diplomatic actions taken by Washington created many surprises: From their policy towards Gaza to the frequent policy changes towards Ukraine. We realised it was a watershed moment in Geopolitical history. Some argue that the current US policy is to move closer to Russia to isolate China ('PRC'). Proponents say this will be part of the grand diplomacy plan and bring a reshuffle in 21st-century geopolitics favourably for the United States' exceptionalism.

Bearing in mind that de-risking from China has cross-party support in the US, UK and EU parliaments. Yet, few had proposed the grand strategy to revive Kissinger's methodology. The question is: Would it work?

I seriously do not think it would.

What is *Reverse Kissinger*?

Before going further to explain the shortfall of Trump's foreign policy, it is better to explain the whole ideology behind it. The day before Nixon went to Beijing, there was a conversation between Nixon and Kissinger on the Sino-US relationship. During the conversation, Kissinger warned Nixon that a future president would not agree with Nixon getting cosy with China. The dialogue goes:

"Kissinger: Now, their present philosophy is different from Confucianism, but the basic principles, that if you have the correct principles, you can dominate the world. It's still inbred in their civilization.

Nixon: I realize that. I think—

*Kissinger: No, as far as he's concerned, that's correct, but I just, I'm just taking the liberty of saying this for the action when you deal with them. I think, in a historical period, they are more formidable than the Russians. And I think in 20 years your successor, if he's as wise as you, will wind up leaning towards the Russians against the Chinese. For the next 15 years we have to lean towards the Chinese against the Russians. We have to play this balance of power game totally unemotionally. Right now, we need the Chinese to correct the Russians and to discipline the Russians."*¹

Indeed Kissinger reportedly suggested the idea to Trump in 2017 and warned it is a bad idea to let Russia get too close with China. ²

According to the archive, the ideology behind Trump's Reversing Kissinger had several shortcomings. Firstly, this strategy was created at the peak of the Cold War, **and Kissinger still carried forward the mentality of the past into the current multi-pole geopolitical world:** In his mind, it was only NATO versus the Warsaw Pact, China is the key player in the Third International but it was never as dominant as the other two. Secondly, **the economy and national interests of Russia and China changed dramatically** and the Cold War mentality is no longer relevant. Last but not least, **the dynamics of US foreign policies and its allies had changed dramatically**, in particular during Trump's second term.

A brief review of geopolitics between USSR, PRC and US in the 1960s and 1970s

A quick review of what geopolitics was like in 1972, the year President Nixon made that watershed trip to the People's Republic of China. From the 1950s onwards, Nikita Khrushchev, the former Soviet leader, adopted the de-Stalinization policy. It caused tension with Chairman Mao, the leader of the People's Republic of China, who accused Khrushchev of Revisionism. Mao was also annoyed with Khrushchev's rapprochement

with more liberal (*relatively*) Eastern European states such as Yugoslavia, in addition to the disagreements on social and economic policies. The relations between the PRC and the USSR worsened significantly. The border conflict between these two nations near Damansky island in Manchuria in 1969 further deteriorated their relationships. The conflict ended with a Soviet victory and a ceasefire was ordered with a return to the status quo ante bellum. As a result, China sought relations with the United States to counterbalance the Soviet threat, which resulted in Kissinger's secret visit to China two years after the ceasefire.

We must remember, that when President Nixon had his handshake with Chairman Mao in Beijing, the PRC was largely an agricultural state, and the economy was largely dominated by state enterprises. Unlike the Soviet Union, which was already an industrialised nation.:

Structure of PRC GDP in different sectors³

Year	GDP Share on Agriculture	GDP Share on Industry	GDP Share on Services	Total GDP in Billions US\$
2024	6.78%	36.48%	56.75%	18,943.29
1972	32.36%	42.70%	24.94%	113.87

National Bureau of Statistics of China.

Around 1/3 of the PRC's GDP came from agricultural products. And even though the industrial sector may have had a significant share of its GDP, most of it was for internal consumption. Meanwhile, there were only a few options for its product to be exported. Since the PRC had severed its trading relations with the USSR. Export share with the Soviets dropped from 48% in 1959 to around 2% in the 1970s. Hong Kong and Japan became the leading export markets of PRC goods. There was a reason why Mao referred to Hong Kong as a window to the rest of the world at that time. The former British colony was one of the few places where the PRC could export their products to earn foreign currency.

In China's view, the PRC achieved energy independence at the Sino-Soviet split. That was the time when the Daqing Oil Field entered its 8th year of full production⁴. With a relatively shallow industrial sector, the Daqing Oil Field would be able to fulfil the domestic demand of the PRC, and it would no longer need to import petroleum product from the Soviet Union. Therefore, it would be easier for PRC to decouple its economic link with USSR.

To sum up: First, the geopolitical tension with the USSR and, second, the economic factor which motivated China seeking rapprochement with the United States in 1972.

How about the relationship between Russia and China now? Unfortunately, both criteria which will motivate China to decouple from Russia no longer exist.

Current PRC and Russia geopolitical dynamics (National interest had changed dramatically)

Very importantly, the border dispute between Russia and China had been largely resolved under the border agreement in 2003. China was granted control over Tarabarov Island (Yinlong Island), Zhenbao Island, and around 50% of Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island (Heixiazi Island), near Khabarovsk.

China is no longer a third nation under two superpowers. In recent years, Vladivostok literally became an entrepôt for the China internal trade between Jilin province and the rest of China. According to a document published by the Chinese Customs Control in 2023⁵, all goods transported from or to Jilin via Vladivostok, are being treated as internal trade, and can be exempted from all export and import procedures. Some will say the city is functioning akin to a Northern Chinese city. The border tension became non-existent particularly after the inauguration of Blagoveshchensk-Heihe Bridge in 2019, not to mention Russia performed more than 100 joint military exercises with China since 2017 and a lot of them were related to the Golden Horn Bay⁶

National Interests indeed become very special friendships. Even though there were moments when nationalists in China caused rows about the sovereignty of Vladivostok, neither the PRC nor Russian governments started any diplomatic initiatives to renegotiate the matter.

As importantly, we should also remember in the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship, Article 9 of the treaty has similarities to NATO's Article 5 in that it commits both parties when one is threatened, to "immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats".⁷

If Trump wanted to persuade Putin to abandon China, the diplomatic hurdle he faced would be much higher than Kissinger persuading Mao to abandon the USSR.

