

Liberal Democrats will invest in local services to enable communities to thrive. Our aim is to ensure that individuals of all backgrounds and means can live free of the fear of sickness, poverty and crime.

The steps we outline in this paper are necessary to create a fair, democratic and prosperous society, in which individuals are able to make their voice heard and develop their talents and skills to the full. But we believe that people can realise their potential best not as isolated individuals, but as members of thriving and responsible communities. We will invest in the network of community services – health, housing, crime prevention, social security, arts and sport – to improve quality, choice and opportunity for everyone.

Guaranteeing high-quality health care

Liberal Democrats remain steadfastly committed to the original aims of the NHS: to enable everyone to live free of the fear of illness, injury and disability; to provide health care free at the point of delivery and regardless of ability to pay. The Government's 'reforms' mean that patients are made to follow the money; under our proposals, money will follow the patients. We especially oppose the two-tier Health Service which the Government is creating. Our priorities are:

- **A decent level of health service funding**, including an annual real increase to match the costs of new technology and the growing number of elderly people. We will start to replace the underfunding suffered by the Health Service under the Conservatives, invest more in renovating and constructing new health service buildings, and increase spending in the priority areas listed below. We will abolish tax relief for private health insurance, whilst protecting the rights of existing policy-holders.

- **Health promotion** – keeping people healthy, and treating the root causes of ill health. We will provide resources for preventive medicine, health education and occupational health, invest in screening programmes for the prevention of disease, tackle the problems of drug abuse, ban tobacco promotion, remove charges for eye tests and dental checkups, and both freeze and extend exemptions from prescription charges. We will increase resources for primary care. We will restore a comprehensive dental screening service in schools and improve the dentists' NHS contract. We will require all government departments to take account of the impact on health of their decisions – of crucial importance in areas such as industrial investment, housing, social security and environmental protection.

- **Real choice in health care.** We will introduce an effective Patient's Charter, including rights to hospital treatment within a specified time, a choice of GP, guaranteed access to health records, and a comprehensive no-fault compensation scheme. We will require health authorities to publish a Charter of Services, defining basic entitlements, and provide redress where these are not satisfied. We will establish a new National Inspectorate for Health to guarantee a quality service.

- **Better health care for women.** We will ensure access to clinics providing health promotion, counselling, family planning and screening services, particularly for cervical and breast cancer, and advice on maternity and child care. We will increase the availability both of treatment by women health professionals and of home birth.

- **High-quality community care**, available through voluntary, private and local authority services to people unable to care for themselves. We will give users control over the options for care and provide services in a way which guarantees individuals maximum independence while retaining existing community links. We will provide bridging finance for local authorities for the transition to the new legislative arrangements on community care

- **Investment in NHS staff**, including in-service training, especially in areas of significant shortage and changing roles. We will reform medical staffing and training to replace the consultant-led hierarchy with teams of accredited specialists.

• **A health service for all.** We will ensure that the assessment of health-care needs and the strategic planning of all services are the responsibility of democratically accountable health authorities. We will replace the so-called 'internal market' with service agreements between authorities and hospitals and other health units. We will replace GP fundholding with a system which guarantees GPs freedom to refer patients outside the service agreements negotiated by health authorities. We will create a common structure of Local Management of Hospitals and community units, ending the ability of NHS Trusts to dispose of their capital assets, to set their own terms and conditions of service for staff, and to withdraw from local planning of health services.

Providing good housing

Decent, affordable and safe housing is vital to personal happiness and family life. We will encourage home ownership, but we recognise that the housing market has been distorted by mortgage tax relief, and we believe that choice in housing means providing more rented accommodation in both public and private sectors. We will:

- **Introduce housing cost relief** weighted towards those most in need and available to house buyers *and* renters. This will replace mortgage tax relief for future home buyers, which often helps most those who need it least, and causes enormous distortions in the savings and housing markets. People holding mortgages will be protected: they will have the choice of moving to housing cost relief or continuing to receive mortgage interest tax relief.
- **Boost house building and renovation.** We will relax controls on local authority capital receipts, especially for new council building, for houses built in cooperation with housing associations, and for renovation and repair work. We recognise that the urgent need for homes can only be met by mobilising both private investment and public spending. We will therefore create a new Partnership Housing sector to ensure high-quality affordable rented housing.
- **Improve tenants' rights** to better standards of repair and maintenance in the public and private sectors. We will encourage councils to create more tenants' cooperatives.

We will retain the right of council tenants to opt for a change of landlord, but only after a fair ballot.

- **Take urgent action on homelessness.** We will pay income support to claimants in advance and assist with initial deposits, extend the duty of local authorities to provide accommodation for 16-18 year olds, and encourage councils to assist each other with housing needs. We will fund the provision of short-term rented housing to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. We will legislate to bring into use dwellings left empty without reasonable cause for more than a year.
- **Adopt new environmental standards** for all buildings, commercial and domestic. We will introduce a requirement for energy audits on all new buildings as a precondition of grants for home insulation, solar heating and other energy-saving measures. Homes which meet the new standards will be exempt from stamp duty on house purchase. We will encourage shared combined heat and power schemes, and encourage those planning new houses to take into account the scope for passive solar heating.

