

# Chapter 1

## My Introduction to the Prostitute State

*“Before the Federal Executive discusses Donnachadh’s motion, I must inform you that if the executive passes this motion, I will tender my resignation as leader.”*

These were the first words I heard Paddy Ashdown utter, the then leader of the Liberal Democrats, at my first meeting of the party’s Federal Executive after being elected to it in September 1996. I had proposed that Lord Holme, Ashdown’s general-election campaign director, could not simultaneously be external-affairs director for Rio Tinto Zinc. Little did I realise that I had come face to face with the political lobbying cartel that I was to battle for the following seven years at the top of the party.

They were to teach me how the British political system invisibly works on behalf of rich vested interests rather than on behalf of the country at large. Instead of a democratic state we have ***The Prostitute State***. It permeates nearly every aspect of our public life and is responsible for two of the most negative global developments of the last century.

The first is the climate and environmental crisis which is creating an unfolding global genocide and ecocide on an unprecedented scale.

The second is the destruction of social justice caused by a vast transfer of wealth and power to a small group of global corporate elites and billionaires, who have usurped our democracies.

Let’s first however explain how this dramatic confrontation with Paddy Ashdown came about. Bizarrely, it started following an accident at the Royal Opera House in 1992, where I worked as a freelance dancer with the Royal Opera Ballet. My therapist, Linda Mutch, was going on a trip to the Amazon to visit the Yanomami Indians with some alternative health practitioners and offered me a place which I accepted.

In the Amazon I saw first-hand the devastation we are causing. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, there were more than six million indigenous people living there. There are now fewer than 200,000. This genocide continues to this day, as the Amazon tribes have their forests destroyed and their people killed by murderous ranchers and gold-diggers. Fourteen Peruvian tribal shamans were massacred in another terrible slaughter in late 2011.

## Chapter 1

I spent about three weeks by myself in a Yanomami shabono as a guest of the tribe. Their hunter-gatherer lifestyle was almost untouched, having lived in harmony with the forest for over 20,000 years. In comparison, since the industrial revolution we have brought our entire planetary eco-system to the edge of destruction. The tribe lived in thatched wooden buildings around a central circle where the children played, overseen by the older children and adults. On my first morning in the shabono, I was woken by the family who slept in the hammocks beside mine. They wanted me to go with them into the forest. We reached a clearing where there was a dead sloth, killed by a hunter the previous day. The family skinned and cut up the animal and we brought it back to the village. Fascinatingly, their culture does not allow the hunter to eat the game he has killed. This simple device prevents greed from stripping the forest of its game and ensures plentiful meat for future generations.

In contrast, with our corporate supermarkets the only restraint is income. Instead of eating meat about every 10 days and fish once a week as the Yanomami do, many people now eat meat with every meal. This has contributed to global environmental and animal-welfare disasters and a human obesity epidemic. The UN reports that meat production is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, at one-fifth of the total. Industrial rearing of cattle and pigs has led to vast swathes of the Amazon being bulldozed to grow soya beans to feed them.

I was only the fourth non-Yanomami person to stay with this tribe and was honoured to be invited to become a tribal member. I declined as I wished to return to London, but they held an honorary ceremony for me before I left, crowning me with a headdress of monkey-skin and feathers. They made clear however that they wanted no more outsiders to disturb them.

Upon my return to London, I resolved to help stop the environmental destruction threatening the Yanomami's very existence. Whilst I did join Survival International (a charity working for indigenous people's rights), I decided to concentrate on tackling our destructive consumer lifestyles. I felt despair for the Yanomami in the face of the bulldozers aimed at their forest homes. Dedicating myself solely to rainforest protection, I would endure the fate of Sisyphus, condemned for eternity to push a rock up a hill, only for it to roll down again. I wanted to tackle the consumer anti-society that was driving those bulldozers.

Following Mahatma Gandhi's maxim that we should be the change that we seek in the world, I felt the most important first step was to tackle my own consumerism. I had very little idea how to do this but decided that every time I went grocery-shopping I would buy at least one organic product. And so on my first week back, I bought a jar of organic ketchup. Since then I have gradually installed in my 1840s Victorian terraced home in Camberwell, solar-electric panels, solar hot water, rain harvester, wood burner, composting toilet, solid-wall insulation, triple glazing and LED lighting. I am a net exporter of electricity, use

## **My Introduction to the Prostitute State**

about a tenth of the average UK mains water consumption and produce about half a wheelie bin of non-recycled rubbish a year. I am learning to produce more food whilst also helping wildlife in the garden.

