

Report for ALTER on Glasgow Federal Conference 4-8 October 2014

For the second successive year, the Lib Dems met in Glasgow. Fewer delegates from southern England made it, consequently ALTER was short of people to attend other peoples' fringes, put cards in to speak in debates and man our stand in the Exhibition. Next year in Bournemouth, we hope more of you can make it – spreading the burden of getting our message out at the Party's main annual gathering.

William Davison, Paul Elderton, George Smid, Daniel Henry and myself kept the ALTER banner flying, assisted at key moments by my wife Martha. We gained one certain new member and several people took away membership and/or standing order forms, as well as having numerous worthwhile 1-2-1 conversations.

We need to be clearer about **why we need more members**. So I've produced a new version of "Why ALTER?" to take to regional conferences.

I have reported separately on our fringe **New Taxes: New Nations**. Now I will report on other fringes I've attended and on where 'tax shifting' has featured on the conference floor in debates.

Our **amendment to the Pre-Manifesto Motion**, which was devoid (as was the pre-manifesto paper itself) of any mention of local taxation reform, did not get selected for debate. I've not yet heard why 'officially' but a member of FCC who doesn't want to be named said it was simply due to the sheer number of amendments submitted: 37 in total, of which only 4 were debated and a few more drafted in without debate. Another member of FCC (and of the Manifesto Working Party) assured me that local tax reform **was** in the penultimate pre-Conference draft (which was far too long) and would find its way into the Manifesto itself.

All wasn't lost in the Tuesday morning debate however. Cara Jenkinson, Chair of Haringey Local Party, spoke out on Mansion Tax (its problems for Central London) and also called for replacement of Council Tax. The previous day we heard Tim Farron (moving the motion on Building More Affordable Homes) and Vince Cable (summing it) mention land value taxation favourably without it even being in the motion! I'm told that Vince mentioned LVT in at least two fringe meetings I couldn't attend myself, as well as one on Business Rate reform where he saw me in the audience and pre-empted what I was going to say.

Finally I had a meeting with Willie Rennie's tax policy adviser, Jhonti Bird. He has been working on Council Tax reform for Scotland and wanted to know if ALTER would support a proposal that falls some way short of 'full' LVT. I said it was a "very significant step in the right direction" so long as the necessary revaluation was not just done once. If the values of land and buildings can be separated, a gradual transformation to 'split rate' (as in parts of the US) could soon follow. Watch this space....