

Lib Dems face their hardest hours as the realities of power sink in

With anger over tuition fees spreading dissent in the party and fears growing over electoral reform, the heady days of Cleggmania seem far away

Toby Helm and Anushka Asthana
The Observer, Sunday 5 December 2010



Lib Dem business secretary Vince Cable's indication that he might abstain in the vote on tuition fees has angered some fellow party members. Photograph: David Levene

Simon Wright, the Liberal Democrat MP for Norwich South, looked tiny, seated at the front of Lecture Theatre One at the University of East Anglia. Staring at him were hundreds of students who had packed the hall for a debate on tuition fees. Near the MP was a placard reminding Wright of his pre-election promise to "vote against any increase in fees in the next parliament".

Finally, after weeks of deliberation, Wright has decided to do just that. His decision was hardly a surprise: with a knife-edge 310 majority, won with the support of undergraduates, Wright had topped the list for the National Union of Students' "decapitation" strategy.

Had he chosen to vote for a government policy that will see the cap on fees almost trebled to £9,000, the NUS would have thrown all its resources into unseating him at the next election. "I think I made the right decision," he told the students about

choosing "constituents" over "coalition".

"Obviously," hissed Kate Llewellyn, an 18-year-old student in the audience, furious that he seemed "so proud of himself".

Others who came to watch Wright take on Aaron Porter, president of the NUS, in the debate were equally angry. Polly Wilson, president of the students' union at nearby Norwich University College of the Arts, pointed out that she and her peers at UEA had actively campaigned to get students out to vote in May, pushing them to back the Lib Dems or Greens. The same pattern was repeated across the country.

Wright's decision made his appearance at UEA less confrontational than it might have been. But there were still boos and hisses when he talked of backing the coalition – and some demanded to know if he will make sure that Lib Dem colleagues follow his lead in the crucial Commons vote on raising fees this Thursday.

"I can assure you we are having very full, frank and open discussions as a political party," was Wright's reply.

The mood of bitterness and sense of betrayal in UEA was clear. Outside the lecture theatre stood two police officers in bright yellow jackets. At the front sat a bulky security guard, his eyes scanning the crowd. The walls were lined with posters demanding "No Fees! No Cuts!" and leaflets urged students to join planned protests this week; students hope that Wednesday will be the biggest demonstration yet.

Before the debate began, a student read a message from the "occupiers" who have taken over a nearby lecture theatre in protest at the government cuts. Similar sit-ins are happening across the country in at least 25 universities from Dundee to London.

Young people are angry; they are organising in a way not seen in years. And the main targets of their fury and derision are the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems cancelled a conference in London this weekend for security reasons and there is already talk on campus about plans to target the party's spring conference in Sheffield – leader Nick Clegg's own backyard.

This week the hitlist includes Lib Dem MPs who have not yet decided how to vote. Now that Wright has turned, students are heading west to Bath to target MP Don Foster. Porter warns: "For Lib Dems it is electoral oblivion unless they stick to their word and use this golden opportunity to prevent a fee hike."

Within the party, many Lib Dems are exasperated with how the fees issue has been handled. David Hall-Matthews, who chairs a pressure group on the left of the party, said tuition fees represented a "red line" and MPs should be proud to vote against this week. But others, while recognising their party is in a mess, believe that, in the longer term, the tuition fees issue may help to show that the Lib Dems have matured into a party of government. They also point out that their position on tuition fees was not one of the four key policies in the election manifesto.

Julian Astle, director of the Lib Dem think tank CentreForum, said the root of the problem lay "not in breaking the promise [to vote against a rise tuition fees], but in making the promise in the first place". The suggestion by business secretary Vince Cable last week that he might abstain in order to avoid a split in the party would fool no one, he said. Lib Dems should recognise their election policy would never have worked – and vote for the increase because it is right.

"You cannot have the minister who helped advance the policy [Cable] and the deputy prime minister who has spoken up for it [Clegg] not supporting it in a Commons vote. That would completely mystify the public," said Astle. Voting for the proposals would demonstrate that the Lib Dems had become "a party capable of government", he said.

