

CROSSBOW - The Bow Group magazine

Conference Edition '07

The
BOW
GROUP

BOW

Media: The art of Politics?

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Editor's Note



When Tony Blair came into power in 1997, I had just started university. My tutor had given us strict instructions that we were to communicate regularly with him using a sinister and new-fangled device "ee-male". I was none too sure about this "ee-male" thing and was convinced it would never take off.

Four years later, I was conducting most of my personal and work correspondence by email. Friends who had previously been on the other side of the world were instantly contactable, MSNable, SMSable. By the time Tony Blair left office earlier this year, MPs were putting themselves up for 24 hour scrutiny on television programmes like 'Big Brother' and (in a manner of speaking) entering teenagers' bedrooms through Face-book.

Tony Blair anticipated and rode a revolution in the way we communicate; the way we think of others, the way we think of ourselves. In 1957, when Crossbow started, politicians would make brief and crackling forays into the public's life on the wireless and occasionally a shaky television image.

Fifty years later, thanks to media advancements, can almost smell their MP's aftershave. The result? The editor suggests that as a result we have moved from a world of thinking about politics to a world of feeling about politics. A world of advanced party branding, designed to tug heart strings, not spark debates. And that in turn has bred a different brand of politician, and a different brand of politics.

This special pull-out supplement to the 50th Anniversary of Crossbow looks at how this media revolution has changed politics and its politicians. John Lloyd sets out what he sees as the tectonic change in balance between media and Government, and we trace the debate back through the pages of half a century of Crossbow.

One accusation levelled at today's politicians, echoed by Geoffrey Howe here in the main magazine, is that they have become more narrowly politically focused. Has the all-rounder politician of artistic flair become a thing of the past? Michael Ancram MP and David Blunkett show off some of their artistic efforts and we look back at the literary writings of Winston Churchill. We discuss why the Left have managed to gain a monopoly hold on art and media and whether that is justified. When I worked at the BBC, I was told to keep my party allegiance quiet if I ever wanted promotion. But in response, Peter Whittle, from the New Culture Forum sets out the Right's claim on art and culture.

I understand that for the next General Election, whenever it may be, Saatchi and Saatchi won Labour's marketing bid with the phrase "Not Flash, Just Gordon." They've realised that 'unbranded' is the latest brand to be seen with. Tories take note: Labour are still on the money and well into the post-branding era. They'll be wheeling out their flashiest marketing men to make the public think that Tony's media revolution never happened.

**Charlotte Leslie - Editor, Crossbow
PPC Bristol North West**

The Bow Group - Council 2007/8

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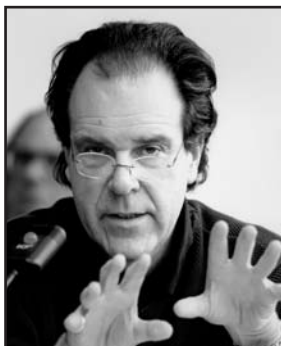
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The Great British institutions

by John Lloyd



The great British institutions to which people gave their faith and trust have, in the last four or five decades, mostly declined from the positions they held. These would include organised religion; political movements and parties; the monarchy; trade unions; patriotic associations; even institutions like the family. All of these have declined in power, and above all in esteem.

They are seen now, mainly, not as revered repositories of trust but as, at best, instruments for serving a particular interest – and often pretty rusty ones, at that. In every case, these institutions have their problems, contradictions and divisions put in the foreground – the problem of homosexuality for the Church of England; the problem of the succession for the Monarchy; the problem of representation for the trade unions; the problem of authority and separation for the family. We have lost, or mostly lost, any kind of naïve faith in these things: lost an innocent way of seeing them. Opinions divide on whether that is a bad, or good, thing.

Second, within that overall loss, there has been and remains a specific loss and a decline: that is, in the field of politics. There has been, more or less everywhere in the democratic world, a continuous drop in party membership and party activism; there has been, more or less everywhere in the democratic world, a general decline in the numbers voting; there has been, more or less everywhere in the democratic world, a diminution of trust in politicians and politics, as measured in polls. Parties, which are the basis of democratic life, are slowly – if trends continue – dying. Politicians are voted in by fewer and fewer people; and are less and less trusted, even by those who vote for them.

Third, these declines have been accompanied by a great rise in the power of one great engine: that is the engine, or engines, of the media. The late Anthony Sampson, who a little before he died, re-issued his “Anatomy of Britain”, 40 years after the first one, two years ago, calling the new book “Who Runs this Place?”, said in it that “no sector increased its power in Britain more than the media...the masters of the media are the new aristocracy, demanding and receiving homage from politicians, big businessmen and the old aristocracy”. Onora O’Neill, the chairwoman of the British Academy, said in her Reith Lectures of 2002 that “the press has acquired unaccountable power that others cannot match”. The old associations and movements were ways of understanding the world – through the prisms of religion, or ideology, or group morality. These things have not gone, of course; but they are mostly weaker. What is much stronger are the media: and they, often, are the only carriers of the messages from the older institutions. Our understanding of the worlds outside of our own acquaintance comes through the media: and so, too, do many of our functioning ideas of right and wrong.

In the past half century, the media have changed hugely. They have not only become much more present everywhere and at all times, they have also become much more aggressive.

Broadcasters like to compare the polite, even deferential, interviews of the early television years with the confrontational interviews of today – always to make the point that confrontation is much better than deference. It is essentially a celebration of power: the power the media have to command politics. The media compete, inevitably, with politicians and other public figures – for the attention and trust of the same people, whom politicians call the electorate and the media, viewers, listeners and readers. The media substitute their own rhythms and demands for those of parliament: declaring that they are the real opposition, they make the studio into the national debating chamber. The demand to make instant replies and give instant answers then replaces the much slower deliberations, compromises, deals and revisions of parliamentary and government politics.

We don’t know what the effect of this is and will be. It might be very good: certainly, we in the media mostly believe it is, and constantly say it is. It might be all to the good that we are cynical, about the motives and actions of those in power; for all power corrupts, as Lord Acton said, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Yet in that case, what about the power of the media? Has that corrupted us? If we are the watchers and the guardians of public morality, who’s looking over us? Is politics better done on and through the media than in parliament and in cabinets and in councils? What we do know is that politics is now done very largely through the media; that the present government thought about nothing so hard as the media when they were preparing for power and think mightily about it in power; and that David Cameron and the new Conservatives have followed the lead, in reshaping their party to the demands of...the media.

We now have, it seems, a turning away not just from politics and political life but also from its representations on the media. Newspapers are less read; news and current affairs are less watched. Entertainment becomes the more constant demand and is more efficiently delivered. People increasingly turn to a new medium – the Internet – for information, debate and also for entertainment. Even television is now an old technology. Many believe that the world of the internet, and that of bloggers, heralds a new age – a new age with some features of the past age. Glen Reynolds, himself a blogger and author of a recent book on the Net, believes that “we are perhaps going full circle; before the Hearst era (late 19th-early 20thC) – and even to a degree before WWII, when big media was countervailed by other institutions. – political parties, churches, labour unions even widespread political discussion groups. The blog phenomenon may be viewed as the return of such influences – a broadening of the community of discourse to include...the community”.

We don’t know what will become of this. It might be very good for us. If Reynolds and others are right, it will mean a broadening of the political discourse. It will mean, though, a different kind of discourse and a different kind of politics. It may be – it seems more likely than not, given the trends I’ve only sketched – that politics as we know it will be destroyed – and in part, by the media. And we don’t yet know what will take their place.

John Lloyd

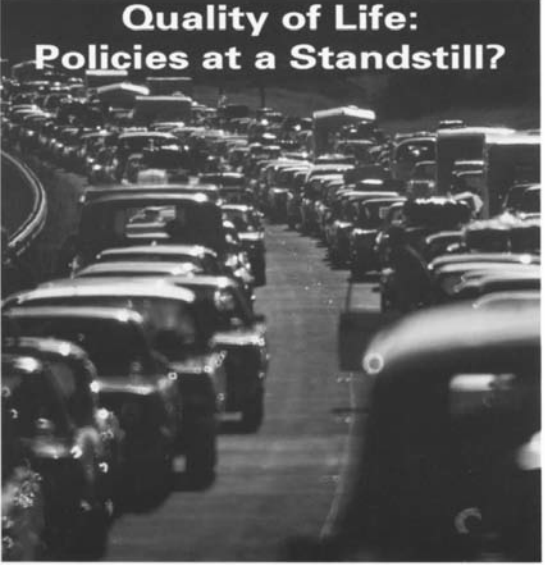
Happiness & public policy

by Richard Layard

Crossbow

£1.50 The Bow Group Quarterly Autumn 1990

**Quality of Life:
Policies at a Standstill?**



Inside:

- **Douglas Hurd on:** Promoting a good government
- **Roger Freeman** attacks Labour's railway fantasy
- **Interview with Hugo Young**
- **Kenneth Clarke on:** Jazz as Torture

Quality of life was on Crossbow's agenda back in 1990!

Happiness is now on the agenda, and about time too. But is this just a trendy fad, or should there be a permanent change in the way we think about the purposes of politics?

I think there has to be a permanent change. It is not of course new to say that the aim of government is to enable people to lead happier lives. In the eighteenth century enlightenment it was standard to believe that the best society is where the people are happiest, and the best policy is what produces the greatest happiness. These admirable views did much to inspire the social reforms of the century that followed. But in many cases it was difficult to apply the principle because so little was known about what makes people happy. However the last thirty years have seen a major scientific revolution, and we now know much more about what causes happiness – using the results of psychology and neuroscience.

The first thing we know is that in the last fifty years average happiness has not increased at all in Britain nor in the USA – despite massive increases in living standards. This is because above an average income of about £10,000 per head richer societies are no happier than poorer societies. Richer people are of course on average happier than poorer people in the same society, but this is largely because people compare their incomes with other people. If everyone gets richer, they feel no better off.

In rich societies like ours what really affects happiness is the quality of personal relationships. Always top comes the quality of family life, or other close personal relationships. Then comes work – having it (if you want it) and enjoying the meaning and comradeship it can bring. And then comes relationships with friends and strangers in the street.

Some societies are much happier than others – and Scandinavian countries always come out near the top. This is largely because people trust each other more there than in other countries. In Britain and the US the number of people who believe that “most other people can be trusted” has halved in the last fifty years, and this reflects the growth of an individualism which makes personal success more important than almost anything else.

These facts call for a revolution in how we think about ourselves and about how the government can help us to flourish. It becomes clear that faster economic growth is not the most important objective for a society. We should not sacrifice human relationships nor peace of mind for the sake of higher living standards, which will be growing anyway.

