

RED LETTER

The newsletter of the Cambridge Universities Labour Club



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INSIDE:

CHANGING THE GREEN DEBATE

*Minister David Lammy on climate change, class
and the need for a red-green coalition*

ACADEMIES: SOCIALLY JUST OR TWO-TIER MADNESS?

Pete Jeffreys explores the debate

LESSONS FROM **MARX** AND **THATCHER**

George Owers considers political morality in
British politics post-Thatcher

PLUS: INFORMATION ON LABOUR ACTIVITIES IN THE NEW TERM



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Welcome!

The Cambridge Universities Labour Club is the Labour Party's presence within both Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin Universities. The Club is a broad church, representing all sides of the Labour party and the political left. We enjoy rigorously discussing and assessing ideas with reference to their impact upon our principles of fairness, equality and opportunity. What brings us together is the belief that we can achieve more together than we can alone; a practical belief that it is through the Labour Party that we can best push for the vision we hold of a fair and just society.

The Club's activities fall into three main categories; meetings, campaigns and socials. Our meetings give members a chance to hear about and discuss crucial issues facing the Country and the Party, usually with outside speakers joining us. This term we will be holding an education forum with a number of experts in the field to discuss the future of our education system. Our social activities this year will comprise of formal halls held in various colleges and beer and sandwiches events, in addition to visits to the pub following other activities.

Our campaigns primarily involve supporting the local Labour party in the fight to win Cambridge back for Labour at the next election, and hence our members are at the front line of the fight to win Labour a fourth term in government. We are a vibrant, active and dedicated club and we hope to welcome many of you to our Freshers' squash and other events this term, details of which can be found in our termcard and on our website (www.cambridgelabour.co.uk).

On behalf of the Labour Club committee I would like to wish you all a successful and enjoyable term and I hope to see many of you at our events in the near future!

William Redfern
Chair
Cambridge Universities Labour Club

Contents	
Changing the Green Debate <i>by David Lammy MP</i>	3
Editorial	6
City Academies: Labour's Dilemma <i>by Pete Jeffreys</i>	7
Lessons from Marx and Thatcher <i>by George Owers</i>	9
Image and Integrity <i>by Andy Russell</i>	12
CULC Events and Announcements	13



Changing the Green Debate

David Lammy is MP for Tottenham and Minister for Skills in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

Perhaps there is an irony in the fact that the biggest postcard campaign to have reached my office recently – by far – has been on the various aspects of the environmental debate: the climate change bill, carbon emissions, renewable energy. At least they were on recycled card.

The sheer weight of the postbags is itself instructive. In my constituency, Tottenham – one of the most deprived in the country – climate change is the issue which motivates people like no other. Even more striking was an analysis of *where* these postcards came from. Conventional wisdom has it that climate change is a 'middle class issue': at best, a luxury for those who can afford to think about tomorrow because their everyday lives are not a struggle to survive; at worst, a trendy metropolitan lifestyle fad. Overwhelmingly, however, the postcards I received have come from some of the most disadvantaged estates and postcodes in Tottenham.

Then, back in July, this was confirmed in a Guardian/ICM poll which asked people whether tackling the environment or the economy should be the government's top priority. The results were remarkable: some 52% of respondents said the environment, as against 44% who said we should prioritise the economy – even given the current global turbulence. Climate change, after all, is still a contested concept; the money in our pockets feels very real indeed. But the demographic breakdown of respondents showed that those who prioritise the environment came substantially more from among the lower-income, less well-educated DE demographic – 56% – than among the better-off ABs (47%).

I was less surprised by these results than many others – and not just because I come from Guyana, whose lush forests and jungles are the source of some 20% of the world's fresh water, and where the duty of every citizen "to participate in activities designed to improve the environment and protect the health of the nation" is enshrined in the country's constitution. After all, on a basic level, people on lower incomes have a much lighter carbon footprint than the well-off, taking fewer foreign holidays and owning fewer (or smaller) cars. But there is something deeper happening too. Places like Tottenham are on the frontline of the climate battle in a very real sense. As one of the most diverse constituencies in Europe, I see many people who people work here in Britain almost solely to send money back to support their families in their country of origin. And as the terrible effects of climate change in the developing world become increasingly devastating, the demand for help from people living and working in our towns and cities grows.