Others point out that the policy on fees has been heavily influenced by Lib Dem thinking and would have been far less progressive without their influence. One former party worker said: "I am actually really proud of what we have achieved in government: taking low earners out of tax, banking reforms, the pupil premium – this is core Lib Dem stuff."

Olly Grender, former director of communications to Paddy Ashdown, admitted that life has changed for Lib Dems, and not always for the better. "Nowadays I have to watch *Have I Got News for You* through my fingers," she said. She admitted the tuition fees row was a "mess", but said it was also evidence that Lib Dems now matter. "I went to a party before the election and this bloke just dismissed me, saying the Lib Dems would never be in government so they didn't matter. I feel quite smug when I think back to that encounter now."

Today, however, polling for OpinionPanel Research shows the extent of their slump, particularly among students. At the election, 48% of students voted Lib Dem, but now just 15% says they back the party. Ben Marks of OpinionPanel said: "It's interesting that the new arrangements won't even affect the current crop of students; it's those starting from 2012 who'll really be affected. It doesn't augur well for future Liberal Democrat support, given that students go on to become opinion formers in society."

But the Lib Dems' difficulties will not end when and if the tuition fees row dies down. Other worries loom large on the horizon, the biggest of them being the fear that a referendum on electoral reform – the Lib Dems' key aim for the coalition – will be lost next May. If that happens, questions will be raised about why the party continues to tie its fortunes to the Tories. And in February, there are worries about how the Lib Dems will perform in Oldham East and Saddleworth, where a byelection will be held after a court found the election result, which went in favour of Labour's Phil Woolas, to be void.

It has been quite a journey from the heady heights of the pre-election period, when the country was fizzing with "Cleggmania" and Cable could do no wrong. Yesterday, the business secretary was the butt of jokes on the social media website Twitter as people compared his U-turns to his upcoming performance on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

Labour's former deputy prime minister, Lord Prescott, led the mocking chorus with his own description of the Lib Dem's role in the coalition two-step: "You take your left foot out and put the right boot in!"

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[Clare1888](#)

5 December 2010 12:28AM

Julian Astle is obviously not the brightest button on the jacket. If Liberal Demorats had not made the pledge which distinguished them so clearly from the other parties then their votes and seats would have been substantially reduced. University town seats such as Norwich would not have been theirs in the first place.

As for the pledge not being on of the four items in the coalition agreement. The point is that it should have been given the pledges given.

The Liberal Democrats are in danger of losing their moral compass altogether. Individual MP's should now look to their own conscience and their own constituents. Their leader had led them into an awful mess.

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[statica](#)

5 December 2010 12:44AM

Well done to the students in East Anglia.

So, protest, engaging in political debate and (not so gently) reminding politicians of their mandate can actually work.

Good luck to those in Bath and the rest of the country, hopefully there'll be support from many other sectors of this 'big society' as well as further lobbying in other areas.

Olly Grender

"I went to a party before the election and this bloke just dismissed me, saying the Lib Dems would never be in government so they didn't matter. I feel quite smug when I think back to that encounter now."

I really wish you did matter and that your party had paid more attention to the promises you'd made rather than focussing on joining the Old Boys Club. The Lib Dems could have mattered so much more. Now you all look as ineffectual and unreliable as so many feared you would be.

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[TwoSwords](#)

5 December 2010 12:58AM

Lib Dems who vote against the bill out of fear of students are idiots.

I expect that the damage has now been done so no matter what any individual Lib Dem MP does students will turn against ALL Lib Dem MPs - Simon Wright is going to lose his seat no matter what.

The Lib Dem MPs should vote in favour in accordance with what they think is the right policy now regardless of that silly pledge - if they think this is a bad policy vote against it, if its a good policy vote in favour of it. Voting against much less abstaining won't save anyone's job.

If they have any sense they will hopefully see that the increase in fees is both practically necessary and morally right.

Recommend? (80)

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[KJS17](#)

5 December 2010 12:58AM

At the election, 48% of students voted Lib Dem, but now just 15% says they back the party.

I think that stat says it all really. They've decided to spit on their biggest supporters, students like me, and they should be justifiably punished for it starting with the local elections next year.

