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# by Bernard Greaves & Gordon Lishman

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## FOREWORD

This booklet is about an idea which has been the most important part of our political lives for 12 years. During that time, we have tried to develop and add to it, amend it and test it. This booklet is an attempt to summarise what we believe.

We have tried to present complex arguments in simple terms. We have not written down to any intended audience. Because we believe in the importance of our subject, we believe it is worth making an effort to understand it.

Restrictions on time and length have prevented us from arguing through some of the background parts of our case. We have concentrated on the development of a theory of community politics rather than going into detail about some of the sources and arguments for our analysis of modern society. We have produced a contribution to what we intend shall continue to be an important debate.

The ideas, and much of the practice of community politics, have come from a small group of people who have talked around the subject for a long time. This is as much their work as ours. For us, the most important contributors to this process are Councillors Tony Greaves and Michael Meadowcroft, who combine the intellectual, emotional, theoretical view of liberalism and community politics with direct experience in local politics that proves the compatibility of theory and practice, of political

principle and political power. Peter Hain made a more determined effort than anyone to develop a coherent view of community politics: in doing so, he argued himself into a position of opposition to some of the principles we set out. His contribution was valuable.

The rest of the core of community politicians/theoreticians has seen some changes over 12 years. The key people, however, have included Lawry Freedman, Chris Greenfield, Simon Hebditch, Councillor Trevor Jones, Councillor Trevor Jones, Phil Kelly, Councillor Stuart Mole, Dave Mumford, Keith Porter, David Prusmann and John Smithson.

BERNARD GREAVES  
August, 1980. GORDON LISHMAN

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Regular readers of ALC booklets will wonder why the series of Campaign Booklets, which so far have been noted for the strong emphasis on the practical, has been extended to include a work of political theory. There are several answers, ranging from our belief that action must always be underpinned by an understanding of the basic political concepts of Liberalism and indeed wherever possible it should be linked to those concepts - through to an unwillingness to launch a new "theoretical" series of booklets which might never get past number 2: This booklet was commissioned because we were concerned that many of the most successful local activists are relatively new to the Liberal Party. Virtually nothing has been written about the nature and theory of community politics, other than strictly practical "how to do it" guides, since 1975 when "Community Politics", edited by Peter Hain, and including important chapters by Liberals such as Gordon and Bernard, was published. It is seven years since the "popular" booklet "Liberals and the Community" was published and that is long out of print. And how many remember "Scarborough Perspectives" nowadays?

In any case thought as well as action has moved on. The last few years have been one of desperate but successful attempts by Liberals to survive. We are now again gaining

in local government strength, growing in the scale of campaigning, and we have a wider geographical base than ever before.

All thanks to the techniques, the strategy, which have followed from the community politics approach.

We are publishing this booklet in the hope that more Liberals will contribute to the growing body of theory underlying the community politics action, and in the hope that many of the activists we have gained in recent years will gain a greater understanding of that theory. If we have a greater awareness of where we are heading it is then easier to make decisions about the direction and priorities of our campaigning.

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# INTRODUCTION

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## 1. WHAT COMMUNITY POLITICS IS NOT

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*Community Politics is not a technique for the winning of Local government elections.*

Community Politics is not a *technique*. It is an ideology, a system of ideas for social transformation. For those ideas to become a reality there is a need for a strategy of political action. For that strategy to be successful it needs to develop effective techniques of political campaigning. Those techniques are a means to an end. If they become an end in themselves, the ideas they were designed to promote will have been lost.

Community Politics is not *local*. It is universal. It is an approach to the collective making of decisions and the co-

operative regulation of society that is relevant in any social group, from the family to the world.

Community Politics is not *government*. It is about people It is about their control of the exercise of power. It is about the distribution of power, the use of power, the dissemination of power and the control of power. It is an approach to the way in which decisions are made. It is not limited to the making of 'political' decisions within the structures of 'government'.

Community Politics is not about *elections*. Elections are an essential ingredient in the process of community politics, a necessary and vital element in the conduct of social affairs. If elections and the holding of elected office become the sole or even the major part of our politics we will have become corrupted by the very system of government and administration that community politics sets out to challenge. The process will have displaced the motivating ideas. We will have lost our reason for fighting elections at all.

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## 2. ORIGINS AND PROBLEMS

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Over a decade the Liberal Party has committed itself at decreasing intervals and with increasing majorities to the practice of community politics. It would be reasonable to expect that the ideas are now clearly understood and widely accepted in the Party. Such a presumption would not be correct. This is why we felt it necessary to open this booklet with a negative statement.

As acceptance of community politics has increased within the Party, understanding of the underlying ideology has not. The acceptance of 'community politics' has been based more on the electoral success that has been seen to stem from it than on the winning of an intellectual debate. It has been apparent at Liberal Party Assemblies that the

appeal of electoral success has been more potent than the appeal of the ideology. Some of its most persuasive advocates on the rostrum have been dangerously near to presenting community politics in terms of our opponents caricature of 'pavement politics' and thereby have revealed their ignorance of the underlying ideas. More discerning critics might have noticed that some of the most coherent criticisms that have been voiced in those debates have been of that caricature by people whose own ideas are entirely compatible with, but not necessarily the same as, the central ideas of community politics.

We realise that electoral techniques are easier to present and debate than the more complex and important underlying ideas, We are, however, committed to the belief that ideology is a necessary part of political debate, the only guarantee of consistent principle, and the unifying and motivating force of a Party. There is an urgent need to re-introduce ideas and ideology into the debate about and practice of community politics.

The intellectual origins of community politics lay in the disintegration of the 'Red Guard' leadership of the Young Liberal movement in the late 1960's. Many within the Party had been highly sceptical of the commitment of that generation of Young Liberal leadership to the central tenets of Liberalism. They were thus equally sceptical of a new body of thought stemming in large measure from that quarter. What they could be excused for failing to realise was that the triumph of distinctively Liberal ideas within that group, after intense doctrinal disputes, led a substantial number of those people to abandon the Liberal Party.

