

The Lib Dems stake out the undemocratic extreme

“Demand better” says the boomerang Lib Dem slogan. That’s good advice when the Lib Dems come round with their proposal to block the wishes of the people and try to overturn the results of the 2016 referendum. Standing on a clear ticket for delay, watering down of Brexit and even a second referendum on terms, they slumped to just 7.4% of the vote in the 2017 election. They had not found the moderate middle, the friendly centre of gravity of the UK electorate as they claim. Their views were far from democratic, as they railed against the decision of the UK voters in 2016. Nor were they very liberal, as they dreamt up another Manifesto of regulations, higher taxes and exhortations to all of us to change the way we live our lives.

It’s a crowded space, this search for the so called moderate centre ground. It is defined as going back to Brussels, saying we are sorry for ever thinking of leaving, and accepting the full swathe of laws, taxes, budgets and common policies that characterise the modern EU. What ever is either moderate or democratic about such an agenda? How is it democratic for more and more laws to be made behind closed doors, drafted by officials we cannot sack or make accountable, and approved by Ministers from 27 countries under pressure not to rock the boat? What is liberal about the austerity policies of the EU’s budget controls, requiring higher taxes, lower spending and lower deficits from countries mired in unemployment in the south and west of the EU? How is the EU’s policy of helping pay for Turkey’s heavily defended borders with the Middle East moderate? What is green about the fishing discard policy or the dash for diesel and the reliance on coal for power by Germany? Why does everything proposed by the EU get through without a whisper of criticism? When will they apologise for the huge damage the Exchange Rate Mechanism did to the livelihoods and businesses of many in the UK, or for the revenge the Euro crisis visited on Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Spain?

The outgoing Leader of the Lib Dems cannot make up his mind exactly when he will leave his job. Maybe he should hold a party referendum on the topic. Nor does he have any confidence in his fellow MPs, saying that they need to open up the contest for a new Leader to people not in Parliament. I guess as he believes laws should be made in Brussels and more control pass to the EU there is a kind of logic to not bothering whether a party leader can argue, question and vote on what we do here at home in our own legislature. It is a further sign of his insouciance towards UK democracy. Into this private debate with a few voters has intruded Tony Blair. A man who did well out of leading the Labour party, he has gone as far as he dare to say his own party under new leadership cannot win an election, and maybe Labour members like him should look around for a new party. Perhaps he has in mind a Social Democrat pro EU break away from Labour, rather like in the 1980s. They would doubtless need to join up with the Lib Dems.

Others looking at this crowded postage stamp of a political position include the hard line group of pro EU Labour MPs who call themselves moderates and

who spend most of their time disagreeing with the electors when they are not disagreeing with their own Leader over most things. All of them suffer from the same underlying problem. There has never been a large market for a pro EU party in the UK. When John Stevens set up the pro Euro Conservatives it gained just 1.4% of the vote in the European elections. It peaked at under 4% in the Kensington and Chelsea by election to Parliament and was disbanded owing to a lack of voter support shortly afterwards. I doubt there would be much of a market on the left for a pro EU Labour party that made its peace with the Establishment on a number of issues where Corbyn is more radical. The pro EU Social Democrats never won new seats in a General Election. The Lib Dem result last time should be a warning to them all that trying to stop Brexit gets you to a very poor third place.

What they seek is no moderate centre they can capture. Supporting a new sell out to the EU is far from being a moderate position to adopt.