



Death of the Left?

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Good things come to those who wait. Apparently. It is perhaps bad form to start with an apology but I feel it is in order. True to form this issue of the 'Forum is late. Very late. If it is not too presumptive perhaps we could be permitted to adopt the moniker of our national kindred spirit - 'The Staggers.' Better late than never though and what an issue. We decided that this issue should focus on the state of left-wing politics in Britain. As a crippled (and perhaps soon to be bankrupt) Labour crawls to the polling station, amidst the worst recession for 30 years, with growing unemployment and the prospect of growing inflation now seems an apposite moment to consider the fortunes of the Left. Newsweek declared on the now famous front cover that 'We Are All Socialists Now', and they had a point. The Federal Reserve mobilised over \$700bn to save Wall Street, No. 10 bought most of the Royal Bank of Scotland - at one time the world's fifth biggest banks. We were truly sailing in uncharted waters. Now with the rise of the Cuddly Conservatives lead by the rose-cheeked 'Dave' who casts himself as the great protector of the NHS one is left with a strange feeling of double vision. Perhaps it's no coincidence that those 3D glasses have one red lens and one blue lens producing a single image. In 'The Rest of the World' we look at America and their own politics in the age of Obama and look at the tumultuous events following the dispute elections of June in Iran. Moving away from politics we look at the issues of gender, ethics and finally climate change. As ever the generosity and enthusiasm of all our contributors (to say nothing of their patience!) has been incredible. A big thank you to all of you. An editorial is suppose to have a 'point' yet we don't want to grind any axes. Rather than tell you what we think we want to ask you to tell us what you think. The 'Forum was established as just that - a place for debate, for dispute, for the exchange of ideas. Are 'right' and 'left' now meaningless? Is the Republican Party the party of America's future? Is positive discrimination a good thing? Should we have an opt-out system for organ donation? And do climate change matter? Have your say. We hope you enjoy the issue.

Matthew Kennedy
Leila Molana-Allan
January 2010

Towards a New Politics?



In the light of recent developments, political and economic, JAMES PANTON questions whether 'Left' and 'Right' are any longer meaningful.

THE CATEGORIES OF LEFT AND RIGHT are no longer adequate to the political challenges of the 21st century.

For some this may give cause for regret. It would be politically easier to cling to the more secure mooring of tried and tested ideas, and it would be far less intellectually destabilising if we could continue to understand ourselves, our opponents, and therefore the nature of the political tasks that face us, in terms stable, solid, historical, political categories. It would, however, be an error.

If there is one point of certainty and security from which we might draw comfort, it is that this is not the first time, and it is unlikely to be the last time, that the world demands of us that we attempt to develop a new political language with which to describe a qualitatively new set of political problems and possibilities.

Back in 1944, the radical sociologist C Wright Mills diagnosed a profound intellectual and political crisis, which he understood in terms of the corrosion of the great 19th and early 20th century ideologies of liberalism, socialism and conservatism. These structures of political thinking had, for Mills, become moribund, and offered little in terms of analytical clarity or motivational force.

For at least the past two decades we have been living through our own intellectual and political crisis. The final collapse of the Soviet Union put paid to the idea that there could be any form of social organisation other than the capitalism. However much right thinking leftists opposed the totalitarian injustices of Stalinism throughout its long year of internal corrosion, the final collapse of the Soviet project also represented the end of any real basis for believing that the world could be organised in an entirely different way.

The collapse of communism was just as much of a problem for the right as it was for the left. Free-marketers were allowed only a few moments of triumphalist revelry before they realised that, for the first time since 1917, they no longer had an obvious opponent against which to define themselves and to justify their system of social organisation. It was not too difficult to counter pose the freedoms of market society to the impoverishment and unfreedom of Stalinist bureaucracy and state authoritarianism. Far more difficult to pretend that the capitalist market was the best means of achieving social justice and human freedom when it had to be justified in its own terms. This crisis, felt most keenly perhaps at the extremes of Communism and

Market Libertarianism, lead also to an erosion of the structures of ideological coherence around which post-war capitalism and the post-war state had been legitimated: the Left-Labour project of welfarism, which the moderate right had bought into, and the right-wing project of Thatcherism.

At the end of the twentieth century we were left with a system of social and political organisation that seemed inevitable – There Is No Alternative to the market, as Thatcher famously put it – but it was nonetheless not a system that we felt able to celebrate or around which popular politics could find any real coherence. If the right had won the economic war and capitalism had triumphed, the Left had won the culture wars, and the ideological basis around which market-Capitalism had once been justified was rent. Bereft of both any vision of a radically different future, and any solid or convincing justification for the organisation of the present, the question of social organisation has sunk into the background, whilst political thinking, lacks the creative tension that emerges from the conflict of alternative visions of the good life.

Of course, the shell of politics remains. The brouhaha of parliamentarians on opposite sides of the dispatch box continues - though

when the most pressing issue they can find to debate is the question of how to regulate their expenses claims, we could be forgiven for thinking that managerialism has finally triumphed over political ideology. The job of making policy continues – though with an almost non-stop production line of policy proposals and new legislation – with more new legislation entering the Statute Books since 1997 than in the entire previous history of recorded law - we could be forgiven for thinking that policy-making has come to replace deep political thinking and the attempt to develop new and inspiring political projects.

And of course, concerned citizens, inspired individuals, and even a few real interest groups, continue to agitate: a tiny band of fathers demand 'justice', environmentalists clamber atop the Houses of Parliament to demand 'urgent action', and Post Office workers even go on strike. But as a host of what are essentially special interest groups, with varying degrees of legitimacy in their claims to represent a political constituency, pursue their concerns largely through the media, the vast majority of the citizenry steps back from the public, political sphere, and gets on with their everyday lives. They feel no real connection with either the business of professional politics or with the campaigning groups who claim to represent them.

But before reaching for the Prozac, we might sit back for a moment and recognise that what we might on the one hand experience as the death of political ideas and imagination, we might on the other hand celebrate as a clearing away of the deadwood of rigid thinking and zombie categories, to make way for an entirely new set of political possibilities. We can again take solace from the previous historical experience: C Wright Mills' prescient assessment of the political situation of 1944, came only a decade before the first stirrings of a new political sensibility amongst a younger generation of would be political actors. This new sensibility would eventually explode, at the dawn of the 1960s, into a host of new political projects, social movements, and ideas: a 'New' Left, civil rights, anti-imperialism, second-wave feminism, gay rights, and even the earliest expression of what we now call environmentalism.

There is of course no historical inevitability in the fact that a period of political corrosion must give way to a new period of political imagination; and there is certainly no inevitability that such a flowering of political possibility will be led by our generation. It will happen not only because we want it to happen, but also if we are prepared to put in the intellectual

effort to work out the key political problems that face us today, and our attitude to them, without the security that comes with the old ways of thinking. We must have the intellectual courage to liberate ourselves from what Mills, following Marx, called 'all the old crap'.

So what is the key political problem of the present? In the midst of the contemporary political malaise, I believe we have lost something even more important than a coherent political narrative or orientation for a meaningful political project. We have also lost a sense of ourselves, as individuals, as potential political actors, as agents of social and political organisation.

If the central question of politics is the question of how we organise society, it is so because politics is something in which we engage in order to take greater control of our lives. The question of social and political organisation is the question of how we can best achieve a society in which we, as individuals, can decide for ourselves who we are and who we want to be, how we want to spend our time, how we can best channel our creative energies, pursue our passions, and live lives that are meaningfully our own.

This question – of individual and social freedom – was central to the historical traditions of liberalism and socialism. The opposing ideologies may have differed on exactly what that freedom looked like, and certainly on how best to achieve that freedom[,] but they were united in the idea that freedom was the central political concern. And both narratives had at their foundation an image of individuals who were capable of freedom and who formed the basis of political actions.

It is not coincidental that as the political traditions of old have corroded, and the public sphere has been all but evacuated by the citizenry, our belief in individual self-determination, in the possibility of freedom and the value of living freely, has much diminished.

At the level of formal politics and policy-making it seems that almost every new proposal or piece of legislation takes the form of a banning order: a restriction or a limitation on apparently everyday individual behaviour. As newly elected Mayor of London, Boris Johnson's first act was to ban the consumption of alcohol on public transport. In the name of the nation's public health, smoking in all enclosed public spaces has been banned. [Banal as these may seem in relation to the historical question of political freedom, they reveal a lot about contemporary politics]. Neither was the product of any great popular demand, and both are premised upon the idea that the

potential problems of social intercourse are best resolved by top-down legislation rather than individuals in communities working out for themselves the standards and rules of their social interactions.

But it would be wrong to see the problem here as one of state authoritarianism. On the contrary, without a sense of ourselves as agents in our own lives, we have increasingly come to call on the state to intervene, to assist, to enable, all of which is really to say, to regulate, any number of levels of our everyday lives. Pick a social issue, and there is a regulatory solution. Unpack the regulatory solution and it soon becomes clear that it is based upon an image of us as individuals who are either vulnerable and incapable of running our own lives, or malicious and malevolent in our interactions with neighbours and other members of our shared communities.

If we are too willing to accept this image of ourselves, and of each other, we not only allow the informality and spontaneity of our everyday lives, with all their difficulties and messiness, and with all their freedoms and creative possibilities, to be replaced by formalised relationships and regulated interactions. We also move further from any image of ourselves as potential political actors. If we feel unable to take control of our own lives and our most everyday interactions, what possibility that we could attempt to take control of the society that we live in, and organise it better around a sense of our real concerns and interests?

That is why I believe the key political question of the moment is the question of individual freedom: freedom of speech and action, of movement and association, but also freedom in everyday life – the freedom to negotiate the niceties of our everyday social interactions without the regulatory intervention of the state. In its current form, this is not a question that can be adequately captured by the traditional narratives of either Left or Right; on the contrary, it is a question that we must pose in new ways, and for which we must be prepared to try out experimental answers and solutions. This, for me, means learning from the best of a tradition of Enlightenment Humanism – of individual and collective experimentation, imagination, a preparedness to take risks, and a fundamental belief in our capacity as human beings to find answers and solutions to the problems that face us.

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Gramsci and The Guardian

CHRIS BAMBERY discusses the role the media plays in the formation of our ideas.

Public support for war in Afghanistan is firm, despite deaths' was the headline in The Guardian back in July, reporting a poll asking whether British troops should quit Afghanistan. Despite the headline the poll showed that support for withdrawal outweighed support for the US and NATO occupation. Since then further polls showed a hardening of opposition with The Independent's poll at the close of July recording a majority, 52 percent, for immediate withdrawal.

The Guardian is an unlikely starting point for an examination of media bias and the left. It is, after all, labeled a 'left wing' newspaper both by the Daily Mail and Conservative front benchers. It opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Unlike the Iraq adventure, the war in Afghanistan has been presented as a 'good war' by politicians and the media, one being fought to benefit the Afghan people, particularly women.

Newspaper's like The Independent, which opposed the Iraq war, supports the Afghan war because it's in Britain's national interests. Politicians and the press tell us British troops need to be there to stop terror attacks and the drugs trade on our streets. Yet occupation

and soaring civilian casualties - Afghans are the overwhelming victims of this war - are fuelling spreading resistance.

As this summer's surge in Helmand province led to increased British casualties the mood turned against this war, despite opinion among what used to be termed the establishment. That became apparent even at the ceremonies marking the return of soldier's coffins.

Of course the issue was contested with many trying to focus on the need to better arm British troops, though the Americans with their greater number of helicopters suffered greater casualties.

What is interesting is that opposition to the war grew despite any lead from the media. No newspaper spearheaded a campaign such as the Daily Mirror did against the Iraq invasion, sponsoring the 2.5 million Stop the War march in February 2003 and producing thousands of placards for marchers.

The media had to reflect the shifting mood over Afghanistan and the Stop the War Coalition got its best share of air time in years, though it's still kept off prestige BBC programmes such as Radio 4's Today.

Exclusion from the media and media bias

are held up by many on the left to explain why our views remain those of a minority. There is, of course, a strong element of truth to this, but it's not the whole story. If the media fully controlled our ideas then what hope is there for radical change, let alone a revolution.

The Sun is the paper all good lefties loathe. The fact that the previously pro-Tory Sun, switched to calling for a vote for Tony Blair in the last three general election can either be explained by its owner Rupert Murdoch's desire to pull the strings of power behind the scenes or by a cruder explanation. The Sun discovered that when it called for a vote for John Major way back in 1992 a majority of its readers ignored it and subsequently switched to backing Labour.

The paper changed tack to reflect its readers. That New Labour with its enthusiasm for the market was thoroughly acceptable to Murdoch must have eased such a painful decision.

News International put a lot of effort into getting The Sun right. They recruit journalists from the best universities and pour over surveys of their readers.

