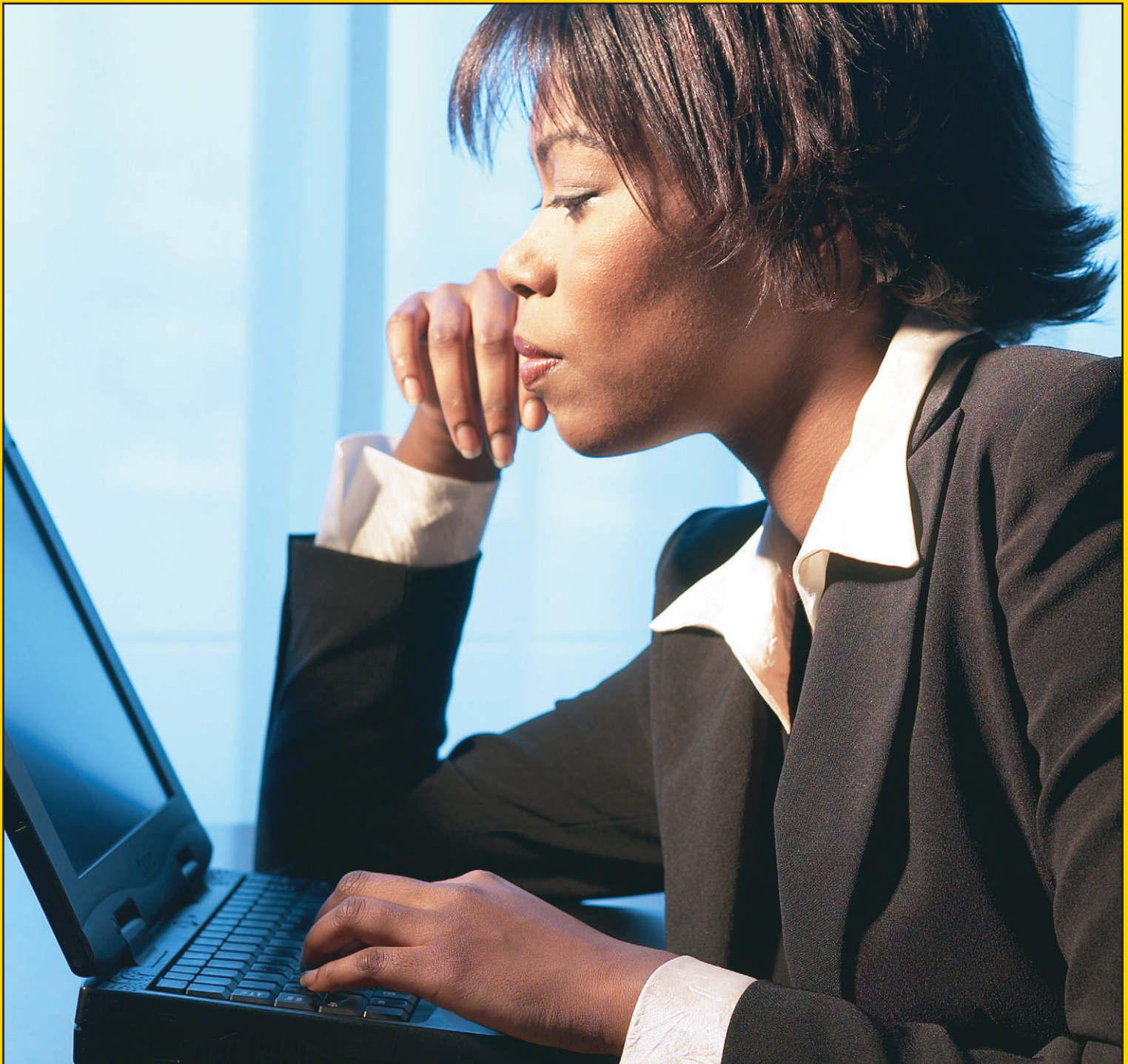


*on Ethnic Minorities*

# FOCUS



## GENERAL ELECTION 2005: LIBERAL DEMOCRAT MANIFESTO FOR ETHNIC MINORITIES



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The reality of Britain today is that it is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith and therefore diverse society. It is a richer society as a result - culturally, socially and economically.

