LIBERAL REFORM

PETER BANCROFT   **BARONESS SUSAN KRAMER**   **ROB BLACKIE**

Fringe event - Saturday 12th March 6.15-7.15pm - Hilton - Bootham Room

PROGRESS THROUGH DISRUPTION: THE LIBERAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SHARING ECONOMY

The rise of the so-called 'sharing economy' has been fast, with technology disrupting industries as varied as transport, banking and hotels. Is such disruption to be welcomed or treated with caution? We debate with our panel of experts: **Baroness Susan Kramer**, **Rob Blackie** and **Peter Bancroft**. Chaired by Liberal Reform Board Member, **Siobhan Mathers**.

LIBERAL REFORM DRINKS
Saturday 12th March 7.30pm onwards

We will be meeting for informal drinks in the bar of the Hilton from 19.30 onwards on Saturday. Please come and say hello! We would be interested in your thoughts on the party's position and the role LR can play in its future.

THE FIRST ONE MEMBER ONE VOTE CONFERENCE

Liberal Reform have been big supporters of one member one vote so we are really looking forward to our first conference since its introduction. If you are a first-time delegate who would not have been able to come before: Welcome!

Our top conference tip (apart from coming to the Liberal Reform Fringe meeting and drinks) is to take a look at the training sessions, which are often really good, and to spend at least some time in the main auditorium as well as the bar!

F4: Liberal Democrat Economic Policy

The first motion of conference is an hour on the economy. Unfortunately, the motion itself is notable primarily for its blandness, as well as for what is not there. No one would know from this that the UK has one of the strongest digital economies in the world.

Extraordinarily for the party of Cobden, Mill and Keynes there is no mention of free trade and the prosperity it brings.

Nor is there any mention of the role of enterprising, entrepreneurial individuals who featured so heavily in Tim Farron's excellent speech on the economy last year.

There is also nothing about the success of the UK economy during the coalition, the record levels of employment and the recent report by the IMF on the strength of our economy during our time in government. Why would we want to let the Tories take the credit for this?

A number of amendments have been submitted on the motion, and we hope in particular that an excellent amendment supported by the Tower Hamlets local party (and many members) is selected for debate by the Federal Conference Committee.

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F6: Fracking

This motion seeks to replace the recently agreed policy that fracking should be allowed under the strictest environmental standards. The current policy is sensible both on environmental grounds - we are still burning coal which could be substituted - and geopolitical grounds - Russia's foreign policy belligerence is strengthened by European reliance on gas imports.

The motion appeals to the notion that a binding target will reduce carbon emissions to argue against an actual measure to reduce carbon emissions - that of burning gas instead of coal. No doubt the same will be said against nuclear power. But if we oppose one measure after another to reduce carbon emissions, then the target, "legally binding" or not, looks more like posturing than a genuine commitment to reducing emissions.

F7: Regulatory Framework for Cannabis

We welcome this motion, which is in line with the sensible, evidence-led Liberal Democrat policy to treat drug use as principally a health problem, and the growing worldwide trend for legalising cannabis. The early evidence from places that have already followed such an approach is promising.

We note that the motion appears to be missing any discussion of the danger of 'renormalising' smoking through cannabis, or of the risk of cannabis being a gateway drug to tobacco, if products mixing the two drugs are permitted, but this can be addressed during the debate.

On a related topic, it is a little surprising that FCC has consistently rejected a motion to allow a discussion on minimising harm from nicotine - a much greater public health problem - by facilitating the switch from tobacco to electronic cigarettes.

F12: Privacy and Security in a Digital Age

We welcome this motion, in an area in which Lib Dems have something distinctive to say. This motion represents Lib Dem policy-making at its best, demonstrating a depth of knowledge and practical liberal approach. Since the motion was drafted there have been a number of Parliamentary reports looking at the draft bill, and we hope in particular that some of the criticisms made in the excellent report of the Intelligence and Security Committee can be reflected on in the debate.

F20 Electing Diverse MPs

It seems likely that this will be the most contentious debate of the conference – not because there is any doubt about the need for us to have a more diverse (as well as larger!) Parliamentary Party, but because of the proposal to introduce all-women shortlists (AWS). Liberal Reform members, like those of other groups in the party, have a variety of views on AWS and Liberal Reform does not take a collective position on the issue. However, we do hope that in the debate everyone can accept that there is a common belief among all members about the ends that we are trying to achieve, and that taking a different view on the means to achieving those ends does not make someone 'illiberal'.

F21: A Fair Deal for Private Renters

This motion would perhaps have been better discussed at the London Region Conference since it seems very focused on the problems of the capital. It also has some extremely odd items under the 'calls for' section. To ban the advertising of new homes overseas might have been practicable in 1986 but in the days of the internet seems to be rather missing the point. More seriously, we do not understand the point of calling for mandatory licensing of landlords. Local authorities already have the power to introduce such systems – surely we should leave it up to them to decide if they need to use it?