Clearly, it is no luxurious extra to be caring about the environment when your family abroad faces ruin and poverty. And in this country, nowhere is the desire to secure a better future for your children writ larger than in the lives of working people. That means securing a decent environment and a liveable planet for future generations as much as any economic assets.

That people want the government to act is abundantly clear. A strong legislative framework for cutting emissions, concerted action with our partners in Europe, the G8 and in the developing world, and greater investment in green technology are vital



parts of this battle. But as some of the greatest political changes in history illustrate, government action and legislation will often *follow* social, cultural or behavioural changes. Very often, people will change before politicians do. And the climate-change crisis is nothing if not, at its very root, a crisis of lifestyle: the cars we drive, the food we buy, the amount we travel.

Individual action, therefore, is also crucial. True, the disparity between the magnitude of the problem and an individual's ability to make a difference can seem overwhelming. When my constituents' family homes in Africa or Asia are menaced by hurricanes, drought or flooding, asking them to change their light bulbs or wash their clothes at 30°C might seem depressingly small. But, as behavioural economists in the US are beginning to point out, with the right prompting – what they call a 'nudge' – we *will* make quite considerable sacrifices for the common good that we might not ordinarily do. We will reform our behaviour to a significant extent in order to conform with 'social norms'. If it can be shown that everyone on your street using less electricity for example, you will fall into line and follow the crowd very quickly. Nor is this overcomplicated: research suggests we will even make quite astute cost-benefit judgments if we get clear, simple feedback.

This should give both government and environmental campaigners alike pause for thought. Because I see some important lessons here.

First and foremost, we must revolutionise the language of the debate – not just what we are saying, but how, and where we locate that debate. To 'nudge' should be to empower, incentivise, assist and kick-start. Yet all too often, the language of the green debate has disengaged the very people who care most about it – telling us what we should *not* be doing, or what we should be giving up. Polls and postbags alike tell me that there *is* a real desire for action, but in parts of society to whom we are not currently speaking – and who we risk turning off when we do speak.

Just look round our allotments in North London, as I did recently: a hive of sustainable activity where people are not just sharing seeds and tips on potato blight, but encountering neighbours and making friends from all cultures, classes and walks of life. At a time of rising fear of knife crime, such encounters are vital. In our inner-cities across the country, where food miles account for 23% of the carbon footprint of the average Briton (the greatest personal use of carbon), waiting lists for allotments have never been longer.

Look at our best schools. Parents I meet will testify to the environmental pester power of children who are bringing home from the classroom the messages they learn about climate change. Indeed, in a recent poll for National Ethical Investment Week, while only 2% of parents listed politicians as having an influence on their social and environmental behaviour, a quarter ranked 'our children' as their key influencer. If we can ensure that our children grow up with a much greater awareness of environmental issues, in the long term there might be much greater engagement among adults.

And look at the power of our faith groups for social action. The Environment Agency recently listed at number two in its list of 50 initiatives that would save the planet – above flying less, green taxes and the expansion of renewable power – the creation of an ecological coalition of faith leaders.

The challenge of climate change is to ask people to make immediate sacrifices for an abstract benefit in the future. The science – and the solution – is complex. If ever



there was a time to talk to people about a complex issue in a way they can relate to – beyond the codes and impenetrable networks of the political class, and beyond the piety of eco-stereotypes – it is surely now.

True, some of the best ideas do sound futuristic – like ‘vertical farms’ or solar photovoltaic technology – though no more futuristic than ‘climate change’ did a decade ago. But empowerment means very practical changes too. Urban communities are the most efficient ways for people to live: the challenge is to make cities more *self-sufficient*. Microgeneration of energy, and housing that makes the best of that energy. Campaigns to encourage people to grow their own food, and educating people about back-garden recycling. And transforming our green urban spaces – from ‘farmscrapers’ to simply making better use of public parks and roof terraces.

In the Labour movement we are all too aware of the challenge of harnessing the untapped well of progressive energy which exists outside the rigid structures of party politics. A recent Fabian Society study showed that while only 9% of Labour sympathizers in NGOs are willing to actually *join* the party, some 59% would be willing to support a Labour campaign on a national issue like the environment – and 69% in a local campaign. Climate change is too important and too immediate for rigid party structures, yet this is perceived by too many people as an unattractive feature of the current debate.