Next, political ideologies have changed. One factor which caused tensions between the USSR and the PRC was the ideological difference. In the case of Putin and Xi, there are few differences between them. Both had an authoritarian tendency, both believed in repressive domestic policies, both were socially conservative towards LGBT rights, and both were very repressive in their policy towards ethnic minorities, in particular towards Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Tatars in Crimea. Both the PRC and Russia adopted strong state intervention towards their economy, and both had a strong one-party rule. To put it simply: The ideological difference between Mao and Khrushchev-Brezhnev had long been gone.

The only tension between Xi and Putin would be their attitude towards the Russo-Ukrainian War, and the strategy towards the economic sanctions. However, even though China tried to gain a foothold in Ukraine and the EU after Trump became the US President for the second time, there is no sign of how it could affect Sino-Russian relations, largely because of the current economic dynamics between today's China and Russia.

China's Dominance in Sino-Russian Economic Dynamics (economic interests of Russia and China had changed dramatically)

Since Putin's Russia second invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he assumed his "*special military operation*" could end in weeks. He seemed unprepared for a prolonged conflict. However, when the war prolonged from weeks to years, and the unexpected economic sanctions from the West kicked in, Putin was trying to get China onto its side to soften the impact of economic sanctions. President Xi tries a balanced action with the intention to gain favourability for the PRC. On one hand, he allows assistance on military goods, but just short of direct ground troops intervention. On the other hand, he was following some economic sanctions, in particular, related to financial transactions, preventing secondary sanctions from the West on China.

If Trump was trying to persuade Putin to distance from China under the Reverse Kissinger ideology, this would not work because the economic dynamics between China and Russia changed dramatically since 1972. Let us review what happened in these years.

China became the global manufacturing powerhouse since Deng Xiaoping's economic reform in the 1980s, and its appetite for natural resources grew year by year. A former main exporter of raw materials, China became the largest importer of materials such as crude oil in 2023.

The following table shows the list of the top 5 oil importers in 2023, and how much crude oil they imported:

Country/Region	Crude oil imports (bbl/day est.)
China	11308860
United States	6480000
India	4674455
South Korea	2734694
Japan	2546159

Source: CEIC data 2023⁸

As shown in the table above, China imported more crude oil than the United States and India combined. When we combined the data on the structure of Russian exports to China, we found out Russia is so heavily reliant on China to earn foreign currency: in 2023, 54% of Russian exports were to China, which amounted to USD129 billion. 60.7 billion came from crude petroleum, and 11.7 billion came from natural gas. It was more than half of the total value of Russian exports to China.⁹

If Trump assumed that Reversing Kissinger would hammer China's ability to maintain its industrial capacity, he would have had to ignore the fact that Russia heavily relied on China to earn its foreign currency. **The US does not have the appetite to consume that much petroleum imported from Russia. Europe will also lack the appetite to return to the days of dependency on Russian gas.**

The Russo-Ukrainian War further complicated the issue since Russia relied on Hong Kong as a free entrepôt to avoid military and economic sanctions. A report published by Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, with data largely based on the Centre for Advance Defence Studies (C4ADS), demonstrated that Hong Kong's exports of semiconductors to Russia almost doubled after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Between August and December 2023, 40 per cent of the USD2 billion worth of shipments to Moscow contained goods on the US and EU lists of advanced components – including semiconductors, computer processors, digital storage units, and integrated circuits – many of them sought by Russia for its war effort. The report also identified numerous locally registered companies that are working with Russia, Iran and North Korea to facilitate their shipping needs, including the transport of sanctioned oil and gas.¹⁰

A few other reports published by OE Data Integration Network – US Government, Centre for Defence Reform Ukraine, and Royal United Service Institute for Defence and Security Service (RUSI) further indicated that several Hong Kong-based companies are the primary suppliers for SMT-iLogic3, such as Asia Pacific Links, Xinghua Co Ltd and Sinno Electronic Co Ltd. The semiconductors were used to manufacture Orlan-10 drones. Not only did Russians import the semiconductors from these companies; companies such as Asia Pacific Links were controlled by Russians in Chinese territories.

In 1972, China largely decoupled from the USSR in terms of their trading relations. That made US rapprochement with China much easier despite their ideological difference. When Trump attempted to use the same trick on Putin and persuaded him to abandon China by lifting economic sanctions and reactivating Nord Stream 2, the hurdle he would face would be significantly higher because the USA would not have the capacity to fulfil Russian needs.

Further Complications of Chaos Diplomacy towards *Reverse Kissinger*: EU, Russia, and the US

When Napoleon Bonaparte tried to impose a naval blockade and embargo on the United Kingdom during the Napoleonic War, it was Russia who violated the policy and caused the blockade to fail. The key word of any diplomatic policy is 'cooperation', otherwise it could easily end up in failure.

The same can be applied to any foreign policies towards Russia after the Russo-Ukrainian war. The economic sanctions were successful at the early stage of the war due to the cooperation among like-minded countries. This included kicking Russia out of SWIFT, the embargo of crude oil exports, and the secondary sanctions, which caused China to stop accepting payments from Russian banking institutes.

However, Trump and his Mandarins lived in the past. They assumed the possibility of only having the US, Russia and China dominating the world in superpower exceptionalism. They ignored the fact that in the 21st century, the world is much more multi-polar. Both the European Union and the South America are much stronger in terms of their economic capacity and international status. It was no longer the 1970s when the geopolitics was dictated by two superpowers.

Complications also involve contradictions from within. Since Trump was elected, he adopted several policies which contradicted the goal of Reverse Kissinger to pull Russia on his side and isolate China.