Protecting the community

Over the past ten years recorded crime has risen faster than at any time in our history. Meanwhile, prison conditions have deteriorated and the public has lost confidence in the criminal justice system. Liberal Democrats will reverse this trend by:

- **Creating safe and secure communities.** We will give local authorities the powers to develop comprehensive community crime prevention programmes, improve services to victims and encourage Neighbourhood Watch and Safer City Programmes. We will pay special attention to the underlying social problems in high-crime areas, particularly to prevent young people drifting into crime.
- **Putting more police officers on the beat.** We will redeploy police resources in order to increase police presence in local communities and establish local neighbourhood offices. We will decentralise budgetary control to police subdivisions. We will encourage recruitment campaigns and training for promotion to increase the number of women and ethnic minority officers

Home energy efficiency discount
Saving energy in the home makes good environmental sense, and will save money on electricity and gas bills. We will make houses which meet high standards of energy efficiency exempt from the first £1000 of stamp duty when they are sold. Their energy standard will be assessed by an energy audit carried out by the local authority's energy efficiency unit.

If a home does not meet the minimum standard, the owner will be able to claim back all money spent within the first year after purchase on raising it to that level, through, for example, home insulation, up to the amount of stamp duty they paid when they bought the property (up to the maximum of £1000). This will help to cut pollution and save energy and give a valuable boost to the housing market.

in the police force and especially in the higher ranks. Multicultural and anti-racism training will also increase confidence in the police among minority ethnic communities. We will support the creation by the police of new Racial Attacks Squads to monitor and coordinate action against racially-motivated attacks.

- **Reforming the criminal justice system.** We will establish a Ministry for Justice, merging the relevant functions of the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department. We will create the post of Public Defender, equivalent in status to the DPP and responsible for investigating alleged miscarriages of justice. We will extend legal aid, ensuring that justice is more widely available. We will encourage 'restorative justice', in which mediation between victims and offenders provides reparations for those who suffer from crime.
- **Radically reforming conditions inside prisons,** reducing overcrowding, improving prison officers' morale and punishing offenders where possible within the community. We will create women's units in prisons where feasible. We will extend the rights and responsibilities of prisoners along the lines recommended by the Woolf Report, and create the post of Prison Ombudsman.
- **Amend the provision of the Asylum Bill.** We will introduce improved welfare and legal rights for genuine asylum seekers and establish substantive rights of appeal.

Ensuring a decent income for all

The tax and social security systems are long overdue for reform. Our objectives are to simplify and integrate the two systems, to mount a determined assault on poverty and dependence, and to protect our citizens from want. We will work towards the eventual creation of a new 'Citizen's Income', payable to all irrespective of sex or status. For pensioners, the Citizen's Income will be well above the present pension, and for everyone else it will be about £12.80 a week (at present prices). Unpaid work will at last be recognised as valuable. Women caring in the home, for example, will receive an independent income from the state for the first time. The Citizen's Income will be buttressed by a single benefit for those in need, unifying income support and family credit, with supplements for

A citizen's pension
At present many people do not receive the full basic state pension. If they have not paid enough tax because they have not earned enough during their working lives, people have to rely on means-tested benefits when they retire. Women in particular are badly affected, because they tend to have the lowest paid jobs and to spend several years looking after children.
Liberal Democrats believe that a pension should be a right for everyone. We will ensure that the basic state pension is paid as of right and end means testing for our poorest senior citizens.

people with disabilities and for child-care support. These reforms will ensure that every citizen is guaranteed a decent minimum income, whether or not they are in employment. Our immediate priorities, which will act as steps towards the Citizen's Income, include:

- **Immediate improvements in benefits.** We will increase Child Benefit by £1 per week for each child. Income support for under-25s will be paid at the full rate, an increase of £8.50 per week. We will give back to 16 and 17 year olds the right to claim income support. We will end immediately the minimum poll tax level of 20%, prior to the abolition of the tax itself. We will reform the Social Fund, removing its cash limit and converting most loans into grants.
- **Increasing the basic state pension** immediately by £5 a week for single pensioners, and by £8 a week for married couples. This higher basic pension will be paid to every pensioner, regardless of their contributory record, to end the indignity of means testing. After the initial increase, we will uprate the basic pension every year in line with average earnings. This will be paid for by abolishing SERPS, which does not help the poorest pensioners. People who have already built up SERPS entitlements will of course still receive their SERPS pension.
- **Protecting the rights of members of occupational pension schemes.** We will provide a statutory framework of protection, including employee representation on occupational pension trusts.
- **Creating a comprehensive disability income scheme** to give people with disabilities real financial freedom. We will increase Invalidity Benefit by 15%, extend mobility allowance and base payments on medical records rather than National Insurance contributions. In the longer term we aim to reimburse individuals in full for the additional costs of their disability.
- **Creating a Carer's Benefit** for the many individuals who forgo normal earnings to look after elderly or disabled relatives. We will convert Invalid Care Allowance into a Carer's Benefit, increasing its value by an immediate 15%, indexing its future level to earnings and altering the entitlement rules to enable carers to combine caring with part-time or even full-time jobs and to ensure that people

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We will introduce Housing Cost Relief, weighted towards those in need and available to house buyers and renters. People holding mortgages will have the choice of moving to housing cost relief or continuing to receive mortgage interest tax relief.

will still be eligible even if the caring starts after the carer reaches pensionable age.

- **Further improvements in benefits.** We will, over the lifetime of a Parliament, phase out the differential in child benefit between the first child and subsequent children; reintroduce death and maternity grants; increase the family premium for income support and family credit, and reform the system of cold-weather payments.

