

Leadership Stakes: Runners & Riders

SHOULD STEEL GO?

There is one question that won't be debated at this year's Liberal Assembly. Should Steel stand down as Leader?

As was suggested by last summer's mystery illness, Steel is tired and burnt-out. The talk of a campaigning party at last year's Assembly resulted in a couple of cosy chats with ALC and then - nothing. Indeed Steel's low profile got so low by the beginning of this year that even his closest advisors were privately suggesting that he was about to give it all up and stand down after the Euro-elections. Liberal MPs took to holding secret meetings to discuss the 'leadership problem' - i.e. the lack of it. There was a scurry of activity as would-be successors made themselves seen at all manner of Liberal meetings as a prelude to launching their respective leadership campaigns.

Probably as a direct result of this activity, Steel has since announced his intention of staying on as leader until after the next election. So this year's Assembly will see a re-launch of his leadership and a bid to put himself in the headlines alongside 'dial a quote' David Owen.

The question is: does the Liberal Party need a re-launch of a tired, burnt out Leader or the opportunity to elect a new one with new ideas and a fresh appeal? And if so, who should that new leader be?

As a public service to the Liberal Party, Liberator presents the race card for the leadership election.



Beith

Evans

Liberal whip and front runner. Has already taken to wearing Steel-type shirts. Likely to be Fleet Street's favourite with his right-wing and establishment views on almost everything.

Charisma rating:
Fussy schoolteacher

5-1



Meadowcroft

Another of the 1983 intake but who has the benefit of years of experience in municipal government behind him. Philosopher-king of the Party who lays stress on Liberal values. A true radical who can't be typecast.

Charisma rating:
Thinking Liberal's Liberal



Ashdown

3-1

Good looking former spy and local government officer. The darling of Assembly defence debates (anti-nuke) and supporter of ALC tendency. Lack of experience may be his big weakness but has drive and ambition.

Charisma rating:
Mega-star

10-1



Penhaligon

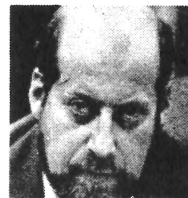
Cornish funny man who fancies his chances. Shrewd electoral tactician who lets electoral considerations colour his policies. Has yet to overcome country yokel image and is using Presidency as stepping stone.

Charisma rating:
Good for a laugh



Johnston

Nearly made it to starting post last time but lacked parliamentary backing. Would rather be a Euro MP than a Westminster one. Leader of Scottish Liberals. Charisma rating:
Monarch of the glen
Odds: 50-1



Freud

Wit, raconteur and gourmet who will probably sit this one out and make money backing the winner. Good constituency MP in safe-ish seat. Charisma rating:
Quiz show material
Odds: 100-1



Hughes

Over energetic and runs danger of burning himself out. Sound on most issues but spoils show by speaking too often and too long. One for next time around. Charisma rating:
Lightweight charmer
Odds: 100-1



Ross

Former Isle of Wight pig farmer who never made it in to the political big time. Dreadfully right-wing on everything and irrational when he doesn't get his way. Charisma rating:
Damp dishcloth
Odds: 100-1



Wainwright

Elder statesman of the Parliamentary Party who is retiring at the next election. Probably the best Leader the Liberal Party never had. Charisma rating:
Favourite uncle
Odds: 100-1



Bruce

Ex-publisher and journalist with record of service to Scottish liberalism. Victory in Gordon one of the surprises at last general election. Charisma rating:
Solid and worthy
Odds: 500-1



Alton

Liverpool opportunist who showed early promise. Now back in the fold after retiring to backbenches with Cyril last year. Tenacious gutter politician. Charisma rating:
Every mother's son
Odds: 100-1



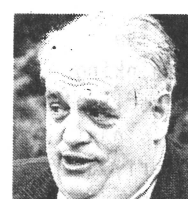
Howells

Welsh farmer and breeder of of champion speckle-faced sheep. Immensely likeable and positively poetic when speaking in his native Welsh tongue. Charisma rating:
Cuddly farmer
Odds: 100-1



Kirkwood

Former Steel aide now trying to live down Steel clone image. Dark horse of the race. Good at fixing things for others. Bright and able. Charisma rating:
Chirpy new boy
Odds: 100-1



Smith

Rochdale independent who may yet throw his hat in the ring. Appallingly right-wing on social issues. May stand down at next election? Charisma rating:
Block-buster
Odds: 100-1



Carlile

Welsh QC of Polish extraction. Blotted copybook at last year's Assembly with unfortunate remarks about gays. Since redeemed himself. Charisma rating:
Legal eagle
Odds: 500-1



Wallace

Baby of the Parliamentary Party (just turned 30). Yet another lawyer. Has risen rapidly through SLP ranks and now guaranteed a seat for life in Orkney & Shetland. Charisma rating:
Could go far
Odds: 500-1