We need a fundamental rethink of our policy priorities, which (as David Cameron has argued) would give higher priority to family life and the way people support each other in communities and at work. This debate is only just beginning.

In my book *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* I make a few illustrative proposals.

1. The most important thing we can affect is the values which our children acquire. Schools should teach them systematically that the secret of a happy life is in giving to other people. Evidence-based programmes exist for doing this, and should become a part of our core curriculum. Topics covered should also include the responsibilities of parenthood and the art of effective parenting.
2. The least happy people in our society are people with a record of **mental illness**. Three-quarters of people with depression or hyper-anxiety receive no treatment, although psychological therapies exist which can cure over half of these terrible cases. Such therapies should be available free on the NHS.
3. **Advertising** makes people feel they need more and thus makes them less happy with what they have. As in Sweden, we should ban advertising aimed at children under 12.
4. We should stop apologising about **taxes**: they discourage us from working even harder and sacrificing further our relationships with family and friends. We should also persist with income **redistribution**, since an extra £1 gives more happiness to poor people than to rich. That argument also implies redistribution to the Third World.

And so on...

Our living standards are not threatened by China or India. In fact we are in a new situation for mankind where further wealth-creation is now unnecessary for survival. If we want to become still happier, we need a new strategy from the one pursued over the last fifty years – we need to put human relationships first.

This is not a dangerous form of utopianism which will lead to an over-active nanny state. One thing happiness research shows is that regulation as such causes irritation and unhappiness. So we should stop regulating things which have minimal effects on human happiness, while in other areas the state should be more proactive (including the support of creative leisure, sport and exercise.)

Unless we find new priorities, our happiness will remain where it has been for the last fifty years. But we can do better than this. We have conquered absolute poverty and the issue now is how to improve our human relationships. Let the debate go forward.

Richard Layard was founder-director of the LSE Centre for Economic Performance. He has written widely on unemployment, inflation, education, inequality and post communist reform. In recent years he has been actively involved in the new science of happiness, and in 2005 published *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. Richard Layard is currently leading a campaign to provide within the NHS evidence-based psychological therapy for people with clinical depression and chronic anxiety disorder. The *Depression Report*, published in July 2006, is the manifesto for this campaign. He is also a member of the House of Lords.

Read Ryan Shorthouse on 'The Quality of Life' agenda, on page 25

Literature and Politics as Bedfellows

by Fred Bosanquet

There are two main schools of thought when it comes to the relationship between literature and politics. There is the old fashioned, romantic view, summed up in the quote on the back cover of Kenneth O'Morgan's biography of Michael Foot, published this year: 'Men of power have no time to read; yet the men who do not read are unfit for power'. Then there is the egalitarian, vocational view, trenchantly put by Charles Clarke in his 2003 comments that there is something 'not quite right' about just sitting in your study reading books. Reading must have some kind of outward relationship with the world, or it is nothing.

Neither view is quite right in my view. Charles Clarke snubs his nose at what many people enjoy as a vital component of their lives – quiet moments settling down with a good book, taking in the broad sweep of what is written on the page, but also nurturing the small details – a minor character that reminds them of someone they know, an exquisitely described emotional state that prickles the hairs on the neck. Most serious readers are very keen on enjoying books for their own sake, otherwise what are they good for? They certainly don't make you money, and it is highly questionable that they make you a better person.

But the other extreme, the political man of letters, is dangerous too. Michael Foot was indeed a deeply learned politician. He drew his heroes from the canon – Byron, Swift, Hazlitt and Montaigne – which infused his creed of romantic socialism, and he published a series of acclaimed essays and pamphlets, most notably his co-authored 1940 polemic 'Guilty Men' which slammed those pre-war leaders who had appeased Nazi Germany. When it came to his own leadership, however, what did all of this count for? The most famous prose associated with Foot's long political career was his Labour Party's 'longest suicide note in history' 1983 manifesto, advocating unilateral nuclear disarmament and five year plans for industry with uneasy echoes of Stalinism. Not surprisingly, his vision for Britain was trounced at the polls by Margaret Thatcher's, whose reading for pleasure extended little beyond Frederick Forsyth thrillers.

Literature presents specific difficulties for politicians as it is a necessarily solitary art form. When you read a book, you are not doing anything of obvious societal virtue, unlike the other arts which can be enjoyed in large groups, fostering opportunities for community bonding and cultural diversity. Literature and politics even seem to be antagonistic in their fundamental purposes. The same slums of London and Dublin that Dickens and Joyce observed, and drew much inspiration from, were the same areas that progressive politicians sought to reform, aiming to eliminate the orphanages, the poorhouses, the brothels – the sensory

squalor, the human tragedy and black comedy, that fired the creative juices of the great writers and led to such remarkable books.

Perhaps a growing awareness of this polarity partially explains why politicians have become less literary since the days of Gladstone, a cultural polymath, and Disraeli, a prolific novelist whose books are still read today. Modern leaders' reading time is usually filled with frantically digesting a ministerial brief, and when they do absorb something extra, it is usually to reinforce their populist credentials, which means ripping through Harry Potter even if it's the last thing they feel like doing on a Friday night just in case they are caught out by some vox pop interviewer.

For any concerned politicians who really want to contribute something valuable to the literary arts that is more lasting than writing platitudinous books on mawkish virtues or knocking off thrillers that end up in Private Eye's 'Reminders of the Day' column three months after publication, I humbly submit a three point plan:

1: Make it a principal aim of your education manifesto to include great literature as a core part of the English syllabus, enjoyed very much for its own sake, rather than for any comparative textual analysis or Freudian Oedipal study. Then there is at least a chance that future generations might develop some sort of reading habit, and it might be possible for benighted publishers like myself to publish and sell decent books to future generations instead of having to make ends meet by foisting yet more ghostwritten bilge by superannuated glamour models on the reading public.

2: Fervently uphold writers' freedom to write what they want without fear of persecution and publicly rally to the cause of any writer or book when this is threatened. This is an especially big thing to do if the book in question is a thinly veiled satire of yourself, or your government.

3: Draw on literature that inspires you to give weight and gravitas to your speeches, and an awareness of your own part in the great historic political tradition. But don't do it in a way that makes you look pretentious, or messianic, or completely out of touch with the electorate.

That's it. Anything more, and you're on very fine eggshells.

Fred Bosanquet is a publisher

The Gallery

A Glimpse at Politicians' and policy wonks' 'artistic side'

Peace

Peace,
 Enticing bright elusive butterfly,
 Flitting through the tangled briar
 Of mindless conflict,
 Passing by but never landing.
 Ephemeral plasma forming, glowing dimly
 Amid the gloom of mistrust's dark despair,
 Near but never warming.

Peace, allegoric white dove prayed for,
 Wanted, hunted,
 Slipping away,
 Leaving only tattered feathers
 In an outstretched hand.

Peace, wild fish on river bed,
 Cast for over and again,
 With different lengths of line
 And varied flies
 Seeking that rise;
 Riding the rushing stream,
 The current's constant strain,
 Not simple to be tempted to the net.



Peace, the eerie still before the storm,
 Gulling the Big Easy before Katrina raised her skirts
 And broke the Levees.
 Peace, offering normality before Merapi blows her top
 And sears the lives of all who trust her.
 Peace, the Christmas football game in No-Man's-Land,
 Among the mutual carols,
 Prelude to a human slaughter on a scale unknown;
 False-comforter, false flatterer, false weather-vane, false Peace.

Peace, the gentle anaesthetic lack of oxygen
 Collapsing lungs in the collapsing mine,
 Death's lullabying silhouette which yet feeds hope of life,
 And still gives reason to go on.

Peace, who stalks byzantine roadmaps of negotiation,
 Often abused to warp conciliation's progress,
 But cannot be containerised by Process;
 And still drives modern saints to martyrdom.

Peace, that graceful gentle falling snow
 Hushing the world around,
 Purifying the ground of every trace
 Of frantic human ministry.

Peace, that great free elemental force
 Who sails the skies on seagulls' wings,
 Drifting, swooping, soaring on the breeze;
 Peace, that stillness born of calm,
 The surface of the mountain lake,
 Untouched by wind,
 Contrasting in perfection of reflection the yin to nature's yang.

Peace, who wears so many masks,
 You are sought in art and history,
 In crevices of violence and under hatred's arches,
 Caught in the language
 Of conflict resolution's prose,
 A pure white bloodstained rose,
 The grail-like dirge-like theme of songs and marches.

Yet, Peace, you do not hide in dusty books,
 Nor lines of poetry,
 Nor politicians' tele-friendly looks
 Nor words of rich rhetoric declamation.

You do not live, nor have you ever lived,
 In human mind, or writing, or polemic;
 But only and ever and immutably
 In Man's heart;
 And in men's hearts alone will you be found.

by Michael Ancram

'on political life'

"Too much I read of that which I have written
And if not written , wished that I had.
Too oft I hear the echo reflected
From the wall that I myself have built
And fail to recognise the words
Which bounce back in my face"

By David Blunkett MP

'Wimbledon 1989'

"Centre Court, cocooned
Warm and comfortable
Untouched by accents
Alien to our own.
People who think
They own all about them.
Enjoying the sunshine
Melting in the heat.
Togetherness
Borne of easy friendship
And shared experience.

The ancient grounds
Green and spacious
The scent of strawberries and hay
Grass roasting in midday sun.
Centre Court, tension,
Click of ball on racquet
The echo, the call of umpire
'Quiet please'
We're thinking"

By David Blunkett MP

Briefing-Note Blues

(or: Another late night at the office)

No amount of crisps and beer
Can justify my staying here.
But there's no way I will get to eat
Until my briefing note's complete.

Regulation by the state
Simply means I'll go home late.
School capital and VAT
Will prove to be the death of me.

And as I rant about DI *
At home Eastenders just began
And happy families settle down,
Eat dinners in their dressing gowns.

But I know that all depends
On my analysis of the trends
Of diverse state school provision
And so I re-adjust my vision

And concentrate on my warm beer
And justify my staying here
By re-affirming that what smote
Failed Governments were briefing notes.

* DI is a category of planning permission.

C. Leslie

To an Education White Paper, 2006, after another delay of another report.

White Paper, White Paper
You really do make a
Mess of procedure
And who really needs ya?

If you said something new
Like you pretend that you do
I'd not get irate
At staying on late

In the office at night.
If you're so centre-right

Then show us some muscle
And go in for the tussle

With stodgy old lefties.
But what would be best is
If you just called a stop
And said "it's a fair cop"

"I may wear the Right clothes
But you lot all know
That my Rhetoric make-up
Won't cause the shake-up

That Tony is craving.
So shuddup with the raving
And peer a bit closer
At a Paper that knows a

Thing or two 'bout cross dressing.
And although it's depressing
Know this old Transvestite
Is not straight and ain't Right."