As with the rest of the media, The Sun has to reflect popular opinion because, like the

rest of the media, it needs to sell papers and advertising space. When, back on the eve of the Iraq invasion, it tried to suggest striking firefighters were stooges of the dictator Saddam Hussein its front page died a death because most people's experiences of firefighters are of them coming to rescue your cat from up a tree not unleashing poison gas on your village.

Contradictions are the reality of consciousness.

The Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, contrasted what he termed common sense with good sense. The first were the ideas of existing society, the second ideas of basic rebellion against that system. Both sets of ideas can exist in the same head.

Drawing on his experience of village life in his native Sardinia at the start of the last century, Gramsci explained ruling ideas had to be translated, literally, into everyday language drawing on everyday experiences by the village's middle class (the teacher, priest, lawyer or policeman).

Today, tabloid claims that refugees step off the plane at Heathrow to be immediately allocated a council house and sumptuous benefits, only work if someone in the pub, café or canteen repeats and defends them.

In Britain today we have hundreds of thousands of people who buy into the idea that migrants are taking 'our' jobs. But we also have hundreds of thousands who believe the government lied about its wars and are still lying and who question why we it is the government lavishes £1.4 trillion on bailing out bankers but will let Britain's only

wind turbine maker close.

Those people are often organised into grass roots networks in the anti-war movement, the trade unions and local campaigns. They feel largely excluded from a mainstream media which accepts the dominant neo-liberal template, as do the three established parties.

The growing recession exacerbates this, creating a deeper sense of 'them and us.' Working people know we will pay for this crisis through welfare cuts, job losses and attacks on pay, pensions and conditions.

That feeling of 'them and us' is a basic element of good sense which can suddenly boil over.

The way the recession is presented by the media, financial experts and politicians is as a force which overwhelms us and over which we have no control. The subliminal message is that resistance is useless.

But in Britain workers in car component plants, a packaging firm and a wind turbine factory have occupied to fight job losses. They've followed their good sense rather than swallowing common sense. The fact that students took part in a wave of occupations earlier this year over the Israeli onslaught on Gaza helped popularise the idea of occupying.

In the process of resistance workers can become conscious of the reality of their position in society and their ability to change it. But the battle between this new 'good sense' and the old 'common sense' is never spontaneously resolved.

In any struggle, let alone any revolution,

people coalesce around particular strategies to achieve change – and in particular between reform and revolution. This is not an even contest. All the forces of conservatism weigh in on the side of common sense, as do the likes of the Labour Party.

At this point Gramsci argues networks of revolutionaries have to exist which have gathered the confidence of their fellow workers in common action and who can put forward a strategy ensuring the new triumphs over the old.

Millions of people in Britain have marched against war and global poverty, hundreds of thousands have mobilised to oppose the Nazi BNP and to fight for jobs. They've done this despite a neo-liberal consensus which embraces all the established parties and the mainstream media. Those people are champions of alternative ideas in places where people gather, study and work.

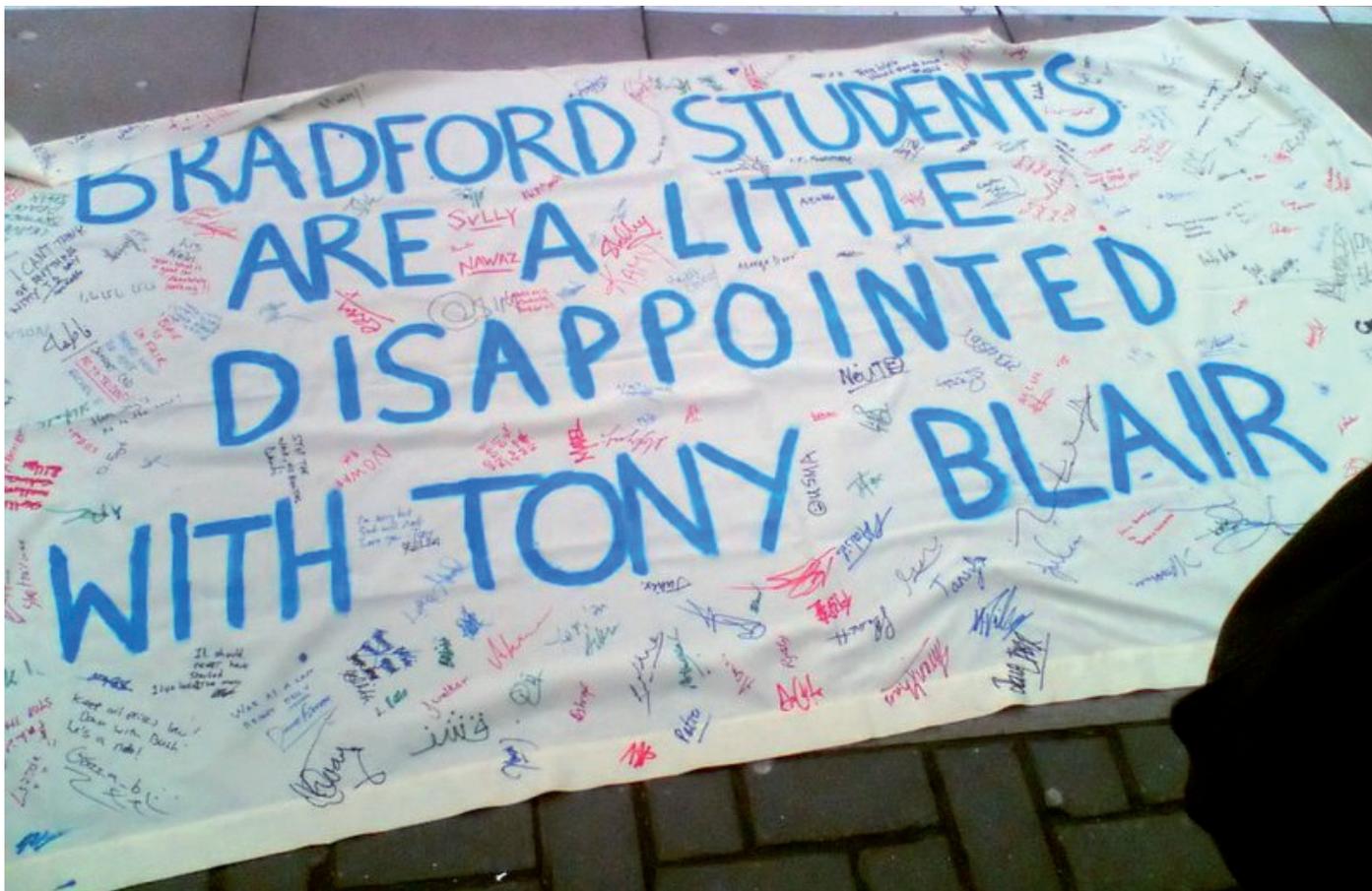
Readers might have been expecting a blast against a biased media which excludes the radical left. To me that's not very interesting because I don't expect the BBC or even The Guardian to promote revolution, let alone The Sun or Daily Mail.

More interesting is how people are drawn into resistance despite the dominant message being 'resistance is useless.' That points to a better future, and boy do we need one in a world blighted by war, recession and environmental destruction.

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[Photography: Ben Visbeek]



Talking 'bout My Generation

KATE GROUCUTT discuss the role young people will play in Labour and the Left's renewal.

FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE LEFT, the last year has given rise to the serious prospect of something that none of us has known in our adult lives: a Conservative Government. Consistently behind in the polls, third in the recent European elections with just 16% of the vote, and facing justifiable public anger over MPs' expenses, this has not been a great time to be a Labour Party member.

As a local Labour activist, trade union representative and someone who is involved with discussions about the future of the Labour Party through my involvement with the Fabian Society, I want to offer some suggestions for ways to improve Labour's electoral fortunes, and revive the left more

broadly. Whether Labour wins the next election or not, we need to reform and renew ourselves. This means looking afresh at the policies we present to the electorate (and this needs to happen quickly) but also the way we decide those policies and the way we operate. Our organisation, structures and campaigning techniques also need to be examined, and changes made which will help us enter the new decade as a more effective, united party.

The younger generation must play a central role in this process. We are the ones who will be keeping the Party going in the decades ahead, and are often looked upon as the foot-soldiers, expected to use our energy to deliver leaflets, attend

rallies and knock on doors. Yet many young people are tired of being asked to do this work, without having a voice in the direction of the Party, or control of any of the decision making processes.

As happens in organisations of all natures, in many parts of the Labour Party there is a power struggle. This may be obvious, as leading a political party is a mechanism to achieving governmental power, whether at local or national level. The Labour Party has dozens of elected positions, even within the smallest local Party unit, and this gives rise to constant power struggles, expressed both through the annual election to these positions, but also through the way that campaigns are run.

The difference between the Labour Party and other organisations is that ideology plays a significant part in any discussion (rightly, of course), which means that these power struggles often have several factors which interlink. Yet in my experience of local Labour Party politics, debates and elections are often contests based more on a generational divide and willingness to embrace change than on ideology, with competency coming a poor third. We need a cultural shift that gives much greater encouragement to new ideas and new ways of working, instead of accepting the status quo and resisting any change. After all, as members of a progressive party, changing society is the very reason that we became interested in politics. We must embody the spirit of radical change internally, as well as fighting for it in Government.

The historic election of Barack Obama as US President has been minutely dissected within the Labour Party, to find the lessons that can be learnt for our own movement and electoral strategy. Whilst there are many differences between the political structures and cultures in America and the UK, there are practices that can be survived the journey across the Atlantic. I had the privilege of campaigning for Obama in Ohio during the last weeks of the campaign, as part of an eighty-strong Young Fabian/Labour Staff Network delegation. We saw a method of political organisation that was radically different to our own, even taking into account the vastly superior level of resources available to those running the campaign compared to the level of funding we can draw on in the UK.

The campaign was simultaneously strictly controlled from the centre, but with high levels of local control and accountability. Every person, from the volunteer talking to their neighbours over the fence to the national campaign director, knew their place in the hierarchy, and reported upwards on a number of measurable targets. We met dynamic young campaigners who had never been involved in politics before, but had shown they could recruit

volunteers and convince voters, and had therefore been given the responsibility of organising on their street, in their neighbourhood or across their entire county. Once this responsibility was handed over, they had the freedom to organise in a way that suited them, and their success was clearly measurable in the numbers collected at the end of each day, counting the number of voters contacted and number of volunteers recruited.

As well as training and trust, this devolution of campaign coordination requires a clear central message. So as well as changing the way we campaign, there must be a strong narrative about the direction that Labour wishes to take the country. Obama's central message of change clearly doesn't work for a Labour Party seeking a fourth term in office, so we need to articulate a new vision for the country. I believe this should be about supporting families through the recession, giving young people opportunities through education and jobs, and ensuring Britain is prepared for the long term challenges we face, for example climate change. Others may disagree, and it is essential that we have the discussion about our priorities soon, and unite around some common themes.

Another lesson from the Obama campaign is about the need to encourage debate about issues, and to see this as a strength of the movement rather than a problem. In the past, debates were seen through the prism of a hostile media, keen to exploit any debate as signs of division and weakness. But with the new media that it becoming increasingly mainstream, there is an opportunity to interact directly with both party members and voters. Websites like labourlist.org and nextleft.org are stimulating debate and discussion, but both would benefit from more regular and open engagement from senior Party and Government figures, which would encourage more people to get involved in the discussion and put forward their ideas.

If young people are to be attracted to the Labour Party, both to join the Party and play an active role in its

campaigns, then there need to be a number of ways for them to engage. People want different things from their political activism, and we must accept that whilst on a practical level this may be achieved through other parts of the Labour movement (through trade union activism or membership of the Fabian Society or other societies) or even through non political campaigns, Labour Party membership is the thing that ties us together, the common thread that binds us.

It is often commented that young people are interested in politics but that this is expressed through getting involved with campaigns like Amnesty International or Make Poverty History, rather than through political parties. I believe that we need to acknowledge this and find ways to channel this energy. Of course campaigners will always push for more, but we need to convince people that many of the causes they support will only be achieved with a Labour Government, and that they should push for their issue to be given greater priority from within the Party. Yet there need to be practical ways for this influence to actually make a difference, if people aren't to be disenchanted with the slow progress of change.

Of course it is difficult to be radical and challenging when you are in Government, but this is where the role of the Party as a forum for debate is so essential. Even young people understand that being in Government requires difficult choices, and that Governments have to focus on the needs of all the people in the country, not just those who voted for it. But at the same time, it needs to be true to its values and traditions as a Party.

Only with openness to new ideas, willingness to take risks and devolve control, and feedback from those taking decisions about the reasons for those decisions, will young people feel that they are part of a Party that listens, and one that reflects their views and acts upon them.