Uniting red and green in the progressive coalition is vital because only the centre-left can deliver real action on improving our environment. Because fighting climate change requires the power of governments, both local and national, acting collectively and internationally. Last year, for example, the Guyanese government offered to place its entire standing forest under the control of a British-led, international body in return for a bilateral deal with the UK for development aid and technical assistance in the transition to a green economy – stimulating the economic growth of one of the world's poorest economies and protecting its vital natural resources. As internationalists, we must be open to such ideas.

It also requires us to emphasise our interdependence as well as our individualism, and to tackle the social consequences of ostentatious consumerism. And ‘nudging’ is fundamentally about harnessing the power of the state to change society for the better – the ethos which underlies our movement.

This is about a renewed case for collective action. After the Second World War, it was a Labour government that helped create from the ashes the popular and political will to build the welfare state for the common good. Through the 60’s and 70’s, it was the Labour movement which helped to bring progressive causes – women’s rights, civil rights, gay rights, ethnic minority rights – out of our inner cities and universities and into the popular and political mainstream. Now the great battle is for the future of our planet. The complex and historic nature of Britain’s diversity means that we are uniquely placed in the world to bring together a coalition for action – as London has begun to do by establishing and hosting the World Cities Leadership Climate Change Summit. If we get this right, we will be world leaders.

And so should we. Because if our children’s generation are to enjoy the same kind of future we have, they demand collective intervention again. On climate change, actions speak louder than words – but the way we talk about it matters.



EDITORIAL

WITH CRISIS, OPPORTUNITY

The British political scene is currently in the unavoidable shadow of the greatest crisis of the world financial system since the Second World War. This is, for the Left, a curiously paradoxical situation.

On the one hand, it is an exciting intellectual opportunity to go on the attack against a market fundamentalism that has seen the values of our socialist politics in retrenchment since the late 1970s. It puts paid to the hollow clichés of the neo-liberals concerning the self-regulation of markets and the uselessness of the power of the state. Few things are more gratifying than seeing the same right-wing ideologues who for years attacked state intervention as a distortion of the perfection of the productive and distributive genius of the free market *begging* for the aid of the still awesome power of the nation-state. A re-assertion of the potential of the state to intervene to ensure that economic processes work for the majority rather than the self-styled 'masters of the universe' who run our financial markets has never been more needed.

On the other hand, an ideological triumphalism and opportunity for intellectual vindication will not help the many millions of ordinary people who stand to lose most spectacularly. Although the sight of city bankers losing their jobs in a mass cull of the Square Mile is not one likely to excite a great deal of sympathy, the long term effect will be such that, as always, the losers will be the working and lower-middle class. It will be these people who will find themselves unable to pay their mortgage, who will find their pension funds sucked dry, who will lose their jobs. Such consequences have potentially ambiguous political consequences. Although the failure of the neo-liberal model of capitalism seems to vindicate the Left, political realities do not always chime with conceptual truisms. The Great Depression of the 1930s was a crisis that only the Left had any real solutions to, but it was a situation exploited, more often than not, by radicals of the Right rather than of the Left. The desperate and the dispossessed are vulnerable to the demagoguery of the racist, irrational politics of the far-right to a worryingly high degree—one only has to witness the triumph of the right-wing in the recent Austrian elections to see the truth of this assertion.

The solution is not to wage a successful intellectual war on the one hand while conceding defeat in the everyday politics of people's jobs, homes, pensions and lives on the other. The solution is to unite our ideological convictions and common-sense values of decency, mutual-aid and collective action with a realistic sense of political possibility and the exercise of actual power for real, concrete good. As ever, the best vehicle in British politics for uniting idealism with power, the pessimism of the intellect with the optimism of the will, is a refreshed, re-energised Labour Party, purged of the dismal apologists for neo-liberal economic orthodoxy, focussed on bringing the financial machinations of globalisation and the 'masters of the universe' who have brought world capitalism to its knees back under political control.

It has to be said that the reaction so far from Mr Brown has been disappointing. Billions are pumped into the financial markets in order to prevent the collective irrationality of incompetent bankers from bringing us all down, but when it comes to directing relatively insignificant sums to ordinary people suffering from increased utility bills, unemployment and financial insecurity, it seems Mr Brown's generosity runs out. The double standard is incredible—the fecklessness of the people who have got us into this mess is effectively rewarded, whereas ordinary, decent people are denied any substantial help. In the end it boils down to this: whose side are you on, Mr Brown? If we are to recover as a party and use our potential to pursue the imperatives of socialist moral crusade, then the answer must be that the Labour Party, with or without Mr Brown, is firmly on the side of the ordinary, decent working people. This is a time of rich potential for the practical, genuine politics of Labour pragmatism. Let us not squander it.



