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Beef War

Irish elections

Civil Service debate:

Radice and Pirie

Parliamentary Diary Trade Union Diary Newsnotes

Editorial

"What did you do in the Beef War, Mr Blair?"

Slowly, painfully, doggedly New Labour has abandoned its past to become the party of low taxation, low inflation and orthodox finance. To even *talk* about those earning £50,000 a year paying more tax is strictly forbidden. Unfortunately a lot of babies have been thrown out with the bathwater. And now, sadly, it may all be in vain. Speaking at the Scottish Conservative conference in Aberdeen John Major said the next election would decide the fate of "our Parliament, our Union, our country ... It's not just a matter of tax and wallet politics; it is a matter of the nature, heart and fibre of the whole United Kingdom."

Of course he's right - there is more to life than post-tax income. There are bigger things going on than a concern of where we are in the "prosperity league".

The beginning of the 'beef war' has exposed a frightening, bigoted, xenophobic core of this country. Many people were delighted. "Major goes to war at last", said the *Daily Mail*. For the British nationalists in the Tory Party - their time had come.

Many other people were profoundly shocked. The letters pages were full of indignation, embarrassment, even shame. Shame that Britain has been reduced to this. Shame that while Continental Europe has moved mountains to create institutions for preventing a third European civil war this century it is Britain that is playing the nationalist card. Now that the Cold War is over it seems it is back to the old European balance of power games. A German born woman living in Scotland wrote to the *Independent* to say that she finds the current atmosphere very intimidating. And no wonder. America banned British beef in 1988. Six other European countries opposed the lifting of the derivatives ban. But the tabloid cartoonists have pictures of Helmut Kohl in jackboots. The *Sun* prints an article entitled "20 ways to be rude to a German". There is much to be ashamed of.

Yet the Europeans remain remarkably calm, so far. Santer advised the British that they are foolish to become isolated over an issue of public health. Is this the reputation we wish to have world-wide? They have consistently characterised the BSE scare as a European problem, when statistically it is overwhelmingly a British problem. A problem which many believe arose from a dogmatic commitment to deregulation.

The opening phase of the beef war is awash with irony. The sight of the British voting against all sorts of sensible proposals which they have campaigned for; Rifkind attacking countries for not acting according to the recommendations of the Commission. For acting according to assessments of their own national interest!

This all seems ludicrous and embarrassing. But there is a much bigger game being played. And it's a long game. And it's not about which party can have the lower taxation. Hints of it arose in 1988 when the following description of the Germans was leaked from a seminar at Chequers: "angst, aggressiveness, bullying, egotism and an inferiority complex." Nicholas Ridley resigned for saying in the *Spectator* what others thought about the Germans. Thatcher was adamant that there should be no European assistance given to the Germans in their effort to reunite their country - despite the fact that this meant bringing East Germany into the European Union. Unfortunately for the British nationalists this mammoth achievement seems to have occurred more easily than anticipated in those triumphalist days. Mrs Thatcher, in her much bought, but less read, memoirs said she believed there will be another war with Germany in the next century. Making predictions decades hence is not usually a very useful exercise. It may say more about the person making the prediction than about the likely course of European politics.

Whatever about the long term some of the implications of this new hostility are now being explored in the public domain. Norman Lamont has discussed pulling out of Europe for some time. John Redwood has advocated the repatriation of powers from European courts to Acts of Parliaments. He argues for a "renegotiation of our relations with Europe. It is both welcome and necessary."

So, after two decades it seems that a significant part of the political class in

this country is still not reconciled to the European Union and they are determined to do something about it. I have no doubt that the English nationalists would prefer better ground to fight on than bull semen, tallow and gelatine. But politics is about making the most of what you have got. For Major unleashing the forces of nationalism and xenophobia does not create a situation which he can control. But a choice has been made and its better than nothing. Who knows what might turn up? What's more, surprisingly, the left in the Cabinet - Dorrell and Clarke - seem to be on side.

This lurch into overt anti-Europeanism is all the more menacing because of its bipartisan nature. The whole basis of the Blairite coup is that no matter how much humiliation the Labour Party is forced to accept in the end the General Election will be won. That is all that matters. Less attention is paid to what the point of this exercise is. Is it so that so many laws can be passed that Parliament will be busy without rest for 5 years as Peter Mandelson has said? Or is it about the exercise of power?

But there is more to power than winning elections. It is exercised by people other than members of the Cabinet. Blair was in a position of power on Wednesday 22 May. Perhaps more power than he will ever have again. He could have made a principled stand. He could have taken the moral high ground in the face of Major's declaration of war. And maybe that would have involved a rough ride from some sections of the tabloid press. But Blair is an "ethical socialist", he has told us. He is a pro-European, he has told us. His is a politics of morality, he has told us. He believes in making "hard choices", he has told us. He, *personally* is in control of New Labour - "It will in the end be driven by me, of course" he explained to the *Evening Standard*. Of course.

His response to the Tories nose-dive into the politics of xenophobia? "The national interest is now engaged and I am certainly not coming here [Italy] to undermine it."

The Tory Party has a majority of one. If a robustly led Labour Party had distanced themselves from the Government and forced a vote on one of the most reckless acts of anti-diplomacy in years who knows what might have happened? Could Ted Heath vote with the Tories? The Scottish and Irish nationalists probably wouldn't have done so. The Ulster Unionists want

Northern Irish beef to become Irish beef. Would Douglas Hurd have voted with the government? He said the result of the beef war is that Germany's attitude to Britain is: "We don't know what you are saying. You are very important. You will stay very important. But there's no dealing with you. There's no point in considering British ideas." Maybe Labour would have lost such a vote but at least the consciences of its most senior figures would be less troubled.

As it is junior Labour spokesmen were forced to defend the Government. But the Labour Party gets no credit for it. When bullying people proves so effective what reason is there to stop? Thus Malcolm Rifkind attacked the Next Prime Minister as follows: "He cannot make his mind up on such a crucial issue. That is pretty pathetic." Various European powers who have been looking forward to a Labour victory for some relief from Britain's obstructionism will have to think again. As this magazine argued last month, real divisions in the society are represented in the Tory Party. The Labour Party cannot speak for all those people disgusted at the country which they are living in. They must turn to a new pro-European group fronted by David Hunt, called Conservative Mainstream. Despite all the smoked salmon breakfast meetings during an 8 month long campaign "to woo business" which ended recently the Labour Party cannot speak for business. For they fail to realise that the business interest involves more than low taxation and low wages. Sir Brian Nicholson, outgoing head of the CBI made this clear when he demanded that the Tory Party remember that the Second World War is over.

Public opinion is a construct. This is especially true of foreign politics. Anyone who doubts it should consider the ease with which Stalin went from being demonised to being fondly referred to as "Uncle Joe" and back to being demonised again. Events of the last week have made it clear that anti-German feeling can be whipped up in this country. New Labour can make a major contribution to stopping this. But for New Labour public opinion is what opinion polls say. And what opinion polls say is what has been constructed. Thus the country is governed by the Tory tabloids. They already know that Blair is a pushover. All the more reason to have him as Prime Minister. So who will be governing the country once Blair gets elected?

Editorial

Labour candidates win two seats in the Forum

Labour candidates contested every constituency in the recent Northern Ireland elections. This is the first time for a quarter of a century that such a thing has happened.

Labour gained two seats in the Elected Forum, and it will be represented in the Negotiating Process if it ever gets off the ground. But much more significant than the two seats was the fact that Labour groups and individuals from all quarters of the Six Counties got together to field over 70 candidates on an agreed programme, and that by and large they stuck to their agreement.

Labour received virtually no publicity. It made its presence known by old-fashioned methods - the methods used by the Labour movement in Britain when there was a Labour movement in Britain. Considerable media publicity was given to the Democratic Left (the former Official Sinn Fein, which is now a member of the governing Coalition in Dublin and is virtually Unionist in orientation), but it polled only a fifth of the Labour vote. In fact the Labour vote was 50% greater than the combined votes of the Democratic Left and the Workers Party.

There was nothing unexpected in this. Wherever Labour has stood in recent years it has polled very substantially better than the Democratic Left and ahead of the Workers Party. Labour has now established itself indisputably as the major representative of the socialist interest in Northern Ireland. And it has done so without any support at all from the British Labour Party, and despite powerful influence exerted against it by the British Labour Party.

