



The Radical Association Conference Briefing: Spring 2017

This briefing covers the RA's perspective on all the motions at Spring Conference. For the most part it is intended to be usefully descriptive rather than prescriptive, and give a viewpoint on the motions' intentions and likely outcomes from a radical perspective, as well as highlighting our concerns on particular issues. We are at the moment calling for specific votes to **SUPPORT** motions F4 and F17, and to back **Option A** on motion F16. We will update this briefing with further additions or emergency briefings as amendments and emergency motions appear.

Saturday

F4 A Rational Approach to Harm Reduction - SUPPORT

This motion is wide ranging, endorsing a significant new policy paper on sex work. Its primary thrust is the decriminalisation of sex work, and taking advantage of the opportunities that would open up for helping support and protect sex workers, whether tackling crimes against them within sex work or supporting them to leave the industry. It also opposes the creep of expensive and unworkable censorship laws in this area.

We fully SUPPORT this motion and strongly call upon all radical association members and supporters to back it as written. Taking a rational approach to harm reduction in sex work has been badly needed for many decades, and a strong statement of liberal principle and practice on this issue will be a good step forward for the party and will hopefully bring the need for better protection and support of sex workers and the ongoing dangers of criminalisation more strongly into the national debate.

F5 Tackling Overcrowding in the Prison System

This motion notes the problems of prison overcrowding, and proposes two motions for dealing with it – sentencing reform to reduce the number and length of custodial sentences, and an increase in numbers of prison officers to return to a safe ratio.

This motion is a step in the right direction, and we agree with the need both to reduce the prison population and ensure a sensible number of prison staff. These are basic steps in any process to improve our prison system, though we query whether more specifics on sentencing policy here might have been helpful. It does seem, too, that the motion as written misses an opportunity to tackle issues like profiteering in the prison system, which helps drive overcrowding and provides a significant perverse incentive to maintain or increase prison population sizes.

F8 The Crisis in Health and Social Care

This motion makes sense as a brief emergency motion, and provides for some generic solutions for urgent NHS stopgaps – a cross-party convention, emergency funding, and a note on the rights of EU citizens in the NHS that essentially restates a post-Brexit right to stay policy.

F8 clearly cannot be the endgame for Liberal Democrat policy in this area, and we will need more specifics on Liberal Democrat plans in the coming years. Norman Lamb and other proposers should take the time to reassure conference

that this will be treated as an emergency motion and that we will, alongside efforts to build cross-party consensus, be developing more effective and distinctive policy in this area. We also note that clause three of “conference calls for” is not ideal in its wording – whilst there is a specific need to retain EU27 staff in the NHS, retention may require bolder policy and better incentives than simply a restatement of what ought to be the general party line.

F11 Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

This motion is a workmanlike if less than spectacular or radical approach to moving towards a medium nuclear deterrent system for the UK, reducing our current capabilities but mapping out a move towards a more minimal system over time and stressing the need for multilateral cooperation.

We question the continued need and viability of nuclear weaponry for the UK in the coming years, especially if as seems likely the country’s ability to fund the deterrent is significantly reduced. There are geopolitical concerns, especially regarding increased threats in Eastern Europe, where we need to be able to reassure our allies of our readiness and ability to support them - but we need more detailed discussion of where and whether nuclear warheads fit into that strategically, rather than focussing as this motion does on the politics of the deterrent in a vacuum. Reducing to a non-credible deterrent, and yet still wasting money that could have been spent on alternative and more effective capabilities to tackle current threats, would be the worst of all worlds.

Sunday

F16 The Role of Faith in State-Funded Schools

This motion provides a modest approach to decreasing the levels of mandated religious activity in schools and ensuring that school pupils receive a full range of religious education, with any religious instruction being separate and optional. It provides three options for Lib Dem policy on faith school admissions, ranging from simply capping religious selection to a percentage to entirely phasing it out.

This policy would provide some progress on these issues, but we have concerns that it may not go far enough to counteract potential problems. The aim of reducing the extent to which children can have certain beliefs pushed at them institutionally, by requiring that all religious instruction and worship is on an opt-out basis, is laudable; however, state funded schools retaining the ability to provide institutionally sanctioned acts of worship and religious instruction may make it difficult to realise these goals. **We see Option A – phasing out religious selection for schools over time – as the fairest option**, a policy that would end selection on what is essentially an arbitrary characteristic defined by, for younger children especially, parental choice.

F17 Associate Citizenship of the European Union - SUPPORT

This motion calls on the UK government to support the moves made by liberals in the EU parliament, especially Guy Verhofstadt, to ensure some variety of “associate” EU citizenship is made available for UK citizens after leaving the EU, probably involving some sort of financial contribution to EU funds in exchange for retaining EU rights regarding free movement, health insurance, etc, and possibly also voting rights.

We SUPPORT this motion and welcome and endorse the call for associate EU citizenship, which may be vital for many people to keep their lives, livelihoods, and families together in the coming years. We certainly also hope that any proposals for it, as the motion states, keep the cost as low as possible to help as many UK citizens as wish to, regardless of means, to maintain their links to the continent.