

# Liberal Democrat Voice

● Lib Dem Voice is the party's premier independent website for news, information and discussion on liberal themes. Every day, there are new stories. The articles below are extracts from the site - but you can read the site itself and join in the debate at [www.libdemvoice.org](http://www.libdemvoice.org)

## Follow the yellow brick road? The Liberal Democrats' general election campaign

*LDV editor Mark Pack was asked to contribute a chapter to the Total Politics Guide to the 2010 General Election*

The 1997 general election turned out to be a once in a generation opportunity for many local Liberal Democrat campaign teams to gain a Parliamentary seat from the Conservatives. At the tail end of a by then deeply unpopular Conservative Government, the election saw unprecedented numbers of seats falling to the party. A few seats that were not quite gained from the Conservatives in 1997 did subsequently fall in 2001 and 2005, but it was the 1997 election with the Conservatives in government that was the main opportunity. Nearly every campaign that missed then did not subsequently win.

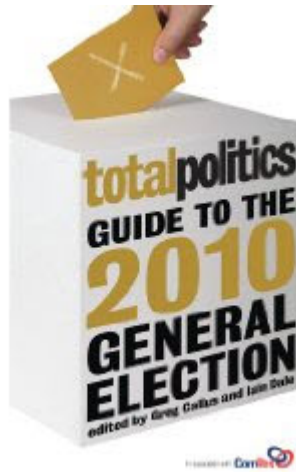
The next general election looks most likely to present the Liberal Democrats with a similar opportunity for seats to be gained from the party in Government, this time Labour. The crucial difference however is the battle between the Liberal Democrats and the main opposition party. In 1997, with Tony Blair's Labour Party in opposition, there were very few Liberal Democrat MPs who had to hold on to their seat against a major challenge from the opposition party. Next time however, with David Cameron's Conservative Party as the opposition, there are many Liberal Democrat MPs who have to hold their seats against a Conservative

challenge. Whilst 1997 was therefore mainly a contest for the Liberal Democrats against one other major party, the next general election will be a contest against two.

That is the double-pronged challenge facing the Liberal Democrats – gain large numbers of seats from Labour whilst making small progress or holding their own against the Conservatives. (In Scotland and Wales there are few seats where there is a direct Liberal Democrat versus nationalist battle, though the SNP ability to take votes off Labour may actually assist the Liberal Democrats in making gains.)

But it is not only many individual local campaign teams who face a make or break opportunity. So does Nick Clegg. For the leader of the third party, their first general election provides a key opportunity to make or break their reputation on the national stage. Both media habits and media regulations see the third party leader given significantly more coverage in a general election campaign than beforehand. For most of the public, it is the first time they really get a chance to form deeply rooted views of the person. Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy both prospered in this limelight. Ming Campbell never got the chance to find out, and now Nick Clegg has the opportunity ahead of him.

**Read the rest of the article and readers' comments at <http://ldv.org.uk/16707>**



## Brown or Cameron? You decide!

*Lib Dem Voice always has a poll for our readers. In mid November, Editor Stephen Tall asked who you'd least like to be Prime Minister.*

Oooh, here's a nasty 'forced choice' question to thrust upon LDV's readers ... let's assume for a moment that, by some quirk of electoral fate, the Lib Dems do not storm to victory at the next general election, and Nick Clegg is not asked by Her Maj to form the next government. A far-fetched scenario, I know, but go with me on this. If those were the circumstances, who would you rather have as Prime Minister: Gordon Brown or David Cameron?

And, yes, those are your only two choices in this poll. We're not giving you an easy 'neither of them' cop-out answer. No opportunity to bat back equidistant platitudes: if you answer this poll question, you must perforce come down off the fence and take a stand.

No, it's not easy, is it? I'm genuinely torn. That's why (with a tip of my hat to my LDV colleague Richard Huzzey) I thought it was a genuinely interesting question to pose.