Back in February 2025, Trump was cutting Ukraine's military aid step by step, first on the ammunition, then on weapon delivery, and intelligence sharing, and now there are allegations of cutting Starlink communications. The purpose of these actions, according to Trump, was to end the war, and let Russia get what it wanted, and the Russians would be kinder with the US. If it was the move to pull away both Russia from China, it had a few complications. The first one was that Ukraine had already approached China for diplomatic support, and China already stepped up its diplomatic action. The recent examples were 1. the open market agreement between Ukraine and China on Ukrainian peas and wild aquatic products¹¹; and 2. China announced its opposition to the US and Russia talks on ending the war without Ukraine and the EU.¹²

EU's re-approaching China out of anxiety. One other issue Trump overlooked was when the European Union imposed sanctions on China on several areas back in March 2021. They included blacklisting companies, arms embargo and cyber sanctions. They included blacklisting companies, arms embargo and cyber sanctions. They resulted from not only cooperation among EU member states but also with the United States. When Trump chose to distance himself from the EU over Ukraine, some European countries started softening their relationship with China. The recent examples are 1. EU parliament removed the restrictions on EU MPs meeting with China¹³; 2. EU Commissioner called for new efforts to improve relations between Brussels and Beijing¹⁴; and 3. The UK government's imminent approval of the planning permission for the new Chinese embassy complex in the centre of London¹⁵. In other words, Trump is trying to collaborate with someone from his enemy by betraying natural allies. The result is those allies isolating Trump collectively instead. Under these circumstances, it would be questionable whether the sanctions can still function well if the EU softened its stance towards China.

Intelligence and long-term national security. Intelligence and long-term national security. Trump's domestic policy also brought some confusion to the Reversing Kissinger policy. Intelligence sharing, for example, is crucial for national security in any confrontation against China. The Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance took an active role in maintaining national security against the threat from China since 2018, and together with France, Japan and Germany (The Five Eyes plus Three) against the threat from Russia. However, since the allegedly pro-Russia Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard took office in the Trump administration, the Trump administration became increasingly pro-Russia. There are already talks among members of the 'Five Eyes plus Three' on setting up their own Eyes to prevent confidential information from leaking to Russia via the United States, or the intelligent sharing was cut off completely. Germany, for example, proposed the idea of the 'Euro Eye' to counter the threat of the US's sudden cut-off of intelligence sharing.¹⁶

Countering Belt and Road. Another example was the cut of The United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was supposed to implement programs in global health, disaster relief, socio-economic development, environmental protection, democratic governance, and education in developing countries, particularly Africa and South America. Since China adopted Belt Road Initiatives in the 2000s, USAID became the institution to counter this scheme by providing grants to developing countries. As Senator Roger Wicker (Republican) said, "I have felt for a long time that USAID is our way to combat the Belt and Road Initiative, which is China's effort to really gain influence around the world, including Africa and South America in the Western Hemisphere."¹⁷

It was a consensus among Republicans and Democrats that cutting aid too aggressively may give a win to China on the world stage. As Michael Sobolik, a China analyst at the conservative Hudson Institute think tank and a former aide to Senator Ted Cruz once said, '(On cutting USAID) ... Do not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Beijing is hoping we do exactly that.'¹⁸

Conclusion

Kissinger's rapprochement with China in 1972 could only happen when the USSR and China were at odds, and the near total decoupling between China and Russia in terms of their trade relations. In contrast, the Sino-Russia relationship has been at its peak in recent years, and both China and Russia rely on each other in terms of their trade.

The Trump administration may try their best to decouple Russia from China, but the USA just does not have

what China had to persuade Putin to do so. Even if Trump is willing to give up on Ukraine, Russia will hardly have incentives to give up on its neighbouring PRC.

Our Party's proposed policies at this conference which we gladly gave our input: Our party rightfully stands with Ukraine, wary of authoritarian regimes such as Russia and China and supports civil liberty movements overseas. We should endeavour to continue our initiatives. In this Spring Conference, our foreign affairs spokesperson Callum Miller will table motion 'F14 The UK's Response to Trump'. It included how to tackle the challenges of the Trump administration. This motion, highlighted our concern about cutting the USAID, and its complications towards Global South which is already under the influence of Belt Road Initiatives. The motion also proposed several policies which would allow the UK to prepare for the potential impact of the US Reverse Kissinger policy, such as:

- a) Protecting our democracy as a national security priority.
- b) Taking influence dominance out of politics by capping donations to UK political parties.
- c) Working closely with European and other democratic allies to coordinate our response to Russian interference and other authoritarian regimes.
- d) Enforcing existing laws to limit the abuse of power by US 'Big Tech' firms and the spread of disinformation on social media.
- e) Cooperating with Norway, Türkiye and other willing NATO allies.

Larry Ngan

Larry Ngan is a member of the Liberal Democrats Federal International Relations Committee (FIRC) and Chair of the Lib Dems Friends of Hong Kong. He contested Folkestone & Hythe at the 2024 general election. Larry is writing in a personal capacity.

National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Tapes, Oval Office, Conversation No. 671–1. Can be obtained in the Office of the Historian website under 'Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972'. Source: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17/d192>

² Asawin Suebsaeng, Andrew Desiderio, Sam Stein, Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, 'Henry Kissinger Pushed Trump to Work with Russia to Box in China', Research Institute for European and American Studies, 5th August 2018.

³ National Bureau of Statistics of China.

⁴ Premier Zhou Enlai reported during the 2nd National People's Congress on 3rd December, 1963 that China became self-sufficient on oil production and supply and no longer required importing Petroleum from other countries. Source: National Museum for Modern Chinese Scientist website.

⁵ Frédéric Lemaître and Benoît Vitkine, 'Beijing greenlit to use Russian port of Vladivostok for its domestic trade' *Le Monde*, 26th May, 2023

⁶ Mark A. Green, 'China and Russia: Quietly Going Steady?', *Wilson Centre*, 29th October 2024.

⁷ "Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation". www.fmprc.gov.cn. Archived from the original on 5 June 2011. Retrieved 19 April 2022.

⁸ CEIC data, 'Crude Oil: Imports'. <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/crude-oil-imports>

⁹ Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), 'China/Russia'. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/rus>

¹⁰ Selwyn Parker, 'Hong Kong keeps Russia's dark fleet afloat', *the Interpreter*, 3rd Sept 2024.

¹¹ 'The Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine signed an agreement to expand the list of Ukrainian agricultural exports to China', *Odessa Journal*, 6th March 2025.

¹² 'China opposes US-Russia talks on ending war without Ukraine and EU', *Ukrainian World Congress*, 7th March 2025.

¹³ Finbarr Bermingham, 'European Parliament removes curbs on lawmaker meetings with China', *South China Morning Post*, 7th March 2025.

¹⁴ Emanuele Bonini, 'Von der Leyen now looks east: India and China as alternatives to Trump's America', *EUNews*, 21st January 2025.