Kate Groucutt is Chair of the Young Fabians, is Chair of her Branch Labour Party in Islington.



Sen and Sensibility

WILLIAM SHORTT looks at the most perennial of buzz-concepts, equality of opportunity.

BRITISH SOCIETY IS BROKEN. That New Labour lot are responsible. Social mobility has been rendered an impossibility by the actions and inaction of this government. The next generation of young adults is doomed. Children are killing each other with knives and guns. Our once great country is dying a slow death. Something must be done! We must have change! Or so David Cameron's Conservatives would have us believe.

The Leader of Her Majesty's Opposition has presented himself as a progressive, a moderniser, a compassionate statesman who is committed to the promotion of both individual responsibility and social justice. Yet factions of his party remain unwilling to address the problem that a significant number of a child's life chances are still determined at birth. Throughout the twentieth century, our political parties fought over how best to respond to the realities of inequality. Broadly speaking, the Left was for equality of outcome and the Right in favour of equality of opportunity. Unfortunately, many on the British Right continue to argue that equality of opportunity is all that is needed to

achieve social justice. With the Labour government expected to lose power in a matter of months, it is time to ask questions of an apparently "progressive" Conservative party leadership.

The problem for any socially minded voter is that the equality of opportunity argument fails to understand the complexities of disadvantage. "I've always believed", says Cameron, "that life is what you make it, that of course life isn't fair, you make your own luck but that there's nothing you can't achieve if you strive and try hard". Well, research into early childhood development would suggest otherwise. The Sutton Trust has shown that children from low-income families who score highly in cognitive tests at two years-old have already been overtaken by their peers from wealthier families by the time they are six to seven years-old. Another study found that children of professionals are exposed to an average of 2,100 words per hour, but children with parents on benefits hear only 600 words per hour. Early failures to provide children with encouragement and communication skills in turn cause behavioural issues that will affect

them – and, consequently, the rest of society – throughout their education and working lives.

In the 1990s, New Labour reconfigured the ideological battleground by becoming a party of social marketeers. If Cameron and Osborne are authentic in their commitment to pursue a modern Conservative creed of progressivism, they too must change and enrich their currently vague notion of "equal opportunities". Giving unskilled young adults with behavioural problems a lower rate of income tax, for example, is neither compassionate nor progressive if, as victims of early abuse or neglect, they cannot now hold down a job. The Conservatives' family and education policy advisers must persuade the party to move beyond this outdated concept. They must go to the root of the problem, which begins in early childhood.

Amartya Sen's "Capability Approach" provides policy makers with a richer understanding of life chances. Sen defines capability as "a person's freedom – the real opportunities – to achieve well-being". Character capabilities are the fundamental skill sets needed to realise a human's potential. They include

possessing the ability to self-regulate, to apply oneself with discipline and persistence when faced with complex tasks, and to be able to feel empathy for others. Sen's approach synthesises a pluralistic view of well-being with the Aristotelian concept of a "good life" in terms of human development. It prioritises citizens' capacities to pursue their goals as opposed to focusing on the issue that one citizen has a greater income or larger house than another.

The capabilities approach is not simply an abstract theory from some leftist groupuscule. Research conducted by Ian Duncan Smith's right-leaning think tank, the Centre for Social Justice, has provided evidence that social deprivation has a direct impact on literacy and numeracy skills. They have shown that intervention through parent programmes when children are between four and eight years-old has the greatest effect; by eleven it is too late. The left-leaning think tanks' research tends to be focused on the social mobility merits of early intervention, whereas Duncan Smith's researchers tend to see social stability as the primary goal; but the methods discussed – as advocated through programmes like Sure Start, the primary SEAL programme, and FAST – are ultimately the same.

If Cameron's claim to be "the heir to Blair" is more than a soundbite, it means he must continue with what Blair got right. The Sure Start programme was one of New Labour's most radical initiatives. Launched in 1998, its aim was of "giving children the best possible start in life". Sure Start centres have created a safe place where parents can take their children for activity sessions. Children participate in programmes that integrate early education with childcare. Parents are engaged in the process through ante- and post-natal education and support. Other programmes like Triple P provide parents with advice and professional support to help them cultivate a positive, stable family environment. The strength of these programmes lies in their realisation that different parents will need different modes of assistance. What is important is that the necessary support schemes are made available to them, and are sufficiently flexible so as to cater for each family's individual needs.

Critics of these support schemes fail to understand that all parents need help of some kind. They argue that these are 'nanny state' intrusions into the sacred

institution of the family. However, it is only through early intervention that the disturbing levels of antisocial behaviour and underachievement amongst teenagers and young adults can be remedied. Pouring millions of pounds into state benefit schemes for adults and obligatory counselling for young offenders is like applying a sticking plaster to a knife wound. Anyone who still thinks that more punitive responses to youth crime will solve the problem should not be in government.

It is likely that we shall see a Conservative government in 2010. If Cameron is serious about helping the disadvantaged, he must pursue an early interventionist agenda with all the courage and commitment that it deserves. Such a progressive agenda will require Cameron to resist his conservative, non-interventionist instincts and show some considerable grit in defying his Tory critics. It will also cost a lot of money. But it will cost considerably less than leaving future governments to pick up the bill for a state-dependent adult's unemployment benefits or full-time prison accommodation.

Historically, the Conservatives have accused Labour of wanting to bring everyone down to a level of colourless, impoverished mediocrity in order that all may be equal. The charge was that in a centralised system that burdens the economy with unnecessary taxation and intervention, the potential of aspiring individuals to achieve their life ambitions will never flourish. Whatever the Conservatives may say, the rebirth of the Labour party under Tony Blair changed this debate. Both Labour and the Conservatives, now more than ever, feel themselves to be the party of aspiration. And so Tory policy makers share a common challenge with their Labour counterparts: how to facilitate the rise of the disadvantaged without necessarily ensuring the decline of the privileged. This must begin and end with the aim of helping children acquire the capabilities to grow into positive, independent adults. Only then shall we see a truly modern, progressive Conservative party provide equal opportunities for all.

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We need to talk about the ‘Special Relationship’

CLARE SHORT MP says Britain is being held back by its ‘Special Relationship’ with the USA

IT IS NOTABLE THAT despite the disquiet throughout the country about the way we went to war in Iraq, and the unease about the deployment in Afghanistan, there is no difference between the two major parties on either issue. The Liberal Democrats had the courage to oppose the Iraq invasion, but they have largely fallen into line over the aftermath, and their recent criticism over Afghanistan is tactical. Similarly, there is mounting public concern about the suffering of the Palestinian people and the failure of the international powers to hold Israel to account for its constant breaches of international law, but these very serious concerns are hardly debated in the mainstream of British politics.

The problem, I believe, is the obsession of all the post war governments with the “special relationship”. The explanation for this obsession takes us back to the old jibe from Dean Acheson, Secretary of State in the Truman government from 1949 to 1953, that Britain has “lost an Empire and not yet found a role”. Britain’s problem, or at least

the problem of the British political elite, is that they are desperate to be seen as a great power. It is notable and laughable how frequently British politicians claim to be leading the world. A particularly visible recent example is the claim from spokespeople from all parties that we are “leading the world” on climate change - even as our domestic performance lags well behind many other European countries.

In reality, the UK is not a great power, and cannot lead except by joining together with other like minded middle-ranking countries to work for more intelligent and far-sighted policies.

In trying to understand Blair’s relationship with President Bush, it is important to put it in the wider context of the post war British government’s obsession with their relationship with the US. Churchill, himself half American, wrote admiringly of “the English speaking peoples”. He was, of course, absolutely right to focus on the possibility of the US joining the war. If this had not happened, Britain might easily have been defeated and occupied by the Nazi

regime, and the history of Europe would have been very different. But for those of us who have grown up fully accepting that Britain is a middle ranking power, it is important to remind ourselves that Britain went into the war as a major power, and did not fully appreciate how weakened it had become until the humiliation of Suez in 1956, when the UK had to withdraw from its disgraceful conspiracy with France and Israel to re-occupy the Suez Canal zone after Nasser’s nationalisation. The US unwillingness to support sterling demonstrated how weak the UK had become, and its political leaders have been hanging on to the American coat tails ever since.

The great exception to this rule was Edward Heath, whose obsession was joining the UK with the rest of Europe rather than with the US. He succeeded: the referendum held under the Wilson government in 1975 settled our membership. But then came Mrs Thatcher who, in the latter part of her premiership, became anti-European Union, and whose legacy lives on in a divided

Conservative party and the breakaway to the UKIP fringe. I am not sure whether those who support UKIP are in favour of our role as America's poodle. They appear to carry a kind of post imperial illusion that Britain can stand alone. But there is so little discussion of major foreign policy options in mainstream politics that their position remains unclear.

Despite this background and Mrs Thatcher's deep affection for Ronald Reagan, she did not support his invasion of Grenada in 1983, and publicly made her position clear. Similarly, Harold Wilson was deeply attached to the "special relationship" but resisted all the pressure exerted on him to involve the UK in the Vietnam War.

Thus Tony Blair's attachment to the special relationship was predictable. But his willingness to follow an extremist President in a reckless and dishonest invasion of Iraq, and to deceive his Cabinet, Parliament and country, to get us there is one of the most abject incarnations of the relationship that we have seen. It is of course a tragedy that Blair gave his word from very early on that he would be with Bush on the invasion of Iraq. There is, in my view, a real possibility that if British support had been made conditional on the support of the UN Security Council, Blair would have been allowed to report that, to his own surprise, there were no WMD. Sanctions could then have been lifted and Saddam Hussein indicted as a war criminal.

The people of Iraq would then have been given the chance, just as did the Serbs with Milosevic, to send him for trial in The Hague.

It is worth remembering that the people of the US were lied to in a different way from those of the UK. They were led to believe that the attack on the Twin Towers was organised out of Iraq. It is not surprising therefore that they were willing to support the war. Nonetheless, figures showed that 80% of Americans supported an invasion only as part of a coalition. Britain's role was to be that coalition, and the tragedy is that Tony Blair did not use that leverage to help shape a better policy.

My own explanation of Blair's behaviour is that he was desperate to form a good relationship with Bush after the closeness of his relationship with Clinton, and therefore desperately anxious to please. In addition, second-term Blair was looking for a bigger legacy than his finely honed skills with focus groups and sound bites. After the attack on the Twin Towers, he wanted to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US and was willing to be less than honest, to manipulate the government system and throw all his authority on the line to do so.

There are many books that tell the story of the UK role in the Iraq invasion. There is increasing public discussion of the need for a major reconsideration of the strategy in Afghanistan. And since the invasion of Lebanon in 2006, and the attack on Gaza in 2009, there is growing unease about

the endless suffering of the Palestinians and the world community's feebleness in holding Israel to respect for international law.

There is also growing pessimism over Barack Obama's prospects of securing peace in the Middle East. He is no doubt sincere, but he is working out of a political system that is completely unbalanced in its unconditional support for Israel. A more independent UK could work with other nations to open more space and make it more likely that Obama would succeed.

The detail of all these questions is deeply important. But underlying all of them is the need for a full debate on Britain's obsession with its relationship with the US. For me, the current state of our relationship with America is that of a small boy who thinks he is important because he is best friends with the biggest boy in the playground. We humiliate ourselves. We fail to use our influence beneficially, and fail to act as an honest friend to either the US or Israel. In doing so, we are stoking up continuing suffering, bloodshed and division at a time when we need unprecedented international co-operation to deal with the mounting crisis of global warming and other environmental strains.

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[Photography: Neil T]

A Republican way forward

TOM GRANT says the Republicans can be the party of America's future.



AS THE BRITISH CONSERVATIVE PARTY re-discovers its voice and prepares for the next general election, the Republican Party in the United States is asking itself hard questions about its own way forward. Republican majorities in both houses of Congress and a Republican President in the White House now have given way to a Democrat monopoly across Washington. Mid-term election defeats in 2006 started a slide which the collapse of Lehman Brothers and a sharp recession in autumn 2008 completed. States which had not voted Democrat in a presidential election in a long time, like Virginia, Indiana, and North Carolina, gave their electoral votes to Barack Obama, and Republican presidential nominee John McCain's long campaign for the White House fell short in its final mile.

Electoral politics knows many vagaries, and one day's certainty can become the next day's doubt. But political parties also can enter long periods in the wilderness: not every reversal is short-term; not every success is permanent. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and ensuing Great Depression were seen as the fault of excessively laissez-faire Republican Presidents. The party was slow to recognize the looming threat of totalitarianism in Europe in the 1930s, and some Republicans stubbornly refused to support President Franklin Roosevelt once war was inevitable. As a result, with only brief Republican interregnums, the House of Representatives remained Democrat from 1933 to 1995.

