

that both had received much coverage in the summer of 2014? Whilst Falkner accepted that the Middle East had experienced a difficult century, he felt it was necessary for us to live with historical mistakes and to make the best of them and that it would be a mistake to think we could go back to previous borders. Citing a recent Michael Ignatieff article in the *Financial Times* which spoke of his aversion to secession, Falkner felt it was worth recognising that 'every new nation creates a new minority group'.

Challenging Arimatsu's sanguine tone about the Liberal International legacy, Simon Drage asked if the apparently widespread use of drones by the Obama administration was proof that international law and oversight remained weak today. Arimatsu argued that, despite initial uncertainty about Pakistan, in the case of operations both there and in Yemen, it was clear that both countries had invited the Americans to intervene; in the case of the latter, the encouragement was forthright. Whilst liberals might query the approach of those individual governments, at the internationalist level, a structure was in place that respected national sovereignty and process of law.

Arimatsu concluded by saying that liberal internationalism was perhaps best understood as a state of mind. Whilst Blair might have asserted a commitment to personal

freedom in 2003, his anti-pluralistic actions were indicative of an outlook counter to the idea of liberal internationalism. That said, the international landscape was shaped profoundly today by the activities of those people inside and outside the UK Liberal Party in the internationalist movement who wished to foster a stronger peace, or at least a better war.

Falkner's conclusion was most optimistic about the future. For all its manifest contradictions, and the difficulties inherent in the so-called 'Right to Protect', international liberalism had changed the discourse of international affairs for the better. He concluded that 'we are all liberal internationalists now'.

As the ninety minute meeting drew to a close, Martin Horwood remarked on the myriad of issues the discussion had not even touched upon, as evidence of the complexity of what had been discussed: the Bolshevik revolution was not even mentioned, nor the effects of the conflict on Africa and Asia. Horwood said the fact that the topic was still relevant and emotive a century later, proved that the apparently ancient liberal battle to foster individual creativity and heterogeneity – against the foes of absolutism and despotism across the world – still had a long way to go.

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Democrats' handling of sexual harassment allegations. In fact, it comes from p. 36 of Dr Elizabeth Evans' book, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats – Representing Women?*, which is based largely on doctoral research undertaken between 2005 and 2009.

Despite the differing context of their report and doctoral research respectively, Helena Morrissey and Elizabeth Evans share a fundamental conclusion: that there is a woman-unfriendly culture in the Liberal Democrats. Morrissey (p. 57) notes that 'the Party (and politics generally) is struggling to genuinely develop an encouraging environment for women', while Evans argues that 'despite the equal opportunity rhetoric, the party is an institution embedded in a masculine ethos and ideology' in which there is a 'persistent privileging of male norms and values' (p. 146).

For both, the most glaring – but by no means only – manifestation of this cultural problem has been the continuing failure to elect more women Liberal Democrat MPs. It is this failure which leads Evans to ask whether Liberal Democrats are 'representing women'.

In answering the question she poses herself, Evans structures her empirical evidence – quantitative and qualitative data, including interviews with parliamentarians, candidates and senior staff – around three key criteria:

- descriptive representation (numbers of women in specified senior roles);
- substantive representation (the extent to which the party's policies may be described as 'feminist'); and
- symbolic representation (whether women are presented as 'tokens').

Evans finds the party most wanting in relation to the first and third of these criteria. She notes that, despite comprising approximately half the membership, women are largely absent from senior voluntary and staff roles. A senior party official is quoted remarking that 'Women do the work but aren't represented at decision-making level' (p. 32). Even at the grassroots, Evans finds 'an inherent gender bias within local parties which seek to reinforce the traditional sexual division of labour' (p. 148). Women are more likely to be baking cakes