¹⁵ 'Chinese Embassy Plan in London Sets Off Opposition', *New York Times*, 20th February 2025. ¹⁶ Chris Lunday, 'German lawmakers float 'Euro Eyes' spy network amid uncertainty on US intel', *Politico*, 7th March 2025.

¹⁷ Sheidlower, Noah; Tan, Huileng, "The USAID shutdown could make China more powerful. Beijing is already pouring billions into countries around the world", *Business Insider*, 7th February 2025.

¹⁸ Gramer, Robbie; Bazail-Eimil, Eric; Kine, Phelim, "As USAID retreats, China pounces". *Politico*, 10th February 2025; and Matza, Max, "Unions sue Trump administration over USAID agency cuts". *BBC News*, 7th February 2025. 11

GERMANY'S FEDERAL ELECTIONS

On 25th February, Sir Graham Watson chaired a meeting for LIBG and LDEG members to review the results of the German Federal Elections, held 2 days before. This also provided an opportunity to examine the zeitgeist, and take the political temperature in the Federal Republic. The three excellent speakers, Thomas Hacker (now formerly) FDP member of the Bundestag, Silvana Koch-Mehnin former MEP and Vice Chair of the European Parliament, and Rob Harrison, a British citizen living in Germany and FDP European Parliamentary candidate.

Germany is still the great steam engine pulling the EU along, not only economically but also as a beacon for democracy. But the recent economic downturn and the increasing unsettled international situations have led to a loss of confidence in itself and its relationship with the EU, plus internal factors around what some feel is uncontrolled immigration, rising crime and violence, and the continuing disparity between the economies and living conditions in the old East and West of the country.

And like the rest of Europe, Germany is under pressure from the mad Bear in the Kremlin and the (possibly even madder) Orange Cockatoo in the White House. Germany needs the protection given by NATO, but it also relies on Russian gas. No amount of wind turbines can make up for the lack of gas and oil, the lack of which was partly behind Hitler's ill-advised and ultimately ill-fated invasion of Russia in 1941.



Observers both within Germany and abroad fear a return to the 1930s, the Weimar days. Markus Soder, Bavaria's CSU premier wrote that "There is a political catechism in Germany that the Nazis were able to gain a foothold because the Conservatives let them in to the coalition of 1933." He fears that the two big Volksparteien (CD/CSU and the SPD) of the past 60 or so years are losing support, and Germany could fragment into splinter groups of the Far Right and Far Left.

Do the results of this latest Federal election bear him out? Let us look at the results

CDU/CSU	Friedrich Mertz	208 seats	14,158,432 votes (28.52%)
AfD	Alice Weidel	152 seats	10,327,148 votes (20.8%)
SPD (16.41%)	Olaf Scholz	120 seats	8,148,284 votes
Grüne	Robert Habeck	85 seats	5,761,476 votes (11.61%)
Die Linke	Heidi Reichinnek, Jan van Aken	64 seats	4,355,382 votes (8.77%)
SSW	Stefan Seidler	1 seat	76,126 votes (0.15%)

Mertz's CDU/CSU won as expected, as Scholz's coalition was seen as not performing.

Other parties did not make the 5% threshold, including the Liberal FDP 2,148,878 votes 4.33%, (down from 7% last time) which was in the previous coalition government

The first speaker Thomas Hacker of the FDP lost his seat, as Graham said, "it is very often the junior partners in the coalition who suffer the most". Thomas noted that the most disturbing aspect of this election was that far right party, the so-called Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubled the amount of seats and its percentage of the vote "so one-fifth of our population of voters chose the far right party; the AfD is the nice face of the National Socialists, the Nazis we had in former times", now the strongest opposition party in the Deutsche Bundestag. All other parties besides the Left party (Die Linke) did not do well, especially Mertz's CD, which had expected far more votes than it finally received."

The only other real winner was the extreme Left party Die Linke, born of the former Communist Party which most believed to be dead. Social media and TikTok played a huge part in their campaign.

So, to the Alternative für Deutschland, the AfD and their whopping 20.8%, the one-fifth. But before we throw our hands up in horror at the prospect of a renewed Nazi Germany, it is only one-fifth. (We have to remember Haider (now dead) and his very far Right Austrian Freedom Party getting 27% of the votes in 1999. There was a similar reaction.) Nearly 80% of German voters did not vote for the AfD, but we must ask who did and why.

The AfD is both backward looking (to the glories of Prussian Imperialism) and totally of the Now, capturing the post globalist fears of the voters. Its leader, Alice Weidel has an international banking background and is clever and persuasive. The party has dropped its policy for Germany to leave the EU (“Dixit”) before the election but still vaunts the idea of the return of the nation state. This vision of Europe echoes those of the Right-wing in the Netherlands, France, Italy, some Eastern European countries and Scandinavia. The AfD persuaded its voters that the old democratic establishment is becoming exhausted and weakening and went in like a wolf. Many of her supporters suffered from the “shy voter syndrome” and would never admit openly to voting for the AfD (like our Reform voters in the UK?)

So who are these shy voters? Young men seemed to have voted in disproportionate numbers for the AfD and young women in disproportionate numbers for the Far Left, according to Thomas Hacker. This gender divide is becoming disturbingly more common (more men voted for Trump than women, for example). Most of the AfD voters live in what is perceived to be the left behind East of Germany, but not all. In the 18-24 age group, 26% voted for the Left and 21% for the AfD. Its support dwindles as the age profile increases, being least popular with the over 70s. Crime and immigration, soaring housing costs and fears of military conscription if Germany goes to war are issues which are driving the young voters away from the centre parties. Thomas Hacker cites a poll by the Edelman trust which says that in the same 18-24 age group 51% of those of the white males feel that they are discriminated against and want radical solutions to this.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, a looked at the wider world and Germany’s place in it. She fears that the challenge to create a strong, centrist coalition (like the past coalition) will create internal instability, and that instability will be felt across Europe, at a time when European unity is needed more desperately than ever before. “There is a clear leadership message from Europe. From that perspective, turn to what’s going on in Germany, it matters, because as I said, Germany is the biggest economy in Europe, it’s geographically at the centre, it’s also very strongly embedded and committed to the European idea”

Germany is expected to form a new coalition government between Friedrich Mertz’s CDU/CS alliance and the SPD. One of their first challenges is energy transition, and Mertz is also promising a massive German infrastructure fund. Europe needs its steam engine back on track, and, given the threats in our volatile world, by extension; so does the UK.

