

youngfabians

Anticipations

"You don't lead by
hitting people over the
head - that's assault,
not leadership."

Dwight Eisenhower

On deadlines and leadership

Editorial by Emma Carr

As this is my first *Anticipations* editorial, I feel my first act should be to congratulate those that have gone before me.

Actually, my first act should be to introduce myself and Angela. My name is Emma and I am the new *Anticipations* editor. I am assisted most ably by the lovely Angela Green - who valiently puts up with my bossiness, my bullying and my attempts to turn every editing session into a trip to the pub instead.

Now, back to my original point, I would like to congratulate my predecessors. Well done; you have all - from early days of Liam Byrne and his companions to the revolutionary days of David Floyd - done a marvellous job and I have underestimated your hard work.

Now, I never expected editing *Anticipations* to be a piece of a cake - this being my second year on the Young Fabian executive, I knew, to some extent, what I was getting myself into. I thought I could handle it. After all, I'm a punctuality and punctuation junkie and I verge on side of being bossy (all who know me are screaming "very bossy" at the page, right now). Editing is surely my dream role?

I am aware of the fact that, in general, Young Fabians are not the best for deadlines. Don't be upset; I'm just trying to be honest. After all, any of you who attended the inaugural Young Fabian trip to Edinbrugh Festival last year will be well aware of the issues I had getting anybody to an event on time. And it played with my nerves, really it did. Made me turn to alcohol; for my nerves, you know?

I thought I could handle it. But now? Well, now I have learnt to change the deadline. After all I, like dear Gordon, am merely the setter of the Golden Rule. In my case, 'meet the target'. And I stick to it, really I do. It's not my fault if the deadline keeps changing.

Now, considering this and the many other woes faced by an *Anticipations* editor - they are too numerous and too complicated to list - and bearing in mind the consistantly high quality the publication has been throughout the years, these editors of yore receive my highest commendation. Well done you, you are truly saints among men. Well, if not quite saints, then certainly quite good really, all things considered.

Now, the next people to mention are the contibutors. The Young Fabians who write the

articles and reviews contained within each issue of *Anticipations*. When I sat down and first looked at the blank project page that was the beginning of this issue, I couldn't imagine how it would end up being an actual publication.

The thing that really helped, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart, was having stuff to put in it. Really. It's wonderful to suddenly see the bucket that is your project start filling up with intelligent writings from intelligent people all over the country.

Which brings me quite neatly to this issue and its contents.

Our theme this time was political leadership and the upcoming local elections - nearly upon us now, see how that deadline thing works. We decided upon this topic for fairly obvious reasons. The Lib Dems had just ousted their leader and were in the middle of a, now completed, leadership battle in which Ming was victorious (wouldn't have happened if Flash had been around). The Tories finally overcame their little leadership hiatus and elected young Mr Cameron as their leader to show they weren't the neptosism obsessed, elite-classed, far-righters everyone thinks they are. And so he duly populated his shadowCabinet with his best buddies, his old Eton chums and, for some reason, Gerald Howarth.

Of course, if you're talking Party leadership, you can't forget the media frenzy that is the 'when will happen' story of Blair and Brown.

As you can see, we are living in a jolly time of leadership upheaval and political unrest. And who better to comment on it that your own good selves? Well, no one actually. And so that's what you've done.

Of course, that isn't the only topic covered, this month's issues features article on myriad subject, including two pieces on Britishness, following up on topic of the Fabians New year's Conference. We also have the write up of the first ever Young Fabian book group.

Anyway, I seem to have run out of space so, from Angela and myself; read on, we hope you enjoy it.

To contact Emma about *Anticipations*, please email ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk. To contact Angela email agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

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More policies, less packaging

James Young states the case for stronger political leadership within the European Union

The European Union is in crisis. When its most ambitious political project to date – the European constitutional treaty – is rejected by popular vote in two of the Union's founding members, it is hard to ignore that the French 'non' and the Dutch 'nee' have left Europe's political elite in no doubt about the trouble they are in with voters.

In response, Tony Blair called for a 'period of reflection' at the start of the British presidency of the European Council. Eight months later, the absence of progress has been publicly conceded by the European Parliament's formal adoption of 'reflection' as its official 'strategy'.

The constitutional treaty was the product of a lengthy 'Convention on the Future of Europe' followed by a protracted intergovernmental conference, together spanning just shy of two and a half years. The Convention certainly exhibited a diversity and executed a scrutiny of the Union previously unseen in preparations for EU treaty reform by opening up the process beyond governments to civil society, NGOs and think tanks. However, the text fell well short in its mission to 'bring the people of Europe closer to the Union'. In its attempts to accommodate such a plethora of positions from the Member States, the final text became a compromise package of reform diluted to the lowest common-denominator; a cloudy haze of democratic transparency presented in an impregnable text whose supposed intent was to bring clarity.

The drafters lost sight of the constitution's purpose, going beyond their remit yet falling short of their elevated ambitions. One debate during the drafting questioned whether a Thucydides quote on the first page might discourage voters from reading the following 280 pages (longer still in some community languages). Perhaps encouraging voters to simply pick up a copy would have been more worthwhile.

But the failure of the constitution to live up to its drafters' lofty aspirations of cultivating and codifying a European demos, did not mean it deserved to be shunned at the ballot box. Achieving consensus in such a diverse union is never easy and will always be the result of compromise. Yet, despite the costs of consensus, the constitution did include some important reforms which merited support.

Principally, the treaty presented a better

framework for decision-making in an enlarged and enlarging EU. The extension of qualified majority voting and, most critically, readjusting of the voting weights of Member States to be more reflective of their disparate population sizes, aimed at making the European Council (the principal decision-making body of the Union) more representative and effective. Second, the creation of a single Foreign Minister and European Diplomatic service would have increased the efficacy of the EU's external relations; providing that single telephone number for those wishing to know Europe's stance on a particular issue, requested by Henry Kissinger almost 30 years ago. Third, modest yet significant democratic reforms included the requirement of the European Council to meet in public; the right of a third or more governments to "call in" proposals for reconsideration and revision; and, with the European Citizen's Initiative, providing the right of petition to all citizens if a million signatures can be collected.

All of these provisions would enhance the capacity of the EU to act more efficiently and do so with greater transparency. They were steps in the right direction and deserved to be ratified – an opinion shared by the majority of Member States who have already done so.

So, did voters in France and the Netherlands get it wrong? Both the French and the Dutch were poorly served by circumstance and events, confused populist arguments and a distinct absence of imagination by the political leadership that had a responsibility to support the constitutional treaty.

Economic, social and political insecurities dogged the minds of the French and Dutch as they went to the polls. Anxieties born out of increased levels of poverty and growing inequalities which, despite being primarily framed in a national context, became entwined with fears of globalisation and a direct and deliberate link was carved out by detractors to erroneously connect the two. As a consequence, many felt, or were lead to believe, that a 'liberal' EU had failed to protect them from a virulent and pervasive globalisation infecting their lives and livelihoods. In other words, the EU embodied the problem, not the solution.

A further common factor was voters' mistrust of politicians. This highlights an inherent flaw

of national plebiscites: complex issues are boiled down to a simplistic choice and that choice is reduced to whether the electorate trusts those who propose treaties, or not.

So, was the failure of the Constitution a failure of political leadership or was the message itself the failure?

Leadership undeniably plays a key role in informing and selling EU treaties to the European public, but blaming the existing political elite and awaiting the emergence of a new generation of prime ministers and presidents is alone insufficient to remedy the Union's ills. To do so is to simply sidestep issues fundamental to the future of the EU; issues that go way beyond personalities.

In a recent Gallup poll of over 100 leading European decision makers and opinion formers, while 90% of respondents felt that the current European crisis reflected too little political leadership on EU issues, 73% called for a "great debate" to establish a new consensus on the future of Europe.



Young women in France were relatively ambivalent about the constitution

Some argue however, that before a new debate ensues, the existing treaty should be salvaged. Germany considers reviving the document a top priority when it assumes the EU Presidency, and should Germany fail, Portugal will take up the task next. Yet given results in France and the Netherlands, surely the constitution and its proposals are dead?

Well, not according to 77% of Gallup's respondents. They feel that it would not be undemocratic to salvage key external points of the constitutional treaty such as the formation of an EU foreign minister and diplomatic service, but acknowledged that democratic consultation should not be avoided as being inconvenient and unnecessary. However, the institutional elements of the constitution are recognised as being too sensitive to be pushed

through by the European Council alone without further public consultation.

These elements need to be shelved until the European political environment brings fresh leadership underpinned by a firmly established consensus on the future of Europe. Poor leadership partly explains the failure of the constitution, but strong leadership offers only part of the solution. Policies and purpose are required to provide the momentum necessary for future leaders to be successful.

The current 'period of reflection' should reflect on two important, mutually reinforcing, considerations. First, address the economic issues that lie at the heart of voters' insecurities. This will aid in the construction of a favourable image of what the EU can do to benefit its citizens. Second, communicate these economic reforms to the European public. Communication is an essential prerequisite to the success of any future European projects. Moreover, any action aimed at changing EU perceptions amongst voters should be about purpose and policies, less about paragraphs and procedures.

The practicalities of delivering progress in Europe are dependant upon a Europe-wide consensus between governments and between peoples. The failure of the constitution has delivered the wake up call to Europe's leaders. But are they listening? Have they the political will to go out and meet the European public so that the people regard their leadership as part of the solution, not the problem?

The existing batch of leaders don't have the sufficient public standing to submit another EU treaty to popular vote, but they are in a position to lay the foundations for debating Europe's future role and purpose. This debate has already begun in Brussels but the methods of communicating EU issues need to be broadened.

An approach whereby the EU has the capacity to tap into national debates, complimented by the opening up of the institutions to greater media coverage would lay the groundwork for tomorrow's leaders to launch a successful European project.

An important consideration now is how much the EU and its leaders are willing to accept the packaging and presentation of the Union must shift towards a more policy-orientated approach that delivers confidence in the Union, which in turn will provide the 'purpose' the Union seeks in the minds of its citizens.

Scottish Fabians Column

Joe Fagan, of the Scottish Young Fabians

On March 26 Scotland became the first constituent nation of the UK to impose a ban on smoking in public places, hailed as one of the most progressive pieces of health legislation in Europe. This is just one of a range of progressive measures necessary to improve Scotland's depressing health profile.

In the coming years NHS Scotland will face the twin problems of general poor health and population ageing. Whilst it is anticipated that people in Scotland will live longer lives, they will not necessarily live longer, healthy lives. Unless radical action is taken, the ensuing strain on public services will become unbearable.

Over 90% of healthcare takes place outwith hospitals and health boards are responding to calls from the Scottish Executive to reflect this through expanding community care, 'up-skilling' paramedics, increasing the powers of nurses and pharmacists and building a proactive NHS in which event-based hospital treatment is a last resort. The cornerstone of reform, however, must be prevention rather than intervention to ameliorate the weight of demand on the health service.

Already there are signs that Scotland is beginning to shed its image as the "sick man of Europe" and foster a healthier culture. Glasgow City Council has pioneered a scheme in which free fruit is distributed in primary schools, to the acclaim of the World Health Organisation. There are pilots in which toothbrushes and toothpaste are freely provided to under- 5s through nurseries to increase awareness of dental health at a younger age. Massive investment has been allocated to the Healthier Scotland campaign undertaken by the Scottish Executive to promote healthy living.