C.L

Autumn

With the approach of the new Millennium, Michael Ancrum MP described nostalgia, new beginnings and the pain of change.

Autumn is a schizophrenic season.

Spring is full of freshness and hope and youth and anticipation. Summer is fulfilled and warm and sultry and content. Winter is hard and bitter and unforgiving. But Autumn wears two faces.

Autumn is crumbling disintegration. Autumn is the onset of mortality. Autumn is the draining of the sap, the drawing back into the centre. Autumn is the descent into death.

Yet Autumn is gay and wears its colours boldly. Autumn is not satisfied by green, but seeks the fires of orange, red and gold to warm its face. Autumn celebrates the distancing of the rival sun.

As the autumn slips seamlessly from September into October, so our century moves inexorably towards the millennium.

And the turning of this century reminds of autumn. The gaiety is there alongside the promise of revival. Yet behind the appearance there is a tiredness, the ending of an era which has run its course.

For those of us who knew and loved the texture and shape of the passing seasons, the coming turning of the year is both sad and nervous. None of us likes to see our certainties begin to wither and decay. None of us feels comfortable when the foundations upon which we stand begin to tremble and to move. We can fight it, but we can never completely halt it.

For that is the motion of the seasons and of history alike; and it has ever been so.

And so has the inexorable return of spring, a new spring for a new age and a new generation. What we of our generation see as the fading light of the passing day is for our children the prelude to a new dawn.

In the schizophrenia of autumn we can see both the comfort of the past and the challenge of the future. To survive, we must embrace both.

**Micheal Ancram MP
1995**



FROM THE ARCHIVES: A look at the media, art and politics debate through the years

Autumn Crossbow '90

Churchill as Wordsmith

Richard Bacon surveys the literary output of a political genius.

When Anthony Montague Brown told Churchill that he had won a Nobel Prize, Churchill's face temporarily lit up - only to sink into gloom on learning that it was for literature, and not for peace. But an award for literature was certainly justified. Churchill was an extraordinary artist in many ways, one who, as William Manchester wrote, "knew how to gather the blazing light of history into his prism and then distort it to his ends". He was an accomplished painter, and any who believe this a myth may visit the studio at Chartwell and see for themselves. Granted, he was not Cezanne. But many of his paintings are truly first rate.

Yet it is as an artist of words that he is chiefly remembered. And not only for his speeches, which represented merely a fraction of his output as a wordsmith. Churchill published fifty six books in his lifetime; histories, biographies, volumes of autobiography, political tracts and one novel. Seekers after these books have been aided by many second-hand bookshops with Churchill sections, and by an excellent *Bibliography of the Works of Sir Winston Churchill* by Frederick Woods (Nicholas Vane, 1963). But some books have been impossible to obtain, or only at ridiculous prices. Enter Leo Cooper, military historian, publisher, and husband of the famous novelist Jilly Cooper. The Leo Cooper imprint has been republishing some of the most famous and hard-to-get titles in recent months, for which one would think a knighthood modest compensation.

Churchill's first book was *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* (Leo Cooper, £14.95), originally published in 1898. It tells of his adventures as a young subaltern in the Northwest Frontier. Finding regimental life in the 4th Hussars too quiet for his taste, and hearing that a Field Force was being formed under General Sir Bindon Blood to quell a revolt of the Pathan tribesmen, Churchill at once telegraphed the General reminding him of an earlier promise that if ever he commanded another expedition on the Indian Frontier he would let Churchill go with him. "No vacancies" the General replied, "Come up as correspondent". And he did. It was a formula Winston employed to good effect in the ensuing years. As a correspondent, he had a justification for nobbing with the generals; as an officer there were usually weapons to hand and foreigners to be killed. Winston roved the Empire, from India to the Sudan to South Africa, in a shameless search for *gloire*, which he then wrote up himself. *London to Ladysmith*, and *Ian Hamilton's March*, were

the other products of this enterprise, published jointly now as *The Boer War* (Leo Cooper, £14.95)

Also relating to this period, though not published until 1930, was *My Early Life* (Leo Cooper, £14.95), one of the finest autobiographies in the English language. It has been available in Fontana paperback, although is now available again in a format which does justice to the contents. Although much of the narrative in *My Early Life* relates to Churchill's adventures as a young officer and reporter, it is actually an account of his whole life from early childhood to when he first became a Member of Parliament. Early on, he recounts the problems he encountered with the Harrow Entrance Examination:

"The Headmaster, Mr Welldon, however, took a broad-minded view of my Latin prose: he showed discernment in judging my general



Churchill: searching for *gloire*

ability. This was the more remarkable, because I was found unable to answer a single question in the Latin paper. I wrote my name at the top of the page. I wrote down the number of the question "I". After much reflection I put a bracket round it thus "(I)". But thereafter I could not think of anything connected with it that was either relevant or true. Incidentally there arrived from nowhere in particular a blot and several smudges.

I gazed for two whole hours at this sad spectacle: and then merciful ushers collected my piece of foolscap with all the others and carried it up to the Headmaster's table. It was from these slender indications of scholarship that Mr Welldon drew the conclusion that I was worthy to pass into Harrow"

Churchill's only novel, *Savrola* (Leo Cooper,

£14.95) was published when he was only 23. A Victorian novel of romance and revolution, it is of more interest for what it reveals of its young author than for its intrinsic merit. The eponymous hero of the book asks "Would you rise in the world? You must work while others amuse themselves", and as Churchill said of Savrola, "ambition was the motive force and he was powerless to resist it." Churchill's other early book was *My African Journey* (Leo Cooper £14.95), an account of his tour of East Africa in 1907 as Under-Secretary for the Colonies. The journey was a combination of work and pleasure - big game-hunting and sight-seeing alternating with official engagements - and his record of it is an accomplished piece of travel writing.

Thoughts and Adventures (Leo Cooper, £16.95) was published in 1932, when Churchill was already in the wilderness, and contains a marvellous array of collected journalism on his travels, his social and political views, his views on cartoonists, and the superb and rightly famous essay *Painting as a Pastime*. *Great Contemporaries* (Leo Cooper, £16.95) published in the same year, contains twenty five profiles of famous people including F.E. Smith, Lawrence of Arabia, George Bernard Shaw and Charles Stewart Parnell. Instinctively, it seems, he knew that the world of his *Great Contemporaries* was the world to which he belonged. As he once said to Violet Bonham Carter: "I am thirty two already. Younger than anyone else who counts though." He went on: "We are all worms. But I do believe that I am a glow-worm." If you are unable to obtain any of these Leo Cooper titles in a bookshop, write to Leo Cooper Sales, P O Box 18, Monmouth, Gwent NP5 4YD, enclosing a cheque or credit card details.

Other Churchill titles still in print include the four volume *History of the English Speaking Peoples*, (£14.95 each, £6.95 paper-back), and the superb six volume masterpiece *The Second World War*, (£25 each), both available from Cassell, at Villiers House, 41/47 The Strand, London WC2. The latter work, in particular, is an absolute gem:

"Thus then, on the night of the 10th May, at the outset of the mighty battle, I acquired the Chief power in the State, which henceforth I wielded in ever growing measure for five years and three months of world war, at the end of which time all our enemies having surrendered or being about to do so, I was immediately dismissed by the British electorate from all further conduct of their affairs.

During these last crowded hours of the political crisis my pulse had not quickened at any moment. I took it all as it came. But I cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account that as I went to bed at about 3 a.m. I was conscious of a profound relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny...."

As Dick Crossman noted: "Is there another instance in British history of a statesman who wrote his own enduring monument in prose as stirring and intensely personal as the actions it describes? If so, I do not know it."

Summer Crossbow '85

A tax break at the box office

The Government's implementation of the film policy white paper has left the industry dissatisfied, and many problems remain unresolved. **Cheryl E. K. Gillan** calls for significant tax incentives for a major cinema refurbishment and investment programme, so that the recent gains of British Film Year are consolidated.



Cheryl Gillan is Assistant Political Officer of the Bow Group and a member of Bow Group Council. For two years she served as Managing Director of Bow Functions.

"The British commercial film industry . . . has an importance and influence both in our national life and internationally, out of all proportion to its size" — *Film Policy*, the Government White Paper, July 1984.

The economic significance of films and their associated activities is impressive. In 1983, with an estimated annual turnover at just one third of that of television, the export performance was more than ten times as great. The industry's foreign earnings were in excess of £90 million and it provided employment for more than 75,000, many working on a freelance contract basis.

Whilst the film-making side of the industry appears to be enjoying a healthy growth pattern with a steady increase in production levels, it is the exhibition side which has rapidly deteriorated, slumping to an all time low in cinema admissions in 1984. Ten years earlier there were some 186 million admissions, but by last year the figure had dropped to 50 million. The cinema-going nation of the forties and fifties does not now average even one visit per year per head of the population. The film industry needs both a strong production and exhibition arm for it to thrive in Britain. With audiences on the increase in many other countries such as France and the United States, what is wrong with our cinemas in the UK?

The exhibition side is dominated by the major chains. Rank, Thorn EMI and Can-

non account for the major ownership of cinemas throughout the country. The rest are owned by smaller chains such as Star and Granada and a series of independent cinemas operated by individuals, councils, film societies and other specialist groups. The smaller operations, incorporating a higher level of personal service and careful programming, show less fluctuation than the big chains, with a steadier pattern of admissions throughout the year. The chains tend to be buoyed up by the 'blockbuster' film, surviving on periods of high activity to keep their cinemas open. Even so, the general trend has been downward. Cinemas closed at the rate of two a week in 1983, with few opening to compensate for the decline.

In 1973 there were 1530 screens and 1269 sites in Britain. In 1983, 1293 cinema screens and 707 cinema sites. As a response to the falling off in box office admissions the chains converted to the multi-screens in existence today. The conversions were often poor with inadequate sound proofing, little or no upgrading of facilities and a subsequent deterioration in the service offered to the public. As inner city areas changed so cinemas found themselves in less desirable areas, but instead of moving, they subdivided further, often incorporating another area of entertainment such as a bingo hall. With an accompanying cut back on overheads, standards declined further. An evening at the pictures was effectively removed as a family enter-

tainment option.

The depletion of revenues affected from the box office the attitude of film distributors towards the UK. Whereas we used to be a prime territory for film releases, we moved down the ranks with many feature films being released here often as much as nine months after other territories. The British audience has suffered a severe erosion of all facilities connected with films and cinema-going, and there are fewer jobs in the industry too. In 1983, 4,359 people were employed full time in cinemas and 6,485 part-time, compared with 1974 when 8,232 were employed full time and 12,027 part-time — a 50% drop in ten years.