- **Unifying income tax and employees' National Insurance contributions** so that the two taxes are collected and administered together and paid on the same income, whether from earnings, investments, capital gains or perks.

- **Making the investment needed to end the recession,** using the money borrowed by the Conservatives to pay for their pre-election tax cuts. We will also raise the basic rate of income tax by one penny in the pound to pay for the improvements essential to education. Our new tax rates will be as follows:

- About 80% of tax payers will pay 26% income tax plus the 9% from National Insurance (a combined rate of 35%).
- On earnings above £33,000, a combined rate of 42% will apply.
- On earnings above £50,000 a combined rate of 50% will be paid.
- Pensioners and ordinary savers will not pay the 9% National Insurance element on their incomes. Special provisions will also ensure that those on modest incomes most of which comes from investments, such as people who have been made redundant, do not pay this 9% on their savings.

Widening horizons: investing in the arts

The arts benefit society in two ways. First, access to the arts is intrinsic to a high quality of life. Second, the cultural sector – the arts, crafts, design, and audiovisual industries – makes as great a net contribution to the economy as does the oil industry. We will:

- **Create a new Ministry of Arts and Communications** headed by a minister in the Cabinet. Liberal Democrats will raise investment in the arts to the EC average over five years.

- **Reform and decentralise arts funding and organisation.**

We will decentralise many of the responsibilities of the Arts Council, increasing the roles of Regional Arts Boards and local authorities.

- **Strengthen links between the arts and education.** We will enhance practical arts teaching and library provision in schools and extend the provision of adult education for the arts and crafts. We will restore funding for public libraries to 1980 levels. We will abolish museum charges for school parties.

- **Transfer responsibility for broadcasting to the new Ministry.** The BBC is a major patron of the arts, and broadcasting itself combines a variety of arts and crafts. We will reform recent legislation affecting the independent channels to entrench the interests of quality broadcasting and to guarantee political independence. These interests will also be reflected in the impending review of the BBC's Charter, and our plans for cable television.

- **Encourage participation within Europe** – including in particular cooperation in the film industry, in protecting and enhancing our common heritage and in expanding opportunities for young artists of all kinds.

Encouraging a fit, active and healthy society

Sport is important for the economic, social and health benefits which it can bring and for its ability to enhance community identity. Liberal Democrats will:

- **Create a UK Sports Commission** to provide a voice for participants, spectators and administrators. State Sports Councils will continue to receive their core funds from government but the Commission will raise and distribute additional resources for the promotion of participation and excellence.

- **Encourage sport across the community.** We will encourage school to invest in sports facilities and open them up to the local community. We will establish Community Sports Plans offering tax relief to sports clubs that share facilities and coaching resources with local schools. We will encourage local authorities to transform football grounds into multi-sport venues.

- **Encourage individual and corporate sponsorship,** review the role of the Foundation for Arts and Sport and reconsider the Conservatives' hasty proposal for a national lottery.

We will fight discrimination by incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law and then extending it into a full UK Bill of Rights.

- **Maintain Britain's leading role in the fight against drug abuse in sport**, ensuring adequate funding for testing programmes and education campaigns directed at participants.

- **Enhance safety in the provision of sports grounds.** We will put the safety of spectators first in any legislation and make standards mandatory. We will take into account the size of grounds when setting safety standards. We will raise revenue for investment in safety by increasing levies on football pools and betting. We will require local authorities to include sports spectators on ground safety committees.

Guaranteeing equal opportunities

A forward-looking society places an equal value on the contribution of all its citizens – and benefits from the participation of all. Yet in today's Britain many groups of individuals are systematically discriminated against by a society which fails to recognise their right to equality of opportunity. Liberal Democrats will:

- **Fight discrimination** by incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law and then extending it into a full UK Bill of Rights. This will reinforce existing protection in British courts against discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, age, disability, religion or sexual orientation. We will set up a Commission of Human Rights to assist individuals to take legal action in cases of discrimination or other breaches of the rights guaranteed in the Convention.

- **Strengthen the rights of women.** We will guarantee equal pay for work of equal value; require public authorities and private contractors holding public contracts to be equal-opportunity employers and improve child-care support and facilities. Proportional representation for elections and modernising Parliamentary procedures will help to end the discrimination against women on elected bodies and in government at European, national and local levels.

- **Extend the opportunities of young people.** We will entrench young people's rights of representation on organisations which affect their lives and well-being such as college governing bodies. We will place a statutory obligation on local authorities to provide a comprehensive youth service in partnership with the voluntary sector, and

we will invest in leisure and recreation facilities. Young people will have the right to confidential medical advice and treatment.

- **Make old age a time of opportunity.** We will introduce a flexible 'decade of retirement' for men and women, in which people may choose to retire and take a state pension at any time between ages 60 and 70 (the value of the pension increasing with the age of retirement). We will increase choice for elderly and retired people by encouraging openings in voluntary and part-time work, and widening the availability of education, the arts and recreational facilities.

- **Protect the rights of ethnic minorities.** We will reinforce legislation to ensure equal opportunities for all, in housing, employment, education and training, especially in inner-city areas. PR will greatly increase the possibilities of participation in the political process. We will repeal the 1981 Nationality Act, reform immigration legislation to make it free from racial discrimination and restore the right of entry to British passport holders. We will push for the extension of EC race discrimination legislation and ensure that the rights of black and Asian British citizens are respected throughout the EC. We will encourage changes to the education system which place a positive value on a pluralist, diverse and multicultural society.