Early indicators suggest that cancer, heart and lung disease are in decline and though the critics of reform are increasingly vocal, now is not the time to discover a reverse gear. A progressive health service will become all the more important as the scale of the challenges we face in the 21st century are realised.

If you are interested in getting involved with the Scottish Young Fabians, please contact Joe Fagan at jfagan_2004@hotmail.com

Scottish Fabians - Events -

Closing the Gap

This event will discuss life chances and child poverty, public service reform, education reform and the future of the Labour Party.

The event will be introduced by a leading politician. After the introduction session there will be two interactive discussion sessions, one before lunch and one after.

Date: Saturday 2nd September 2006
10am-3.30pm

Venue: Central Edinburgh

Speakers: To be confirmed (to include academics, public service professionals and MSPs)

Tickets will be sold on the door for £10 per person.

For more information about this event, please contact Joe Fagan at jfagan_2004@hotmail.com



Regional Young Fabians

Matt Blakely, Regions Officer on the Young Fabian Executive

This is my first input to *Anticipations* and my first as the regional officer. Over the last 6 months we have heard excellent news from across the country in regards to interest in setting up Young Fabian groups and events.

It is my main vision over the course of this summer to see a network of YF members established across the country with support available for people looking to hold events form groups in their local area.

Due to the nature of British politics we have a great focus on London as our political hub. The YF continue to produce a challenging programme of events in the capital and this is going from strength to strength. This year we will also focus on where politics is at it's most relevant to the average vote; local elections.

As centre-left thinkers the local elections provide us with a platform to promote the Young Fabians and what we stand for. As you are aware, we do not push a political agenda but provide a platform for discussion from the Centre-left on the political environment of Britain and the World.

Over the next month YF members will receive information in regards to plans to bring this forum for discussion to the regions of Britain. It is our aim as an exec and my desire as the region's officer to assist and encourage our members to become proactive in their locality and not feel that the YF's are only active in London. To this aim we hope to increase the profile of the YF and with the hard work of the exec and it's members, entwined with the platforms of the local elections, and the Labour Party Conference in Manchester. We hope that as a body of like-minded people we can bring the challenge of dynamic centre left thinking to the varied regions of the country.

If reading this has inspired you to meet local Young Fabians, or if you are already involved in a local group and would like some more support or ideas for events, please contact me. Hopefully we can work together to increase the scope of the Young Fabians across Britain and bring quality political discussion out of London to our local area.

For more information email Matt at: mblakeley@youngfabians.org.uk

YF Trip to Edinburgh

Last year the Young Fabians had their first trip to Edinburgh for the annual festivals.

The trip was arranged to coincide not only with the fringe, book and international festivals but also with the first annual Holyrood Festival of Politics, held in the new Scottish Parliament.

During the political festival we were able to attend some events in the Parliament and were given a tour of the bulding by a Fabians who works for the Labour Party there.

On top of this we enjoyed the comedy, theatre and seminars of the other festivals. As well as some of Edinburgh's amazing night life.

This year the Young Fabians will not only be repeating this trip, but we will be putting on an event at the political festival.

The event will be on youth involvement in politics. There will be a cross Party panel discusses this topic and question and answer

sections so that the audience take part.

As with all Young Fabian trips, places are limited so if you would like to register your interest or for more information (e.g. costs etc.), please email Emma Carr at ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk.



Inside the Scottish Parliament, one of the highlights of last year's trip.

Facing the truth?

Conor McGinn, Young Fabian Vice-Chair, says the new Inquiries Act won't help bring closure to Northern Ireland's painful past

What have Amnesty International, the Irish Government and entire Irish Parliament, the British Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights, and the Law Society of England and Wales got in common? Unfortunately there is no punch-line. What unites these respected organisations, a sovereign government and numerous other groups and individuals is opposition to the Inquiries Act that came into effect in 2005.

It may seem strange that so many are taking such a stance against a seemingly innocuous Act of Parliament, which the Department for Constitutional Affairs says is "designed to provide a framework under which future inquiries, set up by Ministers into events that have caused or have potential to cause public concern, can operate effectively to deliver valuable and practicable recommendations in reasonable time and at a reasonable cost." The DCA gives the impression that it is merely tying up a few loose ends and that previous legislation around inquiries was piecemeal. Others disagree.

In January 1989, then junior Home Office Minister Douglas Hogg MP stated in the House of Commons that some solicitors in Northern Ireland were "unduly sympathetic" to the IRA. A month later Pat Finucane, a leading solicitor who had previously defended IRA suspects, was murdered as he ate his Sunday dinner with his wife and three children in his Belfast home. It remains one of the most controversial killings of the entire Northern Ireland conflict, and almost immediately after his death there were allegations of collusion between his loyalist paramilitary killers and elements of the security forces. John Stevens, then deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire Police, and a team of police officers were appointed to carry out an investigation into breaches of security by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Special Branch and British military intelligence.

By January 1990 the Stevens team had identified a senior member of the loyalist Ulster Defence Association (UDA), Brian Nelson, as a key suspect and planned to arrest him and others in a dawn raid. Officers returned to their secure investigation HQ hours before the planned arrests to find a fire raging in their offices. Fire alarms, telephones and heat-sensitive intruder alarms were not



Conor McGinn Young Fabian Vice-Chair and opponent of the inquiries act

working and the fire destroyed many of their files, though others had been copied and moved to England. Nelson fled to England where he remained until two years later when he returned to Belfast having been exposed as a British Army agent.

Nelson, a UDA intelligence officer, stated at his trial that he had informed his Army handlers about a plan to assassinate Pat Finucane. He was sentenced to ten years. In 1999 another UDA member, William Stobie, was arrested and charged with the murder. The case was dropped due to insufficient evidence and Stobie was shot dead by fellow loyalists amidst allegations that he too was a British agent.

So what does this murky tale of espionage, murder and cover-up have to do with the

Inquiries Act? Unsurprisingly, Geraldine Finucane and her family have campaigned for a public inquiry into the circumstances around her husband's death since 1989. In 2002, retired Canadian judge Peter Cory was appointed by the Government to carry out an inquiry into six murders - including Mr Finucane's - where there were allegations of collusion. After two years of investigation, Judge Cory concluded that the military and police intelligence knew of the murder plot but failed to intervene. He recommended a public inquiry.

This was supported by the final report of the Stevens' Team that concluded that rogue elements within the police and army in Northern Ireland had concluded with loyalists to murder a number of Catholics in the late 1980s. It seemed that the Government had no option but to follow the recommendation of a highly respected international judge and the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, and hold a public inquiry. After a period of time, during which a further member of the UDA, Ken Barrett, has been sentenced to 22 years for his involvement in the murder of Pat Finucane, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Paul Murphy MP announced at the end of 2004 that there would be an inquiry, but that it needed to be on the basis of new legislation. The new legislation is the Inquiries Act 2005, opposed by almost everyone - including Judge Cory - except the Government.

The reason the Act is opposed and so vehemently contested by those in the legal profession and in civil liberties and human rights organisations is because of the power it gives Ministers over any inquiry which operates under its auspices. It gives a Minister the right to order the inquiry to hold sessions in private, for information to be withheld from the public and parties to the inquiry, to restrict access to witnesses and documents and other measures that make accountability and impartiality impossible to achieve. That is why Amnesty International is advising judges not to serve in an inquiry under the terms of the Act. That is why the Law Society of England and Wales and a Joint Committee of the Houses of Parliament think it is both regressive and damaging to openness, transparency and the impartiality of the judiciary. They understand that they Act has wide reaching implications that go far beyond the Pat Finucane inquiry. They also understand that in the case of Pat Finucane we have a perfect example of how the Act can

- and will - be used to the detriment of truth, honesty and full disclosure of information.

The most important people in that case are Pat Finucane's family. Seventeen years ago they lost a husband and father, in circumstances where the very people we expect to protect law and order were implicated in the most grotesque abuse of everything we understand that term to mean. In that respect, if are to move forward into a truly peaceful Ireland where real reconciliation and understanding is to be reached, then we all have to take responsibility for the part we played in the conflict, including the Government. The Inquiries Act is a most unwelcome abdication of responsibility in that regard.

**Young Fabians in
Ireland
&
Irish Young Fabians**

If you would like to find out more about the Irish contingent of the Young Fabians, either in or outside of Ireland, please contact Conor McGinn at cmcginn@youngfabians.org.uk.

Alternatively, if you would like to either comment on this article or write about Irish policy and politics for the next edition of Anticipations, please email your article ideas to Emma Carr at ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk or Angela Green at agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

Young Fabian Schools Project

Nisha Tailor, Schools Project Officer on the Young Fabian executive, explains how Young Fabians can get involved.

The Young Fabians have recently re-launched the Schools Project, which aims to raise political awareness and activity among young people.

Recent surveys suggest that young people are more interested than ever in 'political' issues. For example, research undertaken for The Electoral Commission last year suggests that 81% of 16 to 20-year-olds feel strongly about issues like crime and education. Yet the media – and politicians – regularly bemoan youth apathy, particularly in regards to young people's propensity not to vote. Regardless of low voter turnout, what seems clear is that young people remain interested in politics, even they we don't appear engaged in it.

However the Young Fabian Schools Project is all about engaging young people in citizenship and politics, and making politics relevant exciting and interesting to the public. Challenging the assumption that politics is just about old men in grey suits falling asleep on green sofas! We want young people to feel that politics matters, and understand that it will impact upon nearly every aspect of their lives from the music they download, the subjects they learn at school to the taxes they pay. But recent studies show that young people have a limited understanding of how politics works, with only 9 per cent knowing what their local council does and 35 per cent feeling unsure about what their rights are.

Citizenship education in schools is one of the measures taken to tackle this 'youth disengagement'. This is where we, the Young Fabians come in, the Schools Project arranges for Young Fabian volunteers to visit schools – whether their own old schools, ones in their area or schools further afield – to take part in citizenship lessons, workshops or assemblies. The aim is simple, to enable enthusiastic Young Fabians the chance to help make politics and citizenship seem more relevant and interesting to young people.

The Schools Project activities focus primarily on secondary schools, but this does not mean that work with other age groups is not possible. All of our volunteers are supervised by teachers, so don't worry we won't abandon you to a class of curious 13 year olds!

The range of topics that volunteers can cover is extremely broad (see lesson plans), and ultimately depends on the ideas of its volunteers and teachers. Previous volunteers have conducted assemblies on the media and politics, workshops on working in Westminster, participated in Local Democracy week and organised debates. The project also has a number of lesson plans such as 'Making your own political party', the tsunami, constitutional reform, "who runs London?" and bullying. The key point is to get students thinking and engaged in civic and political debate, to help them appreciate that politics is relevant and can make a difference!

Why get involved?

The Schools Project gives Young Fabians an excellent opportunity to become active in the organisation. As a volunteer, you will meet a range of people – not just the students (who often have challenging and exciting views) but also fellow volunteers and teachers. We are planning to run training sessions for Schools Project volunteers in the near future.

The Schools Project also gives Young Fabians who feel strongly about political engagement the opportunity to test their own views, and to do something practical to get other young people excited about and debating a range of issues.

The Schools Project is a great chance to go back to your old school – and perhaps teach issues that you wish you had had the chance to consider and discuss at a younger age!

Also, for those with an interest in teaching or public speaking – and those who want to build on their communication skills – the Schools Project provides valuable real-life experience.

