

- ISSUE 1 - SPRING 2005 -

SPECTRUM

The Future of Economics and Politics

- ISSUE 1 - SPRING 2005 -

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From the Editor

Welcome to the first edition of 'Spectrum'. In this, the school's only Politics and Economics magazine, we hope to enlighten readers of all age groups on theories and current issues in both subjects. Although these subjects are only available for study in the Eighth Form, the articles in this magazine should appeal to anyone who is concerned about current affairs in all parts of the world. In this edition there are articles on Lebanon and Bhutan, as well as thoughts on the (probable) election happening at home this May.

The reason for the name 'Spectrum' is that within the magazine we hope to involve a full range of ideas from the political and economic spectrum. Whether you are a lover of Keynesian Economics or are passionate about monetarism, whether you want another Blair government or cannot wait to see the back of him, we want to hear your views, and this magazine gives you the chance to make them heard.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to formally apologise for the advertising campaign that 'Spectrum' undertook at the start of this week. Our intention was never to hurt anyone, and if that has happened we are genuinely sorry.

Watch Out America!

(We've got Gross National Happiness)

If by some chance you find yourself lost in a town that is surrounded by uncultivated fields and muddy roads, with little infrastructure (except the king's palace) and where nearly the entire population are farmers, you may just be in Thimpu. Welcome to the capital and commercial centre of "The Kingdom of Bhutan"; considered by some (but not many) to be the happiest place in the world.

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small landlocked country that is wedged between China and India. It has a total population of between 900,000 and 2,500,000 (it seems nobody really knows) and is about 47,000 Square kilometres (roughly the size of Switzerland). In the region it is infamous

able to read and write. Its tourist industry is one of the few prolific parts of the economy, attracting over 7,000 tourists every year. However the government seems to dislike foreign nationals and imposes unjustifiably high taxes that lead to visiting costs of over \$200 a day. With such high fees, and increasing government scrutiny it may be unlikely that tourism will be successful in the future. So how can such a place be considered the happiest country in the world?

One answer to this is its stupefying growth rate of 7.7% (2004) per annum (after inflation). Many argue that at this rate of growth all the population (especially the poor) should start to see improvements in

Another answer is their lack of foreign relations. After signing the "Treaty of Friends" in 1947, Bhutan agreed to close all of its diplomatic relations with other countries (although it didn't really have that many in the first place) and only keep direct relations with India. However the only reason the treaty was signed was to stop India from invading (the British occupation of Bhutan ended in the same year). On the other hand such a treaty was advisable for a country that had been invaded about 10 times during its existence, and such a treaty ensured that it could live in "happiness" without fear of international "meddling" by super-powers such as the USA. Up till today India has been a useful ally, especially as it has given large quantities of unilateral aid (it provides 80% of the government's budget).

Gross National Happiness (GNH) however stands as the government's answer to above question. GNH was originally

"Economic growth alone DOES NOT bring contentment"

for its culture and heritage, and compared with some countries (e.g Myanmar) for its good governance. It is also a country full of natural resources that has export / import partners situated round the world, from Italy to Bangladesh. However despite all this it remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world.

Bhutan has a GDP of about \$2.7 Billion dollars (about the same as Tesco's yearly turnover), and the vast majority of the population continues to live on subsistence farming (80% +), a traditional sign of poverty. Bhutan has often aptly been considered in a state of "globalisation limbo" as it struggles to create the necessary balance between retaining its traditional practices and ways of life and its impending transition to capitalism. Unfortunately (for the population), the leaders of the country often believe that their traditions and antiquated ways of life are more important than the state of the economy. The statistics sadly don't hide the economy's failure, as it has around 20% of the population living below the poverty line, and an average life expectancy of only 53, as well as only 28% of women being

their quality of life and may no longer have to eat emadatse (chilli pepper and cheese stew), the national dish. This view is chosen by only a minority of Bhutanese people as it seems to promote capitalism as a real source of happiness. However increased growth of up to 8.0% may be seen in 2005 with increased exports and higher productivity.

introduced in the 1970's by Bhutan's fourth and present king, HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuk. Although King Wanchuk was a moderniser, much like his father, he created the principle of GNH on the following simple (and obvious) statement: Economic growth alone does not bring contentment. As Bhutan was still under-developed in the 1970s such an idea was quickly adopted by





Happiest Place in the World?

the government as an excuse for a lack of economic success. Unfortunately such a concept has been abused by the government to pass many controversial policies in the recent past. In essence the GNH was created for one purpose, to attempt to legitimise Bhutan's prioritising of the preservation of traditions (or outdated), over globalisation.

GNH is split into four major pillars. The first is the necessity of a pristine environment. This is a commendable idea, especially since over 60% of Bhutan is under tree cover. In a country with such a primitive economy there is an increased pressure on farmers to fell trees, so that they can sell the timber and have room to farm. New government initiatives have been fairly successful and currently the tree cover has risen from 64% to 72% in the past decade.

The next pillar is summarised as competent and transparent governance. Fortunately, Bhutan's central administration has vastly improved during past 20 years. Bhutan may still be a monarchy, but compared with its neighbours the level of corruption within the government is paltry and the King prefers to take a more passive rule. Instead the government has taken on the day to day running of the country. The National assembly (their version of parliament) is mostly voted by the people of Bhutan's 18 different districts at a village level. One hundred and five seats are democratically elected while the monarch nominates only

35 and 10 represent the official religions. The prime-minister is elected every three years by the national assembly, although it is rumoured that the King has a large influence in choosing a suitable PM. Overall however the government works in a fairly democratic manner and normally tries to represent the people of Bhutan.

The last two pillars (economic growth and sustaining heritage respectively), lead back to the originally problem of what is more important. Although HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuk meant to say that preserving culture will lead to more happiness than pure economic growth, the actual doctrine can be very

ambiguous in certain areas.

Today many Bhutanese have changed their mind about GNH, and are starting to see it as a vague doctrine with mixed priorities, which are completely outdated. They are starting to push for more economic reforms, and are looking to have a pure democracy (with a powerless monarchy). Also they are hoping to start more diplomatic relations with other countries outside of India and may try to open up some of their industries from state control. Perhaps they are finally giving real globalisation a try, and all it took was 50 years of poverty, adversity and isolationism and of course no traffic lights.

--Arif Damji

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Sudan-1

On 18th February, the Food Standards Agency announced a list of products containing the illegal Sudan-1 dye. The dye is banned in the UK and across Europe due to its carcinogenic properties, but is sometimes found in dried chillies, as it is used to make them appear more red; all chillies have to be tested upon entry into Europe and the UK and if they contain the dye they are destroyed. Despite this rigorous testing, a contaminated batch of chillies was delivered to Premier foods in 2002, who used it in the manufacture of a Worcester sauce, subsequently used in a variety of other products, primarily those made by food companies Juggs and Loxtons; although this was in 2002 the chilli is still being used, and has been in the system for three years. As a result, all products thought to contain it have been removed from the shelves and consumers are urged not to eat any products they have at home that may have the dye in it.

restored, as many consumers will boycott buying any products from the affected companies; this is as a result of an irrational fear that there will still be traces of the dye in the food products- this could last for several months or even years. The companies may find themselves cutting back on production, labourers or even reducing wages to try and keep their companies running. Premier Foods is a huge corporation that will probably recover in time, but some of the smaller firms involved may not.

There will also undoubtedly be legal cases over the coming years about who is to blame for this crisis. Premier Foods will probably try to pin the blame on the Food Standards Authority or the importer EW Spices of Leicester, where as Juggs and Loxtons may attempt to sue Premier Foods themselves. It is unlikely that the average consumer will try to sue over this incident,



significant action taken over the last few weeks has concerned Premier Foods and its Worcester sauce; what has happened to all the other contaminated chillies? Is this more widespread than we thought? What will be

“...a result of an irrational fear...”