Soon after returning, I learnt that Southwark Council was planning to build on my local nature reserve and sell off whole sections of Burgess Park. I felt that I could not campaign to save the rainforest, if the last tiny bit of wildlife on my own doorstep was to be bulldozed.

With no knowledge about campaigning, I dived in. I had inherited a modest sum of money which paid for the time I took off from dancing to campaign. Local Liberal Democrats were supportive and I admired the anti-nuclear direct actions by Simon Hughes, the local Bermondsey MP. So I joined the party. Within a short time, with Ruth Bright and Alf Langley, I was selected as a candidate for the local elections in Faraday Ward, which covered the huge Aylesbury Estate, famous for its visit from Tony Blair immediately after he became Prime Minister. It had always elected only Labour councillors. But in May 1994, this overwhelmingly council-tenant electorate voted in three Lib-Dem councillors and we duly delivered on our promises. We blocked the building on the park, switched estate maintenance from poisonous pesticides to manual weeding, and our community politics work with the police and residents resulted in an extraordinary 50% reduction in local crime.

A few years after being elected, I received a letter from Survival which led to that dramatic confrontation with Paddy Ashdown. One of Survival's main tactics is to identify threats to indigenous tribes and then ask supporters to write to the relevant head of state. This letter asked us to write to the Indonesian dictator President Suharto. Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), one of the world's largest mining corporations, was proposing a vast open-cast mine in the forests of the Amungme people. They wanted to remove the entire top of the mountain where the Amungme believed they went when they died, akin to the Christian heaven.

Driving mining roads into rain forests is like banging stakes into their hearts – they kill them. It leads inexorably to the death or destitution of the indigenous people who live there. The mine represented a threat to the Amungme's very existence. As I read the leaflet, a bell rang in the back of my mind about RTZ. It was that the Lib Dem Peer Richard Holme was both an RTZ executive-director and their principal political lobbyist, and was also the chair of the party's general-election campaign, with Lord Rennard as his head of campaigns.

It would have been hypocritical to write only to Suharto, so I wrote instead to Paddy Ashdown objecting to Richard being the spokesperson for two conflicting organisations. RTZ was the world's largest private producer of uranium. It had repeated human-rights indictments from the UN and was condemned by numerous environmental groups due to its destructive mining operations.

## Chapter 1

Meanwhile the party supposedly opposed nuclear power and stood for human rights and environmental protection. Sadly when the Liberal Democrats eventually got into power, their Environment Secretary Ed Davey became one of the most enthusiastic pro-nuclear ministers in the developed world.

Paddy's reply to my letter said that Lord Holme had assured him that RTZ's environmental performance was among the best in Europe! No reference was made to the plight of the Amungme. Furious, I contacted various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for documented evidence against RTZ. I sent this with a covering letter to every member of the party's national ruling body, the Federal Executive (FE), calling for action on the scandal.

As I was not an FE member at the time I did not hear the discussion the package elicited. No one responded to my letter but I later learnt that rather than deal with the scandal, they instead requested officers to devise a media strategy, in case it arose during the general-election campaign! This should have acted as a warning light to me about the party's capture by *The Prostitute State*. But I did not know then that it even existed.

Having failed with the leader and Federal Executive, I took the campaign to the party's Federal Conference. The issue had become such a *cause célèbre* for radicals that they named their conference disco Rio Disco Zinc. Shortly after my arrival at conference, Simon Hughes MP asked to speak to me. He was then the party's charismatic environment spokesperson. Surely he would not oppose my objecting at conference to a nuclear lobbyist fronting our general-election campaign? But sadly he did, saying that raising the issue at conference might damage the party.

I replied that having failed privately to get the leader or the FE to take action, it was perfectly reasonable to raise the issue at conference. Simon's attempt to silence me was my first taste of how fear of the UK's media billionaires subverted the party's accountability procedures.

