



THE ELECTION ISSUE



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EDITORIAL

Isn't it weird that broadcasters are confined to rigorous and strict editorial and fairness standards, but newspapers are not? I could say absolutely anything in this editorial, and, as long as it didn't break any particular laws, I can say any opinion I want. It is a popularly understood belief that the 1997 election was swung in a major part by the support from the *The Sun* was a major factor in the electoral victory. Similarly, it is thought that the 2010 election result owed much to the same newspaper's support for the Conservative Party. Naturally, a sceptical view would have it that *The Sun* saw which way the wind was blowing and joined the winning side, but people don't see it that way. It doesn't take much more than a casual glance at the *Daily Mail's* front page to know that the editorial policy is essentially rich in right-wing rhetoric, and there are, of course, plenty of left-wing equivalents.

Although there is a certain amount of editorialising for broadcasters, there is a considerable difference in how information is presented. Broadcasters are strictly controlled, especially during elections, to ensure that each of the major viewpoints is represented fairly: after all, Nick Griffin

was allowed to crucify himself on BBC's *Question Time*. Why it is that print media is not held to the same standards?

Now to deal with something altogether more pertinent. When it comes to tactical voting, well, there's no clear orthodoxy. I was talking with a friend who lives in a safe Conservative seat. I live in a marginal seat Con/Lab seat. He is keen to vote for the Greens, a party people are taking seriously in large numbers for the first time this election and I will probably be forced to vote Labour. He knows that his vote is essentially useless, because his local MP will be running virtually unopposed, so why not send it the way his heart tells him. In my case, although I also instinctively drawn to the Greens, I'm entirely conscious that there is no viable Green candidate in my constituency. What would be the point of voting Green, who won't get elected, when I *might* be able to strike a blow against the Conservatives on a national scale?

And here is the point. An individual vote is all anyone can commit to a political ideal and that's just not nuanced and subtle enough. It is a fundamental weakness of representative

democracy that the views of the individual are *only* relevant in the case that the individual happens to be an MP. Selection of that MP is merely an affair of popularity and promises, but they're appointed mouth-piece for tens of thousands of people each. I don't think for a second that my problems as a twenty-something single man are even superficially similar to a pensioner struggling to care for a relation (beyond the most basic). We may live in a similar place, perhaps even have similar economic circumstances, but I would not consider myself a suitable individual to speak on their behalf, because I don't understand it. Equally, I don't think such a person would be able to speak for my concerns. Luckily, representative democracy has a solution! A lily-livered, public school educated, university graduate (PPE) who's only ever worked as a student, then been an intern (unpaid), then joined a party and been a special advisor and... then become an MP...

Well, I'm pretty sure that I could convey my situation myself in this day and age, and I'm pretty sure that everyone else could as well... people aren't disengaged with politics, it is the politicians who are the disengaged ones.

MEET HCE



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Here
come

THE MANAGERS

Consider for a moment the absence of rhetoric and vision in the political debate leading to the 2015 General Election. Labour promises to build a strong economic foundation and balance the books, whilst the Conservatives promise to secure a better future. The Liberal Democrats have plans to make the UK the largest economy in Europe. These amount to little more than promises to competently administrate the economy, as though the economy is one of the responsibilities of government and not its ultimate exercise of power. This is not an election campaign in which we will discuss the nature of the society that we want to live in and, upon that basis, elect democratic representatives; this is an extended job interview that will culminate in the hiring

of a set of managers to oversee operations at United Kingdom headquarters. A set of goals will be established against which we can review the performance of these managers and then, over the course of five years, we will be furnished with statistics which will make us feel that management has been able to achieve its goals, regardless of what those goals were, whether or not they were goals that were worth achieving in the first place and whether or not we actually understand their deeper significance. This is the face that power presents to us: smart suit, plain tie, non-descript hairstyle, warm handshake and a helpful list of criteria for understanding your own life in relation to the structures of governance that they supervise.

You may imagine power in terms of its symbols: a gun,

a gavel, a wall. Perhaps the idea of power might evoke more frightening images, a secret court, the chains of slavery, a torture chamber, 'a boot stamping on a human face forever' in the words of George Orwell. This is only power dramatized, power acting at its limits in places where it encounters opposition, places where its logic makes no sense. Most of us in Britain only experience a version of power that is so mundane it is invisible, administrators processing forms and data inputting, architecture and city planning, dress-codes and preconceptions, wages and prices. This is power at rest, power that need not reveal itself because its logic has already been accepted and is ingrained not only in the social structure, but in the social subconscious. When tenants are to be evicted so that investors can build new apartments on the site of their current homes, when private companies providing necessary utilities charge at prices that are unaffordable for low earners, when workers are hired on zero hour contracts by firms that evade paying taxes, we might think that this is the result of some administrative error on the part of the managers we have elected, but it is not, this is the power structure of our society functioning perfectly according to its own logic. The administrative anomalies are the occasional victories scored against such injustices, when the





managers acknowledge our dissatisfaction and for the purpose of morale and productivity make symbolic concessions to our demands. Leeway can be found, the budget can be loosened a little and, most importantly, power can wait, it has time, the greater victory has already been won.

