

Insight on SDP and Liberals

Briefing by Conservative Research Department

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This document is a selection of mainly recent quotations by Liberal and SDP spokesmen on politics in general and on particular policies. It does not seek to describe Liberal or SDP policy in detail or to criticize it. That task is undertaken through the other Research Department publications, such as the Briefing Note, 'Politics Today' and Parliamentary Briefs. For example, an analysis and critique of the various alternative economic policies proposed by Labour and the Alliance partners will be published shortly as a 'Politics Today'.

Like its sister-publication 'Insight on Labour', this 'Insight' will be produced at roughly quarterly intervals, and circulated to all Conservative MPs, adopted candidates, Central Office Agents, Ministerial Special Advisers and officers in CCO and CRD.

Please send any useful material for the next issue to: The Editor, 'Insight on SDP and Liberals', Conservative Research Department, 32, Smith Square, London S.W.1

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INSIGHT ON SDP AND LIBERALS

Recent Quotations by Party Spokesmen

Themes

The quotations are designed to illustrate three main themes:

1. The continuing Left-wing commitments of the SDP.
2. The suspicion and lack of fraternity existing between the two partners of this so-called "Alliance".
3. The confusions over policy in both these parties.

Statistical support for these themes is shown by the SDP and Liberal voting records on 173 important divisions (3 line whips) in the period March 1981 to 18th May 1982:

	<u>SDP</u>	<u>Liberals</u>	<u>Both Together</u>
Voted with the Government	9	29	8
Voted against the Government	138	131	121
Abstained	16	6	2
Split	10	7	2
Parties acted differently			40

1. GENERAL

a) SDP COMMITMENT TO THE LEFT

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"Speaking for myself, I do not want a new Centre Party, I want a Labour Party refreshed by new thinking ..." (Sunday Times, 3rd February 1980)

"We believe that a centre party would have no roots, no principles no philosophy and no values". (Guardian, 9th June 1980)

"Yes, we are the inheritors of the old Labour Party" (Daily Telegraph, 25th November 1981)

"I've re-read all the Labour manifestos of this decade, 1970, two in 1974, 1979 ... Generally speaking, these were the aims and policies I believed in". (Guardian, 29th November 1980)

Dr. David Owen:

"When asked by Sir Robin Day, "Do you call yourself a Socialist?". he replied, "Yes, I do". (BBC Radio, 17th March 1981)

"It must be clearly understood that the SDP is not a Mark II Labour Party. It is a new Left of Centre Party". (Daily Telegraph, 11th June 1981)

Mr. Roy Jenkins:

"There has been a lot of talk about the formation of a new Centre Party. Some have even been kind enough to suggest that I might lead it. I find this idea profoundly unattractive ... I do not believe that such a grouping would have any coherent philosophical base ... I cannot be indifferent to the political traditions in which I was brought up ... the Labour Party is and always has been an instinctive part of my life". (Oxford, 9th March 1973)

Mr. Tom Ellis, SDP MP for Wrexham:

"I shall not resign (as an MP) because I still hold the views on which the Labour Party fought the election 20 months ago". (Daily Telegraph, 5th February 1981)

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth, SDP MP for Teesside, Thornaby:

"Mr. Edwards switched from Labour to Conservative. I have done nothing of the sort and intend to go on opposing Conservative policies as strongly as I have done since being elected to Parliament". (Middlesborough Evening Gazette, March 9th 1981. Mr. Alfred Edwards was a former Labour MP who switched to the Conservatives in 1950)

Mr. John Grant, SDP MP for Islington Central:

"The SDP must not be a soggy centre party. That would be fatal. We have to be a radical but responsible left of centre party". (Stockport, 5th March 1982)

b) FRICITION BETWEEN THE PARTNERS

Mr. Ian Wrigglesworth:

"We've got to give everyone outside the impression we're all happily working together". (Sunday Times, 29th March 1981)

Mr. David Steel:

"There is a different attitude between the Liberal Party and the SDP ... It (the SDP) is ... a more authoritarian party and we are a less authoritarian party". (BBC Radio, 20th January 1982)

Mr. Jo Grimond:

"At present the Liberal-Social Democratic alliance occasionally looks too much like a half-way house on the old road of state socialism. It will spend more than the Tories but rather less than Labour ... Such compromises may win votes but they will not improve the country ..." (Journal of Economic Affairs, October 1981)