There are ways to avoid such a prolonged time in the wilderness, but a party does not right itself automatically. Its leaders must recognize the wants and needs of the electorate. Wishing that voters would change their views is a sure-fire formula for failure. The challenge is now to adopt policies that address the American electorate, as that

electorate exists today—and to find candidates who can communicate those policies in optimistic terms, so that voters from a wide cross-section of society will again consider checking “GOP” at the ballot box.

For their Party to find its way forward, Republican leaders need to bear in mind three issues.

First, the Party must build a coalition capable of winning in every major region of the United States. There might have been a time when a solid Republican majority in one part of the country would have been a viable starting-point for national victory. It is doubtful, however, whether that remains the case. The Democrats have made inroads in so many states that once were solidly Republican that the party no longer can rely on a regional firewall.

Second, demographic trends are changing America, and the party that adapts to the trends will stand the better chance of leading America. This is nothing new: the country of Thomas Jefferson looked nothing like the country of Abraham Lincoln. And, merely a generation after the Civil War, America had again been transformed—by westward expansion, by massive immigration, and by the epochal shift to an industrial economy. Changes of equal magnitude have been underway over the past decades as well. No electorate gives its long-term support to a party that simply tries to wish change away. Our opponents in the 2008 election campaign adopted the word “change” as an advertising theme; Republicans must show ourselves responsive in substance to the real changes that mere slogans cannot address.

Third, the GOP already has the talent and credibility to tackle key issues which the public knows demand action. Much as it is on the back foot at present, the party is in fact admirably situated to deal with three of the issues Americans can least afford to avoid.

The first is fiscal responsibility. Both parties have colluded to let spending gallop out of control, and it was a failure of the GOP in the early 2000s not to bridle it. But the scope of public deficits under the Obama Administration has increased. And not just by increments. From a 400 billion dollar deficit—in itself inexcusable—

we now have entered a period of complete fiscal abandon. A two trillion dollar deficit, as a percentage of GDP, matches the spending levels of World War II—but, with bailout after bailout, and a potential massive expansion of public entitlements, there is no objective finish line to tell us when to stop. Republicans should recall the message of Ronald Reagan, and rally behind a banner of fiscal responsibility. The country needs it, and voters will respond.

The second is energy independence. Republicans should not let energy and environmental matters become a Democrat monopoly. Significant parts of the electorate credit the proposition that global carbon emissions must be reduced. We can appeal to these voters, by integrating environmental concerns into our own recognized strengths in other fields. In particular, traditional Republicans understand that national security rests at the heart of government’s responsibility to the citizen. Americans rely upon foreign sources of oil, in countries that certainly do not have America’s best interests in mind. The question of energy independence is a natural coalition-builder, for it is both a security issue and an environmental issue. Policies to support the development of new energy technologies and to wean America off foreign energy sources simultaneously address the environmental concerns that motivate millions of voters.

The final such issue is education. Democrats, since the days of Lyndon Johnson, have advertised themselves as the party that will transfer wealth from rich to poor and, as their theory would have it, this increases opportunity for all. But the one proven asset for increasing opportunity is education, and it is these same Democrats who have long dug in their heels against innovative solutions to America’s education needs. Significant majorities of Americans in virtually every state favor school choice—but the teachers’ unions that dominate public education (and constitute a core constituency of the Democratic party) won’t accept any challenge to their near-monopoly on education. This is a true chink in the Democrats’ armor, and Republicans should be vigorous in promoting

school voucher plans as an option to introduce competition and innovation in education. If voters are suspicious that a voucher plan might be a hidden scheme to reduce public commitment to education, Republican candidates should pledge to support full funding for any voucher program in fact implemented.

This by no means exhausts the list of issues, on which Republicans must compete locally, at state level, and nationally, if we are to regain lost ground against our Democrat competitors. We traditionally have taken the lead on defense, policing, support for family, and regulatory relief for small business. Republicans should continue to lead with credibility and awareness on these issues.

Leadership means different things at different times, and how a party exercises leadership depends on the opportunities the party is given at a given time. Democrats are in the habit of saying that Republicans have nothing constructive to offer. They say we are the party of “no.” The veiled message behind this is that they want Republicans to abrogate the responsibility that falls on the shoulders of the minority party. The GOP indeed does not hold either House of Congress or the White House. But this is not an excuse to ignore the responsibilities of leadership; it instead calls for a particular exercise of leadership, responding to the opportunities and challenges of the particular role in which we find ourselves today. The Democrats control Washington. This places on the GOP a fuller duty to scrutinize the Democrats’ plans, and, when they are ill-advised, a duty to act vigorously in opposition. At the same time, while we discharge our present responsibility, serving as a counterpoise to one-party rule, Republicans must be forward, optimistic, and pro-active in setting out our own policies and ideas. We have better policies and better ideas. This is our way forward as the alternative that America needs.

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PROFESSOR IWAN MORGAN says Barack Obama must break with the past and confront America's growing deficit.

THE LAST THING any American president wants to be is accountant-in-chief of national government, but dealing with the budget deficit has become an increasingly important part of the job. While presidents want to operate in a world of possibilities, the longstanding and large gap between federal revenues and outlays has been a constraint on their options across virtually every policy domain—foreign and domestic—since the 1980s. As Alexander Hamilton observed when the Constitution established the federal power of the purse in 1787, “Money is, with propriety, considered as the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion and enables it to perform its most essential functions.” The founders expected national government to live within its means, which it did throughout its first 150 years other than in war or recession, but only twelve annual budgets have been in balance since 1930. In the mid-twentieth-century Age of Keynes deficits were seen as empowering,

a means to boost the private economy out of depression or maximize growth during prosperity, while incidentally funding the expansion of the national security and welfare states. Since the late 1970s, by contrast, they have become a red peril that threatens America's power, prosperity and long-term wellbeing. A thorn in the side of every president thereafter, the state of U.S. public finance is now the biggest obstacle to Barack Obama achieving the most ambitious domestic agenda of any Oval Office occupant since the 1960s.

Although Congress holds the power of the purse through its capacity to enact appropriation and revenue legislation, presidents can still exert the principal influence on budget policy through their powers to recommend and persuade. Washington's most important planning document is the president's annual budget that sets out government financial requirements for the coming years. This is an intensely political statement of national

priorities that reflects not only strategic assessment of America's needs but also presidential ideological values. Having set the agenda for the legislature's fiscal deliberations, the president then engages in a virtually permanent public campaign to win its approval of his core goals. In America's decentralized governing system, the White House cannot get everything it wants but can expect to secure its main objectives provided these do not appear unrealistically ambitious. The biggest presidential defeats of recent years—Bill Clinton's healthcare reform and George Bush's social security reform are obvious examples—occurred when presidents have overreached without demonstrating the financial viability of their proposals.

As budget leaders, every president from Carter to Obama defined the deficit as a threat to the national interest. Even Bush 41, usually a tepid rhetorician, declared on the eve of the first Gulf War in 1990: “Our nation is standing firm against Saddam Hussein's

aggression, but here at home there's another threat, a cancer gnawing at our nation's health. That cancer is the budget deficit." Such words bespoke concern at deficits unprecedented in scale and frequency in the 1980s. After a brief era of balanced budgets in Bill Clinton's second term, huge deficits returned with a vengeance under Bush 43 and reached proportions not seen since World War II in Obama's first year. The fiscal gap is set to quadruple from \$459 billion in 2008 to \$1.85 trillion in 2009, or from 3.2 percent GDP to 13.1 percent GDP, and will remain huge for the next decade.

Large and chronic budget deficits do pose a genuine danger to America. Firstly, they deter long-term investment because bondholders worry that they fuel inflation. Secondly, they can crowd out private borrowing from the money markets, leading to higher interest rates that penalize productive business investment. Thirdly, they fund current consumption, transferring the costs to the future and shrinking the resources that later generations have available for their own needs. Fourthly, the deficit erodes national saving, making America reliant on foreigners to loan it money. In 2006, the U.S. imported something like 80 percent of the capital that the rest of the world did not use at home. As Obama's National Economic Council director Laurence Summers once remarked, there is something odd about the world's greatest power also being its greatest debtor. Related to this, the final and greatest problem with deficits is their long-term sustainability. Without drastic course correction, their projected continuation will expand America's public debt from 51 percent GDP in 2010 to 82 percent GDP in 2019 and 279 percent GDP in 2050. Long before that point, foreigners are likely to have fled the dollar for fear of a massive American devaluation to ease debt repayment or, ultimately, U.S. default.

So if deficits are a threat, why have successive presidents—Bill Clinton excepted—not done more to eradicate them? The answer is rooted in politics and ideological values rather than economics. As Ronald Reagan once remarked, "all balanced budgets aren't created equal" from presidential perspective. Invariably, a president's program for deficit control complements rather than takes precedence over other goals of his governing agenda. Republican incumbents generally favor balancing the budget at a low rate of revenue, which enables them to keep taxes down and cut spending. Democratic presidents prefer the opposite approach to

maintain high spending within a balanced budget. Accordingly, the budget is a natural battleground over the competing political priorities of the president and Congress, particularly one under opposition-party control. More often than not, the outcome is that both succeed in getting some of their program objectives, but at cost of not advancing the corollary goal of fiscal responsibility.

In the 1980s, Republican Ronald Reagan pushed through massive tax reduction and huge defense expansion, but a predominantly Democratic Congress prevented him making sweeping domestic economies to pay for this, with the result that the deficit exploded. Democrat Bill Clinton fought tooth and nail with a Republican Congress over whether to pay for massive tax cuts within a balanced budget through sweeping retrenchment of entitlement programs, their struggle eventually producing two partial shutdowns of government in 1995-1996 because of failure to produce a budget. The president's success in persuading public opinion that the Republicans were extreme enabled him to win that battle. Eventually the two sides compromised to produce a balanced budget agreement in 1997. With bountiful tax revenues from spectacular economic growth, the U.S. government promptly recorded four consecutive balanced budgets for the first time since the 1920s.

The improvement in public finance seemingly portended elimination of the entire public debt within a decade. However, Bush 43 used the surplus to cut taxes rather than retire the debt, and the dot.com recession of 2001 finished the job of resurrecting huge deficits. Defense spending growth after 9/11 and, in particular, the invasion and occupation of Iraq then put new pressures on the budget. Conventionally, a Republican president, supported by a Republican Congress, would have cut domestic programs in compensation. Instead, Bush's drive to create a new Republican electoral majority led him to practice big-government conservatism that expanded popular programs like education, prescription drug benefits and highways. In association with a weak economy, the combination of tax cuts, defense expansion and domestic program growth produced a fiscal deterioration equivalent to 6 percent GDP as the budget swung from a surplus of 2.4 percent GDP in 2000 to a deficit of 3.6 percent GDP in 2004. Once reelected, Bush promised to shrink the deficit by half in his second term, but the economic crisis that began

in late 2007 put paid to this hope. Having himself inherited the largest budget surplus in American history, he bequeathed Obama the largest peacetime deficit to greet any new president.

Obama faces the greatest fiscal challenge of any president because of contradictory short-term and long-term deficit pressures. He has pushed through the biggest stimulus program in U.S. history to prevent the economy tipping into 1930s-style depression, accepting a further massive expansion of the deficit in the process. Once recovery is in motion, however, Obama has to control the seemingly inexorable growth of entitlement spending on Social Security (pensions), Medicare (healthcare for Social Security recipients) and Medicaid (healthcare for the poor) that threatens to become unsustainable over time. In 2008, their combined cost was more than double that of defense, and will continue rising as a result of an aging population and healthcare inflation. Finding a solution to the problem divides political actors with differing values, as the inflammatory debate about national health insurance currently highlights. The Obama administration sees this program as essential to control healthcare costs in an equitable fashion, but opponents deem it socialistic statism.

Things that cannot go on forever tend not to. This is eminently true of America's budget deficit addiction. The old cliché that there are no easy answers also applies—to a point. In fact, the broad solutions are straightforward—entitlement outlays need to be controlled, tax revenues need to be expanded, and government generally needs to be more cost-conscious in all spending. The devil is in the politics. Just when America needs far-sighted leadership to resolve fiscal problems, it is mired in the worst excesses of partisanship in nearly twenty years. Writing in 2006, Barack Obama declared that the next president had an obligation to re-engage Americans in a project of national renewal requiring acceptance of tough choices based on "understanding of their own self-interest as inextricably linked to the interest of others." Nine months into his first year, this looks a distant dream at best and a fantasy at worst. To advance national debate in that direction, the "audacity of hope" will have to trump the politics of fear and dogma.

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Whither Iran?

HOMA KATOUIZIAN considers Iran's future.