As a result of these measures there are a number of potentially serious economic effects in the short run and long run as well. As a result of product reclamation and the costs of checking any other manufactured products, food manufacturing companies and superstores are going to be missing out on revenue. Premier Foods, Juggs and Loxtons will probably have to shut down production, whilst they check that their most recently produced products are safe and that they don't have any contaminated ingredients left in their storerooms; they may even have to rigorously decontaminate machinery used in the production process. This will undoubtedly lead to a short-term dramatic increase in costs and may require additional labour; this is obviously combined with the fact that they aren't earning anything as well.

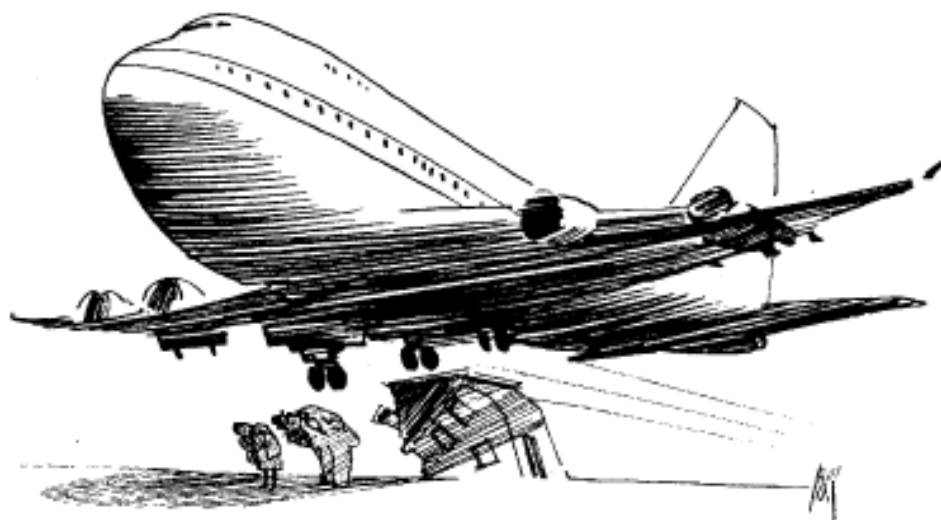
The longer-term effects of the Sudan-1 problem will be more hard hitting for the companies involved. It will take some time for the public confidence to be

as the levels of Sudan-1 in the food products were actually not at a dangerous level, unless you eat the same ready meal products every day for about a month. Although the consumers are unlikely to be affected by this crisis, the companies involved will suffer for their products that have actually caused little damage.

The Food Standards Authority has actually done very little to contain this problem and could have averted the widespread panic we have seen over past weeks. According to the Sunday Times, the FSA failed to conduct tests for Sudan-1 until 2003 (a year after the chillies came to Britain) despite knowing it was carcinogenic since 1982, did not try to have it removed from food products after it was discovered in French products in 2003 and most ridiculously failed to publicise the threat to consumers when they found that last year 1 in every 5 chilli batches contained traces of Sudan-1. This last point is slightly worrying considering the only

the economic consequences of this problem? The FSA says it will stamp down on companies who have flaunted regulations by including the contaminated chillies in their products, but surely it is partly their fault as well? The Sunday Times believes the crisis will die down quickly, but the broken companies and ruined reputations of their managers will spark arguments for years with insurers and trading standards officials. Despite this Sudan-1 is in fact a relatively small crisis and the chances of getting cancer are on a par with chances of getting BSE; there are many other nastier products in our foods that are rarely publicised such as acrylamide, aflatoxins, malachite green, mercury, perchlorate and Heterocyclic aromatic amines and the important thing to do now is to realise that Sudan-1, although dangerous should not be allowed to break up Britain's successful food industry.

--Alex van Besouw



Low Cost Pollution

In the last few years, low cost airlines have become one of the most fashionable forms of travel. Companies such as Easyjet and Ryan-air have made instant successes on the back of consumers looking for cheap weekend breaks and inexpensive business travel. Airlines such as British airways that once seemed to have a monopoly on International flights from the UK, found themselves in the uncomfortable position of being forced into a price war against these new arrivals. And just as it happened in the Bible, David seems to be beating Goliath.

Yet for all their benefits, the use of these airlines induces some very serious environmental costs. As a result of this surge in air travel, carbon emissions have gone up considerably and are continuing to rise. If the projections for global warming are right, then unless we take strong, immediate action, the effects of this climate change will be irreversible in the future. And what we need to remember is that this will happen in our future. It is not just the lives of some far off generations at stake, but on a personal level, it will be very real, for you and me.

Not only are emissions a major concern, but there is also an increase in noise pollution that comes as a result of these flights. As St Paul's is under the Heathrow flight path, the noise levels of these planes are often an irritation. It does not seem such an issue for us as students, but for the millions of people both in the UK and on the Continent who live in close

proximity to these airports, the constant noise of over-head flights is a serious frustration (insomnia is a common result), and the more it increases, the worse it gets.

Importantly, we must remember that we, as members of the EU, have the possibility to make positive changes and correct these market-failures before it is too late. Firstly a tax can be levied on all short-distance routes, using the idea: 'make the polluter pay'. If airlines are forced to pay the full costs of their negative externalities, then they are said to be internalised, and the problem is reduced. In this case I believe the most effective tax would be a hypothecated tax, where all the revenue generated is used to research cleaner fuels, and subsidise more 'environmentally-friendly' alternatives.

One such alternative is the train. Snubbed by many, trains could be one of the best answers to this problem of increased air travel. In many cases, the emissions for a plane are often five times the emissions of a train for the same route, and a train can often hold more passengers. With the possibility of advancing rail technology from the revenue of the airline tax, trains can be made more comfortable, more rapid, and most importantly, more popular. The key may lie in simply raising awareness. No-one can deny the effectiveness of the advertising campaigns of companies such as Easyjet, and if rail can take a similar approach, demand should increase substantially.

Video-conferencing is another avenue, whose merits should be explored in greater depth. The possibility of having a meeting with several different business men stationed in mainland Europe, from the comfort of your London office, is not to be ignored. Many of these low-cost deals attract business men, and by using video-technology in this way, which is extremely cheap to run, the problem of frequent flights will be reduced.

There are those who are opposed to these ideas, and believe that the situation should be left as is. They argue that reducing the number of low-cost flights allowed around Europe will have a detrimental effect on the economies that rely so heavily on the tourism that these flights bring. And there are many such economies. This is true; in the short run these effects will be hard on many places, causing unemployment and falls in revenue for many areas. Yet the irony of this argument is that although it may have some effect on these places now, if we do not take the obvious measures today to curbing global climate change, then these places may not receive any tourism at all, as they will no longer be an attractive holiday destination.

Another objection is that the tax placed on airlines, which will be passed on to the consumer in the form of increased ticket prices, is a regressive tax. Therefore the poor are punished harder than the wealthy, as the increased price takes a greater percentage of their income. And so it is seen to be an inequitable solution. However I would argue that, although this is true, the costs of global warming are so real, the tax is worth it if it succeeds in substantially decreasing demand for this form of travel, as unfair as it may seem.

With twenty-five member states, the European Union is the world's leading trade-block. It has great influence across the world, and I believe that with this position comes responsibility. If we want to stop global warming, then we must take the initiative, and not sit back waiting to be led by the United States, or anywhere else for that matter. If this tax is successful, and for this to happen a substantial fall in emissions must occur, I believe that other countries will have no justification for not following suit, and if they do, only good can come.