City Academies: Labour's Dilemma

*On October 7th CULC will be holding a forum on City Academies, the flagship project of New Labour's 'education, education, education' agenda. Here **Pete Jefferys** explores the difficulties of a programme that claims to defend fairness and social mobility but can also be seen as yet another foray into a two-tiered educational system.*

City academies seem frustratingly paradoxical for Labour. Recently labelled 'engines' of social mobility by the Prime Minister, and praised for their successes by the schools' minister Lord Adonis, they nonetheless appear to embody the twin evils of educational regress that the left is so fundamentally opposed to: privatisation and selection. Indeed, deciding where to stand on this debate initially seems an impossible task. Speak in favour of the academy programme and you appear to reject the egalitarianism of the Comprehensive school movement, speak against them and you are criticising a £5 billion investment which has improved aspirations and standards in some of Britain's most deprived areas.

On closer inspection however, academies are not as paradoxical as they first appear. Known for their imposing glassy facades and well-equipped modern buildings they are appearing in inner city locations from London to Newcastle, replacing state schools which are deemed to have failed. There are currently 83 operational academies, with the government planning to have 200 built by 2010,

many of which are already in the advanced stages of planning or construction. Providing sponsorship are rich individuals, companies or universities, with the government then introducing the majority of the funding to complete the scheme. Crucially, the academies are independent from their LEA giving them authority over the length of the school day, teacher pay and internal policy.

What then of selection? Academies, like specialist schools, are able to select up to 10% of their pupils based on the subject specialisation of the school. This is clearly not the kind of selective policy of the 11+ system and it seems that academies have pupils from social backgrounds which reflect the areas in which they are built. A series of reports from PriceWaterhouseCoopers suggests that close to half of pupils in city academies are on free school meals, compared to just 14% nationally; and only 60% of pupils in academies are white, compared to a national average of over 80%. The vast majority of pupils are not selected by ability but, despite this, academies are improving standards across the board, with grade improvements of close to 30% in English, Maths and Science, compared to a national average of around 6% for each of these subjects.

There are two issues however on which the selection policy of academies seems dubious. Firstly there have been claims of 'selection by the back door', due to the high levels of expulsions practiced at many

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of these schools. Whilst good discipline is undoubtedly a cornerstone of effective education, abandoning pupils to keep up overall standards seems harshly utilitarian. Another issue is that of academies sponsored by religious institutions. Whilst government guidelines suggest that pupils should not be selected according to their faith, it is still at the discretion of academies to take this into consideration when students apply. This seems grossly unfair on those who rightly expect to receive a decent state education without needed to convert to a new religion, and is an issue which I believe the government should give due attention.

This links to the other element which has worried many on the left; the influence of academy sponsors. Whilst the PwC reports make it clear that the schools themselves are happy that their sponsors have limited direct influence, this has done little to quiet fears of creeping privatisation. For instance the *Emmanuel* schools project in the North-East, sponsored by car tycoon Peter Vardy, has been accused of latent creationism and biblical bias in religious studies. However new guidelines brought in by the government are to ensure that academies must stick to the national curriculum in core subjects. All schools in Britain are now required to teach evolution in their science classrooms.

Indeed, there are other factors which seem to justify the extra funding. The use of benefactors to increase investment has provided world class facilities in otherwise deprived areas and the government claims to be rigorous in its selection of potential sponsors. Furthermore, allowing the schools to be independent, by introducing a sponsor, seems to have had many

benefits for the schools, with progressive and reformatory policies being introduced without the worry of conforming to the majority of state guidelines.

City academies may then have a justified position in an egalitarian future for state education. We might make a comparison here with Grammar Schools, anachronisms of the 1950s, which according to a recent report by Sheffield Hallam University encourage 'social segregation'. There are 164 Grammar Schools left in Britain and with the rise of city academies it seems an opportune moment to consider what reason we have for continuing selective education policies in localised areas.

