

Anticipations

The Journal of the Young Fabians

Babe Ruth

Party Conference Edition
General Election 2001 Round-up
Jim McAuslan on Public Service Reform

Volume 5 Issue 3 Autumn 2001 £2.50

Join the Young Fabians for only £5.00

The Young Fabians is the under-31 section of the Fabian Society, Labour's senior think-tank. We were set up in 1960 and remain the only think tank run by and for young people. We are affiliated to the Labour Party and are formally represented on Young Labour National Committee.

As well as our policy and education work, the Young Fabians are the network for young professionals within the Labour Party. Young Fabians provided the volunteers for both Tony Blair's leadership campaign in 1994 and the New Clause IV campaign in 1995. All the young MPs elected in 1997 are members of the Young Fabians, and there are more Fabian MPs than all the Tory MPs put together. As well as pamphlets we produce a quarterly magazine: 'Anticipations', and organise regular political events, conferences, trips abroad, residential summer schools, and social events. Recently we have established a Young Fabian debating team which competes with the Bow Group, Conservative Future and in national competitions. £5 membership also covers membership of the Fabian Society which includes a copy of Fabian Review every quarter, and at least five pamphlets a year, as well as discounts to numerous conferences and social events.



Name: _____ Date of Birth: _____
Address: _____
Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Please indicate your preferred payment method and rate (circle one only)

	Waged	Unwaged
Cheque or PO made payable to the Fabian Society	£31	£14
Direct Debit - fill in mandate below	£29	£13
Special New Member Offer - fill in the mandate below	£5	£5

After your first year of membership costing just £5, the relevant full direct debit rate shown above will apply.

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay Direct Debits

Originators Identification Number 971666

To the Manager: _____ bank/building society
Branch address: _____
Account Holder's name: _____
Account Number: _____
Sort Code: _____

Please pay the Fabian Society Direct Debits from the account detailed on this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee.

The Direct Debit Guarantee

This guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that take part in the Direct Debit Scheme. The efficiency and security of the Scheme is monitored and protected by your own bank or building society. If the amounts to be paid or the payment dates change you will be told at least 14 days in advance of any change. If an error is made by the Fabian Society or by your bank or building Society, you are guaranteed a full and immediate refund from your branch of the paid amount. You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by writing to your bank or building society. Please send a copy of your letter to the Fabian Society. Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions for some types of accounts.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return this whole form to:

Membership, The Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H 9BN

Tel: 0207 227 4900 Fax: 0207 976 7153

Contents

Public or Private? 2 Jim McAuslan goes in search of the public sector ethos.	Work/Life...What? 11  There's such a long way to go, says Neil Harvey-Smith
Putting the Tories out of their misery 4 Janan Ganesh looks back at the last election	Interview with super-woman Ruth Turner 12
Offline 5 Andrew Stevens warns us of the deeper problems with electronic governance	Young Fabian Candidate Reports 14  Mari Williams talks to Young Fabian candidates about their experiences on the doorstep
Yoof' Culture 6 David Floyd peruses the sudden interest in young people's views	Whipped 16 Greg Rosen's inevitable rummage down the back of history's sofa
Where are you now Germaine Greer? 7  Rachel Reeves appeals to the all-women shortlist doubters among you	The New Machiavelli 17
It's the end of agriculture as we know it, Jim 8 John Wrathmell spells yet more gloom for the farming industry	Letter from Shanghai 18
A solution to apathy? 9 Ami Ibitson argues that people should be forced to vote	View from the House 19
Family affairs 10 Joe Bord investigates the commoditisation of children	Book Reviews 20
	The Scottish Column 22
	Young Fabian Summer Snaps 23
	Chair's Columns 24
	Obituary: Dom McElroy 25

Anticipations, like all publications of the Fabian Society, or the Young Fabians, represents not the collective view of the Society, but only the views of the individuals who prepared it. The responsibility of the Society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement.

Published by The Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London, SW1H 9BN.
Tel: 0207 227 4900 Fax: 0207 976 7153 Website: www.fabian-society.org.uk
ISSN 0967-666X

Printed by Premier Printers, 25-31 Violet Road, London, E3 3QQ
Thanks to: Howard

Editorial

No one can have failed to be horrified by the brutality of the disaster which struck the United States on Tuesday 11th September. At this time, as Young Fabians, we have a role not just to support the Labour movement, but also to continually force Labour's agenda forward. Never before has this duty been so important as now in the birth of this new world conflict. In order to achieve real social justice and equality we can't just focus on problems at home. If anything, this horror has shown us how imperative it is to concern ourselves with how the Labour Government and other Western democracies can strive to facilitate international social harmony. We must not turn a blind eye to our responsibilities as world leaders. Through the development of the International Group, the Young Fabians hope to encourage better understanding of world affairs, since it is only through education that we can begin to understand the complex issues which rest on our doorstep.

In this issue Young Fabians analyse the lessons from General Election 2001; Janan Ganesh looks at the reasons for Labour's victory, while Ami Ibitson mourns the lack of turnout and suggests a radical solution. Following that theme, six Young Fabians talk to Mari Williams about life as a parliamentary candidate. In the main interview Ruth Turner talks about the government's record on social entrepreneurialism. Leading up to Labour Party Conference, Jim McAuslan, writes about the challenge that faces the Government over its plans to introduce more private sector involvement in our public services. Don't miss regular columns such as *The New Machiavelli*, *View from the House*, and *Letter from Shanghai*.

Any articles, or comment? Send it through to me at jessica_asato@hotmail.com.

Jessica Asato, Editor



Public Works

Jim McAuslan argues that we can find balance between the roles of the public & private sector, but need to climb out of our silos first.

When I sat on the Fabian Commission on Taxation and Citizenship it was clear from the survey work that our country wanted better public services. Our fellow citizens, fresh from their continental holidays, judged 'UK plc' as inferior in every respect; from the performance of our health service to the tidiness of our cities. Fertile ground for the left perhaps, but there was a sting in the tail. The public did not believe that they were getting value from the taxes they currently paid and that public services were in a permanent decline that no amount of extra taxation would stop.

This should have been a time for the Left to come together in a national programme of renewal and for public sector unions, after years of negotiating redundancies, it could have given and agenda of growth and hope. Yet six months later, and on the back of a pretty shallow debate on PPPs, we all seem to be back in our bunkers. We have slipped in too easily, after all we spent 18 years there and it's quite comfortable. We are all off the hook.

The trouble is that the 'P' word changes everything. Whether it's Privatisation, PFI or PPP it generates fear amongst public servants. The minute the 'P' word is used it changes attitudes, people close up and change is something to be resisted. Too many public sector managers use the threat of the word to compel staff to accept changes they cannot otherwise convince them are sensible. Too often the change

has not been thought through and the 'P' word is thought to provide a quick fix. The government is the worst culprit.

But the 'P' word does not provide a quick fix - I don't believe anything will provide a quick fix. And really, is the 'quick fix' the best fix? Surely it is only by addressing some basic issues that we can find the solutions to long term problems.

For instance, why do we never celebrate success? When Tony Blair was elected he said that public servants must be less risk averse. Yet whenever something goes wrong someone's head is called for. Our whole parliamentary system works that way. When did you last hear of a select committee analysing something that has gone well and drawing lessons? When did the BBC last feature a success story on public servants?

Why does change always seem a threat? Using the 'P' word as a threat may change behaviour but it will not release creativity or commitment. It will breed resentment whether the individual worker stays in the public sector or moves into the private sector. The experiments in health where workers remain as public servants, even though the operation is run by the private sector, may provide alternative approaches. More safety and less fear is needed.

Fundamentally, we need to build a commitment to change. Most public servants are up to their back teeth in change. It is never explained and, if it is, it is usually in some mid-Atlantic consultant speak that no-one understands.

The change invariably leads to lots of activity that doesn't deliver an iota of extra service. More change is then built on change and before you know where you are everyone has lost track of what they are meant to be delivering.

We need to understand more of the situation - the essentials of the public sector ethos need to be understood. Too many involved in PPPs know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. Too many resisting PPPs trot the slogan 'public sector ethos' without knowing what it is. There needs to be a far better culture map of what makes people tick and what motivates them.

If we listened to those who have to deliver we would have a far better product.

People would be more committed to change because they owned it. I wouldn't pretend that everyone is bursting with ideas for improvement or that change is embraced wholeheartedly, but by understanding the blocks you will improve the chance of delivering improvements.

We are all operating in silos. The post election redrawing of Whitehall may give better focus and the regional dimension to delivery is encouraging but things are still the same on the ground. There are some interesting things happening with delivery in Scotland and Wales. Devolution was the big risk, and the big success, of the first term and we should milk the lessons for all they are worth.

We need to understand that targets

contort behaviour. Public servants became more business focused under Heseltine and the rest, but a whole new industry grew up around these targets. League tables developed and public servants became experts at producing statistics that kept top shop off their backs. It didn't actually produce any extra output so why don't we stick to some key vision type targets rather than trying to reduce them to sprockets?

Then there is the workplace trinity: management performance can be poor; IT systems can be cumbersome, slow and prone to go down, and there is an obsession with bringing private sector HR into the public sector.

There are some poor managers but too many blame the nation's woes on poor public service managers. If you had spent 18 years of managing decline and still needed to watch your back then risk taking may not be one of your

strong points!

Let's look for a new management model. Lets have more cross training with managers from all corners of the management profession, coming together in a UK academy for managers.

Let's invest in the tools that workers need to do their jobs to the best of their ability. I think there is much to be said for throwing out all public service IT systems and starting from scratch with one that is built around the citizen and not each of the service providers. The trouble is that contracting out and privatization has meant there are lots of IT providers.

And stop thinking that private sector HR systems are a panacea. Take performance related pay - it causes anger and jealousy. Advocates point to surveys that suggest that staff agree with the principle but when you get below

the headlines you find that most staff agree that poor performance should be tackled by managers, not that good performance should be given extra rewards.

Finally, public sector ethos. There I've said it. To me it means when the public, or consumer as the current language would have it, looks into the eyes of a public servant they see someone who judges their need as a fellow citizen and who treats them with equality and fairness. This is not to be critical of someone who works in the private sector, after all I shop at Sainsbury and not the Co-op, but to recognise the differences. When that truth is realised and celebrated we can get on with delivering...who knows it may even re-establish some trust between citizen and state.

Jim McAuslan is the Deputy General Secretary of the Public & Commercial Services Union



Young Fabian Conference on the future of Secondary Education

The Comprehensive - an ideal too far?

Key Note Speaker: Minister for Education, Stephen Timms MP

Kindly hosted by the Institute of Education, Bedford Way, London, WC1

Saturday October 20th 2001

£6 (£3 non-waged)

To register email: Rachel@reeves82.fsnet.co.uk

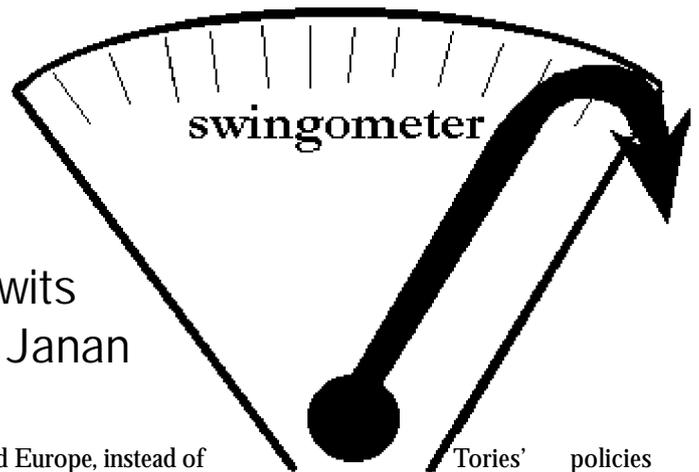
Please send a cheque made payable to Young Fabians to

Rachel Reeves 355 Metro Central Heights, London, SE1 6DQ

**YOUNG
FABIANS**

Electile Dysfunction

Fighting the Tories is a battle of wits with an unarmed opponent says Janan Ganesh



The general election campaign's main success was in further exposing the existing weaknesses of the two main parties. Over the past two years, a combination of public frustration and Labour rhetoric has ensured that the improvement of public services has replaced tax reduction as the central concern of the people. The Conservatives' failure to engage constructively on this issue cost them the votes of centrist swing voters. That William Hague only managed a token visit to one school and one hospital during the four-week campaign, whilst finding ample time to promote his promise of a 6p-a-litre cut in petrol tax, was indicative of his party's ultimately fatal neglect of this key issue.