I duly raised the issue during the FE report to conference but was brushed off by then party president Robert Maclennan MP. No media picked up on the story despite the leadership's worries. However, on my way home I read an article in The Evening Standard quoting Richard Holme saying his position had been endorsed by conference. This outraged me and I promptly decided to stand for election to the Federal Executive on a platform opposing the party's links with RTZ.

Shortly after submitting my election address to Party HQ, I got a call from the party's chief executive saying that I would have to change it. He claimed that as it stated that the party should not be associated with RTZ, it meant the party could be sued by RTZ. I thought this was preposterous. It meant one could not oppose the party being associated even with organisations condemned by the UN. I refused to change it. Weeks later I received the mail-out containing the candidate election addresses and ballot papers. When I opened it, I found they had blanked



out my opposition to the party's link with RTZ. But once I recovered from the shock of seeing such censorship, I started laughing.

I realised that the visibly crude censorship would make a lot of liberals angry and result in them voting for me. On my first attempt at standing for the FE, despite being almost totally unknown, I was duly elected and thus able to table at that very first meeting, a motion requesting that Lord Holme choose between his two roles. The FE is made up of fifteen elected Parliamentarians and Party Officials including the Leader and fifteen directly elected members. Usually a small minority of about five were radical liberals. In the run-up to that first meeting of the newly elected executive, I contacted all of them. Whilst appalled at what Richard Holme represented, none would second my motion as they felt it had no chance of winning.

My final hope was Lembit Opik. He kindly agreed to meet me for lunch on the day the FE met. I outlined how I felt the party's integrity was at stake. He undertook to think seriously about seconding the motion but gave no commitment. So I turned up at the meeting that evening, held in the wood-panelled boardroom at the party's then HQ in Cowley Street, without a single ally, despite having grass-roots support all around the country.

I walked into the boardroom as nervous as hell. The only seat remaining was at the opposite end of the table from where the Party President Robert MacLennan and leader Paddy Ashdown were sitting. The seat beside me to my horror was occupied by Lord Holme! I had never before attended a meeting remotely like this, filled with MPs, Lords and senior party-figures. But Robert chaired it fairly and when it came to my motion, he politely asked me to address it.

That was when Paddy interrupted proceedings and made his startling intervention. I thought to myself – *Oh my God, I have not even uttered a word and the leader is threatening resignation over my very first motion!* Robert indicated for me to proceed. Thankful not to have fainted, I continued. My motion was not a personal attack but simply dealt with the un-tenability of Richard's dual roles.

All of the interventions after I concluded were by the leadership's supporters. The radicals stayed silent and left me hanging out to dry. MacLennan proceeded to the vote, at which point he asked for a seconder. The room went deathly silent. Lembit Opik was sitting to my right, half-way along the board-table. I caught his eye and he stared back with the look of a rabbit caught in the headlamps. I held his gaze and silently asked if he had the courage to put his hand up. To my immense relief he started to raise his hand millimetre by millimetre, as if he was being tortured. But to his credit, raise it he did and the motion was formally placed before the meeting. The vote was 26:1 against with a few abstentions.

I had been trounced but had forced the leadership and FE to put on record their support for Richard's and hence the party's duplicity. I had done what I could but the corporate lobbyists had won their first battle with me and my supporters.

## Chapter 1

Over the next seven years that I served on the Federal Executive, including the final two years as its Deputy Chair, I was to have many such battles over the party's soul.

My second major exposure to ***The Prostitute State*** was over Paddy Ashdown's attempts to secretly align the party with Tony Blair's New Labour party before and after the 1997 general election. It was this battle that taught me that in addition to Holme, there was an entire political-lobbying cartel around the leadership, whom we had been battling and not just Ashdown. Soon after I was elected to the FE, rumours were swirling that Paddy was secretly negotiating a pact with Tony Blair. It was referred to euphemistically as The Project. It had little support among the membership but the powerful group of professional political lobbyists around the leader were hell-bent on delivering it.

Many senior party figures, who I spoke to, were appalled at what was going on behind closed doors, outside the democratic structures of the party. The future of three-party politics was being endangered. To organise opposition to Paddy's project I helped set up a new party grouping called *new radicalism*. Its purpose was to act as a grass-roots members' think-tank, to formulate the philosophical and policy basis for the continuation of an independent liberal party. But crucially it was also to act as a rallying point should the leadership suddenly try to bounce the party into a pact with Blair.