Mr. Tony Greaves, (Organiser of the Association of Liberal Councillors):

"The SDP leadership do not understand the Liberal Party, they have shown no interest whatsoever in finding out about the party ... Some of them show an arrogance ... that they have got the solution to the country's problems ... They seem to think they can just sweep the country ... at the next election and they'll be God's answer to everything". (BBC Radio, 20th January 1982)

Mr. Cyril Smith, Liberal MP for Rochdale:

"One does wonder if Labour had won the last election, what would now be the position. I suspect three of the four (SDP leaders) would be in a Labour Cabinet ... Let it be clear that some of us fear that in having (an alliance) we will not only see the break up of the Labour Party, but in the longer term, of the Liberal Party as well, certainly the Liberal Party as we know it". (Liberal News, 29th September 1981)

Mr. Richard Holme, the former Liberal Party President:

"A cynical electoral deal imposed from above is hardly the way to embark on the new politics". (Guardian, 24th July 1981)

Mr. Cyril Smith, after Mr. William Rodgers had suspended the negotiations for the allocation of seats:

Mr. Rodgers was "acting like an overgrown school-girl" and "poncing about the stage like a prima donna" (Times, 4th January 1982)

Mr. David Alton, Liberal MP for Liverpool, Edgehill:

"I hope that Bill Rogers (sic) appreciates that since his outburst the Alliance has lost 10 points in the opinion polls". (St. Helens, reported in Liberal News, 2nd February 1982)

Mr. Roger Pincham, ex-Chairman of the Liberal Party:

"The leaders of Social Democracy look back to years of power, often exercised by central diktat with little regard for the views of the people in receipt of a torrent of legislation ... This experience of power ... is in danger of creating a Party not only more centralised than our own but also less concerned with genuine local democracy than the Conservative Party and in some respects, the Labour Party". (Liberal Clarion, February 1982)

Mr. William Rodgers:

"Liberals have inevitably developed a ghetto mentality". (BBC Radio, 20th January 1982)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"The Liberals aren't a serious alternative". (Guardian, 29th November 1980)

Lord Beaumont, Director of Liberal Policy Promotion:

"Official discussions with the SDP on the subject of policy are still tantalisingly far off". (Liberal News, 11th May 1982)

Mr. Tom McNally, SDP MP for Stockport South:

"There is no future in an Alliance where the Liberals fight rural England and outer suburbs and the SDP try and take the Labour Party on in the inner cities ... It is more likely that the give will be on the Liberal side". (BBC Radio, 20th January 1982)

Mr. Tony Greaves:

"It is therefore very important indeed that the SDP are kept out of Liberal target wards, Liberal held wards, etc. If they intervene against us in such areas we should (and almost always will) smash them into the ground". (Association of Liberal Councillors Activists' Guide, August 1981)

2. THE ECONOMY

a) UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. John Horam, SDP MP for Gateshead West, SDP Economic Spokesman:

"They (Labour) believe they can bring down unemployment by throwing money at the problem, but their approach has no credibility. It would simply lead to chaos - and the unemployed would suffer ... We have set ourselves the short-run target of taking 1 million off the dole queues in about 2 years. This is not enough; in the longer term, we should set ourselves the aim of getting back to full employment, defined as, say, 4 per cent unemployed". (Canterbury, 3rd March 1982)

"There must be a substantial programme of public investment"... The introduction of four specific job-creation measures ... The net PSBR cost would be about £4 billion". (ibid.)

"You can't bring down unemployment, certainly in the long-term just by throwing money at it. Surely, we learnt that from the last period of Mr. Heath's Government and the first part of the last Labour Government. Surely, we learnt that for good". (Weekend World 29th March 1981)

Mr. Roy Jenkins:

" ... I would certainly not go before the electorate saying 'vote for us and see unemployment disappear like the snows in April'. That would not be an honest or a sensible or a responsible approach. Nor do I really believe that you will deal with unemployment just by creating jobs for the sake of creating jobs. I think how you have got to deal with unemployment is by getting the economy moving. (Weekend World, 29th March 1981)

"I wouldn't do it (ie. reduce unemployment) by just throwing money at it in a wild sort of way, no, I think that is extremely foolish ..."(ibid.)