Similarly, Gordon Brown's long-standing failure to specify how he intended to fund his projected spending rises after 2004 caused Labour its most serious trouble of the campaign. The Tories, brandishing a corroborating report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, alleged that the Chancellor's plans contained a "£10bn black hole" and, to fill it, either stealth taxes or the National Insurance ceiling would rise. Consequently, Labour was on the defensive after only three days of the campaign.

However, Brown's mistake had no effect on the polls which highlights the growing gap between media consensus and public opinion. Indeed, it was William Hague's failure to distinguish between these two variables that led to his downfall. Bob Shrum, the leading US pollster stationed at Millbank throughout the campaign, observed that, after the first week, the Tories made the fatal error of believing the press, which commended their vigor-

ous focus on tax and Europe, instead of the polls, which showed that this strategy had no influence on most voters.

The Tories' lack of confidence in their own policies was illustrated by their barren manifesto which outlined vague objectives while omitting policy detail, and their conspicuous scarcity of press conferences at Tory HQ. While Labour put forward a line-up of high profile figures to face journalists in the Millbank media bunker almost every morning during the campaign, the Tories managed only brief, infrequent and often ill-tempered affairs which created the (largely accurate) impression of a party uncertain of its own policy agenda.

The most notorious breakdown of the Tory campaign occurred with Oliver Letwin's clumsy admission to the FT that his party's spending cuts may reach £20bn over a parliament. The reactions of the two parties to this event revealed much about their respective campaigns. Labour went on the attack with unforgiving alacrity and kept the issue in the news for over a week using stunts and gimmicks (which involved your correspondent and other earnest Young Fabians waving "Free Letwin" placards outside Tory Central Office). Whereas the Tories, rather than defend Letwin's proposal (which was certainly possible), retreated and did not even assert their general ideological support for such cuts. This craven timidity contrasts sharply with the neo-liberal zeal that the Tories showed during Thatcher's election campaigns, and supports Douglas Alexander's contention that they are now "intellectually defenceless".

The main frustration of Millbank's Policy Unit was that they knew the

Tories' policies would fall apart under serious scrutiny but, as the media were refusing to contemplate a Tory victory, no such scrutiny was forthcoming. So, just as the Lib Dems could make uncosted spending commitments in the knowledge that they need never fulfil them, the Tories too produced ill-considered policy proposals (such as their risible pledge to renegotiate the Nice treaty) and got away with it.

No analysis of the campaign could omit a mention of the outstanding success of the Lib Dems, who were widely expected to lose seats. By positioning his party to the left of Labour, Charles Kennedy made it more tempting for natural Labour voters to vote Lib Dem in marginal constituencies where Labour stood no chance of winning. It was this astute strategy of oiling the wheels of tactical voting that resulted in the Lib Dems increasing their support in the south west, the most conservative and anti-European part of the country.

In no other British general election have the opinion polls changed so little during the course of the campaign, thus confirming the theory that Labour's 1997 victory was essentially a two term endorsement which the electorate would only revoke in circumstances of extreme government failure, such as another devaluation or recession. However, while it was never realistic for the Tories to win in 2001, they would surely have expected to significantly reduce the huge majority that Labour secured in 1997. Their failure to do so attests to the misguided priorities and intellectual cowardice of their campaign, as well as to the well-focused and confident efficiency of Labour's.

Access Denied

It was always the case that the first casualties of the dotcom revolution would be those who were never part of it. Yet the prophesies of retailers such as Waterstones disappearing as new companies like Amazon seized the initiative have not been realised. Whilst there are plenty of critics who regard e-commerce and the internet as yesterday's news, growth in internet use continues to accelerate.

The political world has been relatively slow to catch up to developments in information technology but there have been some notable advances. There was actually more supply than demand in terms of Internet activity in the US elections last year. The Internet made some impact in the recent General Election this side of the pond but it is questionable whether sites such as tacticalvoter.net made any difference to the result. It is clear that the Internet has extended political debate in this country, with activist resources and chat sites providing a useful outlet for political energies and challenging the traditional forums of politics.

The most interesting work has been on how citizens can engage with government via the net.

Sites such as yougov.com and upmystreet.com enable local citizens to transact their business with local authorities in a way that would be unthinkable ten, maybe even five, years ago. The Government's expectation is that local authorities will be able to provide all their services online by 2005.

There remain two challenges for e-government. First of all to go beyond what is currently envisaged (the technological extension of existing interaction with government) and to actually use the internet to renew the political process by tackling apathy and remote-

ness head on. The second challenge is to address the antipathy towards politics amongst many young people. It is not surprising that the highest concentration of Internet usage is by young people and it is entirely conceivable that those at university now, who e-mail their friends at other campuses and engage with lecturers on departmental websites, will see the net as their main communication channel in years to come. Yet quite often it is this section of society that will be the most likely to turn off as soon as politics is mentioned. The web development by political parties assumes that net users are actually interested in what they have to say, there is no outreach or attempts to justify both existence and relevance. The initiative is being taken by those outside of the conventional political process, however, such as the political social entrepreneurs behind tacticalvoter.net.

The digital divide is already identified as a key aspect of social exclusion. Quite often it is the unemployed and the less well-off who require the most interaction with agencies of the state. In

the commercial world new products are being developed all

the time, for instance a fridge with internet access is almost at the production stage - it will be able to tell when you run out of orange juice and order it automatically from your supermarket. The customers of public services will expect the same level of service from the state.

It is the first rule of public services in the modern age that they must do more with fewer resources. Therefore there is a role for increased corporate philanthropy as firms are constantly ridding themselves of hardware that although obsolete for their own needs could be



renovated and donated to those who would not otherwise be able to afford it. Obviously not everyone wants computer hardware in their home so imaginative schemes could be considered that allow for digital networking for entire streets through one main PC with incentives for e-community leaders to act on behalf of others.

Digital democracy should not however, be seen as the replacement of representative democracy in a fashion advocated by some. Conservatives the world over are keen to reduce public participation in politics and downplay the role of citizens in the political arena. Yet, only too aware of populist tendencies, many on the right advocate a plebiscitory Internet. Such a system would encourage a society in which those with access to the time and technological capability to research the issues and vote have more of a say than others. Do we really want a society in which the person with the fastest modem has the most power?

Recent Internet polls have shown support of the reintroduction of the death penalty, outlawing of abortion, retention of hunting with dogs and withdrawal from the EU. Luckily, in a society still dominated by conventional news media such polls can be shown to be unrepresentative. By all means, our elected representatives should be accountable to their electors through means such as the Internet and maybe even elected over it. But at all times this should be seen as something that complements traditional forms of democracy rather than replacing them.

Andrew Stevens worked on e-campaigns for the Labour Party in the General Election and formerly for OFSTED on ICT in Schools



Generation X-Cluded

David Floyd tells us why everyone wants to talk to young people

New Labour is the party of consultation. Whether it's referenda on devolution, questionnaires about the NHS, ballots for grammar schools or even the much maligned Philip Gould focus groups, asking people what they think seems to be the Blairite way.

Young people as a group are being consulted more than ever before. Across the country local authorities and voluntary sector organisations are falling over themselves to send out questionnaires and holding forums to ask young people what they want. The government itself has created a Children and Young People's unit which, amongst other things, will co-ordinate a forum of young people from around the country who will advise ministers on policy.

As with all policy fads the big questions are why all of a sudden has this started? Is it a good thing?

A major focus for youth consultation is the new Connexions scheme. Connexions involves the amalgamation of existing career's services with parts of youth services, linked to various voluntary sector youth organisations. The main practical outcome is that careers advisors have or will be replaced by new 'personal advisors' who will help 13-19 year olds with different aspects of their lives when they don't have the answers and 'connect' them with an organisation which does.

This is sensible and long overdue, mainly because provision by careers and youth services in some are currently on the dark side of dismal. The government has stipulated that a factor in making Connexions work has to be the participation of the young people it is going to serve.

In the North London Connexions area, young people were involved in the process of interviewing the Chief

Executive. A group of young people were given the chance to question all the candidates for the job and make their recommendations. In fact the person who ended up getting the job was the overwhelming choice of the young people's panel. There is also going to be young people on local Connexions management boards and a shadow youth management to help administer the whole plan.

The problem is that running gigantic services for young people is highly technical and mostly mind-numbingly boring. Management board meetings are generally conducted in a jargonistic double-speak which would be incomprehensible, not only to young people but to many educated adults who are not schooled in machinations of local government.

While it is important to hear young people's views, it is less important to drag us deep into the unwieldy bureaucratic morass that is local authority decision making. It's a good idea to ask young people where a personal advisor should be stationed and what they should advise on. However, it's a very bad idea to expect young people to sit through 2 hour discussions on budget percentages, especially when everyone else at the meeting is being paid to be there.

Like Connexions, the New Deal for Communities (NDC) sounds great in principle. NDC involves small deprived areas getting a massive cash injection (up to £50million) from central government provided that groups of local people play a major role in how the money is spent. In the Bridge NDC area in Seven Sisters, north London, young people aged under 25 make up around 40% of the population, so they're a major interest group who have to be consulted. The problem is that consul-

tation is just one part of a process. Once young people in Seven Sisters have been asked what they want they need to see action.

The government's approach makes sense. If you're genuinely trying to provide a decent service for someone and you ask them what they want before you do it. You might have a better chance of providing them with what they want or need. In the case of young people it also draws us into the democratic process. If young people get used to the idea that their views are being taken seriously and acted upon by the people in power, they are ultimately more likely to vote and maybe even get actively involved in politics.

The problem is the potential for the reverse. If young people give their views and the people in power nod, smile and proceed to take no notice whatsoever. Then this will only lead to another generation of people growing up cynical about the political system.

It is also important to avoid overkill. Most young people don't want to spend their whole lives than filling in questionnaires and attending discussion forums. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll are all considerably more interesting than tick boxes and committees. It would be sensible for some groups to pool their research rather than replicating it.

The consultation explosion is on balance a good thing. Under the Tories the general approach in providing services was for professionals to make decisions and for young people to like them or lump them. The New Labour approach is to ask young people what they want. The question is are they going to be able to deliver it? The jury's still out.

David Floyd is editor of Exposure magazine (www.exposure.org.uk) and a Young Fabian.

What Women Want

Rachel Reeves reminds Labour's dinosaurs that meritocracy only works when you have equality of opportunity

Women today – “they’ve got it all”, it states at the top of the Fawcett society leaflet. Below there is a picture of a mum pushing her kid in a buggy, with her daughter walking along side. At the bottom: “Fawcett, working for women who haven’t.”

There are those who claim that women now have it pretty damn good, and certainly as good as men. But the facts don’t bear witness to this. Women earn less than men, there are fewer of us in the board room, we are more likely to be in poverty in retirement, one in four of us will have an abortion at some point in our life, because contraception is still so unreliable, we have some of the worst childcare facilities in Europe, and then there’s politics.

