

# PRINCIPLES OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

*These are not necessarily all party policy but are the collective views of a number of individuals involved in the panelling process for local council elections and is prepared for prospective candidates.*



**LIBERTY** is the primary Liberal Democrat value, constrained only by John Stuart Mill's principle that individuals are free to do whatever they wish provided others are not harmed. This means that Liberal Democrats embrace pluralism, value variety, welcome people with different cultures and religions and believe that diversity enriches society. If the preservation of liberty clashes with other Liberal Democrat beliefs, such as equality, then Liberal Democrats put liberty first.



**EQUALITY AND WELFARE.** Liberal Democrats believe that each individual should be treated with equal concern and respect. Hence we believe that the extremes of income should be kept within generally acceptable limits and that the state should use progressive taxation and public investment to reduce inequalities. This would include the provision of a generous safety net for those whose incomes, for whatever reason, fall below the level for them to be able to participate fully in the rights and responsibilities of society. The Welfare State was introduced by the Liberals: Lloyd George (the People's Budget, sick pay, retirement pensions) and Winston Churchill (employment exchanges); and was developed on the principles set out by William Beveridge in his historic report, using the economics of J M Keynes. The Liberal Democrats are the only party consistently advocating higher levels of taxation as necessary to finance a decent society.



**DEMOCRACY.** Liberal Democrats believe in a society based on trust and not, as both Conservatives and Socialists intrinsically believe, in coercion.

Liberals advocate:

- parliamentary reform, so that the people's elected representatives can exercise genuine control over the executive;
- reform of the electoral system by the introduction of proportional representation by the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies, which is not only fairer than "first past the post" but also diminishes the power of the parties and increases that of the voter, and makes almost every vote count;
- an elected second chamber, ideally representative of the regions, to which much power will have been devolved;
- devolution of power to the nations and regions, with democratic national and regional governments;
- strong local government, financed at least in part by a tax on land values, with entrenched powers and responsibilities.

Liberal Democrats believe that political power should be exercised at the lowest possible level. We are devolvers, not centralisers.

**INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACY.** Liberal Democrats' trust in individuals extends  to the workplace, where we believe that workers should have a share in the decisions their firms make (which often have a bigger influence on their daily lives than the decisions of government.) We have advocated and pioneered schemes of profit sharing and of industrial democracy.

The following extracts from the "Liberal Yellow book" published in 1928:

*The real purpose of profit sharing, in conjunction with (a) system of organised consultation... is to show that the worker is treated as a partner, and that the division of the proceeds of industry is not a mystery concealed from him, but is based upon known and established rules to which he is a party.*

and a Liberal Report of 1979 on the environment, demonstrate the long commitment to these principles:

*Once the basic needs of food and shelter are met, man's greatest satisfactions are to found in love, trust and friendship, art and music and in learning, none of which are served by the mythology of growth for its own sake.*

Belief in the value of variety means that we do not lay down a single pattern. The concept of “Stakeholder” firms and, indeed, a “Stakeholder Society”, is essentially Liberal.



**INTERNATIONALISM.** Liberal Democrats believe that Liberal values should extend beyond the shores of this country. With our predecessor party we are the only British political party to have consistently supported full, enthusiastic and committed membership of the European Union from its inception, not simply because we feel that to stay outside, or to be semi-detached, condemns the UK to fourth rate political and economic significance, though that is probably true, but because we see the EU as a bold and exciting adventure. The more idealistic may even see it as a step on the way to world government. The European Parliament is the only legislature anywhere in the world elected across national borders.

Liberal Democrats believe that international action should be taken through the United Nations, which should be reformed to reflect present day political realities. We campaign consistently for Third World development through the cancellation of unpayable third world debt, the reform of the world trading system and a substantial increase in the flows of development aid from the rich to the poor countries.



**SUSTAINABILITY.** Liberal Democrats reject the concept that economic growth in the developed countries is the an acceptable determinant of success in politics and in life. We seek measures to combat climate change and to secure a more equitable sharing of what we have, together with safeguarding an inhabitable planet and the quality of the environment

through the conservation of energy, the development of sustainable energy sources and economic processes. We place the emphasis on greater happiness thorough involvement in art, leisure and the community rather than simply the accumulation of further private material wealth.



**EDUCATION** is seen by Liberal Democrats as a major liberating experience. We reject the restrictive link between education and employment and believe that every individual should have access to, and the opportunity to enjoy education for its own sake throughout their lives. We reject the present “league table mentality” as being largely a categorisation by social conditions and an unwarranted means of undermining committed teachers who choose to work in difficult schools.



**HEALTH** policy should be determined within a democratic regional structure with key priorities being public health and preventive medicine.



**SECURITY** is achieved by fostering strong communities which are capable of identifying and reporting anti-social behaviour, coupled with genuine community policing. Crime is deterred by the likelihood of being caught rather than by the penalties for conviction.

John Cole (Shipley), Michael Meadowcroft (Leeds) and Peter Wrigley (Kirklees).  
Beecroft Publications, Waterloo Lodge, 72 Waterloo Lane, Leeds LS13 2JF  
e-mail: [info@beecroftpublications.co.uk](mailto:info@beecroftpublications.co.uk)

March 2020