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[robi](#)

5 December 2010 1:05AM

I would just like to point out (again) that the line taken by 'centre' forum is bollocks. The HEPI (higher education policy institute) Found that it is likely that the new fees system would not save the government any money, and might end up costing them money. Even if the fees were to save money, they would not do so before the goal for closing the deficit (2014-2015), meaning that this policy cannot be explained in regards to deficit reduction. In addition, the higher fees cap is an illusion. It will be raised to £21,000 in 2016 money, which means it will be approx £17,500 in today's money adjusted for inflation. Since these fees cap WON't be adjusted to inflation, in 2020 it will be approximately £15,000 in today's money or less.

This fees policy is a joke and a con.... and what's worse: it doesn't seem to add up.

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[robi](#)

5 December 2010 1:06AM

@TwoSwords

If they have any sense they will hopefully see that the increase in fees is both practically necessary and morally right.

Can you explain to me why it is practically necessary or morally right? Bear in mind that the figures suggest that it will make no contribution to lowering the deficit.

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[meffisto](#)

5 December 2010 1:08AM

That sniff of power really was too great a temptation, wasn't it? This issue on tuition fees is symbolic of the most egregious political opportunism. It doesn't matter, now, what back-tracking the LibDems may take; they are a spebt force in British politics unless they make the precipitous decision of breaking the coalition and bringing down this Tory dominated government. Sadly for them, they're probably too gutless to "do the right thing".

And for all those who claim that the tuition fees policy agreed on by this coalition is right, referencing the increased income of University graduates, try to remember that those higher earners pay higher tax. If you think they gain an advantage, ie greater earning, then greater

earners should pay more tax. If you think that tax is not great enough now, raise the higher rate of tax. It is quite simple

Graduates are, apparently, the country's wealth generators. If this is the case, then we should be investing in them. We don't need a graduate tax, any more than tuition fees. Simply tax high earners higher, and this will pay for our future; the educated University students.

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[robi](#)

5 December 2010 1:10AM

@Twoswords

And it would be worse for them electorally to vote for the fees. You will vote Conservative or UKIP, they won't get your vote (you already have your mind made up presumably)... yet the students can be won back by a display of integrity. The Lib Dems can't win from the right, you know that as well as I do (and indeed, even right-wingers will be thoroughly unimpressed with their performance).

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[TwoSwords](#)

5 December 2010 1:21AM

robi

It is morally right because not having graduates make a greater contribution amounts to a subsidy from poorer people to better off people. It is practically right because the current funding moral for universities is untenable with numbers being as large as they are. Either we decrease numbers or get the graduates to contribute more and graduate fees are a more sensible funding system than a graduate tax.

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[TwoSwords](#)

5 December 2010 1:29AM

robi

"And it would be worse for them electorally to vote for the fees."

I doubt it will save Simon Wright. Even Porter says the Lib Dems (plural) will pay for the policy

not individual MPs. I think students will turn against the Lib Dems in general - opposing fees won't make any difference to that. And being in government means the Lib Dems will inevitably do things that piss students off in other ways. Many of their votes come from the luxury of opposition. They no longer have that so they should just do the right thing. Which is support graduate fees.

"You will vote Conservative or UKIP,"

Your total lack of nuance and proportion resulting in you thinking that anyone who disagrees with you is a Tory or UKIP voter is amusing. What are you, 18? I've never voted for either the Tories or UKIP.

"they won't get your vote (you already have your mind made up presumably)... "

If they support fees they may well get my vote. Someone who does the wrong thing which they know to be wrong because they want to hold on to a few votes or are intimidated by student protestors DOESN'T get my vote.

"yet the students can be won back by a display of integrity."

I don't it - read about how that girl in Norwich hissed. The Lib Dems have lost students for several years.

"The Lib Dems can't win from the right, you know that as well as I do (and indeed, even right-wingers will be thoroughly unimpressed with their performance)."