For more information or to add your name to the list of volunteers, please contact:

**Nisha Tailor, Schools Project Officer, at ntailor@youngfabians.org.uk
Kathryn White, Schools Project Assistant, at kwhite@youngfabians.org.uk**

Sample lesson plans for the Young Fabian Schools Project

The two lesson plans below are typical of the types of lesson taught by the Schools Project volunteers. The first lesson is aimed at pupils in their final school years and the second lesson is aimed at pupils at Key Stage 3.

Lesson plan 1:

Natural Disasters

Brainstorm as a whole class on what natural disasters have occurred in the past 2 years

Pick 2 or 3 of these natural disasters and ask students, in pairs, to discuss:

- Who are the most affected?
- What the response has been?
- What may be the immediate problems as well as the long term problems?
- How has it affected people in the UK?

Bring the group back together to discuss their ideas. You may lead discussion on some of the following:

1. Natural disasters and the global community:

- Should people in 'safer' parts of the world help others whose home is in an area of the globe that is unstable / vulnerable?
- If some of the places affected had not been tourist resorts (and some of the people British) would we have been so concerned? Is that OK?
- How has the outpouring of support made us feel?

2. Government vs Charity discussion

3. Prevention of Disasters:

- Why do you think it took so long to develop an early-warning system in the area even though people know that such tsunamis happen about every 50 years?
- Would your pupils support more effort into protecting the vulnerability of poorer nations?
- In what ways might this happen – through charity, government or both.

Are you a teacher or governor? Can we help at your school?

We are keen to talk to teachers and governors from a range of different schools who may be interested in our Schools Project.

If you would like us to come to your school then please contact either Nisha or Kathryn.

Lesson plan 2:

Age Discrimination

The aim of the lesson would be to:

- Explore what is meant by "stereotype"
- Consider the effects of the way in which older and younger people are portrayed in the media
- Examine how the Government, and other organisations, are attempting to tackle age discrimination

1. In pairs, ask pupils to draw and label a sketch of a typical boy or a typical girl. They should include the clothes they might wear, the colours of their clothes, their likes, dislikes and their characteristics. Typical ideas might include boys wear blue, girls like pink, boys are tough etc.

2. Ask pupils to share their ideas and record them on the board. Ask pupils what the problem might be with their sketches and descriptions. Will it apply to every single boy or every single girl?

3. Ask pupils if they can think of any situations or occasions when a stereotype could be useful. Suggestions could include manufacturers making products for a specific market.

4. Ask what problems can occur if people use stereotypes. Suggestions could include, employers not considering certain people for jobs. Boys and girls being treated differently. Broaden the discussion into "discrimination" – what it means, what our legal system's approach is.

5. Pick one topic to discuss. For example: What kind of ideas do pupils have about older people? What are they like? What can they do? What can't they do? Are all old people frail and helpless?

6. Ask pupils to brainstorm any inspirational older people they can think of. These could include friends, family, teachers and famous, well known people.

Liam Byrne MP

Current Anticipations Editor, Emma Carr, interviews Liam Byrne, health minister and former Anticipations Editor

Liam Byrne was elected MP for Hodge Hill in a by-election in July 2004. He was given his first ministerial role, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department of Health less than a year later in May 2005.

As I walk into Liam Byrne's Department of Health office I am surprised by the size of it. The near end of the huge rectangular room contains a large desk and chair. The desk is covered, albeit fairly neatly, with piles of papers and folders, as well as the remnants of a bowl of fruit (it's nice to see health ministers take this five-a-day thing seriously).

The rest of the room is taken up by a large table on one side and a big, comfy sofa and two chairs on the other. The sofa and chairs are red, by the way; Labour red. The walls are bare except for one small picture and a large white board at the far end which is covered with some kind of time table.

Liam notices me looking around and explains that most of the other offices have Government art all over the walls. He doesn't say whether the empty walls are his choice or just the luck of the draw. I suspect he just hasn't got round to asking for any pictures.

And so we sit down on the very comfy chair. I explain that this is to be the first podcast Anticipations interview and ask him if he's excited. He laughs and says that he is. I turn on the Dictaphone and the interview begins.

Liam talks first of all about his role as a constituency MP since the by-election victory in 2004. That election campaign focussed, fairly controversially, on anti-social behaviour. I ask him what improvements he has made in tackling anti-social behaviour in his constituency. Liam says that a big part of his role as a constituency MP "is acting as a voice for the community". He and his team, he says, had to "work very hard with the council to get them to take a tougher line on enforcement".

He goes on to talk about a series of constituency residents meetings that they held all over the constituency for nine or ten months soon after his election, inviting over 30,000 people.

"And then we had monthly summits with the council and the police where we went through the individual problems and we demanded action was taken on behalf of local residents.



And, in the space of about six or seven months, action on anti-social behaviour went up 300 per cent. So we were able to deliver a lot."

They followed this up by getting more resources out into neighbourhood policing.

"But we've also had to recognise," he goes on to say, "that enforcement's only one side of the coin. The flip side of the coin is more investment in things for young people to do."

At this point Liam gets even more excited while he talks about youth consultations where he has gone into schools to discuss with young people what their priorities are. "And you know what's amazing? In every school, people's top priority for new services is learning a new skill." Liam goes on to discuss the ambition and the community spirit that is he sees in the young people in Hodge Hill.

After waxing lyrical about the benefits of policies to tackle anti-social behaviour, Liam handles the question of whether those same policies are restricting people's freedom and impinging on civil liberties fairly smoothly. He quotes both Tony Blair – "balancing rights and responsibilities" – and Oliver Wendell Holmes – "those wise constraints which make us free".

"Sometimes you have to accept restrictions on certain types of behaviour," says Liam in a very philosophical tone of voice, "in order that a community as a whole can live a life that is

more free and more meaningful." I merely nod and agree, unwilling – or unable – to interrupt the philosophical flow as he talks about "the very real constraints that come from people living in a climate of fear".

At this point someone brings in a teapot, a cup and a saucer (you'll be able to hear it on the podcast) and I am jolted back into action. As much as I hate to move the Hodge Hill MP from this conversation he discusses with such true conviction, I steer the topic to his ministerial brief.

Liam Byrne is a junior minister for the Department for Health and his brief is long and wide ranging: from social care regulation and provision to services for people with disabilities; from children's health to services for older people. The list goes on.

Asked which of these responsibilities he sees as the greatest challenge facing him in the coming year he replies, almost without hesitation, "raising standards of care, particularly for older people."

"I said when I came in as a minister... I laid out a set of priorities which were about making sure older people were able to live independently for as long as possible, making sure dignity for life was a reality." But I was also very clear that we were going to deliver that within the NHS by making sure there was a renewed alliance between local government and the NHS and by investing in a workforce that was proud and professional."

Liam Byrne describes how important it is to treat people like human being and about the next set of reforms in the NHS are about empowering people.

After discussing services for older people we move on through some of his other ministerial responsibilities before moving onto the NHS as a whole. No discussion with a health minister is complete without a question about the financial crisis that NHS is apparently facing.

When quizzed about NHS finances and trust deficits Liam says "It's easy to see how the media has got on a bandwagon a little bit. The truth is that NHS spending in your average PCT (Primary Care Trust) is going up by 20 percent over the next couple of years, so NHS spending rises by about 16 billion to 92 billion. That presents local communities with an extraordinary new range of choices that they never had before. So we have to bear in mind that there are huge increases in health spending over the next two years and

we also have to remember that 75 percent of NHS trusts bring their books in on balance. Now when you think it's a budget the size of 92 billion, that's like landing a jumbo jet on a postage stamp and three quarters of managers do it well. We need to work on other the 25 percent who don't."

The questioning goes on to cover the use of the private sector in the NHS and the importance of patient choice – Liam says that "Choice is important because it's not popular, it's overwhelmingly popular."

Next I ask the Labour loyalist about his views on Cameron's 'new Tories'. "Our job," he replies, "is to expose Cameron's lack of substance. He's changing a lot of his positions very quickly and sometime it's hard even in the course of a day to keep track." He compares Cameron to George W., who he says was elected in as a "compassionate Conservative".

Very on message there then, Mr Byrne, especially given the Labour Party's recent 'Cameron the chameleon' political broadcasts.

But how about the Labour leadership? How will the next change of Labour leadership affect the Party? And Liam is almost instantaneous in his support of Gordon Brown as the next Labour leader.

And I will finish with Lam Byrne's description of what the Labour party stands for:

"We need to carry on setting out that we are a reformist party that believes in creating opportunity for all. We have to show that we're on the side of ordinary working people, the communities that they live in. But the moment we stop reforming, that will be when we're politically finished. Change is never done."

Young Fabian Podcast

To hear the full Liam Byrne interview, including what he thinks of the Young Fabians – what we do well and what we need to work on – you can download the first ever Anticipation podcast interview on the Anticipations page of Young Fabian website – www.youngfabians.org.uk

Cameron the Chameleon

Jessica Asato asks whether Cameron's shift towards the political centre to be believed? And, if so, where does that leave Labour?

Who said:

"There'll be no going back to the 11-plus"

"The minimum wage has been a success"

"You have got to believe in devolution heart and soul"?

Well, if you'd been paying attention to Labour's 'Dave the Chameleon' ads during the council elections, you'd have known straight away that it was the rainbow-coloured leader of the opposition. The man who's pledged to end the Punch & Judy of question time, who's installed a wind turbine on his roof, and who uses the words 'social justice' as he strolls around council estates. For goodness sake, the man's even signed up to Labour's pledge to end child poverty by 2020 (well, almost).

As Labour people we might be forgiven for feeling a bit at a loss now we can't argue on the doorstep that the Tories are opposed to the minimum wage, abolition of section 28, Sure Start, and further investment in the NHS.

There is something comforting in having a defined enemy to measure your own political credentials against - and to help you keep your faith in a Government which sometimes does things you disagree with. Once the true blue of Tory thinking gets muddied however, there's a tendency to seek out an alternative source of dissatisfaction and disappointment.

The Government itself seems the prime candidate for a significant proportion of the Left - and it was ever thus. Opposition to the war, top-up fees, trust schools, and the greater use of the private sector in the NHS have become badges of honour for some people on the Left to wear with pride as if a reminder that their conscience is in tact.

Some people seem to think that the best way to 'renew' the Labour Party is through devising 'alternative' manifestos for government and calling for Blair's resignation.

Their argument is that the Conservative's move towards the centre-ground (if it is indeed a true shift) enables the Labour Party to slide leftwards because we no longer need to kow-tow to middle England and that section of voters which some activists have never particularly enjoyed courting. Instead of

holding fast on the programme which elected Labour for a third term in 2005, there are siren calls to reclaim a sense of ideology and widen the gap between the two main parties so that voters can tell what the difference is.

While I agree that it is imperative that Labour strives to renew both its ideas and the way it operates as a party, an ill-determined shift to the left is not the answer to winning the next election. For one thing, Cameron's compassionate conversion is good tactics, but that's all it is.

The difference with Blair is that he actually believes in the need to keep people out of poverty pay, increase access to public services for the poorest, and lift people out of a cycle of worklessness. Cameron is simply adjusting to the new political consensus. Pragmatism is the hallmark of Toryism.

But once Cameron has reinvented the image of the Conservatives, he will have a hard time keeping his party committed to centre-ground policies. Particularly when Tory strategists see that their slip in the polls before the locals was potentially due to an increase in the BNP vote Cameron won't fight the next election on the environment, trade justice and poverty, he will respond to the public's priorities which remain the stability of the economy, public services and the combined fear of crime and immigration.