--Richard Norman



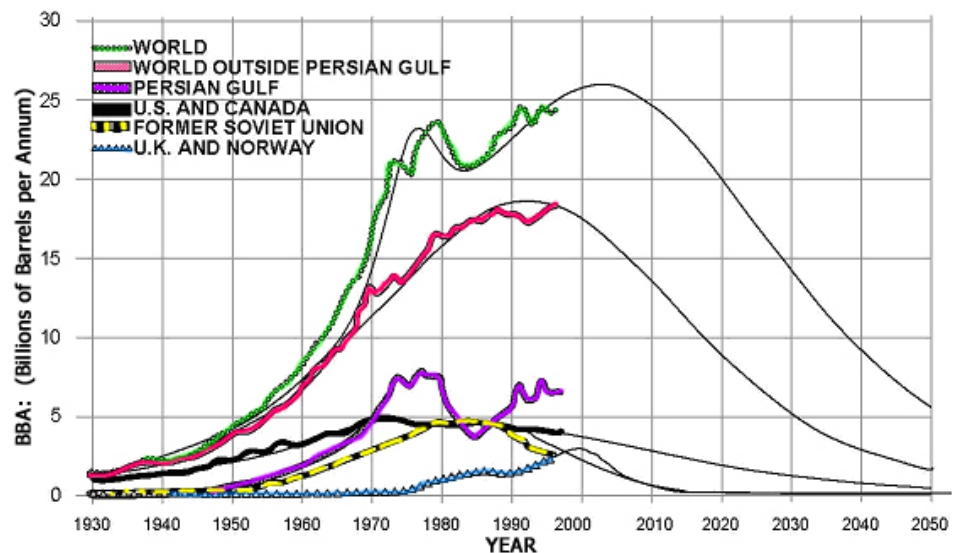
Is America Totally Dependent on Oil?

The supply and resources of oil are quickly running out for the USA. Experts have calculated that it is feasible that the peak global production year for oil could have been as early as 2000, where 76 million barrels/day, of oil, were produced. The crisis of a decline in supply of oil is enforced by the fact that demand is quickly rising and figures show that by 2020, 112 millions barrels of oil per day (MBD) would have to be produced in order to correlate with the demands of the public.

The discovery of oil in 1859 in Pennsylvania was a huge economic event. Since then oil has become a global necessity and huge sums of money have been invested on creating political and economical system based around oil. Since 1859 the production curve has been slowly but surely rising. However now that production is at or very near its peak we can see that there is going to be an exponential drop on the right hand side of the graph.

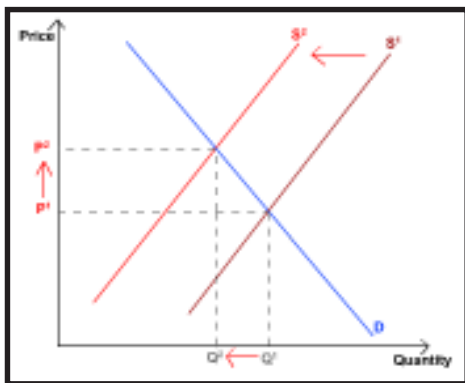
The reason for this drop is not just because all of the constructive resources for oil have been discovered but also because consumption of oil is ever rising. Countries such as India and China can be partially blamed for this as they have a rapidly expanding economy coupled to significant

population growth. However in China the amount of oil consumed per person, so to speak, is not hugely worrying but in the USA it is. The USA manages to acquire 26% of the world's energy while accounting for only 4% of its population and the American public avariciously consumes a lot more than they



produce. This just shows how the USA and the world could not survive without oil; there are 600 million cars in the world and they are all dependant on oil.

As oil is a non-renewable source of energy it is finite and will eventually run out. The steady diminution of oil will cause convulsions on a global scale and as 'oil is the lifeblood of any industrialised nation' a serious reduction in standards of living. Richer countries such as USA would have to adopt a new foreign policy of 'survival of the fittest' and ensure that they are safe and not let any other countries get in their way. Before any of this occurs inelastic demand interacting with inelastic supply would cause a colossal rise in oil prices and hence its 'complimentary goods', such as cars, lubricants and plastics. This price increase in oil and commodities connected with oil, would in turn, due to market forces, mean that only the wealthiest countries would be able to afford black gold allowing for in-equitabilities in the market.



The graph above shows that due to oil being a restricted resource, the supply of it is decreasing every day. This graph shows a decrease in supply, shown by a leftward shift in the supply curve. This leftward shift shifts the equilibrium point where the curves meet and therefore increases the price (of oil) from P1 to P2.

In 2001 President Bush had to make a choice about which policy America would adopt if they were to avoid true economic and political chaos and failure if the circumstances stated above were to happen. His choices consisted of: reducing the standard of living in America, maximise the energy efficiency in the USA or acquire secure new oil supplies from other countries. Bush's

NEP (nation energy policy) advocates the policy of 'securing oil.' This choice is driving the Military and one could say that the years spent by the US armed forces in the Middle East are designed specifically to gain access to the world's largest oil resource. God and geology have not been over generous towards America, in the circumstance, where 60% of the world's reserves for oil reside under hostile territory (the Arabian Gulf and the majority of the Middle East) with Saudi Arabia – the world's largest producer – controlling 35% of the world's oil.

The choice of 'securing oil' under Bush's policy has undoubtedly increased military tension with attacks on the US and in turn attacks by the military; it is an excuse for George Bush and America to justify taking military action. It is debateable now if the policy chosen by Bush was a good one. The main contra evidence was the 9/11 attacks. In Osama Bin Laden's first video after the terrorist attack he indirectly, but clearly, stated that the three reasons why he organised 9/11 were to do with the prerequisite to control and keep oil. America, by adopting this policy is now self-inflicting armed conflict and ultimately it will probably lead to American adopting very rationalistic and introspective policies.

The recessions in world GDP have all been directly or indirectly connected with oil. In 1973, there was a major recession after the OPEC embargos as a result of the 'Yom-Kippur War' in Israel. In 1979, oil prices soared as a result of the Iranian revolution and the subsequent Iraqi-Iranian war, this led to another recession in 1980, with GDP growth falling by 5%. The only other world recession

was in 1991, as a direct result of an increase in oil prices during the Gulf-War in Iraq.

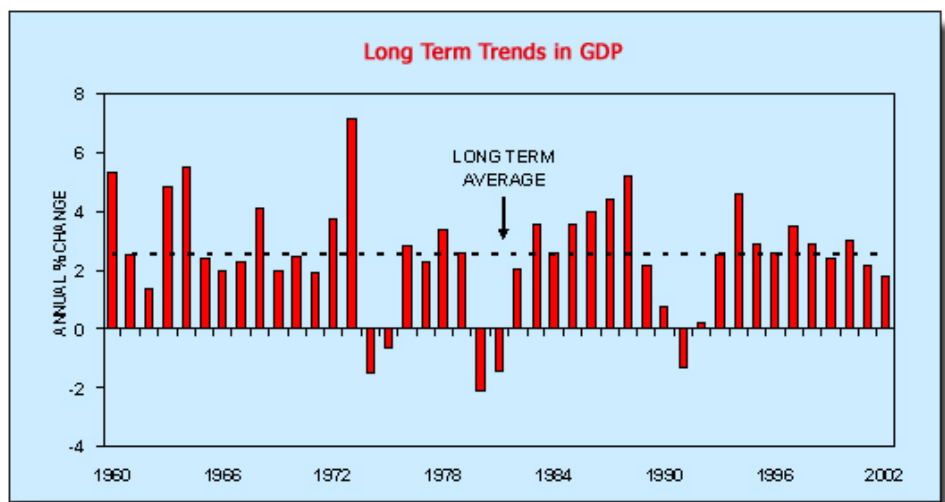
This data explains why George Bush pursues a policy of 'securing oil', as without doing so, the effects to the global economy could be lethal.