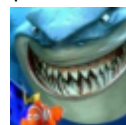
But they can't win from the left either. Their only viable plan as a party is to be a centrist party hoping to be kingmaker and get a few policies in, like the FDP in Germany, in coalition bartering. Going for the left as they did for years and only going into coalition with Labour will lead to one thing and one thing only - merger with Labour. This is what certain naive Guardian journalists who came of age in the 80s want all along as they think the supposed progressive split is the sole reason the Tories will elections. Maybe in 1983 but not these days.

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[Illogician](#)

5 December 2010 1:36AM

I'm one of Mr Wrights constituents and yes I voted for him in May. I'm glad he's decided to vote against the bill, but I can't help feeling it's a little bit stage-managed. I wrote to him about the issue back in September and his reply was so evasive it really gave the impression he has no opinions of his own on the matter. Presumably, someone higher up the chain has given him the all-clear; enough LD's will vote for the policy to make sure it passes, so they can allow a few that are in university seats to rebel and save face.

So, although I do welcome his voting against the bill, I still won't be likely to vote for him again (although that's not just because of tuition fees!)

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[wildejamey](#)

5 December 2010 1:42AM

So voting for the fees makes the LibDems "a party capable of government"? - in other words a party capable of government equates to a party that breaks binding promises before the election to cling to iys ill-gotten power after the election. If this is the sentiment of a LibDem spokesman, I suspect he will be surprised to find that a large section of the electorate fail to share his cynicism or his apologetics for lies and betrayal.

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[JapAl](#)

5 December 2010 1:52AM

But others, while recognising their party is in a mess, believe that, in the longer term, the tuition fees issue may help to show that the Lib Dems have matured into a party of government. This one made me laugh. So ripping up your cast-iron election pledges shows that you have "matured into a party of government"? Welcome to the new politics!

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[OttoMaddox](#)

5 December 2010 3:40AM

It is morally right because not having graduates make a greater contribution amounts to a subsidy from poorer people to better off people.

So then why not tax the rich, many of whom paid far less or even nothing for their degrees in the first place? That seems morally right to me.

Recommend? (50)

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[Integrity2010](#)

5 December 2010 7:00AM

Vince Cable is just trying to make sure that Nick Clegg doesn't stand alone as the most hated man in Britain.

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[FreeTradeMark](#)

5 December 2010 7:06AM

The point is still not being made that Tuition Fees were introduced by, and are now being increased by people who got their university education funded by other taxpayer.

This is right at the very heart of the morality of the situation. If Nick Clegg, and Vincent Cable are so desperate to increase fees, they should dig into their pockets and repay the cost of their own higher education.

The good thing about this all, and the thing that frightens politicians the most, is that this issue might actually get the majority of young people out to vote.

I suspect The Greens, rather than Labour might be the beneficiaries. A lot of young people will also develop a hatred of authority and all politicians as a result too.....

Not necessarily a bad thing either.

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[Lysicamus](#)

5 December 2010 7:11AM

@Clare1888

The Liberal Democrats are in danger of losing their moral compass altogether.

What moral compass? The Lib Dems were ever a party of opportunists and chancers, a left-wing party in the North, right-wing in the South. Their only real beliefs, apart from a priggish belief in their moral superiority, are

1) Proportional representation (but only because it would benefit them). They can forget that dream after May's referendum.

2) The EU and the euro. Not many votes there.

My guess is they'll hang in with the Tories rather than face annihilation now instead of in 2015. After the next general election the Lib Dems will be a broken flush and I wouldn't be surprised if people like Clegg and Laws joined the Conservative Party - assuming the Tories will have them once they have served their purpose as useful idiots.

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Integrity2010

5 December 2010 7:17AM

The point is still not being made that Tuition Fees were introduced by, and are now being increased by people who got their university education funded by other taxpayer.

This is right at the very heart of the morality of the situation. If Nick Clegg, and Vincent Cable are so desperate to increase fees, they should dig into their pockets and repay the cost of their own higher education.

