



DOMESTIC POLICY DISCOURSE IN THE US AND THE UK IN THE 'NEW WORLD ORDER'

Edited by
Lori Maguire

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CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

LORI MAGUIRE

This book is the companion volume to *Foreign Policy Discourse in the “New World Order”* which appeared in 2009. It aims to examine some of the major domestic policy debates in the United Kingdom and the United States from 1992 to 2010. These dates have been chosen for their high significance. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War came to an end. 1992, then, is the first truly post-Cold War year but it also saw elections in both the UK and the US. The results differed—the Conservatives hung onto power in Britain while the Democrats, under Bill Clinton, returned in the US.

With the end of the Cold War, many commentators expected a renewed emphasis on domestic policy as a result of this major change in foreign policy. Until the attacks of 11 September 2001, this is exactly what happened. The “new world order” in economic terms, celebrated the triumph of capitalism and free markets. At this time, Milton Friedman’s economic ideas were hugely popular and Keynes out of fashion. The economic problems of the 1970s, in combination with the manifest failure of communist economies, had largely discredited the traditional notion of the Left and there was a general rightward movement in political discourse.

Recent years, however, have seen a reassessment of this rightward political movement in terms of domestic policy—a reassessment that increased spectacularly after large scale economic problems began in 2008. By the summer of that year, Keynes was making a return and governments were intervening in the economy in often extraordinary ways. The Left, in both nations, was returning to an earlier vision and rhetoric while the Right found itself with little new to say—and in the American case, at least, stuck in Cold War rhetoric.

While there have been a number of studies of the domestic policy of each country, there have been no major attempts at comparative analysis.

Our goal is to consider a wide-range of issues in order to present an overall comparison of major domestic policy debates in each country. Clearly, they differ in terms of relative size and power. At the same time, both obviously have had a lot in common and show similar developments—although, admittedly with important differences. Furthermore, this book is also not specifically concerned with policy or how policy is made but with the debate around policy and the rhetoric used to present different points of view. Since the introduction to the volume on foreign policy discourse contained a long section on the term “discourse” and various theories related to it, this concept will not be discussed in any detail here. Instead, we will attempt an overview of certain major issues, stressing the comparative dimension. Immense similarities in use of language occur and show the cross fertilisation between English-speaking communities but there are also important differences. Our goal will be to illuminate these. For obvious reasons, we have not been able to make an exhaustive study of all issues but have chosen, instead, to look at a few in depth. In this chapter we will take a brief look at certain major issues and then give an overview of the book.

The Economy

During Bill Clinton’s first campaign for the presidency, James Carville’s famous adage read: “the economy, stupid” and, indeed, elections are usually won or lost on the strength of the economy. For this reason, discourse on economic questions is often the base from which a great deal of political discourse springs. Certainly since the late 1970s, the Right has led economic debate in both nations. The woes of the 1970s, and the later revelation of the weaknesses of communist financial systems dethroned and discredited much of socialism and even Keynesianism. The “Chicago Boys” as Brian Glenn shows in chapter 7, ruled the roost and discourse was dominated by terms like “competition”, “choice”, “flexibility”, “privatisation” and, of course, “the market”. From there, this rhetoric spread into other realms and can be found repeatedly in education and health care most notably.

The origins of this discourse lie long before. In 1944 Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian economist (naturalised British), published *The Road to Serfdom*. In it, he stated, among other things:

There is one aspect of the change in moral values brought about by the advance of collectivism which at the present time provides special food for thought. It is that the virtues which are held less and less in esteem and which consequently become rarer are precisely those on which the British

people justly prided themselves and in which they were generally recognized to excel. The virtues possessed by the British people, possessed in a higher degree than most other people, excepting only a few of the smaller nations, like the Swiss and the Dutch—were independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility, the successful reliance on voluntary activity, non-interference with one's neighbour and tolerance of the different and queer, respect for custom and tradition, and a healthy suspicion of power and authority. British strength, British character, and British achievements are to a great extent the result of a cultivation of the spontaneous. But almost all the traditions and institutions in which British moral genius has found its most characteristic expression, and which in turn have moulded the national character and the whole moral climate of England, are those which the progress of collectivism and its inherently centralistic tendencies are progressively destroying.¹

Young Margaret Thatcher was one of the persons who read the book at the time and was strongly influenced by it. Notice the importance that Hayek gives to terms like “independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility”, for these words would become key themes of the Right. Written at the end of World War II, his attack on “collectivism” obviously referred to Nazism but his principle target was socialism and communism—at the time extremely fashionable especially in Britain where he then lived and which would lead to Labour's victory at the polls the following year. In opposition to the internationalist doctrine of socialism, Hayek asserts the need for a stronger national identity on the part of the British and Americans. But he also calls for greater *laissez-faire* in the economy. When he praises “self-reliance”, “individual initiative” and “voluntary activity”, he is effectively asking for a re-evaluation of the private sector and warning against the dangers of too much government and too great a public sector.

Later Milton Friedman squarely linked capitalism with freedom. In 1962 he wrote:

It is widely believed that politics and economics are separate and largely unconnected; that individual freedom is a political problem and material welfare an economic problem; and that any kind of political arrangements can be combined with any kind of economic arrangements. The chief contemporary manifestation of this idea is the advocacy of “democratic socialism” by many who condemn out of hand the restrictions on individual freedom imposed by “totalitarian socialism” in Russia, and who are persuaded that it is possible for a country to adopt the essential features of Russian economic arrangements and yet to ensure individual freedom through political arrangements. The thesis of this chapter is that such a view is a delusion, that there is an intimate connection between economics

and politics, that only certain arrangements are possible and that, in particular, a society which is socialist cannot also be democratic, in the sense of guaranteeing individual freedom.²

So political liberty, he believes, demands economic *laissez-faire*. He goes on to argue that any kind of government compulsion—even taxes taken for retirement pensions—are infringements of individual liberty. Friedman also talks of the importance of the market, saying that “free market capitalist society fosters freedom”.³ In his idealized vision, the market becomes a cure for all of society’s ills, protecting the different groups—consumers, sellers, employees and employers—by ensuring that power is widely dispersed in society. Of particular significance is the idea that a market economy provides flexibility and gives people choice. As Friedman says: “it gives people what they want instead of what a particular group thinks it ought to want.”⁴

In this brief outline we see many of the key terms that became central to right-wing discourse in the 1980s and by the end of the decade, had been accepted by much of the Left as well: words like “choice”, “individual freedom”, “independence” “responsibility” and “self-reliance”. The impact of these ideas can clearly be seen in Thatcher’s first address as leader to the Conservative Party Conference:

Our capitalist system produces a far higher standard of prosperity and happiness because it believes in incentive and opportunity, and because it is founded on human dignity and freedom. Even the Russians have to go to a capitalist country—America—to buy enough wheat to feed their people—and that after more than fifty years of a State-controlled economy. Yet they boast incessantly, while we, who have so much more to boast about, for ever criticize and decry... Some Socialists seem to believe that people should be numbers in a State computer. We believe they should be individuals. We are all unequal. No one, thank heavens, is quite like anyone else, however much the Socialists may pretend otherwise. We believe that everyone has the right to be unequal. But to us, every human being is equally important.⁵

Here we see the link made between capitalism and freedom as well as the fear of the loss of individual and national identity. In another place in the speech, she strongly attacks nationalisation and expresses her firm belief in private enterprise. Later, she spoke of successfully rolling back “the frontiers of the state”, asserting that through privatisation her government had reduced the power of the central government.⁶

Ronald Reagan echoed the same ideas in his speeches, for example, in his acceptance of the Republican nomination:

Let us pledge to restore, in our time, the American spirit of voluntary service, of cooperation, of private and community initiative; a spirit that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation.

As your nominee I pledge to you to restore to the Federal government the capacity to do the people's work, without dominating their lives. I pledge to you—I pledge to you a government that will not only work well but wisely, its ability to act tempered by prudence and its willingness to do good balanced by the knowledge that government is never more dangerous than when our desire to have it help us blinds us to its great power to harm us.⁷

Notice his emphasis on the word “voluntary”, very much in keeping with Friedman’s ideas, as well as his attack on the power of the federal government. For Reagan, the central government’s role must be reduced while that of the private sector must be increased. In another speech he expressed many of his economic beliefs:

Let us also include a permanent limit on the percentage of the people's earnings government can take without their consent... Let our banner proclaim our belief in a free market as the greatest provider for the people. Let us also call for an end to the nit-picking, the harassment and over-regulation of business and industry which restricts expansion and our ability to compete in world markets.⁸

Notice how he describes taxation as the government taking “people’s earnings... without their consent” which clearly links him to the taxpayer revolt of the time.⁹ We also see many of Friedman’s ideas expressed and notably a firm belief in the virtues of the market system and a desire to deregulate it.

The success of the Right in the 1980s in both nations led leftwing parties to adopt similar terms and arguments in their rhetoric as Lori Maguire shows in chapter 3. Soon everybody was talking about “the market”, “choice”, “flexibility” and “competition” and extolling the virtues of the private sector. From economics this vocabulary filtered into other domains. Let us now turn to look at some of these other areas and discourse around them.

Health Care

Health care was a major subject of political discourse in both nations where it reflected certain ideological debates. However, the intensity and even violence of the debate was much greater in the United States where it has become a symbol for the polarisation of that country. Evelyne

Thévenard gives us a detailed look at that subject from Clinton's failed overhaul of the system to Obama's successful one so we will not consider the situation in America in great detail here.

Suffice it to say that, alone among Western nations, the US did not establish a system of universal government mandated health care after World War II. Numerous attempts were made, mainly by Democrats, but they all failed. More than any other issue it has come to symbolise the ideological divide in that nation—in particular with respect to attitudes towards the federal government and its role in American lives. To an extraordinary extent, fear has played a central role in the debate, being used by both sides. Those in favour of reform have stressed the horror stories of those without insurance or those with inadequate insurance (most famously in Michael Moore's film *Sicko*) and cited example after example of very real human tragedy. It has been opponents of major reform, however, who have especially used this tactic, continually playing on fears of communism (to such an extent that even in 2010 their rhetoric seems stuck in the Cold War), fears of the effects change would have both on the nation and the individual's access to health care and fears of massive tax increases. All this served as a way of disguising one of the essential elements in the debate: is health care a right or a privilege? For those in favour of introducing a European-style system in the US, it is a basic human right and Dr Thévenard shows how Clinton and others have used a rights-based terminology although they have usually failed to communicate it effectively. Meanwhile the Republicans feared that successful reform would create a middle class dependent on government spending and re-legitimise the role of the federal government and the party that has traditionally supported it—the Democrats.

One particularly significant element in health care discourse has been the use of popular economic terms relating to the marketplace and to consumers. George W. Bush, for example, presented health care as just another product like cars. Figures on the Right have stated that the best way to contain costs would be to let individuals manage their own health expenditure through special savings accounts and tax breaks. The Democrats, on the other hand, have expressed the belief that only the federal government has the power and the sweep to effectively keep down costs and guarantee access. Thus in the 2008 campaign while McCain talked of "individual responsibility" the Democratic platform spoke of "shared responsibility". The ideological divide is clearly reflected in the discourse.

The story in Britain may appear, at first glance, very different, but, rhetorically, there are a number of similarities. Because of the existence of

the National Health Service, the debate turned on improvement but the vocabulary was remarkably similar. Thatcher instituted and Major continued a controversial market-oriented reform of the NHS to make it more responsive to consumers/patients, more innovative and introduce more competition. Labour at first strongly denounced these changes. For example, Chris Smith, then Shadow spokesman on health, attacked the government saying:

We have a health service that is in crisis, that cannot even deliver same sex wards to the people who wish to have them. Year on year, the Government creates a winter crisis. Year on year we see an explosion of bureaucracy. Year on year we see more managers and fewer nurses. Year on year we see patients on trolleys in accident and emergency departments. Year on year we see cancelled operations. Year on year we see lengthening waiting lists. Year on year we see staff in the health service struggling to cope with the changes that the Government have imposed on them.¹⁰

Smith questions the very nature of the reforms which he sees as increasing bureaucracy to the detriment of actual treatment. Certainly variants of the word “manage” had played an important role in Conservative reforms: in 1984 general managers were appointed in the NHS, while two years after the NHS Management Board was established and then reorganised three years later so it was easy for Labour to mock this term. The problem was, though, that by the time Blair took office, some of the reforms seemed to be having a positive impact. Added to this, the NHS was exhausted by so much change and Blair had announced that “We have no plans to increase tax at all.”¹¹ For this reason, the Government pretty much ignored the question for two years. The flu epidemic of December 1999, however, provoked a massive crisis and, while the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn, admitted that “the influenza outbreak has put great pressure on the NHS”, he insisted that “the NHS is coping.”¹² His Conservative equivalent, Liam Fox had a different view of the situation:

[The Health Secretary’s statement] is long on complacency and short on detail and substance. Many people will have voted new Labour because of the Prime Minister’s promises about the health services. How hollow those promises sound now. Those voters must feel betrayed...The Secretary of State admits that no elective work has been done in the past week. If the health service had been doing its normal work, it would have fallen apart completely. What faith can we have, in view of the Secretary of State’s attitude? When we see sick patients left to die in waiting rooms, waiting in car parks to be seen or stored in converted operating theatres, and when the Secretary of State can say something as complacent as, “The NHS is

coping tremendously well,” we wonder whether the only isolation unit in this country that is operating is the one that he keeps himself in so that he cannot see the complete picture. NHS staff are coping tremendously well, but they are being badly let down by those who run the service.¹³

Rhetoric has changed sides: now it is the Conservatives attacking the failure of Labour and presenting themselves as the real champions of the NHS. The key word here is “waiting”: the sick must wait for care (and sometimes die because they cannot get it) while the Labour government shows no interest in dealing with the problem.

In January 2000, obviously as a reaction to this crisis, Blair promised to massively increase funding for the NHS in order to align the UK’s spending on health with that of the rest of Europe. This plan was announced in July 2000 and, of course meant yet another fundamental reorganisation of the system. In announcing the reform, Blair favoured vocabulary like “change” and “modern” as well as numerous synonyms for them. He also showed a real acceptance of traditional right-wing ideas:

The best performers will be given greater freedom and flexibility, and all will have access to additional funds tied to clear outcomes in performance. That will include a new framework—a concordat—with the private sector. There should be, and will be, no barrier to partnership with the private sector where appropriate—as the private finance initiative hospital building programme has shown.¹⁴

“Greater freedom”, performance incentives and “partnership with the private sector”—these terms would never have been used by Aneurin Bevan, founder of the NHS. Later in the speech he talks of increasing “choice”:

Patients will also have more say and more choice, with a patient advocate and forum in every hospital to give them immediate help with sorting out their complaints, and a voice in how the hospital is run.¹⁵

As we have seen, “choice” has been a key term on the Right. So once again we can see how Blair has incorporated Conservative rhetoric into New Labour.

While on the surface, the American and British debates about health care seem very different, in reality there are fundamental similarities between them. The vocabulary employed in both nations is often surprisingly close and some commentators have seen an ideological element present in British discourse too. Calum Paton, for example, has asserted that the “underlying cause” of the Thatcher and Major reforms

was “central government’s ideological search for market reforms in the public sector”.¹⁶ And this, of course, has been central to Republican preoccupations in the United States. In Britain it may have reached a high point with the 2005 proposal (now dropped) by the Conservatives to create a “patient passport” which sounds suspiciously like the voucher system for schools applied to health care. Essentially, New Labour has vastly increased spending on the NHS which has had many positive results but its continual reforms, coming after a period of continual Conservative reforms, has hurt these improvements.¹⁷ Labour has very real achievements to boast of but it could have done more.

Education

In both Britain and the United States the debate on education is widely similar: the main aspects being strong criticisms of the deficiencies of the system with calls for more testing, the relationship between local and national government (and notably the imposition of national standards), and the attempt to create a closer public/private link.¹⁸ In much of this, the rhetoric of “choice” has been highly important. Like so much else, it is a rhetoric set by the Right and accepted, with certain modifications, by the Left. And, once again, as we have seen with other subjects, the debate is much more polarised in the US than in the UK.

In the United States, one of the best places to locate major elements of this debate is in George W. Bush’s acceptance speech at the Republican Convention of 2000. He said on the subject of education:

Too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade-to-grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge.

This is discrimination, pure and simple—the soft bigotry of low expectations.

And our nation should treat it like other forms of discrimination ... We should end it.

One size does not fit all when it comes to educating our children, so local people should control local schools. And those who spend your tax dollars must be held accountable. When a school district receives federal funds to teach poor children, we expect them to learn. And if they don't, parents should get the money to make a different choice.¹⁹

First he accuses the public school system of having failed to educate American citizens—notably the poorest—because they have not imposed high enough standards. Instead, children are advanced year-on-year,

whether they have mastered basic skills or not. This, Bush insists must stop, but, in keeping with the dominant belief on the Right, the solution should not come from the federal government but rather should come from local areas and from a greater role for the private sector. Notice the key word “choice”: parents should have more choice in schools by which Bush means a voucher programme—that is, a way of offering government funding to enable students to attend private school. This last point is discussed in some detail by Brian Glenn in chapter 7. As he explains, vouchers are part of an overall attempt by many on the Right to privatise the public sector and have been highly controversial. Their supporters call them a way of granting more choice to parents and of introducing beneficial competition among schools which will raise standards in general. Opponents of school vouchers originally attacked them as a way of re-segregating schools and, thus, detrimental to the poor and minorities. The voucher scheme only started to have some real success when the discourse around it was framed as a way to help minority groups (or at least some, particularly deserving elements within them)—and so began to attract support from some leaders of these groups. But Bush’s use of the terms “discrimination”, and “bigotry” clearly have racial connotations. In other words, the true bigots are those who want to deny choice to racial minorities by forcing them into the public system. In 2006, Republican Senator John Ensign went even further, stating that: “Elementary and secondary education is one of the few sectors in this country that does not have open competition.”²⁰ He suggested that “artificial government barriers” should be removed and schools allowed to freely compete with each other—thus improving standards for everyone. To do this he introduced a bill, called “America’s Opportunity Scholarships for Kids”:

The purpose of this legislation is to provide low-income children who are in schools that have consistently not met adequate yearly progress benchmarks, and have not improved student academic achievement, with other options... I believe that this legislation is the next step toward bringing true competition to elementary and secondary education.

Notice how Ensign carefully avoids the term “voucher”, preferring the more positive connotations of “scholarship”. His true goal is evident: to create competition—that is, divert government funding to private schools so that they can attract more pupils—but it is hidden in a rhetoric of compassionate help for the poor.

Bush did not get a generalized voucher scheme but he did get most of the other reforms he demanded in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This law established a lot of requirements like obligatory testing every

year in reading and mathematics for children in grades 3 to 8 and at least one test in grades 10 to 12 but left these tests up to each state—which makes national evaluations extremely difficult. The law also says that states must establish “adequate yearly progress” goals for each school and schools that do not meet these goals for two years will be labelled “in need of improvement”. Eventually such schools could be subject to “restructuring”.

The bill had much bipartisan support, for much of the American Left had, by this time, accepted many of the conservative criticisms of education. But there remained a major difference between Left and Right on the question, as a speech by Sen. Edward Kennedy illustrates:

We will be debating issues of policy, but make no mistake about it, we will be debating the issue of need, of investment, of the type of future we are going to have in this country... When 80 percent of eighth graders lack trained math teachers, we can see what is compromised in terms of the children of this country. At a time when we need their talents, their involvement, and their help in leading the United States in the world community, we fail to provide them the resources they need to build a strong educational foundation. That is what this debate over funding is about. It is about our future.

We know what is out there. Twenty percent of the children in the United States live in poverty; 10 million children are eligible for title I services. We are only reaching a third of them. So if we are going to give life and meaning to “leave no child behind,” we ought to be out front finding ways to reach all of them, not skimping on the 10 million children who are eligible under this legislation, and who look to us for help.²¹

So Kennedy accepts many of the rightwing criticisms about the deficiencies of the system and he is not opposed to testing, but he comes to a very different conclusion on the remedy. Here there is no talk of competition or choice but, rather, he says that what is needed is more money—and money invested in poor areas. The Obama administration has taken a moderate position—keeping the outlines of No Child Left Behind but wanting to increase funding and accountability as well as placing less emphasis on annual testing.

In Britain, debate about education not only resembles that in America but also that about health care. As with the NHS, New Labour established national standards and targets and massively increased funding in their second term. The government also tried to develop the public/private relationship and attempted to create more “choice” by trying to establish an artificial market. In both cases, Blair continued Conservative reforms that had been denounced by Labour at the time. In 1995 Blair announced

that “education will be the passion of my government”, but the verdict is similarly mixed about what has been achieved.²²

Although Blair phased out the Conservatives’ Assisted Places Scheme—a rough equivalent to the American voucher system—which provided government funding for particularly worthy students to attend public school, neither he nor Brown were ready to give up on the idea of greater private sector involvement in education. One particularly infamous result of this was the individual learning accounts (ILAs) whose stated goal was to improve educational opportunities, especially in relation to information technology for older people. Part of the Labour Manifesto of 1997, Brown lauded ILAs in his budget speech of 1999:

This century, Britain has achieved universal free education for children. This Budget introduces the new opportunity for universal education for adults—lifelong learning so that everyone will have the chance to succeed in the new economy.²³

Unfortunately, the government had not properly thought out the programme, did not create adequate safeguards against fraud and an immense scandal developed. Criticism was devastating and the programme was quickly suspended and then formally cancelled.

The Blair government’s attempts to reform the secondary school system continued the love affair with “modernisation”, “choice” and “the market” so prevalent in both nations throughout the period. Blair continued most of the Conservative reforms aimed at allowing parents a greater choice in their children’s schools. Essentially the government accepted the argument that competition improves performance and sought to raise school levels this way. The idea was that if money was linked to pupils then a sort of market would develop.²⁴ In his speech accepting the leadership of the Labour Party, Blair said:

On education, we should provide choice and demand standards from the teachers and schools, but run our education system so that all children get that choice and those standards, not just the privileged few.²⁵

Even for a politician this is vague. Once in power, the Blair government sought to create specialist schools—which looked a lot like an attack on the comprehensive system. However, the concept proved to have serious difficulties. How can a child decide on a specialty at age 12? How can parents really be offered a clear choice between specialty schools since no area, not even London, can offer a full range of possibilities? These and other problems attracted a number of criticisms:

The fundamental problem with the plan is that it is about structures, not standards. We need to focus on what is happening in the classroom, not in the boardroom... We want a variety of social markets in education, not the right hon. Lady's free market. In her model, who will speak up for the special needs child? Who will be the advocate for the looked-after child? Who will guarantee fairness and equality of opportunity? Her answer seems to be parent power. That may work in some places, but what happens where parents do not get involved, will not get involved or cannot get involved?²⁶

Labour is attacked here by the Liberal Democrats' Education spokesman for their fascination with the market—criticisms that, in the past, would have been more likely to be leveled by a Labour member against a Conservative.

The relationship between local and national government also changed during this period—once again a continuation of reforms started by the Conservatives who had introduced a national curriculum. From the start, Blair had stressed literacy and numeracy in primary education:

Children should learn to read, write and count... We must as a country help every child tie down the basics...Language is the currency of a person's freedom, so we need to get much closer to the goal of all eleven-year-olds having sufficient language skills to take advantage of their secondary schooling.²⁷

In the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, the government established both a Literacy Task Force and a Numeracy Task Force which created detailed standards. This went so far that, as one scholar has commented: "In specifying its requirements so precisely, the government crossed the line between telling schools what to teach and telling them how to teach."²⁸ The Thatcher government had already tried to weaken the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and New Labour continued the process. As with the NHS reforms, the result was greater centralisation.

Climate Change

Dealing with climate change effectively can only be done through international and national laws which, by definition, goes against the prevailing discourse of "choice", "diversity", "freedom", and "the market".²⁹ As such, it was bound to cause controversy on the Right. But the situation is more complicated than this. Discourse related to the environment, and particularly climate change, has been coloured by two things. First, there is the fact that the science involved is often complicated

and difficult for non-specialists and, second, the heavy politicisation of the issue. We shall briefly examine each of these and discuss their impact on discourse.

The birth of the modern environmentalist movement is generally said to date from the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 which became an immense bestseller and started, first in the US and then elsewhere, a massive debate on the environment. Rarely has popular concern increased so quickly from such a low level (reaching a peak around 1970) but there were excellent reasons for this: very visible pollution had been growing for some time with cities covered in smog and bodies of water declared "dead". The Western press took up the issue with intensity and dramatised it and, as a result, new laws were voted. The situation improved noticeably—to such an extent that when climate change became a major issue many were inclined to dismiss it as overdramatisation. Its effects were not obvious to see and dealing with it would fundamentally change lifestyles.

Unlike many other aspects of the environmental debate, climate change poses particular problems linked to the highly technical nature of the science on which the discourse is based. While everyone can readily understand a picture of a bird covered in oil in the Gulf of Mexico, not everyone has the necessary knowledge or time to understand the complexities of climate change. To begin with, weather and climate are two different things since weather refers to the changing temperature, precipitation and wind which we experience every hour of every day while climate is defined by Merriam Webster as: "the average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a period of years". So weather is short term while climate is long term. Those who believe the Earth's climate is changing speak of the greenhouse effect which, simply put, means that the Earth's atmosphere lets in energy from the sun and traps it there so that the planet is warm enough for life. They argue that humans have affected this process in various ways, notably through their high use of fossil fuels. These gasses get trapped in the atmosphere, enhancing the greenhouse effect and making the Earth warmer than it should be. As a result, average temperatures have been increasing. Although some critics actually deny the existence of a greenhouse effect, most accept that the Earth is getting warmer but assert that natural causes are responsible. They argue that there are natural cycles that determine the warmth of the planet. If you are not a specialist, it is extremely difficult to sort out the different facts and assertions.

Two scandals have recently dramatised the debate. First, there is the so-called "Climategate". This occurred because the e-mail system of the

University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit (CRU), one of the world's leading centres for climate research, was hacked into and e-mails published in late 2009. The CRU played a major role in the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report which is considered the most authoritative of its kind. Some critics allege that certain e-mails suggest that leading scientists were manipulating data and wanted some papers excluded from the UN's next major assessment. Subsequent investigations by independent panels cleared the scientists of all charges. The House of Commons report, however, did observe that:

The focus on Professor Jones and CRU has been largely misplaced. On the accusations relating to Professor Jones's refusal to share raw data and computer codes, we consider that his actions were in line with common practice in the climate science community. We have suggested that the community consider becoming more transparent by publishing raw data and detailed methodologies.³⁰

This last sentence reveals the difficulties laypeople have in following discourse on the subject and coming to an intelligent decision on it and criticises the scientific community's lack of attention to this. The report suggests that scientists need to explain more in clear language and provide more information.

The second scandal revolved around the discovery that the IPCC used questionable data (some of which came from masters students and lobbying groups) that had not followed the proper process of peer review. *Nature*, a highly respected scholarly journal, called on the IPCC to revise its policies in February 2010. Five leading scholars were invited to suggest ways of doing so. While they often came up with very different remedies—some going so far as to suggest replacing it with a permanent, less politicised body—they all highlighted the need for clear scientific rigour.³¹ Already in 2007, one of the authors of the *Nature* article, Mike Hulme, was sounding warnings about the impact of exaggerated media presentations on the subject. He conducted a study on the result of portrayals of future catastrophe and found that they were generally counterproductive, leading to public apathy. He told the BBC:

My argument is about the dangers of science over-claiming its knowledge about the future and in particular presenting tentative predictions about climate change using words of “disaster”, “apocalypse” and “catastrophe” ...Not only is this not a good way of presenting climate change science, but even in trying to effect change, it's self-defeating.³²

Undeniably, in order to secure media attention and government action, some believers in climate change exaggerated the rate and extent of global warming,—with the IPCC forced to apologise in one case in January 2010.³³ Such examples, in combination with the aforementioned scandals and the complexity of the science have played into the hands of opponents of global warming.

One of the leading critics of climate change is the Danish statistics professor, Bjorn Lomborg who wrote in 2001 *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. This highly controversial book argued that many of the scientific claims about environmental issues are greatly exaggerated or even wrong.³⁴ In a review of a book on climate change, Lomborg argued:

Let's be clear. Global warming is real and man-made. I take as my starting point the findings of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Denying climate science is foolish. But so is denying climate economics, the costs of which could run into the hundreds of trillions of dollars. Depressingly, Mr. [Thomas] Friedman throughout "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" simply does not talk seriously about the costs of his proposed solutions. He also fails to weigh those costs against the benefits, and he doesn't consider the threat of global warming in the context of other significant threats to the world's well-being.³⁵

Here we see some of the main arguments against radical action on global warming: it costs too much money, its threat is exaggerated and, therefore, it is less urgent than other questions like AIDS or malaria or famine. As we shall see, other critics go much further and deny that humans are even responsible for it, saying global warming is part of a natural cycle.

Not only is the science of climate change difficult to understand but, like most environmental questions, it has become heavily politicised. Tony Brenton, who worked on environmental affairs at the UK Foreign Office, has commented:

The dumping of nuclear waste and the control of power station emissions... have led to epic and enduring political rows. These disagreements, moreover, go beyond discussion of particular pollution issues to a quite profound ideological cleavage as to the true extent of the environmental threat that faces us, and the extent to which our lifestyles will have to change to meet it.³⁶

At first it was not obvious that this division would follow a Left/Right one. Certainly, on the Right, business and industry were not keen on greater relementation and standards because of the financial cost but, on the other hand, trade unions, so important in left-of-centre parties, were not

particularly interested in the question either. It was under Richard Nixon, for example, that the Clean Water Act was voted and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created. At the same time, some in the British Labour Party considered the question a “middle-class preoccupation”.³⁷ For those who thought like this on the Left, too much environmentalism hurt both job creation and social justice (notably with regard to the developing world). But by the 1980s, a clear Left/Right divide had emerged. While Thatcher tended to neglect environmental questions (unless forced to do so by Europe), Reagan was often actively hostile, saying at one point of environmental groups: “I do not think they will be happy until the White House looks like a bird’s nest.”³⁸ On the other hand, both Labour and the Democrats had taken on board parts of the environmental agenda.

In the US the connection became even more evident when Al Gore became Vice-President in January 1993. In a bestselling book published in 1992, Gore stated that the environment should be “the central organizing principle for civilization”.³⁹ It was especially after his time as Vice-President that Gore became one of the major voices in the world on climate change, making the film *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006 and winning the Nobel Prize the following year.

Although less obviously linked to the environmental movement than Gore, Tony Blair asserted that the “left-of-centre... is the natural home of those concerned about the environment”.⁴⁰ One of his goals was to respond to criticisms that environmentalism was bad both for social justice and job creation:

I also want to move away from the argument that, when it comes to protecting the environment, something or someone always loses out. There is a tendency to become overly sacrificial about the environment. It is certainly true that there are hard choices to be made in promoting concern for the environment—about the nature of industrial growth, about the incentives we provide for different types of transport, and about how we regulate to discourage pollution. But for too long the equation has been presented as the environment versus jobs, the environment versus competitiveness, protection of the environment hitting the poorest in our society.⁴¹

While he is not very clear about how environmentalism can help social justice, he puts a great deal of stress on the potential for job creation in new technologies developing around environmentalism. Gordon Brown, while Chancellor of the Exchequer, developed these arguments in even greater detail:

Environmental issues—including climate change—have traditionally been placed in a category separate from the economy and from economic policy. But this is no longer tenable. Across a range of environmental issues—from soil erosion to the depletion of marine stocks, from water scarcity to air pollution—it is clear now not just that economic activity is their cause, but that these problems in themselves threaten future economic activity and growth. And it is the poorest members of the community—those most dependent on the natural world for their survival, and those with the fewest resources to buy their way out of unhealthy environments—that suffer the most. Indeed, it is in the issue of climate change that we can see this interaction of economic development, environmental degradation and social inequity most clearly.⁴²

So, in reply to arguments by Lomborg and others, Brown insists that an environmentally sound policy is also good for the economy and, in order to please Labour Party faithful, good for the poorest especially. Obama has followed a similar tactic. In their election statement on the environment, Obama and Biden stressed that investing in clean energy would “create American jobs” and also talked of the importance of the market in such enterprises.⁴³

On the other hand, it has become familiar on the Right, especially in the United States, to question even the existence of climate change. During the very cold winter of 2009-2010, it was common to see signs attacking climate change, asserting that the heavy snow was proof that it did not exist.⁴⁴ The most prominent sceptics have been members of the George W. Bush administration. For example, in an interview with ABC News, then Vice-President Dick Cheney, asserted that:

I think there's an emerging consensus that we do have global warming. You can look at the data on that, and I think clearly we're in a period of warming. Where there does not appear to be a consensus, where it begins to break down, is the extent to which that's part of a normal cycle versus the extent to which it's caused by man, greenhouse gases, et cetera.⁴⁵

Cheney goes further than Lomborg, although he does not actually deny climate change, he affirms that there is no scientific consensus on the reason for climate change, strongly implying that it is just a natural phenomenon.

Although climate change sceptics exist in Britain, the position of most on the Right has been more moderate than in the US. A not uncommon position has been that expressed by Damian Green, a Conservative Member of Parliament:

Although there is still some scientific controversy about whether climate change is caused entirely by human activity or by a curious cyclical pattern that we do not yet understand, I certainly feel that the precautionary principle should apply, and that we should not take the risk with our planet of not doing something about such change.⁴⁶

Although not entirely convinced of the reasons for climate change, Green takes the entirely pragmatic view that it should be dealt with in case the scientists are right. When David Cameron became leader of the party in 2005, he began pushing his party closer to the centre and one sign of this was a new found interest in environmentalism.⁴⁷ A year later, for example, he said:

Whether it is at a global, national or local level, all of us, as leaders and decision makers, must play a part in making the green agenda central to everything we do. We can change how we get around; we can change how we build our homes; we can change our lifestyles, change our industrial processes, change our working practices.⁴⁸

Cameron even redid his party's logo, replacing the torch by an oak tree and used the slogan "Think Green, Vote Blue" in local elections in 2007. So once again we see that, while a similar debate exists in both countries, it is much more centrist and moderate in the UK.

Race

Historically British political discourse has been obsessed with class differences while American has tended to focus on race. Much of this has changed in recent years because of mass, non-white immigration to the UK and because of growing inequality in the US. As Evan Smith shows in chapter 10, in Britain discourse has revolved around three principle subjects: the debate about whether all of those seeking asylum truly deserve it; the question of Britain's often uneasy relationship with the EU which allows free movement of its citizens—leading to the arrival of large numbers of Eastern Europeans; and the issue of multiculturalism and how immigrants and their British-born children fit into mainstream society—in particular, with regard to the Muslim population. Since this is well discussed in Dr Smith's article, we shall not devote much space to it here.

The same is true for immigration to the US which is the subject of chapter 9. Multiculturalism is also a major subject in American discourse and has led to a debate on the importance of the English language. But in other areas there are substantial differences. Much of the discussion

concerns the role of the federal government: should it legalise illegal immigrants or deport them? Almost everyone calls for immigration reform but there is little agreement on what shape it should take. With the economic recession, immigration has returned to a central place in public discourse and a number of figures on the Right have emphasized it. Tom Tancredo, Republican Congressman from 1999 to 2009, has gone so far as to call for an end to all immigration. In one interview he explained his position:

We are in a clash of civilizations. I believe that is true. In order for us to be successful in this clash of civilizations, we need to know first of all who it is exactly that we are at war with. I believe we are fighting Islamo-fascism and it's good to know who you are fighting, what motivates them... The radical multiculturalism we have witnessed over the past forty years in America, I call it a cult of multiculturalism. It has, I think, been successful in destroying the ties that hold us together as Americans. There are certain ideas and ideals that should hold us together and a common language we should use in order to communicate those ideas and ideals. We are becoming a bilingual nation, which is not good from my standpoint... We're losing sight of who we are.⁴⁹

Notice the similarities here with the debate in Britain, in particular in relation to Islam. What is different here is the concern for English because of the large number of Spanish-speaking immigrants.

Unlike Britain, most of the black population in the US has been there for centuries but still suffers from significant disadvantages. What is the reason for this situation and what should be done to remedy it? As we see in chapter 4, a complex discourse has developed around the subject—ostensibly non-racial but with a veiled racial subtext. Of course, race goes against the dominant discourse of “choice”, “competition” and “responsibility”, etc., for a person is born into a race. However, as we shall see, this discourse has still been applied in the US because of a complex link made between race and class on the Right. Paul Krugman has called race the central issue of American politics.⁵⁰ A discourse emerged of white victimisation which presented whites as unfairly suffering from busing and affirmative action policies while paying taxes which went to support “freeloading” minority groups.⁵¹ Thomas and Mary Edsall argued that:

The tax revolt was a major turning point in American politics. It provided raw muscle to the formation of a conservative coalition opposed to the liberal welfare state. The division of the electorate along lines of taxpayers versus tax recipients dovetailed with racial divisions: blacks (along with the growing Hispanic population) were disproportionately the recipients of

government programs for the poor, disproportionately the beneficiaries of government-led efforts to redistribute rights and status, and the black middle and working classes were far more dependent on government programs and jobs than their white counterparts. Race melded into a conservative-driven agenda that sought to polarize the public against the private sector. The tax revolt provided conservatism with a powerful internal coherence, shaping an anti-government ethic, and firmly establishing new grounds for the dissatisfaction of white working- and middle-class voters from their traditional Democratic roots.⁵²

It is clear that, as we can see in chapter 3, in the 1960s, the Republicans, led by Nixon, attempted to attract disaffected working class whites in the South through a language with disguised racial overtones. The link made between race and taxes would play a significant role in the victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Certainly Reagan was a master of a kind of coded language with talk of a “welfare queen”:

She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000.⁵³

This was a gross exaggeration of a real case and, indeed, although Reagan repeated the story many times, he never gave any specifics on the identity of the person. But, for many people, the phrase “welfare queens” summoned up images of lazy, duplicitous blacks exploiting hard-working whites.

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 thrust race back into open debate. The manifest inadequacy of the rescue effort and of the rebuilding of New Orleans caused many to ask whether racial prejudice was not involved since a large part of the population of New Orleans was black. Jesse Jackson, for example, asked: “How can blacks be left out of the leadership [of the relief effort] and trapped into the suffering?”⁵⁴ The writer Rebecca Solnit attacked the American media's coverage of the event in the (perhaps significantly) British newspaper, *The Guardian*:

What people were willing to believe about Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans four years ago is a more serious matter. Of racism. And cliché. The story, as the mainstream media presented it at the time, was about marauding hordes of looters, rapists and murderers swarming through the streets. The descriptions were pretty clearly focused on African-Americans, the great majority left behind in the evacuation of the city (which was then two-thirds black anyway).⁵⁵

She argued that the media had focused on rumour, presenting largely imaginary criminal incidents, supposedly committed by blacks, as truth, and these rumours, in turn, “were believed so fervently that they were used to turn New Orleans into a prison city, with supplies and would-be rescuers prevented from entering and the victims prevented from evacuating.”

After the presidential campaign and victory of Barack Obama in 2008, an openly racist discourse reappeared on the Right in American politics. The taxpayer revolt reached its apogee with the Tea Party movement. Emerging in 2009, the movement protested not only tax rates but the budget deficit, the bail-outs and health care reform, among other things. The link between taxpayer revolt and race, described earlier, received substantiation when signs appeared at Tea Party rallies saying things like “Obama is a destructive unpatriotic black Muslim”, “Obama’s plan: white slavery” or images of him as a primitive African.⁵⁶ Obama’s American nationality was even questioned with “birthers” insisting that he was actually born in Kenya and, therefore, not entitled to be president.⁵⁷ An added twist has been accusations of racism made against blacks. Mark Williams of the Tea Party Express thus attacked the NAACP. Even more significant was the case in July 2010 of Shirley Sherrod, a black official of the Department of Agriculture, who lost her job after the conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart posted video extracts of a speech she gave at an NAACP event which seemed to be racist. In reality, the remarks were taken completely out of context and she was actually condemning racism. Poll after poll has shown a significant decline in racism in America (a fact illustrated by the election of Obama) and it does seem that only a small percentage of the population is engaged in this discourse.⁵⁸ But they can still have an important impact.

Class

At first glance the two nations could not be more opposed than on the subject of class. Traditionally, the British have been seen as absolutely obsessed by class divisions. John Betjeman said that class was “all-absorbing, as it was, is now and ever shall be, to us”.⁵⁹ The Americans, on the other hand, have tended to ignore class, wishfully trying to convince themselves of the American Dream and have, instead, focused more on racial and ethnic differences. But, as we shall see, there has been something of a reversal in the period under study.

As David Cannadine has shown, Thatcher was determined to remove “class”, especially class conflict, from political discourse in Britain.⁶⁰ She

avoided the word in her speeches except as a criticism of communism or socialism. As she explained at one point; “The more you talk about class—or even about “classlessness”—the more you fix the idea in people’s minds.”⁶¹ Her successor, John Major, picked up on this theme, talking of Britain as a “classless society”,⁶² and New Labour continued the rhetoric. For Blair, the class system was something from the past that needed to disappear:

One of the things really wrong with Britain is that there are still hangovers from the class system that are great brakes in our ability to be a proper, mobile, modern society. Sometimes it has taken the form in the Labour Party of inverted snobbery.⁶³

Note the last sentence, for Blair implies that the working class has as negative a role in class divisions as richer elements of society. As he puts it in a later speech, the British have been “defining ourselves as a nation not by what unites us but by what divides us”.⁶⁴ And he goes on to make clear that this division is based on ideas of class:

We have a class system unequal and antiquated, a social fabric tattered and torn, a politics where dogma drives out common sense—even an education system where one part of the nation is taught apart from the other. And if we do not change course we will have two classes of health service, two classes of state schools, two Britains—one on welfare; the other paying for it.

In a clear echo of Disraeli’s famous description of England as being two nations, the rich and the poor, Blair argues that the obsession with class is deepening divisions and threatening the future of the nation. “Class” must be recognised as a thing of the past and a classless society actively worked for in order to assure that Britain will become a thriving, modern country.

The U.S. has been frequently depicted as a classless society and certainly part of the central mythology of the nation is that of the American Dream—that anyone, no matter how poor, can rise in society. Alexis de Tocqueville first and most famously described this, saying that “the soil of America was opposed to territorial aristocracy.”⁶⁵ He went on to explain:

In America, the aristocratic element has always been feeble from its birth...We can scarcely assign to it any degree of influence on the course of affairs. The democratic principle, on the contrary, has gained so much strength by time, by events, and by legislation, as to have become not only predominant, but all-powerful... America, then, exhibits in her social state an extraordinary phenomenon. Men are there seen on a greater equality in

point of fortune and intellect, or, in other words, more equal in their strength, than in any other country of the world, or in any age of which history has preserved the remembrance.⁶⁶

Although he is writing before the concepts of “class” had developed, his use of the terms “democratic” and “equality” essentially suggest the essence of “classlessness”.

But, of course, class has always existed in the U.S., even if it has been partially hidden by ideas like the American Dream or described using words like “income” or “lifestyle”. Certainly, there was more class-oriented rhetoric in the first part of the twentieth century (notably up to World War II) than in the second half, in part because the Cold War and McCarthyism devastated left-wing America. It was also overwhelmed by discourse on race as the civil rights movement took centre stage.

Paradoxically, with the fall of communism, class has begun to rediscover a place in American discourse—particularly since the election of George W. Bush in 2000. This occurred first in academics with publications like *The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can’t Think Straight about Class* in 1990⁶⁷ and the formation of various research groups on the subject and then in the mainstream media with a series of articles on class in America in 2005 in both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Most recent analyses suggest that the U.S. now is more class-bound than Western European nations. The *Wall Street Journal* observed:

Although Americans still think of their land as a place of exceptional opportunity—in contrast to class-bound Europe—the evidence suggests otherwise. And scholars have, over the past decade, come to see America as a less mobile society than they once believed. As recently as the later 1980s, economists argued that not much advantage passed from parent to child, perhaps a little as 20 percent. By that measure, a rich man’s grandchild would have barely any edge over a poor man’s grandchild... But over the last 10 years, better data and more number-crunching have led economists and sociologists to a new consensus: The escalators of mobility move much more slowly. A substantial body of research finds that at least 45 percent of parents’ advantage in income is passed along to their children, and perhaps as much as 60 percent. With the higher estimate, it’s not only how much money your parents have that matters—even your great-grandfather’s wealth might give you a noticeable edge today.⁶⁸

The economist Tom Hertz went so far as to state that; “while few would deny that it is possible to start poor and end rich, the evidence suggests

that this feat is more difficult to accomplish in the United States than in other high income nations”.⁶⁹

Given the situation it was obvious that the arrival of a major recession would see a return of class as an important subject of political discourse. Certainly in the 2008 presidential campaign both Democrats and Republicans used it. Obama, for example, in his acceptance speech at the Democratic convention said:

In Washington, they call this the “Ownership Society,” but what it really means is that you’re on your own. Out of work? Tough luck, you’re on your own. No health care? The market will fix it. You’re on your own. Born into poverty? Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, even if you don’t have boots. You are on your own. Well, it’s time for them to own their failure. It’s time for us to change America. And that’s why I’m running for president of the United States. You see, you see, we Democrats have a very different measure of what constitutes progress in this country. We measure progress by how many people can find a job that pays the mortgage, whether you can put a little extra money away at the end of each month so you can someday watch your child receive her college diploma.⁷⁰

The word class does not appear here but there is a real undertone of it and there is a clear focus on the working class rather than on the middle class. If anything, the rhetoric has become stronger since the bailouts and formed an important part of the debate over Wall Street reform.

The Structure of This Book

The book is divided into three sections. The first, entitled “Left and Right” examines discourse inside and around the major political parties in both nations. Chapter 2, by David Seawright, reassesses the One Nation tradition within the Conservative Party in Britain. He shows the centrality of the myth even during Thatcher’s tenure as Prime Minister, and the basic consistency of Conservative discourse. The Party has long presented itself as putting the nation’s interests above those of a section of the nation or of the party and Dr. Seawright shows how this has been central to its success.

The next chapter, “The Search for a ‘New’ Rhetoric of the Left: A Look at the Strategies of the Democrats and Labour” by Lori Maguire studies the two major left-of-centre parties in the US and the UK. Both found themselves losing elections in the 1980s and their leaders came to the same conclusion: that the voters perceived the parties as having shifted too far to the left and so, if they wanted to win, they would have to move toward the centre. In America, Bill Clinton succeeded in winning the

presidency in 1992 but after a series of policy disasters, the Democrats then lost Congress two years later. Labour followed a similar strategy with less success at first—unexpectedly losing the 1992 election—but then began a long run of government from 1997 to 2010. The article not only examines their strategies and the rhetoric that reflected them, making a close comparison between the two countries, but also compares and contrasts it to actual policy decisions.

The fourth chapter, by Françoise Coste, looks at the language used in the so-called culture war in the United States and, in particular, at its exploitation by the Republican Party. A number of scholars have identified a polarisation in America that goes against class lines, being based on sharply differing opinions on primarily cultural questions. Thus, some working class (predominantly white) people vote for the Republicans because of their opposition to abortion, gun control and gay marriage, even though the policies of the Democratic Party are more to their economic interest. Dr. Coste analyses the rhetorical strategies used by groups against abortion and gay rights and also considers their relations with the Republican Party.

The second section will consider discourse relative to major political questions of the period. Chapter 5, by Ben Offerle, examines economic discourse in Great Britain. As the title says, there has been something of a “back to the future” both with a modified return to pre-World War II economic ideas in the late 1970s and a more recent recourse to Keynesianism because of the recession. He looks in detail at the relationship between policy and rhetoric under Major, Blair and Brown, and even examines discourse on the subject in the 2010 general election.

In chapter 6, Evelyne Thévenard looks at discourse on health care reform in the U.S.—which has been a major subject throughout the period but especially during Clinton’s failed attempt in the 1990s and Obama’s successful one in 2009-10. Although practical considerations like cost and quality have been important, this debate has often been extremely emotional, revealing major ideological tensions. As Dr. Thévenard shows, the debate reflects conflicts between beliefs about individual and collective responsibility, about the role of the federal government and about rights versus privileges. Fear has always been a central element in this debate.

In the following chapter, Brian Glenn examines the importance of the public/private discourse in the UK and the US. He discusses the origins of the Chicago School of economic thought and its application in both Great Britain and the United States. In particular, he focuses on discourse related to education and social security in America and shows how it has been

used, with some success, especially in education, to promote right-wing ideas.

Finally the third section, entitled “Community” will study how issues of race, immigration, religion and integration have figured in the political debate. The first of these chapters, on Northern Ireland, is in a different vein for it is written not by a scholar but by an active participant and describes his own attempts at discourse. Fr. Aidan Troy was chair of the Board of Governors at Holy Cross Girls’ School in Belfast during the traumatic events there between 2001 and 2008. He describes his own efforts to build community and establish a relationship of trust between the different groups in Ulster.

Chapter 9, by Donathan Brown, concerns immigration and multiculturalism in the United States. He looks at the movement to declare English as the official language in that country and examines the reasons presented both for and against. Dr. Brown analyses the groups who support the idea and looks at their reasoning. He also shows the link between language and identity and considers the effect of labels on those who give them and on those who receive them.

Finally Evan Smith examines discourses on immigration and race in Britain and, in particular, showing similarities between the Conservative governments of Thatcher and Major and those of New Labour. This discourse has tended to have three major strands. First, faced with a large increase in the number of those seeking refuge, a debate on so-called “bogus” asylum seekers has emerged. Second, the freedom of movement within the EU and, especially, the right of European citizens to live anywhere in the Union, has provoked a massive discussion. Finally, the permanent establishment of immigrant communities has led to much talk of multiculturalism and how these people fit into British society. Dr. Smith looks at each of these in detail, considering particularly the case of the Muslim community in Britain since 11 September 2001. Labour, it turns out, is not very different from the Conservatives on this issue—and this has been true whenever it has been in power.

Notes

¹ F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: Routledge, 2001, originally published in 1944) 220

² Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) 7-8

³ *Ibid.*, 19

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15

⁵ Margaret Thatcher, Speech at the Conservative Party Conference at Brighton, 10 October 1975 in *Let Our Children Grow Tall: Selected Speeches, 1975-77* (London: Centre for Policy Studies, 1977) 31, 35

⁶ Margaret Thatcher, Speech at the College of Europe, Bruges, 20 September 1988 in *The Revival of Britain* (London: Aurum, 1989) 262. Of course, in many ways Thatcher's governments were among the greatest centralising forces in British history, for example, by abolishing the Greater London Council.

⁷ Ronald Reagan, Acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention, 17 July 1980, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreagan1980rnc.htm> (accessed 17 July 2010)

⁸ Ronald Reagan, Speech to the Second Annual Conservative Political Action conference, 1 March 1975 http://reagan2020.us/speeches/Let_Them_Go_Their_Way.asp (accessed 17 July 2010)

⁹ Taxpayer revolt has a long history in the US and, indeed, the American Revolution, itself began as a protest against "taxation without representation". The most recent manifestation is the Tea Party movement.

¹⁰ Chris Smith, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th series, vol. 285, col. 1006, 20.11.96

¹¹ See the *Financial Times*, 21 September 1995

¹² Alan Milburn, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th series, vol. 342, col. 22, 10.1.2000

¹³ Liam Fox, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th series, vol. 242, col. 24, 10.1.2000

¹⁴ Blair, *Parliamentary Debates*, 6th series, vol. 354, col. 1259, 27.7.2000

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, col. 1260

¹⁶ Paton, "Blair and the NHS", 116. Paton also argues that there is a myth about the NHS: "That myth, comprising interrelated and unproven assumptions, is that the NHS is failing, that reform was driven by a desire for greater patient involvement, that this in turn necessitated market-like reforms to challenge 'provider capture' and that (in the Labour version) hospitals were the epicentre of elite interest which were best challenged by emphasising primary care as the 'answer'."

¹⁷ For more on this see Stephen Driver, "New Labour and Social Policy" in *Ten Years of New Labour*, edited by Matt Beech and Simon Lee (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 45-6

¹⁸ We do not have the space here to discuss higher education but once again there were great similarities in discourse with much talk about its high costs and student loans.

¹⁹ Bush, 3 August 2000. <http://www.2000gop.com/convention/speech/speechbush.html> (accessed 15 July 2010)

²⁰ *Congressional Record*, Senate, page S7766, 18 July 2006. Of course, the mainly public school teachers' unions are strongly linked to the Democratic party which also might account for some of the hostility towards the system among Republicans.

²¹ Edward Kennedy, *Congressional Record*, Senate, S4191, 3 May 2001

²² Blair, Speech at the Institute of Education, University of London, 23 June 1995, *New Britain*, 159

²³ Gordon Brown, *House of Commons Debates*, 6th series, vol.327, col. 181, 9 March 1999

²⁴ For more on this see Alan Smithers, “Education” in *The Blair Effect 2001-5* edited by Anthony Seldon and Dennis Kavanagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

²⁵ Blair, “Accepting the Challenge”, 21 July 1994, 32

²⁶ Edward Davey, *House of Commons Debates*, 25 October 2005, 6th series, vol. 438, col. 177

²⁷ Blair, Speech at the Institute of Education, *op cit.*, 164-5

²⁸ Alan Smithers, “Education Policy” in *The Blair Effect* edited by Anthony Seldon (London: Little, Brown, 2001) 412

²⁹ Because of space limitations, we have not been able to include chapters on the subject in this book so we will discuss it in more depth here.

³⁰ House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, *The Disclosure of Climate Data from the Climactic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia*, HC 387-I (31 March 2010) 52

³¹ “IPCC: Cherish It, Tweak It or Scrap It?”, *Nature*, 463 (11 February 2010) 730-32

³² Quoted in Pallab Ghosh, “Climate Messages Are ‘Off Target’”, 17 May 2007, located at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/6655449.stm> (accessed 12 July 2010)

³³ The case of the disappearing Himalayan glaciers has become notorious. The Working Group II report of the IPCC suggested that these glaciers could disappear by 2035 and this has been widely criticised as overly alarmist within the scientific community. The assertion was based on three other reports, none of which were peer reviewed by scientists and the IPCC took the unprecedented step of apologising for this claim in January 2010.

³⁴ Taken before the Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty (DCSD), that body found Lomborg guilty of serious errors, including plagiarism and fabricating data but declared him not guilty by virtue of his lack of specialisation in the subject. This verdict was overturned by a higher body mainly because of procedural mistakes by the DCSD, and Lomborg claimed vindication.

³⁵ “A Chilling View of Warming”, *Wall Street Journal*, 13 September 2008, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122126316904030487.html> (accessed 30 June 2010)

³⁶ Tony Brenton, *The Greening of Machiavelli* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994) 3

³⁷ P. Stone, *Did We Save the Earth at Stockholm?* (London: East Island Press, 1973)

³⁸ Steve Weisman, “Reagan Assailing Critics, Defends His Environmental Policies as Sound”, *New York Times*, 12 June 1983

³⁹ Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992) 269.

⁴⁰ Tony Blair, “Our Common Environment”, Speech at the Royal Society London, 27 February 1996 in Blair, *New Britain* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996) 223

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 230

⁴² “Full text: Gordon Brown’s speech on Climate Change”, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/mar/15/economy.uk> (accessed 11 July 2010)

⁴³ Barack Obama and Joe Biden, “Promoting a Healthy Environment”, 2008, <http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/issues/EnvironmentFactSheet.pdf> (accessed 11 July 2010)

⁴⁴ Which is not true. People were confusing once again weather and climate.

⁴⁵ 23 February 2007, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=2898539> (accessed 12 July 2010)

⁴⁶ Damian Green, 27 October 1999, *House of Commons Debates*, series 6, vol. 336, col. 965

⁴⁷ For more on this see Matt Beech, “New Labour and the Politics of Dominance” in *Ten Years of New Labour*, edited by Matt Beech and Simon Lee (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 10-13

⁴⁸ David Cameron, “Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change”, speech in Oslo, 21 April 2006, http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches/2006/04/Cameron_Meeting_the_challenge_of_climate_change.aspx (accessed 12 July 2010)

⁴⁹ Interview with Robert McMahon, Council on Foreign Relations, 24 July 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/11141/tancredo.html> (accessed 28 July 2010)

⁵⁰ For more on this see his book, *The Conscience of a Liberal* (New York: Norton, 2007)

⁵¹ For more on the development of this discourse see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)

⁵² Thomas & Mary Edsall. *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1991) 131

⁵³ “‘Welfare Queen’ Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign”. *New York Times*. 15 February 1976.

⁵⁴ “Jesse Jackson Launches Attack on Bush”, 3 September 2005, *Sydney Morning Herald*, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/jesse-jackson-launches-attack-on-bush/2005/09/03/1125302772060.html> (accessed 29 July 2010)

⁵⁵ Rebecca Solnit, “Four years on, Katrina remains cursed by rumour, cliché, lies and racism”, 26 August 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/aug/26/katrina-racism-us-media> (accessed 27 July 2010)

⁵⁶ The NAACP has put a number of the worst signs on YouTube. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWbmEUIQOCQ&feature=channel>

⁵⁷ A number of websites are devoted to this theme. See, for example, www.birthers.com

⁵⁸ For more on this see David O. Sears, Jim Sidanius and Lawrence Bobo, eds. *Racialized Politics: The Debate about Racism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁵⁹ John Betjeman, “Beside the Seaside” in *The Collected Poems* (London, John Murray, 4th ed., 1979) 163

⁶⁰ David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 179

⁶¹ Margaret Thatcher, “Don’t undo My Work”, *Newsweek*, 27 April 1992, located at <http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/111359> (accessed 20 July 2010)

⁶² See, for example, *Today*, 24 November 1990

⁶³ Tony Blair, *The Observer*, 2 October 1994 in *New Britain*, 45

⁶⁴ Blair, Speech to Labour Party Conference, 3 October 1995, *New Britain*, 65

⁶⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Henry reeve (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964) 19

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 31

⁶⁷ Benjamin Demott (New York: Morrow, 1990). See also Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), Michael Zweig (ed), *What’s Class Got to Do with It?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) Michael D. Yates (ed), *More Unequal: Aspects of Class in the United States* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2007) or David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991)

⁶⁸ *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2005

⁶⁹ Tom Hertz, “Understanding Mobility in America”, Center for American Progress, 26 April 2006, available in pdf version on the web by searching for Tom Hertz on Google (accessed 21 July 2010)

⁷⁰ 28 August 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/28/us/politics/28text-obama.html> (accessed 21 July 2010)

PART I:
LEFT AND RIGHT

CHAPTER TWO

THE POWER OF THE ONE NATION MYTH FOR CONSERVATIVE PARTY DISCOURSE

DAVID SEAWRIGHT

At the St. Stephen's Club in London, and with some of the parliamentary constituencies still declaring their results from the previous day's general election, David Cameron the Conservative party leader made what he termed a "big, open and comprehensive offer to the Liberal Democrats" which would involve "helping them implement key planks of their election manifesto" in a coalition government. He concluded his speech with the declaration that:

The Conservative Party has always been a party that puts the national interest first. And the best thing, the national interest thing, the best thing for Britain now is a new government that works together in that national interest, and I hope with all my heart that is something that we can achieve.¹

Of course, in the latter part of that election campaign the Conservatives had specifically warned against a hung parliament and of the deleterious consequences for UK governance from such an outcome. Indeed, just two days before the general election Cameron had emphasised that a "vote for the Liberal Democrats is not a vote for the change for the better it is a vote for change for the worse".² And, whatever the extent of benevolence and goodwill from the political commentariat towards a form of governance that had not been seen in the UK for sixty-five years, and there was much in the first few weeks of the coalition government, David Cameron found it necessary to assuage the fears and concerns of the Conservative party on the realisation that some manifesto pledges would have to be watered down if not discarded outright. "But whatever happens along the way, you can be assured that you still have a Conservative prime minister who will act in the national interest. And putting your country first is about the most important Conservative value there is."³ This capacity to "adapt" to

changing circumstances while at the same time dignifying such expedience as being in the interest of all the nation is one of the most enduring priorities of Conservative party politics. Thus, on becoming leader of the party David Cameron outlined his aims and values of a modern compassionate Conservative party which placed trust in the people: “sharing responsibility, championing freedom and supporting the institutions and culture we share as one nation. Conservatives are not ideologues. That is why in each generation we change, applying our values to new challenges.”⁴

This image of a party adapting to face the new challenges of each successive age but within the context of the institutions and culture of “One Nation” is one of the most abiding myths of the Conservative party. What at first appears as an oxymoron is found to be paradoxically central to Conservative party politics. What the Conservative opponent views as the political manoeuvres of an opportunistic and unprincipled party, are for the Conservative the necessary actions to be taken on behalf of the entire nation. The use of the term One Nation clearly matters for Conservative party politics; for well over a hundred years now the impression has been given that only the Conservative party puts “Nation” before any sectional interest, that only the Conservative party, as *the* national party, has the ability to assuage and balance the plurality of competing interests on behalf of the whole nation. Thus, the power and longevity of such a concept as “One Nation” is crucial to any understanding of the success of the Conservative party⁵. Indeed, Cameron stressed that: “above all, we think for the long term. We’ve been around for a while. The long-term is in our blood.”⁶

In examining the centrality of *One Nation* to any understanding of this “long-term” and its impact on the discourse of Conservative party politics this chapter analyses both the conceptual and empirical elements of the term “One Nation”. Thus, in the first section we trace the historical roots of such a concept and introduce the now almost as “mythical” backbench group of MPs which formed under the label of One Nation in 1950 and of which David Cameron is a member. And, in section two, cognisant of David Cameron’s claim above that “Conservatives are not ideologues”, we see that the party is more of a doctrinal party than is commonly thought and that an “ethos” of One Nation not only facilitates such “necessary adaptation to change” but helps screen the level of ideological tension and diversity, indeed even conflict, within the party due to the “dual nature” of its ideology. In section three we introduce the concept of *political recrudescence*: to show that the dual nature of Conservatism and the resultant tension from such doctrinal positions need not be detrimental to

Conservative party politics. Indeed, it is argued that this “tension” is the essence of Conservative party success but in section four we see that it can malfunction, usually spectacularly when it does, with a commensurate adverse effect on electoral performance which was clearly evident in the performance at the polls in the late 1990s and into the first decade of the twenty first century. However, with David Cameron having reached the “top of the greasy pole” in 2010 the concluding section examines the present party discourse in One Nation terms. But, we begin with an enquiry into the historical roots of the term itself.