Labour's response to this must not be to abandon the goal of trying to create more efficient and productive public services or keeping Britain globally competitive. The continuous investment in public services and economic growth Britain has experienced will become increasingly difficult to sustain in the next three years, and diverting our attention to other areas will give the Tories an open goal.

This is not to say that we shouldn't seek a renewed sense of purpose based on ambitions of increasing equality and notions of the good

Illustration by Matthew Thomas



Little Davie Cameron; painting the town blue

life. It is more that we cannot achieve greater equality without first-class public services working to the advantage of the least well-off or an economy creating wealth and jobs.

The struggle to close the gender pay-gap, for example, requires more flexible part-time jobs, not less, with an increasing tax-take to pay for Sure Start and tax credits so that women have a genuine choice between caring for their children and taking work. Raising the educational achievement for our most disadvantaged children will require further cash transfers as well as greater emphasis on personalised learning. But Labour will be unable to achieve these goals without the continuing support of middle England and their taxes.

It is also imperative that the Labour Party reinvents itself as a political organisation. The natural dissatisfaction that

accompanies an incumbent government, the growth of single issue campaigns, and the continued decline of party allegiance, requires Labour to think imaginatively about the future of campaigning and organisation.

It is a great shame that there wasn't a concrete change after the Labour Party's 1999 21st Century Party consultation which argued for a restructuring of constituencies to focus more on engaging with local communities and campaigning. It's time to get away from defunct branches and tumultuous GC's to focus on what Labour people can achieve on school governing bodies, in tenants' associations, and in co-operation with neighbourhood policing teams. Once Cameron has stopped his flip-flopping the real battle will begin and Labour must be organised to meet the challenge.

Fight for your right to Party

Craig Jones explains why the recent Liberal Democrat leadership contest was hardly worth the bother.

I'm going to be controversial here and say that the outcome of the Liberal Democrat leadership election mattered not one bit: Sir Menzies Campbell is now the Liberal Democrat leader, but it would have made no difference at all which of the three pretenders had walked away with the crown. The party they all stood to inherit is a doomed one. The fate of the Liberal Democrats was sealed on its nightmare day: May 5th 2005. It is a fate that has been borne out over the days since.

Election Day, 5th May 2005: sixty-two seats won, up ten on the day before, secured on a twenty-three per cent share of the vote. Top Liberals hailed it as a triumph but scratch the surface and you can almost feel the cracks in their smiles. Whilst pre-election predictions revealed estimated tallies of up to and over one hundred seats, in a contest where Honest Charlie was pit against Nightmare-on-Elm-Street Howard and the Iraq-worn Blair, the Liberals still hit their glass ceiling at a speed of knots. Their advocacy of populist causes such as the anti-Iraq war movement and resistance to tuition fees impressed the public but had little impact in the only place it matters: the ballot box.

So why did 'The Real Alternative' end up feeling so much like the product of a wild imagination? Mainly for the age-old reason that support was spread too thinly across too many constituencies to win seats in large numbers and this prevented any much talked-about breakthrough. The reasons for this: Firstly, the party is forced to appear virtually schizophrenic on policy, offering different things to different people depending on whether the competition is red or blue. Secondly, they remain just an after-thought protest vote when electors are temporarily loosened from their favoured party.

But, withhold your sympathy, the problems of the party were not just natural - many were self-made. The days since May bore this out. Whilst the PM's popularity was at a new low and the Tories were leaderless, Charles Kennedy had an historic opportunity to seize the headlines and set the agenda. One that was ultimately wasted. The silence from the Liberal Democrats, when they had their best chance to dominate the political airwaves since their creation, was deafening. And now that chance has gone.

The election of the slick and attractive David Cameron will tempt back disappointed Tories from the Liberals in the key South Western seats. Meanwhile, the promise of the new Tory leader to turn his party into a potential election-winner for the first time in 15 years will harden Labour support in traditionally loyal, but recently Liberal, areas such as Newcastle and Cardiff. Recent scandals involving alcoholism, prostitution and the manner in which they removed their former leader denies them even that one brand-differentiator they have managed to create for themselves: that of being the 'nice party'.

Whether they swing to the left or skulk to the right, the Liberals will bleed seats to either Mr Cameron or Mr Brown. They had a historic chance to turn discontent with the two main parties into a breakthrough in May, then a further opportunity to seize the agenda when it was hanging in mid-air during the subsequent months. They blew both of those chances. The new leader of the party is now the proud bearer of a poisoned chalice, cracked down the middle.

But, my Lib Dem friends, don't let what lies ahead spoil your enjoyment of the new leader; after all it may be only Liberal Democrat winner for a good while to come.



'Honestly, it was this big.' Ming the Merciless smiles as he describes the knife in poor Charlie's back

Is there anybody out there?

Sara T'Rula wonders why David Chaytor's electoral reform private member's bill went by almost unnoticed

Given the proclivity of political cynics to decry the present state of affairs – turnout at the last election was only marginally better than in 2001, the constitutional reform programme is apparently gridlocked, and there remains a lack of active citizenship – it is strangely surprising that David Chaytor's EDM 1028 and the accompanying private member's bill received such scant media attention or discussion. The Electoral Choice Bill would have enabled the public to force a referendum on the choice of electoral system provided a petition to that effect had been signed by at least 5% of the relevant electorate.



Cherie smiles knowingly as she tucks her stolen pen into her handbag

The potential effects of such legislation, were it enacted, are manifold. Not only would it take the decision-making responsibility out of the hand of politicians who clearly have a vested interest in the issue, but it would also push reform-minded organisations to win the public debate rather than focussing their efforts, as at present, on political elites. Given the arguments posited by reformers under the banner of democracy, letting the people decide how they should elect their representatives seems rather, well, democratic. But changing the gatekeeper to electoral reform could have further positive ramifications.

The 'apathetic landslides' of 2001 and 2005 and their causes have been extensively analysed and debated, with numerous theories to explain the phenomena. Nevertheless, the argument that the country feels that the public-political relationship has become increasingly frayed, if not severed, is pretty hard to refute even if it is dubiously founded. The popular perception of politicians is that they do not listen sufficiently to public sentiment and there is a distinct resentment of an elite who the public can only provide a check upon once every five years. This is something that Chaytor's bill could have reversed, or at least assuaged. The bill is confined to the issue of electoral reform, but would have set a precedent for further moves into the concept of participatory democracy.

Active citizenship and participatory democracy are not simply compatible, they seem wholly concomitant with each other. But while the former is often emphasised, the latter tends to be neglected. Yet enabling citizens to play an active role in deciding how they are governed could be integral to inspiring them to better understand the institutions that will, even in the most participatory democracy, be the final arbiters of power. It would strengthen the link between citizen and state clearly attributing a degree of responsibility upon the citizen for the people they elect and the system they allow to govern them.

Chaytor's bill was of course confined to enabling citizens to change their electoral system, however, there is little reason why it could not be extended to allow the public to actively participate in the decision-making process on other issues, such as devolution, reform of the Lords, or even aspects of social policy. The only danger comes from its capacity to place populism above politics, but this could surely be mitigated against.

Enabling citizens to be political actors beyond the ballot box is not a new idea, of course. Other countries, such as Canada, have experimented with citizen's juries. In Britain, there has been some scope for citizens to take an active role in deciding how their lives are shaped. For example, parents can vote to have a school removed from the control of local authorities.

It is also misleading to claim that the idea of participatory democracy has not been considered at all when several commissions have referred to the possibility of extending the citizen's role in politics. But for those concerned with an enabling state, active citizenship, and a more transparent politics capable of transgressing party lines, it appears that last year we missed an opportunity to progress.

For further information, email Sara at sara.trula@pembroke.oxford.ac.uk

Yvette Cooper MP

Kathryn White meets the high-profile MP for Pontefract and Castleford and Minister for Housing and Planning to discuss policy – and strategy – in the third term.



M s Cooper, in last year's lecture for the Fabian Society on 'Life Chances', you outlined your priorities for housing policy in this third term. What progress has been made since?

It is interesting that we have seen a period in which income inequality has started to level off, in which child poverty has substantially dropped as a result of a lot of the changes we've made – with tax credits and the minimum wage – but in which we are still seeing rising wealth inequality. The housing market is crucial to that.

Since 1997, the UK has had one million more home-owners and big improvements because of housing market stability, economic stability and low mortgage rates. But we still face a fundamental problem in that we are not building enough houses. Over the last thirty years, the UK has seen a large increase in the number of households, yet a 50% drop in the level of new housing that is built. That discrepancy is unsustainable.

But what about the environmental impact of such large-scale building programmes?

I believe we need to face up to this challenge: we have to build more homes for the next generation. It's unthinkable that at a time when the majority of people say they want to be able to buy their own home, fewer and fewer will be able to do so, and that is something we as a Government have to

address now. Otherwise, we are accepting widening wealth inequality, because only those who are helped – by loans, by family or by other personal means – will be able to afford to buy. That's simply not fair.

We are building increasing amounts on brown-field sites. We also have to recognise that even the most ambitious house-building plans that have been put forward still affect less than 1% of land in the east and south-east. The impact is very limited.

Youth homelessness remains a concern, and is often a 'hidden' problem. Certain young people may be exceptionally vulnerable. How can the Government work to protect these people?

We have done a lot already on the most severe aspects of the problem – for example according to street counts, rough sleeping has seen a dramatic decline since 1997. But it remains true that there are a lot of other people who maybe do not face such severe problems, but still struggle. We are aiming to increase affordable housing across the board, but that takes time.

There is also a growing emphasis on homelessness prevention, and a number of services are being supported by the Government, and led by local authorities, to tackle the root of the problem. One example is the introduction of rent deposit schemes, which help vulnerable people who want to rent privately take those first steps that would otherwise not be possible. By such measures, we can prevent many people becoming homeless in the first place.

SureStart (for 0-5 year olds) is a major policy you have defended which is often attacked by those on the opposite benches: what do you think are the biggest challenges facing SureStart in the long-term?

In the end, parents know that SureStart is great. It involves the whole family, not just the child but the parents as well. Ultimately, people who knock it underestimate the amount of support there is for it from parents. Parents know what difference it is making to their lives, and to their kids.

In the end, the impact of SureStart will be very long-term: it is not going to be felt in the next 12 months, in the next few years. If you look at the impact of similar programmes elsewhere – such as the HeadStart programme in the States – the impact is very long-term, but it does make a big difference. It also makes a difference in the short-term in terms of the way people feel about their lives and their relationships with their children.

The Government promised a SureStart in every neighbourhood: what happened to that objective?

We need to keep the focus on the most disadvantaged areas but there is also a recognition of the need for support much more widely. The plan now is to arrange support for all families through schools and child centres. The Government want to aim to have children's centres and other forms of support more widely available.

What is the Government doing to form bridges between different departments in order to help children who once benefited from SureStart but are now too old for it?

We are developing policies around the idea of extended-schools – not an extended school day, but a whole package linking in with school nurses, health visitors and other services.

But it is important to work out where we are going to make the biggest difference. Research shows that if we can find that support for the under-5s, that is where we are going to make the biggest difference. We still have a lot of work to extend that to more families.

Is the Government's commitment to end child poverty within a generation realistic?

It is hugely ambitious, but it is the right thing to do: it has to be our aim. And we have to recognise that it cannot be done by financial support alone. The parents of children who we want to keep out of poverty in 20 years time are themselves children now. So it is actually a matter of thinking about what we want to do now to support tomorrow's parents, to keep whole families out of poverty.

