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The Beaver

10 February 2009
Newspaper of the
London School of Economics
Students' Union
thebeaveronline.co.uk

Arms holdings 'grossly misrepresented by director'

LSE tracker fund allows investment in arms companies, campaigners say

LSE accused of excessive scrutiny over room bookings

Ali Moussavi
& Rajan Patel

Certain groups of LSE academics and students allegedly face extensive scrutiny when attempting to book rooms for pro-Palestinian events.

Several email exchanges between academics and LSE Conferences across 2008 show that certain student and staff groups with room booking rights often have their credentials questioned and cannot book rooms for free. This is done on the grounds that there has been some degree of external involvement in organising events on the topic of Palestine. The students and academics spoke to the Beaver on condition of anonymity.

Senior school officials, including Howard Davies' Director's Management Team, decide that certain events are not 'LSE events' and that LSE staff and students who are organising them should pay to book an LSE room.

When one such decision was questioned by academics in an email chain, LSE Director of External Relations Robin Hoggard was unable to define an 'LSE event'. He said that there are no specific rules which define what constitutes an 'LSE event'.

Hoggard told the academics that they should raise the matter with the LSE's Pro-Directors, Professors George Gaskell, Janet Hartley and Sarah Worthington.

He then said: "In the circumstances, however, I would have to question whether it would be worth your while. We don't have formal written rules on what defines a School event."

In this particularly email exchange, the ultimate reasoning behind the Pro-Directors' final decision that this was not an LSE event was not explained to the academics.

LSE Staff Against the War, an approved staff group, was asked to pay over £2,300 to book rooms for a conference on the plight of Palestinians after the 1948 War.

The conference was to include LSE academics as chairs and speakers and was intended "in the first instance for LSE staff, to which all members of the School will be invited, along with interested individuals from outside the School."

Alan Revel of LSE Conferences asked LSE Staff Against the War to give him names of its officers, its number of members and its constitution and terms of reference.

Revel claimed that all student societies submit this information to him on an annual basis. Students' Union Treasurer Wil Barber said: "Perhaps there is some confusion, the only information we passed on to Conferences is the room booking form for each society."

Revel also told the group that under no circumstances were they to represent the event as being "for or on behalf of the LSE". The event ultimately did not go ahead.

LSE Staff Against the War is an official LSE staff group which exists on a similar basis to a Students' Union society. Established in 2003, the group has since had room booking rights on LSE for You. They had never faced any such questions when booking rooms in the past.

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Not for Profit protesters delivered a petition to Howard Davies' (below) office on Monday. Four hundred signatories called for LSE to move away from 'pro-business' policies
Cherie Leung

Joseph Cotterill

LSE director Howard Davies has "grossly misrepresented the facts" in statements on the school's holdings in arms companies, campus activists against the arms trade have alleged.

A spokesperson for the LSE Not For Profit campaign said that Davies had "knowingly represented" the school as not having holdings in arms companies, in a Beaver comment piece three weeks ago.

Anti-Gaza war protesters separate from the Not for Profit campaign also demanded during their occupation of the Old Building in the same week that LSE should divest from BAE Systems, a company which manufactures armaments and ammunition.

Davies denied in a letter to the occupiers that the School held direct investments in BAE. "Nor do we have any similar investments in any other arms companies," he said.

Davies said in the letter that the School held some endowment money in a tracker fund called Charittrak, in the form of equities "which change from time to time".

In the letter, dated 16 January, Davies

added that Barclays, the fund's administrator, "have today confirmed that the Charittrak fund does not hold any BAE shares."

Not for Profit activists contend that the Charittrak tracker fund frequently moves money in and out of arms companies as part of daily trading on the markets.

"As an ex-chair of the Financial Services Authority, Howard Davies knows that tracker funds invest in many different sectors," said Michael Deas, a Not for Profit spokesperson.

"The director has made it look like we were acting on false information, when we were not," he added.

Deas conceded that the Not for Profit campaign does not have access to information on current holdings in Charittrak.

Student campaigners say School officials told them it was "extremely clear" that the school held money in arms companies through the Charittrak fund from time to time, in a meeting held during the occupation.

LSE did not respond to the allegations against Davies when approached for comment.

"Council has set up a working group to look at various aspects of socially responsible investment policy at the school and the group will report back to council in due course," a school spokesperson said.



The Not for Profit campaign said that even indirect holdings were unethical.

Deas said making a distinction between direct and indirect investment was "little more than rhetorical" and made no difference to the large sums of money the School was placing in the Charittrak fund.

"Even one or two per cent of this investment is a lot of money if it goes to arms companies," Deas said.

LSE invested £55 million in Charittrak in the 2008 financial year, up from £37 million in 2006.

Equities holdings are popular with charities and universities as stable and diversified sources of income.

Barclays Global Investors managed £2.3 billion for 1,700 UK charities in 2007, including Charittrak.

King's College London holds two-thirds of its endowment in equities. Much of this is currently invested in the Charittrak fund.

Deas said it did not matter that many other institutions besides the LSE placed money in Charittrak.

Collective

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The Collective is The Beaver's governing body. You must have three articles or photos published in the paper to qualify for membership. If you believe you are a Collective member but your name is not on the list above, please email

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LSE events

Highlights of this week's public lectures and talks

China's Democratic Future
Chatham House senior fellow Dr Kerry Brown speaks.
Tonight, D202, 1700-1800

Keeping Score: new approaches to the standard of living
With Prof Richard Steckel.
Tonight, SZT, 1830-2000

Afghanistan and Iraq: good war, bad war?
UN supreme Lakhdar Brahimi in conversation with Prof Mary Kaldor.
Wednesday, HKT, 1830

LSE talent concert
Hidden student and staff stars.
Thursday, Shaw Library, 1305-1400

Where to find European Values?
European human rights court judge Andras Sajó with Prof Conor Gearty.
Thursday, OT, 1830-2000

Contemporary Islam
Idris Tawfiq caps off Discover Islam Week.
Friday, HKT, 1800-2000

Online Prof Luis Garicano discusses incentives in credit crunches and football matches bit.ly/whge

Positions of the week

LSE careers service's pick of the best jobs

Deloitte, multiple graduate opportunities
in China, Spain, Middle East, South Korea and South East Asia through the Global Universities Programme, Deloitte's newest initiative to match top international students from select universities with career opportunities in their home country or another location of interest.

Barclaycard, graduate trainees
in HR, Marketing, Risk and Commercial Programme

The Environment Council.
Finances Assistant and Public and Stakeholder engagement assistant positions

Internship opportunities at Société Générale,
including IT Trainee, synthetic credit structuring...

MVA Consultancy - graduate analyst / researcher.

As a graduate Analyst you will be working in a busy transport consultancy. You may find yourself contributing to a major piece of policy research for a central Government department, a transport assessment in connection with a private residential or commercial developer, development of a transport strategy for a city or region, or a bid for a railway or toll road franchise, or for a new tram system.

3 M - Graduate opportunities,
in business, IT, science, manufacturing and engineering.

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De Beers. Junior Product Manager/Analyst - Marketing Internship.
Joint-venture between De Beers and LVMH, De Beers Diamond Jewellers Ltd. is based in London and operates 50 stores around the world. This internship is proposed within the Head-Office Marketing Department doing the product strategy for all the markets.

Policy Advisor to the Communications Consumer Panel. Associate.
The role of the Communications Consumer Panel is to influence Ofcom, Government, the EU, and service and equipment providers so that the communications interests of consumers and citizens are protected and promoted.

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Bursaries delayed for hundreds of students in loans company error



The Student Services Centre. Photo: Mike Carlson

School organises short-term loans as students await payments

Joe Rennison

LSE is blaming the Student Loans Company for an error that has left hundreds of students still waiting to receive their financial bursaries.

Seven hundred LSE students are awarded bursaries based on their financial situation. The bursaries are paid in instalments at the start of each term by the Student Loans Company.

LSE student services only became aware that the second installment had not

yet been paid to students on 5 February.

LSE Financial Support Manager Sue Platter said that the Student Loans Company had been at fault and had not notified the financial support office in time.

"The process from our end had all gone according to plan, and my colleagues had both followed up on it during January to check that all was well," Platter said.

"It seems that our contacts at the Student Loans Company thought that all was fine, and only realised yesterday [5 February] that the office which carries out this process had run into a problem, which either they did not realise or they did not tell anyone about," she added.

Jon Nolan, a second-year sociology student still without his bursary, said: "Student services have said it's entirely a fault with the Student Loans Company, not LSE's fault. They were told that it would be in tomorrow [6 February], but that's been put back again and no one has any idea of when it is coming in now."

Amy Noble, a second-year law student affected by the problem, said she had expected to receive her bursary in week one. The situation was "absolutely appalling," she said.

Sakine Koc, a second-year sociology student also waiting for her bursary, said: "LSE has been really helpful itself, it's just the Student Loans Company that's the problem."

She continued: "For students from a low income family and who have to live in London, this is a really difficult situation."

Platter said that the school was acting to help affected students. "Even now the



Amy Noble, still waiting for her bursary, called the situation, "absolutely appalling."

Student Loans Company cannot confirm how many students are affected, but they and we are assuming it is all of them," she said.

We have emailed the students to let them know of the problem, which of course some of them had spotted," Platter added. The new projected date for bursary payments to arrive in students' accounts was 18 February, she said.

Student services are offering short-term loans to students in financial difficulty. The Accommodation Office confirmed that they will grant extensions for rent payments from affected students.

Koc, who works in the Students' Union's advice and counseling centre, added that the loans take at least a week to process. "If someone needs an emergency loan it'll take them at least a week to get it," she said.

The Student Loans Company declined to comment on the issue.

NAB energy efficiency faces teething problems

Katherine Ripullone

The New Academic Building recently received the lowest government energy rating of G despite it being awarded a design rating of "excellent" by the independent BRE environmental assessment method (BREEAM) awards.

The low government rating is reportedly used until a year's worth of data has been collected, after which point, the data will be assessed and the official rating specified by the School.

The rating is calculated by comparing the actual energy consumption of the building over twelve months against the expected energy consumption of a building of its kind. A rating of "A" has zero CO₂ emissions while a rating of G has over twice the typical CO₂ emissions for a UK building. Most buildings are registered in

the D and E categories.

Estates development manager Julian Robinson said that even with reassessment "we wouldn't get more than a C".

A final energy rating of C could be seen as problematic if it means that the school would not recoup its losses for the increased upfront investment it made in order to make the NAB environmentally friendly.

According to Robinson, the LSE paid a premium of 5 per cent to get the "Excellent" BREEAM certificate. He said it was still too difficult to predict whether the school would in fact recoup the increased investment but he did point out that the project had been delivered on-time and under-budget.

Robinson added that a building designed from scratch would be able to achieve an A rating, but the predetermined aspect and site of the NAB severely limited the design team, forcing them to use more energy-intensive systems.

Air conditioning, for example, had to be installed in the rooms facing Kingsway due to the excessive noise that would come from opening the windows.

At present there are no A rated buildings on campus.

The School has been criticised by students for its lack of visible follow-through regarding issues of sustainability.

Environment and ethics officer Justus Rollin said: "The school could go much further with sustainability issues."

In response Julian pointed out that the Estates division had conducted a full environmental audit of all buildings on campus, which produced a list of suggestions with their associated costs and benefits.

Future projects will include the refurbishment of Connaught House this summer, and the carbon-neutralisation of the sports grounds. For the new Students' Union building, Robinson hopes to propose a BREEAM target of "Outstanding".

Rollin added: "I would give the school



credit for pursuing certain sustainable aims but there are still certain individuals who are reluctant to take on a pro-active approach.

While there is no official sustainable building policy for the school, Julian said that the NAB represents the way the School is "approaching building, long-

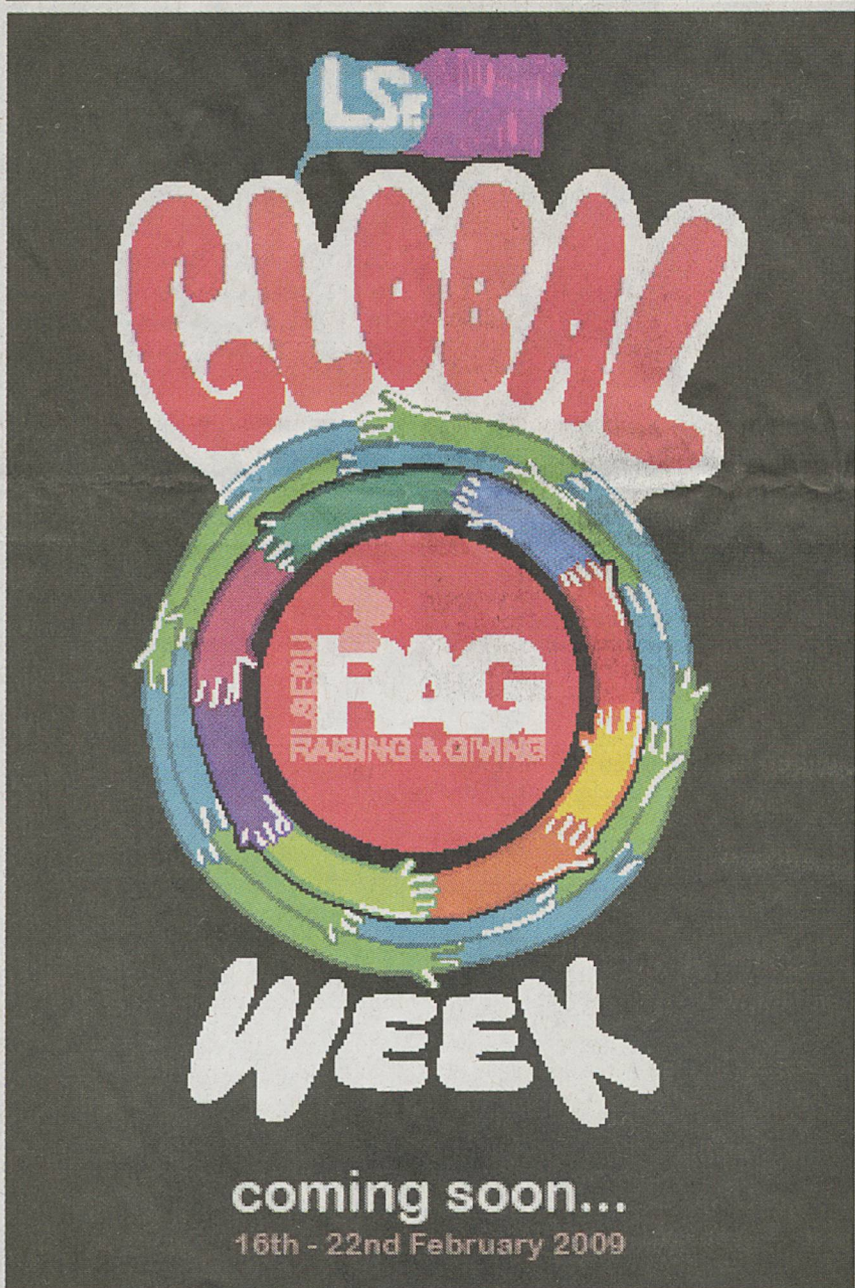
term maintenance and capital, not office, development".

Although it is not official policy, he predicts that, "all new buildings will have to have a high BREEAM rating. The school has seen now that it is achievable within a reasonable budget".



TIMELESS!

Photo
Picture special page 21



Governor diversity data provoke relevance debate



Students outside the Old Building last term
Photo: Erik Lang

Ali Moussavi
& Phyllis Lui

Under one per cent of LSE's governors come from an ethnic minority, a Beaver survey has shown, raising questions over how far one of the school's most influential institutions represents the school's student body.

Twenty-five per cent of governors are women, compared to a student body that is 51 per cent female.

Approximately 78 per cent of governors are over the age of 50, with 40 per cent older than sixty.

The Court of Governors is second only to the school's Council and the Director's office in helping to set school policy.

The governors' constitutional terms of reference include "pre-decision dis-

0.9%

Proportion of LSE governors who come from an ethnic minority

25%

Proportion of LSE governors who are female

51%

Proportion of LSE students who are female

cussions on key policy issues and the involvement of individual governors in the school's activities."

Approximately ninety governors currently sit on the court. Governors are drawn from alumni, donors, and academics selected by the school's Academic Board.

Five are student representatives, elected in Michaelmas term. The student representatives were not included in the Beaver's sampling of the Court's diversity.

Daniel Sheldon, a student representative on court and the Students' Union's communications officer, said he was dismayed at the findings. "For such a diverse institution as LSE, it is both surprising and disappointing to learn that our governing body is so unrepresentative," he said.

"I hope the School accelerates their plans to reflect the diversity of our students and alumni in the Court of Governors," Sheldon said.

School accused of excessive scrutiny over room bookings

>> Continued from page 1

In a similar instance, a renowned LSE research centre tried to book a room for a speaking event with Hanan Ashrawi, the founder of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy and a former Palestinian negotiator in the Middle East peace process.

Revel included the head of LSE Security Paul Thornbury in the email chain about the event. He then asked the research centre staff for extensive information on the event, including liaison, publicity and contact details.

He also suggested that the event be ticketed "both because of the sensitivity of the topic and the likely popularity of the event".

The event's organisers were the LSE research centre, the LSE Students' Union Palestine Society and the Council for Arab British Understanding.

Ultimately, the Council for Arab British Understanding, who were liaising with Ashrawi, moved to the event to the School of Oriental and African Studies because they felt that "it was much easier dealing with SOAS than LSE with all their questions".

At the time, an LSE student organising the event said that the LSE had "just lost a talk by Hanan Ashrawi due to the Conferences Office's McCarthy-style policies."

On a third occasion, LSE Conferences decided not to charge the Palestine Society for a room booked for a conference of UK student Palestine societies.

When approving the event, Revel informed the student organising the event that "this really does not qualify as a [sic] SU society event as its [sic] for a much wider membership that [sic] your soci-

ety and for the benefit of external groups. However since the event is this weekend and we have not picked up on it then we will not look to charge room hire on this occasion."

The student responded, "I do not accept the view that the conferences office is doing us a 'favour'". He argued that the meeting would be for the benefit of the Palestine Society on campus and that "meetings like this happen all the time at the LSE".

Student societies often use the contacts of external organisations to engage speakers for their events on campus. Political societies, for example, may contact their national party's office to get major politicians to appear at Students' Union society events.

The extent of scrutiny on other societies is unclear.

A possible review of room booking procedures was discussed by the School's Court of Governors, with a view to moni-

toring extremism on campus. At a meeting in March 2007, it was stated that the School "was continuing to focus on taking the practical steps to prevent extremism on campus reported to the Court in March, such as reviewing the detail of room booking procedures."

When asked to discuss the School's roombookings policy in the context of Good Campus Relations, LSE Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning Janet Hartley declined to comment.

However, an LSE spokesperson said: "LSE takes a serious but proportionate approach to possible extremism on campus. For this reason it's sensible to keep an overview of events and meetings taking place on our premises."

"But the School has not subjected LSE Staff Against The War - or any other group - to individual targeting and extensive questioning, nor will it do so in future," he said. "Where a proposal raises more questions than another, more questions will

be asked, irrespective of the nature of the event."

The School has also issued a statement arguing that the distinction which Revel and Hoggard pointed to in the email exchanges does not exist: "The room booking policy defines purely internal and purely external events plus some which fall between. There is no single definition of an "LSE event"."

An LSE spokesperson said: "The School aims - indeed has a legal duty - to uphold free speech. As long as an event does not threaten to infringe the law, the School takes no position on the political or other views which may be expressed at an event."

"Free speech is protected by a code of practice, which we expect the LSE Council shortly to review and if necessary update," he added.

The School has also denied that particular scrutiny has been directed at any one group of staff or students.

Election reforms defeated amid Union General Meeting chaos

Higher Education & Research
LSE and sector news

Cold weather and climate change? Snow relation

Despite Britain experiencing the coldest winter in thirty years, scientists maintain that the snow was in accordance with global warming predictions.

The weather is only a short term indicator whereas climate is determined over longer periods of time. Cold bursts like those recently experienced are becoming less frequent as the Earth experiences global warming.

Bob Ward, spokesman for the Grantham Research Institute for Climate Change at London School of Economics, said: "Just as the wet summer of 2007 or recent heat waves cannot be attributed to global warming nor can this cold snap."

Put children first, says report

Professor Lord Richard Layard, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, was part of an enquiry panel which recently published a report arguing that the individualism and "me-first" ideology of parents is damaging their children's future.

The adult pursuit of their own well-being above that of their children is contributing to increased family breakdown and an earlier sexualisation of children, the report found. Layard said: "We think that the preoccupation with self is taking too much of the joy out of children's lives, out of their family lives, out of their school, even out of their leisure life and consumption." He added: "In short children should think that it is love that is the most important thing in life."

Pornography law attacked

Andrew Murray, a Reader in Law at the London School of Economics and Political Science, has come out in opposition toward a new law introduced by the government which aims to crack down on extreme forms of internet pornography.

The law targets the publication of images which display extreme acts of sexual violence, bestiality or necrophilia.

Murray thinks that the law will be impossible to enforce and will instead end up prosecuting those who indulge in legal fetishes like sado-masochism, bondage and domination.



Union returning officer Ossie Fikret (top), first speaker against the motion Vladimir Unkovski-Korica (left), member of the audience asking questions to speakers (right)
Photos: Joseph Cotterill and Cherie Leung

Internet expansion plans for elections threaten fairness, opponents say

Joe Rennison

A controversial amendment to the Students' Union's codes of practice on elections has failed to pass at the Union General Meeting for a second consecutive week.

The amendment fell despite changes to the original reform proposal being made last week in order to garner sufficient support for the amendment to pass.

The debate centred on candidates being permitted to use the internet to campaign in Union elections. Websites and email canvassing are currently forbidden. The reform would allow for candidates to campaign using "all online tools."

PhD student Vladimir Unkovski-Korica spoke against the motion. "Unrestricted use of the web for campaigning purposes obviates existing rules that ensure equality

of opportunity for all candidates," he said. Unkovski-Korica said that he was not opposed to the use of the internet during elections, but that allowing individual candidates to set up their own websites would marginalise those who did not have the skills to create them.

Michael Deas, the second speaker against the motion, attacked the reform proposal's continuing restrictions on internet use.

Candidates would not be allowed to send personal messages to any individual on any social network, and Facebook pages relating to the elections would also be forbidden.

"To not be able to send your mates a message about elections is stupid," Deas said.

Ossie Fikret, the Union returning officer in charge of running elections, drafted the reform. Fikret said that the restrictions had been justified.

"We decided to ban personal messages in an attempt to contain spam. We knew people would contact their friends on Facebook, and they'll still do that now regardless of what the rules say," he said.

"What we wanted to have was a rule that would be enforceable in case people message the whole LSE network. Would people actually do this? With a £27,000 cheque at the end, almost certainly," Fikret added.

The reform also looked to offer greater freedom for the Media Group to report on events regarding the election.

Currently the Beaver must offer equal print space to each candidate, meaning that an equal number of words must be printed about each candidate. Pulse radio is limited to broadcasting debates between candidates.

Pulse Station Manager Mark Harrison said: "The current codes of practice completely gag the media. The rules are so strict that should one candidate punch another in the face we would not be allowed to report it, it really is that ridiculous."

"The electoral reforms are essential for us to be able to provide a balanced, trustworthy news service to inform the electorate and hopefully motivate them to vote," he said.

Harrison added that the only source for updates during the election came from satirical blogs such as Hack Attack.

Hack Attack and similar blogs have escaped Union regulation since beginning to appear on campus two years ago.

The proposed reform would have allowed the Beaver and Pulse to "report news that is both an objective and factual" account of elections.

Fikret said that the reform had fallen for a number of reasons. "The most obvious reason is pretty simple - people were confused. Amendments to amendments of amendments make for a pretty confusing vote," he said.

Fikret added that there was "another element at work within the UGM".

The vast majority of opposition, in fact all of it if I recall correctly, came from the same group of people within the UGM - coincidence? I think not," Fikret said.

"What we witnessed was electioneering and the holding of our democracy to ransom, by a group interested in not maximizing participation, but retaining a stranglehold over the Union," he added.

Unkovski-Korica dismissed Fikret's allegation. "That could be suggested only by those who stand to gain nothing from an equal playing field," he said.

VOTE SU09

Reform or no reform, we'll keep you posted.

By the time Students' Union elections hit campus in a month's time, the Union media group's coverage will already be far in the future. Get ready for a multimedia deluge of broadcasting, blog posting and Beaver reporting, and find out how you can get involved.

