

makes an appearance without us being told she was Asquith's daughter; in 1976 (though from the context you'd think it was 1975), we are told that Cyril Smith seemed about to resign, but not what post he was thinking of resigning from (actually, Chief Whip); and so on. One paragraph of the analysis of the October 1974 election results is written in the present tense, having presumably remained uncorrected since the book's first edition in 1976. Peter Knowlson, a member of the Liberal negotiating team over merger with the SDP, has strangely morphed into someone called Andy Millson. And the post-merger name of the party is given wrongly (it was Social and Liberal Democrats, never Social and Liberal Democratic Party), though it has to be said that Cook joins legions of journalists in that particular error.

More seriously, Liberal *thought* is continuously sidelined. The chapter on Jo Grimond's period as leader refers to his important policy innovations, such as Liberal support for UK entry to Europe, and industrial democracy, in less than half a sentence, whereas the party's opinion poll and electoral record is examined in painstaking detail. The 1986 defence debate at the Eastbourne Assembly – the occasion when the Liberal-SDP Alliance began to fall apart – is referred to with no

explanation of the background whatsoever, while, once again, the same chapter looks at the Alliance's electoral record in impressive detail. Pleasingly, however, the 1986 vote at Eastbourne is *not* represented as Liberal adoption of unilateral nuclear disarmament (another common mistake), though the 1981 vote at Llandudno against Cruise missiles (on a motion moved by a certain P. Ashdown), wrongly, is.

Palgrave, Chris Cook's publishers, have done the book no favours. It suffers from several typos, poor punctuation, blurry typography, erratic paragraph spacing and excessively narrow inside margins. There are no pictures except on the cover, and the index is too skimpy and frequently wrong.

If you want a thorough and comprehensive examination of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat psephology, this book is for you. If you want a fairly concise run-through of the key events in party history, it's not at all bad. But if you want a more in-depth look at Liberal thinking, Liberal policies, Liberal people, and what difference they all made, I'm afraid to say that this book is a disappointment. Now how about a seventh – completely revised – edition?

A shorter version of this review originally appeared in Liberal Democrat News.

Council; reading a reminder about a tax return from the Inland Revenue; compiling Government Funding Council time sheets; carrying out Research Assessment Exercise administration in the University; dealing with Home Office statistics of numbers of anti-social behaviour orders granted; and with Criminal Cases Review Commission figures for the numbers of convictions quashed by the Court of Appeal. Numbers and compiling numbers dominate all of our lives in the first years of the 21st Century. David Boyle's book is an antidote to this.

Just because we all know something does not remove the benefit we gain from someone setting it out and telling us what has actually happened and how we got here. We all know that cost or accountant's reporting is not the only or the most important way to measure what is valuable to us or in society. Even though we all know this, it is still important that someone actually sets out the state we are in and how we got here. David Boyle has done that, and in doing so has produced a very valuable piece of research.

David makes his critique of the over-reliance on statistics and accounting by telling a story. The story is largely historical, with most of the chapters dealing with historical matters. It includes chapters on Bentham and Mill and on Keynes. The link between Bentham, Mill, Bertrand Russell and our very own Conrad Russell are well known. I never knew before that there was a connection between Keynes and the environmental economist E. F. Schumacher. The author is critical at times of the utilitarians but is always reasonably sympathetic to our political heroes. He is fair throughout. His chapter on 'the Feelgood Factor' is even fair to politicians and manufacturers, suggesting that they can't (always) be held responsible for people not being happy (see pp. 89 – 92).

Other chapters which have a political edge are on the origins of the census, and on the growing modern acceptance of sustainable investment strategies (chapter 7). The chapter on the census is about the 18th and 19th centuries, Chadwick and the development of the

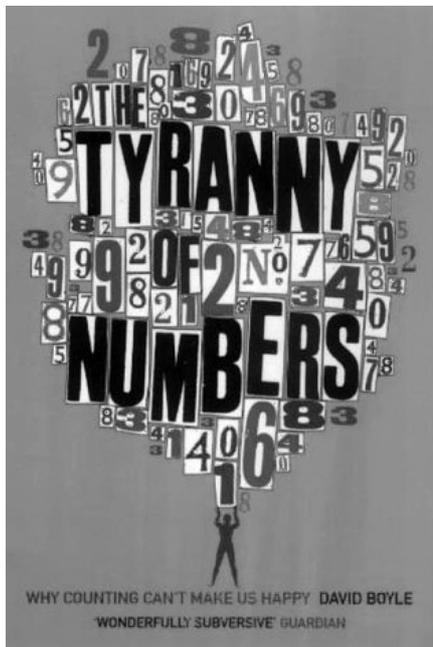
Too many numbers

David Boyle: *The Tyranny of Numbers: Why counting can't make us happy* (Harper Collins, 2001, 236 pp.)
Reviewed by Kiron Reid

I can't make up my mind whether David Boyle is being revolutionary or whether he is just saying something that we all know already. His latest book denounces the dominance of accounting and lambasts the obsession with statistics in modern times.

