

By Christmas 2019 The Word Newspaper hopes to have on sale a book on Democracy. What follows is my chapter. As I write Boris remains on the throne.

I begin with my responses to the same questions all contributors were asked. And, like all the others, there is a short professional autobiography.

1. Why are you interested in Democracy?

When I was a schoolteacher I realised that to make decisions that were based upon collective and inclusive discussion of our values made for a better run school. It became the subject of my masters dissertation.

2. What could we do to improve Democracy in the UK?

Widen and increase the opportunities for us to participate in decision making.

3. Which figure, living or dead, fictional or real life, has inspired you most politically?

Two people. Fred Ridley who was professor of government and politics at the University of Liverpool who used to say that it helped democracy to work if we all knew who to phone up if our dustbins were not emptied. The other was a former president of the old Liberal Party. I attacked him over some policies. In response he told me that policies were easy. Values are not only more important but far more difficult to arrive at. Always put values before everything else he said. That was the time of the Young Liberals and Jeremy Thorpe was not a fan of that president of the party.

4. What event in your life first opened your eyes to democracy and politics?

It was probably serving on the Working Party for Political Literacy (1978). I was the only schoolteacher in the group, working in an area of Liverpool with extremely high levels of unemployment. Bernard Crick was joint chair of the group. In 1962 he had written In Defence of Politics. He thought political education was all about concepts. In an argument with him I suddenly realised he had no clue about the lives led by my kids and their parents. I had a degree in government and politics. I wrote the CSE paper in it. But that argument made me aware that losing

arguments to 14 year olds was more important than PhDs and publishing articles to be read almost exclusively by fellow academics.

BIOGRAPHY

I still remember the arrival of the letter telling my mother that, as attested by the eugenics movement, at eleven I was an insufficiently good racial specimen to go to grammar school. 'Failing' the 11 Plus got me into a school that found out what I was interested in and grew me from there.

After school my first job was as a library assistant in the Cohen Library of the University of Liverpool. £7/10 per week was more than generous for changing the date stamp every morning. I also helped my Dad on the docks and learned how to throw a heaving line properly. Being a night watchman on a ship taught me to play ignorant when the police would somehow find a way in just before finishing a night shift, hoping that I would slip them a pound of sausages or bacon for them to take home.

Then I was a factory hand at Lever Brothers mostly packing OMO (it washes whiter) and such. The machinery was often 60 years old and easy to sabotage if you fancied a 15 minute break.

Eventually I went to University to study Political Theory and Institutions and edited the politics page on our student newspaper.

The sixties were just the right time to be in Liverpool. Then to teach in a boys secondary Modern in Bootle. Then a merger with the girls next door. My school teaching career lasted 16 years and involved what in those days we called 'curriculum development'. Then I became an advisor but took early retirement because I had a good offer to go and felt that, like so many LEAs, there was insufficient resistance in Liverpool to central government.

The phone went and I ended up as Director of CPD in Education in the Faculty/Department of Education at the University of Liverpool. That led to much national and international work and even after final, final, official retirement I did not stop working. I was external examiner at fifteen universities, did more than 45 programme validations, plus evaluations and stuff. Editing CPD Update, a monthly for schools, was a great experience and, today, contributing to The Word Newspaper feels great.

I write and write and write. My website is [www.criticalprofessionallearning](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk) and anyone can

use any of it. I charge nowt. What is a 'failed capitalist'? A 'starving socialist'!

But, no, I am not starving. It is Democracy that is starving!

A LETTER TO THE GODDESS DEMOKRATIA

“Dear Demokratia, I need reassurance. Sometimes when I enter your temple, along with many others bringing votive offerings, I have the fear that it is not you sitting there but instead it is the Goddess Oligarchia disguised as you. Does she, I wonder, take all those offerings and hide them away in her crypt to use for her own purposes? How can I tell if it is really you sitting there or the imposter?”

So far I have received no reply. It looks as though I shall have to devise my own method of distinguishing between the real Demokratia and

the imposter. I shall take an anecdotal approach. And I shall often attach the word politics to the word democracy.

DUSTBINS AND DEMOCRACY

My old Prof, Fred Ridley, used to say that it helped democracy to work if you knew who to phone up when your dustbins weren't emptied. When I was a teacher of and public examiner for Government and Politics (CSE, 16 Plus and GCSE) that throw-away remark of his had a big influence upon me. I taught in areas of very high unemployment. How might I prevent the insidious spread of the shrug of the shoulders; the dismissal of politicians as a bunch of people all out for themselves; they are, we are told, all the same! How might I connect young people to our imperfect system of government and perhaps give them a feeling that their voices were not always going to be unheard? Those were the sort of questions I asked myself.