The Birth of the Myth Sustained in Bodily Form

Because the party “has been around for a while”, Conservatives have a certain predilection for establishing for themselves a line of party ancestry, hardly surprising one might think in a party which eulogises a “partnership” between “those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born”.⁷ One of the foremost of those ancestral lines is that of Disraeli, “it has been the habit of Conservatives to go to Disraeli as to a sacred flame.”⁸ And Disraeli is commonly held to be the source of the One Nation theme⁹. He incorporated the rhetorical flourishes of the Young England movement into his romantic novels in the first half of the nineteenth century and later in his famous Manchester and Crystal Palace speeches of April and June 1872 respectively. In these works Disraeli outlined his trio of objectives which would enable the party to transcend the divisive sectional interests in society by appealing to the electorate as *the* party of the nation.

Gentlemen, the Tory party, unless it is a national party, is nothing. It is not a confederacy of nobles, it is not a democratic multitude; it is party formed from all the numerous classes in the realm—classes alike and equal before the law, but whose different conditions and different aims give vigour and variety to our national life¹⁰.

In a conjunction between the defence of established institutions and a eulogy to the British Empire, Disraeli espoused as his third great object “the elevation of the condition of the people”.¹¹ But, crucially, Disraeli offers an immediate qualifying sentence, “[t]he great problem is to be able to achieve such results without violating those principles of economic truth upon which the prosperity of States depends.”¹² In these two sentences then we find an encapsulation and an anticipation of the post war debates concerning affordable and sustainable social services. These were of course predicated upon a much wider and long lasting parallel

debate within the party between protagonists of an extended state and of a limited state; on the best way to actually achieve that goal of elevating the condition of the people. Indeed, in the famous and eponymous booklet published in 1950, the One Nation Group was careful to incorporate Disraeli's warning on "economic truth".

Socialists believe that the State should provide an average standard. We believe that it should provide a minimum standard, above which people should be free to rise as far as their industry, their thrift, their ability or genius may take them. ... Our economic position does not, and will not for many years, allow us ... to implement in full the social legislation that has been passed since 1944. Therefore, Conservative policy insists on administrative efficiency in the social services, and on the clear recognition of priorities.¹³

And importantly the One Nation Group in its 1992 pamphlet similarly stressed that: "Economic rectitude is the enabler, not the enemy, of social welfare".¹⁴ But, economic reality was never allowed to get in the way of the rhetorical benefits of myth and, for Southgate, Disraeli in his 1845 novel *Sybil*, subtitled the two nations, "coined a phrase that will live for ever and was immediately arresting" when describing the early nineteenth century relations between the rich and the poor: "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy...".¹⁵ The solution of course lay with "the Young England conviction that there could be an alliance between the 'nobs and snobs'".¹⁶ This symbolic union takes place in *Sybil* in the marriage of the aristocratic young hero with the beautiful but penniless heroine.¹⁷ In reality then Disraeli never used the term One Nation (however much he echoed the romantic sentiments of Young England). Nevertheless, through the work of Disraeli, both in his novels of the early nineteenth century and in the famous speeches of the last quarter of that century, we have sketched out for us an outline of the One Nation myth but the first Conservative to exploit the mythical term in any explicit and systematic contemporary way was Stanley Baldwin when appealing for unity, as opposed to the sectional interests of Labour, in the intemperate political climate of the 1920s and 1930s:

the sense that we stand for the union of those two nations of which Disraeli spoke two generations ago; union among our own people to make one nation of our own people at home which, if secured, nothing else matters in the world.¹⁸

This then was the "ancestral mythology" which the One Nation group of MPs utilised in their first pamphlet in 1950 when they traced a lineage

from Disraeli through to Winston Churchill of Conservatives who displayed a concern with a One Nation approach to social problems¹⁹. And, the power of such a conceptual myth is matched by the mythical legacy of that group of MPs who combined in 1950 and became known collectively as One Nation and have been the most auspicious, well known and abiding of the many Conservative ginger-groups since the war. Indeed, as we shall see, as late as 1996 the Group, while irritated at the quite puerile “definitions” of One Nation Conservatism from political enemies and ill intentioned friends alike, were cognisant of its “powerful brand-name attractions which PR-conscious politicians want to grab”.²⁰ But such definitions of One Nation Conservatism are in reality fuelled by the “ideological divergence” in the Conservative party; mirrored within the One Nation Group’s membership itself. From its outset in 1950 the group’s membership has exhibited the full range of the Conservative ideological continuum; for example, in the 1950s we had limited state Conservatives like Angus Maude and Enoch Powell in contrast to those who favoured extended state solutions such as Cuthbert Alport and Iain Macleod; and later in the 1960s and 1970s there was Keith Joseph in comparison to Ian Gilmour, or from the 1980s and 1990s onwards those such as David Heathcoat-Amory or David Willetts relative to Ken Clarke, respectively. In the next section below we see the importance of the One Nation myth as a conceptual canopy for sheltering those diverse strands of Conservative thought.

The Ideological “Ethos” of One Nation

In an influential study of the Labour party in 1979, Drucker utilised a “two-dimensional” approach of “doctrine and ethos” to examine its ideology.²¹ By doctrine, he effectively meant the policy programme of Labour. He claimed that his second dimension, ethos, was an incorporation of sets of values which had sprung from the experiences of the British working class, and which had an effect on all the internal and external relationships of the Labour party. Of course, this ethos sprang partly from Labour’s relationship with the trade unions and when Drucker was writing his thesis he confidently predicted a problem for the Conservative party with any future claim to be “the party of the whole nation”, as the Conservatives could simply not adjust to the new corporatist relationship that the trade unions had established with the Labour government after the 1974 General Elections; and, for Drucker, this problem was exacerbated by the “middle class ethos of the Conservative party”.²² But Drucker, not only misjudged completely the

trades union issue in British politics but the Conservatives' ability to exploit it as a party challenging egregious sectional interests on behalf of the whole nation. And it certainly was not a middle class ethos that allowed for such an eventuality. Although the Labour party—pre-New Labour—may have gloried in a working class epithet, the Conservatives would simply not countenance any official association with 'middle class' groups or any representation with such a label to go unchallenged. Indeed, even in a period which saw the rise of middle class pressure groups—which were formed to challenge what they considered to be the harmful consequences of socialist policies—the Conservative party itself was extremely careful not to be identified with any one section of the community. Thus, although the Conservative party was fully cognisant of the aims of such groups, such as the Middle Class Union or the Middle Class Alliance, it was extremely circumspect in its day-to-day dealings with them, with such circumspection emanating from what was considered to be the true ethos of the Conservative party, namely *One Nation*²³.

As a party claiming an ability to represent the entire British nation, regardless of class or status; "ideology", with its negative connotations, is not a term to be gainfully employed by Conservatives in their political discourse. With its conceptual etymological roots found in the era of Napoleonic dictatorial repression and with Marx and Engels utilising its pejorative meaning in emphasising social class consciousness;²⁴ not surprisingly, ideology was to be resolutely avoided in favour of concepts with greater electoral appeal. Ideally, such concepts would resonate with this putative empathy of a party in tune with the values of the British people. Thus, Conservatives much preferred comforting homely terms, such as "tradition",²⁵ not only to help express this One Nation mindset but to aid a process of de-politicisation. Indeed, politics itself was treated in a similar fashion to ideology. It was not by choice that Conservatives were engaged in this shabby realm: "[t]he man who puts politics first is not fit to be called a civilised being, let alone a Christian."²⁶ Cameron employed a similar strategy in his goal to "eliminate the negative" and detoxify the Conservative brand by speaking of "the planet first, politics second";²⁷ the objective being of course to attenuate the electoral antipathy towards the party that had built up throughout the 1990s by once again utilising this perception of being above the political fray, acting on behalf of the whole nation.

Thus, however much the desire of Drucker to create a contrast that had the Conservatives as sectional and unrepresentative; the party itself eschewed any notion of "class" or class interest and it did this with an

express wish to utilise an ethos which it claimed incorporated sets of values that sprang from the tradition and experiences of the British people. And Gamble has correctly identified the periods of electoral success for the party with the times when the party's policy reflected this politics of the *Conservative Nation*.²⁸ However, although the discourse of the One Nation Group in the 1990s echoed this sentiment of reflecting the tradition and values of the British electorate there is no doubt that the Group was acutely aware of the breakdown in managing the tensions and ideological conflicts within the party. And of course of the rise of New Labour and its counter claim to being the party of a modernised nation more in tune with the values of the British electorate. While making the claim that One Nation thinking had little to do with being "left" or "right" or of being located at one ideological pole or another, the Group stated:

It has been claimed that the ideals and traditions of One Nation Conservatism no longer lie in the mainstream of Tory Party thinking.

The pages which follow totally refute, contradict and destroy this notion. They show that the One Nation view of society—resting on individual rights and duties and on the moral obligations of family life—remains, as it has done all along, the founding concept on which modern Toryism rests.

Skilled propaganda from critics and ill-intentioned "friends" has sought to portray a different picture of today's Conservative Party—a parodied cameo of grasping individuals hell-bent on selfish gain. But at no time has the Tory emphasis on duty towards others, on family values or on civic responsibility changed.²⁹

Thus, by the 1990s and after nearly eighteen years in power, the One Nation Group was reduced to criticising the various party factions which wanted to place the PR attractive slogan of One Nation on their banners and thought it especially ridiculous that the "state driven, we know best" social engineers of the Labour party laid claim to the mantle of One Nation and "why attempts either to link One Nation to some trendy interventionist vision, or, *per contra*, to brand One Nation Tories as a bunch of wets who want a federal Europe, are so contemptible".³⁰ But, there was no doubt that there were those within the One Nation Group itself, let alone within the party *per se*, that did have more of an interventionist vision and were a lot less hostile to the notion of a federal Europe. This "trendy interventionism" was merely one half of the "dual nature" of Conservatism and this dual nature of the party reflected the fact that it contained: "within itself, perfectly preserved and visible like the contents of archaeological strata, specimens from all its historical stages and all its acquisitions from the Liberals".³¹ Maude, in this emphasis upon

the party's palaeontology, emphasised the historical deposits of political thought in the party, layers that ranged from *laissez-faire* competition to state collectivism, with a few by no means useless eccentrics as well. In his magisterial work, Greenleaf referred to this as "the twin inheritance".³² Indeed, Eccleshall in his perceptive analysis of the ideology of the Conservative party places a similar emphasis on the complexity and importance of this dual character. He states:

There have been two conservative versions of this heroic tale of the enduring virtues of the people of this land of hope and glory. ... Each version has enabled conservatives to profess membership of a "national" party because of its peculiar capacity to preserve or restore features of this great inheritance.³³

But it should be noted that individual responsibility, competitive markets, enterprise, opportunity, a low tax economy and the notion of incentives have greater prominence in Conservative texts and in a majority of the One Nation pamphlets than any central role for government and "planning".³⁴ But, tension over the best "One Nation" way to advance opportunities for all in society—by free competitive markets or by judicious governmental direction to wealth creation—is as we have seen an enduring aspect of Conservative ideology and such tension is found to be a perpetual phenomenon in any analysis of the party's history. So in the following section a closer examination of the enduring state of this conflict and tension is undertaken.

"Political Recrudescence" and the Conservative Party

There is little wonder that this "dual nature" or "twin inheritance" would beget tension, and as a result conflict and tension are perpetually present in the party debates over the composition of the policy platforms that will be presented to the electorate, with a goal of addressing those new challenges that are needed for each generation. As Critchley has pointed out in the past:

The true picture is very different; the Tories are a coalition in perpetual conflict, the direction of its progress the subject of continual debate, the standing and regard for its leadership a matter of daily measurement. We have been known not only to raise our voices but also to throw plates. ... But we have never believed it necessary to love one another, in order to dislike the other side.³⁵

Of course, it is the creative aspect of this conflict and tension that is emphasised in Conservative texts, it is the catalyst that aids that “generational change” when such change is needed. Thus, David Willetts by the early 1990s believed:

This is how Conservatives should argue with each other—about the interpretation of their own tradition. It is essential if the Tory party is to carry on being true to itself, that it should permanently engage in a debate about its own history. Otherwise, it will indeed be unable to answer what Disraeli in *Coningsby* called “the awkward question” of “what will you conserve?”³⁶

These “strains and stresses”, in the party, have been a part of its political culture since its inception. Indeed, Geoffrey Butler emphasised the “double nature” of the doctrine of Bolingbroke, that “it was at once a destructive and constructive creed”³⁷. Destructive in that it taught the Tories that they must give up on hopeless ideals and lost causes and to construct an alternative ideal of unity in “one national or Country Party” that contained “precious ideas” in what may be termed “The Constitution”. Thus, this ability for self renewal is part of the party’s “DNA”; it is a “reconstruction” that is “a life giving” and “revivifying marrow to Tory doctrine”.³⁸ This *political recrudescence* is as old as the party itself and such a concept neatly encapsulates the incorporation of both the destructive and constructive aspects of Conservative doctrine. Recrudescence is the quality or state of things “breaking out afresh (usually regarded in terms of disease or indeed of calumny or malignity)” but in its contemporary “transferred sense” we find that it is “a revival or rediscovery of something regarded as good or valuable”.³⁹ And, both these aspects of political recrudescence are present in Conservative party politics but it is only when the party offers a settled policy platform, emanating from its doctrinal debates, that we find electoral success based on this ability to renew itself within an ethos of One Nation. Political recrudescence is therefore perpetually present in the groups and committees that make up the Conservative parliamentary party and their debate is a prerequisite of this ability for self-renewal or of “breaking out afresh”.

But, it is because this internal party debate is couched in terms of One Nation that periodically the party’s “organic living body” may suffer from that “diseased element” inherent within political recrudescence. When issues arise that are viewed as so pivotal that the very essence of Britain’s place in the world is questioned, vis-à-vis the political economic path it must take, then debate can become feverish and unhealthy leading to a collective breakdown in that necessary renewal process. Very simply,

when the mass electorate cannot discern just what the politics of the Conservative Nation are, then it is impossible to ensure that this politics of the nation will be coterminous with the politics of the state.⁴⁰ And, this breakdown was clear in the Corn Laws debate of the 1840s, that of Tariff Reform in the early part of the twentieth century and over the issue of Europe; where protagonists on each side would appeal to a One Nation ethos in a strident defence of their own doctrinal position, with a consequent debilitating effect on the necessary renewal mechanism for electoral success. A very good example of such a debilitating period is found recently over the issue of Europe in the 1990s but whose “malign influence” eventually permeated the whole gamut of internal policy, which encroached on the necessary party mechanisms that could have led to renewal. One has only to read the book, *Tory Wars*,⁴¹ to understand the extent to which this “malign calumny” can have such a debilitating effect; even within what may be termed a more ideologically cohesive “No Turning Back” group of Conservative MPs. Thus, what is necessary for the party’s success is at the same time so potentially dangerous, particularly if the party forgets to dislike the other side more than its own.

The dual nature of the party’s ideology then, can facilitate that essential aspect of being “permanently engaged in a debate about its own history” and in “the interpretation of their own tradition”; which in turn can be conducive to a successful outcome in political recrudescence terms. Such contingency is rooted in Conservative ideology, with this stress on experience over ideational ends epitomised in the Harold Macmillan maxim of “events dear boy, events”. Indeed, for Freedman, the morphology of Conservatism relegated the individualist-collectivist divide to contingent status and it is because of this that the party is erroneously labelled “opportunistic” but consistency lies in the morphology as a whole, as this allows for a constant process of doctrinal trial and error.⁴² The *modus vivendi* of the party therefore, particularly in Parliament, is resonant of Oakshott’s use of the Schopenhauer porcupine metaphor which the Conservative philosopher used to explain civil association but which neatly describes the associative relationship that is the Conservative parliamentary party.

There was once, so Schopenhauer tells us, a colony of porcupines. They were wont to huddle together on a cold winter’s day and, thus wrapped in communal warmth, escape being frozen. But, plagued with the pricks of each other’s quills, they drew apart. And every time the desire for warmth brought them together again, the same calamity overtook them. Thus, they remained, distracted between two misfortunes, able neither to tolerate nor to do without one another, until they discovered that when they stood at a

certain distance from one another they could both delight in one another's individuality and enjoy one another's company. They did not attribute any metaphysical significance to this distance, nor did they imagine it to be an independent source of happiness, like finding a friend. They recognized it to be a relationship in terms not of substantive enjoyments but of contingent considerabilities that they must determine for themselves.⁴³

Oakeshott stresses this aspect of tradition, that its nature is "to tolerate and unite an internal variety, not insisting upon conformity to a single character, and because, further, it has the ability to change without losing its identity".⁴⁴ This is why tradition, and the ability to interpret these "contingent considerabilities" within their own tradition, is such an important facet of the ideological approach of the Conservative party.

When "Malign Calumny" jeopardises the One Nation ethos

As noted above, the One Nation Group was acutely aware of the breakdown in managing the tensions and ideological conflicts within the party; throughout the 1990s and beyond. Voices may have been raised and plates thrown, in Crichtley's terminology⁴⁵, but unfortunately for the Conservatives some within the party forgot to dislike the other side more than their own, jeopardising the tradition to tolerate and unite an internal variety and with it the ethos of One Nation which facilitates that ability for change and self-renewal for the party. Moreover, these ideological conflicts were the culmination of the intense and strident debates of the 1970s and 1980s. The required relationship of "contingent considerabilities" in the parliamentary party was put under severe strain in this period as groups from both sides of the party's ideological continuum refused to acknowledge that certain possibilities could actually be worthy of consideration. It was in this period that the distorted and pervasive propagation of One Nation as a group exclusively on the left of the party was allowed to prevail. It became the received wisdom to portray "One Nation" in terms of an extended state approach to wealth creation in sharp contrast to the limited state policies pursued by neo-liberal Conservative Ministers in the Thatcher era; many of whom, ironically, had belonged to the One Nation group.

A curious coded language came to be used by Conservative critics including some inside the Cabinet. If a minister talked about "one nation" and praised Disraeli, it was a safe assumption that he was attacking Mrs Thatcher and Sir Geoffrey Howe.⁴⁶

Thus, from the late 1970s, with the help of what at best can only be described as lazy journalism, contemporary commentators utilized One Nation as a coded term to denote opposition to Thatcherism⁴⁷. Again, as noted above, by 1996 the One Nation Group thought it necessary to expose the fallacy in such “coded criticism” and by extension the idea that the previous seventeen years of Conservative party policy was somehow not part of the Conservative tradition. However, by the very fact that the media could exploit such an eloquent term to describe the internal opposition to Thatcher’s policies, the scene was set for those controversial and provocative headlines that “sell news”. Not only could the age old complex and problematic debate within the party over the efficacy of state intervention be simplified but as a bonus a compelling concept could be applied to show putative government insensitivity on unemployment and lack of sympathy with the plight of the poor. Such wilful distortion and hegemonic exploitation of the One Nation term was to become particularly evident in the critique by Ian Gilmour. Of course, the extended state tradition was, and is, a constituent part of the “dual nature” of Conservative party ideology; which has a long and distinguished history of contributing to that necessary process of “party renewal”. But crude and sometimes personal attacks by “ill-intentioned friends”, that implied a lack of concern from Conservative colleagues over the welfare of the whole nation, was to merely discredit the extended state position within the party for some considerable period of time.

The emphasis upon the individual—both in moral and economic terms—has been a long standing core element of Conservatism and it was an important part of the party’s political armoury in the fight against socialism post war. But, in echoing the thoughts of the One Nation group in 1996, it is clear that “political enemies and ill intentioned friends alike”⁴⁸ sought a contemporary manipulation and distortion of its use in an attempt to demonstrate that society had been sacrificed on a New Right alter of individualism; to which Mrs Thatcher gave slavish obeisance. Such distortion is evident in the use of Mrs Thatcher’s now notorious remark, but quoted grossly out of context, that: “There is no such thing as society.” However, in reality Mrs Thatcher was only expressing a view of society, as an abstract concept, that had been emphasized so many times in the past by other Conservatives but had not previously, for whatever reason, been appreciated as such.⁴⁹ The effectiveness of this distortion is found in the extent to which the party, in the early part of Cameron’s leadership, took every opportunity to declare that “there is such a thing as society, it’s just not the same thing as the state.”⁵⁰ But, in the actual

interview Mrs Thatcher merely stresses the Conservative core elements of individual responsibility and that of duties vis-à-vis rights:

There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then also to help look after our neighbour and life is a reciprocal business and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations, because there is no such thing as an entitlement unless someone has first met an obligation ... There is no such thing as society. There is living tapestry of men and women and people and the beauty of that tapestry and the quality of our lives will depend upon how much each of us is prepared to take responsibility for ourselves and each of us prepared to turn round and help by our own efforts those who are unfortunate.⁵¹

Of course, in the mid to late 1970s there was criticism from Keith Joseph and others that not only vigorously assailed the policies of the then Labour government but of past Conservative administrations as well. In particular, in the period between the two general elections of 1974, Joseph delivered a series of provocative *mea culpa* speeches which effectively denounced previous Conservative party policy. He believed that such policy, with which many Conservatives like himself must take responsibility, had debilitated economic life and society for over thirty years; through the socialistic fashions that *every* post war government had followed and which had led to a “present nightmare” where governments thought it impractical to reverse the accumulating detritus of socialism. Indeed, in 1975 he made the now famous announcement of his “conversion” to Conservatism, as he had not previously understood the essential aspects of its nature.⁵² Notwithstanding this claim for conversion, there was far more consistency to Joseph’s views, throughout the post war years, than such a claim would imply. For example, Ben Pimlott, believed that few ideological strands had been so consistent as the limited state strand of Conservatism, for almost a quarter of a century before Mrs Thatcher came to power⁵³. But no doubt such a claim from Joseph was made more with an eye to newspaper column inches and to the utilization of the powerful theme of “change” in electoral appeals⁵⁴. However, crucially, the unintended consequence of such a strategy was to acquiesce in the left’s successful hegemonic exploitation of the “One Nation” term. Mrs Thatcher may well have stressed her “one nationer” status, with particular comparison to the claims of the Labour party,⁵⁵ but in their eagerness to appear radical in those electoral appeals and to distance themselves from a putative consensus period a number of the Thatcherites were to be just as culpable, as those on the left of the party, for the long

term damage to that ideological canopy so essential for self renewal—the ethos that is *One Nation*.

In fact, while criticising the stridency of Mrs Thatcher’s approach to political discourse and that of other neo-liberals like Norman Tebbit, Lord David Howell, the One Nation Group’s chairman of the 1990s, portrayed Ian Gilmour as the paternalist rich aristocrat who wanted to give the workers bread and who was right out on the other wing of the party; and that such strident approaches from both sides were making it “harder and harder to create a feeling of unity as people started to get cross with one another”.⁵⁶ Indeed, in the very year that the One Nation group expressed their incredulity at New Labour’s “especially ridiculous” claim to be the party of One Nation, Gilmour believed: “that both Tony Blair’s New Labour and the Liberal Democrats also show signs of being closer to One Nation Toryism than does Major’s government”.⁵⁷ Such views illustrate just how far some on the left of the party, in the 1980s and 1990s, were to move away from mainstream Conservative discourse before more thoughtful Conservatives from the party’s left wing, such as Alistair Burt and Damian Green, would once again contribute seriously to that creative tension so necessary for self-renewal. Thus, it is again members of the One Nation Group, from both the limited and extended state wings of the Conservative continuum, who are involved in that necessary process of self-renewal⁵⁸; and with this in mind, in the final section below David Cameron’s ability to interpret such “considerable change” and his utilisation of a One Nation discourse since becoming the party leader in late 2005 is examined.

Back to a Responsible “Big” Society with David Cameron

In effect then, the late 1990s could not be remotely considered a fruitful period for Conservative political discourse. Indeed, to reiterate, the One Nation Group thought it incumbent upon them to defend the image of the party, in the Thatcher and John Major years, against what they termed “a parodied cameo of grasping individuals hell-bent on selfish gain”.⁵⁹ But, however much the Group thought this a caricature of its, and the party’s, position, in reality this was an extremely effective electoral weapon which the “New” Labour party successfully exploited in their goal to change the climate of opinion. And it was just such an anti-Conservative zeitgeist that three successive leaders of the party had to face. In William Hague’s formative period he strived to create a theme of “Renewing One Nation” but quickly felt driven to a core vote strategy utilising negative imagery in speeches that portrayed the dangers for

Britain as a “foreign land”; a strategy that was to be found rather wanting at the 2001 General Election. A similar trajectory in political discourse was developed under Michael Howard but again concluding with a core vote message on the dangers of Europe and immigration which did not bring success at the 2005 Election either⁶⁰. Sandwiched between was the leadership of Iain Duncan Smith (IDS). He was to develop a theme of Social Justice for the Conservative party but in such a febrile atmosphere as that found in the parliamentary party at the time—where a calamitous scene was being played out with MPs drawing apart plagued by the pricks of each other’s quills—he was to be eventually “pole axed” before he could take such a message to the country. But such thinking was not lost to the party and through his *Centre For Social Justice* and his chairing of the party’s Social Justice policy group an investigation was undertaken on how social justice could be part of an intellectual renewal within the Conservative party⁶¹. And, after the 2010 general election IDS was appointed as Work and Pensions Minister where part of his brief was to mend what David Cameron termed the “broken society”.

But, allied to that problematic perception of grasping individuals hell bent on selfish gain, the party faced a concomitant issue over the existential question of “society” itself. And as we saw above this led directly from Mrs Thatcher’s assertion that: “There is no such thing as society.” To reiterate, however much she was merely expressing the Conservative empirical caveat towards the facile acceptance of abstract concepts and emphasising the Conservative belief in obligations as well as, or before, entitlements; undoubtedly such discourse resonated with that anti-Conservative zeitgeist. But, the effectiveness of such distortion of Conservative discourse is found in the extent to which the party, in the early part of Cameron’s leadership, took every opportunity to declare that “there is such a thing as society, it’s just not the same thing as the state.”⁶² Indeed, Bale correctly identifies this as “an outright lift from the IDS days”.⁶³ Nevertheless, Cameron began to outline a vision for a modern manifesto for a “responsible society” and this vision was to be based on building and strengthening the institutions that encourage social responsibility, such as the family, and it was meant to neatly invert such a critique so that Labour were on the receiving end of the indictment:

The left have always argued that without state control we will become selfish individualists. After ten years in power, Gordon Brown still blames our social problems on Margaret Thatcher’s record of rolling back the state. But surely what the last ten years has conclusively proved is that rolling forward the state is not the answer. ... We are witnessing a decline in social responsibility—caused in large part by the state taking more and

more responsibility away from people. Amazingly, after ten years of a Labour government that was supposed to bring the country together, we are in fact further down the road towards a “no such thing as society” Britain. Not because of selfish individualism, but because of state interventionism.⁶⁴

However, it is important to note that such ideas were not exclusively developed in “the IDS days” as David Cameron’s conceptual analysis, as well as his political discourse, is remarkably similar to that found half a century earlier in the One Nation Group, particularly in the 1959 publication entitled: *The Responsible Society*⁶⁵. Thus, party discourse from both eras places strong emphasis upon: restoring the individual’s share of initiative while reversing the trend towards State domination; the role of the family as an institutional little platoon that promotes good behaviour and instils the right values and moral obligations; the great tradition of and the importance attached to a voluntary sector which is associated with the Hayekian idea of the third sector and which is now at the heart of the party’s plans for social justice in the twenty-first century:

Labour think that social justice principally means equality, achieved and guaranteed by government. We think it means community, built and maintained by people themselves. ... I want to show that the principles of the free market are not incompatible with the principles of voluntarism and social action which we associate with the third sector.⁶⁶

During the 2010 General Election the party developed these ideas into what was termed “The Big Society”, where social enterprises, charities and voluntary groups would provide personalised public services to some of the most disadvantaged people that state bodies had typically failed. And such discourse was not only to be seen as the party’s positive alternative to Labour’s failed big government approach but was to be viewed as consistently informing the policy programme of the coalition government⁶⁷. But, Cameron is also no less aware of that “duality” to Conservative party ideology, and by extension its discourse, and the consequent potential for manoeuvrability that this can give him on the Conservative party continuum. Just one example of this was to be found in his appeal to attract Liberal Democrat voters, where he described himself as a “liberal Conservative”. He declared that his scepticism of the state led to his strongly held belief in the freedom of the individual pursuing their own happiness with minimum interference from government, while emphasis is placed upon continuity and belonging which is embedded in the country’s institutions and that this historical understanding between

past, present and future generations brings people together to play an active part in their community through social responsibility.⁶⁸

Gladstone, who reduced the tax burden and promoted the freedom of religious conscience. And Disraeli, who legalised trade unions and empowered local government to organise civic action. Liberalism and Conservatism—like Gladstone and Disraeli—are often in conflict. But at a deeper level they depend on each other. ... On many of the key issues, it is this balance which we need—not state control, but greater freedom and greater social responsibility⁶⁹.

In this respect David Cameron and his responsible or “big” society is no different from earlier forms of Conservative discourse but undoubtedly Cameron is endeavouring to construct a One Nation strategy, an ethos that places the party above the political fray with the perception that the party is working on behalf of the nation as a whole; stressing the idea that it is once again putting the national interest before party interest in the form of a coalition government; after all “putting your country first is about the most important Conservative value there is.”⁷⁰ However, it remains to be seen if such an “experiment” as that of coalition government will last and if so how the party will “adapt” to such “change”? Will it be an exercise in “dishing the Whigs”, as in the time of Disraeli, or in “party palaeontology” terms will it be another acquisition from the “Liberals” augmenting that archaeological strata that makes Conservative party discourse so rich but so problematic? We shall see.

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Notes

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- ¹ David Cameron speech entitled "National interest first", 7 May 2010. All speeches used in this chapter can be accessed at <http://www.conservatives.com/News/Speeches.aspx> (accessed 20 July 2010)
- ² David Cameron speech entitled "Vote Conservative for guaranteed change on Friday", 4 May 2010.
- ³ David Cameron, "Yes, we've ditched some policies but I'm still a Tory PM", *The Daily Mail*, 21 May 2010.
- ⁴ Conservative Party, *Built to Last*. (London: Conservative Party, 2006)
- ⁵ See, D. Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*. (New York: Continuum, 2010) for a fuller exposition of such an argument.
- ⁶ David Cameron speech to Conservative party rally in London, 28 February 2006.
- ⁷ E. Burke, *Reflections On The Revolution in France*. (London: Penguin Books, 1986 edition) 194-195.
- ⁸ D. Southgate, "The defence of Land and Labour" in N. Gash, et al (eds), *The Conservatives: A History from their Origins to 1965*. (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1977) 125.
- ⁹ For a contemporary example of such usage see: S. Fielding, "A New Politics?" in P. Dunleavy, et al (eds), *Developments in British Politics 6*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) 15.
- ¹⁰ M. A. Keibel, *Selected Speeches of the late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882) 524.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*, 531.
- ¹² *Ibid*.
- ¹³ I. Macleod and A. Maude, *One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems*. (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1950) 9.
- ¹⁴ One Nation Group *One Nation 2000*. (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1992) 9.
- ¹⁵ D. Southgate, "The defence of Land and Labour", op. cit., 123 and Disraeli, B. *Sybil Or The Two Nations*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980) 96.
- ¹⁶ R. Faber, *Young England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987) 257.

¹⁷ However, the novel ends with what may be termed a “Cinderella turn” when Sybil is found to be of aristocratic blood, no doubt the source of her noble mien. Interestingly, in Disraeli’s previous 1844 novel *Coningsby*, the symbolic union is one between the bourgeois mill owner and the aristocracy.

¹⁸ S. Baldwin, *On England*. (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1926) 82.

¹⁹ I. Macleod, and A. Maude, *One Nation: A Tory Approach to Social Problems*. Op cit.

²⁰ One Nation Group, *One Nation at the Heart of the Future*. (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1996) 7.

²¹ H. M. Drucker, *Doctrine and Ethos in the Labour Party*. 1979.

²² *Ibid*, see 8-11 and 116-120.

²³ D. Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*. Op cit.

²⁴ See R. Nisbet, *Conservatism*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986)

²⁵ Reflected in such famous texts as: G. G. Butler, *The Tory Tradition*. (London: John Murray, 1914) and J. R. White, *The Conservative Tradition*. (London: Nicholas Kaye, 1950)

²⁶ Q. Hogg, *The Case For Conservatism*. (London: Penguin, 1947) 11.

²⁷ David Cameron, “The planet first, politics second”, in *The Independent on Sunday*, 3 September 2006.

²⁸ A. Gamble, *The Conservative Nation*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974) 7-8.

²⁹ One Nation Group, *One Nation at the Heart of the Future*, (1996) 5.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

³¹ A. Maude, “The Conservative Crisis I: Party Palaeontology”, *The Spectator*, March 15, 1963),319.

³² W. H. Greenleaf, *The British Political Tradition, Vol. I-III*. (London: Routledge, 1983)

³³ R. Eccleshall, “The doing of conservatism” in M. Freeden, (ed), *Reassessing Political Ideologies*. (London: Routledge, 2001)73.

³⁴ See, D. Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*, op cit, chapter three passim.

³⁵ J. Critchley, “Strains and Stresses in the Conservative Party”, *Political Quarterly*, 44, (1973) 401 & 402.

³⁶ D. Willetts, *Modern Conservatism*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1992) 4.

³⁷ G. G. Butler, *The Tory Tradition*, op.cit, 23-29.

³⁸ *Ibid*., 27.

³⁹ See Oxford English Dictionary on line, <http://dictionary.oed.com>.

⁴⁰ A. Gamble, *The Conservative Nation*. Op cit.

⁴¹ S. Walters, *Tory Wars: Conservatives In Crisis*. (London: Politicos, 2001)

⁴² M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) 349, 382 & 383.

⁴³ M. Oakeshott, “Talking Politics” in *Rationalism in politics and other essays*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991) 460-461.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*., 227.

⁴⁵ J. Critchley, "Strains and Stresses in the Conservative Party", *Political Quarterly*, op cit.

⁴⁶ R. Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Thatcher*. (London: Fontana, 1985) 346.

⁴⁷ For example, see J. Cole, *As It Seemed To Me*. (St Ives: Phoenix, 1996) 209 and 251. On page 209, he equates One Nation with Ian Gilmour and "the wets" and on page 251 he identifies Francis Pym as "One Nation" and makes an explicit contrast with him and John Nott who was more "Thatcherite than Thatcher" but John Nott was a member of One Nation for well over a decade before Francis Pym.

⁴⁸ One Nation Group, *One Nation at the Heart of the Future*, (1996) 7.

⁴⁹ For example in the late 1940s we have: "The Conservative conception of a living organic national unity based upon the variety of qualities and activities of all individuals in it, both as individuals and through the myriad groups and organisations to which they belong, gives Society no existence separate from, or superior to, the sum of its members"; D. Clarke, *The Conservative Faith in a Modern Age*. (London: Conservative Political Centre, 1947) 20. Indeed, RAB Butler similarly made the point in April 1961 that: 'the State must always remember that it is dealing with individuals and not with a collective abstraction', in an article, "The Role of the State in a Conservative Society", for the Cambridge University Conservative Association magazine. See Conservative Political Archive (CPA): RAB Butler Papers, "RAB 20: oddments, 1957-61", Bodleian Library Oxford.

⁵⁰ Conservative Party, *Built to Last*. (London: Conservative Party, 2006) 5.

⁵¹ Margaret Thatcher: complete public statements 1945-1990. Database and Compilation, Oxford University Press, 1999, UDN: 87_384: Mrs Thatcher's interview with Douglas Keay, *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1987, and see the statement requested by *The Sunday Times*, 10 July 1988.

⁵² "One of Sir Keith's more remarkable statements was that, although he had been a member of the Conservative party for years, 'it was only in April 1974 that I was converted to Conservatism. I had thought that I was a Conservative but I now see that I was not one at all'", D. Butler, and D. Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1979*, (London: Macmillan, 1980) 64.

⁵³ B. Pimlott, "Controversy: Is the Post-War Consensus A Myth?", *Contemporary Record*, 3, (1989) 13.

⁵⁴ Indeed, Timothy Raison, *Tories and the Welfare State: A History of Conservative Social Policy since the Second World War*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) 83, gives a "useful reminder that the Joseph who emerged in 1974 was not a wholly new being".

⁵⁵ "But what I am desperately trying to do is to create one nation by having everyone being a man of property or the opportunity to be a man of property. Oh, no, I'm a one nationer", Margaret Thatcher: complete public statements 1945-1990. Database and Compilation, Oxford University Press, 1999, UDN: 83_057: Interview with Hugo Young 22 February 1983.

⁵⁶ Interview with Lord David Howell, House of Lords, 23 June 2004.

⁵⁷ This was an article for the *Prospect* magazine entitled: “Evaporating Wets”, February 1996, p. 11.

⁵⁸ D. Seawright, *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics*. Op cit.

⁵⁹ One Nation Group, *One Nation at the Heart of the Future*, 1996, 5.

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⁶¹ David Cameron, speech following the report of the Social Justice Policy Group, 10 July 2007.

⁶² Conservative Party, *Built to Last 1st edition*, 2006, 5.

⁶³ T. Bale, *The Conservative Party: From Thatcher to Cameron*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2010)

⁶⁴ David Cameron’s speech to the Royal Society, 23 April 2007.

⁶⁵ One Nation Group, *The Responsible Society*. (London: Conservative Political Centre No. 200, 1959)

⁶⁶ David Cameron, speech to the National Council of Voluntary Organisations, 14 December 2006.

⁶⁷ Conservative Party, *Big Society Not Big Government*, (London: Click Digital Solutions, 2010)

⁶⁸ David Cameron, speech in the City of Bath, 22 March 2007.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ David Cameron, “Yes, we’ve ditched some policies but I’m still a Tory PM”, *The Daily Mail*, 21 May 2010.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SEARCH FOR A “NEW”
RHETORIC OF THE LEFT:
A LOOK AT STRATEGIES
OF THE DEMOCRATS AND LABOUR

LORI MAGUIRE

A great deal of attention has been devoted to the electoral problems experienced by the left-of-centre parties in both Great Britain and the United States in recent times. This provoked a search by a number of prominent figures on both sides of the Atlantic, as to the reasons for these difficulties and to develop a new rhetoric that would appeal more to the voters. The academic Alan Finlayson has commented perceptively on the importance of words in politics:

At the very least we have to acknowledge that politics under democratic constitutions is about some people trying to persuade the rest of us of their virtues or the virtues of their political position. To do so, they employ rhetoric intended to illustrate the ways in which their political programme will be good for us by, for example, associating it with positive ends and characteristics. Anyone who has had any involvement in a political organisation or campaign knows that a central aspect of such activity is the strategic one of trying to find ways in which to connect with the wider public through various images, modes of speech and so forth.¹

In its essence, political communication is about finding an appealing message and effectively conveying it to the public through the mass media. We will be examining here how leading figures in the two major leftwing parties of the U.S. and the U.K. analysed their repeated defeats of the 1980s (and, in the case of Labour, early 1990s) drawing from this certain conclusions in order to construct (they hoped) a more effective rhetoric and image.

Although a number of dissimilarities exist between the two parties, both the Democrats and Labour began their quest at the same time: Labour's after its election defeat of 1983 and the Democrats after Reagan's landslide victory in 1984. In both cases they achieved some success afterwards with Bill Clinton's election in 1992 and Labour's triumph in 1997. In neither case have they completely replaced older terminology and, indeed, there has been some return to it recently. We will begin by briefly examining the traditions of the two parties, and then analyse the reasons why many on the Left believed that this "modernisation", as they termed it, was necessary. After this, we will examine the rhetoric of the "new" Left, also known as "triangulation" or the "Third Way" before taking a short look at recent trends.

The Democratic Party of the United States and Britain's Labour Party differ in certain fundamental ways. To begin with, the Democratic Party is much older and traces its ancestry back to the early days of the Republic. After a long and varied history it only firmly became the party of the Left with Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. Class-based rhetoric had not been absent from American politics before Roosevelt but he linked it to phenomenal political success. To some extent, Roosevelt's Depression era speeches qualify as rhetoric of war for he frequently used military vocabulary, although not directly linked to questions of class. For example, in his first inaugural address, he talked about "the great army of our people dedicated to a disciplined attack upon our common problems".² He frequently made attacks on the wealthy but, once again, avoided overt class language, talking of the "rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods" or the "unscrupulous moneychangers".³ Perhaps the best summary of Roosevelt's ideas is contained in his speech to the Democratic National Convention in July 1932 in which he announced the New Deal. Roosevelt said: "My program... is based upon this simple moral principle: the welfare and the soundness of the nation depend first upon what the great mass of the people wish and need; and second, whether or not they are getting it."⁴ Instead of "capitalists" or even "the rich" or "the workers", Roosevelt preferred to attack particular types of the wealthy and to champion the people. Instead of ideology, pragmatism.

Roosevelt turned the Democratic Party into an umbrella organization linking the have-nots to the middle class and performed –at a cost –the extraordinary achievement of gaining the support both of southern blacks and low-income southern whites. A 1936 Gallup poll showed that, while 42 percent of wealthy voters supported him, the percentage rose to 60 percent among middle-income voters and 76 percent among those in lower income groups. Added to that, 80 percent of trade unionists, 81 percent of

unskilled workers and 84 percent of those on relief went for the Democratic Party.⁵ All political parties are coalitions but that of the New Deal, although overwhelmingly successful in its time, was so broad and included so many conflicting interests that it was extraordinarily fragile. This meant that it could not be too radical and that it could splinter fairly easily. Its fragmentation began in earnest in the 1960s as civil rights, the Vietnam War and growing prosperity, began to push its members apart.

In contrast, the Labour Party officially began life only in 1900 and was from the start a consciously class-based party. It was formed from a variety of left-wing organizations including co-operative groups, socialist groups, and trade unions, among others, and began life as the Labour Representation Committee, changing its name in 1906 to the Labour Party. Class-based rhetoric was thus a major element in the party’s presentation of itself from the start, one of its first manifestos declaring that:

The House of Commons is supposed to be the People’s House, and yet the people are not there. Landlords, employers, lawyers, brewers, and financiers are there in force. Why not Labour?⁶

While this rhetoric is stronger than Roosevelt’s, it does not differ that much fundamentally. Note how the word “people” is used rather than a specific class term and how particular groups of the wealthy are denounced rather than the entire class. Neither here nor in Roosevelt’s speeches is wealth itself condemned but the abuse of wealth and power by specific groups. There is an undoubted rejection of Marxist rhetoric here and a belief in the basic soundness of the economic and social system which need only reform. The Labour party’s leaders were always aware of the need to attract middle class voters if they wished to have a majority, and so official party rhetoric was usually restrained. In an in-depth analysis of the 1945 Labour victory, American political scientist, William Newman, came to the conclusion that Labour was “not a class party”. He observed that; “If the Labour Party depends mainly on the industrial sections of the country for seats it nevertheless succeeds or fails proportionately in all the economic areas of the country.” In fact, he found this to be true of all political parties and insisted that Labour is “a genuinely national party”.⁷ It must be emphasized, though, that historically the rhetoric of the Left has been more moderate in the U.S. than in Britain for the Labour Party openly embraced the word “socialism”—at least until the late 1980s. This term was never used in mainstream American politics except by Republicans seeking to discredit their opponents. The Labour Party is also a member of the Socialist International which is not the case of the Democratic Party.

The 1970s and 1980s were a critical time for the Left in both nations. Both the Democrats and Labour suffered a similar crisis at approximately the same time. In America this reached a high point with the disastrous candidacy of George McGovern for president in 1972. The voters decisively rejected his program, widely seen as advocating too generous social policies while being far too weak in foreign policy (although it must be said that there was no such rejection of the party at the congressional level).⁸ In Britain the crisis reached its zenith later, during Michael Foot's tenure as Labour leader from 1979 to 1983. Under Foot, who had a few years earlier talked of "the red flame of socialist courage", the party moved to the left and also paid a heavy price both within itself and at the ballot box, as we shall see.

Similar factors have been put forward to explain this decline in popularity, most notably the economic problems of this period which provoked a strong critique of Keynesianism on the Right; a reaction to the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s; the growth of the middle class and of a "property-owning democracy" and changing demographics due to increasingly suburban population concentrations. Clear evidence exists for the growth of swing voters in both countries. But some have diagnosed the cause as being simply the fracturing of the coalition that sustained each party around certain common policies that had now been put into effect. Everybody wanted "progress" but there was a problem agreeing on what direction the "progress" should take. As early as 1955, the Labour politician Richard Crossman said his party was being "ideologically disintegrated". Because of the success of "Keynesian welfare capitalism", there was no longer much of a demand for socialism:

All this happens to the Labour Party because people in Britain are more prosperous and more contented and because peace is breaking out all over the world. We suddenly feel that our mission to save people from cataclysm and disaster has come unstuck. We are missionaries without a mission, or missionaries more and more dubious about the mission.⁹

One of the problems the Left has encountered in both nations has been this need to find a "mission" that would motivate its rank and file and get the support of the electorate. But over the next few years this proved extremely difficult and, as loss piled on loss, the drive to win elections overwhelmed any missionary zeal.¹⁰

In the case of the United States, the 1970s saw a reorganisation of the electoral map. In part this was because of population shifts from the traditionally Democratic regions of the Midwest and Northeast to the more Republican leaning Sunbelt. But a number of other Democratic areas

became, often in a relatively short period of time, Republican dominated. The classic example is the South which shifted its allegiance, to a large extent, because of racial questions. Pres. Lyndon Johnson was fully aware that this would happen when he signed the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. He had been warned that this legislation “will not only cost you the South, it will cost you the election.”¹¹ Added to this, Johnson attempted to have both guns and butter: funding both the Vietnam War and the Great Society, which led to higher taxes and contributed to growing inflation and other economic problems. And this, in turn, helped the Republicans to pin the label “tax and spend” on their opponents.

Furthermore, Kevin Phillips, a conservative political analyst, published *The Emerging Republican Majority* in 1969. He argued that, if the Republicans stressed support for traditional cultural and social values and opposition to a big government agenda—now linked in many people’s minds to racial questions—then they could form a new majority to govern the country. Also in 1969, *Newsweek* did an examination of “Troubled America” which published the results of a scientific survey showing that almost 80 percent of middle-class Americans thought that, on average, members of racial minorities on welfare had chosen not to work.¹² These and other observations had a profound effect on the Republican Party. In that same year Richard Nixon made a determined appeal to the, as he called it, “Silent Majority”—those who did not oppose the Vietnam War, participate in protest rallies or belong to the counterculture. To attract this “silent majority”, Nixon and others attacked court-ordered busing and called for stronger law enforcement procedures.

Later, Ronald Reagan developed similar themes, using language that, while not overtly racist, contained terms that summoned up, in some people’s minds, a negative image of blacks and other minorities. His attack on “welfare queens” (a story that was largely fictitious) and affirmative action programs and his wish to reduce spending on social programs while increasing crime fighting capabilities, appealed to many whites who considered that African Americans were disproportionately taking advantage of the welfare state—while, at the same time, being the main perpetrators of crime. Furthermore, the Republican Right showed a remarkable gift for caricaturing liberalism, taunting the Democrats as having only one policy: “tax and spend”. In this way, it has been argued, the Republicans split the traditional class-based Democratic coalition.¹³

Recent work has tended to criticise this theory as too simplistic and to stress the role of class. For one thing, it does not explain the situation of states like Kansas, which has a radical past and possesses a negligible black population, but has voted Republican in every presidential election

since 1948, with the exception of 1964, often by large majorities. Nor does it explain that the South was not so solidly Democratic before 1965, with at least four states lacking a Democratic majority in every election from 1948. Matthew Lassiter, in his book, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, argues against a purely race-based interpretation and places greater emphasis on class. He shows how a technically race-neutral language developed to further middle-class aims:

The color-blind and class-driven discourse popularized in the Sunbelt South helped create a suburban blueprint that ultimately resonated from the conservative subdivisions of Southern California to the liberal townships of New England: a bipartisan political language of private property values, individual taxpayer rights, children's educational privileges, family residential security and white racial innocence.¹⁴

Lassiter links many of the changes in southern voting patterns to more general changes in the US as a whole, which he sees, in turn, as related to the expansion of suburban America.

This, of course, is also connected to the growth of the middle class. The late 1940s saw the beginning of a massive demographic shift from rural and urban America towards the suburbs. It also saw an enormous growth in universities and in the number of students. Both of these changes came about, to a large extent, because of the G.I. Bill which provided assistance to veterans. The prosperity of the 1950s continued the evolution towards a largely middle class America with a relatively small group living in poverty—and a large percentage of this group consisting of blacks and immigrants.¹⁵ The Democratic Party shows a complex inter-relationship between class, race and geography that makes it difficult for it to find a presidential candidate who pleases voters in all these divisions.¹⁶

In any case, by the mid-1980s, the Democratic Party was demoralized by its failure to win presidential elections (its decline at the Congressional and state levels was considerably less drastic), having lost every election since 1968, except for that of 1976. The 1972 presidential campaign had been the nadir of Democratic prospects with the resounding defeat of George McGovern and his liberal platform. Most Democratic commentators saw this as a decisive rejection of the leftwing, although, as Bruce Miroff has shown, McGovern's impact on the party, although rarely talked about, has been surprisingly strong. A large number of the party's leaders since then were involved in one way or another in that campaign.¹⁷ Jimmy Carter, the next Democratic presidential candidate turned away from this legacy, positioning himself in the centre. Add to this the fact that many of its leaders were also aware of the demographic changes we have

previously outlined and interpreted the triumphant popularity of Reagan as evidence that America had moved to the right. The old, traditional, class-based rhetoric of the New Deal had, for many, become associated with minority groups and a number of people judged it, therefore, to be counter-productive. Certainly Michael Dukakis, Democratic presidential candidate in 1988, tried to distance himself from these themes, basing his campaign around the so-called “Massachusetts Miracle”—the reinvigoration of the Massachusetts economy during his time as governor. The Republicans, however, worked to paint Dukakis in highly negative colours as a “tax and spend” liberal, weak on crime.¹⁸ The failure of Dukakis to hit back effectively and overcome the image given to him by Republican loyalists convinced even more Democrats that they had to change the way the party was seen and to establish a quick and effective response to such attacks in the future.

Already in 1985, several, mainly southern, Democrats had formed the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC).¹⁹ The DLC argued that the Republicans were winning because they had successfully portrayed the Democrats as a party dominated by narrow interest groups like radical feminists, gay rights or ethnic minorities and thus out of touch with the mainstream of America. This, in turn, led to a philosophy of “tax and spend” which benefitted these minority groups to the disadvantage of the majority. DLC leaders argued that the Democrats had to change the public philosophy of their party. The Democratic Party had to find a way to reconnect with the majority of the nation. As Sam Nunn, one of its founders, put it: “We are going to try to move the party—both in substance and perception—back into the mainstream of American political life.”²⁰ Part of this would mean downplaying the federal government as an engine for reform and emphasizing instead the private sector, local and state governments. Although they certainly do not agree with Reagan’s statement that the federal government “is the problem”, the DLC prefers the use of market mechanisms rather than federal bureaucracies to implement policy. In 1990, the DLC published a statement of its basic beliefs:

We believe the Democratic Party’s fundamental mission is to expand opportunity, not government... We believe that economic growth is the prerequisite to expanding opportunity for everyone. The free market, regulated in the public interest, is the best engine of general prosperity... We believe the purpose of social welfare is to bring the poor into the nation’s economic mainstream, not to maintain them in dependence.²¹

Bill Clinton, one of its founders, described the DLC's goals as "forging a winning message for the Democrats based on fiscal responsibility, creative new ideas on social policy, and a commitment to a strong national defense".²² It also sent out a strong message on crime.

The problem now, as the DLC saw it, was to convince the electorate that they had a different and original message. Their solution was a vocabulary of change, with repeated use of words like "change" and "modern" while at the same time implying that their programme would be a return to an idealized past, linked to the Democratic Party, that contained the true values of the nation:

In keeping with our party's grand tradition, we share Jefferson's belief in individual liberty and responsibility. We endorse Jackson's credo of equal opportunity for all, and special privileges for none. We embrace Roosevelt's thirst for innovation, and Truman's sense in the uncommon sense of common men and women. We carry on Kennedy's summons to civic duty and public service, Johnson's passion for social justice, and Carter's commitment to human rights.²³

At the same time, the word "class" appeared repeatedly but only in connection with the word "middle". Terms traditionally associated with conservatism were also appropriated, such as "choice", "opportunity" and "responsibility".

In 1990, Bill Clinton, then governor of Arkansas, became chair of the DLC and, in an important speech in May 1991, outlined a number of his ideas. After examining the problems facing the U.S., in particular in relation to education, salary levels, health care and job insecurity, Clinton said:

You may say, well if all these things are out there, why in the world haven't the Democrats been able to take advantage of these conditions? I'll tell you why: because too many of the people that used to vote for us, the very burdened middle class we are talking about, have not trusted us in national elections to defend our national interests abroad, to put their values into our social policy at home, or to take their tax money and spend it with discipline. We have got to turn these perceptions around, or we cannot continue a national party.²⁴

In effect, he accepts the Republican, and notably Reaganite, criticisms of the party as valid and, in so doing, gives them greater force. Democratic programs have been responsible for Democratic losses because they have lost touch with the majority of Americans by focussing too much on the have-nots and not enough on the middle class, described here as

“burdened”—an obvious acceptance of right-wing critiques of past Democratic policy on taxation.

He was even more clear in the announcement of his candidacy for the presidency in October 1991:

All of you, in different ways, have brought me here today, to step beyond a life and a job I love, to make a commitment to a larger cause: preserving the American Dream... restoring the hope of the forgotten middle class...reclaiming the future of our children. I refuse to be part of a generation that celebrates the death of Communism abroad with the loss of the American Dream at home.²⁵

Here we can see the link with an idealized heritage through the use of “American Dream”. Words like “restore” and “reclaim” illustrate this decline from past glories. The future of the nation is in jeopardy: America has won the Cold War only to be at risk of losing the peace. Note also the term “forgotten middle class” that obviously echoes Nixon’s famous reference to the “silent majority”. They have lost hope although why is not entirely clear. Later in the speech, he called for a “new covenant to rebuild America” which clothes the social contract idea in a typically American religious dress. He also argued that “government’s responsibility is to create more opportunity. The people’s responsibility is to make the most of it.” Clinton developed this theme further, using his own life as an example. After talking about the poverty of his mother and grandparents, he said:

But we didn’t blame other people. We took responsibility for ourselves and for each other because we knew we could do better. I was raised to believe in the American Dream, in family values, in individual responsibility, and in the obligation of government to help people who were doing the best they could.

Most of the terms used here are traditionally associated with certain strands of rightwing thought, notably “responsibility” (repeated twice), the “individual” and, a more recent addition, “family values”. He does, of course, talk about “the obligation of government” but this is clearly limited only to those “who were doing the best they could”. We can see here the impact of Reaganism with its implications that many of the people on welfare were simply lazy and taking advantage of the system. The use of such rhetoric may have been a deliberate tactic by Clinton and the DLC: as Republicans moved to the right under Reagan and even further to the right from 1994, the use of terms associated with the right may have been an attempt to capture the centre.

In a number of speeches throughout 1990 and 1991, Clinton insisted on the need for a “modern, mainstream agenda” and used key terms like “expansion of opportunity”, “choice”, “responsibility and empowerment of poor people” and “reinventing government”. Like Dukakis before, he developed the theme of economic management and competence. He repeatedly emphasized that the Republicans had run up a huge deficit and that only the Democrats could be trusted to provide capable economic supervision. The sign “It’s the economy, stupid” became a symbol of the campaign. Over and over again Clinton targeted the middle class. He did not ignore the existence of poverty nor did he deny the need to offer government assistance but placed particular emphasis on limiting its duration and concentrating on the most vulnerable elements of society, notably children. These terms and themes would also appear in Britain and would occupy a large place in Tony Blair’s rhetoric.

Once he became president, his rhetoric reflected a certain conflict between his DLC motifs and more traditional Democratic themes like communitarianism and the need for government intervention. In his first inaugural address, predictably, he stressed the ideas of renewal and change:

Today we celebrate the mystery of American renewal. This ceremony is held in the depth of winter, but by the words we speak and the faces we show the world, we force the spring, a spring reborn in the world’s oldest democracy that brings forth the vision and courage to reinvent America. When our Founders’ boldly declared America’s independence to the world and our purposes to the Almighty, they knew that America, to endure, would have to change; not change for change’s sake but change to preserve America’s ideals: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Though we marched to the music of our time, our mission is timeless.²⁶

The themes here are traditional in American inaugural addresses, notably, the reference to the Founding Fathers and American democratic traditions, the invocation of God and, of course, the imagery of rebirth. Notice Clinton’s acceptance of the idea that America has a special mission although he does not tell us what that mission is.

