Is Liberalism Progressive?

**Top line**

ippr proposes to publish a collection of essays examining the role of Liberalism in modern British politics at a critical point in the development of the ideology. The aim is to assess and outline a modern Liberal path to social justice and equality.

This collection of essays aims to contribute to the development of a compelling political narrative that stitches together the key themes and values that underpin a modern, progressive Liberalism.

**Aims:**

- To contribute to the development of a Liberal conception of social justice and equality in a modern context
- To identify the key philosophical issues fundamental to the renewal of progressive Liberal thought and consider the tensions and links between themes and issues
- To develop a coherent narrative that stitches together the key Liberal values
- To examine the historical relationship between progressive and Liberal politics in Britain and identify ideological cleavages
- To set this debate within a global context
- To outline the global and domestic political and policy challenges facing Britain in 2006 and ask how a progressive Liberalism could and should respond
- To identify the key Liberal thinkers and intellectuals and their ideas for the future of progressive Liberalism

**Links to ippr’s work**

ippr is the UK’s leading progressive think tank. Since its inception, ippr has built up a well-deserved reputation for generating new and imaginative ideas. Its aim is to continue to be a force for change by delivering far-reaching and realistic policy solutions in order to produce a fairer, more inclusive and more environmentally sustainable world.

ippr’s mission is to contribute to democratic and political renewal. To this end, this book would build on ippr’s seminal and influential Commission on Social Justice (1994) and the more recent Social Justice: Building a fairer Britain (2005). In addition it will update the landmark analysis published in the Audit of Social Injustice 2004 (Paxton and Dixon 2004). It would also draw on ippr’s Population Politics report (Dixon and Margo 2006), and our 2005 Changing World analysis (Dixon and Pearce 2005).
It would benefit from the fiscal modelling experience of the Directors’ Research Team. It will draw on the expertise of ippr’s core staff across the institute, using the most recent, rigorously researched and evidence-based theories to inform the analysis.

The outline:

Foreword: ippr and progressive political thought, Dame Shirley Williams (250 words)

Since its inception ippr has endeavoured to contribute to the renewal of progressive politics – a political ideology which has always incorporated both Social Democratic and Liberal strands. At various times in history these have come together and broken apart; this book is both an effort to trace this historical relationship and to explore its relevance to politics today.

Section 1 Liberalism in Context

Ch 1 Introduction, Nick Pearce and Julia Margo (2,000 words)

This introduction will set out the case for a wide-ranging renewal of progressive Liberal political thought in 2006, asking what Liberalism means in today’s politics and what the Liberal path to social justice would consist of.

It will explain that the book will critically examine the historical relationship between progressive politics and Liberalism, in order to contribute to the renewal of a progressive Liberal ideology that is equipped with the ideological tools to make Britain a fairer and more socially just society. It will ask whether the core themes seen to underpin modern Liberal thought, such as Social Justice, Choice, Localism, Security and Sustainability, contribute something meaningful to Liberalism as an ideology or as an ideological lens through which to view society, and will defend the rationale for the issues covered in the book.

The essays in section 2 provide the ideological and historical context within which we consider the future of Liberalism and its overarching narrative.

In section three Liberal politicians are asked to explore the tensions between key progressive themes and Liberal ideology and to ask whether these themes provide a useful framework for looking at the world. They will draw out the aspects within these themes that should contribute to a progressive Liberal narrative.

Ch 2 Progressive Liberalism? Unravelling ideologies, Professor Michael Freeden (4,000)

This chapter will analyse the dynamic relationship between Liberal and progressive politics, flagging up where there are key conceptual divides. Seeking to bring liberalism and progressivism together offers the opportunity to include prominent strands in political science and political economy (dominated mainly by classical liberalism) into progressive politics (hitherto drawn mainly from a social democratic tradition).
The liberal concept of social justice is drawn mainly from egalitarian individualism: maximum freedom to pursue one’s own plan of life, provided it doesn’t interfere with the plans of others. Progressive conceptions are more socially informed and see individual plan’s of life as bound up with those of others, both because values that influence perceptions of a good plan of life are embedded in and transmitted through culture; and because individual plans of lives influence the opportunities available to others. Thus liberalism promotes autonomy, equal treatment and access to goods and opportunities, especially health and education; progressivism places more emphasis on equality of outcome, redistribution, the interests of future generations, sustainability and the environment.