THE TITLE OF THIS SHORT ARTICLE is somewhat misleading since prediction regarding anything Iranian is a hazardous task and is often refuted by the following events. The reason is that Iran is, as I have described it, a short-term society, a society which lacks continuity both at the individual and social level. I once wrote that up to a century ago, when an Iranian man left home in the morning he would not know whether, by the evening, he would be made a minister or be hung, drawn and quartered by the evening. I also wrote, on another occasion, that an Iranian may be a merchant this year, a minister next year, and a prisoner the year after. Obviously these are exaggerations, but they are close to the Iranian experience throughout its long history; a history which, though very long, consists of connected short terms. Ask an average Iranian what he would be doing in six month's time and you would normally receive the reply 'In six months' time who is dead and who is alive'.

In the 1970s many if not most Western journalists, analysts and academics used to describe Iran as 'an island of stability in the Middle East'. One Western economist even went as far as predicting Iranian GDP, rate of growth, etc., in the year 2000. In the late 70s the entire Iranian society rose against the state and overthrew it. Since then, there have been countless predictions about political developments in Iran almost all of which have turned out to be off the mark. In 1997, a totally unexpected landslide electoral victory swept the Islamic reformists into power. Many believed that that was 'the beginning of the end' for the Islamist regime. Eight years later, a fundamentalist was elected president, and although there were some complaints about electoral irregularities, hardly anyone denied that he had a large share of the votes.

Let us begin with a brief account of the background to the present situation. In 1979 all shades of opinion combined to bring down the Pahlavi state. No social class and no political party stood against the revolutionary movement, and 98 percent of the people voted for the establishment of an Islamic republic. But almost at the same time fundamental differences began



to emerge among the revolutionary forces such that by 1982 all but the Islamists had been eliminated from politics. There were conservative and radical tendencies among the Islamists themselves but their differences rarely came to the surface in the 80s, partly because of the necessities of the long war with Iraq, but mainly perhaps because of the unifying role of Ayatollah Khomeini who acted as the regime's supreme arbiter.

The end of the war in 1988 and Khomeini's death in the following year began a new era in the politics of the Islamic Republic. At first the union of the conservative Ali Khamenei as supreme leader and the pragmatist Ali Akbar Rafsanjani as president seemed to work fairly well but, especially in Rafsanjani's second term of office (1993-1997), began to show dissatisfaction with his policies. Apart from the conservatives, however, two

other distinct factions had emerged in the 90s: the fundamentalists and the reformists. The fundamentalists – mainly representing the traditional lower and lower middle classes – tended to emphasise the Islamist nature of the regime, advocated an anti-Western foreign policy, and championed the cause of 'the downtrodden': 'death to the capitalist' was a favourite slogan in their street demonstrations. The reformists, on the other hand, displaying an Islamic social-democratic outlook, believed in a more open society and (later) better regional and international relations. The conservatives were closer to the fundamentalists on their religious and foreign policy views; the 'liberal' pragmatists were more in line with the reformists on both domestic and foreign policy issues, although in more moderate and accommodating terms.

Contrary to all predictions, the 1997 presidential election resulted not in a conservative but a reformist-pragmatist victory. Women and young people certainly played an important role in the reformist campaign but the landslide victory reflected the aspirations of most of the voters – both religious and secular – for change. Yet it was not, and could not be, an Iranian ‘Thermidor’, as some of the more historically conscious Western commentators rushed to describe it, if only because the supreme leader, the Revolutionary Guard, the ultimate legislative authority (Council of Guardians), the judiciary, and considerable business and property interests were on the side of conservatives. Khatami won another landslide victory in 2001, but while he brought about significant changes in domestic and foreign policy, he had few friends left in the last two years of his presidency, since the conservatives and fundamentalists used all in their power to limit his options, while at the same time most of his constituents accused him of lack of faith for not delivering the moon. During an address in November 2004 to a meeting at the University of Tehran, Khatami was booed and heckled, some students shouting ‘Khatami, you liar, shame on you’. Yet, if only to prove the short-term nature of Iranian society, when he went there again in 2007 – the second year of Ahmadinejad’s presidency – the crowd were shouting ‘Here comes the people’s saviour’.

Ahmadinejad was a fundamentalist and the candidate of a fundamentalist-conservative coalition, and his election once again caught many of the Iran observers in the wings. Posing as a man of the people and promising increased welfare for the lower strata of the community, he won most of their votes while at the same time attracting the support of powerful conservatives who wanted to be rid of the reformists at all costs. That is why while the conservatives generally applauded his reversal of the reformist trends in domestic and foreign politics, they not infrequently displayed their displeasure at his economic policies, his millenarian views, his abrasive personality and his overtly self-confident behaviour. In 2009 a leader of a solid conservative group – the Islamic Coalition Party – made this clear when he said that, despite serious reservations, they would back Ahmadinejad’s nomination for a second term solely in order to stop a reformist victory.

Four years of Ahmadinejad’s domestic and foreign policies taught the reformists and the secularists a hard lesson. They stopped saying that Khatami had ‘done

nothing’ and became nostalgic about his time as president. The majority of reformists and secularists wanted Khatami to stand. Yet by February 2009 they did not yet have a candidate for the June election. Under great pressure, Khatami first came forward but then stepped down in favour of Mir Hossein Mousavi, a radical prime minister of the 1980s. Backed by the pragmatist faction as well, Mousavi’s campaign started late through a very slow process and – as further proof for the short-term nature of the society – it was only about three weeks before the election day that it began to take off the ground. And even as late as that, no-one could have predicted anything remotely close to the imminently unfolding events.

The electoral dispute that followed is now well-known history and need not be recounted in this brief. It was however a major turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic as it had not experienced anything like it since the power struggles of the early eighties. The factional struggles during the Khatami years were at most a crisis of authority. But now there was a crisis of legitimacy as well, since the Islamic regime had split down the middle, each side claiming legitimacy and – at least implicitly – denying legitimacy to the other side. This was the first time that the reformist-pragmatist coalition had drawn very large crowds made up of both their own supporters and secularist people to the streets, so that the movement could no longer be regarded as that of the Islamic reformist-pragmatist factions, but a wider one, also representing the secularists who had accepted the leadership of the reformists. On the other hand, the supreme leader’s unequivocal backing for the declared election results as well as Ahmadinejad himself changed his usual posture as an arbiter of factional disputes to one that was identified with the fundamentalist faction, and in effect dragged him into factional politics.

At the political-cum-ideological level the reformist leaders stressed the representative and republican features of the system, whereas the fundamentalists put the emphasis on the authority of the supreme leader as representative of the Hidden Imam’s (and thereby God’s) authority. This brought to surface the unresolved dichotomy between the ‘republican’ and the ‘Islamic’ features of the constitution. Thus, the reformists accused the fundamentalist-conservative factions of a ‘coup’ against the republic, while the latter launched a systematic campaign to describe Mousavi and his supporters as pawns – if not puppets

– in a Western conspiracy to bring about a ‘velvet revolution’ in Iran, comparing the events with those in Ukraine and Georgia which had led to the establishment of pro-Western government in those countries.

Warnings about ‘velvet revolutions’ dated back to a couple of years before. And the belief in conspiracy theories is a major characteristic of Iranian politics and society, almost regardless of political affiliation. Western media generally supported the protest movement, but however that may be, there is no evidence – notwithstanding the current show trial confessions and recantations which would not stand up in a proper court of law – that the movement had been organised or owed its existence to foreign conspiracies.

‘The politics of elimination’, as I have termed it, is also a long-standing feature of Iranian politics. Clearly the protestors are in no position to eliminate their rivals from politics even if they so wished. On the other hand, and by the very nature of their ideology, the fundamentalists would not shy away from the political elimination of their opponents if they can. What stands in their way is both the support of quite a few senior ayatollahs for the reformists and the fact that a considerable body of relatively moderate conservatives would not wish to go that far. Hence the present contradictory situation when a considerable number of leading reformists are on show trial, while Mousavi and Khatami are still at large and active, and many senior conservatives have cast doubt on the validity of the charges and trials. Forecasts which promise the imminent fall of the Islamic regime, or ‘the beginning of the end’ for it, are premature and often based on optimistic sentiments even when they come from otherwise serious analysts. There is at present no major external threat to the regime, and as for the domestic forces, the ruling parties have under their command the armed, police and intelligence forces, the economy, the parliament and the judiciary, not to mention the fact that they too have a base in society.

However, I would return to the point that I made at the opening of this piece that things can always happen to Iran and Iranians which are beyond rational expectations. It is not for nothing that Iranians themselves call it ‘the country of possibilities’.

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28-Mordadism: a postmortem

HAMID DABASHI talks about the phenomenon of 28-Mordadism as a paradigm in modern Iranian political culture.

THIS YEAR, Iranians around the world are commemorating the 56th anniversary of the CIA-sponsored coup of 1953 which overthrew Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadeq, for his policy to nationalize Iranian oil. That coup is referred to indexically on the Persian calendar as "kudeta-ye 28 Mordad."

To that date we usually don't even add the year 1332 on our calendar, for just like 9/11, 28/Mordad has assumed such iconic significance that it is as if it happened in the Year Zero of our collective memory. In this essay, I wish to talk about the phenomenon of 28-Mordadism as a political paradigm that peaked in modern Iranian political culture and has now finally exhausted itself.

For generations of Iranians, the coup of

1953 is not a mere historical event. It is the most defining moment of their lives, for it is the most haunting national trauma of their modern history—of foreign intervention followed by domestic tyranny. Iranians cannot speak of 28-Mordad without a certain raw nerve suddenly springing up and about entirely involuntarily. The first thing that Iranians do when they speak of 28-Mordad is to remember a personal story, where they were and what they were doing, very much like the assassination of John F. Kennedy (on 22 November 1963), or Malcolm X (on 21 February 1965), or Martin Luther King Jr. (on 4 April 1968) for Americans. The post-traumatic syndrome of the coup of 1953 was best summed up a a a n d captured in "Zemestan/Winter" (1955), now

the legendary poem of Mehdi Akhavan Sales (1928-1990). "No one returns your greetings/ Heads are dropped deeply into collars," became the talismanic opening of a poem that defined an entire generation of fear and loathing, self-imposed solitude and forsaken hopes.

28-Mordadism, as if absorbing all our history in one sound bite, felt like the birth pang of delivery into an overwhelming awareness of our colonial modernity, of not being in charge of our own destiny, of everything that was best in us collapsing into mere phantom liberties, devoid of substance, of material basis, of formative force, of moral authority.

On the political stage, not just everything that occurred after 28-Mordad, but even things that have happened before it suddenly came together to posit the phenomenon of 28-Mordadism: foreign intervention, colonial domination, imperial arrogance, domestic tyranny, an "enemy" always lurking behind a corner to come and rob us of our liberties, of a mere possibility of democratic institutions. The result has been a categorical circumlocution—at once debilitating and enabling—that begins with the Tobacco Revolt of 1890-1892, runs through the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, and concludes with the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Under the colonial condition that has originally occasioned this mental state of siege and enabled it to spin around itself, we have lived through a persistent politics of force major in which we have placed the forceful substitution of a revolutionary expediency in lieu of a public reason.

I believe that the June 2009 presidential election marks an epistemic exhaustion of 28-Mordadism, when the paradigm has conjugated itself ad nauseum and in the most recent rendition of it by the custodians of the Islamic Republic, the paradigm has in fact degenerated into a political Tourette Syndrome, whereby an evidently psychotic political disorder has begun to tic involuntarily, with vile and violent exclamations of coprolalia. The Islamic Republic carrying 28-Mordadism ad



nauseum is coterminous with an epistemic passage beyond it at the more commanding level of the Iranian political culture, a discursive sublimation that is predicated on a crucial closure of a post-traumatic syndrome that commenced soon after the 1953 coup and concluded in the course of the Islamic Revolution of 1977-1979.

The traumatic memory of the coup of 1953 was very much rekindled and put to very effective political use in the most crucial episodes of the nascent Islamic Republic in order to consolidate its fragile foundations. When on 1 February 1979 Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran, soon after the Shah had left, the idea of an Islamic Republic was far from certain and there was an array of political positions and forces ranging from nationalist to socialist to Islamist. On March 30-31 Khomeini ordered a national referendum, and on 1 April he declared that the Islamic Republic had been overwhelmingly endorsed and established. But by no stretch of imagination was this referendum convincing to major segments of the political and intellectual elite or the population at large, for which reason as early as early June Khomeini was lashing out against what he termed "Westoxicated intellectuals."

