

REINVENTING THE STATE
Social Liberalism for the 21st Century

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Edited by

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Contents

Foreword by <i>Menzies Campbell</i>	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Introduction by <i>Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth</i>	ix
Contributors	xvii

Principles

1	What is Social Liberalism? <i>David Howarth</i>	1
2	Equality Matters <i>Duncan Brack</i>	17
3	Liberal Environmentalism: A Liberalism that Matches the Age We're In <i>Ed Randall</i>	37
4	Global Giants <i>Matthew Taylor</i>	55
5	Me, Myself and I <i>Simon Titley</i>	75
6	Liberalism and the Search for Meaning <i>David Boyle</i>	93
7	Rights and Responsibilities <i>Elsbeth Attwooll</i>	111

Individuals, communities and the state

8	Using Community Politics to Build a Liberal Society <i>Mark Pack</i>	131
9	Status versus Friendship and the Common Good <i>by Lynne Featherstone</i>	145
10	The Politics of Parenting: Confronting the F Word <i>Matthew Taylor</i>	159

Economics		
11	Globalisation and the Role of the British State <i>David Hall-Matthews</i>	175
12	The Economy and Climate Change <i>Chris Huhne</i>	195
13	The Limits of the Market <i>Paul Holmes</i>	211
14	Repoliticising Politics: The Case for Intervention <i>Tim Farron</i>	231
Decentralising the state		
15	The Case for Localism: The Liberal Narrative <i>Chris Huhne</i>	241
16	The State and Education <i>John Howson</i>	255
17	Reforming the NHS: A Local and Democratic Voice <i>Richard S. Grayson</i>	269
Constraining the state		
18	Rebuilding Trust in the Criminal Justice System <i>Tim Starkey</i>	287
19	Tackling Terrorism: A Liberal Democrat Approach <i>by Nick Clegg</i>	301
Britain in the world		
20	To be a Briton: The Citizen and the State <i>William Wallace</i>	325
21	A Rational Defence Policy <i>Tim Garden</i>	345
Conclusions		
22	Communicating Social Liberalism <i>Steve Webb and Jo Holland</i>	363

Foreword

Menzies Campbell

British people are tolerant, energetic, enterprising and compassionate. But they are badly served by a centralised and failing political system that excludes the views of most of them. Britain is also an increasingly unequal society in which too many are prevented from making the best of their lives. And it has been burdened by governments which have failed to face up to long-term challenges such as climate change.

I believe that a different Britain is possible – one in which people and communities are able to wield real political power on their own behalf, where people are not shut out by a lack of income or wealth or respect, and where the environment is valued and protected. The Liberal Democrat commitment to making Britain free, fair and green – the slogan adopted by our policy review last year – can meet these goals.

But liberalism is constantly evolving, in response to new challenges and new thinking. That is why I particularly welcome this book's contribution to liberal political thought, as relevant outside the Liberal Democrats as it is inside, because liberalism's combination of political freedom, social justice and internationalism are needed now more than ever. I hope liberals everywhere will read and respond to its arguments.

Menzies Campbell MP, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

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Most of all, though, our sincere thanks go to all the chapter authors, without whom the book would not have been possible.

Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth
August 2007

Introduction

Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth

This book is about a different way of governing Britain. It is about reinventing the British state so that it delivers social justice and environmental sustainability through a decentralised and participatory democracy.

Throughout much of the last two decades, much of the political debate, both in the country in general and in the Liberal Democrats in particular, has focused on the values of the market in economic, social and environmental policy. The limitations of the market, however, are becoming increasingly obvious. Conservative and Labour governments obsessed with market-based solutions have built a more unequal and unfair society than Britain has experienced at any time since before the Second World War. The ever-more serious threat of uncontrolled climate change cannot be met by market mechanisms alone. And the introduction of markets into the public services has had – at best – mixed results.

This is nothing new to British Liberals, who have argued for well over a century that the market suffers from a number of limitations, and that there is, therefore, an important role for the state. This was the social liberal approach of the New Liberalism of the early twentieth century that laid the foundations of the British welfare state. At the same time, however, Liberals have always recognised the danger of government-based solutions that rely on, or lead to the establishment of, remote and insensitive bureaucracies.

Yet over the last decade New Labour has presided over an expansion of precisely this kind of remote bureaucracy. Furthermore, it has governed in an increasingly authoritarian and controlling manner. The positive argument for the role of the state has become accordingly more difficult to make because the idea of government action has become tainted by New Labour's approach.