- **Guarantee equal rights for gay men and lesbians** through changes to criminal law, anti-discrimination legislation and police practices. We will repeal Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. We will create a common age of consent regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

- **Work with people with disabilities and their organisations** to draw up a charter of rights for people with disabilities. We will implement the 1986 Disabled Persons Act in full, giving priority to the development of advocacy schemes.



**5. Britain's
partners:
European
partnership
for the new
century**

Liberal Democrats will take decisive steps towards a fully integrated, federal and democratic European Community. We believe that by sharing sovereignty and pooling power, Britain and its partners will be better able to achieve common goals for the economy, the environment, society and security than by acting alone. Our aim is to create a citizens' Europe in which power lies as close to the citizen as possible.

Making Britain's European Presidency work

Very few of the proposals that we have set out in the preceding sections will be successful unless Britain is prepared to work in partnership within the Community. Following Maastricht, yet again Britain risks being left behind while the rest of Europe moves on.

Liberal Democrats want Britain to play a full role in creating a dynamic and democratic Europe. We will use Britain's six-month tenure of the Presidency of the Community's Council of Ministers to make a start on the real tasks that lie ahead: building a prosperous and integrated economy; correcting the democratic deficit, making Europe work for its citizens, not its institutions; widening the Community's membership; and helping to create a peaceful and stable new world order. We cannot expect Britain to influence the direction the Community takes in the next decade unless it is a full and enthusiastic member.

Our vision of the new Europe is of a federal community, where power is exercised at the lowest level consistent with good government. For us, federalism means decentralisation: passing powers down more than passing

them up. The creation of Scottish, Welsh and English regional Parliaments therefore goes hand in hand with the promotion of more European cooperation and partnership, ensuring access to power for individuals and their communities right across Europe.

Building a citizens' Europe

January 1993 will bring the single market. Economic and monetary union will follow by the end of the decade. Yet the Community is still too much an organisation for businessmen and bureaucrats instead of citizens and communities. We want to mould Europe's future in the interests of Europe's people. Our priorities are:

- **Economic and monetary union** including the establishment of an independent European Central Bank and a single European currency. We will renounce the Conservatives' 'opt-out' clause and accept the timetable for EMU.
- **Cooperation in research and innovation.** We will encourage further collaboration within the EC on major scientific projects and the development of new technologies such as telecommunications, information technology and environmentally sustainable innovations.
- **Action on the environment.** Our environmental goals cannot be successfully achieved unless action is taken across the Community. The proposed European Environment Agency must be established, a European energy policy drawn up and environmental subsidies and penalties applied Community-wide.
- **An active regional and social policy.** The single market and economic and monetary union will expose regions and firms to greater competition. This will be beneficial in the long run, but the EC must assist in the transitional period. We will renounce Britain's social chapter 'opt-out' and argue for a more flexible framework of social policy across the Community. The EC should set down minimum standards of health and safety and employee rights, leaving national governments and enterprises to decide how to meet them, subject ultimately to the judgement of the courts.
- **Fundamental reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.** We will ease the transition from the present wasteful and

inefficient price support mechanism to market prices and direct support for farmers' incomes to achieve environmental and social goals, to be funded by savings made from the present intervention payment system.

Creating a new democracy in Europe

The Community's structure gives far too much weight to the Council of Ministers at the expense of the European Parliament, and, most importantly, of the individual citizen. Further moves to European union, and enlargement, must depend on the institutions of the EC becoming truly democratic. We will:

- **Set out the rights of the European citizen.** We will work for a clear definition of the rights of the European citizen, and insist that these are common to all Community nationals. This must include common voting rights at local, national and European levels.
- **Increase the democratic powers of the European Parliament.** We will ensure that the Parliament becomes an effective partner with the Council in law-making, exercising in full the power of 'co-decision'.
- **Introduce fair votes for the 1994 British elections to the European Parliament.** The British citizen must no longer be denied the fair voting systems enjoyed by the citizens of every other European country.
- **Make the Commission more accountable.** The Parliament must have the power to confirm or deny the Council's nominee as President of the Commission, and then to approve or not the President's choice of Commissioners – and subsequently to sack them if necessary. We welcome the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty as a first step.
- **Increase democracy and accountability in the Council of Ministers.** We will argue to extend majority voting in the Council to cover all areas of Community policy other than constitutional and crucial security matters. When passing laws, the Council should meet in public.
- **Improve national scrutiny of Ministers' actions in Europe.** We will create a new Europe Committee of the House of Commons, and give our reformed House of Lords (see page 48) a special role in scrutinising developments in the Community.

- **Prepare for Community enlargement,** welcoming EFTA members and, when they are ready, the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. A Community with more members requires reformed and dynamic institutions.

