



# Newsletter

of the Liberal Democrat Humanist & Secularist Group  
Edited by: Roger O'Brien

November 2007

**HUMANIST & SECULAR  
LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**

## **December One Day Conference: “Setting the Agenda for 2008”**

Liberal Democrats will have a new leader in 2008. Will we have some new policies too? Come along with your ideas about what the priorities should be for humanists and secularists within the party and how we can make them happen.

### **Morning - Dignity in Dying**

In the morning Lord Dick Taverne QC (see biography on page 4) will speak on Dignity in Dying, followed by a debate.

### **Afternoon - Priorities for the Group**

The afternoon session will consist of a series of workshops to discuss future priorities for the Humanist & Secular Liberal Democrats.

The topics for the afternoon workshops will be proposed and chosen by those present. So if you have an issue which you think the Group should be pursuing - book now!

The cost for members will be £15 (including refreshments).

**Date: Saturday, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007**

**Place: Conway Hall, Red Lion Square  
London** (Five minutes walk from  Holborn.)

**Guest Speaker: Lord Dick Taverne QC**



● Guest Speaker: Dick Taverne

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# “Setting the Agenda for 2008” Conference Programme

**10:30 Registration, coffee/tea and biscuits.** (Please hand in your ideas for discussion in the afternoon at registration.)

**11:00 Welcome and introductions by Group Chair Arnie Gibbons,** followed by  
**Dick Taverne QC on assisted dying,** followed by  
**Discussion and questions**

**12:30 Lunch**

**1:15 Reconvene for 3-minute (maximum) presentations from participants on  
“What matters most to humanists and secularists in the party?”**

Your chance to promote an issue that really matters to you. For example, should HSLDs be fighting to get assisted dying legalised? Should we prioritise reform of the House of Lords? Should we be vigorously upholding liberty of thought and discussion?

**1:35 Group discussions on some of the above issues:** How should Lib Dems respond? How do we get the issues that matter to us onto the party agenda?

**2:20 Feedback:** reporting back to the conference, followed by  
**Tea break**

**3:00 Plenary: “Spreading the word”** – how do humanists and secularists make themselves heard within the party? Discussion led by Group Chair Arnie Gibbons.

**3:45 End of conference**

**Refreshments** available until 4.00 pm.

\*Timings are approximate, but the conference will definitely start at the scheduled time and finish formally by 3.45 pm.

## Booking Form

I wish to register for the Humanist & Secular Lib Dem Conference on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque (payable to Lib Dem Humanist & Secularist Group) for:

- £15 Group members
- £20 non-members
- £25 Day Conference and Group Membership
- £10 Students

I have special dietary requirements (please give details):

Email: Vice Chair, **Cllr. Vera Head** at [vera.head@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:vera.head@tiscali.co.uk), phone 01494 727254 or  
post to: 10 Cherry Orchard, Amersham, HP6 6LE.

## Leadership Election

Like most groups within the party the Lib Dem Humanist and Secular Group is taking no position on the leadership election. Many things will influence how party members vote, and attitude towards religion is just one of many factors that may determine who you vote for. What we would do is encourage members to attend hustings meetings, and ask some challenging questions.

## AGM report

Like most Annual General Meetings the Group's AGM was a fairly quiet affair. That is probably a good sign as AGMs tend to get lively when all is not well. Outgoing officers reported on a successful year of activity, and pledged to continue efforts to get a faith schools motion on the conference agenda.

The meeting saw the election of a new Chair, existing committee member Arnie Gibbons. Arnie has wide experience in the party

## Brighton Conference

The Party's annual trip to the seaside took us to Brighton this year. Despite the press getting themselves worked up about Ming's leadership it was a fairly sedate affair. Major debates took place on global warming, tackling poverty and better governance. The last of these calls for a wholly elected Second Chamber, which effectively re-affirms the party's position in favour of removing bishops from the House of Lords. For The Humanist & Secular Group our stall received plenty of visitors, keen to talk about a wide variety

of issues. Someone, had fun planning the stall layout, as we found ourselves next to the Lib Dem Christian Forum. That provoked even more debate, but underlined that our disagreements over faith are modest in comparison with our shared Liberalism that unites us.

Our fringe meeting was another lively and packed event. Our speaker Keith Porteous Wood, a tireless campaigner from the National Secular Society, gave a robust speech about the difficulties faced by non-believers.

including 14 years as a councillor, membership of Federal Conference Committee, a spell as regional chair and being both a General and European election agent. He will be ably supported by Vice-Chair Vera Head. John White remains secretary, and Peter Dunphy continues as Treasurer. Membership secretary Richard Church, along with committee members Balan Sisupalan, Marilyn Mason and Mike Pictor all retain their positions.