The Liberal Democrats embrace that Britain and we celebrate it. We will ensure that our laws reflect that diversity, protecting minorities from violence, discrimination and harassment. Labour can no longer lay exclusive claim to the votes of Britain's ethnic minorities.

Many people in Britain, of all backgrounds, were angry about the way we were taken to war in Iraq. And they saw - and very many welcomed and supported - the principled stand the Liberal Democrats took at the time.

We want to restore Britain's reputation on the world stage - fighting international poverty, tackling climate change, protecting human rights and pushing to make sure that free trade is fair for all.

The Liberal Democrats are now seen as the leading proponent of politics which call for tolerance and respect for human rights, both at home and abroad. We have refused to join a ludicrous and dangerous political auction of the other parties on anti-immigrant rhetoric.

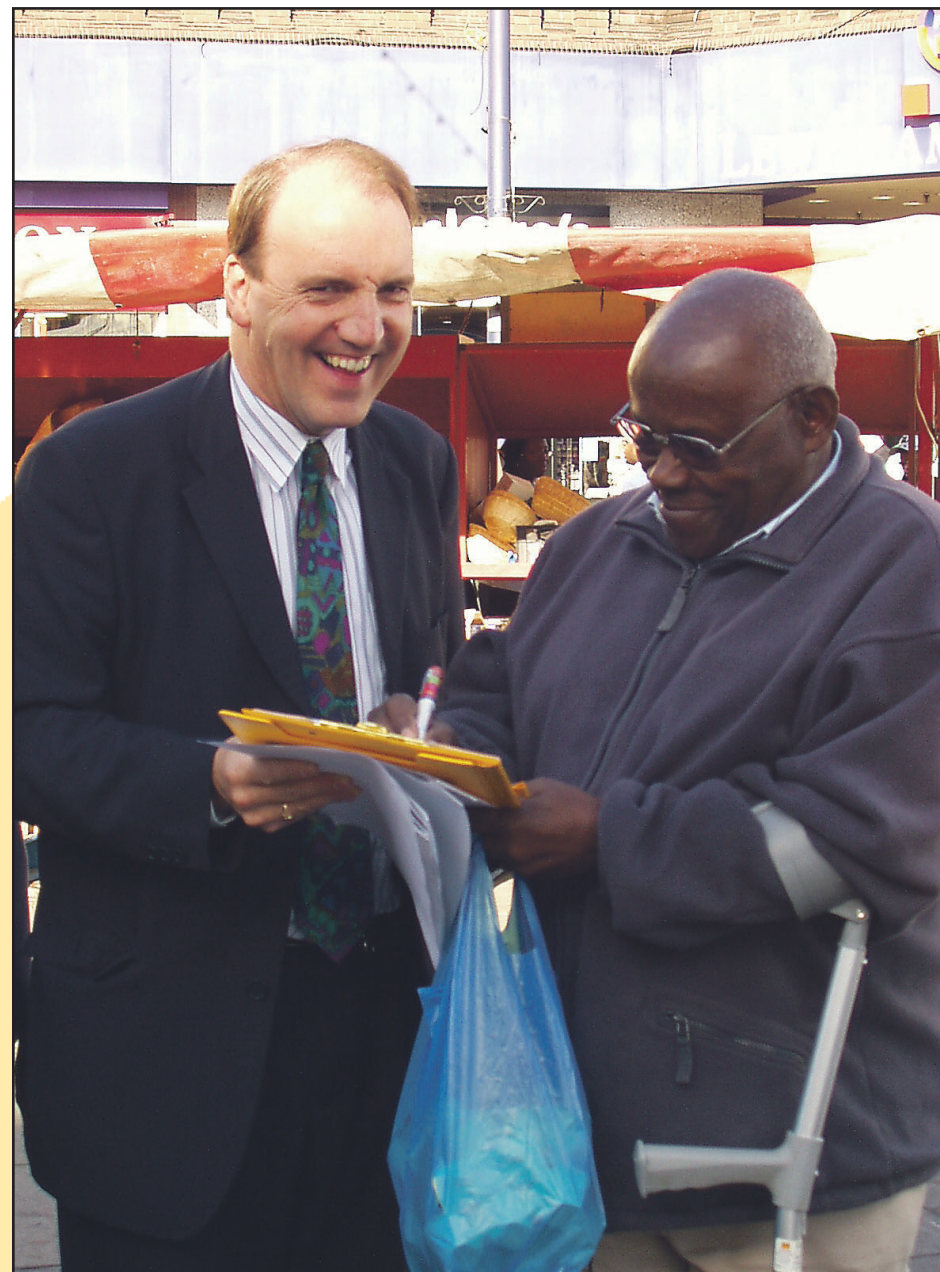
And we will promote a balanced approach to tackling terrorism. That means tough measures to make Britain safe - but not at the expense of fundamental legal rights like has happened at Belmarsh. It means acting through the United Nations on terrorism, but recognising that also means tackling the breeding grounds of terrorism - inequality, extremism and oppression. And it means that war must only be used as a last resort.

