

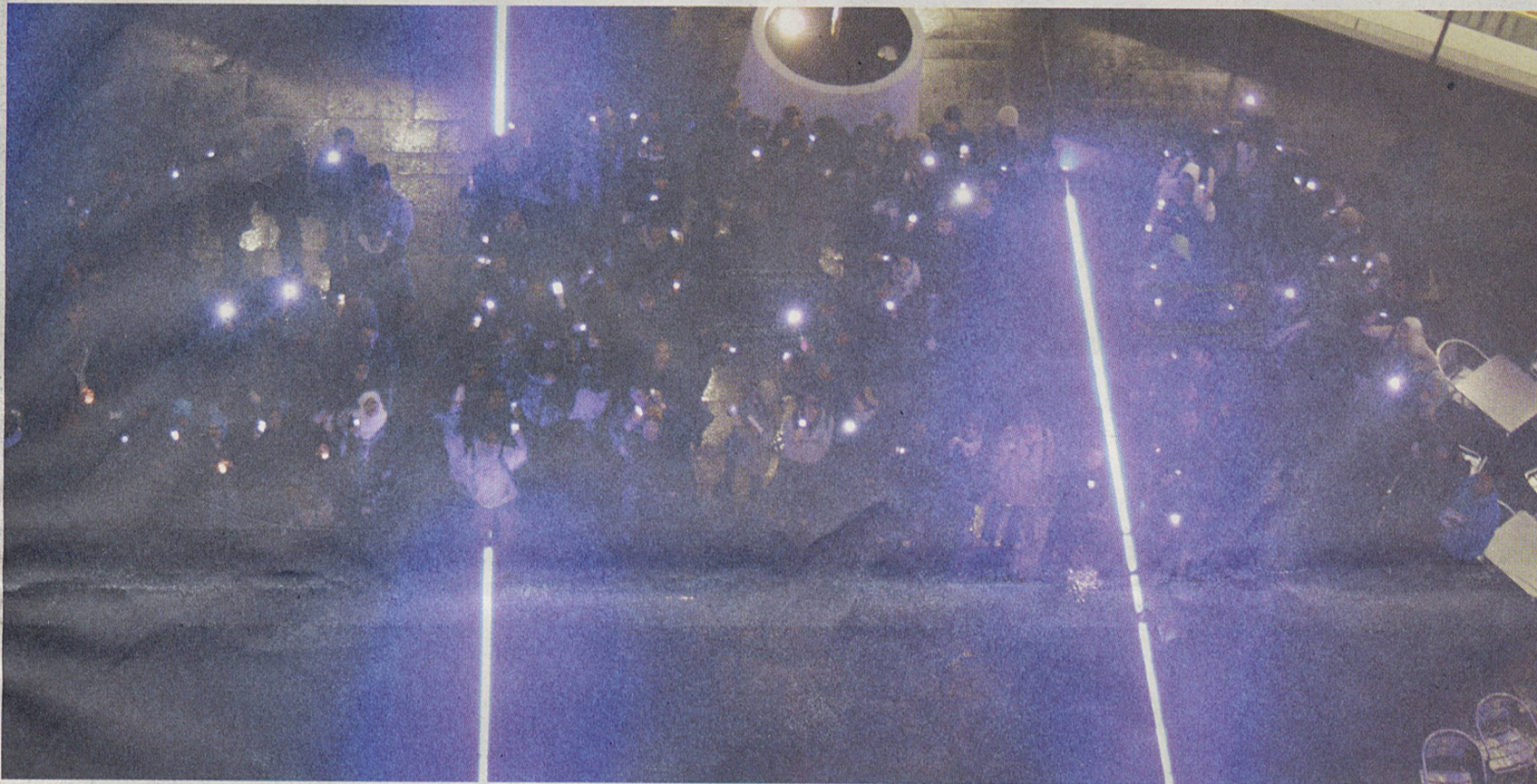


The Beaver

13 January 2009
Newspaper of the
London School of Economics
Students' Union
thebeaveronline.co.uk

Israel at war in Gaza

LSE students join London protests and rallies



Students hold a vigil for Gazans outside the Library on Monday night.
(Affan Mohamed Kolandaiveedu)

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LSE investment bank hopefuls 'consigned to outer circle'

> **FT report: Imperial has edge over LSE**

> **School still top for Citigroup, UBS**

Joe Rennison

LSE has been named in an "outer circle" of universities that investment banks are looking to recruit from, as the recession hits campus recruitment for some of the most popular careers among LSE students.

The Financial Times reported last week that many banks were limiting recruitment to an inner circle consisting of Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial College London.

"The outer part - where some are recruiting and some not - is the London School of Economics, University College London and Warwick University," the article added.

Investment banks have cut back on recruitment after the onset of recession across the financial industry.

According to figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2007 saw graduate employment in the finance sector drop below 10,000 for the first time in five years.

"We're cutting back from going to 67 campuses worldwide to 25," a leading investment bank was quoted in the Financial Times as saying. "What it will mean is, you can do two or three in the UK."

Fiona Sandford, the head of the LSE careers service, dismissed the article's claims. "LSE does not believe that we are in the outer circle," she said. "Citibank say we're in the top tier, UBS that we're their top school in Europe."

"We know we are the top school for many major banks, so I don't know where the FT journalist got his 'facts' from," Sandford said.

Sandford added that the number of banks presenting at the Career Service's banking fayre last term had been the same as the year before, with student tickets to the event selling out.

Careers officers at Oxford and Cambridge have said that they have anecdotal evidence that fewer students are attending banking fairs at their universities.

Oxford university's careers officer estimated that banking recruitment at the university had declined by around fifty per cent.

Sandford said that the LSE Careers Service was adapting to the recessionary job market. "It's a top school for investment banking but there is much more to the graduate labour market than that," she said.

Sandford added: "we have more graduate jobs on the website than in the previous two years and we will be holding events and seminars to help students through this credit crisis."

Online Advice on credit crunch jobs
lse.ac.uk/collections/careersService

LSE academics dominate university research ranks

> **Economics and Law top departments in UK** > **LSE second only to Cambridge for research**

James McGibney

LSE has emerged as one of the top research institutes in the country in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, a government survey which determines research grants to universities.

In the report, a higher proportion of subjects at the LSE attained the "world leading" 4* grade than at any other UK university. When ranked by the grade point average, the LSE came joint-second in the country, beaten only by Cambridge University.

The grade point average is determined by multiplying the percentage of 4* research by 4, 3* research by 3 and so on, and dividing the resulting total by 100.

Several individual subject areas at LSE were judged best nationally. The School's Economics, Law, European Studies and Social Policy departments earned the highest grade point average in the country for their subjects.

LSE's Anthropology department also came out on top of its field when ranked according to the percentage of research

graded 4* by the RAE.

Professor Sarah Worthington, the School's Pro-Director for Research and External Relations, said: "We are a small, specialist university that has delivered outstanding results. Two-thirds of our staff work in LSE departments ranked in the top five in the country, and 36 per cent work in departments ranked first in the country. Students choosing to study at LSE know they will be taught by outstanding academics."

Howard Davies, LSE Director, said: "I'm thrilled with our strong showing"

The RAE's results were "impressive testament to the genuinely world-class research that goes on here," he added.

The RAE is conducted by the four UK higher education funding councils. Subjects at each university are given a quality grade by specialist peer review panels, and the results are used to allocate £1.5 billion in government research grants to the institutions.

However, some controversy over the results has been raised because the RAE does not require institutions to submit all their staff for assessment.

Subsequently, some institutions chose to submit only those staff who would contribute to the success of their and others

RAE's top five UK universities (Grade point average)

1 Cambridge

2 = Oxford

2 = LSE

3 Imperial College London

4 University College London

even drafted in impressive research academics on "unusual" contracts to improve their position.

David Otley, who chaired the panel that assessed economics, accounting and business and management studies, said in his report: "Some very strong units chose to submit only a proportion of their staff for assessment, despite the encouragement in the criteria for all research-active staff to be submitted."

By contrast, the LSE put forward over 90 per cent of eligible staff for evaluation. After this year the RAE is to be replaced by the Research Excellence Framework

(REF). The new REF will judge research quality by numerical indicators such as how many citations academic articles produced at the LSE receive by others.

LSE has previously criticised the use of citation counts as a barometer of the School's academic excellence. The proposed REF system is similar to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, which placed LSE 66th in the world for 2008.

Responding to the REF the panel reviewing economics, business and management research for the RAE, said: "Although much top-quality work was indeed published in what are generally regarded as leading journals, top-quality work could also be found in journals occupying a lower position in conventional rankings."

School officials fear that as a smaller specialised institution, LSE will have fewer articles cited than larger, multi-faculty institutions which will have articles cited not only in the social sciences but also in the natural sciences.

In his comments on the Times Higher Education rankings last term, George Gaskell, Director of the LSE's methodology institute, described the situation as "like comparing a sardine with a good-sized cod."

The Beaver

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Go out of business

>> 'LSE: Not for Profit' campaign sends



Students are paying for LSE brand over education, group claims

Joe Rennison
Vanessa Spencer

Students have drafted an open letter to LSE Director Howard Davies criticising the School's "business-driven" direction.

It calls on Davies to apologise for calling students "loss-making" and "consult academics and students on where the LSE's fundamental priorities should lie".

Davies stunned a Students' Union General Meeting last term when he said that he did not feel accountable to students because "most of you are loss-making anyway".

The LSE: Not for Profit group also criticises the School's investments in arms companies and the decision to name a lecture theatre after former UAE dictator Sheikh Zayed.

"Dirty money at the LSE is not only morally indefensible; it constitutes a gross violation of the School's Institutional Values that demand the highest standards of ethics and conduct in all activities," the letter argues.

A spokesperson for the group said, "The LSE is being run like a business and it's tearing the place apart. Students are fed up of feeling like they are paying large sums of money for a brand, rather than an education. There can be no place for profiting from war and the commemoration of dictators at the LSE. Students must come together to stop this business-focused and unethical direction."

The group criticise the School's current attempt to implement an ethical investment policy. The approach the School

is currently taking is based on the principle of "engagement", whereby shareholders use their stake in firms to influence decision making.

"This could well lead to the ridiculous and unacceptable situation whereby the School adopts an official ethical investment policy but continues to invest in grossly unethical firms," the letter claims.

The group claim that the business-mentality has been reinforced by deficiencies in the School's governing structures.

"School governors and Council members have long exhibited complacency and unwillingness to step out of line or speak out against the business-driven agenda," the letter argues.

Decisions in School committees are taken by acclamation, rather than by secret ballot. Student representatives have argued that this has left committee members unwilling to challenge the suggestions of the School's leadership.

Aled Dilwyn Fisher, LSESU General Secretary, said: "A number of students have commented to me that they feel they are paying for the LSE brand but getting little in return. Almost every student I speak to has some concerns with quality and corporate direction of LSE, and it's time that something was done about it."

The LSE: Not for Profit group successfully passed a motion at the last UGM of Michaelmas term. It is now the official policy of the Students' Union to "oppose the unethical and corporate direction of the LSE". A Facebook group for the campaign has over 260 members.

The LSE was unavailable for comment.

Wall posts from the LSE Not For Profit Facebook group >>

"I think that it is time the school set up an ethical investments policy and that students are included in the decision making body that governs donations." Sofia Zabolotskih Government Student

Business, students tell 'profit-driven' LSE

Forceful letter to School Director >> Arms companies investments, Zayed theatre criticised



Photograph Erik Lang

The letter to Howard Davies in full

Dear Sir Howard,

We are writing to you to express our concern about the unethical and business-driven direction the LSE is currently taking.

The LSE has a rich history as a centre of social progress. It is a fantastic institution with some of the world's leading academics and research. The student body is the most vibrant and diverse in the UK. But the university is losing sight of its original academic purpose. Recent moves to run the university like a business are placing the university under threat. From being a centre of social progress, the LSE has forgotten about the intrinsic value of education, and instead seems more concerned with the bottom line and its global brand.

Students increasingly feel that they are paying for this brand, rather than an education. Recent performances in teaching quality and student satisfaction surveys have been dismal. Teaching quality would not have been allowed to deteriorate had the School management placed sufficient value on the importance of the student experience.

Similarly, we are concerned by the School's decisions to end twenty-four hour opening for the Library, and to consider closing the Nursery for financial reasons. Both of these services are essential to students who must carry out paid employment or look after children during their time at LSE. For an institution with a £26m surplus to stop such essential services on financial grounds is unacceptable.

The deterioration of teaching quality and

threats to essential services have led a large number of students, alumni and academics to feel that the School's administration does not consider the quality of education and services it provides to be a priority. We urge you to consider the possibility that these problems exist because of an institutional mentality that places undue value on corporate aims and neglects the importance of the student experience. We request that you use your unique position within the School to consult academics and students on where the LSE's fundamental priorities should lie, and on how more can be done to place the needs of students and academics at the heart of the decision making process.

Business-minded leadership at LSE has had serious unethical consequences. The decision to name a lecture theatre after the former dictator of UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, in exchange for £2.5m was shocking. Sheikh Zayed's regime permitted gross exploitation of workers, illegalised homosexuality and failed to sign up to international agreements on human rights. LSE's students and academics study and further the ideals of democracy, human rights and emancipation. There can be no place at this School for the commemoration of leaders who abuse these freedoms.

The investments the LSE hold in and the funding it has received from arms companies such as BAE Systems, Boeing and Rolls Royce are equally unacceptable. Arms companies do not just arm 'good' countries to fight 'just' wars. They are responsible for perpetuating bloody conflicts of every type all over the planet. No public institution, especially one supposedly dedicated to social progress, should

profit from war and suffering.

Dirty money at the LSE is not only morally indefensible; it constitutes a gross violation of the School's Institutional Values that demand "the highest standards of ethics and conduct in all activities".

We note that the School is currently working to develop an ethical investment policy. However, this effort is currently focused around the principle of engagement. This approach would see the School use its shares in firms such as those mentioned above to attempt to shape their policies. This could well lead to the ridiculous and unacceptable situation whereby the School adopts an official ethical investment policy, but continues to invest in grossly unethical firms.

The time has now come for you to lead an effort, in consultation with academics and students, to draw up a statement of ethics that governs the LSE's fundraising activities.

We also request that you personally work towards securing student representation on the Development Committee, and any other group involved in fundraising and investment activities. Such representation is essential if trust in the LSE's fundraising activities is to be restored.

The corporate and unethical direction the LSE is taking has only been possible because of deficiencies in the School's governing structures. School governors and Council members have long exhibited complacency and unwillingness to step out of line or speak out against the business-driven agenda. Decisions made in the School's decision-making bodies



Isenotforprofit.org

>> Students and staff can add their signatures to the letter at www.Isenotforprofit.org
>> Campaign planning meeting tonight - G212, 6pm

Do you agree with this letter? Is LSE being run like a business? Do you disagree with the letter - has the School been successful in keeping its ethical standards?

Email your views and letters to: comment@thebeaveronline.co.uk

are not democratic enough. They are taken by "acclamation", a process that sees committees rubber stamp the orders of senior figures such as yourself. We call upon you to introduce the secret ballot in School committees and enshrine the value of free and open debate in the School's constitu-

tional documents.

What really brought the School management's business-driven mentality home to many students was your unacceptable declaration during a Students' Union General Meeting that you do not consider yourself accountable to students because "most of you are loss making anyway". This statement revealed a lack of respect for the role of students within a university, and a belief that it is appropriate to run the LSE as if it is a profit-driven business. Students feel highly insulted by your remarks. We demand no less than a full apology, in an email to all students.

The LSE is a fantastic university, but your leadership is leading it astray. The fact that students are "loss-making" does not make us a less valuable part of the LSE community. The fact that the LSE requires external funding does not excuse the school profiting from war and exploitation. We request that you reassess and define the purpose of the LSE in conjunction with every stakeholder in the School.

Only by recognising the mistakes of the past and the abandoning the dangerous direction in which the LSE's current leadership is taking the School can it be restored to its rightful place as a centre for social progress rather than a direct obstacle to it.

Given the seriousness of the issues raised, we look forward to a speedy response.

Yours sincerely,
The Undersigned

"As a previous 'high margin product', I was appalled by the corporate style in which the LSE is run."
Molly Griffard
General Course Alum

"Its a shame for an academic institution to operate like a shop where students are seen as customers to be exploited from every single penny they can acquire."
Tony Karimu
Masters Student

"I'm much concerned about falling standards of teaching and staff controls."
Musab Iftikhar Khan
Masters Alum

"Self-promotional campaigns aimed primarily at putting forward a narrow ideological agenda, totally undermine the student voice."
Douglas Oliver
Undergraduate Alum

"The LSE is full of swine, and that rascalish Davies has much to answer for."
Tom Warren
Undergraduate Alum

LSE to waive application fees for Gazan students

- > Over 150 students and academics sign letter
- > LSE Director declines to issue public statement
- > Divest from firms that arm Israel, School told

Sofia Zabolotskih
Michael Deas

LSE Director Howard Davies has pledged to waive application fees for Palestinians that have been affected by the Israeli operations against Gaza.

Applicants for a postgraduate course usually have to pay a £35 fee but Davies has promised to implement an existing mechanism to waive postgraduate fees and work with UCAS to waive undergraduate application fees.

Davies said he was "deeply distressed by the reports of conditions" in Gaza in a response to a letter signed by over 150 students and academics. The letter was organised by LSE academics Dr Mike Cushman and Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, the Students' Union Palestine Society, and the LSE Palestine Solidarity Initiative, a group that aims to increase the number of applications to the London School of Economics from Palestine.

The organisers of the letter said they were happy that Davies had pledged a level of financial support, but expressed their disappointment that their other requests were rejected.

The letter also requested that Davies issue a public statement condemning Israel's attack on Palestinian educational institutions and the bombing of the Islamic University of Gaza, support the efforts of LSE faculty to build links with Palestinian universities and divest from firms supporting the Israeli war effort.

The LSE invests in BAE, an arms company which provides components and munitions used by the Israeli military.

Davies said he would not issue a public statement, arguing that it was not School practice to take political positions unless its own policies are at issue. In response to the request to assist the development of academic links with Palestinian universities, Davies said that it was not the role of LSE management to initiate such links but that support for such initiatives does exist. The Director brushed aside the demand to divest from firms supporting the Israeli war effort, highlighting the work of the School's Finance and General Purpose Committee that is currently examining the School's investment policies.

LSE academic Dr Mike Cushman argued that Davies was betraying the LSE's history by refusing to make a statement.

"LSE is an institution founded on those Fabian values that were the precursor of the human rights agenda of modern politics. LSE must restate those values and condemn state criminality. It is not a matter of politics, it is a matter of humanity," he said.

Zainub Chohan, Chair of the Students' Union Palestine Society, said that Davies' refusal to issue a statement was "in stark contrast to an overtly political statement issued by Davies in May 2007 condemning a University and College Union resolution concerning the Israeli Occupation.

Davies said that he made the 2007 statement because the UCU motion proposed an academic boycott, an issue which affects the LSE.

Chohan also highlighted student concern with the LSE's investments in firms that arm Israel.

She said, "By holding shares in BAE, the LSE is directly profiting from the genocidal collective punishment of the people of Gaza. BAE profits, and therefore the suffering of the Gazan population, will fund

our university. There can be no place for profiting from war and suffering at an academic institution. We call upon the LSE to divest from BAE and all other arms companies immediately."

Chohan said that Davies' "hypocrisy" was tantamount to saying that "Palestinian lives do not matter."

Students' Union General Secretary Aled Fisher is among those disappointed by the response. He has sent a letter to the administration urging it to reconsider.