During the election campaign Mo Mowlam briefed the main journalists on the Labour Party attitude. She emphasised that the Labour Party has nothing to do with the Labour candidates - the Labour candidate never claimed that it had - and

she said that when the Labour Party won the General Election it would govern Northern Ireland without reference to the local Labour interest there. In short, she encouraged the journalists to ignore the Labour presence in the election - and they did.

Many of the Labour candidates had previously taken part in the Campaign for Labour Representation lobby to persuade the Labour Party that since it governed Northern Ireland when it won a British election it was under a democratic obligation to seek a mandate there. Mo Mowlam always rejected the CLR case without being able to construct a democratic argument against it. The CLR eventually accepted as final the Labour Party refusal to function in Northern Ireland and it set about developing Labour politics there outside the structures of the Labour Party. But that also displeases Mo Mowlam. She doesn't want to have any Labour politics at all in Northern Ireland when she becomes Secretary of State. And she thinks that is democracy!

Two Labour MPs declared their support for the party which appeared on the ballot she as "UK Unionist Party - Robert McCartney." They were Kate Hoey (founder/leader of Democracy Now) and Frank Field. This party has carried personality cult to the extent of including the leader's name in its title. UK Unionist Robert McCartney has three seats in the Elected Forum. Its list of candidates included Conor Cruise O'Brien and a member of the Conservative Party from Glasgow, Mark Dingwall. The *Times* published an editorial in support of it on May 29th. But it was beaten into second place by Trimble's Unionist Party in Northern Down where McCartney won a Westminster by-election last year. This was because Paisley's DUP stood down in favour of McCartney in the by-election

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Labour Press Statement

Labour Hasn't Gone Away, You Know!

Commenting on Labour's election success, Newtownabbey Labour Councillor Mark Langhammer stated:

"We are naturally delighted that there will be a Labour voice at the talks and we thank everyone who supported us.

"At the beginning of this election, we set ourselves the target of being in the top 10 parties and finishing top of the left. This has been achieved.

"Our success heralds the rebirth of Labour politics here. We must now go on to build an inclusive Labour movement and we intend to consult widely on this, in particular with the trade union movement.

"Labour representatives will not shirk their responsibilities at the negotiations. We will do all we can to help create a lasting political settlement acceptable to both communities.

"We will also ensure that pressing social and economic issues are given the attention they deserve.

"The significance of Labour's achievement at this election should not be underestimated. The election was designed to concentrate on constitutional matters to the exclusion of all else.

"We were also largely ignored by much of the media. Those who wrote us off have now got egg on their faces. The message of the election is clear:

Labour hasn't gone away, you know."

but stood against him in this election.

Hoey's claim that McCartney represents a new "inclusive Unionism", attractive to Catholics, always rang hollow. (He won the North Down seat only because his strident claim that the Official Unionist Party was putting the Union in danger made Paisley his ally.) That claim has now been reduced to obvious absurdity, because UK Unionist McCartney did not field any candidates in the main Catholic constituency of West Belfast while the other Unionist parties did.

Another British Labour influence on the election was an attempt by AEEU Executive (which has been strongly aligned with Hoey's Democracy Now in recent years) to prevent its lay officials in Northern Ireland from being Labour candidates.

Given these circumstances, it can be concluded the emergence of Labour as a force in Northern Ireland politics is the prospect of a media event, and that its prospects must improve from now on.

Above, we report on the limited media interest in Labour in the papers in the province. In Britain little interest was taken in the election in general other than that generated by Conor Cruise O'Brien. The fact that the province is not part of the party political conflict (such as it is) has long meant that it has been regarded as a strange and confusing place. As such it often has strange and confusing elections.

After the election on Saturday June 1 a brief and alliterative comment appeared in the *Guardian*: "The Labour movement has always been a distinct undercurrent in Ulster politics, which has been thwarted by the refusal of Walworth Road to organise in Northern Ireland. As frustrated Labour voters are fond of pointing out, you can be a Labour Party member in Bali, Bangkok, even Roddy Doyle's Ballymun in Dublin, but never in Belfast."

On the same day the *Times* was less sympathetic. Feeling it could not ignore a

Election Results

Across Northern Ireland, Labour got 6,425 votes (0.87%). By constituency the results were as follows—

Antrim East	218	(0.65%)
Antrim North	187	(0.42%)
Antrim South	236	(0.59%)
Belfast East	199	(0.52%)
Belfast North	571	(1.41%)
Belfast South	333	(0.88%)
Belfast West	319	(0.76%)
Down North	171	(0.47%)
Down South	927	(1.98%)
Fermanagh/S. Ty	297	(0.62%)
Foyle	544	(1.20%)
Lagan Valley	143	(0.33%)
L'Derry East	241	(0.65%)
Mid Ulster	271	(0.62%)
Newry & Armagh	262	(0.53%)
Strangford	202	(0.50%)
Tyrone W.	792	(1.93%)
Upper Bann	512	(1.12%)

party which was represented in the Negotiating Process it chose to minimise its achievements by two contradictory means. On the one hand Labour was full of "hardline socialists", a term of abuse if ever I heard one and yet it got elected because, the *Times* claimed people mistook it for a thing called "Tony Blair's Labour Party." It seems that Tony Blair is developing the same megalomaniac tendencies as Robert McCartney.

Donations to the Labour campaign:

Labour Election Fund,

c/o Mark Langhammer,
477 Shore Rd,
Newtownabbey,
BT37 0SP

report

Labour in Northern Ireland

In what is the most significant Labour development in Northern Ireland for 20 years, a newly formed Labour coalition is putting up 72 candidates in the election held on 30th May.

Below David Morrison explains the labyrinthine electoral process, comments on the rise of Labour. We reprint the coalition's manifesto on the back page.

This election is to a 110 member Forum out of which delegates will be chosen for the all-party talks which are to begin on 10th June. 5 members are to be elected from each of the 18 constituencies (making 90 in all) and an additional 2 will be given to each of the 10 parties with the highest aggregate vote across Northern Ireland. These 10 parties will qualify to send delegates to the all-party talks.

This is a most peculiar (and unnecessary) election. A form of party list system is being employed, that is, electors have to vote for a party rather than an individual candidate, the party being one of the 30 or so specified in the legislation.

These range from the well known Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) led by David Trimble to the unknown Democratic Partnership and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (which is funded by the Rowntree Trust - apparently it's not a political party!) They also include a number of individuals who objected to the principle of the Government drawing up the list of parties allowed to stand: these individuals were given the status of a party in an attempt to keep them quiet and parties such as Independent McMullan were added to the list.

Another peculiarity is that a couple of party leaders reckoned that they were more popular than their parties and demanded that their names be appended to their party label: this was conceded so we now have 'The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - Ian Paisley' and 'UK Unionist Party - Robert McCartney' on the ballot paper.

To make matters more complicated, there is not just one list of candidates for each party for Northern Ireland as a whole. To appear on the ballot paper in a

constituency a party has to nominate a list of candidates in that constituency (minimum 2) and 5 members of the Forum will be elected for each constituency, chosen from the party lists by a means which is too complicated to describe - the number of members elected for a party will be very roughly proportional to the votes cast for the party in a constituency.

This horrendously complicated system was cobbled together by the Government as a compromise between those parties like the DUP and the SDLP who wanted a Northern Ireland wide list system and the UUP who wanted a Forum elected by STV in the 18 individual constituencies. Ian Paisley has always topped the poll in the Northern Ireland wide European election with John Hume second (a close second in 1994) and the UUP candidate third some way behind even though the UUP holds twice as many Westminster seats as either the DUP or the SDLP. This explains their preferences for electoral system - and why Ian Paisley wanted his name appended to his party label.

Only the top 6 parties - UUP, SDLP, DUP, Sinn Fein, Alliance and UK Unionist - will get constituency seats (the latter in North Down only where Robert McCartney is the MP). To be represented in the Forum the smaller parties including the parties associated with the Protestant paramilitaries - UDP and PUP - will have to be in the top 10 in terms of total vote across Northern Ireland.

Labour Co-ordinating Committee

The initiative for putting up a Labour candidate was taken by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee which put up candidates in the 1993 local government elections when Mark Langhammer was elected in Newtownabbey. It also put up Niall Cusack in the 1994 European Election when he came 9th with about 2,500 votes.