Sharing security; working for peace

The Gulf War and its aftermath have shown the crucial need for stronger and more effective world institutions capable of upholding international law and enforcing respect for human rights. Britain must ensure that the Community plays a pivotal role in the construction of a new security order in Europe, following the democratisation of Eastern and Central Europe. New initiatives for disarmament and for sharing security burdens will enable further reductions in levels of armaments to be made without endangering security. On the global stage, a stronger United Nations will be needed to underpin cooperation in tackling the world's problems. We will:

- **Develop common European Community foreign and security policies.** This will include a common approach to defence procurement and the gradual integration of Community members' armed forces under a joint military command. The burden of collective security in Western Europe should be shared more equally; we will press for contributions from all nations to the costs of joint forces such as NATO's proposed Rapid Reaction Force – of which Britain will provide almost half.
- **Promote democracy and reform in Eastern and Central Europe** by coordinating generous economic assistance to countries introducing democracy, guaranteeing human rights and reforming their economies.
- **Assist the peaceful evolution of the Commonwealth of Independent States,** the former USSR. We will help not just with food and financial aid and technical assistance, but also with the provision of military resources to shift food and supplies, and with scientific assistance to dismantle nuclear weapons.
- **Develop a pan-European security framework.** We will encourage the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe to develop monitoring, verification and mediation duties within the continent. We will press for NATO to guarantee the borders of Poland, Czechoslovakia and

Further moves to European Union, and enlargement, must depend on the institutions of the European Community becoming truly democratic.

Hungary and to enter into talks with other governments in the region for similar guarantees.

- **Instigate a comprehensive review of UK defence policy** which will be dictated by a rigorous analysis of defence needs rather than by fixed monetary targets. The Review will cover the continuing need for contributions to collective security, the value of Britain's remaining extra-European commitments, and the potential for increasing our contribution to UN peacekeeping missions. Given the present hopeful international situation, we believe that further reductions in levels of armaments will be able to be made without in any way endangering security. Since the review will set out the framework for defence policy for years to come, we will halt any defence cut, and any order for a new weapons system, which might prejudice its outcome.

- **Establish an Arms Conversion Agency** to help arms manufacturers to diversify and convert out of the defence field, funded by savings made in the defence budget. Our proposed regional development agencies will also provide help to areas particularly affected. We will reduce spending on military research and development, and shift the resources saved into the civilian sector.

- **Maintain a *minimum* nuclear deterrent.** We believe that the UK needs to retain its independent nuclear deterrent, but that the escalation of firepower represented by the scale of the Trident replacement for Polaris is unnecessary and unhelpful. We will ensure that the total number of warheads on the four-boat Trident system is limited to no more than that currently deployed on the Polaris system, and our Defence Review will consider whether we can reduce this further without threatening security. Our Review will also examine the possibilities of future European cooperation in the provision of a deterrent force. We reject the Government's proposed replacement of British free-fall nuclear bombs with air-to-surface missiles.

- **Propose new disarmament initiatives** covering all categories of conventional and nuclear weapons. These will aim to eliminate non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe, and to reduce the strategic weapons possessed by the US, the former Soviet Union, Britain, France and China – a vital step towards the day when individual

nations' possession of nuclear deterrents ceases to be necessary.

- **Act against the arms trade.** Together with our Community partners, we will establish a register of all international arms sales, eventually to become a UN register. We will place a total embargo on arms sales to regimes which violate human rights, and work for further global agreements among suppliers to control arms sales and technology transfer. We will close the Defence Export Services Organisation and ensure that overseas aid is not linked in any way to arms purchases.

- **Make the United Nations more effective.** The UN Security Council should take a proactive role in peacekeeping before confrontation develops into conflict. We will work with our Community partners to ensure that funds are available for maintaining peace and security. The UN Military Staff Committee should be reinstated and a permanent peacekeeping force established, with member states contributing contingents on an annual basis. Because of the need to assign British forces to this and to European policing and disaster roles (on top of their present commitments), more general purpose infantry battalions will be required than the number currently planned by the Conservative Government.

Developing global prosperity

A secure, democratic and peaceful world can never be created while so much of the globe remains so desperately poor. Britain must play its part in developing prosperity, protecting the world environment, eradicating poverty, famine and disease, and promoting human rights and international cooperation. This will include:

- **Increasing overseas aid** to reach the UN target of 0.7% of GNP over five years. We will increase aid especially to democratic countries carrying out policies which benefit the poorest, are environmentally sustainable and respect human rights. We will raise the proportion of aid given as grants instead of loans and place greater emphasis on supporting small-scale, community-based, labour-intensive projects. We will promote closer European cooperation, to make the best use of national and Community aid, and avoid wasteful duplication. We will rejoin UNESCO.

