



resources to advertise and get around the press focus on the other parties and their scandals. At the end of the campaign, the May Day riots, with no effort on the Tories' part, had the effect of pushing anti-Livingstone votes into the Norris camp on an implied 'law and order' association. I believe that those events finally settled the outcome of the election.

If there was one surprise above others in the mayoral campaign, it was the emergence of a London political identity. When I began on the campaign trail in August, the hustings showed candidates to be all over the place, both in defining the problems and the solutions. Candidates behaved pretty true to party. By May, the core manifestos looked amazingly similar and indeed quite clearly recognisable to anyone following the policies of the London Region Liberal Democrats as far back as 1997. The pressure of the hustings, sometimes three or four a day, had forced common sense and convergence and in terms of the policy debate it was a clear Liberal Democrat win. A strange bonding also developed among the candidates, with the possible exception of Dobson. No-one was naive, but it must have been close to the sense of shared suffering experienced by hostages. Certainly we could give each other's set speeches and Norris to this day claims that he once gave mine and I his.

I loved every minute of the nine months of the mayoral campaign. I was blessed with a small but amazing team, from Ashley Lumsden, who was born to be a campaign manager, to Charlotte Barraclough, who had never done media until she abandoned a round-the-world trip to run my press operation. My son Jonathan dropped out of university (temporarily) to be my minder, and student interns became the backbone of our operations. Brian Orrell and the London Region Liberal Democrats, MPs and peers led by Ed Davey and Conrad Russell, were stalwarts. The Assembly candidates were dedicated and we owe a lot to those who flogged their guts out knowing that they themselves would not win. We used the campaign to build a London-wide awareness of Liberal Democrats and our policies. Local parties turned out across the capital and we did indeed cover every one of its 250 high streets. Many Londoners used their

vote, even if a second preference, to support a Liberal Democrat for the first time. We won four seats in the Greater London Assembly and because of the calibre of our candidates they are influencing events well beyond their numbers, effectively holding the balance of power.

There will never be an election like this again. Next time it will be a short campaign with limited appearances, more conventional and, I suspect, less filled with surprises. Livingstone will try to remain Mayor until he is carried out feet first. Norris and I will almost certainly both run again. I doubt that next time anyone will bother to write a book about the campaign.

But as the events of last year fade in the memory, I confess I am glad *Nightmare* was written, to remind me that it really did happen and was not just a dream.

*Susan Kramer was the Liberal Democrat candidate in the first London mayoral race.*

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## New leader, new book

Charles Kennedy: *The Future of Politics*

(HarperCollins, 2000; 255pp.)

Reviewed by Duncan Brack

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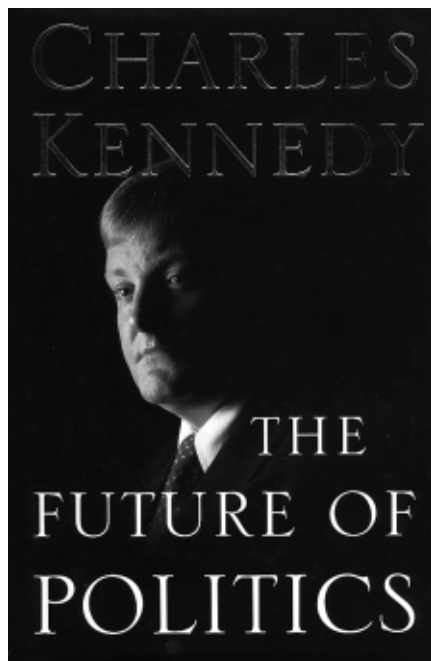
How times change. Paddy Ashdown had to struggle to find a publisher for his first book as leader, *Citizen's Britain*. Twelve years later, Charles Kennedy's first book is produced by a mainstream publisher in glossy hardback – tribute, of course, to the strength and relevance of the party that Ashdown built and Kennedy inherited.

Ye the purpose of these two books was and is rather different. *Citizen's Britain* was a (reasonably successful) attempt to put the third party, at the time disappearing in the opinion polls to within the statistical margin of error of zero, and its leader, on the policy map – to reassert the Liberal strength as a party of imagination and invention. It

was full of ideas, some half-baked, many sensible, some already party policy, some not. In policy terms (though not in strategy), it described an agenda which Ashdown stuck to, pretty much, for the following ten years of his leadership.