In everything that we do counting plays a major role. For example, I spent

today at a seminar by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary about the capital costs in a Best Value Review of Cleaning; discussing the budget at a consultation meeting with NCIS and the National Crime Squad; learning the cost of domiciliary care being considered in a report by the 'Cabinet' (or Executive Board) of Liverpool City



Poor Law, and therefore doesn't include the Young Liberal objections to the census of the 1960s. It does include lots of interesting pictures of the times and highlights the messianic and rather illiberal zeal of some of the utilitarians. The chapter on Charles Booth contains more background on the early Fabian movement and the Liberal critique of their approach is visible here.

Like David's previous book,¹ his Liberal political background is apparent throughout the text but is nowhere explicit. This presumably comes of getting a book contract from a major international publisher about a topic which is still fairly alternative. Presumably, pointing out that he was formerly editor of *Liberal Democrat News* and a policy-maker on a Federal committee might make the author seem a little bit too eccentric. He does mention the Liberal Democrats' famous 'penny on income tax for education' of the 1992 general election (pp. 42 – 43). The very topical critique of economic growth in Chapter 9 mirrors the approach of Liberal Party figures like Lord Beaumont and Felix Dodds in the 1980s and 1990s. It is stated that economic growth was only introduced as an idea in British politics at the Conservative Party Conference in 1954. That sounds surprising. The Liberal Party Assembly of course rejected the conventional adherence to growth in 1979.

The counting paradoxes set out by Boyle at pp. 45 – 55 are excellent. 'Counting paradox 7: the more we count, the less we can compare the figures.' Illustrated by reference to crime statistics, this shows in a couple of pages the same lesson of the works on the law and order debate by Pearson, Chibnall and Cohen.² The coincidence of ideas is shown by the fact that leading Professor David Garland, in his newest book, is writing about the fashions in law and order of the last thirty years and telling us how we got here.³

David Boyle's book is scholarly but it may infuriate academics due to the lack of referencing and sources for many points. In my review of his first book I said: 'Boyle has carried off an impressive feat, getting a big international mainstream publisher to publish a book on alternative economics' (*Liberator*, October 2000). Two in a row is very impressive; his very readable story-telling style contains highly intellectual content but, presumably in order not to put off the generalist, referencing is left to two pages of further reading. The index is fine but not very comprehensive.

A great quote from Keynes would encourage any young political activist to challenge the establishment:

Over against us, standing in the path, there is nothing but a few old gentlemen tightly buttoned-up in their frock coats, who only need to be treated with a little friendly disrespect and bowled over like ninepins. Quite likely, they will enjoy it themselves, once they have got over the shock. (p. 162.)

Very reminiscent of Bob Dylan and 'the times they are a-changing', I think.

At Bristol University in the late 1980s the ambition of most of the brightest students appeared to be to become accountants. Accountants and statisticians are no doubt as much concerned about many of the issues highlighted as everybody else. While reading the book I twice sat next to female postgraduate mathematicians on planes (one Indian/English woman on the way back from Bosnia, one

German on the way from Los Angeles to New Zealand). Both were automatically interested in the argument in Boyle's work.

David Boyle is political and in his humorous style he puts across political points. The historical accounts leading to the present day are used to make those political points. This second book should confirm him as a writer and as an influential contributor to policy debate. For the Liberal Democrats it illustrates that we are in fortunate times. Conrad Russell is undoubtedly the greatest Liberal party political philosopher of a generation. To have a thinking leader, and people like Boyle around as well, all of whom understand the importance of historical context to modern ideas, is a great asset to our ability to get our policy ideas put into practice.

- 1 Boyle D., *Funny Money: In Search of Alternative Cash*, Harper Collins (2000)
- 2 Pearson G., *Hooligan: A history of respectable fears*, Macmillan, London (1983); Chibnall S., *Law and Order News*, Tavistock, London (1977): an analysis of crime reporting in the British press; and Cohen S., *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 3rd ed, Blackwell, Oxford (1987).
- 3 Garland D., *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*, OUP, 2001.

Young Liberal history

Liberal Democrat Youth and Students (LDYS) are aiming to produce a book to celebrate A Century of Young Liberals / Ten Years of LDYS (working title!).

If anyone has any anecdotes, information and/or literature relating to the Young Liberals/LDYS or any of its predecessors, over the last 100 years (especially from the early part of the twentieth century), LDYS would like to hear from you.

They would also like to hear from anyone who would like to get involved with a working group which will be putting together the book and other events throughout 2003.

Please contact the LDYS Office: tel: 020 7227 1387 / 7227 1388; email: ldysadmin@libdems.org.uk.