What emerged was a restatement of Liberalism in a new synthesis to meet the changed perspectives of a new generation: community politics. Every element in that synthesis has a pedigree in the classical Liberal tradition. It is the re-ordering of those ideas in an original combination and their application to modern society that has produced a potent new driving force, combining ideology with the cutting edge of a tough, competent political strategy.

In the early 1970's the advocates of community politics concentrated their efforts on demonstrating their ideas in practice. The campaigning techniques which they developed

proved a powerful recipe for electoral success; indeed they were so successful that some others emulated the techniques and the rhetoric and found them successful without ever understanding the underlying ideas. This led at first to the dangerous personality cult, partly induced by the press, of 'Jones the Vote', and later to the elevation to the high priesthood of the advocates of the 'ALC Method' of winning local government elections.

Out of this has emerged a new generation of highly effective activist campaigners working for the Liberal Party up and down the country and concentrating in large measure on local government. Many have transformed the politics of their locality and many have become Councillors' and some have taken substantial power in their Councils. They have set a new and dauntingly high standard for local government politics. The price they are in danger of paying is to drive themselves to the point of exhaustion and, perhaps more important, to deprive themselves of the time to think.

Activism involves a prime responsibility to have a clear set of ideas motivating one's actions.

The ALC have been the victims of their own success. Their influence and authority have created a new generation of tough-minded, politically competent activists, making ever greater demands for logistic support. The danger, however, is apparent when they are supplied with not only ready packaged techniques, but even the vocabulary of local action ('Artwork Sheets' as they are known). The Liberal Party and British politics are fortunate that the leadership of ALC consists of people with the experience, intellect and commitment to reject the encroaching dangers of mindless activism. Their foresight in commissioning this booklet is but one example of their broader view.

This pamphlet is an attempt to set out in clear terms the ideas from which the successful activist campaigning and electioneering techniques developed within the Party and promoted by the ALC have developed.

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# CAMPAIGN MAILING

CAMPAIGN MAILING is ALC's regular publication which links local and national issues. Produced ten times per year, it contains ideas for campaigning, background information, sample press releases and artwork on issues of topical interest.

It is produced by Peter Chegwyn with help from staff from the House of Commons Whips Office.

Subscriptions to Campaign Mailing cost £12 per year, (£10 to ALC members).

Send s.a.e. for sample copy, or subscribe by writing to ALC, The Birchcliffe Centre, Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, HX7 8DG.

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# COMMUNITY POLITICS

## THE THEORY

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### 3. WHY COMMUNITY?

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Our starting point is the individual. We want to find ways of enabling and encouraging each person to fulfil his or her own potential. We believe that men and women have an immense, largely unrealised capacity for self-direction, self-cultivation, self-understanding and creativity. The ultimate obscenity is to reduce people to the status of objects: to be led, manipulated, directed, discarded.

Our goal transcends political theory: it is an idea of human independence in which each, individually precious, human being has the liberty and the opportunity to experiment, to experience, to learn and to influence his or

her surroundings. This is the libertarian, rationalist, participative tradition of liberalism.

This kind of liberty is not egotistic individualism. It is not about having one's own way: it is about having a way that is one's own. A society based upon liberty is also based upon responsibility and inter-dependence. It requires a framework which guarantees liberty and supports inter-dependence. It is in *community* that mutual and individual responsibility operates. It is in interaction with others, in *community* with others, that the framework is fashioned and the guarantees freely agreed.

A *community* is a group of individuals with something in common: nationality, neighbourhood, religion, work, workplace, victimisation, hobbies and mutual interest are a few obvious examples. The members of a community have some interest in common: something which enables them to identify, one with another. Each person is likely to belong to many different communities, some important, some unimportant, some with a strong sense of identity, some with very little and some whose identity only appears when it is under threat. Some communities are latent; they are only called into existence - or rather their existence is only realised - when they become necessary or useful.

The most important and strongly felt communities are usually the smallest and most immediate. Thus, for many people the family is the most powerfully felt community and the quality of its relationships most instrumental in determining feelings of happiness, security and well-being.

People establish personal identities in relation to the communities to which they feel they belong. Within them they establish for themselves a role and a status, a level of expectations of behaviour in their own and other peoples eyes which they use as a measure of their own success and worth. Self-esteem is usually based on assessment of one's role within various communities.

Communities often develop a greater sense of identity if they are under threat, their way of life challenged, their members victims of discrimination, or their very existence under attack. Under such circumstances communities may discover a sense of unity and come together to organise themselves collectively.

Membership of a community implies some responsibility for other members. Communities have a capacity for mutual care and support in distress or when problems arise. They are not simply a way of establishing an identity in the world: communities look after their own by calling upon reserves of love and duty. Even mutual insurance; providing care now in return for help later has an important role to play.

Communities are not constant overtime. Their organisational form and extent vary according to need and inclination. New communities are formed, old ones pass away, some grow, some decline and their membership is forever in flux. Indeed, the pattern of some of the communities whose identity is strongly felt has undergone a profound change over the last century or more.

A great deal of nonsense is talked about the warmth and closeness of the traditional neighbourhood community and the extended family. There is no doubt that; in some places and at times of poverty or other threat, such communities have been important. Nevertheless, they could be restrictive narrowing and oppressive. Many people went to great lengths to escape from them. In any case, the important factor in support was always friendship rather than proximity. The problem today is the number of factors which inhibit the development of friend-ship and mutual support - geographical and social mobility, mass communications; and the emphasis on the nuclear family are some examples. The growth of the women's movement is an important countervailing factor, the full relevance of which is not yet realised.

The romantic nostalgia for the traditional fore to neighbourhood community and for the extended family may be based on a myth, but the prevalence and attractiveness of that myth show the extent of the need for mutual aid and support, for group friendship links - for community. Other functions of that idealised community include advice and information, the care of children and the very old, even the regulation of crime. As the scale of government has grown, it has become more and more apparent that intervention by the state is not and can-not-be a substitute for mutual aid within the community.

The stress on the most basic community - the nuclear family - has grown as other links have withered and it often cannot fulfil the role which is demanded of it. Indeed, the

romantic idealisation of marriage and the nuclear family has often directly contributed to breakdown. They cannot fulfil so ambitious a role, as the only form of social support outside the institutions of the state and the key intermediary between individuals and the rest of the world. This pervasive fantasy has almost made intolerable the lives of many people who choose to live singly.