In the 2001 General Election, the number of women in parliament fell for the first time since 1979. I heard Germaine Greer speak about 3 years ago, she started off by saying people often asked her what she gets angry about now. Unsurprisingly, there are an awful lot of things that continued to grate her. Well, if you are going to get angry about one thing in the name of women, I think that this is worth it. Our very own Labour Party managed to select only 149 women out of 641 candidates (24%). Of our 50 target seats we only selected women in 11 of them. Better than the other parties, yes. Abysmal, most definitely.

But, instead of getting angry, we could do something. And, it looks like that is what campaigners for women have managed to persuade the Labour Party to do. In the Queen’s speech it was announced that we would introduce legislation to allow women-only short lists. At last it looks like the party is waking up to the fact that the present selection process is not bringing forward and

selecting the women candidates we so need.

But, this battle is not won yet. There are lots of men (and some women) who will oppose this with an awful lot of energy. I want to give a couple of good reasons for why men, and why socialists should support women only short lists.

A quick recap on why we need more female MPs. Firstly, parliament is supposed to be representing the country as a whole. There are some experiences that are distinctly female. Just look at things like childcare. I am willing to bet



that if we had a more representative parliament we would have a half-way decent childcare strategy.

And, look at public perceptions towards our politicians. Ask someone to describe a politician, and chances are they will describe a white, middle class, middle aged man. Not a bad characterisation really. Just look round the House of Commons and you’ll see it fits too many of them. Women make up more than half the electorate, and if you read Harriet Harman’s excellent Fabian pamphlet, you’ll see that the profile of the House of Commons is a huge turnoff for women (and men). If the Labour Party and politicians in general want to

engage people, they need to ensure that the representatives of the people are in tune with their needs, fears and aspirations.

Now, it has been put to me that women-only short lists are unfair and that they explicitly rule out some very good men. But, we are only talking about temporary measures to up the number of women in parliament. We are only having to take radical action because for too long women have been implicitly ruled out of the contest. By men selecting other men who may be members of their trade union, or who have held positions on the GC or on the council for years and years. Women are often unable to take on these sorts of roles. It is still women who take on most of the caring roles in the home. And women are less likely to be part of the equivalent of golf clubs in the business world. They often do not fit in with the laddish or macho cultures which often exist, however unintentional, in political spheres. Women are not networked in the way men are.

Socialists should know, and remember, that an injustice to one is an injustice to all. Men should support women only short lists because as a group, women have been over looked in the Labour Party. Eighty three years after getting the franchise women are still intolerably under-represented in parliament, and it is about time we put right that wrong. A system that systematically fails women is not a system we should tolerate any longer. To put right years of discrimination, it is our duty to put some of the excellent women we have in our party, and in our communities, in parliament.

Rachel Reeves is on the Young Fabian Executive

Reap What you Sow

It's time for our ailing farming industry to have an injection of reality, says John Wrathmell

The Foot and Mouth Crisis is nearly over. In some farming communities cases continue, causing anxiety, depression and despair, but the worst is past. However, for most farmers Foot and Mouth was only the most publicised disaster in a long period of decline. Market prices have made farming no longer a viable way of life: by 1997 the price of lambs at auction in North Yorkshire had dropped below £1.00 per kilo - barely covering the cost of the animal's feed. This has resulted in many young farmers taking the chance to abandon their families' traditional role.

Farmers are not alone in seeing the status quo as unfeasible. Taxpayers are becoming increasingly uneasy at subsidising a minority activity. Consumers are voting with their credit cards and their demands for lower prices in the supermarkets are causing the farmers to be squeezed further. Both Europhiles and Eurosceptics agree that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is in dire need of reform, especially with the prospect of Eastern European farmers joining the common market. If the present position is impossible, indeed harmful, to maintain, then there are two possible alternatives.

First, subsidies could continue with farmers becoming countryside managers. Proud and independent farmers would vigorously oppose the role of "glorified park keepers", but they may have little choice. Tourism already forms a much larger proportion of GDP than farming: according to the value added figures for 1999 tourism made up between 2.8 and 3.9%, farming just 0.9%. Reducing tariffs on imports to the EU would mean that consumers could have their cheaper prices, even if a significant proportion of spending would have to be used for subsidies. The danger is that trying to freeze it at a certain point would be short-sighted

and probably impossible. It would also mean that an increasing proportion of Britain's food would have to be imported.

Second, the farming industry could be opened up to the rigours of the free market. Food prices would fall and taxpayers' money could be diverted to other areas. This would not only be a moral victory for neo-liberals; it would also be welcomed as a great benefit for developing nations. As pointed out by Her Excellency Cheryl Carolus, the South African High Commissioner, in her lecture to the Fabian Society, agriculture is the one area in which devel-



oping nations have an edge over the developed. OECD countries spend more on subsidising their farmers than the combined GDP of all African nations. On the one hand these nations are encouraged to bring down their tariffs and allow Western goods to penetrate their markets, on the other they are restricted in the one market in which they would have an advantage.

This course could have disastrous consequences. A truly free (and unregulated) market would harm animal welfare and the environment. The transport of animals over long distances to find the best price is one of the reasons for the rapid spread of diseases and would become increasingly common. Farmers would be forced into ever more intensive practices as they tried to compete with cheap imports. Small

farms would be found not to be economically viable and would be subsumed by larger farms. Our rural landscape would change dramatically as those large farms used the most economically efficient practices, resulting in, for example, the tearing up of hedges and the levelling of walls to create larger areas for cultivation.

Parallels exist to removal of subsidies from declining industries, although not very comfortable ones for a Labour government. Margaret Thatcher's destruction of the mining and manufacturing base in the 1980s uprooted communities in a similar way. A crucial difference would be that rural areas have already diversified in a way which industrial and mining towns found, and still find, very difficult. Few people in rural towns are physically engaged in agricultural production, even if they strongly sympathise with the difficulties of the farmers.

Government policies could help to make the change less traumatic. Subsidies would have to be reduced gradually to give farmers a chance to adjust. Training schemes could be put in place which would encourage specialisation in particular agricultural tasks - workers who contract themselves and their machinery out to larger farmers are already becoming common. Public transport, non-existent in many rural areas, would have to be improved to allow the labour force to become more mobile.

The rural economy has reached a dividing of the ways and the government is going to need a radical solution. Opening up the industry to more competition would be the more progressive solution, as long as sufficient regulation was in place to curb the environmental effects and preparations were made for the social consequences.

John Wrathmell is a Young Fabian

We threw an Election and nobody came

Ami Ibitson says we can't risk more low-turnout elections

On Thursday June 7th (or rather the early hours of June 8th) political history was made as the Labour Party secured a 'historic second term' as the party of government. There was jubilation, there was celebration; but in the midst of our delight, something was casting a blight over the proceedings. The fact that 41% of the British population had not turned out to the polling station.

Turnout in the 2001 General Election was statistically the lowest in Britain for 83 years. Since that election, debate has raged about the cause and cure for the growing problem of voter apathy. Lack of political engagement and identification? Disillusionment with the political parties on offer perhaps? Or could sheer laziness be more to blame than anyone would care to consider?

Indeed, parties such as the Socialist Alliance would claim that they are the only ones offering voters a real 'alternative' as New Labour's centre left policies mean that the choice between Tory and Labour becomes slimmer. But the polls prove that this argument does not follow, since few Socialist candidates even managed to secure their deposits, along with many (though not all) candidates from other minority/extremist parties. However, another result, that of Wyre Forest in Worcestershire, proved that mass action can achieve results. David Lock the sitting Labour MP and Minister was ousted by an independent single issue candidate, who promised to save the local hospital. If so many voters are 'disillusioned' by the mainstream parties, why did not enough of them vote to elect a few Socialist MP's?

Electoral reformers claim that an overhaul of the voting system is necessary to reduce numbers of 'safe' seats and make voters feel that their vote can actually decide the result. In theory this will also 'engage' the electorate, in particular young and female voters, to take

an interest in politics and take time to decide which party they identify with. But would this actually achieve the desired results? Elections for the European Parliament, Welsh and Scottish Assemblies using PR failed to achieve particularly high turnouts. Maybe this could be different with a higher media profile General Election? Or maybe not. It is difficult to say.

Or, after all this, could it simply be that the electorate cannot be bothered to vote? Is it really possible that such a large number of the population are so disillusioned and unengaged with the political parties that they all stayed away on polling day in principle? Or did some of them just 'not get round to it' or decided they'd rather watch EastEnders instead? If so, surely this is an outrage?



Compulsory voting is legal down under

People around the world have fought and died for the right to vote, including women in this country (and not all that long ago). Should British citizens be allowed to eschew this fundamental right, because it is too inconvenient for them to pop out to the polling station for five minutes? Should we look at making voting compulsory?

Over twenty countries have some form of compulsory voting, perhaps most famously Australia. Before laws making voting compulsory were passed in 1924, voter turnout in Australia had been as low as 47% - similar to the turnout in some British constituencies in 2001. Since then the proportion of Australians voting has hovered at around 94-96%. The Australian author-

ities felt that making voting a legal requirement would greatly reduce voter apathy - voters would simply have to decide which party they identified with and which to vote for. Could this work in Britain?

The major argument against compulsory voting is of course, one of liberty. Just as one has the right to vote, then one surely also must have to right not to? This could be overcome fairly simply, for example, the electorate in 2001 was given the option of applying for a postal vote on request (a ploy which clearly failed spectacularly in its aim to improve turnout by making voting more convenient). Those wishing to exercise their right not to vote could simply complete and send in a form stating this, to avoid any fine for non appearance at the polling station, and of course there is always the option of the spoiled ballot.

This issue is complex, and space here does not permit discussion of matters such as resources to determine the genuineness of voters claiming to be unable to vote. But the fact remains that something needs to be done about voter apathy and compulsory voting, along with electoral reform, party policy and the rest, should not be dismissed as an option.

We owe it to those who died in order for us to have the right to vote to ensure that as many people as possible recognise the importance of doing so. Perhaps what the Wyre Forest result does show is that voters are more interested in issues which affect them than party politics. One thing which compulsory voting would do is allow parties and their activists to concentrate on issues rather than spending a large amount of time identifying and 'getting the vote out.'

**Ami Ibitson
Greenwich
& Lewisham Fabians**

Keeping it in the family

Joe Bord delves into the changing world of childhood

I may be sixty-two and my brother fifty-two, but we are better able to bring up children than a couple of drug addicts with a kid who are living off welfare. Why judge us and not them?"

This question was posed by a retired teacher from Frejus, in a case that shocked France (Le Monde called it 'mind-boggling and nauseating'). The woman concerned had borne the child of her brother and an egg donor. The siblings had deceived staff in a US Fertility Clinic by posing as husband and wife. The French press speculated that the motive for conception was bound up in the \$2 million family inheritance and gleefully reported a family history of infighting. Nevertheless, the octagenarian matriarch of the clan insisted that brother and sister were looking forward to bringing up their boy.

The case is striking because it exposes types of thinking about children that have become prevalent in western societies. Assumptions about the right of personal choice underpinned the determination of the pair. They wanted a child, as they might have wanted any other commodity, and had both the technological and financial means to acquire one. But this commodification was not the way in which they justified their subterfuge. Instead, their argument was based on individual welfare: we can provide better security than many others in society, why should we not have a child? Television pictures showed a loving and indulgent birth mother (although the father was nowhere to be seen) and a spacious house. Conversely, the disgusted reaction of the public was also rationalised in terms of welfare. A child whose father is his uncle, whose mother is his aunt, and whose family circle is both elderly and tumultuous, cannot possibly be happy. A child who was perhaps brought into the world to transmit the property and genealogy of a family line has already been treated as

the means to a sordid end, and therefore morally abused.