"LSE's Institutional Values are consistent with making a statement on the denial of the right to education in Gaza, particularly the value of engagement that states that "interaction with the wider world so that the insights of the social sciences are disseminated as widely as possible for the improvement of society" is integral to the School's core values," Fisher said.

LSE Palestine Solidarity Initiative co-ordinator and former student Ziyaad Lunat called for academic institutions to help students in Gaza.

"We have already noted the cessation of potential applicants to LSE from Gaza as a result of the invasion and urge LSE and all educational institutions to issue messages of solidarity and pledge material support to the Palestinian people," he said.

Israel Society President Patrick Jones called for co-operation and an atmosphere of understanding.

"Student actions should focus on trying to support the efforts of organizations that work to alleviate the suffering on both sides," he said.

"Through co-operation between the Israel and Palestine societies, we can raise much needed funds to mitigate the effects of this conflict," Jones added.

Students and staff join rallies on both side of divide

Sofia Zabolotskih

LSE students and academics were among the hundreds of thousands that protested around the world against the war in Gaza.

Students have taken part in several protests since the Israeli offensive began, including a large LSE contingent in last Saturday's demonstration, which saw up to 100,000 people march to the Israeli embassy in South Kensington.

LSE academic Dr Mike Cushman was among the speakers at the rally held in Hyde Park before the march began.

He spoke out in support of Israeli refuseniks and demonstrators worldwide, and expressed bewilderment at what he sees as the continued abuse of Palestinians' right to education.

The Islamic University, the Gaza Acri-

cultural College and the Ministry of Education were all part of the targets that have been bombed in Israel's two-week air and ground assault.

"These attacks very clearly represent an attempt to wipe out the infrastructure and target civilians, to break their will to resist," said Erin O'Halloren, a 3rd year Bsc International Relations and History student, "This is a colonial situation where the Palestinians are trapped in a cage, with no way of helping themselves and no say in what's occurring to them."

Estelle Cooch, a 2nd year Bsc History student, has been to Palestine five years ago and likened the scenes she saw in Gaza to images of the Warsaw ghetto. "I can only imagine that it's gotten about 10 times worse since I was there. The attacks on Gaza in which the Israelis have killed almost 900 Palestinians and wounded thousands more are not going to get rid of Hamas but create more supporters for

groups like them"

Saturday's protest started off peacefully. However, protesters were confronted with hundreds of riot police at the Israeli embassy, whose continued charges into the crowd led to clashes.

Aled Dylwin Fisher, the General Secretary of the Student Union, was caught in the crushes. "There were some people throwing things outside the Israeli Embassy, but there were hundreds of peaceful protesters going past it," he said.

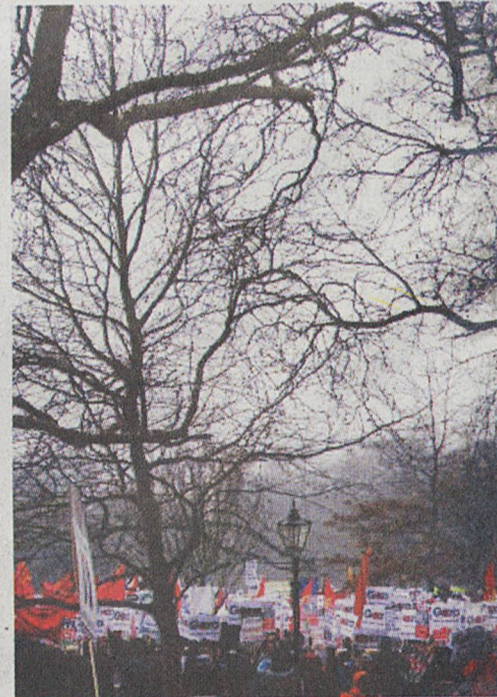
"Suddenly, the police charged the people nearest the embassy. The whole crowd was then pushing backwards towards the other side of the road and people were being crushed, as there were barriers on the other side of the road too.

"Then the barriers suddenly toppled and we fell forward on top of them. Our legs were trapped in it - I lost both my shoes - but we managed to scramble to safety. There were children, women and



Photographs

Clockwise from above: Protestors drop flag at rally (Sofia Z); Israeli flags (Flickr user chrisjohnbeckett); Protest outside Houses of Parliament (underdogpiano@btinternet.com) Gaza protest; Gaza protest in the park (Van



elderly people crushed."

At about 5pm around 1000 demonstrators were boxed in by police near the embassy, with further riot police dispatched to disperse the rest of the demonstrators as they were arriving from Hyde Park. LSE students were among those boxed in.

Chris Westgarth, a 2nd year Bsc Government student, saw demonstrators smash the windows of Starbucks and other shops. "The situation was violent. The police were on horses and other people are putting up barriers against them."

Demonstrators were finally let out one-by-one at around 7pm. "The police were intimidating and unprofessional," said Westgarth, "They took everybody's details and pictures. It was completely over the top."

Organisers accused police of heavy-handedness and complaints have been made to the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

On Sunday, LSE students took part in a pro-Israel rally in Trafalgar Square. Placards read, "End Hamas Terror - Peace for the People of Israel and Gaza."

The protest passed peacefully although Police had to separate the Israel supporters and a group of pro-Palestine demonstrators.



As our Dignity sinks



Prior to the Israeli attack on Gaza, LSE academics Mike Cushman and Jonathan Rosenhead travelled to Gaza on board the siege-breaking ship Dignity.

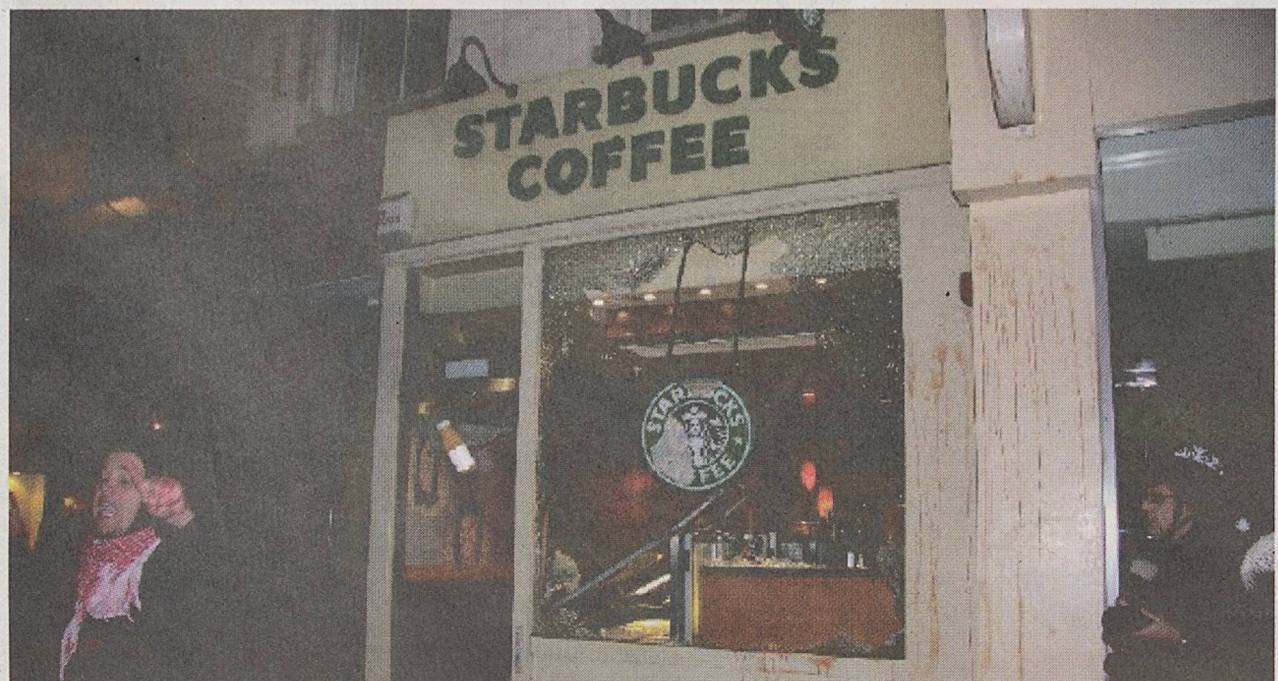
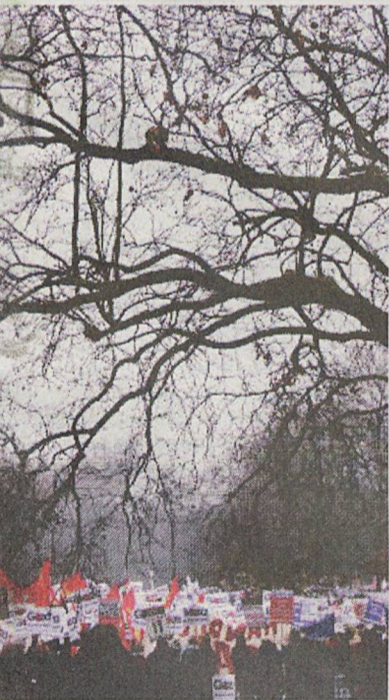
The ship delivered humanitarian supplies and brought back eleven students that the Israeli occupying forces were not permitting to leave Gaza to attend foreign universities.

The academics set sail from Cyprus two weeks before the beginning of hostili-

ties. Professor Cushman said that to Gazans "an attack was generally assumed to be imminent."

"The siege was a long-term covert war crime - population punishment. Now virtually all of the public buildings we visited have been reduced to rubble," he added.

The Dignity was violently barged by an Israeli navy ship as it attempted to land on Gaza on December 30. **Michael Deas**



Dreams of Fresh club night Crushed by students

Henry Lodge

The Students' Union passed a motion at the final Union General Meeting of last term to change the name of LSE's student night from Fresh, back to its original name Crush.

The change to Fresh was part of the Students' Union's plans for a rebranding of the Union's entertainments which was launched in September 2008, at the start of Michaelmas Term.

However, attendance at Fresh decreased in the weeks after the Freshers' Festival and has remained low since.

The rebrand's failure to raise revenues led to the changes in pricing for the night. Previously entry charges would only apply after 8 pm. However, Fresh only charged people for entry after 11 pm. Ultimately, attendance remained poor throughout the Michaelmas term leading to the conclusion that the rebrand had ultimately failed.

The cancellation of Bhangra Crush and the removal of R&B and hip-hop music from the Underground bar is also alleged to be behind the decrease in attendance. Bhangra Crush had previously been one of

the more popular nights for the Students' Union.

Third year student Chris Hare said that the rebranding, particularly the change in music genres was "wishful thinking", however "ultimately R&B and hip hop music the Underground Bar drew in a regular base" at Crush.

Another student said, "Fresh promised so much but delivered so little. The drop in revenues was due to the lack of promotions after week two."

Students' Union Treasurer Wil Barber said he was as yet unable to release financial figures, but acknowledged Fresh's decline in revenues.

Barber said: "We do believe there is still a future for a LSE student night, dwindling interest has been as much a result of failure to match the savage competition from the likes of Rough Hill who now have a rep on most of the hall committees. We are also still suffering from a decision taken last year to stop marketing the night to other students in the capital. The attendance of students from other universities such as Kings and UCL often helped the night break even when most LSE students were staying in because of essay/coursework deadlines."



CHURCH

BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT.

SUNDAYS
11:45AM



VENUE:
OLD THEATRE,
LONDON
SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS,
HOUGHTON STREET

equippers.co.uk

EQUIPPERS
CHURCH

Houghton Street poster policy change to affect societies

Marie Dunaway

New regulations prohibiting fly-posting around external campus areas are to come into action over the next couple of weeks. The new rules, implemented by the school, will mean that posters put up along Houghton Street without permission will be removed without warning. This comes after concerns over the large amounts of waste paper that putting posters up daily produces.

The school is to install 6 new boards along Houghton Street for student society posters to be displayed. The rules mean that societies will have to submit any posters they want displayed by 4pm the previous afternoon to the Student Union reception for them to appear on the boards the following day. Only posters authorised by the School or the Students Union will be displayed in these boards. This will also aid stopping unwanted advertising

around campus. Another move to help societies advertise and also reduce physical waste is a facility for societies to promote their events free on SubTV in the Quad and Tuns. A How-to-pack explaining this is being created by Nick Pauro, Student Events Manager and will be circulated to societies over the coming weeks.

Although the decision was made by the school it was met with approval by those consulted in the Union because of its environmental impact. Zoe Cooke, the Student Union's Societies Officer commented that the Union approved the plans as "it will waste less paper since currently posters tend to get taken down at the end of everyday so more get put up the following". In regards to the new SubTV plans she said "we will start doing this regardless of whether the boards go up in time or not. It's a lot greener and a better use of our resources in any case."

The bulletin boards, which had been planned to be erected for the beginning of Lent term, are currently delayed due to industrial problems over the Christmas break but should be in place by mid-term.



GO ON,

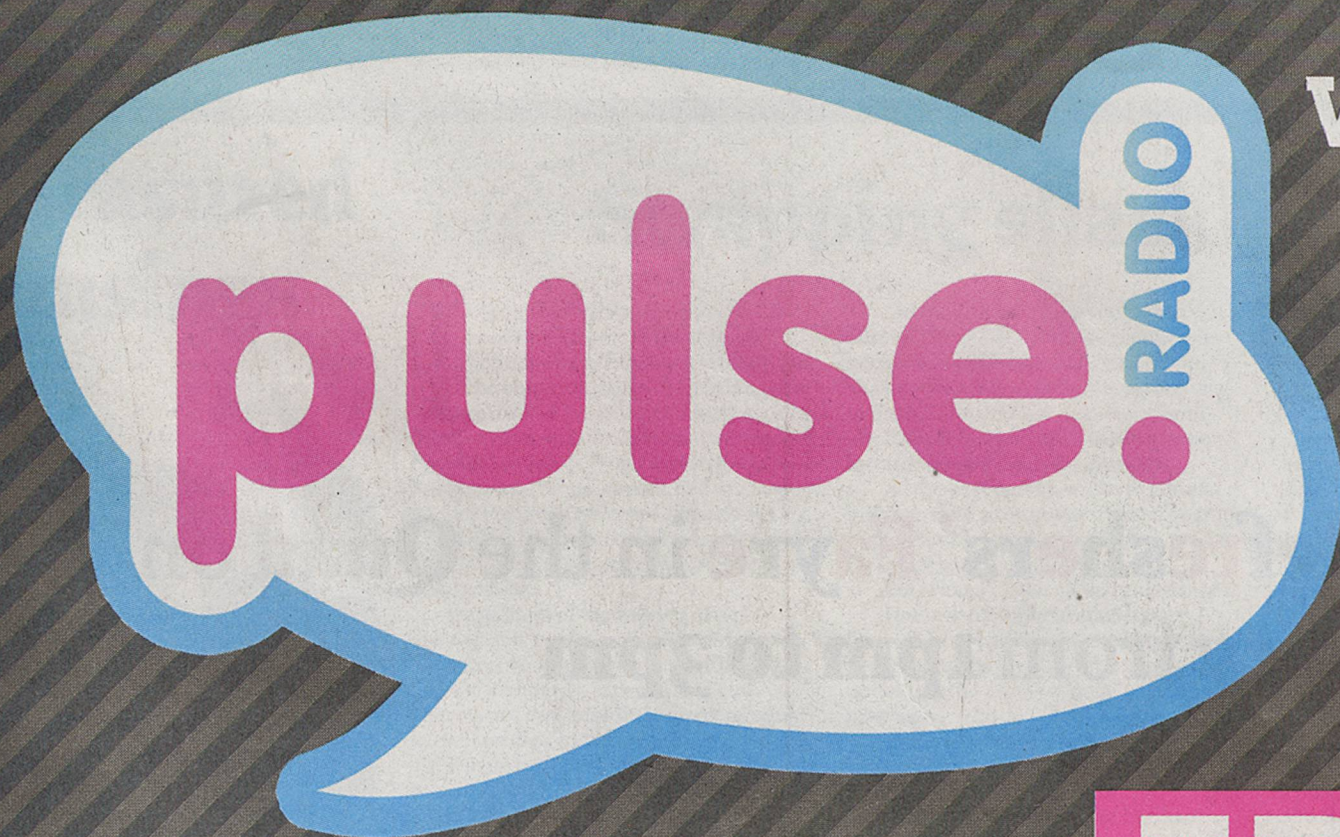
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Comment

We need a gateway to a more ethical School

LSE's complacent leadership must turn away from chasing money - and listen to students

Loren
Davy
Green



When I tell someone I'm studying at the LSE, the reaction is usually something along the lines of "oh, well done you", and a little nervous attempt to outline their views on left wing politics. They assume that as a student here I must be up to my ears in political activism, perpetuating the School's Fabian roots while receiving some of the highest quality education available in this country. Sadly, this couldn't be further from the truth.

George Bernard Shaw and Sidney and Beatrice Webb would doubtless be turning in their graves if they saw what was happening to their beloved LSE. Designed to bring together like-minded gifted students and academics to strive for real progress in the fields of social and political sciences, the LSE has now forgotten its purpose and is being run like a business. The School's Director, Howard Davies, brought this home painfully when he recently told the Students' Union General Meeting that, as students, most of us are "loss-making anyway".

LSE is no longer student focused. Satisfaction surveys have consistently revealed a poor quality of teaching and services. Students, especially foreign students who pay through the nose to attend what they were led to believe is one of the 'leading academic institutions' in the country, feel cheated at the slipping standards and lack of contact time compared to other top universities like Oxbridge.

On top of this, the LSE has claimed not to have enough resources to keep the nursery, a vital resource for some of its students, open. It has also refused to pay the £30,000 a year needed to keep the library open 24 hours a day. This is despite the fact that LSE made a £26 million surplus last year alone: money which, should they choose, could have easily resolved both of these issues. Yet the School makes no move to do so. Why? Because its Director and those in charge are treating it as a business. At the bottom line, student interests come second to business goals.



Perhaps most shocking of all, given the ethical and political persuasions of its founding members, are the companies in which the LSE chooses to invest its money - our tuition fees. Investments in arms companies such as BAE, Boeing, and Rolls Royce demonstrate all too clearly that the as long as the cash keeps rolling in, LSE won't question where or how it was obtained. The School has said itself that one company which it invests in - BHP Bilton - provides material for nuclear weapons.

The Sheikh Zayed theatre debacle serves to emphasise my point. The School readily accepted a donation of £2.5 million on behalf of a dictator who criminalised homosexuality, refused to sign up to international agreements on torture, and allowed the gross exploitation of foreign workers. The donation was unnecessary as the entire of the New Academic Build-

ing, including the theatre, had already been budgeted for. Furthermore, members of committee responsible for donations admitted that they had never actually heard of Sheikh Zayed previously, and had they done a background check would not have taken the money. Yet LSE refuse to change the name, continuing to cause offence to many students of all backgrounds across campus.

The LSE is one of the most vibrant and diverse universities in the world, with an excellent reputation for research and a long history of producing outstanding contributors to society as a whole. Yet it seems that unethical policies, lax educational standards and poor services are letting it down. It does not seem too unreasonable to ask that the school begins to prioritise the reason for its existence: its students. It also needs to be more

LSE's unethical policies and poor services are letting it down

scrupulous in terms of its investment and donation policies.

The LSE: Not For Profit campaign is fighting for exactly these results. Their supporters may have accosted you on the street at the end of last term, wearing t-shirts and a grin despite the rain and cold. Their message is simple: put the student experience at the heart of the decision making process, stop cuts to services and improve teaching quality. They are campaigning for the School to be more than a brand, to remember its Fabian history and to fundraise accordingly.