We drafted a set of five principles for "*new radicalism*" that radical liberal members of the party could rally around. One of these was "*Politics by Example*" which called for the party to be run in line with its principles. I had realised that the party repeatedly failed to practice what it preached in how it ran itself. The party advocated an annual government environmental audit but did not carry out one on itself. It advocated recycling but did not use recycled paper. It advocated Freedom of Information but had a blanket secrecy-clause for its own Federal Executive. It advocated elections for the House of Lords but did not elect its own nominees to the Lords. It advocated clean government but Lib Dem Peers were allowed to sell services as political lobbyists. It advocated transparency in political donations but refused to declare its own donations. It advocated honesty in politics but ran deceitful by-election campaigns.

"*New radicalism*" sought to tackle this hypocrisy with quite a few successes at the party conference. Whilst none were of national importance, they represented opportunities for the party to boost its moral backbone, so that when it entered government, it would have the strength to uphold the party's principles. The lobbying and tax-haven elite in the party's upper echelons however regarded such proposals as "*troublemaking*". Practicing what we preached was not on their agenda.

## My Introduction to the Prostitute State

As part of our battle to stop the Ashdown/Blair deal, we drafted an amendment to the leadership's strategy motion for the 1998 Southport Lib Dem Party Conference. We sought to make clear our commitment to independence but did not want to threaten Ashdown's popular leadership. In other words we wanted a motion saying *"We like you Paddy but don't betray us by hooking up with Blair."*

Conrad Russell (son of Bertrand Russell and one of the party's most distinguished thinkers) became an invaluable personal ally and supporter. Working with his immense intellect was an intimidating privilege. His early death from smoking was a terrible loss to liberalism. As the conference came closer Ed Davey MP, Robert Maclennan MP and many others got involved. I was in the centre of a swirling draft negotiating storm. Our amendment was accepted for debate, along with an additional amendment by future Cambridge MP David Howarth.

The debate drew huge interest and the hall in Southport was packed. I moved the motion and it was summated by Conrad Russell. The atmosphere crackled, as delegates knew that an historic choice was being made. After a nail-biting two-hour debate, the conference chair Liz Barker called the vote. A sea of hands went up across the hall supporting both amendments. Our majority was in excess of 85%! The leadership had been overwhelmingly defeated. The message was clear we did not want to be hitched to New Labour.

Our successful *new radicalism* amendment stated:

*"One of our important aims is to complete the task begun in May 1997, of the Liberal Democrats replacing the discredited, reactionary Conservative Party as the official Opposition, as a step to the strategic goal of a genuinely liberal and radical Liberal Democrat government.*

*Any expansion of the subjects covered by the Joint Cabinet Committee will only be carried out after a genuine consultation with the party and the express consent of the Parliamentary Party. We will seek to involve those from all other parties who support constitutional reform and a more liberal and democratic Europe in the current constitutional process."*

David Howarth's crucial amendment detailed what that consultation should be. It required the parliamentary party, federal executive and conference to vote by a two-thirds majority or else all members had to be balloted. We had high hopes that we had succeeded in securing our independence whilst retaining our leader. But events were to prove us wrong on the second point. Paddy and his lobbyist co-conspirators, despite the vote, continued their secretive negotiations with Blair.

Then on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1998, just two months after Southport, Paddy gambled on destroying the Southport agreement by pressing what we called the unilateral nuclear button. Late that afternoon I got an urgent message from the

## Chapter 1

*new radicalism* activist Gareth Epps to listen to the 6pm news. There were Ashdown and Blair issuing their “Joint Statement” committing both parties to work in parallel in joint-cabinet committees across the entire spectrum of government, despite Blair already having a large majority in the Commons and against the expressed democratic wishes of the Lib Dem Conference. If it went ahead, the only opposition to the right-wing Blairism in Parliament would be the even more right-wing Tories. The lobbyists around Paddy had got what they wanted – direct access to government ministers. On TV Paddy looked embarrassingly like an old public-school teacher with a crush on the handsome new head-boy.