In reality everyone, including themselves, was paying for their University education before through taxation. The situation has changed since then because of the increased number of students. I don't object to students paying something towards fees (not doing so is just not affordable) but there should also be a contribution from society towards the cost of their education. Why? Because educating young people is not only in the interests of the young people concerned. Having an educated workforce makes us more competitive as a nation- the reason we need more graduates today is simply that the nature of the world has changed from being blue collar economies based on braun to being white collar economies where communication skills are more important. Also there are certain professions where you really wouldn't want to be served by people not qualified. Would you want your Doctor not have received a proper training? Would you want your Lawyer to have no proper background in law? Would you want your teachers to have no more specialism in their subject area than the pupils they are teaching? If the answer to these questions is 'no' then you cannot realistically expect the student to pay entirely for an education which doesn't just benefit themselves but actually benefits society.

Recommend? (22)

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Cleggaphobia

5 December 2010 7:24AM

I don't object to students paying something towards fees (not doing so is just not affordable) but there should also be a contribution from society towards the cost of their education. Why?

Because educating young people is not only in the interests of the young people concerned.

Having an educated workforce makes us more competitive as a nation- the reason we need more graduates today is simply that the nature of the world has changed from being blue collar economies based on braun to being white collar economies where communication skills are more important. Also there are certain professions where you really wouldn't want to be served by people not qualified. Would you want your Doctor not have received a proper training? Would you want your Lawyer to have no proper background in law? Would you want your teachers to have no more specialism in their subject area than the pupils they are teaching? If the answer to these questions is 'no' then you cannot realistically expect the student to pay

entirely for an education which doesn't just benefit themselves but actually benefits society. Well said. The question is not 'why should society pay for students to increase their future earning power?' (we'll leave aside that not all graduates do actually earn more) but rather 'why should students alone foot the bill for increasing the nation's future competitiveness and improving their own capacity to bring benefits to society?' In other words why should society get something for nothing?

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[Srizon2001](#)

5 December 2010 7:52AM

Nick Clegg if your party vote for the rise of the tuition fees I can bet your AV vote will be lost in next year. I'll be one of those people who will vote against it to punish you electorally.

Recommend? (38)

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[HGAT](#)

5 December 2010 8:26AM

"I went to a party before the election and this bloke just dismissed me, saying the Lib Dems would never be in government so they didn't matter. I feel quite smug when I think back to that encounter now."

A LibDem view of their role in facilitating the Tories' cynical dismantling of our country.

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[DearDaveAndNick](#)

5 December 2010 8:48AM

The thing that keeps running through my head is that Lib Dems and Conservatives are *in office* but seem to be acting as if they are *in power*. They need to remember that *they serve the electorate*. They were happy to court us before the election. When there is such a strong reaction to their policies, it's time to go back to the drawing board. As the ukuncut protests show, education and AV are not the only areas where the Coalition and Lib Dems will struggle.

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[disciple4d](#)

5 December 2010 8:51AM

This was a clear Lib Dems policy which has been on the books for years, and was clearly promoted in the election. I'm not sure if people can remember, but before the election, in some towns, there were students queueing outside polling stations because they didn't have enough capacity to cope with all the people wanting to vote. There was even a discrimination case brought, when one polling station decided that the people who weren't students should have the opportunity to vote first, in the idea that they had some less democratic rights than the rest of the population.

Why were they doing this? Because of our party's pledges to them. That pledge was a signed promise. If we do not stick to it, it shows just how much a promise from the liberal democrats is worth, doesn't it?

The only reason we got the small increase in votes was because of a huge campaign by students and young people. They made us and they have the capability to send the party into obliteration in the future.

Tories aren't our bosses - and neither is Nick Clegg. Our policies are voted for democratically. He does not control the party, we control him.

That's the whole point in democracy, to allow fair and informed governance. How is Lib Dems lying to the electorate to garner votes any different than Phil Wollaas doing it?

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[hoddle1](#)

5 December 2010 8:55AM

If Clegg and the LibDems had honoured their pre-election promise over tuition fees, and opposed the rise, they would still be a viable party in UK political life.

They opted for the trough rather than the truth.

Their days are not numbered. They are finished.

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[KeithMRoberts](#)

5 December 2010 9:03AM

@Twoswords

As a graduate I have paid for my university education through almost forty years of taxation.

I'm proud to have done so. The universities running costs should sit with the taxpayer in just the same way as education for younger students.