There is no need to consult psephologists to have an idea who will be occupying the managers' offices at the end of the election, the answer is already clear: managers. Even if some of them have different management theories, it doesn't matter; they are still required to manage. It doesn't matter the personal beliefs and ideas of the person holding the role if the structure in which they operate demands that they pursue a particular set of outcomes. The world in which these managers operate has been reduced to a world of costs; regardless of a thing's social value, the desire of the community to pay for and retain it or the intangible benefits it provides, it can only be understood in terms of the expenditure required to maintain it and the income

it brings. Worse, though we act as shareholders when hiring these managers, the investors to whom they must report on budgetary matters, increasingly most of us assume the role of employees when dealing with them. We are called to account for our consumption of company resources, assessed as to our overall value in the organisation. Even the minority of us who are net contributors to the national purse in the form of our paid taxes must know that the game is now played in other arenas. GDP, imports and exports, foreign investments and trade agreements, quantitative easing, currency devaluation, the real business is conducted in rooms we will never enter, using language that we cannot understand. The structure is changing around us, but we are the administrators still struggling away using the old systems, obsolete hardware, software designed for a bygone age, telling ourselves that we are still relevant, refusing to believe that things are changing. We might believe that the reason we haven't felt management's hand on our

shoulder, experienced the sensation of wilting under its scrutiny is because management trusts us to get on with things, is happy with our productivity, values our contribution and sees us as partners in the common endeavour. Their next visit will shatter this illusion.

We are not efficient, relevant or productive and, as these are the only measures of value in the managerialist society, we cannot be said to be of any value. We are completely redundant and by the time anyone bothers to construct an argument to find us a place within the structure we will already be swept to one side, our id cards and access passes will be revoked. Of course a sympathetic management will try to phase out the redundancies, find spaces for some of us in the new arrangement of things, but ultimately what can they do? The structure is what it is and we no longer have anything to contribute.

David Simpson



the big deal

charmed by his voice
you've taken your pencil
made your cross in his box
you knew you had to
show your support
but the winner is pre-
ordained and it is not your man
who will stand at the top
of the stairs so whatever happens
it's a relief to think that you
will not be to blame



if only the market could be left to ..

.. the roistering of a restaurant-ruining dining society.
The sun is starting to shine and we are fixing the roof.
Now the marchers are travelling backwards.
To a moment of gaiety with a yellow budget box.
At 14 she smoked her first crack pipe.
If you hold the balance you hold the power.
Buy baby a stretchy hijab with fake Versace logo.
Strictly Come Voting for the modern electronic era,
I think the risk of the plan is amber-red.
You call it exciting. I call it scary.
Many manicurists may be smuggled from Vietnam.
A & E, worse than a War-Zone
...when the city boys commit their complex frauds.
Young girls are groomed on the streets.
Inter their bodies as becomes their births.
Food bank vouchers, an essential piece of survival kit.
They've changed the recipe for Cadbury's Crème egg.
...the kippers - fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists.
All floppy hair and supreme confidence. ..
Knowing full well she would have no instinct for freedom.
So go back to your constituencies and prepare for insanity.
Which would you make bird of Britain ?



'First Past'

Mayor Christie wanted to know what was what. 'I'm holding a snap election,' he told me. It was a Monday in late August and I had just gotten back from a week's holiday down the coast in Lymington.

'Yes,' said the mayor, sprawled heavily behind his desk, 'it's a snap election. The arrangements have all been made. I want to see what's what.'

'You're out mayor, is what's what,' I thought to myself. Why, the town was backsliding so fast parts of it were sinking into the sea! The mayor was old-guard: tyrannical; bureaucratic; corrupt. Things, when they got done, got done clumsily; heavy-handedly. He had blundered through his years in office and it was time for a change. 'What's what,' I sniffed, standing thin and straight; ridged in the middle of his cluttered office. 'Entirely understandable sir.' That was why I'd been on holiday in the first place after all: not to see the sights of Lymington – Lord no! – but to hammer out a plan with Duxley, the mayor's rival and sworn enemy. Duxley was progressive, liberal, and above all, young.

'I fear that core support is weakening,' the mayor said. He sounded weary and looked at me with big watery eyes.

I nodded. 'A snap election,' I said. 'It's for the best sir. Catch the blighters out.'

Duxley had been very hospitable, of course. Dinner and a friendly woman. There was a job and a pay rise for me, if I could help get the mayor out and him in, he had said. Well, anybody would be mad to turn that down now wouldn't they?

'Superlative sir,' I said, turning sharp on my heels, and then over my shoulder. 'See you tomorrow.'

'Bright and early,' said the mayor.

'Up with the lark,' said I. The old fool's days were numbered, I thought to myself as I sauntered down front steps of the town hall.

X

The next day it was so quiet at the office that it could have been a Saturday. 'Make the most of it,' the mayor said. 'With the clerks out manning the polls, we've got the place to ourselves.' It was so quiet, in fact, that I even managed to get a covert telegram out to Duxley.

Mayor in trouble. Ghost town here. Betting on a landslide.

By the time the reply came it would be too late, of course.

I was the last voter at the building's polling station that night. 'Missed the rush, eh?' I said to the official on duty. He was a heavysset man. Tattoos peeked out





BY STEVEN QUINCY-JONES

the end of his shirt sleeves. He looked me up and down and went back to his paper.

The ballot paper was straightforward enough. I made my mark next to Duxley's name, like this:

Christie []
Duxley [X]

I posted my ballot paper in the slot, and stepped out of the booth confident that I had made the right decision. 'Don't worry,' I said to the disinterested official with a wink: 'we'll lick him.'

X

By Wednesday morning the ballot had been counted. 'Can I have a word?' the mayor asked me, leaning heavily on my desk, knuckles white under his weight.

'Yes', I said.

'In my office' he growled.

I knew I was cooked when I saw the heavysset official from the polling station standing next to the mayor's desk. The official wore a silver knuckle-duster on his big right hand.