By mid-June, the official draft of the constitution of the Islamic Republic was published. But there was no mention of any *Velayat-e Faqih*, or 'rule by Islamic jurist', in it. Khomeini endorsed this draft, as he continued his attacks against the "Westoxicated intellectuals," who at this point were actively demanding the formation of a *Majles-e Moassessan* or a Constitutional Assembly to examine the terms of the constitution (I was present in one such meeting in Tehran University in July 1979). Khomeini openly opposed this idea and announced that there will be "no Westernized jurists" writing any constitution for the Islamic Republic—"only the noble clergy." Meanwhile Khomeini's doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* was being actively disseminated in the country. By early August, *Ayandegan* newspaper, which was actively questioning the notion of *Velayat-e Faqih* was savagely attacked by the Islamist vigilantes and then officially banned. At the same time a major National Democratic Front rally at Tehran University soccer field was viciously attacked (I was present in this rally). By mid-August, the Assembly of Experts had gathered to write the constitution of the Islamic Republic, and by mid-October they had completed their deliberations and drafted the constitution, with the office of *Vali*

Faqih in it.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic was written under conditions that there were both intellectual and militant opposition to it, and Khomeini's circle was in a warring pose to consolidate and institutionalize it at all cost. A perfect opportunity was given to them when on 22 October the late Shah came to the US for cancer treatment, which Khomeini instantly called a plot and invoked the memory of 1953 to make it credible. When on 1 November the liberal Mehdi Bazargan was pictured shaking hand with Zbigniew Brzezinski in Algeria, not just the Islamists but even the left thought the Americans were on to something again. Iranians were bitten by a snake in 1953, as we say in Persian, they were afraid of any black or white rope.

The American Hostage Crisis began on 4 November 1979, lasted 444 days, and by the time it ended on 20 January 1981, it had used and abused the memory of the 1953 coup to consolidate the fragile foundations of an Islamic theocracy. Two days after the hostages were taken, the weak and wobbly Bazargan, Iran's interim prime minister, was pushed aside and forced to resign. The militant Islamists assumed a warring posture. They were now fighting the Great Satan and the left and the liberals, the fainthearted and the soft-spoken better stay clear of the fight.

Exactly in this atmosphere, on 2 December, Khomeini ordered the newly minted constitution of the Islamic Republic put to vote and then reported that it was massively approved, and he became the Supreme Leader. Soon after that, on 25 January 1980 the first presidential election of the Islamic Republic was conducted and Bani Sadr was declared its winner. Soon after that, on 15 March the first parliamentary election was held, with Hezbollah vigilantes attacking the headquarters of all surviving opposition parties, especially the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* Organization, dismantling and discrediting them so they won't be part of the parliament.

That was not enough. On 21 March, the eve of the Persian New Year, Khomeini ordered the "cultural revolution," and thus commenced the militant Islamization of the universities by the intellectual echelon among his devotee (some of them now the leading oppositional intellectuals). All of these crucial steps towards the radical Islamization of the Iranian revolution (and with it political culture) were done under the force major of a repetition of 1953—28-Mordadism at its height.

As if Khomeini needed even more excuse to prove that a US plot against the revolution was in the offing, on 25 April Operation

Eagle Claw to rescue the American hostages met with a catastrophic and (for President Jimmy Carter) embarrassing and costly end in the Iranian deserts, providing further fuel and momentum to Khomeini's revolutionary zeal, so that during the following May, June, and July further Islamization of the state bureaucracy took place, purging anyone suspected of not being committed to the revolution. This in effect amounted to the mass expulsion of Iranians suspected of ideological impurity from the state apparatus. The same story was repeated after the 11 July Nojeh coup attempt, which fuelled Khomeini's fury even more, resulting in the persecution of alternative voices and movements and the radical Islamization of the revolution—the shadow of 1953 was kept consciously, deliberately, successfully on the horizon.

Finally on 27 July the Shah died in Egypt and the American hostages began to lose their usefulness to Khomeini; and when on 22 September Saddam Hussein invaded Iran and the eight grueling Iran-Iraq war started, the Hostage Crisis had completely performed its strategic function as a smoke screen for Khomeini's radical Islamization of the revolution and the brutal elimination of all alternative forces and voices. By 26 October, Iraqi forces had entered Iran and occupied Khorram-Shahr and Iran was fully engaged in a deadly war with Iraq. On 20 January 1981 Khomeini allowed the American hostages to be released, and shifted his attention to the Iran-Iraq War, under which more domestic suppression, and more radical Islamization of the Iranian political culture, society, and above all historiography took place.

With the commencement of the Reform movement in late 1990's, 28-Mordadism began losing its grip on Iranian political culture, after decades of abusing it to sustain an otherwise illegitimate state apparatus. At the moment, custodians of the Islamic Republic continue to abuse it—but for all intents and purposes the paradigm has now completely exhausted itself, hit a plateau, and well passed the point of its diminishing return. The end of 28-Mordadism of course does not mean the end of imperial interventions in the historical destiny of nations. It just means we have a renewed and even playing field to think and act in postcolonial terms.

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No laughing matter?

MAZ JOBRANI thinks about his own actions during the protests in Iran.

I RECENTLY FOUND MYSELF NAKED on the internet. Not in a picture— I've managed to keep such photos hidden deep in the black holes I like to call my closet — but figuratively. You see I had decided to send an e-mail out to my 12000 plus fanbase expressing my support for the protestors in the green movement after the Iranian elections on June 12th. I've accrued this fan base by doing standup comedy shows over the past 11 years from Los Angeles to Toronto to Cairo to anywhere that would have me. As one friend likes to say, I have become the "Persian Elvis" a.k.a. "Pelvis."

Anyway, the morning of the elections I received a call from a reporter at BBC in London asking if they could interview me to try to get a comedic perspective on it. She stated that they were hearing that the former two-time prime minister of Iran, Moussavi, who had run a reformist campaign, had won. They would have to call me back in a few hours when they were on air. However, she called back sooner saying that they now had heard that the incumbent, Ahmadinejad, was claiming

victory and they would have to skip my interview to further delve into this divide. I hung up and thought, "welcome to Iranian politics." I couldn't, in my wildest dreams, imagine what would come next.

What came next was a soap opera of emotions, images and disasters that would be the two weeks that followed these elections. As the protests heated up, I began to get some e-mails and messages on my Facebook from members of my Pelvis fan base (let's call them Pelvisites) asking me to speak out. At first I thought, "who the hell am I to speak out? What does anyone care about what I, a comedian in the U.S. has to say." I also thought it would be pretentious for me to put out any sort of message while young Iranians and old ones too were marching in the streets of Iran and risking their lives. What was I risking? A sore finger from typing?

I laid low for a while, and then it happened. One night while I was sobering up from a night of boozing after some shows in Chicago I turned on the TV to see what the Supreme Leader had said regarding the elections. He basically told

those questioning the results to go screw themselves. That's when this soap took another twist for me. What would the people of Iran do next? I watched as the CNN's chief international correspondent Christiane Amanpour reported that the people had decided to protest again against the words of Khamenei. I was moved by their decision to defy this authority figure and finally felt like I needed to say something. It was as though your older sibling had finally taken a stance against an evil step father and you were there to have his back. (By the way, this never happened to me, but I could swear I saw it in a movie once.)

I sent out an e-mail asking my fans to pay attention to and support this movement. In my e-mail I told of how as a 6 year-old I remember being in Iran the last time there were protests of this magnitude. I remembered going to the basement when my family and I heard gunshots and how for a 6 year-old it felt more like an adventure than a real threat. I wrote how those protesting after these elections sought more freedoms in Iran and how we,

as the world, had to pay attention.

I finished the e-mail and hit send at 05.00 in the morning Chicago time. By the time I woke up at 10.00 to catch my van to the airport I saw that I had received what looked like hundreds of replies on my Blackberry. Before I could look at the responses I had a sudden flash in my head. "What if I sent the e-mail and somehow it got in the hands of the people in the movement? What if somehow, by chance or fate they had read the words, and been so inspired that I, Maz Jobrani, had now been deemed the leader of the movement?" I saw the headline in my mind, "Comedian by Day, Revolutionary by Night; Maz Jobrani leads the movement." Or would it be "Comedian by Night, Revolutionary by Day?" Because comedy is definitely better at night and I'm guessing revolutions can happen during the day if they have to. I would have to inquire from my followers if they had a preference.

I opened a few of the e-mails and they were mainly from friends or fans sending me support for putting out the word. Some e-mailed me from Iran and said they appreciated the gesture and that it was getting really bad there. I wasn't going to be a revolutionary, but at least my fans, the Pelvisites, were on board and aware of what was happening. But then something different happened. I started getting e-mails I wasn't expecting. E-mails of dissent. E-mails defending the elections and arguing that maybe I didn't know what the hell I was talking about.

The first one came from a lady in Greece. Apparently she got my e-mail from a friend of hers who was a Pelvisite who decided to forward my message to others. This lady

thought I was a friend of her friends and decided to challenge me on my call to action. "So, Maz, what do you want next? For the U.S. to attack Iran and take over like it did in Iraq? The Iranian people have voted and what you're seeing in the news is U.S. propoganda." I didn't know who this lady was but felt inclined to e-mail her back. "You dumb bitch! You have no idea what you're talking about. You've never been to Iran and you don't know my politics so don't imply things you don't know." That's what I thought. What I wrote was a little different. "Dear person from Greece that I don't know. Who are you and how did you get my e-mail? I don't agree with you, but you've got the right to your opinion. I'm guessing you've got a lot of time on your hands because you've taken the time to write me on this subject. I love the internet for letting people communicate so easily, but I also hate it for that. Please stay in Greece! - Maz." She wrote back and we went back and forth for about 10 lengthy e-mails (the kind that take you about 15 minutes to read.) Finally I got tired and stopped writing her.

This was the case with a few other e-mails and I was starting to regret ever having sent out the original message in the first place. (It's funny because out of 12000 fans I got about 10 of these and yet they were the ones that stuck out in my mind.)

The other one that bothered me was the Republican friend/acquaintance who thought my e-mail was right on - urging people to support the movement. But he took it further and injected his own agenda. He wrote, "if McCain were president we would be taking a stance on this and showing those people. Obama is

a pussy." Or something like that. What had I done? Suddenly I had McCain supporters thinking I was a McCain supporter and reading Obama criticism into my e-mail about Iran.

I had to e-mail all these people back and clarify myself. I didn't want America to attack Iran nor did I want Obama to express his opinion on the matter until Iranians had a chance to sort things out. All I wanted to do with my e-mail was to express my support for the Green Movement and remind those on my e-mail list that this is a struggle for freedom and it deserves our attention. In a culture where news comes and goes in seconds I wanted the Pelvisites to at least stay on top of this one piece of news and do anything they could to help democracy prevail in Iran.

Well, a few months have passed now and Iran news seems to be lost in its own black hole (not my closet.) Americans are talking about healthcare, the economy and how else they can blame Obama for everything that he inherited. I haven't been in touch with the critical Pelvisites and had to think twice before expressing my opinion further on the matter. Even my own friends and family have argued with me over my stance at times. Usually they say, "it's politics and there's more powers behind the scenes than we know of." I counter with "it's up to us to speak our minds or lay down and be run over." I've felt naked once, I don't mind feeling naked again.

Maz Jobrani is an Iranian-born American comedian who is part of the "Axis of Evil" comedy group. Maz's work can be viewed on his website, www.mazjobrani.com



[Photography: alanoftulsa]



The Climate Quandry

JAMES STAFFORD interviews local sustainability campaigner CHRIS GOODALL

THE WAY IN WHICH many politicians and media pundits talk about what they term 'the green movement' is deeply perverse. Stereotype begets stereotype: some people who affect to care about climate change are rich, like Zac Goldsmith or Prince Charles, ipso facto it's all an 'elitist' project; others happen to have dreadlocks, so it's actually (simultaneously) a marginalised bandwagon for dangerous anarcho-hippies. Sometimes some campaigners say things that play badly in the press or touch on uncomfortable truths; then greens are therefore also uniformly 'hysterical', or at the very least insufferably sanctimonious. As a more-or-less overt exercise in the neutralization of a worryingly apposite critique of modern society, the creation of this discourse has been a success, albeit a qualified one. As a guide to the issues, or even to the range of political and scientific opinion it aspires to represent, it's frequently worse than useless.

By the cliché-o-meter of any number of Times hacks, Chris Goodall is as 'green' as they come. "I don't fly, very rarely drive, have raised my family as vegetarians, and urge my kids to be sceptical about consumerism," he tells me over coffee (on North Parade, naturally). Educated at Cambridge and Harvard business school and with a long career in competition regulation, he is, amongst other things, the parliamentary

candidate for the Green Party in West Oxford and Abingdon. His books and Guardian columns explore the interactions between business practice, government policy, technological change and personal habits in controlling greenhouse gas emissions. Weeks away from Copenhagen, with direct-action protests ongoing and policy announcements coming thick and fast from all over the political spectrum, we have a lot to talk about.