The results of our poll:

**In the event of Nick Clegg not forming a government after the next election, who do you least want to be Prime Minister in a year's time?**

**Gordon Brown**

**459 votes - 42%**

**David Cameron**

**629 votes - 58%**

Read the rest of the article and over 50 comments at <http://ldv.org.uk/16844>

# Danny Alexander MP writes ... Campaigning on Our Manifesto

On Friday, 18 December, Nick Clegg emailed all members to outline our position on the abolition of tuition fees. It was great to see our position, agreed by both the Federal Policy Committee and the Parliamentary Party, broadly welcomed on LDV and elsewhere.

Saddling students with huge debts as they leave universities, particularly at a time when many are failing to find jobs through no fault of their own, is clearly wrong. And the prospect of such debts putting talented young people off going to university is equally wrong. That is why our plan to scrap tuition fees over 6 years from the election will be one of a very small number of core commitments in our manifesto.

By demonstrating that we remain the only mainstream party committed to scrapping tuition fees and doing so in a financially responsible way, we have given our campaigners on the ground a strong message – particularly in university seats; whilst maintaining our reputation for economic competence which has been so hard won by Vince Cable and his team.

Nick's announcement on Friday is part of a series of announcements that we are planning over the coming weeks and months outlining the priorities which will be in our manifesto. We will be drawing attention to what will be our key priorities and commitments in government that, like scrapping tuition fees, will be aimed at building a fairer country.

We were keen to announce our position of the abolition of tuition fees as soon as it had been finally agreed and costed as we know what an important issue it is for many members of the party. And I hope campaigners and candidates in constituencies across the country will use this policy to take the fight to the other two parties, both of whom have no serious answers to the problems of student finance.

We have, of course, already outlined our tax pledges for the manifesto – promising to lift the income tax threshold to £10k, meaning four million people will pay no income tax at all and an average earner will get a £700 tax cut. Paid for by closing tax loopholes and ensuring the very wealthiest play their fair share. The difference could not be clearer between us and a Labour government that has announced plans to increase National Insurance for everyone earning over £20k and a Tory party who are planning tax cuts for millionaires.

These announcements are the first steps to a manifesto that I am confident will be the only one at the next election to offer the real change our country needs to tackle the crises in our economy, our political system, and the environment. We will show that we are able to make the hard choices necessary to fix our economy and make our society fairer.

*\* Danny Alexander MP is Chair of the Manifesto Group and Nick Clegg's chief of staff.*

**Read the readers' comments at <http://ldv.org.uk/17291>**

## Derby North: hung parliament territory?

Let's start with a health warning. My first-hand knowledge of Derby amounts to changing trains there once a decade ago. But the press are keen to help us find out more. Derby North qualifies as a three-way marginal (Lab 39.5%, Lib Dem 30.6% and Tories 25.9% according to Antony Wells). And not one but two national papers descended on the seat to find out how the public saw the PBR.

Slightly bizarrely, they both report on the seat as a Conservative prospect. (It is number 130 on the Tory hit list, number 30 on the Liberal Democrat list of targets.) The Guardian is too high-minded to ask people how they are going to vote. But beneath a headline that is all about Conservative prospects ("Derby holds key to Tory hopes of election victory") the

Times reports a set of vox pops that will please any Liberal Democrat.

Few in their sample were entirely convinced who they would vote for. But the first time voters are moving towards voting Liberal Democrat. The Labour voters are torn between voting Liberal Democrat and spoiling their vote.

And the traditional Conservative voters? They are almost the most interesting group here – and split three ways. Some are staying loyal but probably not Sally Timmins: "We need a change. I won't vote Labour but I am not particularly enamoured with the Tories either. I feel very frustrated by what has happened to the economy. I am the lucky one. A lot of my colleagues have lost their jobs. We

have got good Lib Dem councillors and I would like to vote for them at the general election, but I have got to decide whether it would be a wasted vote. David Cameron is just Blair in Tory clothing: the consummate, glossy PR guy. I want to see some conviction and the Lib Dems seem more in touch with ordinary people...Vince Cable made good sense, as usual..." Elsewhere, a couple of Tory voters are in the "half a mind to vote UKIP" camp.

Overall, the vox pops show a set of voters more likely to make Derby North a Lib Dem gain from second place, rather than a Tory gain from third.

**This article was written for LDV by Peter Welch. Read the rest - plus readers' comments at <http://ldv.org.uk/17131>**