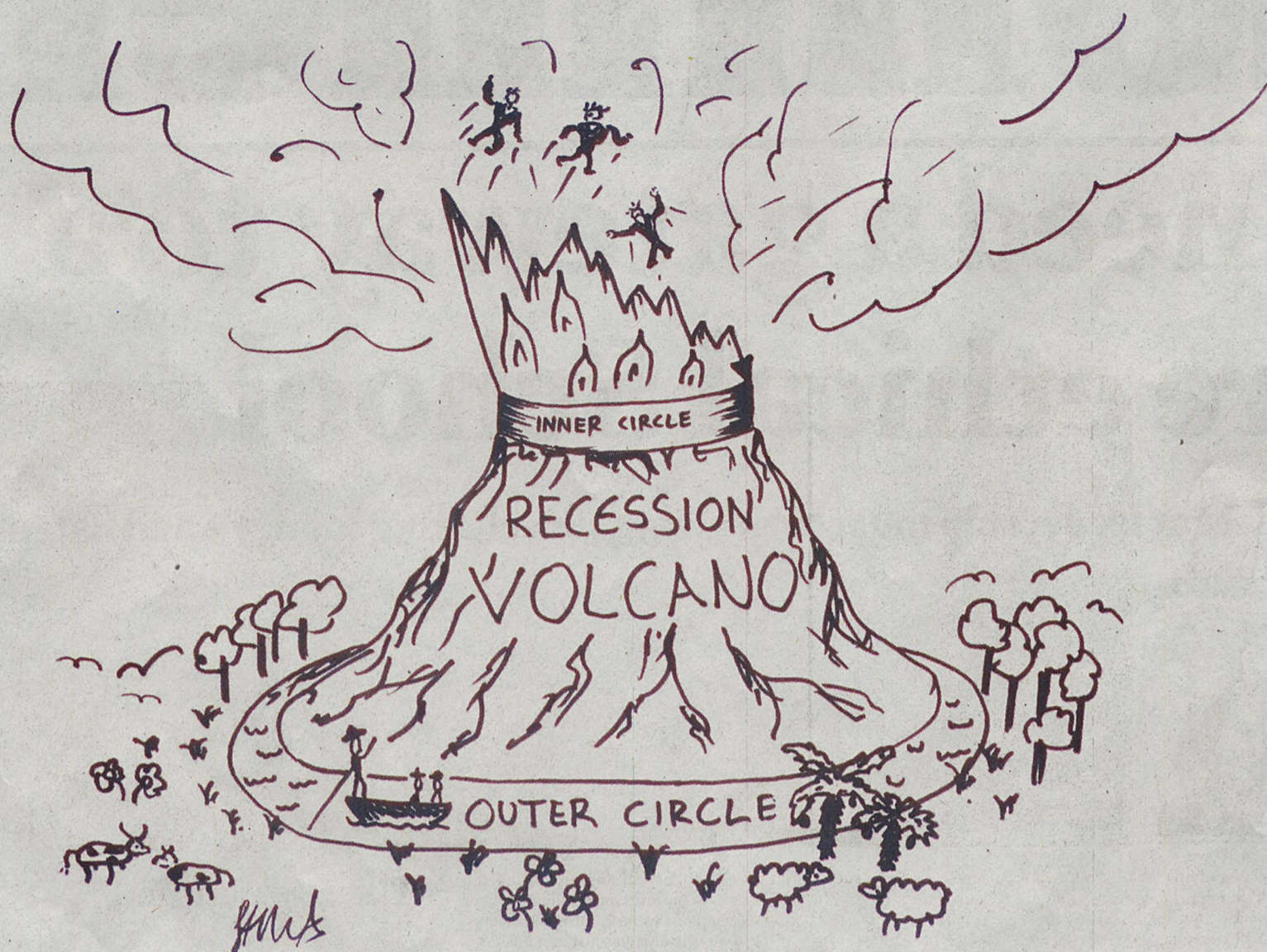
The corporate and unethical direction the LSE is taking is a result of the leadership's complacency. The only way to save the LSE from itself is for students to come together and campaign. The School cannot ignore a united front. We can make the change we want to see happen.

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Jack will be back next week...



The Beaver

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LSE bankers should think twice about riding the volcano

It's now clear there's not much point in setting your hopes too high. But there's no need to panic. The reality of the recession has finally hit home to students at the beginning of 2009 - including on this campus. LSE graduates are not immune from the economic downturn.

It is increasingly plain that campus recruitment by City firms is, if not in total collapse, in full retreat this year. LSE students don't need to be aware that their university has possibly been consigned to an 'outer circle' that this affects their collective career ambitions perhaps more than any other campus population in the country.

If, despite all this, students

still want to pursue a career in investment banking, then we can only recommend the excellent advice provided by the LSE Careers Service. Making fewer, more strategic applications, in areas of the finance sector that you have researched well, would be a good way to steer through to a job at the other side of the recession storm.

But we think this is a deeper watershed moment for many of the traditional career destinations of most LSE students, and this is why we welcome the School and its Careers Service making students aware of other areas of the labour market.

LSE students shouldn't be absolutely dissuaded from investment

banking and finance. This actually be the perfect time to make waves in the industry and take part in laying the foundations of the future of international finance, as it rises out of the ruins of recession. If anyone can do it, LSE students can. But only if graduates get their foot in the door in the first place - and even then with massive caveats surrounding the entire industry.

Newness to the industry is no guarantee that graduates will escape the "talent reviews" and "career upgrades" that human resources directors have already unleashed on their firms in a desperate bid to restructure. This chaos will only continue as the recession bites

deeper and banking activity remains paralysed. In the longer term, this year's (and next year's) graduates will be the first to be fired from the City if the economy belly-flops back into recession after a mishandled recovery in 2010.

Investment bankers are supposed to be experts in risk - that is, apart from the ones who have just drowned the world economy in a tidal wave of supremely risky debt. In terms of its current chances of providing a worthwhile, fulfilling career, much of the post-crunch financial sector is radioactive with risk right now - a poisoned chalice not long for this world, no longer worth students' time and effort trying to break into.

By contrast, LSE students graduating this should realise just how many other doors their degree will open for them throughout their career, as well as being a treasured academic possession in its own right. Social business, green entrepreneurship, the new media - the post-recession economy may need very different skills compared to the previous one, as well as needing the stalwart actuarial and consulting jobs that also attract graduates from this School. What is certain throughout is that LSE students will be in the inner circle of the new economy, and they should reflect on this even as the recession looks gloomiest.

It's up to us to create the LSE we want

Consecutive Students' Union administrations have tackled the multiple problems facing LSE students on an individual basis. Small but committed groups have long campaigned against the School's unethical practices.

By highlighting the LSE's general loss of purpose and business-minded direction, the LSE: Not for Profit campaign will present a coherent and united front capable of both giving students the ability to think critically about what kind of institution they

want the LSE to be.

It must be understood that the LSE's current direction and lack of respect for its students is neither inevitable or long standing. Anthony Giddens, the previous director, ran a university that students felt part of and didn't undermine the work of its academics by honouring dictators. Given that the LSE is directed by Howard Davies, former head of the Financial Services Authority and Peter Sutherland, the Chairman of BP, we should not be surprised by

the LSE's recent turn in a business-focused direction. But it's gone too far. If the LSE hasn't been the place we all want it to be relatively recently, then only student pressure can save it from itself.

The LSE: Not for Profit campaign is not about student politics. It is about the LSE community coming together to take a stand against the increasingly profit-driven nature of our University. Furthermore, it is not just a declaration of what sort of university we don't want,

it's a declaration of what the LSE should be: a progressive centre of social progress in which students are valued as the important part of the community that they are.

Even if you've never considered yourself a politically active student, you can help the campaign. Sign the letter, attend the planning meeting. It's up to us to create the LSE we want. Because if we don't demand an end to this business mentality, who will?

RAE 2008

Congratulations to all the School's academic staff on LSE's Research Assessment Exercise results - a true testament to the voluminous and varied academic research that our small campus produces. As well as producing the best research in their fields in the country, the School's Economics and Law departments are also models of LSE's engagement with the real world. Students are lucky to be taught by the best minds in their subjects of study - the RAE demonstrated this in spades.

In the war of words, Israel's lies are spread unquestioned

Israel's slick PR machine is working at full speed in this conflict - without being challenged

Charlotte Galvin



Fewer military officers; more women; tightly controlled messages; and ministers kept on a short leash. As stated by The Jewish Chronicle on 2nd January, this is the strategy of the Israeli PR machine. Israel has learnt its lessons from the Lebanon War in 2006 when military officers dominated the screens, thus making their claims unpalatable.

Given that the current massacre in Gaza has been planned by the Israeli government for six months, it should come as no surprise that Israel is running such a tight PR ship. The banning of foreign correspondents in Gaza by Israel, despite an Israeli Supreme Court ruling to the contrary, has given Israel's PR machine carte blanche to peddle lies and shape international coverage of the crisis. Just as the Palestinians are being annihilated militarily, they are also being butchered in the media war. If only the besieged and impoverished Palestinians could get a PR machine together: they don't even have to lie, truth and morality is on their side.

The manufactured nature of Israel's propaganda war was epitomised by last Wednesday's pro-Israel protest. Huge Union Jack flags were waved alongside the Israeli flag and accompanied by a rendition of God Save the Queen. Yes, God Save the Queen, not God Save the People of Gaza, but God Save the Queen. You can imagine the average Brit swallowing this facade whole. The pro-Israel demonstrators would be applauded for their loyalty to Queen and country while the pro-Palestine supporters would be vilified for chanting in Arabic; or at least that was the plan. But given the well-oiled Israeli PR machine that bulldozes onto our screens everyday, I wouldn't blame people for viewing the siege of Gaza in such a simplified and skewed way. I would blame the media for allowing their news channels and programmes to function as a platform for Israeli war propaganda, rather than objective news reporting. Furthermore, the contrived and disingenuous message



Israel's Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, speaking recently
Photo: flickr user Tzipi Livni Gallery

of the Israeli PR machine is in part successful because it is so audacious.

It reminds me of a time when a friend witnessed a sofa being stolen from a department store. In hindsight the audacity of the act was so mind-boggling that not one of the hundreds of people nearby stopped to question the men carrying the sofa out of the shop at midday on a Saturday. 'Oh they must be employees', thought passers-by. The Israeli PR machine operates in the same way. You can imagine the Israeli cabinet meetings: 'Go on Tzipi, I dare you, say there isn't a humanitarian crisis.' The lies peddled by the Israeli government are so gargantuan and pulled off with such ease, that no-one really stops to question them.

The IDF's tagline of being 'the most moral army in the world' is just one such example of the topsy-turvy view adopted by the Israeli government and army. Or if we take the word 'moral' to be defined as being in favour of killing children and imprisoning 1.5 million people, then the motto is apt.

The images of the conflict on TV show interchangeable pictures of charred bodies, bloodied babies, wailing mothers and decapitated police officers (classed as civilians under international law). Yet even with this constant stream of visual horror the Israeli PR line never fails to find justification for such massacres. 'Human shields' - the phrase seems to ring in my ears so much that it has led to tinnitus. But did no one stop to think that when the

Hamas leader Nizar Rayyan was killed along with his fourteen family members, these civilians weren't 'human shields' - the Hamas leader was just at home with his family. But as with the despicable bombing of the United Nations school in Gaza, thus far resulting in 43 deaths and over 150 injured, the Israeli PR machine did not offer apologies or remorse for committing such a war crime. No, on the contrary; the government spokesperson Mark Regev accused Hamas of committing a 'war crime' for using those inside the school as a 'human shield.' The temerity with which Regev spoke was confirmed by the fact that there were, apparently, no militants within the school compound. But the lie is already out there, joined by a million other Israeli falsehoods, unstopably ricocheting from one media outlet to another.

Yet for all the lies propagated by the Israeli war machine, some deserve special attention and indeed must be rectified. The IDF are not carrying out 'surgical strikes' in Gaza; such a task is impossible given the density of the population in this slither of land. Gaza is not a satellite state of Iran.

I do not expect it to be too long before the bodies of dead children are not immune from the poisonous tongues of the Israeli war machine's propaganda; will it be that the children's dummies were in fact Iranian-supplied grenades, will the

The lies peddled by the Israeli government are so large that no one stops to question them

baby formula be explained instead as a Molotov cocktail in-the-making: is nothing sacred?

And if all else fails, we are told that the Israelis are with us in 'the war on terror.' We are told that we have had our 9/11 and 7/7, now the Israelis must take up the mantle for defeating the terrorists. How convenient that Mark Regev et al should pass off Palestinian resistance to being in the world's largest open-air prison, in the form of homemade rockets, as terrorism of the same ilk as Al-Qaeda. It is true that Hamas are firing rockets on Israel, but the media fails to mention that they are reactionary and symbolic of the Palestinian refusal to yield to the Israeli siege. How convenient that the Israeli PR machine should skirt over the dispossession of the Palestinians for over 60 years, the building of the Apartheid wall, illegal settlements, the 4 million Palestinian refugees and most recently the nearly two-year long siege of Gaza and withholding of medicine, electricity, water, food and fuel amongst many, many other evils. Instead we are told they are just terrorists and neither the incompetent news readers nor our ignorant selves take the Israeli line to task.

Not only Israel's army, but its PR machine are acting with impunity. Just as the UN is powerless to bring about a ceasefire, the media has failed to hold Israel accountable; to question the official Israeli line, despite public outrage at the killing in Gaza.

Exporting war

Israelis around the world are facing a violent backlash from the war in Gaza

"Natalie"

The author wishes to remain anonymous for reasons of personal safety

Fighting in the Middle East is dominating the news and, more importantly, dominating lives. But the conflict is not just in Israel and Gaza: it has manifested itself outside the physical terrain from which it originates. We see this on campus, where we have the Israel and Palestine societies, and in the streets of London, where we have witnessed protests and solidarity rallies.

Despite the sometimes blatant

hostility, one must accept (and celebrate) the right to proclaim one's support or disapproval of either side in a conflict as a basic feature of democracy. Unfortunately, heated arguments and disagreements about who is 'right' and who is 'wrong' are not the only way this conflict takes shape in this part of the world. An incident that took place recently has proved that we - in countries regarded as democratic - have experienced the nastier, undemocratic side of the current fighting on our own territory. This is an issue that must be addressed.

Like many others fortunate enough not to be endangered by terror or war around me at the time, I spent New Year's Eve celebrating. Yet while my thoughts were in a whole other place to battle and tragedy, two Israelis were shot in Denmark - just for being Israeli. Unlike me, they did not get to toast in the New Year with champagne and fireworks. A man apparently found it justifiable to shoot the two

as a response to the fighting taking place in Gaza.

Attacks on Israelis abroad are, unfortunately, not a new phenomenon. So why is this attack so different from other barbaric terror attacks that have taken place over the past few years?

The answer is that, unlike other assaults abroad, one could claim that what happened in Denmark had no ulterior motive. The perpetrator was - as far as is known - unaided, and decided that it was reasonable enough to kill Israelis just because of their nationality. This was not about gaining publicity or attempting to pressure governments, as was the case in the vicious attacks in Munich 1972, Mombasa 2002, Taba 2004, and other places where Israelis have been attacked and murdered for their nationality. This criminal just couldn't accept their existence, for the pure fact that they were

Israeli. It frighteningly proves a mindset that has spread from Hamas to some of its supporters, legitimising the murder of innocent individuals, wherever they are and whatever they are doing - and these people are operating in our own backyard.

Being half Israeli, I now wonder if speaking Hebrew might provoke a similar attack against myself here in London. It also raises the question of whether we have reached a point where Hamas supporters and people angered by the conflict feel it legitimate to target all Israelis, as long as they are in the vicinity. Are Israelis in the streets of Ashdod and in the streets of Amsterdam today perceived as carrying a legitimate target on their forehead? Unfortunately, this seems to be a valid course of action for some. This man was a loner, but it seems he was not alone in carrying these thoughts. Today, security threats are very real, placing Israelis as well as Jews in danger. Just ask the Jewish communities around Europe who have experienced a

sharp rise of attacks over the recent weeks, as so-called responses to the happenings in Gaza - regardless of any affiliation with Israel. Do events far away justify acts of racism here?

We cannot ignore these developments, not when it comes to Jews and Israelis, or when it comes to any other religion or nationality. We are in danger of having to repeat Niemöller's words: 'when they came for me, there was no one left to speak up'. Let's not accept behavior which some of our grandparents endured in Europe in the 1930s - let alone what it led to in the 1940s. Instead we should, as fortunate people, receiving world-class education and studying in a privileged country, set an example for how peaceful relations should look between Israeli and Palestinian, Jew and Muslim. Let us strive towards such common goals of peace, instead of intensifying the conflict further.



Dangerous to identify as Israeli abroad?
Photo: flickr user hoyasmeg

Letters to the editor



Dear Sir,

The past two weeks have been a trying time for those in Israel and Gaza and all those working to try to bring peace to this tragic conflict that claims more lives daily. As I am sure this edition of the Beaver can attest to, this conflict will also be reflected on our campus. Knowing this, the parties involved have the freedom to choose which approaches to take and what tone will prevail. We have the opportunity to either repeat the divisive and damaging scenes that occurred this time last year, or to forge a new approach that can be constructive and respectful for both sides. Therefore, I hope to discuss with our friends in the Palestine Society ways to work together to aid those on the ground in this conflict as well as ways to improve our relations here on campus.

However, opportunity is not all that awaits us in the upcoming term. The conflict in Gaza has unfortunately sparked an array of hate-inspired attacks against Jews and Israelis across Europe as well as here in London. It would be a shame to see this spread to us here at LSE. Nevertheless, with a proactive attitude, we can work to prevent this. For this purpose, I ask that our General Secretary, Aled Fisher, our friend and Anti-Racism officer, Joseph Brown, and the school administration, work with both the Jewish and Israel Societies to make for more friendly environment for Jewish and Israeli students.

We in the Israel Society look forward to working with the aforementioned parties and having a constructive term of promoting peace and coexistence here as well as in the Middle East.

Regards,

Patrick Jones
BSc '09
General Secretary
LSE SU Israel Society

Email: editor@thebeaveronline.co.uk
Fax: 0207 852 3733

Letters must be received by midnight on the Sunday prior to publication. They must state your full name and be no longer than 250 words. Letters may be edited.

How would she have dealt with the economic crisis?

Brown has failed to learn the lessons from Thatcher's powerful leadership

Jonathan Damsgaard

In April it will be exactly thirty years since Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party was elected into power in the United Kingdom. While she remains a divisive figure in British society, it is hard to ignore her economic legacy. The continuation of Thatcherite economic policy by New Labour in the 1990s was a large determinant of their electoral success. In the early 1980s she faced an overwhelming crisis similar to the one we face now, and one wonders how she would have navigated the current financial turmoil.

Thatcher would not have bailed out the Big Three group of car companies in the US, that's for sure. Although she may not have liked the financial bailouts as a matter of principle, she would have recognised the inevitability of systemic financial collapse. The Big Three, while representative of a politically significant industry, do not qualify for such an elevated standing. The crisis is a textbook case of an industry relying on protectionist trade policies and burdened by unnecessarily powerful unions. The firms have had ample opportunity to restructure their product portfolio and improve their mileage and environmental records. Even more striking is the fact that Chrysler was bailed out in 1984 under similar conditions and presented identical promises of reform.

Thatcher would not have jumped on the bailout-wagon in general, on either side of the Atlantic. A truly Thatcherite approach would force a significant restructuring of the corporations; their product portfolios streamlined and the underlying production methods rethought and retooled to realistically represent the state of the competitive global economy with its considerable environmental and energy constraints. True to Mrs Thatcher's legacy, union contracts need to be radically renegotiated - something a labour-friendly Democratic congress will strive to avoid. A fundamental restructuring is not possible if politicians continue to coddle the corporations.