'Mutiny', said the mayor, collapsing in his chair. 'Have you anything to say for yourself?' I shook my head. The mayor spoke to the heavysset official. 'Lock the door', he said.

Later that day a telegram arrived for me,

but I was nowhere to be found. It was from Duxley.

Landslide? Would that there were an election for us to win! I checked this morning – our contacts have heard nothing of the sort. Alas, we must bide our time.

There's life in the old dog yet, I thought to myself. The mayor had put on a sham election: I was the only voter.

I received this revelation as the knuckleduster broke the first of my ribs.



Bubble & Squeak

I am at large!
The sun revolves
not around The Hague,
but instead
circumnavigates
my mirage.
BUILT FROM BRITISH TOIL!
No interference from quangos
spouting continental jargon.
Did I hear correctly?
I beg your pardon?!
This is our sacred garden!
Our hard fought soil!

You turn if you want to.
Charge your Prosecco
and Gran Gala
to the EU.
I'll raise my pint of mild,
flat as grey rain
drizzling down
on Shoeburyness
and Salisbury Plain.
And I will know
I have remained
British by decree!
My Sterling worth
its weight in gold
to me
and to the world!

You kip if you wish.
But I will stay alert
and equipped!
And I will not cease
till time I reverse!
For our common wealth...
Long before this great nation
became but sorely cursed.
Where's the fight in you?
WHO ARE THE LION HEARTED?

The Poem:

We are to imagine this poem is lovingly crafted by a mystery politician. With characteristic fervour, this celebrated individual informs us of his undying love for Great Britain and relays his deep-seated mistrust of Europe. He also takes the opportunity to underscore his part in choreographing his country's imminent resurrection as a global superpower. The poem is called 'Bubble & Squeak' as this tasty treat is a quintessentially British artefact. It was a toss-up between that and 'Spotted Dick'...

The Writer:

By day, Aysar Ghassan teaches Design. By night, he masquerades as a poet, reading his material at gatherings in the Midlands and in London. Aysar's odes are character-driven and reflect his continued fascination with people and other furry animals. Recently, Aysar was commissioned to write and read a poem for Birmingham Central Library's Burns Night Supper. At the end of April he will be hosting Earlsdon Festival's inaugural Poetry Fringe event. No pressure.

Selection of Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Barking & Dagenham

We can't pin a rosette on a donkey,
We can't stick a badge on a baboon.
Let's take this seriously,
The papers have to be in soon.

Having said that, I think I know
Someone who could win.
His profile is quite literally low
And he dribbles down his chin
But you won't doubt his dedication
Nor his willingness to please.
Yes, there's the defecation
But look at the current MPs.
If we're talking about giving a shit
And not just on the floor,
I propose we select as our candidate
Zebedee, my Labrador.



To Vote or Not To Vote: Why is That The Question?

As the General Election draws near, talks of public debates and the inevitable merit of each candidate being calculated by whose dog is the cutest or what their tie says about their personality are welcomed into the public arena. These dry and often cringeworthy events, in which a selection of wealthy white men attempt to represent a demographic that they cannot understand, are presented to the electorate as a means of determining the country's immediate future; after a carnival of awkward interviews, Mean Girls style bitching and a reminder of all of the good and bad that they have

each done situated within an isolated vacuum ignoring any sense of historical materialism, we, the voices of British democracy, are expected to do our part (a right gifted to us by the very men we are to decide on) and vote.

But why? Is voting all that important for achieving the social change we deserve? Is it the best means of being represented and having our needs and beliefs respected in an official parliamentary capacity?

From a liberal perspective, voting is a right. Our forefathers fought



the fascists seven decades ago so that we could live in a democracy, not a dictatorship. Minorities have fought for the right to vote for over a hundred years and gosh darnit, we'd be disrespecting their honour by abstaining from the most important tradition of our generation.

And yet, from a radical perspective, one that removes all politic activity away from parliament, voting is a masturbatory act that allows a select few to feel like they've achieved something huge by doing very little. The idea of a vote being a right that we have earned is disgusting and condescending. The invocation of minority groups fighting for the right to vote ignores the surrounding prejudices within these so called radical groups. Voting was originally something denied to all but the rich men in society, who believed that to put such a responsibility into the hands of the lower classes would be catastrophic. But, after 1832 and the introduction of the Reform Act, men were given the right to vote regardless of class or suffrage. A success for the working classes? Maybe. But it still took close to a century for women to gain the right to vote, and even then this movement was born not out of a desire to be equal to men, but out of a disgust that black men were able to vote before they were. The Suffragette movement for all of

its successes was still a movement based on the liberation of the white middle class women of British society, with no thought for those struggling beneath them. The idea of rights is, to radicals, verbose and patronising. Having to fight for scraps handed to us by the elite in order to maintain their hegemonic power over us has taken over the discourse of voting, and has trapped us in this five year cycle of expecting change through an arbitrary process.

The social stigma surrounding not voting is a damaging discourse that, ironically, trumps freedom of expression with the idea to uphold what many consider to be a democracy. "If you don't vote, you can't complain" says the liberal, whose uncritical eye refuses to realise the damage that voting can actually cause.

A materialist believes in the consequences of events historical and present. Historical materialism is the belief that, put simply, nothing happens without due cause; shit never just happens. By voting one is complicit in a series of events shaped by the political climate. It legitimises a system that, within our global position of power, actively removes the autonomy of other countries and other individuals. It restricts dissent within a supposed



democracy. It kills brown and black children across the world, be that by drone or economic sanctions. The events of today are inherently and inextricably linked to the events of the past. Our vote allows for all of the above and more oppressions like them to continue in the name of white supremacist capitalism. Voting, to me, is nothing more than choosing the bullet least likely to kill me. Either way, I'm getting shot.