A role for Government help

What can the Government do to help reverse this trend and inject the necessary incentives to revitalise our dying screens? A major fiscal 'carrot' is needed to encourage cinema owners to refurbish existing buildings and invest in new cinemas.

The American investor has been fast to take advantage of the situation. American Multi Cinema is currently developing a ten screen complex in Milton Keynes, due to open in November 1985. Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment has just announced plans for a similar development in the north of England, with rumours that Rank may not be far behind.

It is sad to see the Americans galvanising the British into action, but there is a strong



Charlton Heston at Leicester Square's Star Pavement, inaugurated for British Film Year



Leslie Ash on the Film Year Roadshow

Summer Crossbow '85



(From left to right) Charlton Heston, Barry Norman, Dame Anna Neagle, Sir John Mills, Omar Sharif and Cheryl Gillan

possibility that significant tax incentives would encourage a more rapid renaissance in the industry and the development of jointly-funded projects. Employment would be provided in many areas besides film, not least in the construction industry. With video penetration having reached its peak, and the search for activity away from the armchair increasing, there is a need in the community for entertainment complexes which encourage social contact and

family participation. What is more, going to the pictures is both educative and fun.

British Film Year

One of the bright spots on the horizon, which is highlighting the demand from the public for these facilities, is British Film Year. The Film Year, under the Patronage of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and the Presidency of Sir Richard Attenborough,



Tony Chudleigh (right) of Leyland Trucks hands over the Film Year roadtrain to David Puttnam and Sir Richard Attenborough (left and centre)

was established to encourage everyone to go to the cinema because, as the campaign's slogan puts it 'Cinema — The best place to see a film'. David Puttnam, the campaign's Vice-Chairman, says of the cinema: "The time, effort and energy that goes into the creation of a perfect picture is lost when the film is viewed in any other medium but cinema".

British Film Year, which runs until May 1986, has been financed partly from the Government, partly from sponsors such as British Leyland, and partly from the film industry itself. The campaign's aim has been to revive the cinema-going habit by taking some of the glamour of the film industry throughout the country, to those areas where cinemas have been worst hit. So far the campaign has:

- Set up 25 Film Regional Organisational Groups across the country with membership drawn from all local cinema managers, local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Regional Arts Associations, press and media, film-makers and teachers. All these groups have pledged to support the development of the film and cinema industry in their own regions. Already there have been free screenings, film festivals, newspaper campaigns and star appearances to promote the cause.
- Launched a Roadshow, which is visiting 25 cities with a mobile exhibition and stunts, make-up, costumes and celebrities to celebrate cinema-going in Britain.
- Established a nationwide education programme, putting current film releases on the UK education curriculum. Children and teachers will be going to cinemas as part of their regular classroom activities during 1985/86.
- Helped the public to meet people working behind the scenes in the film industry both through visiting experts on the Roadshow and through talks and seminars on film-making. British Film Days have been arranged featuring première screenings, children's activities and 'open house' at the cinema.
- Over one hundred film stars have already made personal appearances throughout the country to support the programme.

Already, the effect of this programme is being felt across the country. Cannon Classic reports that admissions are up 35%, Rank reports a 40% rise for the first six months of 1985 compared to the same period last year, and Thorn EMI a 24% increase in the same period. The Association of Independent Cinemas believes admissions are about 33% up this year, an unprecedented rise in recent years.

There is a strong possibility that admissions may reach the 65 to 70 million level this year. With this evidence of the demand for film entertainment, coupled with the social and employment implications, now is the time to offer cinema owners the financial inducements to capitalise on the upward trend. With increasing investment in the leisure industry generally, it is important that cinemas are not forgotten.

Summer Crossbow '85

The pleasure of Ronnie Scott's

Jim Lester describes a favourite cure for the pressures of political life



Jim Lester is MP for Broxtowe. From 1979-81 he served as Under-Secretary of State for Employment. He is Deputy Chairman of the All Party Group on Overseas Development, Chairman of Conservative Action to Revive Employment, and a member of the House of Commons Select Committee on Foreign Affairs.



It's good for your blood pressure (Photographs by courtesy of David Redfern)

Twenty years ago, jazz musician Ronnie Scott, frustrated by having nowhere to play his music, opened a small cellar club at 39 Gerrard Street. As he says, if anyone had told him that from that humble beginning, his club would grow into one of the most famous jazz venues in the world, he would have urged them to have their head examined.



He also does jokes

Ronnie himself has become a legend in his own lifetime, not only because of the quality and standard of his music, but also because of his jokes. Members of Parliament and Ministers who frequent the club know them pretty well off by heart, but it is always a joy to take someone who has not been before and test their reaction. A small sample: "Later in the year," he says in the interlude, "we will be presenting Zoot Simms, Sonny Rollins, Ben Webster, Oscar Peterson, The Massed Bands of the RAF, The Luton Girls' Choir, The Red Arrows, The Bolshoi Ballet, The Moscow State Circus and Miles — Sir Bernard Miles. He may not play as well as Miles Davies, but he always turns up on time and he's a Sir and everything. What a galaxy of talent! You don't seem very impressed. Why don't you all join hands and see if you can contact the living?"

Ronnie Scott's club fits well into the Parliamentary calendar. Those of us who get used to fate nights often feel deprived if the House finishes early, and it is an ideal place to go from 11 pm till 3 am and relax to high quality jazz of different types, though Ronnie himself favours the proponents of the tenor sax. Subject only to the dollar rate of exchange, in a full season there are not many names in the jazz world that do not perform here and when the high spots come about, you can't stay for the whole night but

must book for just one session.

George Melly's Christmas Party is one such high spot, being a spontaneous and thoroughly joyful evening out at the end of the Parliamentary Session. Ken Clarke, the present Minister for Health, probably is the most avid attendee and the most knowledgeable person on jazz. David Steel is also a frequent visitor but many others come in from time to time to listen to their favourite music.

Famous occasion

The most famous occasion that I can remember at Ronnie Scott's was on the night of the Vote of Confidence in the Labour Government in 1979. Ken Clarke and I, knowing that these once-in-a-century occasions can fall a bit flat afterwards, arranged that after the vote, we would go to Ronnie Scott's to celebrate. Could you believe that at 1 am, sidling up beside us and looking for the champagne and dolly birds was the Today Programme from Radio 4, just casually suggesting that they were looking for how Tory Members of Parliament were celebrating the success in the House. That broadcast, put out to six million listeners, certainly put both Ronnie Scott's jazz club and those Members of Parliament firmly on the map.

I hope that from this brief article others will visit and enjoy that facility, which has been very important to many of us. The pressures of political life are great and one of the essential elements of good politics is the ability to switch off. Ronnie Scott's is just the place. See you there!

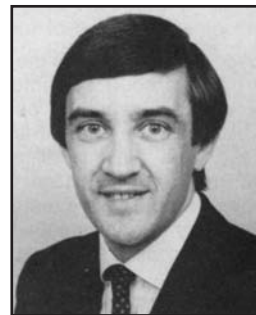


Another of Ronnie's high spots

Winter Crossbow '89

Broadcaster- balanced or Biased?

by Gerald Howarth MP



Revelations in the summer that both the BBC and ITV companies place about 70% of their recruitment advertisements in the Guardian was sufficient evidence to confirm most Conservative's in their deeply-held convictions that broadcasters in general, and those at the BBC in particular, have impeccable left-wing credentials.

It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that all broadcasters are lefties (and I don't wish to impair the careers of those I suspect of being closet Tories), but there can be no doubt that the profession is a magnet for those not of a Conservative disposition. Such assertions are ritually rejected by the media bosses who cite reciprocal complaints from socialist MPs and Walworth Road that the BBC/ITV are the mouthpiece of Central Office as evidence that they have "got the balance right".

Broadcasters fall into three categories.

- Those who openly despise the present government.
- Those who are politically agnostic but believe they are a kind of super-race who are not part of our country. They delight in prejudicing the national interest or in inflicting their hang-ups on the nation.
- Those who believe in certain standards and stand out against the first two categories.

Under the stewardship of the previous Director-General of the BBC, Alasdair Milne, there were endless rows centred on the Current Affairs and Drama departments. There was the 'Real Lives' programme in August 1985 which included an interview with a known IRA terrorist and was only withdrawn when the then Home Secretary, Leon Brittan, intervened. Then there was the reporting by the BBC of the Libyan bombing by the United States in April 1986, a report which was totally one-sided and contrasted starkly with the objective analysis of ITN.

In September 1986 The Monocled Mutineer caused a storm of protest when the historical adviser to the 4-part series was reported as saying that "the finished series bore no relation to the facts he had discovered and presented to the producer and the writer, Alan Bleasdale". The Daily Mail editorial commented "That a sequence of British history has been twisted and fictionalised from a left-wing viewpoint may not be too surprising. Many people believe that the BBC is engaged in a long-term operation to re-write history because of its hatred of our Imperial past" (13 Sept 1986).

What had been billed in the Radio Times as "Class War on the Western Front - Percy Toplis died an outlaw, but to Alan Bleasdale he was a working class hero", eventually drew this extraordinary admission from the producer; "It is not a documentary it is a drama. It is truthful as opposed to accurate."

"TUMBLEDOWN"

The departure of Alasdair Milne to be replaced by Michael Checkland in January 1987 promised to improve matters at the BBC. However, the drama department continued to display its preference for controversial "faction" by screening in May 1988 "Tumbledown", the dramatised account of the events at the battle on Mount Tumbledown during the Falklands War. The BBC argued that the film was "non-political", but in a widely publicised account of the preview of the play the film director, Richard Eyre, was reported as having said "I would feel the film a failure if it's not deeply political..... I don't think the film is balanced, and I hope that's considered one of its advantages, its virtues". Furthermore, the author of 'Tumbledown', Charles Wood, declared that the message of his play was "The Falklands War should never have happened and that it did is a reason for shame, regret and anger." Nor did the play seek to protect the sensitivities of some of those characters which were portrayed in it. Lieutenant Robert Lawrence's girlfriend, was, as her mother wrote in a letter to The Times on 4th June 1988, "portrayed as nothing more than a feelingless sex kitten, no doubt to extract as much sympathy from the public as possible." Intimate moments of her daughter's life had been reproduced shamelessly on television to the great distress of her family.

'Tumbledown' itself followed hard on the heels of 'Airbase', described in the Radio Times as an accurate and true-to-life picture of US airmen manning an F-111 nuclear bomber base somewhere on the east coast of England. It showed those airmen as drunken heroin addicts and sex maniacs, frighteningly incapable of discharging their awesome duties. The programme resulted in angry complaints not only from the United States but also from Members of both Houses of Parliament.