A basic purpose of our approach is therefore to create and to re-create communities, providing a range of mutual support for their members, opportunities to develop and establish a personal role and purpose in life and in co-operation and conflict with each other, to provide the diversity and pluralism which is the basis of mature, participatory democracy.

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## 4. WHY POLITICS?

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Politics is the process of interaction between people and groups, leading to decisions which affect them and their environment. It is the way in which we influence our surroundings. Politics is universal. It is not concerned with the practice of 'politics' by professed 'politicians' working through or in pursuit of 'office' within 'government'. It is concerned with the exercise of power throughout society whether it be through formal structures or not.

The essence of politics is power. The central concern of politics is with the distribution of power and the inter-relation between different centres of power. Its secondary concern is with the control of power and of those who exercise it, the uses to which power is put and the processes by which decisions are reached and implemented.

The Liberal view is based on the moral imperative that all people have an equal right to take part in the process by which decisions that affect their lives are taken. The greatest threat to that right is the concentration of power. Democracy is dependent as much on the dissemination, distribution and control of power as it is upon the ballot.

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# 5. WHY COMMUNITY POLITICS?

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The objective of community politics is not the welfare of communities themselves. Communities are not in themselves an end. The end is the quality of the experience of each individual within them. The justification for community politics lies in the belief that the key to releasing the potential of each person as a unique individual lies in bringing together all individuals in voluntary, mutual and co-operative enterprise within relevant communities.

We have produced world-wide a society of mass production, mass marketing and mass consumption in which choice, participation and creativity are minimal. This approach and the values that have led to it, pervade every facet of human endeavour from industry, politics and commerce to recreation, sports, the arts and eating and drinking: It is a society that operates 'in a similar but, not identical way; irrespective of the professed ideology of the political group who are in control in any particular place at any particular time. All such political groups, some in good faith and some in bad, profess to be promoting the welfare of all. Most usually they do so at the expense of each.

Societies of such mass uniformity not only deny individuality to their members. They are vulnerable. Faced with changes in the factors upon which they are based, they must either adapt themselves as a whole or be faced with tensions which they may not survive. Indeed our current society is approaching just such a crisis. It has created an economy dependent upon the accelerating consumption of non- - renewable resources, that inevitably cannot continue. So it must adapt and change or go out of existence. Yet a mass and uniform society is by its nature ' inflexible.

The alternative is a society made up of many varied and different communities. Such a society offers the individual a wide range of personal choice of social role and life-style. Such a society has a dynamic inbuilt tendency to change and develop.

New ideas can be tried out on an experimental basis within a community where they could not within the whole of society with-out endangering it if they failed. So, it makes sense in terms of the resilience and survival of society to reverse the trends towards centralisation and uniformity, and to encourage decentralisation and variety.

But our perspective is primarily political. We are concerned with the distribution and control of power *within* communities *and* with the manner in which decisions, attitudes and priorities emerge from the full range of smaller communities to govern larger and larger communities. That process of confrontation conflict, negotiation, co-operation, change and law-making is the way in which societies should be run. The concept of pluralism is central to our view of politics, just as the concepts of free choice and diversity are central to our view of personal development. Pluralism is not a neat prescription or an easy concept: it is, however, essential to the alternative society which we are advocating.

We are not just concerned with the creation of communities, but also with their interaction, with the capacity of communities and the individuals who make them up for influencing the world around them and the decisions which affect or involve them, Our view is also outward looking and inclusive: we are not community chauvinists. We are all involved in mankind:

Our aim is therefore the creation of a political system which is based on the interaction of communities in which groups have the power, the will, the knowledge, the technology to influence and affect the making of decisions in which they have an interest. Even more, we want those communities to initiate the debate, to formulate their own demands and priorities and to participate fully in agreeing the rules by which their relationships are regulated.

The first stage in the creation of community is the emergence of a community identity, involving and interesting its members. Sometimes, such an identity will

emerge from a particular struggle and die with it. Sometimes such struggles leave behind a core of dedicated, disillusioned activists, representing nothing but themselves. Our role is to maintain communities which have a function to fulfil but, beyond that it is to create a habit of participation, binding a community together in a constant relationship with power and decision-making.

Within that broader community, there will be many smaller ones taking a more or less active role as they choose and are interested. The two key factors are, firstly, the habit of participation, linked with the techniques and access to power and, secondly, the framework of community institutions, of greater or less structure and formality as necessary, through which participation is made relevant and effective. The habit and reality of controlling their own affairs are crucial factors in keeping communities open, vital and active.

The nature of community politics thus entails a commitment to the dispersal of centralised power in society and its redistribution to the communities which make it up.

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## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The theory of community politics has direct implications for many areas of policy. It provides an ideological basis for many traditional Liberal policies as well as highlighting areas for fruitful investigation and, indeed, shedding new light on well practised arguments within the Liberal Party!

We hope that these examples not only demonstrate the close relationship between community politics and Liberalism; and illustrate the general theory further, but also provide more practical campaigning points.

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## **6. FEDERALISM**

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Community politics is quite incompatible with the centralisation of power at the level of the nation-state. Indeed, it is incompatible with the concentration of power at any level.

The most conspicuous and serious absence in Britain is of any structure of neighbourhood government. This is the level that most directly affects the everyday lives of every-one and it is the level of government in which everyone can take part directly. It is only in small, geographically coherent neighbourhoods that everyone can take a direct part in the making of decisions and the exercise of power. At any level above this, some form of indirect democracy involving representative government is needed.

Almost as serious in Britain is the lack of effective power and independence in local government. Local government, by virtue of the control exercised over it by the state through the control of its finances, has in effect become little more than devolved administration exercised by locally elected representatives carrying out the policies of the central government.

Local government has also been emasculated in many parts of the country by a re-organisation which has put the principle of common size and identical powers before the recognition of perceived local communities. Human settlements are not uniform and our pattern of government ought to recognise this. Barnoldswick has the same right to rule itself as does Leicester. The wilful creation of artificial units and the ignoring of natural communities serves only to destroy the basis of local government.