His first State of the Union address showed more clearly the tensions between the Roosevelt tradition of the Democratic Party and the DLC’s ideas. Following logically from his campaign, he placed the greatest emphasis on economic policy. While he keeps to his earlier discourse on “opportunity” and “responsibility”, he makes sure to add a dose of “community” into the mixture:

I believe we will find our new direction in the basic values that brought us here: opportunity, individual responsibility, community, work, family and faith. We need to break the old habits of both political parties in Washington. We must say that there can be no more something for nothing, and we are all in this together.²⁷

Clinton here asserts that his political ideas, presumably those of the DLC, are genuinely new and different from those of traditional Democratic ones. In fact, he dismisses both parties equally—something which probably irritated members of Congress since many of them symbolized those “old habits”. His last sentence here keenly balances the DLC and the Roosevelt tradition: there should be no “Santa Claus state” giving things away to the unworthy but, on the other hand, we all have a responsibility for each other. The role of the state in helping its citizens is thus not denied but it is limited. Later in the speech he explicitly links it to the behaviour of those citizens: “I want to talk about what government can do, because I believe our government must do more for the hard-working people who pay its way.” In other words, the taxpayer needs to see a good return on his or her investment. The implication seems to be that if you do not work then you do not deserve assistance from the government. This, of course, reflects Clinton’s repeated emphasis on reforming and limiting welfare (later in the speech he says that “after two years, they [those on welfare] must get back to work—in private business if possible; in public service, if necessary.”) But note that he does not reject a role for government in putting people back to work.

Of course, Clinton won the presidency without receiving a majority of the vote or increasing Democratic seats in Congress which placed him in a relatively weak position. Certainly the need to work with a Democratic Congress dominated by liberals and his desire to ensure the unity of the party, pushed him to the Left. Many of Clinton’s first actions as president seemed closer to his days campaigning for McGovern than to this DLC rhetoric. His first two years as president disappointed many in the DLC while not satisfying the liberal wing of the party. Public dissatisfaction with several of Clinton’s initiatives—notably the failure of his health care plan and the controversy over his attempt to allow openly gay people to serve in the US Army—contributed to a Republican victory at the congressional elections in 1994. After this slap from the voters, Clinton moved even further to the right and his rhetoric shows this. In his first State of the Union address after the election, he said: “I think we all agree that we have to change the way the Government works. Let’s make it smaller, less costly, and smarter; leaner, not meaner.”²⁸ A Republican majority in Congress meant that there was little hope of new benefits and,

indeed, Clinton finally agreed to sign a bill limiting the length of time one could remain on welfare. At the same time, he came under vicious attack over his personal life, leading to an impeachment hearing in Congress. In such an atmosphere the legislative achievements of his last years in office were minimal.

Let us then turn to examine the situation of Great Britain. In many ways the demographic evolution of the country resembles that of the United States with the growth of the middle class, the increasing advance of suburbanization and the development of what Margaret Thatcher called “popular capitalism”. The first person to use the term “property owning democracy” was also British, the economist J.E. Meade in 1964. Certainly the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, although obviously important, were less traumatic than in the United States as there was not the same drama of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. Great Britain also has not undergone as radical a change in its electoral map but this is, in part because the Labour Party had not had a notable success in winning with large majorities before Blair. On the other hand, although not as significant as in America, the racial question existed and was growing in magnitude as the Notting Hill riots of 1958, the impact of Enoch Powell and the Brixton and Toxteth riots of 1981 show.

It is well known that, after Labour’s defeat of 1979, when Margaret Thatcher came to power, the party moved to the left, choosing Michael Foot as leader and adopting certain positions viewed as too leftwing by moderate members.²⁹ This provoked a rebellion by influential centrist members who created a new party, the Social Democrats (SDP). After a further defeat in 1983, in which Labour and the SDP each got about one-quarter of the vote, the left-wing found itself largely discredited but their power within the party remained strong. The right-wing then began a slow campaign to win back control of the party. After Foot’s resignation, Neil Kinnock became leader and he considered his primary objective to be returning the party to the centre. He believed in the need for a radical transformation of the party’s policy, organisation and mentality, without which it would never come back to power. But divisions within the party forced him to proceed cautiously—especially during the first years of his leadership which were complicated by the miners’ strike and the activities of Militant Tendency, a Trotskyite group in Liverpool. But the defeat of the miners and of Militant Tendency reinforced Kinnock and weakened the extreme left. He was also helped by the break-up of the Soviet Union which dramatically revealed the weaknesses of the Soviet economy and consecrated the triumph of capitalism and the market. Furthermore, the failure of socialist experiments by the French government from 1981-84

also discredited the economic ideas of the extreme left. By the end of the 1980s, most members of the Labour party were ready to accept the market economy. In 1985, after the defeat of the miners’ strike and coincidentally in the same year as the founding of the DLC, Kinnock attacked.³⁰ In a speech on the future of socialism, he started the process of redefining the policy of the party: certain of his ideas were entirely retaken later by Tony Blair. Kinnock stressed certain values like community and democracy rather than doctrinaire socialism. He even attacked the idea of nationalisation and called for a “servant state”. In 1986 he published *Making Our Way*, he even began to talk positively about capitalism and the market, although he saw them as needing reform and management.³¹ Kinnock instituted a well publicized policy review which shed Labour’s more extreme positions.³² By 1992, Labour had moderate policies and had done its best to attract media attention to them. The result, however, was a fourth election defeat in that year. It seemed that even a movement to the centre could not help Labour win and some began to despair that the party might never form a majority government again.³³ In such a situation it is not surprising to see that Labour chose a more tradition-oriented leader in John Smith who slowed Kinnock’s policies of change. Smith, however, died unexpectedly in 1994 and the young and reform-minded Tony Blair was chosen to replace him.

In an influential article published in 1987, Anthony Heath and S. K. McDonald analysed the demographics of that year’s election and concluded that social change since 1964 had reduced Labour’s vote by five percent.³⁴ At the same time the Conservatives’ position had improved by four points. They also argued that the SDP/Liberal Alliance had benefited from the demographic situation, attracting much support from the middle class. Blair and many other Labour figures wholeheartedly accepted this analysis. Labour politician Giles Radice argued that “Labour cannot afford a class approach.”³⁵ Coming to much the same conclusion as the DLC, Radice insisted that:

[upwardly mobile families] do not believe that [Labour] understands, respects or rewards those who want to “get on”. Far from encouraging talent and promoting opportunity, Labour is seen as the party that is most likely to “take things away”. From the perspective of the aspirant voters, voting Labour is simply not “in their interests”.³⁶

Blair saw Labour’s four election defeats as the voters’ punishment for the party’s failure to adapt to social and economic changes in British society. As we have already seen, Blair picked up themes already presented by Clinton in the US and Kinnock in the UK. As with Clinton, we can see the

paradoxical assertion that something “new” was also a return to earlier ideas: “Labour has returned to its values and is now seeking the clearest and most effective ways of putting them into practice”.³⁷ In some strange way, “renewal” had become a synonym for “modernisation”.

Certainly, “new” quickly became a key word for Blair. As Bill Clinton had talked of “New Democrats” so Blair began to speak of “New Labour” and “modernisation” became one of his mantras. But Blair also realized that he would need a significant gesture to signal major change and so he decided to repeal clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution which committed the party “to secure for the producers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry, and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production of each industry or service” in other words to socialism. Blair succeeded in this and proceeded to develop a rhetoric of the centre for his party.

From the start, Blair rejected ideology, insisting that the Labour Party had been founded to improve the living conditions of the mass of the population and not to promote socialism. In one speech, he argued that the 1945 Labour government was the greatest peace-time government of the 20th century not because it introduced a socialist program but because it put into effect the British people’s aspirations for a better existence.³⁸ This, indeed, should be the aim of government. According to Blair, during the 1970s and 1980s, many in Labour lost contact with the people’s wishes and became obsessed by ideology and, for this reason, the party suffered four consecutive election defeats.³⁹ Labour, Blair argued, had attracted voters because it had been a party of change but, over the years, the insistence on ideology had become a refusal of change. He described the Labour left as being “conservatives of the left” while he called for a “radicalism of the centre”.⁴⁰

Rhetorically, Blair has borrowed from the traditions of the Liberal Party, echoing both Gladstone and Lloyd George at times. He made a point to laud the achievements of past Liberal reformers at the Labour celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Attlee government:

The ultimate objective is a new political consensus of the left-of-centre, based around the key values of democratic socialism and European social democracy, firm in its principles but capable of responding to changing times, so that these values may be put into practice and secure broad support to govern for long periods of time. To reach that consensus we must value the contribution of Lloyd George, Beveridge and Keynes [all noted Liberals] and not just Attlee, Bevan or Crosland. We should start to

explore our own history with fresh understanding and an absence of preconceptions.⁴¹

The key terms here are “consensus” and “broad support”. Blair presents his philosophy as one of pragmatism: be flexible, adapt to change, and respond to what the voters want. At all costs avoid an ideological straitjacket. To make his point even clearer, Blair also echoed the Conservatives:

So, yes, there has been a revolution inside the Labour party. We have rejected the worst of our past, and rediscovered the best. And in rediscovering the best of our past, we have made ourselves fit to face the future, and fit to govern in the future. There is a big idea here. It is about creating a society that is genuinely One Nation in which we seek to realise the potential of all our people.⁴²

Once again we see the idea that only by keeping to the values of the past can one create a good future. Note his use of the term “One nation”, an expression strongly associated with the Conservatives. Blair certainly demonstrates here his sympathy with certain strands of Conservative thought and his fascination with Margaret Thatcher (although one would not normally associate the term “one nation” with her) is well-known—to such an extent that Anthony Seldon devoted one chapter of his biography of Blair to the subject.⁴³ In one pamphlet, Blair went so far as to commend some aspects of the Thatcher government, saying:

Some of its reforms were, in retrospect, necessary acts of modernisation, particularly the exposure of much of the state industrial sector to reform and competition.⁴⁴

Notice his praise of “competition” in particular. Of course, he immediately counters this by attacking the Thatcher government which he accuses of “damaging key national services, notably education and health”.

Blair, in fact likes to say that his socialism is moral and not economic:

Since the collapse of communism, the ethical basis of socialism is the only one that has stood the test of time. This socialism is based on a moral assertion that individuals are interdependent, that they owe duties to one another as well as to themselves, that the good society backs up the efforts of the individuals within it, and that common humanity demands that everyone be given a platform on which to stand.⁴⁵

He is not egalitarian but communitarian for he continually talks about the importance of the community with which the individual evolves. Blair likes to underline the need for cooperation between all members of society in order to assure a well functioning economy—for, like the Democrats, New Labour stresses its economic competence. In an early speech to the TUC, Blair subscribed to the following principle:

Business and employees, your members, aren't two nations divided. That's old style thinking. That's the thinking of the past. Britain works best when business and unions work together.⁴⁶

The citizen, Blair also believes, has rights as well as duties towards other citizens and so, as with Clinton, we find the lexical field of responsibility. Like the Democrats, Blair picked up on fears of law-breaking, famously saying that he would be “tough on crime; tough on the causes of crime”.

Blair has always insisted on the need to maintain the welfare state and he certainly has significantly increased spending in certain areas, most notably the health service. But he does not want to be considered as hostile to the rich. In a speech on social justice in 1994, Blair observed:

Because we [Labour] were anti-poverty, we were portrayed as anti-wealth. Because we were concerned with lifting up the less successful, we were seen as attacking those who aspired to do better.

Because we campaigned for adequate benefits, we were said to be unconcerned about the working poor who were taxed to pay for benefits. Because we wanted to defend the welfare state, people came to assume that we did not think it could be improved. We were seen as interested more in protecting the gains of the past, rather than building on them.

But like Clinton he sees the need for changes and for limiting certain benefits.

Blair won a large victory in 1997 and immediately began work on an important series of reforms, notably in the constitutional domain. In part because of the differing nature of the political systems, Blair enjoyed significantly greater success than Clinton. Realising that an emphasis on newness and moderation became more difficult once in power, Blair sought to present himself and his party in somewhat different terms. His first attempt became known as the famous “Third Way”. According to Blair:

The Third Way is not an attempt to split the difference between Right and Left. It is about traditional values in a changed world.⁴⁷

So, once again newness is a return to tradition. But the term “Third Way” was found to confuse voters and largely disappeared from Labour discourse in subsequent years.⁴⁸ Blair made a number of other attempts after this but none were particularly successful. Blair became obsessed with framing political discourse and came to believe in the need for permanent campaigning. As Labour Party adviser, Philip Gould, explained:

You must always seek to gain and keep momentum, or it will pass immediately to your opponent. Gaining momentum means dominating the news agenda, entering the new cycle at the earliest possible time, and repeatedly re-entering it, with stories and initiatives so that subsequent news coverage is set on your terms.⁴⁹

The problem, though, was that the press quickly became sceptical about New Labour’s spin and began to report critically on Blair’s announcements—to the point of even questioning whether Cherie Blair’s pregnancy was a political manoeuvre. This cynicism was then communicated to the public who started to distrust Labour—a feeling which only increased after the invasion of Iraq and revelations of how the government had misrepresented information. It did not, however, stop Labour from being re-elected in 2001 and 2005.

But, in the end, how “new” are New Labour and the New Democrats? And how does their rhetoric relate to their actual policy positions and actions in power? It has to be stated that most elements of the DLC programme are acceptable to the liberals, which may help explain the failure of the Left to make an effective counter attack. The New Democrats supported welfare reform but wanted it to be achieved through greater investment in education and job training. They called for more environmental protection, supported abortion, family leave, hand gun control and national health care. As Jim Hale has pointed out, they differ mainly from liberals in the areas of trade and affirmative action. He has even argued that: “the DLC has fleshed out a liberal-leaning platform couched in soothing centrist rhetoric.”⁵⁰ Certainly the first two years of the Clinton presidency can be used to argue such a position.

The same argument can be made in relation to New Labour. Blair continually proclaimed that his party had definitely broken from the past, and many agreed with him, seeing New Labour as an extension of Thatcherism.⁵¹ It did not take long for reassessments to emerge and a number of scholars began to question how different from the Labour past it really was. David Rubinstein, for example, argued that Blair’s objectives were little different from those of the Attlee or Wilson governments.⁵² Steven Fielding even said of the revision of Clause Four:

Widely hailed as New Labour's defining moment, this involved deleting from the party's constitution words that enjoyed nothing more than a questionable relevance. They were moreover replaced by another set of words that still allowed the possibility of state ownership. Furthermore, while the new clause endorsed the market, that was something party leaders had done decades before. Consequently, if the revision of Clause Four was the ultimate expression of "New" Labour, then "New" Labour was nothing new.⁵³

Certainly Blair's governments focussed on a number of issues traditionally associated with the Left, such as health and education and sharply increased social spending (especially for health care). Blair himself repeatedly said that education as his top priority, although he continued such Thatcher and Major reforms as a national curriculum and key stage tests (which Labour had initially opposed). With regard to social policy, the Blair governments did make some attempt at lowering income inequality which had grown during the Thatcher years. Blair chose to focus on target groups, notably children and pensioners, and did have some success in improving their living standards.⁵⁴ Certainly Blair made no major changes like those of the post-war Labour government and was content with piecemeal improvements to social welfare, sharing much of the philosophy of the New Democrats. However, this does not make New Labour "new"—a significant and usually dominant proportion of the party since 1951 had always believed that after Attlee, the emphasis should be on improvements to what already existed than in the creation of new structures. So, as in the case of Clinton's New Democrats, it can certainly be argued that the emphasis on novelty and modernisation was primarily a rhetorical device.

Let us now consider how successful the move to the centre was for both the Democrats and Labour. A 2001 poll showed that voters saw Blair's party as preoccupied by the middle class and their interests.⁵⁵ However a detailed analysis by Heath, Jowell and Curtice established that Labour support had already started to grow under John Smith among voters who saw themselves as centrists—and thus before Blair began his ideological repositioning.⁵⁶ On the other hand, they found that:

In contrast, between 1994 and 1997 Tony Blair and New Labour lost ground somewhat on the left, made only modest gains on the centre-left, and had their largest gains on the right of the spectrum. Unlike the 1979-83 and the 1992-4 periods, when gains and losses tended to take an across-the-board character, the 1994-97 gains were highly unevenly distributed and we have no hesitation in attributing them to New Labour's ideological

shift rather than to its perceived competence (or to the Conservatives’ perceived incompetence).⁵⁷

Their conclusion then is that New Labour did, indeed, draw some support from the Conservatives. But, as Pippa Norris has pointed out, resolutely occupying the centre has been “both a blessing and a curse”. She argues that it has been “the bedrock of his popular success and yet the limit of what he can do with his popularity” for being a centrist does not make one an inspiring visionary or give a candidate a mandate for “radical policy change” which will ensure a place in history.⁵⁸

Evidence is less clear in relation to the New Democrats. Exit polls show that in 1992 Clinton had higher support than Dukakis among the white middle class but the difference was small—only one or two percent.⁵⁹ *Congressional Quarterly*, in its analysis of the 1992 election, found that social class was not a major factor:

Except for race, all of the social factors we have examined—region, union membership, social class, and religion—have declined in importance during the postwar years. The decline in regional differences directly parallels the increase in racial differences.... The Democratic Party’s appeals to blacks may have weakened its hold on white groups that traditionally supported it... But the erosion of democratic support among union members, the working class and Catholics results from other factors as well. During the postwar years, these groups have changed... Differences in income between the working class and the middle class have diminished.⁶⁰

It would seem, therefore, that the New Democrats’ demographic analysis was correct. The problem, though, is that *Congressional Quarterly* can find little evidence of their strategy working. The Democrats did, indeed, increase their percentage of the vote among the white working class and other target groups but “the Democrats won with lower absolute levels of support among most of these groups than they had won in previous Democratic victories.”⁶¹ Clinton’s election in 1992 has usually been seen more as a criticism of Bush and the result of a three-way race than a positive endorsement of the Democrat.

The 1994 congressional elections were a complete disaster for the Democrats. Clinton analysed the problem as being fundamentally one of communication which the Republicans, thanks to their Contract with America, had been better at. According to Clinton: “From 1994 on... the side without a national message would sustain unnecessary losses.”⁶² He did admit to a series of mistakes, stating in his memoirs that he should have postponed health care reform when a Republican filibuster became clear and concentrated instead on welfare reform which “would have been

popular with alienated middle-class Americans who voted in droves for Republicans.”⁶³ By not doing so he believed this allowed the media to amplify his errors: “my victories were minimized, my losses were magnified, and the overall impression was created that I as just another pro-tax, big-government liberal, not the New Democrat who had won the presidency.”⁶⁴ So his analysis was clear: the Democrats lost because of his failure to embrace strongly the New Democratic programme and communicate this effectively to the public. Sen. Diane Feinstein agreed: “We Democrats have listened to the 15 percent of the people who had no [health insurance] coverage. Republicans listened to the 85 percent of the people who had coverage.”⁶⁵ But in spite of his subsequent move to the centre, his signing of the Republican welfare reform bill and a booming economy, in 1996 Clinton failed to get a majority of the popular vote with only 49 percent supporting him. *Congressional Quarterly* did, however see an “increasing part of the middle class voting Democratic in that election”.⁶⁶ At the same time, though, the Democrats gained only eight seats in the House and actually lost two in the Senate.

In the period since 2000 profound differences have developed between the two countries. To begin with, if the impeachment of Clinton had revealed deep polarisation in the U.S., the contested presidency of George W. Bush made the situation worse. The Iraq War played a major role here. Discourse related to this conflict was examined in some detail in the companion volume to this book, *Foreign Policy Discourse in the “New World Order” in the United States and the United Kingdom* so it will not be considered in any depth here. Its impact, however, in motivating and radicalizing the American Left should not be underestimated. The rejection of the Iraq War, torture, and Guantanamo Bay discredited the Republicans among many voters and encouraged the Democratic victory at the congressional elections in 2006. When added to a growing economic crisis, it led to victory for the Democrats in the presidential election of 2008 as well. The election of the first black president in American history was an immensely significant development but it has led to greater polarisation in political discourse.

Although Britain has not experienced as strong a polarisation, it has other things in common with the United States, notably the Iraq War. Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister in June 2007 having lost much of his popularity because of his enthusiastic support for the invasion of Iraq. He was replaced by his Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Brown’s major advantage probably was that he had been the architect of economic policy and, thus, of the prosperity of the time. When the economic crisis came, Brown found himself in a difficult position because he had to justify

his own economic decisions and, therefore, could not return to traditional Labour rhetoric. He did try at times to strike a populist tone, notably when asking for a special tax on bonuses, but he was continually hampered by his own past rhetoric and championship of the market. His language has been carefully balanced:

The first choice was this: whether markets left to themselves could sort out the crisis; or whether governments had to act. Our choice was clear: we nationalised Northern Rock and took shares in British banks, and as a result not one British saver has lost a single penny. That was the change we chose. The change that benefits the hard working majority, not the privileged few.

And we faced a second big choice—between letting the recession run its course, or stimulating the economy back to growth. And we made our choice: help for small businesses, targeted tax cuts for millions and advancing our investment in roads, rail and education. That was the change we chose—change that benefits the hard working majority and not just a privileged few.⁶⁷

Here we see several of Blair’s favourite terms: “choice”, “change”, “hard working majority”, “small businesses” and “tax cuts”. But they are offset by traditional Labour themes like nationalisation and by a repeated attack on “a privileged few”. It is one of the obvious differences between British and American left-wing rhetoric that, while Obama took the same actions as Brown with regard to the banks, he would never have dared to use the word “nationalisation”. Brown, unlike pre-Blair Labour leaders, does not present nationalisation as something good but as the necessary response to a major crisis. The decision was made not in the interests of ideology but in those of “British savers”. Let us also examine his use of “privileged few”. Looking at earlier New Labour and New Democrat rhetoric one has the impression—although this is never clearly stated—that if a privileged few exists it consists not of the rich but of certain unspecified elements of the non-working poor, which obviously has a link with Reaganism. With the current economic crisis, “the privileged few” seems to be once again, the rich—or at least certain of them.

Often electorates turn to the left in times of economic crisis but given Labour’s own role in the period leading up to the crisis, this has not occurred. In the elections of May 2010, Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats clearly hoped to capitalize on disillusionment with both Labour and the Conservatives but obviously failed to do so. The results showed some fear at the idea of the Conservatives returning to power, a loss of confidence in Labour, and an uncertainty about any other possibility. All of this, of course, complicates economic recovery and makes twice as

difficult Labour's search for an effective discourse in the present atmosphere.

The economic crisis has also had an impact on discourse in the United States. Certainly there have been a number of attacks on Wall Street and the nation's economic aristocracy but Obama's criticisms have been notably tepid. In a major speech on financial reform, his moderation was evident:

I believe in the power of the free market. I believe in a strong financial sector that helps people to raise capital and get loans and invest their savings. That's part of what has made America what it is. But a free market was never meant to be a free license to take whatever you can get, however you can get it. That's what happened too often in the years leading up to this crisis. Some—and let me be clear, not all—but some on Wall Street forgot that behind every dollar traded or leveraged there's a family looking to buy a house, or pay for an education, open a business, save for retirement. What happens on Wall Street has real consequences across the country, across our economy.⁶⁸

This is a weaker criticism than Roosevelt's, although not fundamentally different. The basic point is the same: some are abusing the system and average people are suffering because of it. The function of government, especially at the national level, is to prevent this from happening. But while Obama's rhetoric has been notably mild, his administration has achieved a remarkable amount in Congress: the stimulus bill, student loan restructuring, credit card reform, financial reform and, of course, major health care reform which had eluded many past presidents.

All of this leads one to believe that political rhetoric is extremely fluid and, indeed, limited and repetitive. Tony Blair uses terms associated with Margaret Thatcher and other Conservatives. Clinton appropriates right-wing rhetoric while the Republican right re-uses radical leftwing terminology in a totally different context.⁶⁹ While there are some ideas and expressions associated with one party more than another, this can change. If something seems to succeed, to appeal to people, then the other party will borrow it—although they tend to adapt it a bit. The essential motivation for any political party is to win elections. If one party fails to do so for a long period of time, they will obviously study the methods and rhetoric of the winning party and try to adjust theirs to make it more attractive to the voters. Both Britain and the United States have tended towards the right since the 1970s for a number of reasons, demographic, and political, among others and, in order to win, the left (at least some of it) has tried to adjust its policies and rhetoric to this situation.

What this brief study has tried to show is that, while there are important differences between the two nations, there is a remarkable similarity in the development of political ideas. The New Democrats and New Labour developed at the same time after suffering a similar period of electoral disappointment. In both cases, their discourse moved to the centre in an attempt to woo voters and they both made a show of breaking from past party orthodoxy and instituting something new. However, it would be wrong to imagine that past rhetoric was significantly more incendiary or oriented towards class warfare or that policy changed dramatically. The speeches and the policies of past Democratic or Labour leaders have not been significantly different from those of New Labour or the New Democrats. Politics is the art of the possible certainly, but it is also the art of repackaging the old and presenting it as the new.

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Notes

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- ¹ Alan Finlayson, *Making Sense of New Labour* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003) 16
- ² *The Essential Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, edited by John Gabriel Hunt (New York: Value Proprietary, 1996) 34
- ³ Franklin Roosevelt, “First Inaugural Address”, 4 March 1933, Hunt, 31
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-7
- ⁵ Jules Witcover, *Party of the People: A History of the Democrats*. (New York: Random House, 2003) 276
- ⁶ Manifesto of the Labour Representation Committee, 1906 in F.W.S. Craig, ed., *British General Election Manifestos, 1900-1974* (London: Macmillan, 1975) 9-10
- ⁷ William Newman, “Patterns of Growth in the British Labour Vote”, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 9:4 (winter 1945-46) 455
- ⁸ See Byron Shafer’s analysis of the problem in *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003)
- ⁹ Richard Crossman, diary, 15 July 1955 in Janet Morgan, ed., *The Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Cape: 1981) p 437.
- ¹⁰ See a number of articles by Michael Walzer, notably in *Dissent* magazine, about the loss of direction by the left in America. Gerry Hassan has picked up on this in his introduction to Gerry Hassan, ed. *After Blair: Politics after the New Labour Decade* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2007) 11, arguing that “the left has lost the sense it once had of a defining project and story, centred around progress towards the idea of socialism.” Of course, recent debate over health care reform in the US shows that it can reappear.
- ¹¹ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998) 18
- ¹² “The Troubled America: A Special Report on the White Majority” *Newsweek*, 6 October 1969
- ¹³ Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) examines the idea in detail and gives a more critical analysis of it.
- ¹⁴ Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 304. A number of commentators have seen a bizarre reversal of class-consciousness in states like Kansas. The journalist Thomas Frank has argued that the Republican right has appropriated the traditional rhetoric of the left, changing the word “capitalism” into “liberalism” (in

its American sense). He asserts that, “in some ways, the backlash vision of life is nothing more than an old-fashioned leftist vision of the world with the economics drained out.” Average people are portrayed as helpless pawns in a world controlled by an eastern liberal elite—frequently accused of being unmanly, effete, and lover of French things. See Thomas Frank, *What’s the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004) 129-30. Voting against what is generally perceived to be a voter’s economic interest is not limited to America. Studies have repeatedly shown that about one-third of the working class in the UK always votes Conservative.

¹⁵ In 1956 the Census Bureau announced for the first time that a majority of the population was white collar. Byron Shafer, for example, has argued that: “A different structure to the economy meant by definition a different occupational structure for American society and a different occupational structure meant a different class structure as well.” *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics*, 11

¹⁶ For a more detailed discussion of factions within the Democratic party see Nicol Rae, *Southern Democrats* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

¹⁷ See Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals’ Moment: the McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2007)

¹⁸ He became the victim of a smear campaign initiated by a supposedly independent group with no obvious ties to the Bush campaign. This group made a television commercial showing convicted killer Willie Horton who, during a furlough from a Massachusetts prison, raped a woman and assaulted her husband. Horton, of course, was black – thus playing to racial fears. Since Dukakis had been governor of Massachusetts at this time, the ad implied that he was somehow responsible for this tragedy.

¹⁹ For more on the DLC see Kenneth Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000)

²⁰ Janet Hook, “Officials Seek Moderation in Party’s Image”, *CQ Weekly Report*, 9 March 1985

²¹ DLC, New Orleans Declaration, 1 March 1990, http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?kaid=86&subid=194&contentid=878 (accessed 21 June 2010)

²² Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004) 319

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ DLC’s Cleveland Convention, 6 May 1991, http://www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?kaid=86&subid=194&contentid=3166 (accessed 21 June 2010)

²⁵ Little Rock, 3 October 1991, <http://www.4president.org/speeches/billclinton1992announcement.htm> (accessed 29 June 2010)

²⁶ First Inaugural Address, 20 January 1993, http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/historicspeeches/clinton/first_inaugural.html (accessed 29 June 2010)

²⁷ State of the Union Address, 17 February 1993, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/states.htm> (accessed 29 June 2010)

²⁸ State of the Union address, 24 January 1995, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/states.htm> (accessed 29 June 2010)

²⁹ Notably unilateral disarmament, withdrawal from Europe and greater nationalization. See “The Limehouse Declaration”, 25 January 1981, <http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/uploads/LimehouseDeclaration.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2010). “Our economy needs a healthy public sector and a healthy private sector without frequent frontier changes. We want to eliminate poverty and promote greater equality without stifling enterprise or imposing bureaucracy from the centre”.

³⁰ For a description of the speech see <http://century.guardian.co.uk/1980-1989/Story/0,6051,108249,00.html> (accessed 29 June 2010)

³¹ Neil Kinnock, *Making Our Way* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). For more on these changes see Tudor Jones, *Remaking the Labour Party from Gaitskell to Blair* (London: Routledge, 1996)

³² For more on its significance and impact see Gerald Taylor, *Labour’s Renewal? The Policy Review and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997)

³³ See A.J. Davies, *To Build a New Jerusalem: The British Labour Party from Keir Hardie to Tony Blair* (London: Little Brown, 1992)

³⁴ Heath, A F and McDonald, S-K, “Social change and the future of the Left”, *The Political Quarterly* 58: (1987) 364-377. See Tony Blair, “New Clause 4”, speech to the Labour Party, 29 April 1995 in *New Britain* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996) 55. See also Anthony Heath, Roger Jowell, and John Curtice, *The Rise of New Labour: Party Policies and Voter Choices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) chapter 2, Davies, 439. Anthony Giddens also came to this conclusion.

³⁵ Giles Radice, “Southern Discomfort” (London: Fabian Society, 1992) 15. In a more recent analysis, Heath, Jowell and Curtice found that the observation was essentially correct but that it was not some new evolution: “New Labour had perhaps simply caught up with something that had long been true in Britain. In this respect Blair would be wrong to say that ‘society has changed and we had failed to change with it’. It would be more accurate to say that ‘society has never conformed with Labour assumptions, but we have failed to realise that until now.’”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13

³⁷ Blair, xii

³⁸ See “The Radical Coalition” a speech at the Fabian Society commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the 1945 general election, 5 July 1995, in *New Britain*, 4-21.

³⁹ “New Clause 4”, Blair, 55; “New Labour, New Life for Britain”, speech at Millbank Tower, London, 4 July 1996, 123.

⁴⁰ See, for example, “Speech to Socialist International” 8 November 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/508882.stm. (accessed 29 June 2010). See also David Coates, “The Character of New Labour” in *New Labour in Power*,

edited by David Coates & Peter Lawler (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000) 8

⁴¹ “The Radical Coalition”, 7

⁴² “New Labour, New Life for Britain”, 22

⁴³ Anthony Seldon with Chris Ballinger, Daniel Collings & Peter Snowdon, *Blair* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2nd ed., 2005)

⁴⁴ “The Third Way”, 5

⁴⁵ “*The Radical Coalition*”, 16

⁴⁶ Speech to the TUC, 14 September 1999

⁴⁷ Blair, “The Third Way: New Politics for the New Century”, Fabian Pamphlet 588 (London : Fabian Society, 1998) 1.

⁴⁸ Steven Fielding, *The Labour Party: Continuity and Change*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 105. See also Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998)

⁴⁹ Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party* (London: Little, Brown, 1998) 294

⁵⁰ Hale, 224

⁵¹ The journalist Neal Lawson invented the term “neo-Labour”, arguing that Blair’s party was simply continuing Thatcherism. See also Stuart Hall “The Great Moving Nowhere Show” in *The New Labour Reader*, edited by Andrew Chadwick and Richard Heffernan (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) and Alex Finlayson, *Making Sense of New Labour* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2003)

⁵² David Rubinstein, “A New Look at New Labour”, *Politics*, 20:3 (2000) 161-7

⁵³ Fielding, 208

⁵⁴ For more on this see Kitty Stewart, “Equality and Social Justice” in *The Blair Effect, 2001-2005* edited by Anthony Seldon and Dennis Kavanagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

⁵⁵ Fielding, 211

⁵⁶ *The Rise of New Labour*, 118

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* See also Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski, “Why Parties Fail to Learn: electoral defeat, selective perception and British party politics”, *Party Politics*, 10:1 (2004) 85-104.

⁵⁸ Pippa Norris, “Elections and Public Opinion” in *The Blair Effect, 2001-2005*, 66

⁵⁹ Shafer, *The Two Majorities*, 65

⁶⁰ Paul Abramson, John Aldrich and David Rohde. *Change and Continuity in the 1992 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1994) 158

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 160

⁶² Clinton, 631. As his biographer has pointed out, Clinton’s presidential papers contain more “communication” speeches from 1992 to 1994 than do Reagan’s. As a communicator, Clinton is hard to beat. See Nigel Hamilton, *Bill Clinton: Mastering the Presidency*. (London: Century, 2007) 362

⁶³ Clinton, 631

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 629

⁶⁵ Quoted in Hamilton, 371

⁶⁶ Paul Abramson, Paul, John Aldrich & David Rohde. *Change and Continuity in the 1992 Elections*. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1994) 109

⁶⁷ Gordon Brown, address at Labour Party Conference, 2009, <http://www2.labour.org.uk/gordon-brown-speech-conference> (accessed 4 June 2010)

⁶⁸ Barack Obama, “Remarks on Wall Street Reform”, Cooper Union, New York, New York, 22 April 2010. Consulted on 3 June 2010 at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-wall-street-reform>

⁶⁹ See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004) 129-30 which is discussed in note 14

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CULTURE WAR IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1992

FRANÇOISE COSTE

Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, both the tone and substance of American political discourse underwent a remarkable transition. Increasingly, ideological and partisan cleavages which had traditionally been defined by class issues came to be replaced by more cultural differences.¹ This phenomenon was not fully analyzed until James Davison Hunter labelled it the “culture war” in his seminal 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. Surveying the political landscape after the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush years, Hunter concluded that, by the 1990s, the economic or social issues which traditionally dominated the American political landscape had come to be superseded by “the honest concerns of different communities engaged in a deeply rooted cultural conflict”.² For Hunter, these “personal disagreements” were so “deep” and “unreconcilable” that they had plunged the United States in “the midst of a culture war”.³ Hunter justified this bellicose term by the extremely high stakes this new political *zeitgeist* involves: cleavages are rooted on “different systems of moral understanding” and “beliefs that provide a source of identity, purpose, and togetherness for the people who live by them”. In this context, the rather Manichean end of political action becomes “the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others”.⁴ More specifically, Hunter identified two sides in this culture war, which he named “orthodox” and “progressive”. Orthodoxy is “the commitment... to an external, definable, and transcendent authority”. Progressivism is much more flexible and relativistic, “the tendency to resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life”.⁵

Since the early 1990s, numerous political scientists and sociologists have demonstrated the relevance of Hunter’s new paradigm. Most famously, in *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, Thomas Frank applied the

culture war thesis to George W. Bush's America, by showing that when unprivileged Americans support the Republican Party (as they have massively done in Kansas since the 1980s), they vote against their economic self-interest. At the root of this paradox lies the manipulation of cultural and religious issues by conservative Republicans, a phenomenon he labelled "the Great Backlash":

While earlier forms of conservatism emphasized fiscal sobriety, the backlash mobilizes voters with explosive social issues—summoning public outrage over everything from busing to un-Christian art—which it then marries to pro-business economic policies. Cultural anger is marshaled to achieve economic ends... In fact, backlash leaders systematically downplay the politics of economics. The movement's basic premise is that culture outweighs economics as a matter of public concern—that *Values Matter Most*, as one backlash title has it.⁶

Political scientists Mark D. Brewer and Jeffrey M. Stonecash, in their extensive study of the American electorate in the 2000s, *Split: Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics*, reached the same conclusion by presenting the American political landscape as primarily characterised by cultural polarization: "the trends indicate that voters are steadily moving to a situation of greater partisan division and that division is driven by differences in class and culture".⁷ Besides, the labels used by Hunter to identify the two sides of this culture war ("orthodox" and "progressive") have also been largely used by subsequent writers to analyze the dynamics of contemporary American politics. Thus, in *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics*, Byron E. Schafer describes what he calls "a new order" which he defines with terms clearly echoing Hunter's:

Here, the distinction between personal liberty and social control became a larger difference between the protection and extension of individual expression versus the fostering and enforcement of collective norms of behavior. Cultural "progressives"—the liberals—took the former position, emphasizing rights and liberties. Cultural "traditionalists"—the conservatives—took the latter, emphasizing norms and responsibilities instead.⁸

This essay will particularly focus on orthodox culture warriors. By this term, we mean the activists who belong to the vast nebula of the new conservative interest groups which appeared in the United States in the wake of the deep cultural changes brought about by the upheavals of the 1960s—such as the recognition of the right to privacy by the Supreme Court (with *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965, then *Roe v. Wade* in 1973),

the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, or the advent of the gay movement. What unites many of these groups is their Evangelical faith.⁹ Since the 1970s, they have more or less coalesced to form an influential lobby often referred to as the religious Right. Groups such as Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, Tony Perkins's Family Research Council, or James Dobson's Focus on the Family have led the conservative side of the culture war under the self-appointed mantle of "family values".¹⁰ These groups are mostly dominated by conservative Protestants and Catholics, which represents a major transition in the political and religious history of the United States since traditional inter-denominational conflicts between Protestants and Catholics have now been replaced by intra-denominational ones between moderates and radicals.¹¹

The religious Right deserves close scrutiny because it has become a central political actor in the United States in the late 20th century, especially through its electoral rapprochement with the Republican Party. The growing presence of orthodox religious conservatives among Republican voters is undeniable. Traditionally, Catholics—like many other ethnic minorities—were Democratic voters, as were white Evangelicals—a predominantly Southern and unprivileged socio-economic group until the last decades of the 20th century. But since the 1980s, the number of Catholics voting for the Republican Party has steadily increased.¹² The Republican evolution of white Evangelicals has been even more striking. Many of them had supported Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, but their presence within the party really became palpable in the 1990s. 47 percent of the delegates attending the Republican convention in Houston in 1992 were Evangelicals.¹³ The same year, according to official National Election Studies (NES) statistics, "religious traditionalism" became a very strong indicator of a Republican vote: 70 percent of church-going Evangelicals voted for George H.W. Bush.¹⁴ The ensuing years confirmed this trend as, throughout the 1990s, Evangelical Christians came to dominate a third of state Republican Parties, while constituting a strong faction in three fifths of them.¹⁵ By the 2000s, Evangelicals represented 25 percent of the American electorate and according to the NES, 88 percent of those attending church every week voted for George W. Bush in 2004.¹⁶ The last twenty years have thus led to two conclusions: orthodox Christians have massively turned towards the Republican Party and they have become a key faction within its ranks.

In his seminal thesis, Hunter identifies two overwhelming axes ("truths") in the moral worldview of these religious conservatives. First, "the world, and all of the life within it, was created by God, and ... human

life begins at conception and, from that point on, it is sacred.” Second, “the human species is differentiated into male and female not only according to genitalia, but also according to role, psyche, and spiritual calling. [Therefore] the natural and divinely mandated sexual relationship among humans is between male and female.” In other words, the two priorities of orthodox conservatives are the fight against abortion and homosexuality.¹⁷ This essay will therefore focus on the rhetorical approach adopted by religious conservatives since 1992 when dealing with these two topics.

Admittedly, Hunter’s theory of a culture war dominated by the issues of abortion and gay rights is not unanimously accepted in the United States. The first note-worthy “counter-study” of his 1991 thesis was conducted by three sociologists, Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson, in 1996. Their own analysis of the NES led them to claim that the culture war hypothesis had been greatly exaggerated by its supporters:

Have public attitudes on a wide range of social issues scaled together become more polarized? Apparently not... The omnibus scales [presented in the paper] are blunt measures. They effectively demonstrate the absence of polarization on a wide sociocultural front—an important corrective to the rhetoric of “culture war”.¹⁸

In 2006, political scientist Morris P. Fiorina reached the same conclusion in an influential book, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. According to him, NES statistics prove the ideological moderation of the American population (“between 2000 and 2004 ... differences between red and blue continue to be minor. ... Independents continue to be the largest category in both red and blue states ... pluralities in both red and blue states classify themselves as centrists.”).¹⁹

Fiorina’s rejection of the division of America between red—or conservative—and blue—or liberal—states is shared by other scholars. Many prefer to see the United States as a “purple” country.²⁰ For example, in their lengthy analysis of NES statistics in 2004 and 2006, Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde also stress the centrism of American voters, especially regarding the values at the core of the culture war theory.²¹ Such writers do not deny the existence and the passion of the religious Right, but they question its influence on the rest of American society. If these extreme ideologues remain a minority in the American population, then Morris P. Fiorina thinks the culture war should be downgraded to mere “noisy skirmishes”.²²

However, even the most vocal opponents of Hunter’s thesis admit some exceptions to their demonstration. The most famous studies proving

the moderation of the American electorate include exceptions regarding the two controversial issues of abortion and homosexuality. In their seminal article, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson recognise that “We find little support for the widely held belief that Americans have become sharply polarized on a wide range of social and cultural opinions... By contrast, Americans have become more divided in their attitudes toward abortion”.²³ As for Fiorina, his anti-culture war demonstration is conclusive, except as regards the NES statistics on gay rights as:

There was a clear difference in one of the major issues of the culture war, homosexuality... The level of support for societal acceptance of homosexuality was 10 percentage points higher in the blue states... The difference is statistically significant.²⁴

In other words, even culture-war sceptics grant a special status to abortion and gay rights, which seems to legitimise the centrality of these two themes in any study of the culture war.

Besides, the key dynamics at play in the culture war may not necessarily be that of the opinion of the American population at-large, but that of its politically active segment.²⁵ The impact of the religious Right on the population matters less than its impact on the political sphere. In this case, the influence of conservative Christians on the Republican Party since the 1990s cannot be denied. A two-fold evolution has taken place within the GOP. Studies of the ideological make-up of delegates attending the Republican National Conventions since the 1980s indicate that, by 1992, these party activists had massively converted to a staunch conservative line, particularly regarding the question of abortion rights.²⁶ The culture war is therefore a phenomenon which was first circumscribed to the most devoted party members, those activists running campaigns in their states and participating to presidential conventions. Logically, after a few years, the leadership of the GOP started to reflect this new trend within the rank and file. The conservative radicalization of the party elite became obvious in the growing polarization of the US Congress since the 1990s.²⁷

The culture war may consequently be more accurately defined as an ideological war pitting an “orthodox” minority against a “progressive” one. The small numbers of culture warriors must not however discredit Hunter’s thesis altogether, since these committed minorities happen to exert a tremendous influence on the rest of the population. As political scientist Greg D. Adams concluded in his study of abortion politics in the United States: “to the extent the mass and elite series are related, the causal arrow must point from elites to masses.”²⁸ The way these partisan

elites shape and frame public opinion is of course through their discourse: their words work as “signals to an inattentive public”.²⁹ This is why it is equally important to study the rhetoric of the religious Right as that of the elite of the Republican Party.

George W. Bush is a case in point. During his first presidential campaign in 2000, he tried to downplay the link between the GOP and radical religious conservatives by touting moderation and “compassionate conservatism”. But while in power, he multiplied gestures towards the religious Right (through his faith-based initiative programme, the limits on stem-cell research, or the global gag rule on abortion...).³⁰ But the best example probably is Bush’s support to a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage during the 2004 campaign. This stance enabled him to obtain record levels of Evangelical support on Election Day, which greatly helped him beat John Kerry.³¹ Tellingly, during the campaign, Bush defined his role with a typical culture-war frame when declaring: “The job of president is to help cultures change”.³² The Bush years therefore confirm that the ideological moderation of the American population matters much less than the polarization of the elites. There has been a contamination of the Republican elite by the orthodox and conservative discourse of the religious Right, and this is how the culture war has become a *fait accompli* for the electorate at-large, regardless of its own moderation.³³

The rapprochement between the GOP and conservative cultural warriors became obvious during its 1992 Convention in Houston. Keynote speaker Pat Buchanan—a former aide to Presidents Nixon and Reagan—gave a vitriolic speech which explicitly presented the core message of the culture war for the first time. Buchanan succeeded in giving flesh and rhetorical content to the academic analysis offered by James Davison Hunter the preceding year. He embraced Hunter’s label by proclaiming: “It is a cultural war”. He also confirmed the religious roots of this conflict by praising George H.W. Bush as “a champion of the Judeo-Christian values” and by describing the United States as “God’s country”. Crucially, Buchanan never shied away from using the most extreme language possible. For him, the stakes were dire: “There is a religious war going on in this country... This war is for the soul of America... We must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.” He also precisely identified the enemy, embodied by the progressive supporters of women’s rights and gay rights. He accused Bill Clinton of supporting “unrestricted abortion on demand” and mercilessly made fun of “radical feminism”. Even more than liberal women though, the main target of Buchanan’s culture war speech was the homosexual community. He

criticised Bill Clinton and Al Gore for forming “the most pro-lesbian and pro-gay ticket in history” and he strongly rejected “the amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women”. He also resorted to homophobic slurs to attack the Democratic Party, especially in his description of its 1992 Convention: “I watched that giant masquerade ball up at Madison Square Garden, where 20,000 liberals and radicals came dressed up as moderates and centrists in the greatest single exhibition of cross-dressing in American political history”.³⁴

Buchanan’s 1992 speech proved a seminal text in the history of the culture war. To this day, it has served as a template, a road map to be followed by the cultural warriors of the Right, both in its tone and language—the more striking, the better—and in its targets—abortion rights supporters and gays.

Abortion

The first priority for the orthodox conservatives identified by Hunter is abortion. Since the US Supreme Court declared abortion constitutional in 1973, anti-abortion conservatives—who label themselves “pro-lifers”—have faced a quandary. The majority of the population (between 60 and 70 percent) actually supports abortion rights.³⁵ As a result, pro-lifers have had no other choice than to mask the unpopular reality of their stance behind a much more appealing language. In other words, form—or discourse—has often trumped content—or the substantive arguments against abortion: each victory achieved by the anti-abortion movement since the 1990s can be explained not so much by massive support for its proposals but by clever lexical contraptions which have left the pro-choice camp stumped.

The primacy granted to language in the fight against *Roe v. Wade* is not new. It was theorised by the leaders of the religious Right from its very beginning. As early as 1979, in their book *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, famous paediatrician C. Everett Koop and theologian Francis A. Schaeffer presented a complete banning of abortion through the vote of a Constitutional amendment as the priority of the pro-life cause. To this end, Koop and Schaeffer identified words as the fundamental weapon to be used by their followers:

Language is an important tool in convincing others of your position... The language we use actually forms the concepts we have and the results these concepts produce.³⁶

Focusing on discourse was all the more necessary as *Roe* had been made possible, according to Koop and Schaeffer, by a smart manipulation of the English language by pro-choicers through euphemisms aimed at concealing the gruesome reality of abortion:

Semantic legerdemain can prepare us for accepting a horror. ... Think of the deliberate changes in language that have been used to soften the stark impact of what is actually happening. Abortion is merely the “removal of fetal tissues”, or “discontinuing” or “termination of pregnancy”.³⁷

Koop and Schaeffer consequently encouraged pro-lifers to centre their discourse on purely emotional arguments: “You will be surprised at how little people really know about these issues. Opinions are often formed on the basis of emotion”.³⁸ *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* itself illustrates these rhetorical conceptions by repeatedly making the dramatic claim that abortion amounts to murdering children and is comparable to the Holocaust.³⁹ Koop and Schaeffer strongly influenced the first generation of pro-lifers in the United States, especially during the Reagan years. However, pro-lifers proved unable to impose a human life amendment. Many blamed this radical discourse for this failure. Comparing women who abort to murderers or Nazis placed pro-lifers in an aggressive position towards women who often resort to abortion while going through a very distressful period in their life.

Interestingly, this condemnation of rhetorical radicalism was shared by the leaders of the pro-life movement themselves. In 1991, one of the main leaders of the religious Right, Ralph Reed (the then executive director of the Christian Coalition), singled out the extremist discourse of pro-life conservatives for their inability to advance their agenda:

[We must] find effective language that motivate[s] our supporters without turning off voters sitting on the fence... Such a message... sets a standard of basic civility that allow[s] secular ears to hear our message.⁴⁰

As a result, the main pro-life groups decided in the early 1990s to adopt a new communication strategy, although the founding principles established by Koop and Schaeffer were not entirely discarded. The premium put on emotional language would still be respected, but the lexical crusade of the movement would be more subtle. The American pro-life movement thus entered a second phase in 1992, marked by a less “absolutist” and more “incrementalist” strategy.⁴¹

New legislative priorities were defined. Today, instead of fighting against abortion *per se*, pro-lifers prefer setting a wide array of restrictions

to the way American women have access to it, with the clear hope that the accumulation of these small obstacles will end up draining *Roe v. Wade* of all meaning—even if it officially remains on the books. Such obstacles include laws which oblige underage girls who are pregnant and want to have an abortion to warn at least one of their parents in order to obtain his or her assent (regulations known as “parental notification” laws or “parental consent” laws); some states have adopted laws establishing a waiting period of 24 or 36 hours between the moment a woman is given an appointment for an abortion and the time of the procedure; in the 1990s, some states even voted laws (which were later declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court) forcing women to warn their husbands if they wanted to abort (“husband notification” laws).⁴²

To justify these restrictions, pro-lifers try to avoid polemics with pro-choicers. This transition towards a more moderate-sounding discourse seems to be a winning strategy in two respects: it enables religious activists to present their ideas as common sense propositions and to drain the abortion debate of all complex and polemical content; more crucially, it enables Republican leaders to play it both ways—they can send positive signals to their conservative base and at the same time appeal safely to the majority of moderate Americans. For instance, the language George W. Bush used to explain his support for parental notification laws purposefully skirted any polemical words, resorting instead to more neutral phrases, like: “I view this as a family rights issue”.⁴³ Thanks to such conciliatory words, pro-lifers and their Republican allies can change the nature of the abortion debate since their legislative proposals seem harmless.

The constant desire to convey an ever more moderate, consensual, and common-sensical image also explains why in the 1990s pro-lifers, both within the religious Right and the Republican Party, abandoned their traditional condemnation of women seeking abortions. In a January 2006 speech, President Bush illustrated this new tone: “We’re sending a clear message to any woman facing a crisis pregnancy: We love you, we love your child, and we’re here to help you”.⁴⁴ Admittedly, as urged by Koop and Schaeffer, pro-life language remains emotional, but anger has now given way to compassion.

The pro-lifers’ efforts to reconnect with pregnant women goes even further since they also take great pains to claim that they care about the mother’s health as much as they care about her foetus. Medical terminology has become ubiquitous in their argumentation. Two health-related issues have particularly captured their attention. First, pro-lifers are convinced of the existence of a link between abortion and breast cancer, a

concern known as “ABC”, for “Abortion-Breast Cancer”.⁴⁵ Pro-lifers are also insisting on what they see as the terrible psychological havoc wreaked by abortion on women, a phenomenon they label “Post-Abortion Syndrome”. According to pro-lifers, women who abort are more likely to suffer from depression, suicidal thoughts, HIV-AIDS, heart disease, and drug addiction.⁴⁶ The movement’s priority in such instances is not the credibility of these medical concepts—the ABC and Post-Abortion syndromes are both rejected by American medical instances—but rather the strengthening of its image as the real and only protector of American women.⁴⁷ As David Reardon, one of the leading theoreticians of the movement today, explained in 2007: “We must change the abortion debate so that we are arguing with our opponents on their own turf, on the issue of defending the interest of women”.⁴⁸

It would nevertheless be a mistake to see in this new pro-woman strategy an abandonment by the movement of its traditional focus—the foetus. Pro-lifers enjoyed one of their recent victories in April 2004 when President Bush signed into law the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (UVVA).⁴⁹ The UVVA stipulates that if a pregnant woman is attacked and loses her foetus as a result of this aggression, her attacker will be judged as if he had assaulted two persons. At first sight, this act is not directly linked to the debate over abortion rights. Yet, a law which amounts to considering a foetus as a full human being—distinct from the woman who is carrying it—can only weaken *Roe* in the long term. The language used by pro-life religious activists during the debate about the UVVA precisely showed that their aim was to trap pro-choicers into a delicate corner thanks to a reversal of the terms usually dominating abortion-related discussions. First among those was the very concept of “choice”. The National Right to Life Committee (NRL) asked its members to insist as much as possible on the following idea: “Lawmakers who call themselves ‘pro-choice’ should support the bill because it protects babies who are injured or killed *contrary* to the choice of their mothers” (emphasis in the original).⁵⁰

The strategy mixing scientifically-sounding phrases and compassionate language for the foetus reached its climax in 2003 with the vote of the Partial-Birth Abortion Act. The law criminalised a certain type of abortion which doctors call “Dilation and Extraction”, or “Dilation and Excavation” (or “D&X”), and which is mostly used in the 3rd trimester of a woman’s pregnancy. The number of D&X procedures is actually minuscule, a few thousand a year—mostly in cases of late-term complications—out of the 1.3 million abortions that take place every year in the United States.⁵¹ D&X abortions consist in pulling the whole foetus from the womb, feet first, with a pair of forceps. The skull is extracted after draining the foetus’

brain through a suction tube. However gruesome such descriptions may sound, the arguments advanced by pro-lifers during the debate on the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban were devoid of medical reality. The very term “partial-birth abortion” does not exist in medical jargon. It is a political and rhetorical invention, an attention-grabbing phrase coined in 1995 during a meeting in Washington, D.C. between a lobbyist working for the National Right to Life Committee and a Republican Congressman from Florida, Charles Canady.⁵²

In this case, language clearly serves a political purpose thanks to terms supposed to trigger repulsion. Descriptions of partial-birth abortions by religious conservatives are always very visual and based on the semantic field of horror:

The doctor performs this... procedure by dilating the cervix and then manually breeching the child. Later the baby’s feet are pulled out of the womb into the birth canal, except for the head which is purposely kept inside the cervix... While that doctor holds with one hand a warm, confused, and defenseless mostly born child, he does the unthinkable. He coldly and purposely rams a hollow metal tube or scissors into that young child’s still fragile skull.⁵³

Or:

The dilation and evacuation method of abortion... involves the abortionist [sic] grasping the unborn child’s body parts at random with a long-toothed clamp. The fetal body parts are then torn off of the body and pulled out of the mother. The remaining body parts are grasped and pulled out, one by one, until only the head remains. The head is then grasped and crushed in order to finally remove it from the mother... the child is torn apart limb from limb.⁵⁴

This lexical guerrilla against so-called partial-birth abortion is not limited to culture war activist groups on the Right. It was also faithfully followed by President Bush and the Republican Party between 2000 and 2008. On the day George W. Bush signed the bill into law, he described this method of abortion as “the partial delivery of a live boy or girl, and a sudden, violent end of that life”.⁵⁵ As for the act itself, it defines partial-birth abortion as:

an abortion in which a physician deliberately and intentionally vaginally delivers a living, unborn child’s body until either the entire baby’s head is outside the body of the mother, or any part of the baby’s trunk past the navel is outside the body of the mother and only the head remains inside

the womb, for the purpose of performing an overt act (usually the puncturing of the back of the child's skull and removing the baby's brains) that the person knows will kill the partially delivered infant ... and then completes delivery of the dead infant. ... [This is] a gruesome and inhumane procedure.⁵⁶

This official description could be taken verbatim from any pro-life pamphlet, the sign that, under the Bush years, a vast and concerted rhetorical effort to attack *Roe* existed from conservative grassroots groups to the highest level of the federal government.

Focusing the debate so much on the question of partial-birth abortion makes obvious political sense. It enables the religious Right to reinterpret the seminal rhetorical lesson preached by Koop and Schaeffer in a subtle and efficient way. Pro-lifers, simple conservative Christian activists or elected Republican officials, have continued to use a highly emotional language. This explains why they actually rarely employed the word "foetus" during the debates about the act, as it can sound medical and cold. They preferred instead to present the foetus as a normal baby, a real person. Hence a predilection in pro-life discourse for phrases such as "the pre-born",⁵⁷ "the mostly-born",⁵⁸ "the four-fifths born",⁵⁹ or even, for George W. Bush, "children who are inches from birth".⁶⁰ Terms like these also offer the advantage to implicitly revive the Koop and Schaeffer-inspired amalgam between abortion and murder, but this time, without resorting to the violent discourse which had hurt the conservative movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, underneath the polished rhetorical surface, the argument remains strikingly similar: common sense makes any decent person consider as an abomination an abortion method during which the brain of what is described as an almost normal child is suctioned away in a tube.

It is precisely this type of instinctive reaction which has become the best ally of pro-lifers in the fight for public opinion: a 2003 opinion poll showed 70 percent of Americans (including many who consider themselves pro-choice) support the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act.⁶¹ There lays the core of the pro-lifers' strategy. The debate over partial-birth abortion left pro-choicers trapped in a rhetorical corner. It is extremely difficult to publicly defend a procedure like D&X when the very terms to describe it have been coined by its opponents to trigger disgust and condemnation. In this case, pro-lifers used language to push millions of Americans to question their theoretical and abstract support towards abortion by forcing them—through the sheer power of a few carefully selected words—to visualise what concretely takes place during a procedure. Even though the method they highlighted only concerned a

very small number of cases, pro-lifers unsurprisingly triggered an outraged reaction. Once again, they followed the footsteps of Koop and Schaeffer by reversing to their advantage the rhetorical strategy of the pro-choicers: “small groups of people often argue their case by using a few extreme examples to gain sympathy for ideas and practices that later are not limited to extreme cases”.⁶²

The choice to turn towards an incremental strategy in the 1990s has proven so fruitful for pro-life conservatives that their latest campaign is following the master-plan established by the partial-birth abortion ban. Pro-lifers are trying to weaken even further popular support for abortion by spreading the notion of foetal citizenship. More specifically, pro-life activists, who until the 2000s had multiplied lexical inventions to describe the foetus as a normal person, have decided to take this approach a step further by painting the foetus as a legitimate citizen of the United States (the National Right to Life Committee announced this new campaign with an unmistakable sense of glee, conscious that pro-choicers would again find it hard to counter this message:

NRL was approached by Janet Folger... with an idea: unborn children are Americans too. For years, we as a pro-life movement have advanced the idea that unborn children are full members of the human family—much to the chagrin of our pro-abortion opponents. But this new, fresh angle on the old idea was something that hadn't been considered yet.”⁶³

Hence the more and more frequent use in pro-life speeches and pamphlets of phrases such as “the right of these little boys and girls”, “pre-born American children”, or even “future American patriots”.⁶⁴ The point of this citizenship angle is obvious. If an embryo is an American citizen, then it becomes impossible to defend abortion as a matter related to women's rights. Public opinion will logically prefer to defend the civil rights of the weakest group—embryos—against those of the most powerful one—pregnant women. A leader of the National Right to Life Committee admitted as much: “When the debate is about women, we lose. When the debate is about babies, we win”.⁶⁵ In the next few years, the culture war regarding abortion is consequently likely to worsen and pit American women against the embryos they carry.

Homosexuality

The religious Right's campaign against homosexuality is more recent than the one against abortion. Not until Bill Clinton's promise in 1992 to

lift the ban preventing gays from serving in the military did this question come to the foreground of American politics.