Voting is a right administered to many and if you want to engage in that right, then more power to you. The issue is that there must be a radical upheaval of our approach to voting. Public apathy is not the issue in a modern democracy, under-representation is. Middle class policies have little to give to those facing the brutal realities of austerity in Britain. What we have seen in this country since 2010 is a rising anger that takes to the streets. Single mothers occupying empty buildings. Angry students marching for Free Education. Climate justice actions against fracking. Black revolutionaries successfully stopping the flow capital to protest police brutality. Apathy is not the problem. People are realising now what a vote means for them and what they can do instead of voting, which is so much more than the ballot.

Promises made will always in the political arena be promises broken. To vote on promises alone is to naively and passively accept our own oppression. To believe that there is a single party that can fulfill our basic needs and help us to 'build a better future' is ridiculous. The interests of any political party are how to further expand capitalism in the interests of accumulated economic wealth. Even if the working classes were to rise and bring forward a new socialist government, the interests of outside control (i.e. The EU, see Syriza in Greece) would never allow those promises to be realised therefore denouncing any voter representation.

Emma Goldman said it long ago, and it still rings true today:

"If voting changed anything, they'd make it illegal."



To vote
Not to vote

Not to vote

TO VOTE

To vote

To vote

TO VOTE

Not to vote

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TO VOTE

To vote

Not to vote

To vote

Not to vote

TO VOTE

NOT TO VOTE

TO VOTE

Not to vote

NO VOTE

ot to vote

Not to vote

To vote

to vote

Not to

Politikos

Parties shouting screaming schreeching
Involved government; small government
Living within means; seeking out justice
Reagan trickledown; Swedish egalitarian
Right to choose freely; hold all lives high
Husband and husband; husband and wife
Sectarian warfare
Marital strife
Without a therapist
Without a mediator
Without an arbitrator
Without a God
(Emperor)
(Pope)
(Method)
The claws come out
Gone is the sense of civility
Gove is the sense of unity
But not the cents
Or the certainty
Only the party platform
Only winning the game
Only the sound bite of fame
All compromise is a lie

Marketing Strategy

Robotic Joe Schmoe, raised to be nothing other than a conduit for clever Coca-Cola and masturbation McDonalds ads, raised from the earliest innocent age to be a pig for slaughter, the faceless somehow legally-human entities lick their chops while they slowly and subliminally skin Joe's layers of buttery blubber off his sea of lard cells amassed all around his ultimately huge carcass. Smiling widely like that famous Marquis, they slice off all the fat and valuable organs Joe has unwittingly chosen to donate to them over his life. They gorge themselves on the amount it fetches at the market and after the conceptual constructs and CEO's have wasted away all their loot they leave just enough of Joe's leftover bones to send to his relatives and feed his children and the circle of life begins anew.



The Blue Day

“I, Rafe Proctor, work in the Extraction Compound of Birmingham’s Municipal Work Force. On average, our sector can extract up to thirteen million chicken embryos for every cycle. The commitment shown by me and my fifty thousand colleagues contributes to the survival of the great islands of the European Union. Without us this prosperity would diminish and the UK would be the next island walled up and left to rot. In the echoing words of the great forefathers of the Order, ‘It is the individual that makes a team work, it is the individual that makes a society work, it is the individual that makes a civilisation work.’”

I could see my reflection as I said this into the monitor; the bags under my eyes seemed to be getting deeper, darker – then again it might have just been the lighting. The screen flashed red.

“Please repeat; last sentence inaudible, last sentence inaudible...” The posh, familiar and monotonous voice of the Order wound through my head like a slow drill. I was a bit hungover so my voice was obviously garbled.

“Fuck’s sake, yes, alright,” I said, holding the audio button again. I repeated the last sentence and the screen went green.

“Thank you Rafe Proctor, may you have an efficient and influential day.”

“Yeah, cheers,” I said, turning and thudding toward the kitchen. The Order let us elect our own morning prayer. I was pretty happy when this new policy came in because the one they used to make us say was really wishy washy, full of self-gratification and sentiment. I ended up leaving my submission to the last minute and what I came up with was basically the same, maybe even shitter. I’d been meaning to request a modification for ages.

“The Subversives shot and killed four Finnish border control police...” I looked up to the TV on the wall, watching but not watching as I sipped my coffee. Polly ran in and I picked her up and plonked her on my leg. She was riding the pony figure I’d got her across my chest and up to my face, the mane tickling my cheek.

“They were eventually caught in Urho Kekkonen National Park. Twelve of the Subversives were killed and the remaining six surrendered have now been taken back to the Russian compound.”

She started trotting it along my head and her big blue eyes lit up when I let out a neigh. I could hear June behind

me opening and shutting cupboard doors.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this in the week now,” she said, that angry tone sitting on the surface like moss on a pond.

“I wasn’t bad, June, for God’s sake. I wasn’t loud or anything.” I didn’t bother turning around, it was too early for an argument.

“Rafe, you’re out getting pissed every night now, it’s a joke.”

I sighed and rubbed my face, Polly did a little neigh back.

“The west wall of the Russian compound has been rebuilt in keeping with the Order’s new regulations for Subversive incarceration. The new kilometre-high walls will be applied across the entire grid as of 2350 and will be the biggest operation undertaken by the Order.”