It would be totally different if Bush chose the policy of increasing energy efficiency. Yes, it would mean retrofitting most of America's buildings and cars and other mechanisms, which would be expensive, however the technology is available and the benefits possibly outweigh the costs, as national security, the environment and the economy of America would all benefit.

In conclusion the answer to the question 'Is America totally dependent on oil' is a definite yes. We have seen that America's economic policy is based around oil and it is the most important factor in the smooth running of industries and the country as a whole. Michael Moore similarly concluded this in his rather one-sided view of the Bush administration in his Fahrenheit 9/11 movie. A more correct statement we could make, branching out from the question posed would be to say that not only is America dependant on oil but so is the entire world. This can be clearly justified on the graph of oil versus global GDP.

Without oil we would find the world a very problematical and unpleasant place to live.

--Nicholas.J.Karmel



The Lebanese Economy

Prior to the civil war, which began in 1975, Lebanon's economy was vibrant and debt free, having prospered through financial services and tourism. Beirut was often described as the Paris of the Middle East. The war brought a halt to all things forward for seventeen devastating years, desecrating the minute country's infrastructure and crippling the economy, bringing tourism to a standstill. Beirut's city centre was almost totally destroyed.

After the Taef Agreements which ended the war, the Lebanese economy has gradually flourished beyond any expectation preceding it. The destruction of much of Beirut's businesses and downtown area which was a popular attraction for tourists, gave Lebanon a fresh start. The Lebanese parliament passed a law whereby all property owners of downtown Beirut had to surrender their properties in return for shares in a new company named Solidere. The company was therefore initially owned by the property owners. Fresh equity capital was then raised by issuing new shares on the Beirut Stock Exchange, which reopened in 1996, raising \$850 million from private investors. Many were Saudi or investors from the Gulf, and among them was the late Rafic Hariri who injected \$100 million for the redevelopment of downtown Beirut. The money was used to relay roads, install new communication

technology and most notably to rebuild and/or restore the old architectural monuments of Centreville.

Inaugurated in 2000, Downtown Beirut is now a thriving cosmopolitan area filled with people day and night. Open in some parts only to pedestrians, shops, cafes, bars and restaurants have sprung up in every alley giving the zone a buzz of excitement all year round. The formation of Solidere had become an extremely important and successful catalyst in the revival of Lebanon and its economy, providing many jobs and encouraging huge investment. Solidere became a symbol of Hariri's vision for Beirut in the 21st century.

Many new businesses have located offices in Beirut, adding to the growth of the country's economy. Today, the economy is based primarily on the service sector which accounts for about 60% of GDP. Sub sectors include commerce, tourism, advertising and financial services. Tourism has played a huge role in Lebanon due to the country's geography, its Mediterranean climate, natural beauty, historical and religious sights of enormous importance, and even winter sports.

Prior to the outbreak of the war, tourism accounted for 20% of GDP; impressive when noting that this particular sector was nowhere near the scale of development of which it is experiencing now. Faraya, the country's largest skiing resort has been expanded and modernized attracting increasing numbers of tourists every year. Tourism relies also on the large diaspora of Lebanese living abroad, who return regularly all year round but mostly during the summer months. It must be said, however, that the recent tragic assassination of ex Prime Minister Hariri in downtown Beirut has temporarily scarred the city and will most definitely affect tourism.

Financial Services currently offered are focused mainly on commercial banking, investment banking and insurance. Despite the war and a banking crisis in the late 1980s, the commercial banking sector remains at the heart of the Lebanon's service oriented economy. Today there are over 70 banks in Lebanon, half of which are foreign owned. Total deposits in commercial banks have multiplied from \$6.5 billion in 1992 to \$33.9 billion at the end of 1999. This massive growth

in the financial sector has been key to encouraging capital inflows, and sustaining the funding needed to finance a country in reconstruction. National authorities have recently and successfully set their sights on enhancing and widening the financial regulation framework, especially encouraging private financial firms. A number of investment banks have established themselves in Beirut, attracted by its location close to Arab markets in the Gulf, and its excellent lifestyle, communications and climate.

The post-war period also experienced a residential and hotel construction boom with many expats and Gulf Arab investors fuelling the construction of upper-end residential property, giving a modern and prevailingly fresh look to much of the city. In 1996, construction activity accounted for 9.2% of GDP, though recently it has slowed because of diminishing urban space. New projects include a massive development of mountain resorts for skiing and summer leisure, called Sannine Zenith, after Mount Sannine, which is one of Lebanon's highest peaks.

Agriculture still prospers thanks to the region's topography and climate, facilitating the cultivation of a diverse variety of vegetables, fruits, cereals and industrial crops. Agriculture contributes 12% of GDP.

Lebanese pound interest rates' gradual fall and exchange rate and price stability can take credit for the improved economic environment that prevails, with growth in all industries which are almost completely private sector owned. Still, the country suffers from an excessively high internal and external debt, accumulated as a result of reconstruction and government spending. Many argue that corruption and mismanagement had a disastrous effect on the level of Lebanon's indebtedness. The country's ratio of debt to GDP, at around 150% is one of the world's highest.

Lebanon is yet to confront the after-effects of Hariri's assassination which may dent tourism, stability and confidence in the area; however these events have in my view unified the Lebanese around the world, bringing them even closer together, and raised hopes for the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon. The appalling attack may well prove to be a new driver for increased democracy, freedom from occupation and prosperity for Lebanon. Mr. Hariri was buried in Martyrs Square at the city centre, right in the heart of his life's work.

--Faiz Boustany



Tax

Give us Back Our Freedom

Tax may not be one of our favourite things, but it is vital to keep this country up and running. Or is it?

Tax provides the government with a tax revenue each year, which they spend as they see fit on improving and mending the economy. We live in a capitalist democratic society, which can be described in layman's terms as a "dog eat dog" world. We are left to fend for ourselves in the world of work, yet still pay up to 40% of our earnings to the government to help us improve the country.

One of the most common complaints about taxation, especially income tax, is that it "isn't fair". The theory of "survival of the fittest" is directly applicable to the capitalist society. Who was it that came up with the transfer argument? Why would a healthy person ever decide to give up a proportion of their wages to effectively subsidise those in ill health? Why should anyone pay for another's education if it will result in no personal gain for themselves? It seems absurd.

Let us examine the case of smoking. 60% of smokers are affected by smoking related illnesses. Why is it that the other 40% of smokers have to pay for the treatment of those who get ill? Then of course comes the argument that smokers are less productive workers, causing the country to operate within its Production Possibility Frontier and in turn contributing to the government running a trade deficit.

We hear every day of the social cost of smoking, but 75% of the social cost of smoking is made up of incomes lost by ill or deceased workers. Though this can still be argued to be a withdrawal from the economy, society does not own individuals and an individual has no obligation to society. In other words, if someone smokes and gets ill, let that be their problem.

So what am I suggesting? Privatisation. No government intervention. No tax. A purely capitalist society where the only obligations are moral ones. Without tax

people would take greater responsibility for their actions. After all, they would have to pay for their mistakes with their own money. Without tax people would be more motivated to work, they would invest more sensibly and would have much larger disposable incomes, stimulating economic growth. Unemployment would disappear along with unemployment benefits and industry would boom.