Wendy Kyrle Pope



Contextualising Taboo: Leigh Bowery and the Media

Stephen Brogan

Between January 1985 and May 1986, the Australian fashion designer and performance artist Leigh Bowery (1961-94) hosted Taboo, a now notorious nightclub held on Thursdays at Maximus, in London's Leicester Square. Bowery and Taboo are the focus of 'Outlaws: Fashion Renegades of 80s London'¹, a new exhibition at The Fashion and Textile Museum. The show draws together the designers of the capital's urban streetwear and clubwear who frequented Taboo, the premise being that the club's clientele was an especially creative crowd that also included pop stars, film makers, artists, and stylishly dressed nightclubbers.

It is the first exhibition held in London devoted to this predominantly LGBTIQ+ subculture of some forty years ago, and to its credit it places the clothes that Bowery designed within their immediate context, something that none of the books devoted to him have done. Yet the title itself quickly raises an eyebrow. Outlaws? Renegades? These were nothing of the sort. Rather, they were fashion designers, many of whom sold their clothes in Kensington and on Bond Street and were happy to dance at Taboo to mainstream pop such as Wham and Madonna. Hardly William Burroughs' territory.

The exhibition has been a labour of love for its curators, but its misleading title points to a bigger concern, namely, the tendency for Taboo to be over-hyped within the media. It is often discussed in isolation, presented as 'the place to be in mid-1980s London', an exclusive bacchanalian club with a strict door policy, packed with a dressed-up clientele of hedonistic, artistic types. This is exemplified in the article in *The Face* that marked Taboo's first birthday (*The Face*, March 1986). Obviously, there is some truth in this, but Taboo was far from being the only decadent and creative club in the capital at this time.

Alternatively, Taboo is bookended by two other clubs that have also received a disproportionately large amount of media attention, Steve Strange's Blitz (the home of London's New Romantics, that ran from 1979-80) and Shoom (the acid house club that ran from 1987-90). This approach, however, reduces the history of London's nightclubs during the 1980s to three giants, with some also-rans mentioned briefly.

Beginning with the media coverage that Taboo received during its lifespan, it was regularly featured in style magazines such as *i-D* and *The Face*, and in listings magazines such as *City Limits*. It was also a key component in the 25-minute documentary commissioned on Bowery by London Weekend Television for its arts series, *South of Watford*², broadcast in the spring of 1986. The coverage focused on Bowery and his circle of friends – his 'All Gay Family' as *i-D* dubbed them – all of whom wore his clothes and frequented his club (*i-D*, April 1985).

Bowery was originally an Australian fashion student who moved to London in 1980 determined to become part of its alternative nightclub set³, achieving this primarily by the media coverage given to his startling fashion collection of 1984 that radically re-worked glam rock clothes and spearheaded the first 1970s revival. The other key members of the 'All Gay Family' included Trojan (née Gary Barnes), artist and muse to Bowery; Marc Vaultier (née Golding), drag-queen doorman of Taboo; Rachel Auburn, fashion designer and DJ at Taboo; David Walls, Bowery's good friend and flatmate.

Most of Taboo's press coverage was found in the nightclub listings and reviews sections, alongside other ground-breaking clubs that, unlike Taboo, all put on shows or bands. Major players included Philip Sallon's Mud Club, at which Vivienne Westwood showed her collections; Heaven's alternative Thursday night called Asylum; The Hippodrome, that had a gay Monday night and an alternative Thursday night at which the likes of Divine and Marilyn both performed; Bolts, the north London gay club that held Hi-NRG-related PAs; and The Batcave, London's best-known goth club that had its own cult, in-house band, The Specimen. Like Taboo, these clubs all operated strict door policies to protect their character and their clientele, and like Taboo, they all attracted pop stars and other creative types, as well as a dressed-up, sexually diverse crowd. Indeed, cross-pollination was the order of the night, with clubbers socialising at a variety of different nightclubs.

Taboo closed abruptly after sixteen months, following an article in the *Mail on Sunday's You Magazine* (1 June, 1986) that revealed widespread drug use at the club. Once again, the media shaped perceptions of Bowery's nightspot. Since then, the mythologising of the club has been on a slow but steady burn in magazine articles and documentaries, often those that highlight the 'alternative' culture of Thatcher's London, while Boy George's musical *Taboo*⁴ has also kept the flame alight. The club's posthumous

Stray from the Conference, What to do in Harrogate

Harrogate has an added attraction since Tim Gordon regained the seat from the Conservatives, who had held it since 2010 when Phil Willis retired. Fly the Liberal Democrat flag and support local businesses in appreciation of their votes!

It is a long time since we were last here. I recall turning up at The Cairn, the conference hotel, and the manager proudly showing us all of the real ale he had laid on for the event. “Ha ha”, we replied, “we’ll drink that tonight”, and did; by the end of the conference he was scraping around for every spare barrel he could lay his hands on, and told us that per head of delegate we had out drunk the Licensed Victualler’s, who’d been there the week before, and they didn’t pay for their’s. He was duly promoted for his efforts.

Harrogate is well served in CAMRA’s Good Beer Guide 2025; the Devonshire Tap House, Devonshire Place, Harrogate Tap, Station Parade, Little Ale House, Cheltenham Crescent, Major Tom’s Social, The Ginnel, Oatlands, Coronation Grove, the Old Bull, Royal Parade, Starling, Oxford St, the Tap on Tower St, and of course the Winter Gardens, royal baths. There are more in Knaresborough.

Harrogate is, of course, synonymous with tea, home of Taylors Yorkshire Tea, and a must visit when in the town is Betty’s Tea Room, though I think no longer on its original site of 1919, it is now in Parliament Street, somewhere to slip out to during some of the duller party business. No, the Betty’s in York is not the original. One should also buy Farrah’s toffee for friends who couldn’t make it and raffle prizes for you next social event. They will customise for you (enquiries@farrahs.com)

A good walk around The Stray to get over the night’s excesses will give you a sense of how important urban open spaces are in a town, especially one that depends heavily on tourism for its local economy. See how North Yorkshire & York runs as a model for the future with Labour’s ill-thought-out local government upheavals and building programmes.