Yet the need for collective responses to the problems we face remains overwhelming. Despite growing prosperity, individuals are increasingly unhappy. Britain is seen as a divided and unfair society, where individuals and communities are powerless in the face of bureaucracies and companies which treat them only as passive consumers. People feel that they cannot control their own destinies – or even their own local services, from schools and hospitals to post offices and community facilities. The Labour and Conservative approach to the breakdown of traditional social structures is to descend to mere consumerism, promising the voters more of everything – or at least more services and possessions, but never values, or community spirit, or social solidarity.

This book therefore puts the case for reinventing the state so that it is creative and enabling, rather than centralising and stifling. We believe that government is not helpless in the face of the market, however globalised it may be. We believe that individuals will re-engage in politics if they are given a real opportunity to exercise control over their own futures. We believe that a reinvented state can deliver social, economic and environmental advances in a responsive, democratic and decentralised manner.

A Liberal Democrat agenda based on this approach will differentiate the party clearly from both Tories and Labour, with their common obsession with the private sector and with their equally centralising record in government. It is the right approach for the country and for the party.

Beliefs: what is social liberalism?

We start with an examination of social liberal beliefs. David Howarth explains in Chapter 1, ‘What is social liberalism?’, the emergence of a distinctive social liberal ideology out of the older classical liberalism. Like their forebears, social liberals believed in the core value of freedom. They held that the state should as far as possible leave people alone to make their own decisions on how to live their lives, but they believed in addition that freedom was not attainable without a fair distribution of wealth and power. This in turn led to support for redistributive taxation as a way of fairly distributing wealth, and for democracy as a way of fairly distributing power.

David Howarth also explains the confusion about ‘economic liberalism’, which is sometimes portrayed (usually by journalists trying to blow up minor differences into major ‘splits’ in the interest of a good story) as a distinctive, and opposed, strand of liberalism. In reality, as

the chapter makes clear, economic liberalism is simply ‘a preference for market mechanisms not in opposition to redistribution but as a method to be used in the detailed design of mechanisms for it’, and those party members who journalists like to identify as economic rather than social liberals are in reality both. There are far more urgent (and interesting) discussions to be had in British politics today than whether a particular public service can best be delivered by the market or the state – which, in any case, is a question which has no general answer.

Clearly, there are, and will always be, differences between Liberals over the details of philosophy and policy – we would hardly be Liberals if there were not. (Even our contributors display this, as well as some differences over terminology.) But this is better described as a difference – or, to more accurate, a continuous spectrum – between maximalist and minimalist social liberals, who differ primarily over the extent of the redistribution they believe necessary to achieve the conditions for political freedom. No social liberal, however, disagrees with the contention that there must be some redistribution.

The following three chapters set out the case for state action in areas we believe are the most urgent. Duncan Brack, in Chapter 2, ‘Equality matters’, argues that Britain’s highly unequal society, in terms of income and wealth distribution and low rates of social mobility, is failing. Standards of health and well-being, rates of crime and anti-social behaviour and levels of community and political participation are all worse than they would be in a more equal society. He therefore argues that Liberals need to recognise the essential role that equality plays in achieving freedom, and to make social justice a more explicit part of the Liberal Democrat programme.

In Chapter 3, ‘Liberal environmentalism’, Ed Randall presents the other great priority of today’s politics, the need to tackle accelerating climate change. He argues for a new liberal environmentalism based on the concept of responsible stewardship – the Earth held in trust for future generations – implemented through democratic means and in ways that respect social justice. No other form of environmentalism has a chance of mobilising the necessary popular support.

Matthew Taylor, in Chapter 4, ‘Global giants’, incorporates these approaches into a broader look at human society, first in the UK and then outside its borders. He finds that while the post-war welfare state built upon the blueprint of the Liberal William Beveridge has addressed

the five giants Beveridge identified – want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness – they still remain pervasive in the UK, though in mutated forms, posing new, more subtle and more complex threats to material and subjective security. Throughout the developing world, however, Beveridge’s five giants remain unconquered, and are now joined by a sixth, environmental degradation, which threatens us all.