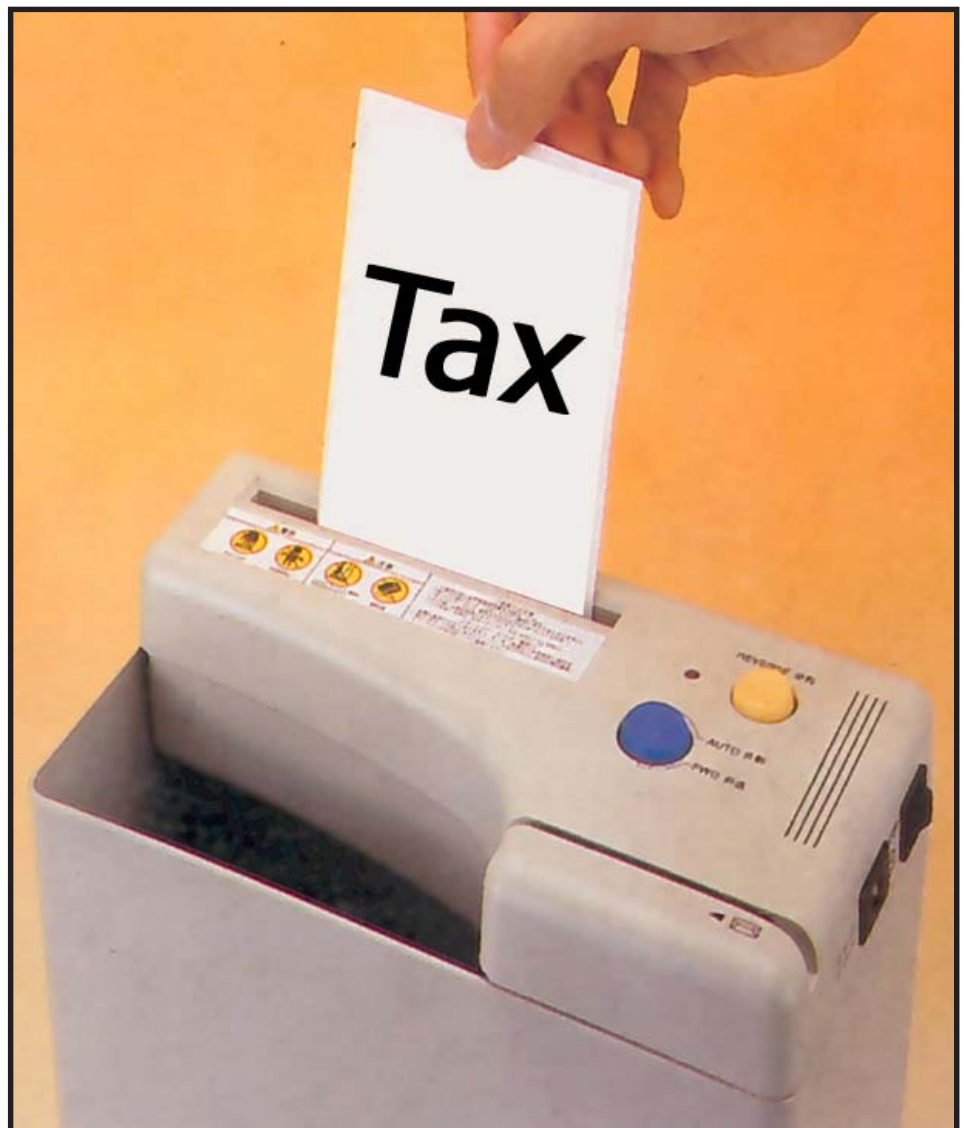
By removing the nonsense of being forced to pay for the shortcomings of others, charity would increase, enabling more scholarships to schools and universities. People would become more aware of their day to day actions, knowing that if they littered or

vandalised, it would be them paying for the damage. If people led high-risk lifestyles then this would be reflected in their health insurance premiums.

The Police force, National defence force and social security services would also be paid for privately, but rather than by a tax, by a set payment. Why should those with a higher income pay more toward their security than someone less well off?

Though I do not necessarily agree with this proposed purely capitalist society, it is undeniably an economically better alternative which shouldn't be ignored.

--Philip Renna



Eminent Domain

One of the age old questions is once again being posed, “Where does private property end and public domain begin?” In other words when do the rights of consumers and private owners start to infringe upon the benefit of the public and when this infringement begins does the government have the right to withdraw the rights of private ownership. The first question that many of you ask is what exactly is eminent domain, often called “condemnation,” which is the legal process by which a public body (and other certain private bodies, which the government has given consent to such as utility companies, railroads, redevelopment corporations and some others) are given the legal power to acquire private property for a use that has been declared to be public by constitution, statute

ownership and survival of big business and government private works.

The trial however will not focus on regress or restitution as residents have been amply for their property as the US Constitution under the Fifth Amendment guarantees that property shall not “be taken for public use, without just compensation.” But one of the main problems is that the Fifth Amendment says private property may only be taken for “public use,” not tax breaks for a major pharmaceutical company. The city of New London argues “revitalization” would increase tax revenue and “create jobs.”, which is a valid public benefit, which according to the city satisfies the Constitutional requirements. Surely though replacing all small business

in Bremerton, Washington, which condemned 22 homes to resell the land to private developers. In one notorious case, billionaire Donald Trump convinced Atlantic City, N.J., to condemn an elderly widow’s home so he could build a limousine parking lot.

In most cases the victims of eminent domain are most often the elderly, the poor and minorities, the obvious downtrodden of society, as they lack the money, political power or respect to have their property rights guaranteed. This is in contrast to corporations, which are very effective at lobbying and are very effective at convincing cities to give them someone else’s land on the pretence that it will be of ‘public benefit’. Public benefit in their mind means the creation of jobs and increase revenues from tax, however surely won’t the public as a whole benefit more from the guarantee of property rights along with the comfort in knowledge that their interests will be protected by the city.

“...the legal process by which a public body ... are given the legal power to acquire private property...”

or ordinance. In the past this has usually applied to either rundown buildings which the government wishes to tear down so that they can build a school or a road works project. However there has been more and more abuses of eminent domain and we have begun to see that private companies are starting to infringe upon the rights of owners.

The most prominent case of this is perhaps the impending Supreme Court case of Kelo vs. New London, the basic in and out of the case is that a poor little old lady Susette Kelo came home one day to find an eviction notice on her door. However it wasn’t the government nor was it a utility company that wanted her out it was actually the New London Development Company of Connecticut which wishes to build a new bio park so Pfizer can have its research and development department all on one campus. Her house and those of six other families living in New London in Fort Trumbull had been compulsorily purchased so that they have five months to leave. The case places economists and politicians on two separate sides of the fence, private rights to

with huge corporations and equally huge tax revenues, which would be of equal public benefit, however who is to decide how much public benefit satisfies the eminent domain requirements. While if our homes and our property can be taken away whenever the government or large corporations decide somebody else would use them more effectively, our property rights are rendered meaningless and public ownership is once again restored.

One other example of the Kelo vs. New London, took place during the early 1980s, when the General Motors Corporation persuaded the city of Detroit which at the time was experiencing a recession to condemn a neighbourhood called Poletown and sell it to GM to build an auto factory for Chevrolets. When this decision was challenge by the local residents, the Supreme Court of Michigan held that the eviction was legal. This in turn set up the precedent that if the government declared a condemnation would benefit the public, the courts could not stand in their way. After this decision took place a series of eminent domain cases came to head, such as

Fortunately, this reign of big business might be coming to an end as the Michigan Supreme Court recently overturned its Poletown decision, stating that, “If one’s ownership of private property is forever subject to the government’s determination that another private party would put one’s land to better use, the ownership of real property is perpetually threatened by the expansion plans of any large discount retailer, ‘megastore,’ or the like.” Now the decision goes to the US Supreme Court, with its decision having far reaching ramifications for the thousands of those affected by eminent domain annually. Personally as a neo-conservative economist I view that all property owners, regardless of means, should have the same right to be secure in their property rights otherwise, the benefits and incentives of private ownership are zilch.