Stewart Rayment

Secrets of the Majestic exhibition: The Mercer Gallery until 31st March 2025, free.

'Dare you enter... the toilets?'

This exhibition shows comic artwork inspired by the famous gents’ washroom of the Majestic Hotel - an opulent porcelain palace of gilded splendour.

Secrets of the Majestic is an 88-page comic book anthology of stories set in, and based around, this wondrous space and seeking to answer one burning question... Why are they like that?

The Majestic opened in 1900 as a grand new hotel for Harrogate’s affluent spa visitors. Famous for its plush décor and splendid service, the Majestic became a major landmark in the town, a by-word for classy luxury. Bizarrely, the hotel’s spacious, ground floor men’s washroom became a famous destination in its own right, with its black and white chequer-tiled floor, elegant wood panelling, Victorian brassware, and even a bench for visitors to sit and admire the magnificent surroundings.

For the past few years, artists and illustrators, too, have marvelled at these gents’ loos, when the Majestic has hosted the annual mid-convention party for Thought Bubble, the UK’s largest festival of comic art which draws international artists and fans to Harrogate each November.

Sheffield-based artist Chris Mole was inspired to put together a collection of short stories by comic artists, each exploring different explanations and theories for such an opulent porcelain palace, running the gamut from horror to action, to science fiction and fantasy. Secrets of the Majestic was successfully funded on Kickstarter in November 2023 and was debuted at Thought Bubble Comic Art Festival 2024, accompanied by this exhibition of selected original artwork and pinups at the Mercer Art Gallery.

Supported by DoubleTree by Hilton Harrogate Majestic.

The Mercer Gallery is at 31 Swan Rd, Harrogate HG1 2SA.

Sue Williams: 1947-2025

Many Liberals were greatly saddened to learn of the death of Sue Williams on 9th February at her London home after a short illness.

Sue was born in Cardiff in 1947, the daughter of Vaughan and Ivy Williams, and the younger sister of Keith. Sue delighted in the fact that she had seen local boy Tom Jones perform in the Muni in Pontypridd, long before he hit the big time.

Sue studied English at Cardiff University, which fostered her lifelong passion for reading and the arts. After graduating, Sue left Cardiff for London and soon began working for the Liberal Party Organisation at its headquarters on the second floor of the National Liberal Club. Catherine Furlong remembered working with Sue in the LPO days, over 40 years ago. “We used to share the speaker timings and other duties at the party conference. We always missed the Leader's Speech [at the time David Steel] and go for a fancy ice cream.”

In the 70s and most of the 80s, until the party merged with the SDP and moved out to Cowley Street, the SDP headquarters, party staff and members often spent time in the NLC bar. One group began to congregate regularly around one particular gingham-covered table. The group consisted of young party workers, Young Liberals, Liberal students and the group that published Liberator.

The Table became an institution – people would say they'd see you at The Table, and when people went on holiday postcards would arrive at the National Liberal Club addressed to “The Table, the Bar, the National Liberal Club” – and they did indeed reach The Table.

Sue was working in LPO and so she was one of the people round The Table in the bar of the club, and that's where I met her. I always got on very well with Sue. She was kind, gentle, highly intelligent, sensitive and had a great sense of humour. She was very quiet – she never liked to be centre stage – but she was a very supportive friend.

After the party left for Cowley Street the group of friends continued to meet up not only at party meetings and conference, but also regularly when Liberator was going to press. Also “the Table” continued in spirit, with various people organising the annual “Table Day Out” where the gang, including Sue, would go on a day out which included a walk and then lunch. Hampstead was a regular favourite. There were also the annual “Table Awards” in early December where awards were invented, candidates nominated, and votes awarded accompanied by copious amounts of alcohol. Sue was a regular attender on the days out and at the awards, both of which still continue.

After leaving the Liberal Party, Sue began working for the BBC, where she was a scheduler for the World Service Newsroom. Her job was often stressful, and yet she was unfailingly kind, sweet and patient, no matter what was demanded of her. She would always find a way to help; whether she was dealing with freelancers struggling to get shifts, staff juggling family commitments or reporters begging for last-minute days off. A rota organiser can hold a huge amount of power over a journalist, but Sue always used that power to help, to encourage and to do good.

In 1989 I got a job as a national trade union official at Bectu, the union for many at the BBC, and Sue was a union member. So, our conversation often turned to what was going on at the Corporation



and a few times I would be at the BBC in connection with my job and I would run into Sue. I am the Editor of the union journal, and when the magazine landed on Sue's doormat that would be another subject of discussion.

As well as her career, Sue's other real passion in life was the arts, in particular the theatre and opera. She would often go to the Opera House in Covent Garden and enjoy nothing better than reviewing and critiquing the singers with her friends post performance. Sue was a great supporter of the choir Eclectic Voices, she particularly liked Scott Stroman's interpretation of Faure's *Requiem* – both the conventional and a jazz version arranged by their accompanist at the time, Charlie Beale. She was also a Prommer and we went to *The Last Night of the Proms* together in the 80s.”

Sue was a sensitive soul and was not a fan of flying, so on one occasion to give her something to look forward to after a serious operation, we decided to go to New York. Sue cruised across the Atlantic and I flew out to meet her. We had a whale of a time: in addition to the sightseeing and visiting lots of New York restaurants, we also hit the shops and came back with more suitcases of clothes than we went with.

Sue retired at the beginning of the pandemic and both events hit her hard. Her niece, Bethan, had also moved to London in Sue's later years, and became a source of tremendous support for Sue during what were undoubtedly difficult times in Sue's life in adjusting to life after work, and post the pandemic. Sue often mentioned Bethan to me and she greatly appreciated her company and practical help and advice during these times.

I was extremely sad to hear of Sue's passing. She was a good friend for more than 40 years and I and her friends will miss her.

Janice Turner

Sue's exposition of the relationships of, particularly Tory governments with the BBC World Service and the compromises involved was one of the articles that, alas, never turned up.

International Abstracts

Trump

It was an ambush, by Tom Nichols. *The Atlantic* March 1st, 2025

Much has and will be said about the televised meeting between Presidents Trump & Zelensky on 28th February. Most looked on in horror and quality American journalism reflects that. Tom Nichols' article is one of many that could have been selected.