The impact on people of the lack of neighbourhood government and the failure of local government is immediate and clearly identifiable. The lack of regional government and of effective and democratic authorities at a continental, a sub-continental and a world level is more intangible in its effects but equally serious. It is the absence of regional authorities that has created much of the stultifying bureaucracy of British internal administration. It is the lack of supranational authorities that has failed to bring about effective arms control, has allowed exploitation by multi-national corporations to go

unchecked and has maintained the inequitable distribution of the benefits of the world's natural resources and the proceed of industrialisation.

Supra-national government is bedevilled by the idea that international democracy means 'one nation one vote', and by the concept of national sovereignty that demands that each country has a veto on any crucial decision.

National sovereignty is a perniciously dangerous concept that subverts the independence of lower levels of government and prevents the exercise of effective power by authorities at a higher level. There is nothing special, sacrosanct or intrinsically superior about the authority of national governments. It is their unbridled exercise of power that is the greatest threat to the ideal of community politics.

Power wherever exercised must be limited. It must be held in check by a framework of constitutional relationships backed by effective enforcement. Above all, the use of power must be held in check by the vigilance and activity of communities with the habit and techniques of participation. Communities at every level have a legitimate claim to exercise power within a defined and limited area. That area of power must be safeguarded against the encroachments of other levels of government. The central concern of politics should be the definition and protection of legitimate sphere of power as exercised by different authorities: that is to say with the evolution, introduction and enforcement of a multi-layered federal structure. Community politics implies federalism.

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## **7. INDUSTRY AND THE PUBLIC SERVICES**

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It is a mistake to think of communities solely in geographical terms. A place is not the only sort of entity that can exist as an organised community and possess a

degree of power to run its own affairs. We should be thinking equally of different functions of government and administration as arenas for the promotion of community politics.

In particular, community politics is applicable to the running of industry and other places of work. It is also applicable to the running of education, the health services and other public services. The establishment of the claims of the communities involved in these fields to run their own affairs is no different in principle from the claims of members of a neighbourhood residential community.

In practice the problems may be more complex. The differing and sometimes competing interests of different groups of workers and consumers must be reconciled. This is not easy and has been used as a justification for rejecting the idea altogether. Of course it is not: It is much more an indication of the need to experiment with a variety of different approaches. Even that at present is premature. It is the claim by communities of both workers and consumers to the control of their own destinies that must be promoted as a valid demand.

Community politics is relevant both as policy and as a process. In policy terms, we are looking for co-operative production, bringing direct and representative democracy into the planning, organisation and management of productive work. In terms of process, we are talking about the organisation and management of industrial communities which can take decisions and can interact in organising production just as any other democratic political community should do.

In the public services we are looking for co-operation, involving not only workers and representatives of the public interests, but also the recipients, the victims, of the services they provide. Health, education and transportation are a long way from any form of democratic control, and even further from any realisation of a role for consumers. There is a need for the policy of decentralisation and co-operation. There is a need for political organisation and community politics.

Community politics is as relevant to the shop floor and the classroom as it is to the housing estate and the town hall. It is significant and welcome that Liberal students are a

growing political force within further and higher education. It is important that they, like the local community activists, understand the nature of the community politics strategy and their role within it.

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## 8. CIVIL LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRACY

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A community running its own affairs is in itself no guarantee, although it is a pre-requisite, of a Liberal society. Any community retains the capacity to be repressive, intolerant and discriminatory in its treatment of outsiders and of its own members and it can be chauvinistic in its approach to the outside world. Indeed, ideas of community self-government are not exclusively Liberal. Some of our most bitter opponents have similar concepts - for instance, the National Front's advocacy of industrial democracy. Community politics can disintegrate into a surrender to the easy populism of the vested interests of a tyrannous majority. Nor should we forget that apartheid is a peculiarly ruthless and logically self-consistent distortion of community politics.

The Liberal vision of community politics is dependent upon the universal safeguard of civil liberties. Unless a community respects and upholds the liberty of the individual, of minority groups, and indeed of majority groups, no community, however well organised, however strong in group identity, can enhance the quality of experience of each and every individual who makes it up. Community politics is dependent upon the universal guarantee within each community of full democratic rights to all its members. This includes a fair voting system. The forms may vary according to the size and circumstances of the particular community but the principle itself is invariable.

Communities which sacrifice the liberty of the individual and democratic self-determination to whatever other

objective, are intrinsically no better than any other form of government. But communities can be the most complete way of safeguarding that liberty and freeing the full potential of their members for self-expression.

There are two distinctively liberal aspects of community politics which afford protection to civil liberty and democratic practice. The first lies in our belief that with the increasing exercise of power goes an increasing responsibility for its application. When power is spread, it is in everyone's interest to use their power to maintain the civil liberty of others lest it be their turn next. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance - not only for one's own freedoms, but for others'.

The second guarantee lies in the acceptance of personal moral responsibility to defend the liberty of oneself and others. In a society which is based on the habit and techniques of participation, in which civil disobedience can be a moral imperative, the difficulties of repression can be greater than the benefits. Tyranny depends not on the consent but on the apathy or despair of its subjects: in a society based on active consent, tyranny is impossible.

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## 9. SOCIAL WELFARE

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If the essence of community politics is to afford the maximum choice to each individual, that ideal cannot be realised if some of the most basic choices are denied to some people. For that reason community politics implies a full system of social welfare.

The welfare state is in a crisis. The expectations created a generation ago of a constantly rising standard of living for everyone, financed out of a steady and constantly continuing rate of economic growth, have led to a level of public demand for welfare provisions which currently is not and perhaps cannot be met. At the same time, the agencies of public welfare provision have grown into vast, insensitive bureaucracies.

Jo Grimond MP summed up the contradiction between the intent - the advertised purpose - of the welfare state, and the everyday reality, when he said that the institutions are "widely suspected of malevolence by precisely the people they are designed to help". In the eyes of such people, the Housing Department, the Supplementary Benefits Office, even the Health Service and Social Services Department, have taken over the roles of policemen and workhouse superintendents - to be treated with caution and suspicion and kept at arm's length.. The difference is that, today, the officers of the welfare state are more begrudging, more ubiquitous and more arbitrary; they are concerned with more and more areas of daily life and they are very much more intrusive into personal privacy.