That the most important thing about children is their welfare and happiness is universally accepted. As the Catholic Church points out, judgements about the welfare of unwanted babies frame our understanding of issues such as abortion and contraception. The most execrated crime today, with the possible exception of child murder, is the sexual abuse of the young. Some of these attitudes are relatively recent. Child abuse has always been detested, but the boundaries of vulnerability have been drawn very differently. In traditional societies, puberty has more commonly been seen as the demarcation of adulthood. The forms of ultimate transgression have also changed: heresy, witchcraft and treason have all been regarded as the most abominable of crimes. None of this is to say that the moral scale of our own mature capitalist society is necessarily wrong. But it does suggest that there is room for dispassionate inquiry into the grounds of our beliefs.

Harm to the young is felt to be particularly iniquitous because they are defenceless and innocent. The maxim 'no rights without responsibilities' is seen as inappropriate with respect to young children because they have not learnt to gauge the consequences of their actions. Where this assumption is challenged, as in the Bulger case, we are intensely disturbed. The trend in Britain has been to push the age of criminal responsibility downward, with the abolition of the rule that no child under 10 may be prosecuted. At the same time, the legal personality of the child has been sharpened with the adoption of specific children's rights by UN convention and domestic law. In effect, the agency of children has been confirmed at the same time as their special capacity to experience harm has been re-emphasised. The cultural frontier

between adult and junior worlds has become more blurred than ever. This may account for our special anxiety over sexuality, one of the few areas in which the authentic child can be defended. In the past, the young became full adults sooner: now we have strange syntheses, such as the 'kidult'.

The merging of adult and childhood roles is accompanied by the attenuation of conventional family structures. There is a parallel here with the erosion of gender differences. Friedrich Engels once argued that the family was a basic mechanism of capitalist accumulation. But now, in a market society based on consumption, the differentiation of producer roles in the household has become much less important. Similarly, children enter the market as consumers, and are targeted by advertisers in much the same way as their parents. This kind of market individualism complements the increasing degree of legal personhood bestowed on the young.

Thus the deception practised by the couple from Frejus is not only morally objectionable, but anachronistic. The primary accusation against them is that the individual rights of the child have been ignored. The couple seek to argue their case by showing that their boy will be able to consume a higher standard of living than other children. They are in turn condemned by people who think that the individual identity of the child will be radically undermined by the confusion of emotional and biological ties. They could be defended by liberals, who often speak up for unconventional relationships, were it not for the fact that brother and sister are suspected of using new techniques for the old-fashioned purpose of keeping accumulated dynastic capital. Our own contemporary norms are relative to our state of historical development, and are quite as prescriptive as those of other societies. A good thing too.

On the Job

Labour has a lot of unfinished business in the workplace, according to Neill Harvey-Smith

Many of the Labour government's proudest achievements are in labour market reform. The New Deal, minimum wage and working families' tax credit have cut unemployment and reduced in-work poverty. Trade union and part-time workers' rights have been enhanced, maternity leave extended and a 48-hour week enacted. Yet labour market inequalities continue to grow as British families and communities bear the strain of one-way flexibility, long hours and low wages.

Since the Conservatives' deregulation in the 1980s, the British people have worked the longest hours in Europe. This continues despite the incorporation of the Working Time Directive. Under the Conservatives, British workers became the cheapest in Europe to dismiss. Workers must not price themselves out of employment through excessive wage demands, time off or inflexible contracts; otherwise, capital will migrate to where labour is cheaper and our competitors will reap the reward. Job insecurity is the price we pay for full employment; the government should ensure that everyone has access to a job, make work pay and retain high incentives at the top to attract talented entrepreneurs.

Even if one accepts the economic analysis, its results are troubling for anyone who maintains Labour's new Clause IV, that wealth should be in the hands of the many. A recent *Management Today* report revealed that Britain's manufacturing workers earn the least in the industrialised world: £20,000 compared to £23,000 in Sweden, £24,000 in France and £36,000 in Japan. By contrast, the average remuneration of Chief Executives has risen by 29% in the last two years and now stands at over half a million pounds, which is £100,000 more generous than anywhere else in Europe.

In the US, which has pursued liberalisation more ruthlessly, three quarters of Americans have weathered two decades of stagnant earnings; though household income has climbed 10% over the last fifteen years, a staggering 97% of that gain has been claimed by the richest fifth of the population. This growing inequality should be deplored, not for its geometric asymmetry, but for its social consequences. Meanwhile, largesse at the top provides the means for the fortunate to opt out of public services, providing their families with the private schooling which will ensure their place in the elite of the future labour market. This is not a recipe for a one-nation Britain.

A second concerning consequence is the current work/life balance experienced by Britain's workers. Not only do we work the longest hours in the EU, but we take the shortest holidays. Women suffer disproportionately from the overwhelming demands of modern life. Despite comprising over half the current workforce, they are still the primary carers in the vast majority of families and only one in ten company directors is female. The growth of the service industry, trends in retailing and the proliferation of call centres has led many part-timers, mainly women, to work unusual hours, including Sundays. So far, flexibility has been largely one-sided, encouraging workers to respond to the demands of a 24/7 economy.

In the 1980s, Europe's record on growth and unemployment was superior to that of Britain or America. Since German unification and the tighter fiscal policy forced on Europe by their rush to a single currency, unemployment has recently been higher on the continent. The Right has been quick to announce the death of the European model. But productivity in manufactur-

ing has risen faster over the last 20 years in "inefficient" Europe than the "dynamic" United States. Britain's rise in unit labour costs over the same period far outstrips our European partners, despite twenty years of supposed cost-cutting. Levels of private investment are still higher abroad. A poorly paid, over-worked and domestically dysfunctional workforce will not close the enormous productivity gap which remains between Britain and her competitors, nor will it operate at the cutting edge of the knowledge economy.

Government should examine institutional means to counter the short-termism endemic in British industry and counter the power of giant financial institutions over business. Facilitating and encouraging the growth of Employee Share Ownership Programmes will give workers a real stake in their future. So will improving management accountability by ensuring greater scrutiny of executive pay increases at the company AGM and shaking up the banking system to provide business with an alternative source of affordable capital. Greater time autonomy will remove an important barrier to women's progress, but so would an expansion of nursery places, better drafted tax relief on company-provided childcare and the introduction of transferable parental leave.

The welfare to work agenda was the priority of the first term. Now a new debate is needed on the nature of how we harness flexibility to serve business and workers, halt growing inequalities in income and give people the security they need to raise families. Enterprise and fairness really must go hand-in-hand.

Neill was a Human Resource Manager at Procter & Gamble. He is now studying towards a PhD in Politics at Edinburgh University.

Turner's Prize

At 30, Ruth Turner has achieved more than most will achieve in a lifetime. She talks to Jessica Asato about her work and inspiration.....

Co-founder of the Big Issue in the North, as well as research company Vision 21, she was named Young Mancunian of the Year and has won numerous other awards for her social and business work. She now works for her own company Vision 21 and for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. She has found time to run for the European Parliament and to sit as a Constituency representative on Labour's NEC. Jessica Asato spoke to her about her big issues.

Jessica Asato: Why did you start the Big Issue in the North?

Ruth Turner: I had a really clear idea that we're only here for a short while. If you want to see things change then you have to find the most effective and practical way of making things change. For us that was by doing business with a difference and it was very important for us that we were seen to be running a successful business as well as a good social project, because as well as trying to provide homeless people with work we were also trying to say you can actually be very successful and be a profit making business, even though we didn't take any profits. That's why we put ourselves in for all sorts of business awards in the Chamber of Commerce - and won a lot too.

JA: How did you end up as the North West "talent scout" for NESTA?

RT: Since I left the Big Issue, Anne and myself and an ex member of staff, Simon Danczuck, set up a research company called Vision 21. The main areas we work in are social research, community consultation, housing work,

regeneration, modernising local government and democracy work, and we work with hard to reach groups.

We try to work in a way where it's more than just getting people to tick boxes, it's actually trying to get them much more involved in shaping their own lives. One of the things we've found is that there is so much talent inside people which needs to be unleashed. It was through speaking about those kinds of things at conferences that I became aware of the National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts (NESTA) who were coming at it from a completely different perspective through the search



for excellence, innovation and creativity. nevertheless there were some themes that were shared which were about discovering and pursuing talented individuals. not just for their benefit, but for the benefit of the UK as a whole.

NESTA is made up of £200m of National Lottery money put into a fund which then makes between £10m-12m a year. That money is used to back creative and talented individuals in the fields of science, technology and the arts. It goes to people who have new

inventions, or who are writing a book, creating a piece of art or whatever their discipline is. It's an extraordinarily enlightened funding programme because it's not making grants it's making investments in people and taking a stake. NESTA have asked me to help them find good people, ideas and projects in the North West.

There's lots of organisations like banks and business advice centres providing support and advice to people who've got good ideas, but most of them are simply focused on helping people set up businesses. They are all coming across people with good ideas but don't quite know where to send them. So we are able to get people through those routes. We also go out to universities, arts boards, cultural industries, to small companies, to science parks, to business parks, and to museums. Each person you meet will then tell you give other people it would be good to go and see, and so the word spreads.

We use the media too; last week we had an article in the Manchester Evening News, and over the course of the next couple of days I had 38 phone calls from individuals with good ideas. There are more personal routes: the other day I had to have some new sockets put in my house. I made the electrician a cup of tea and he said "I've got a good idea", and he started telling me about it, so I told him to get in touch with NESTA who would be able to put him in touch with the engineering department at Liverpool John

Moore's University and develop his idea further.

I meet a whole load of interesting people, tell them that there may be some money they can apply for, and then the rest of my job is them telling me about the amazing things they have thought of and the amazing things they have achieved. It's an enormous privilege. I meet a whole load of interesting people, tell them that there may be some money they can apply for, and the rest of it is listening to the amazing things they have thought of. It doesn't feel like work at all!

JA: Why are you staying in the North West?

RT: I'm not actually from the North West, I'm from Bristol. But Manchester is a really welcoming city with a real buzz about it. The North West is big enough to be a country on its own with a population of nearly 7 million, which is more than the population of Scotland and Wales put together. It's got two amazingly sparkling cities in Manchester and Liverpool, the Lake District, it's got great towns, great history, it's got everything you need. When we were at the Big Issue we had a tremendous sense of Northern pride. I liked the idea of working with people to set up nationally significant initiatives based in the North West to attempt to stop the brain and enterprise drain.

London is a great city, but when it forgets that it's just a capital city and starts thinking of itself as the whole nation then we're all in trouble. It's not in London's interest let alone the rest of the country's interest for us all to pretend that the only new or exciting or clever things happen in London, it's just not true. I firmly believe that we have to push for the right model of directly elected regional government, even though there's a lot of persuading to be done before we go there.

A lot of decisions are already made in the English regions but they are made by health authorities and by government offices. The line of accountability is so obscure sometimes, it means nothing in practice to most people and yet some very important decisions are made by these bodies.

The problem with another layer of

government is that if we have low ambitions then we'll have referenda with very low turnout, and then elections with even lower turnouts, and it would be a complete disaster for politics altogether. I don't think there is an easy answer to this. We've just had the general election for example which was probably more historic than another other Labour victory. And yet, there was a very low turnout, and if we're not worried about that then I don't know why we are in politics.

If we just try to do the same old "politics as usual," it's going to get worse and rightly people are going to get fed up with seeing complacency. One of the reasons I wanted to stand for the NEC was that I was disappointed that the most imaginative, inclusive, effective

"If we just try to do the same old "politics as usual", it's going to get worse and rightly people are going to get fed up with seeing complacency."

ways of achieving social change were coming from the social entrepreneurs, and the people on the ground, not from the politicians. It was worse than that, politicians weren't even recognising these achievements when they saw them. There were too many social entrepreneurs that I knew with immense talents, and an enormous desire to protect and develop the public sphere. Yet I found they were banging their heads against our own structures and politicians. A little voice inside of me was saying; "you can't opt out of this, you're an active member of the Labour Party. You have to at least try to make some kind of bridge."

JA: Has the Labour Government made any progress in this area?

