

The New Lib Dem Leader

A letter to the Herald, Dec 2007

Sir,

Congratulations to Nick Clegg on his selection as leader of the Liberal party. It is a difficult job, and Vince Cable, who has been a solid interim leader, will be a tough act to follow.

Over the years, Lib Dems have made important contributions to the debate on environmental action. And Liberals and Conservatives find common cause on issues such as opposition to Labour's £19bn ID cards scheme.

But there are a number of areas on which the Lib Dems' position is anything but clear. Clichés become clichés partly as a result of being true. And there is a common cliché that Lib Dems sometimes try to be all things to all people.

I hope that under their new leader, the Liberals will clarify a number of policy areas, including these:

On Europe, Ming Campbell wanted people to make a false choice between wholesale withdrawal and unconditional love of the Euro-federal state. Where do they stand on the actual questions facing Britain: in particular, should the EU Constitution be supported?

On the council tax, Liberals like to say they would "axe the tax", which is a nice rhyme. But as a rule they omit to go through the details of their proposed replacement, the 'local income tax'. It would particularly disadvantage working families in areas like ours. Using the Liberals' own figures, in East Hampshire it would be over £2,000 for the average working couple. And they seem to want a property value tax on top of that. Do they stand by these policies?

And finally, on taxation and spending in general, do they approve of Mr Brown's de facto stance of constantly upping tax and increasing the size of the state, regardless of how well the money is spent? Or do they follow our principle: that as the economy grows the proceeds of this growth should be shared between further investment in the public services and easing the tax burden on hard-working families?

Sincerely,

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