Ch 3 The Progressive Consensus in Perspective, Professor Iain McLean (4,000)

This chapter will explore the history of the progressive consensus, in particular analysing what happened to the ‘progressive alliance’ of the Liberal, Irish and Labour Parties which won an overwhelming electoral victory in 1906. It was obstructed by the House of Lords and the First World War. At the end of that war, two of its three elements had been shattered and the Conservatives became dominant for most of the rest of the 20th century.

How has this impacted on British politics today? To what extent do the modern Liberal Democrat and Labour parties share values – are they increasingly converging around similar territory or are they increasingly diverging? What does this mean for the future of progressive politics?

Ch 4 Public Values: Illiberal attitudes in a Liberal country? Peter Taylor-Gooby (3,000 words)

This thematic chapter will use the BSA 2004 and 2005 to examine the changing political milieu and the extent to which progressive politics have become entrenched in political and public life. What and of whom does the ‘centre ground’ in British politics now consist?

It will include comparative data on how public attitudes have changed over time, assessing the momentum of shifts in public opinion and how deeply values are entrenched. The aim will be to ascertain how Liberal is the British public and the potential to engage them in a Liberal agenda. Which Liberal issues resonate most strongly in the public mind? What can we learn from this about the kind of narrative that would resonate?

Hard questions will concern:
- Property and redistribution: when is it justified to interfere with one person’s property holdings through taxation to benefit another? When is dependency on others through the state justified?
- Cultural identity: how far is it justified to interfere with another’s perception of identity to sustain one’s own identity?
- Security: how much is it justified to control some groups to benefit the autonomy of others?
- The environment and sustainability: what is the right trade off between plans of life intergenerationally?
- Social investment: how much should current consumption be restricted to enable investment in future generations?

Ch 5 Britain in 2006: State of the Nation, Mike Dixon and Julia Margo (3,000 words)

What are the key policy challenges modern Liberalism must respond to? Where are we in 2006?
This chapter, incorporating new data showing the extent of the ‘social justice deficit’ facing Britain, will be used to provide the empirical basis for following chapters. The state of the nation will be assessed across a range of indicators of well being, progress and fairness. Key issues could be inequalities in political power; economic inequalities, the labour market and the functioning of the welfare state, and environmental sustainability.

Section 2: A Modern Liberal Narrative: Tensions and challenges

This section will consist of a series of thematic essays authored by Liberal Democrat front bench MPs and leading Liberal thinkers. In each chapter the tensions between and within themes will be highlighted and considered.

Ch 6 Social Liberalism: tough on crime versus civil liberties? Nick Clegg Shadow Home Secretary (4,000 words)

What is a modern Liberal narrative on crime – are Liberals still ‘soft on crime’? How can we reconcile a Liberal commitment to freedom from government intervention with a need to secure our communities? How much is security justified to control some groups to benefit the autonomy of others?

Ch 7 ‘Social Justice’ Steve Webb MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Health Secretary

What is a Liberal narrative on social justice, how does this manifest in Liberal Democrat policy and what are the tensions between social justice and sustainability or liberty? Have poverty and inequality returned to the political agenda? Are Liberals right to see equality and fairness as in tension with each other? If we prioritise freedom over fairness will we end up at the same place? Whose responsibility should it be to meet the social justice challenges facing Britain?

Ch 8 ‘The State’: A Liberal narrative, David Laws MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

What is the modern Liberal narrative on the role of the state? What should be the limits of progressive policy intervention? To what extent should the government intervene to ensure equality for all citizens and how does this relate to a concern for freedom? What does the Liberal view of the state say about personal responsibility? How would this manifest in the scope and nature of liberal policy intervention? What should be the division of responsibility between for instance citizen, employer and state?