The automobile bailout in the US is



Photo: flickr user Steve Punter

indicative of a political reality: we are witnessing the renaissance of Keynesianism. This is evident firstly in terms of the widespread acceptance of government participation in the market. While we can all accept that markets are not perfect, and do not operate outside society in a theoretical vacuum of parameters and definitions, it is dangerously naïve to unconditionally accept that government should set the agenda in the economy. In the next few years the markets will have to come to terms with the emergence of government as a significant shareholder in financial institutions both in Europe and America.

Secondly, the Keynesian logic of priming the pump is enjoying a surprising resurgence. With Gordon Brown taking the lead, followed intently by Barack Obama, deficit spending is the catchphrase. The fiscal dilemma Brown has created is oddly reminiscent to the ballooning public debt Thatcher faced in 1979; a direct product of Keynesian economics. It is also striking to note how differently the two premiers chose to deal with an imminent recession. The 'fiscally prudent' Brown has massively expanded public spending in an attempt to 'kick start' the economy, without any regard for the immensity of the debt funding it. Brown also proposed a budget consisting of superfluous political gaffs,

We are witnessing the renaissance of Keynesianism

such as the reduction in VAT, and partisan taxation of the moderately rich providing minute real monetary additions to the budget. Thatcher correctly feared excessive public borrowing and government spending could only crowd out private investment. While I will be the first to admit that government needs to act to expedite an economic recovery, measures need to be introduced that encourage spending in the private sector, rather than institutionalising endemic saving. Brown cannot borrow his way out of this recession.

One only has to think of the open letter that Thatcher received in 1981 from 364 eminent economists - including the current Bank of England governor Mervyn King - condemning her for daring to cut public spending in the midst of a recession. Mrs Thatcher would, as history has shown, be vindicated as the economy turned, prompting a boom that lasted until the mid-1990s. Mr Brown, while holding a PhD in history, seems naively forgetful of the dangers of excessive Keynesianism. When Thatcher came to power in May 1979, the British economy, by every measure, was in worse shape than it is today. Inflation was out of control, unemployment was high and rising rapidly. If such a blatantly Keynesian letter had been written today, Brown would surely have been one of those 364 economists.

Hasta la victoria siempre?

Fifty years after the revolution, Cubans have achieved a lot - but the island needs change

Ossie Fikret

New Year's Day 2009 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the successful overthrow of Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban dictator. He was, however, only to be replaced by a dictator of a different political shade, in the form of Fidel Castro - a point every American president has made since. Yet we cannot doubt that the cause of the 'Fidelistas' who took power in 1959 - amongst them Ernesto 'Che' Guevara - was noble: to create a society free from the shackles of American imperialism and to make 'Cuba libre' mean something more than a Barcardi Rum and coke.

Fifty years on, after the Bay of Pigs incident, the Cuban Missile crisis, an estimated two-hundred and fifty attempts on Fidel Castro's life and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the island of Cuba and its nationalistic brand of socialism remains. But at what price? A banned books list, a two-tier currency system and political dissenters placed in prison for exercising a right we in the west pride ourselves upon: freedom of speech.

Or so we are told. The Cuban revolution is certainly no model for other nations to follow, but neither does it warrant the demagogic attacks that have been thrown at it by American presidents from John F. Kennedy through to George W. Bush. These attacks have less to do with the idea that Cuba is a moral insult to the 'land of the free' and more to do with the block of Cuban emigrants living in the all-important electoral state of Florida.

Cuba does have human rights abuses, but alongside dramatic human rights successes. A literacy rate of 99.8 per cent



Tourists offer locals access to the valuable Convertible Peso
Photo: flickr user larksflem

and a life expectancy of 77.9 (compared to the USA's 78), mean Cuba has much to be proud of, especially for a nation with such a low GDP (eighty-eighth in the world). Art and culture have thrived in the post-revolution era, with the National Ballet of Cuba and the Buena Vista Social Club becoming both world famous and well within the reach of the average Cubano. Unlike in many western countries, the arts are not restricted to the elite, but open and attended by the common man.

Something is, however, rotten in the Republic of Cuba.

In 1991, Cuba entered the 'special period', following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which for nearly thirty years provided the life-blood of the revolution. During this period the average Cuban lost between 5 and 25 per cent of their body weight. Cuba's GDP and the accessibility of foreign currency plummeted. This forced Cuba to open up to tourism, and in doing so, while bringing in much-demanded foreign currency, removed

an equilibrium that had existed in Cuba since the banishment of foreign tourists following 1959. That equilibrium ensured that while Cubans might be poor, they were equally poor. The introduction of tourists - with their Nike trainers and Samsung cameras - undermined this, and the development of a two-tier economy, based upon the tourist currency (Cuban Convertible Peso), totally undermined the ambitions of the generation born of the 1960s.

While the average income (of around \$20 USD per month) paid in the Cuban Peso would buy the essential goods, it is the convertible Peso that pays for commercial goods, cans of imported Coca-Cola from Mexico, and Mojitos in Havana's swanky clubs. This has led to Cubans taking any job that brings them into close contact with tourists, in the hope of gaining those much-needed convertible Peso tips. Thus, Cuba may be the only place in the world where a university professor will be taking your order in a

restaurant or a medical doctor becomes a prostitute when the sun sets on the Straits of Florida. It almost mirrors the situation overseen by the dictator Batista in the 1950s, when wealthy American tourists would visit the 'brothel of the Caribbean' for their weekend breaks.

It would still be premature to declare the sunset on the Cuban Revolution. If anything, Cubans are as bold and determined as they were in 1959. Calls of 'Patria o muerte' (homeland or death) still echo in Havana, and admiration for Fidel Castro and the secular deity of 'Che' Guevara are still present. But below the surface there is a call for change in Cuba. A change that while protecting the achievements of the revolution, in healthcare and education, will help bring Cuba into the twenty-first century. If that is to be by democratic means, so be it, but given the extent of grassroots organisation within Cuba, there is no reason to doubt that progress can and will be spontaneous. Led by Cubans, for Cubans.

Features



Gazan tales, Gazan tears

Mira Hammad relates the trials, tribulations and tragedies of Israel's assault on Gaza

When I strolled into my living room on the Saturday before last, my first thought was that I had somehow taken several miles worth of wrong turns and accidentally stumbled into a particularly sombre funeral. Wondering who could possibly have been evicted from Strictly Come Dancing this time, I turned towards the television. Just in time to see a child's dismembered corpse being pulled out from beneath the rubble.

Two days later, my aunt Inshirah called from Jerusalem. I have always thought of my aunt as a human Kilimanjaro, due to her formidable character and her tendency to 'explode'. So when I heard her voice quiver as she fought back tears, I felt a tinge of what the ancient Greeks imagined the cosmos must have felt as it watched the Titans fall.

She was relating a brief phone call with Ibrahim Yousef, her friend living in the east of Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza. He had just returned from Kamal Udwan Hospital, where two of his daughters had died. His third daughter, four-year-old Sarwa, is still in a coma. He had described how an Israeli bomb had hit the side of his neighbour's house, causing rubble to collapse into the narrow alleyway in which his children were playing, crushing them.

There had been no warning. Anger slipped under my skin like a hypodermic syringe as she told me about the people she knew in Gaza who had taken to stuffing their children's ears with cotton wool at night so that they wouldn't hear the bombing, and about Ibrahim's son who had drawn a circle on the floor in pencil and wouldn't leave it in case "the Israelis got him".

"Thank God you don't live in Gaza," I said. There was silence on the other end of the phone, except for the crackling static.

"Khalto?" I asked, as I got ready to dial again.

"Oh, I'm still here. I'm just disgusted, Mira."

"What?" What?! What had I done?
"You do realise," she said, and I noted slightly sourly that she had managed to get a grip on herself and was once more

her imperious self. "that that attitude is exactly what caused this massacre in the first place?"

"The feeling that suffering is somehow better, more excusable, if it happens to somebody else - not your auntie, not your friend, but the auntie of some nameless, faceless person whose grief you will never have to cope with.

"For every people that have been killed, every nation that has been raped, this is the underlying assumption. Do you think that if the Israelis weighted our lives as much as they do their own sons' then it would have come to this? Instead they kill hundreds of us in exchange for twenty of their sons who have died in the last eight years, less than those that die in traffic accidents in one weekend. They weight their own lives in gold and ours in dust and until they realise otherwise, the suffering will continue."

I am generally one of those odious people who say "piss off" to any criticism, however 'constructive', but even I had to admit she had a point.

Her point was driven cruelly home as I watched an interview with an Israeli Civil Defence official, Ofer Schmerling, who said, "I shall play music and celebrate what the Israeli Air Force is doing." It was a pity that I'm rather attached to my laptop, because I think that throwing it through my bedroom window would have been an appropriate gesture in response to Schmerling's party plans.

This complete disregard on the part of the Israeli government for the lives and humanity of the Palestinian people was made even more apparent when I spoke to Ramy Abdu, a student from Gaza currently pursuing a Ph.D at the Manchester Metropolitan University's Department of Business and Management Studies.

Ramy had to wait for one and a half years before being allowed by the Israeli authorities to leave Gaza for Manchester, despite the fact that he had already been awarded a place at the university. And when he was finally given permission to come to Britain, his wife and two children were denied it. So they are currently in Gaza, stuck in the midst of a humanitarian disaster, far away from their loved one.

I spoke to Ramy about his experiences in Gaza. Even before the current offensive, he said, life in Gaza for his family was already unbearable.

Following Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, the Israeli government imposed a blockade on Gaza, which has gone on for 18 months thus far. Gazans are not allowed to leave the Strip, and hardly any food, medical aid, or basic necessities such as gas and oil are allowed in. Gaza effectively became an overcrowded, open air prison with 1.5 million inmates.

According to United Nations figures, 70 per cent of Gazan children were malnourished even before the current offensive began. Ramy brought this reality home to me. He told me about a phone call he received from his wife in the early hours of the morning as she panicked over their youngest child, who was crying and desperate for milk. That day she had gone through the neighbourhood looking for baby milk - now a scarce commodity. Although she eventually found some milk formula, the water and gas supplies had been cut off. Eventually, she could no longer stand watching her baby cry while waiting for the gas supply needed to boil dirty water for the milk. She went outside, scavenged for twigs and tried to create a fire in order to feed her baby.

Stories like this make the Israeli government's assertion of "self-defence from unprovoked Hamas rocket attacks which broke the ceasefire" sound very hollow. Indeed, Israel may not have been actively blowing up the people of Gaza during the ceasefire. But they have been slowly murdering a population by denying them any access to basic needs. Although I agree that Hamas' rocket attacks are wrong, they are hardly "unprovoked." The Israeli government has been making life for the people of Gaza unbearable - surely indignant surprise should not be the response of that same government when Gazans try to resist them? But, alas, as Rabindranath Tagore put it, "Power takes as ingratitude the writhing of its victims."

At that point, Gazans could scarcely have imagined that the situation was about to get very much worse, when

She could no longer stand watching her baby cry while waiting for the gas supply needed to boil dirty water for the milk

Israel launched its surprise offensive on 27 December. Ramy has not been able to contact his family in Gaza for several days due to the bombing of telephone lines. When he did manage to speak to his wife, she told him that they were running out of food and were now living off one meal a day, scraping from a speedily-depleting supply of tins she had stored. Worse still, his daughter had been hit by shrapnel from an Israeli bomb which fell nearby.

Improbable as it sounds, there are far worse stories than Ramy's. Wael Daya is also a Gazan student studying at Manchester. His family, including grandparents and children, lived in the Zaytoun area, beside Salah-al-Din street in a four-storey building which housed seven people on each floor. At 5am on 7 January, an Israeli F-16 fighter aircraft bombed the 7m tall building, completely destroying it. Two days later, only 13 people have been recovered from the rubble. Ambulances have not been allowed access to the site.

Contrary to Israeli claims that their military is doing everything it can to minimise civilian casualties, Wael's family did not receive any warning of the attack. Nor were any inhabitants of the house wanted by Israeli authorities. Civilian deaths, it seems, do not way any more heavily on the Israeli government's conscience than militant deaths. I wonder whether the aforesaid conscience is an imaginary entity.

When I asked Wael what his hopes were, he said that now his only hope rests in God. When I asked Ramy what he wanted for his children, he told me that all he asked for were that their humanitarian needs be fulfilled; he was not in a position even to hope for the protection of their human rights. In the face of such disproportionate suffering, can the international community afford to watch in silence as one of the strongest military forces in the world pounds a desperate civilian population into submission? What can possibly justify this grotesque culling of human life? And who will end it?



Restoring context to conflict

Joseph Brown wants to refocus the media lens to get a proper perspective on Hamas

In the past two weeks we have seen intensive coverage the Israeli invasion of Gaza. However, what most have not seen is a comprehensive run down of the conflict's immediate history leading up to this point.

We seldom hear how the Hamas leadership has been consistently sidelined, going against not only a democratic election, but Fatah President Mahmoud Abbas' attempts to bring Hamas into a unity government and even Hamas' proven willingness to negotiate with Israel and the United States. The policy of forced isolationism which took shape in early 2006 is the basis for the violence we see on our screens today, and diverting from this course is the only way to end the killing and begin a meaningful peace process.

Most governments and media outlets seem to have simply swallowed the US-Israeli labeling of Hamas as simply 'a terrorist organisation' and worked from there, assuming that because of their 'inherently violent nature', Israel's responses are rational if not wholly right. The framework for opinion making ignores the unwavering persecution of Hamas and leaves little room for more meaningful discussion of who Hamas are and how their actions can be understood, if not morally justified.

Bucking this trend, some commentators, such as William Sieghart of the Times have requested that we "adjust our distorted image of Hamas." Likewise, Robert Fisk wrote in the Independent an article sardonically titled "Why do they hate the West so much, we will ask", in which he thoroughly exposed the crimes the West and Israel have committed against the Palestinian people, the people of Gaza and the Hamas leadership there.

However, the problem here is not just that discerning commentators are few and far between, but also that they too do not address the recent history at play here. If we are to understand the true nature of

the crisis unravelling in Gaza, we must not limit ourselves to the current body-count – however revealing about the disparity of power and disproportionate actions employed. We must also look at the documented actions involved in creating this crisis. This most recent war did not start on the 27 December 2008. Rather, it is merely the most recent eruption of a much longer battle for Gaza, a battle that had begun with the disastrous international response to the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, in which Hamas won 56 per cent of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

"I've asked why nobody saw it coming," said US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice of Hamas' electoral success. "I don't know anyone who wasn't caught off guard by Hamas' strong showing." Fatah, for one, was not. In fact, they had warned their American counterparts on many occasions that they were not ready to contest elections. By the time of Arafat's death in 2004, decades of authoritarian rule had left Fatah an empty shell – the pinnacle of corruption and inefficiency. Mahmoud Abbas had no real base of support and cleavages quickly erupted within the party. Meanwhile, Hamas was supplying Palestinians on the ground with basic healthcare and education, receiving funding from wealthy external benefactors and stood for elections on a platform of Islamic moral integrity.

It was the international response to this election that set the stage for the spate of bloodshed we have seen for the past three years. The 'Quartet' – the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations – demanded that Hamas recognise Israel, renounce violence and abide by all former agreements between the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Israel. This demand was the most irrational, shortsighted and ahistorical decision ever made during the Israeli-

Palestinian peace process, and it has also proven to be the most catastrophic.

A closer look at these demands reveals a number of double standards at play. First and most important are the demands for Hamas' recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence. Eighteen years ago, Fatah, like Hamas in 2006, did not recognise Israel and was committed to the violent destruction of the Jewish state. However, these parts of Fatah's constitution were negotiated over and removed; Israel did not demand that they be removed before the negotiations. Why this approach was not considered with Hamas – who have been open to negotiations – is truly mind-boggling. Critics will argue that Hamas rejectionism and demand for the return of all of historic Palestine is the key reason why we cannot negotiate with them. Yet the same had been said of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation for almost a quarter of a century.

What we have to come to terms with is that from Hamas' perspective, what they see is that after decades of struggle Fatah came to recognise Israel, renounced violence in 1988 and went on to make a number of agreements, none of which brought the Palestinian people any closer towards the creation of an independent Palestinian state. Hamas, like Fatah, have always been willing to come to the table, but unlike their predecessors, they will not give up any part of their programme without substantial initiatives from Israel.

Hamas rejected the Quartet's demands. Instead of negotiating with the democratically-elected government, the Quartet cut off aid to the PNA, meaning that salaries went unpaid and its budget of US\$2 billion could not be met. Israel then arrested 64 members of the Palestinian legislature and tightened their sanctions on Gaza to include commercial trade.

During the ensuing descent into violence between Fatah and Hamas,


Mahmoud Abbas attempted twice to bring Hamas back into the fold and form a unity government, first in October 2006 and again in February 2007 in Mecca. Both were swiftly quashed by the US who refused to accept Hamas involvement in any way. Failing to isolate Hamas in the first instance, the State Department then developed "Plan B", which included the dissolution of the government, "eliminating the [Hamas] Executive Force" and training Fatah forces abroad to provide Abbas "the capability to take the required strategic political decisions... such as dismissing the cabinet, establishing an emergency cabinet" – the ability to forcibly remove Hamas.

When this document was leaked to the Jordanian newspaper Al-Majid, Hamas realised what was about to happen and that it had to act to defend its position in government. "There was a plan, approved by America, to destroy the political choice," said Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum. This suspicion was reinforced when in mid-May 2007, 500 newly-trained Fatah National Security Force troops arrived in Gaza, fresh from their training in Egypt. In June, Haaretz reported that Abbas had requested that Israel allow a massive Egyptian shipment of dozens of armored cars, hundreds of hand grenades, and millions of rounds of ammunition into Gaza. Hamas began their 'coup' in earnest. "Finally we decided to put an end to it. If we had let them stay loose in Gaza, there would have been more violence," Barhoum stated. By 16 June, Hamas had removed Fatah from Gaza.

David Wurmser, a neoconservative and former chief Middle East adviser to US Vice President Dick Cheney, succinctly reported that Hamas had no intention of taking Gaza until Fatah forced its hand. "What happened wasn't so much a coup by Hamas but an attempted coup by Fatah

that was preempted before it could happen," he said.

The misrepresentation of Hamas as an organisation founded purely on terror, violence and Islamic fundamentalism is provably untrue. In essence, Hamas is simply Fatah without the endemic corruption and with a smattering of Islamic influences. Hamas has a military wing just like Fatah; it defends itself and engages in terror activities when it feels under threat. It engages in negotiations and political processes at every opportunity, subduing its violent tendencies. Hamas continues to be open to negotiations and have repeatedly sent delegations to international summits to demand the liberation of the West Bank and Gaza as the basis for a Palestinian state. Most importantly, despite being forcibly removed from office by Fatah, Israel and the United States, we are consistently reminded of the alleged Hamas plot to take over Gaza, something that simply did not happen. The only way to move closer to a peaceful resolution is to accept these realities and deal with Hamas, as with Fatah, as equals accepting that this is the only way to bring an end to violence.



A WAR RE-IGNITED

THREE WEEKS INTO THE RENWED FIGHTING IN GAZA, **JOSEPH BROWN**
AND ISRAEL SOCIETY MEMBER '**JON**' EXPLAIN HOW
HAMAS AND ISRAEL CAME TO BLOWS AGAIN

Flickr user Amir Farshad Ebrahimi

An obligation to military recourse

Israel Society member '**Jon**' explains the threat Israel faces and motivation for taking action

The awful spectre of war has shrouded Gaza once again, and prospects of peace remain elusive. However, peace is something that can only be achieved through efforts made by both sides in a conflict. It is therefore important to know and understand who and why Israel is fighting and what this means for the future of the region.