(Former members of the Campaign for Labour Representation are associated with this Committee - the CLR, which had the objective of persuading the Labour Party to organise in Northern Ireland, when Kate Hoey MP formed Democracy Now and hijacked the campaign for Unionist purposes).

At the same time other Independent Labour Councillors - Hugh Casey from Craigavon, Malachi Curran from Down and Johnny McLaughlin from Omagh - all of them formerly of the SDLP, were in discussion about possibly forming a Labour Party. These strands were put together at a meeting in Belfast on 13th April to which the Militant were also invited. Agreement in principle was reached to stand in the election on 30th May and a Manifesto was drawn up and agreed in the following week.

There are 72 Labour candidates in all, at least 2 Labour candidates in each of the 18 constituencies which means that Labour will be on the ballot paper in every constituency - and everyone in Northern Ireland will have the opportunity to vote Labour. (Another peculiarity of this election is that there is no deposit so there is no cost involved in nominating candidates). In the vast majority of cases these people are local to the constituency in which they are standing and have some sort of Labour and/or trade union credentials.

There is a good chance that Labour will finish in the top 10. It certainly should be top of the left, ahead of the Workers' Party and Democratic Left. Whatever happens, the very fact of the Labour coalition's existence bodes well for future Labour development.

Beyond nice and evil

analysis

Joe Keenan replies to Walter Cobb's reflections on the nature of evil

In Labour & Trade Union Review, April 1996 (No 53). Mr Walter Cobb commented at length on the implications of the horrific incident at Dunblane. I have no knowledge of the circumstances of that incident and would prefer to wait on the report of the inquiry into them before attempting to come to any conclusion on the matter. My remarks here are directed to more general aspects of the article.

Mr Cobb commented:

"...any fool knows that a really evil deed is the quickest route to fame. That is the first way in which the whole society is guilty of the encouragement of evil."

Insofar as I can extract any meaning from that comment it would seem to go as follows: society promotes the acquisition of fame as a social good, fame can be acquired most readily by murdering many innocent victims, the more, and the more innocent, the better; therefore, the whole society is guilty of the massacre at Dunblane and any other similar incidents which might be expected to occur.

Mr Cobb may care to elaborate on just what, if anything, he actually meant. Mr Cobb went on to say:

"To encourage a crime is never as bad as actually committing it, obviously."

I do not believe that is true. Even if it is true, its truth is far from obvious. Very many murders in Northern Ireland have been committed by persons who were encouraged to those acts by others who were very careful to keep their hands clean of anything so vulgar as actual blood and guts. To my mind the hypocrites are more, not less, culpable than the poor bloody infantry who came to call, kill, court and cell.

Again Mr Cobb may care to elaborate on just what, if anything, he meant.

Further Mr Cobb reflects:

"Personal violence is the oldest, crudest and most commonly unjust system of enforcing some basic standard on a human society. In a tribe, anyone may try to

enforce what they see as proper conduct on anyone else. But both the facts and the common rules of culture are open to dispute. When civilisation tries to bind together many tribes, some more formal rules are necessary. Law was invented, not as a means to perfection, but simply to curb the brutal and destructive pattern of the blood-feud...we are drifting towards the American concept of personal 'defence', a return to tribalism."

That is to misconceive both tribalism and civilisation. It is a caricature of the origins of law.

Law was not invented for any purpose whatsoever: it was a development in the social life of more or less settled human communities which won the allegiance of those communities to the extent that it facilitated the internal resolution of more or less unsettling disputes. As such the development of law may most usefully be viewed under two aspects. Firstly, as a narrative of class struggle and its outcome in the original establishment of property relations in land, labour power and the products of labour. Secondly, as the surviving record of the elemental social struggle that ultimately gave rise to you and I and Mr Cobb: that between necessity and freedom, custom and code, law found and law declared, spoken and written law.

The point here at issue between Mr Cobb and myself arises under this second aspect of the matter.

Tribal society was anything but lawless. It was on the contrary, society groaning under the weight of customs and taboos which regulated every conceivable element, the most minute detail, of daily life. Tribal society was not composed of individuals who could engage in "personal violence" or take "personal vengeance". Such purposeful individual activity was literally inconceivable. Violence, defence and vengeance were collective affairs, conducted by kin-groups and totem societies in ritual forms heavily imbued with religious significance. There was, in

consequence, very little of it.

When the coup-counting, eagle-feather collecting warriors of the Sioux and Cheyenne engaged in war with the civilised, law-abiding, United States they encountered the New York Irish and a thorough-going violence that they could not previously have imagined.

The war of all against all which Hobbes posited as the character of a state of nature is in fact a very unnatural state of affairs. Peace is the condition of existence of tribal societies which consequently, left to their own devices, are very stable arrangements. If, however, they are disturbed they very rapidly become very unstable and either atomise to death or dissolve into vast, tenuous, transitory groups whose only common habit is war.

The "tribal confederations" of the Volkswanderung (Vandals, Goths, etc.) were just such fluid, transitory, communities. Germanic tribes who had long since been propelled into history by the activities of the Romans were terminally destabilised by the irruption of the Huns (another confederation of tribes stimulated by another civilised empire; the glory of its rise and fall spanned little more than a generation) and migrated, seeking gainful employment and a refuge and allies against the monsters behind them, into the empire. But the empire, old and arthritic, collapsed under the strain, and the Germans, who had once been stable tribal peoples and now were raw material in a condition of nervous anxiety, had to rebuild it.

Fortunately, the Catholic Church was at hand with the requisite tools under its cassock. The migrations had given rise to the novel authority of kingship (king, from *kuning*, the head of the kin) and the Church set about disconnecting this institution from its (already distant) basis in the social life of the tribe. Literacy was magic and so, hey presto, tribal custom and taboo was codified; written down in a Latin which neither judge nor judged could speak or read. Law which had been found in the life of the people was delivered to the king who now declared, and by declaring changed, it. And the king who declared the law of the people in the books of the church, declared that it was his law and his people (what the Church thought about it all was proclaimed by Innocent III from the Lateran in 1215 or thereabouts).

Hence law, which had been of necessity, entered the realm of freedom. Freedom,

which is another name for instability, is the condition of existence of civilised societies, which have in consequence an infinite capacity for violence. The human material of civilisation has been formed in the shadow of total war. The most successful of civilised societies have been those which have most easily and completely channelled the energies of their instability in sustained bursts of frenzied mayhem.

Brendan Clifford, in a variety of articles in publications including I think the L&TUR, seeking to uncover the origins of the first and second World Wars, has shown how Britain in the twentieth century has very successfully organised its military disruptions of the world as crusades against evil. If Mr Cobb had read those articles he might have phrased his formula somewhat differently as "...the first way in which the whole society is guilty of the encouragement of evil is by organising itself in crusades against evil". But alas not.

For Mr Cobb: "There is such a thing as evil. I do not propose to say much about its likely original causes, which are utterly obscure and beyond our present knowledge of the human brain. Some people stay nice even in worst circumstances. Some people go wrong despite having had every possible advantage. The reason for such differences is not the main point, nor are we yet knowledgeable enough to tell why one human brain works differently from another. It could be inheritance, trauma, chemicals, the Infernal Lord Lucifer, whatever. The point is, even after one has recognised personal evil, one should not avoid the separate question of how such evils may be cured or encouraged."

Evil, in the sense in which Mr Cobb deploys the term, as a universal property which exists independently of the discrete acts which instantiate it, is a worthless, meaningless excuse for refusing to think anything in particular in this crude world of instances. Within a theological framework the concept has meaning and even some value as a kind of universal solvent, attacking the struts and undermining the foundations of the framework itself. Outside those claustrophobically narrow confines of the absolute, infinite and eternal the word is simply overworked and empty; exhausted of meaning it lounges limp and distressed in a tabloid world according to Bruce, where it's nice to see ya, to see ya nice, and if you're not nice, GOTCHA.

Church based rules on philanthropy brewed in alien culture

Postscript

I had intended to leave it at that, but then Mr Cobb, having stitched himself up in number 53, returned to the fray in number 54 and entirely undid himself. And its not a pretty sight

According to Mr Cobb: "Mathematical concepts like Phi and logarithms and triangles clearly exist apart from human consciousness of them. Whether evil is a concept of the same sort is a moot point. My personal view, based on a wider materialist set of beliefs, leads me to say that it is not."