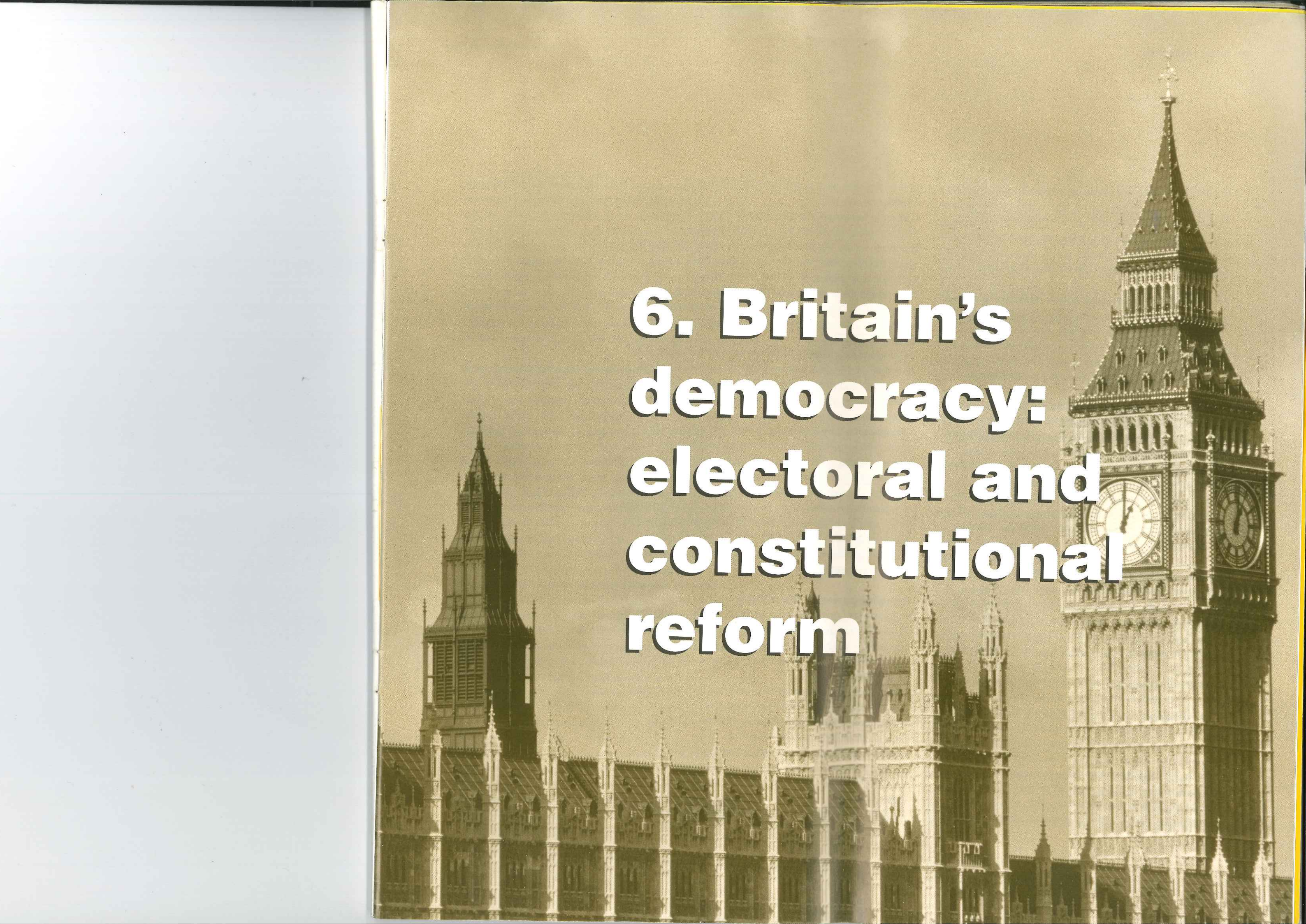
- **Ending the commercialisation of aid** which the current Government has practised and which substantially reduces its value to the world's poorest. We will reduce the proportion of UK aid tied to the purchase of UK goods and services and ensure that help to British exports is solely a function of the Department of Trade and Industry, rather than the ODA.

- **Encouraging environmentally sustainable development.**

This includes the transfer of appropriate technology, the development of sustainable agriculture and forestry, sustainable use policies for the tropical rain forests and projects to prevent desertification, and the promotion of energy conservation and renewable energy schemes. We will provide technical help to develop methods of resource accounting and environmental protection and ensure that measures of sustainability are incorporated in decisions on development projects and programmes.

- **Urgent action to tackle the growth in the world's population.** Having doubled in the past fifty years to five billion, the world's population is expected to increase by a further one billion in the 1990s alone. We will give priority to support for family-planning programmes, education and employment opportunities for women, and basic provision for old age.

- **Reform of the world trading and financial systems.** We see the successful conclusion of the Uruguay round of the GATT world trade talks as an urgent priority. Global prosperity also requires the reversal of the net flow of resources from the global South. We will press the EC to coordinate international action to resolve the debt crisis, including reducing government-to-government debt, introducing regulatory and tax regimes to encourage commercial banks to reduce or write off debt, extending eligibility to IMF and World Bank loans, and encouraging, where appropriate, debt for development and debt for environment swaps. We will press for the progressive reduction of all tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, and in particular the removal of unfair trading barriers against developing countries.



**6. Britain's
democracy:
electoral and
constitutional
reform**

Liberal Democrats, alone in British politics, recognise that unless we change Britain's system of government, we cannot change Britain's future. Without constitutional reform, we will not achieve our other objectives.

We believe in citizenship, not subjecthood – in the ability of all individuals to exercise power over the institutions that govern their lives. The creation of a modernised democracy therefore lies at the heart of all our proposals.

We recognise too that Britain's success in the next century will depend not just on changing *what* we do, but in changing the *way* in which we do it. However worthy its intentions, and however able its personnel, no government will be able to put Britain right unless and until it has modernised our constitution.

Fair voting for an effective Parliament

Our current 'winner takes all' system of voting has many faults. It is unfair, unstable and divisive. Government by minority is usually bad government: in no truly democratic country could a disaster like the poll tax have been pushed through in defiance of public opinion, wasting billions of pounds and causing misery to millions of people. Our top priority is therefore the introduction of fair votes for all elections at all levels of government.