Hamas, the target of Israel's military actions in Gaza, is an organisation involved in social welfare, politics and "military" action in Palestinian administered territories. They won the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections and formed a coalition government, and retains de facto control over Gaza even though Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), subsequently dismissed the government in June 2007. Hamas is a widely supported movement, mainly due to their campaign which is based on Islamist ideology, very similar to that of Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolution. Hamas themselves are recognised as a terrorist group by the European Union, United States, Canada, Japan and Israel. Jordan have banned the group and expelled any members, such as Khlaid Meshaal now living in Syria. The UK and Australia recognise Hamas, the movement, but regards its paramilitary wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, to be terrorists. The level of integration between the two is obvious, and therefore no one can legitimately maintain the claim that Hamas are a normal, democratically elected government.

After Hamas were elected, Israel and the Quartet (the United Nations, EU, Russia and the US) withheld funding to the PNA until they recognised Israel, renounced the use of violence and accepted previous treaties agreed between Israel and the PNA. Some argued that by participating in the elections, they had

recognised these treaties in a de facto manner. Hamas, however, never complied. Nonetheless, the international economic sanctions have been terminated in June 2007 after the dissolution of the Hamas-led unity government.

Since the 2006 election, Hamas have spent very little money on civic improvements and bettering the quality of life of their citizens. Instead, they have spent nearly three years turning the Gaza Strip into a kill-zone for as many people as possible, and tried to provoke an Israeli incursion provoking a situation that results in loss of life on both sides. It is astounding that Hamas' leaders have personal escape routes from their homes while not a single municipal bomb shelter exists in Gaza. Perhaps the reason for this is because Hamas know that if they spend all their money and time on "resistance" against a non-occupying force, then the UN and other NGOs will provide support for education, food distribution etc. The West will never let anyone starve and that works well for Hamas.

The Qassam rockets are fire-and-forget weapons designed to cause panic, damage and loss of life. They are fired in unbelievable quantities (up to 100 a day or one every ten minutes or so in daylight hours) and place 700,000 people under constant threat. There are three main reasons why loss of life is extremely low. Firstly, the rockets are poorly engineered, which often means that they fall short. Secondly, they lack a guidance system - they are just aimed and fired in the general direction of Israel. Lastly, an extremely well-drilled civil response. Every citizen knows their nearest shelters are, every home has a safe room and schools run, sometimes daily, practice drills. Imagine if London was subjected to the same. This city has roughly the same population as Israel. Imagine that Londoners are allowed fifteen seconds to run for shelter

a hundred times a day, every day. And for over 8 years. Imagine parents being powerless to protect their children.

The administration of Gaza is the responsibility of Hamas. Israel has no obligation to provide for the citizens of Gaza anymore. They are no longer an "occupying army" - the total pullout in 2005 ended any claims of occupation. This "blockade" or "siege" we hear about - Israel have closed their common border with a sworn enemy whose charter states "The Day of Judgement will not come about until Muslims fight the Jews, when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees" and swears for the destruction of Israel. A peace treaty is not on the cards here. A ceasefire is a chance for Hamas to resupply for the next round of fighting. Why should Israel automatically provide amenities to a group sworn to its destruction? Surely a compromise can be found. If Hamas stop firing rockets, Israel will be happy to broker a peace deal.

Hamas spent most of the time during the six-month ceasefire provoking Israel, trying to get them to respond. Just one example, beyond the rocket firing, is Gilad Shalit, who nearly one thousand days ago was kidnapped from Israel, not Gaza, in order to force an Israeli incursion. They have been unable to use suicide bombings so have changed to rockets. They have intimidated their way to a position of dictatorship - lest anyone forget about the Palestinian Civil War of 2007 where Fatah members were executed, even pushed off roofs, in order to give Hamas total control. Very democratic. Eventually, after years of unilateral provocation Israel snapped. For Olmert, "enough is enough."

Two weeks ago, Israel went into Gaza. The loss of life has been high, but let's not kid ourselves - this is not just a simple exercise of X dead Palestinians vs Y dead Israelis. Israel has a vastly superior arsenal, and the battle ground is a densely-pop-

Hamas spent most of the time during the six-month ceasefire provoking Israel, trying to get them to respond

ulated urban environment, purposefully chosen by Hamas. Shockingly, Hamas hide weapons in their own places of worship. Hamas place rocket factories next to schools. Hamas "leaders" hide in hospitals acting as nurses. While many will argue that Gaza is overpopulated, it is helpful to remember that most of the world is overpopulated. Incidentally, London is more densely populated than Gaza.

Israel is not perfect. One dead civilian is one too many. But whereas Israel does its utmost to avoid unfortunate civilian deaths, attempts to make up for it by admitting wounded Palestinians to Israeli hospitals and has Israeli organisations protest to the Government on behalf of the Palestinians, Hamas hides behind children. Hamas aims for civilians under the premise that conscription for Israeli citizens aged eighteen makes every Israeli a soldier. Hamas killed 550 Fatah members in a week in 2007 and nobody said a word. That amounts to more deaths per day than what is happening now.

Unfortunately, one-sided ceasefires do not work. Peace is a two-sided partnership. Unfortunately however, peace is not a word Hamas are interested in. Israel is now saying the same - no peace with Hamas because this has become a fight for survival. The reality is war and that brings death. It is unfortunate, but short of Hamas lining up one side of an open field and Israel the other, more people will most certainly die. The international community has been extremely lax in looking to stop the fighting, including the Arab League. This is because the prevailing attitude is that Israel have a right to act, and whilst this is messy, this is the only way to do it.

The author wishes to remain anonymous for reasons of personal safety



President-elect Barack Obama with former Governor of Virginia L. Douglas Wilder (with microphone)

The long road to being free at last

Shibani Mahtani examines challenges that still stifle our progress towards social equality

Eighteen years ago today, history was made in American politics. Lawrence Douglas Wilder was inaugurated as Governor of Virginia, making him the first elected African-American governor of any American state.

In the eighteen years that have since passed, much has been said about change, progress and the overcoming of racial barriers. With President-elect Barack Obama's inauguration just a week from now, and on a date that arguably warrants a special place in American political history, it is perhaps apt to look at how much social progress has been made in the public sphere.

The issue of race in politics is never an easy one to broach. In fact, it is deemed so 'sensitive' in Singapore, where I am from, that public discussions that might generate 'racial tensions' have been banned. The problem however, is that this phrase, 'racial tensions', covers such a large and ambiguous area. Consequently, race in politics or otherwise is hardly ever discussed in Singapore, whether in public and in media or even between groups of friends or colleagues.

Even in the UK, where discussions on race and social progress are clearly more open and common, the corridors of power down Whitehall and Westminster Palace continue to be dominated by white males. While a significant step towards redressing this was made when Patricia Scotland became the first black woman to become a government minister, being named by Prime Minister Gordon Brown as Attorney General of England and Wales in 2007. Nonetheless, Brown still faces criticism for the lack of minority representation in his cabinet.

The first step to getting over this hurdle is of course acknowledging the issue and having open discussions on it; something that is lacking in Singapore. This should apply to racial and gender equality, and even other often overlooked groups like immigrants and underprivileged classes,

since the struggle for social equality hardly stops at achieving equality among races.

However, even with open discussions, institutional barriers still exist which hinder social progress. The term "institutional racism" is one that is thrown around frequently. Certain corporations in the US have been given this infamous label, while over here, the Metropolitan Police and even universities have been criticised as being institutionally racist. Deputy Assistant Commissioner Cressida Dick admitted as much in 2003 when she said that "there is not an institution out there that could say, 'We are not racist.'" Racial profiling and failures to provide professional service to someone because of their skin colour is a phenomenon that still exists, and is something that is unlikely to be eradicated in the near future.

An interim step that has been taken by some to mitigate ethnic under-representation and racism is the controversial policy known as affirmative action. But it is doubtful that the best way to break the many glass ceilings that still exist for minority groups in many societies, people have questioned whether increased affirmative action is necessarily the right way to go. In the political realm especially, it is hardly a sustainable policy to adopt.

An alternative answer, which we got to see in the US Presidential campaign, was to take up a 'post-racial' approach. What was truly remarkable about Obama was not that he was a black man, but that he was an extremely capable, intellectual and inspirational individual who promised Americans something different from the partisanship that has come to dominate American politics under George W. Bush. While he has appointed the first African-American attorney general, his picks for cabinet are notable in that all of them have been chosen primarily based on capability, and not race, gender, or even political party. Rarely in his campaign did the President-elect play on the fact that he was African-American. He even refrained

from associating himself too closely with other historic African-American figures before him, sometimes referring to Martin Luther King Jr. as 'a preacher from Atlanta' in his speeches instead of mentioning him by name.

More intriguing perhaps is Obama's views on affirmative action. He believes that affirmative action should still be in place to ensure that all in society have an equal chance at getting into college or getting a job, but qualifies that by arguing that a quota system or affirmative action applied solely on the basis of ethnicity is ineffective.

Another politically under-represented demographic is of course women. The extent of this problem was probably illustrated best during the US presidential campaigns, when some feminists, so desperate to see a woman in the White House, chose to unquestioningly support Governor Sarah Palin, in spite of her many shortcomings as a potential Vice President.

Women in politics are constantly judged by gender-specific standards and are subjected to far more media attention and, invariably, criticism, in comparison to their male counterparts. Once presidential hopeful Senator Hillary Clinton is the leading example, but closer to home, Rachida Dati, the French Minister for Justice, has often been criticised for her fashion choices, namely her tendency to wear expensive Chanel clothes. In terms of proportional representation in national legislatures, the statistics are rather bleak as well. Women make up a mere 19.7 per cent of Members of Parliament in the Commons (even though Britain has 0.98 males for every 1 female), and 16.1 per cent of the US Senate (0.97 males to 1 female).

Yet the least we could point to the likes of Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir or Indira Gandhi for having broken the glass ceiling for women in their respective countries. In contrast, the prospect of seeing the election of a head of government or head of state that was an immigrant

Cressida Dick admitted as much in 2003 when she said that "there is not an institution out there that could say, 'We are not racist.'"

or coming from an extremely disenfranchised background seem to be far more remote possibilities. The closest example would be that of French President Nicolas Sarkozy - son of an Hungarian immigrant. Even then, the influx into France of immigrants from former French colonies in North Africa have triggered much political debate, even xenophobic remarks and policy proposals. The integration of immigrants into society remains no easy task anywhere - with many having to deal with overt racism and discrimination that prevalent in their daily lives, before even considering how under-represented they are in government.

Thus, while we look back on this historical date and celebrate Obama's inauguration next week, it is easy to laud the progress we've made towards the ideal of societies based on meritocracy, without any form of racial, ethnic or gender discrimination. Yet much remains to be done to minimise, if not eliminate discrimination, especially when it comes to political representation. After all, a democracy can only be truly functional if all its constituents are represented in its political processes. While affirmative action does provide some utility towards this end, it is problematic as it institutionalises the continued consideration of race and gender as factors in recruitment and admissions.

It will take a concerted and conscious effort from individuals in society to ensure that they themselves stop looking at surface definitions of a person, such as their ethnicity, religious affiliation, or gender, and form an informed judgment based on their capabilities or talent. It is perhaps only then that we can continue to experience social progress, landmarked by historical political milestones - perhaps the first minority Prime Minister of Britain or even the first female President of the United States.

Making strides in lean times

Sebastian Horn discusses financial strategies with Robin Stalker, Chief Financial Officer of Adidas

Robin Stalker, the Chief Financial Officer of the Adidas group, visited LSE last term on 27 November, to speak about his firm's financial strategy.

Mr. Stalker, who came on invitation from the LSE Students' Union German Society, gave his audience a rare insider's perspective on the sporting goods industry.

I approached the New Zealander for a short interview afterwards, hoping to glean fresh insights on the importance of major sporting events, performance enhancing electronics, and Adidas' take on the current financial crisis.

Even to the layman, it is apparent that the sporting goods industry of today is greatly driven by branding and marketing. A short video clip at the beginning of Stalker's presentation, depicting some of the recent victories of athletes and teams wearing Adidas outfits, underlined this.

With the recent Uefa championships and the Beijing Olympics offering plenty of showrooms, Adidas had reaped substantial benefits.

"This really was an excellent year for Adidas. But not just because of the high profile we enjoyed during the major sporting events", Mr. Stalker explained. "They also changed the emphasis in our communication with the consumer.

We launched special products for these events that everybody just has to have – for example, the ball for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2010."

Apart from the major sporting spectacles, another growing source of sporting riches comes from enhancing athletic performance with technologically advanced sportswear. It is arguable, for instance, that the record-breaking performances at the Olympics from the likes of Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt were as much a

product of the athletes' abilities as it is about the latest technological improvements in sportswear.

I asked Stalker for his views on this development: "Is there a trend towards technology, in particular electronics, dominating sports?"

"The trends at the moment do not include a lot of electronics," he said. "However, we believe in the future they will become very important."

Currently, the industry is dividing its focus onto a high-tech performance market and a leisure and lifestyle market, he explained.

In terms of sports electronics, Adidas is a leading innovator. "We're at the forefront of introducing electronics into performance products: not just measuring devices but also cushioning enhancements for your shoes, telling you how much cushioning you need."

Yet, in spite of recent sporting events and technological advancements, it is safe to say that the retail market will not exactly be booming in the next couple months. How does the Adidas Group feel about the current economic climate and the resulting shrink in sales?

"We are definitely affected by it," Stalker admitted. "There will be a much higher conservatism in the ordering from our customers. They are less willing to commit to large orders in advance."

However, there are opportunities to be seized upon in the current economic climate.

"There will also be a flight to quality. A lot of consumers will go for a product they understand and know from well-established brands. Based on the current order book and retailer feedback, despite a challenging market environment, we are optimistic that our Group will achieve sales and earnings growth again in 2009 –



Photo: Niklas Röhling

"You happen to fall into a lovely demographic group which means that you are already in our marketing sites"

but not at the same level that we will have this year."

Graduate recruitment too has often been touted as a major casualty in lean times like today. I asked Stalker whether LSE graduates have good reason to be confident or worried about the job market.

"Firstly, talent always wins," he declared. "The better qualified you are the better chances you have, under any conditions. There will always be some companies growing and they will have to employ people."

Having multi-national experience is also very useful, especially in Stalker's eyes. LSE graduates can be pretty pleased in this respect – hardly any other university can boast anything close to the LSE's international credentials.

How then would Adidas go after this talent pool and consumer group that the LSE presents? "You happen to fall into a lovely demographic group which means that you are already in our marketing sites," Stalker revealed.

Having been with Adidas for 12 years, I wondered what he felt about the company in terms of its attractiveness to prospective employees.

He emphasized the attractiveness of the industry. "It's a fun place," he said. "There's a considerable amount of passion in it and we also understand the importance of performance."

Perhaps athletic competition is not that much different from corporate competition after all.



Flickr user Tywak

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Social

Career focus Medecins sans Frontieres



Photo: Medecin Sans Frontiere

Going to the doctors

About MSF



Flickr: raffaelebrustia

<http://www.msf.org.uk/>

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an independent international medical humanitarian organization that delivers emergency aid in more than 60 countries to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural or man-made disasters or exclusion from healthcare.

In emergencies and their aftermath, MSF rehabilitates and runs hospitals and clinics, performs surgery, battles epidemics, carries out vaccination campaigns, operates feeding centres for malnourished children and offers MSF Logometal health care. When needed, MSF also constructs wells, dispenses clean drinking water, and provides shelter materials like blankets and plastic sheeting.

Through longer-term programmes, MSF treats patients with infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, sleeping sickness and HIV/AIDS and provides medical and psychological care to marginalized groups such as street children.

Founded by doctors and journalists in 1971, MSF is now a worldwide movement with sections in 19 countries and an international coordination office in Geneva, Switzerland. abruptly stopped and leaned back. Had I started walking as soon as he did, I would have walked straight into that hand and he would have had a good grope.

Instead, I jumped to the side and pushed past him. But I was shaking.

An independent and self-directed organisation, MSF's actions are guided by medical ethics and the principles of neutrality and impartiality. This means that MSF offers assistance to people based only on need and irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation.

MSF strives to ensure that we have the power to freely evaluate medical needs, to access populations without restriction, and to directly control the aid we provide giving priority to those in most grave danger. MSF does not take sides in armed conflict and insists on unhindered access to patients.

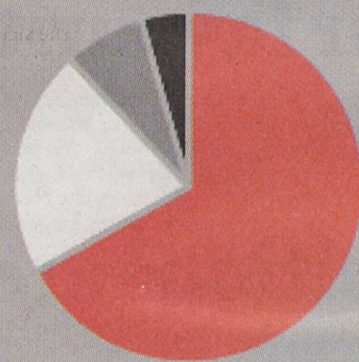
When MSF is witness to massive and neglected acts of violence against individuals and groups, we may speak out publicly based on eyewitness accounts, medical data and experience.

The work of MSF is carried out by over 25,000 health professionals, logistics experts and administrative staff who run projects in approximately 65 countries around the world.