These are not arguments against social justice or against a role for public authorities in meeting social need. They are arguments against the particular method of achieving social justice and competent, caring support for those in need.

The current ideology of social welfare is based on a limited and limiting view of the central role of the paid professional in providing support. That view is also inaccurate: it remains true that, in most areas of welfare, most support is provided by families, friends, neighbours and, above all, self-help. We believe that it is possible to base a strategy for social welfare on the community politics approach. The emphasis will be on self-help and mutual aid, on the sharing of skills and knowledge amongst those who provide care in the community. The role of professionals will be much more in the prevention of problems, in support for carers in the family and the community, and in the stimulation of community responsibility and care: This will involve a direct attack on the competency, bureaucracy and vested interests of many of those who are currently involved in providing services. In particular, professionals must be prevented from colonising the newly-rediscovered 'informal sector' of families, friends and neighbours. The process of resisting such colonisation, of building up mutual aid, and of providing limited support for carers is a political process involving the growth to power of communities. It is unlikely to be based on conscious decisions amongst professionals to limit their own interference.

There is also an urgent need to re-examine and to challenge the way in which decisions about priorities and resource allocation are made. Again, the case is for political and campaigning action, breaking down problems and decisions to a manageable and relevant level for direct participation by the victims of welfare paternalism.

Community politics poses a direct challenge to the social democratic ideology of centralised state welfare provision and its consequent undermining of the role of the community. Over the last 75 years, the ideology of bureaucracy, centralism and paternalism has developed to the point of suffocating its victims. Community politics offers the opportunity for a caring, competent alternative.

Social need is not confined within the boundaries of the nation state. There are whole populations in the Third World whose lives never rise above total and abject poverty. The remedies of international aid and the promotion of industrialisation have signally failed to work. With the current pattern of regular world recessions and a growing shortage of natural resources it is evident that they never will. Real solutions, are dependent on effective controls to prevent exploitation by international companies and freeing all from the shackles of national self-interest. Both require supra-national institutions pursuing a programme to promote social justice on a world scale. Community politics embraces a commitment to social justice embodying a supranational dimension.

We must be clear, however, that we do not create justice with equality. Social equality leads to a dull uniformity and an unacceptable degree of compulsion. That we reject. But without social justice the degree of diversity and choice that we advocate is not possible.

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## **10. ECONOMIC PLANNING**

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Central economic planning is one of the many threats to the independence of local communities. Just as local government has been effectively transformed into an agency of national government through expenditure controls, so economic planning centralised at a national level could, and indeed currently does, suppress the independent exercise of power by other communities within society.

To act independently a community must be able to determine its own level of expenditure. How the revenue is raised is of secondary importance. If one accepts this, it follows that centralised control of public expenditure is incompatible with community politics.

Further, the development of fully co-operative industrial enterprises on a community politics model makes the concept of a national prices and incomes policy both a nonsense and unenforceable. The need for such controls is based on the breakdown of the direct relationship between wages, prices and productivity. It is the rigidity and conservatism of Britain's industrial structure, and of our system of industrial relations, that lie at the root of our problems. It causes a vicious spiral which divorces the key elements of production from each other. In a system of *co-operative* production, income is related to productivity - to profit. Liberals have been far too shy about the economic implications of worker participation and co-operatives. The participatory economy is the alternative to the immobility of the present..

The regulation of the economy has created a centralised bureaucracy second only to that involved in the management of the welfare state. For all its monitoring and control, that apparatus has failed to create prosperity. Both in absolute terms and by comparison with other states, our economic management has not worked. It has not worked because it has substituted detailed interference for control of the framework within which interaction takes place, because of the stultifying effect of the controls themselves; and because it has generally been incompetent even in its own terms.

In the field of government and politics, we advocate freedom and interaction between communities within an agreed framework. In just the same way, we advocate economic freedom, with some decisions necessarily taken at a higher level, involving a group of communities coming

together as one larger community. Such a group of communities will need to protect itself against unfair competition from elsewhere and will need in the real, imperfect world to play a role in monetary and fiscal policy. The obvious example of such a larger community is, of course, the nation-state. It is not, however, the best example or the most relevant level.

The concentration of economic power at national level has distracted attention from economic relations between groups of nations. The crucial failure of most policies for regional economic development has stemmed from the obsession with central planning and subsidies to the direct detriment of any policy to develop regions as economic entities. A single currency and a lack of exchange controls between regions of one country may well prevent central planners even from considering such key factors in regional imbalance as the flight of capital and enterprise. Within regions, the same principle applies to smaller depressed areas such as the inner cities. From a logical point of view as well as from an ideological community politics perspective, the relevant larger economic units for our own country's future are summed up in the phrase "Europe of the regions".

The two keys to economic development and the conservation of resources are co-operative production and competitive distribution operating within a clear and firm framework of protection for freedom and enterprise. The two major steps forward will be the re-structuring of industry into co-operative units, and the breaking down of the scale of operation of industrial production. As in the political system, the essence of our view is based on self-managing communities, freely united in a federal system which establishes a just framework. The philosophy of community politics is also the political economy of freedom.

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# THE STRATEGY

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# 11. THE NATURE OF THE MOVEMENT

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Community politics postulates no Utopia. There is no point at which the transformation of society will be complete; when a new ideal order will take over from the old. Community politics recognises that society is always changing and that the purpose of political and social organisation is to enable that change to be controlled deliberately and democratically. Beyond that, it recognises that, as the structure of communities in society is always changing, so the political and social structures to which they give rise must also always change. Community politics is *dynamic* not static.

This truth has profound consequences for the nature of the political movement campaigning for community politics. The sort of comprehensive change in the distribution of political power that we wish to see cannot be accomplished in a single coup. It must be a continuing and accelerating process throughout the whole of society. And it will never be complete. If once it ossifies, it ceases to be community politics.

Because there is no final end product, the end cannot justify the means. The means and the end are the same thing. Community politics is the process of change itself. The movement for change must thus possess the characteristics of the society it wishes to create. It must be democratic, participatory, decentralised, community oriented, diverse, creative, dynamic, experimental and tremendous fun. As it grows it will become itself the very society it is campaigning to create.