LEFT-WING BIAS

My colleague, Julian Critchley, writing in the Guardian in February 1989 suggests that Lord Swann acknowledged the left-wing bias in the drama department on the grounds that there are no right-wing dramatists. That might have rung true had it not been for the celebrated case of the other Falklands play, The Falklands Play, written by an acknowledged master of the genre, Ian Curteis. As many people now know, Alasdair Milne commissioned The Falklands Play from Ian Curteis, described it as "a terrific story" and a play which "has enriched the BBC" but then decided to delay the scheduled date of transmission from April 1987 (the 5th anniversary of the Falklands War) until after the expected general election. The word was around that the reason for the postponement was that the play cast the Prime Minister in too favourable a light, all of course denied by the BBC.

From Winter Crossbow '89

They lurk by night: Parliament's Dracula Syndrome

by Elizabeth Taylor

Would you do business with a business opened at 3 P.M. . . conducted many of its important meetings after midnight. . . and made most of its important management decisions around three in the morning?

You wouldn't?

Why ever not?

That is precisely the way our parliamentarians see fit to run the country.

There they sit ensconced in the House at three in the afternoon, not to rise again until around 3 A.M. on all too many occasions.

Important legislation is therefore mooted, discussed and passed at hours of the day and night when most respectable people are:

- a) asleep
- b) awaiting delayed flights in airports
- c) putting chairs on tables in restaurants
- d) writing Transylvanian vampire novels

Ah — but the nocturnal deliberations of parliament constitute an ancient and venerable tradition, so I'm told, dating back to the late 18th, early 19th century (pre British Rail, pre Wright Brothers, obviously) when gentlemen took until at least three o' clock to get into Westminster by coach-and-four from their baronial acreages in the shires.

Like most quaint traditions, quaint parliamentary hours made at least some sense once upon a time. In today's competitive international trading environment however, these traditions make sense no longer.

Conducting the business of government at consistently unsociable hours merely serves to contribute to Britain's image abroad as a giant historical theme park: quaint, cuddly, tradition-bound, populated by a majority of charmingly daft

eccentrics as exemplified by Parliament, with its curious aversion to the 20th century and to the forces of technological and social change.

In what other developed countries do governments keep such crazy hours?

In the U.S., normal business hours normally prevail. Mr. Smith-Goes-to Washington-style filibustering is the exception.

In the Canadian Parliament, hours are nine to five and there's a creche for the children of both male and female MP's. (Oh yes, male MP's can have domestic responsibilities, children and a political career too. Everybody should be equal. I always say.)

Point all this out to a typical Britain MP and he'll say that something should be done about parliamentary hours, but nothing ever is.

There exists an unwritten, unspoken conspiracy which acts to preserve Parliament as an exclusive, predominantly male club. Daft parliamentary hours are yet another means of maintaining Parliament's exclusivity; its isolation and remoteness from the very electorate it is elected to represent.

Perhaps things will change with the advent of the broadcasting of Parliament — another shock-horror innovation resisted by MP's for decades.

In the matter of parliamentary hours, will somebody — anybody — please assist in dragging our more recalcitrant parliamentarians kicking and screaming into step with the rest of the world, quick?

One thing is certain. The rest of the world, our trading competitors included, has not the remotest intention of being dragged back into step with us.

Hungry for Political Pin-Ups

Jilly Cooper describes her visit to the House of Commons back in 1972 – before Parliament was televised.

I've never admired politicians. I dislike their blandness, their ringing voices, their all embracing smiles that pass over one like a lighthouse beam. It was therefore with no great enthusiasm that I visited the House of Commons, particularly as it was due to debate a subject completely beyond me: the floating of the pound.

I arrived in the middle of question time. Reggie Maudling and Mark Carlisle were answering queries about pole-traps, violence and animals on television.

'How would the minister like to be one of the Brooke Bond television monkeys?' asked a backbencher.

'He is' said another.

I looked at my Order Paper. Consideration of Bill ordered to lie on the table, said the first item. Who was Bill? I wondered.

The House was slowly filling up. Members strolled in with the conscious swagger of the Eleven at school. I sat directly facing the Tory benches. It was alarming how few of them I recognised. Enoch Powell, as pale as death watching everything with the concentration of a Wimbledon linesman. Mr Paisley, fountain pens gleaming in his breast pocket, like the foreman of a slaughter house.

Ted Heath breezed in to answer questions, looking brisk, burnished and showing a lot of white cuff. He is more relaxed than he is on telly, but his voice is less posh. Some nice bitchy repartee flashed back and forth between him and the backbenchers. It is amazing how many people can pack onto the front bench. I'm sure one must be given Cabinet status because of the smallness of one's bottom.

The debate on the Floating of the Pound began. The Speaker said feelingly he hoped the Hon. Members would keep their speeches short. He hoped in vain. Mr. Healey, florid and blue suited, his bushy all-in-one eyebrow rising and falling, his fluff-on-the-needle voice rolling out endless quotations from the papers, went on for over an hour.

There is no getting away from the fact, Conservatives are better looking

I moved over to the other side of the gallery and had a more interesting time watching Harold Wilson's face running the gamut of emotions from incredulity to scorn to a James Bond smoulder through his Mary Whitehouse spectacles. There is no getting away from the fact, Conservatives are better looking, sleeker, more peachy, with their well cut suits, and incredibly well brushed patent leather hair. The Socialists in sports jackets or khaki green suits look altogether more untidy and untamed.

The House itself gives off a fantastically theatrical atmosphere,

with the table with the great gold mace and the great bell of big Ben tolling the quartets. Then there are the green leather benches, not the violent acid green of spring, but the mature willow green of high summer. And one is constantly aware of this green. If anything exciting happens in the House, one can hardly see it for a sea of dark suits, but as soon as the proceedings become boring, the house empties and it unrolls like a great billiard table.

I leave convinced that if MPs are to regain the respect of the nation, the Commons must be televised

Then it was Roy Jenkins' turn, and everyone came rushing in from the bars and the smoking rooms like cats when they hear the tin-opener biting into their Kattomeat. Enoch followed Roy but how different the delivery, almost rabble rousing- the burning eyes, the unctuous Uriah Heep manner, the bent shoulders, the whining yet hypnotic voice. A gentle temperate Liberal followed Enoch, rather like a ladies' singles, after a tremendously exciting men's' doubles. The sky in the windows turned from pearly grey to deep indigo. I fought sleep. As far as I was concerned the pound could turn over and do the breast-stroke.

Dinner over, flushed with insolence and wine, the Labour benches began to fill up. The theatrical atmosphere returned. Finally Harold rose to wind up for the Opposition. He was magnificent. Evidently it is the first time he has really caught fire since the Election, and every minute one could feel Labour spirits rising. The Tory front bench turned to stone. Ted, most boot-faced of all, sank into himself, trebling and quadrupling his chins, until Wilson sat down in a storm of applause. The Opposition, smelling blood, roared for Ted. But Ted wasn't budging and they got Robert Carr instead, looking elegant but seasick. As ten o'clock approached, they worked themselves into a frenzy as exciting as the best Centre Court match.

Ten struck. The noise subsided. The House divided. Eyes to the left, Nose to the right. Despite the clamour, the Tories won by 28 votes.

As I left, the yellow stone of the House was softened by floodlight, Big Ben shone like a great sugar sifter against an ink-blue sky, and I felt a strange elation in having witnessed such a ritual, in seeing men I'd despised as cardboard characters suddenly emerging as intensely real, and human, and strangely grown in stature. I leave convinced that if MPs are to regain the respect of the nation, the Commons must be televised. I don't think they need be frightened of over-exposure. Some of the backbenchers are so electrifyingly dishy they would make Callan and Jason King look to their laurels. And we might even get a full frontal bench across the gatefold of Cosmopolitan.

The full version of this article first appeared in The Sunday Times, 1972

Campbell Reviewed

Rachel Wolf reviews Alistair Campbell's 'The Blair Years' and is unimpressed

All right, I'll admit it. I just can't do it. After three weeks of struggle, toil and general mental effort, I have thrown the Blair Years aside. Finally, on page 600, I have given up.

This book is, quite simply, boring. The prose is less "vivid [and] direct", as Matthew Parris put it, than rambling and lifeless. The pages are saturated with a self-satisfied sheen which starve the sentences of impact or humour. The 'revelations' are few, far between and not terribly shocking. Clare Short a pain in the neck? Gosh. Robin Cook a bit smug at times? Surely not. Peter Mandelson a drama queen with limited self control? Who'd have guessed it.

And frankly, I don't think I'm alone. Although the press have nodded solemnly, gasped in unison, and generally told us that this is a Very Important book, I cannot help but notice that they always quote from the first 200 or the last 50 pages. As someone who is proud of getting well beyond the half way mark, I'm a bit miffed they couldn't be bothered to do the same.

Maybe I'm being unfair. There is a good reason why most reviewers enjoyed The Blair Years. They could get indignant about Campbell's hot contempt of journalists – journalists he manipulated, but also depended on. They could revise their understanding of events, and the spin they were given. They could consult with their younger selves. In other words, they were there.

I was not. I was nine years old when this book started, and my own personal dramas – was Katie still my best friend? Should Joanna be invited to my birthday party? – were much more immediate and absorbing than an election. For me, The Blair Years is a history book, a window on what happened as I was growing up.

As far as I can see, not much did. Other than Northern Ireland and Iraq, Campbell is absorbed in minutiae. People muff their lines, or have affairs, or go off message (stop "being serious"), but they don't do very much.

Of course, action will always be limited in opposition – Labour realised "messages" (and let us be clear, repeal of Clause 4 was a message, not a policy) were more important than detail. But I did expect, as I finally, wearily, turned page 187 on the crest of the "new dawn", for something to change.

It did not. The opposition remained the opposition – they'd just swapped addresses. Message was still key, the style

and pattern of days were indistinguishable, and people – shadow ministers, ministers, civil servants and journalists – were approached (and, I assume, managed, although the details of that management remain a mystery) in the same way.

And not only did nothing happen, nothing happened with no purpose. I never really understood what the point was – did Campbell really swear, storm and under-sleep his way through eight years just to keep the Tories out? How dull.

There should have been a point to it all. That there wasn't, which is the message I took away from The Blair Years, tells you why inexperience matters.

After 18 years in opposition, it is difficult to stop behaving as if you are running an electoral campaign. Blair's style in government was no different from his style out of government: a tiny team, no minutes for civil servants to follow, little trust of those outside the magic circle, utter disregard for process. The result? A headless, poorly coordinated mess, albeit a mess with a good message.

In comparison, the impact of spin is meaningless. Of course journalists and politicians are obsessed by Campbell; they are convinced of the media's importance. Actually, we don't know how much difference the silly games Campbell played to perfection really made. I suspect less than the Westminster village believes.