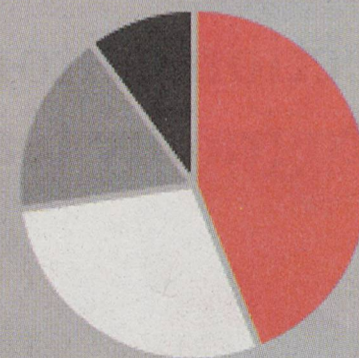
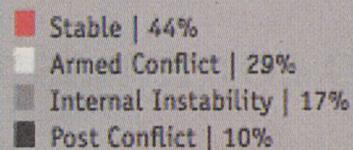
MSF Nobel Peace Prize IconThe MSF movement was awarded the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize

MSF operations

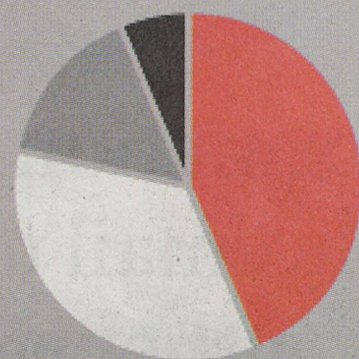
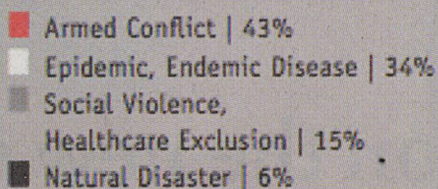
Project Locations



Context of Interventions



Event Triggering Intervention



Philosophical Hairy

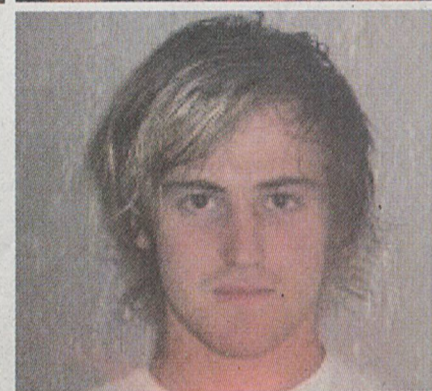
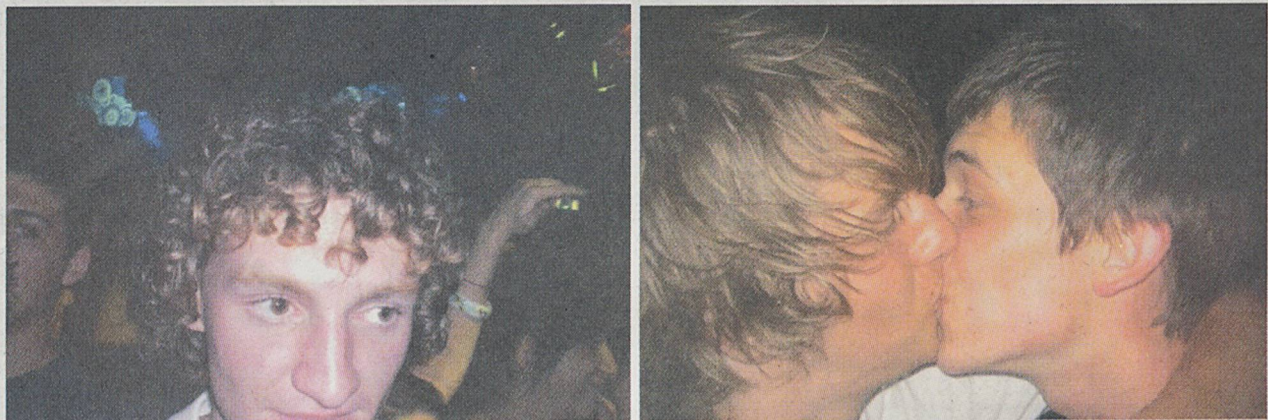


Philosophical Barry
Assisted by the capable Ali Moussourcey

Sunday evenings are truly blissful. A time to reflect on the achievements, or failures, of the past seven days. An opportunity to convalesce, a brief interregnum from the exertions that this modern life demands, space for some of what I like to call "Barry time". Fortunately for myself, this special time of the week has witnessed another miracle. Among the debris and detritus of Bring on the Wall, Bone-kickers, The Graham Norton Show and Inside Sport (possibly the worst sporting show ever made), the proverbial gardeners at the BBC also, by mistake or by design,

sowed the seeds of something special. A precious flower that has somehow taken root. This marvel is Match Of The Day 2. Be it Adrian Chiles' quirky humour, enhanced massively by his status as a genuine football fan, listening to Lee Dixon use the word 'organised' roughly sixty-two times a show, or the guest appearances of the capable Graham Murty, the show offers something for everyone. 2 Good, 2 Bad has to be the work of the researchers who foolishly thought Tim Lovejoy was talking sense when he said there were shows with more potential than Soccer AM. Alas, they have succeeded where he has failed, sorry, spectacularly failed. However after switching on this Sunday I witnessed a crime so despicable that even the IDF wouldn't perpetrate it. No, not Gary Lineker being let out by his parents for a second time this week. It was the appearance of Newcastle striker Andy Carroll: take a bow, son. For the benefit of those who aren't such pious devotees of the show, Mr Carroll, who clearly hasn't learnt from David Beckham's South African faux pas, has opted for a shocking Ludacris style, snaking cane row hairstyle. But every cloud has a silver lining. In my reflective state my cognitions settled on the worst Athletics Union haircuts I have borne witness to since the beginning of this year. Here, in no particular order, are my top five shocking barnets >>

philosophicalbarry@thebeaveronline.co.uk



Clockwise, from top-left
Dewi Hall Evans - No badgers were harmed in the taking of this photo
Big Joe Watson - Despite spending the average annual earnings of a Middlesborough resident every time he visits the barber, his hair still looks shit
Charlie Glyn - Its time to come clean. We all know you're a closet ginger
Lawrence Fisher - Sometimes words just aren't enough...
Phil Leung Jr. - Love-child of Mr. T and Nancy Lam

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Gamblers Anon

The final bets of last year proved to be about as successful as our track record would suggest. We lost the big money bet on Lewis Hamilton to win Sports Personality of the year, and won the small bet on Usain Bolt winning the Overseas Personality Award. We are all in shock at the moment that a cyclist managed to beat the youngest ever driver to win the F1 World Championship, and it still has settled after three weeks away from the office. That isn't to take away from Hoy's achievements, which we can all agree were phenomenal, yet Hamilton's achievement seemed somewhat more spectacular. Perhaps Lewis's main failing was that we all expected him to win it after he snatched defeat from the jaws of victory the previous season, thus his achievement was all the less spectacular. This term we are hoping to start off with a giant killing. Following South-end's heroics last week, we will back the Shrimpers to beat Chelsea with our full £20. Chelsea aren't the team they were under Mourinho, and are likely to be uncomfortable with the surroundings the League One stadium Roots Hall provides. Watch out for the key clashes of Drogba v Mildenhall and Walker v Terry, as these will prove key in determining the fate of our bet.

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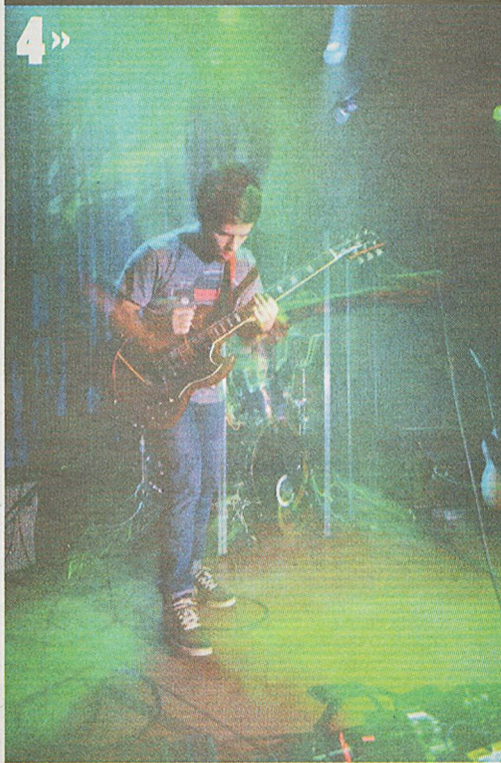
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EDITORIAL

OH HAI!

Pleased to meet you. Welcome to the new, glittering, or at least slightly mutated Part B. We've spent our holidays shivering and burrowing behind the sofa, looking for loose change. Could you spare some? While you're foraging around, help yourself to a New Year's special. 2009 promises to be an abysmal year, full of doom and abject misery, so what better way to kick things off than by reading this?

**SACHIN PATEL &
JULIAN BOYS**

FAQ! FAX! FACTS!

Dear Julian,

This year I asked Santa for a job after I graduate. I'm not hopeful, so is there any chance of me being employed as Part B's photocopier-boy?

Yours,
U.N. Chômeur.

Dear Sachin,

Since 2009 is already going down the toilet, can you write off this crop of Part B issues too? I'm sure you would at least appreciate saving the trees.

Yours,
A concerned reader.

Dear Part B,

I've coughth my thounge in the fridge and it's very cold. What, pray thould I do? I await your rethponthe impathiently. I've been here thix weekth now!

**WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU TOO!
SEND YOUR LETTERS TO
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SAVE UP AND SHIP OUT

lizcheesbrough is leaving on a jet plane

Oh 2009, before you have even begun your 365-day reign we are already writing you off as a failure. The recession has moved from 'American attitude towards global warming' status in to its full glory of crisis and despair, where every man, woman and child are wrestling over the last 75% off reductions and admitting to shopping in Lidl. Convinced that finding a job is now futile, we are tightening our belts in anticipation of not only financial destruction but also ecological collapse; the icebergs keep on melting and it's so bloody cold that our eyes are freezing over. The best thing we have to look forward to is the spring, so that if our flats are repossessed then at least we won't die from hypothermia in the doorway of a boarded up Woolworths. Oh 2009, we're ever so sorry but it's just not going to be your year.

Do you remember the good old days? Those halcyon times seem like a distant memory - prior to recession, global warming, terrorism and stop-and-search policemen. You could buy a pint for a pound, there were only five TV channels and penny sweets really were just one, singular penny. The world was all round rosy - recycling was the enjoyable pastime of the aging hippie, clinging to aspirations of self-sufficiency after watching *The Good Life* too many times. Now, as the government contemplates fining you for insufficient sorting and washing of old jam jars, it has become more of a desperate floundering in the face of global environmental collapse. Gaza, Obama, bin bags and teenage pregnancy won't matter one bit if we all freeze, fry, starve or drown in 2009. While the end is probably not nigh, the way we are constantly bombarded with horrors has created a 'carry on crisis' where whatever we do, it's all going to hell anyway.

In the face of eternal misery, us Brits still have one thing on our side. No, it's not a strong currency, a thriving labour market or even our beautiful, safe, historic shires; it's our ability to emigrate. Thankfully, even in this modern world of fear and global bad behaviour, the British passport is still generally welcome (just don't make a scene, recite any form of football chant or wear socks with sandals). Now is the time to go work in a beach bar in Malaysia or become a go-go dancer in Benidorm. It's hot, sexy and so much cheaper - and it's not like you'd have a job here anyway. The competition that students face as they graduate in 2009 is unlike anything seen before, with a growing mass of similarly highly qualified and experienced competitors giving you an odds of around 1 in 20 when applying for a job in Watirose, let alone the City. By the end of the year there will be approximately 12 employees left in the British financial sector, one of which is a secretary and another just mends

the photocopier. Whatever those fantastical aspirations were - drop them. Come back in a while when we're not facing the worst recession in nearly a century, and try your luck against future graduates who are currently in a secondary school.

Imagine the scene - instead of waking up in a bedroom the size of a hamster cage, with ice on the inside of the windows and junkies outside the door; you could roll out of your hammock, throw on a sarong and roll a blunt before going to work at the surf shop. Instead of commuting to a poorly paid job just to be made redundant, you could be flexing your muscles on a podium - with only a pair of PVC chaps to contain your excitement. Essentially, this may be the best financial advice you will get in 2009 - if there are no well paid jobs left, go get one which you will actually enjoy, somewhere

your parents and say 'yes mum. I know about the crippling student debt and the lack of jobs, so I'm going to join the circus. Yes, there are still circuses. In fact, it's pretty well paid and the travel opportunities are great. I always knew gymnastics would be more useful than economics. At least I'm not becoming a prostitute.'

May 2009 be the year that we don our tie-dye shirts and gold hot pants, we braid, dreadlock, rave and expand our minds in ways we never knew how. We no longer have the pressure to perform, as there is nobody to perform for, nobody to read our CVs for jobs that are no longer available. So, while the world waits to see if the sky really is going to fall upon our heads (be it due to nature, poverty or missile) go see the cities that will be underwater by the time you hit your forties, go travel the lands that will be uninhabitable as temperatures rise. We may be stripped of our ability to earn, but we have the opportunity to learn, adventure, push our overdrafts to the limit and legitimately take a second, third, or fourth gap year.

Why stay in the UK, wearing sackcloth and eating squirrel meat, when you could be bedding down with a Greek Adonis in your beach hut every night? Go sit yourself down (preferably on a bean bag) and imagine what it would be like to walk slowly, not at a half sprint in the Oxford Street throngs. Imagine walking half on the beach and half in the sea, so that your feet sink and your footprints stretch out behind you along the coast. Let your hairs stand on end and imagine the smell of the sea, the spray starching your warmed skin. Isn't that just lovely, and much lovelier than a pitiful city where all it does is rain all year round - except exam time.

Whatever it is that makes you feel happy and alive, freeze it in your mind. Then go, find an empty bargain beans tin and put sellotape across the top of it. Loads of sellotape; like a taught, see-thru drum.

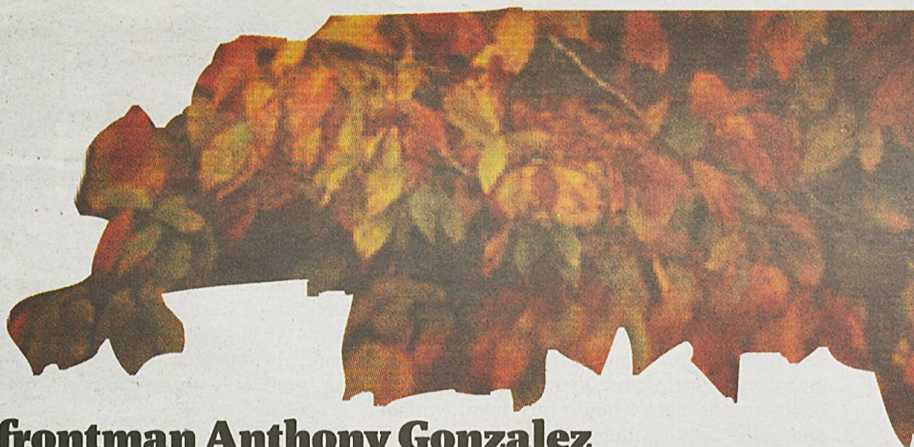
Now get a knife, and stab through the tape in one, swift swing (ensuring your leg is not underneath). This is not a spiritual ritual to help you re-imagine your footloose dreams, it is a moneybox; so damn well put one or two of your shiny pounds in it every day and don't break in to it to buy a kebab when you're pissed. This tin, if used appropriately, can unlock the door to your crisis-modified dreams, something that the environment, the economy and certainly not LSE can give you. Let 2009 be not only the year of despair, but also the year of achieving your goal of teaching impoverished children to scuba dive in Thailand. Handy tip - look down the back of other peoples sofas for bargain change, apparently there is over one billion pounds down there in the UK alone. Just make sure they're not watching.



where you don't need to wear shoes to work. As some wise man once said - happiness doesn't come with a three figure salary, but nor does it come with a p45.

LSE teaches us very little it seems, but one thing it does promote is the primacy of success - and by that they mean financial success. We willingly jump on to the conveyor belt of the consumer experience; internships are followed by grad schemes, degrees followed by masters. If they tell you to do it it's probably a good idea - all in the eternal expedition for an enviable wage, an elite status in your field and a nice big house in Islington. Now that LSE cannot sustain itself as a breeding ground for any sector, let alone the City, a new lesson needs to be taught. May it preach the pursuit of pleasure over wealth, the ability to behave as an individual not a competitor; the strength to stand up to

STARGAZING



Liam McLaughlin interviews M83 frontman **Anthony Gonzalez**

A church is a pretty apt gigging venue for any hallowed webzine favourite. It's a place of hushed silence, prayer, contemplation and sanctimoniousness; all of which correspond with the values of any self-respecting, webzine-reading indielectual.

There is certainly something very amusing about the painfully trendy crowd sitting in pews, muttering expectantly in sombre tones beneath large glowing chandeliers with dusty old hymnbooks piled up precariously in the shady corners: the musical cognoscenti are finally acting out a long-lived fantasy to liter-

"People have the right to think what they want about my music"

ally worship one of their gods. Tonight that god is M83's Anthony Gonzalez; a silhouette in the preacher's position; entering to no applause, only a deafening, awe-induced silence.

He opens the set with a reflective tide of twittering electronics and russet blushed synths which swirl and build up gradually to a hypnotic storm, at which point the rest of the band come out to long-awaited explosions of clapping and cheering from the adoring crowd. New songs such as 'Kim and Jessie' and 'We Own the Sky' are greeted with the same fervour as the old anthem 'Don't Save Us from the Flames' and, as the evening closes with an extended version of 'Couleurs', the respect for Gonzalez's unassuming stance has intensified tenfold. He exits the stage not from the back like the rest of the band, but through the nave of the church; through his fans and into the icy night.

A few days later I was able to speak to Gonzalez about his unique musical vision and his impressions about his success. "It's great, it's been a great year," he says. "I'm very proud and I'm really glad that people love the album. It's very positive and it gives me a lot of strength to make another one."

M83's success has indeed shown them to be blazing an exciting new path through the often droning and derivative 'shoegaze' genre, with their engaging themes of melancholic nostalgia and their evocative concepts. In fact it'd be more apt to call them 'stargaze' due to their quasi-cosmic soundscapes. Suffice to say, the fact that M83 are actually named after a galaxy is clearly

not incidental. What does Gonzalez make of all these genre categories bandied around his music though, are they misleading or what? "Not really, people have the right to think what they want about my music. It really depends on what people think. My music is a mixture of all my influences. I listen to lots of different types; electronic, ambient, rock, cinematic...cinema is actually very important for me when making music."

Perhaps it is this inherent openness in Gonzalez's personality which leads him to create such universally appealing yet deeply personal music? Indeed on M83's new album, *Saturdays=Youth*, Gonzalez clearly takes a lot of inspiration for his music from the memory of his own teenage years – blue skies; the smell of freshly cut grass; the sparkle of young love; the touching importance of friendship; the invincible feeling of Friday evening and the sunny haze of Saturday morning. "It's a tribute to my teenage years" reflects Gonzalez, "I had a really beautiful time; it was wonderful to be a teenager for me; lots of good times. And Saturday is the most important day for teenagers of course!" Was he writing about his own experiences or experiences he wished he had? "It depends on the song. Music is a way to express myself to other people especially because I'm not very talkative! So music is a good way to talk about me. Some songs are like fiction though; things that never happened to me."

"John Hughes is the best director of the 80s I think"

Gonzalez's poignant celebration of youth is encapsulated in the opening track of the album, 'You, Appearing'. It's a sombre yet majestic song; it's a lament, but also a wistful acknowledgment of the innocent, starry wonder of youth and its blithe freedom. Characters seen on the front cover of the album are explored in more depth in each song and the music videos present a perfect vision of suburban teenage life; each person showing the same contrived woes, self-conscious posturing or mere unadulterated excitement that we all experience as teenagers. Were these things intentionally made to fit into the album? "The cover is part of the album. We spent a lot of time getting it right and throwing all the teenage clichés we could think

of in! But it matches perfectly with the music."

Absolutely. The front cover is like a utopian impression of the perfect gold-tinged youth; the summer sun hazily shining overhead and all the people are beautiful, stylish and wide eyed; obviously a reflection of Gonzalez's wistful nostalgia. But was it a conscious decision to also make the videos a big part of the album considering Gonzalez's love of John Hughes, director of films such as 'Breakfast Club', 'Pretty In Pink' and 'Ferris Bueller's Day Off'? "John Hughes is a great director," says Gonzalez. "When I was a

"It was wonderful to be a teenager for me; lots of good times"

kid I watched his films a lot and I appreciate the atmospheres he creates. They're a perfect representation of what a teenager is. I love that; it's perfect. Also the soundtrack always matched the film perfectly. He is the best director of the 80s I think," reckons Gonzalez with no hint of irony.

Perhaps *Saturdays=Youth*'s sensitive exploration of the common human experience of adolescence via cinematic-level emotion is why the album has been so well received? Perhaps Gonzalez with his personal musings has actually tapped into something bigger than he imagined? "Maybe...I don't know. That could be a good reason for the success," says Gonzalez modestly. "Certainly people can relate to the album because of this. Also the sound is very different to what other bands are doing and to what we've done before. But that is really a good reason you have..."

While being a universalist snapshot into adolescence, *Saturdays=Youth* is also a very personal journey for Gonzalez. It's a glimpse into teenage life during the 80s; a grainy memory of a decade which many people would like to forget. Why does Gonzalez attach so much wonder to it then? "I was born in the 80s and I grew up listening to 80s music so the album is about myself in that sense," he explains. "When I listen to 80s music it reminds me of my childhood which is one reason it has inspired me for this album. The 80s were also a big time for the music industry and I'm not ashamed to listen to 80s music, on the contrary; 80s music could be really moving and emotional."

It is clear from *Saturdays=Youth* that M83

are a band who are not afraid of dealing with powerful emotions and their music and the demeanour of Gonzalez show this brilliantly. However, they do much of it with the aid of the commonly slated 80s favourite, the synthesiser, rather than the more usual 'rock band' format of their forebears My Bloody Valentine and the Cocteau Twins. Whilst this may be apt for their bastardised 80s-esque sound, how can the harsh electronic tones of synths conjure up such moving music? "I don't think when I'm making music" reveals Gonzalez. "For me it's just a way to express myself. When I'm sitting in front of my keyboard I'm not thinking of being emotional... However I suppose being nostalgic and melancholic is just a part of myself."

