What’s coming up at Autumn Conference

As well as a full programme of training, events, networking and parties – at autumn conference this year we have a huge package of policy motions, which all members have the chance to debate, amend and vote on.

Find out more about the policies we will be debating at autumn conference right here.

And if you haven’t yet, book your place at conference right here:

Book your place

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Proroguing parliament

A short prorogation is supposed to happen every year…

Go to Source
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A no deal Brexit must be stopped

The Liberal Democrats stand ready to do everything we can to prevent a No Deal Brexit.

With Boris Johnson determined to plough headlong into this national crisis, which he admits will lead to food and medicine shortages, we now need to work across party lines to take control of the order paper.

Before yesterday’s meeting with party leaders, I made it clear that no option is off the table when it comes to stopping the UK crashing out of the E.U. without a deal. **I also outlined a potential legislative ‘triple lock’ to prevent it.**

> .@joswinson is putting forward a ‘triple-lock’ to prevent the catastrophe of a no deal Brexit – and the Liberal Democrats will

> keep fighting to stop Brexit altogether.#DemandBetter than Brexit & join our campaign: https://t.co/Mp2XkNJx4v pic.twitter.com/ZWrpbi0pgn
>
> — Liberal Democrats (@LibDems) August 27, 2019

I am pleased that the meeting focused on a legislative route to prevent No Deal. We have agreed this is the best way forward, and we are now considering various scenarios to deliver this. **There will be further meetings over the next few days across all groups in Parliament.**

Yesterday afternoon, I attended and spoke at another cross-party meeting at Church House. Together, we stated our opposition to an anti-democratic shut-down (prorogation) of Parliament, which Boris Johnson could use to force through No Deal.

> Today I've met with MPs from all parties who want to stop both a disastrous No Deal and an anti-democratic shut-down of Parliament. We will keep working together to prevent it. And then, the @LibDems will continue to lead the fight to stop Brexit altogether. pic.twitter.com/5HKis0go6Z
>
> — Jo Swinson (@joswinson) August 27, 2019

I look forward to continuing these cross-party efforts to avert a disastrous No Deal Brexit. Then, **the Lib Dems will continue to lead the fight to stop Brexit altogether.**

Go to Source
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Champions of international liberalism

Champions of international liberalism

Our national interests are European and they are global. So, as we continue to work to stop Brexit, we Liberal Democrats will also look ahead and develop a proper national strategy on the basis of a clear understanding of what our interests are. We must act and decide on our future, because if the UK fails to do so, if through fear and timidity we dither and do nothing, there are consequences of inaction.

In 1948 British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin set out a foreign policy which

would appeal to the ‘broad masses of workers’. It was a belief in a robust national defence married to a passionate commitment to social justice. At home, the interest of working people was the national interest, and it stood for a balance of power between capital and labour.

> We Liberal Democrats will look ahead and develop a proper national strategy on the basis of a clear understanding of what our national interests are. There are consequences of inaction.

Abroad, we sought cooperation amongst the democratic nations to defend our democracy against threats we face. He based it on Winston Churchill’s description of three overlapping majestic circles among the free nations. These were: the English speaking world and the United States; a united Europe; and the Empire and Commonwealth. Britain was at the juncture of all three and our leadership would combine European values and American power to link these circles together into a powerful democratic alliance. I believe that the three majestic circles are still our best guide to our geopolitical interests and so to the foreign policy we need in the years ahead.

These circles were underpinned by the international rules based order established in the aftermath of the Second World War. Bevin, Clement Attlee and Churchill helped to shape the Atlantic Charter of 1941 which set out the aims and values of this post-war order. All countries would have the right to self-determination. All people the right to freedom of speech, of expression, of religion, and freedom from want and fear. All of these being classic liberal values. And here they struck a chord with Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ – nations would collaborate to ‘improve labour standards, economic advancement, and social security’ for all.

These are, of course, bedrocks of social democracy. The Charter led to the institutions which still govern us today: the United Nations – its first meeting held in London in 1946; the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that became the World Trade Organisation; the Bretton Woods conference that founded the IMF and what became the World Bank; and NATO to defend our democracies.

Liberal Democrats believe in the values of this order, but it has lost the moral energy of its birth in the Second World War.