RT: The government has undoubtedly made good progress in supporting social entrepreneurs. Things such as the tax credits for community investments will start making a huge difference over the next few years. There is an increasing willingness to look at the third sector, not as a second rate provider but as

a genuine partner and as a way of reaching into communities and allowing people to do things for themselves, rather than having something done to them. The difficulty is that you've got public service structures that have been set up for decades, centrally delivered, and it's very difficult to change. Also there is a worry that if we tinker with public services then we are tinkering with something that's very precious to us. Both my Mum and Dad work in the public sector, it's not because they are stupid or unimaginative, it's because they genuinely believe that the public deserve quality services. I can see why there's a worry that if you change that and have different forms of ownership then that really precious, intangible feeling might go. I think it won't, but it's a job of persuasion. You can't force people into wanting to do things for themselves, you can stimulate that spark, but the desire has to be there first.

JA: You mentioned low turnout at the election - it was particularly low for younger people - do you have any thoughts on how to engage younger voters?

RT: I've been to a lot of Labour Party meetings where people ask: "how do we get young people involved?." Every constituency has the same problem, that there's only one or two young members and they've tried everything and there's this gloom that tends to settle. This huge gulf has developed between those of us who are politically obsessed and everyone else who's just getting on with their life. There's a danger that we're becoming so daunted by that task that we're not going to get started on it. While we don't know all of the answers we can start by learning lessons from elsewhere. We already know how to excite people about taking control of their own lives, about working together, about criticising those in charge. But anyone who really cares about politics, who want to get voter turnouts up just for a start, is going to face a lot of hard work. We can't just sit back and wait for some genius with a magic wand to show the way. We just have to eat away at it little by little, and isn't that a very Fabian method!

Feature



Luke Akehurst former National Secretary of Labour Students and agent for Holborn and St Pancras fought the Liberal Democrats for second place in the Tory stronghold of Aldershot.



Judith Begg at 22 was Labour's youngest candidate. She represented the party in the Tory heartland of Christ church and East Dorset. She is founder of the Fabian Women's Network.



Howard Dawber, former Chair of the Young Fabians, was the Labour candidate for Cheadle, one of the few constituencies which changed hands from Tory to Lib Dem in the election.

Out for the Count!

Mari Williams, Young Fabian Chair, spoke to six Young Fabians about their experience representing the Labour Party in the General Election. Still buzzing from the adrenaline of the campaign they describe a far from apathetic public and a deeply demoralised Tory opposition.

How did you first get involved in the Labour Party and the Young Fabians?

Luke: I joined the Party in 1988 aged 16. I was from a Labour activist household but the main reason was because I wanted to help Neil Kinnock get rid of unilateralism!

Judith: At Edinburgh university

Howard: I joined at 16 because of what the Tory government was doing to the North West; destroying public services and abolishing Greater Manchester County Council. I joined the YFs because I wanted to help develop policy ideas for a future Labour Government.

Michael: I joined the Don Valley Labour Party in South Yorkshire when I was 15. I joined the Fabian Society when I was at university and thought I was clever.

Chris: I was brought up in a Christian Socialist household in Rotherham, South Yorkshire. I was lucky enough to be at Cambridge when Anthony Giddens was there and his thoughts on the "Third Way" were crystallising.

Isabel: As far back as I remember I have been delivering Labour Party leaflets!

What was it like being a candidate?

Luke: Fun, if you enjoy getting sunburnt! It is a great feeling knowing you have inspired some people to vote Labour for the first time.

Judith: It was a bit scary knowing the buck stops with you., but also great to have the opportunity to talk to so many people, and to really state Labour's case. It's brought home to me the importance of the Constituency side of an MP's role.

Howard: It was scary after all those years of campaigning for other people to realise that when people talked about the candidate they meant you. But I got a great sense of achievement from helping solve people's problems on the doorstep. One of the nicest things was working with local party members who were committed to running a dynamic campaign.

Michael: Very funny. The most important event in the diary of the CLP was not the General Election but the Annual Dinner.

Chris: A great experience and a tremendous responsibility.

Isabel: One of the most fulfilling experiences of my life. I had the rare opportunity to fight for what I believe in and help raise the profile of the Party - it was all worth it.

What surprised you most on the campaign trail?

Luke: Most people I met were totally uninterested in the national campaign as reported in the media. They were instead keenly interested in very local, practical issues like car parking and town centre regeneration. I was also

pleasantly surprised with a lack of cynicism about politics - most people were genuinely pleased to meet political canvassers and put their views across.

Judith: I was surprised by how willing people were to have a chat, not just on the doorstep, but in the pub or wherever. I'm not convinced by the whole apathy thing, most people have issues that they really care about, it's just a question of asking them what they are interested in and really listening.

Howard: The most amazing thing was how little animosity there was towards the Labour government and how friendly people were on the doorstep. Almost everyone agreed that things weren't so bad under Labour.

Michael: The Tories hate everything we stand for and every moment that they're not in power. I feel that if a lot of very rich Tories in the Yorkshire Dales are complaining about the Labour Government, then we must be doing something right.

Chris: I was amazed about the number of people who were coming over to Labour for the first time.

Isabel: The greatest shock was the antagonism directed towards me from members of the public who clearly did not feel there should be a Labour Government. Perhaps the greatest disappointment was the disinterest in the political process particularly amongst young people.

What was the opposition like?

Luke: The Lib Dems were terrified we would supplant them and take second place - their entire campaign was



Michael Dugher stood in the North Yorkshire Tory stronghold of Skipton and Ripon. He is a Special Advisor at the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

about trying (and failing) to squeeze the Labour vote. The Tories just went on and on about Europe.

Howard: The Conservative was quite an honourable and likeable man, despite the fact that I disagreed with almost everything he believed in. In policy terms, the Liberal Democrats were closer to Labour, but I found their candidate arrogant and out of touch. The local Lib Dems were horrified to find Labour running a high profile campaign in Cheadle, and got very nasty. On the night before the election our campaign office had all the locks superglued shut, and we had to call the police to get back in!

Michael: My Conservative opponent was known for his pro-European views so not entirely at ease with Hague's Tory Party. The Lib Dem candidate was typically all over the place, refusing to discuss or defend Lib Dem policy. I also had quite a bit of opposition from local Labour members who were rather disappointed when I wouldn't have the slogan 'ban the bomb' on my election address.

Chris: Eleanor Lang was pleasant on a personal one to one basis but I was disappointed that she fought a very negative campaign.

Isabel: Misguided.

What was the reaction to Labour on the doorstep/on the street?

Luke: People in this part of the world are a lot politer than the people I'm used to canvassing in inner London elections. There was a tiny minority of racists and xenophobes who seemed quite shocked that anyone disagreed with their views and I felt were mainly motivated by fear of change and the unknown.



Chris Naylor stood for Epping Forest Steven Norris' former seat. His opponent Eleanor Lang, was the Conservative spokeswoman on Constitutional Affairs. He currently works at the IDEA.

Howard: People were surprisingly positive about Labour's first term and were happy to see Blair as Prime Minister. The only problem was that many natural Labour supporters thought that voting Lib Dem was the best way to secure a Labour victory.

Michael: The political backdrop to our campaign was the foot and mouth crisis which, as luck would have it, broke out in the constituency on the day the election was called. I tried to be sympathetic - particularly to the poor hill farmers who suffer genuine hard-



Howard Dawber's 'Hello' style Rose ship - but at the end of the day the farmers wanted someone to blame. I tried to explain that agriculture gets more subsidy than any other industry put together and doubled, but I nearly got pitch forked.

Chris: People were more willing to have a full and frank discussion about politics and policy than ever before. I certainly didn't find that people were apathetic. There was however disillusionment with the current process and practice of politics.



Isabel Owen works for Glyn Ford MEP and flew the Labour flag in the South West Tory stronghold of Tiverton & Honiton

Isabel: Interestingly the issues on the doorstep were rarely health, education, the economy, but hunting, foot and mouth and "that europe thing". But then the Tories did increase their vote!

What advice would you give to aspiring candidates?

Luke: Enjoy yourself - although elections have a serious aim they are supposed to be fun to take part in.

Judith: It's a really big commitment, and you should only do it if you are going to get stuck in and do it properly. I would love to see more women standing, as a young woman I got a really positive reception from people who were fed up seeing the same old identikit politicians. If you are thinking about standing, get in touch with the Labour Women's Network who can give you a lot of advice about the selection process.

Howard: The party desperately needs young, creative, and enthusiastic candidates. So don't listen to anyone who says you're too young, or inexperienced. If you take the trouble to talk to people on the doorstep you can always win them round.

Chris: Work hard and fight to win - do what you think is right - be positive and be yourself.

Michael: Have a thick skin and enjoy yourself. Most importantly you should try to use the campaign to build up the party organisation and recruit more members.

Isabel: The most important thing is to enjoy it. It is hard work but it is also rewarding. Pick a constituency where you feel comfortable and have a good rapport with the activists. Make sure it is more than just a career move - you may not win!

Greg Rosen finds history is littered with the political corpses of those who fell foul of the whips.

This summer's furore over the appointment of Commons Select Committee chairs was held by many in the media to crystalise the emasculation of traditional backbench independence and power. That New Labour, via the dark machinations of the whips office, might try and influence whether the legendary "battling butterball" Gwyneth Dunwoody and the veteran loyalist Donald Anderson should continue as chairs of the Transport and Foreign Affairs Select Committees was seen as breaking new ground in "control-freakery".

But was it? The handling of the issue by the Whips Office was certainly not as deft as it might have been. But the involvement of the Whips Office in deciding the composition of select committee's was not new. It is in the fine tradition of the Mother of Parliaments. The Whips Office was involved in the decision to put both Anderson and Dunwoody on their select committees in the first place. It is the Whips Offices of all the parties that operate the conventions that give a certain number of select committee chairs to each party, decide the relative representation of each party on the various select committees and indeed provide for representation of minority parties and minority views. Without their involvement there would have been no guarantee, for example, that the Conservatives would have let Frank Field chair the Social Security Select Committee in the Major years.

That is not to say that the Whips Office cannot be heavy handed, sometimes counterproductively so. However that is not new. John P. Mackintosh, for example, a determined and articulate Labour MP who did more to bring about the creation of Commons select committees than arguably any other backbencher, was himself kept off one of the pilot select committees he had persuaded the then Wilson government to create by the enmity of certain mem-

bers of the Whips Office. The Whips Office under the last Labour government had a reputation for being particularly tough-minded, one whip earning notoriety for apparently banging the intravenous drip of a dying Labour Parliamentarian who had had to be wheeled into Westminster on his hospital trolley to maintain the government's majority, in order to prove to doubting Tories that he was still alive.

But it would be wrong to assume that the MP mentioned above came to Westminster on his hospital trolley in terror of the Whips. It was his loyalty to the Labour movement, the same loyalty that led Mackintosh, when he himself was dying in an Edinburgh hospital in July 1978 to write a letter to his whip asking that the seriousness of his 'flu' (it was in fact a heart tumour) be kept secret for fear it might warn the Tories of the likelihood of an impending by-election.

Indeed, just as it is absurd to attribute loyalty to the government amongst Labour backbenchers as being either a new phenomenon or due to some form of New Labour Millbank mind-control, it is a delusion to believe that before the 1990s there was some sort of 'golden age' of backbench power. There have been few Parliamentarians with as long an experience of the Commons as late George Strauss, who became a senior Minister under Attlee and eventually Father of the House before his retirement as Labour MP for Vauxhall in 1979. His considered view in 1965 does not indicate the existence of some golden age of backbench independence which New Labour has stolen away. He wrote: "With Labour in government the influence of the backbencher on policy is small. Decisions are made in the secrecy of the Cabinet. Prior consultation with backbenchers is impossible and subsequent rejection politically impracticable, particularly when the government has a tiny majority. The possibility of an early election makes it

essential to avoid the image of an indecisive government that can be diverted from its course by backbench pressures."

