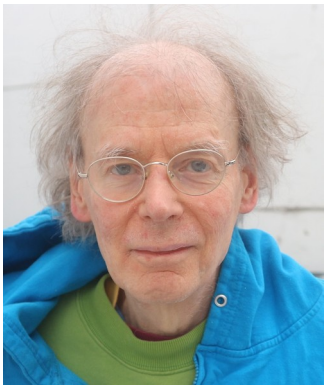
David Barnsdale, standing for Federal Council

About me:



At 20, when I was a libertarian Marxist, I read J S Mill on free speech – Mill's stance dovetailed into why I opposed Trotskyists. I also read Karl Popper because he was recommended to me as a serious critic of Marxism and I recognized that there was a need to test my beliefs with contrary ideas. At the time, Marxism passed that test. I only later came to appreciate Popper. Now both Popper and Mill are central to my political thinking.

I read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* when it first became trendy and it deeply influenced the way I viewed the world. That outlook led me to disastrously misread a situation – an experience I now value for the skepticism I gained towards any ideology not valuing hard facts.

When I first helped the Liberal Democrats in 2016, I had already been voting Lib Dem for several years. I joined in 2019 to oppose Brexit. I am mainly active in my locality canvassing and leafleting.

The quick read:

- **Enlightenment values**
- **Research based policy**
- **Free Debate**
- **Sex is real and sometimes matters**
- **Need for the party to take a strong stand on the issues that matter**
- **Federal Council – challenging group-think**

If you have time to find out why, read on:

Enlightenment values

For a political party whose function is to change the world through policy, reason must be the foundation.

Research based policy

Research must establish the facts in a neutral way even if those facts are not what we would like them to be. Only when those facts have been established should we go on to decide what we are going to do about them. Believing the world is how we would like it to be, opens the way to disastrous unintended consequences. Lived-experience may focus on areas where we need policy – it should not determine policy.

Free Debate

We as humans have a great ability to reason but also a great tendency to confirmation bias. That's why we should welcome engagement with ideas we disagree with – to check we might not be wrong but also to understand our own view better. Free debate is more fundamental than democracy as no vote is valid without a debate. Hence, "the majority wills it" can never be a justification for suppressing debate.

Sex is real and sometimes matters

We are mammals and hence either have bodies that develop to support large gametes or small. Most of the time sex shouldn't matter but not always. The male advantage in sport is rooted in the reality that, among mammals, female bodies are adapted to produce large gametes and support the development of a fetus to term.
Across human cultures, the pattern is that it is overwhelmingly males who commit sexual violence – it is too consistent to be a social construct. For that reason prisons need to be single-sex and that means the warders not just the prisoners. Given the power imbalance, we shouldn't take the risk. But once you admit a single male it then becomes hard to avoid male prison warders due to the same strength advantage that means women's sport has to be women only.

The need for the party to take a strong stand on the issues that matter

Everyone knows we are a pro-Europe party so why are we still avoiding saying that we aren't going to sort out Britain's economy unless we, at minimum, join the single market? We need to be explaining to voters why that is so.
And that includes issues on which I disagree with the party. If it is gender identity that matters to the extent that sex is irrelevant then MPs need to defend that. For many, it is something they only feel comfortable talking about when talking to party members. If they so little understand the concept of gender identity that they find they have to resort to evasion when talking to journalists then maybe they should be arguing for a change in policy.
The least convincing reason for avoiding talking about sex versus gender identity to journalists is that it is a side issue. If it were a side issue those opposing discussion of the relevance of sex would not have blocked debate at conference twice. The one thing both sides agree on is that it's important – it is about the nature of reality itself.

Federal Council – challenging group-think

Federal Council has limited powers – its influence will be to challenge conventional wisdom. The last election was a dramatic success but that is not a reason to think Federal Board can be relied on to come up with the best strategy going forward. Indeed a great success can be the foundation of future failure if it leads to complacency and a belief that what has proved successful in the past will work in the future. That danger is especially acute if conditions change.