Briefly in response to that: they don't, it isn't and you're not. And I really would prefer to leave it at that, but seven words, however satisfying, do not constitute an argument and some species of argumentation seems called for and so, in for a penny in for a pound...

Mathematical concepts like Phi and logarithms and triangles are products of human consciousness. They are abstractions from the sensuous experience of human beings that have enabled us to organise that experience into a world of intelligible thought and discourse. But the world as we think and speak of it is an entirely human creation and entirely distinct from the world of objects of sense that we assume will continue in some sense to exist when we have gone to glory.

We cannot know that it will continue in any sense to exist because we can by definition have no experience of its existing after the possibility of any such experience of it has disappeared.

We can, however, know and know clearly, because we know ourselves, that when we have packed our conceptual bags and gone beyond worlds and the words of them that Phi and logarithms and triangles will not be besporting themselves and gambolling with unicorns and fairies on the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

I recall Flann O'Brien suggesting in *At Swim Two Birds* that evil is an odd

number but apart from that I cannot imagine how the notion of it as a mathematical concept could ever become moot.

Further, but forbearing to overburden the matter with more quotes from Mr Cobb:

Plato's view of evil as a privation of the form of the good was taken up by Augustine and became part of the small change of Scholastic commerce. I wasn't aware, and tend rather to doubt, that he was homosexual. The whole tendency of his philosophy is disgust at the physical world; its flesh and desires and so on. The process of digestion horrified him and I always assumed that sex did too. But then it is difficult to work up any public-schoolboy smut on an issue of asexuality.

I am not a practical man and cannot be expected to dwell any longer on social matters where it is an advantage to skip questions. I am not very athletic either and frequently trip up.

Perhaps I should conclude by pointing to just one instance of his vacuous use of empty words leading to a problem in Mr Cobb's discourse. Crossbows, he told us in No. 53, "were banned as ethically hideous when first introduced into medieval warfare". And indeed they were, but really Mr Cobb might have asked himself why.

Medieval warfare was a matter of gallant knights, gaily bedight and encased in armour, trampling masses of unarmoured peasants to get at and joust with one another. By the period in question the technology of armour had outpaced that of weapons and their jousts were good and thrilling, but harmless, fun; for the knights that is, the unarmoured mass still had to put up with being trampled (and chopped to bits and so on). Then crossbow-wielding peasants (well, not peasants exactly, but persons unknown to heraldry and chivalry and being gaily bedight) fired armour-piercing bolts which made battle-fields dangerous places for gallant knights, which was ethically hideous. Of course it was; the prospect of class struggle, class war even, most certainly isn't nice.

That was why he called it evil?

??

No!

Battle...?

3.142

Good

Not say any. But many concepts of what is not decent

Common view someone under pressure, avert other - maybe hit policeman

Gwydion M. Williams

Notes on the News

Mad Cows and slaughter

There is no evidence that Al Capone was a gangster. At least, he was never duly convicted of anything except tax evasion. So there is no evidence of his gangsterism. Or rather, one could say this, in the same sense that Tory Ministers keep saying there is no evidence for things that displease them.

When dealing with infected cows, there are two methods that can be applied. The first says that if any animal has contracted an infectious or mysterious disease, the whole herd is unsafe and must be slaughtered. This is the traditional method for dealing with foot-and-mouth. It has been successful. The same determined policy has successfully kept down BSE in Irish cattle, and in cattle everywhere else except Britain.

The second method involves applying a version of "human rights" for cows. Not "human rights" in the sense that the animals are any less likely to end up on the dinner table or offal heap. But when dealing with new, dangerous, mysterious disease like BSE, the decision was made to only slaughter the "guilty" animals and "save money" by preserving the rest of herd.

This method depends heavily on guessing right about an unknown disease. British farm policy has so far guessed wrong. BSE had (perhaps) come from Scrapie in sheep. People had eaten infected mutton without ill effects. So *perhaps* the same would be true of BSE, which would make it safe to let the disease die out naturally. And *perhaps* this could be done without any need to protect people from BSE-infected beef.

Then along came some new cases of human disease that were just what one would expect if the gamble had proved wrong and BSE can in fact infect humans. It is a dangerous insidious infection, surviving even what most people would

regard as a very thorough cooking. And American research has cast doubt on the original notion that BSE was in fact Scrapie for cows. You can give cows Scrapie, but not easily, and the resultant disease does not look very much like BSE. It suddenly looked very possible that every bit of British beef was in fact a lethal time-bomb, sowing diseases that would gradually emerge and cause chaos in years to come. Hence the bans and general panic.

This disaster is blamed on having followed the "best" scientific advice. Note the qualification - not "general scientific opinion" or "available advice" but "best" advice. Not the evidence that which independent experts trust, nor the opinion of most scientists, but "best" in that it matches the prejudices of the minister.

This "best" advice has been repeatedly wrong, and the rest of world does not trust it a bit. You can bully or bribe till you get advice you want to hear, and then hide behind it. Only the rest of the world has chosen not to be deceived. Has said "Baaah Humbug", in fact.

Both Canada and the United States of America long ago banned tainted British beef. Under all of that free-market rhetoric, America remains highly regulated and protectionist. Europe tried to be tolerant but must protect its own reputation. With British beef tainted as mad, bad and dangerous to eat, they must take a hard line.

Al Capone would probably have handled it much better. He was a successful practitioner of wickedness. The Thatcherites are Jeffrey Archer type clowns, thinking that secret wickedness and trickery is how the world really works. It really does not, and Capone was always careful to keep his customers satisfied and well looked after, however tough he may have been on his competitors. Effective slaughter would have been just what he would have recommended, and he would have been quite right.

Westminster Fouls

There has always been some fiddling in local government. Council estates have to go somewhere, and may change the balance of an area. Likewise it matters very much where the political boundaries are drawn. But that was a game with rules, which some people bent a little but everyone more or less respected. Equivalent to bad tackles in football.

What happened in "New Model Westminster" was equivalent to bringing out a baseball bat on the football pitch and start laying about with it. Yet given the remarkable lack of modesty or empathy among those involved, I can well believe they really did not understand how badly or deviantly they were acting.

Russia - expensive freedoms

There is no situation so bad that you cannot make it worse. The USSR since Khrushchev had been trying to abandon socialist economics while keeping intact the structure of party dictatorship. It might have worked - China has been managing it - but in the event got stuck.

When the collapse of the USSR suddenly put Boris Yeltsin into power, it became obvious that the pig-headed stubbornness that had made him excellent as the leader of the anti-Gorbachev forces made him a completely useless leader. When Russian society began to fall apart, he had no idea what to do about it, except for fighting people he did not like.

All those who have thrived on the chaos fear a repeat of the left victories that have occurred quite smoothly and successfully in Eastern Europe. There does seem to be no third way. In Russia "liberalism" is not even able to unite with itself. Yavlinsky and Lebed cannot coexist or combine. One cannot balance liberal nihilism with anything else, not even another brand of liberal nihilism.

But we are told that the ex-Communists are a threat to The Freedom. When people say this, they are not talking about freedom in the ordinary sense - people doing what they want. This is obviously good in itself, but also of necessity limited, since everyone is interacting with everyone else

Newsnotes continued on page 15

Kevin Brady

Parliamentary Diary

Drinks for me. (Only).

Away from Westminster, Gordon Brown was seen drinking champagne in Marylebone station buffet bar shortly after the FA Cup Final between Liverpool and Manchester on the 11th of May. He was surrounded by admirers. It was believed that Peter Mandelson was not among them.

Those working class families affected by Brown's plans to scrap Child Benefit for 16 to 18 year olds would no doubt be even more angry if they were aware that while they must make do with less, the source of their anger will not be going without his little pleasures.

Mindless thoughts

How is it that a strong advocate of a nuclear weapon's based defence policy and a staunch supporter of the UN deployment of force against Saddam Hussein, even where it involved the mass slaughter of Iraqi soldiers, can be a leading figure campaigning against what is commonly known as the knife culture?

I refer to Lady Olga Maitland, who when moving the Third Reading of the Offensive Weapons Bill on 26 April said: "The knife culture is set to engulf us all unless we take a firm hand and curb it now. There must be tough condemnation from society for young thugs who engage in mindless violence."