The absence of the government machine, however, is terrifying. Dozens of ministers and thousands of public servants, many of whom have real jobs and real expertise, must have been making up their job as they went along – controlled in what they could say, in the way they could present their figures, but not properly briefed on what they should do.

Because Blair had many good ideas (I know, mostly stolen from the Conservatives), a strong economy, a shambolic opposition and, yes, a great spin doctor, this didn't show. Much. Of course, vast quantities of money were poorly spent, reform was more limited than it should have been, and Britain generally squandered its golden years in ways it is likely to regret for decades. But, then, elections kept being won, so it didn't matter. I take it back, the Blair Years is not boring. It is one of the most depressing books I have ever (almost) read.

Rachel Wolf is a sub-editor of Crossbow

Political Canon, Literary Time-bomb

by Chris Skidmore



The relationship between politics and our national literature has always been an oddly close one. It is perhaps easy to see why. Literature gives us a sense of who we are and where we come from. Like our shared history, we can trace a common sense of identity and understanding through our past into the present, following a thread through classic works of literature that leads us from Beowulf to Brick Lane. Like great art, our literary heritage in part reflects upon ourselves: the books we choose to read define how we choose to define ourselves. For the politicians, they are simply too important to be left alone.

In recent years, however, the notion that there should be a body or canon of literature that should be studied in schools has, in the words of our own Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, become 'an unpopular idea'. Recently, fifty schools even returned their free

copies of classic works sent to them by the Millennium Library Trust, claiming that the works were boring and would not be read. In this climate, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority launched a 'national conversation' two years ago about the future direction of how English should be taught in schools. Their English 21 project has also begun to reconsider whether there should be a canon of literature in our changing society. One of its purposes in doing so is 'to consider what 'heritage' means in our multi-ethnic, multicultural society'. As a result, the QCA's prescribed set text list for GCSE is currently being updated in what seems like a relegation battle in the football league – Yeats, Byron and Joyce are out, to be replaced by more fashionable and modern writers such as the comedian Meera Syal (of Goodness Gracious Me fame).

The reasons for these shifts are alarming. Arguing for her inclusion on the list, the QCA state that Syal represents an 'authentic voice' about other cultures. But the ring of authenticity sounds hollow when we consider the end result is that the literary canon taught in schools has been replaced by the need to press equal opportunities with such fervour that there is not one English or Welsh poet in a prescribed list of poetry 'from different cultures' in an English GCSE exam. Perversely, poets such as Derek Walcott, who justifiably it might be claimed should be read simply on his own merit, can only be studied in the context of their ethnic background.

But the changes strike far deeper than this. A shift towards modernity and the need to make literature more reflective of today's society has ensured that in English literature GCSE, the canon of poetry is represented by 32 contemporary poems and only 16 pre-1914 from which candidates must choose two - which must be one of each gender. In favour of women

writers such as Carol Ann Duffy, our literary greats are being shunned. A pupil can now go through the school system and get top marks in English without knowing that Spenser, Milton or Pope ever existed.

The need to make literature 'more relevant' is of course symptomatic of a wider desire in our society: the desire of change. Eschewing knowledge for supposed understanding, it becomes an alluring prospect to believe that we can redefine our own heritage, ignore our traditions, scorn the past for the present.

No writer understood the fallacy of doing this better than T. S. Eliot. Incidentally excluded from the QCA's list, his work demonstrates how we should be determined to maintain our traditions. From his youth, Eliot took up the defence of 'the permanent things' against the restlessness of change that later became a crucial theme of his poetry: 'The endless cycle of idea and action, / Endless invention, endless experiment, / Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness'. In his book *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot relented that we are 'destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanised caravans.' Above all, he warned against the pace of progress simply destroying what had come before:

Then you must start painfully again, and you cannot put on a new culture ready made. You must wait for the grass to grow to feed the sheep to give the wool out of which your new coat will be made. You must pass through many centuries of barbarism. We should not live to see the new culture, nor would our great-great-grandchildren; and if we did, not one of us would be happy in it.

Written during the Second World War, the book's pessimism is understandable, but Eliot's argument against creating a 'new culture ready made' hits out equally at those concerned with making literature or politics 'relevant'. Change for change's sake may appear seductive, but it is essentially a hollow exercise. In a separate essay on the literature of politics, Eliot's words might perhaps be closely studied by the QCA: he urged his readers not to concern themselves with temporary writers of alleged influence, 'or with those publicists who have impressed their

names upon the public by catching the morning tide, and rowing very fast in the direction in which the current was flowing.' Rather, what is important is that 'there should always be a few writers preoccupied in penetrating to the core of the matter, in trying to arrive at the truth and to set it forth, without too much hope, without ambition to alter the immediate course of affairs and without being downcast or defeated when nothing appears to ensue.'

Eliot did not expect to turn back the clock; nor did he expect that we would be pleased by the result, even were it possible: after all, we all are creatures of the age into which we have been born: 'We cannot restore old policies / or follow an antique drum'. But we should not forget the contribution of the past at the expense of the present. For Eliot, they are inseparable: a poet exists only through the experiences of his forebears: 'he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past'. The lesson to be learnt is how do we return from merely living in the present, with its obsession for all things relevant? We might do little better than start with Eliot. Just as his poetry tells us about the human condition, in its splendor and its misery, his prose makes us acutely aware of the importance of maintaining our traditions, of the permanent things. As Eliot himself wrote in *Little Gidding*: 'And what the dead had no speech for, when living, / They can tell you, being dead: the communication / Of the dead is tongued with the fire beyond the language of the living.'



T.S. Eliot

Print Media R.I.P. ?

by *Tim Montgomerie*

Rupert Murdoch – the greatest-ever press baron – has predicted that the last newspaper reader will recycle his final paper copy in April 2040. The Economist has also predicted the end of newspapers although it quotes media pundits who give the newspaper until 2043.

It is, of course, the internet and the dawn of 24 hour television news that is driving this slow death of the newspaper. People can get the news for ‘free’ on a whole range of platforms from BBC Online to very specialist niche websites. Online sources of news are faster. But that’s not their only advantage. They can shrink or expand to fit the importance of a news story. They can give a story tens or thousands of words. Newspapers are much less flexible. Every newspaper journalist has often had an otherwise good story spiked because the editor couldn’t or wouldn’t find it space.

Online news platforms can also be interactive. If journalists are frustrated by the lack of space, the people who are the subject of stories can be furious at the way they are treated. Quotations they provide to journalists are often truncated or reported out of context. Journalists often write on subjects that they know little about. People wronged by newspapers have little opportunity to fight back. They can write a letter that might get published a day or two later but the damage is probably done by then. With new, online media there are opportunities for immediate responses. People can leave a comment on a blog or even set up their own blog to highlight a major media organisation’s errors and biases. Critics of new media complain that most blogs and citizen-created journalism is of low quality. And they’d be right. Most is. But the best citizen journalism is, in my opinion, better than the best of old media and you find the cream through increasingly influential gateway sites. For example: I go to the Burning Our Money blog for the best rolling guide to the extent of government waste.

No newspaper or old media organisation provides anything as good as the service provided by the former Treasury employee who is the blog’s volunteer author. PoliticalBetting.com and UK Polling Report give me better and faster understandings of opinion polling than any newspaper. And at a time when newspapers like The Times and The Telegraph are providing less and less political coverage (and more and more coverage of personal health and other lighter subjects) it is websites like my own – ConservativeHome.com – that are providing political enthusiasts with their fix of news, insight and debate.

Is there anything newspapers can do about this media revolution?

Lots of strategies are being tried. The most likely-to-succeed strategy will, I believe, be an investment in quality. In a world of information overload there will be a demand for trustworthy sources of news and comment. Downmarket newspapers like The Daily Express may not survive but superbrands like the New York Times and the BBC have every opportunity of benefiting from a flight-to-quality amongst those consumers who demand it. That is why the recent scandals that have engulfed both the NYT and the BBC are so serious. They strike at their man chance of survival.

‘Old media’ will survive if it combines excellent online content with adoption of ‘electronic paper’. In the not-too-distant future we won’t be reading The Telegraph on a thick newspaper but we’ll download it on to an electronic device that will resemble paper. We’ll be able to fold it up and put it in our bag with our laptops and it will link to the internet – downloading news stories as the day goes by. There won’t be turnings of pages – always difficult on a crowded tube (I don’t predict that ending any time soon!) – but we’ll press some kind of button at the bottom of the electronic paper and a new page will appear. The page will be designed especially for us. My newspaper will have lots of politics, foreign news and sport. Your electronic newspaper will reflect your own preferences.

This is the world we are entering. Newspapers will be electronic. Television stations will have blogs. Bloggers will be making videos. Campaigning organisations will be covering events. Political parties will be publishing commentayr. They will all merge into each other and the consumer will get nearly all of it for free. Bow Group members – so used to the broadcast media being left-leaning – should welcome this new era with enthusiasm.

Tim Montgomerie is Editor of ConservativeHome.com.



Our Media's not Right

by Peter Whittle



'We were anti-industry, anti-capitalism, anti-advertising, anti-selling, anti-profit, anti-patriotism, anti-monarchy, anti-empire, anti-police, anti-armed forces, anti-bomb, anti-authority. Almost anything that made the world a freer, safer and more prosperous place – you name it, we were anti it.'

So wrote Antony Jay, the writer of *Yes Minister*, in an article in the *Times* this year. He was describing the culture which existed at the BBC's *Tonight* programme when he worked there at the very time that *Crossbow* was founded in 1957.

Now, fast-forward fifty years. In his book, *Can We Trust the BBC?*, published earlier this year, the former BBC reporter Robin Aitken listed the current core beliefs of the BBC, as described to him in an interview with an anonymous employee. Again, these were, it seems, readily identifiable, and included 'anti-Americanism, pro-multiculturalism, pro-government spending, anti-big business, pro-UN, pro EU, and pro-foreigner and foreign governments - especially if they're left-wing.'

So far, so BBC, you might say. But this would be to underestimate the way in which the general world view of which these beliefs are a part has permeated all corners of the cultural and media landscape - a landscape which has expanded hugely in the past five decades, and certainly beyond the confines of Broadcasting House.

During this time, it was the Right which was decisively winning the important economic arguments. However large parts of it – including, unfortunately, much of the Conservative Party - never really understood the so-called Culture War which had been taking place under its nose throughout the post-war period. What started off as a 'counter-culture' became the ruling orthodoxy, and, to a remarkable degree, it is still in place. And the triumph of relativism and political correctness has enabled it to become even more deeply entrenched.