Mr. John Horam:

"A government ... may consciously decide to take some of the strain by accepting a rather higher rate of inflation in the short term in order to gain the prize of higher output and employment." (SDP Discussion Paper on Economic Policy, October 1981)

b) INTEREST RATES AND EXCHANGE RATES

Mr. John Horam:

"It is a mistake to ask for both an expansion of the economy and for lower interest rates". (Hansard, 16th March 1981, col.63)

"To suppose that the first requirement is to lower interest rates and that if these are secured then even a further depression of demand is acceptable ... is to fatally misunderstand business psychology". (SDP Discussion Paper on Economic Policy, October 1981)

(Mrs. Williams saw the reduction of interest rates as the "first essential". Financial Times, 7th October 1981)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"Hold the pound steady to encourage exports without forcing inflation up". (Crosby By-Election leaflet, October 1981)

Mr. John Horam:

"... a mildly reflationary package would have a favourable downward effect on the value of the pound". (Hansard, 16th March 1981, col. 62)

"It would be right to accompany this (stimulus to the economy) with a considerable attempt to lower the exchange rate of the pound in order to stimulate demand for our products abroad ... recently the pound has fallen but not far enough". (SDP Discussion Paper on Economic Policy)

c) INCOMES POLICIES

The SDP seems to support the general concept of pay controls, but is confused over how these **should** be enforced.

Dr. Owen:

"We believe that politicians have dabbled too long in the detailed process of wage bargaining". (Hansard, 28th October 1981, col.910)

Mr. John Horam:

"They (incomes policies) tend to force trade-offs with the unions which are sometimes against the general interests of society and the long-run efficiency of the economy. They consume huge amounts of government time ..." (SDP Discussion Paper on Economic Policy)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"Statutory prices and incomes policies are too rigid to last for long ... Typically they are modified by permitting qualifications... the qualifications then arouse feelings of injustice and the policies become discredited". (Politics is for People, p.133)

Mr. Roy Jenkins:

"We see no more future in the long term for a rigid bureaucratic centrally imposed incomes policy than we do for brutal monetarism". (The Guardian, 5th October 1981)

"... I would go for as flexible a (pay) policy as possible, because one which is too rigid, first of all it has a bad effect on the labour market, and we must have adaptability and change of jobs ... there is also the disadvantage that if it is too rigid, you can enforce it for a bit, and then it busts, and then you are back where you started". (ibid.)

The Liberals emphatically support long-term statutory pay controls:

Mr. Richard Wainwright, Liberal MP for Colne Valley and Liberal Economic Spokesman:

"How can we credibly present to the voters a policy which is based on the bland assumption that the TUC is going to change its heart and mind overnight".

Mr. John Pardoe, former Liberal MP, Liberal Economic Spokesman in the 1974-9 Parliament:

"To reflate the economy without an incomes policy would be the height of irresponsibility. It would lead to the father and mother of all wage explosions. There is no alternative to a statutory incomes policy". (Liberal News, 6th April 1982)

Mr. Jo Grimond:

"I was startled to hear Mrs. Shirley Williams advocating a prices and incomes policy on the grounds that it was essential for planning the economy. An incomes policy may be needed, but Mrs. Williams' statement gives me the impression that she believes in overall state planning ... we should not delude ourselves into thinking that an incomes policy is other than a serious infringement on freedom ... Nor have the Liberals explained how it is to be worked, and even if they had, it is certainly not the permanent answer to our economic troubles ..." (Journal of Economic Affairs, October 1981)

d) TRADE UNION LAW

Here, confusion between and within the Alliance partners is shown by their Commons voting behaviour. On 8th February 1982, the Liberals and 17 SDP MPs voted for the Second Reading of Mr. Tebbit's Employment Bill, while 5 SDP MPs, including Mr. John Grant, their employment spokesman, voted against, and 5 abstained or were absent. On the 19th May 1982, while the Liberals voted for the Third Reading of the Bill, the SDP abstained, with Mr. Grant voting against.