While city academies are raising aspirations and equality of opportunity right across the social spectrum, Grammar Schools cater predominantly for the middle classes and arguably drain talent from the local comprehensive schools. With the rise of academies and growing disillusionment with selective 'meritocratic' systems we have reached a turning point in British education. It will now be a crucial decision for ministers and policy makers as to how far they wish, and are able, to spread the boundaries of equality in education.

Pete Jeffreys is CULC secretary. Details of the forum that CULC will be holding on the subject of city academies are at the back of this edition of Red Letter, along with details of our other events and upcoming opportunities to get involved in Cambridge Universities Labour Club.



LESSONS FROM THATCHER AND MARX

George Owers *considers the moral and ideological issues at the heart of the post-Thatcherite consensus.*

Margaret Thatcher once said, "economics are the method; the object is to change the soul". To me, this is the most fundamental and important thing that she ever said. Let us examine the assumptions that underpin this statement, and what it tells us both of the philosophical underpinnings of Thatcherism and the response of the Left.

The most glaringly obvious point to be made here is that it reveals her to be something of a determinist, which has some radically ironic implications in terms of the underlying moral implications of her political philosophy. Thatcher was notorious for extolling the supposed moral benefits of her emphasis on personal responsibility and self-discipline, an emphasis that led her to relentlessly denigrate the role of the state in helping individuals, especially in terms of the Welfare State (although the irony here is, of course, that the mass unemployment she deliberately created forced millions to rely on the state in this way to an extent that had never been seen in the socio-economic history of the UK to that point, and has not been seen since). Of course, it is only meaningful to talk about encouraging personal responsibility as being the main aspiration of political and economic reform if the source of social problems is internal to people in the first place. If the crucial constraining factors in socio-economic life are external to the individual, then such an emphasis on personal responsibility makes about as much sense as berating a man who has had both legs amputated for coming last in a 100 metre race.

This is what makes her statement about the relationship between economics and the human soul so revealing. I am instantly reminded of, funnily enough, Karl Marx's statement from his 'Preface to a Contribution to Political Economy', when he argues that, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness". Is this, in essence, not what Thatcher is saying? Does she not imply that our soul, our social consciousness, is changed, and therefore to a great extent determined, by the economics of a society? Is Thatcher not endorsing the view of the crude determinist interpreters of Marx, that the superstructure of human beings' beliefs, politics, ideology etc arise from the economic base of society? If we are being charitable, we may say that Thatcher's comment could be compatible with a more subtle formula, such as the idea that the economic unterbau conditions the ideal uberbau, thus avoiding the problematically emphatic idea of determination. Whatever the subtleties, it is clear that Thatcher seems to endorse an essentially Marxist idea here.

Schumpeter once said that Keynes was "Marx with the adjectives changed". We might say that Thatcher was "Marx with the morality reversed and class loyalty switched", at least in some respects of their respective analyses of the nature of capitalism. However, the crucial point is that if you concede that the economic relations of society condition the way people live and think, then the idea that people should be able to overcome their economic position and the consciousness engendered by the relations of production that they find themselves in becomes a sort of grotesque joke, a joke that Thatcher obviously relished. She supposed that by winning the class war for her side she could not only keep working people in check, she could also make them unthinkingly accept the very moral co-ordinates of her uni-



verse. A thankless free market brutalism conditions the lower classes to accept ceaseless competition, greed and the war of all against all as axiomatic, the basic moral propositions of any thinkable political outlook. By altering the economic base, she can consolidate the ideological assumptions of the masses for her side – she can achieve the ultimate moral victory, that of making people think that the idea that ‘homo homini lupus’ (‘man is a wolf to man’) is unassailable, self-evidently true, true eternally and unconditionally.