The reason, one supposes, lies in the reference to young thugs indulging in mindless violence. If such violence really is mindless, arising from no specific cause, then it ought to be stopped without giving it further thought. But it isn't, as numerous research studies have shown. Facts, of course, are never allowed to get in the way of opinions of the likes of Lady Olga Maitland. Consequently, we are confronted with not only ignorance about the causes of the violence of young thugs, but also with basic prejudices against

alienated working class youth.

Westminster Blues

That other Tory lady, Dame Shirley Porter, was the subject of a House of Commons debate on 14 May. In a brief, but brilliant interjection, Labour's Gordon Prentice referred to a document unearthed by the district auditor in which Shirley Porter said, "A key element in building stable communities must be to attract home owners into Westminster. This means finding innovative ways of ensuring that the right sort of housing is available to the right sort of buyer or tenant. And it must be available by October 1989".

Prentice pointed out that October 1989 was significant because it was when the electoral register for the 1990 council elections was closed. He also referred to comments made by Westminster council officers which suggested a carefully contrived plan to manipulate the council's housing policy for party political purposes. In his winding up speech, the Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, David Curry, took up a number of points made by Opposition speakers. He ignored completely Gordon Prentice's salient comments.

Privatisation Gains and Pains

On 15 May in one of those little debates which give Tory backbenchers the opportunity to suck up to Ministers, John Marshall, MP for Hendon South, praised the Government's privatisation record, and suggested that, "Privatisation has led to a much better performance by the British economy". Better, presumably than under previous governments. This, of course, is nonsense but something has to be said in favour of privatisation, particularly as a number of recent studies have shown that it is far from being the success imagined

by John Marshall and his colleagues.

What was really interesting about his comments, however, was his acknowledgement that improvements in efficiency in the privatised utilities are largely the result of reductions in employee numbers. He cited British Telecom, British Gas, the electricity companies, as well as British Airways and British Steel, where increases in efficiency are linked to reductions in the workforce. We can, therefore, applaud his honesty, if not his naivete. He also claimed that productivity increases have been accompanied by a dramatic rise in the quality of customer service. Unfortunately, BT was the only example he gave of where such a dramatic rise has occurred. No doubt because he would have had to distort the facts a little if he wanted to claim the same about electricity, gas or water. Having made the connection between privatisation and competition, he forgot to tell the House that in the residential market, where he said that service has improved, BT has a virtual monopoly.

New Labour - what a shower

Something is seriously wrong when Edwina Currie sounds more progressive than New Labour's defence spokesman, Dr. John Reid. Dr. Reid (although his doctorate is of the non-medical type we shall refer to him as doctor, for this is how he wishes to be addressed) apparently believes the presence of gays and lesbians in the armed forces weakens operational effectiveness, denies the right to privacy to both homosexuals and heterosexuals and undermines mutual confidence, obedience and the cohesion of the military unit.

He made these claims during a debate on the Armed Forces Bill on 9 May in response to an attempt by Edwina Currie to introduce a new clause which would have outlawed discrimination on the grounds of sexuality. If only Alexander the Great, who was accompanied by a young man on his military campaigns, had been present to answer Dr. Reid's charges. The thing that was really sickening about his speech, however, was his reference to heterosexual service men and women having to shower with gay and lesbian members, as if homosexuality was a contagious disease.

Dave Chapel

Trade Union Diary

Tony's favourite store
Whenever New Labour wants to demonstrate the daftness of public ownership they ask "would you really want Marks and Spencer to be nationalised?" It's a special favourite of Tony Blair's.

Sir Richard Greenbury has made it clear that the company's newly declared support for Blair would have no bearing on the firm's determination never to recognise a trade union. That condition seemed to be fine by Mr Blair. The Labour Party's position in general is that trade unions should be recognised when more than half the workforce are members. No comment is made on the problem of acquiring members without having recognition.

Last month M&S announced that they are abolishing the concept of a full-time job. Staff were told they could negotiate about the *decision* over the following weeks. These "negotiations" would be between the individual employee and the M&S organisation. No doubt during the course of these negotiations the employees will see the wisdom of the assertion Mr Blair made in the *Sunday Times* in February: "The real change in industrial relations is the recognition that the threat from outside competition is greater than disagreement with the management."

But fair is fair M&S are certainly doing their bit for equality of treatment. Workers who opened up the stores in the morning have up to now been given a free breakfast. Following individual negotiation that has now ended. Here is the M&S line on the matter:

"It is felt that it was no longer appropriate for one group of staff to have the benefit of breakfast. We have to make sure that everyone is fairly treated."

Obviously Tony has impressed Marks and Spencers with his caring, sharing philosophy.

Teachers' Shame
Government policy in education

seems to have had the effect of not just neutralising union opposition, but of getting the unions to become the most enthusiastic enforcers of Government ideology.

Policies such as league tables - especially in the case of younger children - mean that schools are fighting to have the greatest proportion of well-behaved and swotish pupils. Children who are in any way difficult must be got rid of, rather than having extra time and effort spent on them.

The unions know this. They make a great fuss about it. They publicly denounced Government policy for the odious social consequences that were inevitable.

Yet the unions, not just the Heads, seem to talk about little else these days but the "right" of teachers to expel pupils at will. Much was made of the recent case in which teachers refused to touch a boy who had assaulted a teacher. The *Daily Mail* joined enthusiastically in publicly humiliating this boy.

The unions calculatedly ignored the circumstances of the case. The boy had been trampled in a stampede of pupils. A teacher tried to help him. He lashed out and struck the teacher. But never mind all the that. The opportunity for making the case for teachers' "right" to expel, over the decision by the Local Education Authority, could not be missed.

The teaching unions won a moral victory over the Government over the last three years. Now they demean themselves and become the Government's greatest apologists for no better reason than making life easier for themselves. But unless a child is denied an education, expelled or not, he will end up being dealt with by a teacher somewhere. Perhaps even a teacher who is a member of a trade union.

Mirror, Mirror, on the wall

Since the days of that great socialist, Robert Maxwell, the Mirror group has hardly had the best of records in its treatment of workers. In those days it tended to pick on particular and partly isolated groups of trade unionists - the rest were having their pensions stolen.

Under Montgomery, Mirror Group wouldn't recognise a union if it stepped on one. It was with this organisation in mind that the New Labour Party opposed the Tory Bill to limit the ability of media giants to take over TV companies. (Mr Blair was also doing a favour for his new friend, Rupert Murdoch.)

The *Mirror* is the sponsor of John Prescott's "Rolling Rose" campaign whose purpose is to recruit large numbers of paper members for the Labour Party - constituency voting fodder.

The Mirror Group has recently launched a recruitment drive. Mirror TV are seeking 300 new staff. They will be given 18 month contracts. They will be paid for 6 of those months. (They will, after all, be working in television.)

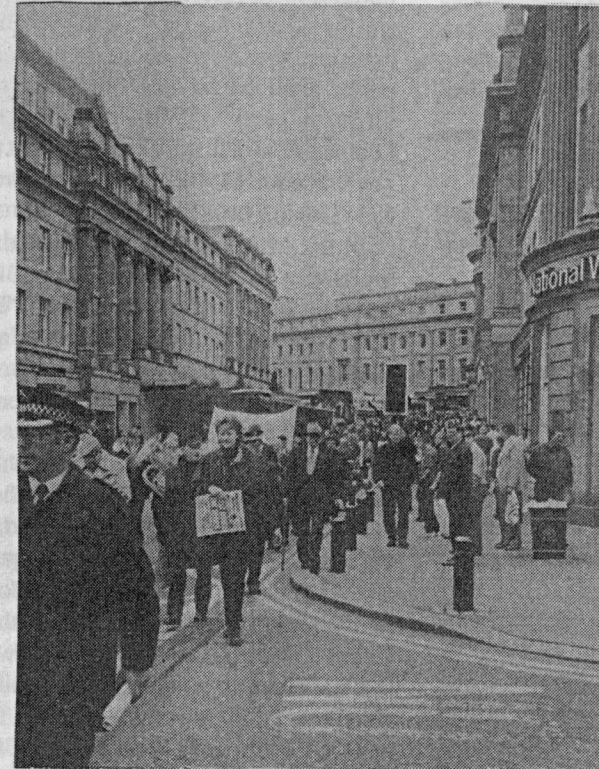
A very minimum wage indeed.