VOTESU09.COM
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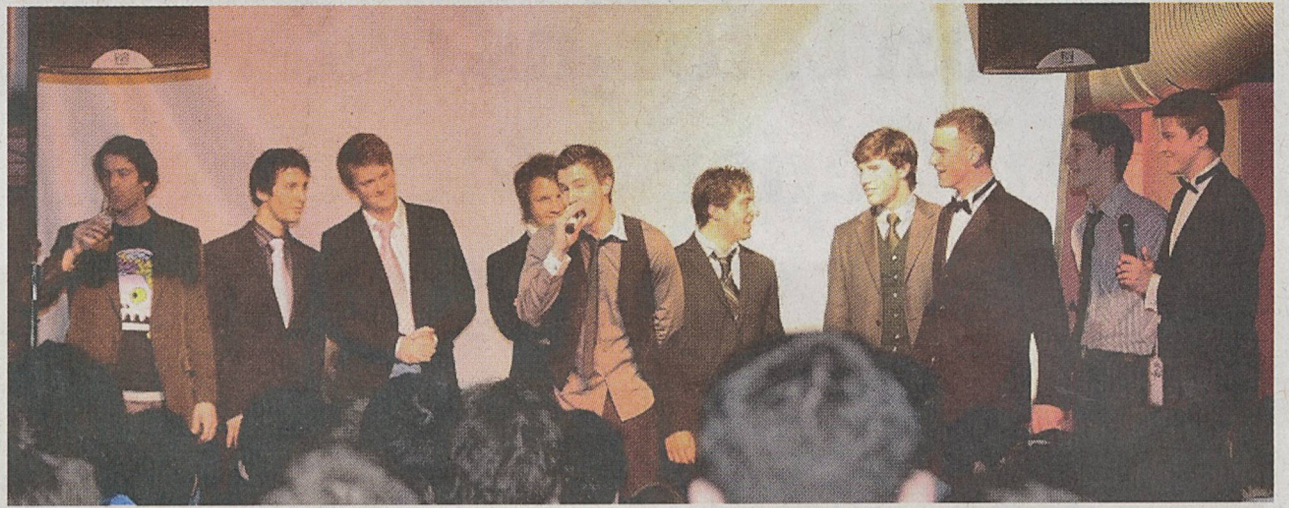




China Week events celebrate coming of the Year of the Ox

LSE's Chinese student community took part in a series of lectures, organised a stall on Houghton Street and held an exhibition of pictures taken by students in China (above) as part of Chinese New Year celebrations last week.

Joseph Cotterill



Bankside students fined after roof party rumbled by wardens

Phyllis Lui

Students at a LSE residence were fined a combined total of £660 for "dangerously reckless" behaviour last week after a rooftop party went awry.

22 students were caught on the roof and balcony at Bankside House with alcohol, guitars and candles due to the noise they had created.

A Bankside warden investigation discovered that a Facebook group had advertised the party.

Students who attended the party said they had been unaware that the roof was off limits. One of the students said he had not seen any signs forbidding access. "If there were any, they should have been much bigger and the door should have been locked," he added.

Students' Union Residences officer

Helen Roberts said she was told by a Bankside staff member that the roof prohibition was "not specified, but it's just common sense".

In an email addressed to the students, the Bankside wardens outlined the penalties for the party, which included the fine and attendance at a meeting. The students' behaviour was "utterly irresponsible," the wardens added.

The students collectively decided to accept the penalty and donate the fine to charity.

One of the students said he believed the fine to be "rather excessive". "Although now I've accepted the fine," he added, "at first I thought it was unnecessary, as no damage was done."

The wardens said during the meeting that the punishment was less severe than action taken by other halls in similar cases in the past, and that it would be very unpleasant for them to make the phone calls to students' parents in the case of injury.



Mr LSE candidates strut stuff in Quad

Rees Sutton was crowned top male of the LSE student body last week in the Athletic Union's men-only beauty pageant.

Sutton and seven other contestants underwent a series of challenges in the competition, including a talent show, before a Quad crowd.

Miss LSE, a female pageant held by non-Union external organisers last term, generated national controversy and was condemned by women's groups in the Students' Union.

Joseph Cotterill

Societies' anger at refused entry to 'party of the year'

Jonathan Damsgaard & Marie Dunnaway

Organisers of a joint society party entitled 'Voulez-Vous?' plan to sue the Vendrome club in Mayfair after the club turned away nearly half of the students attending the £2500 event.

Club bouncers started to refuse entry an hour after the start of the party, enforcing an over-21 policy. Many of those who had bought tickets were refused entry for being under 21 but those who arrived and were admitted before the checks started said the club hadn't been asking for age identification on the door.

Vendrome had another booking for a party with UK men's magazine Nuts which clashed with the Voulez Vous party.

Society president and organiser of the event Nick Oudin said: "The club never told us about this other party". He added

that the contract guaranteed the societies exclusivity at the club until 10:30 pm.

Society members suggested that entry was refused to attendees of Voulez Vous so that the Nuts party could take priority.

The night, organised by the Franco-British Student Alliance (FBASA), LSE Finance Society and the LSE Fashion Society, in conjunction with Kings College and UCL, was planned and advertised as 'The Party of the year'. The party was a Moulin Rouge themed party with a Can-Can Fashion Show, French wines and free drinks for over 300 guests.

Oudin continued that there were no terms regulating the age limit of the attendees. The societies had also received written confirmation that their guests would be admitted regardless of age. One student said "even though I was over 21, I was still not admitted".

The Vendrome General Manager said that the club reserves the right of entry regarding all customers and such a provision

had been incorporated as a standard clause into the contract.

The club asserts that it has an 'over 21' policy and the students should have been aware of this. Vendrome claims that when a number of students had been refused entry at 10 pm, an incident at the door prompted the establishment to refuse entry to any and all of the guests.

The organisers gave refunds on the door to those who arrived and were denied entry. Vendrome has refused to refund any of the fee. The party organizer's agency is planning to sue Vendrome for the problems caused.

Oudin, in a message to all those who planned to attend, said: "We did our best to organise a wonderful evening. Everything was planned accordingly and we had been working on this since Week 8 of MT. Please understand that we are extremely disappointed over this and hope that it will not affect your image of our respective societies."

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Union a mystery to most students

Beaver survey uncovers widespread lack of interest in Students' Union officials and structures

Jonathan Damsgaard

Eighty-eight per cent of students do not know what the LSE Students' Union sabbatical officers do, a Beaver survey of almost four hundred students has indicated, fuelling the debate on apathy on campus.

Twelve per cent of students surveyed last week could name the four sabbatical roles of General Secretary, Treasurer, Education and Welfare, and Communications.

The survey's findings come after the launch last term of 'Your Union', an on-going consultation with students over the Union's long-term future. The results also follows a complete rebrand of the Union at the beginning of the academic year.

Making the Union relevant to students was central to both policies.

While 50 per cent of students knew that the sabbatical officers have office hours, most were unable to account for their responsibilities.

Seventeen per cent of students were able to name Aled Dilwyn Fisher as the Union's general secretary. A total of 82 per cent were unaware that the role of general secretary existed.

LSESU General Secretary Aled Fisher said: "It's not bad. at a high pressure environment like lse you can't expect everyone to know your name and its pretty good given the communication problems that the SU has faced and are in the process of amending."

More students could name the communications officer, Dan Sheldon, than could identify his role in the Union.

Sheldon said that the fact more people know his name than know what his job is within the SU, "shows that my superior talents and personality shine through any shortcomings in my role."

Only 28 people of the 383 surveyed knew who the LSESU Treasurer was and this was coupled by an similarly low 38 people being able to name the LSESU Welfare officer.

Some students said they were broadly aware of the 'academic' and 'welfare' roles of the sabbatical officers.

The sabbatical officers form the leadership of the Students' Union's executive. The officers receive a £27,000 salary over the course of a one-year term to manage the Union's staff, services, and overall direction on a full-time basis.

Four students are voted into the positions in elections every Lent term. Full-time students are also elected to societies, antiracism and women's portfolios on the executive, among others.

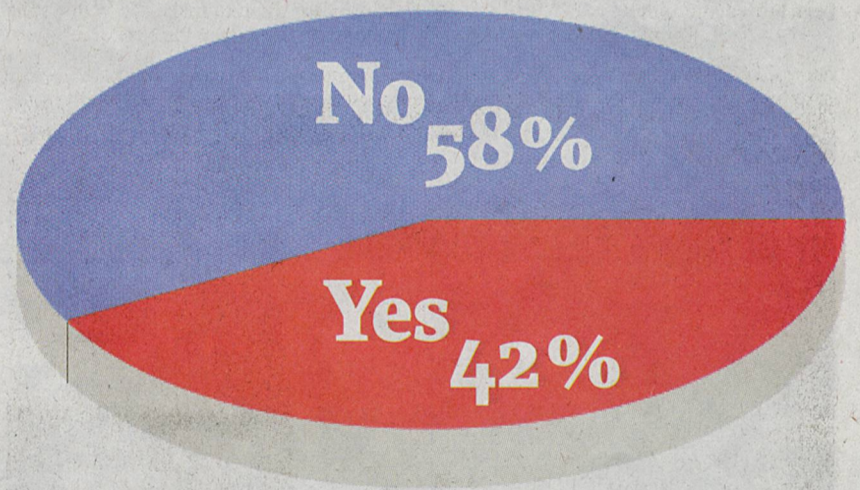
Forty per cent of students said that they read the Union's global email. The communications officer sends the email to all students each week to promote Union activities and events.



Percentage of respondents who know **Aled Fisher**



Percentage of respondents who read the **Global Email**



Survey Results:

We surveyed 383 students on campus over the past week.

Can you name the Sabbatical Officers and their role?

- 66 people could name Aled Fisher, while 68 people knew our SU has a General Secretary
- 28 people could name Will Barber, while 39 people knew our SU has a Treasurer
- 50 people could name Dan Sheldon, while 41 people knew our SU has a communications officer
- 38 people could name Emmanuel Akpan-Inwang and 38 people knew our SU had a Welfare Officer

Are you aware that the Sabbatical officers have office hours?

67% of those students surveyed were not

Do you read the Global e-mail?

42% do not

"It's a bit surprising that people don't pay attention. If everyone participated in elections then maybe the Sabbatical officers would be more well known. They are getting a free ride"

Nina Mason, Second-year undergraduate

"I'm shocked they get paid that much, I only knew [Aled Fisher] through the Beaver. I've not seen him on Houghton Street."

Migora, Second-year Law undergraduate

A large blue banner is hung across the front of a brick building. The banner features the KPMG logo in the top left corner and large white text in the center. At the bottom right of the banner, a person is standing, looking up at the text, providing a sense of scale. The banner is held up by metal rings and cables.

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Comment

Seeing through the veil: a tool for women's liberty

Islam is not compatible with the oppression of women, but instead gives them freedom

Mira Hammad

Anja Krausova

LSESU Feminist Society Chair

It is not often that the label of oppression is tacked onto a people who are not oppressed. Throughout history, people have had to struggle for recognition of their suffering, no matter how real it is. For Muslim women living in the West, however, Western media and popular thought makes the assumption of oppression readily; based not on a real understanding of Islam or of the lives of Muslim women, but on a false supposition that any way of life which dares to be so wholly and perceptibly different from their own must in some way be less valid and lacking in the qualities which the West has claimed to belong to alone, such as "freedom" and "equality".

The truth is that a celebrity- and image-obsessed media cannot comprehend the philosophy of women who choose to wear veils and to abandon the norms prescribed to them by a narrow-minded society. So they choose to explain away this life choice by placating themselves with the belief that these women have not made a conscious, informed, decision but have simply been forced to live in a certain way by their domineering male family members.

Last year a friend of ours, living in Leeds, noticed ITV cameramen filming people while she was shopping on the high street. She thought no more of it until she watched the news and saw statistics about forced marriage in Britain were being set to a backdrop of an image of her walking down the street. Clearly, the fact that she wears hijab had nothing to do with this interesting choice of background. The irony is that forced marriage is expressly forbidden in Islam, a fact that I have never heard mentioned in the mainstream media despite the discussions that crop up every few months regarding forced marriage.

The newspapers, too, are peppered with their fair share of patronising and misplaced attempts to "liberate" women from the influence of Islam - as seen in an article in the Guardian, which, referring



A symbol of oppression, or liberation?
Photo: flickr user See Wah

to Islam, claimed that "Women are always the main victims, since extreme religions express their identities through... disgust of women." Call me presumptuous, but I feel that if I am to be treated as a victim I should at least be allowed the privilege of being one. I would also like an explanation as to how any religion which refers to Paradise as being "at the feet of your mother" can also paradoxically hold any kind of disgust for women.

It is not that I am ignorant of the effect of the misinterpretation of Islam on the common perception of the faith. I can comprehend, in a world where so-called 'Muslim countries' such as Saudi Arabia propagate rules like the law forbidding women from driving, why many people who are ignorant of the tenets of Islam could assume that sexist policies are indeed - as the Saudi Arabian government claims - part and parcel of the Muslim message.

What these people fail to realise, however, is that the word 'Islam' is used as a shroud by some governments in Arab

countries in order to mask their own repressive regimes and to fuel the pretence that their actions are not propelled by greedy self interest but are the result of some higher belief system. Anyone who has studied Islam in any level of depth or openness will realise that not only is this a complete fallacy, but Islam and sexism are also a complete contradiction in terms. In a religion which believes that men and women were created "from a single soul" in order to be "partners" the idea of a two tier system where men are treated on a higher level than women is surely abhorrent.

The point, however, is that in the same way that people recognised that the white supremacists' use of Christianity to justify their actions in South Africa was totally erroneous and completely at odds with Christianity, so too is the use of Islam to justify any form of subjugation of women. The problem is, while people in the West were very aware of the Christian

faith, and so could see by themselves the level of distortion applied, their position on Islam is by and large one of ignorance. In order to achieve a true perspective on what Islam means for women, and indeed as a whole, people need to look not at "Muslim" countries and the model of Islam they claim to stand for but at the religion itself. Initiatives such as the LSESU Islamic Society "Discover Islam Week", which is taking place this week, are a perfect platform from which to do so.

So, you may be asking, if Islam does not stand for oppression, then what does it stand for, in relation to women? For me, it is tantamount to liberation, not repression. I say this as someone who has tried out several different philosophies and genuinely found Islam to be the one that delivered the deepest sense of freedom. Growing up, I had always been a 'passport Muslim', but I only really decided to embrace Islam a couple of months before I came to university. It was also at this time that I started to wear a headscarf - a garment that many Western commenta-

tors seem to regard as the ultimate symbol of oppression. I consider the decision to wear it to be the best I have ever made.

It is difficult to explain the significance of wearing hijab to those who haven't experienced it. It is an immensely satisfying feeling to transcend societal standards which are based around the objectification of women and ascend instead to a level where women are not expected to be shallow sex symbols but are judged as valid human beings. It is a statement that for us, at least, there is more to life than appearance and women do not have to resort to plastic surgery and laborious beauty processes in order to be recognised as being of worth. Islam should be recognised as a beacon for women's rights, not the opposite. In this way, the feminist movement and Islam have a lot in common. It really should have been Muslims that stood beside the Feminist Society at the forefront of the anti-Miss LSE campaign, and it is a Muslim's duty to fight against the oppression and the objectification of women, wherever it may occur.

Mr LSE: harmless fun

The pageant did not seek to undermine feminism; it was tongue-in-cheek

Danielle Priestley



Contrary to some expectations, last Wednesday's Mr LSE competition was a highly enjoyable night off - not senseless mockery, but classic parody.

I consider myself a feminist in terms of the fact that I advocate equal rights for the genders in education, work, sport, society, and all other possible aspects of life, and I denounce certain realities, such

as the fact that single female pensioners are more likely to live in poverty than their male counterparts, and that rape is an endemic and under-prosecuted problem in our society.

However, it is extremely misguided, unhelpful, and even offensive, to link the endurance of these and other abhorrent statistics to the phenomenon of the beauty pageant, and particularly to the lowly Mr LSE competition.

What many seem not to realise is that the Athletics Union is made up of a roughly equal number of males and females, as is the AU executive, which made the decision to put on the Mr LSE



Photo: Cheri Leung

competition. The AU is not a misogynistic institution that seeks to mock the achievements of feminism, but a group of students who generally found the School and nationwide reaction to December's Miss LSE competition frankly a bit over the top.

Don't get me wrong; I think beauty pageants are rather silly and archaic, and there were aspects of Miss LSE which any decent, respectful human being should oppose, including the taking of the participants' measurements on stage. But I'll concentrate my energies on denouncing that aspect of the competition, not the competition itself, just as women in

football or rugby, for instance, concentrate their energies on raising the profile of women's sport and removing barriers to participation, rather than condemning the sport as a whole.

Just as many comedians seek to derive amusement from the parodying of serious topics, so the organisers of Mr LSE sought to derive amusement from the semi-serious topic of the beauty pageant and recent reactions thereto.

Ed Healy, AU Communications Officer, said that "when we came up of the idea of Mr LSE, there was no intention of mocking Miss LSE what so ever. When we first came up with the idea, we wanted

to imitate the classic show 'Man O Man'. We think the show was extremely well received, not only by the female contingent of the audience, but also by the males who were also in attendance, and from the feedback we have received we are confident that the next AU Exec will be copying the idea again".

Let's not turn the whole issue into something it's not: Mr LSE was not a mockery of women, of feminism, or of men. And let's not be arrogant enough to think it's going to have wider, reverberating consequences for the oppression and inequality of women in our society. It was an evening of hilarity during which a roomful of students got to laugh at eight men singing, dancing, and planking (generally making idiots of themselves) in the name of tongue-in-cheek joviality.

My heartfelt thanks to all involved, especially Clare and her "pimped" crutches (yes, I am noting the androcentric irony of the word 'pimped'), Bocca for singing the personally sentimental 'Blydon Races', and the AU executive for not taking themselves too seriously.



FABIAN VALUES

The Beaver

Established in 1949

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Questions for the director

We hope he will not call anyone loss-making this time. The school's director, Howard Davies, will once again make himself available to answer questions and debate from students at this week's Union General Meeting on Thursday.

It is fair to say that Davies' last performance was almost a complete disaster. The director managed to insult the majority of students by implying that they were a drain on the school's finances, and dismissed many students' questions far too curtly for this newspaper's liking.

Members of the Athletic Union, for example, asked what the school would do to reschedule classes and lectures away from sports activities on Wednesday afternoons.

They were treated to the

bizarre spectacle of Davies, a former chair of the Financial Services Authority and grandee of the Tate galleries and the Booker prize, attempting to argue that afternoons begin at one o'clock rather than midday.

Overall, it was a tragically wasted opportunity for students to question the head of their university directly - an opportunity that our peers at almost any other university in the country do not get, and which we are lucky to have.

Davies eventually and gracefully apologised for any offence that had been caused by his remark, in a Beaver comment piece. This time around in the UGM, the director should pay students the courtesy of giving much fuller answers to the questions that they ask.

Compared to last term's hearing, where the nursery and the relative emptiness of the New Academic Building were discussed, some issues have been solved.

However, as even a cursory

look at this week's Beaver news pages shows, the director should present the school's view on new issues that have arisen.

It would be well worth students asking, for instance, what the school can do with regards to the Student Loans Company's treatment of bursaries. Or how the school's governors can be made more diverse and reflective of the student body: a Court of Governors that is 99 per cent white is just not good enough.

There are also wider issues of what the school can do to promote graduate recruitment as recession teeters on the brink of depression and university leavers find themselves in the worst jobs drought for twenty years.

Then there are problems left over from last term. What will the school do to make Wednesday afternoons free for sports players? Davies seemed surprised by the depth of feeling on the issue at his last UGM appearance, and promised that the school's timetables office would look into the situation. What

will happen now?

On one issue in particular, however, the director must make the school's position much plainer than in the past. The Beaver reports this week allegations that Davies did not give a full account of the school's investment in arms companies.

Campaigners from the Not for Profit movement that has just been set up on campus say LSE may still contribute money to arms companies through a tracker fund, and that there is nothing to prevent the money going to these firms during normal trading.

The Beaver will leave the merits of the protesters' claims up to readers to decide, but on such a morally controversial issue we feel that it was important and in the interest of students that the allegations were published.

In many ways this issue is now bound up with the legacy of last month's Old Theatre occupation, the organisers of which demanded divestment from

firms which supplied arms to Israel in the Gaza war. It is a legacy which this newspaper largely regards as baleful and damaging to relations on campus. The director may, or may not, have something to say about that as well.

But ethical investment is something that affects us all at LSE. The time is right for LSE to stake out its rightful position as a moral leader among universities in this country. There can be no real opposition to creating a truly ethical investment strategy in the school. The presumably small returns LSE may or may not get from investing in arms companies via the tracker fund are just not worth the moral ambiguity and opprobrium that LSE could attract on this issue.

Students can therefore look forward to this week's meeting. If the director could discuss the finer points of the world's financial meltdown at the recent Davos World Economic Forum, then surely he can give a straight answer to LSE students.

RBS's shameful involvement with oil and gas must be ended

The bank's unethical policies could offset any gains promised in climate change legislation

Jade Buddenberg

Banks have received much negative press lately. Sensational headlines exposed irresponsible lending and immorally high bonuses. Unethical investment policies, however, escaped the limelight. The Royal Bank of Scotland, one of the UK's largest banks - which also owns NatWest - is a prime example. Its corporate social responsibility team has worked hard to conceal that the bank is the UK's leading financier of climate change. Sneakily, its marketing has moved away from the old RBS image of 'the oil and gas bank', and the bank's PR boasts 30 per cent reduction of in-house carbon emissions. Behind the scenes, however, RBS is funding environmental disaster without scruple. Even though taxpayers' money bought 60 per cent of its shares, the government encourages business as usual at RBS.

RBS provides essential finance for two climatically outrageous projects: Kingsnorth Coal Power Station and Canadian tar sands. If built, the former will bust any hopes of the UK government reaching carbon targets set by its climate bill. The latter, if exploited fully, will immorally accelerate climate change and turn an area as big as the UK into toxic wasteland. RBS is not the only financier of these two climate crimes. Yet it provided \$10 billion for oil and gas projects in 2006 alone, more than any other UK bank.

Canada sits on 15 per cent of total global oil locked into sand below pristine forest. The cost of extraction is nearly double that of conventional oil. Tapping this resource was unthinkable before peak oil and prices of \$100 a barrel. Oil companies scrambled for this alternative source of fossil fuel, literally scraping the bottom of the barrel. In 2004 and 2006 RBS arranged \$800 million in loans to the Long Lake tar sands project in Canada, effectively investing in environmental disaster.

Producing oil from tar sands involves deforestation, heating the sand and washing the tar out. This process emits three times more CO₂ than conventional oil extraction. Along the way, an area larger



The RBS building in London
Photo: flickr user Drumaboy

than the UK could be deprived of forest. Boreal forest is special because it is one of the last ancient pristine forests in the world. Besides losing all its wildlife and a chunk of Canadian natural beauty, a valuable carbon sink is destroyed. Even worse, the soil acts as a carbon dioxide store, and so this greenhouse gas is released during extraction. Lastly, the water used to wash the tar from the sand is left behind in lakes of toxic liquid, turning the area into a contaminated wasteland.

In times of economic recession, oil and gas are considered safe investments. But in the long run, Canadian tar sands pose a risky venture in pure financial terms. The cost of expected law suits by affected locals and environmental groups is beyond estimation. Loops in the Canadian legal system are likely to close soon so that land will have to be restored to its former state. This will cost all stakeholders dearly. The recent drop in the oil price to half its value once again raises concern over the price tag of extraction. Finally, the reputation of all companies involved will suffer.

Most importantly, burning the fossil fuel available in tar sands will counter any effort to combat climate change. Carbon emission targets will be unreachable if Canadian alternative fossil fuels are not fully exploited. All environmental legisla-

tion is undermined by such projects. The post-Kyoto talks taking place later this year in Copenhagen have thus suffered a set back before they even began. The credibility of the negotiating countries whose banks finance Canadian tar sands may rightly be questioned.

On this side of the Atlantic, EON are planning to build the first new coal power plant in the UK for thirty years. The existing facilities at Kingsnorth in Kent are to be replaced by a coal firing station that is only 20 per cent cleaner. Instead of moving resources into sustainable sources of energy, the government is considering sanctioning this project. Coal is by far the dirtiest of fossil fuels because of the large carbon dioxide volumes released upon burning. If Kingsnorth is built, it will emit more carbon dioxide each year than the whole of Ghana, according to the World Development Movement.

EON boast that 'carbon capture and storage' (CCS) technology will remedy this effect. However, this technology is far from ready to use commercially. At the same time it would increase the plant's energy needs by at least a quarter. The method of storing carbon dioxide under the earth is hardly a solution, reminiscent of nuclear waste contaminating the earth for decades. Deserving more ridicule, Kingsnorth is at most 'CCS ready' and

there are no guarantees the technology will ever be used.

Caroline Lucas MEP reported that Kingsnorth being 'CCS ready' means "there is a big space much like a car park next to the proposed coal fire station" - nothing more. All of EON's greenwash should not distract from the detrimental consequences Kingsnorth would have. Not only will it undermine the UK government's Climate Bill targets. It will embarrass this country as hypocrites at international climate negotiations. How is it, China will surely ask, that we should not rely on coal for power while you are investing in it yourself?