Fair votes will make every elector's vote count. It will increase citizens' control over their elected representatives, by abolishing safe seats. It will eradicate the power of the extremist minority in political parties. It will lead to a better choice of candidates and ensure that more women and candidates from minority ethnic communities are elected. Above all, it will reduce tit-for-tat politics and introduce much greater stability into government, allowing individuals

and businesses alike to plan for their future with confidence. We will:

- **Bring in fair votes.** We will introduce proportional representation for all elections at local, national and European levels. We propose the single transferable vote, by which electors cast their votes in multi-member constituencies based on natural communities.
- **Introduce fixed-term Parliaments of four years,** with a known date for the next election, subject to an earlier election only if the government loses a special 'explicit' vote of no confidence.
- **Reform the House of Lords.** We will maintain a second chamber as a Senate, primarily elected by the citizens of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. It will have power to delay all legislation other than money bills for up to two years.
- **Improve the way Parliament works.** We will give MPs greater influence over the executive by boosting the powers of Select Committees, improving staff backup for backbenchers and increasing financial and civil service support for opposition parties. We will improve the quality of legislation by establishing pre-legislative committees and better scrutiny of delegated legislation. We will improve the quality of debates by allocating time for business more fairly, timetabling Committee sessions of bills and ending Parliament's late-night sittings.

Bringing power to the people

Our system of government is far too centralised, and fails to make effective use of the talents and skills available across the country. We believe that political power is best exercised at the most local level possible, consistent with good government. We will:

- **Introduce Home Rule for Scotland,** with the immediate creation of an elected Scottish Parliament.
- **Introduce Home Rule for Wales,** with the immediate creation of an elected Welsh Senedd.
- **Reform and strengthen local government,** removing unnecessary tiers, restoring councils' independence and ensuring they are accountable to the people through a fair voting system.
- **Create the framework for regional government in**

England. We will enable the establishment of fully democratic regional governments throughout England. We will set up a Strategic Authority for London as a priority. Preceding the new regional governments, we will establish regional development agencies throughout England, helping to boost economic development and prosperity.

- **Decentralise power** to the new national and regional governments. Economic development, housing, health, social services, roads and public transport, education and planning are functions which should be devolved from Whitehall and brought nearer the people they most affect.

Strengthening local government

The current Government's approach to local government finance – most notably through the poll tax fiasco – has been to destroy the independence of local authorities by reducing their powers to raise and spend revenue. The Liberal Democrat approach is exactly the opposite: we aim to take power away from Westminster and Whitehall, giving new powers to stronger, more independent and more democratic local councils – elected by fair votes. We will:

- **Abolish the poll tax**, cancel plans for the proposed Council Tax and introduce a Local Income Tax, related to ability to pay and collected by the Inland Revenue. Local Income Tax is easy to understand, easy to administer, and fair. It works effectively in many other countries.

- **Replace the Uniform Business Rate with Site Value Rating** – locally administered and based on the taxation of land values (with exemption for agricultural land and domestic properties). This will create incentives to improve property, rather than leave it undeveloped. Administration will be easier and local accountability will be restored.

- **Reform and strengthen local government.** We will reform principal local councils into a unitary system based on natural communities and the wishes of local people. We will give the new authorities greater responsibilities – for example, over education, health, and planning – and freedom to ensure the delivery of services in ways they think best. Local authorities will be given a 'general power of competence', which will allow them to carry out any beneficial local action which neither duplicates the work of other public bodies nor breaks the law.

Consulting local citizens

Liberal Democrats want local councils to be as responsive and accountable to their local citizens as possible. We will introduce across the country an initiative pioneered by Liberal Democrat-run councils such as South Somerset and Richmond.

We will require every council to conduct an annual survey of all its residents to gauge their views on the quality of local services. A summary of the results of the survey, compared to the previous year's findings, will be published with the annual demand for local income tax, so that every resident is able to tell what their council is achieving with the money they pay.

- **Bring local government nearer to the people**, by enabling the formation of a full network of community, parish, town or neighbourhood councils. We will ensure that all tiers of regional and local government publish a 'Charter of Services', giving citizens clear rights to standards of service, and remedies if these are not met.

Ensuring citizens' rights and opportunities

No citizen is truly free unless all are. Individual citizens and minority communities themselves need protection against the power of the state and against discrimination and unfair treatment. Citizens must have rights of access to information about decisions taken by public authorities in their name. We will:

- **Introduce a Freedom of Information Act**, placing responsibility on government and other authorities to justify secrecy. We will reverse the present Government's encroachments on freedom of speech and association, such as the banning of trade unions at GCHQ. We will legislate to give individuals the right of access to their personal files, except in matters relating to national security, whether held by public or private bodies. Security services and intelligence agencies should be accountable to a committee of senior Privy Councillors.

- **Enact a Bill of Rights** by immediately incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights and its protocols into UK law. We will create a Commission of Human Rights to help people bring proceedings under the Bill and to recommend changes in existing law and practice. In due course we will add rights and freedoms not currently included in the Convention, extending into a full UK Bill of Rights.

- **Take tougher action against discrimination.** Our Bill of Rights will guarantee effective protection against discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, age, disability, religion or sexual orientation. Our Commission of Human Rights will help individuals take legal action in cases of discrimination.