--Frederic S. Wolens

North Korea

A State in Crisis

North Korea is a state in crisis. Economically it is a wreck and politically it is a leper. It shuns the outside world that looks down on it as a Cold War relic that keeps causing trouble with its incendiary statements and threat of disrupting the peace in eastern world. Its official head of state has been dead for over a decade and its current leader is a reclusive playboy who spends most of his time in his palace watching James Bond films (except probably not the most recent one). Brainwashed by Stalinist propaganda, North Korean citizens regard their “Dear Leader” as something of a deity. Radio and TV sets in North Korea are pre-tuned to government

central Pyongyang (the capital), there are no billboards advertising goods and the city is a drab grey metropolis with the only things that display any free thinking or artistic nature the many national monuments celebrating the two Kims and their “victory” in the Korean War, with eerily few people in the streets as there is little fuel available.

According to many of the North Korean exiles interviewed, there is a belief that the “Dear Leader”, Kim Jong-Il, has already lost his personal authority to a clique of generals and party cadres. With no public announcement, governments from Tokyo to

favoured heir apparent, his son Kim Jong-Chol, 23, who was educated in Geneva, is reported to have staged a shoot-out inside a palace with Kim Jang-Hyun, 34, an illegitimate son of Kim Il-sung, father of the dictator and founder of the dynasty. According to exiles, North Korean agents in Beijing and Ulan Bator are frantically selling assets to raise cash — an important sign, says one activist, because “the secret police can always smell the crisis coming before anybody else”. If Kim does not have the secret police on his side, his days are most definitely numbered. The cult of the Kim dynasty, its “perfect” theory of *Juche* — patriotic self-reliance — and *Songun* (army first) and the utopian society of which the officials boast, are visibly breaking down. There is a genuine fear from the Chinese that the trickle of refugees trying to gain access to the west via China will turn into a flood. In a situation reminiscent of the Berlin Wall during the Cold War, people risk everything in order to gain access to the free world, deeply ironic when China is seen as the free world.



Kim Jong Il (left) talks with his ever smiling generals – is one of them to be the new leader of the worlds last outpost of Stalinism

stations that pump out a steady stream of propaganda. The state has been dubbed the world’s worst violator of press freedom by the media rights body *Reporters Without Frontiers*. Press outlets and broadcasters - all of them under direct state control - serve up a menu of flattering reports about Kim Jong-Il and his daily agenda. North Korea’s economic hardships or famines are not reported. In

Washington are preparing for a change of regime. The Japanese intelligence agency referred to “signs of instability” inside the political establishment and predicted a feud among the elite as they strive to seize power from Kim. Jang Song-Thaek, Kim’s ambitious brother-in-law, was purged from party office after he tried to build up a military faction to put his own son in power. The dictator’s

As Pyongyang’s closest ally, and its largest aid donor, Beijing arguably holds the most leverage over the secretive and unpredictable North. China’s relationship with Pyongyang has been extremely close for decades - “like lips and teeth”, according to Beijing. Although this official party mantra is not the whole story. North Korea is just as dependent on China today as it was during the Korean War. Beijing sends at least 1m tonnes of oil a year and an equally crucial amount of food aid - at least 200,000 tonnes a year, according to one estimate. China is also North Korea’s top trading partner. Official and black market trade between the two countries is believed to be worth around 40% of the North’s total trade. Twice now, when North Korea threatened to leave nuclear talks, China has signalled its displeasure by suspending its oil supply to Pyongyang, with immediate results. North Korea’s announcement last week was more serious than previous ones. Saying it was pulling out of talks indefinitely contained its most explicit public assertion that it possesses nuclear weapons. Some analysts suggest that North Korea will have ballistic missiles capable of reaching the United States by 2015. It also has armed forces which numbers 1 million, making it by far the biggest in comparison to population size – China’s 4 million man army which makes up 0.27% of its population, whereas Korea’s is 4.4% of its population, with a

military budget of \$1.3 billion a year. This gives a strong economic case from North Korea's point of view as to why nuclear weapons would be a benefit to them. With the ultimate deterrent to an American or South Korean invasion, there would be little need for the huge number of soldiers currently draining the economy. With resources and manpower freed up, effort could be put into agriculture or trade or many other options available.

Japan has a very strained relationship with Pyongyang; the North kidnapped many Japanese nationals in the past and Pyongyang continues to threaten peace in the region. On 1st March they introduced a new trade regulation that states that all ships over 100 tons must have special pollution insurance, an item that few if any North Korean ships have. After China and South Korea, Japan is Pyongyang's biggest trading partner with North Korea's exports to Japan valued at around \$200m (£104m) last year – one their few legitimate sources of income. Pyongyang denies all claims of state-sponsored illegal trade (counterfeiting money, drug smuggling and production and selling arms to terrorist groups are among the claims) although this is known to be lies. Officially, Japan is holding off on its threat to impose sanctions on North Korea. Tokyo wants to avoid provoking its unpredictable neighbour at a time when it is trying to coax it back into negotiations over its nuclear weapons programme. But the impact of the new regulations will be the same, heightening Pyongyang's economic turmoil, from years of corruption, a poorly planned economy and few natural resources with which to supplement their minimal international trade.



Last April an unknown number of North Koreans died in an explosive firebomb that wrecked the railway station at Ryongchon, near the Chinese border, on the day when

Kim's personal train was due to pass through. Foreign diplomats initially accepted the regime's explanation of an accident. But two well informed ambassadors in Pyongyang say that they now have doubts. In a telltale measure, frontier guards ordered visitors to leave all mobile phones at the Chinese border post — rumour has it that the Ryongchon blast was triggered by a mobile phone. An attempt to kill Kim would come as no surprise. Defections by party officials and army officers

have increased as the elite senses that it faces disaster. Japan is considering economic sanctions to retaliate for the kidnappings of its nationals by North Korea and some American policymakers think that the regime should be pushed to the point of self-destruction. Their hopes soon may well come true.

--James Thomas

The Ivory Coast Conflict

A Brief Explanation

The Ivory Coast has for years set the example in Africa of a thriving country that provides opportunity and wealth, but in a period of five years she has gone from being a renowned area of peace and prosperity to a country in crisis, with open fighting, lawlessness and poverty sweeping the state.

After the Ivory coast became independent from France in 1960, President Houphouet-Boigny took control of the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (in a single-party system) and implemented many forward-thinking plans for trade, capitalism and foreign policy which led to the Ivory Coast having the fastest rate of economic growth of any country in the world during the seventies. Rich in raw materials and with a diverse and skilled workforce, the Ivory Coast had all the building blocks to maintain a successful economy and social situation. This was achieved with the growth of a huge cocoa-export industry, the maintenance of close economic ties with France and large-scale foreign investment (Particularly with the USA).

With the boom of the cocoa trade around 1970 there was a huge influx of foreign migrants into the Ivory Coast from Ghana, Mali and Guinea. This renewed competition for work and space created the potential threat of racial tension, but this was kept firmly in check by the iron-fisted rule of President Houphouet-Boigny until his death in 1988.

Mr. Houphouet-Boigny was immediately replaced by Henri Bedie, and his election could be viewed as one of the great catalysts for the current situation of near civil war. Bedie did not command the same natural authority as his predecessor whom the public knew as 'the old man', and employed nationalist policies to maintain support. Ban's were placed on any foreign-born candidates standing for election, with an overall view to alienating all foreigners

in the Ivory Coast, many of whom formed part of the army and other important national institutions. Suddenly people who had lived there for years were being told that they were no longer citizens of the country. This aroused much racial tension in the Ivory Coast.