The vicious cut in central funding that this government is imposing on the universities under cover of the fees issue is pure right wing dogma that future generations will suffer for.

As for the Liberals, the bulk of them have always been an unprincipled two faced bunch, the electorate didn't recognise it before they finally sold themselves. They have just proved the old adage "every man has his price". The Tories got them pretty cheaply didn't they?

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[RicardoRichardo](#)

5 December 2010 9:05AM

The bigger problem for the LibDems is that their stance on tuition fees is symptomatic of their general approach to policy making and campaigning. In the long years of opposition they cultivated the habit of telling people what they wanted to hear, safe in the knowledge that they'd never actually be called on to deliver in government. LibDem leaflets, and LibDem campaigners, made similarly broken pledges in every constituency they had a chance of winning. For example, in my area they promised to abolish tolls on the Severn bridge. Well, the regional transport minister is Norman Baker, but I'm still paying £5.50 every time I go to work. And that is not to mention their foolish strategy in Lib-Lab marginals of portraying New Labour as the Tories in disguise. We can all see who admires the Tories now.

The cumulative effect of so many broken promises at a local level will be devastating at the next election. As Rafael Behr has predicted, they will probably be driven by unpopularity to ask the Tories to join them in an alliance.

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[oohkuchi](#)

5 December 2010 9:24AM

Did Prescott really come up with that brilliant one-liner at the end unaided?

Seriously, though, the Lib Dems will just have to kiss goodbye to those who feel betrayed. They are better off without them anyway. Clegg made the right choice--better one term of real power than 100 years of impotence. Risky as it is, this is the only way they can establish themselves as a credible option in future elections, whatever the short-term damage now. The tuition fees thing affects an elite, and anyway pales in contrast to the lies (Iraq) and betrayals of the British Parasite Party, aka Labour. It will soon be forgotten.

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[sjxt](#)

5 December 2010 9:26AM

RicardoRichardo is right. The LibDems are fundamentally a party of opposition. They exist for politicians and voters who prefer the luxury of having it all ways all the time and never having to face up to the responsibility of hard choices. It would have made no difference if they had ended up in coalition with the Conservatives or Labour - either way they would disappoint one side or other of their support and facing accusations of "betrayal".

For all that I prefer having them in the Coalition rather than a Tory Government with an ascendant right pushing its nutcase policies. Even if you don't like the Coalition, that would have been much worse.

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[cloudgroover](#)

5 December 2010 9:46AM

Just take a look at Cleggs face these days. Tired, stressed and aged. He knows!

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[solip1](#)

5 December 2010 10:02AM

I joined the Lib Dems shortly before the last election as I was so excited at the idea of the party that I had always supported finally getting the chance of real influence at the national level. I was hoping for a hung parliament. I was hoping that the Lib Dems would moderate in an intelligent way the excesses of power which both Labour and the Conservatives had previously had handed to them by a ridiculous electoral system. I was hoping for a government which would aim to make us more European rather than more American.

I still believe that my local MP (Julian Huppert) is excellent, but I feel totally betrayed by the leadership of the party, and I will not be renewing my membership. Had I wanted to vote Conservative I would have done so. Gove and Lansley in particular are ideological extremists and I support nothing that they do.

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[Daniel873](#)

5 December 2010 10:04AM

the tuition fees issue may help to show that the Lib Dems have matured into a party of government.

Lying, breaking explicit pledges and conning the electorate shows that you've 'matured into a party of government' alright. But weren't the Lib Dems supposed to bring a 'different politics'? Oh nevermind that was another fib too.

"I went to a party before the election and this bloke just dismissed me, saying the Lib Dems would never be in government so they didn't matter. I feel quite smug when I think back to that encounter now."

But you don't matter. You're just propping up a Tory government which failed to win the election so it can push through Tory policies.

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[mgpdleft](#)

5 December 2010 10:16AM

The behaviour of the Lib-dems has made many people think again about proportional representation. The assumption was that the Lib-Dems and Labour would, under PR, provide an almost unbroken centre-left block that would prevent the Tories wrecking havoc. But did we take into consideration how political leaders can just change policies at a whim? The reality is that we are just as likely to be faced with a continual pro-Tory government for years. How could we get rid of this coalition under PR?