Labour's majority is now rather larger, but otherwise little has changed. The complaints about previous governments were not that they interfered with the choice of Select Committee chairs but that they either opposed the creation of Select Committees in the first place or shut down the few pilot committees that Dick Crossman got going during the 1960s in his brief but reforming period as Leader of the House of Commons. It was not until 1979 that Norman St. John Stevas created Commons Select Committees on a systematic basis. Thatcher sacked him for his pains in her first reshuffle. Not only that but the Tory Whips regularly interfered with Parliamentary committee composition and sought to depose chairs of whom they disapproved, such as the pro-European Heathite Geoffrey Rippon, who was deposed from his foreign affairs role in 1981.

Indeed, perhaps the most tangible aspect of the Dunwoody/Anderson furore was the fact that, far from being intimidated by the Whips, Labour backbenchers proved more than capable of making their own minds up. Just as some were quick to applaud this evidence of free-thinking, it would be refreshing if some would be slower to condemn these same Labour backbenchers for being unthinking Whips Office "drones": it might just be that they happen to agree with the Whips that government policy, the manifesto on which they stood, is actually worth supporting. To be a free-thinker does not mean you have rebel against what you freely believe just because others believe it too.

Greg is Young Fabian Vice Chair and President of London Young Fabians

The New Machiavelli

Ship of Fools

The Fabian founders would be spinning in their graves if they knew the venue of the Fabian Gala Dinner. The Society founded to fight for peace and brotherhood held its fundraiser onboard HMS Belfast. In amongst the torpedo tubes and paintings of great naval battles, those willing to fork out £50 a ticket got to listen to Roy Hattersley attack the Prime Minister, just for a change.

Hattersley's case is that meritocracy – Tony Blair's driving value – simply redistributes inequality. He may be right – but until we have a meritocracy we won't know. So instead of attacking systems which don't exist, we should concentrate on doing away with the class barriers, educational inequalities and poverty which prevent people getting on in life. It reminds me of Fabian Society member Mahatma Ghandi's response to the question 'what do you think of British civilisation?' He replied 'I think it would be a good idea.'

On yer bike...

There was an impressive turnout from Fabian Local Societies members for the Local Societies meeting and tea at the House of Commons in July. Over 100 Fabians heard prospects for Labour's second term from MPs old and new – from Jim Knight, the new

Labour MP for Dorset South, to veterans Frank Dobson and Ann Clwyd MP. In the sweltering heat of the Attlee Suite in the new Portculis House, the Fabian audience discovered that the astronomical cost for the new building didn't extend to air conditioning.

The heat had obviously got to Frank Dobson. When asked about young people not voting, he said young people have never voted and reducing the age of voting from 21 to 18 merely increased the number of people not voting. On the summer riots in the northern mill towns, he offered the view that the people behind the riots were as bad as the IRA – controlling their turf and selling drugs. The person next to me muttered 'sounds like Norman Tebbit'.

Progress to where?

To the TUC headquarters for the Progress conference. Or was it? With speakers including Ken Livingstone, Mark Seddon, and Unison's Dave Prentice it seemed at times more like the Tribune Rally. Progress is obviously trying to be more ecumenical in its outlook. The only revelation of the day was Tribune editor Mark Seddon coming out for proportional representation. Tribune backed tactical voting for the Liberal Democrats at the last election and now its editor has backed PR. He

also favours higher income tax and scrapping tuition fees: is Seddon's defection to the Lib Dems on the cards?

On the cards

There's been a hoax chain mail letter doing the rounds for years, asking for people to send their business cards to a little boy dying of cancer who is trying to get into the Guinness Book of Records. The 'little boy' is now in his twenties and cured, but millions of business cards continue to arrive from all over the world. The hoax has been exposed in radio, tv and newspapers. So imagine Howard Dawber's surprise when a copy of the letter arrived on his desk having been passed on via establishment figures such as Mo Mowlam, Gordon Brown, Jonathan Dimbleby, and David Yelland. Isn't it slightly worrying that the people running the country can be so easily hoaxed?

And Finally...

The publishing sensation of the decade is about to hit the streets. The Dictionary of Labour Biography is Greg Rosen's opus magni – a huge work detailing the lives of every prominent Labour politician and figure for one hundred years. With a cast of thousands being bullied and badgered by Greg to write the entries, this might be the first book to have more authors than readers...

America Mourns, A World Awaits

Reflecting on the aftermath of an unsuccessful Irish uprising against the British in 1916, contemporary poet Yeats remarked, "all has changed, changed utterly. A terrible beauty is born." It is almost impossible to view the scenes of untold carnage in lower Manhattan and not be moved to similar observations of momentous change. The 21st Century is here.

As a world awaits America's response in collaboration with its allies in NATO and beyond, questions no one ever wanted to have to answer are being laid before policy maker's doors. Does this

attack undermine the logic for National Missile Defence and therefore British participation with the scheme? How does Britain as a close partner of the US act as a key European Union player in shaping a global response to terrorism?

All of a sudden these questions have been lifted from theoretical debate to issues that stand to mean the difference between life or death for thousands of people in Britain and beyond.

The Young Fabian International Group was established in 2000 to examine these issues through a series of receptions, events and publications focussing on the foreign policy challenges of our time. Never has the time

for such dialogue been greater.

On December 6th we will kick off with an event at the Chinese Embassy in London. Present will be the Chinese Ambassador to the UK, Labour politicians and of course Young Fabian members. As elections in Zimbabwe draw near I will also be organising a conference looking at what may be a seismic democratic event – or not.

If you would like to have any details about the above planned events please contact me at Dartmouth Street or at underwoodchris@yahoo.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

Chris Underwood
International Group Co-ordinator

Lifting the bamboo curtain

In the last of his columns from Shanghai, Tim Sharp reveals a country coming to terms with both its history and its future.

One of the most successful classes I have taught at my school was a lesson on stereotypes. It was in the aftermath of the US spy plane furore and the 16 and 17 year olds were in their element. Americans are fat, bullying and blonde. The French are dark and romantic. The British are gentlemen, have big noses or, my favourite, are “cool - like Mr Sharp.”

I told them that many people in the UK thought that the Chinese all looked the same, wore straw hats and were experts in martial arts. They were not amused. The people of the Middle Kingdom do have a certain conception of themselves as at the centre of the universe. There is some justification for this. A quarter of the world's population lives in China. Even in cosmopolitan Shanghai, few people have regular contact with foreigners. Therefore it is not surprising that the kids hold hackneyed views of the outside world.

Despite this, Chinese people are extraordinarily welcoming towards foreigners. A train journey may provoke stares but will also attract friendly questions about your nationality, job and of course, opinion of Chinese food. In the midst of a fraught discussion with a ticket seller more often than not an English-speaker will step forward to your rescue.

There is clearly a resurgence of national pride which is taking the place of Marxism as a unifying force in the country. The Sydney Olympics attracted enormous attention from audiences pleased to see their country's domination of events such as badminton, table tennis and gymnastics. It can also be seen in the fierce reaction of the Chinese government towards measures taken by the Japanese to restrict certain imports. I was in a bar in Shanghai the night that the 2008 Olympic Games

were awarded to Beijing. The jubilation of the young people there scotches the claims in some of the Western press that interest in the bid did not extend beyond the capital.

It also has its negative side. Although the recent collision between a US spy plane and a Chinese fighter was handled sensitively by China's “quality” papers, there was an outpouring of anti-US vitriol in the tabloid press and in internet chatrooms such as that run by the Communist Party's “People's Daily” newspaper.

Attitudes towards the Japanese are even more disturbing. They are the biggest ex-pat group in the city yet Shanghainese are almost unanimous in their hatred of their Asian neighbours. Despite positive initiatives like school exchanges, even official attitudes are bordering on xenophobic. In nearby Nanjing there is an enormous memorial to the horrific massacre of civilians by Japanese troops there in the 1930s. Each plaque ends with a call to all Chinese to build up the motherland to prevent any future aggression. References to the Japanese verge on the racist.

Foreign countries have to accept their share of the blame for such attitudes. George W. Bush's demotion of China from partner to competitor, the sale of arms to Taiwan, and his proposed missile defence shield are designed to be insulting. Japan's cack-handed approval of a school history textbook that glosses over war-time atrocities in Asia is similarly provocative.

There is evidence that friendly engagement can have an impact on the issues important to the West. Remarkably, the Chinese delegation bidding for the 2008 Olympics cited potential progress on human rights as an argument for the Games to be given to Beijing.

The concern of the Chinese government about its international status has become increasingly evident. During the spy plane affair supportive comments from foreign press and governments were used to justify the Chinese stance. The recent meeting of the Shanghai 5 grouping of China, Russia and some Central Asian states proves that China is seeking links abroad and is prepared to make the running. In time, this may become an alliance which causes the West some worry.

Some steps are being taken by the West to engage with China and vice versa. An increasing number of foreign companies and joint ventures are locating here. Their requirements are a challenge to the tradition-bound Chinese educational system.

At my school, the foreign teachers have helped to develop the school's links with the UK. Assisted by the British Council, an initial video conference exchange with a UK school has become a full-blown partnership comprising e-mail exchanges and reciprocal visits. A football match between the teachers and the British Consulate-General further allowed students and staff to improve their linguistic confidence and interact with non-Chinese.

In the international sphere China can appear intimidating. One of the last communist states, its population of 1.6 billion dwarfs everyone else and for much of the 20th Century the country showed little interest in playing a positive role in the international community. The resurgence of national pride has both its good and its bad aspects. It is the responsibility of both China and the international community to ensure that the former wins out and China takes its place as a partner of the West on the global stage. And you can't get more international than the Olympic Games.

Split personalities

Too much consensus will lead to a victory for the far right, says Ben Leapman

Political journalists love splits. For a decade the Conservative Party has been our meat and drink, as grandees pop up to denounce the leader of the day. Today Labour is at a turning point in terms of where the party stands. I hear that Tony Blair even dropped the phrase “centre-left” at a recent meeting of the National Executive Committee. He claimed to be leading a party of the “centre”. Most Labour members would disagree.

The split comes to a head over the Government’s plans to involve private companies in running public services. Yet while the Prime Minister and his reshaped Cabinet are lined up on one side of this divide, the rebels have no effective leader. The Left in Parliament ranges from has-beens like Lord Hattersley to who-he’s like Alan Simpson. Inside Mr Blair’s big tent, demoted Robin Cook lacks the personal popularity to be a credible rival, while left-wing ministers such as Peter Hain are too junior. Trade unions’ opposition is thwarted by their poor public image and anonymous leadership.

In desperation, we journalists lionize such unlikely figures as stubborn old Gwyneth Dunwoody, sacked as chair of the Transport Select Committee then reinstated in the biggest rebellion of Labour MPs since 1997. This autumn, she and other select committee chairs will set the agenda with investigations into creeping privatisation throughout Britain’s public services. Yet overall, Tony Blair is lucky to have no single, strong, charismatic rival. Which brings us back to journalists and splits.

We all have a special love for feuding at the heart of Government, potential successors plotting against their bosses. Such stories killed the careers of

Michael Heseltine and Michael Portillo by branding them forever ‘disloyal’. Hence the regular stories of rows between Gordon Brown and Tony Blair. Mr Brown, we are told, is a closet “Old Labour” supporter. His budgets, while pleasing Middle England, were secretly redistributed. He has more time for unions and backbench MPs. He is marginally more cautious on Europe.

This is a pale imitation of a split. Yes, Mr Brown would like to be Prime Minister. Yes, there are camps of Blair and Brown supporters in Government. But on most issues you cannot slip cigarette paper between the positions of



the two men who were, in opposition, the architects of New Labour.