The legalisation of a multi-party system in 1990 gave all sectors of the population political influence, and led to the growth of many small factions and strong anti-nationalist party, the Rally of Republicans (RDR) led by muslim Alassane Ouattara. His party came to represent the interests of those oppressed by the nationalist policies of the ruling party, yet he was banned from standing for election by Bedie's successor, Robert Guei, because of his questionable parentage. The general election of 2001 was destined to be the turning point in the situation, where Ouattara would gain power and reverse these destructive nationalist policies, but Guei went through with the banning order on Ouattara, quite blatantly rigged the election results, and declared himself winner. This sparked off conflict. Ivorian dissidents and disaffected members of the military launched a failed coup attempt in September 2002. Rebel forces claimed the northern half of the country, and thousands were killed. Following this, French peacekeepers moved in to the buffer zone between the rebel 'Ouattara' north and the Government held south, whilst British and French foreign nationals were evacuated.

The conflict has raged intermittently ever since whilst Robert Guei's successor Laurent Gbagbo has taken power. With the economy in a state of near collapse and another general election around the corner, it remains to be seen whether the Ivory Coast will recover its long-held prosperity, or take the all-too familiar route to all-out civil war and destruction; a path well trodden by countries like the war ravaged Sierra Leone.

--Christophe Elisha

The Voice of the Dissaffected Youth: Confused Election Ramblings

May 5th. The day we have to look forward to. The day that one of the most fiercely contested general elections of recent years will finally occur. The day the people will speak. The day the great democratic process will be proudly displayed to the rest of the world by the country that pioneered it. Britons will vote in their millions, conclusively choosing a strong government that will have a large enough majority to make manly, macho decisions that will personally affect every Briton. The great people of this great country shall whole-heartedly say:

‘YES! Saint Tony will continue to gloriously run our country. He will selflessly eliminate poverty, destroy unemployment, decimate the Tories, and reform beyond recognition our antiquated constitution. He will provide pensioners with electricity, single mothers with benefits and Eurosceptics with a referendum. NHS funding will continue to rise, there will be more Community Support Officers on our streets and Labour’s innovative, original points system will control immigration. Schools will be disciplined and choice will be available to everyone. Internationally Saint Tony will spread freedom with his much-loved brother-in-arms George W. Bush; whilst at the simultaneously eliminating AIDS, malaria and starvation worldwide and making Presidents George Bush and Hu Jintao sign and adhere to the Kyoto agreement. Forward shall be the way Britain will go, not back to the Dark Ages of the Thatcher Dictatorship.’

Hmmmm... I would sincerely hope that by now anybody who has reached this stage of this piece would have recognised the sarcasm (not to mention the complete inaccuracy) of the first paragraph. What most people do not remember is the mindless optimism that followed the 1997 general election, where paragraphs like this piece’s first were commonplace, whether they were written in *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Sun* or *Asian Babes*. In 1997 people were actually

optimistic about their country’s political future: they had finally got rid of the unpopular Major government that had been responsible for Black Wednesday, the doomed ‘Back to Basics’ campaign, amusing yet unpleasant revelations about David Mellor’s personal affairs and barrow-loads of similar sleaze. John Major, the man who had previously been known as the boy who had run away from the circus to join an accountancy firm, had been ousted, giving the most powerful position in the country to the dashing, handsome (by politicians’ standards), new age, modern reformer that was Tony Blair. He was swept in on a giant majority and change was in the wind: the people were curious. How would these inexperienced young men fare in the gritty, boring, repetitive world of executive government? How would an inexperienced young man like Gordon Brown be able to control the economy in this crazy new world with the dotcom boom and the coming of the new European currency. Would the government be able to irrevocably answer the question that had scuppered John Major’s government: the question of the Euro?

To give the Blair government credit, they have witnessed and coped with the fuel crisis, the dotcom crash and recession, Kosovo, foot and mouth, 9/11 and Afghanistan whilst at the same time raising NHS funding and foreign aid. They have managed all of this without hugely raising taxes and without disintegrating and dividing under pressure. The divides in Labour’s ranks have until recently been impossible to see, with the government appearing to be functioning like a well-oiled steam roller that was just given a rocket boost down a steep hill. They have been put under huge amounts of pressure by the media, by the opposition and by the public, but the temptation to turn on the leader like vultures on a wounded comrade has mostly been avoided, well at least among the big hitters of Cabinet. This is sadly something the Conservatives cannot boast of. When the people started disliking John Major the combined forces of

Redwood, Portillo and Lilley flew in and started ripping the Government to shreds, completely ignoring the principle of collective responsibility in order to try and gain themselves some political capital. Unfortunately for them and the Conservatives this ruthless, undisguised political opportunism went unrewarded by the general public who saw it for what it was.

The public today also has the good sense to recognise political opportunism when it is staring them in the face. Now I’m not saying that Labour and the Liberal Democrats aren’t guilty as well, but I would hope that anyone with a semblance of political intelligence can recognise Michael Howard’s recent proposals as shamefaced attempts to grab votes for the Tories. Government waste was their first easy target. Howard realised that if he could cut waste he would be able to lower taxes *and* increase spending on public services. Plans to cut down on quangos and misuse of public money were announced. Nothing wrong with that, in fact I definitely agree with Mr Howard on this one. After all, our money could be spent on better things than the National Potato Council (a real quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation) or the 10000 new Whitehall bureaucrats’ standard-issue grey suit and biro. We hear reports that the nation’s children are the heaviest drug takers in Europe, with figures of something like one in three under sixteen year olds having smoked cannabis. Michael Howard introduces Conservative proposals to increase prison sentences for cannabis and ecstasy dealers. He even goes on a high-profile drugs raid on some terrified stoned teenagers where, according to a police spokesman, ‘a small amount of cannabis was found and three arrests were made. Fair enough Michael you might say, and with justification. After all teenage drug abuse is one of the nation’s major problems and the country’s parents are understandably terrified.

Unfortunately for Mr Howard the nation's parents weren't sufficiently worried about the problem to give him many votes. "What shall we try next?", he wondered. "Hmmm... those two don't seem to have really worked and we're running out of easy targets, let's tap into the racist vote, take away votes from the BNP and UKIP: after all it worked for Lynton Crosby and John Howard in Australia." Now I'm not saying that the Tories' proposals are racist or that proposing stricter limits on immigration is racist, but the boost they gained in the opinion polls, I feel, was down to their move further to the right and tapping into the inherent racism in this country that stems from the 'influx' of people with different coloured skin. And racism does exist in this country, whether or not we have the most multi-cultural society in the world. I don't like to admit it because I am proud of this country's diversity if little else about it, but when you have people who are noticeably different you will always get the ignorant, moronic bullies to come with them.

This time the Conservatives only received a small boost in the polls, nowhere near enough. More was going to be needed. The next easy target on their agenda is the 'grey' vote: the pensioners' vote. It's not hard to get votes from them: promise to give them more money, reduce their tax, and you're sorted. Ignore any long term implications such as the approaching pensions crisis which the governments after yours can sort out. The pensions crisis is going to be what analysts will call 'a biggie'. The baby-boomers, the children born during the post-Second World War boom, are due for retirement in about five to ten years time and they will be demanding big things from the NHS and from their state-funded pensions. There will be just enough time for Michael Howard to achieve his dream of being Prime Minister, with his place in the history books, whilst being able to leave Number 10 just before the proverbial faeces hits the fan. This is not to mention the fact that his proposals will not actually address any of the fundamental inequalities in the present system: according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Conservatives' council tax proposals would deliver £9.04 a week to

the richest pensioners, £5.12 to the middle and nothing to the poorest who are on benefits. I daresay Michael Howard has some decent reasons for his Old People Proposals, but he stinks of political opportunism: political opportunism that Benjamin Disraeli, the undisputed godfather of opportunistic politics in this country, would be ashamed of.