“I just don’t want to see you turn into the others. Down the Social every night after work, it destroys families Rafe. Ellie’s Jack down the road, he basically lives there now, and they used to be so happy.” She was still banging around as she said this, it amazed me how functional she could be whilst angry. I kissed Polly on the head and put her down before grabbing my work bag.

“I’ll see you tonight, June.” I said, stopping at the door. She stared at me as I went to leave, she seemed tired, defeated. It was like looking in a mirror.

I was exactly one hundred and ninety-eight extractions into my weekly cycle. It was half eleven in the morning and a Thursday so this was really good. Each of our minimum daily targets was at least fifty successfully inseminated units. If you were sick then you could appeal, because they wouldn’t want you contaminating the embryos, but if you had a broken bone or whatever then you’d just have to power through. I’d seen people extracting with arms in slings and legs in casts. It was pretty rare for us not to hit our targets, though. I’d been there eight years and in my division only twenty three people were taken away by the Order for exclusion.

At that point I was well into the ‘zone’, as we liked to call it - a state where all of your external thoughts stop and you become completely lost in the graft. I pulled out my interceptor tool off the magnet and carefully applied it to the next hole in my vat.

“Here ya’r, mate,” Andy said, locking in the tray of operated eggs. I ignored him and extracted my eighty fifth nucleus, keeping the ninety degree

angle perfect. I then quickly rotated it to the new tray and slid the extraction into the syringe before carefully injecting the nucleus into the egg. The container flashed blue, indicating a successful operation, and I felt the tiny hit of endorphins flow through me. It quickly faded and I turned to Andy, returning his grin.

“Sorry Andy, cheers for bringin’ it so quick,” I said, pressing my glove against my brow.

“You’re on some form today, int ya?”

“Yeah man, just gettin’ stuck in, like.” I leant back on my station and took

a swig from the Lucozade bottle, the cold liquid fizz gushing down my body.

“Can you gimmi a hand actually, Pro? One of the units is stuck in the cogs.”

“Fuck’s sake, again?”

“I know mate, they need to get us a new machine in, bad,” Andy said, already turning for his unit on the other side of the walkway.

There were about fifty eyeless, mouthless, wingless and featherless chickens crawling over one another in his storage bucket. The conveyer belt to the right was spasmodically jutting and blood was sprayed across the nearest wall.



“I was going to shut it down, but I thought I’d better check first.” Andy said, looking into the hole adjacent to the belt.

I bent down and put my arm in, grabbing the moving limb trapped in the cog.

“Put it in reverse, Andy,” I said, wincing with the stretch. The noise abruptly changed and I pulled out the bloody, convulsing animal in one quick stroke. I fell back slightly and looked at it in my hand; it pretty much looked like the chickens you’d get from the Ration Lorries, only it had a head and its muscles twitched, like there was a kitten in there playing and pushing from the inside.

“Cheers mate!” Andy said.

I nodded to him and threw it into the bucket with the others.

I leant back in my chair at the Social and exhaled a cloud of vapour. I turned and looked down the long line of docks, each with men and women propped in them, just like me, smoking and drinking after another long day. I sat back up and put my glass under the spout for another refill. I was drinking more heavily than usual and I didn’t really know why. It was at times like that, when I’d be enjoying and wanting

it the most, that I’d quietly wish it wasn’t free, that I didn’t have the easy option. I drank the dregs and stumbled to my feet. I had to walk through Lickey Hills to get home and when I got to the top I stopped and looked out in the dark to the glowing blue of the city, pulsing with all its cracks and symmetry. Feeling lost I turned and thought of nothing.

In the morning I kissed Polly on the cheek, being careful not to wake her. She looked so tranquil lying there, resting in the warm moment like a white cloud in a still sky. I stood there staring for a short while, lost in the mush of thoughts that comes with a morning hangover. I tried to cling onto my mind’s quietness, but by the time I got to the monitor and saw myself looking back at me, reality fell on me like a lead slab. I pressed the switch and focused on my eyes; the bags were definitely getting deeper.



Words to Keep the Irish People Reassured

"A committee is now being set up to investigate whether it will be cheaper in the long run to promote Cork as a 'Venice of the south west.'"

- Waterford Whispers News

You've stood accused, by yourself,
of being born without a silver spoon
since at least the day you told a man in Athlone
he could use a day's work.

And like Lenin, famously brought to Ireland
by none other than yourself,
a man of the people,
for the people.
Someday, too, they'll know it.
Then you'll be every historian's
new book of a revolutionary in the pipeline.

You watched great iron doors swing open
at a wave from Bertie,
while you squeezed in through back door dog flaps
and stained your suits
on grimy kitchen linoleum,

but it's no matter now.
You'd change absolutely nothing,
because the faith and trust of us all
is yours and dearly earned,
while Bertie was last heard muttering to a pint of *Bass*
that he has no knowledge of such an investigation.

It could only have been your sacramental voice
from the Dáil one rainy day in February
saying *Venice got used to it*
to restore calm among those rebels down there,

and although the next time I called your offices
for a comment you weren't available to take it,
I knew it was because you were busy
rooting out your *English-Irish Irish-English* dictionary
to look up the *as Gaeilge* of gondola.



Of fences

'Two roads diverged in a yellow wood'
Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

'Our wills and fates do so contrary run'
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Yes, two hands on the steering wheel
allow for a manual precision,
or so the guides inform us.

Two sides allow a balanced debate,
or a complicated story.

Two attempts, a hope
of passing our failures.
Two failures, another proof
of past wrongs.

Two possibilities allow a choice, of dilemma.
In two minds allows that we are indeed human.

Two kidneys – a spare organ for selfless donation,
or twice the capacity for filtering mundane exchanges.