More women MPs: does it really matter?

Yes, it makes a big difference. More women in Parliament changes the way things happen. It changes the way decisions are made, on a very human and practical level.

What should the Government – as distinct from the political parties – be doing to

encourage more women to enter political office?

One of the biggest ways in which Parliament and the Government can make a difference is on the issue of maternity leave. Women must be able to combine work and family, and the Government must help them to make this happen. We are still extending maternity – and paternity – leave.

A second major issue is women and pensions, and that is something the Government is keen to tackle. I believe that it is women MPs who will put these sorts of issues high on the agenda and encourage discussions to improve matters for the future.

What has Labour done badly since coming to power?

Well, that's a really difficult question. I suppose there was a period early on where we maybe could have taken a longer-term view. There were a huge number of things we wanted to do, but perhaps we could have thought more about our long-term aims and challenges. Facing the immediate challenges on questions such as childcare means that only now are we establishing programmes that will support ambitious policies for years to come. It takes time to put that in place.

There are always difficult challenges for a party in Government to renew itself – not to end up in opposition, and go through the historical cycle. The challenge for us now is continuous renewal – new ideas, being able to keep in touch with the things that need changing. The aim must be to renew, without losing power.

With the advent of Cameron's Tories, is a 'progressive consensus' now entrenched in our political culture, or are his centre-leaning policies merely a gimmick?

We have not seen any substance yet in order to know. They have a good PR campaign, but it means that there are very mixed signals from the Conservative Party at the moment. For example, on the one hand we get David Cameron saying something that initially sounds progressive, and then we find that he's asked John Redwood to run the commission on their future economic policy! Remember, we are still only 9 months after they lost the General Election with a very right-wing programme which was largely drawn-up by David Cameron. The jury is still out on where they are – they are still Conservative after all.

The Rehabilitation of Wilson

Nick Bowes explains why thirty years is a very long time in British politics, especially for Harold Wilson

Thirty years ago, on 13th March, 1976, Harold Wilson announced to a stunned nation his intention to resign as Prime Minister. After winning four out of five General Elections, 13 years as leader of the Labour Party with eight in Downing Street – Harold Wilson was departing the biggest job in British politics.

However, history has been unkind to Wilson. He deserves to be treated better. To many on the left, Wilson is unlikely to ever be a political idol. Indeed, many party members questioned his ideological roots, and whether he was really a 'Labour man' at all, with Dennis Healey accusing Wilson of having "neither political principle nor sense of direction". Much of this criticism is unfair. He changed Britain for the better. His ability to hold together a fractious party, and his personal skill and qualities as a politician merit much greater recognition – after all, this was the man responsible for the immortal phrase 'the Labour Party is a moral crusade or it is nothing'.

Path to Downing Street

Wilson was a political giant of his time, dominating British politics for the best part of three decades. Characterised by his Yorkshire accent and trademark Gannex raincoat, he liked nothing better than dousing his food with HP sauce, smoking his pipe, holidaying in the Scilly Isles and demonstrating that he was a man of the people, with his finger on the pulse of the British public.

He managed to mix his down-to-earth persona with a forward-looking, ambitious vision for a modern Britain that tapped firmly into the nation's psyche. With the Beatles, mini-skirts and swinging London, Wilson epitomised the modernity of Britain in the 1960s, enhanced by his exploitation of television through the use of the political sound bite. All this was seen as a long way

from the Tory aristocracy that had occupied Downing Street since the early 1950s.

Previously a brilliant Oxford don and a war time civil servant, he entered Parliament in 1945, and represented various incarnations of his Merseyside constituency until 1983. His career quickly blossomed, and he became the

youngest Cabinet minister of the twentieth century just two years later. Formerly a staunch Bevanite – resigning with Bevan from Attlee's cabinet in protest at the introduction of NHS charges – he travelled a political journey in the 1950s towards the centre of the Party. By the time of Gaitskell's untimely death in 1963, Wilson's stature was such that he was in pole position to assume control of the Labour Party. Wilson quickly galvanised the party in opposition, helping propel them to power after 13 frustrating years in the wilderness.



Good Old Mr Wilson

Wilson's Governments were responsible for legislation that transformed the social fabric of the nation. Divorce and obscene publications laws were relaxed, homosexuality and abortion were legalised, the death penalty was abolished, and acts on equal pay and rights at work heralded a more permissive and liberal society. Equally, the rolling back of the grammar school system and the vast expansion in higher education – including the establishment of the radical Open University – widened access to university life previously beyond the reach of most parts of society.

He was also one of the first politicians to recognise the importance of technology and science to the nation's economic growth. In this respect, Wilson was way ahead of his time. Concepts outlined in Wilson's 'white heat of technology' speech in 1963 are still relevant today. Yet, forty years later, we are still striving to create the dynamic innovation-led economy espoused by Wilson.

On the international stage, Wilson's ability to keep the UK out of direct military involvement in Vietnam was a real achievement for many on the left. He did this without fatally damaging the special relationship with Washington. But for others, he was pilloried for his tacit support for what many saw as an imperialistic military campaign.

One of Wilson's masterstrokes remains the way he avoided the disintegration of the Labour Party over the divisive issue of Europe. On his return to Downing Street in 1974, with the Labour Party grass roots and some senior figures having swung firmly hostile towards the Common Market, many major Cabinet members were still ferociously in favour of membership. His bold waiving of the cardinal rule of cabinet collective responsibility was a brilliant tactical political move, allowing ministerial dissenters to express their personal views. While he steered the nation to a resounding yes vote in the referendum, he simultaneously prevented total cabinet anarchy and avoided the likely collapse of the Government over this thorny issue.

A Devalued Premiership?

Most British governments in the post-war period operated against a backdrop of general economic crises and Wilson's period in office was no different. Looking back, the decision to not devalue the Pound immediately upon assuming power in 1964 – from a position of political strength – was a tragic error of judgement. For the next three years, Wilson's efforts at revitalising and modernising the economy were buffeted by economic crises and austerity drives, in order to bolster a flailing exchange rate against rising flows of international speculation.

Eventually, the power of the markets won through, and devaluation was foisted on the Government in a major humiliation for Wilson. With so much political capital invested in defending Sterling, the seeds of Wilson's defeat at the ballot box in June 1970 were sown in the torment of devaluation. Hamstrung by his infamous 'pound in your pocket' broadcast to the nation, Wilson's credibility evaporated overnight.

Foreseeing the looming disaster from an increasingly militant trade union movement, Wilson tried reform. But 1969's In Place of Strife legislation failed, stumbling upon firm resistance from a coalition of the unions and a Callaghan-led cabal of senior Cabinet colleagues. It was a crushing defeat, and one which would come back to fatally haunt Callaghan and the Labour Government ten years later.

Wilson's style of government came in for criticism – particularly in this first stint as Prime Minister. He was accused of being too dictatorial, and slightly Machiavellian in the way he so clearly enjoyed scheming. The length and frequency of his cabinet meetings was legendary. His reluctance to devolve decision making power was slated by his exasperated and exhausted team of ministers. His 'kitchen sink Cabinet' of Marcia Falkender, Joe Haines, Gerald Kaufman, and, later, Bernard Donohue, bred mistrust amongst his real Cabinet with its supposed secretive decision making and almost mystical hold over Wilson.

A Surprise Defeat

Yet, Wilson was the great survivor. After Wilson's six long years of economic and industrial toil, most pundits by 1970 viewed a third election victory for Labour as inevitable, but were surprised by the defeat at the hands of Edward Heath and Selsdon Man. Heath in fact inherited the best economic conditions of any incoming Prime Minister of the Twentieth Century. Legend talks of the impact a rogue set of trade figures had on the electorate – but the reality was that the Labour vote stayed firmly at home on election day, disgruntled by extensive austerity, pay freezes and perceived inaction in the face of excessive union strength.

Wilson's Return

Wilson himself was surprised to return to No 10 in 1974, forming a minority Government. He didn't expect to win – the opposite to 1970 when he and most commentators didn't expect defeat. Entering Downing Street with the country in the throws of a major economic crisis, Wilson had lost the energetic enthusiasm for government he had in 1964. But learning from his 1964-70 premiership, he decided to govern as a 'deep lying centre-half' – allowing his experienced Cabinet to take much more responsibility for their ministries than before.

And what a Cabinet it was. Wilson's 1974-76 Cabinet included Jim Callaghan, Denis Healey, Tony Crosland, Barbara Castle, Tony Benn, Michael Foot, Roy Jenkins and Shirley Williams – all heavyweights of the world of politics in that or any generation. In a second election later in 1974, he scraped a narrow workable majority, giving Wilson slightly more political room for manoeuvre.

The Whiff of Intrigue and the Smell of Lavender

Part of Wilson's mystique was the whiff of intrigue that surrounded his period in office. It was the stuff of legend and the newspapers still love it to this day.

One of the most extravagant tales involved an alleged right-wing conspiracy of the military, upper classes and captains of British industry, with MI5 actively undermining his regime by cultivating political instability. Peter Wright's infamous Spycatcher fuelled the rumour mill, and tales from those close to the centre during this time confirm that Wilson himself questioned the role of suspicious subversive forces, but nothing has ever been proved.

However, nothing captured this intrigue more than the whispers surrounding Wilson's shock departure, announced close to his 60th birthday. Many thought there was something more sinister to the decision than Wilson was prepared to publicly admit. It was rumoured there was some form of blackmail involved, perhaps orchestrated by the secret service. Some question whether he was caught in a financial scandal, others alleging Wilson was a Soviet agent, while some alluded to his relationship with his political secretary, Marcia Falkender, being more than just professional. Thirty years later, rumours are still circulating.

Falkender's fingerprints were also alleged to be all over Wilson's resignation honours list – colloquially known as the 'Lavender List'. Recently dramatised by BBC4, the shady background and dubious character of some of those receiving honours has hung like a dark cloud over Wilson's reputation to this day.

Departing the Stage with Dignity

But when it comes to his resignation, the fact of the matter was that Wilson was almost certainly tired and had ringed his sixtieth birthday as a suitable time to depart the political stage. His energies were sapped after the draining years of leadership and some suggest he may also have begun to realise that his legendary mental prowess was waning, pointing towards his declining health during later years.

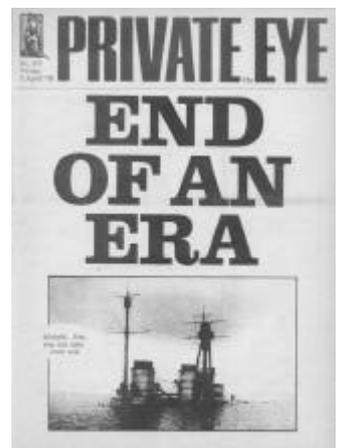
But he went on his own terms, and with dignity and remains to this day the only Prime Minister for over a century to voluntarily relinquish the biggest job in British politics.

Wilson continued on the backbenches, retiring as an MP in 1983, before moving on to the Lords. He was seen little in public after 1985 due to the tragic advance of Alzheimer's and he died aged 79 in 1995 with limited fanfare. He is buried in his beloved Isles of Scilly.

