

[The not-so-liberal antidemocrats?](#) [1]

Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Monday 19 April 2010



The Liberal Democrats claim to be a liberal party. This is half-true, at best. Their manifesto has some good points on social issues: opposing ID cards is the very minimum that I'd expect of a politician, but it's nice that the Lib Dems agree. On some social issues, though, they fail to live up to their ideals. Rather than ending the shameful drug prohibition laws, the Lib Dems settle for platitudes like 'treatment' of addicts as if that makes up for laws that criminalise a whole section of people living their lives in peace. What's more, Nick Clegg's comment that he wants to 'change people's behaviour' before they commit crimes at the debate is a nod towards social engineering that no liberal should make. Nevertheless, the Liberal Democrats are fairly liberal on social issues.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the party's economic policies, which evoke the worst kind of left-wing populism. They claim that government should soak the rich to give everyone else a free ride - a highly illiberal idea, even if it was realistic. They claim that they can give nearly everyone tax cuts and spend more on government, simply by 'closing tax loopholes' and raising capital gains tax to a whopping 50%. This is laughable: these tax hikes would smother new enterprises and totally undermine an economy recovery. For a man who claims to have predicted the financial crisis, Vince Cable seems shockingly ignorant of what his own policies would do to the economy.

The Liberal Democrats are also the most strongly pro-EU party in Westminster, and Nick Clegg is an ardent federalist. The Liberal Democrats broke their own 2005 manifesto pledge for a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty by abstaining from the vote on holding a referendum. There is a valid debate about the virtues of the EU, but it is a strange sort of 'democrat' that would vote to deny people a referendum on something as important as the Lisbon Treaty.

The Liberal Democrats's platform is a mish-mash of fairly decent social policies, Europhilia, and populist economics. Nick Clegg's rise has been compared to Susan Boyle's: but to be fair, we have no reason to think Susan Boyle is that unsound.

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) [4]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/politics-and-government/the-not-so-liberal-antidemocrats>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/politics-and-government/the-not-so-liberal-antidemocrats>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5809>

[3] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[4] <http://disqus.com>