As the first phase of the pro-life movement was marked by an almost instinctive turn to a radical position, the religious Right entered the debate on the presence of gays in the military in 1992 in a dogmatic manner. When an issue appears in the political landscape, cultural warriors do not materially and intellectually have the time to elaborate a sophisticated and subtle rhetorical strategy. They consequently react as if guided by their *id*, an *id* strongly influenced by their orthodox religious convictions, to use Hunter's categories. This explains why the conservative discourse about homosexuality is infused with religious language. The Bible remains the be-all and end-all of most conservative arguments. The Family Research Council, one of the many groups active in the religious Right nebula, starts its main brochure on homosexuality with the remark: "homosexuality is unambiguously found wanting by Scripture.... This booklet reinforces that wise and universal judgment".⁶⁶ More specifically, the description of homosexuality as an "abomination" in the Bible (a passage in Leviticus reads "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.") leads religious conservatives to describe it as a sin. This stance makes for straightforward demonstrations, steeped in moral vocabulary. Pat Robertson, the head of the Christian Coalition, thus likened lifting the ban on gays in the military to giving "preferred status to evil".⁶⁷

Conservative language is also heavily influenced by a passage from Ephesians, in which Paul says: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." The analogy between heterosexual marriage and the Christian covenant is the rock on which religious conservatives base their war against gay marriage, as in the case of Christian writer John Noonan:

The God of Israel is a faithful husband, he is never seen as a devoted homosexual lover. The Christ of the New Testament is a bridegroom, the Church is his bride; the couple are [sic] never presented as a homosexual pair.⁶⁸

This religious absolutism obviously echoes the first pro-lifers who followed the lead of theologian Francis A. Schaeffer. But radicalism did not work to convince Americans to turn against *Roe v. Wade*. Similarly, disparaging homosexuality as a sin means taking the risk of offending less religious Americans. Therefore, even if radicalism probably derives from the most heartfelt feelings of conservative cultural warriors, it must, if it is

to succeed in the political arena, be tweaked and framed in a more neutral manner. Hence the turn in recent anti-gay rhetoric to innocuous-sounding terms like “homosexual lifestyle”, “homosexual behavior”, or “homosexual activity”.⁶⁹ These seemingly trivial words impose a conservative vision of homosexuality. For if homosexuality is but a “lifestyle” or a “behavior” then it can be opposed to the notion that it is an identity.

The “lifestyle” label consequently enables the religious Right to continue to present homosexuality as something negative, but without any Biblical connotation. It logically leads to the idea that being gay results from a simple choice. People are responsible for their “behavior”, as opposed to an identity defined by genetics. Religious Right groups explicitly draw this connection, like Focus on the Family (“Homosexuality is not inborn”) or the Family Research Council (“The notion that ‘people are born gay’ is nothing less than the ‘Big Lie’ of the homosexual movement... People do choose, and can be held responsible for, what overt sexual behaviors they actually engage in. ... Such behavior is clearly voluntary.”).⁷⁰ For the most charitable conservatives, this choice is not caused by the malevolence of homosexuals, but by a disease. Hence another type of rhetoric, in which the language of sin is masked by that of science and psychology. The Traditional Values Coalition sees homosexuals as “deeply dysfunctional and self-destructive”, while Focus on the Family defines homosexuality as a “relational problem of satisfying emotional needs in an unhealthy way”.⁷¹ Other cultural warriors push the scientific lexicon even further and present homosexuality as a mental illness labelled “SSAD” for “Same-Sex Attraction Disorder”.⁷²

Pushed to its ultimate conclusion, the notion that homosexuality is a chosen lifestyle has tremendous political implications. It means that, like all choices, it is reversible. Conservative leaders consequently insist on the virtue of what they call “reparative therapy”, a type of counselling which can supposedly cure people of their homosexual disorder.⁷³ Such beliefs explain the conviction frequently asserted in conservative literature that “there are... thousands of former homosexuals” who have “experience[d] liberation from their lifestyle”.⁷⁴

The modulation of their harsh ideological discourse by scientific-sounding arguments helped religious conservatives transform their image on the question of abortion and broaden their appeal. The same mechanism seems at work on the issue of homosexuality. By reducing homosexuality to a choice and a curable disease, they weaken the credibility of their adversaries who denounce anti-gay bigotry. One does not choose to be black, so racism is odious. But if one chooses to be gay, then criticizing his/her lifestyle becomes acceptable. In the debate on

abortion, resorting to supposedly-scientific terms led the religious Right to assume the popular role of protector of pregnant women and their foetus. Adopting a compassionate posture became critical too when the debate over gay marriage started to rage in the United States in 2003-2004. Conservative activists cast themselves as the last protectors of the American family. The concern for the traditional family includes the desire to protect children. According to Catholic writer Susan Brinkmann, "The whole issue of gay marriage can be summed up in one word—children".⁷⁵ "Children" here must be understood as a not so subtle code word aimed at establishing a connection between the issue of gay marriage and paedophilia. In the few instances in which the amalgam between gays and child molesters is explicitly used, culture warriors once again prefer to hide behind pseudo-scientific language, as in this demonstration by the Family Research Council regarding "Child Sexual Abuse": "Pedophiles are invariably males. ... Significant numbers of victims are males.... Many pedophiles consider themselves to be homosexual".⁷⁶ It is never made clear how a paedophile would find it easier to rape children if he was allowed to marry an adult of the same sex. But as in the debate over abortion, the point is to affect people through a language that automatically triggers an emotional response.

Using the question of families and children in relation with gay marriage has become omnipresent in the political arena. This trope enables conservatives to present their progressive opponents as the foes of this most consensual of institutions, the traditional nuclear family. Before a Congressional debate about gay marriage in 2006, James Dobson made his priority clear: not so much to obtain a majority in the Senate but to "help the voters identify who is and is not supportive of the family". This, in turn, enabled Focus to finance TV spots aimed at attacking Democrats opposed to the amendment, like Senator Salazar of Colorado, where an ad claimed "Why doesn't Senator Salazar believe every child needs a mother and a father?"⁷⁷ This type of argument is reminiscent of the pro-lifers' strategy regarding partial-birth abortion. It similarly pushes Democrats into a trap since no politician can possibly criticise the notion of family. Conservative rhetoric really works at its best when it corners progressives into untenable predicaments.

This rhetorical model combining compassionate and consensual notions, initiated at first by religious Right activist groups, was also the one adopted by President George W. Bush. After the Massachusetts Supreme Court legalised gay marriage in November 2003 and San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom started to issue marriage certificates to same-sex couples in February 2004, George W. Bush announced his

support for a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. In this crucial election year, he tried to ground his stance on sociological-like remarks about the general welfare of human society. He described marriage as “the most fundamental institution of civilization”, “the most enduring human institution”, and “one of our most basic social institutions.” Tellingly, he avoided resorting to classical culture war rhetoric, taking pains to downplay the Christian undertone of his position. He justified the amendment thanks to historical precedents presented in an ecumenical manner: “After more than two centuries of American jurisprudence and millennia of human experience, a few judges and local authorities are presuming to change the most fundamental institution of civilization”, “the union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith”.⁷⁸

However, despite his attempts at softening his rhetoric, Bush’s anti-gay marriage pronouncements in 2004 do not mark a real departure from traditional culture war language. When evoking the supporters of gay rights, he never failed to resort to a typically passionate and polemical tone. More specifically, the conditions in which gay marriage entered the body politic provided great fodder to appeal to his conservative base: the fact that same-sex marriage had resulted from a judicial decision in Massachusetts and a municipal order in San Francisco was unacceptable to them. This particular situation enabled Bush to condemn the process that had made gay marriage possible as much as gay marriage itself. He repeatedly denounced the lack of respect for the will of the people on the part of gay-rights supporters: “some activist judges and local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage... Activist courts have left the people with one recourse... our nation must enact a constitutional amendment to protect marriage.”⁷⁹ This procedural angle connected his anti-gay marriage stance with one of the oldest staples of the religious Right: the idea that the will of the people, which supposedly tends towards conservative values, is ignored by unelected progressive elites—a complaint which evidently finds its roots in *Roe*. Hence Bush’s anger during the 2004 presidential campaign against the denial of democracy entailed in his eyes by the practice of gay marriages in Massachusetts and San Francisco:

On a matter of such importance, the voice of the people must be heard...
 Unless action is taken, we can expect more arbitrary court decisions...
 more defiance of the law by local officials.⁸⁰

The language of the religious Right in the debate over same-sex marriage is consequently two-faceted, alternating between a soothing common sense tone on the historical and cultural legitimacy of the traditional family and more polemical political attacks against gay-rights supporters. This ambivalence marks the main departure on the part of anti-gay activists from the successful rhetorical model established by pro-lifers since the 1990s. It also exposes a more interesting and complex dimension of the religious Right. On the question of abortion, conservative cultural warriors enjoyed a series of legislative successes during the Bush years, the proof that the language of common sense and moderation can fuel a virtuous cycle for the movement. In other words, the patience required by the choice of incrementalism in the 1990s has born fruit and given pro-lifers reasons to be confident for the long-term outcome of their fight. The fact that the opponents of gay marriage have proven unable to limit their argumentation to similar moderate themes, like families and children, and instead feel the need to also resort to solemn warning about dangerous pro-gay progressives reveals a very different state of mind.

For religious conservatives, same-sex marriage is not an issue limited to gay people. Their discourse is grounded on a catastrophist domino theory: gay marriage threatens the survival of the traditional family, and if the family collapses, then society will too. In 2008 Tony Perkins, the head of the Family Research Council, asserted “we will not survive if we lose the institution of marriage”, while Catholic author Susan Brinkmann concluded: “Heterosexual marriage is a societal structure and without it, society crumbles”.⁸¹

In the dystopia brought about by same-sex marriage, all moral bearings will disappear. The most recurrent moral nightmare found in the conservative discourse over gay marriage is about polygamy. The Hoover Institute, one of the oldest conservative think tanks, warned: “Among the likeliest effects of gay marriage is to take us down a slippery slope to legalize polygamy and polyamory (group marriage)”.⁸² The National Organisation for Marriage asked “Is polygamy next?”⁸³, to which Republican Senator Rick Santorum replied “yes” in 2003: “If the Supreme Court says that you have the right to consensual gay sex within your home, then you have the right to bigamy, you have the right to polygamy, you have the right to incest, you have the right to adultery. You have the right to anything.”⁸⁴ Such scenarios explain the extremely alarmist pronouncements of religious Right leaders during the debate over gay marriage. Dobson wrote to his followers “This effort is our D-DAY, or Gettysburg or Stalingrad”.⁸⁵

Admittedly, such pronouncements can help the cause: hyperbolic discourse is more likely to mobilise the base and catch the attention of public opinion. But if it is really an efficient weapon, why is it absent from the pro-lifers' rhetorical arsenal? Both pro-lifers and anti-gay marriage activists are involved in a culture war against progressives. Yet, despite numerous similarities in their discourse (masking religious arguments behind the language of science, cultural tradition, or compassion for instance), when it comes to actually engaging the enemy, their battle-plans could not be more different. Since the 1990s, when pro-lifers ceased to call pregnant women who abort murderers or Nazis, their discourse has had a single focus. They exclusively discuss topics related to pregnant women and foetuses, while completely ignoring pro-choice activists. They do not even try to insult them; they just speak as if they did not exist. This is probably due to the fact that conservatives constitute, on the question of abortion, an ideological minority. Attacking pro-choicers would probably offend the majority of Americans who still support *Roe v. Wade*.

Such caution is not necessary in the debate over gay marriage, where the majority of the population actually agrees with the religious Right (only 41 percent of Americans support same-sex marriage).⁸⁶ This provides conservative cultural warriors with a comfort zone, but this extra margin of liberty is not necessarily positive. Because they think they have to make less of an effort to appeal to the population than in the case of abortion, and because their target is less integrated in mainstream society (there are many more women than gays), religious conservatives probably feel they can be more brutally honest in exposing the inmost depths of their conviction on homosexuality. This explains why, contrary to pro-lifers, anti-gay marriage leaders appear obsessed by their adversaries. Their discourse is peppered with allusions to gay activists, who constitute in their view a "homosexual lobby".⁸⁷ Like all lobbies, the homosexual one has a specific set of demands deemed the "gay agenda" or "the homosexual agenda" by conservative Christians.⁸⁸ But the gay lobby is singled out by the religious Right from other progressive groups (like pro-choice organizations) because it is supposedly very well organised and all-powerful. Dobson calls it a "most powerful lobby" with a "master plan".⁸⁹ It is so influential that it has imposed what the religious group Concerned Women for America has described as a "gay thought police".⁹⁰

Gays are accused of using their all-mighty lobby to change the laws of the United States in their favour. This conservative resentment is expressed through frequent allusions to the fact that gays want to be treated as special citizens, worthy of exceptional treatment. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush declared "I don't think they

[gays] should have special rights.”⁹¹ The almost mechanical use of the word “special” in conservative rhetoric when discussing gays seems puzzling: the desire of homosexuals to be able to integrate straight institutions like the armed forces or marriage bespeaks more of a will to act normally than to separate oneself from society.

There consequently exists a clear contradiction between the words anti-gay conservatives use and the reality these words actually describe. The religious Right represents tens of millions of Christian believers and thousands of churches and political organizations with million-dollar budgets. On the question of same-sex marriage, the majority of the population is on its side. Yet the most prominent argument it is using to prevent the legalization of gay marriage is insisting—almost obsessively, as in a conspiracy theory—on the dark agenda of an all-powerful gay enemy bent on destroying heterosexual couples and taking their children away. Far from displaying confidence and optimism—two attitudes which proved crucial to help pro-lifers appeal to more and more Americans—the cognitive dissonance between the considerable visibility and resources of the anti-gay movement and its language of victimization and persecution betrays a feeling of paranoia. Inevitably, basing a political crusade on paranoia cannot work in the long term. The inefficiency of this strategy is already apparent: support for same-sex marriage may still constitute a minority position in the United States but it increases by one point every year.⁹² These statistics are understandable. It is difficult to trust activists whose discourse sounds so panic-stricken because panic implicitly diminishes their credibility: if the beliefs of anti-gay conservatives are so fragile that centuries-old and consensual traditions like heterosexual couples and child-raising can be destroyed by the marriages of people who represent a tiny fraction of the population, then these beliefs may not be so valuable and worth fighting for after all. The very passion fuelling the religious Right’s fight against homosexuality may paradoxically contribute to a decline of its influence as its hyperbolic language blurs its message by disconnecting it from political reality.

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Notes

¹ Lyman A. Kellstedt et al., "Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?" *Sociology of Religion* 55:3 (1994): 308.

² James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁶ Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 5-6. In their lengthy study of the conservative movement in the United States, John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge express the exact same idea with this catchy formula: "the Republicans have managed to convince Joe that in America, class is not a question of money but of values." (John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge, *The Right Nation, Conservative Power in America* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 236).

⁷ Mark D. Brewer and Jeffrey M. Stonecash, *Split: Class and Cultural Divides in American Politics* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007), 184-185.

⁸ Byron E. Shafer, *The Two Majorities and the Puzzle of Modern American Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 31.

⁹ Religious historian Randall Balmer offers this three-fold definition of Evangelicalism: "First, an Evangelical is someone who takes the Bible seriously, even (for many not all) to the point of literal interpretation. ... Second, on the basis of this view of the Bible, evangelicals believe in the importance of conversion as the central criterion for salvation. ... Finally, an Evangelical is someone who recognizes the imperative to spread the faith, or to *evangelize*." (Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come, How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), xviii-xix).

¹⁰ Matthew D. Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s*, ed. Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 14-15.

¹¹ William H. Flanigan and Nancy H. Zingale, *Political Behavior of the American Electorate, Eleventh Edition* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2006), 106.

¹² Geoffrey C. Layman, "Religion and Political Behavior in the United States: The Impact of Beliefs, Affiliations, and Commitment from 1980 to 1994," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61:2 (Summer, 1997): 295, 301.

¹³ Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 296.

¹⁴ Edward G. Carmines and Geoffrey C. Layman, "Cultural Conflict in American Politics: Religious Traditionalism, Postmaterialism, and US Political Behavior," *The Journal of Politics*, 59:3 (August 1997): 759-760; Kellstedt et al., 320.

¹⁵ Shafer, 180.

¹⁶ Flanigan and Zingale, 114-115.

¹⁷ Hunter, 46, 122. This overwhelming concern for abortion and homosexuality is all the more understandable when taking into account the theological underpinnings of the Evangelical faith, as explained by Christopher J. Soper: "Evangelical theology, with its stress on personal faith and practice, leads believers to be more concerned with political issues which can be interpreted in terms of an individual's lifestyle, behavior, and morality than those issues which are corporate in nature." (quoted in Shafer, 178).

¹⁸ Paul DiMaggio, John Evans, and Bethany Bryson, "Have Americans' Social Attitudes Become more Polarized?" *The American Journal of Sociology*, 102:3 (November 1996): 708.

¹⁹ Morris P. Fiorina, with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 47.

²⁰ For a detailed study of the economic and cultural homogeneity of the American electorate, see: Stephen Ansolabehere, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder Jr., "Purple America," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 20:2 (Spring 2006): 97-118.

²¹ Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde, *Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007), 317.

²² Fiorina, 8.

²³ DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson, 715.

²⁴ Fiorina, 41-42.

²⁵ This *caveat* is all the more relevant in a country where turn-out is historically low. In a country where few people vote, an active minority can have disproportionate influence. This seems to be the case of the religious Right as its supporters happen to vote in great numbers. The historic 1994 mid-terms (when the GOP captured both chambers of Congress) were marked by this phenomenon: "Despite low voter turnout by the full eligible electorate, on election day about 30 percent of those who voted were evangelical Christians and among these, about 69% percent voted Republican. Though right-wing Christians represented only an estimated 9 or 10 percent of the population, their disproportionate electoral participation made them a force to be reckoned with." (Diamond, 311-312).

²⁶ Thomas M. Carsey and Geoffrey C. Layman, "A Dynamic Model of Political Change among Party Activists," *Political Behavior*, 21:1 (March 1999): 21-22. Numerous political scientists have reached the same conclusion, see for example:

Edward G. Carmines and James Woods, "The Role of Party Activists in the Evolution of the Abortion Issue," *Political Behavior*, 21:4 (December 2002): 365-368.

²⁷ Fiorina, 14-18.

²⁸ Greg D. Adams, "Evidence of an Issue Evolution," *American Journal of Political Science*, 41:3 (July 1997): 734-735.

²⁹ Carmine and Woods, 374.

³⁰ Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 148-149.

³¹ Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, 46; 90; 110.

³² Quoted in Laurie Goodstein, "Personal and Political, Bush's Faith Blurs Lines," *New York Times*, October 26, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/26/politics/campaign/26religion.html>.

³³ Mark D. Brewer and Jeffrey M. Stonecash thus summarize this political highjacking of the population: "The decisions of elites ultimately dictate the policy options presented to voters on Election Day" (Brewer and Stonecash, 112).

³⁴ Pat Buchanan, "Address to the Republican National Convention, 17 Aug. 1992," *American Rhetoric*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/Patrickbuchanan1992rnc.htm>.

³⁵ Ruy Teixeira, *The Coming End of the Culture War* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2009), 17-18.

³⁶ C. Everett Koop and Francis A. Schaeffer, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1979), 62, 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 71; 49.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Melody Rose, *Safe, Legal, and Unavailable? Abortion Politics in the United States*. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2007), 9. For a detailed analysis of how the Biblical radicalism of the Christian Right can handicap the movement in the modern and secular American democratic system, see: Ronald E. Hopson and Donald R. Smith, "Changing Fortunes: An Analysis of Christian Right Ascendance Within American Political Discourse," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 38:1 (March 1999): 2-3.

⁴¹ Fred Barnes, "Try Again," *The New Republic*, June 13, 1994, 9.

⁴² Rose, 103-107.

⁴³ Quoted in William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (London: University of California Press, 2004), 248.

⁴⁴ George W. Bush, "President Calls 'March for Life' Participants," [whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060123-2.html), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/01/20060123-2.html>.

⁴⁵ NRLC, "Abortion's Deleterious Effects on Women: Abortion and Breast Cancer," *National Right to Life News* 33.1 (January 2006), <http://www.nrlc.org/news/2006/NRL01/BreastCancerLinkPage18Jan06.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Wanda Franz, "Evidence that Abortion Does Real Damage to Women," *National Right to Life News* (January 2003), <http://www.nrlc.org/news/2003/NRL01/franz.html>.

⁴⁷ In 2003, the U.S. National Cancer Institute definitely rejected the existence of the ABC link (Nancy Gibbs, “The Grassroots Abortion War,” *Time*, February 15, 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1590444,00.html>). Similarly, serious scientific studies do not recognize “post-abortion syndrome”. However more and more states, under pressure from pro-life lobbies, are obliging doctors to mention the so-called psychological risks women take if they choose to abort (Emily Bazelon, “Is There a Post-Abortion Syndrome?” *New York Times*, January 22, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/21/magazine/21abortion.t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine&oref=slogin).

⁴⁸ Quoted in Bazelon.

⁴⁹ To strengthen public support for the bill, its Congressional sponsors gave it a second name, the Laci and Conner’s Law, after Laci Peterson, a young woman killed by her husband in 2003 while 8-months pregnant. She was expecting a boy, who was to be named Conner (NRLC, “Murder of Laci and Conner Peterson Focus Attention of Lawmakers on Unborn Victims of Violence Act,” *National Right to Life News* (May 2003), http://www.nrlc.org/news/2003/NRL05/president_bush_urges_action_on_n.htm).

⁵⁰ Quoted in William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (London: University of California Press, 2004), 238-239.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Rosen, “John Roberts, Centrist?” *The New Republic*, December 11, 2006, <http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20061211&s=rosen121106>.

⁵² Cynthia Gorney, “Gambling with Abortion,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 2004, 38.

⁵³ Steve Newman, “What is ‘Partial-Birth Abortion?’” *National Right to Life News* (March 11, 1998), <http://www.nrlc.org/news/1998/NRL3.98/what.html>.

⁵⁴ NRLC, “Bill Highlighting Unborn Child’s Pain Introduced by Pro-Life Leaders in Congress,” *National Right to Life News* (June 2004), [bill_highlighting_unborn_child.htm](http://www.nrlc.org/news/2004/NRL06/bill_highlighting_unborn_child.htm).

⁵⁵ George W. Bush, “President Bush Signs Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003,” [whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031105-1.html>.

⁵⁶ United States Congress. “Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003,” The Library of Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c108:5:./temp/~c1086zAv8V...>

⁵⁷ Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right, From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994) 97; Rose, 25; Saletan, 91.

⁵⁸ Newman ; Saletan 233.

⁵⁹ Saletan, 233.

⁶⁰ Bush, *President Bush Signs*.

⁶¹ Rose, 55.

⁶² Koop and Schaeffer, 36-37.

⁶³ Jones, “Unborn Children Are Americans Too!” *National Right to Life News* (December 2002), <http://www.nrlc.org/news/2002/NRL12/derr.html>. This new

strategy fits an approach first identified by Ronald E. Hopson and Donald R. Smith in 1999. Hopson and Smith showed that switching its emphasis from Biblical imperative to mainstream American values could only legitimate the religious Right: “These rhetorical strategies may be successful through their appeal to preferences and predilections which are historically rooted in American culture... These claims may be embraced as they are in harmony with hegemonic sociocultural attitudes within American society.” (p.6).

⁶⁴ Saletan 171 ; Rose 25.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Deana A. Roelinger, “Friends and Foes: Media, Politics, and Tactics in the Abortion War,” *Social Problems* 53:4 (2006): 554.

⁶⁶ Timothy J. Dailey, *The Bible, the Church, and Homosexuality: Exposing the ‘Gay’ Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Family Research Council, 2004), vi.

⁶⁷ Quoted in John Gallagher and Chris Bull, *Perfect Enemies: The Battle Between the Religious Right and the Gay Movement* (Oxford: Madison Books, 2001), 132.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Dailey, 25.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Jesse McKinley and Kirk Johnson, “Mormons Tipped Scale in Ban on Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/15/us/politics/15marriage.html>;

Susan Brinkmann, “Health Risks of the homosexual lifestyle,” *Catholic Standard & Times*, May-June 2004, <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/homosexuality/ho0088.html>.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Dan Gilgoff, *The Jesus Machine: How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical American Are Winning the Culture War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 56; Peter Sprigg, *Homosexuality is not a Civil Right* (Washington, D.C.: Family Research Council, 2007), 5, 9-10.

⁷¹ Traditional Values Coalition Educational and Legal Institute, “Statistics On the Homosexual Lifestyle,” http://www.traditionalvalues.org/pdf_files/statistics_on_homosexual_lifestyle.pdf; Quoted in Gilgoff, 48.

⁷² Susan Brinkmann, “Treatment and Prevention,” Catholic Education Resource Center, <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/homosexuality/ho0089.html>.

Condemning homosexuality with scientific-sounding jargon is not accepted by America’s leading scientific authorities. Homosexuality was removed from the list of mental illnesses by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (Gilgoff, 56).

⁷³ Sprigg, 11.

⁷⁴ Sprigg, 11; quoted in Gallagher and Bull, 294.

⁷⁵ Susan Brinkmann, “Gay Marriage: Who’s Minding the Children?” Catholic Education Resource Center,

<http://catholiceducation.org/articles/homosexuality/ho0090.html>.

⁷⁶ Sprigg, 16.

⁷⁷ Jim Rutenberg, “Conservatives Watching Senate Debate on Gay Marriage,” *New York Times*, June 6, 2006,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/06/washington/06bush.html>.

⁷⁸ George W. Bush, “Bush’s Remarks on Marriage Amendment,” *New York Times*, February 25, 2004. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/25/us/same-sex-marriage-bush-s-remarks-on-marriage-amendment.html>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Quoted in Laurie Goodstein, “A Line in the Sand for Same-Sex Marriage Foes,” *New York Times*, October 27, 2008,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/27/us/27right.html>; Brinkmann, *Gay Marriage*.

⁸² Quoted in Brinkmann, *Gay Marriage*.

⁸³ National Organisation for Marriage, “Why Marriage Matters”

⁸⁴ Rick Santorum, “Excerpt from Santorum Interview,” *USA Today*, April 23, 2003,

http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2003-04-23-santorum-excerpt_x.htm.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Gilgoff, 147.

⁸⁶ Teixeira, 12.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Thomas Edsall, “Gay Rights and the Religious Right,” *Washington Post*, August 10, 1992: A.10.

⁸⁸ Michael Weisskopf, “Ernegized by Pulpit or Passion, the Public is Calling,” *Washington Post*, February 19, 1993: A.01.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Gilgoff, 11 ; quoted in Lassiter, 28.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Sean Loughlin, “Santorum under fire for comments on homosexuality,” [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com), April 22, 2003,

[http://www.cnn.com/2003/ ALLPOLITICS/04/22/santorum.gays/](http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/04/22/santorum.gays/)

⁹¹ George W. Bush, “Presidential Debate in Winston-Salem, North Carolina,” The American Presidency Project, 11 Oct. 2000,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29419>.

⁹² Teixeira, 12 ; Fiorina, 123-125.

PART II:
MAJOR ISSUES

CHAPTER FIVE

ECONOMIC DISCOURSE IN THE UK (1992-2010): BACK TO THE FUTURE?

B. C. OFFERLE

“The word ‘discourse’ has become a highly contentious term”...¹ To keep it simple, the word will be used here as the interface between political leaders and the ordinary man in the street, i.e., the “Mondeo man” or the “Worcester woman” (formerly known as the people on “the Clapham omnibus”). In most cases, the message eventually becomes intelligible to the public only after it has been relayed by the media which first mill it through their own “black box”.

A distinction can be drawn between “debate” and “discourse”, the former concerning more strictly the discussion of issues whereas the latter deals more with how the results of those discussions are conveyed to the electorate. Yet, the two notions are highly correlated, so both aspects will be considered here.

It may seem overblown to start this with a reference to the times when the UK had an “empire on which the sun never sets”,² but when tackling economic issues the British imperial past is still very much part of most Britons’ psyches.³ The same holds true for other past financial events like when the UK government had to go cap in hand to the IMF for cash in 1976 or when sterling was humiliatingly thrown out of the EU’s Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in 1992.⁴

In fact, economic discourse in the UK can most often be summed up in convenient catch phrases. Under Macmillan, the Brits “never had it so good”, the Wilson and Callaghan years were those of “boom & bust” and ended up with the “winter of discontent”. Margaret Thatcher brought in “the rolling back of the state” & “monetarism”, while Labour activists were then known as the “looney left”. In contrast, Tony Blair introduced “third way economics” into Britain. It seems however that economic

discourse works best with charismatic leaders: one is not too sure as yet of how to label John Major or Gordon Brown.

Another striking feature is that there usually is a certain continuum in the discourse of successive governments, whatever their political hue: Edward Heath was never averse to the idea of having to form a coalition government and Tony Blair was only too eager to cash in on the successes of Margaret Thatcher's reforms. Margaret Thatcher may be an exception in so far as she decided to renege on the traditions of her own party and wandered away from consensus Toryism, the "One Nation" tradition.

At any rate, it remains true that economic discourse is essential in the UK's political life as it is a country in which most elections are lost or won on the economic front, in accordance with "it's the economy, stupid!" the slogan associated with Bill Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign. Against the background of globalisation and the current financial crisis and along with the last general election, the current problem in Britain is that the economic discourse of all the major parties has become rather baffling and confused and needs addressing.

After a brief overview of the first years of this study period, this chapter will move on to concentrate more on the impact and implications of the current financial crisis on economic discourse in the UK.

John Major, the lacklustre Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher eventually stepped down in November 1990, after she had been let down by most members of her own Cabinet:

I was sick at heart. I could have resisted the opposition of opponents and potential rivals and even respected them for it; but what grieved me was the desertion of those I had always considered friends and allies and the weasel words whereby they had transmuted their betrayal into frank advice and concern for my fate. I dictated a brief statement of my resignation to be read out at Cabinet the following morning ...⁵

It is certainly unfair to say that Margaret Thatcher's insistence on imposing a "poll tax" was the real motive for her demise. She had been in office for eleven years and in politics, this was probably reason enough to dispose of her. John Major was chosen to succeed her. Although he was not amongst the barons of the regime, he was the least bad choice. He inherited a party in disarray, highly divided especially on European issues.⁶ Like all Prime Ministers who merely succeed their predecessors as Party leader rather than being elected by the people, John Major was in an awkward political position. Yet, he muddled through to win the next

general election in 1992, although he was re-elected less on his own merits than from the fear of the unknown that was then offered by the Labour party, whose leader, Neil Kinnock, was not too convincing either. John Major was certainly a *decent* Prime Minister but his job was being made increasingly difficult by the gradually diminishing majority he held in Parliament. Besides, John Major was in charge when sterling had to leave the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in a panic and that constituted a serious dent in the Tory reputation for economic competence. The final trouble with John Major's economic discourse is probably that there is not very much to say about it, except that it was pretty dull!

In the meantime the political vacuum in government left the field clear for a new young man to make his ascent and take over the Labour party. A lawyer by trade, Tony Blair mastered all the skills of political discourse. He was a man with a vision and a consensus seeker. He strongly felt that if Labour was ever to win a general election again, the party had to be re-constructed in a way that could be clearly understood by the average voter on the street. He was also fully aware that British society had moved on and had become more of a service society in which unionised jobs in red brick factories were increasingly becoming a feature of the past.

His first task was then to rebrand the image of his party and give it a more middle class appeal. This implied severing the century-old links with the trade unions and growing out of Labour's industrialist and collectivist roots. An important symbolical move was therefore to delete any reference to the "collective ownership of the means of production". So, Labour changed names and became ... *New Labour!* Yet, what was so new about it?

Although Margaret Thatcher also had her bed time books—Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek or Alan Walters—she was very much of a pragmatist and never laid much emphasis on deep theory. So she could easily associate with Milton Friedman's advocacy of free market economics versus government intervention and regulation. Her economics was more like home ... economics based on the natural instincts needed to run a local shop, all skills she had time to practise in her own parents' grocery shop, when she was little. She felt equally comfortable with Alan Walter's *Critique* which opposed UK entry into the ERM because it was "half baked"!⁷ For instance, Margaret Thatcher strongly believed that the role of the State did not consist so much in protecting citizens but in teaching them how to look after themselves and avoid the State invading their private lives:

The general endeavour to achieve security by restrictive measures, tolerated or supported by the state, has in the course of time produced a

progressive transformation of society—a transformation in which, as in many other ways, Germany has led and the other countries have followed. This development has been hastened by another effect of socialist teaching, the deliberate disparagement of all activities involving economic risk and the moral opprobrium cast on the gains which makes risks worth taking but which only few can win. We cannot blame our young men when they prefer the safe, salaried position to the risk of enterprise after they have heard from their earliest youth the former described as the superior, more unselfish and disinterested occupation.... If in the first attempt to create a world of free men we have failed, we must try again. The guiding principle, that a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy, remains as true to-day as it was in the nineteenth century.”⁸

Margaret Thatcher also benefited from the help of more than decent Chancellors of the Exchequer—like Geoffrey Howe, Nigel Lawson or Norman Lamont—although she did not always agree with them on economic policy.

Tony Blair certainly was different in so far as he needed to ground his vision of a new society in some sort of new ideology, which took the form of A. Giddens’s “third way”⁹ that aimed to lay the foundations of a centre-left positioning. Tony Blair certainly was a man of deeply-held convictions. Although he has always claimed that politics and religion should not be mixed, many of Tony Blair’s public speeches—economic among others—contain some religious undertones:

Tony Blair’s most senior advisers have intervened to prevent him discussing his faith in public, according to two new profiles of the Prime Minister. The bar on the topic is so rigid that Alastair Campbell, Mr. Blair’s director of strategy and communication, intervened in a recent interview to prevent the Prime Minister from answering a question about his Christianity. “We don’t do God”, Mr. Campbell interrupted.¹⁰

So, for example, although Tony Blair’s interpretation of the role of the State is not basically too different from that of Margaret Thatcher’s, it immediately comes across as having a more human face:

The role of the state is changing. The state today needs to be enabling and based on a partnership with the citizen, one of mutual rights and responsibilities. The implications are profound. Public services need to go through the same revolution—professionally, culturally and in organisation—that the private sector has been through.... But politics is subject to the same forces of change as everything else. It is less tribal; people will be interested in issues, not necessarily ideologies; political

organisation if it is rigid is off-putting; and there are myriad new ways of communicating information. Above all, political parties need to go out and seek public participation, not wait for the public to be permitted the privilege of becoming part of the sect...”¹¹

In a sense, “third way economics” came up at the right moment since it promised to reconcile all opinions because it presented itself as “the renewal of social democracy”, sociology applied to economics. It propounded the rolling back of the state and offered the creation of a dynamic capitalism which would benefit all citizens. It seemed therefore to offer the perfect compromise between neo-liberalism and social democracy.¹² Yet, in retrospect, this *newspeak* often seems not much more than a catchy slogan and often remains rather verbose. In actual fact, “the third way” as a new ideology barely survived Tony Blair’s first term and it was only rarely made reference to it after that. The theme of “cool Britannia” met the same fate.

One last obstacle remained on the way to *New Labour*’s success. It still had to convince voters that the re-born party was fit to run the country’s economy and that it was no longer the “tax & spend” party of the past. This was easily achieved by promising to stick to Tory spending limits, at least in the beginning. So in June 1997, Labour was finally ready to take on the penny-pinching Tories in a general election.

Bambi, the charming Prime Minister

Apparently, *New Labour* had managed to pass on its message to the voters: it was a landslide victory. Some whimperers were only too quick to comment that voters needed a change after nearly 18 years of uninterrupted Conservative government, that they were merely tired of the dithering Tories, of their divisions over Europe and of their incompetence over ... mad-cow disease. So, that was the people’s choice.

Tony Blair set out to implement his programme as stated in the Labour manifesto,¹³ an idealistic attempt to improve lives through a blend of free-market economics and social justice. The economic discourse was a bit of a mixed bag which included both post monetarism and neo-Keynesianism, in which the focus is much more on equilibrium. Neo-Keynesians reject the neo-classical approach of the IS/LM model which attempts to bring together the monetary economy and the “real” economy of output and employment.

New Labour confirmed that economic policy ought to adapt to the new globalised environment so that everyone can make the best advantage of

it. Although that also implied some risk-taking, it was the government's job to prepare all its citizens for the "New World Order". In that respect, it welcomed Schumpeter's theory of creative destruction and his approach to entrepreneur capitalism. The idea was to encourage citizens to get more involved in economic activity and make being in work more attractive as the objective was to give wealth creation precedence over wealth distribution. In return, the government favoured individual responsibility over national solidarity, which was, again, reminiscent of Tory policy. The traditional Labour equality/ inequality equation was to be substituted by the resolution of the opposition between inclusion/ exclusion. Yet, there were some of Schumpeter's ideas that *New Labour* found increasingly difficult to comply with:

The relevant type of stagnationist theory has been developed by the late Lord Keynes ... [Hence] the necessity of government expenditure at home or government action forcing "foreign investment". Of late, however, another recommendation has come into favor. Since, under present conditions, anyone who advocates government deficit financing is in obvious danger of making himself ridiculous, Washington economists have veered round to recommend balanced budgets, but budgets balanced at a very high level of taxation, the taxes to be highly progressive so as to eliminate the high incomes from which the menace of saving primarily proceeds. This accords with the slogan that (owing to the saving done by the receivers of high incomes) "in modern societies, the ultimate cause of unemployment is the inequality of incomes".¹⁴

One of the first decisions taken by the Labour government was to grant operational independence to the Bank of England, thus divesting itself of the responsibility for low inflation and transferring this essential task to the country's Central bank. Since markets now rule the world, it has become all the more essential that the government's economic policy be absolutely credible. This implies that in macroeconomics, fighting inflation must be given priority over unemployment, while microeconomics ought to focus on creating the most favourable conditions for growth to prosper. Inflation anticipation by economic agents is based more on the government's economic discourse than on whatever rules may have been vaguely enunciated.

In actual fact, this led the Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer to follow the same monetary policy as his Tory predecessor since the post monetarist way to stability puts the same long-term demands on any type of government. Gordon Brown, as Chancellor of the Exchequer also put in place a "Golden rule" which aimed to strictly constrain the government's leverage to run huge deficits and increase public debt.

Another important pillar in the economic discourse sold by *New Labour* to the voters was that the UK ought to become a world leader in the knowledge economy. This implies that education and innovation¹⁵ should be encouraged and that a favourable business environment must be supported so that Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) can thrive and prosper free of government overregulation. Government business help agencies were prompt to spread slogans to support the idea that “the UK must aim to become the best place in the world to set up a business”—it must be noted that similar promotional campaigns also exist at EU level. In sum, *New Labour* had also become pro-business and was only too eager to assert that economic wealth is created by private firms, not by the State which can only serve as a catalyst. As Tony Blair frequently explained—e.g., on his visit to the French National assembly in March 1998: “Only policies that work really matter, whether they be left or right-wing”. In an article for *The Economist*, Tony Blair confirmed his views: “‘Open versus closed’ is as important today as ‘left versus right’”.¹⁶

But, these are “words, words, words...”, if Hamlet, Prince of Denmark can be quoted in this context. Economic discourse can only be assessed and judged against the test of facts and reality? So, how far did *New Labour* make good on its promises?

In Tony Blair’s two terms, the UK economy was undoubtedly successful. The OECD described the UK as “a paragon of economic stability”¹⁷ while *The Economist* talked of a “British miracle”... yet, with a question mark!¹⁸ After being considered the “sick man” of Europe in the 1970s, Britain had become the envy of all her major EU partners. The UK had most obviously and remarkably adapted to world globalisation: it achieved impressive macro economic stability and convincing growth rates as well as maintained a strong national currency. The UK had also benefited from not being a euro-zone member, which allowed for the free management of its monetary policy. Although it has been agreed here not to go into the details of the UK-EU relations, Gordon Brown, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, produced a set of five criteria to be met before Britain could join the euro. Apart from being a perfect example of political mumbo-jumbo, this stance is an excellent illustration of what economic discourse can achieve, since the five criteria allowed the government in place to do exactly as it desired without any real further institutional interference.

European Central Bank (ECB) discipline indeed imposes the same constraints on all Euroland members whatever their specific needs: countries with an overheating economy may require a more tightened

monetary policy, whereas those at the low ebb of their economic cycle longed for a more loosened approach.

Quite a few problems still needed fixing. Productivity remained comparatively low, growth and employment was mainly driven by public spending. Public services, especially transport, road infrastructure and healthcare were still far from satisfactory. The reform of the NHS (National Health Service) is a case in point. Comparatively to the massive public funding invested in healthcare—Labour had planned a budget of £107bn for England only—results still remain unspectacular, as if the government believed that it could resolve problems just by throwing money at it. Of course, some significant progress has been made, but that is exactly the difficulty with “discourse”: the British public simply feels that what they are actually experiencing in their daily lives is far remote from the expectations that the government had raised:

It is an irrational quirk of public opinion that while record numbers of National Health Service patients are satisfied with their care, many tell pollsters that the NHS is deteriorating. The same disjuncture between personal experience and general perceptions is evident when it comes to crime, fear of which has increased even as incidence has fallen.¹⁹

The same could be said about education, another avowed government priority: Britain still ranks fairly low in international league tables. Besides, the divide between rich and poor has not really been bridged.

Anyway when Tony Blair finally announced at the end of May 2007 that he had decided to step down as Prime Minister, he left the country’s economy in a fairly favourable shape,²⁰ except for the increasingly worrying state of its public finances, and that was after enjoying a prolonged period of “good times” (procyclical). One was left to wonder what would happen if Britain ever had to be confronted again with a bumpy economic environment. Yet, both the OECD and the IMF thought there was no real cause for concern and that the situation would get back to normal in a matter of months.

At any rate, most people were relieved to see Tony Blair go. After 10 years of Tony Blair, they had possibly simply got tired of his clever rhetoric and of his big grin smiles. He had become too clever at spinning the news to convey an impression of activity and progress. Besides, the major resentment against him concerned his decisions to involve Britain in the Middle East, more especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, but this lies beyond the scope of economics.

Gordon Brown, the unlucky Prime Minister

In June 2007, Gordon Brown eventually became Prime Minister, after being kept waiting (too?) long in the wings of the corridors of power. He was however in an awkward position, right from the start. First, and like John Major in 1992, he simply slipped into the shoes of Tony Blair without the stamp of approval of a general election. He had already been in charge of running the country's economy as Chancellor of the Exchequer for the previous ten years, so his economic discourse had a sense of *déjà vu*, more especially because Tony Blair had granted him a fairly free rein over the management of the country's day to day affairs, while the Prime Minister preferred to strut and fret upon the international stage.

Gordon Brown was widely respected as Chancellor of the Exchequer, but a competent finance minister does not necessarily make a good Prime Minister. His dour temperament fitted in well with the task of looking after the people's pennies, but became a liability when compared with the exhilarating skills that Tony Blair displayed in all of his public speeches. Gordon Brown has shown a constant failure to speak to the electorate in a language it can understand. Moreover, he had based his reputation on macro-financial prudence and yet, public spending was irretrievably sinking into the red.

Politics is probably about the art of mastering circumstances, yet, it requires a certain amount of luck too. In retrospect, it may appear that Gordon Brown was not the right man, in the right place, at the right moment. At the start of his term, the new PM made a certain number of political mistakes like his dithering about whether he should call a snap election. His Cabinet was then soon besieged with a string of political scandals.

Furthermore, over the summer of 2007, there were alarming signs of a looming financial crisis, then complacently called a "credit crunch". Financial innovation had led to the development of ever more sophisticated derivative financial products and high returns on riskless ventures with the promise that liquidity was always there. Yet, the securitization process became so complex that nobody really knew what was owed to whom. Those products are usually mentioned in their intriguing abbreviated form like CDOs (Collateral Debt Obligations) or SIVs (Special Investment Vehicles) etc. The latest scare concerns CDS (Credit Default Swaps) which obviously seem to have been designed for those seeking financial protection against default, but this market is totally unregulated. More recently, they have played a rather mysterious part in

the public debt crisis that has badly hit Greece and which will most probably also concern other euro-area countries.²¹ Anyway, investors took fright, so they left in droves and withdrew their support. Central banks must also take their blame for it, since it appears that monetary policy was too loose for too long thus contributing to pumping up the housing market, most particularly in the US and the UK.

Britain was one of the first overt victims of this unprecedented situation with the collapse of Northern Rock²² in September 2007, causing a bank run. To ordinary people this sounded alarming. Technical details must be overlooked here, but what is more interesting in terms of economic discourse is that the panic was prompted by the very announcement designed to prevent it by the financial authorities. The more the authorities (the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Treasury or the Bank of England) tried to reassure small investors, the longer the queues formed at the door of the bank, full of people racing to get their cash back. So the government was left with no other alternative than to “recapitalise” the bank, which is only a more politically correct term for “nationalisation”. Naturally, this was anathema to *New Labour* as it reeked too much of the “Old Labour” of the 1970s.

Paradoxically enough, this prompted a rebound in Gordon Brown’s popularity in opinion polls as he appeared to have dealt swiftly with a most thorny issue. Yet, that was a breathtaking U-turn for a government which had always claimed never to interfere with private business. The same story can be told about other British banks such as Royal Bank of Scotland or Lloyd’s etc. What is most important here is that Gordon Brown’s macro-prudential reputation and the system of split responsibility that he had put in place was in tatters: depositors neither understood it nor trusted it any longer.

Yet, the worst was still to come after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. This sent a shockwave throughout the financial world. Britain came under heavy pressure to act, especially from her major continental partners, France and Germany. Britain found itself in a most awkward position as it stood, again, alone in her own category. As a world leading financial centre, along with New York, London was bound to be among the most badly hit countries by a financial crisis. Britain’s fault line is probably that its economy, or at least London’s, has become too reliant on financial services both in terms of national economic growth and employment. Yet, what could honestly be done without betraying Britain’s own national interests?

The debate was triggered from an unexpected corner, when the head of the FSA (Financial Services Authority) suggested a Tobin tax-type levy on

all financial transactions. This is not a brand-new idea, but it has the support of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. It is rather difficult to implement and could easily prove counter productive. Gordon Brown's response was fairly hesitant at first, but he soon realised that something had to be done and if they were to work out, decisions had to be made at international level and at any rate, with the support of the US. Several G20 summits attempted to tackle the issue. The results are mixed, at best—some progress will probably be made especially re: tax havens, but the rest remains rather ambivalent, only because G summits are only “discourse” and not legally binding.

The Prime Minister now seems to agree that traders' bonuses are indecent, but that that is only the tip of the iceberg. At least, the government has imposed a “bonus super tax” but that is only temporary. With the current credible attempt of the US government to bring “too big to fail” banks down to size, one can only hope that further legislation will follow in Britain. In the meantime, bank traders' bonuses are back and the banks that did survive the storm seem even larger and more powerful than ever: it is (more or less) back to business as usual! The real work will probably take place behind the scenes, away from the public eye, and will be passed on to the Basel committee on international financial reforms. There had already been a Basel 1 agreement, then a Basel 2... so now on to Basel 3!

It then appears that the “Anglo-Saxon” model suffers from “Market fatigue”²³ and certainly needs to rebuild its tarnished image. Yet, the current crisis is less about the demise of the free market than the proof of the specific failure of finance and its deregulation. This Anglo-Saxon model of “arm's length” finance can be contrasted with the “hands on” approach of France and Germany. A “French model” has suddenly emerged: French bankers are so much risk-averse that in times of crisis, they unsurprisingly appear very well equipped to weather the storm. French banks were indeed less badly hit, but they had less to lose—nothing ventured, nothing gained ... Long-term relationships with clients may prove a safer way of meeting companies' needs since it makes both lender and borrowers more reliant on each other. However, when it comes to financing innovation, markets are probably better at deciding on the feasibility of a project and at allocating the much needed resources. It could perhaps be argued that a cross-bred model is the way forward, although most economists believe that a mix breed would not deliver the advantages of either system. The current plans aim to regulate securitization more closely but there is no real reason why it should be ended.

One can easily ignore here the technical details since our job is more to concentrate on the implications for *New Labour's* economic discourse. So, what had happened to macro-financial prudence? It seemed the government gave priority to bad governance and short-termism and courted business and an atomised consumerist populace. It did not really care that inequality was on the rise as long as it generated greater economic activity for all. After all, that was only the result of lighter regulation and a more flexible labour market, except that it made short shrift of the promised holy trinity of prudence, stability and caution. Yet, the public became rather worried after the collapse of Northern Rock and they started to ask themselves whether they should trust the banks when banks did not even trust each other. Still, they expected the government to punish the culprits, when found guilty. In the end, the philosophy infused into the people by the government seemed to have been that the “best buck is a fast buck”! And everybody was beguiled by US Secretary H. M. Paulson into believing that no one was guilty, and certainly not the Yankees: “it was just human nature”!²⁴

In our current world of globalisation deprived of ideology, the media are only too prompt to hark to a past golden age of storytelling. In quieter times—read: prior to the financial crisis—the trend was to bring back Karl Marx: “As a system of government, communism is dead or dying. As a system of ideas, its future looks secure”:

...Marx was right about a good many things—about a lot of what is wrong with capitalism, for instance, about globalisation and international markets, about the business cycle, about the way economics shapes ideas. Marx was prescient: that word keeps coming up. By all means discard communism as practised in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (and China, North Korea, Cuba and in fact wherever it has been practised). But please don't discard Marx.²⁵

So now has the time come for J. M. Keynes to make a comeback? At any rate, there has been no shortage of new books.²⁶ First it would be inaccurate to subsume all of Keynes's works into the mere advocacy of running abysmal public deficits, although one must consider that Keynes's theories have never proved more relevant than in the present time, even if at the end of the 1980s it was widely believed that the domination of Keynes's theories on how to deal with recessions had come to an end. Keynes explains why economies go into a downturn and why supply does not always create its own demand. Hence the response with huge fiscal stimulus policies in the current crisis.²⁷

Lucas's "rational expectations" theory of booms and slumps may prove totally irrelevant right now and it could well be that Milton Friedman was wrong too. In our case, it cannot be denied that bankers placed too much faith in mathematical forecasting models and they started to believe that risk ethics could be discarded as they had become convinced that risk could be discounted.²⁸ It also shows that most economists lost touch with reality but it does not tell us much about what changes are needed. In a monetary economy, people try to pile up cash rather than real goods, yet when everyone behaves in the same way—as happened after the fall of Lehman Brothers—the consequence is an end to demand, which indeed causes a real recession. Keynes did aver that there always remains "irreducible uncertainty", which is the primary source of market economies' instability. The real challenge would then lie in the distinction between macro and micro-economics and uncertainty. It could also be ascertained that by getting rid of the assumption of perfect rationality, behavioural economists probably made the best sense of what lies at the roots of the current financial crisis. So this may not simply be Keynes's comeback but rather the advent of Keynes's Second Age?²⁹ The final truth is that Keynes had never really gone away and that his theories had their full part in Tony Blair's "third way economics", albeit in the updated version of "neo-Keynesianism". The actual scope of the master's comeback remains to be seen. It may well prove only temporary and involve only a careful selection of his ideas.

Although it may look less mundane the present economic discourse is probably more about the return of the state than about discussing economic theory. Most State-run companies have already been privatised in the UK. After Northern Rock and Lehman Brothers, governments could not lie idle and let "too big to fail" banks collapse and cause systemic damage to the real economy. The growth of the state is not simply a matter of balancing accounting books and infusing new ethics into the financial community, it is more akin to a vibrant ideology.

The fact is that Britain's public spending is forecast to top 50 percent of GDP, although the government is only too eager to hand banks back to private owners. Yet, it is obvious that the role of the state has moved back to the centre-stage of economic discourse. Gordon Brown's pledge, first as Chancellor of the Exchequer and then as Prime Minister, to macro financial prudence proved an illusion. In the last ten years of Labour government, spending on public services has ballooned: Britain doubled spending on education between 1997 and 2007 and increased the budget for the NHS by 6 percent a year. In addition, two-thirds of the new jobs created were in the public sector whose pay increases grew faster than in

the private sector: “the revival of the state is creating a series of fierce debates that will shape policymaking over the coming decades With deficits soaring nobody can afford to ignore the size of government deficit”.³⁰ Even SMEs keep complaining that they find it hard to find the adequate financing for their “innovative” projects and the British Chamber of Commerce has to keep a barometer to monitor the cost of regularly increasing government red tape and new regulations imposed on British firms.³¹ So the image of Britain as the realm of free trade and light regulation is, comparatively, just another myth: the “dead hand of the state” is still very busy under the government of the reformers.³² Given the UK’s ageing population, it is most unlikely that the needs for public services will decrease over the next thirty years. It must also be added that the size of Britain’s public deficit and debt is more of a political issue than pure economics, although it will probably remain high for quite some time: “High debt is seen as a serious problem... Adam Smith may have warned that debt can enfeeble a nation but he also remarked in 1776 that ‘Great Britain seems to support with ease a debt burden which, half a century ago, nobody believed her capable of supporting’ ...”.³³ However, taxpayers are worried since they are aware that somebody will have to foot the bill, at some time or other.

The change may be that the UK government gives constant support to free trade and market forces in the hope to use it to the country’s own national interest. Against the backdrop of the rise of sovereign funds, the key word in Britain’s economic Newspeak is that of State capitalism, even though it is hard to deny that financial markets are presently too reliant on government action.

Another new important feature could be the emphasis laid on business ethics. There is obviously currently some concern about the relationship between society and business as bankers have been largely perceived as greedy villains only interested in short-term profits. This leads to questioning the formerly received idea that businesses are designed to make profits: “But money ... can’t buy you love ...”. But, it ought at least to win respect!³⁴ There is not much trust left either in the probity of politicians after the scandal over MPs’ expenses on all sides of Parliament.

Discussing the return of the State and economic discourse in the UK unavoidably takes us back to the Thatcher period and calls for the examination of its permanence and heritage. The premise is that *New Labour* never really went back on the Thatcher changes of the 1980s, but tried to improve on those reforms by lending them a softer, more human and social touch. This does not give credence to the claims that Tony Blair was just another Margaret Thatcher in disguise. Margaret Thatcher and

Tony Blair were distinct personalities and Gordon Brown is different again, more austere and ineloquent than the first two. It must be noted that this type of comparison is a recurrent trick in the discourse of the British economic press. In 1981, the *Financial Times* complained that “Mrs Thatcher was not really a Thatcherite”³⁵ and *The Economist* suggested that she was a Keynesian in disguise:

The main thrust of criticism in Tuesday’s cabinet was that this is now leaving the government with the worst of all political worlds. It has neither contained public spending as promised, not allowed itself to take credit for letting it rip. Every measure aimed at relieving the nation in recession has been made grudgingly ... Why can she not bring herself to boast about her enforced Keynesianism instead of stomping the country demanding ever more cuts from her ministers?³⁶

So the debate now is over whether “there is no alternative” or if the Thatcher era has come to a close for good. It cannot be denied that most of Margaret Thatcher’s achievements—privatisation, deregulation, tax-cutting, the curbing of trade unions, the priority given to wealth creation over wealth distribution—was very much part of the economic discourse until the financial crisis broke out. Yet now, as the British economy is again experiencing difficulties all the economic principles she had opposed seem to be back on the political agenda. Margaret Thatcher’s philosophy of hard work and thrift has been tarnished by the publicity given to the huge premiums awarded to bank traders for using their clients’ savings to their own advantage.³⁷

However there is another side to the argument because most politicians were pressed for time. They had to act on the spur of the moment since they did not have much room for manoeuvre or much time to ponder over what was the best escape route. Apart from the temporary taking over of some unhealthy banks by the government, nationalisation is still well anchored in the past. Although the bonus supertax is forecast to yield £2.5bn, a much higher figure than predicted by Alistair Darling, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, it is only a temporary windfall tax. So the Thatcher economic model may be not be buried, as yet: “For all the excitable short-term neo-Keynesianism, the basic long-term solution is Thatcherite: stringent economic discipline”.³⁸ It is hard to believe that economic discourse in the UK is only a tale of paradise lost, regained and lost... again!

The accidental election

During the last general election campaign, economic discourse became all the more important. Gordon Brown had created purposeless unpopularity. David Cameron, the Tory leader, is a smooth talker, yet possibly with the wrong English accent in these times of crisis. Some commentators liken him to the young Tony Blair. Although fairly popular, he is however a lonely figure in a party still divided over many issues. Still, David Cameron has yet to “sell the deal” with the British electorate and convince it that he leads a reliable team. Voters still wonder how the Tories would cope with Labour’s fiscal inheritance. George Osborne, the then shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, managed “to make his fiscal conservatism sound compassionate”, as he declared : “Without enterprise and aspiration, compassion comes with an empty wallet. That line could have come from the *New Labour Bible*”.³⁹

The election results are most interesting, because there is a promise of a different happening: “But there is something peculiar about this episode: it is the first meltdown in the era of broad consensus in economic policy. The parties were all implicated in the mistakes that led to the bust, and their remedies now are similar, unlike, say, 1979”.⁴⁰ This time there was no real “big choice” between the two main parties, as opposed to 1945, 1979 or 1997, but history never repeats itself. The hard facts are that there is a huge public finance problem to address, the tightest squeeze on spending since the UK had to negotiate with the IMF in 1976, but there are not too many solutions to solve it and nobody wants to talk about it much. It is a tricky balancing act between “tax and spend”, as the voters expect taxes to rise to redress the mess, but they also remain attached to a high standard in public services—although the fiscal adjustment that relies on spending cuts works probably better than those based on tax rises. So, the difference now seems to be between “big spenders” and “wise” spenders, but they all remain... spenders!

The level of public debt indeed seems to be defining the debate in all political parties. The Labour party now presents neo-liberalism as a “bankrupt ideology”. Labour attacked the Conservatives on their “slash and burn” tactics. Gordon Brown’s criticism of the Tories as “anachronistic, parochial, extremist, jejune and heartless”⁴¹ fell flat, as well as his warning that the Conservative party would place economic recovery at risk because of its ideological “hatred” of the State. David Cameron’s claim that Britain has become a “broken society” is not really credible either.

An election is never won or lost until after the day voters have cast their votes. In the past few months before the election, pollsters had claimed that the election result was a foregone conclusion, but the gap between the two major parties was narrowing fast and there was then talk of a hung (called “balanced” in some parts of the UK) parliament where no single party holds the majority and must therefore share power with another party. So, one must also take account of the weakness of Britain’s first-past-the-post electoral system which allows a political party to come to office even though it may not have obtained a majority of votes in the country. That heralded the sign of yet another return ... that of the Liberal Democrats. Yet, all three parties courted the centre-ground, although the Liberal-Democrats (Lib-Dems) also moved towards more liberalism: “It is still redistributive, but with fewer big spending pledges and more emphasis on tax cuts than on benefits for low-earners”.⁴² At least the Lib-Dems agree that such labels as “right” or “left” have become anachronistic, yet they also intend to pose as the guarantors of fiscal responsibility. The voters were left hanging wondering who would be best at making the right cuts in public spending.

In those circumstances, the introduction of election debates where the three major challengers were given the opportunity to confront their views live on TV appeared at first a refreshing novelty. The last of the three debates dealt largely with the state of Britain’s economy. The format eventually agreed upon seemed to have been the result of harsh negotiating between the three participants. One problem was to justify why only the leaders of the three major parties had been invited. So David Dimbleby, the BBC presenter, did not hesitate to use up a couple of minutes in the programme to give the full list and times of all the programmes with the other political parties run by the BBC: Scotland’s SNP (the Scottish National Party), Wales’s Plaid Cymru (Welsh for “the Party of Wales”). A debate between the leaders of Northern Ireland had also been organised and finally, some air time was also available for UKIP (the UK Independence Party) and the Greens too.

Each debate lasted ninety minutes and consisted in answering questions from members in the audience. It was obvious that each contestant had been fully briefed and groomed by their spin doctors. It can first be noted how they addressed each other. To Gordon Brown, the other two were simply “Dave” and “Nick”. To David Cameron, Gordon Brown was most often “the Prime Minister” while Nick Clegg was usually referred to as “the Liberal Democrats”. Nick Clegg preferred to use full names: “Gordon Brown” and “David Cameron”.