RBS was the mandated lead arranger of \$70 billion of loans to EON in 2007 along with Barclays and HSBC. The proximity of this deal to the announcement of Kingsnorth suggests that RBS loans will partially finance the coal plant. Sadly, this is only the tip of the melting iceberg for RBS. The bank has provided coal financing loans totaling \$95 billion in the short time span of 2006 to 2008. Admittedly, RBS has financed some renewable energy projects, including wind farms in Italy and Australia. But these investments remain laughable compared to the bank's involvement in coal. Scaled against total investments in oil and gas, RBS's contribution to renewable energy is virtually invisible.

RBS, or the 'Oyal Bank of Scotland', is literally fuelling climate chaos. Even two years ago, its embedded carbon footprint was estimated to be larger than that of Scotland, chiefly due to its involvement in Canadian tar sands. The bank's CSR division is keen to point out its efforts to reduce internal carbon emissions. However, RBS refuse to even monitor indirect emissions which have risen fivefold from 2001-2006.

RBS claim they invest on behalf of clients and rebuff any responsibility for their investments. Syndicated loans have made it difficult to blame one bank alone for financing a project. Pressure groups and environmentalists are calling for more transparency. Especially after the bailout, the UK taxpayer has a right to more accountability. Yet the government insists at keeping RBS at an arm's length. The pressure is building, along with calls for a more regulated banking system. Campaigners are fighting for more ethical investment policies. People and Planet, a UK-wide student group, are threatening to boycott RBS-NatWest in autumn next year. Their impact remains to be seen, but the government is in a unique position to set a standard in accordance with its ambitious climate bill. RBS, in the meantime, is likely to increase investment into their CSR division.

A queer kind of progress

Legal recognition of trans identity is needed

Lizzie Merrow
LSESU LGBT Officer



Just over a month ago, the Pope declared that gays pose the same threat to life on this planet as global warming. The pontiff's address brought to a close a year which saw a cacophonous and international debate surrounding the confrontation between religious and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) rights groups.

In November, Proposition 8 passed in California to amend the state's constitution to define marriage as an exclusively heterosexual union. Groups supporting Prop 8, in particular the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, claimed that the legalisation of gay marriage threat-

ened their religious freedom, and pumped millions of dollars into the campaign for the measure.

These events may lead some to worry about mounting tension in the supposed contradictions between religious values and LGBT rights. What is often overlooked is the degree of support the gay community received from certain religious minorities in the run-up to the elections. A number of Jewish groups voiced their opposition to Prop 8, as did the Episcopal Church in California.

Following the election, Jon Meacham, an author and commentator on issues of faith in America who is a practicing Episcopalian, claimed that there was "a very compelling religious case to be made for gay marriage. It is not the job of religious people to deny sacraments." Dan Savage, gay rights activist and advice columnist, pointed out that there are congregations in America "that will marry gay and lesbian couples. What about their religious freedom?"

Footage from every major American city on 15 November showed hundreds



The controversy over the appointment of openly gay Gene Robinson as bishop shows there is still some way to go to reconcile religion and sexuality
Photo: flickr user Lynceus

of thousands of people demonstrating against Proposition 8. The amendment overturned the ruling of the state's Supreme Court that denial of equal protection under the law on the grounds of sexual orientation is unconstitutional. This, and the fact that the straight majority was allowed to vote on the rights of the minority, led many straight 'allies' - supporters of the LGBT movement - to take to the streets alongside those more directly affected.

The events after Prop 8, and the fact that the amendment passed by a mere 4 per cent of the vote - as opposed to 20 per cent, which was the winning margin of a similar measure in 2004 - should be viewed as a source of encouragement. Not only is society progressing towards a more open and accepting attitude towards gay rights, religious groups are participating in the struggle.

In last week's part B, Neeraj Patel outlined the concept of 'trans' and the range of identities which it encompasses.

Trans people will often reject the gender assigned to them at birth (at birth,

assigned gender is based on exterior anatomy), on the grounds that their self-identified gender doesn't match up with their assigned gender. Some identify with the opposite gender (male or female), some don't feel comfortable defining themselves within the male-female-binary at all, and some identify as both.

These identities and issues fall within the umbrella term 'trans', and belong to what is probably the least recognised minority in the UK.

Patel drew attention to the fact that the LSE's anti-harassment policy neglects to mention discrimination on the grounds of gender identity. In fact, the School fulfils this country's legal standards by excluding trans people from protection: there is no hate crime legislation pertaining to gender identity.

This stems from the fact that there are only two recognised gender identities in UK law: male and female. In effect, the gender binary of male and female is enforced by law. This creates a whole range of unnecessary problems for trans people, and should possibly be considered

to be governmental coercion in its worst form, reaching beyond mere regulation of the individual's home or right to privacy, attempting to restrict their very identity.

Proposition 8 and measures like it pose a threat not only to the rights of gay and bisexual people, but also to straight people's rights, because it grants the state the authority to decide which type of partner is acceptable in which type of legally recognised union. UK law poses a threat to trans and non-trans people alike because it dictates who a person can or can't be.

However, it is important to recognize and appreciate the progress which has been made: where division and prejudice were formerly the rule, LGBT rights groups have become increasingly aware of the "T" that was only recently added to their acronym. Education on trans identity has made significant progress. With continued unity and pressure from the LGBT and ally community, UK legislation will evolve to accommodate for trans people, their protection and recognition under the law.

Letters to the editor

More abortion debate on campus

Dear Sir,

Whatever happened to debate at the LSE?

Firstly, on picking up a copy of The Beaver (700th edition, no less) this week I was disappointed by the highly tendentious content. I read three articles which approached the sensitive and difficult subject of abortion. It is a grave subject upon which good people disagree. There appeared, however, to be no room for disagreement with the prevailing pro-choice orthodoxy amongst The Beaver Editorial team given that there was not a shred of balance in the 3 reporting or comment pieces, and nobody commissioned to give an alternative viewpoint. I hope this apparent disparity will be dissolved with an article putting the other side of the argument in next week's edition.

Secondly, Mr. Akpan-Inwang appears incandescent at the audacity of a group who believe the unborn child is a worthy cause to champion and advocate their case should wish to share their views with LSE Students. Surely a man with such a temperament is ill-suited to the position of Education and Welfare Officer, let alone the LSE: a veritable hotbed of debate *rerum cognoscere causas* [italics].

Finally, after some time trying to locate the Letters "section" in The Beaver, I came across a meagre two letters buried in a single column slither. When I contributed to the column inches of the newspaper, the Letters section was the scene of robust exchange, alas no longer. I would like to be proved wrong by the publication of this letter and steps taken to redress concerns expressed herewith.

Yours faithfully,

Samuel Burke
BSc '08

Parallels with the Conservative past

Dear Sir,

So the Conservative Future leader says his party will only oppose "far-left fascism". Maybe his party still prefer to make friends with fascists of the far-right, just like Maggie Thatcher did with General Pinochet?

Gary Buswell
BSc '09

Not as grim as you think up north

Dear Sir,

I was shocked to read an article in this week's Beaver entitled "students, academic debate grimness of the North". The wording of the title alone aggrieved me. This constant negative connotation that the North holds as being grim, poor and unhappy is something that must be changed. On a monetary scale, the North may be of slightly less value than the South, but Sir, I ask you now, can you put a price on happiness and joy? Living in the North gives me such pleasure, the friendliness of the people is unrivalled and the landscape is varied and stunning. I only hope that not all LSE students hold views similar to those of Tim Leunig. Indeed, I willingly invite any confused southerners to spend a weekend at my home in Yorkshire to experience the area I so love. There's nowt wrong wi the north!

Yours sincerely,

Joshua ET Wood
BSc '11



Blackpool tower, beach and pier in northern England
Photo: flickr user Neil101

Short-selling must not be left unchecked

Greater regulation of this speculative corner of the financial sector will help confidence

Matt Lomas

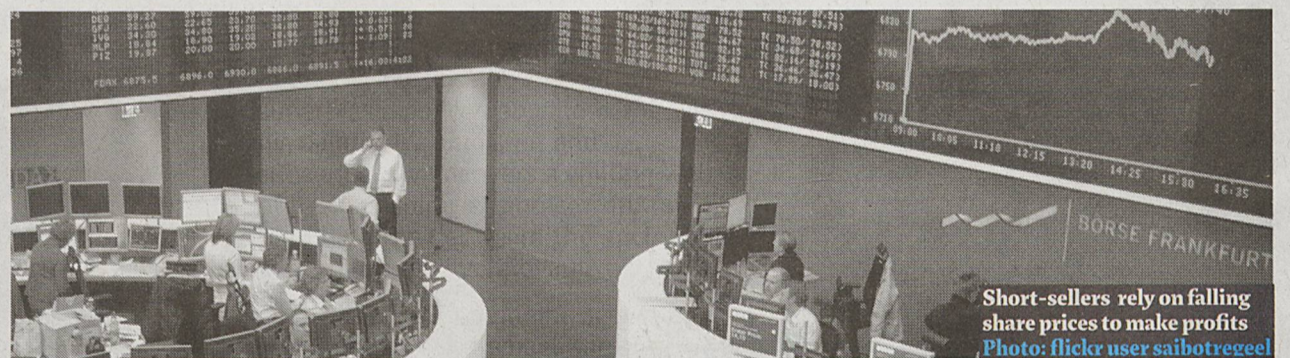


Short-sellers. They've been blamed for financial ruin since 1929, but who are they, and what do they do? Put simply, they borrow (or in some cases don't even bother to do this - so-called 'naked short-selling') shares from a company and sell them in the hope the prices will fall. The aim is to buy them back at a lower price in order to return the stock to the original owner - pocketing the difference as profit. They usually work as part of hedge fund management.

Consider this statement from former Dr Mahathir Mohammad, expressing views typical of many Third World leaders when it comes to short-selling: "Stop hedge funds, derivatives and currency

trading. Stop banks lending non-existent money by the billions. Regulate and supervise your banks. Jail miscreants who made profits from abusing the system." This statement was sent in an open letter from the former leader of Malaysia for twenty three years to Barack Obama upon his assuming the presidency. Mahathir has also blamed George Soros, the famous Hungarian-born stock market speculator in the past for his country's currency collapse in 1997. He has some other strange ideas, but nevertheless his viewpoint carries great currency in the Third World.

In the current crisis, short-selling has been blamed for high-profile casualties. Alex Salmond, the First Minister of Scotland, blamed "spins and speculators", in reference to short sellers, for HBOS's plummeting share price, which fluctuated between 88p and 220p on 17 September 2008, before a take-over deal by Lloyds TSB was announced later the same day. There are reports that traders had short-



Short-sellers rely on falling share prices to make profits
Photo: flickr user saibotregel

sold HBOS share stocks and then spread rumors through anonymous e-mails about its poor funding position. One trader is said to have made £100 million. Vince Cable, the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman, called hedge fund managers who partake in short-selling as the "masters of the universe." The Financial Services Authority soon after launched an investigation and banned all short-selling on 19 September. But this ban was not renewed last month after a review, but the FSA instead demanded that short-sellers disclose their position to the market.

Most analysts say that short-sellers are not to blame for the current financial crisis. Before the crisis there had been a boom in short-selling, particularly in Asian markets in which, ironically, anti-short-selling feeling has traditionally been high over the last decade, due to the currency crisis there in 1997.

The FSA has refused to extend the ban amid an admission that the initial ban

may have harmed the market by dampening any chances of liquidity entering back into the system. At the same time, Germany, Belgium and France have extended their bans until March. The FSA has also declined to impose further restrictions on short-selling. It has refused to introduce a 'circuit-breaker', whereby trades of shares are suspended if their price falls by more than 10 per cent, as well as to adopt a 'tick-up-rule', where shares can be traded only if their price is rising. There is an expectation that the FSA may adopt similar practices to the US, where all brokers are required to mark a sale as a long or short one. This would allow for more data on the market and therefore more transparency; having the desired effect of investors being able to determine whether a sale is artificial or not.

Why is the UK so in love with short-selling then? Short-selling is an extreme of the free market, a powerful tool in 'cleaning up the market'. During the 1997

Asian crisis many analysts and World Bank officials lamented these countries' poor economic fundamentals such as current account deficits. Yet Hong Kong had an excellent current account situation in 1997, and solid foreign reserves worth US\$88 billion. Why then did its currency stumble in 1997? Eventually, Hong Kong was able to avoid devaluation, but it still saw a severe fall in its stock market value when its economy was on a relatively fine footing. Incidentally, Donald Tsang, the then Financial Secretary, declared war on the speculators. But the fact remains that short-selling is big business.

It seems it would be silly to put a total ban on short-selling - it is an effective tool of the market to expose inefficient market positions, such as a current account deficit. Yet the practice itself must not go unchecked. We need more transparency, and a declaration by brokers of whether a sale is long or short is a good start - but only that.

Features



Photo: Beaver archive

The London School of Exclusion

Joe Sammut and Aliabbas Virani discuss the elitism behind British university admissions

Perhaps the acronym LSE should stand for "London School of Exclusion". An investigation in last Monday's *Guardian* confirms that Britain's top universities are the reserve of the "well-off middle class". The research found that children from the most affluent quarter of families account for 55 per cent of students at "prestigious universities". This was described as evidence of a "ticking time bomb" as a lack of equal opportunities for education often deepens social problems.

Amongst the "prestigious" universities used in the research were Bristol and Warwick, which are merely members of the elite Russell group. This is unlike the LSE, which is part of the unofficially termed, super-elite "G5 group" of British universities.

This long standing trend of elitism is set to be amplified by the fierce lobbying of the G5 group of universities. The G5, coined by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, is named after the G7, the largest capitalist economies. They represent a group of universities that regard themselves as the best and most prestigious in the country.

Richard Sykes, Rector of Imperial College London (a fellow G5 university) till July last year, threatened to reject home and EU students unless the £3000 cap on tuition fees was lifted. The resonance of this threat can be felt within the LSE itself, with its 60 per cent of international students who pay enormous sums to acquire a degree with the LSE brand name.

More recently, the Chancellor of Oxford University, Lord Patten, stated his belief that universities should "not be treated like social security offices" and that the cap on tuition fees should not exist at all. In other words, he believed universities that have high levels of research funding and are well-reputed should charge fees comparable to that charged in American universities.

Howard Davies' views on the loss-making nature of home fee-paying students are not unknown. His recent comments that people are going to have

to experience a drop in living standards to "releverage" the economy shows that perhaps, he believes that EU and home students should be charged fees comparable to what is imposed on international students. Anna Krausova, a second-year Government undergraduate, said she believes that "the bureaucrats in the school administration are looking to rip off UK and EU students as much as international students".

This disparity between EU students and international students is unpopular with some sectors of the LSE student body. An international student, who wished to remain anonymous, argued that "this is a disgusting example of the UK's climate of hostility to foreigners. People are judged not on their intellect but on whether they can pay the fees; it sometimes feels that you're buying your way into a white man's club instead of being welcomed due to your contribution to an academic institution."

If this fee change is to be implemented, it will only come into effect after a review next year. In a shining example of the beacon that is British democracy, the Labour government made an agreement to postpone the findings of the review until after the next general election. It would not be ridiculous to claim that this shows an expectation of an unfavourable and predetermined result, instead of a decision only being made after all information is considered.

Part of the problem for UK universities is the high level of bureaucracy and centralised control over funding. An illustration of this is the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a committee that decides how funding is allocated based upon a faculty's level and "quality" of published research. The RAE assesses the productivity of a faculty and, through the absurd logic of Thatcherism, the best performing departments are given more funding. The government programme "The Future of Higher Education" even admits that this will see funding being concentrated in the hands of a small minority of universities, while the rest will face budget cuts.

Centralisation of research funding is not the only problem with the RAE. As is fully consistent with Labour's policy in other areas, it focuses attention on providing research and the "relevant skills" for employability in today's economy. In practice, this means that education is becoming increasingly modular and narrowly focused on acquiring particular skills that are useful for employers. In a speech last Thursday, Tony Benn argued that education should be focused on "discovering the genius in everybody" and should be a "lifelong process" rather than a just precursor to employment. The aim of creating critical, educated people – vital for the survival of a democratic society – seems unimportant in comparison to providing functionaries for industries.

This is the essence of the university model that is being implemented in the UK, even though only a minority of universities (such as the LSE) concentrate on research. The majority of universities will become mere training institutions for employment. The government paper that outlines their programme states that "realising the economic benefits of university research" is a central aspect of policy. This policy encourages the funding of faculties that have directly transferable research for business but at the detriment of faculties without such skills. This affects humanities and social science faculties in particular. At the LSE, a department which is under direct threat is the department of Social Anthropology. Conversely, departments such as the Economics department will continue to shift from any critical discussion on the subject towards skills required for financial institutions.

This process of shifting priorities are already felt in other universities such as Sussex University, a reasonably prestigious institution, where the campaign "Sussex: Not For Sale" was formed. This was an organisation of students, teachers and lecturers who aimed to combat the perceived threat of the business driven approach to other departments. At the heart of the campaign is the recent and massive expansion of the Business School

"It sometimes feels like you're buying your way into a white man's club instead of being welcomed due to your contribution"

in Sussex, which trains students in skills transferable to business, as a sign of the university's move away from critical and holistic education. It can be posited that this move is in effect subsidising the costly aspects of business, such as training, and thus increasing the profit level at the expense of the fee paying student and taxpayer.

The latest economic recession is set to intensify this business-driven policy. The Education Department recently cut the teaching grant at the London Metropolitan University by 10 per cent. A University and College Lecturers Union (UCU) representative from the university said that "there was nothing left to cut" and that the cut was having a damaging effect on education quality. According to him, teachers "teach ridiculous hours so cannot teach the way [they] would like". The London Met faces 400 redundancies and the UCU representative argued that it is likely to enter a "spiral of decline". That is, unless it becomes a "private institution" that would entail the complete closure of the Met as an academic institution and turning it into a training institute for business.

In his speech on Thursday, Tony Benn argued "if you can bail out the bloody banks you can bail out the education system". This argument can be developed into a solution for education in the country.

Contrary to claims of feasibility, the UK managed to maintain a world-class higher education system that was free at the point of access; this is maintained in most European countries as well as some less economically-developed countries. If the aim of higher education is to educate people critically and holistically, then this programme is a surely solution. The alternative is a series of training institutions that can add value to labour for business, but nothing more, at the taxpayers and fee payer's expense. Fortunately, the renaissance of student activism on campus and across the country makes the former solution realisable.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE STRIKES

CAMPBELL MCGDADE AND ESTELLE COOCH DISCUSS THE INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS



Photos: Steve Miller

Stop banking on 'racism' spin

Campbell McDade criticises the Government's flawed and cynical accusations of xenophobia

As the strikes and protests at the Lindsey oil refinery came to an end on Thursday, Gordon Brown is surely rueing his choice of words 18 months ago when he promised "British jobs for every British worker". The sentiment behind these words was perhaps noble, but wholly inconsistent with his ardent support for free trade and open markets at the World Economic Forum in Davos last week; urging countries to avoid retreating into protectionism. His is right in the latter (and most probably taken out of context in the former), but with a recession firmly entrenched and a looming depression, courses of action and word choices will be looked at with an eye towards criticism.

Contradictions present in Brown's speech are one thing, but this is quite different from his senior ministers' claims that the strike actions last week were xenophobic. These are not jingoistic nationalists, they are workers who, like many of us, are worried about the prospects of work in this harsh economic climate.

The government is not alone in this. The BBC was forced to apologise for the misrepresentation of a worker on strike, who was shown on Monday's news saying, "These Portuguese and Eyteties - we can't work alongside them". Apparently, he had gone on to say that the British workers could not work alongside the foreign workers because they were being segregated by the hiring firm, rather than because they were impossible to abide by. Using the term "Eyteties" to replace Italians was wrong and should rightfully be condemned, but it is clear that the news editors were using this statement as an opportunity to skew the public perception of the workers, in line with what many politicians and other newspaper commentators have been saying.

Leaving the inaccurate portrayal of the

oil workers aside, the dangers of xenophobia and fervent nationalism still persist. In the very same news broadcast, the BBC showed an incident in which a member of the British National Party was trying to hand out leaflets to the strikers. In the spirit of accurate and fair reporting, they subsequently showed a worker asking for the BNP member to be removed, but the incident is still a worrying reminder of the potential political backlash in times like ours.

Last week's Beaver reported that Michael Rock, the national chair of Conservative Future, was unwilling to join the LSE in supporting an anti-BNP drive, which highlights that such complacency is not uncommon. Aled Fisher was absolutely right in attacking Rock for his preference of 'bogus theoretical debates'. The BNP is dangerous; they preach extremist rhetoric and it is childish and ignorant of anyone with any sense of historical knowledge to not to join in wholeheartedly condemning them.

A leaked Home Office report last September, entitled 'Responding to Economic Challenges', made, was proof that the government is worried about the economic downturn leading to increased support for extreme groups, political or otherwise. The anti-fascist magazine "Searchlight" reported in the same month that the BNP expected to gain from the recession, quoting the BNP treasurer saying, "Economic meltdowns are one of the drivers of political revolutions, and the BNP must be ready to take advantage of the mess all the of the other parties have made of the economy."

It is not hard to see why the Home Office and the BNP believe this. The period after World War I is increasingly being compared to the current crisis (though somewhat prematurely). The post war period was also the era of political extremism in Europe, often with racist and

If the Prime Minister and the Business Secretary are worried about xenophobia, a more useful start would perhaps be making sure there is social protection in place

nationalist undertones.

However, staying aware of this danger is markedly different from painting the workers at Lindsey as xenophobes. Such rhetoric is inflammatory and if anything, likely to drive workers into the arms of the BNP and other groups who should be excluded as much as possible from the political process.

Some of the members of the strike might be BNP members, and some might even be thinking of voting for or supporting the BNP, but generalist comments such as Lord Mandelson's that we should concentrate on economic issues and not the "politics of xenophobia" is hardly helpful. Society at large has a responsibility to ensure that members of the BNP, or any other extremist, group are isolated and unable to preach their ignorance to others. The governing party should not belittle the economic plight of citizens, but should make sure that there are social safety nets to protect those who have been dealt a bad hand by the free market and globalisation.

The workers at Lindsey are not blaming the foreigners who are 'stealing their jobs' for their grievances. Rather, they are upset that the winners of the Total contract are using European Union laws to ignore local pay deals and employing people, regardless of nationality, below hard fought union pay deals. This is not the fault of Total nor the company, IREM, who won the contract. It is an that the government in this country should assess, as they are the ones entrusted to make sure the electorate and taxpayers are properly considered. If the issue is essentially concerned with minimum wage being incompatible with local union pay, then perhaps that matter needs to be carefully reviewed. Shirking responsibility by condemning the aggrieved is not constructive.

Gordon Brown was correct in extolling

the virtues of the free market at Davos, especially in the face of calls across the pond for protectionism. The USA and Britain have spent the last 30 years preaching to the rest of the world about the importance of free flow of capital and goods. For them to about turn when things start to get rough is hypocritical, and not the correct course of action. However, the free market does not have to be inconsistent with rightful justice. If IREM had the best proposal, they should be awarded the contract by all means. But when they are employing foreign workers because the British minimum wage allows them to ignore local pay deals, then there are clearly problems.

If the Prime Minister and the Business Secretary are worried about xenophobia, a more useful start would perhaps be making sure there is social protection in place, rather than bandying the term about in an attempt to denigrate and deliberately misrepresent the angst on the picket lines. We must ensure the EU and common market is maintained (not least because British workers are employed on the continent far more than other Europeans are employed in Britain) while at the same time making sure there is protection for British workers and that xenophobia is treated seriously and not as a smear to decry genuine recourse.

The dangers of parties of the far right (or far left, for that matter) should be taken seriously and not be used as a political or theoretical tool. If the BNP wins in the upcoming European elections then the fault will lie with the government as much as with those tricked by their seemingly converted public face. We should be working with those in Brussels to see that free market does not mean companies can exploit pay differences. Encouraging a situation where Nick Griffin represents British constituents at the European Parliament is not likely to help that.



Photo Illustration by Mike Carlson and Chun Han Wong

It's the economy, Gordon

Estelle Cooch wants political action and worker solidarity to fight recession and the far right

It is not the first time that the slogan 'British Jobs for British Workers' has been chanted by workers on picket lines fearing for their jobs. Sadly, it will probably not be the last.

The slogan was first encouraged by Oswald Mosley - Leader of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, to justify attacks on Jewish immigrants to the East End of London. It emerged again during the 1970s in an attempt to force black and Asian workers out of their jobs. Since then it has re-emerged time and time again, whenever dissatisfied workers reach the wrong conclusion of the causes of unemployment, with foreign workers being scapegoated as a result.