*The Future of Politics* does not need to establish the party in the public mind. It is aimed instead to define Kennedy as a man with a policy prospectus, something which neither his own background as TV light entertainment's favourite politician, nor his uninspiring leadership campaign, managed to do. Does it succeed? Yes and no.

Unlike *Citizen's Britain*, it contains almost no *new* ideas. It is an explanation, mostly coherent and lucid, of the



party's *existing* policy position; indeed, those of us more familiar than we would like to be with party policy papers will recognise many proposals and even, on occasion, entire paragraphs lifted verbatim from other sources. There's nothing necessarily wrong with this – after all, it would be rather alarming to find that your new leader didn't go along with the vast bulk of party policy – but it would be nice to find the occasional new idea. The only one I could spot in the entire book was a commitment to all-women shortlists and 'zipping' for parliamentary selections, a position which I was certainly not aware Kennedy held, and one that it would be quite nice seeing him do something about. There are also, unfortunately, too many mistakes – carbon monoxide, for example, is not the main global greenhouse gas (it's carbon dioxide, an entirely different substance), and the UK's target under the Kyoto Protocol is a 12.5% reduction in greenhouse emissions, not 5.2%. The logic is not always coherent, for example over fuel taxes, a point picked up when the launch of the book coincided with the first wave of fuel tax protests; and overall the book has not been well edited.

But on the other hand... no-one expected Kennedy to be an ideas man, and there are other qualities which party leaders can display. Kennedy's great strength lies in his ability to

communicate a message, and what this book does is to put over the Liberal Democrat agenda in a well-written and accessible way. The policy proposals are interspersed with personal anecdotes and reminiscences which make them enjoyable to read, and Kennedy's turn of phrase is occasionally brilliant (as in 'the political map is like a water bed – apply pressure in one area and you will get a reaction somewhere else'). Some sections – particularly the case for the Euro – are excellent.

My favourite part of all is the opening paragraphs of the conclusion, where Kennedy lists the four things he has got most seriously wrong since entering parliament in 1983 (for your information: not opposing the establishment of the Child Support Agency; trying to minimise attention to the conference vote in favour of a Royal Commission on the reform of drugs

law in 1994 (not 1992, as the book says); not paying enough attention to the environment as a major campaigning issue for the Alliance; and not protesting enough at the British police's suppression of demonstrations against Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit in 1999). What other party leader would approach his task with such humility?

Charles Kennedy, of course, still has much to prove. Next year's anticipated election campaign, and particularly the TV debates between the leaders, will put to the test the extent to which he really believes and understands everything that's in this book, as well as his ability to communicate it. But *The Future of Politics* is not a bad start at all.

*Duncan Brack was Policy Director of the Liberal Democrats 1988–94, and is Editor of the Journal of Liberal Democrat History.*

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## More mirage than vision

**Garry Tregidga: *The Liberal Party in South-West Britain since 1918: Political Decline, Dormancy and Rebirth* (University of Exeter Press, 2000; 281pp.)**

**Reviewed by John Howe**

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To those who joined the Liberal Party in the 1950s or 1960s, the West Country was the promised land, or rather the land of promise. Fading memories of triumphs in the twenties were reinforced by the contemporary view of the Liberals as the party of the Celtic fringe; then Torrington in 1958 and North Devon in 1959 created the vision of a Liberal heartland from which the party might expand. But the vision proved a mirage, and even in 1997 fewer than half of the West Country seats fell to the Liberal Democrats.

Garry Tregidga's book examines the background to these events with four successive questions. Why did the Liberal Party achieve a triumph in the south-west in 1923 almost equalling the 1906 landslide? Why was it wiped out only ten months later yet then made a

limited – but only a limited – recovery in 1929? Why did the party decline for two decades thereafter but not die? And why did the series of revivals from 1955 onwards achieve no significant parliamentary success until 1997?

To answer these questions Tregidga has amassed impressive evidence. He has read extensively in the local press, which continued to provide good reports of meetings, speeches and party events with editorial comment reflecting local opinions. The personal papers of the regional party leaders, notably the Aclands and the Foots, have been thoroughly reviewed, and the relevant national collections are cited – for example Sir Archibald Sinclair's papers seem particularly useful for the years just before 1939 when