Besides the voter/consumer could easily identify the three products that were on offer. Gordon Brown clearly presented himself as the man with experience:

There's a lot to this job... I don't get all of it right, but I do know how to run the economy in good times and in bad... I've had the duty of telling you this evening that while we have policies for the future, the Conservatives would put the recovery immediately at risk with an emergency budget. I've asked David and Nick questions all evening. David has not been able to confirm ... I don't like having to do this, but I have to tell you that things are too important to be left to risky policies under these two people. They are not ready for government, because they have not thought through their policies. They are not ready for government....⁴³

David Cameron represented change:

Our economy is stuck in a rut, and we need change to get it moving.... That's the change we need. If you vote Conservative next Thursday, we can start to get work on Friday... I think I've got a great team behind me. I think we can do great things in this country. If you vote labour, you'll get more of the same. If you vote Liberal, as we've seen tonight, it's just uncertainty. If you vote Conservative on Thursday, you can have a new, fresh government, making a clean break, and taking our country in a new direction, and bringing the change we need....⁴⁴

Nick Clegg chose to brand himself as the new, different, fair, honest and decent anti-establishment... politician:

Tonight's debate is about you: about your job, the taxes you pay, your family, about the prosperity of our economy. We need to do things differently to build a new, stronger and fairer economy. The way they got us into this mess is not the way out. We need to be frank about the cuts that will be needed ...Of course, they'll tell you tonight that these things can't be done. I think we've got to do things differently, to deliver the fairness, the prosperity, and the jobs that you and your families deserve.... Just think how many times you've been given lots of promises from these old parties, and when they get back into government, you find that nothing really changes at all... Maybe I should explain, rather than having David Cameron and Gordon Brown, very much in the style of old politics, making misleading claims. I think there is a problem. It's a problem I didn't create, you didn't create. They created it. It was Conservative and Labour governments that created chaos ...⁴⁵

There was time for ten questions. The selection was fair and none too surprising: when to stop state support for the economy, taxation, bank

regulation, deindustrialisation, education, the abuse of state benefits, family support, immigration etc. There is not enough room here to go into all of these questions in detail, yet the major issue was probably how each party intended to cut the budget deficit. All three parties had plans for this, but the only difference among them seemed to be on when and how harshly they would do it. Unfortunately the voter did not get any details about how each party will achieve the budget cuts that it plans:

Thus far, the campaign argument on the economy has circled around minutiae. Parties have fought viciously about the wisdom of spending cuts or tax rises of £6bn—mere trifles. The state will spend £704bn this year—about half of national output. The government will, just to pay its running costs, borrow £163bn. State spending must be reduced.⁴⁶

Inevitably that raised concern during the debate: “Audience member: ‘We all know there’s going to be spending cuts after the general election, no matter who wins. Why can’t you be honest and tell us?’”⁴⁷ Nick Clegg was the only participant to acknowledge the fact: “Well, I think one thing I would like to add to this Nadim, you’re right in implying none of the political parties has spelt out the details. Some of them are simply not possible to spell out now but clearly more will need to be done...”⁴⁸

In those circumstances, it is not too surprising that public opinion is growing cynical, since people are more interested in issues than in ideology. The wider the gap between the political and economic discourse of politicians and voters, the more the electorate becomes disillusioned. The rift is not so much between the different parties but between the voters and the politicians as a class: “Audience member: ‘Are the politicians aware that they have become removed from the concerns of the real people, especially on immigration, and why don’t you remember that you are there to serve us, not to ignore us?’”⁴⁹

This raises the question of the real impact of such debates—and more generally speaking of other media—on the way voters cast their votes. At any rate, many media specialists were highly critical of the TV debates. Chris Moncrieff, a former political editor of the Press Association, found them “stage-managed, sterile and stiff”:

What we got, in fact, was four-and-a-half hours of repetitious political party blather in unnatural almost clinical surroundings, with a silent, sanitised, po-faced audience ordered not to react or respond, with dissent or otherwise, to the ramblings of our would-be leaders.... The programmes were hailed on all sides as a great advance in the democratic process. But what we got were debates inside a straitjacket.... So, the next time these leader debate broadcasts come round, it should be the people, namely the

professional broadcasters, and they alone, with the power to decide how these programmes are conducted. The political classes should be kept well away from the action.⁵⁰

The fact is that, although most opinion pollsters said that Nick Clegg had come out as the overall winner in the TV debates, the Liberal Democrats ended up with fewer seats in parliament this time round than in the previous election.

Conclusion: the way forward?

So, this election indeed produced a “hung” parliament. It took a while to decide who was going to go to bed with whom, since they were bound to be strange bedfellows. Even the Queen said she was not prepared to see anybody too quickly. As in France when “cohabitation” occurs, the British government system is not designed for working smoothly with coalition governments. Anyway, it was eventually decided that a Tory/ Lib-Dems coalition was to be.

A coalition programme for government was promptly released.⁵¹ Yet, it is very difficult to give a synthetic view of its economic aspects. It is too much like a Superstore online catalogue that expands in all directions. It has 31 sections under a headline entitled : “Freedom, Fairness, Responsibility”. So, should we rather look at ... “Banking” (1)? “Business” (2)? “Jobs and welfare” (19)? “Taxation” (30)?... or simply focus on “Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport” (7)?

It is still early days, so we need to wait and see if this unwanted partnership can go anywhere and how long it will last. However, it seems unlikely that the Liberal Democrats will have much clout on economic policy in the coalition: their natural economic instinct still leans more on the side of Labour. Nick Clegg will probably concentrate on electoral reform: the only way to resurrection for the Lib-Dems?

And what of *New Labour* and Her Majesty’s new Opposition? Will it be able to reconstruct itself? In a recent article in *Le Monde* newspaper, Anthony Giddens declared that “*New Labour* is dead!”⁵² *New Labour* was never too much impressed by the French economic model, but they will soon become eager learners? And, what better leisure reading for them than Derrida?

Nobody seems to be able to anticipate which way British economic policy is going to go because there is too much uncertainty... at least according to Keynes’s economic theory?

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CHAPTER SIX

THE REFORM THAT CANNOT WAIT— THE HEALTH CARE POLICY DEBATE 1992-2010: WHY DISCOURSE MATTERS

EVELINE THEVENARD

This health care system of ours is badly broken and it is time to fix it. Despite the dedication of literally millions of talented health care professionals, our health care is too uncertain and too expensive, too bureaucratic and too wasteful... At long last, after decades of false starts, we must make this our most urgent priority: giving every American health security, health care that can never be taken away, health care that is always there. That is what we must do tonight¹.

These were the terms used by Bill Clinton in September 1993, in a televised address before a joint session of Congress, appealing to lawmakers to overhaul a crazy quilt of public and private programmes that left 37 million Americans uninsured and absorbed 14 percent of the country's economy. Sixteen years later, after an election campaign where health care issues had featured prominently, Barack Obama proclaimed on March 5, 2009 at a White House Forum on Health Reform:

...health care reform is no longer just a moral imperative, it's a fiscal imperative. If we want to create jobs and rebuild our economy and get our federal budget under control, then we have to address the crushing cost of health care this year, in this administration. ...And the purpose of this forum is to start answering that question—to determine how we lower costs for everyone, improve quality for everyone, and expand coverage to all Americans. And our goal will be to enact comprehensive health care reform by the end of this year. That is our commitment. That is our goal².

The health care reform debate was back, framed at least partly in eerily similar terms. One of the key issues on the public policy agenda and one that would shape the Obama presidency, health care reform was also a test of how far the country had really moved from a time marked by strong distrust of government to one where government involvement was seen as inevitable. Was a resilient health care system, unlikely to collapse from within, finally ready for the reform that had eluded liberals since the early 20th century?³

The health care debate has waxed and waned, heavily influenced by rhetoric and symbols ever since Theodore Roosevelt called for national health insurance in the 1912 presidential campaign. The salience of the issue has varied with the alternating cycles of conservatism and progressiveness in US politics and policy. Few issues have generated such intense partisan debate as health care reform, and since the early 1990s, the political discourse of national overhaul vs. incremental change has crystallised attitudes and magnified the ideological divide between Republicans and Democrats.

The debate has revolved around access, cost and quality, but also above all, around America's conflicting values and ideals. Indeed, the limited American welfare state reflects the tensions between individual and collective responsibility, as do the terms, far from value-neutral, used to categorise programmes (public assistance/social insurance/entitlements) and recipients (deserving/undeserving). The language used to promote or defeat health care reform has reflected this pattern. Thus in 1965 Medicare was sold to Congress and the American public as a "social insurance" programme where recipients (the deserving elderly) duly paid into the programme, even if the federal government would actually fund part of it.⁴ In the war of words Republicans and Democrats waged over the latest attempt at health care reform, the controversial "public option" morphed into a "consumer option" in October 2009, as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was trying to deflect Republican accusations of "government takeover of the health care system".

The importance of discourse on health policy matters cannot be underestimated. More than any other domestic policy issue, health reform has to be sold to lawmakers, stakeholders, and the public. It is an emotionally charged issue, a policy area that directly affects every single American and readily lends itself to the use of personal life histories and tragedies. The choice of terms matters, and the way the debate is framed shapes the public's perception of issues. *Choice, security, competition, universal, rationing*—each word has a particular resonance and impact. Most Americans consider health care as a right, not a privilege. Yet they

harbour a perennial mistrust of government and maintain a faith in the free market.⁵ The inconsistencies in the public discourse promoting reform reflect this ambivalence and the difficulties of reconciling these two cultural strains.

Fear has been a central element of health policy discourse. In the pre-1990s debates over national health insurance, the rhetoric of reform opponents tapped into the public's fears of communism and of the changes to America's political and economic system such reforms would inevitably bring. In recent debates, conservative scare tactics have bolstered the notion that reform would threaten insured Americans' personal situation and raise taxes.⁶

This paper is devoted to an analysis of the evolution of the health care debate during a period bracketed by the two boldest attempts at reforming the health care system in US history, each promoted by a President with exceptional rhetorical gifts. It will show that over the past two decades the dominant discourse shifted from one recognizing health care as a social good to one viewing it as a market commodity, even if the era also saw two major expansions of public coverage for "deserving" segments of the population (despite a prevailing rhetoric of personal responsibility and individual choice) and the enactment of an improbable, historic piece of legislation. The time frame saw major changes in health care delivery, increased health insecurity, and exploding costs, as well as a shifting of the burden of responsibility for life's major risks (illness, old age, unemployment) from the government and employers to individuals.⁷ These changes took place in an era marked by public loss of confidence in the capacity of the federal government to handle problems and by an increased polarization of American political life, culminating in the stark partisanship of the 2009-10 debate over health care overhaul. Although conservative rhetoric has remained remarkably unchanged, the reformers' ambivalent discourse has reflected the divisions between centrists and liberals in the Democratic Party and the difficulty of framing a message that resonates with increasingly conservative voters.⁸ But the latest stages of this debate, leading to narrow passage of the most sweeping social legislation since Medicare, have seen a return to a rights-based discourse that had been shunned by the Democratic leadership since the early 1990s.

1. The Clinton reform initiative

Following the failure of various health reform plans in the 1970s,⁹ the issue lost prominence in the 1980s. The debate over the Clinton reform plan was the first major debate over health care overhaul during a period

of retrenchment, and its defeat was “arguably the most dissected legislative failure in modern history”.¹⁰ Several factors converged in the re-emergence of health care reform as a major political issue in the early 1990s: costs had been increasing sharply since the late 1970s (from \$950 per capita in 1970 to \$2,350 in 1989) and were becoming a major problem for businesses and the federal government (in 1991 health care absorbed nearly 15 percent of the federal budget, up from 10 per cent in 1975), while an increasing number of Americans were uninsured or feared losing their coverage. Rising costs and changing economic patterns were eroding employer-based coverage, the foundation of the U.S. health insurance system. The recession of the early 1990s amplified these long-term trends, and health policy experts predicted the imminent breakdown of the system if comprehensive reform was not enacted. During the 1992 primaries Bill Clinton made comprehensive health insurance reform one of the major—and certainly the most emotional—themes of his national campaign. Although the national climate seemed ripe for change and reform “could not wait,” the Clinton plan was declared dead in September 1994. The crisis rhetoric which had helped propel the issue to the top of the policy agenda backfired when Republicans counterattacked with a big-government crisis argument, and when, with a recovery under way, fears of an impending collapse of the system receded.

The outcome of the debate largely hinged on the way issues were framed by advocates and opponents of reform, the Clinton Administration, Democrats and Republicans in Congress, interest groups, and the media. Although Clinton and his advisers paid extraordinary attention to the public’s response to reform proposals, and the speech used to promote the initiative was carefully tailored to what Americans wanted to hear,¹¹ support for the Clinton plan fell from 74 percent in spring 1993 to 33 percent in June 1994.¹²

The failure of the Clinton plan, attributable to, among other reasons, failure to find a message to communicate effectively its merits, set the terms of the health insurance debate for years to come and served as a potent warning to liberals tempted to enter this political minefield. The aggressive rhetoric used by the two sides during the “battle” for national health insurance reflected the merciless partisan fight where the Clinton plan and concurring plans were “killed”¹³ and reformist hopes durably wounded.

The Clinton reform initiative marked a turning point in liberal discourse on health insurance. Although in his 1992 acceptance speech at the Democratic convention he had used the language of social justice with a populist streak, promising:

An America in which health care is a right, not a privilege, in which we say to all of our people: “Your government has the courage finally to take on the health care profiteers and make health care affordable for every family”¹⁴

Clinton had also run as a New Democrat against Big Government, promising to reduce taxes for the middle-class and cut the deficit in half over four years. On health issues his priority was to reduce health costs, which he saw as a major impediment to economic growth, and he had rejected the single-payer, Canadian-style health system favoured by some Democrats. In his national campaign he adopted the rhetoric and principles of “managed competition within a budget.”¹⁵ *Managed competition*, which health economist T. Marmor has derided as “an oxymoron,”¹⁶ was a growingly popular, market-based concept forged by health economists in the early 1990s which aimed at controlling health care inflation through competition between private insurers and the use of managerial techniques. “Managed competition within a budget” attempted to reconcile competition and regulation (through premium caps and other government restrictions on insurers’ practices) to reduce costs and achieve universal coverage, the two proclaimed objectives of Clinton’s initiative. This middle-of-the-road approach, “conservative means to liberal ends,”¹⁷ also aimed at rallying a maximum number of conservative Democrats and moderate Republicans around the plan.

Although the President’s embrace of a market-based approach ultimately failed to secure him a victory, it durably influenced the health policy discourse. Although a single-payer bill was introduced in Congress, it was never considered as a viable option and has so far remained politically unfeasible. What was recognised as the best policy by many experts was, and remains, bad politics.

The Clinton plan, formally introduced in Congress as the Health Security Act in October 1993, maintained the existing combination of private insurance and public programmes. It would have guaranteed all Americans and legal residents access to a national benefit package. It included an employer mandate, with federal subsidies for low-income workers and small businesses. Federal regulations would cap premiums to achieve cost control. The plan also encouraged enrolment in managed care organizations. No direct taxes would be raised to finance coverage expansion, except a cigarette tax. Savings would be achieved through eliminating waste in public and private programmes. The plan was based on six principles which the President had reviewed in a televised address on September 22, 1993: security, simplicity, savings, choice, quality, and responsibility. He mentioned *security* first, as most important, an echo of

the Social Security Act of 1935, a reference to the federal pension system, America's most cherished, least controversial social programme. However, the remainder of his speech made heavy use of the rhetoric of personal responsibility as a way to reduce costs and maximise efficiency.

...We also have higher rates of AIDS, of smoking and excessive drinking, of teen pregnancy, of low birthweight babies... We have to change our ways if we ever really want to be healthy as a people and have an affordable health care system... Responsibility in our health care system isn't just about them, it's about you, it's about me, it's about each of us. Too many of us have not taken responsibility for our own relations to the health care system. Many of us who have had fully paid health care plans have used the system whether we needed it or not without thinking what the costs were.

Such discourse, on the part of a President who had promised to "end welfare as we know it," was intended to resonate with centrists in Congress, but also with Reagan Democrats who were critical of costly programmes targeting the poor and had denounced welfare fraud.

Indeed, Clinton's rhetorical strategy was to appeal to the middle-class, without whose support no large scale reform would pass, and to avoid any echoes of targeted, war-on-poverty style programmes. Another major objective was to avoid any perception that the overhaul might upset the health care arrangements people were satisfied with—which was the case for most Americans.¹⁸

The errors that led to the defeat of the Clinton plan have been amply analyzed. In addition to its having come up against the historic obstacles to health reform,¹⁹ it suffered from an unfavourable political context, a delayed agenda, the way it was designed, and the substance of the reform itself. Clinton became entangled in the contradictions of his own rhetoric, and was never able to convey a positive message about the role of the government he had pledged to "reinvent". It turned out that middle-class, insured Americans could not be convinced they had more to gain than to lose under the reform. And a divided, underfinanced pro-reform coalition which failed to coalesce around a single plan allowed opponents to frame the debate on their own, profoundly ideological terms.

In late 1993, in a widely circulated memo, Republican strategist William Kristol outlined the strategy his party needed to adopt to win back control of Congress, one based on unconditional opposition to the Clinton plan, warning that successful reform would not only be bad for the country, but also a "serious political threat to the Republican Party" and:

legitimize middle-class dependence for “security” on government spending and regulation. It will revive the reputation of the party that spends and regulates, the Democrats, as the generous protector of middle-class interests. And it will at the same time strike a punishing blow against Republican claims to defend the middle class by restraining government.²⁰

The health care reform debate was thus seen by radical Republicans as a zero-sum-game, a battle whose outcome would determine the future of their party, and so the plan had to be “erased”, not “amended”. Kristol provided a step-by-step guide to killing health care reform by making massive use of anti-government rhetoric and scare tactics to convince Americans that the cost controls implemented under the Clinton plan would lead to rationing and undermine the quality of care and the patient-doctor relationship. These arguments were the linchpin of the 1994 conservative campaign to defeat the Clinton plan.²¹ There was no real bipartisan health policy debate per se, although moderate Republicans made policy proposals. The Republican discourse centred on denying there was a health care crisis while highlighting the risk of a crisis generated by a federal “takeover” of the health care system. Health care reform, which Clinton had presented in his September 1993 address as “a uniquely American solution”, became a metaphor for the threat his presidency posed to the American economy and for its assault on American values.

2. Incrementalism as policy

The 1992-1994 debate had promoted a market-based reform as means to the end of providing universal coverage. Although the debate did not go away, in the years that followed, reference to universal coverage and the uninsured was dropped, and the market was promoted in purely economic terms (healthy competition would reduce costs) as well as ideological ones (individual choice would preserve and enhance American values). “Comprehensive reform” and “major overhaul” gave way to incremental change.

The laboratories of reform

The “devolution revolution”, at the heart of the Republican discourse but supported by liberals as conducive to positive innovation, shifted policy development to the state level, where debates never led to the rhetorical excesses of the national debate over comprehensive reform.

Clinton himself was convinced that granting states more flexibility under Medicaid would allow them to devise ingenious or innovative ways

of covering more people. When he addressed the nation's governors at the White House on February 1, 1993, denouncing "the cumbersome process by which the federal government has micromanaged the health care system affecting poor Americans," he echoed Republicans' long-standing criticisms of an oversized, inefficient federal government which were to culminate in their 1994 Contract with America, with its commitment to "the end of government that is too big, too intrusive". Liberal and conservative discourse converged to encourage state reform experiments which had started in the late 1980s in the aftermath of the failed national reform, as Americans continued to evince strong distrust of the federal government. But while liberals were hoping to achieve at the state level what they had failed to do at national level, the main goal of Republican leaders after their 1994 congressional victory was to cut federal expenditures and eliminate entitlements. States engaged in a flurry of initiatives under the waivers granted by the federal government. Some particularly promising state reforms received extensive media coverage and expert scrutiny as states were promoted as "policy laboratories", setting models that other states or the federal government could emulate.²²

Although the rhetoric of devolution did translate into action with welfare reform and the block granting of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in 1996, it showed its limits on health issues with the political and budgetary difficulties encountered by state reformers and the ultimate failure of the most dramatic initiatives. The much touted "freedom" granted to the states failed to reduce the number of uninsured, and state leeway was in fact severely limited by the federal regulatory framework within which they had to operate.²³

CHIP: the bipartisan discourse

A true, bipartisan partnership—forged on the strength of good intentions, motivated by a simple desire to help our country's most vulnerable citizens, and nurtured in a politics-free atmosphere—led to enactment of CHIP, arguably the most significant advancement in children's health in this modern era.²⁴

The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), passed in 1997 as part of the Balanced Budget Act, added another piece to America's patchwork health care system. It was the biggest expansion of public insurance since 1965, and was enacted during a brief lull in the partisan politics of the 1990s. It was promoted as a relatively inexpensive programme to cover a deserving category of the population: low-income

children, and was an ideological compromise between conservatives who wanted a block grant and liberals who wanted an expansion of Medicaid.²⁵

Sponsored by Senators Orrin Hatch (R) and Ted Kennedy (D) with the support of the White House, CHIP was enacted into law as Title XXI of the Social Security Act in August 1997. It authorised federal matching funds (\$40 billion over 10 years) for states that elected to provide health insurance coverage to children whose parents' incomes were too high for Medicaid eligibility but who could not afford private insurance. The programme would be run by the states, which could use the funds either to expand their Medicaid programme or to set up or expand separate children's health insurance programmes or to combine both options.

Although the programme was applauded as a bipartisan compromise, the debate over its design, scope, and funding echoed previous, controversial debates over the respective roles of the federal government and the states in health care, and in the determination shown by conservatives to end the growth of entitlements. A key word was "flexibility", which resonated well with the devolutionary ideology of the Republican dominated Congress and conservative denunciation of "unfunded mandates": states would not be forced to join; they would be able to determine the structure of the programme and be given broad latitude in setting eligibility criteria as well as the scope of benefits. Separate CHIP programmes were modelled on private insurance, with parents' financial participation on a sliding scale, which would clearly distinguish them from Medicaid with its welfare connotations.

The language of the bill formally established the non-entitlement status of the programme, two years after Congress' unsuccessful attempt to eliminate Medicaid as an entitlement:

NONENTITLEMENT—Nothing in this title shall be construed as providing an individual with an entitlement to child health assistance under a State child health plan.²⁶

Although some conservatives criticised Orrin Hatch for wanting to create a "big government program",²⁷ framing the issue in moral terms allowed him to paint the Republican Party as "the party who does not hate children" and to enhance his image as a conservative concerned with social justice.²⁸ Funding would be provided by a "sin tax" (an increase in the federal tobacco tax), which reinforced the moral discourse used to promote a bill aimed at "hardworking families". A majority of Republicans joined the Democrats in approving the proposal.

By leaving the states to work out the details of implementation, lawmakers were able to shift the ideological debate over the balance of

power between the federal government and the states to a lower level of government.²⁹ The carefully-crafted compromise allowed both sides to claim victory, but in spite of the emotional rhetoric, ten years later, as prominent Democrats and Republicans congratulated themselves on authoring CHIP, 9 million children still did not have access to coverage, under a programme with wide regional disparities.

3. The market as solution

The rhetoric of the marketplace

The reference to consumerism and to the health care marketplace in American rhetoric is not new. Indeed, during the 1940s debate over national health insurance, the American Medical Association denied that patients had financial problems getting necessary care, arguing that “they have decided they can afford twice as much for tobacco as for physicians’ services,” thus equating health care with any other consumer product.³⁰ However, although in the words of medical historian R. Stevens the U.S. has had a “health care industry” rather than a “health service” since the post-war period,³¹ the political discourse over health care was predominantly one of social rights between the early 1950s and the late 1970s and what sociologist P. Starr has termed the “coming of the corporation”.³² Subsequently, a sharp rise in health care costs, a more conservative political climate, and the rising influence of neoliberal economists in health care policy led to widespread acceptance of market-based reforms as the best solutions to the problems of costs and quality for both public and private insurance.³³ Managed care, a version of which (“managed competition”) was the foundation of the Clinton plan, brought about a major transformation in the delivery of health services and in the role of the medical profession. It was the centrepiece of health care policy issues and proposals in the aftermath of the failed reform, a period marked by the predominance of market rhetoric by conservatives and reformers alike.

The “patient as consumer” concept, initially forged in the 1970s by liberal activists to protest against the perceived paternalism of the medical profession, was then largely used by key health care stakeholders to promote efficiency and maximise profits and by conservative politicians to promote their own free-market agenda, all in the name of American values, freedom of choice,³⁴ freedom of information, and consumer rights. Its counterpart in the market metaphor, the “doctor as provider” concept, was symbolic of the transformation of the traditional doctor-patient

relationship into a business one devoid of the professional autonomy attached to the exercise of the medical profession. In the 1990s, this commodification of health care which also applied to hospitals led to the emergence of huge corporations combining the functions of insurer and health services provider (“managed care organizations” or MCOs), where the use of the business model in a highly competitive environment would maximise efficiency, improve quality, and satisfy the patient as consumer.

But the term *managed care* soon became loaded with negative connotations and a metaphor for all the excesses of market-based policies. Indeed, if it was touted as a magic bullet which would solve all problems, it was also denounced as the ultimate horror story as controversies erupted over the methods used by MCOs to reduce costs and maximise profits at the consumer’s expense. The managed care backlash dominated the last years of the century as sensational media reports shed light on the disjunction of rhetoric and reality: if managed care was supposed to empower consumers by allowing them more choices or more patient-centred care, it was nevertheless insurance companies who made the crucial decisions and in some cases denied coverage.³⁵ But while the denunciation of managed care abuses provided powerful political rhetoric and bipartisan consensus, it also sidestepped the more explosive issue of universal access.³⁶ The rhetoric over patient protections dominated the health policy debate between 1998 and 2001 at the state and national level. While states passed a string of regulatory reforms to guarantee patient protections, a federal Patient’s Bill of Rights failed twice in Congress, due to concessions from the health care industry and Republican opposition. However, this redefinition of a “right”³⁷ to health care from that of a right of citizenship (as in Roosevelt’s or Truman’s discourse) to one guaranteed under a private contract offered nothing whatsoever regarding access to the millions who were uninsured.

When marketplace rhetoric and electoral strategies collide: the Medicare Modernization Act

Although the number of uninsured kept rising and numerous reports outlined the persistent problems of access, cost and quality,³⁸ health care reform was not high on the political agenda between the late 1990s and 2006. In the presidential debates of Campaign 2000, while both G.W. Bush and Al Gore addressed the popular issue of prescription drug coverage, of major interest to a crucial fraction of the electorate, and pledged to add a drug benefit to the programme, neither candidate put forward a comprehensive plan to cover the 40 million uninsured. Gore

described a more modest goal of universal coverage for children as “one of my top priorities”, while vigorously flaunting his small government credentials:

I would like to see eventually in this country some form of universal health care, but I’m not for a government-run system. In fact, I’m for shrinking the size of government. I want a smaller and smarter government. I have been in charge of this reinventing government streamlining project that’s reduced the size of government by more than 300,000 people in the last several years.³⁹

Unsurprisingly, Bush outlined market-based solutions consistent with Republican ideology, such as tax subsidies for the purchase of private insurance that would be the guiding health policy principles of his presidency. He also affirmed unambiguously his opposition to national health insurance:

I’m absolutely opposed to a national health care plan. I don’t want the federal government making decisions for consumers or for providers. I remember what the administration tried to do in 1993. They tried to have a national health care plan. And fortunately, it failed. I trust people, I don’t trust the federal government.⁴⁰

Health care was not Bush’s top priority. On the social policy agenda of the former Texas governor who had campaigned as a “compassionate conservative”, it ranked behind education and poverty issues and behind the partial privatization of Social Security, long a target of the conservative wing of the Republican Party. However, to the dismay of his conservative base, Bush’s presidency saw the biggest health care entitlement expansion since 1965 with passage of the controversial Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) in 2003, which added prescription drug coverage to the health insurance programme for the elderly. While the Republicans’ initial objective had been to implement the market-based reforms promoted for fiscal but mostly ideological reasons by conservatives since 1994, the final bill failed to fundamentally alter the structure of Medicare and turn it over to private insurers, while granting huge financial concessions to private stakeholders. The highly costly and complex piece of legislation was passed after the most partisan battle in the history of the programme.

Although a bipartisan consensus against adding drug coverage had long prevailed,⁴¹ the rising costs of outpatient medications, an increase in the elderly population relying on expensive drug treatment, a decline in employer coverage for retirees, and federal budget surpluses from 1998 to

2001⁴² pushed the issue onto the political agenda in the late 1990s, and competing bills were introduced in Congress between 1999 and 2002. Coverage expansion offered the Democrats an opportunity to consolidate their image as the historical founders and defenders of a very popular programme. The Republicans, perceiving this as a major electoral issue and a threat to their image with elderly voters, eventually rallied around the idea. After the midterm elections allowed Republicans to regain control of Congress, President Bush in his January 2003 State of the Union address pledged his budget would “commit an additional \$400 billion over the next decade to reform and strengthen Medicare” although the budget surplus had vanished. Prescription drug coverage was mentioned in the vaguest terms, while the President’s rhetoric stressed the importance of “choice”, a key word in consumer-oriented conservative discourse, and attacked frivolous malpractice suits and trial lawyers, the main culprits for rising costs—a familiar conservative line.

After the President’s initial proposals to limit the new benefit to seniors enrolled in private plans failed to garner the support of prominent Republican lawmakers from rural states, the debate shifted to Congress. It revolved around the role of the federal government in managing the expansion of the programme and it threw into stark relief the partisan ideological divide. Although concessions were ultimately granted on both sides after a protracted debate, the proclaimed objective of most Democrats was to ensure the survival of Medicare as a universal, comprehensive public programme (“Medicare as we know it”), while Republicans argued that the role of government should be limited to providing subsidies to private insurance companies with minimum government interference with the design of the drug benefit plan. Thus Bill Thomas, one of the House Ways and Means Committee’s most ardent advocates of market-based reforms, wrote in a June 2003 letter to his colleagues as the House Bill was being debated:

Only by harnessing competitive forces can we begin to bend the long range cost curve of the program, while continuing to provide more and better health services. Creating structures that allow competition and market forces encourage the prudent use of taxpayers’ resources and will finally let us get a handle on the long term imbalances facing the Medicare program.⁴³

The final bill which emerged from the conference committee in November 2003 was backed by some moderate Democrats, while some conservative Republicans opposed it. It satisfied neither conservatives nor liberals. Conservative Republicans denounced the costly expansion of a major

entitlement programme, the “largest tax increase that one generation has put on another generation in the history of this country,”⁴⁴ while Democrats denounced the privatisation of Medicare and the gifts to drug and insurance companies, who during the debate had consistently framed their message in terms of consumer choice and individual freedom.⁴⁵ Liberals also deplored the gaps in coverage. After fierce lobbying by the drug industry,⁴⁶ the legislation ended up forbidding the federal government to use its group purchasing power to negotiate prices with drug companies, leaving it up to the fragmented insurance market to bargain far less successfully for lower prices and depriving the government of an effective tool to control drug costs. But drug money, however instrumental in influencing the core spirit of the legislation, was not the only factor. The language of the law also reflected Republicans’ deep-felt belief in the superior efficiency of the private sector and market competition:

In order to promote competition under this part and in carrying out this part, the Secretary (1) may not interfere with the negotiations between drug manufacturers and pharmacies and [prescription drug plan] sponsors.

Consumer-directed health care

Although it had not been the main focus of the debate, a provision of the MMA which encouraged the creation of Health Savings Accounts (HSA) actually rewarded conservative groups’ long-standing efforts to privatise and individualise health insurance. President G.W. Bush also made HSAs and “consumer-directed health care” the focus of his second-term health policy initiatives, both rhetorically (during his 2004 re-election campaign and in public speeches) and by pushing an expansion of the 2003 measures through Congress in 2006. Consumer-directed health care (CDHC), promoted by conservative economists, think-tanks, and policymakers since the 1980s, during the Bush years replaced managed care as the best, newest, and hottest way to “empower consumers” and control costs.

A centrepiece of this new approach to health insurance, HSAs are tax-free accounts funded by employer and employee contributions which can be used to pay for medical expenses. Such accounts are combined with high-deductible insurance policies that kick in when catastrophic health expenses are incurred.

CDHC, embraced by George W. Bush as the health care equivalent of his “ownership society” (patients “own” their accounts and insurance policies which are portable from one job to another), was promoted as a means to control costs by making people responsible for their health care

purchasing decisions. Unlike traditional insurance, CDHC shifts responsibility for health care decisions from the provider to the patient/consumer who can “manage” his health care costs. The underlying philosophy of CDHC is that in a traditional, third party payer insurance system, people overconsume, thus contributing to spiralling health care costs:

Health-care costs are on the rise because the consumers are not involved in the decision-making process. Most health-care costs are covered by third parties. And therefore, the actual user of health care is not the purchaser of health care. And there’s no market forces involved with health care. It’s one of the reasons I’m a strong believer in what they call health savings accounts... This is a way to make sure people are actually involved with the decision-making process on health care.⁴⁷

His health policy discourse framed health care as just another consumer product:

When you go buy a car, you know, you’re able to shop and compare. And yet in health care that’s just not happening in America today.⁴⁸

The discourse used to promote HSAs combines the language of consumption with that of individual freedom and personal effort, cherished American values, subsumed under the “consumer choice” concept—choosing an insurance plan, doctor, or health services. Critics of CDHC have argued that such a system, attractive to young and healthy workers, can saddle patients with enormous bills for expenses below the deductible or lead them to skimp on necessary care. The language of marketing means little in health care, where in general, patients cannot make informed choices for themselves but have to rely on the expert advice of their doctors. And the tax exemption means little to low-income workers who don’t earn enough to be taxed.

Although since their creation in 2003 HSAs have attracted a growing number of workers (from 3.2 million in January 2006 to 8 million in January 2009),⁴⁹ they only cover 5 per cent of all Americans with private insurance.⁵⁰ Their capacity to deal with the cost and quality issues remains in dispute, and they have clearly done nothing to improve access to health coverage.

Return of the socialist bogeyman

Although G.W. Bush's health care policy record is not entirely negative,⁵¹ his conservative, market-oriented ideology undeniably contributed to the rising number of uninsured at the end of his second term, a time which also saw one of the most ideological debates of his presidency. His decision to veto an expansion of the children's programme twice in 2007 was one of the least glorious decisions of his whole presidency, and it was criticised by prominent members of his own party.

Although S-CHIP was recognised as a success, millions were still uncovered in 2006.⁵² When the programme came up for reauthorisation in 2007, a bipartisan consensus emerged in Congress to expand it by \$35 million over five years while raising eligibility standards to up to 300 per cent of poverty level in order to cover 4 million additional children. Although the revised version, passed by Congress after Bush's first veto, was designed to meet conservative Republican objections, he again vetoed it as legislation "that moves our health care system in the wrong direction". Bush had earlier made it clear that he opposed expanding the programme on "philosophical and ideological grounds",⁵³ although fiscal reasons were also mentioned.

The rhetorical fight over reauthorizing the Children's Health Insurance Program between July 2007 and January 2008 set the stage for the subsequent debate over national health insurance. In the words of health policy expert Sarah Rosenbaum, "the S-CHIP battle became a proxy war over the duties that government should assume in national health care reform."⁵⁴ The discourse of the Democratic majority and many Republican moderates (including the Republican Congressional leadership) framed the issue as a much needed expansion of a popular programme for a deserving category, while the radical right in Congress and the Bush Administration denounced it as the Trojan horse for a new entitlement which would pave the way for "socialized medicine".⁵⁵ The return of this term which had rarely been used since the end of the Cold War signalled the fear of radical Republicans that the enhanced programme would become the equivalent of Medicare, a first step towards universal coverage. The campaign against the S-CHIP bill, conducted by members of the Bush Administration, conservative lawmakers, and right-wing bloggers and think tanks, also aimed to mobilise the Republican base for future battles, with a discourse at least partly based on disinformation, lies, and simplistic slogans. Thus, in an April 2007 op-ed piece, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Mike Leavitt contended that:

Some members even desire a single, government-run health system, and S-CHIP is their vehicle for getting there... But the administration will not support a gradual government takeover of the health care, and neither will the American people... A government takeover of health care cannot control costs without rationing care. The result would be fewer choices, longer waits, lower quality and higher taxes.⁵⁶

In fact, S-CHIP financed health services delivered by the private sector, and the expansion was supported by most private health care industry interests. When the debate ended in a stalemate after the House failed to override the President's veto, in January 2008, battle-lines were again drawn and rhetorical ammunition readied for a fight over two competing visions of health care policy which left little room for compromise.

4. Health care reform at last?

Back on the agenda

As the 2008 presidential campaign was still in its early, unofficial stage, Barack Obama pledged his determination to make "affordable, universal health care" more than a campaign promise, to rise above partisan bickering, and to tackle head-on the issues of coverage and costs.⁵⁷ If the Illinois Senator had for a long time evinced a concern for health care problems, all candidates addressed the issue on the campaign trail, in stump speeches and televised debates. Polls indicated that rising premiums and labour-market uncertainties made it a top concern for voters, who felt major changes were needed to improve health care security and affordability.⁵⁸ The political/policy discourse of both the primaries and national campaigns reflected this concern and sharpened the ideological fault lines between conservatives and liberals.

During the primaries, the three Democratic candidates put forward fairly similar proposals, building on the existing public-private system with few truly fresh policy solutions. None of them proposed a public, single-payer system. Coverage would be improved through an expansion of public programmes, subsidies to improve access to private insurance, and a public, Medicare-like plan that would coexist with private insurers for workers who did not have access to employer-sponsored insurance. These plans borrowed heavily from political scientist J. Hacker's Health Care for America Plan, but also from the reform implemented in Massachusetts in 2006. The plans would be financed through a repeal of the Bush tax cuts and a penalty levied on employers who did not provide insurance to their workers. The Republican candidates saw cost as the

most crucial issue, and they proposed an expansion of HSAs and tax credits for the purchase of private insurance, financed through a repeal of the tax exemption for employer-provided benefits. In the national campaign, John McCain's health care discourse reflected the conservative belief that the best way to contain costs was to put consumers in charge of managing their own health expenditures. But if “freedom of choice” was a key phrase in his rhetoric, choice was also a Democratic mantra, reflecting the careful approach of reformers who had drawn lessons from the Clinton debacle. Thus Hillary Clinton's reform plan was dubbed the “American Health Choices Plan” to prevent attacks similar to those which had killed the 1994 reform by arguing it would restrict patient freedom. The Democratic platform also stressed choice, and proclaimed that:

Families and individuals should have the option of keeping the coverage they have or choosing from a wide array of health insurance plans, including many private health insurance options and a public plan.

And candidate Obama insisted, in the first of a series of similar statements he would make over and over again in the battle over a problematic health care bill:

If you've got a health care plan that you like, you can keep it. All I'm going to do is help you to lower the premiums on it. You'll still have choice of doctor.⁵⁹

But while McCain focused heavily on individual responsibility for health and health care, the Democratic platform emphasised “shared responsibility between employers, workers, insurers, providers and government,” and the Democratic nominee called for a fresh perspective on the role of government:

Ours is a promise that says government cannot solve all our problems, but what it should do is that which we cannot do for ourselves: protect us from harm and provide every child a decent education; keep our water clean and our toys safe; invest in new schools, and new roads, and science, and technology.

Our government should work for us, not against us. It should help us, not hurt us. It should ensure opportunity not just for those with the most money and influence, but for every American who's willing to work.⁶⁰

Indeed, reframing the message on government responsibility would be one of the most crucial and arduous tasks of Democratic policymakers, whose health care proposals were labelled as “socialist” during the

primaries by Republican candidates Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney, in terms reminiscent of the Cold-War debate over national health insurance:

We've got to do it the American way. The American way is not single-payer, government-controlled anything. That's a European way of doing something; that's frankly a socialist way of doing something. That's why when you hear Democrats in particular talk about single-mandated health care, universal health care, what they're talking about is socialized medicine.⁶¹

Although McCain refrained from such rhetorical excesses, they nevertheless set the tone of the debate over an issue that would define the Obama Presidency, in a culture war fought in the name of American values and a uniquely American system.

Launching the 2009 Health care reform debate

Having drawn the lessons of the 1993 disaster from former Clinton advisers, Obama adopted a radically different strategy: he would act quickly, set objectives, let Congress work out the details and claim credit for success, while pitching health care reform to the public, health care players, reluctant Democrats, and the few potentially willing Republicans as a “moral but also fiscal imperative”, without linking his name to a specific plan. The Presidential rhetoric, through an unprecedented media campaign and countless public appearances, aimed to explain, to convince, empathise with, raise a sense of urgency with, and above all reassure the public about a plan whose substance attested to the persistence of a fairly conservative model based on the traditional public/private pattern, with a combination of government subsidies and insurance regulation to expand coverage.

The worst recession since World War II provided both challenges and opportunities. Rising unemployment had led to an increase in the number of uninsured, while declining payroll tax revenues and an increase in the number of recipients affected state and federal public programmes. Linking comprehensive health reform to the nation's economic future, and heart wrenching individual situations to pressing national issues, made for a powerful, dramatic narrative which might win over a broad section of the electorate. But the unprecedented infusion of federal money into the economy to avoid a collapse of the banking and auto industries had left many Americans deeply worried about massive government intervention and how taxpayers would pay for it. In addition, the President had many other crucial issues competing for his attention, in particular, the job

situation, which had worsened during the health care debate. Although Obama had a level of personal popularity and political capital which Clinton lacked at the outset of his presidency, he would have to face the challenge of a more polarized Congress with almost no moderate Republicans, in a campaign for reform which bore striking similarities to an election campaign, characterised by an advertising blitz financed by massive amounts of money, a reliance on polls to tailor discourse to public expectations, a town-hall meeting format for speeches, and rhetorical excesses.

Above all, the President and Congressional Democrats had to confront the difficulty of selling a reform that purported to achieve two virtually irreconcilable objectives: slowing the growth of health costs (“bending the cost curve”, in policy wonk language) and expanding coverage—in the words of Democratic Senator Evan Bayh, “the challenge” of “addressing the cognitive dissonance of a \$900 billion bill that purports to save money”.⁶² While the White House would frame the issues and repeatedly (if rather mechanically) use the bully pulpit to deliver the political message, Congress would be left to wrangle over the policy details of a bill which ran to thousands of pages and would affect the lives of tens of millions of Americans.

The battle got off to an early start with passage of the stimulus bill in February 2009, a few days after Obama signed into law the CHIP reauthorization bill, followed by his budget proposal which set aside a reserve fund of \$630 billion over 10 years as a first step in funding comprehensive health reform. The health care provisions of the Recovery and Investment Act which accounted for a tiny fraction of the \$787 billion bill were fiercely contested by Republican lawmakers, including Senator Orrin Hatch:

I would like to take a few minutes now to talk about the health care provisions in this so called stimulus package, or more appropriately, the next installment of the Socialized Health Care For All Act of 2009. President Obama recently made the media rounds stating that any delay in passing this government-spending package would be “inexcusable and irresponsible.” Well, today I am going to highlight certain health care provisions in this Trojan horse legislation that, in the President’s own words, should be classified as inexcusable and irresponsible...⁶³

Regarding the budget proposal, which unambiguously linked health care reform to the sustainability of the U.S. economy, its carefully worded language, laying out eight principles to guide congressional efforts, marked Obama’s determination to put cost before access as his primary

objective, and preserving what had become, in the language of both right and left, the main ideological weapon in the struggle for Americans' hearts and minds: assuring *choice* topped the list of principles:

1. *Guarantee Choice.* The plan should provide Americans a choice of health plans and physicians. People will be allowed to keep their own doctor and their employer-based health plan.

This central point in the President's rhetoric would be hard to reconcile with another, which had been part of a recurring message about the unsustainable status quo: achieving *universality* of coverage was relegated to a distant sixth place, and was described in the vaguest terms:

6. *Aim for Universality.* The plan must put the United States on a clear path to cover all Americans.⁶⁴

The White House Conference of March 2009 officially kicked off the campaign to overhaul America's health care with an inclusive speech marking Obama's determination to distance himself from Clinton's approach by opting for bipartisanship and seeking the cooperation of major industry players. While key congressional committees set to work on legislation to meet a Presidential deadline of August 1, the White House, while not absent from public view, mostly engaged in private negotiations with major stakeholders, in particular, drug makers. As Congress was about to adjourn for its summer recess with a bill stalemated in the Senate Finance Committee, liberals were widely seen as losing control of the debate over health care overhaul, which conservatives had succeeded in framing in their own terms.

In late July and during the August recess, Obama launched a national grassroots campaign aimed at feeling the pulse for reform, rebutting conservative attacks, and reassuring voters. Political opposition grew fiercer, as did personal attacks (name-calling reaching the extremes of "communist" and "Nazi") on the President and Democratic lawmakers who had taken the debate to the public in town-hall meetings around the country.

If some lawmakers in predominantly conservative areas saw it as vital to preserving their seats in the next election, the stakes were just as high for a President who needed to firmly reassert his leadership on an issue whose outcome would determine his ability to pass such other crucial reforms on his policy agenda as financial and environmental regulation.

By September 9, when Obama had taken the debate to the nation in his second address before a joint session of Congress, a political commentator

remarked that it was his “sixth prime time appearance in eight months (two speeches, four press conferences), surpassing the records of all other presidents”,⁶⁵ and the risk of overexposure was frequently cited.

The language of the debate

In his press conferences, addresses to the nation, to industry groups, unions, TV interviews, and town-hall meetings, Obama constantly had two audiences to convince and reassure: members of Congress fearful of the impact of reform on their re-election prospects, and an American public fearing the consequences for their insurance status and tax liabilities. His discourse had to be simple enough to convince the public, yet provide enough detail to be credible (at the risk of being labelled a “tutorial”)⁶⁶ – a difficult balancing act to pull off when promoting a work in progress which contained a myriad of different, highly complex provisions and disputed figures.

Both Obama and his opponents drew upon polls and pollsters to determine the wording of their messages and how to align them to American values. The Republican discourse adhered to consultant (and rhetorical architect of the 1994 Contract for America) Frank Luntz's guidelines, in a memo leaked to the press in May (*The Language of Healthcare 2009*) which used arguments based on his recommendations:

It could lead to the government setting standards of care, instead of doctors who really know what's best.

It could lead to the government rationing care, making people stand in line and denying treatment like they do in other countries with national healthcare.

President Obama wants to put the Washington bureaucrats in charge of healthcare. I want to put the medical professionals in charge, and I want patients as an equal partner.⁶⁷

But the vociferous town-hall attacks also saw the return of a favourite conservative tactic: the use of cultural issues such as abortion, immigration, and euthanasia, which the various bills were falsely accused of covering, and even encouraging (in the case of end-of-life counselling, labelled “death panels”, according to a rumour propagated by Sarah Palin but tacitly approved by the Republican mainstream).

Obama's discourse combined impassioned rhetoric with the use of personal (including his own) experience with illness and carefully calibrated language addressing the fears and problems of the insured middle-class, the crucial constituency to be won over. The rhetorical

guidelines were mostly dispensed by Luntz's liberal counterpart, the Herndon Alliance, a progressive coalition which advises progressive groups on communications strategies. Indeed, the advice on "winning the debate on health care reform" posted on the organisation's website in July 2009⁶⁸ echoed phrases which had relentlessly punctuated the President's speech since that spring. "Quality, affordable health care" was thus favoured over "universal coverage" as less polarizing and more likely to convince the "satisfied majority" of Americans, whose main worry was not access but rising premiums. "Security and stability" addressed the currently insured's main worry: losing coverage through illness or changing employment status. And like the name of the bills which emerged from congressional committees (America's Affordable Health Choices Act), "choice" (of doctor or plan) was at the heart of Presidential rhetoric, including that addressing the most controversial aspect of his health reform: the "public option". Denounced by conservative groups as "government-run health care", the public option was only an option, however desirable, and it would not be a deal-breaker.

The military metaphor dominated on both sides during the summer debate in what even the mainstream media termed the "health care war". Although many Republican attacks were channelled through conservative media, blogs, and TV and radio anchors, there were a few direct attacks from radical lawmakers as well as from the Senate Finance Committee's ranking Republican, Charles Grassley, aimed at energizing the party's conservative base and boosting their re-election prospects.⁶⁹ After South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint threatened to turn health care reform into Obama's Waterloo ("If we're able to stop Obama on this, it will be his Waterloo. It will break him"),⁷⁰ thus providing the President with a powerful punch line to denounce the political gain his opponents were hoping to achieve, it was Nancy Pelosi's turn to use warlike imagery to rally her divided troops behind the Democrats' health care overhaul:

This is going to be carpet bombing. Carpet bombing, slash and burn, shock and awe—anything you want to say to describe what the insurance companies will do to hold on to their special advantage, which exploits the patients and holds the American consumer at the mercy of the insurance company.⁷¹

And Andrew Stern, the president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), justified his choice of union leader Dennis Rivera to lead the campaign for health care because "we needed our General Petraeus to win this war."⁷²

Both liberals and conservatives touted their commitment to preserving American values, while Obama, echoing liberal discourse from the 1930s to the Clinton era, and with an eye on the polls, promoted reform as fitting the mould of American exceptionalism:

Now, what we need to do is come up with a uniquely American way of providing care. (Applause.) So I'm not in favor of a Canadian system, I'm not in favor of a British system, I'm not in a favor of a French system. That's not what Max is working on. Every one of us, what we've said is, let's find a uniquely American solution because historically here in the United States the majority of people get their health insurance on the job.⁷³

The rhetoric and policy, whether reflecting the President's own conviction or a strategy to win the centre, showed a striking continuity with the liberal approach to reform since the 1980s: a belief in the efficiency of a regulated free-market. Competition should lead to more efficiency, and insurance companies (the only clearly labelled villains in Obama's discourse on private stakeholders) should be "disciplined" and "kept honest", but allowed to compete with an increasingly unlikely public option. Guaranteeing that "no government bureaucrat can take your health insurance away," beyond disappointing the most liberal lawmakers, did little to restore Americans' faith in the responsibility of government to act for the common good.

However, in his September 9 address to a joint session of Congress which allowed him to regain control of the debate, the President did make the moral case for health care reform by quoting Ted Kennedy, who had argued that:

It concerns more than material things... What we face... is above all a moral issue; at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country.

Obama also kept hammering home the necessity of urgent action, which had permeated his discourse since the beginning of the health care initiative:

Now is the season for action. Now is when we must bring the best ideas of both parties together, and show the American people that we can still do what we were sent here to do. Now is the time to deliver on health care. Now is the time to deliver on health care.

The floor debates in Congress

During the historic House floor debate which led to passage of the landmark legislation on November 7, 2009, the hard numbers and technicalities which Democratic lawmakers had haggled over for months in committee gave way to a rhetorical frame that put the “moral imperative” squarely at the centre of Democratic discourse. While each side appealed to lawmakers' sense of history, Democrats used the language of rights to position the Affordable Health Care for America Act as a milestone in the fight against injustice and gender discrimination, with some even placing it within the realm of constitutional rights under the general welfare clause:

We have an obligation, constitutional and moral, to provide for the general welfare of every American citizen. Allowing a broken health care system to continue to bankrupt families, businesses and hospitals and deny coverage to millions is a failure of duty. We must act now.⁷⁴

Although the bill was termed “a sweeping overhaul” of the health care system, it was the outcome of numerous compromises, and left many frustrated. But it marked a turning point in the history of health care reform and would be a first step toward meeting Obama’s threefold objective: covering the uninsured, making secure the coverage of the insured, and containing health care costs. It would cover 96 percent of the population, put an end to insurers’ most egregious practices, and create a public insurance programme that would compete with private plans in government-regulated exchanges. And it would pay for itself through new taxes on the wealthy and savings from Medicare.

While the debate in the Upper Chamber offered few fresh arguments on the substance of a bill in many respects similar to its counterpart in the House, the peculiarities of Senate rules created conditions for a month-long drama and last minute procedural votes within an intensely polarised chamber where politics prevailed over policy, even within Democratic ranks. As the debate unfolded, it highlighted both Democratic divisions and their leadership skills at unifying their ranks. While the concessions granted to a handful of centrist Democrats to garner the 60 votes necessary to avert a Republican filibuster were the butt of derisive metaphors,⁷⁵ the main sticking points were the abortion language and the public option, which, if unamended, threatened to be deal-breakers within the Democratic caucus and would be the main hurdles in rewriting the two bills into an acceptable final compromise.

On the Republican side, although the discourse of such radical lawmakers as Tom Coburn was filled with traditional references to “government takeover” and “loss of freedom”, the opposition’s main line of attack was the increased costs to government, businesses, and families which the bill was bound to create. There were also the perennial ideological issues that have framed debates over social policy since the Progressive Era: federalism, states rights, and the constitutionality of a bill that would force Americans to buy a financial product they did not necessarily want. Thus Kay Hutchinson (R-Texas) argued that passage of the bill would lead to “the trampling of the rights of our States under the 10th amendment”,⁷⁶ and John Ensign (R-Nev) claimed that “on the individual mandate, this bill violates the U.S. Constitution”,⁷⁷ and predicted a constitutional challenge to the bill if enacted into law.

As the debate dragged on, peaking in a series of procedural votes in the run-up to Christmas, one villain (the insurance companies) featured consistently at the heart of the Democratic discourse:

The bad behavior you see on the Senate floor is the last thrashing throes of the health insurance industry as it watches its business model begin to die ... Good riddance to that business model. We know it all too well. It deserves a stake through its cold and greedy heart, but some of our colleagues here are fighting to the death to keep it alive.⁷⁸

The harsh terms used to excoriate insurers and hail their future demise failed to convince liberal activists and left wing Democrats such as Howard Dean, who criticised the bill as “a bailout for the insurance industry”. Indeed, the industry had lobbied hard against a public option which had been cut from the final version of the Senate bill. However the remarks delivered by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid before the final vote on December 24 emphasised the moral dimension of a bill that Truman had called for in 1946, while also signalling that it would be the beginning of a long process, a minimum package, not perfect, but far better than the status quo:

Like so many endeavors that have benefitted so many Americans, making health insurance more affordable and health insurance companies more accountable is a process... This morning is not the end of that process; it is merely the beginning. We will continue to build on this success, to improve our health system even more, and to further ease the terrible burdens on American families and businesses.

5. The Home stretch

The upset victory of Republican Scott Brown in Massachusetts on January 19, 2010, coming just as House and Senate leaders were trying to work out their differences, brought the debate over the intricacies of the conference process to an abrupt halt. Confusing messages from the President and Congressional leaders in the aftermath of the election reflected both divisions among Democrats on the right policy approach and their growing panic over the political consequences of passing or not passing reform. While Obama eventually stuck to the substance of the bill, he admitted communication errors, before signalling he was determined to make an ultimate attempt at reaching a bipartisan consensus.

A February 25 televised health summit where the President invited Republicans to submit proposals added little to the substance of the debate, but the courteous exchanges again sent powerful messages to the voters on the philosophical divide between the two parties on the role of government. The event also signalled a shift in the way the Republicans framed the issue: as reconciliation appeared to be the only option left for the Democrats to move a revised bill forward and bypass a filibuster, the Republican leadership focused on process, ignoring the fact that they themselves had several times used the tactic of reconciliation to push through major legislation. In his opening statement, after noting that “we don’t do comprehensive well” and stressing the benefits of a step-by-step approach, Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) warned the Democrats against “jamming [the bill] through in a partisan way”, invoking Tocqueville’s “tyranny of the majority”, while Orrin Hatch slammed the recourse to reconciliation as “an assault on the democratic process.”

This use of reconciliation to jam through this legislation, against the will of the American people, would be unprecedented in scope. And the havoc wrought would threaten our system of checks and balances, corrode the legislative process, degrade our system of government and damage the prospects of bipartisanship.⁷⁹

In their ultimate push for reform, Democrats had to explain and justify the use of reconciliation, but they also had to send a clear message to reassure the voters who cared little about the technicalities of the process but were sensitive to the alleged threats it represented to America’s founding principles. Thus, “reconciliation” with its tricky connotations was shunned in official Democratic discourse in favour of a more straightforward emphasis on the “up-or-down vote” or “majority vote”.⁸⁰

The landmark legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by Barack Obama in March 2010 enshrines “the core principle that everybody should have some basic security when it comes to their health care,”⁸¹ and boldly reconnects the Democratic Party to its central ideals of social justice. Financing a reform that would benefit the working poor by a tax on the wealthiest may mark the beginning of a shift away from the politics and policies that have increased inequalities over the past three decades. In perhaps one of the most fitting homages to a President who had relentlessly pursued a highly risky goal for what he deemed to be right, Representative James Clyburn hailed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act passed by the House on March 21, 2010 as the “Civil Rights Act of the 21st century”.⁸²

But the rhetorical battle was not over. Redefining health care reform in their own terms promised to be the centrepiece of Republican strategy in the no-holds-barred fight they would wage to regain control of Congress in the 2010 midterms. Democrats would have to frame their message well if they hoped to convince the population of the benefits of a health care reform that has plugged a gaping hole in the American welfare state and earned Obama a place in history alongside Franklin D. Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson.

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²³ For a critical discussion of the "laboratory" metaphor, see M. Sparer, L. Brown. "States and the Health Care Crisis. The Limits and Lessons of Laboratory Federalism", Rich & White 181-202.

²⁴ Sen. Orrin Hatch during the Senate debate over S-CHIP reauthorization (the program was renamed State Children's Health Insurance Program in 2000), Sept 27, 2007. <http://majorityleader.house.gov/docUploads/Hatch%20CHIP.pdf> (accessed Nov 20, 2009)

²⁵ M. Sparer. "Leading the Health Policy Orchestra: The Need for an Intergovernmental Partnership", *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law* (Henceforth cited as *JHPPL*), 28:2-3 (2003): 251.

²⁶ Unlike Medicaid, it provides an entitlement to *states*, not to *individuals*.

²⁷ J. Carney. "Hatching Mischief", *Time Magazine*, Apr. 21, 1997; <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,986210,00.html> (accessed Oct 23, 2009)

²⁸ "Hatch Joins Kennedy to Back a Health Program." *NYT*, March 14, 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/14/us/hatch-joins-kennedy-to-back-a-health-program.html> accessed Oct 23, 2009

²⁹ C. Grogan and E. Rigby. "Federalism, Partisan Politics, and Shifting Support for State Flexibility: The Case of the U.S. State Children's Health Insurance Program." *Publius*. 39: 1 (2009): 47-69.

³⁰ Quoted by J. Burrow. *AMA Voice of American Medicine*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963) 361. See also Gordon, 160-162.

³¹ "History and Health Policy in the United States: The Making of a Health Care Industry, 1948-2008", *Social History of Medicine*, 21:3, pp. 461-483, 468.

³² P. Starr. *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 420-449.

³³ M. Schlesinger. "On Values and Democratic Policymaking: The Deceptive Consensus Around Market-Oriented Care". *JHPPL*, 27:6 (2002): 889-926. For an analysis of the rise and the implications of the market metaphor, see: G. Annas, "Reframing the Debate on Health Care Reform by Replacing Our Metaphors", *NEJM*, 332: 11 (1995): 745-748; N. Tomes; "Patients or Health Care Consumers? Why the History of Contested Terms Matters", *History and Health Care policy in the USA*.

³⁴ The word "choice", touted by liberal and conservative reformers, is actually quite ambiguous. It usually refers to a choice of insurance plan, whereas what patients really value is choosing their doctor, which is normally restricted in managed care plans. As for the freedom to choose one's insurer, it can also be very limited, since in several states one or two large insurers dominate the market.

³⁵ *JHPPL*, 24:5 (1999).

³⁶ D. Mechanic. "The Managed Care Backlash: Perceptions and Rhetoric in Health Care Policy and the Potential for Health Care Reform", *The Milbank Quarterly*, 79:1 (2001): 35-54.

³⁷ M. Schlesinger. "The Dangers of the Market Panacea", in J. Morone and L. Jacobs *Healthy Wealthy and Fair*, (Oxford: OUP, 2005) 119.