The most recent unofficial strikes that have swept Britain's oil refineries and power stations involved over 2,000 workers. In the Sellafield Nuclear Plant in Cumbria, there was a meeting of over 600 workers in the car park to discuss strike action. The initial walk-outs at Lindsey Refinery in North Lincolnshire came after protests at the arrival of 200 Italian and Portuguese staff, who were awarded a large construction contract in favour of British workers. This has since sparked "sympathy strikes" and unofficial walk-outs at twenty-one other plants across Britain. When one considers the impotence of British trade unionism since the 1980s, these numbers are without doubt remarkable.

Many media commentators, trade union leaders and politicians have portrayed the walk-outs as an example of solidarity between British workers - the like of which we have not seen in years. Derek Simpson, joint leader of the largest Trade Union in Britain claimed 'The unofficial action taking place across the UK is not about race or immigration, it's about class.'

I wish I could agree with Derek Simpson, but one only has to consider the elated reaction of the British National Party, the United Kingdom Independence

Party (UKIP) and others to realise that, sadly, the defining element behind most of the strikes is immigration. The BNP claimed on their website last week that it was proud to be "the only party which unequivocally stands for the rights of British workers" and this was "a great day for British nationalism".

Likewise, UKIP chose to capitalise on the strikes by claiming 'It's not British jobs for British workers, it's British taxes for foreign workers'. The fact that immigrants contribute 10 per cent more to the economy in tax and national insurance compared to what they receive in benefits and services seems to be irrelevant to UKIP. Similarly, three times as many British workers leave the UK to work in the European Union, compared with the number of EU workers entering Britain - another fact conveniently glossed over by those wishing to capitalise on anti-immigrant feeling.

It is worth remembering at this point that it was Gordon Brown who first pledged 'British jobs for British workers' in June 2007. Indeed, in recent years we have seen all major British political parties slowly shift more and more to the right in an attempt to outdo each other at the severity of their stance on immigration. As we plunge headlong into the worst recession, at least since the 1970s, the negative effects of the anti-immigration rhetoric espoused by New Labour and Conservative ministers is going to become frighteningly apparent.

The debate over British involvement within the EU and the problems that the 'free-market' has created for British workers is at the heart of the recent strikes. Again, this considers the issue from the wrong angle. The problem with Britain and the EU is not one of nationality, but rather the imposition of neo-liberal regulations on EU countries that have reduced the rights of all workers to the benefit of employers. Whenever the opportunity to sign British workers up to positive EU

It is only by attacking the system of subcontracting itself that we can seriously fight exploitation in all sectors of the British workforce

regulations that cap working hours or improve working conditions has arisen, New Labour ministers have rejected it.

Instead, over the past twenty years we have seen the gradual privatisation of basic welfare services and an increase in the subcontracting of jobs. Subcontracting firms - those that carry out a particular part of a project in an attempt to reduce costs - are usually huge multinationals who take workers on as self-employed, in an effort to produce a multi-layered economy. In effect, as the number of supposedly 'self-employed' workers increases, so does the opportunity to decrease wages and working conditions and abandon any responsibility towards holiday leave, sick leave and pension rights.

To blame foreign workers for accepting jobs in subcontractor firms is to miss the point completely; they face worse rates of exploitation than most unionised British workers.

It is only by attacking the system of subcontracting itself, engaging with the foreign workers involved, unionising them and building solidarity that we can seriously fight exploitation in all sectors of the British workforce. Had the strikes been about subcontracting, job cuts or factory closures, it is likely that Gordon Brown would have been forced to act quickly, yet the divisive nature of the 'British jobs for British workers' slogan let the real culprits - subcontracting multinationals - off the hook, allowing for the continued exploitation of those workers.

While Gordon Brown was quick to distance himself from the slogan (although advocating it only two years previously), unless we see a real shift in government rhetoric around immigration and asylum, the underlying racism in the recent strikes will no doubt re-emerge as the recession gets worse. One cannot claim that 'immigrants should adopt British norms of acceptability' and at the same time wonder why votes for the BNP have increased four-fold since 2001. While media stories

and government rhetoric may not always appear 'explicitly' racist, they contribute to a tone around immigration discourse that suggests immigrants and asylum seekers are a problem that needs to be tackled, rather than focusing on government policy that has shifted jobs away from the manufacturing industry and destroyed basic welfare services.

Since the Thatcher government, the move away from manufacturing jobs has been justified by the explanation that Britain was becoming a global financial centre. As another bank seems to collapse every day, one must begin to question the logic of a system where the long-term goal remains profit, rather than the welfare of ordinary people.

There is no reason for ordinary people to be unemployed in this country. The collapse of the banks proves the government will intervene to save jobs when it is in their interests to do so. As global warming and the destruction of our environment continues to worsen, why can the government not invest money into creating jobs building renewable energy resources?

The recession is not going to go away any time soon, the living conditions of working people are going to get worse alongside increased job cuts and if the wrong conclusions are drawn about the crisis, the popularity of racist parties like the BNP will continue to grow. Britain has a proud multiracial history and likewise one of fighting the lies peddled by fascist parties. The solution is not to blame British workers, nor is it to blame foreign workers, but rather to blame those at the top of the global financial system who have caused this crisis. It is unlikely that they will be feeling the strain of the recession anytime soon. Only collective resistance and solidarity between all workers, regardless of nationality, can begin to challenge the system that brought us into this mess.



Flickr user steve punter

The price of peace

Devika Menon wonders if an end is truly within sight for the war-weary Sri Lankans.

Three long decades of incessant fighting, and the civil war in Sri Lanka finally seems to be on its last legs – or so they say. Never before has the Sri Lankan army been so close to victory, having captured three rebel strongholds in the Northeast since January.

It has been a good couple of months in terms of propaganda for President Mahinda Rajapaksa, who came to office in 2005 after his promise to end the war once and for all. On a superficial level, he seems to be keeping this pledge, but does the end of the war really guarantee a decisive and complete end to a 30-year-old conflict? And does the promise of an 'imminent victory' justify the alleged human rights abuses that have the international community in a frenzy?

It is perhaps apt to consider the background behind this seemingly endless and complicated conflict. The civil war between the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or simply the 'Tamil Tigers', and the mostly Sinhalese government began in the late 1970s when various forms of discrimination towards Tamils escalated. The LTTE demanded a separate Tamil state, and to this day claim they will not rest until they receive a 'guarantee of living with freedom and dignity and sovereignty'. A bitter war ensued between the army and the Tigers, unperturbed by sporadic international efforts at cease-fires and peace talks. The inauguration of Rajapaksa in 2005 saw the end of the 2002

peace talks, and fighting resumed in the Tamil heartlands north of the country – where most of the war has been concentrated.

The government's unwillingness to accept nothing less than an unconditional surrender and the complete destruction of the LTTE, coupled with the Tigers' resilience and their refusal to settle for anything but freedom and sovereignty, has brought the situation to a dead end. Is "victory" really within reach, as the government believes? Or will the rebels bounce back from this all-time low, as they have done so many times before?

Very little has been said from the side of the Tamil Tigers after their recent losses, but their spokesman seemed, at least on the surface, unfazed, and did not believe that this is the end of the road for their hard-fought cost. The issue has persisted for too long and is rooted too deep into Sri Lankan society to be resolved with a military victory. It may, hopefully, be a significant stepping stone towards an eventual solution – but only if followed by adequate and careful diplomacy. A second-year Sinhalese student believes that a government victory can solve the conflict, but said "the government will have to keep a watchful eye to prevent LTTE rearming themselves. During the ceasefire in 2004, this is exactly what happened."

Caught between the rebel group and the determined government are 250,000 innocent civilians, who have no chance of escaping the Northeast where the army is

"there is an underlying feeling that this will not be the end of the conflict"

now battling for control of shrinking Tiger territory. Both sides show a shocking indifference towards the plight of these people, with neither willing to hazard a short ceasefire period to allow evacuation of the region. The government's rationale is that the rebels will (as they have certainly done before) use the ceasefire period to regroup and plan further attacks, which they cannot afford at this stage. They also claim that civilians cannot expect protection outside government-established safe zones. On the rebel side, claims that civilians are being used as human shields and are thus prevented from escaping have not been clarified; independent journalists are not allowed near the war zones. However, the thousands trapped between the two sides are undoubtedly and desperately trying to escape, with a group of 2500 having done so in the past few days.

International humanitarian organisations are expressing increasing concerns about the trapped civilians, who, among other things, are now experiencing food crises. The UN World Food Programme has not been able to get supplies across to the war-hit areas for nearly a month. Convoys sent out to investigate the situation have left, claiming their investigations were interrupted and inhibited and ultimately, ineffective.

It seems that the international community is doing all that it can at the moment without further aggravating the situation. Increasing pressure for peace talks in order for the innocents to be

evacuated and receiving a guarantee from the government that non-combatants will be unharmed are the safest actions that can be taken, given the political tensions and complications. The government is already accusing certain organisations of exaggerating numbers and favouring the Tigers.

The end of the war may be near, with rebel-held territory shrinking fast (they now hold just 200 square kilometres), but the future of the people and the country as a whole still looks hazy. In the capital Colombo, while some are excited over the prospect of victory, a source living in city, who does not want to be named, says that "there is the underlying feeling that this will not be the end of the conflict". Mistrust among Tamils may still fester, leading to the formation of new groups, and worse still there is the fear that the LTTE will not go down without an attack on the capital. Colombo is fiercely guarded by the army but it may be a last ditch attempt by the rebels, when they have absolutely nothing left to lose.

Indeed, the end of this war maybe the beginning of a new Cold War-esque situation within the country. If the army does prevail in the next few days as is prophesied, it will be a significant victory for President Rajapaksa, who would go down in history as the figure who ended a war that many believed could not be won. But at what cost?

From Right to Left: the political columns

Hayek

Alex
Blance



Auntie Beeb doesn't know best

Once again the BBC appears to have got itself into a right mess. After the enormous row over the behaviour of Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand, they're back at the task of creating their own chaos.

This time it has been with Carol Thatcher, daughter of the former Prime Minister Baroness Thatcher. It is reported that, within the privacy of the green room after filming an episode of *The One Show*, on which Thatcher served as a roaming reporter, she described a tennis player they had been watching on television as a "golliwog".

After a period of back and forth between the BBC people, who leaked the comment to the press, and Thatcher's agent, a full apology came from Carol for any unintended offence caused by her thoughtless remark. Her agent toured around television and radio stations saying: "Carol is mortified that anyone should take offence at a silly joke. She has summarily apologised." However this was not enough to satisfy the Beeb and they later confirmed that Thatcher had been sacked from her job at the show for not apologising for her comments sooner.

The state that the BBC has got itself into with these kind of incidents has got to a ridiculous point, but the way that Carol Thatcher has been treated is particularly terrible, considering a number of other 'incidents' that the corporation has dealt with along these lines. Thinking back to the Ross/Brand row. The comments they left on an individual's answer phone were directly rude, insulting and disrespectful to him and his family, yet it is noticeable that Ross got away with a short period of suspension and is now back and bold as ever. The difference between Ross and Thatcher is that his remarks were directly harmful and anyone could see they were so, and there was plenty of time for him to stop and reconsider his actions, which he clearly failed to do.

While it is not in any way acceptable to refer to people as looking like golliwogs, and I entirely agree with London mayor Boris Johnson's view that the journalist's use was offensive, we are children of an enlightened age. Given the time that Thatcher grew up, when 'Golly' still appeared on Robinson's jam and golliwogs were still very much around in popular culture, one can at least comprehend how someone could make such an unpleasant

slip up. Carol did this, but apologised for the remark and has no history of making other offensive comments. While this does not entirely absolve her of all guilt in her bad choice of words, it should be taken as an apology.

This is in contrast to Radio 1 DJ Chris Moyles and the BBC's hypocrisy in its handling of his behaviour. He has been surrounded by controversies regarding sexism, a number of homophobic remarks and comments in poor taste about Auschwitz. However, the BBC has come to Moyles' defence each time.

If the BBC is going to take the unforgiving line that it has taken with Carol Thatcher we must demand at the very least that a level of consistency in its treatment of other staff. Yet I believe that the corporation is heading down a very slippery road, and I fear that if they applied the Thatcher standard on regretful comments across the board, the BBC would see a culling of presenters. We must stamp out racist, homophobic, and other offensive uses of language, but doing so by generating these unpleasant rows does not seem the best way to do it.

Laski



Vlad
Unkovski-
Korica

Time is ripe to fight the far right

Fascism is a clear and present danger across the world today. Fascists everywhere are looking to benefit from the economic crisis and the ideological confusion it has sowed in communities threatened by mass unemployment, poverty and uncertainty.

Witness the elation with which the British National Party welcomed the mass wildcat strikes at oil refineries and power plants last week. A common slogan displayed by strikers demanded 'British jobs for British workers'. The BNP applauded the action and called on workers to join its trade union, called Solidarity.

The BNP is no longer a marginal force in British politics. Having won a seat in the London Assembly last May, it hopes to win a London seat in the European Parliament in spring of this year.

Richard Barnbook won the London Assembly seat for the far right group, after a campaign in which he said that "parts of our capital city are coming to resemble a dangerous and grotty third-world town". What kind of person will they put forward as a candidate for Member of European Parliament?

The problem is wider than the BNP

though. Economic crises usually sow ideological confusion in all spheres of life and among all social groups. When the regularity of everyday life is upset by a new situation with no clear rules of behaviour, the door is wide open for ideologies and movements which promise order and identity in the face of adversity.

Anyone who grew up in 1990s Serbia will know, the mass delirium thrown up around religious or national mythology, widespread respect for astrologers and clairvoyants, the prominence of mafiosi in urban life, and the emergence of new pop art forms appealing to base human emotions, in times of economic collapse and wartime. (Sentence doesn't end).

The rise of the far right then, often sponsored by the state apparatus itself, is impossible without a pre-existing milieu that prevents the activities of such groups to be perceived as beyond the pale.

Serbia, though, is just one illustration I am acquainted with at first hand. What about the flourishing of the American evangelical movement under the shadow of Reaganomics? What about the rise of Dugin Eurasianism to celebrity in Yeltsin's Russia?

Let us not forget the latest scandal to

hit the Vatican. Bishop Richard Williamson, excommunicated in 1988 for being consecrated without papal approval, had his excommunication lifted by Pope Benedict XVI last month, despite having expressing controversial views on the Holocaust in an interview with Swedish television in November.

All of these examples show that the ground is ready for the emergence of a militant far right. That is why, when Michael Rock, national chair of Conservative Future, gives off the appearance of being more interested in defining the BNP as 'left wing' fascists than in backing campaigns against fascism and racism, we should be more than worried.

The left has a glorious and unparalleled history in combating fascism. Perhaps no more is necessary to back this claim than to bring up the International Brigades and fight against fascism in Spain in the 1930s.

Closer to home, we have shown how vibrant and powerful a multinational, multiracial and multicultural movement can be in the form of the anti-war movement. It is surely a better launching pad for the fight against the recession than vile racism and militant nationalism.

Viridian

A tale of a pesticide and unnecessary evil

Justus Rollin

Environment and Ethics officer

Despite decades of health and environmental controversy, pesticides are still widely used and remain highly controversial. The one pesticide that has evoked the greatest deluge of public and scientific debate and criticism is DDT.

First developed in the late Nineteenth century, it became widely used as "effective" insecticide in the 1940s and 1950s. Soon, questions over its impact on health and wildlife were raised. But it was not until the publication of Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" in 1962 did the public and policy makers become fully aware of the impending crisis.

Countries began responding to the DDT threat. Hungary led the way, banning the chemical in 1968, followed by others such as the United States in 1972. In 2004, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants banned among other pesticides DDT - allowing only a restricted use in disease vector control.

The chemical is still regarded, controversially, by many as an effective mean for malaria control. Surely, they argue, malaria is a disease that far too many people around the world are left vulnerable to, and DDT represents a necessary evil to save lives. According to the World Health Organisation, there are around 250 million malaria cases each year, resulting in about a million deaths - 90 per cent of them in Africa, with the majority of victims being children below five years of age.

While DDT was banned primarily for its negative impact on ecosystems and animals, research has also linked DDT to human diseases, such as breast cancer and other fatal illnesses. It bio-accumulates in fat tissues of humans and animals alike. DDT can even be found in polar bears as well as in breast milk of mothers in Europe (where it had been long banned) and Africa (where it is still widely used), often at levels far exceeding the safe limits of DDT for infants.

Apart from the health and environmental implications, DDT's effectiveness against mosquitoes is merely temporary: mosquitoes will eventually become resistant to this toxic pesticide! In India for example, the use of DDT led to an initial decrease in malaria cases from 6.5 million to 50,000 cases per year, however the amount of cases has gone up to 6.5 million again due to mosquitoes developing a resistance to DDT. The use of DDT in fighting malaria is a contentious issue, since Western environmentalists are often excused of green imperialism, while there are other urgent issues that many developing countries have to deal with. However, ignoring the health implication of DDT and not looking for other possibilities to control malaria, such as biological control, is barely acceptable. Moreover, it is still mainly chemical corporations from the rich north who are profiting from the sale of DDT - so the true winners in the game of deadly pesticides are hardly the potential victims of malaria.

Measured musings



The battle between our best instincts

With the LSE Not for Profit campaign gaining steam; collecting 450 signatures on a letter to Howard Davies against the "decline in quality and unethical treatment of the LSE", it is perhaps apt to note that in the 2007-8 session, there were 8,777 full time students at the LSE. Leaving out the part-time students, this makes the 450 signatures, while a valiant effort, still merely 5 per cent of the school's populace.

The sentiment behind this campaign is noble, and what it is fighting for is something that all students at the LSE or any other institution should desire - putting the student experience at the heart of decision making, receiving a holistic education and not merely a brand name on a piece of paper, and a socially responsible investment policy, amongst other things.

Despite the idealistic strain of thought behind the campaign - why just 5 per cent of the student population? Is there a trade-off that we as students, and many people around the world, have to accept?

Yes, we do not study in the most homely of campuses in the country; yes,

we do not receive the best teaching despite the amount that we pay for our education (particularly international students) - but perhaps the primary reason behind the lack of mass support for the campaign is that ultimately that the average LSE student does not really care. More than just a matter of apathy, however, perhaps the brand-driven education that we receive at the LSE is all that most of the students really desire.

The unyielding debate between pragmatism and idealism seems to have a particular significance here. Many LSE students complain affectionately about the school, but are never driven enough to do anything about their little grievances. They feel that ultimately, they have gotten what they came for - it is undeniable that the LSE brand name carries you rather far in the working world, and that it is one of the best universities in terms of employability. Despite how the current economic crisis may have hurt every sector imaginable, there have been tales of LSE students rejecting job offers and internships from investment banks or various prestigious law firms.

Similarly, many countries and societies have willingly accepted their limited political and civil freedoms as long as they have a degree of affluence and prosperity. Intangible merits such as these, or moral and ethical concerns like those that LSE Not For Profit are championing, are usually secondary concerns. The clamour for political freedoms and rights are usually born when economic structures start to collapse, or when affluence is so prevalent that there is nothing to risk with social unrest. This is definitely the case in Singapore - most people are willing to accept government restrictions on press freedom and the freedom of speech as long, as they continue to prosper economically and maintain their relatively high standards of living. Again the precedence of pragmatic concerns seems to withstand the inner idealism and yearning for intangible gratifications.

Of course, this is not necessarily the right attitude. I once met a French student in an international conference, who told me that Singapore, Hong Kong, and similar territories do not deserve to be called "countries" as they lack a certain spirit

that is a precondition for being a "citizen". According to him, if all the populace is concerned about is money and prosperity, they do not and cannot encompass the full "spirit" of what it means to belong to a nation. Unduly critical as this may be, he did have somewhat of a point.

This sounds familiar; many times I have heard students at the LSE lament that this school hardly feels like a school, but an institution that merely prepares you for the corporate, working world and adult life.

Whatever an individual's view on these individual campaigns such as LSE Not for Profit and the broader issue of student, even political and civil rights, we have to concede that it is necessary to have groups that fight for something more - however unattainable this may be. If all of us give in to pragmatism and settle for the tangible too often and too easily, we will lose any hope of bettering our existence. As long as we still have our youth, we must never let idealism die.

Shibani Mahtani
Features Editor



A foibe memorial in Trieste. Flickr user pollabarca2.

Timely ode of remembrance

Giorgio Daniele Lizzul relates the nearly-lost memory of the tragic 'foibe' killings in Istria

For Italians, 10 February marks the National Memorial Day of Exiles and the Foibe - a date for the remembrance of the victims of the 'foibe' massacres and the exiles of Istria and the Julian provinces - Italy's former Dalmatian territories.

Sixty-two years ago, the fate of 350,000 Italian Istrians and Dalmatians was sealed as the Allied forces drew up the new post-war borders. Italy lost the vast majority of Istria and all of its Dalmatian territories to the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, ending decades of Slavic nationalist aspirations for these provinces.

Most people would be forgiven for not knowing this little-mentioned piece of post-war history. In fact, many Italians would struggle to even place Istria on a map, let alone remember these events. Istria, a small peninsula surrounded by the Adriatic sea and flanked by Italy to the west and Croatia to the east, has traditionally been seen as Italy's easternmost province.

The region has long been home to an ethnically-mixed population, which prior to the Second World War was split between Istrian Italians and Croats, each comprising roughly half of the population.

With the demise of fascist Italy and the Italian Social Republic, the aftermath of fascist policies, the likes of forced 'Italianisation' and the repression of the Slavic population, gave rise to severe reprisals against the Istrian and Dalmatian Italians.

Italians were regarded as fascists, and under the cover of the liberation and resistance movements, a policy of violence and ethnic cleansing began to emerge against Italians, fascists and non-fascists alike.

The term 'foibe' has now become an infamous one to many from Istria. The 'foibe' are best described as naturally occurring underground chasms with small, often obscured, entrances on the ground surface, but descend hundreds of metres into the Earth. 'Foibe' are extremely prevalent throughout Istria, and gained their notoriety during the period from 1943 to 1947 when they were accorded the new function - mass graves for thousands of Istrians, who met their end in these deep abysses as retribution for twenty years of fascist rule. Some were guilty of collaboration with the fascists, but many were not. The indiscriminate nature of the killing was perhaps best highlighted by the killing of Communist Italian Istrians, who, despite having previously fought alongside their Slavic Istrian brothers to overthrow the forces of fascism under Tito's Partisan forces, were dealt the same fate as collaborators were.

An estimated 10,000 to 30,000 Istrian Italians were executed in the foibe, but it is likely that the exact numbers will never be known. The killings were performed in an extremely brutal manner; victims were tortured, raped and mutilated before being thrown into the 'foibe', often while still alive. The violence and intimidation that emanated from the Slavic reprisals led to many Italians leaving their homeland for

Most people would be forgiven for not knowing this little-mentioned piece of post-war history

Italy.

The situation of the Istrian Italians was further exacerbated by the Italian government's inability to negotiate seriously for the protection of its eastern population. In fact, it spent more time at the 1946 Paris peace conference trying to negotiate the saving of Italy's North and East African colonies as well as the maintenance of its navy, rather than protecting and securing the future of many of its citizens.

After negotiations failed to even secure the future of Italian-dominated Istrian cities in the post-war period, the exodus began. Cities experienced large decreases in their populace; Pula saw 30,000 of its 34,000 population leave. To avoid the permanent reminder of the loss of the Julian territories, Istrian exiles dispersed themselves across Italy, and eventually throughout the world.

Following the exodus, decades of silence dominated the Italian political spectrum on the Istrian question, with the exception of neo-fascist parties who still maintained claims for the Julian provinces. In 1975, Italy finally ended all claims to the lost territories of Istria and the issue began to decline in significance and interest.

This changed, however, in 2005 when Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's coalition government introduced a national memorial day on the 10 February with the backing of the majority of political parties. The introduction of the day of remembrance was met with support even from many of the descendant parties of

the Italian Communist party, who had for decades tried to cover up the massacres as fascist propaganda and only recently began to acknowledge the atrocities.

However this new interest in the 'foibe' massacres and the subsequent exodus are also seen as an attempt by Italian far right to mask the many fascist atrocities which had befallen the other half of the population under Mussolini, and tarnish the legacy of the resistance movements which helped overthrow the fascists and Nazis from Istria. Unsurprisingly, this move coincided with recent attempts by the Italian right to mask Italy's dark fascist past.

Political contentions aside, what progress and developments have there been for the Italian Istrian immigrants? With Croatia's hopes for entry into the European Union, there has been increased impetus for an overhaul of restrictive laws that prohibit Italians from buying property in Istria. The property market there had been closed internationally, so as to discourage a 'resettlement' of the land by Italians. The new property liberalisation will allow many Istrian exiles to return and re-acquire land they had lost.

Furthermore, the recognition of Istria as a dual-language area has helped a process of acceptance emerge over the area's history and mixed cultural heritage. Yet the Italian community in Istria, now comprising no more than 7 per cent of the Istrian population, will forever remain a shadow of its former pre-war self - a visible testament to the ravages of ethnic cleansing.