From Unity Man to Uncle Jim

It is certainly the case that Wilson was critical to holding the Party together, following the war of the Bevanites and Gaitskillites in the 1950s. Given how quickly the Labour Party's fortunes deteriorated after his departure – failing to win another election until 1997 – this

is a strong argument. His replacement, Jim Callaghan, was faced with an increasingly hostile political landscape as the 70s progressed. In a move of satirical prophesy, Private Eye's front cover from the week of the r e s i g n a t i o n



showed a ship, slowly sinking below the surface of the sea. From the ship, Wilson is announcing "Alright, Jim, you can take over now". Whether it was already sinking and Wilson had decided to abandon ship, or whether the fatal damage to the Party was yet to come is another debate for another time.

But history teaches us valuable lessons. Blair will hand over power at some point in this Parliament, and Labour will have to undertake a leadership election, just as there was a leadership battle when Wilson resigned. If it can be done in a way that ensures a smooth transition of power in the way there was in 1976, without fracturing the party, then our chances of a fourth election victory in a row will be boosted. It would be preferable to avoid replicating Private Eye's front cover, with 'Jim' substituted by 'Gordon' and it would be good if Blair could mirror the dignity of Wilson's departure.

The Rehabilitation of Wilson

Ben Pimlott's mighty biography of Wilson tried – and, to some extent, succeeded in rehabilitating Wilson's legacy. But for someone of such stature, he surely deserves a much higher profile, and a better reputation within the Labour Party. The impact on the lives of millions of people surely warrants a worthy rehabilitation for a remarkable man, much of which was delivered against a backdrop of tiny – or even absent altogether – Parliamentary majorities, and horrific economic crises. And, quite simply, he was a kind and decent man, with a strong sense of right and wrong.

Famously, a week was a long time in politics according to Wilson. Then, three decades is certainly way too long for society and the Labour movement to realise the dues it owes to Wilson for the role he played in helping transform Britain into the modern nation it is today.

Dr Nick Bowes is a Young Fabian, a Tooting Labour Party member and a fan of Harold Wilson

The School Ties That Bind

Oli de Botton tells us there is no greater basis for British identity and inclusivity than a commonly shared curriculum

We should all be more British now. So says our next Prime Minister. British identity should be defined positively by the institutions we love and the experiences we share. The NHS, the Queen, watching England win the world cup – and perhaps – our common experiences in the classroom. It is an often quoted figure that a child spends fifty one minutes out of every hour outside school. That may be true but it does mean that for nine minutes of every hour, children around the country are doing exactly the same thing. Aside from sleeping, no activity expresses greater commonality and a sense of collective identity than going school.

Indeed, when you meet someone in the pub you are able to plot them on a mutual educational compass. 'I left school in 88', 'oh you were in my brother's year'. 'Do you remember learning in science that if you can't roll your tongue it is because of your genes?' 'Yes and in history about Hitler invading the Rhine?' These conversations are ubiquitous. Hate them or love them, the national curriculum and comprehensive schools have provided a frame for conversation between virtually everyone in the country. However, this may be changing. As schools begin to fragment and become independent, it won't surprise anyone if society follows suit. A conversation in future might run more like this. 'Do you remember how we studied our baccalaureate online without a real teacher?' 'No, we were too interested in studying our school's specialism of performing arts.' If national institutions foster national identities, the disconnectedness of schools could lead to the disconnectedness of people.

You can see how this works in the classroom too. In my Year 10 group there are over eleven different ethnicities, at least twelve languages spoken and a huge array of different personal identities. There is some bad behaviour, there is some underachievement but there is little or no overt racism and degradation of difference. And crucially for this new British agenda, there may even be a positive sense of shared identity. Everyone knows that Steve is hyper on Friday period 6 and everyone understands that Mr Smith, the LSA, is there to help Derick – and everyone accepts these things. Difference is accepted (and expected) because we are all in it together, because we are all sharing the same experience. Politicians talk of a Britishness that binds

people together from different backgrounds. Perhaps there is no greater breeding ground for such an ideal than a comprehensive school and an inclusive classroom?

So what does this mean for education policy and in particular the new plans for 'independent self-governing state schools'? It means that when we talk about fair admissions and LEA overview, we are talking about more than just education. We are talking about safe-guarding a national conversation. Selection by academic ability, religion, specialist subject or parental suitability may provide choice for some at least. But because schools, like people, are interdependent, the choice for one means the absence of choice for another. Social segregation is the obvious outcome of a system which privileges disproportionately the rights of the individual. Every time a school becomes a sub-section of an atomised system, a small piece of the national common thread is frayed.

These high-minded ideals of a shared society may not matter to most. Certainly all parents and children really want is a good school. But perhaps we should judge a good school not only by its results but by its ability to culture a socially cohesive community, by its ability to re-direct those headed for exclusion, anti-social behaviour and crime (crime being the thing that acts against our shared purpose in the most destructive way.) At their best, schools provide a focus for unity and a means of binding together disparate people. Indeed, never doubt that children, without their inbuilt prejudices, have the capacity to achieve the things that adults rarely can; the real question is whether the politicians are brave enough to let them try. So if the Chancellor et al are serious about engendering a sense of self-confidence in who we are as a nation, we should seek to bring together, not split apart, the institutions that bind all of us together.

Following the Fabian New Year's conference, the topic of Britishness has been a hot topic among Young Fabians all over the country. If you would like to add to this debate, please visit the Young Fabian online discussion board at www.youngfabians.org.uk

A new British chapter?

Sara T'Rula discusses the concept of Britishness in the UK's modern society

January's Fabian New Year Conference and its topic, Britishness, was widely reported and discussed in the media. The cynic's response to the event was that it had obviously been the brainchild of a PM in waiting, and one hoping to assuage the thorny issue of the West Lothian question. But the events of 2005 surely undermine this thesis: the July bombings, the brutal murder of the black teenager, Anthony Walker, and the race riots between the Black and Asian communities in Birmingham all serve to support Michael Wills' claim that "national identity matters." Wills is not a lone voice - Trevor Phillips of the CRE argued at the conference that we need to be more explicit about what 'British' is, and Ted Cattle's Cohesion Team (who produced the report into the race riots of 2001) lamented the fact that "there has been little attempt to develop clear values which focus on what it means to be the citizen of a modern multi-racial Britain."

John Denham was the minister who oversaw the government's initial response to the 2001 riots and, recently, has been concerned with the creation of an "identity that expresses the core values, shared histories and future vision for Britain" through a genuinely inclusive British national story. Denham first (to the best of my knowledge) laid out his idea of creating a 'national story' in a lecture in 2004, but the idea is not new. Benedict Anderson described nations as 'imagined communities' held together through cultural tools, such as a shared language and shared history. Nations are also relatively new – there were no African 'nations' prior to colonialism, for example. To be part of a nation is to be part of a community a large proportion of whom one will likely never meet, yet one identifies and feels connected with one's co-nationals and feels a sense of duty and commitment to their welfare. That is why the concept of a 'British identity' is so integral to overcoming terrorism, to building cohesion within and across our diverse communities, to facing increasing globalisation, and to successfully implementing a programme of social provision.

The debate on 'Britishness' and what it means to be British, both in the New Year's Conference and in the media, shows that there is a multitude of opinions on the matter. A knee-jerk reaction response is to claim that it is unlikely a consensus can be reached, to

intimate that British identity may be something of an illusion. It certainly appears an easy target for critics of anyone who attempts to define or promote such an identity to point out that the critic's 'Britishness' is something different (and perhaps also more, or less, relevant) than that of those they are criticising. However, we should remember that our cultural and political identities are dynamic concepts and the current public debate is in its formative stages. Given the reasons for the recent salience of British identity as a political concept, its very malleability suggests it could be a concept capable of fostering a stronger sense of inclusiveness than exists at present, rather than a source for dispute. 'Britishness' seems capable of cutting across the dividing lines of class, gender, religion and ethnicity; it is, by definition, an amalgamation.

But some commentators still argue that we cannot have a coherent concept of Britishness without making it one of such generalisations as to render it redundant, while others seem to reject outright that they are British at all. In this atmosphere, even the semantics take on an often overlooked importance. There are many who reject the idea of a 'British nation' because it is perceived as competing with other nationalisms (e.g. Welsh or Scottish), as being promoted as if it is supposed to supersede these other nationalisms. I don't think that we can have a 'British national story' in this sense, precisely because there is no such thing as the British nation. There are British nations, in the plural, and within those nations various different immigrant populations. Britain is a multinational and polyethnic state, and our story must reflect that if it is to be inclusive. Denham makes it clear that this is what he is seeking, but his terminology of a 'national story' is ambiguous and, perhaps, engenders hostilities where there should be none. Moreover, Denham's terminology reflects the wider debate.

However, recognising the pluralism of Britain, brings us to the crux of this issue. Can we tell a coherent story that includes all national groups and ethnic minorities? Can such a story inspire pride in British identity? Is identity even the right term for the relationship we want to create?

There is a history which includes the national groups of Britain and many ethnic minorities:

the founding of the British state, the immigration that occurred from British colonies, and the immigration from the EU. Some aspects of this history are antagonistic, and it does not include all ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there are key events that do unite us all. The two world wars, and the public sentiment regarding events like Dunblane or the bombing in London last July clearly indicate our capacity for connectedness. This capacity will, however, need encouragement, and everyone will have to play an active role. Integration is two-way, and the question of nationalisms is too often couched in terms of the relationship between the national minorities and the majority, the English. Furthermore, this history needs to reflect some underlying values for it to really mean something to all of us.

But what kind of identity are we trying to create? It certainly cannot be an ethnic identity, and the idea of 'Britishness' being a cultural identity seems to suggest a level of homogeneity that it is improbable that we can achieve or perhaps even desire. A key element of the debate surrounding 'Britishness' is that we need, within limits, to embrace diversity. And, if 'culture' is taken broadly, it is clear that many individuals are each immersed in several distinct, overlapping cultures.

Britishness could refer to a political identity, but even here it is not without problems. Firstly, if it is about a sense of patriotism, about the citizen's relationship to the state, then it may not be sufficient to engender the kind of mutual concern and compassion that we are seeking with the Britishness debate. Secondly, a political identity seems too bound up with ideology and partisan influences. The problem with 'identity' as a term to describe an inclusive Britishness is that identity is too narrow a term. It is a logical relation of all or nothing, and doesn't seem to fit the conception of Britishness that we are seeking.

That is why Denham's idea of a British story is worth exploring. He argues that we need to work out how we want to be able to describe ourselves, what story we want to be able to tell about Britain, and how we should progress towards this goal. The question of 'identity' is both treated implicitly yet left quite open-ended. In deciding what we want the British story to be and then creating it, we will be deciding what kind of identity we want to forge.

But this might make the argument that a British identity can be defined by creating a British story appear to be circular. Surely different people will have different, conflicting

ideas of what the 'British story' should be? Doesn't this fail to progress beyond the deadlock of the debate on British identity? How inclusive do we want to be? There are many groups within Britain, and all need to be involved in the creation of a British story. But, as Ted Cattle rightly pointed out, the degree, and significance, of the differences between these groups undoubtedly varies. In order to create an inclusive story it may be necessary to treat different groups differently to give them an equal stake in our political institutions, our local communities, our British symbols; in short, our British story. Yet it may be that there are some differences that prove to be too difficult to surmount. But that is something we can never really know for certain until we attempt to find out.

This is where Denham's concept stops being circular – because it takes a long-term view and accepts that Britishness is a dynamic concept that is always evolving. As such, there is no prerogative for imposing one particular conception and ignoring others. More importantly, it is a project that everyone explicitly can have a stake in, contribute towards and benefit from. It encourages dialogue between groups in order to find out where our limits lie, but it also allows our limits to expand.