The contemporary heirs to Orwell's British intellectuals – that group he famously described as being unique in the world in its distaste for its own nationality – can be found amongst

today's media commentators, TV producers, critics, playwrights, publishers and academics. Their access to opinion-forming is unrivalled, their influence in setting the tone and temperature of our times hugely disproportionate to their numbers.

These cultural elites are firmly in control of what marketing men call 'the narrative.' So for example, the Thatcher years are now routinely portrayed in the popular media – and not just by the BBC - as representing an appalling lowpoint in the country's history, with Baroness Thatcher herself the object of nothing less than a systematic demonisation. Similarly, you will search in vain for a single play, piece of visual art, film or novel which seriously questions, say, the basic tenets of multiculturalism, or which depicts capitalism as anything more than at the very best a necessary evil.

When confronted with such an analysis, the liberal establishment tends to scoff, pointing out that the UK's most popular mass-circulation newspapers are conservative-supporting to a greater or lesser degree. This is of course true, but it remains the case that the views expressed in the *Sun* or the *Daily Mail* are not broadly culturally sanctioned, while the readers of these papers exist far from the levers of power. All they are essentially doing is reacting to an agenda which has already been set.

As indeed, it might appear, is the Conservative Party. It remains to be seen whether the strategy of the current leadership derives from a canny recognition that, in order to connect with the country at large, it will have to tread carefully through the broad minefield which has been laid down by the cultural and media establishment, or from the fact that they have, indeed, already accepted defeat in the culture wars.

I hope it is the former, for the battle is far from over. 'I will bring an end to the repentance that is a kind of self-loathing competing with the memories that nourish the hatred of others,' declared the newly elected President Sarkozy this year. It was hugely encouraging to hear such words from the leader of a European country. It would be truly inspiring to hear them here, too.



Peter Whittle is the Director of The New Culture Forum.
www.newcultureforum.org.uk

Opera for All

by **Tony Hall, Chief Executive, Covent Garden Royal Opera House**

It was a strange meeting for an opera house. Supported by corporate lawyers, clutching the work of two merchant banks and a strategic analysis from McKinsey's, we were meeting a group of venture capitalists in a country house outside Amsterdam. All the preparatory work had been provided for us at no or nominal cost. We were negotiating to buy Opus Arte – an independent DVD label known in the classical music world for producing recordings of the highest quality. Opus Arte not only own a back catalogue of many recordings of opera and ballet from Covent Garden but also recordings from Glyndebourne, the Liceu in Barcelona, the Teatro Royale in Madrid, Nederlands Opera and many other great opera houses in Europe. We had to be careful to get the price right – the bank advised on what value we should put on the company, and after a difficult and hard day the deal was done. We wanted our recordings back under our control. But we also wanted much more. And, in my view, our thinking tells you a lot about some of the challenges the arts and culture in this country are facing.

Opus Arte gives us a way to reach lots more people with our productions – important if 30% of your income comes from a Government grant. Already, we have developed special low-cost performances for school-children, and also for people who have never been to an opera or ballet before. Our big screen relays and live performances have developed over the last five years so we reach over 40,000 people in 17 different locations. Our partnership with the BBC ensures that millions see and hear us, really important when you have a theatre that can seat only 2,200 people a night.

But the great thing about what is happening in the digital world is that it allows you to go global and reach out to people in new and fresh ways. Our first aim will be to sell DVDs of many more of the productions that we put on at Covent Garden, not just in standard definition but also in high definition. A couple of years ago with Sony we built a high definition production suite in our basement. Since then all our recordings with the BBC have been in high definition. The results are outstanding – the picture and quality of the sound are breathtakingly good. Opus Arte will also act as a vehicle for preparing us for a world where video recordings are downloaded directly to the consumer in their home. The fact that the Metropolitan Opera is now relaying some performances to cinemas in Britain, and Glyndebourne has followed suit with the Odeon chain, shows you another possibility. We aim to do the same. All of this is moving inexorably towards a future in three to five years time whereby you will have the possibility of seeing what is happening that night live on the stage of the Royal Opera House, broadcast direct to your living room.

The acquisition of Opus Arte also says something about the

business-like way in which arts organisations run themselves. None of us are “grant junkies”, all of us to a greater or lesser extent rely on earned income. In our case, for every pound we take in Government grant we have to make nearly three more. And the percentage of our total turnover provided by the grant is decreasing year on year. For me this is what makes arts organisations so interesting; they have to put the art and creativity first; every single time. But they have also got to balance the books. The commercial exploitation of what we do is going to become even more important and as we do so, we need new skills – commercial skills, marketing skills, expertise in rights. We also need to know how to partner with other organisations some in the cultural sphere, some not. Opus Arte will be run as a commercial enterprise – returning profit to the Opera House for investment in our core activities.

Finally, I hope Opus Arte acts as a magnet for talent. We would be shortsighted if we simply saw this company as a vehicle for the Royal Opera House. I hope we use it as a vehicle for partnering with other opera houses in this country and around Europe to promote the art forms we feel passionate about – ballet and opera. Opera and ballet companies are fiercely independent, and long may that be so. But perhaps with Opus Arte we can come together to help promote what we, together, are good at and win new audiences for what we care about. Equally, I hope, our recordings can help nurture new talent, singers on our Young Artists Programme, for example, or the new choreography being led by the likes of Will Tuckett and Wayne McGregor. And I hope too that we can use the work of Opus Arte to act as a tool for educating people in opera and ballet, for fulfilling people's need for basic knowledge, but also taking them onto a journey into creative depths of understanding. It is my belief that the arts and culture in this country are unrivalled anywhere else in the world. The job for all of us, whether in running arts organisations or in politics, is to understand why this is the case and ensure that conditions for that success continue.



The politics of the skyscraper

by Nick Cuff, Commercial Secretary, The Bow Group

London Mayor Ken Livingstone's vision of the Capital includes a scattering of almost twenty skyscrapers emerging over the next decade. From Renzo Piano's thousand feet "Shard of Glass", to the bulky thirty-two storey "Walkie-talkie" tower the skyline of London looks set to be changed forever.

To date, London has constrained its appetite thanks to the efforts of cautious planners and a vociferous heritage lobby. But with the 21st century upon us Livingstone believes it's time for this generation to leave its mark.

The onset of high-rise living has united and divided Londoners in equal measure. The city's famous skyline will be irreparably altered. So is Livingstone a man with a vision of a new London embracing the post-modern era? Or is he an irresponsible politician determined to leave a personal footprint on the UK capital?

The central problem with the current debate is not Livingstone's aspiration for a better London; rather Livingstone's love affair with the skyscraper seems to be unconditional. His rhetoric implies battle lines have been drawn. You are either pro-heritage and oppose skyscrapers out of hand. Or you are pro-development and comfortable with a wave of glass obelisks alongside London's most cherished landmarks.

A middle way seems to be lacking. History shows you can be both pro-heritage and pro-development. Both Canary Wharf and the NatWest Tower prove that with good planning you can deliver impressive skyscrapers without endangering London's many heritage sites.

Livingstone has brushed this argument aside arguing that it's economically imperative that we build, build and build. He is backed by the Corporation of London - the City's custodians. The City feels the only way to match the explosive demand for office space in the Square Mile is to build upwards. London already has the most expensive office rents in the world and in the last two years alone, the West End experienced a staggering 40% rental growth. There is concern that continued rises are unsustainable. A recent London Chambers of Commerce survey revealed a startling 38% of businesses would consider pulling out of London if rents got any higher.

However, whilst there is undoubted pressure on office space, it is less clear whether the solution lies in the blanket building of skyscrapers. A recent select committee report concluded that no company had been put off locating in London because of lack of office space, and that there were plenty of suitable brownfield sites for development of commercial and residential buildings without the need to build a vast array of tall buildings.

But rental rises are not the only reason for the City's backing. Both the Mayor and London's business representative believe a leading commercial centre needs world famous commercial landmarks. More developments such as Swiss Re's Gerkin are wanted. The popularity of the skyscraper is as much about branding London plc as it is about economics.

But what Livingstone and the City seem to ignore is that London is surrounded by famous landmarks. And tall buildings jutting abruptly out of the street scene could have a devastating impact on some of these most cherished sites.

UNESCO, the cultural agency of the United Nations, has fired the first shot. It met to discuss whether to put two of London's World Heritage sites on their "endangered" list - Westminster and the Tower of London. Views from London Bridge are threatened by the "Shard of Glass". Meanwhile, Parliament will have to contend with the 52 storey St Georges Wharf Tower at Vauxhall. The latter having been muscled through by John Prescott.

UNESCO's intervention prompted the Government to publish a White Paper in March which would effectively ban developers seeking to build skyscrapers on Britain's heritage sites. However, this could be too little too late as many skyscrapers are already marching towards planning consent.

If poorly planned, tall buildings won't just be bad news for London's heritage, they'll be bad news for the environment. Tall buildings are notoriously energy inefficient. They take on average 30% more embodied energy to build and in the 50-year life-cycle of a typical commercial skyscraper, the building's energy costs are at 34% and more of the total costs. In an era where politicians are constantly searching for best practice approaches to the environment, are we at risk of taking a step backwards with a wave of skyscrapers?

London's success means that the limited land available will need to be maximised. Both commercial and demographic pressures are pushing London to expand its building stock. In the last 15 years, London increased its head count by 700,000 and it's set to rise again by the same in the next decade. Londoners need more homes and offices. However, a wave of skyscrapers should not be the only answer as the Mayor would have many believe.

Livingstone is a man with forthright views and you cannot fault him for aspiration. Skyscrapers capture the imagination and many would argue they are the ultimate symbol of modernity. New York, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Sao Paulo all boast iconic, skyscraper dominated skylines. However, London already has an iconic skyline. Skyscrapers will come at a cost and with too many that cost maybe London's rich heritage.

The Quality of Life Agenda

by Ryan Shorthouse

Unhappiness is on the increase. For those in their twenties, the rate of non-clinical depression has doubled since the 1980s. 1 in 6 of the total population are now said to be sufferers of depression or chronic anxiety disorder.

This is a problem that Lord Layard rightly identifies as an important crisis that policy-makers need to address. Of course, the root cause of this epoch of unhappiness is contested. Economist Thomas Naylor blames 'affluenza'. Growing personal wealth triggers greater consumerism, leading to a society where people have an incessant desire to acquire what only the wealthy can afford, inevitably leading to widespread disappointment.

The growing influence of the media in people's lives has accentuated the differences between having and not having certain material possessions. TV ownership and access to the Internet from homes has rocketed, pulling us towards the screen. Roughly 75% of all 9-13 year olds have televisions in their room. Our social circle now consists of the glamorous strangers behind the screen. Real friends usually have similar backgrounds and wealth; this is why we befriend them in the first place. The celebrities we have allowed to enter our lives do not, making us more aware of our own deficiencies.