The other day I had, if you will forgive the phrase, a ‘democratic dustbin moment’. The pavement outside my house was being dug up. I could not drive my car. So, a chat with the workmen: why, I asked, was this being done for the second time in a couple of weeks? Apparently the previous company had not done the job properly. It had to be done again. I walked to the shops. On my way I encountered three other companies doing something similar. How many phone calls would I have to make if I wished not simply to complain but to understand what was going on, discover when these jobs might be completed and make local government responsive to the voters?

Perhaps Oligarchia really has sneaked in and, when we were not looking, replaced poor old Demokratia.

DEMOCRACY IN THE MINISTRY OF TRUTH

In 1962 Bernard Crick wrote *In Defence of Politics*. In 1971 he and others established the Politics

Association for, mostly, teachers of politics. I was a member of its Executive Committee and when it began to research political literacy I became a member of the working party. The Report (1978) was edited by Alex Porter and Bernard Crick and the final meeting took place in the Senate Room of the University of London. That building was the Head Quarters of the Ministry of Information during WWII and as such inspired George Orwell to conceive his Ministry of Truth for 1984.

Outside the room sits the mummified body of Jeremy Bentham in a sort of sentry box on wheels. He is present at meetings of Senate and wheeling him in had been the job of one member of our working party when an undergraduate. We needed Bentham that day. Unfortunately we left him outside.

In the draft report Alex had taken the risk of referring to a school as being democratic. This did not seem a problem to him or to me. Alex had taught in a sixth form college and me in secondary moderns. We had, I think, an instinctive feel for

what it was like to suffer from a bossy headteacher. It was, however, a problem for those members of the working party that I saw as 'academics'. Yes, I did have a bias that I have never quite shaken off.

The question was raised, should such a term be used in the final report? The next question was, did we have the power to make a decision about using that word? This led to the need to decide by what means we should decide if we had that power: a simple majority or what? We made the decisions in reverse order. It took about three quarters of an hour. The eventual answer to the first question was, 'yes'. None of this took me any closer to a definitive understanding of the concept of democracy. I spent part of the discussion time declining Crick's name in Latin: Crook, Crank, Crick and so on.

I had the thought that while Aristotle was arguing about defining the concept of a table in contrast to the concept of a chair his tea would have gone cold.

It is worth remembering the date of the Report on Political Literacy, 1978. In 1979 Margaret Thatcher arrived. Are we now more politically literate or less?

BEWARE THE GREEKS BEARING CONCEPTS

The Greeks, particularly the Athenians, gave us the words ‘politics’ and ‘democracy’ and because they pondered upon meaning so much we see them as concepts for us to define, re-define and again to re-define. The Athenians did not, however, invent discussion or all variants of group decision-making. We constrain ourselves if we imagine that in order to define Politics and Democracy our only reference point is ancient Athens. My question is: while we have been making free with the words Politics and Democracy have we allowed them to become empty concepts or, perhaps worse, concepts to be flung about without bothering to think?

Nevertheless, those Greek words have a gravitational pull and Aristotle, the great conceptualiser, refuses to leave the stage. In *Of The People By The People, A New History of Democracy* (2011) Richard Osborne alerts us to the tendency to conceptualise but by beginning his book with the Greeks he firmly plants in the mind the notion that we are dealing with a Greek/Athenian invention.

John Keane in *The Life and Death of DEMOCRACY* (2009) also begins with the Greeks but provides a perspective on the development of democracy that allows us to take into account societies far beyond Greece. He also reminds us of the efforts made by the so-called 'Founding Fathers' of the Constitution of the USA to damp down democracy. The Electoral College continues to exemplify their anti democratic intent; an intent that is often made to appear pro democratic by the use of Tom Paine's language or at least the spirit of his language.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed

by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Attributing such rights to a divinity reminds us that Bentham referred to them as,

NONSENSE ON STILTS.

STRONG AND STABLE GOVERNMENT

I see politics as the inclusive discussion of and consensual arrival at public values. In my opinion defining it as the struggle for or the games that people play to obtain power is to seriously undermine and devalue its meaning. I find it disappointing that so many politicians and commentators upon the actions of politicians effectively see politics as a dirty game of manipulation. Reading Gordon Brown's book *My Life, Our Times* (2017) I found it necessary to stay alert to signs of what I regard as the misuse of

both word and concept. Have you read Blair's book, *A Journey* (2010)? I titled my review of it *From Illusion to Delusion*. It is the same with many books written by politicians. They tend to believe that politics is defined as what politicians do. Too often what they do is to hurt politics. In the process they also hurt democracy.

Democracy can be perceived in a number of ways. The Peasants Revolt of 1381, the Putney Debates of 1647, the French Revolution of 1789 are among many examples of people exerting a right to participate in governmental decision making. To sit on the far right in the French Assembly of 1789 indicated your preference for absolute government in the form of a monarch. To sit on the far left indicated your preference for wide participation. I keep this in mind when I hear or read the words Right Wing and Left Wing used as labels for political behaviour and belief. This, of course, places Tony Blair far to the right. The two most prominent words in Blair's book are 'leader' and 'leadership'.