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[Bizbuz](#)

5 December 2010 10:39AM

The LibDems don't get it that they are supporting trebling the university fees - so how is that fair or any better than what we have now. No matter how fair the repayment policy will be, the students are still going to have to pay back much more than now because they will have a bigger debt than now.

Stop clegging LibDemmers!

Recommend? (5)

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[tomguard](#)

5 December 2010 10:39AM

@Olly Gender

"I went to a party before the election and this bloke just dismissed me, saying the Lib Dems would never be in government so they didn't matter. I feel quite smug when I think back to that encounter now."

I wonder how smug you will feel come the next election when you are voted out into the wilderness? So go on smugly enjoying your taste of pseudo-power while it lasts - the Tories are really very clever aren't they? You have fallen right into their trap and become the whipping boys for the public anger against their vile inequitable and divisive policies. You at least have done us one favour: you have shown that what passes for democracy in this country to be a sham and an illusion and that the LibDems are just as venal and amoral as the rest of the political class.

Recommend? (22)

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[cloudgroover](#)

5 December 2010 10:43AM

And it is bare faced hypocrisy to announce a policy such as Vince cable has then suggest you may abstain or vote against it. Unacceptable under any party name.

Recommend? (11)

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[VoxAC30](#)

5 December 2010 10:47AM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.



[schwitters](#)

5 December 2010 10:53AM

My father was a factory worker and we would have been on the ConDem radar as deserving poor. My father paid taxes, worked in the same place for forty years and I was the first of my family to go to grammar school, ever do A levels, let alone get a degree.

I was paid a full grant and had no fees to pay. It still wasn't a lot and I had to work during vacations, there was just no way my folks could help me financially.

The most irritating comment on these boards is the notion that it is unfair for the poor to subsidise the middle classes who go to university. My father happily paid his taxes in the knowledge that they helped sustain the NHS and the education system as a whole, and that was before his son went off on his education journey.

He, and his generation, saw education as route away the factory floor. My work during vacations included working with these same people on the shop floor and they had nothing but pride for their sons and daughters who travelled along my route.

To hear immensely wealthy politicians (I daren't even think of the working class Tory commentators) even suggesting that the new changes are an inevitable reality is just too disturbing. Truth is I see my generation as the Golden Generation in terms of education opportunity. The thought of the debt that the students of today are facing when they leave would have been enough, in my day, for many of us not to go for that degree. To suggest otherwise can only come from people who have not experienced the kind of poverty prevalent in places like my home town, even today.

When politicians say there is no other way I want to send them back to university again to learn that there are always other ways. Then again, most of the current government wouldn't have needed a full grant in my time either.

Recommend? (40)

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[tomguard](#)

5 December 2010 10:56AM

@VoxAC30

To be fair, I always thought they were cunts.

I think I am perhaps too gullible and was taken in by the LibDems, particularly Vince Cable (though not Clegg who I always thought an oily creep), but yes you are right that is exactly what they are though I would extend the description to all politicians.

Recommend? (12)

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[bigwilsonstyles](#)

5 December 2010 11:00AM

Hardest hours? No, not yet. That will come when they lose the referendum on AV and get massacred in the local elections in the spring. Hopefully the defeat will be so crushing that the party falls apart altogether.

Recommend? (15)

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[harovitch](#)

5 December 2010 11:05AM

Clegg and Cable have sold their party for forty pieces of silver. Depressing isn't it what lengths some people will go to for power and position. How amazingly short sighted they are though; the liberal democrats are now a spent force who have proved beyond all doubt that they are completely devoid of honesty and integrity, and are just like all other politicians will lie their way as much as they need to achieve their own personal goals and ambitions. Having lied and deceived the people that voted for them they are so deeply mesmerised by the short term grandeur of 'being in government' they are unable so see exactly how much they are hated and despised. It really doesn't matter what stance they take now having revealed their true colours. One thing they most certainly have achieved is they will have changed the attitude of all erstwhile LD supporters throughout the country in that they will never ever be listened to again.