Thus, there can be no centrally imposed discipline; there must be self-discipline. There can be no elite, organising and controlling; but rather a mutual and democratic co-operation. There can be no rigid party organisation; instead a constantly shifting coalition of interest groups, co-operating and campaigning together in parallel for social change where their interests coincide.

We believe that there is a crucial role in this movement for a Liberal Party. In any society, there is a need for a distinctive, tough-minded Liberalism, represented by an organised group. Our concern is with the nature of the movement around it, with the relationship between movement and Party and with the form and beliefs of the Party.

As we have made clear, we want to stimulate action by communities to take and use power. Although this process is in itself liberal, the goals and style of those communities need not be liberal. There is a need to defend, maintain and extend the practice of liberalism within and against many groups in society. We therefore see two roles for the Liberal Party in the community politics movement: firstly as the core of the movement, stimulating, enabling and supporting communities in campaigning; and secondly as the continuing force for liberal values and practice within the world.

Jo Grimond wrote in 1970 that he saw the Liberal Party's future as "a coalition of different groups putting different emphases on different parts of the same basic idea." In fact, the Party, despite occasional attempts, has never succeeded in emulating the organisational style that has characterised both Labour and Tory Parties over most of this century. One of the Liberal Party's great strengths lies in the diversity of approaches, political and organisational, to its single basic theme of liberalism. In the years ahead, we have to come to terms with the reality of combining full participation in and even leadership of a broadly based mass movement, with maintaining at every level of the Party a clear and coherent view of the need for Liberal values and Liberal campaigning. The Party's current failure to do this at a national level is an important weakness.

A necessary condition of these roles for the Liberal Party will be much more debate and much greater coherence at every level about the essential elements of liberalism - not the details of policies, but the unchanging ideas on which these transient policies are based. That security in belief is a pre-condition of the compromises and working relationships which are a necessary part of building the movement, and of working with non-Liberals. We shall work with a wide range of other groups in the pursuit of common objectives. Sometimes, our views and objectives will diverge from those of many of these groups.

Some alliances and coalitions will be long-term; others will be limited to specific issues. Whether it is the building of a Popular Front, at local or at national level, or whether it is a one-off protest meeting, the Liberal role will be clearer and easier if it is based on a coherent definition of the Liberal position.

Our movement is by its nature a campaigning movement. Two characteristics of community Politics make this necessary: it is a movement of consent and of democracy and it is a movement of vision and idealism. It will always progress, if it remains true to itself, by convincing people that its vision is worthwhile and is worth striving to translate into reality. It will only become a reality to the extent that people take part. If they do not it will fail.

The whole community politics approach is thus a continuous campaign.

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## 12. OBSTACLES TO CHANGE

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Movements for change have to come to terms with the immense resistance to change built into the institutions of the status quo. It is clear from many studies, and from our own experience, that public policy is not controlled to any great extent by the formal institutions of the political system, by Parliament, or even by the Cabinet. The nature of the corporate state, the process of consensus politics, the weight of the pressure on Ministers from their Civil Service advisers, all these have by now been fully documented. There is no coherent continuing control over the development and implementation of policy. Bureaucracy rules.

No one group of people can compete. Power is exercised by an interlocking network of competing interests. The Cabinet and Parliament are among them, although by no means the most important. Others are the Civil Service, The Treasury

in particular, the City, the C.B.I., the T.U.C., individual unions, large firm's, the political parties, the press and a varied and changing assortment of powerful individuals and opinion leaders. Most of the organisations are themselves bureaucracies, in which institutional preservation, playing by the bureaucratic rules and maintaining the status quo have taken over from any more open ways of making decisions. 'Parkinson's Law' said a lot about such institutions: unfortunately, Professor Parkinson did not go on to describe the political and economic system which results from the combination and interaction of such bureaucracies. Our job is not just to spread power; it is also to locate and attribute it, making defined people and definite groups answer for their decisions and actions.

The political establishment we have identified is immensely resilient. It changes and permits change only slowly. Over and over again we have seen the way in which politicians have given pledges in opposition that they have every intention of honouring, only to abandon them in office. We have seen bold radicals out of power, like Michael Foot, become the timid and reactionary mice of the Government front bench. We have seen the entire labour movement transformed within a couple of generations from a crusading zeal against social injustice to petty Wilsonian tinkering with the levers of power.

Indeed, the Labour movement is a fearful, lesson to us of how our own idealism could become corrupted and our radicalism diluted by the prospect, cynics would say the realities, of political office. If we are to avoid this sort of fate we must have-a clear concept of how it happens and how to avoid it.

Establishment institutions use two main mechanisms in resisting change. They corrupt, and they frustrate. The corruption is the corruption of individuals by power. In order to achieve power and maintain it, they compromise the very purposes for which they wanted to exercise it, until for many it is power itself that becomes the only recognisable end. Those who are not corrupted by power usually become frustrated in wielding it: They become side-tracked. Their attentions are diverted into peripheral areas and their energies dissipated into the pursuit of the irrelevant. Or they find their authority, undermined. The holding of political office is transient. The institutions are not. Many a Minister has found that changes he or she

wishes to implement have been sabotaged within his or her own department by delay and prevarication until he or she is safely out of office, superseded by a new and tamer incumbent.

Any radical political movement working by conventional means through the conventional process of politics is likely to fail. As it approaches power, its political radicalism will be undermined from within by ambition and compromise. When it achieves office it will find that its power is sufficiently circumscribed to prevent it implementing the radical programme to which it is committed.

This is of course the logic of revolution. The system will always prevail until it is overthrown. That will only come about through creating a revolutionary movement that can confront and destroy the system from outside, probably by violence.

Such revolutions have not been markedly successful. When they succeed they usually do no more than substitute a new ruling elite for the old one. The rhetoric, the vocabulary and the personnel may change, but the structure of institutions survives. For instance in Russia, the Czar's civil service became in large measure the Communist Party after the revolution. An even clearer example was seen in Portugal where, after the recent revolution, the deputy head of Salazar's military intelligence turned out to be a committed Marxist, ready to move into the new political arena with scarcely a hitch on the way. Political systems and political operators have a great deal in common across countries, across the centuries, or across a wide range of organisations.