What Thatcher intended was that the masses should never realise that such a moral (or rather amoral) outlook presupposes a certain economic organisation of society, and as such will rise or fall with that economic organisation. In other words, ‘homo homini lupus’ is not unconditionally true, but holds only contingently. In a society completely saturated in market-fundamentalism, where every person must struggle with every other person in a morally anarchic world in which the fundamental imperative is “pull the ladder up Jack and sod the rest”, then of course such a maxim holds true. It can hardly not do. Even the most moral individual can cling to her morality only when it will not compromise her very existence. It is a central Brechtian point – it is difficult to be good in a bad society, by which we mean one defined by capitalist relations of production. Because people have to act immorally to get by in a capitalist society, the only psychological way of coping with this terrible fact is to legitimise immorality as inevitable – it’s OK to be greedy and selfish, because everyone is and must be by the very code of their genetic make-up. This is determinism rearing its ugly head again, but as a response to a psychological tension – the tension between the knowledge that one is acting immorally and the fact that one has little choice but to act immorally within the structure of capitalism. Acceptance of this tension should imply a commitment to act to change the structure of society. For people in a society where exploitative economic relationships often benefit them, or at least benefit, in fundamental ways, the majority of them – for example, in a society such as our own where we benefit in terms of cheap goods and services from the exploitation of cheap third world labour – the tension is assuaged not by commitment to political radicalism, but by attempting to convince ourselves that what is immoral is not immoral. Marx makes a great deal out of the way capitalism disrupts traditional ways of thinking and traditional social relations – as he and Engels put it in ‘The Communist Manifesto’, “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones ... All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned”. The solidity of our moral purpose melts into the airy uncertainties of an amoral universe.

Thatcher’s attempts to moralise her own politics, by appeal to ‘personal responsibility’ and the like, were an attempt to provide a very thin veil of ethical legitimacy for her radicalisation of the class war. We need not have too many illusions as to the sort of soul Thatcher had in mind for Britain after her eleven years of socio-economic engineering. It is the soul of the wolf for those with the teeth to use it, and the soul of the compliant, unsuspecting sheep for the rest – of unconstrained exploitation for those with the means of production and of meek acceptance for those without. It is the mask that hides and normalises social and economic licence.

Whatever we think of Thatcher – whatever repugnance we have for her (a)moral aspirations and whatever opposition we show to her class loyalties – if we do not accept the lessons of the attitude that is embodied the Thatcherite project, then we on the Left have no hope. What are these lessons? Firstly, that the level of functioning morality of any society is constrained by its economic base, and as such its economic base has to be changed. This is the kernel of truth in Thatcher’s above quotation.



Whether or not she was genuinely amoral and opposed the existence of a functioning morality because it gets in the way of the manifestation of the power of her class over the others, or whether she deceived herself that her 'values' of greed and the economic war of all against all were actually moral, in order to make her revival of the assault of the bourgeoisie psychologically possible, is a moot point. Thatcher does not seem the sort of woman capable of such mealy-mouthed hypocrisy and delusion, so I suspect the former, but it hardly matters. The second lesson is that the above quotation has a determinist implication that is fundamentally wrong. Although the economic relations of any society tend to constrain the possibilities of the predominant moral, ideological and political climate, they are not rigidly determined by it and it is not a one way street. Moral ideas are not mere epiphenomena, they are the basis for our shaping of our economic and social universe – the emergence and spreading of moral ideas change the economic base, or can do if they are given concrete expression in the form of political movements. Properly speaking, politics is a moral phenomenon. Moral ideals can exist quite independently from the economic base, or, what is but the same point differently put, they can emerge as reactions to the morality encoded into any society's relations of production, and gain a concrete embodiment that leads to change in the economic base. This is the lesson of the socialist movement historically. Abstract ideas of justice can be put into political practice if they given a cogent and compelling enough expression, a wide enough circulation and an effective enough organisation in terms of their promotion.

So, the task of the Left is one of a remoralisation in the face of a society sucked dry of worthwhile values. This means facing up to the moral assumptions programmed into the economic and social relations of British society, and challenging them in a political programme, rather than accepting them and accommodating them to the extent that we become their handmaidens. Unfortunately, New Labour has accommodated itself only too well to them, and has made huge inroads in terms of naturalising them. As such, New Labour has performed the function of anchoring Thatcherite ideology into the soil of British society in a way that Thatcher herself could never have achieved. This is because, as Marx warned us, a key feature of ideology is that it presents itself as universal, the immutable background against which politics plays itself out. This was a feature that could only ever be given to Thatcherite turbo-capitalism if the traditional socialist opposition was seen to accept it as inevitable. This is exactly what happened with New Labour. However, merely accepting the foundation-stones of our moral and ideological enemies means that we can only construct society in the image of their architect's plan. If we want to achieve *our* moral aspirations, we must re-articulate them, re-communicate them and re-think how we can embody them in a new political programme designed to change the moral constraints imposed by our economic base. They can be embodied by Labour, and the exigencies of democratic British politics actually makes the Labour Party particularly suitable, but only if we can throw out the deformed, disgusting degeneracies of New Labour's acceptance of the values of Thatcherism. Harold Wilson once said that the Labour Party is a moral crusade, or it is nothing. If we do not learn the lessons of Thatcher, New Labour and that spectre that haunts this whole analysis, Karl Marx, the Labour Party risks completely succumbing to this moral nihilism.