Fashionable hyperreality



Flickr user Ammar Abd Rabbo

Ashmi Kunde pays tribute to the art of couture

Once upon a time, there was a palatial white room where every pillar and banister was adorned with paper roses, magnolias and camellias.

The guests waited expectantly, in an atmosphere scented with anticipation and too much expensive perfume. And then they appeared: A stream of beautiful princesses, descending into the room to the sound of an enchanting melody. They were dressed in the 65 pristine creations of Karl Lagerfeld, immaculately cut and embellished with lace, crystals and sequins. And each girl wore upon her head a magnificent floral tiara, entirely hand-crafted from ordinary copy paper by Japanese hairdresser Katsuya Kamo.

Welcome to Chanel's haute couture showing, considered "the most magical show" of Paris Couture Week 2009, the biannual fashion phenomenon which took place last week. Don't let your mind dwell too much upon how such a theatrical performance can be termed a 'fashion show', or even how such a thing is being staged in such depressing financial times. Leave all practicality and reality at the door, for these are the realms of the *crème de la crème* of fashion.

Haute couture (literally, 'high dress-making') traditionally refers to one-of-a-kind, luxurious garments, meticulously made using the most time-consuming of methods. Ever since its formal establishment, the label of 'couture' could only be used by fashion houses who met the criteria of the 'Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture'.

Today, these rules of exclusivity still

exist, but the definition of couture has changed. Now the essence of this world lies more in its ability to pull apart the threads of realism and hand sew them into sheer fantasy. Couture aspires to be something, anything, everything unimaginable. It is visible and tangible proof of how fabrics can be designed, decorated and draped on the human form to create something extraordinary. It would be foolish to search for only fashion in haute couture. Which is why, for me, couture is nothing short of art.

This year I watched the Christian Dior show, which was inspired by Flemish paintings, in awe. The models emerged from behind huge stained glass screens and sashayed down the runway in yards of silk and satin. I envied those models for having the touch of a John Galliano garment against their skin. Each and every one of those dream-like dresses left me spellbound.

It's only once the curtains fell that I remembered the fact that I will never have the money, figure or occasion to wear such masterpieces. Upon leaving this fairytale world, practicality and reality came back to remind me that we are facing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Undoubtedly high fashion spells out even higher prices. So how does the market for haute couture still exist?

They say if you ask the price of something, you can't afford it. Which is probably why the buyers and sellers involved in the business don't seem to question the sky-high expenses involved. And the shocking thing is, the outfits actually need to have some of those extra zeros on their

price tags. It may seem ludicrous to fork out £50,000 for a Chanel couture gown, but this includes (amongst a range of other things) the cost of at least 800 hours of dress-making, including the laborious task of individually embroidering on each pearl and sequin, and hand-cutting leaves and flowers to trim the hems.

And then come the price of the ostentatious displaying of these clothes. The Dior show cost £2 million to put together. Perhaps an astounding sum of money for us, but clearly not for the fashion house, which has seen annual sales increases of 35 per cent since 2007. Chanel has declared a 20 per cent escalation in sales from last year and is expecting a further increase for 2009. Forecasters at Givenchy also see a 20 per cent increase in sales for 2009.

But where are these sales coming from? Who generates the demand for this supply of high fashion? The limited number of high end consumers. This whole industry lies in the hands of these few hundred extremely rich people whose bank accounts keep them on safe distant shores, whilst the rest of the world drowns in economic despair. Last year, despite a loss in clientele from the States, it was the newly-rich customers from the Middle East, Russia and China who kept the demand alive. There is this eternal existence of ultra-rich consumers, who are willing to forego the purchase of a small house in exchange for a single item on clothing, which will probably see the light of day (or the flash of cameras) a single time.

As much as I would desperately love to have my wardrobe bursting at the seams

"There's a credit crunch, not a creative crunch."

- John Galliano

with Dior, I am only a mere mortal - a student living in London, whose current fashion mantra is along the lines of 'recessionista chic'. I frequently scour high street stores for that rare combination of something attractive and affordable. As the effects of the credit crunch spread far and wide, I feel guilty about my own (often excessive) fashion purchases, and frequently end up crossing off clothing items from my shopping list.

So, despite having just openly declared my love for the dream works, I find something slightly distasteful in the fact that certain people are still able to spend an average person's annual salary on one garment. Especially when that average person probably lost that salary, due to one of the 76,000 job cuts that happened during the very same week as Paris Couture.

The couture industry is anything but on the brink of ruin. And it's making it globally evident in the most expensive of ways possible. Haute couturiers have even been compared to Marie Antoinette, for giving the impression of declaring, "If there are no clothes, then let them wear couture!"

Personally, I don't see it quite that way. It is doubtful that fashion designers are so wrapped up in their creativity that they remain completely oblivious to obvious current affairs. Perhaps they just believe that those affairs have less so to do with them. If couture is made as a form of creative expression, displayed to maintain the prestige of the fashion house, and sold because a client held a whimsy of being adorned in luxury, then where does the outside world come into the equation? Does the industry really need to tone down its decadence to mourn for dearly departed financial institutions? Are we right in making critical, cynical comments? Or are we merely casting our jealous eyes on this market which is still untainted by the darkness of economic downturn?

Like I said, couture is art. And like all other art forms, is it an escape from reality, with no rules and no budget constraints. "There's a credit crunch, not a creative crunch," said John Galliano, after his flamboyant Dior show. "Of course, everyone is being more careful with their discretionary purchases. I am. But it's our job to make people dream."

Translating these dreams into reality continues to be an expensive hobby, but art and business are two sides of the same glittering coin of couture. The undeniable truth is that the dismal economic circumstances have spelled anything but 'The End' to the world of couture.

And so it continues to live happily, fashionably, expensively ever after.

Campaign profile



Reduce, Re-use, ReLove!

Harriet Jackson has a slightly different take on fashion

See the crazy blonde girl handing out folders for free on Houghton Street? Or the rails of clothes for sale in the Quad a few weeks ago? These events were both organised by ReLove, a group created to promote the reuse of anything that would otherwise go to waste.

Hopefully you already know that our society wastes a huge amount of perfectly usable goods. But did you know that LSE has created its very own group to promote the reuse of all manner of goods?

ReLove is just one of the six groups that form Sustainable LSE Consulting, a student group created by LSE to generate achievable solutions to create an environmentally conscious community. The other groups' missions include collecting unwanted goods from halls, promoting reusable mugs and coordinating less wasteful printing at LSE.

The first ReLove event of the year was a joint Clothes Swap with People and Planet. This did not entail stripping in the Quad, as some people thought, but exchanging old clothes (or buying for a nominal 50p). Be they clothes that you had eaten too many pies to squeeze into anymore, or merely ones which you felt belonged with Take That in the 1990s, there will surely be another person at LSE who would appreciate them more than your bin. With clothing brands like Topshop, Zara and FCUK on our racks, there were plenty of bargains!

This event was followed with an old folder sale. Hundreds of ring-binders were due to be sent to landfill after being discarded by various parts of the LSE administration. Fortunately, ReLove stepped in to redistribute them to the students of LSE, who may not be needy but can always consume more. Retail prices for a thick ring binder are usually around £2-3, but ReLove was selling them for a fantastically cheap 10p, and even started giving them away for an optional donation. The biggest cost incurred was the dignity of the sellers on Houghton Street as they resorted to desperate measures to get attention.

Check out our website for more details at www.doyourelove.blogspot.com. Join our 'Reduce, Re-use, ReLove' fun by coming to our future events. Miss them, miss out!

The gap yawns wide, the toll rises high

Alizeh Kohari gently prods the LSE conscience, to pull more weight behind a good cause

It is easy to forget, walking along the Thames, that there are other rivers in the world. Rivers less mighty, less voluminous - rivers that are now, in fact, mere trickles on arid stretches of land. It is just as easy to forget, in the flurry of black business suits and the symphony of clacking heels, that life exists outside the streets of Central London - that in Africa, little girls with matted hair and bloated bellies suck on their fists and watch their mothers scavenge for food; that in India, young boys play cricket on the streets, using bamboo sticks hammered hastily into the ground as wickets.

It is easy to forget all this, and entirely natural to do so. Perhaps this forgetting business is a necessary mechanism, for how is one to function otherwise? Poverty.com, records the number of hunger deaths

every hour; try doing your Econ. problem set with that hunger-death-list growing longer with every demand curve you draw. (48 minutes into the hour, the number figures at eight hundred and fourteen - no.815: Birendra Khan, no.816: Mr. Akili Oluwu, no.817: Celina Lima ...) Meeting the deadline becomes that much more difficult.

However, it won't do to keep one's head firmly underground, either. (No.832: Ms. Beatrice Sousa). The gap yawns wide between the haves and the have-nots of this world. The UN Millennium Development goals crumble to nothingness as 2015 approaches; development initiatives take a hit in this new financial-crisis-ridden world. Amidst all this, the Development Society here at the LSE seeks to create a little awareness and trigger a little

action amongst its student population.

What do we do? A little of this, a little of that. There are movie screenings and informal discussions on development-centered topics - we make sure that the coffee we sip during heated debates is of the Fairtrade variety. There are talks and seminars and panel discussions on different development topics. We urge our members to attend development initiatives outside of the LSE, in London and beyond - in Warwick, in Oxford, in Cambridge. We raise funds for our adopted charities - Hope for Children and UYDO. Then there is Development Week, an annual fixture - all proceeds, of course, go to the adopted NGOs. Interested in a career in development? Make sure you attend the upcoming Development Career Fair in conjunction with the LSE Careers Service.

There is a certain degree of moral dogma that tends to accompany any discussion on why a career in development is, or should be, a lucrative idea: a gentleman of some prominence in this field, when asked why he gravitated towards development in the first place, huffed and puffed a little, sighed dramatically, raised his eyes heavenwards, then answered: 'I saw the poverty around me, the utter, hopeless poverty, the naked little children, and thought to myself 'there, but for the grace of God, go I'. I knew I had to play my part somehow.'

This gentleman's instinct, one of empathy, was essentially a good one, but we at the LSE SU Development Society take ourselves a little less seriously; hopefully, we're a little less self-congratulatory. The yawning gap that spans the world in

terms of development is an imbalance that needs to be corrected, urgently, because there are human lives at stake (No. 912: Fanta Ngoyi). We'd like to help out in the correction of that balance, we'd like to help stave off Death No.913. Join us in our cause. It's a good one.

Watch out for the Development Charity Auction next week, featuring Howard Davies, Aled Fisher, Ms. LSE and a host of other "celebrities"!



Photo: Cherie Leung

From underfed pups to opulent slumdogs

Dhiraj Nainani from the Timeless team looks at the influence of the Indian film industry

Until a few years ago, the term 'Bollywood' conjured up very specific images. The instinctive reaction for the Western world was to think of bright costumes, dancing and singing every second minute, and (of course) a 'kissing' scene behind a tree. For those not from the Indian subcontinent, the Indian film industry was seen as the somewhat eccentric cousin of other film industries: a harmless curiosity that occasionally turned out a film worthy of attention (for example, *Mother India* won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1958), but which generally kept to itself, entertaining its billion-strong audience.

Of course, this is quite a generalised statement, but it should be noted that this was the dominant viewpoint until quite recently. Although there is no specific marker in terms of date, global perspectives towards Indian films have changed in a massive way. Bollywood, it seems, is here to stay.

In my mind, it began in 2001. *Lagaan* ('Land Tax') was a film about a group of villagers under the rule of British Raj in the 1890s, who, upon protesting over an unfair land tax imposed on them, were told that the tax would be lifted if they beat the English at their own game – cricket. Implausible? In many ways, yes – but un-

surprisingly, it was a massive hit in India. It also got an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film: something that had not happened since *Mother Earth*. Although the film did not win, it seems that it spurred a movement that echoed not only in India but around the world. In India, films began to take themselves more seriously and began focusing on 'real life' problems as opposed to escapism. Films such as *Rang De Basanti* ('Paint It Yellow') received a BAFTA Foreign Film nomination; *Black and Taare Zameen Par* ('Stars on the Earth') looked at physical and mental disabilities in a beautiful and sensitive manner; *Aamir*, *Mumbai Meri Jaan* ('Mumbai My Love') and *A Wednesday* looked at explaining the difference between unnecessary racist incitement and genuine terrorism. Just a week ago, *Luck by Chance* offered a satirical view at the Indian film industry itself. 'Bollywood', it seems, began to grow up.

Internationally, especially in Europe, names such as Shahrukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai and Amitabh Bachan began seeping into regular households. Poland, Switzerland, Germany and Austria started offering subsidies to filmmakers wanting to shoot there, while simultaneously putting Hindi songs in clubs. International films and actors shifted their focus to India. Be it Deepa Mehta's Foreign Film Oscar

For the Indian film industry to be associated with the spectacle of light and song is not a new concept by any means

nomination (*Water*), Johnny Depp signing with Amitabh Bachan in *Shantaram*, or Will Smith singing a Hindi song on *Indian Idol* – Hollywood began listening, and listening hard. The recent success of *Slumdog Millionaire* has seen the best melange of international and domestic efforts. Danny Boyle's lovingly sensitive portrayal of human nature has won accolades in festivals and awards ceremonies worldwide; in India, music composer A.R. Rahman has become an overnight symbol of India's rising dominance on the global stage.

The rising influence of Bollywood can also be demonstrated on a smaller level, back at LSE. On Sunday 1 February, the LSESU put on 'Timeless 2009', a cultural show aimed at raising money for charity. The show was a smashing success, and the 1500-strong sellout crowd at Sadler's Wells theatre gave a lot of positive feedback. However, some suggested that despite having a neutral storyline (a fantasy tale akin to Homer's *Odyssey*), the show possessed a very 'Bollywoodish' feel, as most of the performers were of Indian subcontinental origin and the expanse of colour, song and dance was reminiscent of a Bollywood film. While most loved the show, they felt that it had had more of a 'subcontinental' feel to it than a global one.

The truth of the matter is that the team actively campaigned for as many people to audition as possible, regardless of ethnicity, as the show aimed to showcase the diversity of LSE. It just so happened that the number of people of subcontinental origin at the auditions vastly outnumbered others; so please make sure you audition next year! And in the show itself, acts such as the Garba, Raas or Nepalese performances did not just have representatives from those respective cultures in them – quite the opposite.

So while acknowledging the influence of sub-continental culture, I would not say the show itself was dominated by Bollywood. Perhaps people were reminded of Bollywood films because this is the niche that the industry has carved out for itself, – and I'm very happy with that. For the Indian film industry to be associated with the spectacle of light and song is not a new concept by any means, but if it still holds true to this day, then it means that it has preserved its roots well enough for international audiences to see both the glamorous 'spectacle' side as well as its new maturity.

That alone speaks of the successful evolution of the Indian film industry, and a sign for even better things to come. I can't wait.

Listings: This week around campus

Tuesday 10th February
Indian Food Festival
Quad, 7 pm

Wednesday 11th February
The Argentinian and Politics societies present:
Latin America in the wake of the global financial crisis: main challenges from an economic and social perspective
Speakers: Alfonso Prat-Gay and Sergio Bergman
D502, 6.15 pm

"Backstabbing for Beginners – A Crash Course in International Diplomacy"
Speaker: Michael Soussan
E304, 7-9 pm

BanglaSoc presents
"Bangla Unplugged" – the best of modern Bangla music
Underground Bar, 7-9.30pm

Thursday 12th February
Indian Sari Tying and Mehendi
Quad, 12 noon

Friday 13th February
Relove Folder Sale
Houghton Street, 12-2pm

Retro Bollywood Crush - 1940-2009
Quad, 8 pm - 1 am

Monday 16th February
The German Society presents:
Global Governance
Speaker: Professor Gesine Schwan – SPD Candidate for President of Germany
Old Theatre, 6.30-7.30 pm

Social is the missing link --



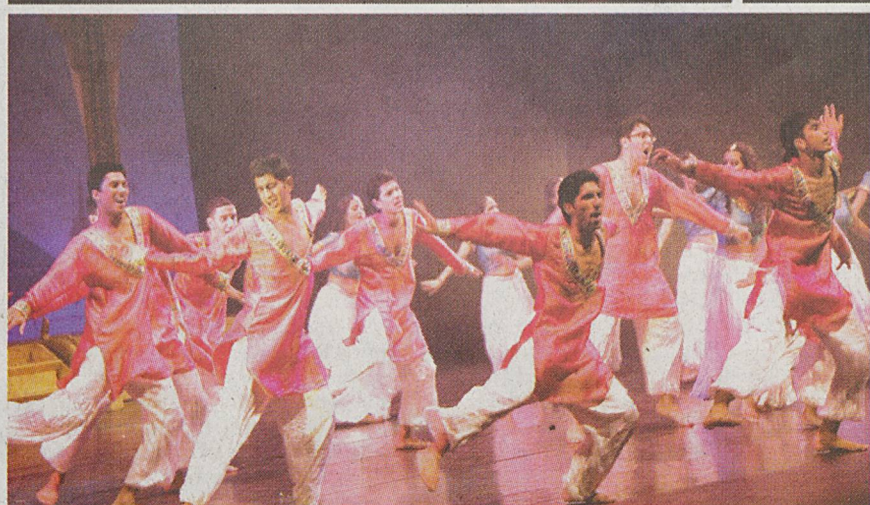
Help discover it.

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IMMORTALISING TIMELESS

Cherie Leung and
Zeeshan Malik
captured moments
from the annual LSE
cultural show



Federer: Still the Greatest of all time?

Weilong Liang

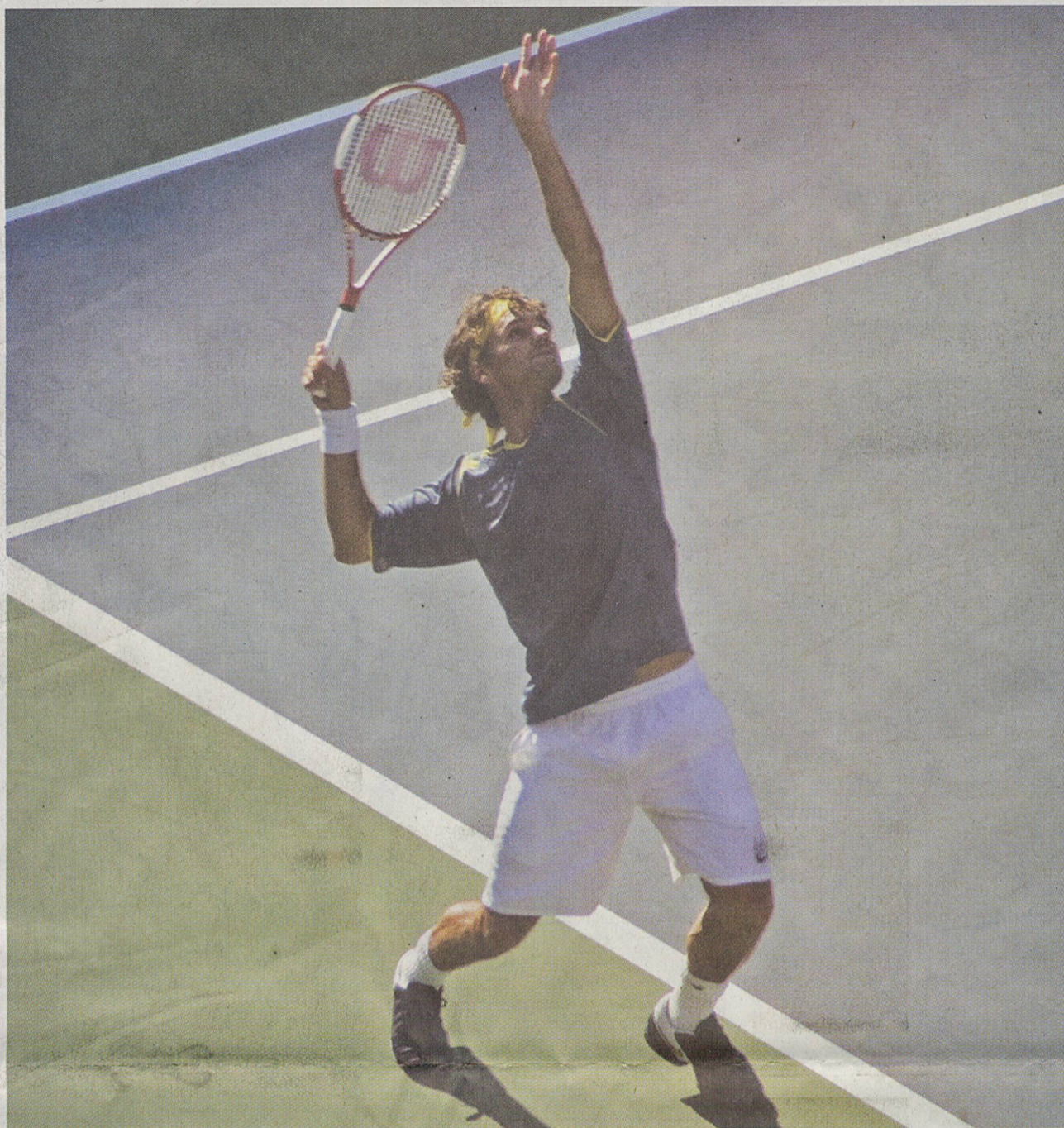
A year ago I would have had no hesitation in hailing Roger Federer as the greatest tennis player of all time. But merely a year later three Grand Slam final defeats to Rafael Nadal has left Roger Federer struggling to come to terms with the loss of his Number One status, his cherished Wimbledon title and his superiority over Nadal on hard courts.

Even some of Federer's most loyal fans are beginning to doubt that he is the greatest, despite the fact that he holds the open era record for the longest unbeaten run on grass and hard courts. Let's also not forget that he is the first man to win two Grand Slams (US and Wimbledon) five times in a row. He will break Ivan Lendl's record of nineteen Grand Slam final appearances, and it is inconceivable that he won't add at least two more Grand Slams to surpass the fourteen won by Pete Sampras.

Federer himself would probably admit that he needs to win the French Open to cement his reputation as the best ever. But on his worst surface Federer will find it exceedingly tough to beat Nadal, who has never lost a match at Roland Garros. Some would need to see Federer surpass Sampras' record of seven Wimbledon victories before labelling him as the best ever. This is achievable, as long as his service game and net play is strong when he comes up against Nadal.

As someone who has been roundly entertained by his flamboyant stroke-making I need no convincing that Roger Federer is the greatest tennis player of all time, but in order to win over the sceptics he must bounce back from the setbacks of last year and overcome Rafael Nadal.

Reaching for the stars. Roger Federer lets one rip. Photo from Flickr user eugene.



There's more than one kind of beaver you could be working on

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If so, we need your help. Beaver Sports is looking for a team of dedicated tits, fannies, and willies, who can spel, to move us on to the next level. Email us at:

sports@thebeaveronline.co.uk



Philosophical Barry is on Sabbatical. He'll be back next week to provide his own unique insight into the sporting world.

philosophicalbarry@thebeaveronline.co.uk

Celts blend sports with societies

Sam Tempest Keeping partook in a glorious Celtic scrumdown of a party

The Celtic Society's event of the year was held last Sunday as the Scotland v Wales RBS Six Nations match was contested at a raucous Murrayfield. Christened the 'Ruck N Roll' party, a select group of fervent nationalists (the good type) attended to cheer on their respective countries of origin.

Tempers were briefly raised as a leek, a symbol synonymous with the Welsh people, was found butchered in a nearby classroom, which the Welsh contingent construed as an attack on their cultural heritage. Fortunately the situation was defused after the revelation that the offending vegetable was in fact just left over from a Chinese Food Society party from the previous night. A cache of sheep's stomachs was subsequently released intact.

While the party raged regardless, the game itself was full of excitement and controversy. After running face first into the shoulder of Martin Williams, a man whose nickname is 'Nugget', perhaps due to being almost as hard as gold, Simon Webster managed to render himself comatose without using the standard Scots method of deep-fried Mars bars and whisky. This summed up how committed both sides were in chasing victory in their opening fixture despite finding themselves in vastly different circumstances prior to kick off.

After last year's Grand Slam, the Welsh were looking to show the mettle of their championship credentials, a feat they tackled with aplomb. Despite a valiant late rally from the Scots, providing a glimmer of hope for beleaguered coach Frank Hadden and his players who came into the tournament under the normal burden of inflated national expectation, the Welsh were always in control after an eight-minute first half barrage where they scored two tries. The Scots will have to improve drastically if they are to gain anything from next week's trip to Paris in order to revive their ever fading hopes of tournament success.



Photo from Beth Harrison

Celtic Society Treasurer Ciaran Deeny was pleased with how the event unfolded as students both Welsh and Scottish, past and present, nationalist and neutral enjoyed the selection of drinks and nibbles as well as the main event. Speaking through an interpreter due to his indecipherable Irish accent he said: "It was a grand day. Things started off a bit hairy but hey, who doesn't like a bit of a scrap to get the blood pumping?"