Arnie said: "it is encouraging that we have continuity with so many members of last year's committee willing to continue their efforts. The one person who has stepped back is outgoing Chair Roger O'Brien. Roger did a tremendous amount for the group as Chair last year and as Treasurer for two years before that. Roger's skills will not be lost to us, and we are grateful that he has agreed to continue editing our Newsletters."

## Welsh Faith Schools Motion 'Kicked Into Long Grass'

Lib Dem Humanists & Secularists in Wales were disappointed that a motion to Welsh Conference in October was referred back to Welsh Policy Committee after a narrow vote.

The motion, signed by 20 conference representatives, called for the Welsh Party to change its policy on faith schools to ensure that schools did not discriminate on grounds of faith in either admissions or employment

arrangements. It also called for no further faith schools to be created in Wales.

The motion was proposed by Cardiff North Assembly candidate, Ed Bridges, who argued that education involves questioning the world around us, and denying children the opportunity to do this in publicly-funded schools was misguided.

However, a request for the motion to be referred back was made by Kirsty Williams AM, who claimed, amongst other things, that the motion was 'illiberal'. Despite impassioned speeches by Cllr. John Dixon and Cllr. Mark Cole calling

for the right to debate the motion, the request to refer back was accepted.

After the debate in Aberystwyth, Cllr. Ed Bridges said: "We were obviously terribly disappointed that our colleagues chose to kick this topic into the long grass and deny us the chance for an open debate. Just as children in Wales' faith schools are often denied the chance to explore issues which might be uncomfortable for the authorities, so too the Lib Dems in Wales seem to have denied delegates the chance for an open debate on this important issue."



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# About Lord Dick Taverne QC

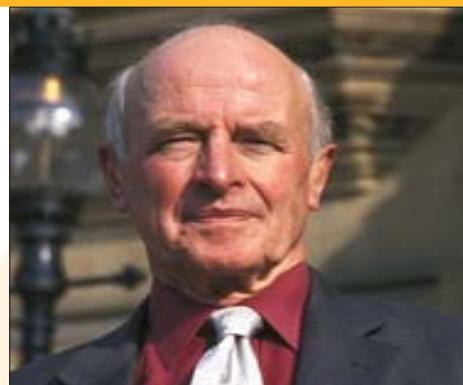
Lord Taverne – Dick Taverne QC – was born in 1928, and educated at Charterhouse School, then Balliol College, Oxford, where he gained a First in Greats. He took part in the Oxford Union debating tour of the USA in 1951, and was called to the Bar in 1954, becoming a QC in 1965.

In 1962, Dick contested and won the Lincoln seat for Labour, remaining a Labour MP for 10 years. During that time, he was a Minister in the Home Office for two years, a Minister of State in the Treasury, rising to Financial Secretary there from 1969 to 1970 and Chairman of the Public Expenditure (General) Sub-Committee from 1971 to 1972.

That year, he resigned as a Labour MP, and stood as a Democratic Labour candidate for the same seat, which he again won, and represented Lincoln as MP from March 1973 to September 1974. He also published during that time (1973) *The Future of the Left – Lincoln and After*. Political involvement continued, however, and Dick became a Member of the National Committee of the SDP

between 1981 and 1987. During those years, he contested Southwark & Peckham for the SDP in 1982, and Dulwich in 1983. When the Liberal Democrats emerged, he was on the Federal Policy Committee for a year between 1989 and 1990.

Outside politics, Dick Taverne's wide-ranging interests have led him to become a Director of AXA Equity and Law Life Assurance Society plc, and of the BOC Group plc. He was the first Director, then later Chairman, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, where he stayed until 1982. During that time, in 1979, he took on Membership of the International Review Body, examining the workings of the European Commission. Chairmanship of the Public Policy Centre came next until 1987, when he became a founding Director of PRIMA Europe, rising to Chairman in 1991 and President in 1993 until 1998. In that period, from 1989 for 10 years, Dick was also Chairman of OLIM Investment Trust, in addition to becoming Deputy Chairman of the Central European Growth



Fund in 1994, and Chairman of Alcohol & Drug Prevention Treatment Ltd. in 1996. That same year, he became Chairman of AXA Equity & Law, mentioned above. In 2002 he founded Sense About Science, a charity to promote the evidence-based approach to scientific issues. His main interest is now science and society and in 2005 he published *The March of Unreason – Science, Democracy and the New Fundamentalism* (OUP).

Dick Taverne married Janice Hennessey in 1955, and they have two daughters. One of them – Suzanna – went on to become Managing Director of the British Museum. Dick was created a Life Peer in 1996, and lists his main recreation as sailing.



The Humanist & Secular Liberal Democrats are affiliated to both the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society.

Why not check out their websites:

[www.humanism.org.uk](http://www.humanism.org.uk) [www.secularism.org.uk](http://www.secularism.org.uk)

national  
secular  
society



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Humanist and Secular  
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