The next three chapters look at the social liberal agenda in relation to individual motivations and political structures. Simon Titley, in Chapter 5, ‘Me, myself and I’, examines how the transformation in the sense of self, in the way people perceive themselves, has changed society in far-reaching ways. But while the disappearance of the old deferential hierarchies in many ways has been positive, in others it has degraded society, breaking down people’s sense of social solidarity and trust in institutions. Politicians have responded by adopting an essentially consumerist approach, promising people instant gratification; no wonder trust in politics has declined and voters view parties as indistinguishable. The chapter calls on Liberals to find a way to rebuild the social fabric, to help individuals develop the meaning they want in their lives – and for the Liberal Democrats to differentiate ourselves by challenging this consumerist approach, by ‘being true to ourselves and not trying to please everyone’.

David Boyle, in Chapter 6, addresses the same question, ‘The search for meaning’, in a different way. He looks at the religious aspects of Liberalism’s heritage, including the sense that there is something more than the bottom line, that people have something unique to offer in their ordinary lives, and that people and communities make things possible. He argues for a series of social liberal measures to decentralise the state and create structures in which people matter and can make a difference – and also, that Liberals should cease to portray themselves as mere secular technocrats and recognise the element of spirituality that lies within their history.

In Chapter 7, Elspeth Attwooll takes a systematic look at the extent to which political decision-making involves choices about fulfilling claims and allocating responsibilities. From the perspective of social liberalism, she argues, it is a mistake to prioritise claims – which risks treating society as no more than a set of atomised, competing, individuals – or responsibilities – which risks treating individuals as undifferentiated, subservient, components. Rather, a social liberal approach starts with a concept of social goods of which human beings are the main beneficiaries.

The policy agenda

The remainder of the book fleshes out these beliefs and principles into more detailed policy proposals. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 all continue the debate about the relationship between individuals, communities and the state. Mark Pack, in Chapter 8, ‘Using community politics’, looks at how the Liberal adherence to the principle of community politics can be applied in highly practical ways – not merely to win elections (which is what it has all too often come to mean) but to allow people to take power into their own hands. A series of proposals are put forward, for central and local government, and for party campaigners, to change the state from being an organisation that does things for people to one through which people do things for themselves.

Lynne Featherstone, in Chapter 9, ‘Status versus friendship and the common good’, picks up Simon Titley’s and David Boyle’s theme, and examines the extent to which the balance between status, as defined primarily by possessions, and friendship (and neighbourliness, and social solidarity), has become seriously out of kilter. She identifies what is needed to address the malaise and ensure that society comes to place more value on individual responsibility and the common good.

In Chapter 10, ‘The politics of parenting’, Matthew Taylor argues for a new approach to family policy – and an urgent one, given the current levels of unhappiness, ill-health and insecurity amongst British children. He analyses how the obsession with work amongst policy-makers has undermined the value of parental interaction with children and is placing mothers and fathers in an impossible balancing act between work and family. Liberals must reassert the value of parental involvement (by both parents) and create structures that make it possible.

The next four chapters consider economic policy. David Hall-Matthews, in Chapter 11, ‘Globalisation and the role of the British state’, examines the extent to which – contrary to much recent government rhetoric – nation-states can in reality exercise control over the impacts of globalisation. Indeed, not to do so risks strengthening the hand of those who oppose globalisation and its benefits – sometimes xenophobic nationalists, but often ordinary citizens despairing of their government’s ability to control their future. The government has a clear responsibility – and ability – to assist those who are least well-equipped to benefit from globalisation, and to check its negative impacts.

In Chapter 12, ‘The economy and climate change’, Chris Huhne develops Ed Randall’s theme into a detailed set of policy proposals. Decarbonising the economy will require a coordinated response across the private and public sectors unlike any other policy challenge that we have faced in peacetime. Yet we already largely possess the technology and the policy framework – what is needed is leadership, with an understanding and commitment that can deliver serious change. Importantly, the chapter shows how a policy programme can be constructed without hurting the poor or compromising on redistribution.

Chapters 13 and 14 both look at the limits of the market. Paul Holmes analyses the failures of market-based solutions to deliver what has often been claimed for them, by governments of both other parties, for the last three decades. The chapter gives examples, in health, education and housing, and a counter-example, of the success of local-council-led regeneration in Chesterfield. PFI schemes are revealed to have delivered little of value. Tim Farron addresses the same theme from the viewpoint of rural communities. A lack of affordable housing and employment opportunities, and agricultural markets in which farmers are at the mercy of major purchasers, such as the supermarkets, have devastated many rural villages. Both chapters reach the same conclusion: that there is much that the market cannot deliver that nevertheless is valued, and that social liberals do not have to accept market outcomes as immutable.