Well, if Paddy had pressed his nuclear button, we also had a button to press. One that the leadership had never before had to deal with and that was *new radicalism’s* nationwide e-mail network. As soon as the TV news was over, we immediately messaged all our members. Within hours we had set up a new campaign group to lead the opposition to the Blair/Ashdown pact. It was called the Campaign for Liberal Democracy. An agreed statement for the press was immediately issued, opposing Ashdown’s betrayal of the democratically approved party strategy.

We then started collecting signatures to trigger an emergency conference. Within ten days we already had 120 of the 200 elected conference-delegate signatures required. This gave us a very strong hand going into the fraught Federal Executive meeting that followed the Joint Statement, where Ashdown had to get a two-thirds majority to back his trashing of the Southport Motion. Ashdown however had planned to bypass the Federal Executive, Parliamentary Party and Conference opposition by going directly to an immediate “*back me or sack me*” all-member ballot. This was Ashdown’s best hope of destroying party opposition to the Joint Statement. There was one problem. He had to get the FE to authorise it.

It would be challenging for us to explain why such a referendum was potentially undemocratic. Paddy knew it would not be a referendum on the Joint Statement but on his leadership. We therefore decided not to contest the referendum but instead chose the slogan “*No Referendum without Debate*”. This meant that Paddy would not get his ballot until after an emergency conference had debated his proposal.

So, when called to speak in the FE debate, I simply said if the leadership insisted on the “*back me or sack me*” referendum, then I could guarantee by the end of the week, we would have the two hundred signatures required for an emergency conference. Paddy would face the humiliation of an awful destructive public row in front of the nation’s media. In light of the 85% support for the Southport Motion and the activists’ outrage across the country after the Joint Statement, he would almost definitely be trounced.

One of Paddy’s main allies, the lobbyist Tim Clement Jones, then asked: if the leadership promised not to hold the shotgun referendum, would we promise not

## My Introduction to the Prostitute State

to call an emergency conference prior to the autumn conference. My response was immediate. *"That's a deal!"* It was an extraordinary moment. The release of tension was enormous. Organised party members had taken on the might of Ashdown, Blair and the lobbyists and succeeded. But it was also the moment that sealed Paddy's fate as leader.

Ashdown's failure at the FE gave manoeuvring space to the Parliamentary Party. Nearly every single member of his parliamentary team refused to join. Ashdown's Project was dead. Just two months later Ashdown's leadership was finished. On the 20<sup>th</sup> January 1999 at 5.15 pm Ashdown announced his decision to stand down as leader. True to form, he had told Tony Blair of his decision before he told his own party colleagues.

On the evening of Paddy's resignation Nick Sutton, then editor of The Today programme on Radio 4, spent an hour in my living room urging me to go on-air and state the real reason for Paddy's resignation was that his grand Project was dead. I refused but paid tribute to Ashdown's achievements as leader. Despite his duplicity, I actually liked Paddy and was sad to see him go. To this day, Ashdown has never explained why having rescued the Liberal Democrats from oblivion and spoken passionately about transparency, bottom-up politics and ending the two party system, he then almost from the very beginning of his leadership, according to his diaries, bizarrely negotiated behind his party's back, trying to destroy in classic top-down fashion, the very three-party system he had sought to create. But what is important in this story is that despite their enormous advantages, the corporate lobbying state can occasionally be beaten by organised democratic action.

During the battle over The Project, it had become clear that the power base around Ashdown was largely composed of wealthy political lobbyists. Paddy, being an ex-marine, diplomat and secret-service member (MI6), was not himself an ex-lobbyist. But those he appointed to his inner circle included Lord McNally, a lobbyist and later Vice-President of the notorious lobbying firm Weber Shandwycks. McNally continuously broke the voluntary code banning the hire of parliamentarians as lobbyists. As mentioned, Richard Holme was head lobbyist for Rio Tinto Zinc. Ashdown's two deputy directors for the general election were Tim Clement Jones who worked for the international lobbying conglomerate DLA Piper and Dick Newby, director of lobbying firm Matrix. It also included Tim Razzall who was a director of various tax-haven registered companies. Nearly all of Paddy's corporate lobbying circle was appointed to the Lords as Lib Dem peers, giving them unrestricted access to parliament. This added to their commercial value as lobbyists.