But the popularity of the Liberal Democrats amongst the ethnic minority communities of Britain is not just about our stand on international issues and protection of civil liberties - our distinctive voice on health, education and crime is just as important.

Our policies resonate because the ethnic minority communities in this country understand that opportunity and freedom for all are not just slogans, they need to be put into practice by political parties with affordable policies that will make Britain better.

The Liberal Democrats have been the real opposition in this parliament. But we have no arbitrary or artificial limit to our ambition. Many people in the ethnic minority communities in this country are looking for a political home - I want the Liberal Democrats to be that home. United; principled; ambitious as a party. Together we can make those ambitions real for the country, for us and for the future of our children.

*Charles Kennedy*



## **Top 5 Liberal Democrat policies for Ethnic Minorities**

- **Strengthen the fight against discrimination and harassment with a single Equality Act** to replace the tangled mess of our existing anti-discrimination law.
- **Prioritise international law, democracy and respect for human rights** - national security and prevention of international terrorism are best achieved through international co-operation.
- **Safeguard a human-rights based asylum policy** in accordance with the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on Refugees - no quotas or targets on asylum seekers and refugees, but a quick, fair and principled assessment of each case.
- **Create confidence in the immigration system**, by consulting with business and the public services to set quotas reflecting Britain's economic needs, to benefit both the British people and the British economy; while promoting the positive contribution made by immigrants throughout our history.
- **Use New Deal money on a better employment scheme**, with better, more personalised support and skills training, and recognising that some ethnic minority groups face particular problems in entering the jobs market.

**This document contains Federal Liberal Democrat policy, except in areas where policy of the Scottish and Welsh Liberal Democrats applies. A full costing document will be published at the same time as the General Election Manifesto.**

## Promoting Equality and Protecting Rights

Liberal Democrats are committed to protecting the rights of any person or group who is disadvantaged because they belong to the Black and Ethnic minority section of British society. We will combat discrimination on the grounds of race and/or religion at all levels and in all quarters.

- **Strengthen the fight against discrimination and harassment with a single Equality Act** to replace the tangled mess of our existing anti-discrimination law. Such legislation is crucial if the government's proposed Commission for Equality and Human Rights is to be effective.

Liberal Democrats recognise that many cultural groups are defined by religious faith, rather than ethnic group. We also recognise that Far-Right groups often rephrase their racist rhetoric in terms of religion to exploit the lack of legislation protecting religious groups. Our proposed Equality Act will:

- **Protect people from discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the basis of religion or belief.** This legislation will be equivalent to existing race discrimination legislation and would apply in fields such as employment, education and the provision of goods and services.

- It was the Liberal Democrats who led the call for an amendment to the laws on incitement to racial hatred to criminalise those who use religious words as a pretext for race hate.

There should be legal parity between all religions and religious groups - no one religion or denomination should receive preferential treatment. We will:

- **Abolish the existing Blasphemy Law**, which is discriminatory in its application as it only protects



Christianity and not other beliefs. The law is outdated, incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, and is unnecessary on taste grounds given the existence of more modern advertising and broadcast standards.

- **In the longer term, support the disestablishment of the Church of England.**

### Asylum - Safe Havens

The use of asylum as a political football by successive governments and the other political parties has had severe repercussions for race relations in Britain. Liberal Democrats have been consistent – we recognise that for much of our history Britain has had a proud record of granting safe refuge to those fleeing persecution, and in turn, refugees have enriched our culture and wealth immeasurably. We will:

- **Safeguard a human-rights based asylum policy** in accordance with the UK's obligations under the UN Convention on Refugees - no quotas or targets on asylum seekers and refugees.