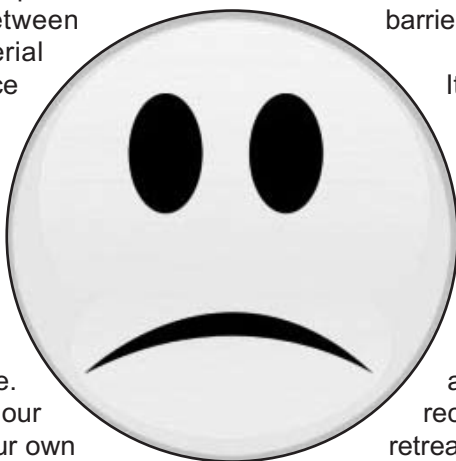
However, to blame the obsession with materials is too simple. Unhappiness is caused by a range of factors from unemployment to poverty, and more crucially a lack of time with those you care about. The British workforce works 8% longer than the average French employee. 16% of us take advantage of our opt-out from the EU working time directive, working well above 48 hours per week. Engrossed in work, the time available to socialise with friends and family reduces. As the time when we leave the office becomes later, our chance to fit in anything in before dinner and bed rapidly diminishes.

People would be happier if they felt there was more to life than work. The first step in achieving this is surely to give people a degree of choice in their weekly working hours to undertake out-of-work experiences. In Europe, 90% of firms offer flexitime. Here, less than half do. A recent survey by the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London found that depression and anxiety costs companies a staggering £12 billion a year. Companies should be embracing the potential benefit of flexible working in boosting productivity.

Second, people need to have the resources to undertake

experiences out of work. The arts and sports are powerful instruments in making people happy. Being a member of a football team or a local theatre group is where you develop friendship groups and gain another purpose outside of your job. Work provides the foundations for a successful life; but the arts and sports give it colour.

The problem is that these experiences are often not accessible, being too expensive. A worrying proportion of society leads a monotonous routine of work then home, unable to afford an additional dimension to their life. This is where the voluntary sector provides a fundamental role. A charity called Tennis for Free, for example, gives free lessons to those who want to learn a new skill and socialise with new people without the enormous financial barrier of joining a tennis club.



It need not be organised activity that people need out-of-work however. Friends should be able to go for a kick about in the local park. Those able to afford it can pay for private space, in a sports club for example, to enjoy such activities. But those unable to pay, they are left with public space, often overrun by anti-social behaviour. Nearly half of all gangs say they hang around in parks or recreational areas. It is no wonder people retreat indoors, missing out on free out-of-work activity that would enhance their social network, improve their physical fitness and quality of life. It is sad that 75% of people say they do not know of any police officers in their neighbourhood. More visible policing is needed. These eyes on the street would get people outdoors.

Sceptics say mental health and unhappiness is not on the rise- people are just more aware of it, and thus more prone to ungrounded self-diagnosis. It has even been suggested that people say they are depressed because it is fashionable, a symbol of the troubled artist, oozing with creativity but nowhere to channel it. This criticism ignores the growing dissatisfaction among an expanding number of people. There is a longing for something more than just work. Watching sportsmen and actors performing on the TV do not match the thrill and social interaction you get from doing it yourself. You just watch as others succeed, and you make no friends along the way. Increasing the accessibility of arts and sports may just be the start to unlocking a more fulfilling lifestyle for a greater number of people.

Ryan Shorthouse is a parliamentary researcher and sub-editor of crossbow

Charlotte Leslie meets Sarah Butterfield: Official Royal Tour Artist (India 2006)

Sarah Butterfield is perhaps better known in less artistically aware circles as the wife of David Willetts MP. But to many, David Willetts is possibly known as Sarah Butterfield's husband. Sarah Butterfield is an acclaimed best-selling artist. She recently accompanied a Royal Tour to India, as the official tour artist, and paintings were on sale from 25th September. David and Sarah live in the kind of house that Iris Murdoch used to write about, just west of Shepherds Bush.

As Sarah lets me in, Maisy, their sassy blond Golden Retriever makes me very welcome and sniffs my jeans with disconcerting relish. Sarah leads me through a narrow hallway lined with her paintings through to a light airy kitchen space (designed, I later learn, by Sarah with her architect's hat on) - also filled with paintings. Maisy dances round in delight. "This is what I call my Kitchen Kennel Studio" says Sarah, and it is not hard to see why. I have come to ask this artist wife of a politician how she sees politics. I have nice theories about politics, branding, communication and emotion manipulation, but suddenly suspect that a real artist might quickly relegate them to the 'nice theory' bin.

"if I was to paint The Left, I'd paint people in a small room arguing over a small amount of money on the table."

We sit at a large wooden kitchen table, opposite a variety of tantalising canvasses stacked against the far wall. Sarah is astonishingly productive, and, I am told, produces her paintings quickly. "What drives your work?" I ask, looking around. Sarah laughs. I'm tempted to say that if I knew, I might stop painting! But it's a love of nature, of light, a love of the whole business of putting down paint side by side - and seeing it turn into light and space. I try to paint relationships, not detail. I have to look at the world in an abstract way to show the thing as it really appears, and not how we think it appears. I see the world in an iridescent way- I see beauty in the most normal objects like a jar of marmite or a teaspoon."

I think of how hard to it must be to see beauty in some of the political murk of Westminster. I ask if she's ever been tempted to enter politics. "Oh, it did go through my mind as I was qualifying to be an architect. At that stage, you can't help asking yourself what it will all lead

to. But the most involved I got was canvassing for the local party in a General Election. I think two politicians in one house might be too much!"

Looking around, it strikes me that going 'through the keyhole', you wouldn't have Sarah down as the wife of Conservative politician. The house is too free, unorthodox, 'bohemian'. I mention this. "People often assume the 'bohemian artist', who rides outside the formal and functionary structures of every day office life in the roaring city, is fundamentally left-wing." I suggest. "Do you think that's true?"

Sarah is very concise on this. "I think that's a very twentieth century view of artists." She says. "Before that, most artists were working to commission, doing portraits and things so it wasn't the case at all. But what you say was certainly true in the twentieth century when art was trying to separate itself from its history or from any history. So left wing politics and art in the twentieth century had a similar mindset. Now art is rediscovering its roots and is more at ease with its own history.

"So if I gave you the titles 'Conservatism' and 'The Left'," I say, "and commissioned you to paint two separate pictures, what do you think you'd come up with?" Sarah is suddenly thoughtful. "I've not been commissioned to paint abstracts," She replies slowly. "But as starters, for Conservatism, a new road going through a beautiful landscape, a road that fits in with its surroundings; and if I was to paint The Left, I'd paint people in a small room arguing over a small amount of money on the table."

Brilliant. I quietly wonder if Mr. Hilton's job isn't under threat. "So if you had one day to shape the way someone felt and thought about something," I ask, "would you paint them a picture, compile some statistics, or write them a speech?" Sarah is contemplative. "Well, for me as an artist, an image always comes to my mind. I see something, I want to make it into a picture. But if, as you are asking, it's the other way around, I normally find some analogy or metaphor to make the point. For example, the environment: If you want a way to look at the finiteness of the world around us, look at land. If you divide up all the land we have in the U.K between all the people, we get roughly 80m² each. And if you ask people how high the sky is, they say, oh about twelve miles - but it's not, it's only five. So looking at it like that, we don't really have that much sky each. I try to find a striking way of looking at things. But to answer your question directly, I

would paint, because it's my natural way of doing it, but with an angle. But I don't usually begin with a message. It's usually an idea or a reaction."

But people must assume your paintings have some sort of 'message'? I ask. Do they have a message? Sarah thinks. "Well, because I'm a figurative painter, people don't tend to think they've got a message. I remember my old art tutor used to say 'Aren't we getting a bit literary?' when my paintings got too wordy. I try to be a painterly-painter. But you will get internal harmonies in a picture, so afterwards you realise why you wanted to paint it – perhaps its got a squares within golden sections or something. So if my paintings do have a message it's that the world is capable of analysis, it's a world of unity and order. And that it's fundamentally good. But if you had to paint a picture with a message? Sarah replies with heart-felt sincerity. "That the world matters. Our relationship with our natural world matters – "If we don't know nature, we don't know ourselves".

"So what do you think of David Cameron's environmentalism and 'blue sky and green leaves' branding?" I ask. "Well it's understandable that he wanted to peg out a new set of issues and be distinctive." She replies. "And my passionate conviction is about how to look after the world. In my current exhibition from my tour in India, I paint a lot of figures against water. David, my husband, says that if there is an abundance of water in a country, it is more likely to be a relaxed democracy. Where water is short, the system of government tends to be much more hierarchical. Our blood stream is the same sodium concentration as seawater. We are mostly made up of water. Our evolution is in our blood. We can't deny evolutionary history. We are intimately connected with our surroundings; if they go wrong, we go wrong. The paintings in my exhibition of figures against water where people are seen drinking from a pool tries to convey some of this thinking.

But as regards delivering and presenting the environmental policy, my own personal view is that I think it is all a bit more humdrum. That environmental policy fits in with your policy on the economy, education, blue and green issues that exist along side. If you start the issue afresh, it can get picked up and put down. If you work with it within existing structures, it can invigorate them. But if you separate it off too much, it risks getting the compelling attention of novelty, but which can wear off.

"It's a theme that underlies a large part of this interview," I say, "so let's finish on it. Change to win': What do you think the relationship should be between the old and the new?"

Sarah does not hesitate. "People ask what it is like to paint." She says. "Imagine you're at the edge of a frozen river, blind-fold, and you've got to get across. You test with your foot to see if the ice is secure. You test all the way. It may mean that as you step out, to find the right path over those frozen torrents, you've got to double back sometimes. You go from what you know to the next move. T.S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the individual talent' tells us to imbue oneself with all that went before, then to reflect your time. At age 16, I read that and thought 'that will keep me busy for the rest of my life'"

If Sarah's canvasses are anything to go by, it has. In the midst of our party's muffled disquiet over old and new, what better lesson can Conservatives learn, but re-read Eliot, look to the artist and to follow suit?

Sarah Butterfield's Exhibition "India – an unusual journey accompanying a Royal Tour" Neru Centre, 8 South Audley Street, London W1 Tuesday 25th – Friday 28th September 10-6pm All pictures can be seen at www.sarahbutterfield.co.uk

'Young Woman, Backlit' by Sarah Butterfield.



Crossbow apologises unreservedly to the artist and to readers for black-and-white on this page!



Back Cover: 'Today in India' by Sarah Butterfield. With kind permission of the artist.