Mr. Eric Ogden:

"My own individual conclusion is that this is a bad, political, Bill, which does not deserve support in any way". (Guardian, 6th February 1982)

Mr. John Grant:

"I think it is a bad Bill" (Guardian, 6th February 1982)

Mr. William Rodgers:

"The plain fact is that on all the available evidence, a significant majority of individual trade unions believe in the Bill's provisions". (Hansard, 8th February 1982, col.759)

Mr. John Horam:

"Nor should we avoid a realistic examination of the obstacles to employment in the labour market created by Government regulation and trade union practices". (SDP Discussion Paper on Economic Policy)

e) TAX

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"There is much to be said for a wealth tax" (Sunday Telegraph, 27th September 1981)

"...widening the tax base is a better place to begin than increasing the standard rate of income tax". (Politics is for People, p. 62)

Dr. David Owen:

"The allowance which causes the greatest inequity between individuals is mortgage relief ... there is an overwhelming case for adjusting downwards the allowances and exemptions which grew up in a period of unrealistically high marginal rates". (Face the Future, pp.96-7)

SDP Discussion Paper on Local Government and Finance, October 1981:

"If a wealth tax were to be introduced, it could conveniently be combined with rates as a local government tax".

Mr. John Horam:

"The first way of paying (for "The sort of expansion I am proposing ") which would have been necessary under the approach which I adopt is to increase the standard rate of income tax. A slightly better way of doing it would be to put a surcharge for one year on all rates of income tax". (Hansard, 16th March 1981, col.61)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"We are committed to legislation in this Parliament, which will go far to remove our most pervasive inequality - inequality of wealth. Public ownership of development land, the new Gifts Tax, and the proposed Wealth Tax will all alter the balance of wealth in our society". (Party Political Broadcast on behalf of the Labour Party, 20th November 1974)

f) NATIONALISATION

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"Nationalisation is primarily a means to an end, the end being the more just distribution of wealth in our society". (Daily Telegraph, 26th February 1974)

"The extension of public ownership is an important Labour Party principle..." (Stevenage and Hertford, 2nd August 1974)

"We need your help to bring into public ownership, ports, ship-building and aircraft". (October 1974 Election Address)

Dr. David Owen:

"Although it is a terrible thing to say, what Mrs. Thatcher is doing in the steel industry, would be inevitable under a Labour Government as well...If it had been done earlier, there need have been fewer closures and less unemployment". (Sunday Express, 14th February 1981)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"...There's no reason to believe that civil servants are better than businessmen at running industry; there's every reason to believe the opposite". (Newsnight, BBC2 28th January 1982)

g) IMPORT CONTROLS

Mr. Roy Jenkins:

"Import controls need to be approached with particular caution... they would be bound to invite retaliation". (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 23rd February 1981)

Dr. David Owen:

"The case for some kind of import restriction - if this does not provoke retaliation against British exports - is very strong".
(Face the Future, p.131)

h) AGRICULTURE

SDP Discussion Paper on Local Government and Finance, October 1981:

"There is also one exclusion from the rating system which can no longer be justified: the derating of agricultural land and buildings. The rerating of agriculture would strengthen the rate base of many local authorities with low resources".

3. SOCIAL AFFAIRS

a) HOUSING

SDP Discussion Paper on Housing, October 1981:

"We need to debate whether ... the Right to Buy should remain a single national policy, or whether it should be up to local decision in the light of local housing needs ... The terms of the Right to Buy should be amended so as to provide for councils to be given the first option to buy back the property".

b) RATES

Mr. David Alton, Liberal MP for Liverpool, Edgehill:

"Local councils should have the inalienable right to levy a supplementary rate. I do not see why it should be a matter for Central Government to interfere in these matters. If local authorities make a mess of things, local electors can throw them out".
(Liberal News, 27th April 1982)

SDP Discussion Paper on Local Government and Finance, October 1981:

"Rates are a very good tax, and one particularly apt for local government. The rates are simple, comprehensible, practicable and familiar. They have a high yield, low collection and administrative costs and are hard to avoid or evade ... In all these respects, rates are better than most other taxes".

c) EDUCATION

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"It is with reluctance that I for one conclude that the freedom to send one's child to an independent school is bought at too high a price for the rest of society". (Politics is for People, p.158)

"The social case for the comprehensive school has always been unanswerable". (Politics is for People, p.156)

"I passionately believe that the comprehensive school is the proper complement for what I think will ultimately be a classless society". (Daily Telegraph, 13th June 1979)

SDP Discussion Document on Education, October 1981:

"The number of private schools and the proportion of children going to them has always been significant, and the consequences are harmful. Private schools help to divide society".