A "nation of thieves"

On Saturday 11th May, the New Atlantic Initiative held a Congress in Prague. This was essentially a Margaret Thatcher fan club. The main, and only serious event was a speech by Mrs. Thatcher. Most of the other contributions were adulatory genuflections before the Great Lady which even caricatures of Soviet Congresses could not do justice to.

Mrs. Thatcher's theme was essentially anti-German and a plea for us to accept American world supremacy: "The most practical way forward, I believe, is to merge the North American Free Trade Area with the European Community, including the countries of Central, and perhaps in time, Eastern Europe." Prague was a suitable venue. Almost alone in Eastern Europe it pursues the pure Thatcherite free market dream - in the process of which it destroyed its own state. While others in that part of the world have adopted policies which acknowledge that there is such a thing as society, the Czech Republic is referred to widely as a "nation of thieves."

Well, Mrs Thatcher was heartily applauded by her (last remaining?) audience in her Czech bunker. And applauding along with the rest was none other than Peter Mandelson.



Newcastle, New Labour. Not.

I went to Newcastle to celebrate May-Day. I used to march on May-Day in London, but expressions of international workers' solidarity have been considered "unhelpful" for some years now by our leaders in the metropolis - not just by New Labour but by the "anti-workerist" pillocks on the so-called Left.

"Workers" and "solidarity" have been banned from the vocabulary of New Labour and any notion of internationalism has finally gone with Tony Blair's backing for John Major's daft bull semen war with Europe.

But back to May-Day, about 1000 people, accompanied by bands, walked through the city-centre from Central Station to Exhibition Park on Saturday 4th May.

We were addressed by TUC Chairman, Margaret Prosser, who is always good for a fiery speech. Michael Meacher was introduced by a local organiser who said that he had better make clear that a Labour Government would not simply be a change of faces.

He duly obliged. The big issue on the

May Day

report

Dave Chapel reports from Newcastle

march was the abolition of the new JobSeekers' Allowance. Mr Meacher was quite clear that Labour would get rid of this legislation. I have met Mr Meacher many times over the years and can vouch that it was definitely him, and not some

"what does Blair say?"

The JobSeekers' Allowance was the main subject of an address by a representative of the civil service union - the CPSA. He was supposed to make the case for the unemployed. (The actual unemployed, present in some numbers, were not invited to speak.) Admittedly my mind wandered. But my only memory is of this man whinging about the effect the JSA might have on those who worked in dole offices.

(A week or so earlier the real unemployed had occupied a dole office. No one one was hurt and no damage was done. But the CPSA was not best pleased - though they have a policy of making an alliance with with the unemployed. An account of this occupation will appear in a future issue of this journal.)

researcher, on the platform. I say this because a recent magazine article under his name pledging repeal of the JSA was renounced under pressure from Blair's babes and a researcher was blamed. When Meacher made his pledge in Newcastle, the local anarchists heckled him with chants of

May Day report continued on page 13



New Labour make their demands on May Day

Michael Morrison

"Blairspeak"*an analysis of New Labour's policy making mechanism*

Tony Blair introduced Giles Radice's collection of essays "What needs to change" with a piece entitled "My vision for Britain" (A longer review of these essays will appear next month, space permitting.)

In his introduction Blair states that "The role of intellectuals and thinkers is crucial" and argues for a "constant engagement in the battle of ideas." Yet he fails to mention any of the essayists in the book. In fact he mentions no other "thinkers" past or present, domestic or foreign, Tory or Labour. The impression is given that all the thoughts expressed are his own.

The communitarianism of Etzioni, fashionable in New Labour circles 18 months ago is not mentioned. The enthusiasm for the "Tiger" economies fashionable about 3 months ago is not mentioned either. No members of the Labour Shadow Cabinet get a mention. The Blair musings contained in this introduction are ill-defined and self-contradictory. But should anyone feel inclined to engage in the "battle of ideas" there are no other sources to refer to.

(The one exception to this is as follows: "The freedoms won by ordinary people over the last hundred years are what makes this a civilised society today. T.H. Marshall described this process as the century-by-century accretion of civil, political and social rights." This magazine would be delighted to publish any reflections on the contribution of Mr Marshall to making Britain a young country again.)

For a social democrat Blair's "vision" makes depressing reading. Deliberately so, since he regards it as one of his key tasks to create low expectations, warning against generating "excitement" (though on the next page he says Labour's project is "exciting and relevant").

Sometimes Blair gives the impression that Government is impotent in the face of

global capital (eg *Financial Times* 23 May 1995: "the determining context of economic policy is the new global market," and therefore "the room for manoeuvre of any government is already heavily circumscribed"). But not here. He attacks the Tories as follows: "The failure of economic management has caused the Tory government's failure on employment, spending and tax."

So, presumably then, another form of economic management would have resulted in a different outcome. On the one hand this other - New Labour - form is only subtly different from the Tories given that the Labour Party is now the low-tax party, remember. On the other hand it must represent an enormous revolution, for Blair contrasts New Labour's "radicalism" with the "so-called radicalism" of the Thatcherites.

The Tories have wrecked manufacturing industry, the trade union movement, the mining industry, fragmented the railways and the health service, created what is, in Blair's own words, "the most centralized and heavy-handed state in peacetime history". But, instead of avocating a period of calm he attacks the Thatcherites for not being radical enough.

However, many people have commented that the politics of New Labour and the Tories are becoming indistinguishable. That cannot be because Tony Blair is broadly satisfied with what the Tories have done, give or take some spending on education (financed by reductions from other programmes.) They have left a "social fabric which is tattered and torn", he writes. Much "of what they have done in power has actually helped

accelerate social breakdown." The remedies of the New Right were "divisive and inefficient", he explains. It seems he wants to do something very, very different from the Tories. Confused?

"New Labour - is the heir to a proud tradition in the party's history", he argues. (In the *Guardian* on 15 Jan '96 Blair explained that New Labour is "not some public relations exercise but a new and different party".) With a thoroughly Leninist view of history he argues that the government's of Atlee and Wilson were New Labour, *avant le mot*.

But Old Labour merely wanted to socialise a part of the economy. Blair wants to "build a new social order." "The only way to rebuild social order and stability", he alleges, "is through strong values, socially shared, inculcated through individuals, family, government."

What does he intend to do if these values are not socially shared? Must these values be shared throughout England, or the United Kingdom or the European Union? What does he intend to do if families don't wish to inculcate their children? Is he prepared to continue with the social disorder and social instability which would be the consequence? The inculcation of strong values is not, Blair assures us, "a lurch into authoritarianism" it is about "freedom and responsibility." Just to repeat, Blair is asserting that a society imposing strong values on individuals, presumably against their will, is about *freedom*.

And what exactly are these values, which are at the heart of the next Prime Ministers' politics and which we all must share? "This moral credo shows itself in our practical commitment to a mixed economy, with public and private sectors both working in the public interest". Are people not committed to this "moral credo" at the moment? What would it mean to not be committed to it? The economy certainly isn't as mixed as it used to be, but on the other hand Blair is on record as saying "it may not matter whether the spending is public or private" (speech to CBI conference last November).

In addition to explaining his "ethical socialism" Blair also wrote about the creation of a "stakeholder economy" and a "stakeholder society". This does not appear to be a minor matter. "Social justice is inconceivable while millions of people have no stake in society. That is why we have placed such stress on tackling unemployment." Thus it is not possible to

Then

Arthur Scargill on Blair:

"The only memory I have of Tony is when he first spoke with me, when he spoke as a newly elected MP, when he said it was one of the proudest moments in his life to speak alongside one of the greatest trade union leaders in Britain, Arthur Scargill".

source: *Guardian* May 4

be both unemployed and to have a stake, it seems. It is also not possible to have social justice without having a stake. And Blair has said repeatedly that he believes that *everyone* has a stake. Ergo, full employment seems to be the objective. (he also wants organisations to become more "productive by using the enormous advances in technology", presumably so that they can employ fewer people).

The "stakeholder economy", he goes on to say "is based on the idea that unless we mobilize the efforts and talents of the whole population, we will fail to achieve our economic potential, and continue to fall behind." That is an admirable and moving conception of society. But it has nothing to do with capitalism. As everyone knows capitalism is about making profits. Mobilising the efforts and talents of the whole population has only ever occurred as an act of political will, most effectively during world wars.