- **Establish a dedicated Asylum Agency** to consider claims lawfully, competently and impartially, independent from political interference.

- **End asylum seekers' dependence on benefits, by allowing them to work.** This will reduce tensions in their local communities and help to ensure that no asylum seeker is left destitute.

- **Fight the damaging and unwarranted caricaturing, victimisation and scapegoating of asylum seekers and refugees by extremist politicians and some elements of the media.**

### Managed Migration – Maximum Opportunities

Immigrants are too often labelled a problem for British society. Britain has benefited hugely from immigration. There is a positive economic case for immigration, but this case must continue to be made and the Liberal Democrats will not shirk from doing so. However economic migration must be effectively managed. We will:

- **Create confidence in the immigration system**, by consulting with business and the public services to set quotas reflecting Britain's economic needs to benefit both the British people and the British economy.

- **Reject the misleading blurring of economic migration with asylum-seeking**, and of both with

illegal immigration

- **Preserve the right to family re-union** on a case by case basis without recourse to arbitrary limits or quotas.

### Equality of Opportunity and the Public Services

Liberal Democrats believe that the top political priority for the people of Britain, regardless of their ethnic background, is high quality local public services. In paying for this, our mantra is 'fairer, simpler taxes'. We want to create a fairer distribution of the costs of paying for public services, as well as better public services. Equal access to education is crucial for achieving equality of opportunity. Really high quality education for all is vital, especially for ethnic groups that may be disadvantaged initially by poverty, English as a second language, and so forth. Our policies to improve quality and access to education and training are therefore especially important to many ethnic minority communities. We are committed in particular to:

- **Improving Early Years: smaller classes, better investment.** Children well taught and well cared-for in their early years have a far better chance of living fulfilled and rewarding lives. The government's £1 billion Child Trust Fund – a cash handout to 18 year olds – is, by contrast, expensive, unnecessary and delivers few real benefits. We will improve early years support by spending this money where it will do the most good - reducing average maximum class sizes from 30 to 20 for children aged 5-7.

- **No tuition fees, no top-up fees – university affordable for every student.** Labour broke their promise on top-up fees. The result: tens of thousands of able students saddled with mountainous debts, or frightened altogether from going to university. Funded from our

new 50% rate on incomes over £100,000, we will abolish all tuition fees.

- **Ensuring that faith schools reflect the diversity of their local community** by operating a fair admissions policy and teaching the national curriculum. It is essential that schools cater for local pupils and do not contribute to social or cultural divisiveness.

Liberal Democrats also recognise that some ethnic or religious groups have special needs or sensitivities, which must be taken into account in the delivery of public services. We will:

- **Prioritise public health measures which seek to tackle head-on the inequality that exists in health and access to health care of many ethnic minority communities**, and continue to grow capacity of the NHS to guarantee rapid access to diagnosis and treatment of vulnerable groups.

- **Introduce a targeted health MOT** for people at risk of certain diseases, to increase access to screening and blood pressure and cholesterol tests. People of certain ethnic backgrounds are more susceptible to particular diseases.

- **Require Health Impact Assessments on government policies** and the budget with a particular focus on the impact of policy on health inequality and groups with special health needs, for example, ethnic minority communities.

- **Tackle the root causes of ill health** by restoring free NHS dental check-ups and eye tests, guaranteeing every individual access to relevant screening tests according to their own personal risk factors, including age, gender and ethnicity, and expanding the choice of treatment options to include Complementary and Alternative Medical therapies where clinically appropriate.

- **Guarantee free personal care for elderly and disabled people.** Those towards the end of their lives deserve dignity. Liberal Democrats will provide free personal care for all elderly and disabled people when they most need it.

- **Put over £100 a month more on the pension at 75 as a first step to extending it to all, taking a million pensioners off means-testing.** We will simplify the system and, by guaranteeing a basic pension at 75 of at least (from April) £109.45 per week, abolish the need for means-tests altogether for a million people. Every pensioner couple over 75 will receive at least £167.05 per week (from April) state pension - £33 more than at present. And pension entitlements for these older pensioners will be based on citizenship, not national insurance record.