We start with the 10:10 campaign launched in July by the activist filmmaker Franny Armstrong, an initiative that Goodall has championed. The news from the Commons is bad: a Liberal Democrat motion to get the government to match local councils and businesses across the country in committing to emissions reductions of 10% across in 2010 has been defeated on a Labour whip. Just two government M.P.s dissented; one, incidentally, was Forum contributor Colin Challen. Goodall is visibly dismayed, but unsurprised. "I just thought it might get through, if enough Labour backbenchers broke ranks. It's a shame." His explanation for the government's recalcitrance is, nonetheless, characteristically pragmatic. "More than many industries, the government has found it hard to get a hold on its own emissions, partly because the buildings are so bad," he explains. "Government estate is incredibly badly insulated, and that's to do

with poor purchasing. But it does show that their commitment to rapid change is very limited indeed."

"The thing with 10:10 is, it is something achievable and it's got some momentum behind it. People fall into different camps on this, but my inclination is that individual action is important, because it sends signals into the process." I remind him of the old chestnut about 'green' choices being expensive, luxurious, boutique. "That's nonsense. It's incredibly cheap to be green. Instead of buying the usual seven t-shirts in a year, you buy one or two. Being green is about buying things intelligently, thinking about where things are sourced, what you actually need and what you don't. It's entirely compatible with a modest, comfortable lifestyle."

On the vexed question of nuclear power – another hot topic thanks to an honorary mention in the Queen's Speech – Goodall is on less certain ground. The real problem, he believes, is one of cost. "I'm frankly quite agnostic about nuclear power. The additional costs of new plants are going to manifest themselves in higher electricity prices, but, that will happen whatever we do. And that hits the poor hardest, which is why we need a massive national energy efficiency programme to help them. That's what the Green party advocates." He is sceptical, too,

about the increased clout a dash for nuclear will confer on the 'big six' energy companies. "The government has had to effectively bribe EDF," he says, referring to rumoured state-backed guaranteed returns on the French energy giant's investment in a new generation of British nuclear power stations. "They are in a position of power as one of the few companies with the expertise to build the plants. That, ultimately, means higher bills – or higher taxes – for you and me. The financial risks are enormous." Even this agnosticism, however, places him fundamentally at odds with Green party policy, and environmental groups more generally. "We need to think hard about nuclear. I have a bias against it but that doesn't mean ruling it out. I get into enormous trouble with environmentalists for saying this, but I think it is probably the least ecologically intrusive form of generation." He draws a comparison with coal: "Didcot power station has almost certainly killed more people in the course of its lifetime – through the huge range of pollutants it pumps out into the atmosphere – than the whole nuclear power industry in Britain from when it was first established."

Coal in general and Didcot in particular is also very much on the agenda when we meet. Climate campers are occupying the top of the station's chimney, just a few weeks after attempting to storm Ratcliffe-on-Soar to shut it down. Does civil disobedience help build support for action on dangerous emissions? The question finds Goodall, once again, striking a cautious tone. "I wish I could be certain. I think it's very important to get a broader spectrum of people involved. Middle-aged people, small c-conservatives, if you like. We don't need a small group of activists, but a movement of millions. People of my age, forty somethings, fifty something – this is our mess. It will start to affect our children, and it may affect our grandchildren very badly. It is up to my generation to act." He freely admits that, like many others, he finds more traditional routines of political activity more comforting. "I'm instinctively a goodie-goodie. I like writing, meetings, marches. The Wave in London, ahead of the Copenhagen negotiations on 5th December – it's very important that it's huge. All ages, all classes, all races, on those buses from Oxford heading to the capital to show that there is a broad base of support amongst the British public for action on the most important issue of our times. But me getting arrested? I suspect it wouldn't help, no."

Perhaps, after all, it would be unsightly for a prospective MP to be caught D-locking himself to a conveyor belt full of

coal. How does he rate his chances in Oxford West? And what separates his party from the Lib Dems, who, by common consent, have some of the most radical-sounding climate policies of the 'big three?' Goodall is quick to draw dividing lines. "The fact is, they don't like making enemies – the minute they hit an obstacle, their policy fades. Green party policy advocates substantial changes in our habits. It's about mandatory energy-efficiency." Locally, there is resentment about Lib Dem attempts to paint the Greens as being mad anti-vivisectionists. "A lot of Green members around here detest vivisection, but they also detest violent animal-rights activists. Nationally, our party policies are in fact identical. We agree on phasing out what's essentially 19th century technology in the medium term, perhaps over the next 20 years." Even if, as Goodall seems resigned to admitting, the Tories are likely to reclaim this key marginal in 2010, the sort of liberal-left teamwork envisaged by some is unlikely to bear fruit in Oxford next May. Goodall certainly has little time for Labour. Recalling the Energy and Climate Change secretary's 'town-hall meeting' in Oxford over the summer, he despairs. "We have earned ourselves politicians like Ed Miliband. He wants to be gradually pushed by a long queue of activists into doing something. It's a clear failure of leadership."

What's less clear is where Goodall stands in relation to the existing institutional consensus on responses to climate change. Along with Nicholas Stern, Gordon Brown, and Barack Obama, he is no critic of global capitalism. At a panel discussion hosted by the Forum he was keen to stress its unique capacity for creating the sort of economy we live in today, which seems, at best, to be a somewhat circular proposition. Failing to match Green party leader Caroline Lucas's forceful advocacy of redistribution, or her appeal to Labour's disaffected left, he is impossible to pin down politically, except (perhaps) in his unusually deep commitment to localism, and his omnipresent desire that those in power should spend more to do more faster. As such, Goodall can be seen as highlighting both the laziness of right-wing and media attempts to pigeonhole a wide range of activists, and the limitations of an outlook that glosses over fundamental questions about why human societies are systematically wrecking the climate they inhabit. Is this the stuff of which revolutions are made? Only time will tell.

Chris Goodall is the Green Party PPC for West Oxford, regularly contributes to the Guardian and has written a number of books about climate change.

Monetizing Global Commons

MOLLY SCOTT-CATO looks at the role of national currencies in carbon trading.

AS I WRITE, the Copenhagen bidding war is hotting up. As the offers and counter-offers jostle for media attention, what is the proposal of choice for your concerned Green-about-town? Having been in this game for the past 30 years or so our party is saddled with the advantages and disadvantages of a unusually high degree of knowledge and experience. While we disagree about what can be sometimes mind-numbing particularities we do agree in our characterization of the atmosphere as a global commons, presenting an immediate challenge to those who would portray it instead as the last frontier to be enclosed and privatised. And we are agreed on the two fundamental requirements for any global agreement: there must be a realistic cap; and the right to produce carbon must be shared fairly. 'Fairly' means an equal right

to each person who lives on planet earth.

This is an appealing opening gambit, but the complexities arise almost immediately because what is fair is not always as clear-cut as it might seem. If we take the Marxist principle of 'to each according to her/his need' then we might create a situation where, because of the nature of the local climate, the citizens of Finland are given a much larger quota than the citizens of France. This might be particularly galling if applied to the citizens of Alaska, many of whom are only there because of earning their livelihoods from extracting the very product that created the problem we are trying to solve.

The idea of an absolute cap on emissions seems, if anything, even clearer but it is in fact a murky area. From the scientific point of view we really have no

idea about what the planet can take, and so here we are working on a consensus of human belief, rather than the hard science that we hear politicians appealing to. Unsurprisingly, things are stickier still from the economic perspective, and if my study of economics has taught me one thing it is too be deeply suspicious of economists when they come bearing a plan. Economists love to play about with time, and many of the trading schemes being proposed allow them to do this by 'borrowing carbon from the future'. If the situation were likely to improve we might get away with this, but it is actually more likely to deteriorate, with scientific evidence of the accelerating nature of climate change weighing heavier every day.

The financial crisis has demonstrated what happens when we allow economists





to indulge in their favourite pastime of shuffling value and money through time. This is dangerous enough when it is just about the paper stuff: when it actually relates to the real environment we inhabit, it is considerably more serious. When reading the economists' proposals we should always keep that Climate Camp slogan - "the planet doesn't do bailouts" - at the front of our minds.

Which brings me to money. The question that goes unasked in most discussions of carbon trading is "how do we pay for it?" I don't mean this in the sense of "can we afford the future?", an inane question to which the only sensible response is John Ruskin's: "There is no wealth but life". I mean it in a rather less poetic sense: what currency are we going to do the trading in? Most of the trading schemes propose the transfer of large sums from the governments of the developed economies (EU, USA, and Japan) to those of developing countries, which have larger populations but lower levels of output. Seeing this as a simple solution is a classic mistake made by those who haven't been watching economics carefully enough and assume that money is a neutral medium of exchange. Nothing could be further from the truth.

If this trade is to be conducted in dollars then what is to prevent the US from either borrowing it from the future—as they have just done to bail out the banks—or creating it from thin air, by what they are

now calling 'quantitative easing' but which is not, of course, literally printing money? The answer to both these questions is, nothing at all. That is the benefit of controlling a 'reserve currency', and so the same applies to the other countries or economic blocs that control reserve currencies (euro, yen), so long as their currencies continue to be held in foreign reserves and considered safe.

In other words, just as the US has created money and used it to buy imports from around the world at virtually no cost, so it could print this money to buy the permission to produce carbon dioxide. In this scenario a properly enforced carbon cap could actually lead to greater inequality, with the US still enjoying a high consumption lifestyle but the countries of the South struggling even harder to buy their right to subsistence. More sophisticated interpretations of carbon trade emphasise transfers to balance the carbon exchange in the form of technological knowledge or equipment—especially technology which can enable the poorer countries to find their way onto the fast track to low-carbon economic sufficiency rather than following in the mistaken footsteps of the petroleum-indulged West.

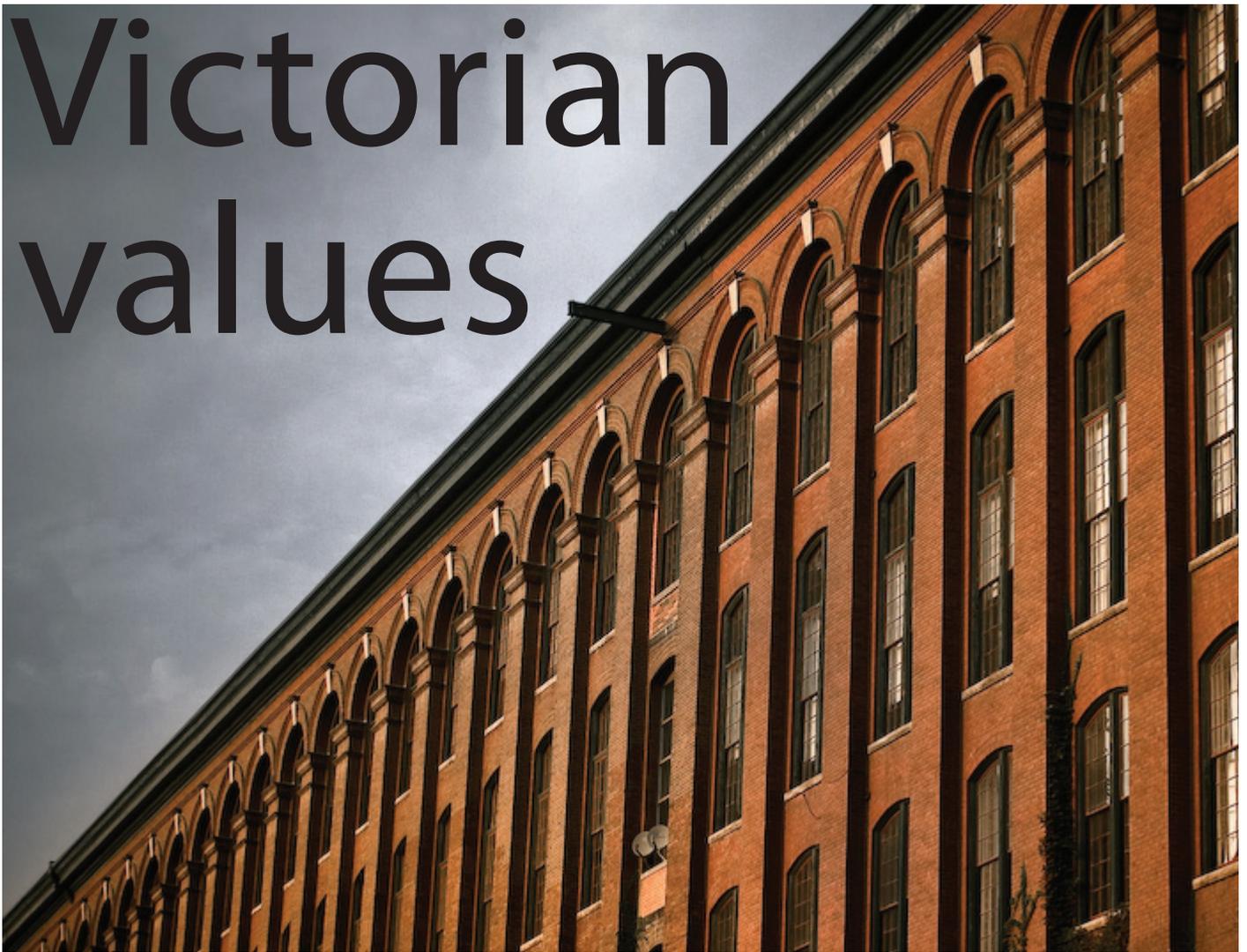
A smarter solution, however, and one which has also been discussed by Richard Douthwaite and by my colleagues at the Irish think-tank the Foundation for the Economics of Stability, is to create a new international trading currency called Ebcu,

or environment-backed currency unit. An elaboration on some of the ideas Feasta have developed under their putative 'cap and share' scheme, the Ebcu would be a currency issued by an international body we might call the International Reserve Bank. It would be allocated to countries according to their population size. Countries that became part of the scheme would agree to only trade their CO2 emission permits in Ebcus, thus removing the imbalance in the present global trade system. They might also agree to hold their reserves and balance their trade accounts in Ebcus. Such a scheme would ensure the efficiency advantages of a system of 'carbon trading' without allowing the domination of the market by certain players who rely on their strength of their country's currency.