Looking forward to the society's planned trip to Cardiff to watch the Wales v Ireland Game on 21 March, he said: "Aye, we'll see how good these boys are when they got Drico (Brian O'Driscoll) staring them in the face. Man's a legend, I tell ye".

If anyone would like any more information on this trip then please e-mail d.mccauley@lse.ac.uk by the 1 March. Judging by this shindig, its not to be missed.



Photo from Sam Tempest Keeping

Gamblers Anon

If things generally get easier with time then we're really doing something drastically wrong here at Gambler's Anon. We started this little tipster piece nigh on ten weeks ago but have yet to really grasp the subtle art of gambling. In the hope of reviving our fortunes we have decided to follow the lead of president Obama and take a new direction; Greyhound racing.

One of the team was this week was talking about how he grew up with a pair of beloved deerhounds by his side. Hounds are renowned as companions and here are some other interesting facts about the greyhound in particular:

-In the Odyssey, Homer wrote of Odysseus' loyal dog Argus, who turned out to be a greyhound.

-When running greyhounds spend 80% of their time in the air, much the same as a cheetah does.

-If your greyhound is especially loving, this shouldn't come as a surprise. They have bigger hearts than most other canine breeds.

-Greyhounds are one of the oldest breeds of dog, their images appearing in paintings from as far back as 8,000 years ago.

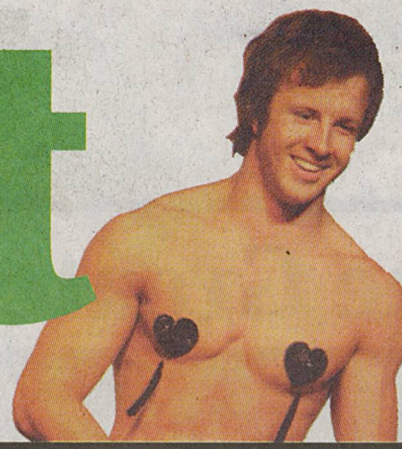
With all this in mind we are going to place £5 on the fantastically named Soviet Maldini in the Irish Derby at 49/1. Perhaps he'll show the steel of the left, both the communists and the AC Milan full back.

Finally we will place £7.50 each on Mustang Garcia in the Gorton Cup at 4/1 and Wise Thought in the English Derby at 22/1. Fingers crossed they'll all turn out to be this man's best friend.

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Sport



We have a winner!
 << Monsieur LSE, page 22

Pool Club in at the deep end

Chris Gully reports on the pool team's clash with the might Cambridge

Pool took another step to becoming the premier sport of the LSE Athletics Union as the first and second teams entered into a practice match against Cambridge University on Sunday 1 February. This was the first and final practice match in anticipation of the British University Championships starting 19 February. The LSE Pool club's star has been on the rise ever since our shock success in December's UPC National 9 Ball Championships.

Despite the LSE team's burgeoning talent being clear for all to see, Cambridge came in to the match as overwhelming favourites. Their first team had previously made it to the semi-finals of the National Championships in 2007. In addition they also as had England University Captain Robert Cork among their ranks. Cork is a show stopper to say the least (no pun intended), dominating opponents with his fluid stroke play and unerring finesse.

Before the match had even begun there was a clear contrast between the two teams. Cambridge looked well turned out, dressed from head to toe in professional looking light blue uniforms, especially compared to our 'straight out of the bed' look. There was no question who won the battle of 'cool', however.

LSE raced into a formidable 1-0 lead with Lee Mager, LSE captain and former Cambridge player, suffocating the life out of Cambridge's other Robert with his excessively tactical play. Unfortunately our early good luck managed to turn against us as a number of scrappy frames went Cambridge's way. A bodacious break and dish (for those unfamiliar with Pool jargon, this is when you clear all your balls from the break without any misses) from yours truly along with some Mager magic managed to keep things close for a time but we appeared to merely be prolonging the inevitable.

As the England captain turned up, having been held up by his girlfriend's birthday, Cambridge had managed to build an insurmountable lead. The match was now just a case of seeing whether we could hold our own against one of the top players in the country.

Cue the advent of what some might term a miracle. All four first team mem-



bers, Lee, Alpesh, Robert and Martin all managed to score victories over our country's finest. Too little too late perhaps, but we were having a great time putting the England man to shame. It all boiled down to whether I could pull off one more victory giving us a much coveted white wash of an England captain.

Alas, I lost. And badly at that, feeling the full wrath of a wounded ego. My extensive experience in handling long and large instruments was no match for his forceful potting in every hole.

All in all though we were an extremely happy team, the first to come within 3 frames of the men from the Bridge. No

...the first team to come within 3 frames of the men from the Bridge.

The pool club posse: Robert Li, Martin Rydland, and Lee Mager show off their long, thin implements.

mean feat considering the wealth of World Rules experience within the Cambridge camp compared to our own limited exposure to the game. Our second team held their own too, meaning everything is healthy within LSE Pool in the run up to the impending BUCS Championship.

Love Struck

What with campus tensions running high after the Occupation, the cold snow shepherding in feelings of woe and essay and dissertation deadlines fast approaching, we thought it would be nice if we did something to help boost the dwindling love levels here at the LSE. So Beaver Sports has decided to run our very own love struck service for the next two weeks, the format is simple: send us your messages of romance lost and we'll do our best to reunite you with that special someone. Just drop us an e-mail at sports@thebeaveronline.co.uk.

We kissed at the carol and my heart sizzled like a chicken wing. Your secret blend of spices has me hooked, I yearn to wake up to the smell of eggs and bacon. Love the colonel.

We got talking at Boom (one of the first nights of freshers week), I was sitting in the corner. You were from Devon (i think), were studying Social Policy and Criminology and your dream was to become a pirate! I liked cats (better than dogs) and didn't have a mobile phone. Would love to meet up again.

I was the tall blonde guy, sexy bit of stubble, open collar pink shirt and a suit (ralph lauren) - you were wearing a sexy black dress with blue and green fabric cupping your (ample) cleavage. Small, dark hair, I think you're women's rugby - but inbreeding doesn't put me off too much ;) Get in touch and I will rock your world all night long x

I saw you play your clarinet last Wednesday, you blew me away. I'd like a chance to blow you back. You will always be my Mr LSE.

You were the passionate/angry girl at the UGM, my voice was drowned out by the crowd. Some might say I belong in a Zoo, cause I'm an animal if you know what I mean. Let me take you into the jungle.

You were the tall, dark one with the bulging biceps who suggested I drop by your office hour so that you could address my welfare. Expect me to drop by.

If any of these individuals happens to be you then just a drop us an e-mail at sports@thebeaveronline.co.uk and we'll put you straight in touch with your lost love.

Results

Mother Nature - 1

LSE - 0

Keep up with your pool stats

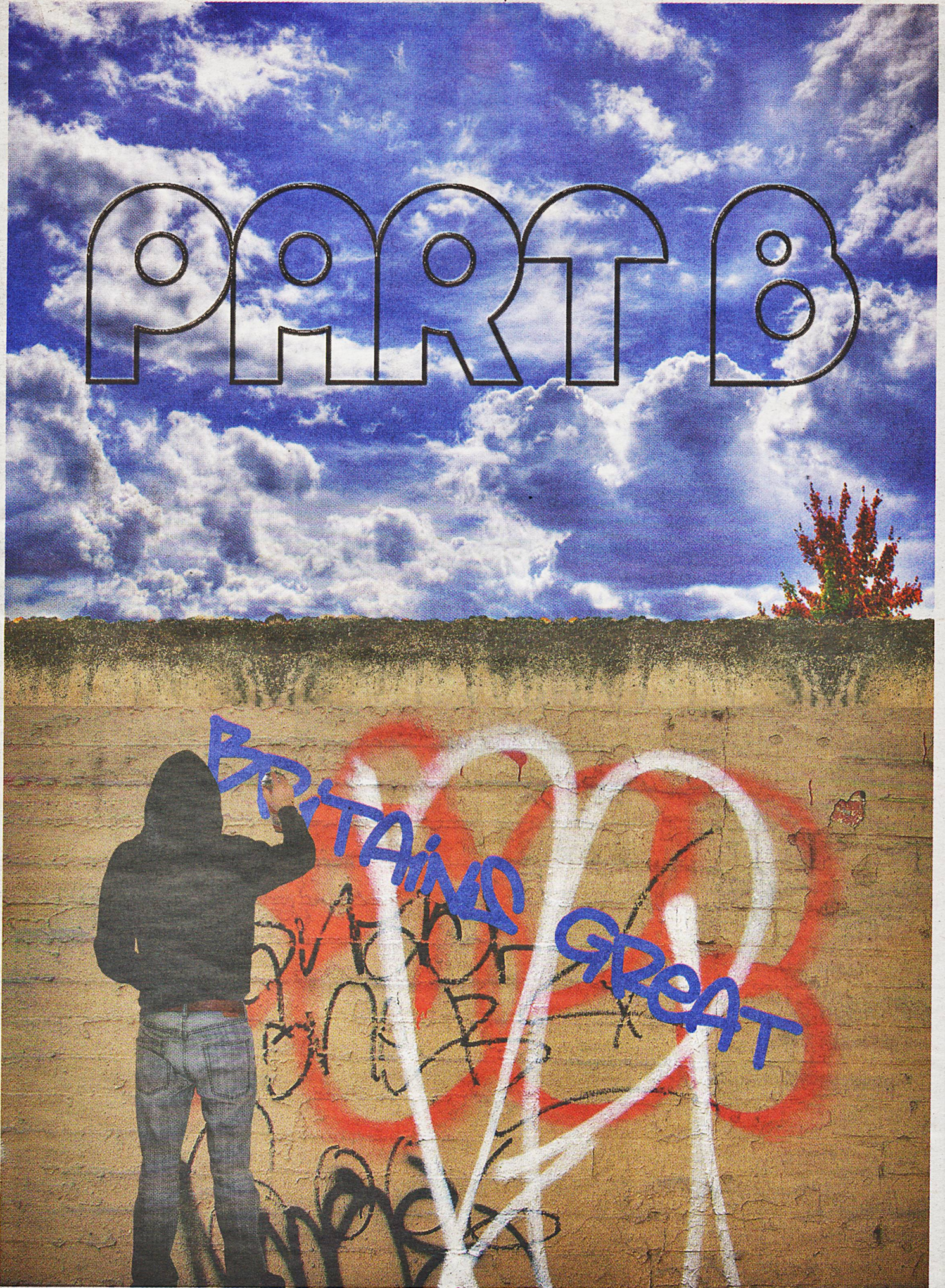
1st Teams Player Stats

Name	Team	Won	Win %
Lee	LSE	4/5	80%
Rob H	Cambridge	4/5	80%
Dunstan	Cambridge	3/5	60%
Graham	Cambridge	3/5	60%
Paul	Cambridge	3/5	60%
Robert	LSE	3/5	60%
Martin	LSE	2/5	40%
Alpesh	LSE	1/5	20%
Chris	LSE	1/5	20%
Rob C	Cambridge	1/5	20%

2nd Teams Player Stats

Name	Team	Won	Win %
Josh	Cambridge	5/5	100%
Tom	Cambridge	4/5	60%
Chris	Cambridge	3/5	60%
Gurpeet	LSE	3/5	60%
Luke	Cambridge	3/5	60%
Lorry	Cambridge	2/5	40%
Simon	LSE	2/5	40%
Will	LSE	3/10	33%
Dan	LSE	0/5	0%

PART B



10.02.09

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EDITORIAL

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This week we honour the country in which you are currently standing, ignoring our better instincts to indulge in sweaty nationalist fervour. Blighty has made a few mistakes over the years, but here we tactfully ignore them and concentrate on the happy times, like week-long cricket matches and acid house. And, before you decide to leave the country in disgust, just remember that at least we haven't gone bankrupt, like Iceland.

**SACHIN PATEL &
JULIAN BOYS**

FAQ! FAX! FACTS!

Dear Julian,

I lost my child in a snowdrift last Monday: is there any chance you can put up an appeal for information in next week's issue? It's still pretty icy out there, and I'm worried he's mutated into a penguin.

Anna Molly

Dear Sachin,

I found the content of last week's partB highly offensive. As I sit here and flick through the lurid photos of obese men abusing innocent kittens, I question your judgement. Oh wait. This is the magazine I found under my flatmate's bed. Nevermind.

Cyril McParvel

WIN!

the soundtrack to the new **notorious b.i.g.** biopic with bare wicked trax, including **biggie** classics and a new song by **jay-z!**

just find a link between gangster rap and a british cream tea, and email it to

THEBEAVER.PARTB@GMAIL.COM

THE EVOLUTION OF DEVOLUTION

meganjones is representing for the valleys

Britain does not exist, has never existed, and will never exist. Since people have inhabited this land we have divided and defined ourselves according to a feeling of belonging, be that to family, community or nation. The dividing lines between tribes, peoples and nations have varied greatly over time, but the lack of a one-size-fits-all concept of "British" identity has not. We are four distinct nations, each with our own cultures, identities and traditions, and no amount of integration will ever change this.

We may share a respect or reverence for vague, universal concepts such as equality, justice, freedom, law and order, but this is not a sufficient foundation for a coherent nation. These shared values are not exclusive to England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. How many other nations are based upon these very same principles, and do all these, therefore, automatically come under Britain's dominion?

'Revolution will come to Wales, just you wait.'

It is most ironic that values such as freedom, equality and justice were the last things on the minds of the English parliament and monarch when the concept of Britain was enshrined in law. The Act of Union 1536, which unified England and Wales, legalised inequality on the grounds of race and language. The Welsh could not hold official positions or enter certain towns in their own nation, English was made the official language of Wales, and the people became sec-

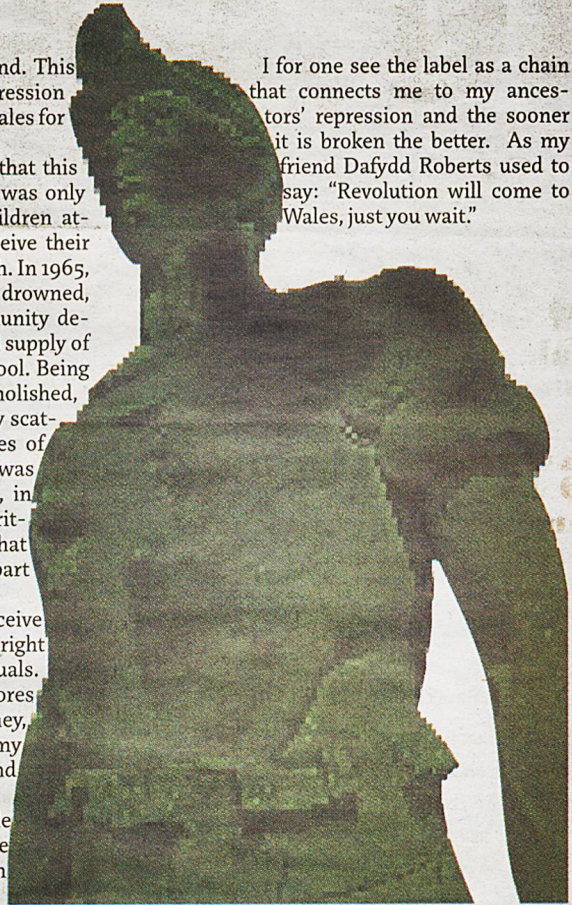
ond class citizens within their own land. This began a policy of subjugation and oppression that was felt in Ireland, Scotland and Wales for subsequent centuries.

However, it is too easy to believe that this policy is ancient history - it is not. It was only during my father's childhood that children attending the local school began to receive their education through the medium of Welsh. In 1965, the Welsh village of Cwm Celyn was drowned, its inhabitants displaced and a community destroyed in order to safeguard a plentiful supply of water for the developing city of Liverpool. Being British meant having one's home demolished, chapel razed to the ground, community scattered to the four winds and the graves of relatives desecrated as the graveyard was flooded. This was allowed to happen, in fact positively encouraged, by the British government, who did not care that one part of Britain was being ripped apart against the will of its people.

Today I do not have the right to receive basic services in my mother tongue, a right taken for granted by most individuals. Banks, supermarkets and high street stores are more than happy to take my money, but extremely reluctant to respect my linguistic identity, and the freedom and rights it entails.

Is it any wonder that some people refuse to be labelled as British given the repression, inequality and oppression implicit in the concept's development?

I for one see the label as a chain that connects me to my ancestors' repression and the sooner it is broken the better. As my friend Dafydd Roberts used to say: "Revolution will come to Wales, just you wait."



LOSS OF A BRITISH SUCKING TREAT

reaganpersaud is sweet for his sweets

You should stop eating those, it'll make your teeth rot. Alas, no such risk faces the youth of today. Whilst it will always be a pleasurable past-time reflection for us young adults who grew up in British society, the children of tomorrow's tomorrow have given up on lollipops; one of the greatest traditional sweet shop joys. Stores have decided that the lollipop business just isn't cost effective enough anymore, making it almost impossible to find a single lollipop anywhere unless you buy wholesale.

The fact is that most of us have forgotten how much joy this sweet treat used to bring. Fair enough, a lollipop just isn't the sort of thing you walk around the LSE licking away on. The young adult of today has to fit certain criteria, and unfortunately a penchant for lickable sticks doesn't seem to be on the plan for public perfection. But

just because we aren't allowed to appreciate this treat in public doesn't mean that anyone forgets how amazing it was as a child. Everyone loved lollipops. They were the sweet of our generation, the perfect treat whenever you felt like it! Everybody indulged as they were readily available all over Britain. But now, things have changed...

My sudden craving on our beautiful snow day lead me to Tesco, Sainsbury, Asda, newsagents, corner stores...none of which sold lollipops! Sure there is the silly drumstick substitute but some of us like to chew the rock! I finally found one in the Natural History Museum - I repeat, a HISTORY museum. Our token candy, a lasting symbol of British childhood, takes its place amongst dinosaur bones and plastic blue whales. A treat that all British students once savoured has now become...extinct.

The idea that such a treat could be dying out may seem absurd, but in fact production of the lollipop in Britain has plummeted by 60 per cent in the last ten years. By the time we decide to raise children, there will

probably be none of these teeth-rotters around.

What's happened to British society that has resulted in the removal of such small joys? The bigger question - or fear - is what will be removed next? Britain has always been a nation that prides itself on being able to supply to meet demand. And all of a sudden there has been a total dismissal of something which was very important to young Britons. The simple fact is that British society has forgotten our treat; forgotten its significance amongst other great childhood touchstones such as the zoo, pokémon, and spin the bottle. We appear to have forgotten our past.

The adverts of yesteryear still ring in my ears, the flavours still lingers in my mouth. The soft centre still makes me smile. And yet this beautiful simple piece of sweetness has been removed from the markets to make room for 21st century substitute 'delicacies'. It's not often that we can say 'back in the good old days' but today I say for all us lollipop lovers...LET'S GO BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS!



SUBURBICIDE

calumyoung finds

The nub of British social history runs thus: man enters city; man hastily vacates it for the suburbs. Look to any Briton in possession of a double garage, a couple of kids, and a mortgage, and you will find a dystopian view of city life. British anti-urbanism is a marketable product: brands like Pringle and Hackett make it their business to sell green pasture one tweed blazer at a time, albeit at prices that only a city salary can afford. But British anti-urbanism goes beyond distaste for all things city; it's a social trend which tells us a great deal about British society.

It must have been as a result of a farming accident that suburban Britain forgot that cities are nothing more than a concrete manifestation of the people in them. The righteous anger of our middle-brow is willing to pour forth on all city goings-on and, in the same breath, we attack the people that live in them. In this sense, contempt for cities reveals a shocking pessimism in modern society. It must be the contention of anyone who hates the city that those people they brush up against will harm them more than they will help them. Will they be worse off for greater interaction? The belief that they will be worse off for meeting new and different people is entwined with the view that a homogenous community is better than an open one. It's synonymous with xenophobia.

As such, anti-urbanism also tells the story of a fundamentally insular society. One that would sooner fence off its consciousness in suburbia, than have it meet politics, philosophies or cultures in any way out of the ordinary. Cities like London excel at bringing people from all over the world together: clichés of the melting-pot aside, anyone living in a major world city enjoys a mind-broadening experience. Whilst frantically searching for a seatbelt in a cab last week I was informed



Utopia in suburbia

by an Italian friend that, at home, wearing a seat-belt while on the road was considered a slur on the driver's ability. Foreign perspectives on the same things are magically enriching moments; only in a multicultural city are they possible. Anti-urbanism to this extent represents a desire to avoid those who are not like 'us'. But through demarcating 'us' and 'them' so ruthlessly, the society in question is changing for the worse.

It is also the case that through co-existing only with those who we have vetted, as most do in the countryside, British society is becoming considerably more atomised. People are being geographically grouped by their politics, wealth and age. Political pollsters can more often than not guess party allegiances when given a post-code. Is this a social trend that we should be encouraging? Conversely, in London, with the exception of a few wholly elite districts, most areas tell us nothing more about those that live in them than their address. It's a blessing of the twenty-first century city that two individuals inhabiting almost the same strip of physical space can have backgrounds which are totally alien to each other. Social atomisation in rural districts encourages the worst tendencies in human nature; in the absence of common ground between citizens, it also poses a threat to the liberal state.

Anti-urbanism is also the condition of an irrational society. A society that has been bewitched into thinking that natural and perfect equates to goodness and happiness. Between organic yoghurt and that claim made by so many lost female fortysomethings that "it's my natural colour", British society has fallen out of love with man-made creations. For it is just as easy to find beauty in the scenery inside the M25 as it is outside it. All major cities have architectural contributions which can be considered breathtaking,

which were created in the modern era. A personal favourite of mine, to be found in London, is the stunning Art-deco creation on Fleet Street which used to house the Daily Express.

The active pursuit of a bucolic way of life in the country, even if it means a 2 hour commute, also represents the belief that the past will always be better than the future. Those hankering after the country are in truth looking to import a style of living from the nineteenth century, in rejection of the city which has become synonymous in many minds with modernity and, in particular, modern social ills. Yet surely what modernity has to offer is greater than the past. We now live in a society which is more meritocratic, wealthier and more equal than that of the years which those who reject the city are looking to recreate. Certainly we are hardwired for nostalgia, yet in its anti-urban manifestation it's an essentially irrational condition. To reject development strikes at the very core of human society. This is a pessimism which dare not speak its name, yet it is one omnipresent in British society today.

And so it is that an Englishman's home became his fortress when he moved to the country. A guard against all those who haven't been vetted and invited in for canapés. It is to the individual's detriment that he or she no longer wishes to mix with those that are not like them. We must go back to the future in order to rekindle the belief that what we create tomorrow will be better than today. Indeed, it was not ever thus. British culture positively oozed a belief in the future and, more specifically, a belief in the city during the late 1970s. For that generation, who believed in the 'white heat' of the technological revolution, the future promised more than the past. It still does today, and it lies in the city.

UNDERNEATH THE SKINS

aarrongammalliere doesn't like it but will still watch it

I hate Skins', I said. 'Write an article about it, then', I was asked. 'OK', I responded.

I didn't say anything at the time, but I wasn't looking forward to this. My relationship with this cult show is, at best, tempestuous. Like most people of my generation, I was absorbed in curiosity when the show was about to make its debut in 2007. Everyone remembers the two minute trailer showing rambunctious teenagers making out, drinking, and being downright wild in some poor mug's gaff, all to the tune of NME anthem, 'Standing In The Way Of Control'. Anticipation was high, and so too were expectations. Finally, there would be a show I could relate to that would define the lost and alienated generation of my youth, which would reflect the lifestyles of every teenager in Britain. For too long, British teens had been subjected to Californian counterparts trying to deal with the tribulations of getting their Porsche fixed or getting rid of the \$3000 overdraft on daddy's credit card. Shows like *The OC* and *Gossip Girl* have no relevance to teenagers this side of the Atlantic. Life isn't always sunny, hardly ever that rich and never that plastic and nauseating.

Skins promised to be the remedy to all the American tripe that many had unfortunately grown up around. So, on a Thursday, at 10 pm, I sat. I watched. I watched some more. And as 11 pm neared, I realised two things: firstly, that this show would be massive; and secondly, that it was really bad. The acting was, at times, unbearable, and, aside from that Sid dude, the one with the hat I myself am guilty of wearing from time to time, the characters were completely unbelievable. The plot seemed turgid and forced while the dialogue was wholly embarrassing. Despite this, however, I dabbled now and then, to see if I had missed out. I saw a guy being forced to get jiggy with his sister, and I saw Sid confess his love to an anorexic. That's all I can remember.

For all of my criticisms, though, it was, as I had guessed, a hit. I would hear the trendy girls who never look twice at a guy like me around High Street Kensington talk about it, I would hear fourteen-year-olds say how fit Tony was (do none of you realise he was that fat kid in 'About A Boy'?) and everywhere, naughty teenagers were having 'Skins-parties' at their picturesque, middle-class suburban houses. And so, it did what I thought it would: define a generation. The British *OC*, in all its decadent glory, had arrived.