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³⁹ October 11, 2000. The Second Gore-Bush Presidential Debate. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29419> (accessed June 2010)

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⁴³ <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/healthdocs/modernizestrengthen.pdf>

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⁴⁸ Forum held at the Department of Health and Human Services, Feb 16, 2006. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/jan-june06/coverage_2-16.html (accessed Oct 2009)

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⁵⁰ J. Roberson. “Health Savings Accounts Haven’t Caught on with Workers”, *The Dallas Morning News*. July 31, 2008.

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⁵² http://www.census.gov/Press-release/www/releases/archives/income_wealth/010583.html (accessed November 2008)

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⁵⁴ S. Rosenbaum. “The proxy war. S-CHIP and the Government’s Role in Health Care Reform”. *NEJM*, 358:9 (2008): 870.

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⁵⁶ M. Leavitt. “Return SCHIP to Its Roots”, *Modern Healthcare and The Commonwealth Fund*, (April 2007).

⁵⁷ <http://obamaspeeches.com/097-The-Time-Has-Come-for-Universal-Health-Care-Obama-Speech.htm> (accessed Sept 12 2009)

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⁶⁴ Office of Management and Budget. *President Obama's fiscal 2010 Budget. Transforming and Modernizing America's Health Care System.*

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⁶⁵ David Gergen. http://gergenvoice.blogspot.com/2009_09_01_archive.html (accessed Sept 23, 2009)

⁶⁶ Dan Balz. "The Hard Sell Begins", *Washington Post* 23/07/10

⁶⁷ politico - <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0509/22155.html> (accessed June 15, 2009)

⁶⁸ http://www.thirdway.org/data/product/file/234/Messaging_Health_Reform.pdf (accessed Aug 2, 2009)

⁶⁹ Instead of correcting the false claim that the House bill would encourage euthanasia, at an Iowa town-meeting on Aug 12, Grassley fanned the controversy by saying: "You have every right to fear. You shouldn't have counseling at the end of life, you should have done that 20 years before. Should not have a government run plan to decide when to pull the plug on grandma".

⁷⁰ Ben Smith, "Health reform foes plan Obama's 'Waterloo'", *Politico* (17 July 2009).

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⁷¹ <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/31/pelosis-secret-weapon-in-health-care-debate-chocolate/?pagemode=print>. 31 jul accessed Aug 10

⁷² S. Greenhouse, "Dennis Rivera Leads Labor Charge for Health Reform", *NYT* 26 August 2010.

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⁷⁴ G.K Butterfield (D-NC), *Congressional Record* (House of Representatives) Nov 7, 2009, H12842

⁷⁵ Such as the "Louisiana purchase" to refer to the Medicaid expansion granted to Mary Landrieu, (D-Louisiana), to secure her vote, or the "cornhusker kickback", the huge federal Medicaid subsidy offered to Sen. Ben Nelson (D-Nebraska) to ensure his support for the bill. The latter was eliminated in the reconciliation bill passed March 21, 2010.

⁷⁶ Kay Hutchinson, *Congressional Record* (Senate) 23 Dec, 2009, S13821.

⁷⁷ John Ensign, *Congressional Record* (Senate) 23 Dec. 2009, S13822.

⁷⁸ Senator Sheldon Whitehouse 22 Dec. 2009

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⁷⁹ “Reconciliation on health care would be an assault to the Democratic process”. Orrin Hatch, *Washington Post*, March 2, 2010.

⁸⁰ Barack Obama’s White House address, March 3, 2010.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PRIVATISATION AS A STRATEGY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, THE UNITED STATES AND BEYOND

BRIAN J. GLENN

Conservatives in the United Kingdom and America have adopted a remarkably similar set of strategies towards developing new constituencies in the last two decades, and this is not a coincidence. What follows in this chapter is an intellectual history, not simply of a common policy *goal*, but also of a *strategy*, and one whose movement we will follow from the University of Chicago, to Chile, to Britain, and finally back to America. With the British election of 2010 and the return of the Conservatives to power, this strategy will be as important as it has ever been in Britain, just as American conservatives continue to follow it in America as well.

Free market conservatives believe in small government and low taxes, with decisions being made locally—if government must be involved at all—and thus seek to privatise government services and inject market forces into the creation of policy.¹ In short, privatisation is the foremost *goal* of free market conservatives. Yet many of the programmes most hated by free market conservatives are extremely popular with large portions of society, and conservatives in Britain and America have traditionally found it difficult to see their goals turned into lasting reforms, or reforms at all, for that matter. The long-term solution has been to design policies that make the concept of private provision of services more attractive than public provision for the beneficiaries. In short, conservative intellectuals have had to design methods of making privatisation attractive enough to elicit popular support, and this has resulted in new and important thinking about policy design.

The Chicago School

The *laissez-faire*, free market ideas that have come to be identified with the “Chicago School of Economics” arrived in the 1930s with the influence of the first wave of scholars such as Frank Knight, Lloyd Mints, Henry Simons, and Jacob Viner. Although they approached the subject from a variety of angles, these individuals were linked by the idea of the free market bringing goods to society that monopolies (especially state monopolies) simply could not offer—along with, of course, the fundamental good of personal freedom of choice.

To understand what has come to be known as the Chicago School of thinking about economics, we can begin with the definition provided by Milton Friedman:

In discussion of economic policy, Chicago stands for belief in the efficacy of the free market as a means of organising resources, for skepticism about government intervention into economic affairs, and for emphasis on the quantity of money as a key factor in producing inflation. In discussions of economic science, “Chicago” stands for an approach that takes seriously the use of economic theory as a tool for analyzing a startlingly wide range of concrete problems, rather than as an abstract mathematical structure of great beauty but little power, for an approach that insists on empirical testing of theoretical generalizations and rejects alike facts without theory and theory without facts.²

Friedman’s description is a bit too vague for our purposes, and certainly understates the intensity with which many of these beliefs are held. H. Laurence Miller has placed the same concepts into a more specific framework in describing an acolyte of the Chicago School:

1. A polar position as advocate of an individualistic market economy;
2. The emphasis he puts on the “usefulness and relevance of neo-classical economic theory”;
3. The way in which he equates the actual and the ideal market;
4. The way in which he sees and applies economics in and to every nook and cranny of life;
5. The emphasis that he puts on hypothesis testing as a neglected element in the development of positive economics.³

As component number four above makes clear, the market becomes the driving force behind the Chicago School of Economics. The market is something that for proponents can be applied everywhere, in all elements of life—and here is the key point, not simply because the market works

(not all members of the first generation agreed that it did, especially Knight), but rather because the market guaranteed maximum freedom. As Milton Friedman explained,

It prevents one person from interfering with another in respect of most of its activities. The consumer is protected from coercion by the seller because of the presence of other sellers with whom he can deal. The seller is protected from coercion by the consumer because of other consumers to whom he can sell. The employee is protected from coercion by the employer because of other employers for whom he can work, and so on. And the market does this impersonally and without centralized authority.⁴

We should also note the combination of component numbers one and five from Miller's list above. For adherents, being an advocate of market theory was central, and their work was not meant to be purely theoretical, but rather appropriate for application to the real world, and this meant seeing their theories shaped into policy and deployed. Friedman, for example, began to develop policy proposals regarding a wide range of issues such as the "negative income tax, substitution of publicly subsidised private schools for public schools, making participation in social security voluntary, abolishing licensure for doctors, [a] volunteer army in lieu of the draft," and he advocated their enactment.⁵ Yet the academics sitting in Chicago found that America's leaders in the 1940s and 1950s were simply not yet receptive enough to their ideas to work them into domestic policy—while at the same time they greatly feared the spread of communism both overseas and in Central and Latin America and were willing to do something about it in terms of domestic policy abroad. Thus began a fascinating experiment to plant the seeds of the Chicago School abroad in Chile.

The Chicago School and the Chicago Boys

In 1939 Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration reacted to the spreading appeal of communism abroad in part by trying to improve America's relationship with various Latin American countries through the creation of the Institute for Inter-American Affairs (IIAA), which would fund programmes that were mutually beneficial to the U.S. and the recipient country.. In 1953 the International Cooperation Administration created a programme in which American universities would directly train other countries' administrators, and within two years, seventy-eight American universities had entered into relationships with foreign countries.⁶ One country in particular that attracted attention was Chile,

which was perceived as having the potential to open its markets and serve as a bulwark against communism if properly supported. This perception led the U.S. government (with additional help from the Ford Foundation) to fund scholarships for Chilean students to study economics at the University of Chicago, with the goal of these individuals returning to their home country to spread the Chicago School of thinking both as professors, business leaders, and policy experts.

Between 1957 and 1970, the University of Chicago welcomed about one hundred carefully selected Chilean students into its graduate programmes in Economics. In the words of Juan Gabriel Valdés, this “deliberate endeavor aimed, quite explicitly, to influence economic views and, potentially, to influence government decisions on the course of the economy.” The department created a special workshop on developmental economics where the students could see how the kinds of theory being taught at Chicago could be applied back at home.⁷ Ford Foundation reports repeatedly noted that students were highly limited in the kinds of theory being taught such that the “Chicago approach to development” “differs from the typical approach to development programs at other universities and one often encounters rather sanguine reactions about Chicago economics around Latin America.” Another author described the education of the students in terms of “an excellent reputation plus a controversial ideological aroma in Latin America.”⁸

The “Chicago Boys” (as the Chilean students came to be called in non-derogatory terms) quickly assumed authoritative positions in Chile’s business community and in academe. Importantly, they maintained communication networks and were broadly seen as having a distinctive free market approach that was very attractive to many in industry and banking—especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the country socialised many of those same firms under the direction of President Salvador Allende.

In 1973, General Augusto Pinochet took power after a successful coup against Allende. In preparation for the coup, the navy requested that a research group create an economic plan for the new government. The plan was written under the direction of the Chicago Boys, who:

introduced into Chilean society ideas that were completely new, concepts entirely absent from the “ideas market” prior to the military coup, equivalent to the exact sciences—as the motor behind the organization of society. The Chicago Boys immediately converted a set of economic objectives into the sole determinant of all that was socially desirable. Economic analysis was subsequently extended to other areas of social activity, including a proposed ideal “modern individual”: competitive and

acquisitive, he was supposed to spawn a culture in tune with his own reproduction and the creation of a “nation of owners.” The Chicago Boys introduced the concept of a minimal state, concerned solely with public order: in other words, a state limited to repressive duties and dealing with extreme poverty. Above all, they introduced into the “public debate” (which during the years of dictatorship became a mere monologue) a self-sustaining economic discourse, whose variables formed part of a theoretical framework that excluded ethical, cultural, political, or social considerations. Indeed, it did not even acknowledge the presence of such considerations.⁹

Price controls (excepts for wages) were almost immediately eliminated, regulation was reduced in many areas to virtually nothing, and public corporations and other entities such as universities and television stations had to finance themselves without governmental support. Perhaps most dramatically, the government reduced its economic role as producer, owner, and employer and focused instead on facilitating growth in the private sector. In 1975, the State Corporation for the Promotion of Production (*Corporación do Formento do la Producción*) sold off 86 percent of its bank stock to private citizens, along with control of over one hundred and ten firms. In the following three years, from 1975 to 1978, the country sold off more than four hundred additional firms. In 1978 alone, the sale of just forty-four firms (which included four large banks) represented a transfer of over \$730 million (US), which is the rough equivalent of about two-thirds of all investment for that year. By the end of the first quarter of 1979, roughly a third of all the land appropriated by the government under Allende had been returned, and an additional 35 percent was distributed to the nation’s peasants by the end of the decade. In 1973, the government had been a major stockholder in nineteen banks. By 1981 it held interest in just two.¹⁰

More than anything else, perhaps, the privatisation of the country’s social security system has stood out as a shining beacon for how the state can be detached from a policy. Chile had the hemisphere’s oldest social security system, which it had established in 1924. By the late 1970s, the system’s deficit was running equal to 25 percent of the nation’s GDP, and it was clear that a major change to the system was needed. The solution provided by the Chicago Boys was to privatise it, with one analyst seeing their intent being to “switch the burden of retirement to the individual, lessen the government’s financial responsibilities, stimulate the economy, and encourage employment.”¹¹ The old system had over thirty different categories of retirement funds, each with different benefits, although over 90 percent of citizens were in the three largest, which allowed up to 100

percent of final earnings for salaried government employees and 70 percent for wage earners in the private sector. Employers paid a payroll tax for each worker ranging from 11 to 16 percent of wages. Under the new system, workers had to pay in at least 10 percent of their wages, which were tax deferred, and had the option of making additional payments after income taxes were paid. These contributions would be invested in a range of mutual funds that were privately operated but carefully overseen by regulators. Each worker was also given a bond equal to the value of his or her existing contributions, indexed to inflation. Finally, the government would no longer provide for disability or survivor's benefits, rather, each worker had to purchase insurance to cover these potential costs, equalling about three percent of wages. An additional 7 percent of wages went to covering health care.

"Public opinion at the time was more in favor of standardizing and centralizing the system while maintaining the pay-as-you-go arrangementthan in changing the system itself," and while the government could simply have implemented the changes, it still felt the need to create a financial arrangement that was initially cost-neutral to both workers and employers.¹² The government also mandated that the employers of any worker who switched to the new system had to grant that worker an 18 percent wage increase, while at the same time the employer's social security contributions would be reduced to zero. It was estimated that this would be cost-neutral to the employers, and actually give a raise to each worker.

The privatisation efforts of the Pinochet government were not fully supported by the citizens, as polls revealed once the government left power, but they remained in a softened form by succeeding governments. The ability of parliamentary governments to privatise or nationalise industries is not in question, rather, the concern for privatisers was how to protect their efforts once the opposition entered office. This was the concern of British privatisers, and their answer was to employ a strategy that would focus on the demand-side.

Privatisation Efforts in the United Kingdom

The British government under Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee (1945-51) nationalised a significant portion of Britain's heavy industry and utilities, and also created the National Health System. Despite the desires of successive Conservative prime ministers, privatisation proposals could not muster enough support among the population to merit efforts that could simply be overturned by later Labour governments. Starting in

the 1970s, a new generation of conservative intellectuals began asking how a government could design policies in order to make lasting changes, and the conclusion they eventually reached was to make working-class citizens *owners*, so that claims that privatisation served only the needs of the wealthy would ring hollow. Driven by the need to create lasting mass support, many of the privatisation efforts specifically targeted working-class elements of the population.

While British Petroleum was partially sold off in 1974, the big wave of privatisation took place only after Margaret Thatcher's government entered office following the 1979 election. Even in cases where the government did not sell off its holding completely, it always sold off enough to be nothing more than a minority holder, allowing (in theory at least) market forces to drive the company's decisions. In 1979, the process began with ICL (computers), followed by Fairey (aerospace) and Ferranti (electronics) in 1980. 1981 saw British Aerospace, British Sugar Corporation, National Freight Corporation, and Cable and Wireless sold off, with Amersham (chemicals), Britoil, and British Rail Hotels in 1982. British Airways and British Petroleum were privatised in 1983, with British Gas Corporation (oil assets only), Enterprise Oil, Sealink, Immos (microchips), Jaguar, and British Telecom in 1984. These sales totalled around £7.2 billion.¹³

In order to generate support for privatisation among wage-earners, the Conservative government at times adopted the strategy of selling small numbers of shares to low-income households at discount rates and giving extra shares to those who held their shares for a certain number of years. We see this in the sale of Britoil, a company that explored for oil in the North Sea. Preference was given to those seeking to purchase small amounts of shares, and those who held them for at least three years received additional ones at no cost. When the sale was finally tendered, 99 percent of applications came from small investors, with 92 percent of the company's employees seeking to buy in as well.¹⁴

One problem the Conservative government encountered was that many of the companies it sought to privatise were not making profits and hence were unattractive to potential investors. In order to create consumer demand, the government went to the one set of stakeholders who could turn the companies around—the employees themselves. As we just saw, more than nine out of ten Britoil employees sought to buy into their employer when given the opportunity, and this was the case for National Freight as well. National Freight had suffered from long-standing labour disputes and had been in the red for a number of years prior to the offering, and yet when employees were given the chance, they purchased

82 percent of the company's stock. The company quickly turned a profit, and two years later the value of the stock quadrupled.¹⁵

For our purposes, the most interesting case is the sale of council housing. In 1979, when Thatcher came into office, approximately 30 percent of all Britons lived in public housing, owned by the local city councils. Council houses were initially rented at cost, but over the decades rent failed to increase with costs, and thus grew heavily subsidised, much to the benefit of those who lived there. Moreover, families only had to meet income eligibility requirements at time of entry into their first residence, with the result that far from being safety nets for the poor, council housing were often enclaves that differed little in income from the larger demographic, and because residents received quality subsidised housing, Conservative politicians who sought to privatise them found a large and vehemently opposed constituency. The solution was to buy out the stakeholders.

In 1979, Britain had approximately seven million public housing units. The Thatcher government wanted all of them sold off, and in councils controlled by Conservatives, many did immediately go on sale. But in councils controlled by Labour, opponents put up a number of roadblocks, leading Parliament to pass a "Right to Buy" law, which not only mandated units be put up for sale to current residents, but also subsidised the purchase price. The plan worked like this: Each tenant or family in a unit was eligible to purchase that unit if they had been residing in it as their principal residence for at least two years. If the purchaser had lived in the unit for at least three years, the sale price would be 67 percent of the assessed value, and the price was dropped by an additional one percent for every additional year the purchasers had been living in council housing—regardless of whether it was in that unit or not—up to a discount of sixty percent off the valued price for someone who had been residing in council housing for thirty years. For those who still could not afford their units, the law allowed them to purchase as low as 50 percent of the unit's equity. They could subsequently purchase additional 12.5 percent increments in following years, while still paying rent to the council for the remaining portions. Finally, the law allowed the poorest a rebate in taxes that higher earners received for mortgage interest rate deductions. Thanks to the support provided by the programme, low-income earners purchased their housing at significantly higher percentages than the national average.¹⁶

In the first five years of the programme, tenants purchased 500,000 out of the 7 million units, and in 1983, there was evidence that many of the new owners flipped their votes from Labour to Conservative as well. A study in June of 1983 revealed that 49 percent of "working-class" voters

living in council housing voted for Labour in that year's election, while the percentage dropped to 26 percent for those in the same income brackets who owned their homes.¹⁷

The efforts of the Chicago Boys and of the Conservative governments in Britain were carefully watched by conservative intellectuals in America, especially by Stuart M. Butler, an Englishman who had been on the staff of the Adam Smith Institute before being recruited by the Heritage Foundation in 1979. Butler asked two important questions. First, "Why do government programs in America seem always to grow and never shrink?" Second, "What are the implications for those seeking to downsize government?" His answer appeared in a brilliant, slender book entitled, *Privatizing Federal Spending*.¹⁸

Stuart M. Butler on Privatising Federal Spending

Butler built his analysis on one simple insight that has long been known but rarely discussed by those seeking to shrink government: policies generate interest groups to support them.¹⁹ Butler called these groups "public spending coalitions," and noted that these coalitions alter the dynamics of politics in ways that facilitate programmatic growth and increased spending.²⁰ The most obvious reason such coalitions exist is because the benefits their members receive are greater than the expenses the recipients themselves pay out. Since the costs are diffuse and the benefits are specific, there is a great incentive for recipients to work for increased spending, along with perceived rewards for the lawmakers who vote for the increases, while the average taxpayer barely notices the marginal uptick in taxes, and would have a difficult time attributing a decrease (or more likely, a lack of increase) in their taxes to the efforts made to rein in a specific programme.²¹

Butler noted that most attempts to rein in spending focused on denouncing the costs of a given programme, decrying it as being wasteful and inefficient. Attempts to cut spending by appealing to outraged taxpayers are referred to as "supply side" approaches, and are almost always doomed to fail because those who receive the benefits have large incentives to mobilise in order to protect them, rewarding supportive legislators with votes and donations while demonising those seeking cuts as mean spirited. On the other end, the average taxpayer will barely notice a cut in the programme, and hence will not bother to mobilise. To overcome this incentive structure, Butler suggested that those who seek to control spending or even shrink programmes should focus on the "demand side," by which he meant convincing beneficiaries to want their benefits to

be supplied privately instead of from the government. Butler offered a series of strategies to make privatisation a more appealing option. The challenge was to present privatisation of government programmes in a manner that appealed to beneficiaries by offering more services and more choice while making the costs of public provision apparent to those who pay for them. Butler focused on four elements.

First, establish the government as the facilitator, but not as the provider, of goods and services. In the early twenty-first century, of course, we take this for granted, but when he was writing in the mid-1980s, garbage collection was still performed by public employees in most locales on both sides of the Atlantic and the concept of subcontracting out services had yet to be fully discovered.

Second, divert demand into the private sector. This, Butler argued, was the heart and soul of privatisation, since it aligned the interests of stakeholders with those seeking to shrink government. For recipients, it offered the potential of choice of services, while for politicians, it presented the ability to offer more, not less. Third, detach elements of the spending coalitions by applying user fees when possible, “buying out” key elements, and fighting a public relations battle to redefine the issue (which, he noted, might entail subsidising conservative think tanks that could counter the research conducted by service providers). Fourth, create “mirror image” private spending coalitions, for example, by offering contracts to private sector providers who could operate schools, prisons, collect the trash, staff the cafeterias and indeed even the mess tents for military stationed abroad. Finally, Butler suggests starting out small and working incrementally so as to prevent the opposition from frightening key populations with stories about how the whole system will be brought down.²²

Importantly, Butler noted that not all services can be detached from the government in the same way, and the form of privatisation had to fit the type of programme involved. The purest form of privatisation involves *load shedding*, “where the government transfers the tasks of funding and providing the service into the private sector.” The second method entails *contracting out*, where the government still retains responsibility for setting the standards of service and remains in charge of paying for them, but the services themselves are provided by private sector firms. Finally, there are *vouchers*, “where the government provides consumers with the funds they need to purchase the service in the open market.”²³

Throughout *Privatizing Federal Spending*, Butler reminded the reader that the key to designing any successful policy is to *align the interests of the stakeholders with those of the policy goals*. Where recipients get more

while paying less, it will be difficult to shrink that policy. By creating user fees and offering carefully designed tax incentives, for example, the same recipients could potentially find private sector alternatives more financially attractive. Likewise, coalitions built up around a public sector policy could be counteracted by coalitions of potential private sector service providers coupled with potential new recipients—or with existing recipients who could be convinced they would be treated better if given the opportunity to choose their providers. Policies, in short, could create constituents.

Privatisation as a Strategy in America

Education

Privatisation emerged as a formal strategy for American conservatives in two domestic policy fields. The first was federal K-12 education policy, the second was Social Security. In both cases, conservatives appear to have come to Butler's "demand-side" strategies reluctantly and indeed perhaps inadvertently after their initial attempts to privatise the system through "supply-side" means failed.

American conservatives have had a troubled relationship with federal education policy for the simple reason that if one believes the federal government has no role to play whatsoever, any policy beyond that will cause one difficulties, leaving either the choice of trying to reduce the policy's reach or standing on the sidelines while others make decisions. Despite President Reagan's campaign promise to eliminate the Department of Education, its budget grew above inflation across his term in office. This left conservatives in the lurch, since if Reagan himself could not stop growth of federal spending on what they considered a local issue, who could? The logical conclusion was that if they could not shrink the government's role as a facilitator in education, they could at least reduce its role as a provider, and the mechanism for doing so was to privatise the system through education vouchers, in which parents could take a portion of the funds allocated by a local school district per child, and use that money to send the child to another school, be it in a suburb where the schools were better, a private school, or even a religious school. Opponents feared vouchers for a number of reasons. They were untested and held the potential to wreak havoc with local school systems if widely adopted, since administrators might not know until quite late what their staffing needs and budgets would look like for the next school year, especially if high percentages of students used vouchers to move out of the

district. In a period where bussing was still widely used and controversial, vouchers kindled fears of racial and economic resegregation if white children fled mixed school systems, and of course the fear of vouchers being used to fund students attending religious schools raised many constitutional concerns. Proponents simply found it too difficult to overcome these fears, and as an assault on government involvement in education, vouchers were a non-starter.

The opening came instead in the form of magnet schools, in which a school focused on a particular subject, such as the performing arts, or computer skills, and opened its doors to students from a range of neighbouring districts. This had the appeal of “choice,” and was linked to attempts to integrate students voluntarily. Moreover, magnet schools avoided concerns about sending students to private religious schools, while at the same time allowing attacks on a public sector “monopoly” of unresponsive neighbourhood schools. Magnet schools hardly constituted an opportunity for broad educational change, but they did facilitate the state of Minnesota moving to allow “charter schools” in which public funds could be used at private (and often non-union) schools. In Minnesota, these schools were seen by both parties as an opportunity to integrate communities while lifting the debate out of the “political and ideological morass” that vouchers threatened. Yet to certain conservative intellectuals, these schools also presented the very opening they needed to push for vouchers.²⁴

By the late 1980s, conservatives began to institutionalise efforts at promoting vouchers, not merely by linking them to charter schools, but also through creating think tanks that could provide proponents with the needed information and communication networks. The State Policy Network, for example, was created to arm local proponents with the resources they needed to push for vouchers, and was funded by the Bradley, Castle Rock, Richard and Helen DeVos, and Olin foundations. The bigger move happened in 1993 with the founding of the Center for Educational Reform (CER), also funded with help from the Bradley, Olin, and Scaife foundations. Headed by one of Stuart Butler’s former Heritage Foundation colleagues, Jeanne Allen, CER systematically monitored charter schools across the country and attempted to use that knowledge to help supporters focus their efforts effectively. Foundations also funded a number of others working to promote vouchers and school choice, such as Chester Finn, a well-known pro-voucher advocate (who was granted over a million dollars between 1988 and 2002 by the Olin Foundation), the Institute for Justice, which litigated on behalf of voucher proponents in a number of jurisdictions, and the Program on Education Policy and

Governance at Harvard University, headed by Prof. Paul Peterson, a pro-voucher advocate and researcher.²⁵

The first true attempt at vouchers was the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), which began in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1990, allowing those who won a lottery for a voucher to use the money to send their child to a school other than the one to which he or she was assigned. What makes the programme so interesting is that it garnered support from a wide range of proponents across the ideological spectrum, from Gov. Tommy Thompson, a privatising governor, to Howard Fuller, a community activist who several years prior proposed dividing Milwaukee into segregated school districts so as to be able to focus on the specific needs of black students, to Annette “Polly” Williams, an African-American Democratic state representative who had twice chaired Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaign in the state.²⁶ Thompson was a true free marketer who believed that all services that could be privatised should be. Fuller and Williams supported the endeavour out of their frustration with the inability of the school district to raise its students’ academic performance.

The Milwaukee experiment with vouchers was tiny, even by Milwaukee’s standards, with less than one percent of the students having an opportunity to move schools, yet this programme took on a national scope in the attention it garnered. For proponents of school choice, this experiment had the potential to break them if it failed. Thus, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation began funding supplemental vouchers for Milwaukee’s students in order to generate increased participation for a few years until vouchers became accepted. The programme took the name Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), and the grants given were not called “vouchers” but rather “scholarships” so that they were not seen in a provocative light, all the while generating (it was hoped), more support for vouchers among the families that received them. PAVE “was intended as a stopgap measure, offering educational options to low-income families, stabilising enrolment at Milwaukee’s secular schools, and cultivating a political constituency for the voucher programme, while proponents sought to expand the MPCP to include religious schools.” Bradley spent over \$2.7 million on the project between 1986 and 1995.²⁷

As mentioned above, one powerful argument against vouchers was that opponents feared they were an attempt to allow middle-class whites to flee mixed schools in favour of ones with students similar to themselves. If vouchers were really a means of resegregating schools both along race and socioeconomic position, arguing in their favour would be difficult indeed. The Milwaukee experiment, therefore, needed to dispel this fear by targeting poor and racial minorities and framing vouchers and PAVE’s

“scholarships” as civil rights measures aimed at helping the city’s neediest students find their way out of failing schools—and this was pretty much what happened. Since both Howard Fuller and Polly Williams came from the very segment of the population vouchers were allegedly intended to help, and also claimed to speak on behalf of that constituency, their support for vouchers blunted opponents’ claims about vouchers being intended to serve middle-class whites.. The framing of vouchers as a civil rights issue was a brilliant tactical move, and indeed, the very first issue of the *Journal of School Choice* presented vouchers as the intellectual offspring of the civil rights movement that has started with *Brown v. Board of Education* just over fifty years earlier.²⁸

As Jeff Henig notes, one of the great early contributions of the Milwaukee experiment was simply to make citizens comfortable with vouchers.²⁹ The Milwaukee experiment allowed school choice proponents elsewhere to employ vouchers as a wedge policy, opening the door to further experimentation, while at the same time attracting new constituencies into their “mirror image” coalitions. Still, the ultimate goal was of course to grow the voucher movement, and this remained stifled if only private schools were available, since they remained expensive—usually far above the price a voucher could purchase. What was needed was the ability to use vouchers to send children to less expensive religious schools.

The test came in 1995 when Republicans took control of both houses of the Wisconsin legislature and the governor’s seat, and passed a law allowing vouchers to be used in religious schools. This truly pushed school choice onto dangerous ground, and when the state’s Supreme Court ruled the law constitutional, this sent ripples across the educational establishment. The law was accompanied by an increase in funding for vouchers, and while the year before the court’s ruling saw just 1,501 Milwaukee students using vouchers, the following year saw the number shoot up to 5,740. After the U.S. Supreme Court allowed public funds to be used in parochial schools in the 2002 case of *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (536 U.S. 639), vouchers finally became a nationwide educational plank for Republicans. Cleveland had over 5,500 students using vouchers in the fall of 2004, the same year that Congress passed a voucher programme for Washington, DC. While over a million students have at this point been through either a charter or magnet school and some 39,000 have employed a voucher in Cleveland, Florida, Milwaukee and Washington, DC, vouchers have certainly not yet exploded in the manner proponents had hoped they would, but at this point has all the elements

allowing them to do so.³⁰ We will return to school choice after examining Social Security privatisation efforts, allowing us to contrast the two.

Social Security

Conservative politicians mostly opposed passage of the Social Security Act of 1935, and many have not fully reconciled themselves to the programme even up to the present day. This is so for a variety of reasons, but for our purposes free marketeers argue the programme falsely presents itself as an insurance programme and is financially untenable without large cuts in benefits or increases in taxes. Moreover, the programme taxes workers at a rate higher than many conservatives are willing to countenance and places staggering amounts of money in the hands of government bureaucrats for investment.

Prior to Ronald Reagan's ascension to the presidency, the basic strategy of congressional conservatives opposed to expanding Social Security was to attempt to tie any increases in benefits directly to increases in the programme's contributions, so that Democrats could not increase the size of the state without making workers feel it through higher taxes.³¹ For reasons relating to the increase in the number of workers relative to retirees, and the growing economy for the better part of the 1960s and 1970s, this strategy backfired, since the programme was able to increase benefits for existing retirees based on nothing more than the nation's economic growth, allowing congressional Democrats to paint Republicans as being mean spirited towards the elderly.³²

Upon assuming office, Reagan's administration attempted to shrink Social Security directly by cutting benefits almost immediately for workers about to retire. Social Security is structured so that each worker will receive a given percentage of his or her calculated earnings upon retiring at the full retirement age of 65, or they could retire early at age 62 and receive 80 percent of benefits, which, when Reagan took office, a significant 60 percent of workers did. David Stockman, the administrations' director of the Office of Management and Budget, was tasked to find economies in the programme, and he settled on cuts to the disability programme, combined with lowering the benefits of early retirement from 80 percent of benefits to 55 percent. This plan was approved by the President in spring of 1981, and had it gone into effect, which would have happened almost immediately, effective January 1, 1982, "a worker retiring at age 62 on that date and expecting to get \$247.60 a month would instead get \$163.90."³³

Needless to say, this idea did not sit well with members of Congress. The Senate unanimously rejected the bill, and the whole episode led to Social Security coming to be known as the “third rail” of politics, after the electrified third rail on subway lines that is so highly charged that it kills anyone attempting to touch it. Shortly thereafter, Butler published *Privatizing Federal Spending*, and a number of conservatives based in the newly-emerging Washington, DC think tanks came to believe that Social Security was indeed open to change for the simple reason that it was destined to implode down the line if changes were not made either to benefits or funding. What was needed was an effective long-term strategy that would serve to raise doubts among stakeholders that Social Security would be there for them in the future, while at the same time presenting privatised accounts as a more preferable alternative. The solution settled upon, at least by the staff at the Heritage Foundation, was to promote Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), as the first step towards a larger privatisation effort.

In 1974, Congress created IRAs as part of the Employee Retirement Protection Act. IRAs were for workers who did not have retirement plans where they worked, and allowed workers to invest up to \$1,500 a year into an investment account and receive tax deferred treatment on them. In 1981, Congress allowed all workers to create IRAs, and contribute up to \$2,000 a year into them. Thus, every worker could also be an investor, earning returns on their contributions in ways similar (at least in theory) to the ways the U.S. “invested” their Social Security contributions. As Butler’s sometime co-author Peter Germanis noted in 1983, if workers got used to making and controlling their own investments in IRAs, it would be easier for them to conceptualise doing the same with their Social Security funds.³⁴

George W. Bush and the Privatisation of Social Security

The election of George W. Bush to the White House led to the finest opportunity for privatising Social Security that proponents had seen in decades. Bush had long and sincerely been a supporter of privatising Social Security. Indeed, it had been in his platform when he ran for Congress in 1978.³⁵ Moreover, this was not merely an issue he paid lip service to, rather; it was one he studied at some level of depth in his time as Governor of Texas.³⁶ Accepting the nomination for president from the Republican Party, Bush stated:

Social Security has been called the third rail of American politics, the one you’re not supposed to touch because it might shock you. But if you don’t

touch it, you cannot fix it. And I intend to fix it. To the seniors in this country, you earned your benefits, you made your plans, and President George W. Bush will keep the promise of Social Security, no changes, no reductions, no way. Our opponents will say otherwise. This is their last parting ploy, and don't believe a word of it. Now is the time—now is the time for Republicans and Democrats to end the politics of fear and save Social Security together. For younger workers, we will give you the option, your choice, to put part of your payroll taxes into sound, responsible investments. This will mean a higher return on your money in over 30 or 40 years, a nest egg to help your retirement or to pass on to your children. When this money is in your name, in your account, it's just not a program, it's your property.³⁷

The idea as presented was that those who so desired could transfer some of their previous Social Security contributions into private accounts in the form of a government bond, very similar to what happened in Chile, and afterward their future contributions would go into an account similar to an IRA. The problem for Social Security is that the very first generations of recipients received more in benefits than they paid in, and every generation since has been making up for this continuing “legacy debt,” with the complication that if every worker immediately left the system and placed all of their contributions in their own accounts, the system would not be able to afford to pay existing retirees.³⁸ The incoming Bush administration was handed a beautiful opportunity to overcome the legacy problem thanks to the budget surplus it initially inherited, yet the president-elect opted to put the money towards tax cuts instead, and once the economy went into recession, this left little room for privatisation efforts to succeed.

By the time President Bush made an effort to see private accounts enacted at the start of this second term in 2004, the momentum was gone, the framing had been almost entirely controlled by its opponents, and the idea was widely mocked in late night talk shows (which were, in all likelihood, the primary source of information about the plan for most Americans). As Sen. Phil Graham noted in a *Wall Street Journal* interview, the president “jumped out with a very big idea that he ran on, but he didn't lay the political groundwork in the Senate or the House. He ran on it. We didn't. He's not up for election again. We are.”³⁹

Butler Applied

If we look back to Butler's strategy as outlined above, we can recall that he suggested five steps. First, establish the government as the

guarantor of services, but not the direct provider. Second, divert demand into the private sector by offering recipients more rather than less, and choice rather than command. Third, detach key elements of the spending coalition, possibly through side payments. Fourth, create a “mirror coalition” that would fight for private provision to offset those who were fighting for public. Finally, move incrementally, in part to learn from early mistakes or to avoid making huge ones, and also so as not to frighten the population, which almost always finds any change worrisome. As we shall see, school choice proponents met these criteria far more successfully than the Social Security privatisation proponents did.

Establishing the government as the guarantor of services was in many ways easier for education than it was for Social Security, since by default the latter was not going to be guaranteed at all. Contributions invested in mutual funds could rise, but they could also fall. The libertarian Cato Institute purchased the website *www.socialsecurity.org* for example, and at the time of President Bush’s proposals had a “Social Security Calculator” where citizens could enter the amount taken from their pay in FICA taxes and could find out how much more they could earn if the stock market continued its stellar upward climb. Of course, markets go down too, helping to explain why the calculator was taken off the website once the market dropped (it has not yet returned). The simple reality is that Social Security has always been there for today’s generations, and Americans are very comfortable with the security it provides. Promises of greater returns, it turns out, were unable to offset the fears many held about market downturns.

In contrast, public education had already set standards. Those who thought their districts met them really were not all that concerned about vouchers, since they would not be needing them for their own children. For those who thought their schools were failing to start with, vouchers offered the very chance for better performance they were looking for. The key fear for those concerned with vouchers was not that they would lower standards but rather that they would lead to further racial or socioeconomic segregation of schools, which is why the strategy of presenting vouchers as a “redistributive program targeted to liberate low-income minorities from stifling and bureaucratic public systems” was so brilliant.⁴⁰ Whether the conservative foundations that funded support for vouchers were truly concerned about the wellbeing of poor minorities is irrelevant, as activists like Polly Williams and Howard Fuller quickly realised, as long as the programmes achieved their goals.

Pertaining to Butler’s second element of diverting demand into the private sector, education vouchers hold the potential to offer parents who

want to make use of them the opportunity to send their children to better schools than the one offered by their own district, and also the choice of what kind of education their child could receive. The so-called “education blob” comprised of the dreaded National Educators Association, teachers colleges, and supportive politicians, it was claimed, constantly spoke of change and improvement, but those reforms never seemed to appear, particularly before the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Lifetime tenure, complacent school boards that were seen as pandering to unions, and low standards plagued failing public schools because they did not face competition that would draw away students and funding. Magnet schools and charter schools, of course, were seen as a step in the right direction (especially if they were non-union), but vouchers, particularly in conjunction with NCLB, offered beleaguered parents a powerful attractive option: choice. Since vouchers gave parents *more* funds for their child to go to a private or religious school than they themselves paid in taxes, these schools in particular (since they could also send their child to another public school) suddenly turned into financially attractive alternatives.

Vouchers also served nicely in detaching the poor from the pro-spending coalition. The nation’s public schools have been portrayed as one of the great levelling elements in American society, and the strategy of portraying vouchers as a civil rights issue was critical, since it not only blunted concerns about attempts at re-segregation, but allowed for libertarian conservatives and black civil rights activists to work hand-in-hand—a strategy, it should be noted, that has been deployed by the conservative legal movement to great effect in other areas as well.⁴¹ In all fairness, the numbers to-date have been modest. Somewhere around forty thousand voucher recipients nationwide constitutes a miniscule percentage, yet as Jeff Henig has noted, this still has the makings for a powerful future movement.⁴² Firstly, the fact that vouchers have been intensely concentrated in Milwaukee and Cleveland has allowed them to become firmly established components of those district’s school systems, while in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio, a startling one child in five now attends a charter school. School choice, in other words, has become a settled part of public education, admittedly in less than a handful of cities, but enough for it to serve as a beachhead for those who want to expand it elsewhere, and the potential for this to happen is enormous.⁴³

Vouchers also hold the potential, finally, to dislodge the connection many taxpayers feel about supporting their local schools financially. Even families without children often feel a need for strong schools, and there is empirical evidence that an economic payoff exists, but this “depends upon the relatively tight geographical nexus between the taxation and the

investment. School choice programs attenuate and potentially sever that connection,” by literally moving a locale’s children beyond the district.⁴⁴

Social Security also had a strong suit in private accounts. If the legacy debt was somehow overcome (and there is reason to believe it could have been had President Bush opted to place the surplus into it), there is a strong argument to be made that carefully regulated private accounts could generate larger returns for them over a worker’s lifetime than the existing Social Security system could. There are however, a lot of assumptions in this. Firstly, as mentioned above, markets can go down as well as up, and as many retirees discovered during the recession at the start of the new millennium, expected funds may be far lower than hoped for when it comes time for retirement. The Cato Institute’s calculator’s disappearance is telling, and those familiar with the pioneering work of Kahneman and Tversky know that most individuals, most of the time, experience the pain of loss more intensely than they do the joy of gain, which in plain English means that many Americans, if given the choice, will be more than happy to keep the Social Security system as it is rather than risk investing those same contributions on their own.⁴⁵ The fact that Social Security simply cannot remain as it is, of course, looms positively for those seeking to privatise in the future.

Butler’s fourth criteria was to create what he called a “mirror image” spending coalition that would compete to move a policy further towards the privatised end of the spectrum to offset the public spending coalition. As it relates to education vouchers, the connection between parents who employ vouchers for their children is obvious—yet the targeted populations of poor minorities are often among the least engaged citizens in America. More powerful would be the civil rights organisations that claim to speak on their behalf, much as Fuller and Williams did in Milwaukee. Obviously, the most powerful groups of all are business actors that would profit from increased enrolments in private or religious schools. There are now a wide range of Educational Management Organizations (EMOs) that offer professional school administration and (more frequently) support services to smaller schools that have difficulties achieving economies of scale. This industry is tiny and still trying to find its footing, but there is great reason to believe demand will grow.⁴⁶ Moreover, research has indicated that not only are EMOs active in lobbying for increased school choice, but moreover, school choice proponents have worked to support EMOs politically in order to further their agenda.⁴⁷ The fact that there are now multiple think tanks focusing on vouchers is also crucial.

The mirror image spending coalition for Social Security may at first glance appear to be even more powerful, especially if investment firms had gotten behind the idea—which they did not. As Steve Teles and Martha Derthick explain:

Business support for Social Security was nowhere near what it was for many of the administration's other priorities, especially tax cuts. First, most employers' key interest in Social Security is preventing an increase in the payroll tax, but especially after the surpluses dried up, it became clear that private accounts would make the job of eliminating the program's long-term funding shortfall *more* difficult without tax increases. Second, businesses that might have had a profit motive for supporting privatization, such as the financial services industry, are in fact faced with a complex political calculus. If private accounts are structured like 401ks and IRAs, with broad access to existing mutual funds, the possibilities for a substantial regulatory burden are significant, and the amounts of money, especially for low earners, may be unprofitable. But fairly early in the process of developing Bush's proposals (and in the thinking of many of the privatization network's members) it was decided that preventing moral hazard and having to create some form of minimum benefit required that the accounts be indexed, like the Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS). This had the effect of taking almost all the profit out privatization and with it much of the benefit for financial providers to compensate for their regulatory risk.⁴⁸

Despite being depicted as small and anaemic in power, America's labour unions still have staggering amounts of retirement funds under their control. In 1999, an umbrella organisation representing unions sent a letter to hundreds of investment companies explaining that if the firm supported President Bush's privatisation efforts, the unions would pull all of their investments out from its management. Speaking in a 2006 interview, David John of the Heritage Foundation complained that the union letter "scared away many potential supporters, and remains so to this day."⁴⁹

Finally, Butler recommended that efforts to detach service provision from the state be done incrementally, so as not to frighten off key stakeholders. As we saw above, the school choice movement proceeded in just such a manner. In fairness, it was less because that was their early strategy than because they literally had no other choice in the matter, since vouchers were initially a non-starter. Conservatives came to support charter schools because that was the only option they saw open to them, and given the bipartisan support for them, the move was neither controversial nor radical, and this incremental move opened the door for

the next logical step in the “choice” paradigm by allowing parents to move their children out of failing public schools without their children having to pass often competitive exams to get into charters.

As it pertained to Social Security, the lesson taught by E.E. Schattschneider remains as powerful today as it did when he wrote the *Semisovereign People* in 1960, namely, that controlling the perceptions of the policy are often as important as the policy itself.⁵⁰ Whether the privatisation steps were incremental or not became irrelevant since they were quickly and effectively branded as broad and dangerous. Proponents of Social Security privatisation completely lost control of how the issue was defined, which is no surprise given they went head-to-head against the American Association of Retired Persons (now known simply as AARP). Immediately after President Bush was elected to his second term in 2004, *Modern Maturity*, AARP’s magazine came out powerfully against any attempts to privatise the programme.⁵¹ Given the magazine was sent out to 35 million seniors, almost all of whom vote, the message was extremely difficult for proponents to counter. In combination with the \$5 million media campaign, opponents of privatisation came completely to dominate how the issue was depicted.

Privatisation has also been the central strategy of British conservatives since the 1990s as well, and here again, we can see how Butler’s approach has been effective. As we saw discussed above in the section on the Thatcher era, the challenge was to build support for efforts among wage-earners, and the government employed a number of strategies to do so. Most centred around incentive structures to turn wage-earners into owners, often by heavily subsidizing their purchases. Council housing residents were able to purchase units at literally one-third the assessed valuations, under some circumstances, while nine out of ten workers in some companies opted to purchase stock in their newly privatised firms thanks to subsidies. We have devoted far more attention to the American case than the British one, largely because of the complexity of the American federal system, but intellectually, British conservatives have been forced to follow similar strategies in order to avoid re-nationalisation once they lose power.

The privatisation of the railroads is a perfect example. Completed under the leadership of John Major, the selling off of the rail system had all the potential to be a highly popular policy. Privatisation could have resulted in a more consumer driven system that offered trains when needed at more competitive prices. Yet to this day the act has remained controversial and highly unpopular, for the simple reason that it has not been able to generate a supportive constituency. Consumers have not felt

as though service has improved, and while the Labour government opted not to re-nationalise it, it is not obvious they would face that much opposition from the broad electorate if they did. As noted above, it is often hard for citizens to appreciate privatisation merely as a cost-cutting endeavour for the simple reason that they more likely than not will not feel the savings directly through lower taxes, while cuts in service may be immediately obvious.

The story of privatisation in Britain picks up again in 2010 with the election of a coalition led by the Conservatives. Again, as with Chile, parliamentary governments lack the considerable roadblocks to change faced by Americans, but this is a double-edged sword, since the concern moves to designing policies in a manner that makes reversing them by succeeding leftist governments difficult.

Prior to the election, Conservatives had promised dramatic cuts in government. Shadow culture secretary Jeremy Hunt promised a “golden age” of tax breaks with incentives for philanthropy, coupled with cuts in arts spending.⁵² After the election, the massive cuts in spending were depicted as necessitated by a fiscal emergency, but what does that mean once the fiscal emergency is dealt with down the line?

This strategic question has surfaced with the question of privatising the Post Office. Actually first considered under the Labour government of Gordon Brown in late 2009, the subject remained too challenging despite the obvious need to deal with massive budgetary problems. The feasibility of selling off a minority stake to an established carrier proved not to be the issue. Rather, the challenge was to move the current employees (and retirees) into the supporting “mirror” coalition. Privatising companies by subsidising the sales during times of healthy finances is one thing, doing so under a recession is another. Whether the government can successfully build support without a privatisation strategy similar to the ones employed under Thatcher may prove to be the difference down the line between the Post Office’s sale being seen as successful (as with British Telecom) or a questionable failure (as with the railroads).

Policy entrepreneurs really can learn from past mistakes. The intellectual journey of privatisation efforts began in the halls of the University of Chicago’s Economics Department and travelled from there to Chile. From that point on, conservatives had a role model, but one that needed to be modified to succeed under democratic conditions. The lessons learned from the Thatcher government’s successful efforts were adapted for the American system. How they will be employed on both

sides of the Atlantic from this point on may prove critical, if conservatives seek to find lasting change.

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Notes

¹ Peter Berkowitz, *Varieties of Conservatism in America* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004).

² Milton Friedman, "Schools at Chicago," *University of Chicago Magazine*, August, 11-16, 1974, 12.

³ Lawrence H. Miller Jr., "On the "Chicago School of Economics"," *Journal of Political Economy* 1 (1962): 65.

⁴ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 14-15.

⁵ Juan Gabriel Valdés, *Pinochet's Economists: The Chicago School in Chile* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 71.

⁶ Valdés, *Pinochet's Economists*, 88.

⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

⁸ *Ibid*, 192-3.

⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 21, 23.

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PART III:
COMMUNITY

CHAPTER EIGHT

NORTHERN IRELAND: A COMPLEX DEBATE IN THE STRUGGLE TO BECOME A COMMUNITY

AIDAN TROY

On 9th March 2010 a vote was taken in Belfast on the devolution of policing and justice powers from the Westminster Parliament in London to the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont. There were 105 votes cast, of which 88 were in favour and 17 against. Behind this simple statement of fact lies a long and torturous road of discourse, disagreement and uncertainty. In many ways, this vote represents the story of political discourse in Northern Ireland over decades. The story of the relationship of this part of the island of Ireland with Britain stretches back over centuries.

In this chapter I aim to explore the complex set of relationships within Northern Ireland as well as with the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. To a lesser extent the role of the United States of America is part of this discourse in the search for peace. In this chapter I will call upon my personal knowledge and involvement in community and political discourse within Northern Ireland between 2001 and 2008. It will be necessary to refer back to previous years and events to provide some understanding of the enormity of what the vote on 9th March represents. It may seem like a small item with which to begin a chapter that seeks to trace a complex debate in the struggle to become a community. That, however, represents the history of the policy discourse in what has been a troubled part of Europe for many decades.

This chapter will take as its optic an event from which it will be sought to draw lessons in dialogue and discourse that may have an application in conflict resolution in other contexts. This event is the Holy Cross Girls' Primary School blockade that happened between June and November 2001. This event became known worldwide due to a high level of media exposure. As its tenth anniversary approaches next year there seems to be

a continuing interest from media outlets judging from enquiries I have received from the USA as well as from the UK and Ireland.

The story of this protest against children going to school will set out some of the factors that led to an event that occurred three years after the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998. The political discourse that had led to this Agreement was seen by many as precluding an outbreak of serious violence as occurred over those months in 2001.

How the protest was brought to an end will be examined in terms of the dialogue that was necessary at all levels and involved individuals, schools, whole communities, organisations such as trade unions and politicians at local and national levels. The main finding will be that there was no substitute for the slow but painful journey of building trust in an effort to engage in dialogue. Without such discourse, a resolution would have taken even longer and violence or death might have overtaken any solution.

Background to present Discourse

Between 14th July 1969 and 31st December 2001, it is estimated that 3,523 people died in the events commonly referred to as “The Troubles”. From 1968 onwards there was a growing civil rights movement that highlighted discrimination against Nationalists in comparison with their Unionist neighbours. This was most clearly evident in matters of drawing constituency boundaries that would give a guaranteed majority to Unionists. The other area of discrimination related to the allocation of housing. The manner in which this movement was dealt with politically and how marches were policed led to serious civil disturbance. Civil rights marches were attacked on a number of occasions. It is important to state that the original membership of this civil rights movement was drawn from both Nationalist and Unionist populations.

The history of relationships within what is now Northern Ireland reaches far back in history. After World War I, a guerrilla war occurred that sought to expel the British from Ireland. That war ended with the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 in which six counties in the north-east of the Province of Ulster were partitioned from the rest of Ireland and remained under British Rule. This creation of a border on the island of Ireland was to have a huge effect on political life and discourse on both its sides. A civil war based on this Treaty determined to a significant degree political allegiance in the Republic. The state of Northern Ireland was now home to two groups of people, with predominantly Protestant Unionists or Loyalists looking to London and mainly Catholic Nationalists or

Republicans to Dublin. In using the term “domestic” in the title of this book, the reality of discourse where Northern Ireland is concerned can even present its own difficulties. Until comparatively recent times, Unionists would have seen the rest of Ireland as a foreign state with no rightful place in any discourse. Some would still hold to that view. At the same time, “domestic” for many Nationalists applies in the first place to discourse on the whole island of Ireland with the UK being the “foreign” power.

While the history of Ireland and the present reality may not be as easily summarised as has been done here, some general idea of background is essential to even begin to appreciate the complexity involved in any form of policy discourse when approaching events still unfolding to the present day.

Agreement at Hillsborough Castle

As recently as 5th February 2010 a marathon session of talks between the main political parties attended by the leaders of the British and Irish governments finally reached a conclusion in what is now known as “Agreement at Hillsborough Castle”. The name comes from the location of the talks. Hillsborough Castle is now the residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since the Stormont Parliament was prorogued by British Prime Minister Edward Heath in 1972 due to the break down in law and order.

The five sections of this Agreement give some idea of how much discourse still remains on the agenda of the locally elected Assembly. The big issue that is seen by many as the last piece of the “jigsaw” to be put in place is policing and justice. If that alone remained to be discussed and arranged it would be a challenge of great proportion. Behind this and other issues, the history of violence and the breakdown of law and order have left deep scars that linger. It will remain an enormous challenge to bring about healing.

A Department of Justice came into being on 12th April 2010 following the vote of the Assembly on 9th March. The negative votes registered came from the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) which is not convinced that the Assembly is yet working sufficiently well. They cite as an example of this the area of education and the lack of agreement on how to handle the transfer from primary to secondary schools. This area of education is probably one of the most discussed topics of recent years and one that is far from settled. More will be said later in this chapter about education and its role in the life of Northern Ireland. The Minister dealing with policing

and justice at local level will not come from either Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) or Sinn Féin (SF), but from the Alliance Party that seeks to occupy the middle ground in what is still a deeply divided society in many ways.

The next section of the Hillsborough Agreement that will require diligent discourse and creative planning is the vexed issue of Parades. Historically the issue of parading, predominantly by Unionist groups known as loyal orders, has seen some of the worst rioting and violence of recent years. The summers following the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 saw serious and sustained riots as contentious marches were held. There are thousands of marches each summer that pass off peacefully. There are a small number of others that bring to the surface sectarian division. Until this issue of parades is resolved there will always be the danger of peace being lost. The role of the Parades Commission in making determinations about marches has become part of this discourse. The police are required to enforce these determinations and this has brought them into the centre of opposing sides during some of these marches.

These first two sections on Policing and Justice along with Parades is not the full challenge facing the Assembly at Stormont. The nature of this body is complex in that the two biggest parties, DUP and SF occupy the leadership positions. There is no opposition as would be known in Westminster where the parties not in government would exercise this function. At Stormont there has been a constant call for greater discourse and action in the working of the Assembly. The third section of the Hillsborough Agreement seeks to initiate a discourse around “Improving Executive Function and Delivery”. The leaders of the two other biggest parties in the Assembly, the UUP and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) have been asked to co-chair this working group.

After four decades of violence in Northern Ireland, the challenge is now to engage in discourse aimed at consolidating the hard-earned peace in society. The greater the progress that can be made by the Executive on necessary matters affecting all areas of society, the greater will be the stability of what is still a fragile society struggling to become a community at peace. The involvement of all parties elected to the Assembly in this discourse offers the best possibility of progress leading to action being taken.

The final section of this Hillsborough Agreement calls the Assembly into renewed discourse on the St Andrews Agreement of November 2006. This Northern Ireland Bill passed in the Westminster Parliament still has not been fully implemented. There is a call for an examination that will

identify all matters contained in that Agreement that have not been faithfully implemented.

These matters of the Hillsborough Agreement might in another context be seen as part of the discourse that any administration would be expected to engage in as part of the ordering of a society. But, the progress made in the 1990s up to the present day is in many ways nothing short of amazing. If a person who had been born in the late 1960s, and grown up knowing only of bombing, murder and violence, had been told that Northern Ireland was going to be ready for what is now proposed, they might have judged it to be impossible to achieve.

To delve into the background of Northern Ireland and gain some appreciation of the distance travelled in recent years, I propose to revisit an event of 2001 in which I witnessed the power of discourse in tackling what were difficult and complex issues.

Holy Cross Girls' Primary School Blockade

Walking the walk to and from school: 3rd September-23rd November 2001

From 1994 I had lived in Rome as part of the government of the Passionist Congregation, an international Catholic religious group, of which I have been a member since 1964. A phone call from my superior in Dublin in November 2000 was to change my life more than I could ever have imagined. He asked me to become parish priest and rector at Holy Cross Passionist Monastery in Ardoyne, Belfast, Northern Ireland. It was a surprise to me as I am not from the North of Ireland and I had lived outside of Ireland for the previous six years.

Still, the Good Friday Agreement¹ brought about a new situation and was overwhelmingly endorsed in a referendum by the people on both sides of the Irish border. This indicated that a new opportunity was opening up in the struggle to become a community in Northern Ireland and to forge a new relationship with the Republic of Ireland. There was great rejoicing; even from the distance of Rome, I could sense something of the huge relief that decades of murder, bombing and rioting seemed to be coming to the end. There were scenes of people dancing in the streets. It was a time of great hope.

It was with a sense of optimism that I accepted this posting to Belfast. This would be a time of rebuilding and of engaging in the debate and the struggle to become a united community rather than two separated parts. Apart from any economic or political dimension to this movement forward,

it sat easily with my religious convictions as a Catholic priest. There is something wrong about people bearing the name of Christian being locked in conflict.

On 20th June 2001, I noticed among items of news on the internet that there had been trouble at Holy Cross Girls' Primary School, Ardoyne Road, Belfast, on the previous afternoon. It is still a matter of dispute as to what caused the outbreak of rioting and violence as the children left school at the end of the day. The incident that sparked off this trouble centred around the putting up of flags for the annual Orange Order marches to be held on 12th July. Those putting up the flags claim that parents waiting to collect their children from school attempted to topple a ladder leaning against a lamppost. The parents claim that it was they who were attacked and put in danger. As I was not there, I am not in a position to give an answer as to what happened. However it happened, the repercussions were to be enormous for all concerned.

Beginning my assignment in Belfast in August 2001, I was to discover a situation far more complex and fractured than I could have imagined. Nothing could have prepared me for what awaited me on arrival there. It was not long before it became very clear to me that this was not only a complex situation but a very dangerous one and unlikely to be resolved before schools reopened after summer holidays on 3rd September.

On 6th August, the board of governors of Holy Cross School elected me as their chairperson. The board of governors is the body entrusted with overseeing the running of the school and the implementation of policies. I had asked not to be considered for this post due to being new in the parish and because of having lived outside of Ireland for the previous seven years.

The seriousness of the situation was highlighted when one of the experienced members of the governors suggested that someone without family ties in the locality might be needed in this position at such a critical juncture in the school's history. The apprehension was that in the coming weeks and months any governor with a family living locally, could be putting them in danger. This was frightening to hear. With some trepidation I accepted this post of responsibility without having any real idea of what might be involved. All I knew was that a steep learning curve lay ahead for me and a need for a lot of listening and discourse with a wide variety of people.

Throughout the summer of 2001 attempts at dialogue between the protestors and the parents with children at Holy Cross School continued. Being new to the situation and even though now chair of the school governors, I experienced some frustration at not being able to be part of

this discourse. It worried me when with the help of experienced independent mediators no solution was found. With only a matter of a few weeks to go before the school was to reopen, some steps had to be taken to see if this was going to be possible. The breakdown between the two parts of this community in a tiny area of north Belfast was becoming more fixed and rigid as the reopening date of the school approached. With no agreement as to how to state the problem, discourse aimed at mutual understanding and a resolution lay at the root of the failure over the weeks of the summer.

As a newcomer to the area and to this situation I needed help and a lot of it. Local clergy of other denominations helped me to understand better what might be going on. It seems that there was an almost complete breakdown of trust between people who lived only a small distance from each other but who had for years lived totally separate lives. Fear and suspicion were rife and now this breakdown in community relations had taken the form of a blockade of the school due to open within weeks.

There were difficulties already existing between the two parts of this community that shared this same area of Ardoyne. This most recent breakdown was the latest of a long series of problems. But now the accumulated animosity of past years and events was coming to the surface. This was abundantly clear to me from all I was hearing and witnessing.

