

[A role for supporters](#)

At Spring Conference at York we will be debating the role of supporters of the party.

This follows the extensive consultation we had in the Autumn. You will remember that we had two consultation sessions at Brighton (you can find the consultation document [here](#)), after which the Federal Board arranged for a series of further consultation sessions around the country, as well as member webinars and an online survey.

Many thanks to the thousands of you who asked questions and also responded to the survey. At these sessions we promised that members would have the final say on the details of a registered supporter scheme, and **we will vote on them on Saturday afternoon at Conference.**

You can find the Business Motion setting out the arrangements starting on Page 42, with constitutional amendments starting on Page 46, of the [Conference Agenda](#).

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Author:

[The Leader – vol 4](#)

Brexit latest

I have always believed that in the game of bluff around Brexit, no Deal wouldn't happen since rational behaviour would prevail. Either Parliament would vote through Theresa May's proposal (which can't be dignified with the word "deal"; negotiations haven't started yet) or, following a new referendum, we would finish up still inside the EU.

I still believe these are the two likely outcomes.

The sense that Brexit is an unholy mess cooked up to solve party political problems is widespread

But I have been struck by how much No Deal talk has now entered the national vocabulary. **There is a whiff of fear**, especially in business. I have spoken to all the main business groups including those representing the main sectors of the economy. Key take-aways from the conversations were that many firms are desperately worried. Even if they don't believe No Deal will happen, some

of their customer and suppliers do. **A large amount of potential investment is quietly leaking out of the country;** heavy costs are being incurred and contracts lost; and very few businesses are remotely prepared.

When I worked in a large multinational company, my colleagues there had a rather low view of politicians. **But the Brexit saga has turned suspicion into outright contempt.** The sense that Brexit is an unholy mess cooked up to solve party political problems is widespread. The events of the last few days must have hardened that feeling.

First there are the machinations in the Labour Party.

Corbyn has grudgingly been persuaded to sign up to a People's Vote to prevent further defections

Jeremy Corbyn has been strongly opposed to a People's Vote and committed to 'Deliver Brexit'. He has now grudgingly been persuaded to prevent further defections, to sign up (sort of) to a People's Vote with an option to remain. **I have yet to find anyone who believes a word of it.** We all assume that the Labour Party will whip, when the time comes, for a People's Vote, while quietly knowing that a substantial number of their MPs will vote with the government. None of the rebels will be subject to any of Corbyn's 'purges'.

And this week we have had Theresa May agreeing, in effect, to a **three month postponement of Brexit** but with no indication of a plan to break the deadlock.

It is for this reason that the most likely route to a People's Vote remains the one which currently seems most improbable: that the government eventually recognises that there are better odds on winning a referendum than getting the deal through parliament. **The government does not want to concede, but it may yet have to.**

The businesses I have been talking to say that **this three month delay is, if anything, more worse than useless:** prolonging the uncertainty over 'no deal'. I noticed that my successor Greg Clark and his ministerial team were amongst those threatening to resign unless Theresa May backed down from a 'No Deal'. They seem to have been persuaded she has. Maybe I am missing something here.

In other news

The other, related, political shock was the foundation of the breakaway group of independents, or TIG.

They have undoubtedly made a splash and captured some media attention. There is a public mood of wanting 'something new' and an alternative to the discredited binary system we have at present. The MPs showed courage by breaking away and **my instincts are that we in the Liberal Democrats should work with them if we can.**

We have a lot to bring to the table: organisation; infrastructure; a strong,

and growing, local government base.

Early contacts with TIG suggest positive vibes

It is too early to talk about formal association but the first-past-the-post system imposes its own brutal logic. Hanging together or hanging separately.

Early contacts suggest positive vibes.

This week's news from the **Indian subcontinent managed to penetrate the Brexit haze** which surrounds our domestic agenda. It brought me up short as I have close links with India; my Indian in-laws are in the firing line if war heats up. The events are eerily familiar to those I described futuristically in my novel *Open Arms* is now unfolding in real time. The novel explores ways in which that conflict plays out in multi-cultural Britain.

And finally

It is difficult to find time to read amidst the political drama. I am still enjoying the excellent work of one of my favourite authors Simon Sebag Montefiore: biographer (Stalin; Catherine The Great); novelist (*One Night in Winter*); Historian (*Jerusalem*; *The Romanovs*). *Written in History* is a compilation of around 200 letters "which changed the world" from the Pharaohs to the present day. There are some remarkable love letters from Henry VIII, Bonaparte, Stalin, Nelson and James I (to his male lover the Duke of Buckingham); letters about war; moving letters of goodbye (Walter Raleigh's before his execution is a classic).

And I am immensely privileged this week to be able to present "My music" at the Wigmore Hall with the orchestra of St Johns. Mostly Bach and Mozart. Having had a turn on *Desert Island Discs* ten years ago, and another on a similar programme on Radio 3, this programme represents a trilogy of talk and music programmes, featuring my favourite classical music. This will be a rare treat away from the political fray.



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[ALDC want to help you win](#)

The local elections are fast approaching, and we all want to see a bumper set of results. ALDC can help you with that!

ALDC are the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors and Campaigners – a membership organisation that provides advice, resources and training to support our members with their campaigning to win elections.

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[Have your say on Lib Dem policy](#)

We are currently developing new policies on health and social care, crime and policing and poverty and regional inequality and **we want to know what you think.**

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[Supporter scheme](#)

Following extensive consultation within the party, the Federal Board asked the Federal People Development Committee to develop a formal scheme for registered supporters. This is in keeping with the Party's agreed strategy to create a political and social movement and forms part of proposals to open up our structures which are being debated at Spring Conference in York.

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