

The party conference season started with the Liberal Democrats at Bournemouth. Does the party matter anyway? Where is it going? What kind of a party should it aspire to be? European-style social democrats? This implies the adoption of a blend of socialist and market policies informed by - what? Keynesian economics? Green economics? Free market economics? Raw pragmatism? Making it up as they go?

Are the European social democratic parties a good example to follow? Since the collapse of Marxism and the discrediting of Keynesianism, they have lost direction too. With no guiding principles to draw on, they keep going only on their own inertia and there is little difference between them and their opponents, leaving the electorate with scant real choice.

With so little to distinguish them from the alternatives, no coherent view of how the economy works and how it ought to work, how can such parties possibly make an impression? Britain needs a strong third force in politics but the Liberal Democrats seem unable to give it one. If the Georgists in the party had been listened to, the picture would be different, but at least they are still around and working hard to present the argument. They are doing their best to put their point and deserve support.