Two bricklayers will not mend fences.
Boundaries built by bullies are not there to sit on.

Two hands cupped:
an arc for drinking.

Two animals, arked,
did not allow for
the Woolly Mammoth,
Dodo, Steller's Sea Cow,
Falkland Islands Wolf,
Caribbean Monk Seal,
Javan Tiger or Chinese River Dolphin

Two elements,
say hydrogen and oxygen
might allow
a molecular reaction.
Sometimes,
that makes water
this vessel overflowing, maybe.

In two minds allows that we are human in deed.
Two hands joined, a more-than-flesh linking.

Two things which life does not allow:
words that can be throated back,
and bullets which re-enter a gun.

I have seen the artist's photo
of a red rose bud, shattered
by one small pellet.

When Malala Yousafzai rose
from the metal shell-shock
of her school bus, she spat
their fears in her blood,
then softly spoke louder.

When doubts flower,
then harden to a bullet,
will I know how to bite it?

Not Plato's Republic

Walking across Clapham Common. I stumble now and then. Shoe trouble, and because my mind is elsewhere. My head's in the clouds as they say over here. Since I lost my job I'm occupied by thoughts.

Such as how it came about that people accepted someone's right to own land. Somebody must have come along and said a given piece of ground was theirs and this was believed. Fences were put up, the *owners* saying, 'This belongs to me.' In the abstract it's hard to imagine, but people are gullible, believing all they're told; favouring acceptance over questioning. They bow the head in obedience to those who take; to those who as a consequence of past takings, now *have*. The have-nots continue to have nothing and now we are seeing in today's world, a vast and increasing homelessness. Those who have do not give a damn. And as for the silent majority we hear about, which side do they favour? Out of habit, out of fear, they cosy up to the status quo, trying, for the sake of expedience, to curry favour with the owners of things. So they'll be patted on the head by their *masters* and told they're well behaved. Praise which they hope will guarantee their safety. All lives are short and they want to get ahead in theirs; don't want trouble, or be

associated with the have-nots. Even so, some of the servile *good* ones will end up on the street. Nobody ever thinks in terms of a Social Contract -- for more than obvious reasons.

I'm a homeless man, originally from Geneva, who is despondent about the growing gap between the poor like myself, and the rich. Bankers, for example, earning in excess of a million pa. The auric myth in their case is that they managed to achieve this by being especially gifted and brilliant. Not so in reality of course. It's a control-club with many mediocre members; many incompetents-with-connections in the nest. Then there are the super-rich. It's a known fact that some of the very richest companies and individuals in our midst pay nothing in the way of tax at all. And the politicians, what are they doing about such gross inequalities? *Mm, these are difficult times*, a prominent MP with a guaranteed pay-rise murmured complacently to a pal of mine facing homelessness. *Did you vote for me?* Suffice it to say, we are **not** living in Plato's *Republic*.

So, the rich get richer, accumulating more and more artworks and property and the poor go on getting poorer, as is well documented, many ending up on

the street. Nobody cares to think a crime has taken place. 'A dog-eat-dog world', some with a vested interest like to bleat, 'is the *natural order* of things'. These are the types who do not believe in *Society*. 'Nasty, brutish and short' being what they'd actually be left with in their little savage landscape if it ceased to exist altogether.

Well from Hobbes, back to my fellow countryman – Rousseau. What he *didn't* mean by a Social Contract: 'An agreement that the dispossessed will go to war to fight for the possessions of the rich. They will be plucked from their miserable, filthy gutters at necessary moments and sent to die for *Their* Country.' Nice one greedies.

I trip on a clump of grass in my shoes that don't quite fit. The clouds inside my head have gone dark with the knowledge of what's happening in the world around us. Looking up I see Holy Trinity Church before me and I think of the Clapham Sect, and of Wilberforce. It's said that slavery is hugely on the increase in modern times; that if you're *au fait* you can buy a person for £50.00 or less.

It troubles me that political philosophy is a time-waster for the vast majority. A no-no; a marginalised taboo – appropriate fodder for the despised

intellectual few but poison to everybody else. *Survival of the fittest*, a phrase emptyheaded fatcats have got hold of and now witter about self-importantly, is the smuggest, most overused tautology of the age.



Twelve ways to avoid voting at the General Election *(with thanks to Adrian Mitchell)*

One: STAR-STRUCK

I can't vote cos I love Russell Brand and he says don't vote and anyway his hair is awesome.

Two: OVERWHELMED

They all look the same to me. I don't know what they stand for and what's the difference between them anyway? O God, I need a cup of tea.

Three: CONFUSED

What election? I don't watch the news. Is it like the Great British Bake-Off? Will it be multiple choice?

Four: PUT-OFF, VULNERABLE ETC.

The Voter Registration Form is too complicated and I don't understand it. I wanted to vote, but it's all jargon, and it's just too much.

Five: PHILOSOPHICAL

Unfortunately democracy is a flawed system full of contradictions and I shall be busy planting this year's potatoes.

Six: PRACTICAL

If it's raining I shan't be voting, or if I don't get home from work in time. I've got to give the kids their tea and get them to bed. Why can't we vote online?

Seven: ELDERLY OR FRAIL

It's a long way to the polling station and Thursdays is my day for Skyping my grand-daughter in Australia.

Eight: REASONABLE

Politicians! Liars! Careerists! Who are you frigging kidding? Get out of here!

Nine: FASHIONABLE

Polling booths are just so last millennium, darling. I wouldn't be seen dead in one unless it was in Mumbai, or maybe Paris.