[One of the Grimmiest Days in American Diplomacy - The Atlantic](#)

Trump Drops the Mask, by Jonathan Chait. *The Atlantic* March 10th, 2025

The president's latest positions on the Russia-Ukraine war reveal that he is indifferent to ongoing slaughter—indeed, he is willing to increase it,

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/03/trump-ukraine-russia-war/681993/>

Purges, payback, disruptions, power grabs - tracking the damage and the pushback, by Mark S. Bergman, 7Pillars Global Insights LLC. March 8th 2025 edition

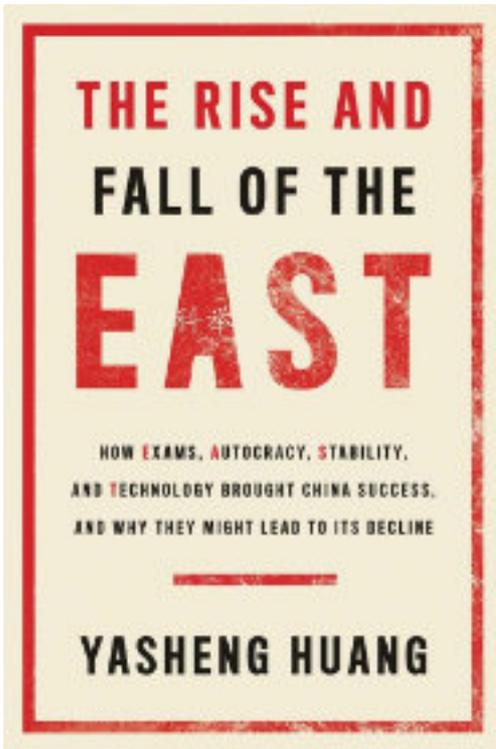
Sierra Leone

Ethnic politics and chieftaincy struggle in Sierra Leone – A threat to national unity, by Alusine Mansaray. *The Sierra Leone Telegraph*, February 27th, 2025

Not an untypical story across Africa but one to keep a constant watch on. Meanwhile, the Chinese open a traditional medical centre in Freetown, and over-fish Sierra Leone's waters.

<https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/ethnic-politics-and-chieftaincy-struggle-in-sierra-leone-a-threat-to-national-unity/>

Reviews



Rise and Fall of the EAST – How Exams, Autocracy, Stability and Technology Brought China Success, and Why They Might Lead to its Decline, by Yasheng Huang
Yale University Press 2024
isbn 9780300281934

For a long time, academia tried to explain questions like: Is there a longevity of Chinese dynasties? Why industrialisation did not happen in China? Or why did China become an industrial powerhouse in the 21st Century? Yasheng Huang, the Epoch Foundation Professor of Global Economics and Management at the MIT Sloan School of Management, tries to answer these questions.

It was an ambitious project because he first tried to elaborate thoroughly on Chinese History. It was the EAST module which brought the longevity of the Chinese Empire: Examination, Autocracy, Stability, and Technology. In his book, he used scientific data to prove the correlation between Keju (科舉), an imperial civil service exam system that was introduced in the 6th century AD till 1911, and the development of the Chinese economy and society. He went on to argue that the Chinese Communist Party inherited this module and enabled China to become an industrial powerhouse. However, the limitation of this module caused the stagnation of

growth in Chinese political, economic, and social development. When President Xi took office, his policies destroyed the dynamics of EAST. Instead of trying to break the bottleneck, his policies brought instability and uncertainties to the future of the country.

Without being too much of a spoiler, this book made some very interesting observations. Firstly, the use of scientific data to analyse the economic, social, and scientific developments in imperial China. In this section on the social background of the exam candidates and their ranking in Keju, through the data, he made some interesting observations on how meritocracy in the exam system worked in general, and how the final part of the exam (Interview with the emperor himself, or 'palace examination' (殿試)) helped the emperor to hire talents which were in need when the exam took place.

The chapters on Technology (Chapters 7 and 8) are the most insightful portions of the book since the author utilised the data from his database and his self-developed CDI index (Chinese Dynastic Innovation). From them, he elaborates on the co-relation of Keju, the unity of the country, and their impact on scientific developments in the country. Through the data, he argued the more unified the empire was, the fewer scientific innovations were created in the country, and the introduction of Keju was the beginning of the downfall of the scientific development of the country according to his own CDI index.

The author also used an interesting comparison between Chinese establishments and Institutions in Europe and America. For example, he compared the 'Thick Politics' of Henry VIII and imperial politics in the Tang and Ming Dynasties; he also compared the Keju with SAT in the US, in terms of purpose, and the process of standardisation and narrow the scope throughout its history. The author also used a very MBA approach to analysing the imperial civil service and exam systems, such as by analysing organisation structure, what Key Performance Index it is using, and comparing the Chinese and USSR economies by using the U-form (Unified form economy) and M-form (Multifunctional economy).

Like most works on analysing Imperial Chinese history comprehensively, there would inevitably be drawbacks to generalising historical events and facts. While analysing the issue with the Keju system for example, the author analysed the entire system throughout the years as a whole, somewhat disregarding how the system changed throughout the years and dynasties. We have to keep in mind that the examination syllabus of Keju changed substantially throughout its history. This included the streamlining of the examination syllabus, the evolution of eight-legged articles, and the introduction of regional quotas.

One key area which was absent in this book is the analysis of the examination syllabus. To analyse an exam system without analysing the examination papers will be a major area of improvement since the questions raised in the examination papers can be an important hint on what kind of talent the imperial government of the era prefers to hire into the civil service. The book did mention the kind of questions raised during the Palace Exam, but without comparing the question papers in other parts of the exam, it would be difficult to justify the importance of the Palace Examination.

Another area for improvement was that while the author tried to put the history of Imperial China and the recent development of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the content of the book made those two parts sparsely related. It could be due to the structure of the book. Chapters 1-2 were about exams. Then chapters 3-4 about Autocracy. Further on, chapters 5-6 about Stability, and 7-8 about Technology. In each part, the odd-numbered chapters were about Imperial China, and the even-numbered chapters were about CCP. Each chapter provided some interesting insight, and the discourse of some odd number of chapters was somehow related. However, in some sections of the book, in particular the chapters on Stability and Technology, the content of the odd and even number chapters was not related. Therefore, it was difficult for readers to understand how the EAST module in the past related to the current developments.