"The hope is that, with the introduction of a system of school leaving statements, the existing GCE and CSE examinations can be abolished".

d) HEALTH

Dr. Owen:

"I hope the quality of the health service under a social democratic government would be so strong that no one would want to waste their money on private medicine. As far as I am concerned the same goes for education". (The Times, 9th October 1981)

"It is legitimate and right to phase private medicine out from within the NHS and for Government to take financial and other measures actively to discourage the growth of the private health sector". (Face the Future, 1981, p.401)

4. CONSTITUTION:

SDP Statement 'A Fresh Start for Britain':

"We are committed to obtaining proportional representation at the earliest opportunity because it is a precondition of the new policies which Britain needs".

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"I asked Shirley Williams why the book ('Politics is for People') contained nothing about electoral reform. She replied that she did not mind one way or the other about proportional representation; in her view it was tosh to think that Britain's social and economic performance had anything to do with the particular electoral system the country enjoyed. 'But Roy, Bill and David were keen on PR, so I went along with them'." (Peter Kellner, Political Editor of the New Statesman, 9th October 1981)

Mr. John Horam, referring to the present Houses of Parliament:

"I'd do away with all this, I really would. I'd happily move the whole thing to Scunthorpe and leave this to the tourists. When I hear something described as traditional, all my suspicions are aroused". (Daily Telegraph, 19th May 1982)

5. DEFENCE

Mr. David Steel:

Asked if he would cancel Polaris, he replied: "Yes" and revealed that an Alliance Government would phase Polaris out "as soon as possible". (BBC TV, 11th March 1982, reported in the Times, 12th March 1982)

Dr David Owen, referring to the preceding remark:

"He is in no position to say what an Alliance government would do. That is not the policy of the Social Democrats". (The Times, 12th March 1982)

Mr. David Steel:

The Liberal leader admitted in an interview with The Times that the question was "slightly tricky" for the alliance, "simply because the Liberal Party has always been against the independent nuclear deterrent". They had a clear, principled commitment against the deterrent, "not just an economic argument". (The Times, 30th March 1982)

Mr. Richard Wainwright, Liberal MP for Colne Valley:

"Liberals have always said No to the so-called British independent deterrent - Polaris, and now Trident. We say No to the Neutron Bomb". (Liberal News, 27th April 1982)

Mr. Peter Knowlson, Head of Party Policy:

"Liberals have consistently opposed a British independent nuclear deterrent since 1957. 1980 Assembly reaffirmed its total opposition to an independent British strategic nuclear deterrent and the purchase of Trident Missiles, it also condemned successive Labour and Conservative Governments for spending vast sums on the modernisation of Polaris without parliamentary authority. However, Party policy does not state what we should do with Polaris if Liberals were in Government". Liberal News, 4th May 1982)

6. SOME FINAL WORDS

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"The bubble of euphoria is also going to be burst a bit, as we begin to **spell** out straightforward and as it were, no longer fuzzy-at-the-edges policy statements. Other people will leave, they'll say "this isn't what I meant at all". So yes, we are undoubtedly going to lose some ground, we have to in the next year or two". (BBC Radio, 20th January 1982)

The SDP's early surge, she was quoted as saying, had been achieved "without much in the way of organisational or intellectual underpinnings" but based on a "broad and frothy" support. "60 per cent of the new party's members were political novices, easily put off by the nitty-gritty and the in-fighting of the process". (Reported in the Washington Post, 10th March 1982; later denied by Mrs. Williams)

Dr. David Owen, when asked what was in his party's manifesto:

"Look, love, if you want a manifesto, go and join one of the other parties". (Times, 27th March 1981)

Dr. David Owen:

"I do not think a Prime Minister is essential for running a government". (Observer, 29th March 1981)

Mrs. Shirley Williams:

"The danger for any new party, at a time of disillusion with the old parties, is that it becomes all things to all men". (Observer, 29th March 1981)

Mr. Jack Smith, a Newcastle Labour councillor who defected to the SDP:

"I found out I'd made a mistake and decided to return to the Socialist policies I've loved for 20 years. I didn't get on with people in the SDP. There was a lack of communication, a lack of organisation and they haven't got policies". (Newcastle Journal, 16th July 1981)

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