The next section discusses a crucial element of the social liberal state: its decentralised nature. Chris Huhne, in Chapter 15, puts the case for localism as a core part of the Liberal narrative. He argues that the current failure of the British state to deliver much of what its people want is undermining the entire political process. The answer is localism: ‘the decentralisation not just of management decisions but of political responsibility to a human scale where voters can once again identify – and complain to, or praise, or boot out – decision-makers in their community’.

John Howson and Richard Grayson then apply this principle to education and to health. John Howson argues that to provide for an education system that is responsive to the needs of both individuals and the local community, a top-down system between central government working with the private or not-for-profit sectors cannot work. The community element must be preserved. Similarly, Richard Grayson puts the case for reforming the NHS so that it is run by democratically accountable local people with

wide-ranging powers. Without this local power, local people will be continually asking for health care that is not on the menu, and for which they have not been given a price. Radical devolution has happened elsewhere in Europe, and it works. The challenge now is to apply it to the UK.

The social liberal state is not just decentralised; it is constrained. It respects human rights and civil liberties, even – perhaps especially – in the face of serious challenges from crime and terrorism. In Chapter 18, ‘Rebuilding trust in the criminal justice system’, Tim Starkey criticises Labour’s centralising approach, fondness for knee-jerk legislation, obsession with targets and undermining of judicial independence. He proposes instead a series of ways in which the workings of the state can be made more efficient, more decentralised and more democratic.

In Chapter 19, ‘Tackling terrorism’, Nick Clegg argues that there can be no accommodation between liberalism and Islamist terrorism, which represent value systems which are diametrically opposed to one another. In other words, liberalism must be forthright in its own defence. The chapter proposes greater engagement with the mainstream Muslim community, together with reforms to the intelligence services, police and the judicial system to strengthen anti-terror prosecutions. ‘Our aim should remain steadfast and simple: to protect both our lives and our liberties, and to refuse to accept that one requires the sacrifice of the other.’

The final policy section looks at Britain’s place in the world. Liberals are instinctively internationalists and individualists, opposed to the closed communalism that nationalism encourages. Yet, as William Wallace, in Chapter 20, ‘To be a Briton’, argues, national identity is still important; democratic government can be supported and redistributive welfare can be maintained only by a commitment to shared institutions and values, rooted in shared understandings of their origins and rationale. At present confused and contested, it is a Liberal task to clarify and redefine them. In Chapter 21, Tim Garden puts forward the case for a rational defence policy, ensuring national security while also meeting international challenges. Given the escalating costs of defence technology, and the current over-stretch in the British armed forces, he argues for sharing capabilities through NATO and the EU. ‘In defence, perhaps more than any other policy area, we need to reinvent the role of the state by accepting that the sovereignty of the state can be most effectively exercised through international collaboration.’

Conclusions

The last chapter in the book, 'Communicating social liberalism', by Steve Webb and Jo Holland, brings us back to our starting point. The social liberal argument has three steps. First, relying exclusively on unfettered market mechanisms to deliver a liberal and democratic society is doomed to failure. Second, positive state intervention to tackle market failures is not only perfectly compatible with Liberalism, it may be actively necessary for a full understanding of individual freedom. Third, Liberal interventions in markets are different in kind from socialist interventions, being always as local as possible and as accountable as possible.

The chapter goes on to develop the basic framework for a social liberal message, and points to the trends in public opinion which will make it a popular approach – the widespread resentment at gross inequalities in income and wealth which appear to bear little relation to effort or talent; the public demand for coordinated international action on climate change; the growing awareness of the problems caused when market players become too powerful; a clear desire for exercising control over decisions affecting local public services; and continued concern over the 'nanny state', particularly in reaction to rafts of centralised targets that seek to micro-manage the public sphere.

Our goal in all these things – the goal of all this book's contributors – is to enable the individual to make the most of his or her life. This will not happen if the state stands idly by. Nor will it happen if the state steps in to control. But it will happen if the state enables, if the state hands power back and if the state tames the power of the market.

To achieve these aims requires the reinvention of the British state. The country's current structures of government and society do not work, and the ideologies – if one can call them that – of Labour and Conservatives do not provide a solution. Given the challenges that the UK now faces – the external threats of climate change, terrorism and unchecked globalisation, the internal ones of an unequal and unparticipative society – but also given the basic values and tremendous capabilities of Britain's people, when treated as the responsible and intelligent human beings they mostly are, social liberalism's combination of political freedom, social justice and democracy are needed now more than ever.