And with music this great, let's be glad. *Saturdays=Youth* is surely one of the best albums of 2008 and is a kaleidoscopic explosion of feeling and sincerity in what was otherwise a rather drab musical year. It shows that despite today's disturbingly art-crushing consumerist culture, conformity and rampant individualism, music can avoid the clichés of the hatefully tedious bling-bling-I'm-so-miserable zeitgeist and still find inspiration in the most honest of souls; those who are able to plunge the depths of their experiences and draw out something unique yet universal which speaks in coloured flames of melody, rhythm and harmony. Anthony Gonzalez said the success of his music inspires him to make more. I wonder what he'd say if he knew his music inspires us to listen to more? *Saturdays=Youth* is out now on Mute Records



THREE WOMEN

loisjeary sees sylvia plath's only play brought to life

"The previous production history is shrouded in mystery. I definitely know it was done on the radio in August 1962, and I can't say that it has ever been done since then." Aware of the risk associated with staging such a play, never before seen and largely forgotten as a script for over four decades, theatre director Robert Shaw was nevertheless convinced that **Three Women** was a play which he not only wanted to, but had to, bring to the stage.

Three Women is the only play by **Sylvia Plath**, a writer regarded for her poetry and novels but largely unknown as a dramatist. The text, in verse for three voices, was originally written for radio and was broadcast a few months before Plath committed suicide, aged 30. Some years later it was published in a collection of poetry entitled *Winter Trees*, and Shaw's staging of the piece follows two years of negotiation with Plath's estate and publishers. He admits he was not aware

"I just thought that if this piece has the power to transform the way people see you, or people's behaviour in that way, then there is obviously something to it."

that Plath had ever written a play, but that when he found out about it he felt an "entirely unreasonable and irrational feeling that this is a play I have to do and now is when I have to do it."

Shaw's confidence in the piece was reaffirmed on countless occasions, when he found that coming into contact with the text had a "transformational effect" on friends and strangers alike. "I was staying at a hotel in Croatia when I found the play on the internet. I realised I had to have a copy of it so I went down to reception and asked if they could print it out for me. They, in the rather glassy way that they do, said 'that'll be two pounds a page'. I came back a couple of hours later and their whole demeanour had changed. They had suddenly become tremendously friendly and it had completely transformed their attitude to me: from being a customer in their hotel to being somebody that they wanted to help. I just thought that if this piece has the power to transform the way people see you, or people's behaviour in that way, then there is obviously something to it."

That this effect should occur across cultural and gender divides is all the more striking given the themes dealt with in the play. On the surface, *Three Women* is a gender specific piece, exploring the complex emotions that women feel about pregnancy and birth. The three voices belong to a wife (Elisabeth Dahl), who marvels at the won-

"I am a heroine of the peripheral."

der of her new baby, a secretary (Tilly Fortune), dealing with the most recent of many miscarriages and a student (Lara Lemon), whom after an unwanted pregnancy puts her baby up for adoption. Each of the characters communicate the palpable sense that childbearing can only be truly understood by women, the 'flat' men never more than onlookers. They are resented for not understanding, for being the cause of the women's distress, for not feeling the pain themselves.

Yet, as Shaw identifies, the sophistication of Plath's writing ensures that among the highly personal feelings of these three women is a universality that speaks to all. The deeper themes of loss, isolation and discovering meaning in life are elegantly weaved into the language of the play. "The way that she finds to express what's going on in your head, what you feel, images, emotions and impressions, is extraordinary. My favourite line in the play is 'I shall be a heroine of the peripheral'. As a theatre director I feel a lot in common with that."

Bringing a play initially intended for radio onto the stage is a challenge that Shaw relishes. "You have to think about how you'll make it work on stage because it wasn't originally conceived as having that dimension to it. It's a process of exploration. That's part of the risk - we're taking a radio play and putting it on stage, and the risk is it doesn't work. It makes you fight ten times harder to make sure you find the way that it does work."

A play written in verse presents further challenges. "I want to find out who these characters are and make them believable. Any play starts with that but when you've got a play in verse it's even more important to consider it because your

"The way that she finds to express what's going on in your head... is extraordinary."

characters are speaking poetry and that's not natural. You've got to be sure that your characters are believable and real, and that people can respond to them." It is a testament to all involved and, of course, to Plath's own writing, that the language never presents a barrier to the complete naturalness and believability of the women.

With the three women performing a series of interweaving monologues and never directly engaging with one another, the play could be static and the characters detached. This problem is largely averted by some subtle and predominantly visual interaction between the women. A



Image: Marilyn Kingwill



"Who is he, this blue, furious boy, shiny and strange, as if he had hurtled from a star?"

grey scarf, discarded by the student, examined by the secretary but then passed to the wife to cradle like a baby, serves as an unconvincing symbol of a child. The grey mass does not fully fit with the descriptions of babies' soft pink skin elsewhere in the play, but it does succeed in providing a sense of continuity between the various speeches.

Lighting is used to shift focus between the women: harsh spotlights for intimate monologues and bright washes to represent the setting of the maternity ward, which increases the clinical coldness of the stark, bare white walls. Occasionally, the sporadic lighting and haunting piano soundtrack distracts from the language of the piece - a few more periods of silence between passages would better allow the mind to digest the richness and emotion on offer.

Through occasional appeals to one another, the women are linked by an invisible bond, a connection which is strongest between the two characters who understand the pain of losing a child. As Lara Lemon's expressive, downcast eyes gaze at the sad fury of the secretary's loss, an impressive performance by Tilly Fortune which successfully captures the raw spirit in Plath's writing, the only mother who can hold her child stands slightly apart, her expression suggesting she is not fully able to comprehend the pain that the other woman is feeling. The attitude conveyed to the role of childbirth in a woman's life is complex and ambiguous. In some ways it is seen as a symbol of femininity, the ultimate expression of a woman's natural purpose in life. Following yet another miscarriage, the secretary is left feeling deformed and insufficient as she explores her failings as a woman. The student, revelling in the joy of being young and care-free having

voluntarily given up her child, ultimately feels a loss which she knows can never be filled.

Yet there is also a sense of alienation in each of the women's experiences: alienation from their own physical appearance, 'I am a mountain now, among mountain women'; from male-dominated society, 'That flat, flat, flatness from which ideas, destructions, bulldozers, guillotines, white chambers of shrieks proceed'; and, disconcertingly, from the very children they bear, 'Who is he, this blue, furious boy, shiny and strange, as if he had hurtled from a star?'

The language given to the first voice, the wife, also suggests a sense of caution toward the realities of motherhood. With the birth of her child she is rendered almost infantile herself, 'I hear the moo of cows. . . The talking ducks, the happy lambs. I am simple again', and with her entire purpose in life dedicated to mothering the child there is a cynical sense that she is no longer good for anything else. The mother embraces this new role with a dreamy smile, yet it seems that this baby is sucking from her any of the fiery independence, drive and passion for

"She gave us the amount of herself she wanted us to have in the writing"

life that the other two women cling to in their loss.

When considering his staging of the play, Shaw thought it important to treat the text simply as a piece of dramatic writing, rather than looking at it as an autobiographical reflection of Plath's own experiences. "Of all the writers that I know, she overtly puts so much more of her self and her own experiences into her writing. She gave us the amount of herself that she wanted us to have in the writing, and I don't really feel the need to go and start looking at her life and bringing other aspects of it into it. Shakespeare is one of the writers we know least about and that doesn't stop us considering him to be a genius."

But it is almost impossible not to look for Plath's own experiences in the three voices. The mother of two young children at the time of her death, Plath had also experienced a miscarriage. We can never know for certain how much of herself she put into the play, or how much is purely imagined and constructed for the characters themselves, but the text can only have benefited from the emotional honesty that comes with experience, and that characteristically marks Plath's works apart.

Ultimately, this short play exposes us to the reality of this most fundamental aspect of human existence, with all its complexity and contradictions. The performances successfully convey the dazzling range of emotion contained within the language. There is no question that this is an unconventional piece of theatre, which relies heavily on the quality of the writing, but from Sylvia Plath I would expect nothing less.

Three Women runs at the Jermyn Street Theatre until 7th February. Box office: 0207 287 2875

BORED GAME

A Turkish peasant successfully teaches a donkey to bray the theme tune to 'Black-adder'

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The Shaw Library is exposed to be a mind control training ground for evil shaolin monks. LSE shuts down and the financial services industry completely collapses

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A new world which kills an less than 300 friends

Gordon Brown expresses his amusement at Prime Minister's Questions by saying 'LOL'

Madonna adopts a baby african elephant and insists on breast-feeding it on the bus

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Iceland becomes sq bankrupt th it actually recedes into the ocean GO BACK TO SQUARE 11

Hollywood celebrities adopt freeganism in the face of the recession. Tom Hanks eats roadkill on live TV

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An apathy virus infects everyone on Earth, making everyone indifferent to everything. Life continues as normal

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01.01.09

Howard Davies implodes under the colossal weight of his own ego GO TO SQUARE 13!

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Richard Brans ers how to rais and charges £ ond to chat by to Kurt Cobain shoots himself

order rises
anyone with
Facebook

Russian plutocrats
launch a global
marketing campaign
to rebrand themselves
goofycrats



CONGRATULATIONS!

You have successfully
navigated your way through
the choppy waters of 2009,
and are one step closer to
death!

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The term 'mad props' is
entered into the Oxford
English Dictionary

Scratch 'n' Sniff laptop
screens are invented.
Drug use escalates out
of all control and society
collapses.

GO BACK TO SQUARE 5

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politics
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The
existence
of Boris
Johnson is
revealed to
be a joke



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Heath Ledger rises from
the dead and unites
humanity in a new
religion, bringing about
world peace
GO TO SQUARE 23! 7

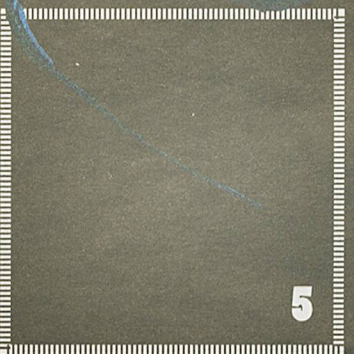
David Cameron
publicly reveals
himself to be a
chameleon

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Guns become legal in
Britain and Russian
Roulette becomes
playground craze



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SAME SHIT, DIFFERENT YEAR

ignorance is not bliss says **ruby buckley**

You know you're having a shitter of a New Year's when you're sat watching Jools slur his words on Hootenanny.

Alright, you may get to preview NME's next big jangly guitar band's new single, but then you have to put up with an African folk bonanza and a jazz sax soloist with a horrendous beard. The other option is equally as bad. You know the scene. Pre-pubescents singing along to the Final Countdown, complete with all the "do doo doos", while the parents pop the champagne. Later on it's dancing around the handbags for the mums and rhythmless knee-bopping courtesy of the dads. It's the one time of the year, bar weddings and fiftieth birthday dos, where people will get excited about a selection of hits before they return the next day, once the hangover has subsided, to describing their music taste as 'anything on the radio'.

Call me a music snob, but that sentence resonates as sweetly as cutlery scratching on a plate with me. It's people like this that kept Bryan Adams on top of the chart for 16 weeks, the very same lot that rate Robbie Williams, and yes, those folk who whack on Norah Jones at dinner parties. It's not just that they find these atrocious artists enjoyable, but they seem to revel in a state of musical ignorance. "Oh I don't really know the names" they say, as their eyes glaze over as you mention

seminal artists of popular music. Unfortunately I was not blessed with the voice of an angel, and to be frank, I am tiring of having to attempt to sing the chorus of "Don't You Want Me" just so people will twig who the Human League are.

So what should one do to bring in the New Year? Head down to Shoreditch to pop pills with the rest of the rebellious middle class youth and dance to fuzzy electronic beats. But they are as bad as the middle-aged, Thatcher supporters who think the Script is good Sunday morning music. I was terribly disappointed to find out upon moving to London that, just because someone is sporting tatty Converse and a striped shirt, it doesn't mean they know anything about Kraftwerk's influence on pop music.

New Year's is such a non-event anyway; I clearly should have gone to Afterskool at LSE instead.



FUTURE DAZE

peteyu goes back in time to save the future

Two thousand and nine, lucky number nine of the new millennium! So, what new and wondrous music should we expect to glide through the airwaves this year then? Well, one way City Analysts predict stock prices is to look at past trends. Seeing as we are all a bunch of budding City Analysts whether we admit it or not (I mean if Wikipedia says so then it must be true) I thought it'd be a good idea to sneak a peek back into the disappearing mystic cloud that is 2008.

Well...it's a bit depressing really. Ok fine, I admit there were a few bands that might pass as being quite enjoyable. MGMT swept us off our feet

with their lush synth sounds in *Oracular Spectacular*, and for a moment there they seemed to be the next best thing. Then we realised they stank worse than

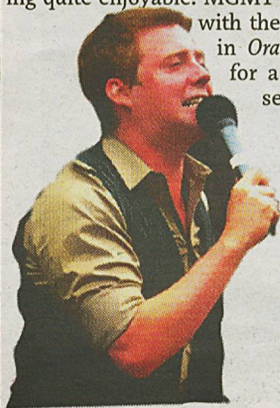
a mountain of pigeon shit live. Oops. Other youthful acts such as Vampire Weekend and Noah and the Whale also hit our ears, and

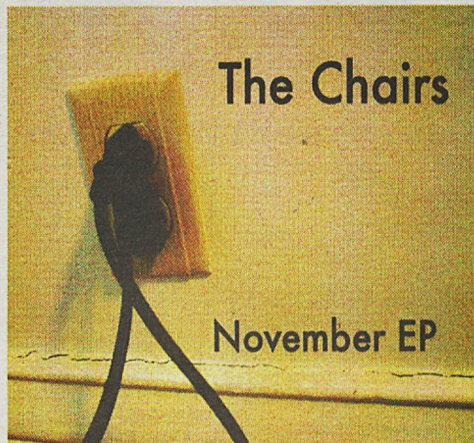
subsequently bored our ears. It seemed as if there was a general plot by the music industry to force recycled trash down our mouths and, when we gagged they released some new 'innovative' artist like Foals or Santogold to stamp out any dissent by reminding us how, in this day and age, innovation equals crap because innovation requires talent. With us now firmly on side, they then released re-releases of uber-bands' past albums, such as Kaiser Chief's *Off With Their Heads*, to multi-million pound success. Yeah, suck on that credit crunch!

It's looking quite bleak really. So far, it seems musical talent for 2009 is going to plummet with world GDP figures. But... there is still hope. The resistance has not given up just yet. Just like the bunch of plucky royalist rakes who brought about the Restoration, past glories will be relived by modern legends. Yes, I am talking about none other than the godfathers of modern indie, Franz Ferdinand, making a comeback after what seems like a millennia of silence with *Tonight: Franz Ferdinand*. Other bands I should mention are Florence and the Machine, White Lies, The Virgins and La Roux because NME names them as their top favourites for 2009. But that does also mean you should only ever listen to these bands ten times and only download their singles to save wasting money on their crappy, egg mayonnaise filler-filled albums.

My advice, dear readers, is to invest only in

products which you know about. Avoid complicated new trinkets like the plague and you just might survive this financial and musical year with your bank balances in the black and your temperament as jolly as Seth Rogen high on Pineapple Express. What I'm really trying to say, behind all that hyperbole, is to stick to what you know. Not just to the bands that you know will never get lazy (yes Kaiser Chiefs I have had my suspicions about you from the very start), but to what you know makes good music - real passion rather than gimmicks. Seeing as it is the New Year, I might as well end on a joyous note. Yes there might have been a lot of cannon fodder in 2008, but there were also some real awe inspiring gems, such as Bon Iver's sublime *For Emma Forever Ago* and the Dodos with their heartfelt *Visiter*, reminding us not to mark the speakers for the spring clean dumpster just yet.





NOVEMBER EP

THE CHAIRS

joshheller salutes free music

Perhaps 2009 will be the year that truly marks the death of the physical format. Radiohead got the ball rolling with their online release of *In Rainbows*; history will inevitably judge that as a pivotal moment in music distribution. The Chairs are an unsigned band from Wisconsin and you can download their first EP, *November*, without even the hassle of paying for it! This will inevitably be a route bands take in 2009 and beyond, using free releases to demand music fans and bloggers attention. Using the Internet to build hype is nothing new, although giving away entire albums is rare. With every Myspace wall cluttered with musicians desperately trying to flog their wares, it is usually only the truly exciting bands that make it down this path (the execrable Lily Allen notwithstanding). So are The Chairs good or exciting enough to make it? Well on the basis of this five track EP, they just might be.

Their songs range from the jaunty haughty indie-pop of 'Polly' to the ambient vocal-heavy rock of 'Fire and Ice', as well as a quiet grunge-tinged 'I Gotta Go'. Lead singer Phil Kronenberg sounds a lot like The Weakerthans' John Samson, although perhaps half an octave lower. His songs are often a strange juxtaposition of mournful and hopeful. The excellent bassist Andre Juan paints the whole EP with a light shade of funk. This is an extremely accomplished debut, it doesn't sound particularly lo-fi, but it is clear they will benefit from a more equipped studio and some experienced producers. It seems only a matter of time before The Chairs are signed; it isn't inconceivable that when they are, their label may halt the free downloads. The lack of foresight in the record industry never fails to astonish. Go download *November* now, if for no other reason than to wait till they get popular and say "I only like their early stuff."

VIVE LE CHIC

cuimok takes french

Call me fussy if you will, but my nitpicky-persnickety little soul positively glowed with happiness the moment the opening band took to the stage — not just because they sounded good, but because it was the first time I didn't actually have to wait over an hour for a gig to begin. (Strange, I always had the impression it was the French who liked being fashionably late.)

Having said that, opening act of the night Okou were very impressive indeed. I didn't quite know what to expect when I first saw them, looking rather small on stage, armed with nothing but an old banjo and an Afro between the two of them, but it wasn't long before the annoying buzz of the pre-gig beer-chatter gradually faded into a comfortable, appreciative silence as Tattiana Heintz's husky vocals, accompanied by Gilbert Trefzger's artful strumming, filled the hall.

That set the tone for the rest of the night, and when Nouvelle Vague finally made their appearance they did not disappoint. New additions to the band Nadeah and Marianne Elise were surprisingly at ease onstage, to the point of coming across as being somewhat blasé at times, actually. Their first song of the night was met with a somewhat lukewarm response, probably because it was something from their yet-to-be-released third album, but they didn't seem to care.

As the night wore on and they played more familiar favourites like 'Just Can't Get Enough' and 'Human Fly', their pantomime antics and penchant for pretending to be mannequins (at the strangest of junctures) increased in frequency and recklessness. In the midst of performing a rather blithe version of 'Too Drunk to F***' a water fight ensued between Nadeah and the audience which ended with her climbing off-stage and shimmying her way across the crowded floor to grab a drink from the bar, much to the chagrin of the security guys.

It was random, but this was why I loved Nouvelle Vague to begin with: their blithesome self-indulgence and playful unpredictability, on top of stellar vocals and excellent musical arrangements. Perhaps on paper "French band doing bossa nova covers of old new wave and post-punk songs" doesn't sound very exciting, but as the crowd at the Forum chanted and sang along and watched Nadeah and Marianne prance about like drunken pixies in 1920s flapper dresses, I felt as glee-ful as a little girl who had been made privy to her older sisters' big secret. I guess the secret's out in the open now. (Psst... they'll be back to perform at the Roundhouse this October, if you're interested.)



Inescapable - totally inescapable - is the figure of Che Guevara. It finds itself printed on t-shirts, plastered on walls, rapped in verses, parodied by Banksy, beamed in vodka ads, and rather disturbingly tattooed on Mike Tyson's lower abdomen. To this diverse pantheon of celebrity we can now add a Hollywood epic, with even a heavyweight director in the form of *Ocean's Eleven's* Steven Soderbergh. Well, maybe.