REVIEWS

Women and the Liberal Democrats

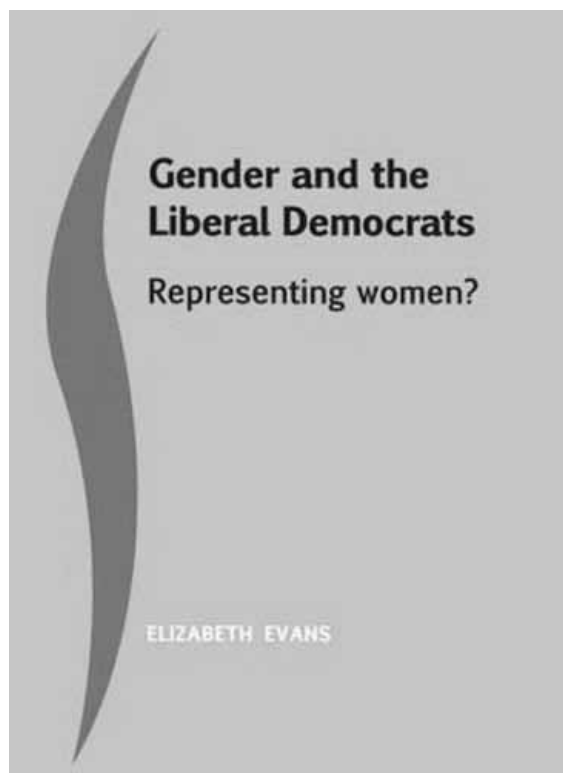
Dr Elizabeth Evans, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats – Representing Women?* (Manchester University Press, 2011)

Review by **Dinti Batstone**

I just worry that the way the party behaves as an employer does not reflect our policies, I seethe about it. It's a wider cultural thing and a couple of senior people at the top don't think there's a problem but there is. There is a major problem.

That's obvious to anyone who sees Cowley Street close up.

BUT FOR THE reference to Cowley Street, this quote could have come straight out of Helena Morrissey's report last year into the Liberal



and running raffles than voting as delegates to party conference.

The handful of women who have successfully made it into senior positions are too often deployed in a tokenistic way. Evans observes that photographs chosen for the last three general election manifestos reinforce 'the gendered identification of MPs as male, whilst voters and members of the public are codified as female' (p. 138) and argues convincingly that the party could better deploy its women parliamentarians to convey the message that women can be successful Liberal Democrat politicians. Her overarching conclusion is that pro-women policies are not sufficient for the party to be able to claim that it represents women: 'the party's policies, however feminist, are ultimately undermined by a lack of women MPs' (p. 126).

The book also considers in detail the controversial question of whether under-representation at a parliamentary level is driven primarily by supply-side (women not coming forward) or demand-side (women not being selected) factors. This is where her argument is at its weakest. Whilst acknowledging that 'there is reciprocity between supply-side and demand-side factors' (p. 75), and noting that labour-intensive campaigning techniques mean 'that time affects both the supply and demand of women

candidates' (p. 81), Evans nevertheless glosses over these complexities to conclude unequivocally that 'the party is suffering from demand-side rather than supply-side problems vis-à-vis women candidates'. This un-nuanced view seems largely to be based on a flawed assumption that the mere fact of being on the 'approved list' of candidates is indicative of a genuine and pressing desire to stand for parliament. In fact, many women (and men) go through the approval process without any serious intention of standing in the next election, let alone subsequent elections. For them, going through the 'approval' process is merely dipping a toe in the water.

More worryingly, Evans' unstinting attachment to the demand-side worldview means that she fails to engage with the very serious issue of candidate attrition. Many 'approved' women decide after one or two elections that they will not stand again. While this is understandable given the enormous personal sacrifices entailed in making a serious run for parliament, it deprives the party of a key talent pool of women with the experience to win tough contests (a problem more acute for Liberal Democrats than for parties with 'safe' seats). Evans' use of raw numbers of 'approved' women as evidence for her assertion that the Liberal Democrats do not have a supply-side problem fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the 'approved list': it may feed the candidate pool, but it is certainly not a proxy for it. Moreover, her claim that the party's Campaign for Gender Balance 'places emphasis on increasing the number of women on the approved list, rather than encouraging those women already on the list to apply for seats' is simply factually incorrect.

Also missing from Evans' analysis is an exploration of the role that women party members may play on the demand side. Evans notes that 'some (female candidates with children) felt they were in a Catch-22 situation: either they went for it and got criticised for being a 'neglectful' or 'bad' parent, or they accepted that they wouldn't be able to stand until their children were older' (p. 96). However, she does not probe the extent to which these feelings may be

reinforced or diminished by interactions with female party members. While quoting Liberal Democrat peer Paul Tyler's observation that 'women candidates are asked questions that would not be asked of a man in a comparable position' (p. 74), Evans fails to consider who is asking those questions and why. Anecdotal evidence from candidates mentored by Campaign for Gender Balance suggests these questions most often come from older women, reflecting a patriarchal view of family life deeply rooted in wider society. Evans initially dismisses societal factors as having 'little impact upon the election of women MPs' (p. 102), yet later argues that 'an increase (in the prominence of Liberal Democrat women as role models) would undoubtedly symbolise that it is possible for women to overcome the various societal and institutional barriers to election' (p. 144).