The following year, series two began. Though that didn't seem to do as well, it still attracted fanatics of the first season, and themed itself around the same premise of sex, drugs, and not nearly enough rock and roll. Were the forty year-old writers of the show about youth hitting a dead-end? What else could they write about? After all, not much constitutes teenage years, besides getting girls and getting stoned, right? They could never write about something as true to life as getting bullied or struggling to find a job, or hating school, or *not* getting girls, could they? That would be far too realistic. So we were left with a clone.

2009 arrived, and a third series came. A new cast, a new college and a new start; I intended to

enjoy this one, I really did.

I was introduced to the first character, Freddie, with an implausible skateboarding sequence down a steep road. Clearly not the actor, the accomplished stand-in narrowly avoided a bus and bumped into a policeman, forcing him to drop his strawberry Cornetto on his groin. Freddie will inevitably be the protagonist of the show, and this was my first disappointment. Both the first and second series were led by a 'fittie', with the same hair, bad-boy attitude (with a soft heart, of course) and play-by-my-rules mantra. I foolishly believed that the third season would adopt a more bold and audacious approach to the show, possibly warranting a female protagonist, or at least a less polished, side-fringed poser that seem to dominate the airwaves of alternative telly these days. The character and his direction is predictable; doomed to become smitten with a girl he can't have, and slowly self-destruct in an orgy of promiscuity and friendship fall-outs. More characters were gradually introduced.

JJ, the swatty loser whose intelligence makes him a girl-repellent (and I thought my apparent intelligence would attract girls) and the third amigo, Cook, a well-acted and surprisingly refreshing character, bucking the trend of the show's usual constructs. The latter of these characters, however, was the only plausible creation amidst what was a humiliating showcase of every teenage stereotype imaginable. We are introduced to Pandora, a ditsy blonde who isn't the sharpest tool in the box, twins Katie and Emily, the chalk and cheese pair, one confident and in a relationship, the other self-loathing and reserved, and who's never had a 'bf'.

None of these tired characters, all of which can easily be seen in John Hughes' 'The Breakfast Club', a film twenty years its elder, compare to the abysmally constructed monster that is Effy. She, as Tony's younger sister, has adopted a persona many viewers of the first season saw coming; a panda-eyed vixen, who likes to flirt, and is partial to eating boys for breakfast.

Clearly, writers saw this dependent and troubled character as a perfect outlet for needless sex and a possible OD, as well as a sanctimonious moral message of 'drugs are bad and so am I, despite the show's perpetual and subversive glorification of that exact lifestyle, often depicting the morning-after regret in a manner of perverse enjoyment. Not

content to shove the poor actress into a one-dimensional role, the writers saw it as their duty to make Effy's final scene a quickie in the nurse's office. Such a juxtaposition is cringe-worthy. And I bet he didn't rubber up.

Unfortunately, the nauseating plethora of characters was just the tip of the Topshop-garment-laden iceberg. 'Funny' consisted of rude geriatrics, public flashing, farting down a megaphone, and poorly delivered slapstick. At times, the humour had remnants of *The Benny Hill Show*, with cheeky jokes about the giggle-inducing topic of sex, and out-dated innuendo. I myself was wondering whether this was a feeble attempt at irony, or a genuine excuse to please the show's slags-to-be demographic. I found myself chuckling for all the wrong reasons, and becoming quite uncomfortable at the fact that some poor writer thought this would actually pass as humorous. Granted, creating a funny script is a demanding task, but to consolidate that with hyperbolised flatulence and general over-acting leaves me feeling sorry for the actors of the show.

With a script as diabolically bad as this, one cannot hold them completely responsible for their lacklustre performances (with the exception of Cook, played very well by Jack O'Connell, who is the only salvaging feature of the show at this point.)

And so, for a few months at least, *Skins* will be the word on every trendy kid's lips, leaving me thoroughly on the sidelines for another year. Despite its flaws, it still makes for compulsive viewing, if only to see what ridiculous escapades the 'gang' will get up to next, and is an hour of your week not totally wasted.

Do I hate it? Yes. Is it bad? Yes. Will I watch it every Thursday? Yes, and for that, I feel quite ashamed.



BABYLON

stephenminas on myth and reality throughout the ages

Herodotus insisted that "in magnificence there is no other city that approaches Babylon". Some of the relics of this magnificent city are on display in the British Museum; monuments of one empire on display within a monument of another. This is a fitting reflection of Babylon's history; the Fertile Crescent (or the 'Futile Crescent', as it is under current management) is a graveyard of empires, but the Babylonians got there first.

The sweep of empires has left its mark. The Stela of Nabonidus, Babylonia's final king, is displayed with its official inscription deliberately erased – probably on the orders of Cyrus, after the Persians took Babylon in 539 BC. Under Cyprus' successors, things got worse. Herodotus tells us that Darius plotted to "carry off" a solid gold statue, "but had not the hardihood to lay his hands upon it". His son, Xerxes, had no such qualms, killing the statue's priest and spiriting it off. Persians, Greeks, more Persians and Ottomans all came and went. In 2003, the occupying Americans converted the ancient city into Camp Babylon. Damage was done and is currently being assessed. The striking photos of American soldiers at work among the ruins are reminders that history can never be completely cordoned off into ages. Babylon, once looted by the Persians, now lies at the heart of the 'Mess O'Potamia' of Bush and Saddam.

There are other artefacts on display, the most spectacular being a lion and a mushhushshu ('furious snake') dragon commissioned by King Nebuchadnezzar in the sixth century. Glazed into brick, enigmatic and unknowable, these figures lined the Processional Way – the only paved street in town – and guided those who passed below in their devotions.

Smaller relics offer insights on a more human scale. There is a tablet, c. 100 BC, of Greek

crib notes on the Babylonian language, hinting at some of the difficulties that Alexander's successors must have had. From the sixth century BC comes the 'first map of the world', naturally with Babylon at its centre (what people has ever imagined itself anywhere else?). The map locates gods, monsters and heroes, which this part of the world has never lacked.

But here, the exhibition changes abruptly, and instead of more priceless artefacts there are latter day interpretations of Babylon. There are sixteenth and seventeenth century engravings of the 'Wonders of the World'. There is Escher's 'Tower of Babel' woodcut. Some items are only tenuously connected to Babylon. Dürer's 'Penance of St John Chrysostom', the great Doctor of the Eastern churches, is included as a 'key source' for Blake's forlorn 'Nebuchadnezzar'.

Then a West Indian on video loop announces that Rastafarians equate Babylon with oppression and human destruction. This is apparently because the Old Testament Nebuchadnezzar, scourge of the Jews, "represents the entire Western system of oppression, erosion of values, selfishness, capitalism ... the people who run America..." Just as discordant is a painting by Michael Lassell, who grew up under a dictatorship in Romania and has painted the Tower of Babel as a pile of shoes.

There is also evidence of Babylon's significance to modern Iraq. Propaganda murals in the drab realist style show Saddam Hussein as the successor to the Babylonian kings. There he is, sitting astride the magnificent Ishtar Gate! Absurd and crass, this warns us what every great culture can degenerate into.

In their own way, these fragmentary interpretations are very much like the Tower of Babel, after God's timely intervention. Here we can see Dürer, plainly mad Rastafarians and Saddam

Hussein speaking past each other with glorious abandon. The Babylon of 'reality' is overwhelmed by the manifold, clashing Babylons of 'myth'.

The large, mostly elderly audience would have come with their own preconceptions, as did I. But the exhibition will have left them with no inkling of Babylonian law, which was sophisticated; nor of Babylonian legend, which tells us much more about the Babylonians than the speculations of Israelites and Greeks can; nor of the fact that the first cities were in Mesopotamia. On these the exhibition is silent.

Nor would they have learnt of Babylon's wisdom in medical matters: according to Herodotus, the Babylonians "have no physicians, but when a man is ill, they lay him in the public square, and the passers-by come up to him, and if they have ever had his disease themselves or have known any one who has suffered from it, they give him advice, recommending him to do whatever they found good in their own case, or in the case known to them; and no one is allowed to pass the sick man in silence without asking him what his ailment is". A workable alternative to the NHS?

'Babylon: Myth and Reality' demonstrates the hold that Babylon has on the Western imagination. But where is Babylon as interpreted by its Eastern inheritors? Incredibly, the only word here is given to Saddam and his awful murals. Babylon (with apologies to Vrettos, who was talking about Alexandria) has become a "city of the Western mind". It seems nothing will redeem it from this fate. Certainly not Nebuchadnezzar's old rival, the God of the Old Testament who, if this exhibition is anything to go by, still nurses a grudge.

'Babylon: Myth and Reality' is on until the 15th of March in the British Museum



PartB's Cultural Map of Britain

STORNOWAY: The emperor Claudius declares this remote corner to be the edge of the world

ABERDEEN: A gruesome accident in the kitchen unintentionally gives birth to the deep-fried Mars bar

EDINBURGH: Junkies take the romance out of heavy addiction

GLASGOW: A pub brawl gives rise to sectarian violence

DERBY: Five young men compose John Peel's favourite pop song

MANCHESTER: Liam Gallagher is born. Culture dies

STOCKTON: Ian Rankin's less Sloane Ranger neighbourhood popularises prison-wall art

GLIMBY: Brian's original Captain Birds Eye created by



enter is
culture dies.

LIVERPOOL: Birthplace of pop
music, and also, John Worrall's
cultural homeland

CHICHESTER: Childhood Arcadia
of his son, Led Zep frontman

SKWEN: Bonnie Tyler discovers
red, red, white, condemning Wales to
cultural oblivion

St. H. S. Sodor: Barbara Hepworth
with's abstract creations attract
centrecourts to Kathin

HAMWORTHY: Sports & Leisure
Centre opens in 2003. Millions
left disappointed, but are
unashamed

ISLE OF WIGHT: Hendrix sets his
guitar alight, starting a massive
forest blaze

SOUTH LONDON: GNVQ in Music
is introduced, leading to the ges,
ests of garage and grime

SANDWICH: the lo-
cal Earl puts cheese
on bread, calling it
the open sandwich.
6 years later he gets
trashed on homemade
blackberry liqueur and
puts more bread on
top of the cheese, and
shortens the name

CANNON ISLAND:
thousands wipe out most
of the locals. British
culture is temporarily
by restorator

MILTON KEYNES: a post war
Tampa to built just outside
families
the 1925 to house their perfect

THE BEST OF BRITISH

nathanbriant gets kinky

According to the BBC, in 2002 when the first 'Britishness' test was mooted for possible immigrants by the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, Norman Cook, aka **Fatboy Slim**, thought the best thing about Britain was that 'most people speak your language when you go abroad.' Hmm. **Elton John** said he loved the British 'sense of humour.' We all have things we like about Britain. Without getting too political or controversial, I think Britain's just nice already: there's a certain aspect of it that doesn't need celebrating. Waving a flag around in Birmingham with a marching band behind me like Boris Johnson did in Beijing last summer wouldn't make me feel any more nationalistic than I do now. It'd just make me look like a twat. Walking in the British countryside is lovely; the BBC is an institution that all British people can be proud of, so is the NHS; and our pop music.

Although there are some British bands that are vastly overrated (just take **Oasis** and the completely ridiculous 'Champagne Supernova' with its lines 'Slowly walking down the hall/faster than a cannonball') Britain has produced some of the best bands ever. **The Beatles**, **The Jam** and **The Libertines** are quintessentially British. However, for the best examples of British bands, let's look to **The Kinks** and **Blur**.

The Kinks were formed around Muswell Hill, North London, in the early 1960s by their lead guitarist and backing vocalist, Dave Davies, and Kinks bassist until the early 1970s, Pete Quaife, when they were both at school. Dave's older brother, Ray, joined soon after and took the role of lead songwriter, lead singer and rhythm guitarist; former Rolling Stones drummer Mick Avory completed the line-up. However, after an eponymous album, released in 1964, with the exception of 'Stop Your Sobbing' and 'You Really Got Me' there was really nothing to write home about. Their greatness was only fulfilled after a couple of years of experience as a professional band.

Graham Coxon, Blur's recently returned guitarist met Damon Albarn, lead singer and lead songwriter at school, in Colchester, Essex, in the mid-1980s when Coxon was thirteen and Albarn fourteen. Quickly becoming friends, throughout their teens they listened to classic British pop, like **The Specials**, and as they got older, **The Smiths**. Both active in the local music scene, they met computer programmer Dave Rowntree, who, in the late 1980s was recruited by Coxon as the band's drummer. At eighteen, Coxon moved down to Goldsmiths College, London, to study Fine Art, where he met the band's bassist, then-French student, Alex James. By 1991, they'd finished their first, and in places, disappointing album, *Leisure*.

The best thing about both bands is that they don't necessarily celebrate their Britishness outright, VE Day style, but blend in other influences from outside Britain. For example, although early R'n'B heavily influenced the Kinks' work, it wasn't particularly well-used, but in their

later albums they learned to blend this with British poise (and, in a way, reticence). The same thing can't necessarily be said about Blur - at times their sound is unashamedly brazen, particularly on the self-titled 1997 album and 1999's *13*. On tracks like 'Song 2' and 'Bugman' however, they can also have their mellow, heart-rendering moments, like in 'Beetlebum', 'Coffee & TV' and 'Out Of Time'.

Really, I've been skirting round the issue. There are particular songs that are so brilliantly British, and it's because of that I love them.

'Waterloo Sunset', by the Kinks, (on their best album, the 1967 *Something Else By The Kinks*), inspired me on arrival in September to make several trips down from my halls just to imagine 'Terry and Julie' crossing over the river to Waterloo station. And it's so easy to imagine. "Dirty old river, must you keep rolling, flowing into the night". I just can't say how the start of that song makes me feel. Put in the best way I can, it's the best pop song ever recorded. Everything about it is perfect. The chugging guitars in the background - the boats floating slowly down the Thames - the backing vocals: wonderful; the understated atmosphere of the song makes it as great as it is. The atmosphere of that song is unique to pretty much anything I've heard. Bloody marvellous.

Although it would never match 'Waterloo Sunset's brilliance, 'For Tomorrow' is Blur's 'British' track. (Others would argue that it's the shamefully crap 'Country House' but that's so overtly and pathetically British it's a wonder they didn't exhume Winston Churchill for the video). A wistful track with 'a twentieth century girl' 'holding on for dear life', it's a song about middle class Britishness. The inspiration for this song, the first on their second album *Modern Life is Rubbish*, was the middle classes attitudes that all of the band members had grown up in and around, and the band's increasing annoyance with the Americanised British music scene, particularly the dominance of **Nirvana**. Again, the general atmosphere of the song is the best thing about it; I can relate to 'holding on to the wheel' and just 'waiting for tomorrow' in a British way. Somehow, I don't really think some Seattle scenester moshing to 'I Hate Myself & I Want To Die' would have held the same sentiments, and I love that.

Overall, then, 'For Tomorrow' and 'Waterloo Sunset' are British classics. They're great because they're understated and don't necessarily bow down to Britain's wealth, greatness and past glories, but celebrate the things that aren't necessarily seen to be that important. In the end, these things generally deemed insignificant are the things that make us British and make Britain what it is.



FRANZ FERDINAND

sachinpatel reviews their new album

Back in 2004, I walked into HMV and was faced with the choice of buying either **The Killers'** *Hot Fuss* or **Franz Ferdinand's** eponymous debut. Thank goodness I endorsed the latter. While their contemporaries have meandered through the wilderness of Americana before pandering to their love of eighties guilty pleasures, Franz Ferdinand's career to date has been elusive, concise and, most importantly, of a consistently high quality. To those who feel hoodwinked by 2005's sophomore effort, *You Could Have It So Much Better*, I would proffer that while their debut was considered sleeker and tauter, the second release was of comparable quality, only brasher, grittier and angrier. It was recorded in a hurry - often seen as a curse - but I would maintain that its more developed song structures showed greater depth to the band's abilities.

Step into 2009 and, against a backdrop of mediocre indie and attractive female electropopsters, how does the Scottish quartet's latest effort fare? Much has

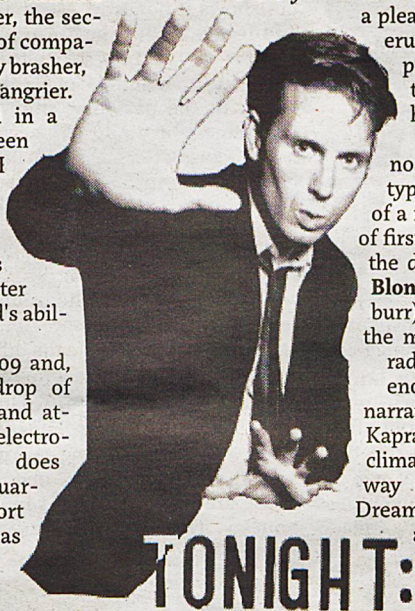
been said of the intervening years, in which the band experimented with creaky synths, Afrobeat grooves and shiny pop producers, but has any of this actually surfaced in *Tonight*: Franz Ferdinand? One thing that can safely be said is that *Tonight...* is a considerably leaner beast than the last; more focused on the dancefloor than society's ills. Tracks like 'No You Girls' and the opener, 'Ulysses', ride on football terrace choruses and hooks while successfully navigating the waters of synthesiser experimentation. When the band deal a heavier hand, as in the case of 'What She Came For' and 'Twilight Omens', the songs have a pleasing blend of retro glam and roadhouse eruptions. Treated piano gives way to well-produced rhythm-led stomps that are attractive and memorable, if not instantly history-rewriting.

Conceptually, frontman Alex Kapranos reckons *Tonight* is a depiction of a typical lads' night out, from the discovery of a new drug (Ulysses), through the naivety of first love (No You Girls), to the euphoria of the dancefloor (Live Alone, which channels **Blondie** and **Abba** through a Glaswegian burr). In this respect, the album is bang on the money: far from being a discrete set of radio-ready singles, the group are clever enough to know the benefits of pacing and narrative arc, thus the album unfolds true to Kapranos' cheeky and insightful lyrics. The climax of this night on the tiles arrives halfway through undoubted centrepiece *Lucid Dreams*, which, isolated from the context of the album, sounds wildly experimental and

strangely lurching. In context, this eight-minute marathon represents the transformation from innocence into hedonism, as a krautrock groove makes way for four minutes of Moroder-esque acid-house freakout.

After the peak must come the comedown, surely, and the album delivers here, too. The loping, sideways 'Dream Again' is reminiscent of Tom Waits at his addled best, while closer 'Katherine Kiss Me' is a partial reprise of 'No You Girls', re-imagined as a acoustic troubadour's farewell. On paper, these varied genres sound wildly disparate, but the cohesion of an album can come from lyrical themes too, as shown in this instance. By allowing the events of the night to take hold of the album, Kapranos delivers a resounding finger to those who would doubt their breadth in songwriting skills. *Tonight* may lack the instant appeal of the band's debut, and the songs may not stand the test of time in the same way, but it offers an intriguing insight into their less obvious influences - a key example being 'Send Him Away', which apes *Vampire Weekend* in its pursuit of African polyrhythms and psych-funk grooves.

Do Franz Ferdinand remain relevant in the aftermath of the scene they helped to revive? Not really, but I would argue that that scene has gone stale to such a degree that no band with any artistic integrity would even want to. From here on, the band could go in myriad directions, provided they can keep on delivering the hooks and lyrical invention and wit that have kept them a cut above the rest of the pack thus far. Long may Nick McCarthy's Moogs and Korqs fart and groan!



TONIGHT:

NIL POINTS?

georginabutler bets on britain

British music. **The Beatles**; **Pink Floyd**; **Queen**; **Coldplay**; **Radiohead**. Iconic bands epitomising British popular music and securing Britain and the United Kingdom as connoisseurs of good music. In the nineties, the British music scene brought us **Take That** and also the **Spice Girls** - five larger-than-life personalities keen to espouse "girl power" and excite the nation. Scary, Sporty, Posh, Ginger and Baby enjoyed success as members of what was arguably the best-selling girl group of all time.

Now, in the "noughties", **Take That** have reunited (minus Williams) and experienced similarly colossal success. Popular across Europe, **Take That** were superstars and they continue to reign supreme after having reunited. The **Spice Girls** also reunited for a world tour, with tickets selling out in minutes.

Cut to a studio at BBC Television Centre, where the search is on for a candidate to take us to the Eurovision Song Contest. Despite the vigour of British music, the title of Eurovision Song Contest Winner manages all too easily to elude the United Kingdom. With only a smattering of past wins (all decades ago - with the likes of **Sandy Shaw** singing 'Puppet on a String' in 1967; **Brotherhood of Man** with 'Save your kisses for me' in 1976; **Bucks Fizz's** 'Making your mind up' in 1981 and **Katrina and the Waves** in 1997) it is time the



United Kingdom won Eurovision once again. With such a strong British music scene and bands and solo artists throughout history who have shaped music around the world, first place at the Eurovision Song Contest should not be beyond the United Kingdom's reach. Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber has been drafted in to write the song and the public have had the opportunity to choose their favourite act as our entry for Eurovision 2009. The winner of the Saturday night entertainment show 'Eurovision: Your Country Needs You' and therefore the United Kingdom's entry, is Jade Ewen. Throughout the series, Jade Ewen gave polished performances, with strong vocals and clean choreography. She will sing the song 'My Time', composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber, with lyrics by Diane Warren. The song is aptly named and will represent the United Kingdom's entry well, as last year the UK languished in last place. Can Ewen sing? Yes. Can Ewen dance? Yes. Can Ewen take the United Kingdom all the way to win the Eurovision Song Contest 2009, thereby reflecting the general notable success of British music? Only time will tell.

THIS IS ENGLAND

hollicastman on how shane meadows found the real British working class

Pulzer once said, "Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail". My life experience on this fair isle has taught me that the influence of class permeates far more than just party politics; it covers nearly all aspects of culture and society. British filmmaking is no exception. Shane Meadows has made a name for himself by making movies that paint an accurate portrayal of British working class life. Considering that for many LSE students the closest glimpse of a working class Brit on the silver screen is Dick Van Dyke's mockney monstrosity in *Mary Poppins*, Meadows' cinematic contributions are incredibly valuable.

Meadows made his directorial debut in 1999, and after minor successes with *Dead Man's Shoes* and *No Room for Romeo*; *This is England* hit the back-street silver screens. As is so often the case, unfortunately, critical acclaim wasn't mirrored with any substantial box office earnings. But those who have seen the film cannot deny its power; it is Brit-grit cinema at its finest.

This is England is a bucket list must; whether you have been born and bred in Blighty or are just here for the weather, there is no better source of

insight into the realities of 1980s working-class Britain. Set in a grimy northern seaside council estate, the film follows the life of thirteen-year-old Shaun. The ill-dressed teen is taken under



the wing of a skinhead gang who fill the void left behind after the death of his father in the Falklands conflict. Striking flashbacks of power suit-clad Thatcher delivering speeches about the strength of empire are employed to chilling effect,

appearing to come from a land which time has forgotten.

This film is a powerful reminder of pre-New Labour Britain, before Tony, his spin, his M People soundtrack and the promises of prosperity. Things were bleak. The laissez-faire agenda of the new right had left a generation lost: literal abandonment for some, figurative abandonment for others (*The Iron Lady* had already professed that there was no such thing as society). Meadows illustrates how far-right extremism offered a stabilising force in many of the skinhead's lives. He doesn't romanticise the working class experience, but shows it honestly; Meadows' dictatorship is so effective because he has lived it.

It is easy for filmmakers to pander to the stereotypical caricatures of British working class angst. In the past that simple recipe mixed a coal miner and a northern accent into a terraced house. Class, after all, is not a universally comprehensible concept; along with the cuppa, crumpets and emotional vacancy, it is one of the notorious legacies for which the British are most renowned and belittled for. The films of Meadows, however, transcend the often-exercised potential for filmmakers to trivialise the working class and place them in compartments of convention. Meadows rises above; he tells the truth.

And at a time when prospects - the economy, graduate employment, and even the weather forecast - are bleak, *This is England*, though far from a pick-me-up, is gripping, and heart-wrenchingly so. The scenes of violence and racially-motivated abuse are raw. And in this rawness, exists their honesty. This is real life. This is English cinema.

MY WINNIPEG

trentmaynard on how guy maddin's winnipeg is also your winnipeg

Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Winnipeg: A city many people outside of Canada have never heard of, and that many Canadians would rather forget. *My Winnipeg*, director Guy Maddin's cinematic reflection on his hometown, is conscious of this reality, and it seeks to unravel the mystery that has kept him tied to sleepy, snowy Winnipeg all these years.

But while recognising the flaws and relative insignificance of the city, it also builds it up as a mystical space: a place of mystery and legend, with powers uniquely its own. By digging deep into the urbanity of his youth, he hopes to discover why Winnipeg has held onto him into adulthood; why he just can't escape and move on.