But there were also obstacles to be overcome within the community in which I was to serve. The number of meetings held with school personnel, parents and community groups occupied days and many nights. When meeting with the parents of Holy Cross pupils I suggested that I would need to meet with the police to get their assessment about the return to school. Some parents immediately objected. They told me that because I was new to the area I didn't realise that people in nationalist Ardoyne did not generally deal with police. This had been largely true since the outbreak of violence in 1969.

I pointed out to the parents that with 225 girls aged 4 to 11 years of age going back to school in a matter of weeks I had a duty to take steps to ensure their health and safety. It was, therefore, impossible to ignore the role of police (then the Royal Ulster Constabulary). If their advice was not to use Ardoyne Road to reach the school, we would certainly have to listen to such a security assessment.

Meetings and discussion with the police while needed were not easy. Not having been present in June 2001 when the protest against the school began, I was at a disadvantage at meetings with the police. In the event, the police indicated that they would provide security, insofar as they would be able, to ensure a safe passage of the children to their school and

back home each day. This enabled me to go back to the parents and tell them to prepare for the return to school on September 3. On 15th August, a Catholic feast day, I invited the parents and the whole parish to Holy Cross church so that I could outline some suggestions on the return to school and also to pray for safety for all concerned.

When I was to meet the British Army regarding the return to school the same objection was raised by some parents. The British Army came to Northern Ireland because of the breakdown of law and order. From an initial welcome in the Nationalist community, the military soon came to be seen as the “enemy”, especially following the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971. British soldiers in a place such as Ardoyne where I was now living were treated with the greatest possible suspicion. The events of “Bloody Sunday” in Derry on 30th January 1972 when thirteen unarmed civilians were shot dead by the army marked a new level of alienation from the Nationalist community. The Saville Inquiry into these events reported in 2010. The British Prime Minister, David Cameron, spoke in the House of Commons of the killings being “unjustified and unjustifiable”. Reaction to the Saville Inquiry divided predictably along Unionist/Nationalist lines. A way of dealing with other past killings and injuries remains a pressing need in Northern Ireland. Alongside the truth of what occurred, a path to reconciliation remains elusive.

There seemed little prospect of an improvement in community relations within the area of Ardoyne. In July 2001 there had been serious rioting between Loyalists and Republicans during what is known in Ulster as “the marching season”. In 2000 there had been a feud within Loyalist ranks in another part of Belfast that led to some families being resettled in Glenbryn Estate where Holy Cross Girls’ School is situated. Holy Cross School had been built there and opened in 1969 after a fire at its previous location. It was built at a time when Glenbryn housed families of different religious and political outlooks together. The school opened just prior to the outbreak of the civil unrest that has lasted until recently.

It can be difficult for people to believe that something as simple as going to school can become so fraught with difficulties. I can appreciate very well such a reaction. Although daily involved, I could scarcely believe what was happening around me. Having lived outside Ireland for years and even though I had always followed events in Northern Ireland very closely, I was shocked at what had happened already since 19th June and had grave fears about what might yet occur.

Descriptions and opinions on what unfolded as the children went back to school on 3rd September 2001 are recorded in many newspaper articles

and other media outlets. Two books, for example, chronicle these events and may provide some insight into what was taking place.² Rather than relate what happened day by day, I will offer for consideration some of the lessons I learned from those awful and frightening days of the protest.

Complexity of dialogue and mutual understanding

After some weeks of walking daily to and from school with the parents and their children, it became clear that this blockade of Holy Cross School could go on for a long time. But, would little children be able to keep going for a long time? Also, would the parents and the community of Ardoyne be able to keep walking daily through a wall of hatred without resorting to violence? In the previous decades of trouble, 99 people had died by violence in Holy Cross parish, Ardoyne. There was a familiarity with violence within the area and it was my constant concern that this might be seen by some within our Catholic community as a justifiable reaction to what was happening to the children.

It became very clear to me as I discoursed with various individuals and groups that the obstacles to having all gather around the one table was at this stage impossible to overcome. The protestors would not be welcomed by the parents and neither could the parents approach the protestors in their community centre. Parents would not meet police and army. Therefore, if there was to be any hope of dialogue no opportunity was too small to grasp and creativity was needed to seek some points of discourse that might be the beginning of mutual understanding.

A few weeks into the protest, with the help of clergy of different denominations and two local politicians, a meeting was brokered between five protestors and five of the Holy Cross School board of governors. After all that had happened, including the throwing of a bomb as the children walked to school, this first face to face meeting was never going to be easy. In many ways it was extraordinary that it was taking place at all.

The meeting did not lead anywhere but at least we had met face to face. Some of the parents were far from pleased when news of this meeting came out. They asked how I and fellow school governors could sit in the same room as people who were daily abusing their children. It was easy for me to appreciate how they felt and what they were saying. Twice a day I had walked in the midst of this appalling scene. But, I had to point out that sometimes I had to take decisions that not everyone would be in agreement with. It was clear to me that only through patient dialogue was there any hope of a resolution. We had no guarantee that there would ever be a positive outcome but efforts at resolution had to continue. The

alternative was too terrible to contemplate—the death or serious injury to any child or adult.

Two weeks later another such meeting was held between the protestors and the school governors. We got no further than in the previous one. At the end of what was a frustrating meeting, it was so clear to everyone that just repeating meetings was not likely to bring about reconciliation. There had to be some new element introduced that might be seen as a token of trust and good will. Because the meeting was about to end and as it would take some “behind the scenes” political engagement, I decided without asking my fellow governors to take an initiative. I offered to give my mobile phone number to the protesters so that we could have regular contact in our search for a solution. This was greeted with silence and perhaps a certain amount of disbelief by the representatives of the protestors. I read out my mobile phone number and the meeting ended.

After the meeting most of my fellow school governors expressed their grave doubts about the wisdom of what I had just done. They feared that I would be persecuted with nuisance calls or even threats. Having just arrived from an extended time living in Rome, what I did in offering my phone number was not done in any heroic way. It was an effort to break the deadlock that made a breakthrough in this vicious and highly dangerous protest possible.

Already there were developments that gave rise to this concern on the part of the other school governors. Some placards were being held up almost daily reading, “Father Troy is a paedophile”. With so much public comment about clerical sexual abuse of children, it was not difficult to see where the idea came from. It hurt me none the less, especially when it was seen on television news by the parents and children as well as by my relatives and friends in other places. Death threats against me had become a regular occurrence with police arriving at various times to warn me that my life was in danger.

The seriousness of the daily events was not centred on me and my personal safety even though there were increasingly serious warnings of danger to my life coming from the police. The daily priority for all who wanted reconciliation and healing was to reach into a broken community to build trust and a way forward together in peace.

From the moment I had arrived in Holy Cross at the beginning of August 2001, I had publically stated that the protestors had issues that local authority or the British Government needed to address. What I could never accept was the abuse of children going to and from school as a method of protest. In any search for a solution it is important to appreciate the ground on which the other person stands, even if one is totally opposed

to their methods. Not everyone was in agreement with my saying this. So, it was not only a matter of reaching across a community divide, but of working within my own community for a broadening of perspective on what was happening. It is also true that from the parents and the local community, I learned a lot and was prevented from making some serious errors of judgement.

However complex all discourse was, the lack of understanding between protestors and school governors was a revelation to me. At the table of dialogue the language was English but the frames of reference were so different. It was not only religious but political and cultural as well. We were in the same room around the same table but in some ways we were on different planets as far as understanding was concerned. At times I wondered if this arose because I was from a different background and had not a Belfast or a Northern Ireland background. At other times, I saw being different as an advantage as I had no family hurts or memories with which to deal. Overall, I believe that there is a *de facto* difference between people who have lived almost totally separate lives for generations.

It was interesting to observe the two local politicians in this setting. Both were from a paramilitary background on opposing sides. Both had been engaged with armed groups who had inflicted suffering on those who were on the other side of the community divide. Violence was part of their lives from a young age and this had formed them into the men they had become. Since arriving in Belfast a few weeks earlier, I had soon learned that without my knowing it, I was having discourse with local politicians who had a paramilitary background. Ceasefires and political progress were drawing such people into political and community discourse. The answer was seen not to lie in violence and that neither side could defeat the other. It struck me that without their knowing it, they had a common background and aspirations for their respective sector of the community that were remarkably similar.

Because of this, they had a sense of where each other was coming from and could on occasion resolve a bottleneck that was blocking progress. Most of the rest of us were lost as to how best to connect with each other in order to get the children out of the awful situation in which they were trapped. People who rightly abhorred violence inflicted by paramilitaries were not slow to condemn the fact that I was seen to associate with these people. Even though the two politicians I was most in contact with for organising these meetings were both elected, I was seen to be associating with the “wrong” sort of people. The fact that I was a minister of religion made my association with such people totally wrong.

A lot of walls but few bridges

On arriving in north Belfast in 2001, I began living in the shadow of a wall that was designed to keep both sides of the community at a safe distance from each other. In Belfast walls, referred to as “peace walls”, are not only still in place as an attempt to keep the peace between two sides of what I believe is one community, but are on the increase. There are now 80 permanent “peace-walls” constructed in a city that is small by European standards. The most recent of these walls was constructed in 2008. In 1994 there were 26 peace walls in Belfast. Since Loyalist and Republican ceasefires in 1990’s the number has trebled.

Duncan Morrow, of Community Relations Council³, estimates that it may take up to 20 years before any of these walls may come down. His prediction I believe to be optimistic. When local dialogue was brokered as described here, it was a discourse between people who lived very close to each other but without any contact. People met who may have seen each other from a distance but had no real relationship for many years. In those few instances where there was a “mixed” workforce, relationships seldom extended outside the work place.

Political Engagement

Having lived for seven years in Rome prior to coming to Belfast, I noticed an almost complete absence of discourse on a European dimension. The changes of the network of relationships within Europe since World War II are extensive and significant. On arrival in Belfast, practically all references to the European context were seldom mentioned. It was the relationship to London (Unionist) or Dublin (Nationalist) that was important.

An aspect of life that came as no real surprise to me was that the people of Ardoyne, Loyalist and Republican, were isolated from each other. Historically this had been the case for as long as anyone can remember. But there was another aspect that did interest me and that I believe has an effect on political discourse. This centred around people where I was living who tended not to travel far from their own homes. This arose, mainly, from decades of violence where if one went too far from home, there was no guarantee of getting back safely. Not only were people looking at the world through the prism of their own co-religionists but this did not extend much beyond their own district. An exception to this was when people travelled to marches or to football games in Scotland. A team supported by the “Orange” community playing a team of

the “Green” side in Glasgow could lead to major trouble on the streets of Belfast.

As the search continued for a solution to the awful scenes of young girls running a gauntlet of danger and hatred daily, it was extremely difficult to create a wider context in which a solution might be found. At one point, I requested a meeting with the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in London and the Taoiseach, the Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, in Dublin. The situation was so desperate that I was seeking some new elements to see if the school children could be rescued from the horror of their daily trip to and from school.

Also, I was conscious that the daily events of the protest did not auger well for a continuation of the optimism following the Good Friday Agreement. The event of the Holy Cross School blockade was a worrying reminder of how fragile the peace was and how much remained to be done in the area of community relations.

It was suggested by some in Loyalist circles that the school protest was a ploy by Republicans to bring shame on their traditional enemies. Had I believed at any stage that there was any issue other than children going to school, I could not have been part of the daily walk to and from school. It was the plight of the children that sustained in me and in others a sense of urgency in seeking a solution. The complexity of living in Belfast in 2001 was captured for people all over the world by the sight of children being terrified going to and from school.

The meeting with Prime Minister Blair never took place although I did meet British Government Ministers at Stormont. There was also a meeting arranged with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State at Hillsborough Castle. They were all well aware of what was happening. The decisions they made not to intervene directly in the protest was reflected in the tactics of the police in marshalling the protest each day. This was done in the manner of dealing with a contentious parade. But this was never a parade, but children and their parents going to and from school. A judicial review of the policing of the school protest is ongoing with an appeal in the European Courts of Justice yet to be heard.

In meeting with Taoiseach Ahern at Government Buildings, Dublin, in October 2001 it became clear that he and the Irish Government were very well briefed and seeking to help bring this blight on the European stage to a speedy conclusion. In a meeting of an hour it was possible to give him some suggestions as to what might be possible in a political context. It was clear that he and Prime Minister Blair were both ashamed of what was unfolding daily on T.V. screens around the world. This was not the image of Europe or of their respective countries that they wished to be seen.

Another person who showed an almost daily concern for the well-being of all and the urgency of a resolution was the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese. She was born and raised in Holy Cross parish and so knew the issues well.

At this time I was still trying to find a path to resolve this conflict so that the children could be rescued from this nightmare which was not of their making. Had I still been in Rome and following these events through the media, I might have imagined that a solution could be found even if difficult to achieve. As I stood on Ardoyne Road every day for many hours over three months, I learned an important lesson about the situation in Northern Ireland. It was clear to me that the physical walls separating and keeping people apart are going to come down only when there is a change of hearts and minds among people almost totally separated from each other on every personal and family level.

The work to create community cannot be guaranteed a successful outcome at present in Northern Ireland. It saddens me to say this as a Christian who believes that eventually dialogue and good-will will yield a solution. The aspiration to achieve an end to the protest and a better life for the children never wavered in my heart. It was clear that the protestors needed to get out of a situation, admittedly of their own making, that was drawing condemnation from around the world. It was never going to be acceptable to me if the resolution of this protest did not end up as a win-win. Any semblance of victory for one side over the other would leave a legacy of bitterness and hatred that might never heal.

My life as priest had not brought me into any significant contact with the workings of government. This was to change when the local administration in Stormont, Belfast, made contact with the board of governors and with the protestors. Meetings took place with David Trimble (UUP), First Minister, and Mark Durkan (SDLP), Deputy First Minister. The protest seemed that it could continue into the next year before this political intervention took place. Such discussions needed careful arranging. It would have been totally unacceptable to the school board of governors to negotiate while innocent children were still unable to access their school without hindrance. They had been and were not doing anything other than trying to get an education.

These talks at Stormont were complex and eventually hope was emerging when a set of proposals was prepared for the protesting community to consider. The major sticking point was the proposal to build a wall across Ardoyne Road in order to offer better protection to the Loyalist residents who felt they were not safe in their homes because of

possible attacks from their Republican neighbours. As mentioned above, trust was in very short supply.

The building of a wall was judged by the school governors and the parents of Holy Cross School as a disaster. A bridge was needed that would link us and not a wall that would provide another “interface” and a focal point for protest and possible riots. Had a wall been imposed by the government it would have signalled the end of Holy Cross School as a place where any parent would send their child. Also, it would have left a legacy of bitterness that might never be overcome.

On 23rd November 2001, a meeting of the residents of the Glenbryn Estate where Holy Cross School is situated accepted the proposals of Trimble and Durkan by a small majority and passed a resolution to suspend the protest. It was the best outcome for all concerned and one in which everyone could rejoice. It was not an end in the full sense of a return to what is normal living in society. It would be a further two years before sporadic violence and various incidents at the school and its environs ended. After the suspension of the protest until my transfer from Holy Cross I never again walked along Ardoyne Road to the school in case it might provoke anger or an incident. That made me sad but it also indicated how fragile the resolution of the conflict still was.

Mutual Lack of Understanding—Coded Language

Family life, understandably, has been seriously disrupted during four decades of violence and killing in Northern Ireland. In some places this has been more intense than in others. Visitors during the years of violence were often surprised at how normal life went on. Apart from Belfast, Derry and some other places where violence was part of daily life, many other towns and villages remained largely unaffected by what was happening. It is as if there have been two parallel worlds co-existing. On the one hand, there are generations in both Nationalist and Unionist areas who have lived constantly under the threat of disruption and in fear. In other places, people lived lives that were not affected by the civil disruption and violence. In economically poorer areas the former was more likely to have been experienced.

During the years I spent in Belfast from 2001-2008, I would regularly be invited by church and other groups to address them on the situation in north Belfast because of the publicity about rioting, violence, etc. At these events, I would be accompanied by a minister from another Church in north Belfast. We would make a joint presentation on our experience and the work of our respective churches for reconciliation and peace.

Generally we would travel together by car to these events. Often our travel would be within Belfast although we did go further away to speak. Within Belfast we might be no more than twenty minutes drive away from where we lived and ministered. But, the people we were addressing listened to our words as if they were describing a far away land and a people with whom they had little in common. But these were co-religionists and would share some of the same political aspirations.

Initially I presumed that it was my being something of an “outsider” that led to my not grasping what was really taking place at such gatherings. But my colleague who was born in Northern Ireland and who had worked in the civil service before being called to ministry assured me that this was not the explanation. His view was that there was more in common between working class Catholics and Protestants than there was between either of these and their more affluent co-religionists. The people I met at these meetings always came across as wanting to engage in a process of understanding what really lay behind the events and experiences we were describing.

Some of these church-based groups whom we met would not have been familiar with street rioting. If they came across a riot on the streets during a journey, it would be by chance. But the rioting such as we, as ministers of religion, were familiar with, often occurring over a number of days and nights, would be outside the experience of the people to whom we were discoursing. There would be some in these audiences who would be surprised that we were so familiar with the street violence happening in our area. The attitude of some of these people would be that the place for clergy representatives were in their church and not in the middle of a riot.

The role of clergy, we would point out during such gatherings could sometimes prove to be crucial in trying to prevent serious injury or loss of life. At times, the police would approach a clergy member to relay a message to community leaders who might have influence. Sometimes community leaders would convey suggestions to police for bringing about an end to the trouble occurring through the mediation of a clergy member. In other places, such a role for clergy may seem hard to believe, but in those days in north Belfast it was how conflict was managed. That is why the improvement in relationships between community and police is so essential. The importance of the devolution of policing powers is also crucial in bringing about an improvement in communication between community and police.

Different styles of living present their own demands and can be unique to a place. Having lived in places as far apart as San Francisco and Rome

over almost forty years as a priest, I have seen differences of outlook co-existing in what might broadly be described as one community of citizens.

In Northern Ireland a deeply rooted and still existing sectarian division makes these differences all the more marked. Even when there are no physical walls keeping people apart there can be unseen barriers of attitude and outlook that will need to be dismantled if Northern Ireland is to enjoy a lasting peace. The healing of sectarian divisions still remains an urgent goal to be achieved. Otherwise, a slide back towards isolation, mistrust and possible inter-communal violence cannot be ruled out in the future.

My understanding of the Unionist or Protestant people was enormously helped by monthly meetings of clergy of different denominations in north Belfast that I was privileged to attend. The main Christian denominations participated in these gatherings that came together initially to share on common issues in the area where we all ministered. These meetings enabled us to know each other and to grow in trust and appreciation of each other's particular issues. For instance, one minister of religion asked me not to speak of "ecumenism" in any public discourse that we shared. He told me that in his community this was coded language for "Rome Rule", i.e. a Catholic Church takeover. Never would I have envisaged this being an interpretation. Another shared with me that he could never be present at a Mass offered in a Catholic church. The minister's own congregation would find that a step too far.

On one occasion we as a group of clergy visited Birmingham, England, to see how an Anglican church had been adapted to serve a now Muslim majority in the neighbourhood. What was once a large Christian church was now a thriving community centre with a crèche that had become the heart of this community of mostly immigrants. There was still a chapel for Christian worship as part of this restyled building. Important as looking at such models for adaptation was, the experience helped us as a group of very different people come to a great appreciation of each other and our various ministries.

Is it a Religious War?

It does not surprise me when people within and outside Northern Ireland pose the question as to whether the conflict is over religion or not.

Sometimes it is imagined that all the people regarded as Catholics are in some way "controlled" by their church. Whatever about the past, this is certainly not the case now. Annual Mass attendance in the parish in which I served in north Belfast showed a regular Sunday Mass attendance of less than 18 percent. That meant that up to 82 percent of the people of the

parish did not attend church regularly. At the same time, not once in the seven years I spent in that parish was there ever anything less than a welcome into any home at which I called. The only complaint I received was that I did not visit often enough.

At the monthly meetings with clergy of Christian denominations, I became aware that each of their congregations were often fewer in number (remembering that there were a number of these groups.) This is not a point scoring exercise but may help to understand a little better that the description “Protestant” and “Catholic” does not refer in the first place to all people on either side of the community being regular church goers.

This is not to deny that there is a religious dimension to the conflict out of which Northern Ireland is now emerging. The truth is that religious labels do not in the first place refer to adherence to a vibrant church community dedicated to the values of the Gospel. At our clergy meetings each referred to their own community in terms of colour—“Orange” for Protestant and “Green” for Catholic. We found this the most neutral way of speaking and least likely to cause offence.

There are layers of history, culture, politics and economics that are concealed under these labels. The teaching of history in a divided society is not straightforward. As has been said of many conflicts, “one person’s terrorist, is another person’s freedom fighter”. To strip back some of these layers and to see how a productive discourse may yield some progress, I see education in Northern Ireland as the key issue to be addressed.

Urgent Issues of Education

The resolving of any conflict is complex and never more so than when people don’t know each other. Whether it is Belfast, Berlin, Palestine or wherever, once walls are keeping people apart, it is not easy to find reconciliation and to win the peace in the minds and hearts of people who have lived physically close to each other but as strangers. If you know your “enemy” in any shape or form, there may be some chance of building a bridge and taking a step towards each other. The positive consequence from offering my mobile phone number to the protesters as a gesture of trust had implications way beyond anything I had foreseen. When suspicion and fear in the face of threats from another group is part of survival for a community, dealing with such a small act of trust as giving a phone number is new territory for the receiving group. The initial reaction may be to suspect that somehow this is a trap of some sort. When this turns out to be a genuine gesture, an initial confusion gives way to a beginning of building a relationship and of constructive communication.

No opportunity in a deeply divided society that finds a response should be underestimated. When in this part of Belfast from 2003-2008 there were many suicides, the majority of them young people, a visit to the bereaved family of any or no religion was always welcomed. In other circumstances such a visit would not be possible for safety reasons as well as out of sensitivity to accepted boundaries. People crossed boundaries, often delineated by walls, to be with people who had lost a loved one by suicide. Groups established to tackle this appalling loss of life were never “Protestant” or “Catholic”. These labels simply did not apply.

During the months walking with the children and their parents to and from school a few years before these suicides, I wondered why there was an education system that kept children almost totally segregated from birth to third level studies, for those who got that far. There is in Northern Ireland a reluctance to honestly face this “elephant in the room”. There is no denying that all the evidence shows that faith schools do not cause sectarianism. In fact, faith schools try very hard to inculcate values of love, tolerance, reaching out to others, forgiveness and all that is humanly admirable. The same can be said for many State schools that are attended almost exclusively by Protestants. In the middle are integrated schools that seek to bring together people of all religious beliefs and none. These are most impressive and any visits I paid to them brought home to me how they too are contributing to a better future for all children. But on their own they do not hold the full answer.

Until such time as a creative discourse leads to a fundamental reorganisation of education at primary and secondary levels takes place, this isolation will continue making the creation of community extremely difficult. In saying this as a Catholic, church leadership could interpret this approach as being less than fully supportive of faith schools. Nothing could be further from the truth. The earlier part of this chapter attempted to give some insight into my own defence of a Catholic school. There is a long history of brave struggles to create a faith school system. What is needed is an acceptance of the history and value of faith schools without prejudice to a new way of educating children and young people together.

Linked to the educational system is segregated housing. It has proved very difficult to make changes to where people live. Brave efforts to bring people together have been made with limited success. By and large these schemes have been few in number and limited to a few areas in Northern Ireland. They have not had any great impact on how people remain isolated from each other. In integrated schools children can sit in class each day and then go home to areas where their friends are unlikely to go to play or to visit. This may seem an exaggeration but it is not. There are

still areas where people from one side of the community are afraid to go. It is heartbreaking to find children who share the day in school together and there it ends. The good work of the school can be eroded at the end of the school day as pupils part company to go to their own “side” of the community.

At present living in Paris and ministering in a parish of over forty different nationalities, I have learned a lot about diversity. There are children preparing each weekend for sacraments of initiation because their school does not have a religious education section in the curriculum. This involves a commitment by their parents to support this religious formation and calls on the parish to provide this opportunity of entering into its life of faith and religious practice. There are other models of education and formation of the young from which we can learn.

Education in Northern Ireland is at a difficult juncture with the Minister of Education in the Assembly attempting to replace the transfer test from primary to secondary schools. This examination taken at 11 years of age determines the type of second-level school the child will attend. Backing for the abolition of this transfer test has not been forthcoming from grammar schools that are considered the elite of secondary schools. Both Catholic and Protestant grammar schools have introduced their own transfer test. Parents are now left in the difficult position of trying to arrange their children’s education without knowing what form of assessment will be used in the coming year. While this is not an issue that divides on sectarian lines—the opposite is the case—it still highlights the complexity of change being introduced in Northern Ireland.

How history is seen has a great bearing on how the present is viewed. The teaching of history to young enquiring people gives a context for future discourse. Where pupils not only study apart but have few opportunities to interact and relate, the seeds of a divided future are already being sown. The culture of a people is part of their history and is communicated by reference to significant events and symbols. In Northern Ireland, dates of significant events and symbols that are shared in the whole community are few and far between. Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Mother’s Day would be a few of those that transcend any community divide. But despite recent efforts, the 12th July, commemorating the 1690 Battle of the Boyne, remains central and a defining event in the Unionist community. The Easter Rising of 1916 in Dublin that triggered the break with Britain remains an event to be commemorated in many Nationalist areas. The same largely applies to the celebration of St Patrick’s Day on 17th March each year.

However, with political progress culminating in the Agreement of Hillsborough Castle outlined above, Unionists and Nationalists have answered the invitation of the successive Presidents of the U.S.A. to be present at the White House each St Patrick's Day. Discourse at such an event has a lot to do with economic development for a newly emerging Northern Ireland. In the past, the work force of each side of the community seldom worked side by side. This now is changing and discourse to bring it about lies at the heart of what has become a politically united "pilgrimage" each St Patrick's Day to Washington.

Concluding Remarks

A Future to be Created

Following the Holy Cross School protest in 2001, I set about creating a dialogue around the possibility of having a "shared space" in Ardoyne that could one day be occupied by people from both sides of the community. The dream was to restore an old school building on this "interface" where I then lived. The building to be brought back to life had once been a school for girls and boys from the Catholic parish of Holy Cross during the early years of the 20th Century. The flag of the Republic of Ireland is a tricolour with green and orange joined by white in the centre. Then "Orange" and "Green" must continue the discourse that will result in learning to live side by side as equal partners. This building, derelict for many years, is ideally suited to such vision having a door opening onto the "Orange" side of the road and one opening onto the "Green" side.

The plan was to have a crèche at the heart of this building that would mark a new beginning for a new generation. In this new way of being a community a person could enter the building from one "side" and leave from the other "side". In fact, it should not matter after a while to which side of the road a person belonged.

It is my belief that it is necessary to begin again with young children and parents if building a community with any form of shared life and shared vision is to be achieved. The challenge was never underestimated as such a vision was set out. The interesting aspect was that while all admitted the difficulties, nobody was saying that the hope was wrong.

To even get separated people into dialogue, some non-threatening activity needed to be found. If there was even a hint that this was one side of the community trying to gain an advantage over the other, the scheme would be dead before it could begin. A cross-community health partnership agreed to be the "anchor tenant" and to operate the crèche.

With an “Orange” and “Green” board of management in place the hope was that this group would plant a seed of hope in a better future for all people. This proposed shared space was also to provide suicide prevention, counselling and other community services.

The Peace III programme from the European Union showed a great interest in initiating a discourse around creating such a shared space. Fundraising throughout Ireland to bring about this new beginning found a most generous response. Individuals and groups in the United States of America showed an enthusiasm and interest in the project. The architectural design was magnificent and exciting and was born out of long hours of discussion by interested parties. The granting of planning permission from Belfast City Council was a major step forward. It was never going to be easy after decades of separated living as there was bound to be mutual suspicion and distrust.

Since arriving in Ardoyne, Belfast, in summer 2001 a lesson I learned was that perception can be as important as reality. In fact, perception so often was the only reality that mattered. How a situation was seen and interpreted is what matters. Because of knowing this to be the case, I decided to embark on a preparatory discourse before the planning application was lodged.

Perception is the only reality for many people on both sides of the divide irrespective of what may actually be proposed or actually happening. There are myths on both sides that are not easily challenged. A more recent perception was that Nationalists had achieved more out of the peace process than Unionists. Even when it could be shown that overall such was not the case, it was extremely difficult if not impossible to alter that opinion.

During 2007–2008 I attended, along with the architect for the building, a series of discourses with local Unionist politicians, residents and community workers. These sessions were held in a community office on the “Orange” side of the divide. This in itself was significant in that I was invited onto “their side”. This probably seems strange to people who live in an integrated community. But in the context of the complex society in Northern Ireland, this was a tiny step in the right direction. A modicum of understanding between the participants on both sides was emerging. Some in the Nationalist community were surprised that I took the risk of going into such “enemy” territory—a perception of our neighbours not borne out by the facts of the situation.

In September 2008, my appointment in Holy Cross parish in Ardoyne was ended. Leaving this project behind was a disappointment for me. The planning for this cross-community centre has ceased and it is now planned

to have a Catholic parish centre in the old school building. Even if the bricks and mortar have not been put in place, the discourse initiated can only have been a positive development in a society where at one time guns and explosions did the “talking”.

The Challenge Remains

Each reader will make up their own mind about the journey that Northern Ireland has made and is still making. What has been described here is one person’s view set out in broad brush strokes.

Most may agree that any discourse on creating an integrated and peaceful community remains both challenging and complex. It will never be easy and will always be a struggle. There has been real growth over the past decade in Northern Ireland when we trace where it has come from to where it is today. Some places in Northern Ireland still have a form of co-existence if not full peace. A threat still remains from individuals and groups who would want to undo what has been achieved.

“Dissident Republicans” live in the heart of their own community. They are dissatisfied with the decisions made by politicians they once respected but who now co-operate with the police and have entered into political discourse. The decision to leave behind the armed struggle to achieve a united Ireland is a step too far for them. They are people who believe that the attainment of their goal can only be achieved by toppling the political institutions now in place. If this requires violence, as has been used in the murder and injury of security forces, they are ready to use it. Often it is remarked by politicians and commentators that such violent groups are small in number. While that is true, it does not mean that they are not highly dangerous.

The British and Irish Governments remain key players in the creation of a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. My conviction is that the remaining pockets of sectarianism and lack of peace can best be removed by local action. Government plans and finance are needed but if the action is not locally based, then the struggle to be a community will be lost. My hope also is that people at each local level will not lose heart but keep believing in the possibility of a better future. The discourse must go on.

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Notes

¹ Also known as the Belfast Agreement signed 10 April, 1998–
www.nio.gov.uk/the-agreement

² Anne Cadwallader, *Holy Cross The Untold Story*, (Belfast: The Brehon Press, 2004); Aidan Troy, *Holy Cross A Personal Experience*, (Dublin: Curragh Press, 2005)

³ Community Relations Council (CRC) formed in 1990–
www.community-relations.org.uk

CHAPTER NINE

ON DEFINING COMMUNITY: RACE, RHETORIC AND EXCLUSION WITHIN THE ENGLISH AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE DEBATE

DONATHAN BROWN

With the exception of ancient Israel, no people have argued more than Americans about the terms of their own existence. No other people at all have made the argument a major reason for their being. The quarrel begins with the contradiction between what Jefferson wrote and the continuing realities of American life.¹

—Edward Countryman

Attempts to define and articulate both who and what is “American,” at least along linguistic lines, can be traced to the Republican controlled thirty-seventh session of the 1919 Nebraska state legislature. Given their overwhelming majorities in both the state House and Senate, Senate Files 15, 237, and 24 were passed with tremendous support, ushering in Nebraska’s as well as the nation’s first set of state-level English-only laws. In what Raymond Tatalovich refers to as “wartime hysteria,” Nebraska’s legislative actions, although aimed at the growing German population, Tatalovich reminds us that, “while Germans may have been the specific target group, a general anti-foreign and anti-alien attitude motivated the political establishment of Nebraska to pass an array of restrictive laws.”² This early development of English-only laws began a pattern, largely sponsored by Republicans that sought to create, define, and articulate who does and does not belong in the “American” community.

American history is replete with efforts to declare English as the national language, both on state and federal levels. These legislative attempts, like the Nebraska episode, have and continue to receive widespread support from Southern Republicans, but also from lawmakers

from states that are experiencing growing numbers of immigrants from Latin America, particularly from Mexico. As Rodney Hero reminds us, “race and ethnicity are and have been pervasive influences in the political and social system,” whereas such policy formations are driven by a rhetorical and historical tendency to narrowly encapsulate how we define the “American” community.³ Questions of how community is defined, along with who defines it are queries that must be addressed within discussions pertaining to race, rhetoric, and public policy. Do such definitions of community embrace all, or, do they favour unity only when it is sequestered to racial or linguistic enclaves? The reality is fragmentation, whether social, economic, or in this case, linguistic, is well-represented throughout American political development. As evidenced by numerous episodes of exclusionary policies throughout American history, fragmentation exists as the foundation of defining who we are as a people, as a citizenry, and as a country as well.

The recurring debate to legislate English as the national language, particularly by Republican members of Congress, provides us with various contemporary examples of policy formations aimed at curbing the perceived threats that Latino immigration supposedly brings. Because rhetorical discourse, through legislative debates, possess the propensity to procure policy parameters in defence of supposed linguistic and cultural threats, this chapter concerns itself with the formation of community through the arguments offered by proponents of English-only legislation.⁴ In what follows, this chapter argues that a diachronic observation of this legislative debate, despite claims by English-only proponents, is about more than just language, it is about race and culture. This discussion will incorporate arguments from English-only proponents to illustrate how community is strategically framed to exclude certain segments of society on behalf of “preserving” and “enhancing” the role of English in America.

Immigration and the English as a National Language Movement

After the Immigration Act of 1924, establishing quotas, immigration reached exceptionally low levels in the U.S., climbing only somewhat in the 1960s and 1970s after national origins were abolished. It attained a peak, then, with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (ICRA) of 1986 to decline thereafter, although immigration stayed at a higher level than in recent history.⁵ In particular, Mexican immigration increased, in part because of conditions in Mexico but also because of economic changes in the U.S.:

The economic expansion of the 1970s onwards disproportionately took place in the states that had traditionally received Mexican migrants—the Sunbelt states of the Southwest, particularly California. Some of the occupational shift in demand was toward skilled, white-collar jobs and away from skilled and semi-skilled manual jobs. There was, however, also an increase in demand for relatively unskilled jobs in service, retail, and construction activities to build the cities and the suburbs and to provide inexpensive consumer services for their inhabitants. These jobs required little in the way of language proficiency, and in times of high employment, there was not a ready supply of native born willing to work for low pay and, often, poor working conditions.⁶

Legal Mexican immigration peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s, comprising in 1991 over 50 percent of the total.⁷ Not coincidentally, perhaps, the current movement to make English the official national language dates from the 1980s.

In 1983, U.S. English was founded by Senator S. I. Hayakawa, the Canadian-born son of Japanese immigrants, and Dr. John Tanton, an activist against population growth and immigration. Three years later Tanton found himself in the midst of controversy after a memo he had written—that many consider insulting to Hispanics—was leaked to the press. He has also been shown to have links to eugenics and neo-Nazi groups.⁸ Tanton then left the group and his initial involvement in it is not mentioned on the group's website. Tanton, however, did not disappear and he and others formerly associated with U.S. English founded Pro English in 1994. This group came into existence specifically to defend an English-only law voted by Arizona in 1988 which prevented the state and its employees from using any language but English, with certain exceptions related to health and public safety. This law was overturned in court afterwards. Other groups, such as English First and American Ethnic Coalition also exist.

Membership in these groups increased in the 1990s perhaps not coincidentally after the signature of NAFTA in 1992 and its ratification the following year. The growth in trade between Mexico and the United States made human movement easier too. It is estimated that around 40 percent of undocumented arrivals came from there.⁹ These recent immigrants were younger, poorer and less well educated than most Americans but also than earlier immigrants. Most of them lived in California, Texas and Illinois, making up 20 percent of the population in California, but it had become clear by 2000 that more and more were heading to other states.¹⁰ Added to this were large numbers of immigrants arriving from the Caribbean, notably Haiti and Cuba.

In the face of such numbers, the pro-English groups have asserted that the linguistic homogeneity and even the cultural unity of the nation itself is in peril. Pro English, for example, has a banner headline on its website proclaiming: “Protecting our nation’s unity in the English language”.¹¹ These groups have also achieved some limited successes. About thirty states now have some form of official English laws, most of them mainly symbolic. In 1996, the House of Representatives voted to ban most uses of other languages by the federal government but the bill failed in the Senate. Later, in 2006 and 2007, the Senate voted to recognise English as a “common and unifying” language but in neither case did this become law.¹² The movement has been widely attacked and accused of racism. One of its most frequent critics, James Crawford, Director of the Institute for Language and Education, told the House Subcommittee on Education Reform that such a law would be unnecessary:

Certainly there is no threat to English in America, no challenge to its status as the language of educational advancement, economic success and political discourse. According to the 2000 census, 92 percent of U.S. residents speak English fluently; 96 percent speak it “well” or “very well”; and only 1.3 percent speak no English at all.¹³

Crawford also argues that demographic research has clearly shown that the rate of Anglicisation is actually increasing as today’s immigrants learn English faster than in the past. He also criticises the official English advocates for not demanding more government funding for English-as-a second-language classes. They talk about the importance of speaking good English but not about providing the means to do so.

English-Only as “American” Only

One question that oftentimes receives little attention when discussing race and policy formation revolves around the relationship between naming and negativity, that is, as a result of certain populations cast as a threatening menace, how various policies have become implemented to curb their movement and access to resources in society.¹⁴ Kenneth Burke, for example, has argued that saying that a group of people are African American, Latino, Jewish, or even immigrants, has unleashed rhetorical and political mechanisms aimed at undercutting the movement of these groups. As creators of the negative, we purposely attribute both inferior traits and characteristics to such groups with the sole purpose of excluding them from certain communities and resources. To define community, as past and present social and political movements illustrate, is often to

incorporate the practice of erecting barricades to block the participation and representation of those who do not fit the narrow build we frequently use to define community. Therefore, the power of naming, along with the force behind creating the negative, equally contributes to the discussion at hand, though in discursive and oftentimes subtle ways.

The combination of race and community has long suffered from the paralyzing perils of segregation and participatory exclusion, whereas definitions of “American” have constantly undergone various transformations to accommodate the driving political ideologies of the time. The unique relationship between race, policy and notions of community draws similar observations from noted historian Erin Foner. He writes that, “nowhere is this symbiotic relationship between inclusion and exclusion. . . more evident than in debates over the fundamental question who is an American, further speaking to America’s ongoing dilemma toward unifying as one”.¹⁵ As far as the debate to legislate English as the national language is concerned, Foner’s comment could not be more accurate.

Nowhere in the history of the United States has a federally legislated “official language” existed, however, attempts at passing such a bill have received much effort and discussion. For instance, in 2006, amidst a heated debate over the comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, Oklahoma Republican United States Senator Jim Inhofe introduced Senate amendment 4064, an amendment “to declare English as the national language of the United States and to promote the patriotic integration of prospective US citizens.” Inhofe, an ardent supporter of English-only measures, resides in a state where in 2006, Latinos comprised 6.9 percent of the population, and felt such a federal amendment was needed to guide immigrants toward assimilating to the “American” way of life, which, as this amendment notes, includes speaking English.¹⁶ Inhofe’s English-only amendment received the support of eleven co-sponsors, ten of whom were Republicans from the states of Kentucky, Montana, Georgia, Wyoming, Alabama, South Carolina, and Arizona, along with both Republican Senators from Tennessee and Oklahoma. Although the 2006 immigration reform bill failed, Senator Inhofe’s amendment secured sixty-two yeas and thirty-five nays. Of the sixty-two supporters of Inhofe’s measure, six were Democrats from the states of Montana, West Virginia, Delaware, South Dakota, Florida, Nebraska, and both Senators from North Dakota. Of those thirty-five Senators who voted nay on this amendment, all were Democrats, including the then Democratic Senator from Illinois, Barack Obama.

To support their policy preference, Senator Inhofe, along with five of his Republican colleagues, took to the floor of the Senate to defend the

validity of this amendment and to urge its passage. Given the racially obtrusive timing this amendment has, considering it was attached to the larger Immigration Reform Act of 2006, Senator Inhofe approached the Senate floor to offer these explanatory words regarding the nature of the bill. He stated:

Basically, what it does is it recognizes the practical reality of the role of English as our national language. It states explicitly that English is our national language, providing English a status in law that it has not had before. It clarifies that there is no entitlement to receive Federal documents and services in languages other than English. It declares that any rights of a person and services or materials in languages other than English must be authorized or provided by law. It recognizes the decades of unbroken court opinions that civil rights laws protecting against national origin and discrimination do not create rights to Government services and materials in languages other than English, and establishes enhanced goals of the DHS as redesigned. This is what I talked about in trying to make those more uniform.¹⁷

For Senator Inhofe, federally declaring English as the national language is long overdue and is desperately needed. Far too long has the role of English in America either been ignored or not recognised as the uniting language that it is. The purpose of this amendment is not only to recognise the English language as “America’s” language, but in doing so, to place under scrutiny the rights of “language minorities” to receive governmental services in languages other than English. Note that Inhofe cites no specific court cases when speaking to the “decades of unbroken court opinions” that this amendment seeks to rectify. Senator Inhofe’s ambiguity invites many questions from sceptics of his amendment that he does not address. Again, as a statement that was intended to clarify the role and purpose of his amendment, Senator Inhofe’s intentions continue to be clouded. However, the residual message left from Senator Inhofe’s floor statement is clear: “Americans” or the “American” people speak English and English-only.

Coming to the aid of Senator Inhofe, was Arizona Republican Senator, John Kyl. Representing a state where in 2006 Latinos comprised 30.6 percent of the population, Senator Kyl felt deeply committed to “unifying” the country, as he believe this amendment possesses the propensity to do.¹⁸ In his words, the Inhofe amendment:

Is very important and that I think unifies us. What are some of the things that do unify us? Well, our language unifies us. Senator *Alexander*, who will speak in a moment, was responsible also for working with Senator

Inhofe to include provisions in this amendment that help us to recognize the importance of English in our country and the importance—not just for our new immigrants but for all Americans—of speaking this language that is our national language. So an amendment that recognizes that it is our national language is very positive for both immigrants and nonimmigrants alike. I would also like to make a point about what this amendment is not. This is not an English-only amendment. . . . We do speak a lot of different languages in this country, but English is our national language, and I think we can all agree on those great principles.¹⁹

Following the lead of Senator Inhofe's opening remarks; Senator Kyl's advocacy reflects an attempt toward defining "America" and "Americans" by means of linguistic commonality. As opposed to other factors such as poverty, Senator Kyl places his attention and avers that a shared linguistic linkage is what can unify us as a "United" States, whereas all other countervailing political elements are secondary. This line of advocacy reflects what Benedict Anderson refers to as an "imagined community," in which each nation has in its mind, who is and who is not a member of that community, along with what measures are needed to create community.²⁰ The imagined community depicted throughout Senators Inhofe's and Kyl's remarks, defines and legitimises linguistic homogeneity as what "Americans" want and is a key element in defining what "Americans" are. Language policies within the grander scheme of community formation, argues Ronald Schmidt, "can be understood best in terms of the politics of identity," an ongoing process that creates, defines, and identifies "us" and "them."²¹

Despite the claim from Senator Kyl that "this is not an English-only amendment," neither he nor Senator Inhofe offered anything to the contrary to support this claim. Arguments from English-only proponents have raised many questions about race, as well as definitions of community and equality. The English as the national language amendment, although disguised as a "common sense" amendment, could not be further from actuality. Such competing notions of equality, whether along the lines of "language minorities" or otherwise, argues Mary Stuckey, have "been contentious throughout our national history and... [have] provided both the means of excluding members of groups and the basis for the inclusion of groups."²² What English-only proponents succeed in is not only illustrating what and who "Americans" are, but simultaneously defining who and what characteristics do not belong to this "American" community. Given the immigration reform theme that embodied the spirit of this amendment and debate, arguments from English-only proponents mirror Samuel Huntington's "Hispanic Challenge thesis." For example,

Huntington argues that “a massive Hispanic influx raised questions concerning America’s linguistic and cultural unity. . . . The celebration of diversity replaced emphasis on what Americans had in common.”²³ Through Huntington’s worldview, the dilemmas of Latino immigration have caused much strife, no longer allowing us, as “Americans,” to say “we.” For Huntington and like many English-only proponents, to be “American” is to embody a common linguistic and cultural community; anything else threatens what binds us together as “Americans.”

The diachronic developments within the English-only debate in America continue to remain a rather fascinating struggle in American political rhetoric and development. As a nation/community, our political system, posits Rodney Hero, “needs to be viewed and understood not only in terms of its strengths but also in terms of its contradictions and/weaknesses” but also, “a politics that simultaneously draws upon and challenges American political values.”²⁴ The English-only debate in America arouses contradictions in how and whose voice is considered legitimate along with whose framing of community is privileged. For example, without a federally mandated official language, Indiana Republican Congressman Mark Souder warns that, “we are all going to descend into chaos,” later adding, “if you are going to come to America, then learn our language.”²⁵ Given the prestigious body that Congress represents, its members and their beliefs are given considerable weight and merit, even if they ultimately advocate community formation along the lines of cultural homogeneity and linguistic oneness. Achieving linguistic suppression is vital in “America,” whereas immigrants must know and adjust accordingly, notes most proponents. These sentiments are perhaps best stated through the words of former Georgia Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich. In his words, “if you are pro-immigration into America, you should be pro-assimilation into the American way of life. . . . America is a state of mind; it’s a way of being.”²⁶ Like Souder, Inhofe and Kyl, Gingrich follows a similar stream of thought, believing that English-only legislation is “America’s” best safeguard against the undesired consequences that accompany linguistic pluralism.²⁷ As a result, these proponents seek to subtly define “American” community around the variables of cultural and linguistic homogeneity.

Despite campaigning in Spanish before, President George W. Bush offered his support of the Inhofe amendment. President Bush argued that, “if you learn English, and you’re a hard worker, and you have a dream, you have the capacity from going from picking crops to owning the store, or from sweeping office floors to being an office manager.”²⁸ President Bush articulated his English-only advocacy under the grand scheme of the

mythic “American dream.” In “America,” those who speak English are those who succeed in society; in “America” all one needs is the English language and an unwavering work ethic in order to reach their dreams, all other socio-political and economic factors do not apply. “America,” as President Bush leads us to believe, is a community comprised of likeminded individuals who speak English, work hard, and are devoid of any desires or tendencies to discriminate. In a weekly radio address, President Bush continued to define “America” and “Americans” within the parameters expressed by proponents throughout the English-only debate. Americans, according to President Bush, “are bound together by our shared ideals, an appreciation of our history, respect for our flag and the ability to speak and write in English.”²⁹ Furthermore, President Bush offers an encapsulating model of who “Americans” are,³⁰ arguing that, “I think people who want to be a citizen of this country ought to learn English. . . and they ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English.”³¹ By inserting his advocacy, President Bush evokes what David Zarefsky refers to as the power of “presidential definition,” which, similar to a terministic screen, enables “the president, by defining a situation . . . to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public,” which is quite germane to the policy debate at hand.³² Noting the President’s powerful rhetorical platform and availability to discursive means of communication, President Bush frames “America” in and around strategically restrictive qualifiers in defence of the Inhofe amendment.

The 2006 campaign to legislate English as the national language, although unsuccessful, marked only one of the numerous recent efforts to secure its passage. Debates of this calibre have propelled some proponents to national prominence; these figures include former Colorado Republican Representative and 2008 presidential nominee, Tom Tancredo. In 2008, Tancredo authored a column in the *Washington Times* titled, “Speak English: What’s Good for Golf, Should be Good for U.S.” In his column, Tancredo applauded the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) for announcing that all tour players must speak English; veteran players will have two years to pass an oral exam, whereas new players must pass an oral exam in order to join the LPGA tour. In applauding this move, Tancredo seizes the moment to insert and advocate his English-only stance. Writing in regard to the supposed perils that accompany linguistic heterogeneity, Tancredo writes:

In 2008, even the Republican Party surrendered to the illusion of bilingualism by endorsing a presidential primary debate broadcast in Spanish from the University of Miami in Florida. Since all new citizens must pass an English-language exam, why do we think there are Hispanics

voters who do not know enough English to follow a presidential debate? Why would we want to encourage new voters not to learn English? In Europe today, more than 20 languages are spoken in the countries of the European Union. Can you guess which is the default language used in business when there are no translators available? It is English...We can only wish that “immigrant rights” groups would show as much wisdom and stop obstructing immigrants’ economic progress by opposing English only policies.³³

According to Tancredo, the continual failure to anoint English as the national language represents a much larger dilemma. By “surrendering” to bilingualism, not only are there no incentives for immigrants to better themselves by learning English, but the nation is forced to occupy a comprising cultural and linguistic position as well. For Tancredo, “Americans” speak English, and despite the multiple languages spoken in the European Union, English is the default language. Efforts to undercut English as the national language only harm and further jeopardise the omnipresent opportunities that await immigrants to this country. Make no mistake; English is *the* language of the United States, however, without official declaration, the nation’s future hangs in the balance.

Concerned with efforts to unite one nation under one language, Iowa Republican Congressman Steve King, on February 11, 2009, introduced House Resolution 997, the English Language Unity Act of 2009. With approximately one hundred and twenty eight co-sponsors, of the five Democratic supporters, four represent districts throughout the South. In King’s attempt to establish English as the national language, this bill sought to:

Establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization, and to avoid misconstructions of the English language texts of the laws of the United States pursuant to Congress’ powers to provide for the general welfare of the United States and to establish a uniform rule of naturalization under article I, section 8, of the Constitution.³⁴

Like his predecessors, King follows in stride with a similar rationale; like Tancredo, King is creating an “American” community through the identification of linguistic qualifiers. Unfortunately for King, his bill was referred to the House Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, where its status was dormant. However, not satisfied with this result, fifteen days after Congressman King’s amendment was introduced, only to be delayed in committee, Republican Congressman of New York, Peter King introduced HR 1229 on February 26, 2009, a bill entitled, “the National Language Act of 2009.”³⁵ However, as the political

process continues to illustrate, the majority of bills and resolutions never make it out of committee, and so this bill on August 19, 2009, was referred to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties, where it too lay dormant.

As legislative efforts to mandate English as the national language continue, these debates follow familiar argumentative patterns and sets of speakers. Southern Republicans, generally those behind such English-only campaigns, place this legislation on-par with efforts to stabilise an ever-changing “America.” As part of this campaign to keep America, “America,” proponents denounce charges from English-only dissenters, such as Nevada Democratic Senator Harry Reid, who labelled such an amendment as “racist.” However, despite such sentiments from dissenters, the proponents’ efforts to “assimilate” immigrants to the “American” way of life, especially amidst current shifts in populations, have become stronger and more frequent. If nothing else, these rhetorical efforts to “unify America” play heavily upon defining who and what is and is not “American.” When making their case, English-only proponents rhetorically craft encapsulating definitions of the “American people” with the addition of a racial and linguistic element. Again, as Mary Stuckey reminds us, “not everyone is invited to the national party; just enough of us to keep the party going, to sustain the fragile consensus allowing us to function more or less collectively most of the time.”³⁶ Within this (re)making of the “American people,” English-only proponents carefully frame “Americans” in such a way that their definitions closely resemble one nation, under one language.

Conclusion

As a discursive task that rhetorically constructs “us” and “them,” a worldview of suspicion and distrust is allowed to fester as justification toward exclusion and fragmentation. If nothing else, the rhetorical power of naming and its implications toward unifying and dividing must be observed and analysed for its close relation to community and fragmentation. Along these lines, Amardo Rodriguez says it best, “meaning is political.”³⁷ To be “American” means that those selected individuals possess unique qualities that distinguish them from other nations, citizens, and communities. We know that naming and defining are privileged tasks, reserved largely for those with high socio-economic and political capital. However, what has not been specifically addressed is the relationship between language and community formation, as it relates to the issue at hand—English as the national language. Language, similar to

the ways race, religion, and gender have plagued and divided society, possesses the propensity to engender similar outcomes as well. One aspect of language usage that cannot be ignored, writes Leobardo Estrada, “is the social function of language in solidifying group identity,” while simultaneously, this solidifying of group identity is exactly the same ideology employed to justify fragmentation and harbour segregationist sentiments.³⁸

Throughout the various illustrations and rationales of what defines America as a community, writes Howard Hill, is “the acquisition of the English language and American citizenship, and on the adoptions of American customs, standards, and methods of life. Americanism is defined as a process by which an alien acquires our language, citizenship, customs, and ideals.”³⁹ What continues to exist as a common topic throughout the rhetorical efforts of English-only advocates are attempts at framing this debate within a national identity politics dedicated toward defining not only who “Americans” are but perhaps more importantly, who or what “Americans” are not; largely drawn in opposition to how we view ourselves, denying the existence of resemblance.

What continues to flourish without question are the overarching definitions of what is “American,” and who are “Americans.” This essay, from the outset, sought to argue that proponents of this recurring debate to establish an “official language” are speaking about more than language, but about race and culture. As a result, definitions of “America” or “Americans” can occupy a thinly laced veil of intolerance and bigotry. At the base of this debate is at least one dominant rhetorical mechanism. This transformation calls attention to our overall involvement with how “America” and “Americans” are defined and by whom. This restrictive reoccurrence is common within political rhetoric and is referred to as debate framing. Framing within political discourses strategically seeks the goal of restricting images and conceptions within certain ideological circles, containing their meaning and possible outcomes.⁴⁰ As evidenced here, arguments from proponents in defence of English-only legislation engage in the privileging of certain concepts established within this frame while disavowing others.⁴¹

With a firm sense of how they wish to portray America, proponents seize definitions of community/country that link linguistic and cultural homogeneity with how America was originated and how it ought to remain. Fragmentation has been achieved in this debate through creating, restricting, and promoting a restrictive framing of “American” identity by asking and simultaneously answering the question of who belongs in America.⁴² This obsession surrounding the large scale presence and

paranoia over identity politics and status in America raises many questions and concerns. Of such concerns, Richard Hofstadter observes, “status problems take on a special importance in American life because a very large part of the population suffers from one of the most troublesome of all status questions: they are tormented by a nagging doubt as to whether they are really and truly fully Americans.”⁴³ As seen throughout this debate, some who believe themselves true and full Americans are concerned with the welfare of their nation and wish to ensure its continual prosperity by preserving its culture and native language, English. Those who argue otherwise are cast as “un American,” that is, those who are unconcerned with preserving our nation’s delicate balance, heritage, and overall stability.⁴⁴

As the number of immigrants increases, particularly those from Mexico, debates over immigration reform will continue to foster further friction regarding state, local and federal efforts to legislate English as the national language.

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¹ Edward Countryman, *Americans: A Collision of Histories*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 72-73.

² Raymond Tatalovich, *Nativism Reborn? The Official English Language Movement and the American States*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 34.

³ Rodney Hero, *Faces of Inequality: Social Diversity in American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5.

⁴ For more of a background story onto the English-only debate, see, Dennis Baron, *The English-Only Question: An Official Language for Americans?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁵ For more details see Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard, 2006) especially the appendix which contains numerous charts and graphs on the subject

⁶ Frank Bean, et.al., “Introduction”, ” in *At the Crossroads: Mexico and U.S. Immigration Policy*, edited by Frank D. Bean, et. al. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 9

⁷ Alene Gelbard and Marion Carter, “Mexican Immigration and the U.S. Population” in *At the Crossroads*, op.cit., 122

⁸ See Elsa Auerbach, “The Challenge of the English Only Movement”, *College English*, 54:7 (November 1992) 850.

⁹ Alene Gelbard and Marion Carter, op. cit. 123.

¹⁰ According to Jorge Durand, Douglas Massey and Emilio Parrado, “The New Era of Mexican Migration to the United States”, *Journal of American History*, 86:2 (Sept., 1999) 531: “Moreover, more than five states received more than a thousand Mexican immigrants in 1986 (the traditional receiving states of Arizona, California, Illinois, New Mexico and Texas); but by 1995 the number had grown to 11 (with the addition of Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington). New Jersey-New York combined to equal a twelfth region receiving more than a thousand Mexican immigrants per year. According to data from the Census and Current Population Survey, the proportion of recent Mexican immigrants going to California dropped from 63 percent to 40 percent between 1990 and 1996 while the percentage going to nontraditional states grew from 13 percent to 31 percent, yielding a sharp increase in the diversity of destinations.”

¹¹ <http://www.proenglish.org/> (accessed 1 August 2010)

¹² See “Senate Votes to Set English as National Language”, *The New York Times*, 19 May 2006

¹³ 26 July 2006, http://www.elladvocates.org/documents/englishonly/Crawford_Official_English_testimony.pdf (accessed 1 August 2010)

¹⁴ A more sustained discussion on Kenneth Burke and the creation of the negative can be found here: William Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 130.

¹⁵ Erin Foner, *Who Owns History? Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 150-151.

¹⁶ United States Census Bureau, *Oklahoma Quick Facts*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/40000.html>

¹⁷ United States Congress, Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006, 109th Congress, 1st Session, May, 18, 2006.

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²⁰ See, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso Press, 1983), 15.

²¹ Ronald Schmidt, *Language Policy and Identity Politics in the United States*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 47.

²² Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity*. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 13.

²³ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 4.

²⁴ Rodney E. Hero, "Foreword," in *Latino Politics: Identity, Mobilization and Representation*, ed. Rodolfo Espino, David L. Leal and Kenneth J. Meier (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), ix.

²⁵ Suzanne Gamboa, "House Speaks Up on Making English Official Language" *Forth Worth Telegram*, July, 27, 2006, sec. A5.

²⁶ Eric Pfeiffer, "Gingrich backs English push as Official Language." *Washington Times*, January, 25, 2007, sec. A06.

²⁷ For a good discussion on how French and British solidarity has influenced its policies regarding language, see, Dennis Ager, *Language Policy In Britain and France: The Processes of Policy*. (London: Cassell, 1996). Also, for a wider perspective on the intersection of race and public policy within France, see, Kenneth J. Meier and Daniel P. Hawes, "Ethnic Conflict in France: A Case for Representative Bureaucracy?" *American Review of Public Administration*, 39, no. 3. (2009): 269-285.

²⁸ Charles Hulse. "Senate Votes to Set English as National Language." *New York Times*, May, 19, 2006, sec. A 18.

²⁹ Shannon Dinan, "Bush Calls on Aliens to Adopt Culture; Specifies Respect for U.S. Flag, Ability to Speak, Write in English." *Washington Times*, May 26, 2006, sec. A 02.

³⁰ See, Vanessa B. Beasley, *You the People: American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

³¹ Jim Ruthenburg, "Bush Enters Anthem on Language" *New York Times*, April 29, 2006, sec. 1A.

³² David Zarefsky, "Presidential Power and the Power of Definition" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 34:1 (2004):11.

³³ Tom Tancredo, "Speak English: What's Good for Golf, Should Be Good for U.S." *Washington Times*, August 29, 2008, sec. A 19.

³⁴ U.S. Congress. House. *English Language Unity Act of 2009*. H.R. 997. 111TH Congress 1st session (February 11, 2009).

³⁵ U.S. Congress. House. *National Language Act of 2009*, H.R. 1229. 111TH Congress 1st session (February 26, 2009).

³⁶ Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity*, p.2.

³⁷ Amardo Rodriguez, *On Matters of Liberation (1): The Case Against Hierarchy*. (Cresskill: Hampton Press, Inc., 2003), 11.

³⁸ Leobardo F. Estrada, "Language and Political Consciousness among the Spanish-speaking in *The United States: A Demographic Study*, ed. D.J.R. Bruckner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 17.

³⁹ Howard C. Hill, "The Americanization Movement," in *Race and Ethnicity in Modern America*, ed. Richard Meister (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974), 33.