If there were no rivalry at all, one would have to be invented - and backed up with ‘evidence’ based on word-by-word analysis of speeches, particularly when they happen to be delivered on the same day. The ‘Brown-as-Old-Labour’ theory is about to run up against its biggest test. The Treasury is the driving force behind privatisation. Much of the momentum may be coming from the mandarins, but Mr Brown is nominally in charge, and the blame will fall on him. The blame for refusing to renationalise Railtrack. The blame for firms making profits out of state schools and NHS hospitals. The blame for the unpopular public-private partnership on the London Underground, which Mayor Ken Livingstone claims is

unsafe. In a sign that Mr Brown is rattled, his friends have started putting it about that the PPP is championed by Number 10 and the Department of Transport, not the Treasury. But it is too late. If a Tube train crashes under the new regime, Mr Brown’s career crashes with it.

MPs are still wringing their hands about the low election turnout. Many fear that the vacuum will be filled by extremists, particularly the far right. Their response is to ignore the problem. Labour election leaflets attack the Tories and Lib Dems, but do not mention the British National Party.

Journalists prefer not to speak to such groups. After this summer’s riots in Oldham, Jeremy Paxman broke with custom by interviewing, on BBC2’s *Newsnight*, BNP leader Nick Griffin, who polled 16 per cent in the town. On TV he came across as exactly what he is, a question-dodging politician whose views are distasteful to most

Britons. People who vote for the BNP do so because they feel ignored. Lack of media coverage fuels that suspicion. So do election rules in Scotland and London which say that parties polling less than five per cent get no seats. In London the threshold was set explicitly to exclude the far right.

In his *Tribune* column in 1945, George Orwell wrote: “Even those who declare themselves to be in favour of freedom of opinion generally drop their claim when it is their own adversaries who are being persecuted.” Democracy wins by confronting its enemies, not ignoring them. The more people see of the BNP, the less they will like it. So let us lift the media and political boycotts. Then, when the far right fails to progress beyond the fringe, it will have only its unpopularity to blame.

Book Reviews

'No Logo' By Naomi Klein



This book has been described as one of the most effective critiques of the marketing industry since the 1950s, and I certainly found it interesting and thought provoking.

The main hypothesis of the book is that the more people find out about the brand names, their outrage will fuel the next political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational organisations, particularly those with very high brand name recognition. Brands are attacked for taking up public space with their images, for censoring out images that do not fit in with their “pro family” image, and for causing job losses in the West and the creation of sweat-shop jobs in the Third World.

Klein's first attack on brands involves the education system, which was previously an “unbranded space”. She bemoans the incursion of brands into universities, and sights examples of corporations stifling protests and influencing academic research.

Interestingly, she suggests that the preoccupation with “political correctness” and equality issues in the 1980s distracted from the bigger issues of the increasing presence of global corporations on campuses. Indeed, she compares it to “rearranging the furniture while the house burnt down”. I think I would take it as read that she would not be an enthusiast for Labour's proposals for more private sector partnerships in our schools!

I found one of the most shocking parts of the book the anecdotes from sweatshops in the developing world, where allegedly many of the branded outfits we wear are produced. As jobs have been lost in the West in textiles, she argues that new ones have been created in the Third World which are far more temporary and transient. She paints a picture of vast factories, employing young women, who work for managers who are often abusive. She regards the notion of “trickle down theory”, where wealth seeps from foreign investment to the local people, as a “cruel hoax”, because the foreign brands put little or nothing back into the local economy. I imagine that if we were to approach the specific brands she accuses that they would have a different interpretation on their activities, but I think she effectively undermines the argument that any type of job is better than none at all.

Klein also suggests that brands have had a deleterious effect on the developing world, by destroying jobs in Western factories. I felt that one of her most valid criticisms referred to the “blossoming of unpaid work” in corpora-

tions that expect young people to spend their summers working for nothing or just travel expenses in order to gain “experience”. Obviously, the only people who can afford to do this have affluent parents who can support them. If work needs to be done, especially when it comes to administrative tasks, then I think that young people deserve to be paid properly for it. Klein makes the point, rightly in my opinion, that as employers come to expect to see placements on CVs, the position of the privileged who can afford to work for nothing will be enhanced.

As I read the book I was struck by two thoughts. I think Klein overestimates the awareness of the general public to the issues she is raising, especially over production processes in the Third World. She praises “culture jammers” who deface advertising bill boards and the protestors who occupy public space to reclaim it from brands, yet I do not think these strategies get their message across effectively. Many members of the public associate anti-globalisation protests more with violence and carnage, rather than the arguments of the protestors. I would have thought that using the mainstream media to make their case would be a more effective strategy than painting graffiti on posters or trashing cities around the world.

I think that Klein's own suggestions for the way forward miss the potential of branded products. She criticises brand names that have set up “codes of conduct” to improve conditions in their factories, suggesting that the workers should solve the problems themselves. In addition, she calls for a new type of world where we should become a “globally minded society, including not just global capital, but also global citizens, global rights and global responsibilities.” This all sounds very utopian to me – and in actual fact I would suggest that brands are actually the most credible route to improving conditions in the developing countries. If a consumer wants to support ethical production processes, then the best way is to buy a brand that is known to follow best practise. In a world of unbranded products, how could the consumer have an impact? The brands that succeed in the future may well be those that add something to society and create the sort of world and conditions that Klein believes in.

**By James Connal,
Secretary of the Young Fabians.**

Tom Driberg,
The Soul of Indiscretion,
 by Francis Wheen,
 Reviewed by Andrew Stevens



The headline 'Young Fabian praises Francis Wheen' would raise a few eyebrows in fashionably left-wing circles so I'll reserve that for later. However, the timely re-release in paperback of Wheen's excellent biography of the controversial former party chair and MP Tom Driberg, *The Soul of Indiscretion*, paints a tale, amusing and sad in turns, of one of the most flamboyant and colourful persons to pass through the doors of Parliament. The subjects of Wheen's biographies so far (Driberg in 1990 and Karl Marx in 1999) have proved to immense in scope for salacious commentary and anecdotal recollection but his mighty tome Karl Marx read in parts like an airport novel, although such a popular subject would require a new theme to be worthy of analysis. *The Soul of Indiscretion* however, reads brilliantly and oozes wit and charm from every page. Instead of the dry regurgitation of a political career, as is common in many a political biography, the reader is treated to an insight-

ful and fascinating account of the circumstances surrounding Driberg's life. Driberg would not have had an indistinguishable life anyhow as former MP for Maldon 1942-1955, Chairman of the Labour Party and peer of the realm (Lord Bradwell of Bradwell-juxta-Mare). But Driberg was also fiercely off-message before the term ever fell off Peter Mandelson's lips (before Peter Mandelson was even born almost) and certainly refused to adhere to the rigidities and moral codes of polite British society as would have been expected of him as a Labour MP. Now famously associated with frowned upon homosexuality and allegedly receiving Moscow Gold as a suspected KGB agent, Tom Driberg's life is given a decent appraisal. Like so many others before and after him, it seems that a figure like Driberg is almost inherently bound to draw criticism from a Labour Party that values conformism and social respectability above the ability to stand out and shine brilliantly and a quick look around today's Labour Party displays few, if any, characters of such a flamboyant and bon vivant nature. But Francis Wheen's excellent book goes some way towards keeping on record the life and times of such a larger than life figure who refrained from what was expected of him at times, especially paying the bills.

A Curious Incident

Having spent a little time at the National Gallery, I walked down Whitehall towards Westminster, in order to admire the Palace. Whereupon the heavens opened, and I found myself sharing an umbrella with a significant man. He was rather taller than I, and as he stooped slightly, I caught a clear view of his balding and greying head. The gentleman was pin-striped, and seemed to have a military mien. He had too many teeth for comfort, and his monogrammed cufflink bore the initials 'IDS'. The classics master at a minor public school, or perhaps a civil servant below the very first rank.

'Horrible weather' I tentatively remarked. He looked at me. 'Most of it has come over from Europe', he replied, with an air of conspiracy, 'But we'll soon fix that. The Americans enjoy atmospheric conditions that are far in advance of ours'. There was now a gleam in his eye. 'I am especially keen on missile defences and the voucher system of private education subsidies'. While I considered this, he went on. 'In fact, there exists only one fat impediment between me and my plans'. Surely, I murmured, there was more than one obstacle. 'There is only one obstacle that I care about!' A pause followed, during which I tried to work it all out. 'This is all beyond my ken' I confessed. 'Exactly!' he enthused: 'Nobody has truly grasped the implications of my final victory. I am prepared to go where even Sir Keith Joseph feared to tread. With my policies to savour, the people of this country will realise that that Mr. Blair's so-called part-

nerships are a dangerous socialistic plot.' This was most confusing. Was my new acquaintance referring to the government scheme to draft in private capital and management into our public services? Indeed, it appeared that he was. Staring into my eyes, he intoned 'Everyone knows that Gordon Brown is a communist'. Quite possibly, I reflected, the government could be made to look left-wing besides this person, even as it set about spinning Bevan in his grave.

As the rain continued to drum down, a gaggle of soaked tourists struggled past. A couple of them attempted to approach our doorway. My new friend shook his umbrella at them threateningly. Surprised, they attempted to slip him a couple of coins, out of sympathy. My interlocutor shook with uncontrollable rage: 'Euros!' he hissed, 'I'll show them how to treat the gnomes of Frankfurt!' He hurled the pennies into the traffic, causing a bicyclist to crash. 'If only we still had hanging', he remarked wistfully, 'and corporal punishment for thieves'. Despite the downpour, I began slowly edging away. 'Don't go' he implored, 'I'm a normal family man with a number of healthy children, none of whom, to the best of my knowledge, are homosexuals.' At that moment, a limousine slowed in front of us, and the darkened window slowly slid down. I heard a sepulchral female voice issuing forth. 'Step inside, Iain, my son and spiritual heir. There Is No Alternative. You will Not Be For Turning. The Mummy Has Returned For The Last Time'. Like any sane individual, I ran like hell.



Silver linings have clouds too

Despite Labour's decisive general election victory in Scotland, Judith Begg warns of the perils of complacency.

Running the first post-devolution General Election campaign was never going to be easy, with Labour focusing nationally on schools and hospitals, what was there for Scottish Labour to talk about?

The answer was to wait for the other parties to stick their heads above the parapet, then machine gun them – and it worked. Both the SNP and the Scottish Tories produced manifestos which were inappropriate for a Westminster election, add to this that they were uncoded and impractical, and Scottish Labour was laughing.

Not only did we retain every seat won in '97, we also saw a tiny swing from the Tories to Labour, compared to a national swing away from us. Similarly, there was a swing to us from the SNP. What is worrying though, was the swing of 6.8% from the SNP to Labour based on the results of the 1999 Scottish Parliament elections. Now that may seem like an odd thing to say, but not if you consider the implications for the next Holyrood elections. Opinion Polls in no way indicate that sort of swing away from the SNP at Holyrood, so how can we account for this anomaly?

It would seem that many people see voting SNP in a Westminster election as a wasted vote, whilst this would not be true in a Holyrood election. Many SNP voters appear to have either stayed at home or voted tactically. They would seem to be holding their fire.

The problem that Labour faces in Holyrood is this; people do not make a distinction between the Labour-led Scottish Executive and the Parliament itself; therefore, the achievements of the Executive are seen as achievements of the Parliament as an institution. We are caught in a vicious circle – the more Labour delivers at Holyrood, the more this is perceived as the Parliament delivering, the more the SNP can claim that a Parliament which was entirely independent could deliver even more.

This situation is exacerbated by our coalition partners, who during the election seemed only too happy to take credit for the achievements of the Executive, whilst pointing the finger at Labour on anything that they felt they could make capital out of. If we are honest, some of the messages coming out of the Executive haven't helped.