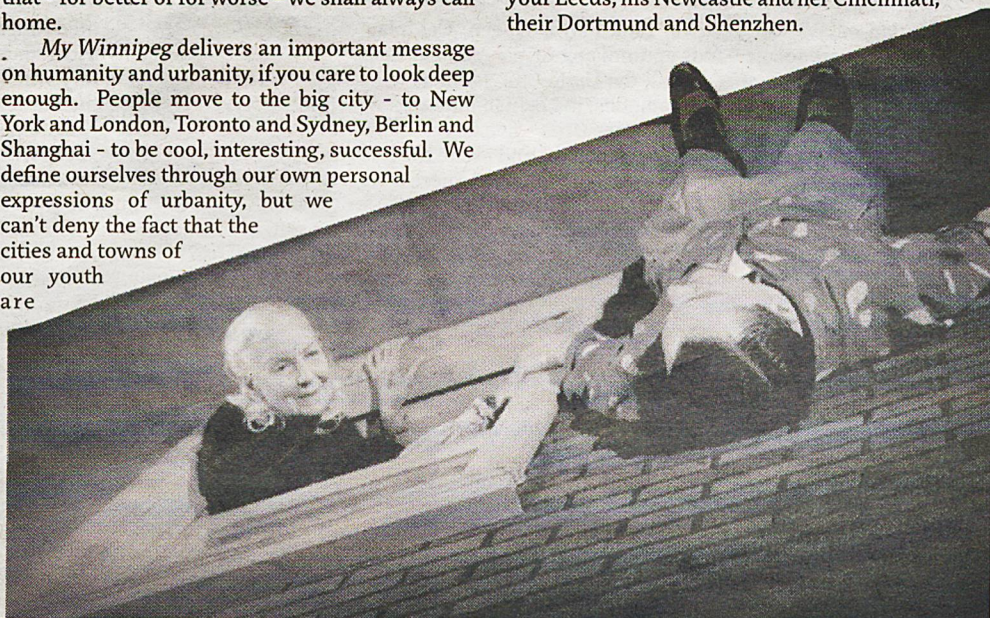
Described as a "surrealist-inflected pseudo-documentary," the film is a mix of poetic urban meanderings, historical reenactments and experimental childhood exploration. In less-skilled hands it would seemingly spiral into a disjointed disaster, but of course it could not be put into other hands - this is Maddin's Winnipeg, after all. It is a narrative straight out of the winding folds of his mind, telling the tale of a long-term relationship with a city that might be terrible, if he didn't love it so much.

And the genius in *My Winnipeg* is that the film is, in one way or another, about all of our

hometowns. This is not just an exposé on the world's coldest city, but on the spacial markers we associate with comfort, that we wrap in nostalgia, that - for better or for worse - we shall always call home.

My Winnipeg delivers an important message on humanity and urbanity, if you care to look deep enough. People move to the big city - to New York and London, Toronto and Sydney, Berlin and Shanghai - to be cool, interesting, successful. We define ourselves through our own personal expressions of urbanity, but we can't deny the fact that the cities and towns of our youth are

always with us. They have made us what we are; they are us, and they are ours. And in that truth, Guy Maddin's Winnipeg is also my Vancouver and your Leeds, his Newcastle and her Cincinnati, their Dortmund and Shenzhen.



THE UGLY DUCKLING?

loisjeary thinks theatreland is a wonderland

British theatre may not seem as sexy as its celluloid cousin, but the names you have come to recognise from the billboards and Oscar hype are those of directors and writers who are firmly indebted to the quality and reputation of the British stage.

The current legacy of British theatre seems to be in training talent which is then seduced by the bright lights of Hollywood. Danny Boyle, director of *Slumdog Millionaire* and *Trainspotting*, started his career in theatre, while *Frost/Nixon*, adapted from the West End play by Peter Morgan, is another Oscar contender.

Mike Leigh's approach as a director is rooted in the practice of improvisation, which has been a founding principle of British theatre for many years, and reflects his own theatrical training and background. Employing the discipline and rigour of improvisation has contributed to the distinctive feel and success of his films including *Happy-Go-Lucky*, which has earned him yet another Oscar nomination.

Theatreland is still considered the most important place for an actor to earn their luvvie stripes. As an actor, Daniel Radcliffe was as wooden as his Nimbus 2000 before he bared all in *Equus*, after which he was suddenly lauded and exported as one of Britain's acting hopes. The National Theatre's recent production of Alan Bennett's *The History Boys* raised the profile of

a number of young actors including James Corden, one half of the creative force behind BBC sitcom *Gavin & Stacey*, and Dominic Cooper, the buff fiancé in *Mamma Mia!*

Despite the obvious allure of film, the story of British theatre is not simply of mass migration from the stage to the screen. This spring will see Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen abandon their respective stomping grounds of *The Starship Enterprise* and *Middle Earth* to take the stage in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Although they are both experienced and committed stage actors, their return to the West End demonstrates the global appeal of British theatre.

And it's not just actors who benefit from the reputation and command of British theatre. If it were left to film, then the only opportunity ordinary folk would get to see the likes of Jude Law in person would be to wait for hours at a premiere, or to stalk him around Primrose Hill. Neither of these are advisable: they have a tendency to lead to hypothermia, arrest or both. But fortunately, as it must for all 'proper' actors, the time has come for Jude to realise that his potential can only truly be fulfilled on the stage. No doubt Jude hopes that his turn as *Hamlet* this summer will banish all vomit-inducing memories of *Alfie* forever. For the rest of us, we can look forward to a couple of hours spent in a nice theatre, staring at him legitimately, with no risk of a restraining order, because we have paid for our tickets and have as much right to be there as the next drooling no-hoper.

So, as you are captivated by the glitz and glamour of Hollywood spare a thought for good old British theatre, stuck back here in the cold, trying desperately to wrench Andrew Lloyd Webber's grasping hands from its throat. After all, if it were not for the years they spent treading the boards, who knows whether our film talent would have ever been allowed to step foot onto the red carpet.



BAD SCIENCE REVIEW: THE PHYSICISTS

rajanpatel sees social science in action at lse

The doctrine of mutually assured destruction may now be merely of historical interest, but global nuclear catastrophe was a palpable threat when Friedrich Dürrenmatt wrote *The Physicists* in 1961. The play – which explores the decision of the physicist Möbius to feign insanity in order to keep his revolutionary, and potentially destructive, discoveries secret – probed the ethical implications of scientists' new status as destroyers of worlds. Cold War physicists were suddenly forced to struggle with the consequences of their single-minded quest for knowledge.

Though familiarity with this debate may lessen *The Physicists'* impact upon a modern audience, the play's plot twists and absurdist elements keep it compelling. Möbius' fellow inmates, who claim to be Einstein and Newton, reveal themselves as

secret agents attempting to steal his ideas for their governments. All three have murdered their nurses to prevent them discovering the truth. Racked by guilt and unwilling to make his work public, Möbius persuades 'Einstein' and 'Newton' to give up their missions, only to be thwarted by his truly deranged psychiatrist Mathilde von Zahnd. The play ends with the physicists locked in the asylum as von Zahnd prepares to achieve total world domination with Möbius' ideas.

The Physicists aims to satirise the Cold War arms race, the world that Dürrenmatt saw as a madhouse and the ridiculous espionage efforts of the power blocs, and this production successfully tackled a difficult subject. Directors Balthazar van Roosendaal and Christina Ammon played up the absurdity of the situation to good effect, creating an appropriately strained and often hys-

terical tone. Nima Rahimi, Callum Hassall and Peter Yu – the physicists – and Camille Deniau as psychiatrist von Zahnd were all convincing, with Rahimi's twitchy and unsettling portrayal of the mad Möbius a stand-out. There was fine support from Talal Mahamadi as the bemused police inspector and from Kopal Kapoor as Nurse Stettler, Möbius' lover and victim.

Choosing to stage *The Physicists* was a bold move. Dürrenmatt saw theatre as a means of involving his audience in active debate – as a consequence, his plays deal with complex issues and may leave viewers more puzzled than entertained. There should be more challenging and intellectually engaging drama at the LSE, and this production was a step in the right direction.

helenreeves

IT'S NOT OVER

gives an inconcise history of british feminism

Many believe feminism as we know it began with the suffragettes but, in fact, this is not so. While it would be foolish to attempt to impose a precise starting point, Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal text *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, seems like a good place to start. At the time of Wollstonecraft's writing, women did not exist as 'persons' under the law, but were property of husbands or fathers. Marriage represented a property contract, and married women belonged entirely to their husbands. Indeed, for this reason, women could not be found liable for various criminal acts, as of course they were not responsible for their own actions; their husbands were. Nor could women own property, vote, or claim legal responsibility for their children. Against this backdrop, Wollstonecraft asserted that femininity in all its passivity and submissiveness, was an artificial, constructed concept; a product of a patriarchal culture. Yet it was not until the late twentieth century that such ideas were really given credence.

During the 1800s women's relegation to the sphere of home and hearth intensified, just as new opportunities and ideas were opening up for men. Cue the suffragettes. The first women's suffrage organisation was formed in 1865 in Manchester, and the story unravelled from there. After much campaigning both by militant suffragettes and the more passive suffragists - who were up against such gems from male MPs of the time as: "if a woman could be brought in [to the voting act], so could cows!" - and the interlude of World War I, the vote was finally won in part by 1918, and in full by 1928.

In the intervening seventy years, World War II; the inception of the NHS; housewives; the baby

boom; the contraceptive pill; relaxation of divorce and abortion laws; Germaine Greer and Susie Orbach and domestic violence and rape within marriage getting recognised as crimes have all made their mark on women's role in society. So too have Thatcher; the European Union; new reproductive technologies; internet pornography; Princess Diana; lads' mags; Trinny and Susannah and Lucy Pinder.

Today, many feel that there is no room, nor any need, for feminism. But this is far from the truth. I am not misled, I am not a whingeing bitch, and I do not hate men. In fact, I intensely dislike confrontation. Though there are a plethora of issues to contend with, I will discuss two.

Today, domestic violence (towards women, by men) accounts for nearly a quarter of all recorded violent crime in England and Wales. In fact, one incident of domestic violence is reported to the police every minute. This does not reflect overtly intensive reporting: on average a woman is assaulted thirty-five times before her first call to the police. Thus it is less of a surprise that two women a week are killed by their male partners, and indeed, nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or ex-partner. However, in a survey by Amnesty International, it was found that 74 per cent of men would report a dog being beaten, but only 53 per cent would report domestic violence to the police.

One of the worst things about the UK is how it deals with rape. At least 47,000 women are raped every year in the UK; 5 per cent of women over the age of sixteen have been raped. Yet three out of four local authorities have no support services for rape. Counter to popular myth, the majority of perpetrators are not strangers in dark alleys,

but people known to the victim. Though reports of rape to the police have increased in recent decades, research suggests that up to 95 per cent of rapes are never reported. There is little wonder that conviction rates continue to decrease. The national conviction rate for rape is 5.3 per cent, yet in many areas it is much worse; in Gloucestershire the conviction rate is only 0.86 per cent. There is an over-estimation of the scale of false reports by the police (23.8 per cent of rapes are labelled by the police as 'no crime'), prosecutors and public juries. Subjective judgements are frequently made against complainants, though research shows that the rate of false allegations for rape is no higher than for any other offence. It is not often simply a matter of 'your word against his' as many people believe - there is supporting evidence in 86.7 per cent of charged cases of rape. Why so hard to convict? Societal attitudes are not in favour of the rape survivor: 34 per cent of people in the UK believe a woman is responsible for being raped if she has behaved flirtatiously; 26 per cent if she was wearing revealing clothing; 22 per cent if she has had many sexual partners and 30 per cent if she had been drinking. This is sickening. No-one asks to be raped: if they do, it is by definition not rape.

As Germaine Greer said in 1970: "Liberation will not happen unless women agree to be outcasts, eccentrics, perverts or whatever the powers-that-be choose to call them. There have been women in the past far more daring than we would need to be now, who ventured all and gained a little, but survived after all". I do not think that the ownership of a vagina sanctions rape, beatings and belittling. Women, the war is not yet over.

IDENTITY

CROWNED OR COLLARED

waynefan proposes abolishing the monarchy



Are you British? Do you believe in slavery? If not, how can you justify supporting the British monarchy? Though the path against monarchy is well-trodden, it's vital to restate the case for why the British monarchy is so very wrong. This will not be another argument about why the royal family is irrelevant and outdated in today's society: anachronistic or not, the existence of the Royal Family is morally repugnant and based on the same system of beliefs that produced slavery and the suffering of millions.

The logic of the British monarchy follows the same principle that supported slavery. This argument may seem absurd at first: what similarities exist between royals who get dressed by butlers, and slaves who get sold and beaten into submission? However, both of these positions are constructed from the same social ideology: the idea that human beings are born into a specific class in society. Clearly, slavery and monarchy produce very different results for the people crowned or collared. Nevertheless, these two very different social positions rest on the ends of the same

moral see-saw. While one is celebrated, the other is condemned: this is the real absurdity.

Some may argue that, whether we like it or not, the world is inherently based on a class divide. Universal equality cannot exist. Thus, calling for an end to the British monarchy does not resolve anything. From this perspective, complete equality at birth is impossible and an attempt to achieve such equality may cause more problems than solutions. However, the institutionalisation of an equal society is not the aim of my argument. Equality at birth across the world is an unattainable ideal; however, we should strive to remove a national symbol that supports and legitimises ideas of class superiority and privilege by birth-right.

Millions of Britons buy into the idea of symbolic monarchy because they find comfort in such traditions. The Royal Family, they argue, provides stability and a certain continuation within society that helps to forge national unity and a sense of British identity. Believe it or not, I empathise with this argument, and believe traditions are impor-

tant for social stability. However, such social traditions could be continued without the perpetuation of a class ideology that officially legitimises the social placement of one person above another solely on the basis of birth and lineage.

For example, in Canada, the ceremonial and symbolic functions of the monarch are served by the Governor General. The Governor General of Canada is appointed by the democratically elected Prime Minister. The current Canadian Governor General, Michaëlle Jean, is a black woman born of a Haitian refugee family, who fled to Canada during her childhood. Essentially, if calling for the abolishing of monarchy is too extreme for some, a similar institution could be achieved through a more equitable and democratic selection process. The symbolic representatives of a nation could be chosen by the content of their character instead of the size of the silver spoon they are born with. This choice exists, and the right choice would say much more about the British identity than the status quo.

BIG CHEF LITTLE CHEF

sophiemarment takes a look at little heston's.

When I first heard that Heston Blumenthal, the triple Michelin starred chef and owner of the Fat Duck at Bray was going to 'revamp' Little Chef for a Channel 4 documentary, I could only do one thing, groan. You really could not get two culinary establishments (if you can call Little Chef a culinary establishment) further apart on the gastronomic scale than the aforementioned roadside eatery at places like Popham, Hampshire and Blumenthal's flagship restaurant, renowned for its two-year waiting list. This is the man who brought snail porridge to a £129 tasting menu and created nitro-scrambled egg and bacon ice cream, the same man who in his latest book, *In Search of Perfection*, provides us with a nine-page recipe for fish pie and who brought the term 'molecular gastronomy' into our living rooms. What on earth possessed him to put one foot, nay, one toe within a millimetre of the Olympic Breakfast?

The answer, apparently, is childhood nostalgia. I have to say that my childhood memories of Little Chef road-stops between interminably long and tedious car journeys are far from nostalgic but it would appear that Blumenthal developed an emotional attachment to the glowing red sign and little white hat at an early age. While Blumenthal's attempts to save the chain, which went bankrupt in 2007 only to be bought out by RCapital, may be just another in a long line of recent documentaries following the formula of big-chef-goes-to-small-town-and-brings-fresh-organic-ingredients-to-uneducated-wannabe-cooks-come-restauranteurs, it would seem that

Blumenthal's attempts have sat well with the critics. Richard Vines commented that "I have eaten out about 180 times this year and this is the most exciting menu I've seen, combining childhood memories with contemporary tastes." Praise indeed from a hardened food critic.

So what exactly has Blumenthal done with Little Chef other than piping the smell of brewing coffee and the sound of tinkling pots and pans into the ladies and gents? Looking at the menu there is little of discernable difference. There are still the age old favourites of fish and chips and bangers and mash. Just about the most controversial item on the menu is the Haagen-Daz fondue of small ice-cream balls dipped in chocolate which can be shared between two for a mere £9.95. The real difference is in the tasting. Blumenthal has sourced everything from the hake in the fish and chips to the batter that surrounds them. The Olym-

pic Breakfast now boasts British pork sausages from Finnebrogue Venison Co., black pudding from Ramsay of Carluke Ltd. and unsmoked bacon from Denhay Farms, in West Dorset. Perhaps the biggest difference however is that there are now chefs in Little Chef

rather than people dressed in chequered trousers who open packets and pop them in the microwave. It would seem that Blumenthal has succeeded in turning around the Popham chain of Little Chef but the real test for his latest experiment will be whether or not his revamp is rolled out to the other 400 chains dotted along Britain's motorways.

I still cannot but groan at the thought of Little Heston's but I kept watching the programme and that was the real point of it all.

Big Chef, Little Chef aired at 9pm 19th-21st Jan on C4.



partB recipe

Heston's Chips

easiness - 5/10
tastiness - 9/10
cheapness - 6/10

stuff that goes in it:
1.2kg/2lb 8oz potatoes, such as Charlotte or Belle de Fontenay
1 litre groundnut oil
salt



1. With the right variety of potato, these chips are crisp on the outside and light and fluffy on the inside. The beauty of this method is that the potatoes can be cooked twice and kept in the fridge until required.
2. With a sharp knife, square the potatoes into rectangles and then cut them into chips about 1cm thick. The length of the chips is not so important, but try to keep them the same thickness so that they will cook at the same rate.
3. As soon as the chips are cut, put them into a bowl under cold running water for 10 minutes or so to rinse off some of the starch, then drain them.
4. Next, bring a saucepan of unsalted water to the boil and plunge in the drained potatoes. Bring back to the boil and simmer very gently until the point of a knife will penetrate the chips easily.
5. Very carefully lift the potatoes out of the water, using a slotted spoon, and place them on a tray. Allow them to steam until they are cool, then place them in the fridge. The chips will harden when cold.
6. Heat the groundnut oil to a temperature of 130C/250F and plunge the chips in carefully as they may splutter. After a while, they will take on a drier appearance (do not let them brown at all). When this happens, they have finished their second cooking process; drain them, let them cool to room temperature, and put them into the fridge. When cold, they are ready for their final cooking.
7. Heat the groundnut oil to a temperature of 180C/350F. Carefully plunge in the chips and cook until golden brown. This may take 8-10 minutes.
8. Drain and season with salt only; they will take quite a lot. Serve.

THIS ONE TIME, AT BAND CAMP...

angelachow is working abroad for the summer

With so much choice around on where to go and what to do with a few spare months in my gap year, I decided not to climb Mount Kilimanjaro, follow the Inca Trail, or do the fashionable in-vogue backpacking type things. Instead, I decided that I wanted to go to summer camp. Camp America is a well-known organisation which recruits young people who are naively willing to work for a pittance in the countryside for a summer in North America. Camp staff are usually just a bunch of students on their summer holiday from university in the States or Britain - so ordinary youthful folks, like you and me.

For those of you who do not know what an American summer camp is like, let me attempt to enlighten you. It is a longstanding tradition that during each summer, children from all over the US are shipped off to a camp so their parents can have a holiday and go on a cruise by themselves. The conventional view of camp is a vast woody area with a lake or two, a campfire, lots of wooden cabins and innumerable children running around screaming all day. If you've seen *The Parent Trap* or *Camp Rock*, then you'll have a fairly good idea of what I'm talking about. If you've ever been to one, you'll know there's no other experience like it.

There are also a lot of variations of camp - Ben Stiller went to 'fat camp' in *Heavyweights*, the gang reminisced about 'band camp' in *American Pie*, the Addams Family kids were sent to 'brat camp' and the list goes on. It's basically ten weeks of fun for the 'happy campers' where they escape supervision of the parents and swap it for the overlooking of 'all-knowing' twenty-year old camp leaders, affectionately known as counsellors.

So, with the summer in sight I was all packed up for the next two and half months with shorts and t-shirts ready for my adventure at Camp Pinewood, a highly stereotype-fitting 'brat camp' full of rich kids and thirteen-year old wannabe Paris Hiltons in North Carolina. As I left home, I had no idea what to expect, and little did I know that it was going to be one of the most stressful and traumatic experiences I've ever had to endure, but also one of the most amazing and fulfilling summers of my life so far.

After landing in New York with the other Brits on the way to the same camp and sitting for twenty hours on the Greyhound, we were picked up by a big yellow school bus in Hendersonville, North Carolina and driven to camp. Everything stereotypical you see in films about summer camp is actually kind of accurate. As the bus drove in, a big 'Welcome to Camp Pinewood' sign greeted me, quickly followed by the massive camp grounds complete with two glistening lakes and rolls of grass surrounded by a forest of trees and hills wedged between the mountains, all smiling back at me in the serene sunshine. Arriving on the first day, it felt like it would be a good summer - lots of long, hot days filled with sunshine, relaxing, and swimming in the lake.

But I was wrong. We were immediately sent to work, being made to clean, sweep and dust the cabins, pick up all the rubbish lying about the grounds, and generally make the place sparkle.

Parents of campers are instructed to send in their child's belongings along a week early so that the counsellors can spend three days cooped up in the sweaty, overheated cabins folding the clothes and organising the cubby holes of each of the twelve 'dependents' for whom they will be directly responsible as counsellor. Did I also mention that we had to fold and make each of the twelve prison-like bunk beds to creaseless perfection and were not allowed to leave for our nights off until we passed a generally rigorous personal tidiness inspection? This was cheap labour at \$650 pocket money for the full ten weeks of our labour - little pay for such demanding work.

But it got even worse when the moment finally arrived and the campers appeared. Imagine the most spoilt kid you know, who gets catered to by mum and dad at every whim, and for whom money is no object. Much like most of the fifteen-year-olds

scene which is forever ingrained in my brain is of a camper who got a Tiffany & Co bracelet sent to her in the post; she took one look at before screaming, "Eww, I hate it" and promptly flinging it out of her hands onto the floor and swiftly walked off. I found this obscenely offensive, and a little bit disturbing.

But don't get me wrong, there are also many upsides to camp as well. The pros of working at camp definitely outweigh the cons of backchatting brats, immeasurable mosquito bites and backbreaking physical toil. We sang songs, made water bombs, water-skied and played sports all day in the 100°F sunshine and perfect blue skies. And all of this is done within the warmly protective confines of the 'camp bubble' where you forget all your cares in the world, and you suspend your real life to do nothing but have fun for a few weeks. There's no homework, no coursework and no exams. You have a structured schedule, you have a clear purpose and you have a home. Meals are cooked for you with an exciting array of typical American, super-unhealthy and calorific foods: Sloppy Joes, tacos, corn dogs, chips, chicken fingers, grilled cheese sandwiches and the like. Field trips were always good too.

The joys of continuous chanting of absurd songs on a school bus whilst driving to many a theme park, arcade centre, zoo and ice cream parlour will forever haunt me in my sleep. I do not feel that any words can really do justice to explaining the endless new and exciting opportunities you are exposed to at camp so I won't really attempt to. All I can say is that they are immeasurable.

As much as it sounds like a prepared answer to a competency question for a job interview, I learned more in those ten weeks away from home than I have ever done in ten years in a classroom. The feeling of responsibility doesn't hit you until you see the panicked faces of the parents when they drop their kid off and meet you for the first time - you're a total stranger, yet they are handing over their most treasured possession and putting all their faith in you that their child will come back in one piece. It's kind of a big deal.

So my conclusion of my time at camp is that it's pretty hard work with not much appreciation and rubbish pay: it's not something to be entered into lightly. But, really, you get as much out of the camp being a counsellor than being a camper; you make kindred friendships with the other members of staff after bonding over the hell and misery of being one, and, believe it or not, you end up bawling your eyes out and clinging to your favourite campers while the bus drives them off home at the end of the summer. Your journey from being dumped in an alien environment to making it your home is one which will stay with you, if not forever, for a very long time. The only slight drawback is that you will definitely experience a severe case of 'post camp blues': I was extremely homesick for one and a half weeks whilst at camp, but I've been 'campsick' for about one and a half years since coming home, and nostalgia hits me every time I see or hear the word 'camp'.



who appear on My Super Sweet Sixteen on MTV. Now multiply that by a hundred - these kids are something else. They all come from wealthy backgrounds and are used to having maids follow them around, treating them like royalty and never hearing the word 'no.' These campers do not just bring a backpack with a couple shorts and t-shirts with them, they pack up two log-sized duffel bags full of their Abercrombie & Fitch gear complete with Juicy Couture flip flops and D&G bug shades. And not only do they bring more than they can possibly wear so that they don't need to wash their clothes while at camp, they are sent packages from home every week full of candy, toys and other goodies surplus to most people's everyday needs. One