It has become a feeble version of the original and it now belongs to Davos Man with his sense of privilege and entitlement. The idealism of the West has been tarnished. We need leadership to renew our country and an international activism to rebuild an international order based on social justice and democracy. This requires Britain to first of all prioritise ensuring the closest possible relationship with the Europe – as members of the EU – and security in Europe to safeguard the continent. Second, to sustain our bond across the Atlantic with the United States, and third to renew our global role. Within each circle we must concentrate our national resources and capability, particularly where they overlap.

Europe

Britain's economic, political and security interests dictate that we have the closest possible relationship with the European Union. Its members are not merely our nearest neighbours but we share the same values, have common interests, and can achieve more together than we can alone in a global economy that does not recognise borders. So stopping a "no deal" Brexit is vital but insufficient – we are committed to the UK remaining in the EU.

> Britain's interests dictate that we have the closest possible relationship with the European Union.

This means that we do not facilitate Brexit but give the electorate a People's Vote in order to stop Brexit if they so wish. Whatever emerges out of the Brexit chaos, we will not cease to make the case for the UK's EU membership and will argue for the closest possible relationship with the EU. Any future progressive manifesto will need to be mindful of the realities of the UK's situation at the time of the next general election when determining policy.

In or out of the EU we are a major European power. We need to strengthen our commitment to the security and defence of Europe. Alongside France we are the most capable military power. Our intelligence gathering capacity remains indispensable. Our membership of the Five Eyes intelligence partnership makes us a global leader in the fight against terrorism. In NATO Britain holds the position of Deputy Supreme Allied Commander. We need to increase NATO's conventional deterrent and help develop the application of Artificial Intelligence.

Cybersecurity is now a first tier threat and Britain has a key role to play in the integration of internal security and external defence to meet the new challenges of hybrid warfare. We must provide credible deterrents that convince Russia NATO is committed to Europe's collective defence. And by increasing our commitment to NATO we are more likely to keep the United States engaged in Europe.

Britain led EU expansion. We have a long history of involvement with eastern European countries like Estonia. We went to war for Poland and have a close relationship with their people through migration. Ukraine wants our support in helping to build its democracy. These countries have looked to us to provide a more balanced Europe and we have a special responsibility for creating alliances with them.

We need a long term strategic response to Islamist terrorism, not piecemeal reactions. This must include standing by our global commitment to the UN's 'responsibility to protect' and supporting the development of the weaker states to the East and to the South. Our failure – and Syria's refugee crisis is a warning – will only lead to Russia's continuing destabilisation of the

borderlands, more Islamist terrorism and increasing flows of refugees across the Mediterranean.

The United States

The United States is our ally and the Atlantic remains our strategic frontier. Our historic relationship is far bigger than whoever holds the office of President of the United States at any one time. Labour has swung from uncritical support for US foreign policy with disastrous consequences in Iraq, to its current anti-Trump hostility. The Conservatives under Boris Johnson not only wish to ape Trump domestically but seem quite happy to become his poodle internationally. Neither approach benefits our national interest over the long term.

Our historic relationship with the United States is neither special nor is it just sentimental. But it is based on hardheaded interests. Our mutual sharing of intelligence and the interoperability of our nuclear submarine forces makes it more than just a transaction. Our army, navy and air force is designed to fight alongside the US in a supporting role. The relationship gives us security, and it amplifies our capabilities.

But Britain cannot settle for just being a useful component of US military and security strategy. It undermines our sovereignty and leaves us over reliant on American knowledge and resources. And with President Trump, America is unpredictable.

As Prime Minister Attlee remarked to Ernest Bevin in a Cabinet meeting discussing the nuclear deterrent, ‘We ought not to give the Americans the impression that we cannot get on without them; for we can and, if necessary, will do so.’ Harold Wilson demonstrated this during the Vietnam War when he resisted the intense American pressure for British support. ‘Lyndon Johnson is begging me even to send a bagpipe band to Vietnam’, he told his Cabinet in December 1964.

Global power

Britain’s unique history requires us to remain a global power. London is the historic commercial centre of the shipping industry and we have obligations to keep open the world’s shipping lanes. Our naval base in Bahrain has been revived, recognising that East of Suez is once again of strategic global importance. We are a signatory of the Five Power Defence Arrangements along with Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand and Australia which has a focus on counter terrorism and maritime security. France has expressed an interest in joining and this provides us with an opportunity to strengthen our military and security commitments with the French.