Corporate lobbyists do not view democratic parties as the public views them. They see party membership as a legitimate route to access power. If that means

## Chapter 1

doing sweetheart deals with the Murdoch-endorsed Blair or the equally Murdoch-endorsed Cameron, then so be it. Having senior members of the Liberal Democrats on joint-cabinet committees with government ministers meant they would have direct access to the corridors of power, which is gold for the professional lobbyist. I am not saying there was a deliberate conspiracy to achieve such access for their corporate clients but *de facto* that is what The Project, if successful, would have delivered. What we were really battling in our efforts to save the party from being tied to the Blair Project, was yet again ***The Prostitute State***.

I realised that our huge but successful effort to defeat The Project, would have to be repeated again and again as long as the lobbying cabal retained their grip on the party's leadership. I therefore embarked on two campaigns to curb the political lobbyists' power over the leadership. The first was to put an end to the leader's unilateral power to appoint members of the House of Lords. This was being used to appoint lobbyists, tax-haven directors, party donors and corporate directors to parliament. The second campaign was to ban Liberal Democrat members of the House of Lords from selling their services as corporate political lobbyists. I had no idea what a powerful landmine I was stepping on with this. Its explosion would eventually lead to the establishment demanding my resignation as Deputy Chair of the Party.

We began as usual by drafting a conference motion on political lobbying. Being able to use our *new radicalism* electronic network to negotiate the text of motions and to tell people what was happening at Federal Executive level, meant we were reclaiming some party democracy back from the lobbyists. A measure of how successful we were was the viciousness of the bile poured over us by lobbyists such as Lord McNally in "Liberal Democrat News" and at the FE. At one stage Charles Kennedy angrily threatened to close the party's entire electronic messaging system down, after I referred to his key lieutenant Lord Clement Jones as "*Lord Cayman Islands*" in honour of his selling lobbying services to the infamous tax haven!

Our conference motion on lobbying stated:

### ***"Regulation of Parliamentary Lobbying***

*Conference notes the public unease about the influence of unaccountable parliamentary lobbyists on the present and previous governments.*

*Conference recognises, however the value of constructive professional lobbying and the work done by voluntary organisations and individuals to influence and inform people in power.*

*Conference believes that to reduce the possibility of corruption and the exertion of undue influence and to ensure the full transparency of parliamentary procedures, the roles of parliamentarian and professional lobbyist must be kept strictly separate.*

*Conference therefore believes that:*

- *No parliamentarian or their employees at Westminster or European level should be an employee of, receive any financial reward from or hold a financial stake in any of the duly registered professional parliamentary lobbying companies (i.e. ones that offer their parliamentary lobbying services for hire to paying commercial and other clients).*
- *A statutory register of such professional lobbying firms should be set up and supervised by the Commissioner on Parliamentary Standards. Furthermore Conference welcomes the voluntary ethical code of conduct adopted by the Association of Professional Political Consultants (APPC). Conference notes however that some professional parliamentary lobbying firms are failing to join APPC or to observe or support the voluntary code of conduct. This commercially undermines the position of ethically conducted firms.*
- *Conference therefore calls for a statutory Code of Conduct to be drawn up which should be supervised by the Commissioner.*
- *Conference requests that all Liberal Democrat Peers should abide by the terms of this motion within two years."*

The establishment threw a huge effort into blocking this motion, repeatedly persuading the Conference Committee to vote against its selection for debate. With each rejection, the motion's support among the wider party membership grew larger. A number of the Conference Committee members were actually political lobbyists or peers and so had a direct conflict of interest. Indeed *new radicalism* was told that a member said he was voting against the motion being debated because it would affect his lobbying career! We unsuccessfully appealed to the Federal Appeals Panel requesting that they outlaw political lobbyists on the conference committee voting on regulation of lobbying issues, due to the inherent conflict of interest.

In 1998, following yet more lobbying scandals in the House of Lords, Lord Neill was appointed by the government to investigate. The Lib Dem leadership brazenly issued a press release stating that the inquiry was "*long overdue*", whilst at the same time continuing their strenuous efforts to suppress the debate within their own party. The refusal to allow debate at that year's Spring Conference meant that even if accepted for the Autumn Conference, it would be too late for its conclusions to be submitted to Neill, as the closing date was prior to the conference. This meant that the party's submission would be left to the leadership and their lobbyists. We wrote to Lord Neill, asking if he would accept a late submission following the vote at conference.

