

The Observer

Let's talk dirty

IT SOUNDED as dry as dust, but a pre-election debate chaired by *Economist* editor Bill Emmott was surprisingly juicy. The motion was 'my party alone understands the proper role of the market', and the panel included the Lib Dems' would-be leader Chris Huhne; Labour's star new boy Liam Byrne, and the only black Conservative candidate in a winnable seat, Adam Afriye. Perhaps it was because the co-sponsor of the evening's debate was called Stockholm Network that this proper-sounding line-up turned up the heat and scattered the stage with innuendos and double entendres. There were lubricious sexual metaphors (on foreplay and the 'thrust of an argument'). There was a (paraphrased) quote from Zsa Zsa Gabor's sixth husband on his wedding night: 'I know what I'm supposed to do, but how do I make it original and interesting?' Liam Byrne quoted *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, and even Chris Huhne peppered his talk with references to urges and desires. That the Stockholm Network is actually a bunch of unsexy, free-market think-tanks doesn't matter. All the nudge-nudge, wink-wink raised the audience's hopes. Far from being a boring election, we may actually have some fun.