Further evidence of Blair's hostility to market forces comes from his observation that "unless we act together, the rewards will be hoarded at the top." That is a devastating insight. Surely it must mean that those at the bottom must organise to defend their interests directly in the market or via their representatives in Parliament. Curious then, that he did not mention the Social Chapter once. Is this not a mechanism for preventing the rewards being hoarded at the top? Curious then that his one mention of the minimum wage was in an explanation of why "big promises" should not be made. The minimum wage is not set in the interests of those at the bottom, he explains, but for the "good of the country".

Now

Blair continues to give his support to Thatcherism:

"In the first wave of response to global change, markets had to be opened up. In Britain this was largely done in the 1980s." "Our task is not to revisit the 1980s"

source: *Progress*, Feb**Blairism in Prospect**

Gordon Brown: "Our political opponents are desperately trying to dismiss our plans as nothing more than empty political sloganising. How wrong they are." (*Progress*, Feb)

Blair again:

what stakeholding is not: "This is not code for the import of the German economic model." (*Prospect*, June)

what stakeholding is: "such an economy is about empowerment of the individual"

(ibid)

"It means we need points of security in a world of rapid change." What is a point of security? How will we know when we have it? (ibid)

And now, a brief guide to Blairspeak: "My politics is in essence quite simple" (*What needs to change*)

1. "Change today depends on winning trust".

2. "Winning trust depends on showing vision and competence".

3. "proving competence is done in the details as much as the big vision" but from (2) trust depends on vision and competence (and from (3) we know this is more a matter of detail than vision (which from (2) we know is necessary for trust.) (ibid)

"Political reform is an essential part of economic and social reform."

"we need to fashion a new social order to meet the anxiety and insecurity people feel about the breakdown of traditional norms and institutions, and the fragmentation of families and communities." (ibid)

Thus, recognising that people are anxious about the breakdown of traditional norms, Blair aims to reassure them by creating a new social order involving change in the political, economic and social spheres.

To summarise he joins the pillars of the agenda:

"What joins these four pillars of Labour's political agenda is a belief about how people relate to the society in which they live." (ibid)

May Day report continued from page 11

Howard.

Imran Ali, from the Punjab Labour Federation brought a lot of people down to earth as he described how employers in his part of the world dealt with trade union leaders. They killed them. Mr Ali differed from most of the stars on the platform by trying to talk to as many people as possible and not just "those that matter".

Then from the sublime to the ridiculous. A man who called himself "Larch", a leader of the tree protesters in Newbury spoke. I have no problem with saving the environment. (If I had a penny for every tree I planted following the storms of '87 and '91, I'd be a rich man.)

But Larch came across as a manipulator of minds. He scared the hell out of me. I could not get the image of Waco out of my mind. When someone promises personal liberation without any structural context, the suspicion of an ego trip must be very strong indeed.

Interestingly enough, there were plenty of genuine anarchists present. In fact, they probably represented the largest single group. At their centre was a group of working class Geordies in their mid to late twenties who were charming, politically interesting and good fun to be with. With them were a lot of teenagers who quite rightly were more interested in snogging than flogging papers.

The anarchists were not allowed to speak, though they had a damn sight more to say than Mr. "Larch". They held their own rally on May-Day itself and were addressed by a Labour activist who was genuinely unemployed. At the official May-Day they confined themselves to having a good day out, organising a football match and engaging in a bit of fairly mild heckling for the benefit of Mr Meacher.

The weekend was rounded off nicely on the Monday when the local labour movement took over Teignmouth railway station for a festival of music, dancing, eating, drinking and a dollop of politics.

Michael Craig

report

Giles
Radice

V

Dr Madsen
Pirie

for and against a politically neutral civil service

22 May, Whitehall

This debate would have been more interesting had Peter Mandelson turned up as billed. That is because Madsen Pirie's case for the politicisation of the Civil Service has many similarities with the calls for Whitehall upheaval that Mandelson made in the risible, badly written, proto-Thatcherite tract he published a couple of months ago. Who would have won the competition for being the most "radical"? We will never know.

As it was Mandelson was replaced by Radice, the Chairman of the Public Service Select Committee, calmly made a defence for a politically neutral civil service without reference to the multitudes of personal advisors swarming around the upper reaches of New Labour. Nor did he mention a new New Labour policy, announced 8 days earlier by Ann Taylor which is to have civil servants working for Opposition spokesmen.

Dr. Pirie cannot be personally blamed for the enthusiasm with which Thatcher took up many of his suggestions during her rampage through civil society in the 1980s. In practically any other society (and indeed in this society at any other time) a man with such an unshakeable and lunatic attachment to market dogma would be the subject of mild amusement, if not actual pity. Though the head of the archetypal think tank he has not engaged in thought for a very long time, relying instead on faith. Unfortunately for everyone else it seems the fervour of his crusade will not diminish until an exact correspondence between economic reality and the most rarefied abstractions of Anglo-American economics is achieved; a fervour which, incidentally has nothing to do with the subtleties and moralities of Adam Smith's economics.

It is not clear if his tongue is in his cheek at least some of the time. When it

was put to him that he was falsely polarising the debate and reducing complex issues to naive simplicities he acknowledged this explaining smugly that he was adopting a debating position. If so, it is tiresome to listen to.

Pirie's stock-in-trade is provocation based on unsupported assertion. For him it is axiomatic that the public sector is "less efficient" than the private. (Readers may think I am camping this up. Regretably, this man cannot be satirised.) Efficiency is a matter of cash. That certain goods and services should or must be provided collectively does not affect the primacy and simplicity of efficiency as a concept.

The public sector is less "entrepreneurial". Therefore it is inferior. (Not just different.) He spoke without reflecting on the possible anti-social consequences of having an entrepreneurial police service or judiciary. That the private sector is the model to aspire to is axiomatic regardless of what is produced or in what circumstances. (Mirror group pensioners spending their old age in poverty no doubt find this a great comfort.) The implication is that a complex, industrial economy could function without a substantial civil service. He did not feel it necessary to point to examples of this happening in practice.

As for the question under discussion Pirie asserted that the Civil Service prevents Ministers from doing what they want. (And what Ministers want is what the electorate wants. An untalented GCSE politics student could identify flaws with this extraordinarily clever man's analysis, should he be unfortunate enough to be exposed to it. Pirie's world is a simple, and in my view, uninteresting one.) His case was made with elegance and wit. This did not compensate for the fact that it was completely without foundation as several members of the audience, many

of them civil servants, pointed out. They explained that the most notorious examples of misgovernment came in the teeth of civil service opposition. Opposition which eventually relented. The most notorious example, being the poll tax, was a suggestion of the Adam Smith Institute as Radice cheekily pointed out. The problem is in fact the opposite of what Pirie supposes - ambitious civil servants, knowing that they are dealing with a dogmatic administration become unwilling to present contrary arguments. Despite these objections Pirie did not feel motivated to present examples to support his case.

One such example raised by Radice was that of Tony Benn who blamed his failure to do unspecified and no doubt radical things on civil service opposition. On hearing this whinge Denis Healy countered that he never had any trouble, suggesting that it may be something to do with Benn personally. Radice explained that Benn's difficulty was a lack of Prime Ministerial support - in other words a political problem. Civil Servants are non-partisan, not non-political. This is a precious and rare thing. Corruption is the norm in government in many parts of the world. Pirie did not acknowledge this. (Corruption is, of course, just another form of things being sold for what the market can bear.)

Pirie's proposal was that the top three civil service grades should be appointees of the government in power. He asserted that this would make them more dependent and therefore accountable to their political masters, thus speeding up the pace of change - any change, good or bad.

Pirie is right. The Civil Service do have an agenda. But not one which is sinister, as he implies. They are conservatives. They are in favour of caution, of reflection and the tested method which half-works rather than the untested method which might make things a lot worse. This is to be applauded. It provides a quality control on the impulses of, often arrogant and occasionally ignorant Ministers.

Part of Pirie's argument went as follows: the Civil Service has changed a great deal already therefore it should change more. Pirie, like Thatcher, is an anti-conservative. They both want the existing order to be upset and are intolerant of the intervention of inconvenient facts. Facts which contradict The Dogma are clearly wrong, so why consider them?