Evans asserts that 'there are insufficient critical actors working to feminise the party' (p. 151). While acknowledging the efforts of a few individuals, she criticises a lack of joined-up thinking, strategic direction and leadership from the top. She highlights the relatively low status, funding and membership of the party's two women's organisations (CGB and WLD, merged into Liberal Democrat Women last year) and sees this as an area in which the influence of SDP feminists was diluted following the 1988 merger with the Liberal Party. The evidence she cites for this is credible, but her characterisation of Liberalism at times descends into caricature: 'Liberal ideology remains based upon the writings of a group of male writers whose political philosophies, whilst dealing with equality and liberty, are not, on the whole, concerned with women and achieving equality for women'. The chapter on ideology opens with a paragraph from the *Orange Book*, quotes at length from the works of Conrad Russell, and yet makes only a passing mention of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. On this narrowly precarious base, Evans constructs an argument that comes very close to stating outright that feminism and liberalism are fundamentally irreconcilable.

This is a shame as it occasionally leaves the reader feeling that there

may be an element of confirmation bias in some of the data presentation and interpretation. This tendency is most evident in Evans' framing of the issue of female representation almost exclusively through the prism of All-Women Shortlists (AWS). Data that does not fit with her worldview that Liberal Democrats have a demand-side problem is heavily caveated: 'Liberal Democrats selected the largest percentage of women in their vacant (2010) seats; however it is important to note that this is on much smaller numbers, and following the election, the party has the lowest percentage of women MPs' (p. 9). In the last electoral cycle, without AWS, Liberal Democrats selected women in 37 per cent of the party's most winnable seats and four out of seven retiring incumbent seats. The fact that these women were not elected in the constituencies where they stood can hardly be attributed to a demand-side problem within the Liberal Democrats.

A more nuanced approach to the intersection between feminism and liberalism might have explored why women in winnable seats did not get elected and considered what mechanisms other than AWS Liberal Democrats could use to attract, retain and elect more women candidates. It might also have made more

of areas of success (until recently the European Parliament, where for several years there were more female than male Liberal Democrat MEPs) as well as exploring why successive party leaders have failed to use a mechanism wholly within their gift to appoint more women to the House of Lords.

Despite some shortcomings, Elizabeth Evans' book is to be strongly welcomed as the first serious scholarly analysis of female under-representation in the Liberal Democrats. For long-standing party activists it paints in forensic detail an all too familiar picture of intra-generational tensions, presentism, grinding low-level discrimination and egalitarian rhetoric unmatched by tangible outcomes. I hope Dr Evans will revisit the issue after the next election and find that the party's culture has improved. Meanwhile, implementing Helena Morrissey's recommendations would be a good start.

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of Liberal Democrat leadership to define himself as 'centre-left', established so little rapport with those in the party who defined themselves in the same way.

He was, as Torrance's account reminds us, politically ruthless, and that was not necessarily a fault when used to secure real political advances. But detachment was a fatal flaw when, for example, it came to negotiating the merger with the SDP. The SDP leadership went into the negotiations determined to promote an SDP position; David Steel failed to back his own team when they presented a Liberal case. That was how the problems arose with the famous 'dead parrot' policy document. The book quotes a suggestion that I was trying to set a trap for Steel. In fact I had assumed that we would, with difficulty, eventually arrive at an acceptable compromise by negotiation, but that if his own side told him it was not achievable he would back us. I should have realised that concluding the negotiations mattered much more to him than the content of a document that he had probably barely read. Incidentally, even if there was no other reason for buying this book – although there are several – it is worth it for another sight of the priceless photo

It's Boy David

David Torrance, *David Steel: Rising Hope to Elder Statesman* (Biteback Publishing, 2012)

Review by Alan Beith

THERE IS NOT a lot of scope for adding to the picture most Liberal Democrats have of David Steel, despite David Torrance's diligent examination of correspondence and papers, his interviews with politicians and his ability to put together a clear and thorough narrative. Indeed, the uncomplicated clarity of David Steel's personality makes new insights difficult to find. His political progression from Borders by-election star to presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament is detailed in the book, and it underlines the political courage of

his early campaigns on apartheid, on immigration and on abortion law reform, as well as the extent to which his considerable political skills benefitted the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. His shortcomings are equally well known to readers of political biography: his impatience with policy and detail, his failure to turn his Liberal instincts into a more thoroughly Liberal analysis of political issues, and his detachment from the grassroots workers of the party he led. It was ironic that someone who was much more ready than the current generation