Gordon Brown addressing the Fabian New Year Conference on the Future of Britishness in January

Yeah but, no but... I'm British!

Sarah Mizra discusses Britishness as a British Muslim

Having recently attended the Fabian New Year Conference 2006, I was perplexed by the many discussions surrounding identity and more specifically to myself, being 'Muslim and British' or being 'Muslim or British' as some media undertones suggest. Not only has this topic been totally saturated, and to an extent cliché, one is made to feel in some instances that religion is the new racism.

I've been brought up as a Muslim and I must confess that I only really began to take these beliefs seriously a few years ago. At no point in my life have I seen any contradictions between the two. I queue up unnecessarily, yelled for joy when we won the Olympic bid and I drink tea as if it were on tap. Praying regularly, disagreeing with the government's stance on Foreign Policy (as do many other people) and wearing a cloth on my head does not interfere with my identity. It would cause far less controversy if I wore it as a bandanna or a Marilyn Monroe style scarf to prevent my hair blowing all over the place as I speed off into the wilderness in a convertible and it should not raise questions about my 'loyalty'.

With the rise of political Islam and to an extent, 'Urban Islamic Chic' amongst the youth most practising Muslims feel it a civic duty to participate in rhetoric that concerns world affairs. This is because we believe in the concept of 'Umma' i.e. that believers are part of a worldwide community and that the suffering of a mother who has lost a child in Afghanistan is equal to that of the loss suffered by ourselves/our loved ones. Imam Ali, son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed (and first caliph in Islam in the Shia school of thought and the fourth in the Sunni schools) famously remarked:

"If a man is not your equal in faith, he is your equal in humanity."

Nick Cohen of the New Statesman suggested in the seminar 'Global Britain: must foreign policy divide?' that matters of foreign policy should not divide us.

To imply that we should all be able to support one position on the success/failure of Iraq, the occupation of Palestine is, in my opinion, elementary. Since 9/11, 7/7 and the war on Iraq, Muslims have been forced to ask themselves where they stand politically, which have led to a sense of 'over-determination' in sociological terms for some; rightfully or

wrongfully allowing the pressure to influence decisions in relevant and irrelevant contexts.

The 'war on terror' has developed a level of political suspicion but the Muslim community in the UK needs to make some serious changes to the way that they react to political incidents. For example, displaying primitive, offensive and illegal banners in some form of retaliation for the previous day's events.

As the renowned Oxford University scholar, Tariq Ramadan stated in the seminar, 'Islam of the west will the reformers win?' there are three qualities that British Muslims need to adopt.

First, self-confidence to speak out about their beliefs and to correct any untruths.

Second, the ability to criticise ourselves openly about mistakes we/certain members of the community have made.

Third, to be more creative in the way that we address misunderstandings, misconceptions and lines of action.

The last point will only occur if we try to return to our historically pluralistic roots and drop the 'them' and 'us' mentality that is infiltrating our society. Dialogue, discussion and debate is fundamental to this solution, and Tony Blair will do well to remember this when placing a ban on 'glorifying terrorism' with or without intent, in a so-called democracy, supporting Bush's personal war and refusing to talk about the "anomaly" Guantanamo.

This means putting political correctness to one side for now and not being afraid to ask questions. From my experience this is a lot better than the awkwardness felt by some in not understanding the reasoning behind certain beliefs/practices. If anything, it is an excellent ice-breaker. The fact of the matter is whether we come from a secular or non-secular background, the majority of us hold a set of common moral values. We all need to stop reiterating any divisions and concentrate on strengthening the ties that bind us as a British nation.

A local election for local people...

Tom Flynn rants about the standing in a local election

As an active member of the Labour Party, I am unfortunate enough to live within the boundaries of a council which elects one third of its members each year. That means that 3 out of every 4 years we have elections. Our well earned rest from the electoral cycle was due in 2005, when we looked forward to hanging up our clipboards for a few months and the people of Southampton longed for weekends free from the unpleasant business of telling political canvassers to piss off. Sadly our dreams of sleepy Saturdays and evenings in the pub were shattered by the sound of 'Beautiful Day' echoing from the loud hailer of the Prescott Battle Bus. The Dear Leader had called a general election and for the fourth year running I was destined to spend my birthday wearing a rosette, grinning like an idiot and scaring children. 2006 will be something of a milestone for activists in Southampton. It's our 10th consecutive year of elections and we have had the occasional by-election also. We have spent so much time knocking doors that even our canvassers are starting to get confused:

"So, what are you asking me to vote for?"

"Even if you don't like what we've done locally, it's important that you vote for us this time so we don't lose our Labour Government and end up with the Tories"

"But I thought it was a local election?"

"Erm, let me think about this... 2005, 'Forward, not back'. 2006, 'Ambitious for Southampton' – yes you're right – could you cross out 'Useless Tory Government' on the leaflet I've just given you and replace it with 'Incompetent Lib Dem Council'.

So the members are knackered and the electorate are sceptical of panicked local candidates dragging them out to vote with horror stories about how 'it's too close to call'. These voters can remember the last time they were conned in this way by a candidate whose votes were subsequently weighed rather than counted, such was their majority. And the reason they remember? It was last year.

Turnout in my ward is unlikely to exceed 30%. That means that even if everyone who votes puts an X in the box next to my name, I will still only have the support of a third of those eligible. The likelihood is that the winning candidate will secure the votes of

around 10% of those registered in the ward. For many people it feels like a waste of time, so they don't bother voting in local elections. Others who feel disaffected with the main political parties use local elections as a way of registering their disillusionment by staying away. So the 'election by thirds' system is hardly helping matters as people are dragged out of their homes year after year to choose one of their three local politicians rather than all three at once. So I am making an appeal to the Minister for Communities & Local Government, David Miliband:

Dear David,

Have you thought about being rebranded as Dave? We've got to deal with the Cameron threat somehow and a change of name might make you seem more 'down with the kids'. Just a thought. You'll need an Ipod as well.

Earlier this year, you promised a major review of the future structure of local government. I am writing to ask you to consider abolishing the system currently used by some councils whereby elections are staggered over a four year period.

If I win in May, I'll be the only Labour representative in an area of 10,000 people. The constituents will be confused which ward councillor to contact, as there will be two Tories and one Labour each putting out their own literature and excluding the information for the other. So why not divide the ward up into 3 smaller ones? That way, residents are clear about who to contact and councillors will know every inch of their much smaller wards. Community policing has been successful, so why not extend the idea to our elected representatives? I'm not asking that we have more of them, just that we divide the work in a more manageable way.

So is there any chance we can have elections less frequently? It's just that there are some potholes that need filling in, a few broken streetlights and the odd problem with anti-social behaviour and we would have dealt with them years ago but we were busy putting out leaflets. You have to do that sort of thing in an election year.

Many Thanks,
Tom Flynn
Labour Candidate for Freemantle Ward,
Southampton City Council

text
text

Where to draw the line

Rebecca Rennison asks at what point does freedom of speech go from social satire to incitement to religious hatred?

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations General Assembly Resolution, 10 December 1948.

"I pass protesters every day at Downing Street, and believe me, you name it, they protest against it. I may not like what they call me but I thank God they can. That's called freedom"

Tony Blair, April 2002

Recent events have placed the issue of freedom of speech very much at the centre of current debate, most notably in the form of twelve cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, however, to regard this as a debate about religion alone would be misguided. The cartoons were regarded by some as part of a wider attack on Islam by the West, evidence of a culture clash in which the West is attempting to snuff out the Islamic creed and that whilst it is acceptable to poke fun at Islam this is not the case for Christianity. Anyone who holds this view should pay a visit to Gilbert and George's latest exhibit or perhaps have a read of the Da Vinci Code to realise that freedom of expression is not being used to question Islam alone. However, it is this critical use to which freedom of expression is put that is being challenged by contemporary laws and conventions and leaves us questioning which sentiments it is, and which it is not, acceptable to express.

Freedom of expression is increasingly becoming conditional rather than absolute. Had the Government's Incitement to Religious Hatred Bill passed in its original form publishing those cartoons in the UK would have been illegal – they would have 'recklessly' caused religious hatred. The Serious Organised Crime Act, outlawing protests within one kilometre of parliament that do not have advance permission from the Metropolitan police, came into force at the start of August and demonstrators have been arrested for 'picnicking' on Parliament Square. Furthermore, in the wake of the Danish cartoons many journalists are to be found advocating a degree of 'self censorship' chastising their Danish colleagues for their reckless abuse of the freedom of expression.

There have also been several recent instances of prominent individuals being investigated or prosecuted for the views they expressed. Abu Hamza was successfully prosecuted for, among other things, charges related to "stirring up religious hatred" BNP leader Nick Griffin was cleared of inciting religious hatred. Sir Iqbal Sacranie was investigated by the police after allegedly claiming that homosexuality and Islam were incompatible, but the case was dropped on the advice of the CPS. It seems that everywhere we look laws are being passed to curtail our freedom to speak our mind and individuals are being prosecuted for the views they voice. Clearly there is a fine line between expressing your opinion and committing a crime, the question is, where is it drawn?

Why do we consider it acceptable for certain theories to be expressed and not others? Some might argue that a person is free to speak their mind provided that this does not cause offence to any other individual, that entry into civilised society requires us to exchange certain rights for others. In this instance the freedom of speech becomes little more than the freedom to please and any comments that might cause offence or unease are out of the question. Yet without this freedom of expression, this freedom to cause offence, humankind would never have progressed beyond the cave. When first floated the ideas of Galileo and Darwin caused great upset whereas now they are widely accepted, quite simply, we need freedom of speech to include the freedom to offend.

This leads to the conclusion that it is plainly too difficult to draw a line between what is a person's rightful freedom of speech and what

constitutes unacceptable views and we should just accept that sometimes we will be offended. It was Voltaire who expressed the oft quoted sentiment "I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it" (wise words indeed given some of his own views on race). What we must accept is that the right of Bob Geldoff to call on the world to make poverty history is secured only if we accept that we must also allow the David Irvings and Nick Griffins of this world to express their views, no matter how distasteful we might find them. In the words of former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Charles Evan Hughes 'The right of the best of men are secured only as the rights of the vilest and most abhorrent are protected' (Near vs. Ohio, 1931). Forcing the musings of these individuals away from the public arena is not the answer, rather we must engage them in debate, we must answer back with our own freedom of speech and prove their ideas wrong.

Restricting freedom of speech can never be the solution. I am prepared to accept that sometimes I will be offended (at the last election 20ft high billboards of Michael Howard generally produced a feeling of nausea) but I would take this offence any day over the alternative of a society in which none of us is truly free and the most dangerous ideas are aired only behind closed doors.



Turkish protesters burn the Danish flag outside the embassy in protest against cartoons depicting Mohammed

Events Diary

Much done...

14 January - Fabian New Year Conference: "Who do we want to be? The future of Britishness"

18 January - South Korean Embassy: "The Asian Tigers Grow Up - Political Democracy And Economic Reform"

26 January - Polish Embassy: "The Future Of NATO"

9 February - Seminar with Hilary Benn - 2005 and Beyond: An Evaluation of the UK's Commitment to Africa

28 February - YF Candidate Network Launch Event

4 March - Young Fabians Islington Super Saturday (Campaigning and Book Club)

9 March - Italian Embassy: "Terrorism in Europe and the World"

27 March - 100 Days of Cameron: "More mirage than miracle?"

18 April - Seminar on EU-US Relations

25 April - Faith and Politics: an unholy alliance?

Much still to do...