(indirectly exercised) power.

I believe that Pirie's proposals would result in a senior Civil Service that was less, not more, accountable. With changes of government the architects of policy would be gone before the long-term effects are fully clear. (Although I think he massively overstates the extent to which complex things like policy making can be adequately linked to individuals. He asserts heroically that a major factor in the success or failure of a policy - which are in themselves complex questions Pirie brushes over - is the personal effort of the policy maker. He then makes yet a further assumption that the knowledge of personal identification with a policy combined with severe penalties and generous rewards will secure additional commitment. At no point when Pirie makes assumptions does he advertise this fact. What to the observer is an assumption is a truth to him.)

Unlike the anonymous and publicly spirited people who populate a career Civil Service, the people that Ministers appoint directly are likely to have big egos and big ideas, expressed with certainty. This is comforting to a Minister. It does not mean that they are right. Their big egos may make them unsusceptible to the etiquette of Whitehall life resulting in conflict with other advisers or even, with their own Minister. Alan Walters, Thatcher's economics advisor springs to mind. Blair may start to see the merit in a political neutral Civil Service once the various advisors to senior Shadow Cabinet Ministers start squabbling among themselves or, worse still, not tell him what is going on.

The meeting, sponsored by *Prospect* magazine was well attended, well chaired and included many interesting and reflective contributions from the audience. Unfortunately, however, large numbers of questions were accepted and then answered in one go in ten minutes at the end. This permitted, Pirie in particular, to respond to the ones he wanted to. One observation he chose not to respond to was that his proposal would result in having two (at least) separate senior Civil Services. The one currently in Government would be well informed. The other would not. What is lost by the break in continuity and the loss of experience? In America, always a model for Pirie, government halts for about three months when there is a change of Party in office.

I read recently that Pirie is a major figure in Mensa, an organisation in which

people with a facility for doing IQ tests attempt to figure out what else they have in common. Compared to the population at large they have a marked tendency to support eugenics. They are also sympathetic to the idea of an absolute form of meritocracy. Black, white, rich, poor, men, women, gay or straight are all allowed in. As long as they are very, very clever. This may explain Pirie's innocence on matters of history, culture or society. The fact that Britain's Civil Service has been a model for the rest of the world since the Northcote-Trevelyan Report in 1854 is of no account.

In this respect he has much in common with the leader of New Labour, a party without history. A party that does not recognise social or cultural divisions, never mind class ones - One Nation! New Britain! Blair, who is also a very, very clever man explained in an interview with the *Evening Standard* (23 May) "I am an unremitting meritocrat." (And what about the poor? Why the hell didn't they try harder at school instead of coming for help from people who went to the trouble of getting a decent education.)

Listening to Madsen has a *fin de siècle* air about it. The great guru of privatisation is scraping the bottom of the barrel in search of more things to privatise. Publicity-shy Blair seems to have some sympathy with this view though he lacks Madsen's refreshing directness. He explains in *Sunday Business* (21 April):

"It is not that privatisation is ideologically wrong in all circumstances. It isn't.... There are all sorts of ways it can be done now. Look at the Labour Party itself, we've contracted out some of the services we've had - the newspapers and magazines are done on a private basis." The Labour Party's glossy New mag *New Labour, New Britain*, featuring New Sir Terence Conran is not quite the same as the Post Office.

Like Pirie, though, New Labour will have difficulty finding things left to privatise but *Sunday Business* summarises as follows: "Blair doesn't rule out major privatisations in the future - one of the few things the Labour leader does not rule out."

But it would be an exaggeration to compare him to Dr. Madsen Pirie. Unlike Pirie he "disagrees with" situations that are "unfair" (in the *Standard* interview again.) His example? - "millionaires who pay no tax."

That really pisses me off as well.

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all the time. But then there is The Freedom, absolute and God-given, not restricted at all except by monstrous tyrants - but also not implying that people can necessarily do what they want. If your notion of freedom is outside of The Freedom, then the authorities have not only a right but even a duty to stop you at once. That is how The Freedom operates both in Britain and America, and some in Russia want to follow their example.

One other minor point - not two people can quite agree on what The Freedom actually is. Most liberals and libertarians are agreed that it ought to be obvious, and are therefore enraged with each other for failing to see the obvious.

Russia since 1991 has been treated as a defeated nation. Its armed forces are still intact, but turn out to count for little in the new world order. It has grown poorer - lost between one-third and one-half of its wealth. Many people are ambitious to turn it into a third-world country, selling raw materials and importing manufactured goods. Only the whole process is being done so clumsily it is almost bound to fail. A simple electoral defeat for Yeltsin is probably the least painful way to end it.

The market for pain

"Yes it hurt / Yes it worked" say the Tories. It would have been a good slogan for the Miss Whiplash ladies who advertise in London telephone boxes. Only each individual really does have a choice about whether or not to make use of their services. Whereas the Tories have imposed their painful remedies against the wishes of a majority of the population. Especially in Scotland, which is most likely lost after some two hundred years of union following seven hundred years of vicious conflict.

Britain in the 1970s needed a shake-up after several decades of the very best and fastest growth the economy had ever had. It did not need more "market forces", which were more or less irrelevant to the wealth of the total society.

Labour manifesto

Elections May 30

Labour is a broad grouping of independent Labour councillors, socialist groups and individuals who are working together to establish an effective Labour political presence in the Northern Ireland area.

We stand for a fairer, more just society, and the fullest extension of democracy to enable working people to control their lives and destiny.

A vote for us is a vote for traditional Labour values:

- *full employment*
- *defence of the National Health Service against the imposition of market forces. Scrap the Trusts!*
- *civilised standards in a system of comprehensive social welfare;*
- *opposition to the privatisation of our water and public transport services and of the Post Office; and a return of the electricity industry to public ownership;*
- *equal rights for women;*
- *proper trade union standards of pay and conditions for workers, including a minimum wage.*

Labour is the Third Strand in politics, which is neither Unionist nor Nationalist but is concerned with uniting working class people in defence of their common social and economic interests. We will put bread and butter issues at the top of the political agenda where they belong. And we will deal squarely with all other issues, with the shared interests of working class people as our guide.

A vote for Labour is a vote for democracy and a just society, and against the stale sectarian politics of the past.

The Peace Process - No going back

- We are opposed to all violence and coercion from any quarter. There is no acceptable level of violence.
- We support the principle of democratic consent by both communities in determining the political and constitutional future of Northern Ireland.
- All-party talks must begin on 10th June - without fail.
- Their aim and object must be to find lasting political arrangements and to take the gun out of Irish politics permanently.
- Any new political arrangements and institutions agreed in the talks must be based on the best interests of working class people.
- The peace talks should be broadened to include social organisations such as the trade unions and community associations.
- De-commissioning should be addressed as the talks proceed, not as a pre-condition.
- While we are sceptical about the proposed Forum, we reserve the right to argue the socialist case there against Tory policies. But we will not prop up any institutions which do not have broad cross-community support. There can be no going back to a Stormont-type regime.
- The victims of violence should be honoured in the best possible way - by building a lasting peace which both sides of the community can give their allegiance to.
- A sensitive and humane approach should be adopted to the issue of prisoners. There should be an agreed release programme for all prisoners in Britain and Ireland serving sentences arising out of the troubles.
- There should be a community-based police service which is locally accountable and reflects the communal balance.
- The European Convention of Human Rights should be enacted into law in Northern Ireland.
- Fair Employment legislation should be revised to include provision for fair distribution of public funds.
- Government and administration should in future be "transparent". Freedom of Information must be provided for.
- We support co-operation and harmonisation between North and South, but only on the basis of measures which serve the interests of working class people in each jurisdiction. No reduction in social standards is acceptable.

A Jobs Commission

- There should be an additional track to the current political process dealing with social and economic issues, especially jobs. Unemployment is a fundamental social problem. It needs radical solutions.
- We want real jobs. And we want to bring the training programmes and industrial agencies under greater community control.
- To that end, we call for the establishment of a Jobs Commission involving representatives of the political parties and giving a voice to trade unions, community and women's groups, youth organisations, and the organisation of the unemployed.
- A Jobs Commission would force bread and butter issues up the political agenda and give them the attention they deserve.
- It would also build trust between the political parties by concentrating on issues that unite rather than divide people - and thereby help create the climate for a lasting peace.