

# Letters to the Editor

## Lib Dems in the Cities

I took out a subscription to the *Journal* only to find I was already part of living history.

Michael Meadowcroft's analysis of Liberal Democrat performance in the large cities ('Lib Dems in the cities', *Journal of Liberal History* 117, winter 2022–23) suggests the party's prospects in my own city, Birmingham, are 'depressing' – in spite of our making significant gains of four seats against Labour in 2022.

In discussing Birmingham, he might of course have ranged further in Liberal history as, of all the metropolitan cities, we are unique in having a large Conservative base dating back to the defection of the Chamberlain family from the Liberals. Indeed, the city has been run, unassisted, by the Conservatives in recent memory.

His numerical analysis implies that our gains in 2022 were purely localised and his overall analysis, reasonably, questioned what the Liberal Democrats in the 2020s have to offer the large cities and whether the party has the capacity to take power again in these places. The large electoral wards in Birmingham are certainly tough going for community politicians and even tougher for those seeking to follow party handbooks on electioneering.

However, the Birmingham gains were not just the result of localised 'trench' campaigns

but were underpinned by the city party's approach to the diversity and difficulties of urban life – and offer the party some indication of the direction it might take. Of the new group of 12, five are of Asian heritage and two are Muslim women. The Liberal Democrats were the only party to have a council candidate of Somali heritage. This diverse council group operates – and operated before 2022 – as an effective team, challenging Labour's neglect of the city's diverse neighbourhoods. The 2022 Birmingham manifesto was genuinely radical and clear-sighted and developed by the party's membership. For instance, we were the only party to advocate congestion charging – but with the proceeds becoming part of a programme of localised action in response to climate change rather than, as is normal in urban planning, going to big projects.

In the end, history will judge whether the prospects are now as depressing as Michael indicates. However, Birmingham was the birthplace of urban Liberalism and may be part of its rebirth.

*Jon Hunt (Birmingham group leader 2016–23)*

## Colin Coote

I was interested to see the reference to Colin Coote as a 'moderate coalition Unionist

MP' In K.O. Morgan's article on 'Lloyd George and the hard-faced men 1918–22' in the recent special issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 119, summer 2023). It is worth correcting the record, I think, to advise that Colin Coote was in fact the Coalition Liberal MP for the Isle of Ely, elected unopposed in 1918 and then losing to the Tories in 1922 when both the Conservatives and Labour stood against him. Interestingly, he had replaced one of Rosebery's sons, Neil Primrose, unopposed, at a by-election as MP for Wisbech in 1917 after the former was killed in action in Palestine. Coote was later editor of the *Daily Telegraph* between 1950 and 1964.

Coote produced a memoir called 'Editorial' which contains on pages 108 to 109 his description of the episode with Frank Hodges that Morgan referred to in the article.

*Malcolm Baines*

## Peter Hain

It is a pity that the *Journal* devoted so much newsprint to the article by Peter Hain ('Stop the Tour!', *Journal of Liberal History* 118, spring 2023). I found the article to be somewhat geared to self-promotion and interest and lacked any objectivity. When all is said and done, the protest was anything other than peaceful. Liberal principles do not encompass criminal activity.

*David Yates*