More often revolutions fail, particularly where they attempt to be non-violent. The confrontation they seek is indeed sometime eagerly welcomed by the system it is meant to overthrow. The organised and concerted might of all the institutions of the state is more than a match for the most dedicated and widely supported revolutionary mob. The more highly developed the country and the more sophisticated its administrative system, the harder its overthrow becomes. Ultimately it may depend upon prolonged civil war and external intervention. Then one must ask whether the destruction and the suffering are not so terrible that they

cannot be justified except as an alter-native to the most repressive tyranny.

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## 13. THE DUAL APPROACH

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If the choice was between alternatives as stark as that, between conventional establishment politics or revolutionary confrontation, the outlook would be bleak indeed. But Community politics offers a third choice of much greater flexibility and sophistication. We cannot say with any degree of certainty that it will succeed. What we can say is that it offers a real hope of bringing about a peaceful and accelerating transformation of politics depending upon the determination and skill with which it is applied.

That choice has been termed the 'dual approach'. It involves working simultaneously within and outside the established political system. The fusion of the two approaches creates a strategy distinctively, new and different when allied to the ideas of community politics.

We work through the established political structures not to win and exercise power but to remodel that structure itself; to create a new generation of political institutions corresponding to the reality of the pattern of communities that exist within society; to break down the centralised power structure of our society so that no single person or group possesses disproportionate power and all people and groups share the responsibility for controlling their own affairs.

To subvert and destroy the political establishment in such a radical way requires a powerful political movement based outside the political system. We work outside the political system, not to create confrontation or to foment revolution. It is indeed a more radical process than revolution.

The aim, by promoting joint community action directly in society, is to create the very structures of community organisation which we wish to see emerge as the new political structure. We mobilise people to take control of their own affairs, to take power and to use it.

We work outside the political structure in a way that reinforces what we do within it. The two forms of action are co-ordinated and complementary. Together they have a greater prospect of success than either would have independently.

We are concerned with real power, not just with the trappings of office. In a democracy, power means much the same thing as influence - effective influence is political power and, as we have noted, many people who think they have power, find in the end that it is just influence. Often, indeed, it is a lot less influence than they would wish, but absolute power is undesirable in itself even when it is limited in time or field of operation.

People often confuse power with position. They may be linked but they are not the same thing. An obvious example is the legion of local government committee chairmen who have position but never exercise any effective power at all: Yet local campaigners, for example, can wield power without ever getting elected.

Our aim is to fuse the two elements of campaigning, to create the irresistible groundswell which will force and mould change. As politicians operating in the market-place of politics, we are involved in the skills of influence, of co-operation, of negotiation, of constructive conflict. Those skills are about achieving change by consent and making it stick against what-ever vested interests may oppose it. The skills are relevant both in the community and in the chambers and ante-rooms of representative democracy.

The advantages of building up the campaigning, community based movement lie in the continuing, unremitting pressure for concessions and change, in the guarantee of pressure being maintained even on those who come from the same group or party and in the ability of that movement to keep the faith when necessary compromises achieve only diluted success. Above all, the advantage of the movement is that it is not merely a pressure group; it is actually creating

on the ground the habits and institutions of community politics.

That is the groundswell which made Reform a reality in Britain, and which forced the Czechoslovak government of Dubcek beyond the point of no return in trying to create communism with a human face.

The advantages of building up the party to fight elections, win power and exert influence, are that its elected members can respond to the pressures, they can use the resources of the system, they can facilitate, enable, even finance the movement towards community awareness and community control. In any case, there is a contradiction built in to the argument of the activist who says 'that real democracy can only be attained by destroying the only manifestations of the democratic principle that we have'. Democracy, particularly representative democracy, and particularly in any large complex group, has to be learned by use and practice.

We believe in politics. We are committed to the interaction, the compromises, the conflicts which make up democracy. The present day Liberal Party needs to learn a lot both about its own underlying aims and about the skills necessary to achieve them. Elected representatives, in Parliament and in local authorities, need more often to ask themselves questions about their own direction, about how far they can influence decisions and administrative practices. They need to have before them, and to be continually reminded of the questions they should be asking themselves - does this proposal involve people in taking their own decisions, is there a modification which could be made to that proposal to safeguard a minority interest, can the other proposal be made more effective or more democratic? Minority party politics is not just about declaiming a policy alternative; it can also be about the exercise of real influence - real power.

Liberals can exert such power by using their skills and opportunities and by linking representative action to a mass movement which is actively creating and pressing for the alternative liberal society. The acceptance by Liberals of this role can be the breakthrough to a new politics and a new society.

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# 14. THE WORKING CLASS AND THE UNDERCLASS

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We have made a start, albeit a very limited one, in community politics campaigning. That start has been largely in residential neighbourhood communities and has been reflected in local government success. The attention which this has attracted within the Party has tended to lead people to identify community politics as local government politics.

This of course is false. We have neglected the problems of evolving a community politics approach relevant to Parliamentary campaigning both within the constituencies and at a national level. At present we are united by a common organisation and common policies, but present two wholly different styles at local and national level.

It has also led us to neglect interest groups of a non-geographical and non-residential nature. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the place of work. Industrial democracy is a key element of Liberal policy and the place of work a crucial arena for the application of community politics. Yet we have not even started to campaign there.

Before we do, we have to rid ourselves of the romantic idea of the working class systematised by the Trades Unions and the Labour movement into a series of powerful myths. The working class is not universally oppressed and exploited. The working class is not a revolutionary vanguard fighting to transform society. Working class solidarity with the poor, the oppressed and the exploited throughout the world is a figment of the imagination. The working class is not universally exploited by and opposed to capitalism.

The modern Trades Union movement has indeed a powerful vested interest in maintaining the present industrial status quo. Unionised labour is now a relatively privileged

group within society. They have traded any aspirations they might have had for control and responsibility in industry for financial reward and security. That reward and security is deeply rooted in our current industrial structure. The Trades Unions have become an immensely conservative force. Any change within industry is a threat to their entrenched position and any concession must be bought for the highest price possible in crude financial terms. The pace-makers are doing very well indeed. The others follow according to the differentials that have evolved out of the strength of their bargaining position.