Recommend? (10)

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[SimonPeterAustralia](#)

5 December 2010 11:08AM

This comment has been removed by a moderator. Replies may also be deleted.



[s1syphus](#)

5 December 2010 11:34AM

Ah, TwoSwords again, throwing your meaningless and groundless opinions into the fray.

"Practically necessary and morally right"

Perhaps one of many practical options available, certainly not one of the the practically necessary options available with anything approaching a moral content.

You and your children had a good time at university did you? Pulling the ladder up behind you now?

You haven't got a clue mate. I think I understand your ideal society now:

One in which the lower-orders know their place and stay there while their 'betters' get on with the work of making themselves lots of money.

I would suggest it's practically necessary that you get back in your box and morally right that you spend some time living on the breadline.

Recommend? (15)

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epinoa

5 December 2010 11:47AM

Nick Clegg's Cambridge education doesn't seem to have amounted to much. Screwing your own voter base is hardly one of the smartest political moves.

Recommend? (12)

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holzy

5 December 2010 12:19PM

It was when I reached the word 'smug' - 'I feel quite smug' - that I reached for my baseball bat ...

Recommend? (6)

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Cleggaphobia

5 December 2010 12:28PM

I've lost ALL faith in Quisling Clegg and Vichy Vince. When are we going to be Liberated?

Recommend? (5)

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blueporcupine

5 December 2010 12:32PM

"Obviously," hissed Kate Llewellyn, an 18-year-old student in the audience, furious that he seemed "so proud of himself".

Haha. This suggests to me that quite a lot of this is about hate, and how good it feels to really, y'know, get together and hate someone.

Of course it's an important decision, to vote against your own party within months of becoming an MP! What does she expect? Especially if there is an alternative which *some* people might consider viable, and I imagine quite a lot of people tried to persuade Wright of that. He kept

quiet and thought about it, and made what I think is the right decision, good for him. But no, that isn't enough, he has to make it *in the right way!* Because he didn't, the hatez can continue. FFS.

Recommend? (6)

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[francomimmi](#)

5 December 2010 12:34PM

Isn't it beautiful? Julian Astle thinks that, betraying its voters, Lib Dems demonstrate that they have become "a party capable of government". So now we know what it takes, to reach the power. O tempora...

Recommend? (12)

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[Youngliars](#)

5 December 2010 12:38PM

"You cannot have the minister who helped advance the policy [Cable] and the deputy prime minister who has spoken up for it [Clegg] not supporting it in a Commons vote. That would completely mystify the public," said Astle. Voting for the proposals would demonstrate that the Lib Dems had become "a party capable of government", he said.

Hey he's probably right, in order to run a government you have to NOT listen to the people's demands. 'To be able to make tough decisions' yeah right. Jesus Christ, how stupid are they? They are actively exposing the problems with the system without even realising they are doing it. What a bunch of idiots. Keep talking and lets see how you can make yourselves look even stupider, invalidate your own government!

Recommend? (8)

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[mickforthemoment](#)

5 December 2010 1:02PM

"...the tuition fees issue may help to show that the Lib Dems have matured into a party of government. They also point out that their position on tuition fees was not one of the four key policies in the election manifesto."

Well, it was a key policy to those who voted LibDem for their radical and progressive education policies. As pointed out by others, this pledge was a vote-winner for them, especially amongst

students. If they don't deliver, they will justifiably lose those votes at the next election.

The problem for the LibDems is that the coalition has no electoral mandate to govern... but does so only through the dodgy default of our unwritten constitution. Scanting power, in the posh-boys coalition, the libDems chucked the chance to make the Tories govern and lose in minority government. The electoral scare tactics of the banking classes (we'll go the way of Greece) tucked them into bed with the Tories, who make sure it's the LibDems who are exposed whenever possible.

Watching Clegg's mob being pulled apart, is one of the few pleasures to be had from this government.

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[KatharineMcPhee](#)

5 December 2010 1:14PM

Next general election, LibDems seats won, that will be a big zero, were see how smug they are then, they are truly shameful, and will pay for there lies and deceptiveness .

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