## Chapter 1

Neill replied that he would be willing to do so. However, even Lord Neill's acceptance of a late submission failed to budge the conference committee. The leadership again won by a couple of votes and the members were thus denied any democratic influence on the leadership's submission on lobbying to Neill. The corporate lobbyists had again triumphed.

The scale of the leadership's efforts to block the motion was revelatory of the depth of its capture by the corporate lobby. Remember in public they were calling for the cleaning up of British politics. The chief whip, Paul Tyler, told the conference committee that it was unconstitutional (not in relation to the party's own constitution but the so-called unwritten constitution of the United Kingdom), as it would restrict the rights of MPs and so should not be debated. According to Tyler, the motion also contravened the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament! To me this demonstrated that liberalism is absolutely right. Everyone can have their values perverted and therefore institutional checks and balances are needed to hold everyone even liberals accountable.

Unwilling to give in to such bullying, in July 2000 I wrote to Elizabeth Filkin, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, asking whether our proposal to stop parliamentarians being political lobbyists would be contrary to the British Constitution (sic) by potentially restricting the rights of parliamentarians. Filkin replied within a week stating *"I cannot see that the propositions in the motion could, in themselves, restrict the rights of Members of Parliament. It would be entirely for Members of Parliament to decide by vote whether any such changes proposed to them should be implemented."* To my pleasant surprise, the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards was actually working in the wider interests of democracy rather than the narrow interests of the lobbying establishment.

But the political establishment could not stomach such an independent Commissioner. The fatal flaw in the Nolan legislation (typical of so many of the fake accountability procedures put in place by the UK's establishment) is that the Parliamentary Commissioner is appointed by the very MPs whose ethics they supervise. The parliamentary committee responsible, including Lib Dem MP Archy Kirkwood (one of Paddy's inner circle) refused to re-appoint Elizabeth Filkin when her first four-year contract was up. They appointed the safe establishment figure Sir Philip Mawer instead. The highlight of Mawer's two terms in office was a ruling on two train tickets mis-used by David Blunkett MP. The entire parliamentary expenses scandal continued under his nose.

Filkin's ruling, unsurprisingly, made no difference to the Lib Dem establishment's determination to prevent the debate on lobbying. However the dam eventually broke. By the record thirteenth submission, it was the most widely endorsed motion in the history of the party. Crucially the balance of power on the



committee had shifted by one in our favour and the debate was finally allowed at the 2001 Spring Conference.

At conference the leadership of both the Parliamentary Parties, in the Commons and in the Lords, opposed our motion. But we pulled off a coup when Diana Wallis MEP, who was to become Deputy President of the European Parliament, agreed to speak on our behalf. It was a heated debate. In opening it, I focused on the principles of transparency, accountability and the separation of powers. Political lobbying has an important role in democracy, but it must be free from even the perception of corruption. Ethically you cannot simultaneously be a legislator and a paid lobbyist.

After her speech, I thanked Wallis for her courage in speaking out. Her reply was illuminating. *"I was more than happy to speak. I am fed up of those bastards coming to my office trying to bully me."* She was referring to the Lib Dem Lords who were professional lobbyists. This brought home to me how crucial tackling lobbying was. As we were speaking, the chair moved to the vote. There was no need for a card vote - we had won by a clear majority! The Liberal Democrats were now committed to a statutory register for political lobbyists, a ban on lobbying by all parliamentarians and more importantly were going to phase out lobbying by Liberal Democrat legislators within two years, without waiting for legislation. Or so I thought.....

Despite the vote, the leadership remained determined to protect the corporate lobbyists. At the FE meeting following conference, its chair Lord Dholakia announced the setting up of a committee to *"consider"* the motion. As he said *"consider"* rather than *"implement"*, I realised immediately that they were trying to destroy the motion. All of the proposed committee's membership were members of the Lords and were appointed by a member of the Lords and it was chaired by Baroness Harris, also a member of the Lords - the very people affected by the motion. There were to be no supporters of the motion on the committee.

Time passed with no report from this "committee". Finally, following repeated demands at party conferences, they were forced to report to the FE. And unsurprisingly, their lordships announced that the motion was *"un-implementable"*. A heated debate ensued. The process had taken so long that there was by now a new leader, Charles Kennedy, whose inner circle was again dominated by political lobbyists.