Contributors

Elsbeth Attwooll has been the Liberal Democrat MEP for Scotland since 1999. She is a member of the Regional Development, Fisheries and Employment & Social Affairs Committees. She is also the Scottish Liberal Democrats' Europe spokesperson and President of the Scottish Women Liberal Democrats and the Scottish Section of Liberal International. Born in 1943, she was educated at St Andrews University: Queen's College, Dundee, and taught jurisprudence at the University of Glasgow. Her political career spans more than three decades, beginning in 1974 when she stood as a Parliamentary candidate in Glasgow Maryhill.

David Boyle is the author of *Blondel's Song* (Penguin), a fellow of the New Economics Foundation, and a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee. He has also written a number of books about money, social trends and the future, including *The Little Money Book*, *The Tyranny of Numbers* and *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life*. See www.david-boyle.co.uk.

Duncan Brack is a freelance researcher, mainly on international environmental issues. A former Director of Policy for the Liberal Democrats (1988–94), he currently chairs the party's Federal Conference Committee and was vice-chair of the 'Meeting the Challenge' policy review group in 2005–06. He is also the Editor of the *Journal of Liberal History* and has co-edited a series of books, including the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* (1998), *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (2007), and *Why I Am A Liberal Democrat* (1995).

Nick Clegg is MP for Sheffield Hallam and Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary. He studied at Cambridge, Minnesota and College d'Europe before training as a journalist. He then worked as a development and trade expert in the EU, sat as an MEP (1999–2004), lectured at Sheffield and Cambridge universities, and was elected as an MP in 2005. He served first as Europe spokesperson and then Shadow Home Secretary, a role in which he has spearheaded the Liberal

Democrats' defence of civil liberties, promoted a liberal approach to immigration and campaigned for prison reform.

Tim Farron was elected as MP for Westmorland & Lonsdale in 2005. He is Parliamentary Private Secretary to Menzies Campbell, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hill Farming, and a member of the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee. He is currently also the district councillor for the Milnthorpe ward on South Lakeland District Council. He chaired the recent South Cumbria NHS Inquiry and is active in campaigns to protect and enhance the Westmorland General Hospital in Kendal.

Lynne Featherstone was elected as MP for Hornsey & Wood Green in 2005. She was a Haringey councillor 1998–2006, and a member of the Greater London Assembly 2000–05. Before being promoted to the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet as the Shadow Secretary of State for International Development in 2007, Lynne was part of the home affairs team, as well as being the spokesperson for London. Lynne was short-listed for the 2006 Channel 4 Political Awards, while her blog has twice been nominated for the *New Statesman* New Media Awards.

Tim Garden was the Liberal Democrat spokesperson on Defence in the Lords. He was a pilot in the RAF for thirty-two years, and eventually became responsible for forward planning for all three services. After retirement as an air marshal, he was Director of Chatham House, and a visiting professor at the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College London, where he worked on defence diplomacy, NATO Reaction Forces, and European defence capabilities. His chapter here was one of the last pieces he wrote before dying, just as this book went to print.

Dr Richard S. Grayson was Director of Policy of the Liberal Democrats in 1999–2004, during which time he was one of the principal authors of the party's manifestos for the 2001 general election and the 2004 European election. He stood for Parliament in 2005 in his home town of Hemel Hempstead, and has been reelected in the same seat for the next election. He was Director of the Centre for Reform in 1998–99. Since 2004 he has lectured in British politics at Goldsmiths, University of London, and has been Head of Politics there since 2006.

Dr David Hall-Matthews is a lecturer in the School of Politics and International Studies at Leeds University. He has conducted research on nineteenth-century India and contemporary Malawi, publishing a number of articles and a book, *Peasants, Famine and the State in Colonial Western India* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). He is currently working on a contemporary history of South Asia for

Blackwell. He has advised several Liberal Democrat international development spokespersons and served on policy working groups on development, international trade and investment and, currently, the UK response to globalisation.