Image and Integrity

Andy Russell *considers issues of style and substance in the British political climate*

What you are doing is important. What people think you are doing is vital.

Our perceptions of the world are frequently out of step with reality. In politics this fact may be used to deceive the public into loving a wolf in the highest quality Armani suits. Cameron's Conservatives have wised up to this fact, whilst Labour seems to have forgotten the unrivalled power of public perception. The Conservatives look good! Like the infamous Dorian Grey, his true character hidden behind a beautiful fiction, Cameron has constructed an image, which has little bearing on reality. His summer vacation is a perfect case in point; after finishing his feverishly self-publicised 'bucket and spade' holiday in Cornwall, he spent a week touring the Turkish-Riviera on Luxury yachts with his super-rich friends. It is little wonder why this part of his holiday did not appear on Webcameron.

What is so upsetting is that Labour is currently the better party. The economic climate is bad, but the Conservatives would not do better. Labour has excellent policies and the best people to implement them, but the public does not see this. Media coverage is partly to blame, but is not the core of the problem. From the outside, the Government does appear out of touch. It probably is, but not with what people want, only with what they want to see. If one gets the latter right, then the former is a case of business as usual. We have the ideas, the means and the will to make this country better – people need to see that; we need to show them.

The issue of image is constantly being raised in the media in connection with Gordon Brown. 'He looks tired', 'He looks sullen', 'He doesn't smile as much as Blair' – Gordon Brown is one of the most intelligent men in the country and the best person to lead us through economic troubles. Who cares what he looks like? The public does! I do not mean his cosmetic features (he will never be Brad Pitt), but his overall image is crucial. The botched attempt to rebrand Brown as Heathcliff was an understanding that image is important. If I knew exactly how to correctly rebrand Brown then I shouldn't be writing this article, but should be working for the best marketing firm in the country. Unfortunately for me, I don't.

The image of the leader is vital. I am not calling for a change of leadership. I did like David Miliband's article, I think highly of him and think the 'leadership challenge' was largely a media driven fiction. He knows that Brown is the best man for the job. In the article, he says we need to 'find the confidence to make our case afresh'. Our convictions have not changed, our ideals have not changed, it is our image we must alter, it is this image that must be fresh and appealing.

I may risk coming across as devious by championing the idea of cultivating image. It is certainly the case that the way in which Cameron has done it, is indeed through illusions, half-truths and zero convictions. The idea of focusing on image conjures ghosts of accusations of sleaze and the eventually distrusted Blair. Of course, image is not the only thing to be concerned about (unless you are a Conservative). If we truly have the best policies and people then there is nothing wrong with cultivating an image to show this. Even the best product rarely sells without good marketing. It is essential for the Labour party to maintain its integrity, even when the Tories are selling off theirs as if it were going out of fashion. We must at all costs maintain integrity, even if others do not value their own.



CULC EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dates for your diary

Monday 13th October
Freshers' Squash
7.30pm Kennedy Room, Cambridge Union

Tuesday 21st October
Policy Discussion Group
8pm The Eagle

Sunday 26th October
Beer and Sandwiches
8pm Location TBC

Wednesday 12th November
All Party Education Pub Meet
8pm Upstairs in the Maypole

Thursday 13th November
CULC v CUCA debate
7.30pm The Union

Sunday 16th November
Beer and Sandwiches
8pm Location TBC

Thursday 20th November
Michael Wills MP
7.30pm Location TBC

Friday 28th November
Richard Howitt MEP
8pm Location TBC

Monday 1st December
Termly General Meeting
8pm Location TBC (followed by a pub

Other events are being confirmed in due course, including an education forum, visits by several leading political figures and a formal hall.

Articles are ALWAYS welcome for Red Letter—please email all contributions to gbo20@cam.ac.uk. I endeavour to include as much as possible, and encourage contributors to be as in-depth or concise as they wish.