Ch 9 ‘Choice’ and ‘Localism’, Vince Cable MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary

Choice and Localism are favourite terms for progressives and Liberal currently. But what do they mean and what do they offer a modern Liberal narrative?
What should be the role of choice in the future of public services? Does the theme of choice provide a useful lens through which to view policy and politics? Should we use ‘choice’ as the dominant reform message rather than for example personalisation, contestability or fairness? What are the tensions between choice and fairness – how can we ensure choice without undermining collective consumption? How can we incentivise local activism? How is a Liberal conception of localism different from a progressive or conservative one?

**Ch 10 ‘Democracy’, Lord Wallace (4,000 words)**

What would a Liberal ‘democratic agenda’ consist of? How can Liberals move the agenda forward from devolution and electoral reform and provide an achievable and compelling narrative on political and constitutional reform? What is a modern Progressive Liberal response to inequalities in political power (voting patterns, political engagement, systemic inequalities eg in the electoral system, constitutional anomalies, local versus national?) and constitutional reform issues. What are the tensions between democracy and equality (or localism and a rights based constitution)? How are these best resolved? How can we enthuse people about the revival of democracy at local levels?

**Ch 12 ‘Security’: Liberalism in a Changing World, Lord Dahrendorf (4,000 words)**

How should security demands be balanced with concerns for civil liberties and limited regulation? Do we have responsibility to secure international human rights, or should we put protection for our own citizens first, (eg by deporting convicted terrorists to countries where they might be tortured)? Global security: organised crime and terrorism Political instability, Britain and Islam

**Ch 13 Sustainability, Chris Huhne MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Environment Secretary (4,000 words)**

What is the role of the market in achieving environmentally sustainable outcomes? How can we reconcile sustainability and social justice, or sustainability and growth? Social justice versus sustainability – how can they be combined? What are the political choices here? What is the right trade off between plans of life intergenerationally? How much should current consumption be restricted to enable investment in future generations? Themes: Moving to a low carbon / no-carbon economy Green taxes? Land value tax?
Section 3: Conclusion

Ch 14 A Progressive Liberal Narrative, Vince Cable MP (3, 000 words)

What themes should be prioritised, where are there key tensions and how can they be resolved? How can we draw together these ideas to produce a coherent political narrative that encapsulates what progressive Liberals believe in? How can this narrative usefully inform a reform agenda?

Ch 15 Progressive Liberalism? Nick Pearce (3, 000 words)

Response from ippr Director

56, 000 words

Biographies

Vince Cable MP is Liberal Democrat Shadow Chancellor

Nick Clegg MP is Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary

Lord Dahrendorf is a former director of the London School of Economics and warden of St. Antony’s College, Oxford. From 1969 to 1970 he was a member of the German parliament for the Free Democratic Party, the German liberals, and a Parliamentary Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1970 he became a Commissioner in the European Commission in Brussels. He now sits in the House of Lords as a crossbencher.

Mike Dixon is Research Fellow in the Director’s Research Team at the Institute for Public Policy Research and formerly a communications advisor at Ogilvy & Mather.

Michael Freeden is Professor of Politics at the University of Oxford and Professorial Fellow at Mansfield College, Oxford. He is the founding-editor of the Journal of Political Ideologies, and the director of the Centre for Political Ideologies at the University of Oxford.

Chris Huhne MP is Liberal Democrat Shadow Environment Secretary

David Laws MP is Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

Iain McLean is Professor of politics at Oxford University and a fellow of Nuffield College.

Julia Margo is Research Fellow in the Director’s Research Team at the Institute for Public Policy Research, formerly a commissioning editor at the Sunday Times and parliamentary researcher for Paddy Ashdown, former leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

Nick Pearce is Director of ippr.
Lord Wallace is joint Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrat peers

Steve Webb MP is Liberal Democrat Shadow Health Secretary