Jo Holland is Senior Researcher to Steve Webb MP, and runs his Parliamentary office in Westminster. She has worked with him on the health and social security portfolios, and now in his role as manifesto chair. She sat on the Liberal Democrat Children and Families policy working group in 2006 and co-authored the chapter 'Children, the family and the state: a liberal agenda' in *The Orange Book* in 2004. She was elected as the party's Parliamentary Staff Chair in 2002–03 and is currently an executive member of the Liberal Democrat Christian Forum. She has an MA in History from Cambridge University.

Paul Holmes is Liberal Democrat MP for Chesterfield. He joined the SDP-Liberal Alliance in 1983 and the Liberal Democrats in 1988. He was elected as MP for Chesterfield in 2001 and co-founded the Beveridge Group. In the 2001–05 Parliament he was a member of the Education and Skills Select Committee, the Lib Dem spokesperson for people with disabilities, and a Friend of UNICEF in the Commons. In 2005 he was elected as Chairman of the Parliamentary Party and in 2007 joined the Shadow Cabinet as Shadow Minister for Housing.

David Howarth is the MP for Cambridge. He is currently a member of the Liberal Democrats' shadow cabinet with responsibility for legal affairs. Before his election to Parliament he taught law and economics at the University of Cambridge, served on the Liberal Democrats' Federal Policy Committee and led Cambridge City Council.

Professor John Howson has been an adviser to four Liberal Democrat shadow secretaries of state for education over the past ten years. He is a director of Education Data Surveys, a leading research company in the field of education. He started his teaching career in Tottenham in the 1970s and his political career in Devizes during the 1966 general election, while still at university. In the 2005 general election he fought Reading East for the Lib Dems.

Chris Huhne is MP for Eastleigh and the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. He was runner-up in the 2006 leadership contest, and was previously Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and economic spokesman for the pan-European Liberal group in the European Parliament from 1999 to 2005. He is a former City economist and journalist for the *Independent*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Guardian* and *Economist*.

Mark Pack is Head of Innovations for the Liberal Democrats, having previously worked in the Campaigns & Elections Department for seven years. He was the campaign manager for Lynne Featherstone's 2005 victory in Hornsey & Wood Green. Before working for the party, Mark had a series of jobs in IT and academia, and he completed a doctorate in nineteenth-century English elections. He writes here in a personal capacity.

Ed Randall is a lecturer in politics and social policy at Goldsmiths University of London. He was a councillor in Greenwich for sixteen years and a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate in the borough. He is the author of *The European Union and Health Policy* and *A Union for Health*, and he edited the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* with Duncan Brack. Ed has recently written for the *Political Quarterly* on Liberal policy and politics and for the *Journal of European Public Policy* on European regulatory governance. His current research is concerned with politics, risk and food.

Tim Starkey has practised as a criminal barrister for six years, appearing in courts at all levels from the Magistrates' Court to the Court of Appeal. Over this time he has both prosecuted and defended in a wide range of cases, gaining valuable insights into the problems of the criminal justice system. He was on the Federal Party working group which produced the policy paper *Together We Can Cut Crime*.

Matthew Taylor was first elected MP for Truro & St Austell in 1987, aged 24, and remained the youngest MP for ten years. He has held several key positions in the Liberal Democrat Shadow Cabinet, including environment, education and Shadow Chancellor. He has also been the Chair of the Parliamentary Party and Head of Communications and Campaigns. After two decades as an MP, and following his marriage to partner Vicky and the birth of their son Arthur, he will be standing down at the next election to dedicate more time to his family.

Simon Titley is a writer and public affairs consultant based in Brussels. He writes regularly on political and public affairs, and recently contributed a chapter to the global standard reference work, *The Handbook of Public Affairs*; he is also on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Political Marketing*. His political activities focus on writing and producing *Liberator* magazine. He was a Liberal parliamentary candidate in the 1983 election, and a member of the party's election HQ team in 1987 and 1992. He was born in Lincoln in 1957 and educated at the University of Keele, where he read International Relations.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) is Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, and spokesman on foreign affairs. He is also emeritus professor of international relations at the London School of Economics, where he taught full time from 1995 to 2005, and chair of the LSE's Cold War Studies Centre. He has written on European international politics and transatlantic relations, as well as on British foreign policy and on the links between foreign policy, history and national identity.

Steve Webb has been MP for Northavon since 1997, and now chairs the Liberal Democrat manifesto group. From 1999 to 2005 he was the party's spokesman on social security and from 2005 to 2007 on health. Prior to being elected to Parliament he worked for nine years as an economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies, before being appointed Professor of Social Policy at Bath University in 1995.