The creation of a currency linked to carbon emissions would make real the green economist's contention that, rather than time being money as under capitalism, energy should be money. When you talk about trading the right to produce CO2 the concept of the atmosphere as a global commons has moved into the realm of metaphor. By creating a currency over which all the countries of the world have equal ownership rights, we could help to move it back towards reality.

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Victorian values



COLIN CHALLEN MP discusses precedents for the rapid economic transformations required to address the problem of climate change

Speaking at a recent meeting held at the Institute of Directors, I found myself preaching revolution. Of course, it would be a revolution only to be undertaken after having taken the advice of consultants, but a revolution nonetheless. The previous speaker happened to be a consultant from McKinsey, and with his graphs he explained how our progression to a decarbonised society would have to happen three times faster than the Industrial Revolution. At least, that is what I understood. So we should all become revolutionaries - carbon revolutionaries, which means that previous concepts about how we organise society need to change.

It put me in mind of my favourite peacetime technological transformation - the coming of the railways. In the UK during the 1844-1852 railway 'mania' 6,000 miles of track were laid, as was the path to the

completion of the industrial and social revolution of the nineteenth century. Britain was utterly transformed. It cost rather a lot of money - more than our then GDP - spent in a very short space of time and of course there were many speculators who lost fortunes in the pursuit of profit. Contrast that experience of transformation with what we are now engaged in. Today, our 'carbon revolution' is micro-managed to the nth degree: it is undermined by continual changes of direction, stop-start policies, conditions, caveats and doubts.

International climate change conferences are looking more and more like Groundhog Days set in the lugubrious surroundings of the last chance saloon. This year's hero, President Obama (who never shoots from the hip) could be the archetypal sheriff who cleans things up, but even the man who says 'we can' has run into

insuperable problems back home, which predictably emanate from a legislature which is stuffed with people who plead for exemptions from climate law. It is this intransigence, combined with the imprecision of China's commitment, that has downgraded Copenhagen to the status of 'a significant step.'

After the Montreal climate change conference four years ago, everybody hailed it as a success simply because it was agreed that talking would continue. This time round, that is not an option. The average global temperature has already risen since pre-industrial times by three-quarters of a degree (with significant variations in some regions) and scientists agree that even if we stopped all greenhouse gas emissions immediately, there is another degree or so of temperature rise in the system. But even where we are today means many people are now vulnerable, and many eco-systems are already changing

and being damaged. The acceleration of the melting of the polar ice cap is indisputable, as is glacial melt around the world.

For those of us in the developed world, we mistakenly think we have time on our side. From a purely selfish, almost colonial standpoint, we believe that it is always people in the developing world who will suffer first. Yet the impacts of climate change will not be felt solely by people in Bangladesh or Sub-Saharan Africa. Whilst nobody can categorically state that Hurricane Katrina, the 10-year old Australian drought, or the Californian or Greek forest fires were caused by climate change, such extreme events are likely to become more frequent once it takes hold. The potential for major dislocation in the West is obvious.

Part of our difficulty has been to conceptualise the issue of climate change in terms of long-term, incremental change - a linear, gradual process which can be gently steered away from its business-as-usual path. Hence, much policy focus has been on the 2050 greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, and not enough on what we do with the cumulative emissions which are causing the problem now. I do not think we should go out looking for people to blame for this - setting a long term target is a perfectly rational thing to do, but in the absence of substantive political will it becomes an excuse for delaying tough decisions.

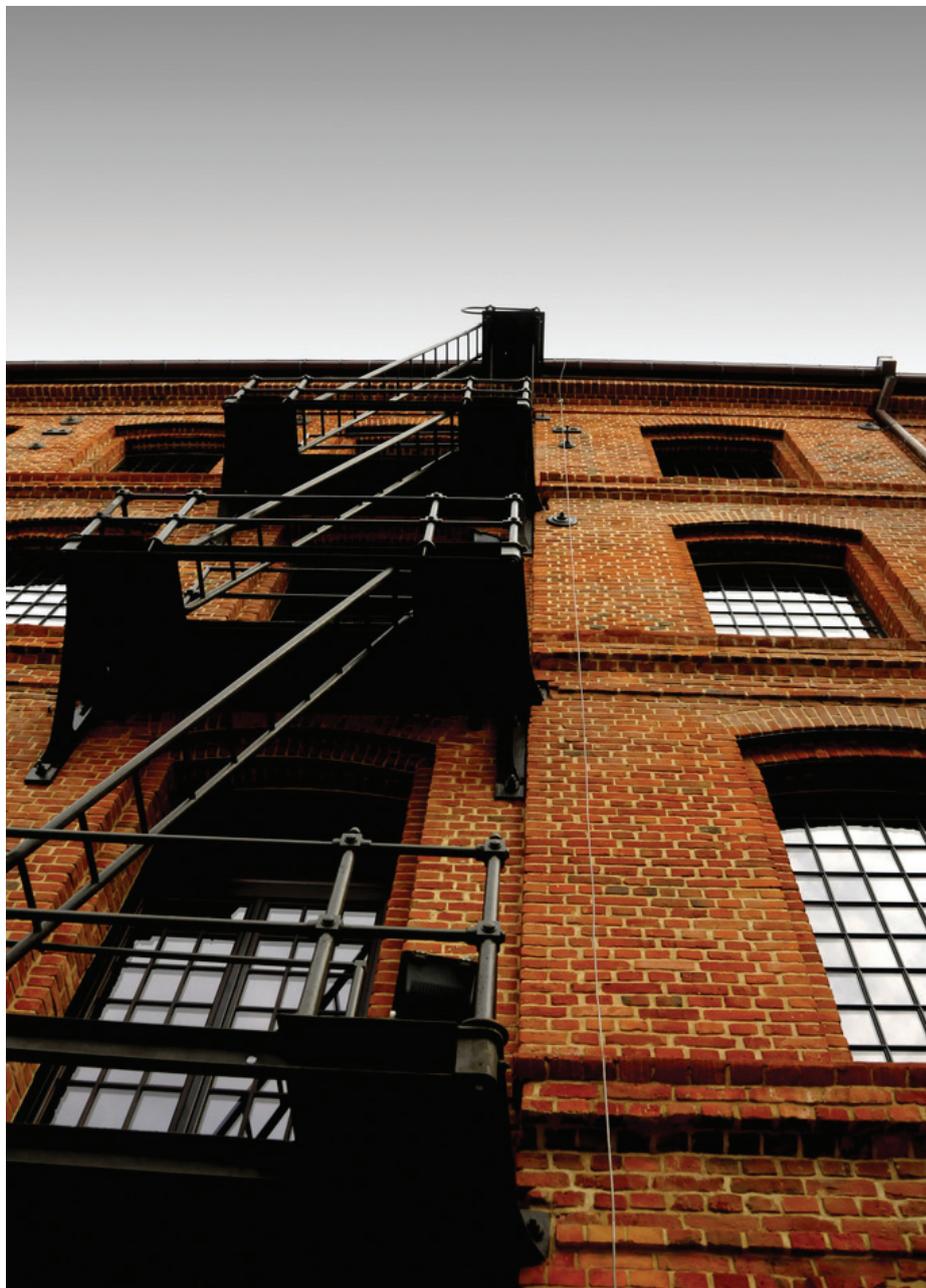
Professor Rajendra Pachauri, who chairs the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that greenhouse gas emissions should peak and then begin to decline by 2015, just over five years away. This now looks like mission impossible and I'm not aware of a single country which has such an aim. Indeed, in China's case, it looks like their supposedly substantial commitment to a reduction in the 'carbon intensity' of economic growth need not even reduce emissions. In all likelihood, it will increase them. The Chinese position, announced at the UN summit in New York and confirmed at Copenhagen, is little different to the position which President George W. Bush eventually took up. In climate change terms, it cannot be considered a step forward: indeed, it is probably the reverse, since it has led some into believing that at last something

sufficient - how important that word is - was being done, and that we therefore might all relax and put our feet up.

So what conditions will lead to carbon revolutionaries taking to the streets (on their feet and bicycles, perhaps)? Should we be demanding a command economy, where government takes a much stronger role, as in wartime? Can we picture Ed Miliband as a sort of latter-day Ernest Bevin, in charge of Works or some other catch-all department in a coalition government? Or should we have a demand economy, where, as in the case of the railway or dot-com booms new technologies lead to massive new opportunities for making money? If it is the latter, then there is still a real role for government. It is interesting to note that in many cases, the role of government only becomes

apparent in the wake of a technological revolution (e.g. health and safety on the railways necessarily could only become an issue after they were built.) But since we want to create - as part of the solution to climate change - a technological transformation which is prompted by social concerns, there is a role for government beforehand. That role, I would suggest, is to find every way it can to help as many people as possible to make as much money as they can out of the new decarbonising technologies. Despite all the talk of a recession-busting green revolution, we've managed to do very little so far.

Colin Challen MP is the chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on climate change





Climate Justice

EMILY MELVILLE sets out the conceptual challenges posed by climate justice.

Sometimes environmentalists are accused of using climate change to push their political agenda. When arguing for decentralised energy production, for example, we are implicitly questioning the centralization of power and government – a proposition that some find threatening. The issue of climate justice has the potential to provoke still stronger responses. Climate justice is about recognising that climate change is a social justice issue. The industrialised countries with the historical responsibility for emissions are the ones with the most power to make decisions about the climate. However, they are least affected by the impacts of climate change, which are being felt most acutely by the poorest people.

The concept of climate justice can be seen as an issue of the left because it is about egalitarian principles, but it also presents itself as a universal principle, like that of human rights. Climate change is a symptom of the unsustainable way in which humans are living on this planet – but it is one that needs emergency treatment. Because the world has focussed its attention on this urgent problem, the injustices of climate change can be used to highlight older, related problems in the

world economy.

Climate change poses its own set of problems for the left, however, ensuring that its appropriation of the language of ‘climate justice’ has not been rapid, universal, or straightforward. The destabilisation of our climate is an extreme manifestation of the human economy overstepping environmental limits – in this case, a limit to the rate at which ecosystems can process the greenhouse gasses emitted by human activities. The fact of environmental limits means that we are playing a zero sum game – however efficiently we use our resources, however much we clean up our waste, we cannot have infinite growth in consumption.

This is a challenge to much traditional thinking on the left, which has traditionally focussed on incremental improvements labour rights and the gradual amelioration human inequality, with the assumption that continued industrialisation will deliver ever greater wealth and comfort for the masses. If there is a limit to how much we can consume, how many resources we can extract, how much waste we can emit, we cannot simply go on increasing our wealth in this way. The fact of ecological limits requires everyone – left or right – to

re-think their economic theory to take this into account. This is a significant challenge, which is still marginal to both capitalist and socialist thinking about the world economy.

The concept of environmental limits is a challenge to the left, but it is also an opportunity. If we accept that we are playing a zero sum game, the fallacy of the ‘trickle-down effect’ – that the people at the bottom of the pile should be happy enough, because they’re getting richer all the time as a result of the activities of the very wealthy – is no longer defensible. Unless we are happy to willingly sacrifice the lives of others in the pursuit of further luxury, the only morally acceptable response to the problem of environmental limits has to be redistribution, of some sort. By exposing the fallacy of a trickle-down economics sustained by endless growth, climate change offers a strong rejoinder to the logic of neoliberalism, and a conceptual opportunity for the left. It has yet to be fully grasped.

Emilia Meville is a member of the UK youth delegation at the Copenhagen climate conference

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