Ten: WORRIED

What if I vote for the Greens and that helps Nigel Farage get in?

Eleven: HEALTH AND SAFETY

I refuse to vote until I have received a completed risk assessment form for the possible dangers of entering what is often a flimsily constructed polling booth.

Twelve: HAD ENOUGH

I can't be arsed really. UKIP, Labour, Tories. Whatever.

Joni Was Right

Joni was right: justice is just ice
Diluting the truth your whole life
Because I once had the impression
That America and Britain
Cared greatly about the poverty-stricken
But the planet we live on
Is reigned over by greed
Empires have fallen and we still make them bleed

This little piggy went to market to make his profits increase
So what if he tramples on smaller, struggling economies?

Joni was right: justice is just ice
Cold, hard and transparent
The World Bank a window to the West's soul
Scoring many a deliberate own-goal
Anything not advancing their role
Will be swiftly deposed
Thanks to majority rule
Who left the bullies in charge of the school?

Global X-Factor jury turning down the unworthy
Toast themselves with champagne while millions die thirsty

Joni was right: justice is just ice
Something that melts away
At the prospect of money
Resolution seems an impossibility
While some have stable currency
Heightening their indifference
With no vote and no voice
Those seeking equality are left with no choice

Financial security is an issue of geographical fate
The foreign oil that we siphon steadily fuels deadly hate

The Third Party

For those of you disillusioned, disenfranchised American voters who might wish for a successful third party, please know that we have one. However, it may not be the one you want or wish opt for. It's a party you must vote for, if you vote at all. Let us call it the Money Party. Its membership is extremely small, perhaps as few as one percent, and restricted to a select few international corporations along with a very select few wealthy individuals, make no mistake, it has managed to take control of both the Republican and Democrat Parties, making them both obsolete and insignificant. The Money Party does not represent the interest of America or your interest, nor does it owe allegiance to any nation. In fact, it would appear that we are now living under an entirely undemocratic system that Italy's Benito Mussolini properly labeled Fascism.

America a fascist state? The man's insane." Isn't that what many of you are thinking? But, hear me out in this, along with the vision and wisdom of our Founding Fathers. The end of democracy, and the American Revolution will occur when the government falls into the hands of the lending institutions and moneyed incorporations." Thomas Jefferson. Have we not indeed fallen?

"History records that money changers have used every form of abuse, intrigue, deceit and violent means possible, to maintain their control over government, by controlling money and its issuance." James Madison. It's now referred to as The Federal Reserve. It's not as though we haven't been warned. More recently, of course, we've had Ike's warning of the Military Industrial Complex, and if that were not enough, we suffered the assassination of JFK, who had the audacity to threaten the Federal Reserve System with Executive Order 11110. Look it up.

Unfortunately, no president has since dared to defy the Money Party in its quest for global military and economic hegemony with the hope of returning power to we the people. One could and most properly should ask how this alarming situation was allowed to happen. It, too, goes back to our very beginnings . It rests on the age old question of whether or not we are, as the poet John Donne put it, "our brother's keeper". Then back even further than that with the teaching of Jesus. "Truly I tell you that whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

How did this most sensible and simple

wisdom get lost in what should have been the intellectual evolution of our kind? For an answer, let us return to our beginnings as a nation and the creation of the Great American Dream. Freedom was the key to all that one could desire . . . to happiness. And that was great, but with the assumption that we could determine for ourselves what constitutes happiness. Unfortunately, this is where we went awry. That Great American Dream came to mean nothing more than the accumulation of material wealth. This, of course, meant that such wealth must be derived in competition with, or in many cases at the expense of, our fellow man. Thus, followed the ridiculous concept of “The-Rugged-Individualist” the man who needed no one, the man who would build it by himself. This, of course, was in sharp contrast to what John Donne and Jesus had in mind. Of course, not everyone wished to be or became the rugged individualist.

There were those who recognized that we, not the individualist, but we, were responsible for the creation of what was to be the great promise of an equal and just future for all. It would happen only through cooperation. This meant that there would be not one but generally two approaches to its realization throughout the population. One would insist that

man should be free and unfettered by a government which he often viewed as an obstacle to his quest for material gain.. The other approach, recognizing his brother's need as his own, viewed his government as the vehicle for assuring equality and justice for all. These two approaches grew into what we now term the conservative Republican and progressive Democrat Parties.

To hear the parties go at each other, one would think that one or the other must have evil designs in their attempts to force their erroneous convictions on the other, when actually, neither is without merit. The conservative's initiative cannot be denied, nor can his preference for continuity and stability. These can be viewed as admirable and even necessary traits. On the other hand, who can deny that the progressive's willingness to risk change leads to progress as opposed to stagnation, and that his concern for others benefits both the others and himself. There is no doubt but that any society can benefit from the wisdom embedded in both, provided they can work together collectively, with the moderates of each curbing the extremes of both. This is what the founding fathers had envisioned. So how did it all go so wrong?