We should consider renewing attempts to expand the UN Security Council to include India, Brazil, Germany and Japan, and to promote the idea of a Rapid Reaction Force under its control, however difficult this might prove to be. Our two new aircraft carriers HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales along with the French carrier could play a leading role in a naval version.

Britain must reinvent this circle of influence by combining our hard power with a role as a democratic leader, a social connector, and an ideas maker. A priority is tackling climate change and its impact on water and food security. Drought, falling crop yields and the storms show why we need a global and cooperative response.

> The international system is changing. A new order is taking shape amongst the world's major powers. Britain has a role to play but only if we have the political will.

Amongst our greatest assets are our language, our culture and our history. The strongest relationships a country can make comes through cultural association. We must nurture our global pre-eminence in soft power. But we must be wary of not using it to avoid tough decisions or disguise a lack of will.

The international system is changing. A new order is taking shape amongst the world's major powers. Britain has a role to play, but only if we have the political will. Our world class diplomatic corps is a major force for British strategic power and influence, but it is underfunded.

Our defence spending as a percentage of our GDP dropped to 1.8% in 2017/2018. Cultural influence and social exchange is now as necessary to projecting national influence as the willingness to use military force, and yet we are cutting back here as well, reducing the budgets of the British Council and BBC World Service.

This government is not spending enough to meet the risks, threats, nor the opportunities identified in its own National Defence and Security Strategy. For the avoidance of doubt, now is not the time for the UK to unilaterally dispose of its nuclear deterrent given the threats we face.

One of the priorities for a progressive government must be a Strategic Defence and Security Review to give the electorate, our allies and our potential enemies a clear message of our intent and purpose. We should consider increasing our spending commitment above NATO's two per cent of GDP, lifting it incrementally to 2.5 per cent over a five-year period. This will allow us to maintain our conventional forces at an adequate level. Being clear about our commitment to our independent nuclear deterrent is important. Developing the role of the National Security Council will be crucial to coordinate and implement the national strategy across Government. Progressives should be proud not ashamed of such goals.

> If we fail to act, if we leave Britain broken and divided, if we allow tyranny and illiberalism in the world to grow, there will be consequences and they will hurt us.

Britain still retains considerable global influence. We are a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the G7. The G20 gives us a relationship

with emerging powers. We have influential roles to play in the European Security Council, in NATO, and in rule making bodies such as the Basel Committee on Banking Regulation. And we are the second largest bilateral donor in the world with a strong track record on development issues like universal education and health care.

We are a big country but sometimes we can act and behave as if we are small. We need to renew our own country and play our part in rebuilding a global order based on democracy and the rule of law. If we fail to act, if we leave Britain broken and divided, if we allow tyranny and illiberalism in the world to grow, there will be consequences and they will hurt us. In short, we must be resolute in remembering, defending and advocating that cooperating with others makes Britain a bigger and stronger nation state.

In June Russia's Vladimir Putin told the Financial Times that liberalism has become "obsolete". Nonsense.

Liberal values could not be more relevant in an international context – Liberal Democrats will be their champion.

Chuka Umunna

Shadow Foreign Secretary
& Liberal Democrat MP for Streatham

This blog piece is adapted from Chuka's pamphlet, "What are progressives for?", published by the Progressive Centre UK in March 2019.

Go to Source
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Announcing the new Lib Dem Shadow Cabinet

Now more than ever, people are crying out for a new vision for our country.

They want an alternative to creeping nationalism and populism. **People want a new vision for our country, and only the Liberal Democrats can supply that.**

That’s why today, we’re announcing our new Shadow Cabinet to stop Brexit.

> People want a new vision for our country, and only the Liberal Democrats can supply that.

The Conservatives want no deal Brexit, no matter the cost. Labour is more interested in winning a General Election than remaining in the EU. **Only we can be the real alternative our country so desperately needs.**

This is a team that’s ready to offer solutions to the big issues people are facing, like rampant inequality, the climate crisis and a cash-strapped NHS. But Brexit has starved these issues of oxygen. **And whenever we do head into the next General Election, we’ll do so as the biggest, strongest Remain party.** Our new Shadow Cabinet is ready to secure a People’s Vote – and win it.

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