Wednesday 17 May - New Members' Welcome

The Old Star, St James's Park, Westminster
6:30pm

This annual social event is a chance for new members of the Young Fabians to meet the Exec and find out more about getting involved with our activities. Old members are of course welcome too!

Contact our membership officer Richard on rmessingham@youngfabians.org.uk for more details.

Monday 19 June - Turkish Embassy:

Turkey's entry into the EU
Please RSVP to Mark Rusling at mrusling@youngfabians.org.uk

Thursday 14 September - Dutch Embassy: Immigration

Please RSVP to Mark Rusling at mrusling@youngfabians.org.uk

Book Club

An Unsocial Socialist, George Bernard Shaw (Virago, 1884)

Reviewed by the Young Fabian book club and written up by Angela Green, Deputy Editor of *Anticipations*.

"I had read the first volume of Karl Marx's 'Capital', and made my hero a Marxian socialist... a Red, an enemy of civilization, a universal thief, atheist, adulterer, anarchist, apostle of Satan..."
 – Shaw on Sidney Trefusis

In this, his fifth and final novel - written just prior to the formation of the Fabian Society – Shaw attempts to weave a socialist treatise around an often witty, albeit frequently confused, satire on social prejudice.

Although Shaw's protagonist, the proselytizing socialist Sidney Trefusis, is the son of a millionaire, he is wholly intent upon overthrowing the capitalist society he feels is responsible for enslaving both the workers and the women-folk. Desperate to break all connection to his class and the society of exploitation that has made him ridiculously wealthy, he seeks to make England "the property of its inhabitants collectively". The choice, according to Trefusis, is quite simply "Socialism or Smash".

So far, so logical. Yet Trefusis' methods for affecting his much-vaulted socialist revolution are, at best, somewhat unorthodox.

Having callously abandoned his beautiful and devoted wife, Henrietta, so as to focus his attentions solely upon from his socialist beliefs; Trefusis then retreats to Alton College, his abandoned wife's alma mater, where he meets the woman who, despite not loving him, will later become his second wife, Agatha Wylie.

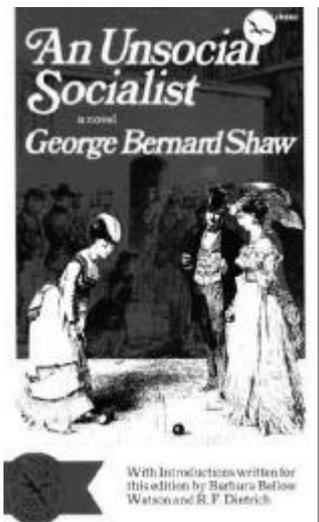
There, for reasons never fully explained, he affects the mannerisms of an "umble peasant", Jeff Smilash, and attempts, with limited success, to incite his 'fellow' workers to rise up against their capitalist oppressors. Yet despite Trefusis' best intentions, he

achieves little or nothing as Smilash. Thus, when this guise fails Trefusis instead sets about converting members of his own class, in particular the women, to socialism with the belief that it is women who, by giving a cause respectability, could make it grow.

But even this attempt falters, leaving Trefusis increasingly aimless and confused: an outspoken critic of capitalism, yet one unwilling to give up his wealth and social standing, and seemingly content to incite his long-desired socialist revolt from within the narrow confines of his class. Consequently Trefusis becomes increasingly repellant as the book progresses.

In creating a hero whose attempts at forcing the proletariat to revolt fail so singularly, Shaw seems to be trying to demonstrate that it is only through the workers - and not the educated middle-classes, no matter how good their intentions - that a revolution can effected.

"An Unsocial Socialist" attempts to juxtapose a socialist message with an unromantic love story and a socio-political satire, yet ultimately fails at all three. A major flaw of the book lies in the fact that, whilst entertainingly written, there isn't a single likeable character with whom the reader can empathise. So whilst Shaw deftly creates a picture of social and political dissolution, by failing to assail the hearts and minds of his readers, he ultimately creates a hollow and confused novel.



Young Fabian Book Club - Summer 2006
 The next meeting of the Young Fabian book club will take place in early June at a Westminster venue tbc. We will try to arrange it for a mid-week evening so as to accommodate more people. However, if you are unable to make the meeting itself, then you can still send any ideas or submissions to us at the email addresses below.
 The next book to be discussed will be "*The Road to Wigan Pier*", by George Orwell.
 If you would like to take part in this book club, please email either Emma at ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk or Angela at agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

An End to Poverty: A historical debate

Gareth Stedman Jones (Profile Books, London, 2004)

Reviewed by Ian Barrett

Debate economics with a right-winger and it is only a matter of time before Adam Smith crops up in the conversation. The iconic figure of Thatcherite economics is often presented as a ideological trump card to justify punitive welfare cuts, deregulation of labour laws, privatisation and tax breaks for the rich. Any attempt to interfere with the 'hidden hand' of the market, we are told, will do more harm than good. In his new work, Gareth Stedman Jones seeks to reinterpret Adam Smith – as the inspiration for a social democratic system using economic growth to fund the alleviation of poverty. Professor Stedman Jones outlines a system of thought which originated in the tumultuous years of the French Revolution, but was snuffed out in Britain by the backlash against radicalism, only to re-emerge in the last years of the nineteenth century.

Chapter one deals with the emergence in the 1790s of radical ideas about bringing an end to poverty through schemes of social insurance and mass education. Stedman Jones concentrates on the work of Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet and Tom Paine and especially Paine's works *Rights of Man: Part Two* (1792) and *Agrarian Justice* (1797). He skilfully teases out both the intellectual prerequisites of Paine's schemes and their immediate political context. Some of these are uncontroversial. However, some have far-reaching consequences. For example, the links which Stedman Jones seeks to draw between Paine and Adam Smith. In this account, Stedman Jones sees Paine's ideas as a 'sharpening' of some of Smith's attacks on monopoly and corruption, forming a vision of a commercially oriented republic, in which investment generates the wealth to be used in the alleviation of poverty.

Chapter two is devoted to explaining why Paine's radical ideas failed so spectacularly to take root in Britain (they were burning effigies of Paine in the streets by 1792) and why laissez-faire capitalism took such a vice-like hold on political discourse in Britain in this period. Chapter three performs a similar task for France. This comparative approach proves useful in clarifying how capitalist readings of Adam Smith came to form the basis of a nascent 'science' of economics, raised by its proponents out of the arena of political debate and paraded as self-evident 'truth'.

Chapters four and five continue the story into the years of the early nineteenth century, contrasting developments in France and Italy with developments in Britain, where friendly societies filled the gap left by the failure of social democratic ideas. Chapter six relates developments in the late nineteenth century (Fabianism among them) to the Paineite tradition outlined in the first five chapters.

An End to Poverty? sets out to upset the traditionally accepted narrative of socialist ideas, and in this it heartily succeeds. The mere fact that Stedman Jones positions Adam Smith as a nascent social democrat is bound to upset some on the right, and the fact that Marx and Engels are hardly mentioned will no doubt perform the same task on the left. The great strength of Stedman Jones's work, however, is the way in which he paints a historical background for the social democratic movement. 'New Labour' has found it far more difficult to place itself within a historical narrative than socialists devoted to collective ownership of the means of production. This book will defend against the claim that post-clause-four Labour is a historical aberration, politically successful but ideologically vacuous.

There are, however, two main weaknesses. Firstly, Stedman Jones's treatment of Thomas Malthus is far from convincing. Malthus's intellectual development is not analysed closely enough for Professor Stedman Jones to be able to carry his argument that the French Revolution caused the development of British prejudice against the 'labouring poor'. Secondly, Stedman Jones cannot claim a particularly strong identity for his group of intellectuals, because there is not a coherent ideological or social string binding them. He is forced to admit that the welfare legislation of 1906-14 'owed nothing to the ideas of Paine or Condorcet'. As a result, his desire to reconnect modern social democracy with Enlightenment roots hits a gap around the turn of the twentieth century.

These limitations notwithstanding, *An End to Poverty?* is an important work which deserves to be read by those with an interest in the historical background of social democratic ideas, and will also be useful in replying to right-wingers who wax lyrical about Smith.

P.G.Tips: A word from our leader

Prema Gurunathan, Young Fabian Chair

Wrap up warm and get those earmuffs on. Spring may not be here but the local elections are, with many Young Fabians are trudging the streets, making deliveries and doing knock-ups. It's the un-glamorous part of politics, and not fun when the British weather takes it upon itself to soak your carefully prepared leaflets. But it's got to be done, and in return there's the promise of doing some good for your constituents, even if sorting out the dog poo isn't quite how anyone envisaged spending their Saturday morning as a teenager.

It is timely that Spring's issue of Anticipations has a focus on political leadership. Whether political leadership matters is a longstanding debate. On one hand, even the briefest glance at history will reflect that a single person can make a difference – for better (Gandhi, FDR) or worse (Hitler, Mao Zedong). Yet in today's world the power of the globalised market sometimes reduces a politician to just another hapless individual, no matter the resources he has at hand, or the personal qualities he possesses.

Bemoaning the plight of political pygmies appears to be a thriving cottage industry but in many instances all it takes is still one man with his hand on the red button to start global catastrophe. So Charles de Gaulle may be right to say that the graveyards may be full of indispensable men, however the world may not flourish as it would have, but for their loss.

In keeping with the theme of political leadership, the Young Fabians will (by the time you read this) have held an event 'David Cameron's first 100 days: More mirage than miracle?'. Amongst other things, it will be an opportunity to give Dave a progress report. As merits a man whose Policy Review commissions are a good 14 months away, but who has already indicated that he will not be heeding the likes of Sir Bob Geldof and that intellectual heavy-weight Zac Goldsmith who sit on these worthy groups, I suspect the verdict from some quarters may be 'needs to work harder and pay attention to what the teacher says'.

Apart from our campaign sessions, the Young Fabians have held a host of regular events since the start of 2006. Seminars at the South Korean, Polish and Italian embassies examined the Asian Tigers, NATO and terrorism respectively. Our event with Secretary of State for International

Development, Hilary Benn MP back in February was a huge success, with around 140 attendees from the Young Fabians, universities, NGOs and Clifford Chance, where the event was hosted.

Putting aside the obvious incongruity between the posh surroundings of the 30th Floor and the subject at hand (poverty in Africa), the evening was a stimulating one. The promises have been made, but will they be delivered? The record of this Labour government on international aid is not one to be ashamed of, but there is, as ever more to be done. On a lighter note, it appears that this particular Chair of the Young Fabians may never fulfill her ambition of becoming a Parliamentary Private Secretary when during the when Q&A session, I irreverently informed the Secretary of State that he was 'not to argue with the chair'.

More recently, the Young Fabians organized two seminars looking at issues that will forever be topical – one on EU-US relations with Douglas Alexander MP (Minister for Europe), another on faith and politics. Check inside for details. Finally, looking ahead, if you are a new member, we will be having our annual new members' welcome on May 17th the Old Star in Westminster. It has proved useful as several new members have become more involved after attending the evening, so please come along if you are free.

In the meantime, for those of you who are standing as candidates in the local elections, I'd like to wish the best of luck – not just for the election but, if elected, for your term ahead.

To contact the Young Fabian chair, please email her at premag@youngfabians.org.uk.