⁴⁰ See, Andrew Feldman, *Framing the Debate*. (New York: IG Publishing, 2007).

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lines of race, racism and culture might find the following texts useful: Haig Bosmajian, *The Language of Oppression* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983). Teun Adrianus Van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴² Vanessa B. Beasley, ed., *Who Belongs in America: Presidents, Rhetoric & Immigration*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006).

⁴³ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 58.

⁴⁴ See, Raymond Tatalovich, *Nativism Reborn? The Official English Language Movement and the American States*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1995).

CHAPTER TEN

“MANAGING” MIGRATION:
DISCOURSES ON IMMIGRATION AND “RACE
RELATIONS” FROM THATCHERISM
TO NEW LABOUR

EVAN SMITH

Remarkable as the Labour Party’s change of attitude over immigration has been..., it falls very clearly into an established historical pattern... [T]he Labour Party in opposition bitterly opposed immigration controls which it described as a “fraudulent remedy” for the social evils of the day. Yet possessed of power..., it manipulated these controls much more ruthlessly than had its political opponents.

—Paul Foot, 1965¹

On 2 November 2009, Home Secretary Alan Johnson presented a speech to the Royal Society for Arts on security in the twenty-first century, where he declared that when New Labour came into power in 1997, “there was no magic button we could push immediately to resolve all the historic, political and operational problems associated with immigration”, but stated that “the UK is now far more successful at tackling migration than most of its European and north [sic] American neighbours”.² Johnson claimed that the Labour Government had made “real and rapid progress” on containing the “huge surge in migration”, especially since 2001, but admitted that “our record is not perfect”. This chapter aims to explore this record of New Labour on migration and “race relations”³ since 1997 and more importantly, track how the discourses on “race” and immigration in Britain over the last decade fit into the longer history of British immigration. Through this exploration, this chapter will argue that 1997 does not represent a turning point in the history of immigration in Britain, with a large number of continuities between the discourse on immigration

under the Conservative Governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major and the Labour Governments under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Under New Labour, certain discourses can be highlighted as being particularly prominent in the debates over immigration and “race”. The first is that over the last twenty years, there has been a massive increase in the amount of people seeking refuge in the West and much of the discourse has focused on the issue of supposed “bogus” asylum seekers. The second is tied to Britain’s role in post-Cold War Europe and the growth of the European Union (EU)—alongside the anxiety of Britain’s sovereignty in the EU, the free movement of EU citizens within its borders, including to Britain, has been a major concern within the discourse. The third is how Britain has dealt with previous patterns of migration, particularly the non-white migration that occurred after the Second World War. As new generations of non-white Britons emerge, much of the discourse on immigration and “race” has focused on the pros and cons of multiculturalism and how the new generations “fit” into mainstream (i.e. white) British society. These topics are not just discussed within the realms of parliamentary discourse, but are debated throughout Britain, with a diffuse number of people engaged in the debate and using a widespread range of media to discuss it. This chapter will analyse these key themes in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary discourses of migration and “race relations” and present the continuities, and changes, in the discourse from the final years of Thatcher’s Government to the present day of the New Labour Government.

“The numbers game”: The discourse on immigration and “race relations” in the post-war era

Throughout the post-war era, much of the discourse on immigration and “race relations” has focused on preventing “undesirable” migrants from entering Britain, at the cost of other social, economic and humanitarian concerns.⁴ Since 1962, when the Commonwealth Immigrants Act was first passed, non-white migration has become increasingly restricted under the belief that “good race relations” stemmed from immigration control. The aphorism attributed to Labour MP Roy Hattersley sums up the bipartisan consensus that non-white immigration was the “problem”: “Without integration, limitation is inexcusable; without limitation, integration is impossible”.⁵

Almost as soon as large scale immigration from the Commonwealth commenced, concerns were voiced about the “dangerous social problems” brought to Britain by non-white migrants, with objections raised in

Parliament that these immigrants could enter Britain “regardless of their health, means of subsistence, character record, habits, culture, education, need for them economically... or of the wishes of the British people”.⁶ Two competing interests were juxtaposed in the discourse on immigration from the Commonwealth—the interest of regenerating the British economy through migrant labour and the interest of maintaining some form of homogeneous (and white) British culture. Thus the “cheapness of Commonwealth labour [was] always contrasted with its putative social and political cost”.⁷ The economic dimension of the immigration debate gave way to a “rather different agenda of nationhood and cultural politics” and created the “foundations of the ‘numbers game’ equating immigration concentrations with social problems”.⁸ The result of this debate was an increasingly bipartisan consensus amongst policy makers that immigration control was to be enforced to maintain social order in Britain, which reflected wider concerns publicised in the British press and by other interest groups.

This sentiment can be seen as constantly reiterated throughout the history of British immigration and much of rhetoric that has existed under the Conservatives and New Labour can be traced back to Margaret Thatcher’s declarations made in her interview with Granada Television’s *World in Action* in January 1978:

People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture... So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples’ fears on numbers.⁹

Since the 1950s, the discourse on immigration and “race relations” has been dominated by the “numbers game” and the ideal that “good race relations” could only be achieved by immigration control. However, as Robert Moore has argued “the argument about numbers is unwinnable because however many you decide upon there will always be someone to campaign for less and others for whom one is too many”—if one has “admitted that black people are a problem in themselves, it is impossible to resist the argument for less of them”.¹⁰

The “numbers game” looks set to continue in the discourse on immigration and “race relations”, with the question presented as how many people and under what circumstances should be let in, because there is little room in the discourse to ask whether immigration controls are necessary or useful in today’s increasingly globalised world. In mainstream British politics, “open borders” is a taboo subject, with no government particularly willing to lessen restrictions on immigration already in place. Even amongst academics and human rights activists, the

concept of “open borders” is not agreed upon. Stephen Castles has argued that in the globalised market economy, “open borders” “would not work in current circumstances” because for Castles, trans-national migration is a “transfer of value from poor to rich countries: taking human capital, and the educational resources of the less-developed world, and using them in the already rich countries”.¹¹ To prevent a “brain drain” from developing countries, Castles has argued that “labour migration should be allowed—but not necessarily in an unplanned, chaotic, free-market manner”.¹² Liza Schuster in a reply to Castles has argued that despite controls being ever tighter, people still find a way into the destination country, stating:

Controlled borders, let alone closed borders, are a fiction, and... the European and other governments which attempt to enforce these are involved in a symbolic battle at best.¹³

It is within this symbolic battle, Schuster claims, that there are “very real serious costs and consequences” in the enforcement of immigration control, not just for migrants, but for the destination countries also.¹⁴ As well as the massive financial costs of maintaining border control, hundreds of migrants die or are injured in gaining entry to the destination country and there is an “increase in racial prejudice and racial violence each time migration controls become the focus of political attention”.¹⁵ Schuster points to the reasons for why there should be a discussion about the validity and function of border control, but this discussion is at the margins of the discourse. As Imogen Tyler has argued, “there is no open debate about whether or not “we” should open “our” borders—such questions would be illegible within the terms of the current political hegemony”.¹⁶

So the argument that to have “good race relations” depends on migrants being limited to a recognisable minority and with strict conditions placed upon their entry still abounds. This argument is often a conflation of Malthusian principles and colonialist attitudes—that Britain cannot withstand excessive numbers of migrants and if migrants are accepted, they have to accept “our” rules for entry. This Malthusian element can be seen in an article written by Professor of Economics Bob Rowthorn for *Prospect* magazine, who stated in 2003 that, “Some immigration is desirable in any society, but this must be kept within limits” and:

[i]n most European countries, many people would agree that their population is already too large. This is certainly true in Britain. For us, population growth is now a cost, not a benefit.¹⁷

But zero net migration to Britain is also undesirable and unfeasible. Primarily the British economy requires a periodic influx of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, but Britain also has international and domestic obligations that allow, for example, the right of family reconciliation for migrants already residing in Britain and the right of refugees to seek asylum. Unable to halt immigration entirely, the British Government (and many outside of Parliament) have emphasised that if people are to enter Britain, they have to accept the lengthy and complicated processes to gain entry and that the Government determined who could enter the country. As the New Labour 2002 White Paper stated:

If managed properly, migration can bring considerable benefits to the UK, including improvements in economic growth and productivity, as well as cultural enrichment and diversity. “Managing” migration means having an *orderly, organised and enforceable system of entry*.¹⁸ (Emphasis added)

Accepting the authority of the state and of the dominant white British society was not just limited to border control, but affected all areas of a migrant’s life in Britain. The parliamentary and extra-parliamentary discourse has seen an emphasis on migrants understanding their minority position in British society and accepting British “values”, which seem to echo Thatcher’s 1978 statement:

[W]e must hold out the prospect of a clear end to immigration and that is the view we have taken and I am certain that is the right view to keep good race relations and to keep fundamental British characteristics... We are a British nation with British characteristics. Every country can take some small minorities and in many ways they add to the richness and variety of this country. The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened.¹⁹

As it is undesirable and unfeasible to completely halt immigration, particularly as Britain is now part of the European Union, much of the discourse seems to be about giving the appearance that “something” is being done about immigration. Phil Woolas, Minister of State for Borders and Immigration, stated in an interview with *The Guardian* in November 2008, that Labour’s “prime purpose” was “reassuring the public” that the Government was in control of immigration policy, admitting, “[y]ou can only stop it being seen as a problem when you can convince the public you’re in control of it, and that’s my goal”.²⁰ However the reality of immigration control policy is that it has repeatedly been the result of competing factors within British society, primarily striking a balance between placating anti-immigrationist attitudes, economic concerns,

pressure from progressive and community organisations and maintaining the image of the Government as a fair and equitable governing body, while being strict on the perceived “open door” of immigration. As David Renton has stated, in a similar argument to Liza Schuster:

It has often been assumed that the purpose of immigration controls was primarily to restrict the entry of migrants. If this was the goal, then the controls must be deemed a failure. After each new law, new migrants have arrived... Controls may not have reduced the numbers settling, but if their point was in fact to guide public opinion, to show that something “tough” was being done, they have been a success.²¹

While the overall numbers of migrants to Britain may have remained rather steady, particularly since Britain joined the European Economic Community in the year that the Immigration Act 1971 came into effect, the demographics of those entering Britain has changed dramatically, with labour migration from the Commonwealth substituted for labour migration from Europe and most migration from developing nations coming from family reconciliation and refugee intake. The practical result of the consensus that immigration control is necessary for “good race relations” has been the increasingly restrictive legislation introduced to prevent non-white immigration into Britain.

The anxiety of control evasion: “Bogus” asylum seekers in the 1990s

With the introduction of these controls on immigration and narrowing of the categories of those who can enter Britain, a major part of the discourse on immigration has been in the definition of who is “desirable” and who is “undesirable”, and from this definition, the discourse has also reflected an anxiety that people were falsely claiming to be part of those who were categorised as “desirable”. As soon as immigration controls were introduced in the early 1960s, there was a widespread anxiety that migrants were evading control, by by-passing the control process altogether, by using false documents or by making false claims about the nature of their entry into Britain.

The criminalisation of irregular migration continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as more dependents sought family reconciliation with those who had entered before the introduction of the Immigration Act 1971. However there was a shift in the discourse in the late 1980s and early 1990s to identify a new form of “bogus” migrant that was seen as a

growing threat. From the late 1980s onwards, the number of refugees seeking asylum in Britain rose dramatically. The history of Britain as a port of asylum stretches back to the French Huguenots and prior to the 1980s, as Robin Cohen has noted, “[i]t is often asserted and widely believed that Britain has an exemplary record of offering hospitality to those fleeing from political and religious persecution”.²² There was a sharp distinction between the treatment of refugees from Europe and those from Africa and Asia, as the treatment of East African Asians fleeing Kenya, Uganda and Malawi in the late 1960s and early 1970s has demonstrated. There also seemed to be a preference for those fleeing Communist regimes, such as defectors from the Eastern Bloc, who also came in small and “manageable” numbers. As the Cold War ended and “democracy”, and its companion market capitalism, spread across the globe, there was a belief that refugees escaping political persecution would decrease. But the opposite occurred as war, conflict and political upheaval surfaced throughout the world.

Britain’s refugee intake in the 1980s was fairly consistent and despite a peak of approximately 9,900 applicants for asylum in 1980, the decade saw the number of applications steady at around 4,000 per year in most years.²³ This increased significantly to 44,840 in 1990, which then fluctuated between 22,370 in 1993 and 80,315 in 2000, before reaching a peak 84,130 in 2002, then decreasing considerably to 23,430 in 2007, although the number of successful applications has been drastically lower.²⁴ Britain is a signatory of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which categorised a refugee as any person who:

owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.²⁵

However this definition is limited, as there are numerous reasons for persecution not included in this definition, for which people flee their homeland and seek asylum, such as persecution on the grounds of gender or sexuality, as well as other reasons, such as fleeing war zones, natural (or manmade) disasters and abject poverty. As Frances Webber wrote in 1991, at the beginning of the massive influx of refugees into Britain:

The Convention's definition of refugee is very narrow, covering only those fleeing because of a "well-founded fear of persecution"... Western governments have consistently rejected calls from refugee organisations to extend the definition of "refugee" in the Convention to include victims of war, civil war, natural disaster or serious disturbance... Even if the criteria were applied with care and generosity (which they are not), they would exclude those who have lost their family or home through war or civil war...; who have lost their home and their livelihood through forced resettlement... or the creation of military buffer zones.²⁶

The result, Webber predicted, was that "[t]he number of people who, having not qualified under the strict definition of refugees... is to be severely reduced".²⁷ The last two decades have shown Webber's predictions to be correct as the limited scope of the official definition of a "refugee" has seen many within the Government, the immigration control system and the popular press view many people escaping immense hardships in their own countries as "bogus" asylum seekers with no genuine claim to remain in Britain.

Also included within the Convention is the internationally recognised (and moral) obligation of the host nation to provide legal and welfare assistance to refugees that seek asylum within their nation. This has further fuelled the suspicion that many of the people who are seeking asylum in Britain are "bogus", who fall outside the UN Convention definition of a "refugee" and actually are "economic migrants". Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the dichotomy between the "genuine" refugee and the "bogus" asylum seeker has been a prominent discourse in Britain. As Robert Winder has written:

[P]ublic opinion regarded the migrants as a mere pest. The new term "asylum-seeker" rapidly acquired a sarcastic prefix: "bogus". The British public came to believe that all migrants were false: none had a right to be here; all were helping themselves at our expense. There was sharp political pressure on the government to get tough.²⁸

The tabloid press, particularly the *Daily Mail* and *The Sun*, ran numerous articles on how "bogus" asylum seekers were abusing the system, who were falsely presenting themselves as refugees, but were actually "economic migrants". A number of scholars have documented the portrayal of refugees as "bogus" asylum seekers by the tabloid press and how this populist anxiety over the issue of asylum in Britain was appropriated by the Government and developed into official policy. A succinct example of the negative portrayal of refugees from the mid-1990s,

as the number of people seeking asylum in Britain rose, is from the *Daily Mail* and cited by Liza Schuster and John Solomos:

The easiest way to clamber on board the Great British Gravy Train is to enter the country on a visitor’s visa or slip in illegally. Then if you’re caught, just claim political asylum.²⁹

This negative portrayal of refugees as “bogus” asylum seekers and illegal “economic migrants” seeped into Parliamentary discourse and the Conservatives, who were in power as the influx of refugees increased, responded to this anxiety, similar to the discourse surrounding Commonwealth migration in the 1960s-70s, by declaring that “something” had to be done to prevent “bogus” migrants seeking asylum. Michael Howard, Home Secretary from 1993 to 1997, repeating the consensus that “fair but firm and effective immigration control is a necessary condition” for “preserving good race relations in this country”, stated:

For far too many people across the world, this country is far too attractive a destination for bogus asylum seekers and other illegal immigrants. The reason is simple: it is far easier to obtain access to jobs and benefits here than almost anywhere else. That is the problem that these measures are intended to remedy.³⁰

The measures introduced by the Conservatives were legislation, the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993 and the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, which “applied harsh new measures to asylum seekers, designed to reduce the numbers arriving in Britain”.³¹ This focus on “bogus” refugees dominated the debates on the 1993 and 1996 Acts in Parliament, with Emily Fletcher calculating that in Parliamentary debates on the 1993 Act, the word “bogus” was used 53 times and 122 times in the debate on the 1996 Act.³²

The anxiety continues: New Labour and asylum seekers

In May 1997, Tony Blair’s Labour Government came to power under the banner of “New Labour, New Life for Britain” and similar to Wilson’s election in 1964 and 1974, many believed that a Labour Government would design a more “humane” immigration policy. As Schuster and Solomos wrote, “[t]he election of a Labour government... led to expectations of an asylum policy more concerned with social justice than narrow national interest”.³³ However this was not to be the case. Although New Labour may have softened the language utilised by the Conservatives

(Fletcher notes that the word “bogus” was only used 19 times in Parliamentary debates on asylum between 1997 and 1999)³⁴ and spoke of “fairness” and “social justice” in immigration control policy, New Labour still focused heavily upon distinguishing between “genuine” (and deserving) refugees and “bogus” (and undeserving) asylum seekers. Labour’s 1998 White Paper, *Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum*, stated that “[t]he Government is committed to protecting genuine refugees... But there is no doubt that large numbers of economic migrants are abusing the system by claiming asylum”.³⁵ The Government promised to assist “genuine” refugees, but emphasised that “new arrangements are needed... which minimise the attractions of the UK to economic migrants”.³⁶ The policy changes outlined in this White Paper formed the basis of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1999, which strengthened the Acts introduced by the Conservatives during the mid-1990s and continued the bi-partisan dichotomy between the “bogus” and “undeserving” asylum seekers and the “deserving” refugees.³⁷

Many critics saw the Labour Government’s actions as a renunciation of its commitment to social justice and pandering to popular racism.³⁸ However the architects of New Labour, such as Tony Blair and Jack Straw, had conceded the ground to the Conservatives on the need to detect and deter “bogus” asylum seekers long before the introduction of the 1999 Act. In 1995, Blair declared, “We oppose bogus [asylum] applications and fraud and we recognise the need for immigration controls”, and a few months later, Straw admitted, “No one doubts the need to tackle the problem of bogus asylum seekers”.³⁹

Since 1999, Labour has introduced several additional pieces of legislation to further restrict the amount of migrants seeking asylum and refugee status in Britain. This has been accompanied by a relentless campaign in the popular press, the tabloids in particular,⁴⁰ to further demonise and criminalize refugees seeking asylum. It cannot be said that the Government and the press are working together to promote stricter policies regarding asylum seekers, but the discourse has seen the negative portrayals of refugees echoed by both sections, a “feedback loop” of moral panic⁴¹ that has seen policy decisions and public/media responses seek ever increasing restrictions upon potential refugees. As Tony Kushner wrote in 2003:

In Britain at the start of the twenty-first century, the government, state, media and public have intertwined in a mutually reinforcing and reassuring process to problematize and often stigmatise asylum-seekers. It is through this combination of anti-asylum sentiment finding legitimacy from the top

down, alongside the sustenance provided by the daily press campaign and the encouragement of ordinary people from the bottom up, that enabled a poll carried out in February 2003 for *The Times* to suggest that the number of asylum-seekers was “the most serious problem in Britain at present”.⁴²

Numerous studies have been conducted over the last decade, which have demonstrated that the popular press has routinely portrayed asylum seekers as undesirable, undeserving and deceitful “economic migrants” and that the discourse on refugees and asylum in Britain has been skewed towards negative stereotypes. A 2000/01 report by Oxfam’s UK Poverty Programme in Scotland found that coverage of refugee and asylum issues in the Scottish press was “characterised by negative imagery, hostility towards asylum seekers, and a ‘culture of disbelief’”, with 44 percent of 253 articles classified by the study as “negative”.⁴³ The report found that the press had created a “climate of fear” through the “use of unsubstantiated claims about the numbers of people claiming asylum in the UK, their motives, and alleged anti-social behaviour among asylum groups”,⁴⁴ which had a serious impact on the Government’s policy towards refugees. Tony Kushner noted that over a six month period, ending in March 2003, an electronic search using Lexis-Nexus yielded over 400 articles in the *Daily Mail* on asylum seekers, who “relentlessly reminded its readers” that asylum seekers were “swamping” Britain.⁴⁵ On the subject of this supposed “swamping” of Britain (a phrase that echoes Thatcher’s infamous 1978 statement), a 2004 study by the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) detailed the negative language repeatedly used to describe asylum seekers and refugees in the popular press:

“scrounger, sponger, fraudster, robbing the system”, “burden/strain on resources”, “illegal working, cheap labour, cash in hand, black economy”, “criminal (unspecified or non-violent)”, “criminal violent”, “arrested, jailed, guilty”, “mob, horde, riot, rampage, disorder”, “a threat, a worry, to be feared (terror, but not terrorism)”.⁴⁶

These depictions of refugees and asylum seekers as undesirable, criminal and potentially dangerous, the report found, “imply that Britain is under attack from migrants, particularly asylum seekers and refugees”.⁴⁷ The report asserted that an outcome of this negative press reportage is the “potential to give rise to extreme feelings of fear and hostility” and an “increase [in] the likelihood of harassment of asylum seekers and refugees”.⁴⁸

The ever-tightening restrictions on asylum seekers in Government policy and the recent electoral “victories” of the British National Party seem to vindicate these 2004 predictions by the ICAR. The discourse on refugees and asylum seekers has been overtly defined by the negative stereotypes of the popular press and reinforced by both major parties, as well as several extra-parliamentary groups and minor political parties on the right. For refugee advocates and anti-racist activists, the discourse seems irrevocably skewed. In their current “Just.Fair” campaign for an “end to the unjust and unfair treatment of refugees”, the Refugee Council has declared:

The asylum debate has become so distorted that the right to asylum in the UK is now under threat. Increasingly harsh government policy is eroding the protection we offer to those in need. British politicians are even talking about withdrawing from the 1951 Refugee Convention altogether.⁴⁹

And this debate seems set to continue. In his speech to the Royal Society of Arts, the Home Secretary spoke of the “reasonable expectations of the moderate majority” who “accept that offering asylum to those who face persecution in their own land is part of our Island story”, but Johnson also emphasised that this “moderate majority” also “want to be confident that those who have no right to be here”, such as “failed asylum seekers”, are “identified and speedily removed”.⁵⁰ The language may have softened, even in comparison with the language of former New Labour Home Secretaries Jack Straw and David Blunkett, but the practical outcomes of this discourse remain—an immigration control policy that puts enormous scrutiny upon potential refugees and asylum seekers at the expense of international and moral obligations.

The spectre of Europe is haunting Britain

While most migration from developing nations is in the form of refugees, this number is outweighed by people entering, either short-term or long-term, from the European Economic Area (EEA) to work, reside or settle in Britain. Since Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, the free movement of people within the borders of the EEC (and then the European Union) has meant that Britain has experienced significantly more numbers of migrants from Europe than from the Commonwealth and other nations, whose numbers were cut dramatically by the introduction of the Immigration Act 1971. Although opposition to Britain joining the European Communities has been widespread, but diffuse, since the early 1970s, opposition to migration from within Europe

was only a minor feature in the discourse on immigration in Britain until the 1990s. The most reasonable explanation for this is because there was free movement within the EEC’s borders, labour migration was not permanent and numbers seemed to rise and fall in line with changes in the economic landscape. But there is also the possibility that objections to European migration were muted because most migrants within the EEC were “white”. The collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-1991 and the enlargement of the European Union have shifted the discourse on European migration in Britain. A substantial part of the discourse nowadays is a concern over migrants from Eastern Europe to Britain, replicating fears expressed over previous waves of migrants to Britain—that Eastern Europeans, particularly Polish migrants, are taking jobs away from British people and that others, particularly Romanians, Bulgarians and Albanians, are involved in crime in Britain, from petty offences to transnational organised crime. These objections to migration from Eastern Europe are usually, but not always, part of a wider objection to the European Union and the push for Britain to leave the EU. As mentioned above, “Euroscepticism” is a diffuse phenomenon in British politics and is expressed by many on the right and the left, for different reasons, and it is important to note that anti-European immigration sentiment is not inherent to anti-EU arguments, although it is a prevalent issue raised within the discourse.

In 1985, the Schengen Agreement was first signed by member countries of the EEC to discard the operation of border control between these countries, which has expanded within the EU to twenty-five countries. Britain, under Margaret Thatcher’s Premiership, refused to join the Schengen Area, with Thatcher stating in 1988:

Of course, we want to make it easier for goods to pass through frontiers. Of course, we must make it easier for people to travel through the Community. But it is a matter of plain common sense that we cannot totally abolish frontier controls if we are also to protect our citizens from crime and stop the movement of drugs, of terrorists and of illegal immigrants.⁵¹

Britain, along with Ireland, is not obliged to join the Schengen Area, but accepts the free movement of people within the EU. However since the end of the Cold War and a major expansion of the EU in 2004, many Britons have expressed concern over immigration from Eastern Europe, largely for the reasons listed by Thatcher in 1988.

One of the most prominent national groups to migrate to Britain since the enlargement of the EU is the Poles. Although Polish migration has come in several waves, including a major influx of Poles after the Second

World War, the wave of Polish migrants entering since 2004 has been portrayed by many, including the tabloid press, as disproportionate to previous migration patterns, even though this argument, used against Afro-Caribbean and Asian migration in the post-war era, is nothing new. In the *Daily Mail* in 2006, Fiona Barton described Southampton as the “home to the highest density of Poles outside London” and declared that it was “indisputable” that the city was “experiencing the biggest influx of foreigners in its history”,⁵² although the same argument has been used to describe Jewish, Afro-Caribbean and Asian migrants in the past—that this wave of Poles was somehow different than others. In Barton’s piece, titled “The New Britons”, she asserted:

I feel like a foreigner, but this is not Warsaw, Krakow [sic] or Gdansk. I am in Southampton, an English city where one in ten of the 220,000 population is now believed to be Polish.⁵³

The article included a statement by the Home Office about “no longer bothering to hunt hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants” in Britain, making an implicit link between Polish migrants and “illegal immigrants”, even though it is perfectly legal for Polish people to enter, work and reside in Britain. Polish migrants intending to work do have to register for their first twelve months, but Barton referred to a large number of Poles “living in the black economy”, who “are paid in cash”. This was the phenomenon of the “Polish plumber”, whose apparent tenacity, ready availability and economic competitiveness was seen as a threat to British jobs,⁵⁴ with Barton stating, “But while the middle classes have been full of praise, others claim the competition has meant British workers losing out”. Barton quotes local workers to amplify these feelings of anxiety towards Polish migrants, with a hardware shop owner saying, “it is very unusual to hear anyone speaking English. I think it is getting a bit out of hand” and a woman serving in a cake shop adding, “I like the Polish people but it is all too much”. Barton even quotes an older Polish migrant to make the distinction between the previous wave of migrants and the recent influx:

The old Polish people think the newcomers are drunks and cause trouble. Yes, they do drink and are a bit more visible. You see more of it *because there are so many of them*. (My emphasis)⁵⁵

Barton’s article is important because it demonstrates many of the conventions used in the reporting of immigration issues by the popular and tabloid press, but it is also significant because it is one of the articles raised in the dispute between the Federation of Poles in Great Britain

(ZPWB) and the *Daily Mail* investigated by Press Complaints Council (PCC) in 2008 over the alleged negative portrayal of Polish people by the tabloid newspaper. In February 2008, the Federation complained that over a two year period, Poles and other central European migrants had “experienced a relentless campaign from the *Daily Mail*”, which may have “not always been untrue”, but had “an ability to convey a negative political slant”.⁵⁶ The Federation listed 80 articles between May 2006 and February 2008, claiming that “barely 5 could be described as positive in content and in tone”.⁵⁷ Like the argument made by ICAR linking the negative portrayal of asylum seekers in the press and the harassment of refugees and asylum seekers by members of the public, the Federation also linked the tabloids’ portrayal of Polish migrants and violence towards Poles, resulting in “street abuse, fire-bombed homes and mob attacks”.⁵⁸ In early 2009, the Federation reported a “growing number of racist incidents in which Poles have been victims”, stating that during 2008, there was “at least a 20% increase in the number of such incidents reported in the British national and local media”, compared with 2007.⁵⁹ According to the PCC, the *Daily Mail* was “sorry that its coverage had upset the Federation” and “wished to emphasise that it was in no way anti-Polish”, and amended or removed some of the articles identified by the Federation.⁶⁰ Speaking to *The Guardian*, a *Daily Mail* spokesperson declared that the tabloid was “not in any way anti-Polish” and referred to Barton’s article as a “very balanced and fair assessment of the virtues of Polish immigrants”.⁶¹ However the “balanced” article by Barton still uses conventions of the tabloid press, which negatively portray Polish migrants and can contribute to hostility towards European migrants in Britain.

While Polish migrants may be the most recognised migrant group from Europe in Britain, other Eastern European national groups have also been identified by the popular press, politicians and others as having a potentially negative impact upon British society, particularly linking these Eastern Europeans with crime. Since the introduction of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 and the enlargement of the EU in 2004, many in Britain have viewed the “open borders” of the EU as unlocking the metaphorical floodgates of crime and disorder, brought into Britain by Eastern European migrants. Will Somerville has shown in his book, *Immigration under New Labour*, that as the EU expanded in early 2004, “the prospect of EU enlargement and unrestricted labour market access provoked a media frenzy” with *The Sun* and the *Daily Express* running the headlines “See You in May: Thousands of gipsies head for Britain” and “1.6 million gipsies ready to flood in” respectively.⁶²

Since then, the press, both the tabloids and the more respectable broadsheets, have often connected Eastern Europe migrants with a rise in crime. In November 2006, the *Daily Mail* claimed that “[a] tenth of all crime in some parts of Britain is now committed by eastern European immigrants”, specifying a “sharp rise in street violence, people-trafficking, prostitution, cash-machine thefts and fraud”.⁶³ Often the press stipulated that a particular national group have been responsible for various crimes, with headlines such as: “Bulgarian Women Gangs Bring Pickpocket Crisis” (*The Observer*); “Romanians Living in UK Carry Out 1,000 Crimes in Six Months” (*Daily Mail*); “Fagin Gangs: Romania Gangs Rounded Up” (*The Sun*); “Eighty Albanian Killers ‘Have Settled in Britain’” (*Daily Telegraph*).⁶⁴ This reporting has filtered into the Parliamentary discourse as well, with the former shadow Home Secretary David Davis enquiring on a number of occasions whether the Home Office had figures on the number of Eastern Europeans involved in serious and organised crime in Britain, declaring that “[o]rganised crime slips too easily across our borders”.⁶⁵ Despite this portrayal of Eastern European migration as responsible for a wave of criminality, a study by the Association of Chief Police Officers, released in April 2008, found that crime amongst these migrant groups were “in line with the rate of offending by the general population”.⁶⁶

The intertwining of anti-immigration politics and Euroscepticism

Criticism of unregulated Eastern European migration can be seen as part of a wider opposition to Britain’s role in the European Union, a trait which is shared by the Conservatives with many other Eurosceptic organisations and Eurosceptics in the British press. As Wiktor Moszczyński said, “Poles and other Central Europeans seem to be the whipping boys for the newspaper’s vehement hostility to Britain’s participation in the European Union”.⁶⁷ The most prominent and explicitly Eurosceptic party in Britain is the UK Independence Party (UKIP), who believe that Britain “should withdraw from European Union”, promoting “friendship and free trade”, but “not political union”.⁶⁸ In their 2009 European Parliament elections, UKIP gained 16.5 percent of the vote and thirteen seats,⁶⁹ heavily campaigning for withdrawal from the EU and limiting immigration from Europe. Their campaign document for the European Parliament elections, intertwining opposition to the EU with an anti-immigration position, declared:

Our membership of the European Union is already costing jobs in the UK. Major construction projects now hire many of their staff overseas, with British workers not even having the opportunity to apply...

The only people who should decide who can come to live, work and settle in Britain should be the British people themselves. We can only do this outside of the EU political union. The open-door immigration policy has been voted against by only one party—UKIP.⁷⁰

The 2009 European Parliament elections saw a swing by British voters, albeit a low voter turnout, to the right, with the explicitly Eurosceptic and anti-immigrationist UKIP and the British National Party (BNP) gaining votes and/or seats, and the Conservatives, with a more toned down rhetoric on Europe and immigration, winning a majority of British seats.⁷¹ However anti-EU politics are not always defined by the right, with the Labour Party until the era of New Labour traditionally opposing British involvement in the forerunners of the EU, and are not always linked to anti-immigrationist politics. The labour movement has also traditionally opposed British entry into Europe, viewing the EU and its predecessors as a capitalist super state that allows the flow of economic benefits into the hands of a supra-national ruling capitalist class and away from the working classes.

The 2009 European Parliament election also saw the creation of a new left-wing anti-EU party, the No2EU: Yes to Democracy party, which sought to promote withdrawal from the EU on less nationalist and xenophobic grounds, but did not make much ground against the Eurosceptic right. No2EU had originally emerged from a crisis in the British labour movement over the free movement of labour within the EU, with wildcat strikes breaking out across Britain in response to several companies employing non-union workers, primarily from Italy and Portugal. The aim of the strikes seemed to be quite varied, with a wider range of different organisations and interest groups intervening.⁷² Some saw the strike as a response to employers using non-union labour to drive down wages, while others focused on the supra-capitalist structures of the European Union. But the most controversial element of the strike was the slogan, “British jobs for British workers”, used by some involved in the strike. This slogan had been first used by the National Front and the British National Party, but had been revived by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in several speeches in 2007, including the TUC Annual Conference and the Labour Party Conference.⁷³ The slogan was evoked by some rank-and-file striking workers,⁷⁴ which drew fierce media attention to the strike and divided the labour movement over how to support the strike. The

reluctance to explicitly support or condemn the strikers using the slogan can be seen in the comments from the trade unions involved. Derek Simpson, a joint leader of Unite, asserted that “[n]o European worker should be barred from applying for a British job and absolutely no British worker should be barred from applying for a British job”, while General Secretary of the GMB, Paul Kenny said, “You simply cannot say that only Italians can apply for jobs”.⁷⁵ TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber stated:

Unions are clear that the anger should be directed at employers, not the Italian workers. No doubt some of the more distasteful elements in our towns and cities will try to use the fears of workers to stir up hatred and xenophobia.

But I am confident that union members will direct their anger at the employers who have caused this dispute with their apparent attempt to undercut the wages, conditions and union representation of existing staff.⁷⁶

Some “distasteful elements”, such as the BNP, tried to make political capital out of the strikes, using the slogan “British jobs for British workers” in a council by-election in the ward of Newton Hyde in Greater Manchester. In May 2008, the BNP had polled 846 votes in the ward, compared to Labour’s vote of 1,124, and this gap of only 278 votes was expected to close as the economic downturn worsened and the BNP campaigned on the “British jobs” slogan.⁷⁷ But this did not happen as the BNP vote increased marginally to 889 votes, but Labour’s majority soared to 1,379 votes.⁷⁸ James Purnell, Labour MP for Stalybridge and Hyde, which encompasses the Newton Hyde ward, said, “I think it’s a victory for hope and solidarity over people who want to bring division and hatred”.⁷⁹ However four months later, the BNP had a surprising result in the European Parliament elections, winning two MEP seats for former National Front members Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons, in the North West and Yorkshire, exploiting populist anxiety over immigration and the European Union. On the other hand, No2EU only managed to gain around 1 percent of the vote across Britain.⁸⁰ What the wildcat strikes and the No2EU campaign demonstrated was that it is difficult to disentangle anti-EU politics from nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric and left-wing, and generally anti-racist, opposition to the EU is a minor part of the discourse, unfortunately trumped by the right, who continue to dominate the discourses on immigration and the European Union.

Immigration and integration

While the discourse on immigration in Britain has increasingly focused on asylum seekers and migration from Eastern Europe, there has still been major trepidation in many areas of British society over the effects of Afro-Caribbean and Asian migration, especially concerning the children of migrants and the creation of ethnic minority communities. As these communities have become more established, a populist and racist anxiety about ethnic minorities and multiple discourses on the “threat” of multiculturalism have emerged. These discourses have repeatedly voiced anxieties revolving around the themes of integration (and migrants’ apparent failure to do so), segregation, threats to the “British way of life” and the “clash of civilisations”.

As noted earlier in the chapter, since the 1960s there has been a growing consensus that non-white immigration from the Commonwealth was a “problem” that required strict immigration control to limit numbers and an emphasis on integration and assimilation in the domestic sphere. The remedy pursued by Labour Governments from 1964 to 1970, then 1974 to 1979, was to enforce tight immigration control procedures, alongside the introduction of legislation to curb racial discrimination. With the Race Relations Act, it was possible to prosecute against the most overt forms of racial discrimination and harassment, but its connection to the strengthening of immigration control reflected the Government’s emphasis on migrants integrating into British society. The Labour Government believed that this process of integration would help “stamp out the evils of racialism”,⁸¹ but actually allowed the anti-immigrationists, inside the Conservative Party, as well as in extra-parliamentary organisations and in the popular press, to dictate the agenda towards further restrictions. The Powellite/Thatcherite anxieties over the “integration” of ethnic minorities in Britain and the establishment of ethnic communities from the descendents of the original Commonwealth migrants still loom large over the discourse of immigration and “race relations”, with multiculturalism portrayed as a divisive influence upon mainstream British society.

In recent years, two aspects of “multicultural” Britain have come increasingly under attack. The first aspect is directed at the Afro-Caribbean community, particularly young Afro-Caribbean males, linking them to certain types of criminal behaviour. As many scholars have shown, the stereotype of “black youth” equals “black crime”⁸² has existed since the 1970s, with Afro-Caribbean youth continually linked by the mainstream press, the police, the judiciary and the Government to various forms of street crime and “gang-related” activities. However in the last

five years, the “moral panic” over “knife crime” has exploded, with many people in the aforementioned institutions calling for a crackdown on this type of crime, with a particular focus on the Afro-Caribbean community.

The second aspect has largely arisen as part of the “War on Terror” that Western Governments have waged since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September, 2001, although many of the themes it uses existed long before. It is the demonisation of Muslim communities in Britain, their association by many to terrorism and the portrayal of a “clash of civilisations” between Islam and “Western values”. The last section of this chapter will explore these two developments in the discourse of immigration and “race” in contemporary Britain and how they have advanced under New Labour.

The supposed criminality of black youth and the phenomenon of “knife crime”

Over the last five years, there has been much discussion in the press, by the police, in Parliament and numerous community organisations about the phenomenon of “knife crime”. As Kiron Reid has written, this wave of “moral panic” about crime involving knives is “not something new” and that “incidents of this type have previously caused outrage, leading to demands for police action and the introduction of new legislation”, showing that similar concerns about youth and knives have been raised since the early 1960s.⁸³ Although the term “knife crime” is routinely used by the press and politicians, a study by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King’s College London has pointed out that the term is nebulous, stating it “is not always entirely clear what it actually is or what they actually mean when they use the term”, as it “potentially encompasses a very broad range of offences”.⁸⁴ An inquiry by the Home Affairs Committee acknowledged the difficulty in defining “knife crime”, despite its popular usage, and noted that in popular discourse, the term referred “primarily to stabbings but also the illegal carrying of knives by young people in a public place or on school premises”.⁸⁵

While a major theme in this discourse is an anxiety over youth, particularly from urban lower socio-economic areas, which ties into a wider phenomenon under New Labour of a fear of “chavs”, “hoodies” and ASBOs, there has also been a heavy focus on “knife crime” amongst young Afro-Caribbean males and questions raised over whether “knife crime” is synonymous with urban black culture. As Sunny Handal wrote in *The Guardian*, “there is a strong undertone of ‘What are we going [to] do about the black boys?’ to all this”.⁸⁶ In the Callaghan Memorial Speech in

Cardiff in April 2007, Tony Blair spoke about “knife and gun crime”, calling for tougher measures against “knife and gun gangs” and “an intensive police focus”, but declared “we won’t stop this by pretending it isn’t young black kids doing it”.⁸⁷ The *Daily Mail* reported this speech by Blair with the headline, “Face the Facts on Knife Crime, Blair Tells Black Families”, claiming that “Senior politicians have been reluctant to lay the blame at the door of black youngsters for fear of a backlash from race campaigners”.⁸⁸ Another article from July 2008 in the *Daily Mail* stated that “[b]lack youths are suspected of more than half of knife crime among children in the capital” and emphasised that “in the overwhelming majority of reported cases of knife crime involving young people, the victims are white”.⁸⁹

Most recently, columnist Rod Liddle wrote on his blog for the conservative magazine *The Spectator*:

The overwhelming majority of street crime, knife crime, gun crime, robbery and crimes of sexual violence in London is carried out by young men from the African-Caribbean community. Of course, in return, we have rap music, goat curry and a far more vibrant and diverse understanding of cultures which were once alien to us.⁹⁰

Liddle was criticised by many for this statement, with Dianne Abbott, a Labour MP, stating, “It is obviously statistically false to say that the ‘overwhelming majority’ of the crimes listed by Rod are committed by young black men”, and numerous bloggers have cited statistics from the Ministry of Justice to demonstrate that Liddle had made “unsupported wild claims”.⁹¹ Liddle refuted that there was “nothing remotely racist” in his blog and claimed that the blame for the crimes he mentioned, as well as the criticism he received, on multiculturalism—“the notion”, in his words, “that cultures, no matter how antithetical to the norm, or anti-social, should be allowed to develop unhindered, without criticism”.⁹² Other conservative commentators supported Liddle, with Antonia Senior writing in *The Times* that various forms of violent and street crime are “products of something rotten in the state of urban black culture”.⁹³ Both Liddle’s statement and the story published by the *Daily Mail* a year earlier show slippage between what statistics are available and what are unquantifiable categorisations, attempting to use official figures to “emphasise the amount of knife crime black people were responsible for”,⁹⁴ but this is not supported by the report released by the Ministry of Justice. According to the Ministry of Justice’s April 2009 report, in 2007-08, 43.5 per cent of offences dealt with by Youth Offending Teams as “violence against person” (where presumably “knife crime” would fit into) in London were

committed by people self-identifying as “white”, with people self-identifying as “black/black British” committing 34.7 percent and those self-identifying as “mixed” committing 8.6 per cent.⁹⁵

The discourse on “knife crime” also extended beyond associations with Afro-Caribbean youth and was linked by some to other forms of immigration, including refugees and migrants from Eastern Europe. Cambridgeshire Police Chief Julie Spence was quoted by the *Daily Mail* saying, “We have had the Iraqi Kurds who carry knives and the Poles and the Lithuanians who carry knives”.⁹⁶ David T.C. Davies, a Conservative MP, in a House of Commons debate on “knife crime” attributed the phenomenon to a lack of integration of immigrants, claiming:

[t]here is a problem when large groups of people who have come from a variety of racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds are all dumped into one particular area, cheek by jowl, without any attempt to integrate them.⁹⁷

However the association between “knife crime” and any ethnic group is false, with crimes considered to fall under the term more likely to be determined by location and socio-economic status. As the Home Affairs Committee asserted, “knife use is not linked to ethnicity but rather reflects the local demography”.⁹⁸ But the association between “knife crime” and ethnic minorities in Britain, especially Afro-Caribbean males, replicates a particularly resilient discourse that connects crime and anti-social behaviour to immigrant communities, which has occurred throughout the twentieth century. The focus on the supposed criminality of black youth has ebbed and flowed since the 1950s and a fractured relationship between Britain’s black communities and the State, shaped by episodes of racial harassment and mistrust on both sides, “stretches back to the beginnings of post-war settlement”,⁹⁹ with the alarm over “knife crime” only the latest incarnation of this discourse.

Islamophobia and the “clash of civilisations” thesis

Another discourse that prominently occupies the debate on multiculturalism in Britain is an anxiety over Muslims in Britain and the supposed conflict between Islam and “Western values”. This discourse has grown intensely since the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September, 2001 and the ensuing “War on Terror” enthusiastically adopted by Tony Blair’s Government. However this suspicion of Britain’s Muslim communities and the belief that Islam was an oppositional force to Western society did not suddenly emerge in the early 2000s and, as Scott

Poynting and Victoria Mason have shown, the discourse had been largely shaped by the “Rushdie affair” in 1989, when Muslims protested against Salman Rushdie’s book *The Satanic Verses* in Bradford.¹⁰⁰ Just as the inner city riots in 1980, 1981 and 1985 had caused some in the British Government and the press to question the impact of “allowing” Afro-Caribbean migration in the 1940s and 1950s, the “Rushdie Affair” led to a similar discourse on the effects of Asian migration, principally from Pakistan and Bangladesh, from the 1950s to the 1970s, which has continued to be part of the contemporary discourse. Lord Jenkins’ comment from the late 1980s that “in retrospect we might have been more cautious about allowing the creation in the 1950s of substantial Muslim communities here”¹⁰¹ could easily have been said by numerous politicians or columnists in the last decade.

While this particular discourse had been growing throughout the 1990s, it was several events in 2001 that saw the anxiety over British Muslims reach new heights. Between May and July 2001, several Northern towns and cities, including Oldham and Bradford, experienced confrontations (or “riots”) between primarily young Asian males, the police and fascist agitators. Then, in September 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States saw President George W. Bush pronounce a global “War on Terror”, with Britain emerging as a close ally of the US, assisting in the invasion of Afghanistan and domestically, implementing several new pieces of highly restrictive anti-terrorist legislation. The discourse of apprehension over Britain’s Muslim communities and their place in British society, expressed by politicians, the police, the press and other groupings, thus took on the language of war—that a conflict had erupted between mainstream British society and the Muslim population in Britain, heavily influenced by Samuel P. Huntington’s “clash of civilisations” thesis, “positioning East and West, Islam and Christianity, as diametrically opposed and irreconcilable”.¹⁰² Huntington had first developed his thesis in the aftermath of the Cold War, but it gained mainstream popularity after the attacks on 11 September, 2001. As Chris Allen has demonstrated, a wide range of media outlets in Britain took up the themes and terminology of Huntington, with a clear example being the headlines in the *Daily Telegraph* October 2001 that declared, “This War Is Not About Terror, It’s About Islam” and “In This War of Civilisations, the West Will Prevail”.¹⁰³

Proponents of this thesis have tended to portray the Muslim communities in Britain (and across the globe) as a monolithic bloc and depict Islam as an illiberal, anti-democratic, patriarchal, inhumane and backwards religion, which is incapable of moderation or compromise. This view of Islam, described by many as “Islamophobia”,¹⁰⁴ has permeated the

discourses on immigration, multiculturalism and the “War on Terror” in Britain, with views and language previously confined to the more right-wing sections of the Conservatives and other anti-immigration groups now adopted by many commentators in the mainstream. An example of this is how Robert Kilroy-Silk, a former Labour MP turned daytime television presenter turned Eurosceptic politician, appropriated the language of racist groups, such as the BNP, in his 2004 column in the *Sunday Express* where he characterised Arabs as “suicide bombers, limb-amputators, women-repressors”.¹⁰⁵

However this Islamophobia is not just expressed in such explicit and crude terms, with many respected (and traditionally liberal) individuals conveying anti-Muslim opinions, usually couched in articulate and reasoned terms. Numerous writers have asserted that the Muslim communities are dominated by “radical Islam”, which Nick Cohen has described as “inspired by religious fanaticism and Nazi conspiracy theory”,¹⁰⁶ and that Muslims in Britain are becoming more hostile to liberal democracy, with Martin Amis declaring that the “civil war” within Islam had been won by “radical Islam”.¹⁰⁷ These proponents view liberal democracy as under threat by “radical Islam”, which is deemed to be gaining ground in Britain, and that liberal democratic principles were being sacrificed by not criticising Islam. This argument is demonstrated by Polly Toynbee, a columnist for *The Guardian*, who wrote in 2004:

It is getting harder to argue against the hijab and the Koran’s edict that a woman’s place is one step behind. It is beginning to be racist for teachers or social workers to object to autocratic patriarchy and submission of women within many Muslim communities.¹⁰⁸

As Chris Allen has written, commentators at the “opposite end[s] of the political spectrum” have all made similar points about Islam and Muslims in Britain, with anti-Muslim racism (or Islamophobia) becoming increasingly commonplace.¹⁰⁹

In this discourse, certain objects and cultural practices have been portrayed as symbols of the disjuncture between British society and its Muslim population, with the most prominent being the debate over the “veil”. Previous discourses on immigration and “race relations” in Britain have sought to convey other objects and practices as symbols of immigrants’ opposition to mainstream British society, such as long-running objections to Sikhs wearing turbans in the workplace, with the various pieces of clothing worn by some Muslim women, the *hijab*, the *niqab* and the *burkha*, the latest incarnation of an enduring anti-immigrant discourse. Gholam Khiabany and Milly Williamson have argued that the

“Muslim veil is a long-standing topic in the British press... constructed as evidence of Muslim women’s victimhood and of Islam’s backward patriarchy”, but in recent years, it has also been viewed as “a symbol of a stubborn refusal to accept ‘our’ culture or embrace modernity; it is a sign of defiance and an image of menace”.¹¹⁰ Harriet Harman’s statement that “[t]he veil is an obstacle to women’s participation, on equal terms, in society”¹¹¹ has been echoed by numerous politicians, writers and others, who view the veil as incompatible with women’s rights in a liberal democratic society.

However with the “War on Terror”, the veil has also been regarded as a much more sinister symbol, a symbol of opposition to “the British way of life”, of separatism and of deviance—a symbol of potential terrorism. Jack Straw wrote in a column for the *Lancashire Telegraph* in 2006 that when speaking to a constituent wearing a veil, he “felt uncomfortable about talking to someone ‘face-to-face’ who I could not see”, declaring that the veil is “such a visible statement of separation and difference”.¹¹² Many of Straw’s New Labour colleagues, particularly Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, defended his statements and Straw was also supported by many columnists in the mainstream and tabloid press. Khiabany and Williamson have demonstrated that the tabloids, using the example of *The Sun*, have popularised the “idea of the veiled woman as a dangerous resistance figure” and anxieties over “security” after 9/11 have led to the belief that women wearing the veil are hindering anti-terrorist actions.¹¹³ The portrayal of the veil as a threat to national security is highlighted by Khiabany and Williamson when they quote Trevor Kavanagh, who posed the question in his column for *The Sun*: “What is the difference between a burka and a balaclava? Is the veil a garment or a veiled threat?”¹¹⁴ And the effect that this suspicion was, as Gary Younge wrote recently, that “Muslim women passed, in the public imagination, from being actually among the group most likely to be racially attacked to ostensibly being a primary cause of social strife”.¹¹⁵

Just as the negative portrayal of refugees and asylum seekers has resulted in increasingly restrictive policies for those seeking asylum in Britain, the demonisation of Muslims in Britain (and of Islam in general) has had significant practical implications. In the “War on Terror”, the Islamophobic discourse has been used to garner support for the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and their subsequent occupation. Richard Seymour has demonstrated that this has included a prominent argument put forward on the basis of liberal democratic principles by a multitude of British left-liberals, including Christopher Hitchens, Nick Cohen, David Aaronovitch and Norman Geras, which Seymour has described as “the pro-war left”.¹¹⁶

This “pro-war left” saw Islam, as supposedly practised in Iraq and Afghanistan (as well as other countries, such as Iran, Palestine and Lebanon), as a form of political extremism and totalitarianism, akin to fascism or Stalinism and the “War on Terror” was portrayed, Seymour has pointed out, as “an enlightened war of reason against entrenched superstition”.¹¹⁷ This view of the “War on Terror” as an act of liberation from “political Islam” by numerous left-liberals neatly dovetails with traditional right-wing and neo-conservative Islamophobic arguments, which have multiplied over the last decade.

Domestically, the anxiety over Islam can be seen in how anti-terrorism laws, introduced in numerous Acts over the last decade, have been applied. The association by many in the Government, the police, other institutions of the State and the press of Muslims with the potential for terrorism has led to increasingly tougher scrutiny by the State on Britain’s Muslim communities, as well as other ethnic minorities. *The Guardian* reported in April 2009 that from 2006-07 to 2007-08 the amount of stop and searches conducted for counter-terrorism purposes rose dramatically from 37, 197 to 117,278, with the number of Afro-Caribbean people stopped rising by 322 percent and the number of Asian people stopped rising by 277 percent.¹¹⁸ As well as increasing pressure on Muslims in Britain implemented by the institutions of the State, the normalisation of Islamophobic sentiment expressed by many has resulted in attacks on Muslims and other ethnic minorities in Britain. In October 2007, *The Independent* reported that attacks on ethnic minorities had “soared” over the last few years, with a 12 percent rise in 2005-06 with 41,000 attacks, and declared that “[t]he statistics confirm anecdotal evidence that ethnic minorities have been increasingly targeted in recent years, with the Muslim community under particular pressure since the September 11 attacks six years ago.”¹¹⁹

When Nick Griffin, leader of the far right British National Party, was to appear on BBC’s *Question Time* in October 2009, on a panel that included Jack Straw, despite Labour’s long-standing policy of ‘no platform’ for fascists, Gary Younge wrote for *The Guardian Online*, “[t]omorrow night the conversation that Straw started [the call for Muslim women to remove their veils] will follow its logical, lamentable path as he takes his seat alongside the British National Party leader, Nick Griffin, on the panel of *Question Time*”.¹²⁰ For Younge, the political space for the British National Party to win two seats at the European Parliament elections was opened up by New Labour’s “race-baiting rhetoric”¹²¹ on terrorism, social cohesion and immigration, which have been outlined in this chapter. However this chapter has tried to demonstrate that the

discourses which have existed under New Labour were largely established before 1997. Just as New Labour used a Thatcherite platform for many of its socio-economic policies, the Thatcherite consensus on immigration and “race” formed the base for Tony Blair’s Government to uphold popular anxieties about “bogus” asylum seekers, immigration numbers and multiculturalism’s threat to “the British way of life”. And with New Labour continuing to promulgate negative discourses on immigration and “race relations” as the norm, it allowed others, in Parliament, in the press and in extra-parliamentary groups, to advocate more extreme, and often more explicitly racist, positions. Younge is mostly correct is when he asserted that “New Labour’s politics enabled the BNP”,¹²² but it chiefly embraced discourses that had been forged since the 1960s, that the migrants were ‘the problem’ and non-white migration was something that needed to be “managed”. Since the 1960s, when Labour has been in opposition, it has criticised Conservative immigration policies and condemned the Tories’ pandering to racism, promising to repeal these policies when in power, but for the most part, they have allowed these restrictions to continue, strengthened the controls themselves and have largely maintained the negative discourses on immigration and “race”. As Sarah Spencer wrote in 2007, “Labour failed to shift the debate into more constructive territory in the early years when it had the greatest chance to succeed. When Blair left office, there was still no sign that it seriously intended to try”.¹²³

Postscript

This chapter was written in the final months of Gordon Brown’s Labour Government. The trends in the discourses on “race” and immigration identified in the chapter were present in the lead up to the General Election in May 2010 and continue under the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition. After years of Labour trying to appear tough on immigration, part of the Conservatives’ campaign was to portray immigration under Labour as “open door”, with the Tories vowing to cap immigration after the election. On the other hand, the reporting of Gordon Brown’s description of a Northern pensioner as “a bigot” after she questioned him about Eastern European migration further muddied the discourse—Conservative supporters portrayed this as a denunciation of any questioning of immigration as racist by the “PC Brigade”, while some Labour supporters saw this as this Labour Party ignoring working class concerns about immigration. The election campaigns highlighted the same

discourse that had existed over the last two decades, that the consensus remained that “something” needed to be done about immigration.

Alongside this discourse amongst the major parties, there has also been a large amount of concern over the prominence of the far right. The BNP seemed on the verge of obtaining a seat in the House of Commons after their 2009 European Election wins, while the English Defence League (EDL) emerged as an extra-parliamentary, street-based movement mobilising people (particularly young men) who were apparently “concerned” about “Islamic fundamentalism”. Similar to the strategies taken up by the National Front, the British Movement and the BNP in the past, the BNP and the EDL seemed to be undertaking a “twin track” strategy—the BNP representing a respectable side to racist politics, while the EDL engaged in street violence, harassment and intimidation, although the two organisations deny any connections. However the BNP’s vote collapsed at the General Election and corresponding local elections, losing most of their council seats and their overall vote faltering. Akin to the 1979 defeat of the National Front, anti-fascist activists and other commentators are wondering whether this will mean that disaffected BNP activists will move towards the street “politics” of the EDL.

In the aftermath of the election, the Con/Lib Dem coalition have vowed to cap immigration from outside the EU, while two of the MPs vying for leadership of the Labour Party have blamed the Labour defeat partially on Labour “being soft” and “out of touch” on the issue of immigration. Despite the official end of New Labour, the discourses on “race” and immigration that has existed since the 1990s looks set to continue.

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Jo Turney has noted that similar discourses have arisen over the veil as another “moral panic” under New Labour, the “hoodie”. In a paper delivered in 2008, Turney said, “In contemporary society, where the threat of terrorism pervades the social climate, such forms of dress become potent symbols of a collective fear”. Jo Turney, “As Seen on CCTV: Anti-Social Knitting and the Horror of the ‘Hoodie’”, Unpublished paper presented at the 2008 Social History Society Annual Conference, Rotterdam, April 2008. I would like to thank Dr Turney for providing me with a copy of her paper and her permission to quote from it in this chapter.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Donathan Brown is a visiting fellow in the department of Speech Communication at Ithaca College. His research interests rest at the intersection of race, rhetoric and public policy, particularly pertaining to African Americans and Latinos.

Françoise Coste, after devoting her PhD to the Republican Party in New York State, became a lecturer in American Studies at the University of Toulouse, France. She has written a textbook on the American presidency as well as many articles about contemporary American politics, paying close attention to the debate over women's rights and the modern techniques of political communication.

Brian J. Glenn is a Research Fellow at the Insurance Law Center, University of Connecticut School of Law and teaches in the Department of Government, Suffolk University. His work has earned awards from the New England Political Science Association, the Law & Society Association, and the American Risk & Insurance Association.

Lori Maguire is Professor of British and American Studies at the University of Paris VIII. She received her doctorate in Modern History at St. Antony's College, Oxford. Her research interests include British and American foreign policy, media studies and contemporary political history. She is the author of a number of books and articles and edited the companion volume to this book, *Foreign Policy Discourse in the United Kingdom and the United States in the "New World Order"* (Cambridge Scholars, 2009)

Bernard Offerle is Associate Professor at the University of Paris Ouest, France. He lectures on political, economic and social issues in the UK. His research interests include UK government economic policy and the British economic press. His latest publications deal with the UK government's efforts to encourage innovation and its support to British SMEs.

David Seawright is a Senior Lecturer in British Politics in the School of Politics and International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Leeds. He has published widely in the area of Political Parties and is the author of *The British Conservative Party and One Nation Politics* (2010); *An Important Matter of Principle* (1999), about the post war decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and is co-editor of *Britain For and Against Europe* (1998), on the British parties' attitudes to the European Union.

Evan Smith is a Research Assistant with the School of Law/Department of History at Flinders University in South Australia. He is currently conducting research with Dr Marinella Marmo on racial and sexual discrimination in British immigration control since the 1960s.

Eveline Thevenard is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne. Her research deals with American social welfare policy, with a special focus on health care reform. She is the author of *Etat et Protection Sociale aux Etats-Unis* (Ellipses 2002) as well as numerous articles on the American health care system (*Revue Française d'Etudes Américaines*, l'Harmattan, *Nuevo Mundo*).

Aidan Troy, a Catholic priest of the Passionist Congregation, was born in Ireland in 1945. He was twice elected Provincial Superior in Ireland (1980-1986) and to the General Council of the Passionists in Rome (1994-2000). A philosophy graduate of NUI, Dublin (1967) and a theology graduate from Clonliffe College, Dublin (1971), he holds a Masters Degree in Pastoral Ministry from University of San Francisco (1988). In 2001 he obtained a Licentiate in Theology from the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, Rome. He is pastor of the Mission Anglophone, Paris since October, 2008.

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