I asked did we want to clean up politics or were we willing to damage the party's soul for the sake of lobbyists? Amazingly, the FE overrode Kennedy and upheld the motion and deadline for Liberal Democrat peers. So with both the party conference and FE endorsing the motion, it would finally be implemented. Or would it.....?

I am afraid not. The corporate state is grindingly persistent. The leadership played one last card. At the following FE, which I missed as I was working in

## Chapter 1

Finland, they tabled legal advice from Lord Goodhart that the motion contravened the rights of Lib Dem peers under the European Convention on Human Rights! I was absolutely gutted that such a supposedly distinguished liberal constitutional lawyer as Lord Goodhart could twist the Convention on Human Rights into justifying the practice of parliamentarians selling their services as corporate lobbyists.

I had described the advice by Lord Goodhart as being “*spurious*”. Commissioning legal advice from someone who as a peer was affected by the motion and whose colleagues were impacted financially was a clear conflict of interest. He should have recused himself. Kennedy’s response was to say my claim of spuriousness was “*legally actionable*”. Yes, he tried that old bullying tactic of legal sabre-rattling in order to get his way.

Despite not having any funds to defend myself against Kennedy’s threat, I refused to withdraw my criticism of Lord Goodhart’s advice. But they tabled the advice anyway. In my absence, the FE caved in and agreed not to implement the conference decision on lobbying. Years of work trying to tackle corporate lobbying corruption in the party was swept away, using Goodhart’s “*advice*”. The subsequent FE report to the next Federal Conference made no mention of its refusal to implement the conference motion on lobbying and Lib Dem peers continued their lucrative corporate lobbying. I felt I had a duty to let conference know. I therefore took the rostrum and outlined the FE’s suppression of the conference decision.

The Party President Lord Dholakia then took the rostrum and, instead of explaining why he was refusing to implement conference’s democratic instructions, attacked me for raising the issue, claiming I had no right to do this as I was covered by the “*collective responsibility*” of the FE. He then in an unprecedented action, called publicly from the platform at conference for my resignation, despite my being Deputy Chair of the party.

Something inside me snapped.

The fact that such enormous democratic effort over so many years, by so many Lib Dem members, should result in absolutely no action being taken, made me realise that it would take decades to cure the party’s endemic corruption from the inside. The three examples outlined above are just a sliver of the culture of ***The Prostitute State*** that I as a party officer experienced at the heart of the Lib Dems; a heart riddled with corporate political lobbyists.

Over a decade of trying to democratically reform the party from within but being repeatedly subverted by lobbyists, finally boiled over and in anger, I stood up and announced rather melodramatically from the floor “*Right Mr President, it is outrageous that you are refusing to tackle the corruption that lies at the heart of the party and it is also clear that it is becoming impossible to clean it up. So you get*

## My Introduction to the Prostitute State

*what you are asking for. I am quitting.*" With that, I stormed out of the conference hall.

There was a stunned silence. Many of my supporters, to be honest, thought I had been really stupid. I had destroyed in one moment of anger much of the political capital and momentum I had built up with my colleagues and *new radicalism* over the previous 12 years. But the years of bullying, frustration and constant legal threats had taken their toll. I was burnt out.

These battles demonstrate the power that lobbying has over our body politic and what that means in day-to-day terms, from the real life experiences of just one political activist. Let me assure you that if it is strong in the Liberal Democrats, it is pretty much overwhelming in the other major parties.

Seven years later, the Occupy Movement's heroic 2011 protest outside St Paul's Cathedral, forced me to re-evaluate my personal experiences of the corruption in the Liberal Democrats and to develop them into the wider political thesis of ***The Prostitute State***.

You will see, as it unfolds in chapter after chapter that it is in reality a state that is phenomenally different from the one we are told we live in. Whilst largely invisible to the ordinary citizen, it controls almost every aspect of our democracy and the world around us. Like Lilliputians in Gulliver's Travels, we are like little people running around under a glass cake-stand, thinking we are players in a free democracy, when in reality the corporate billionaires are outside looking in and pulling our strings, as their gluttony grabs more and more of our common wealth and power and destroys our planet's core essential ecosystems in the process. Tackling ***The Prostitute State*** is the most crucial task facing humanity right now.