The best way to ensure that the public services are sensitive to the needs of ethnic minority groups is to enhance political representation of this section of the community. We would:

- **Bring in fair votes for all national and local elections** by introducing the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.

### Equality and the Legal System

Good police relationships with all communities are essential to effective policing. However, in recent years, relationships with ethnic minority communities have been particularly strained. There is concern that the use of powers such as 'stop and search' has disproportionately affected minority groups and aggravated community tensions. It is of particular concern that Section 44 of the Terrorism Act has led to a disproportionate increase in the number of Asian people being stopped. We will:

- Encourage police forces to be more representative of the communities they serve, and ensure that 'stop and search' is

based on intelligence and attaches no relevance to the race or colour of those stopped by the police.

- Scrap the government's ID card scheme, which will provide another pretext for 'stop and search' and lead to discrimination and harassment.

Liberal Democrats recognise that ethnic minorities also have concerns about the way in which the courts and the prison system treat ethnic minority citizens who come into contact with them. We will:

- Repeal the Government's illiberal criminal justice measures. Limiting trial by jury denies defendants the opportunity to be tried by a jury representative of the community rather than a disproportionately white judiciary.

## Equality of Opportunity in the Economy

Ethnic minority communities often live in economically disadvantaged areas, characterised by low pay and high unemployment. To boost the prosperity of these communities, we will:

- **Axe the Council Tax and replace with Local Income Tax** so that everyone pays according to their income and no one pays more than they can afford. Council Tax is based on the size of someone's house, but Local Income Tax is based on income.

- **Use New Deal money on a better employment scheme**, to help those in need of assistance to re-enter the job market. We will provide individualised work and training schemes, modelled on the existing Employment Zones in the areas of highest unemployment. This alternative to the current New Deal would tailor assistance to the individual jobseekers, so that they get the package of support they need to find work.

- **Protect workers on low incomes**



through an annual review of the national minimum wage by the Low Pay Commission who will make recommendations on its level to the government.

Self-employment and small businesses are a particularly important route to economic advancement for ethnic minorities. We will:

- **Cut the red tape that stops businesses from growing.** We will slash the red tape, bureaucracy and over-regulation that is holding British business back – especially small businesses.

- **Introduce small business rate relief.** Many small businesses pay a disproportionate amount in rates – as much as 35% of their profits. We will help small businesses by reforming the business rates system to allow

firms with a rateable value of less than £25,000 to claim a business rate allowance of up to £1,500. This would represent a saving of over £600 a year for the majority of small businesses.

## Foreign Policy Based on Principles

Britain's membership of the UN Security Council, the Commonwealth, the EU, NATO, and other global bodies gives us a key role in world affairs. But with power comes responsibility. We must not ignore our obligation to abide by international law, nor turn a blind eye to poverty in the developing world. Britain's influence should be used to fight for human rights and equitable and peaceful relationships between nations. The Liberal Democrat approach puts democratic values, human

rights and good governance at the top of the foreign policy agenda.

- **We should not have gone to war in Iraq – it's time to restore trust in government.** There were no Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq; there was no serious and current threat; and inspectors were denied the time they needed to finish their job in Iraq. The war has cost thousands of lives on all sides, and the British taxpayer has had to foot a bill for £3.5 billion so far. Liberal Democrats will prioritise international law, democracy and respect for human rights, believing national security and preventing international terrorism are best achieved through international co-operation. For maximum influence, Britain must work through the United Nations, and as a committed member of the EU, as well as with the US. We will seek to reform the institutions and resources of the UN and the EU to make them more immediately responsive to international challenges.

- **Meet Britain's promise on aid.** Liberal Democrats are committed to realising a world free from



poverty. In order to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 (which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, providing universal primary education, and combating HIV/AIDS) the UK needs to provide more effective international assistance. Liberal Democrats will increase British aid spending from 0.35% today to at least 0.5% by 2007/08, and set out detailed plans for it to reach 0.7% of Gross

National Income by 2011 at the latest.

- **Fair Trade.** Rich countries still operate subsidies and tariff barriers that hit the poorest countries in the world. We will seek to break down the barriers that prevent the poorest countries in the world selling their goods to us on fair terms, and promote trade and investment in developing countries.





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