All in all, this is an ambitious project. The author tried to provide an answer to the longevity of the Chinese Empire and how the CCP brought forward the inheritance. It provided a very inspiring insight on Chinese History from someone with an MBA background and it is an interesting read.

Larry Ngan

**Liberator Song Book, 33(½) edition
Liberator Publications 2025 £5.00**

The Liberator Song Book has been the essential tool to conference entertainment since it first appeared in the early 1980s, the magazine, then part of the Young Liberal Movement had produced a few smaller song sheets in the previous decade, and *Paper Songs for Paper Tigers* probably dates back to the late 1960s. What may have gone unnoticed to collectors is that both the 32nd and 33rd editions both had new prefaces by Lord Bonkers (or his Ilke) for the Spring Conference issue. Will those infidels at Liberator stop at nothing to raise money?

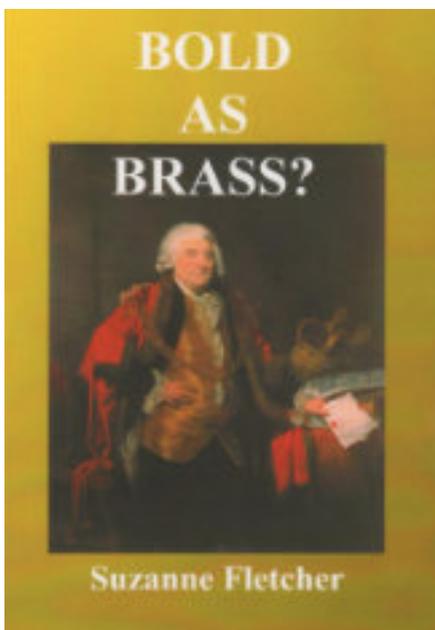
But there is another reason for reviewing this 33½ edition, an advert on the back cover for Andrew Hickey’s blog A History of Rock Music in 500 Songs. This is an awesome feat of scholarship; you might disagree with some of the content, but overall, there is little I’d fault it with.

Pick up your Song Book at Stall 25; sign up to Liberator – it has outlived every other Liberal and Liberal Democrat paper.

Saeed Rahman



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



We don’t often think of where the idioms that roll off our tongues come from. We think too little of our Whig and more specifically our largely forgotten Radical antecedents.

Amidst the spin doctors and misreporting in the media, at least Hansard is there to report exactly who said what, but that has not always been the case. Until 1771 the press was not allowed to report the facts, and any that did were punished. Brass Crosby changed all of that.

Brass Crosby’s career echoes to us to this day; he was MP for Honiton, Lord Mayor of London but most significantly, in 1771 he dismissed the case against John Miller, a printer who had been arrested for publishing Parliamentary debates. Crosby had to justify his actions before the House of Commons, who ended up sending him to the Tower of London. There was public outcry, and after he was released from the Tower when Parliament rose, from that day on publication has not been prevented.

Bold in actions as well as words against the establishment of his day, what could be the source of the idiom? Brass Crosby was an unflinching Radical who would sit comfortably with Liberal Democrats today.

Copies may be obtained from Suzanne via Bold as Brass? www.brasscrosby.co.uk or brasscrosby1725@gmail.com and there will hopefully be some copies at Harrogate.

Stewart Rayment

The Celts a modern history, by Ian Stewart
Princeton University Press 2025
isbn 9780691222516

The problem with books about the Celts is that you never know what you're going to get. In this case it is primarily the growth of Celtic studies from the 18th century onwards and parallel cultural developments rather than going back to the early Iron Age. Stewart is commended for its breadth.

There are disagreements and discontinuities at nearly every stage. Linking the Hallstatt culture to the La Tene has its difficulties, what happened in between? You can take this right up to modern Celticisms in Spain example; Cornish is not the only Celtic language to have died.

Are the French Gauls or Franks or a mixture of both? I struggle to remember sources but some point of the last 20 years of study that suggested that the majority of Irish people probably had a pre-Celtic ancestry, which would tend to suggest, like the La Tene we have a warrior elite coming in and assimilating with a previous community. National pride, there is the Gaulish Celt sack of Rome in the 4th century BCE and so far as Britain is concerned, the Boudicca revolt is probably our most significant recollection of the Roman occupation. The great megaliths certainly pre-date the Celts and the druids, though those people were quite capable of creating pressive structures of their own; consider Maiden Castle. The Romans were particularly vindictive towards the druids, massacring them on Mona (Anglesey). That they survived beyond the Roman realms in Scotland and Ireland gives us the myth of Columba turning up on Iona and converting druids to Christianity, recognising the truth of his message and going on to establish an Irish Christian Church which evangelised the east coast of Britain, converting Saxon populations prior to Roman Catholic intervention. Henry VIII of course would fall back on these arguments for his departure from Rome.

The chapter Race, History & the Irish Questions the politics of the limits of anti-Celtic racism, is probably the most interesting to Liberals in terms of its attempts to discuss the issues around Home Rule and its assessment of the responses about some of the leading scholars of the day. I would commend the work of George Watson in respect of Marx and Engels. The chapter on the land question expands on the on this without specifically mentioning liberal interventions. Nor does the strange survival of the liberalism in Britain in the Celtic fringes feature; that that would be another subject altogether; the reasons partly rested in the non-conformist continuity in post-war Britain in those areas and the personalization of politics particularly in highland Scotland.

Stewart looks more at the German and French dimensions than most Anglocentric books on the Celts. Gauls notwithstanding, the French government was suppressing the Breton language in the mid-20th century; I'm not sure what the present position is. By contrast, a book I reviewed on Scottish nationalism back in the 1980s stressed very much that the survival of the Gaelic language in Scotland owed much more to enlightenment of Whitehall than Saxon Edinburgh, who at the time would probably have suppressed it. The survival and revival of the Welsh language, similarly, is something to be celebrated, indeed parents struggle to get their children into Welsh language schools.

The survival of Irish Gaelic has been more fraught. De Valera's attempts to revive the language by making all teachers spend some time in Gaeltacht actually led to its decline in those areas. Despite learning it at school, the younger generation of my Irish family speak very little of the native tongue, despite otherwise having a flair for languages.

A fine piece of scholarship going into the controversies of Celt and updating them. Stewart's exposition is clearer than many recent books on the subject and is thoroughly commended.

Stewart Rayment