Black workers in Southern Africa would not even smile at the thought of solidarity with a Yorkshire miner. Hollow laughter would rapidly give way to anger. The 'industrial proletariat' of the First and Second Worlds enjoy their prosperity every bit as much from the exploitation of resources and the creation of subservient economies in the Third World as do the multi-national corporations and 'inter-national capitalism'.

Our work with the Trades Unions and with people at their places of work must have its basis in an understanding of this reality and a rejection of romantic myths. In working with the labour force, we are working with wealth producers who already have a substantial stake in that wealth. That is not wrong, except insofar as it is based on the exploitation and poverty of others.

In promoting community politics on the shop floor we shall be challenging both the orthodoxy and the vested interests of the Trades Union movement. We will be reviled as anti-union and lackeys of the bosses. We will face bitter and determined opposition from a minority of dedicated activists ruthless in their methods and democratic in name only. Yet if we persist, match their commitment and evolve techniques as effective as, yet different from, those we have pioneered in residential communities, we will evoke an equal response by giving hope and a direct involvement to many who have become cynical and alienated. We will begin to create industrial democracy.

But we will not be ending exploitation and deprivation. The deprived and exploited in our society are not, in general, the industrial working classes. There is a new under class of people without the means of earning, without the means of exercising power pushed around by government agencies,

the needs ignored, their dignity trampled underfoot and with few who will stand up for their rights, defend their interests or state their case.

Such people enter a vicious descending cycle of deprivation. What may begin as no more than an apparently minor misfortune can lead to the loss of employment, homelessness, the breaking of family ties, a desperate shortage of money leading to inadequate clothing and diet. To label it the poverty trap is to overlook the desperation and sheer misery of it.

All those groups that fall outside the mainstream of social normality are vulnerable: the old, the unemployed, the young, ethnic minorities whatever their colour, single parent families, the sick, the disabled, the illiterate, the mentally retarded, the mentally ill, orphans, gay people, artist political activists particularly for minority causes, alcoholics, gamblers, itinerants and ex-offenders. They are not, of course, separate groups. If one belongs to one, the chances are greatly increased of belonging to others. They are all people who are highly stigmatised in society, as if social disapproval could provide a justification for discrimination and deprivation.

A real challenge to community politics is our ability to get amongst these people and stimulate them into effective politic campaigning and community organisation.

In no way are we advocating the dispensation of charity or provision of social work. The problem is a political one and it demands a political solution. Without it, whatever assistance is handed out, the problem will recur. And the political impetus must come from those involved themselves. We can be no more than a catalyst. But that role is essential. We have not yet started to fulfil it.

A politically effective and organised underclass is not itself going to solve all its problems. That will depend on complementary action within the political system. Nor is it going to provide us with electoral dividends of any substantial significance. It is important simply because the need is greatest. Its justification is its own intrinsic worth in restoring to demoralised people a sense of their own dignity and an ability to control their own lives. That is what community politics is about.

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# THE LIBERAL TRADITION

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## 15.

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This booklet, whatever its inadequacies, can be traced to four roots: our own backgrounds, reading, interpretation and belief; our own and others' experience of politics; our conscious and deliberate attempt rationally to think through, to develop, to synthesise a coherent theory of community politics; and also the British Liberal and Radical tradition in which we are working.

We have not used Liberal thinkers and activists of the past merely as a starting point. Rather we have developed our own ideas, we have discovered common themes in Liberal history, and we have read and interwoven their ideas and approaches with our own. Liberalism has no single Bible to be followed; it has instead a rich and varied series of contributions on and around continuing themes.

The principle of government by consent, of a constitutional and judicial framework to guarantee liberty, goes back to Hobbes and Locke and beyond. The commitment to the principles of civil, social and personal liberty, the concept of the tyrannous majority, the belief in pluralism and diversity, the democratic basis of representative government are all best described by J.S. Mill. Professor T.H. Green takes the argument about liberty further, developing the important idea of positive liberty which is enshrined in the preamble to the Liberal Party Constitution today.

The commitment to social liberty, the ideas of community, the belief in welfare service to free individuals is developed by Mill and then carried through thinkers and activists from Hobhouse and Lloyd George to Keynes and Beveridge. The belief in the capacity of a free community

to exercise power responsibly is the underlying theme of the 'optimists', the 19th century Liberal reformers and leaders.

Fox's commitment to liberty, to self-determination, to an impartial judicial process marks the real start of organised liberalism. Gladstone carried those principles further into practice and principle. More recently, leading Liberals have maintained liberalism's record as the defender of liberty.

Acton, so much under-rated as a contributor to Liberal thought, was the precursor of much that we have written. His conception of the dynamism of politics, the process of evolution and change in societies and institutions, his conception of federalism as an idea of infinite possibility all these are important parts of our own ideology.

In terms of campaigning style, of relationships between a party and a movement, of outrage at social injustice, we have learned a lot from the Radicals of the 19th century - and could learn a great deal more. To Grimond is owed much, for example his concept of the movement as distinct from the party, and his analysis of the evils of bureaucracy.

It is immensely heartening to find one's ideas for action and for theory foreshadowed by others. When they are so clearly part of a single, coherent political tradition, it makes us sure that we are politically at home.

Our intention in writing this booklet has been to create a new synthesis of old ideas; to apply Liberal values to modern society and, in so doing, to establish not only a theory but also a clear strategy for action. In the last analysis, our theory will not stand as an isolated, intricate work of philosophy: it will be judged as a basis for action.

Our movement needs ideas and debate. It needs experiment and campaigning. They must always be interlinked. Our hope is that we have made some contribution to that process.

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## About the authors

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He was for many years active in the Young Liberal Movement and was Political Vice-chairman of the National League of Young Liberals. He is a former Liberal Parliamentary candidate for North Bradford and a former Director of Policy Promotion of the Liberal Party.

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Although Bernard is often met with the greeting "Hello Tony" (and vice versa) he is no relation.

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