- **End the bias against women's participation in the present political system.** The introduction of fair votes and of sensible Parliamentary conditions will increase both the number of women candidates and the number of women

MPs. In addition, we will use government's powers of appointment to ensure fair representation of women on public bodies.

- **Improve the administration of the legal system** with the establishment of a Ministry of Justice, separating responsibility for civil liberties and justice from that for order and security. We will establish a Judicial Services Commission to appoint judges.

- **Adopt a written constitution**, of which the Bill of Rights will form the centrepiece. We will create a Supreme Court to entrench and defend these fundamental reforms to the relationship between the citizen and the state.

Working for peace: Northern Ireland

Liberal Democrats reject simplistic solutions for Northern Ireland. We aim to confront the legitimate fears and aspirations of both communities. We accept that both the Unionist and Nationalist traditions are valid and legitimate; that Northern Ireland should remain a part of the UK until the free consent of the majority of its people is given to change; that the Republic of Ireland has a legitimate interest in the future of Northern Ireland; and that a partnership in government which allows both communities to participate is the only practical way in which to make progress.

Together with the Alliance Party, our sister party and the only non-sectarian political party in Northern Ireland, we believe that mutual respect, shared responsibilities and decentralised government are the only basis for a lasting solution to the troubles of Northern Ireland. We will work together to:

- **Maintain the Anglo-Irish Agreement**, unless and until an improved agreement emerges from cross-party talks to replace it.

- **Strengthen the constitutional rights of individuals within Northern Ireland.** The case for fair voting for all elections, to bring together communities and encourage cooperation, and for a Bill of Rights to protect individuals, is even more pressing in Northern Ireland than it is in the rest of the UK. We will reform the Diplock system, so that three judges preside over non-jury trials, and encourage the use of juries wherever possible. We will introduce a 110-day limit on the

length of time for which a prisoner may be held before trial, repeal the broadcasting ban, and provide for the videotaping of police interviews with terrorist suspects.

- **Support community-based organisations** striving for peace and reconciliation and working to eliminate sectarianism and discrimination in religious life, education, housing and politics.

- **Welcome the opportunities offered by the development of the European Community**, in terms of economic assistance to Northern Ireland and also because it creates a framework for progress in the relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Our Pledge

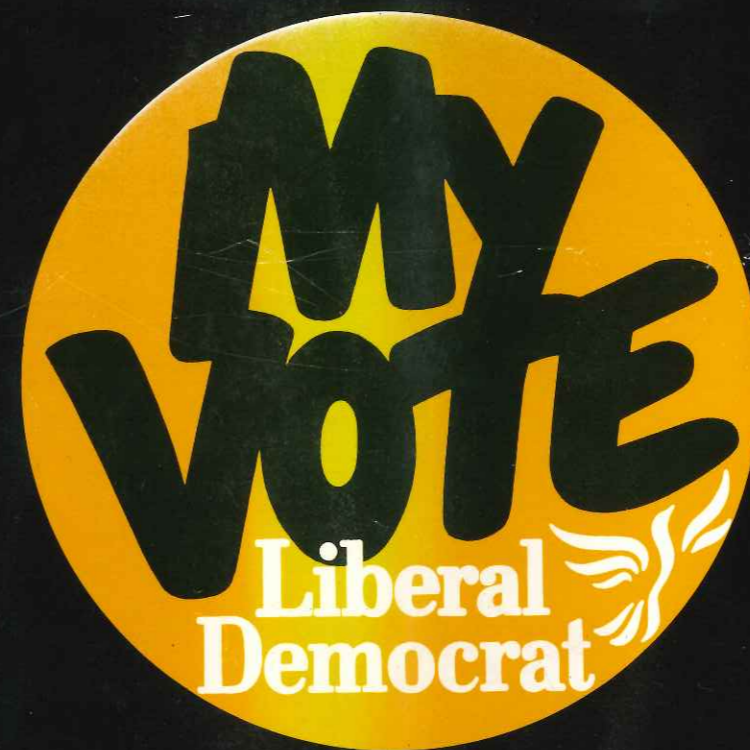
What has been set out in these pages is a programme which could change Britain for good.

We could become a country of citizens, not subjects, striving for excellence rather than settling for second best. We could be economically prosperous, environmentally responsible and educated to our full potential. But the obstacle to national success is the British system of government itself. Until that outdated charade is swept away, Britain's decline will continue, whatever government may be in power.

That is why Liberal Democrats are putting constitutional change at the heart of our election campaign. The reform of our outdated and undemocratic voting system in particular is the change which will make other reforms possible and is the key to a successful future.

Because we believe in stable democratic government supported by a majority of the British people, we shall not only campaign wholeheartedly for fair votes in the coming weeks, we also make a pledge for the period after the election. Our aim will be the creation of stable government for a whole Parliament and a more democratic basis for future elections. Liberal Democrats will neither support nor participate in a government which turns its back on reform. Any minority government which tries to play games with the constitution in order to cling to power, promoting instability and dodging the moral challenge of democracy, will have to contend with us.

That is our pledge.



Published for the Liberal Democrats by Liberal Democrat Publications,
8 Fordington Green, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1GB
Tel: 0305 264646 Fax: 0305 250150

Designed by Forward Publishing Ltd
Reproduction by Graphic Ideas Studios
Printed in the UK by Leighton Printing Company
Distributed by Diamond Magazine Distribution Ltd

£1.50