This isn't your typical Hollywood movie. Spurning the big Hollywood bucks for greater artistic control, Soderbergh has tried to create a defiant fuck-you to all conventional cinema. Unable to decide what part of Guevara's life to focus on and with little regard for commercial viability, Soderbergh has created what is in reality a single, sprawling 258-minute piece, cut in half for general release. The first half is to be released here next month, entitled *El Argentine*.

Beautifully shot with a heavy dose of handhelds, *El Argentine* takes us into heat of the jungle during the Cuban revolution. Based on Che's diary, it's compiled not as a narrative, but as a collection of diary entries. Rather like documentary raw-footage, there is no narration, no in-depth introduction, and surprisingly fleeting references to the Revolution as a whole. The focus is, instead, on what Che is doing in that particular diary en-

bearded homies. The revolution itself is always in the background, but the foreground is well and truly dominated by the revolutionary.

The problem *El Argentine* faces is that the character of the revolutionary is one of the least complex, least compelling figures to be put on film. What makes the historic Che Guevara such an interesting character is that he has the power to conjure up feelings of hate as powerful as those of love. He was a man of paradox. A man equally inclined to execute

of those who served him as he was clued up to the suffering of the lower classes as a whole; as capable of baseness as greatness. Soderbergh's Guevara isn't a paradox. He is less a character than a caricature.

Soderbergh's Che wonders from story to story, always doing what's right, doing what's required. When his men stray to fulfil their sexual urges on some village folk, he disciplines them. When the boys gather around the campfire and discuss the female revolutionaries they've tapped, he

is annotating his communist manifesto. When he is being fired at, he shows no fear. When he finally needs to execute one of his men, it's for all the right reasons. Where is the moral ambiguity? Where are the paradoxes?

Watching the movie you increasingly feel you aren't watching a film, but instead a case for canonization. Piece of evidence after piece of evidence is presented to the man's greatness, before you realise that is all Soderbergh is doing. He isn't depicting a man: he is depicting more an incorruptible prophet. His character isn't Che Guevara, it's Jesus of the Jungle. What bullshit.

The opportunity Soderbergh had to delve into Guevara's soul is all wasted on this unrealistic, plastic character portrayal. Incredibly, he manages to create a movie that tells you as little about Che Guevara as the shirts



CHE

adriangrocock delves into soderbergh's latest epic

try, whether teaching people to read, being paralysed by asthma, shooting members of the Cuban army, or hanging out with his

people en mass with little trial or hesitation as to educate and liberate the oppressed. A man who was as ignorant to the suffering

emblazoned with his face they sell on the street. All image, no substance. What a shame, what a waste.

TURNING JAPANESE

christinaschmidt-zur-nedden does not like conveyer belt

Together with a group of bewildered elderly people and a Hessian museum guide I find myself somewhat uncomfortably looking at a bare breasted bionic woman Manga statue transforming herself into a spaceship against the background of a wallpaper exhibiting psychedelic mushrooms. I have come to see Takashi Murakami's exhibition at my local museum in Frankfurt. The Japanese artist is known for his provocative style, with works ranging from cartoony paintings to quasi-minimalist sculptures to huge inflatable balloons and a vast array of factory-produced items. Murakami stands for the equalisation of art and commerce. By putting the museum shop in the first room of the exhibition he delivers an explicit message of art as a commercialised object no different from other brands or products. The shop is as important as any other room of the exhibition and brands seem to pop up everywhere as the walls are lined with glass boxes containing Murakami's latest design for Louis Vuitton handbags. The only thing missing is the cashier next to them. Similarly, the music video that Murakami has directed for Kanye West's song 'Good Morning' features a little teddy bear flying happily through a universe of brand-planets.

The demystification of art by making it part of a chain-producing machinery was first developed by Andy Warhol; however, the frequent comparison of both artists is often rash and imprudent. Warhol's 'factory' was more

like a hang-out spot for his stoned friends with a team of about six people actually producing something while Murakami, much like British artist Damien Hirst, employs around 70 people slaving away on a 16-hour Japanese working day plan in his Kaikai Kiki company with offices in Tokyo and New York. In that way, Murakami is much more an entrepreneur and manager of his own art than Warhol ever was. He is at the forefront of all the contemporary artists who hold that business art is the new art. This evolving trend clearly puts an end to the times of the poverty-stricken talented artist painting beautiful sceneries in his little apartment before being discovered and marketed by some hard-nosed business man.

Gazing at a piece called *Lonesome cowboy* - a naked Manga boy sculpture waving an ejaculate lasso at the spectator - I ask myself how much longer this sort of art is going to last. Murakami claims that his art represents the struggle of discriminated people but to me it seems that its only message is to shock and irritate people. Murakami borrows heavily from other artists. I detect works that bear a great similarity to Yves Klein's blue canvases, Hokusai's great wave, Lichtenstein's pop art and Rodin's statues. Except for Murakami's alter ego 'DOB', which is hidden in almost every piece there is nothing truly original about his work. With a BFA, MFA and PhD from Tokyo's National University of Fine Arts and Music, clearly Murakami could do better than laying all his art out digitally to

later reproduce it on canvas. Luckily I am not completely disappointed as our guide leads us to a room showing the artist's latest work which exhibits a couple of abstract paintings marking a return to the historic Japanese nihon-ga style. Although most of Murakami's work is inspired by the Japanese Otaku (or computer-nerd) Manga subculture, his twelve-year long traditional education in Japan has not been for nothing. Aware of his roots, Murakami even flew in a Japanese Shinto priest to consecrate the whole exhibition our guide tells us. I wonder what the holy man thought about 'Lonesome cowboy'.

Murakami's work could easily be labelled as shallow entertainment art with an uncertain future. However sometimes shallowness is the point. Living in a world of fast-forward consumerism lacking intellectual depth, Murakami's art might be criticised for sympathising with the new fun generation but his honesty is nevertheless striking. Few people realise that the art market is almost as cruel as the financial market with paintings being a major investment mainly because of the names behind it and less for the mere appreciation of artistic talent. Murakami's original contribution to the art world is that shocking bluntness with which his art is telling the story of the new business art. Or in simpler terms, Murakami's art can also be a bridge between generations as the middle-aged Japanese woman next to me is quietly humming Kanye West's song as she exits the museum.



THE SOUTHERN CONTINENT

graemebirrell knows exactly why he loves Australia

I've always been resentful of Australians. Most poignantly, I think it's the fact that none of them really seem to do anything, but still manage to maintain a relatively decent economy, government, and general wellbeing. Every Australian I've ever met seems to work three days a week and barbeque every second meal. And I can't help but feeling jealous. I'd love to live on the beach where the sun shines ten months of the year - why the hell should I have to live in a dreary grey Britain simply because I aspire to be a slave to London's financial services economy. Most Australians who share dreams of trading stock for a living seem to come here, work for three years, and bugger off home to put a deposit on a five bedroom mansion in the 'burbs. Where's the justice in that? Three years of working in London for me will likely only culminate in maybe being able to afford the daily congestion charge to get my Focus into work in the morning, not a cushy surfer lifestyle on the Gold Coast. So why do I love Australia so much? Well, here are some reasons.

It's a country of amazing natural beauty. Even the top ten best places to go in Australia would be a near impossible list to compile - and that's what's great about it; its got at least three places every single person on Earth would fall in love with immediately were they to visit. Personally, my favourites have been Uluru (Ayer's Rock), the Whitsunday Islands and the Great Barrier Reef, and the Daintree Rainforest. Uluru looks amazing in pictures and on TV, but to actually be there is second to none. For some reason I was there on Christmas Day one year, and spending Christmas under perfect blue skies with 40 degree sunshine in the middle of a giant red desert was once in a lifetime. Even more incredible at Uluru is having dinner under the stars - you get served platters of shark, barracuda, and native meats on tables lit only by the stars. It's so dark you can shine

a torch in the sky and see where it hits the stars. Very romantic. The Whitsundays have that incredible perfect white beach that's in loads of postcards and always gets voted best beach in the world. For a small dollar sum you can hire yourself a half-mad ex-navy officer to sail you in a 45 ft sailboat out to the Great Barrier Reef from Airlie Beach and snorkel on secluded beaches around the islands - perfect. And finally, the Daintree Rainforest is just immaculate tropical rainforest where if you don't see some dangerous predators and snakes in the wild, you should demand your money back.

It's also a country full of great people. I know I said I was resentful of them, but to be honest, that was just stubbornness at wanting to be one of them. The great thing about Aussies is that they're so laid back that they seem to have absolutely no problems, most of them. I watched a bit of Big Brother Australia when I was there one year, and the last four people in the house were some stoned surfer guy, his girlfriend, his ex-girlfriend who he cheated on, and her best mate. In the UK they'd all fall out with each other within five minutes and someone would probably end up being seriously injured. But being Australians, they all just kicked back with a barbie and a Fosters and chatted breeze. And they're such inclusive people too I've noticed - especially in sport. Each state has its 'own' sport - Rugby League in Queensland (they call it 'footie') Rugby Union in New South Wales (they call this 'footie' too) and Aussie Rules Football in Victoria (they also call this 'footie'). What's great is that every person in each state is the biggest fan of the chosen state sport, and has total disregard for any other game. It's ingenious - everyone is a winner because they only care about

their own sport.

But what gets me most is how Aussies maintain their crazy beach lifestyles. I've met many Australians abroad when travelling - they keep turning up bloody everywhere. Most I meet, though, are not like me - a poor 19 year old student with a month or two to kill in Costa Rica - they're generally 35 year olds who 'are waiting to start their real lives' when they get home sometime in the next ten years. Or they're working in Walkabout to fund petrol for their Ferraris back home. And yet in Australia you can go to the moves for £1.50, or get amazing sushi from a real Japanese dude for five quid (Sushi Train in the Gold Coast is like Yo Sushi!, but they use an actual train), or buy a speedboat for just a couple hundred smacks. Petrol is well cheap despite having been flown halfway round the world to get there, and designer clothes are sold at outlet prices. Maybe as an economics student I should assert the fact that my pound is worth more than their dollars and that stuff in general is only relatively cheaper. But I don't care - as long as I have my earnings in Pound Sterling, Australia will always be a treasure trove of cheap crap for me, the tourist.

So there you have it - I've successfully kissed Australia's ass for a thousand words. And maybe I've gone a little overboard. Maybe you think I've just rambled on about a country and people that don't really deserve or warrant much praise - after all a country founded on beaches and barbeques doesn't suggest much in the way of being an iconic cultural stalwart, and the relative youth of Australian cities and towns may not provide much in the way of historical architecture or interest. But what gets me is that when a country with such incredible natural beauty, constant sunshine, perfect surfing beaches, and a generally great standard of nonchalant, relaxed life exists - why the hell are we all still living on a dreary grey island in Europe?



THE DETOX DIARIES

sophiemarment does detox so you don't have to.

New Year, a time for resolution, drink less, eat less, get fit. I for one have felt the tell tale signs of the Christmas binge. I found myself lying upon the sofa a couple of evenings before New Year with a tub of Celebrations, a big fat glass of red wine and an extra half a stone, watching something of little interest (wasn't Christmas telly rubbish this year?) and was hit by the realisation that the picture I painted was, at best, desperate. Bridget Jones-esque in fact. I could be her. She could be me. What was I to do? Action was needed. Now I'm not one for dieting. I've always condemned it and I'm not going to pretend that I've ever had a desire to go on one. However, in the knowledge that I was going to potentially write an article on food for a 'New Year' theme and, given the fact that all food articles at New Year are about dieting, I considered the possibilities. It's pretty difficult to write an article on something that you have no experience of. So for you, dear reader, I took the plunge. I was Bridget Jones in the making and I was going to diet!

The problem with dieting, one of many, is that there are countless numbers of them. Ok, so I was going to diet, but which one? GI, Atkins, Water diet? I decided to consult my good friend the Sunday Times Style magazine. This friend of mine informed me that if you're going to diet, it

should be detox because detox is not just a diet, it's a lifestyle. Detox will not only allow you to lose weight it will leave you feeling rejuvenated, with better skin, more energy and toxin-free. All this sounded promising and with a new opinion of dieting I hit the internet to find some meal plans. This was where the thin fabric of 'less fat, more energy' began to tear. Crudités do not constitute lunch in my opinion. Neither was I overly impressed by the no-dairy, no-wheat, no-caffeine, no-alcohol, no-red-meat elements of the diet. However, I had decided to detox, and detox I would.

The next step was to go and procure the necessary items for my seven-day assault upon my unsuspecting body. This proved to be a mistake. Strolling down the food-laden aisles of Sainsbury's I was hit by the realisation that I really couldn't eat ANYTHING!! I was restricted to the fruit & veg and grains section. That's two of the nine-trillion supermarket aisles! Heading home with a bag filled with brown rice, salad and oats, head thumping from the caffeine-withdrawal headache and feeling like my blood sugar was dangerously plummeting, I was overcome by

the sensation that this was not going to be the new and enjoyable experience I had foreseen.

So what can you eat when you detox? Well, it's oats and fruit for breakfast; vegetable soup or salad with oatcakes for lunch, and fish with brown rice or baked potato for supper. Not an overly inspiring menu and one I approached with trepidation. Now, before I go any further, let me deal with the issue of brown rice. I'm all for brown bread, brown sugar, I'll even go as wholewheat pasta is alright. Brown rice is another thing all together. Don't believe that crap they tell you about it having a wonderful nutty flavour or wholesome texture, because that's what it is, crap. Not only does it take twice as long to cook as white rice but if you overcook it by a minute it turns

into a nasty lumpy gunky mess. The way the husk curls up at the ends to reveal the lighter centre is reminiscent of moulding dog turds and the pale brown residue left around the inside of the saucepan is indescribably off-putting.

Not only is the food tediously uninspiring on a detox diet, but there is the added factor of having to consume your unappetising morsel of a meal whilst your family or flatmates are gleefully tucking into a veritable feast. Try eating a tuna salad whilst everyone else is munching on roast lamb and potato gratin. Frankly, if detox is your lifestyle, you can have no social life and you will be very unpopular if you're living and eating with. You can't even go for a coffee! Let alone a pub. A detox lifestyle is fine if you're a hermit, but not if you have any kind of sociable inclination.

But that's enough about the food side of things. Moving swiftly on to drink. Detox has made me come to the following conclusion: my drinking habits are limited to water, tea and red wine. Having two of these cut out of my nutrition plan has made for a very boring

week. The detox plan insists on you drinking at least two litres of water a day with various other delicious nutritious let's-save-the-world-hug-trees-and-be-free-and-organic drink prescriptions. I have to say my heart sank when I saw the word 'Wheatgrass' only two days in. Having read A.A. Gill's description of it as the worst thing he's ever put in his mouth, I have to admit that I opted out of this treat.

Herbal teas on the other hand I am well qualified to talk about. In my seven days of this godforsaken diet I

have carried out extensive research on herbal tea and these are my findings. Firstly, I have imbibed every flavour of herbal tea under the

Sainsbury's shelves, and I can officially say that not only is their scent so cloying that it will linger in your room for days, but no matter what the label says, whether it's Spiced Apple or Camomile with Vanilla and Honey, Peppermint or Loganberry, Lemon and Ginger or Orange and Cinamon - they all taste like pondwater. Stagnant pondwater at that. Secondly, it doesn't matter how long you infuse them for, be it five minutes or five seconds, they still taste the same. Thirdly, they are a waste of money and frankly, the only reason they're meant to be good for you is that they don't contain caffeine. If you want a healthy alternative to tea or coffee have a cup of hot water with a slice of lemon in it and spend your money on a magazine to read whilst you're drinking it.

So now for the real question - having put myself through seven gruelling days of brown rice and herbal tea - has it paid off? Do I feel more energetic? No, I have spent most of the week feeling deprived of enough energy to get

out of bed in the morning. Is my skin looking clear and refreshed? Not any more noticeably than before the detox. Has it worked as a weight loss programme? As a starvation programme, maybe, as to the weight,

I lost 3 lb. Nothing that a couple of 20 minute runs wouldn't have shifted. If you're thinking of detoxing take my advice, invest your time, money and self-control in something more worthwhile, like a gym subscription. Thinking detox? Think again.

TUESDAY
I AM SICK OF FISH!!
(I AM EVEN MORE SICK OF BROWN RICE)

SATURDAY
Today was very nearly a serious setback. Visit to the grandma in Brixham. Try explaining detox to a 92 year old. No. Field that. Don't.

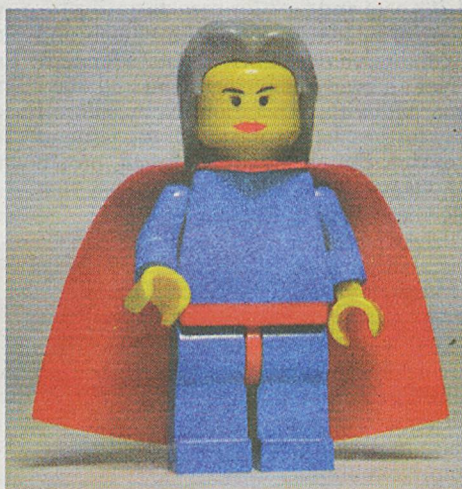
FRIDAY
They said you might get caffeine withdrawal headaches. Day one and I already have withdrawal...

NAKED AMBITION

sarahsimpson is turned inside-out by the latest trends

Oh dear God I am so sick of tartan. And judging by the plethoric presence of the pattern in the January sales wasting valuable floor space, so is the rest of the UK. Thankfully the New Year signals new trends but be cautious, dear reader, for we have bigger issues on our hands than pending ruin of our economy: wait for it, underwear as outerwear. Supposedly evoking the image of a sensuous and provocative woman on the catwalk, here in the real world is an entirely different matter. Wearing nothing over your tights-whities? The Superman undertones are inescapable.

All this messiness started with the Prada s/s 09 show, and its bra-top: upon inspection it seemed to be all 'bra', very little 'top'. That sort of title would mislead a girl into thinking she might actually be looking at a top but don't be fooled; it's a bra - nothing more. The folly doesn't stop there. The ever-gregarious Vivienne Westwood has encouraged women to wear their husband's boxer shorts as outerwear. Knicker-sightings have also been reported on the catwalks of MaxMara, Marc Jacobs and Marni. Even Topshop paid hom-



age to this trend with some sequin pants.

This is all well and good if you don't succumb to the lure of the Wright's Bar caramel square on a daily basis. Yes, this trend smacks of the size-snobbish sentiments that assisted the rise of the wet look leggings in 2008 - stay away Porky. The baring of one's midriff is not only highly incon-

sistent with the sub-zero temperatures we have been experiencing, it's a bit too Britney circa the unforgettable 'Sometimes'-era and the shudderingly unpleasant 'Gimme More' video. The latest Louis Vuitton ads really are the icing on the cake. Picture this: Madonna, legs akimbo, with a Louis Vuitton bag dangling from her shoe with her sheathed only by monogrammed frilly LV knickers. OK, OK, we get it Madonna, you've still got it, now put your pants away.

Still not put off? Fear not, humility can be maintained and/or salvaged. If you play your cards right, this trend can be rather wearable. Sheer materials can serve as modest yet Romantic cover-ups which allow pretty underwear to suggestively peek through while avoiding the shameless hussy look. For those who prefer to keep their undies strictly utilitarian, a vintage slip can double as a party dress given the right accessories. Either way attitude is key. If the look is cool, cavalier and slightly off-hand, it can come off as quite distinctive and quirky. Subtlety is vital as is a high quality collection of skivvies. Courage, mon brave!

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