I apologise to any Conservatives reading up to this point. You probably feel as if Michael Howard is being treated a bit unfairly: after all, it's not as if Labour and the Liberal Democrats don't also stink of the foul stench of opportunism. Labour has been stealing Conservative policies with increasing regularity, forcing the Tories to move to the right. And the Liberal Democrats aren't exactly the Knights in Shining Armour they are trying to make themselves out to be. They are presenting themselves as the opposition vote, the rebel vote, the disaffected-with-the-other-two-parties vote, whilst not presenting any serious policies of their own. They have opposed unpopular government measures such as the Iraq war and top-up fees because it has won them support whilst not offering any solutions to the financial crisis present in universities across the land. In a political environment where the government is hated in some areas and distrusted in the rest, and the opposition are unable to effectively galvanise support, it will not surprise me if turnout in the next general election dips below 50%.

Now Mr Blair, it's your turn.

Ten years ago the electorate was actually optimistic. Your image of the handsome, trustworthy messiah to save the United Kingdom from the sleaze, lies and mistakes of the Tories has given way to a lack of trust amongst the general population: hatred amongst the young, disappointment among the middle aged and sadness amongst the elderly. You set out to re-establish trust amongst the electorate and for a while it worked. Your natural charisma, your convincing manner, your acting skills, your abilities as a public speaker were in complete contrast to any high-profile UK politician that I can think of, except maybe Winston Churchill. Even the most anti-war, anti-establishment, far-Right, upper-class, old, über-patriotic

Briton will have to try very hard to not be affected as you worm and slither your way out of problem after problem.

I will not say that I have completely lost faith in the Labour Government's ability as an executive machine. Interest rates are low, mortgage rates are low, benefits have helped many of the poverty stricken (even if the fundamental problems of the causes of poverty haven't been tackled), waiting lists are shorter, and the decision to give the Bank of England independence was unquestionably the best decision of the Blair administration. However, the young and old alike are afraid to walk the streets at night, taxes have (stealthily) risen, the education system is still a mess, the civil service has been politicised, and constitutional reform has been piecemeal and clumsily arranged. Most recently, and most disturbingly, there have been the draconian proposals that could give the executive emergency powers similar to those given by Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution which allowed Hitler to take over Weimar Germany and legally inflict a dictatorship on a troubled state. I'm not implying that this is David Blunkett's and Charles Clarke's master plan to take over the world, but it is possible that if another far-left or right-wing party springs up, these powers could be misused.

The final problem I have with the Labour government is the problem of spin, especially on this current election campaign. Now I know this has been criticised regularly and heavily so I'll keep it short. This election campaign will be the dirtiest I have ever witnessed, dirtier even than last year's American presidential campaign and the Ukrainian presidential campaign where the opposition candidate, Victor Yushenko, was poisoned by the government's secret service. By the way Alan Milburn has been conducting the campaign so far, I wouldn't be surprised if he considered these tactics if there were any signs that Labour were likely to lose. The release of documents about Black Wednesday reminded the electorate of the failings of the Conservatives whilst simultaneously making it seem as if John Major was trying to block their release. The anti-Semitic advertising campaign

served mainly to draw huge amounts of attention to the posters whilst Labour just slipped the net of being widely condemned as racist. Labour advertising campaigns also blame Michael Howard for introducing the poll tax, which isn't strictly true since he was only a powerless, junior minister at the time. We haven't officially heard the date of the election yet (at the time of writing), but Labour has started its campaign in earnest. And you know why? Because of the return of the spin master-in-chief, Alastair Campbell. In the words of John Major, 'the government is now so lost to political black arts that it may never be able to find its way back to straight-forward dealing.'

But everyone knows who the real winner will be in the coming general election. The two months in between now and May 5 are irrelevant. To change the outcome it would have to take a nuclear war on China started by Tony Blair in partnership with George Bush and Vladimir Putin; or Charles Clarke denouncing and banning football, alcohol, pornography, sex and every other vice the

people love; or Michael Howard transferring his brain into David Beckham's head whilst handing out fifty pound notes in constituencies all over the country and simultaneously introducing detailed plans to balance the budget, whilst halving taxes and doubling public spending.

No, the winner is *guaranteed* to be the Apathy Party. They will probably get as many non-existent votes as all the other parties' real votes combined, if not more. Voter apathy and disenchantment is running higher than ever before. In the 2001 election turnout hit an all-time low at 59.12%, just about defeating the Iraqi turnout result of 57% despite the fact that Iraqis were threatened with death if they got involved in the electoral process and despite the fact that several candidates were murdered, forcing the election campaign underground. On May 5th turnout is predicted to be even lower than in 2001: from 40% to 57% depending on who you hear it from. This year the same problems as in 2001 apply, except on a much larger scale. Voters hate the government, hate the

Tories, and laugh at the Lib Dems. They don't trust anyone and don't consider it worth the effort to go down road and put a cross in a box.

And I really can't blame them. When you get a sense, like I have, that a comic Scotsman with a drink problem is more likely to tell the truth than the longest serving Labour Prime Minister ever you start to think your country's in trouble. When you get a sense, like I have, that your other choice of candidate is a scheming, heartless, soulless lawyer solely concerned with getting power and a place in the history books, you can sympathise with the paranoid, reeking old man lying in the gutter convinced that anyone in a suit is demented and crazy. When you start to think, like I do, that the man running the country is not a politician but rather an actor playing a spooky hybrid clone of Margaret Thatcher, Jimmy Carter and Moses, you can understand why people have lost faith in the political system or why they just don't care.

--Dom MacIver

Thaw's Thoughts

I am, having just read Dominic's "Voice of the Disaffected Youth", a little troubled. If Dominic's is the authentic, or at least reasonably representative, voice of youth, then I think we all ought to be troubled, for he paints a bleak picture of the contemporary British political scene. It is a picture that makes the Caravaggios currently on show at the National Gallery appear positively bright and optimistic. We are governed, and can only ever hope to be governed, it seems, by duplicitous, manipulative, self-serving rogues.

I hope, and I believe, that Dominic is mistaken. Whilst I acknowledge that there are reasonable grounds for doubting the integrity and good-will of many of those who govern us, I refuse to believe that our politics is so deeply and fatally afflicted. Most politicians, and certainly all those whom I have known, are honest people with a genuine desire to do good. They can be

foolish and arrogant and selfish and manipulative, certainly, but I think that in most there is an underlying sense of virtue in which we should find reassurance.

Several years ago, When Douglas Hurd was Foreign Secretary, I spent some time working for the Foreign Office. I was at the very bottom of a very big pyramid of power and I was just about as remote from the Foreign Secretary as the average person on the street, so I certainly cannot claim a privileged position from which to judge the integrity with which he guided the nation's foreign policy. I did, however, enjoy one revelatory insight. One morning the blood transfusion service set up their beds in the basement of the office, so I went down to offer my pint of blood. Hurd was on the bed next to me, quietly and unceremoniously giving some of his blood too. There were no cameras or microphones or minders or spin-doctors – just an ordinary man trying to do a bit of good. I felt really quite uplifted

by the experience, and it did a great deal to rid me of my cynicism and pessimism.

I think that Douglas Hurd strove, not always successfully, to be a virtuous Foreign Secretary, and I think that most people in similar positions today likewise seek to be virtuous. They will get things wrong, they will say and do terrible things. But they will endeavour to get things right, to say and to do the right things. They are not very different from the rest of us – flawed, fallible, foolish, but basically good. Just as Caravaggio's late paintings offer rays of light amidst all the pain and suffering, so too are there signs of goodness in Westminster and Whitehall. It is up to us to encourage such goodness wherever we find it. A disaffected, careless electorate is likely to lead to careless government. A positive, active and concerned electorate will encourage positive, purposeful, virtuous government.

--Mr. Thaw