Any federal wing of a national Party has to perfect a difficult balance in its relationship with the centre. It is counter-productive to portray divergence in policy as the devolved administration 'standing up' to the central body. To imply

that the central Party is attempting to impose its will on sections of its own structure raises questions about the ethics of the Party, which will taint not only the centre, but will spread throughout its body.

Internal conflict is a gift to the Party's opponents, especially, as in Scotland's case, when the main opposition party has a separatist agenda. To portray diversions from UK policy as a victory of Holyrood over a bullying Westminster, can only help those whose aim is the break-up of Britain. It does not have the intended result of increasing the popularity of the governing party in the devolved institution, but rather decreases the popularity of the central institution, thereby bolstering the separatist case.

Obviously there's no problem with diverging from UK policy, after all, why have a Parliament if we planned to change nothing? But it is dangerous to take the moral high ground. Why not simply say that we've made different choices on how to spend our budget? It's not a miraculous

feat of death-defying economics, it's a budgetary choice. Money which would have been spent one way will now be spent another, and we're only storing up trouble for ourselves by pretending any different. Devolved administrations have the right to make their own budgetary choices. Holyrood is perfectly entitled to

introduce free personal care for the elderly – but lets not pretend that we haven't cut money from the Social Justice budget to pay for it.

It must also be remembered that the Scottish electorate are not the only audience of the Executive. The competing demands of different parts of the country are likely to cause ever greater friction with the establishment of English Regional Assemblies, and it is vital for national stability that all parts of the nation are at ease with the constitutional and budgetary settlement.

We should absolutely be proud of what Labour is achieving in Scotland, but we can't allow the SNP to hijack those achievements, or allow our natural patriotic pride to be defined in conflict with Westminster. The Labour Government at Westminster is not the enemy – poverty, ignorance, squalor, disease and want are the enemies, and the Nats obviously. Westminster and Holyrood share the same vision and aims, divergences in means to achieving these must not be allowed to obstruct our view of the end goal.

“Poverty, ignorance, squalor, disease, and want are the enemies, not the Government in Westminster”



Young Fabians at Alvescot 2001



Young Fabians trip to Uncle Tony's house



Alun Michael at the first YF Wales event



Kevin, Ellie, and Johnny Sparkle



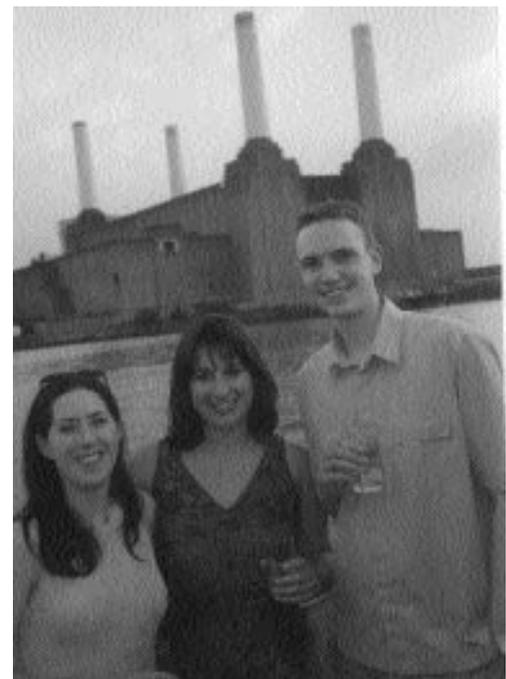
Mari with her shades at Alvescot



Gareth Thomas MP



Thanks for a great year Mari!



Lucy, Rachel, and Andy, at the Young Fabian Boat Party, July 2001



Roger Lyons, MSF Union



Rachel, Nicci, and the Editor

Chairs' Columns

Dear Young Fabian. The summer has seen a frenzy of Young Fabian activity and to quote Gordon Brown and the Carpenters, "We've only just begun".

The Young Fabians held its first event in Wales with a lecture by Alun Michael. In July the London Young Fabian Fabians organised the Annual Boat Party on the Thames this year a sell out. The incriminating photographs appear on page 23. In August 20 lucky members went on tour of Ten Downing Street whilst James Connal organised the first Young Fabian Tennis Tournament. Our annual Summer School was held in Alvescot. Speakers included Ruth Turner, Paul Richards and Matt Carter.

Time to get out your diary.

Education Conference London October 20

"The Comprehensive an ideal too far?" is the topic for the Young Fabian Education Conference. Stephen Timms will be our key note speaker. The event is being hosted by the Institute of Education in London. To register email Rachel@reeves82.fsnet.co.uk

Labour Party Conference Brighton September 30th

Young Fabians will be organising two fringes: 'Can't Stand the Heat - Get back to the kitchen?' Has Labour failed to tackle the work/life balance? Amongst our speakers will be Tess Kingham who left the Commons claiming it was a 'gentleman's club'. (1pm Brighton Media Centre) Our second fringe is 'Selection: The End of the

Comprehensive?' Roy Hattersley has unfortunately withdrawn and in his place Francis Beckett will be defending the comprehensive against Stephen Pollard co-author of 'A Class Act'. (5pm Brighton Media Centre). Our Annual Reception to be addressed by David Lammy will be on Wednesday 3rd October in the Sussex Arts Club.

Chinese Embassy Reception London December 6th

The Young Fabian Excellent programme presents a reception at the Chinese Embassy. If you would like to attend email underwoodchris@yahoo.com

Young Fabian Annual General Meeting London Saturday November 17th

We have invited columnist and author Jonathan Freedland as our guest speaker.

Coming soon: a three night trip to the European Parliament. To be first to hear join our email list. Email: subscribe-youngfabians@egroups.com

As this is my last letter as chair I would like to take the opportunity to say a huge thank you to the other members of the executive who have made this year both successful and fun. The Young Fabians are only as good as the time, effort and enthusiasm of the team. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you all. Greg Rosen will be stepping down from the executive this year I would like to recognise contribution he has made to the

Young Fabians. Look out for his book A Dictionary of Labour Biography appearing in all good bookshops soon!

I look forward to seeing you at one of our Autumn events.

**Mari Williams
Chair, Young Fabians**

Scottish Young Fabians

Hey folks, Following on from the success of previous events held by the SYFs this year there are plans to hold an MSP's reception at the start of October where members can come along, meet the Exec and quiz a few members of the Scottish Parliament at the same time! Details for this are being finalised and will be sent out to you as soon as they are available.

The SYF summer school is also being organised at the moment and will take place at the end of October. As always it will be cram-packed, full of debate on issues of the day. There will be speakers from all sections of political life - MPs, MSPs, party officials, journalists and academics. The AGM will also take place this weekend and the results of the SYF Exec elections announced, so do come along and have your say. Whether you are a new member or an avid conference goer, you will find something in it for you. As soon as details are finalised they will be sent out to you.

You will shortly receive your second edition of 'Talking Point', the SYF newsletter. As stated previ-

ously this is a new venture for the SYF committee and we would hope it was reflective of the views of our members, so if you have any burning ideas or topics you would like to write an article on, please send them to me for consideration in the next issue.

SYF Executive Elections

In a break with tradition the SYF Executive committee elections will this year be held by ballot. This was a move agreed by the present executive committee, in the (provisional) adoption of a new constitution, which will be voted on at the AGM. I hope you will agree that this is a progressive step for the SYFs and I would call on everyone to use their vote. Anyone who is a member of the Scottish Young Fabians can stand for election and you will be notified of the timetable for election in the second edition of 'Talking Point'. Meanwhile if you need further information about standing please get in touch with me on the number/e-mail listed below.

Lastly I would like to personally thank all of the members of my executive committee for their hard work and dedication throughout the year, their continued commitment has meant that we have had an excellent year so far. Thank you guys!

Looking forward to seeing you all in the near future,

**Johanna Baxter,
Chair, The Scottish
Young Fabians
07811 450410
johanna@pcs.org.uk**

A Tribute to Dominic McElroy

Dominic McElroy, the Labour Party organiser for Leeds, died suddenly on 12 August while on holiday in Greece. He was just 26. Michael Dugher and Joe McGowan, two of his closest friends pay their tribute to him.

Dom would have found it funny to be appearing in *Anticipations*, the journal of the Young Fabians. He was, albeit sometimes tongue-in-cheek, a class warrior and he would have dismissed the Young Fabians as a bunch of middle class kids in London who like "talking" about socialism.

Dom was a Yorkshireman through and through. Born and bred in Halifax, he was straightforward, hard working and deeply loyal. Often blunt, occasionally indiscreet, Dominic was no diplomat. But he nevertheless had a heart of solid gold and he was as honest as the day is long. As one of his friends in Leeds has said "Dominic spoke as he found and he loved nothing more than arguing the toss". In spite of this, he was genuinely inclusive in his political friends. Dom was a great social mixer.

Dominic joined the Labour Party in his Halifax aged 15. His commitment to the party was unquestionable. His politics were a combination of old Yorkshire common sense and new Labour loyalties. He wasn't on board with the 'project' - if such a thing really exists - and he had no time for the abstract political fantasies indulged in by Labour's metropolitan elites.

Dom was fiercely practical in his socialism. He backed the Labour Government to the hilt because he knew that millions of ordinary people in this country depended on having one. He was an official of the party and therefore couldn't be seen to criticise senior figures in the Government, but when he wanted to vent his spleen he often wrote letters to the *Guardian* under the name 'Paul Elliot'.

Dom's politics were the product of his background. He joined the party not because he read about it in a book at university or because he wanted to be an MP, but because he saw at first hand the inequality and lack of opportunity that affected many of the people he grew up with. Dom had great empathy for people and a real passion for social justice. Unlike some of the intellectuals and groupies that New Labour attracts, Dom felt the Labour Party in his bones. Labour was a lifelong commitment for Dominic and not a passing fashion or political experiment.

Dominic was also a real grafter. After leaving Halifax to study for a degree at Nene College, Dom joined Labour Students. He was elected to the National Committee as publicity officer in 1995 and he had a real talent for cam-

paing, organising and motivating others. As Tom Watson has observed: "While others were furthering their careers, Dom was rolling up his sleeves. Never afraid of hard work, he was a natural party organiser".

Dom went on to be the 1997 general election organiser for David Lock in Wyre Forest. He played a key role in delivering that seat for Labour and he made many lifelong friends in Kidderminster. He spent a year in London working for Ian Coleman MP becoming active in Tooting CLP, so much so that he stood as a Wandsworth councillor. But, again to quote Tom Watson, "neither the beer or the back-biting were to his liking and he returned to his beloved Yorkshire".

Dominic joined the staff of the Yorkshire Regional Labour Party as European information officer in the run-up to the 1999 European elections. By the 2001 general election, he was the party's organiser for Leeds and able to see more of his close family and friends.

Many of us will remember Dom as a true friend. His humour, kindness and sheer humanity were a great comfort to anyone who needed cheering up. He was one of the loudest people you could ever meet and he was also one of the most fun people to be with.

Dom was always the life and soul of any party. He had a great affection for Irish music - reflecting, as it did, his ancestry - and several of us recall Dominic singing the Fields of Athenry down his mobile phone on Christmas Day. He would take little encouragement in a busy pub to launch into a chorus of the Wild Rover, often amending the lyrics to echo the sounds of the terraces at his beloved Burnley Football Club. Another abiding memory of Dom that his friends share is the endless renditions of Ilkley Moor Ba' Tat. It may be the Yorkshire National Anthem, but to many of us it will always be Dom's song.

Dominic packed so much into his short life and he knew he had to. He never wasted a minute. Dom understood better than most that - to quote the lyrics of John Lennon - "life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans". He will be missed by the Labour party as one of its great servants and most tireless campaigners. And he will be missed by his family and friends because he was a truly loveable individual.

One thing is for sure: heaven will be a much noisier place with Dominic there, but it will also be a lot more fun.

Michael Dugher and Joe McGowan were Labour parliamentary candidates at the 2001 General Election.