For the answer to that question, we must return again to the warnings of those same founding fathers and the Money Party they cautioned us against. With the assassination of JFK and the continuous fear it generated, the Money Party, playing to and dividing the extremes of both parties, gained virtual control of each branch of the Federal Government. Elected representatives of both the Republican and Democrat parties became treasonable accessories to the abolishment of constitutional rights and protections with the use of lies, propaganda and false flag threats including the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, 9/11 and Iraq's WMD. The Money Party has increased its power and obscene wealth through manufactured fear in a climate of a perpetual war on terror, which, like the war on drugs, was never meant to be won

With this knowledge, I will refuse to vote, and I would encourage you to do the same. The argument that one should, in this situation, vote for the lesser of two evils may not be a wise choice. In fact, you have no choice but to vote for evil, for any vote you cast, even for one of the minority parties, will, in effect, be for the greatest evil of all, the Money Party which has, through its corporate media, succeeded in diverting and dividing

you, by confronting you with relatively insignificant issues like the deficit, immigration, pro-life, gay marriage and taxation. If you will take note that the illegal war in Afghanistan which should be our first and main concern with its untold cost in lives and money, was only slightly touched upon by the Democrats during their convention and not even mentioned during the Republican convention. Your vote will be an indication to them that you are still buying the Great American Dream, and so long as you can be persuaded it remains viable, their position remains secure, and our future dim.

From the lexicon of modern day politics, "bipartisanship" seems to have been dropped completely. Only if the progressives and the conservatives can come together in the common cause of denying the Money Party's enslavement of both. May we yet be saved. But, it will happen only if, in a true spirit of bipartisanship, the progressive can allow the conservative to check his exuberance with reason to avoid folly and if the conservative can learn to share in the excitement and revelation of change, will this be possible. Amen.



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The “Suffragette In Trousers”

Feminist historians often argue that they have been written out of mainstream memory; but with one exception. The suffragette movement is one which focuses on females. But what of the men that were supportive of their struggle?

There were many various suffragist organisations, both at local and national level, but arguably the most influential of these was the WSPU (**Women’s Social and Political Union**). From which men were banned. All except for Frederick Pethwick-Lawrence, the only man who ever did have a role in it, and this was mainly due to his friendship with Christabel Pankhurst. He chose to work for the outfit, but was unable to join it. But there were various male fraternities which similarly minded gentlemen may throw their lot in with. The Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage was established in the Spring of 1905. Meanwhile, the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies politely deigned that chaps were able to join them, if they so desired. Or, if their bag was more to champion the universal promotion of voting rights, they could join the People’s Suffrage Federation. Of the 1000 or so members of the MLWS did indeed belong to one or more other societies.

So what kind of cove could you conceivably expect to run into within it? Over 50% were from the clergy, and stats from the first 300 members comprised of 10% scholars, 16% clergy and authors (though why these two should be lumped together is beyond me as well) and 13% were journalists. There were also a fair number of lawyers, and in fact it was run by one. By their own admission, they were a “sober, grey-coated and somewhat grey-haired group”, although there individual maverick types who took part in the stunts and exploits their ‘sisters’ got up to: setting fire to railway carriages, leaving bombs in stations, assaulting members of the government, you know, that kind of malarkey. Some also even went to prison for their exploits, and were similarly subjected to the ‘cat and mouse’ ordeal of having their hunger strike protests thwarted by being force fed. Some even attempted to go further than this and go on a thirst strike in addition. Though often, they simply weren’t permitted to make such protests at all: one chap, Housman, literally couldn’t get arrested. He tried, found he had difficulty in doing so, and then, when he was, was released after a matter of hours, being released without charge (by contrast, typically women would get a minimum of three months). But the effect wasn’t the same, for a bloke, even



if he was successful. When women put themselves through such ordeals, they were considered heroic (or should that be heroine-ic?) whereas for a man it was simply seen as “unmanning”. And then on top of this were views such as those purported by one Pointz Wright, of the Men’s Political Union, who wrote: ‘ It is men’s lack of chivalry which drives them [women] to do it, and men alone are to blame... the shame is with the men who cause women to suffer and drive the courageous to desperation’. Emmeline Pankhurst also wrote in “My Own Story” that men’s violence was general,

bloody and harmful, but that women’s was righteous and hurt no-one but the guilty. Possibly because she viewed that, as already having the vote, they ought to make their feeling known via the ballot box, whereas women didn’t have any other means. Daughter Christabel just felt that men were inherently violent by nature. Really, what was a boy to do?

But some got results : in 1912 George Lansbury, an outspoken labour MP stood in Bow, East London as a suffrage supporting candidate, and got a fair part of support into the bargain for doing so. Another, somewhat amusing

instance of civil disobedience in order to gain attention was made by Lawrence Housmann, refusing to complete his 1911 census, ensuring he had NO IDEA how many women were in his gaff that eve (when the census was taken) as they had locked him out, quite barring him from the property!

But the idea of having men support women's suffrage kind of stuck on the throat. After all, how far was the desire to liberate women, or enable them to do so for themselves, tempered by the instinct of chivalry, to protect one's womenfolk. Was their assistance another example of holding the door open for them? But did it matter, when men had a greater knowledge of public life and how to oil the mechanisms of it?

There were many reasons why men threw in their support for "The Cause": some were of a theoretical, idealistic belief: for example, Gilbert Murray's interest was initially piqued by his study of Greek civilisation, and a sense of "fair play". The argument put forth in the "Workmen's Times" was that if a woman was to take a lesser wage than a man for doing the same job, she would essentially be viewed as a "blackleg", i.e. going against union rights. Other objections were more of a human rights strain, such

as the medical profession being against force feeding.

A rare, yet fascinating book on the subject "The Men's Share" states that: "The 'suffragette in trousers' had always been something of a contradiction in terms. By 1913 he had become an embarrassment whose very presence threatened both the legitimacy of militant protest and the coherence of the suffrage identity". But this did not stop men from showing their support, boasting proudly if their daughters had been arrested for militant protests! Press coverage also initially focussed on the support that married suffragettes received from their husbands, although this was soon replaced by headlines such as "Suffragettes Neglected Children"!



THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