On the right is also where I would place Lenin. From Craig Oliver's book, *UNLEASHING DEMONS, The Inside Story of Brexit* (2016) we learn that Michael Gove had a picture of Lenin on his wall during the referendum campaign. Could he have had 'unity of purpose' in mind?

Some reviewers of Brown's book judge him to have been a less effective prime minister than his predecessor. Making that judgment indicates to me a current belief that prime ministers must be on the absolutist side of the left/right spectrum. Brown describes his efforts to restore cabinet government and a proper relationship with the civil service. I see that as neither weak nor foolish, although he had previously done his bit to drastically reduce civil service numbers. In his book he makes use of Macmillan's famous reply when asked what could throw government off course: 'Events, dear boy, events.' He also makes use of Wilson's 'A week is a long time in politics.' He gives the impression of someone surprised by the job: by the lack of control he had compared with his role as Chancellor. Possibly he should have taken note of Mike Tyson, the boxer, who

said that everyone has a plan till they get punched on the mouth.

‘Overwhelmed’ is the word used by some to describe Brown as prime minister, probably because, as he explains in his book, he came to believe that times had changed and prime ministers were now constantly ‘in the thick of it’. Quite possibly his early developed sense of responsibility and attention to detail exacerbated the problem in his eyes, though he did try to spread power across his government. He was, of course, constantly under attack from, particularly, the Murdoch press who had previously supported Blair.

But it concerns me that we appear to have formed the notion that only the seeming to be strong (and stable) can be in charge. Theresa May demonstrated the limitations of that belief, certainly as an empty electioneering war cry. Yes, Blair had a lot of control but it was based upon carefully crafted narratives (often lies) and the tendency to keep chucking short-term policies at the electorate rather than to think even medium

term. His long term amounted to slogans such as 'aspiration' and 'choice' and 'modernisation.' In education the phrase 'initiative fatigue' was heard a lot. Each initiative seemed to come with a slogan and a target.

To watch Geoff Mulgan, Blair's Head of Policy, and Michael Barber, known in Whitehall during Blair's time as Mr. Deliverology, lecture a House of Lords committee on how government should be done these days was to realise that the words Democracy and Politics were no longer accompanied by the word Accountability, at least not as we knew it.

I wrote the first draft of the last GCSE Politics syllabus (now called specifications). One quarter of it was about the accountability of government to the people. I was far too slow to realise that Blair stood that notion on its head and that in future the people would be held accountable to the government if they did not hit their given targets. 'Given' by the way was a frequently used term at consultation events under New Labour. If you

questioned the wisdom of a target you would be shut up with, “That is a ‘Government Given’”.

Mulgan wrote a book called *GOOD AND BAD POWER* (2006). He wears his scholarship on both sleeves, trousers as well. The letters MCD stand for Mad Citation Disease. He has got it, badly. I hope that my infection is only mild. Basically Mulgan is a ‘doer’. Perhaps we need more ‘considerers’.

Barber’s book, *Instruction to Deliver* has been re-published a few times. My copy is from 2008. As with Tony Blair’s book it is one of those books devoured by Cameron and Gove and Osborne as they sought to follow ‘The Master’, Blair, that is. I believe that civil servants attending a talk by Barber would refer to such sessions as ‘Death by PowerPoint and Flowchart’. New Labour was a target setting government and Barber told us how to hit the target. A fan of Liverpool FC he once wrote to the club telling them what they should be doing. I have no idea if they took his advice to

heart so it must have been a coincidence that they did not seem to do very well afterwards.

The second edition of Philip Gould's book *The Unfinished Revolution: How New Labour Changed British Politics For Ever* (2011) has a long foreword by Blair. New Labour was, he tells us, all about 'choice'. Did the power to make choices spread during his time? Who could choose? And are focus groups the same as democracy? I called my review *Ersatz politics and deviant governance*.

I usually think of democracy as somewhat untidy. That is what happens when you lose a few arguments. If autocracy has a defence it is that it provides government that is very tidy. Don't argue with an autocrat!

Boris challenged me on this. He provided untidy autocracy. Why? How? Autocrats that are very strong do not need to use much power. If, however, they are weak they have two choices. The first is to cajole, like Elizabeth 1st. We think of her as

strong but even after the Armada of 1588 she had to tread carefully. The second choice was selected by both James 1st and his son Charles 1st. Treading roughshod was more in their line and we know what happened in 1649: lost, one head.

It was not until 1859 that Anglican services to celebrate Charles the Martyr ended. That was the year my mother's father was born, fifty years after the birth of William Gladstone. Gosh, to think that, centuries from now, there might be church services to commemorate Boris the Martyr.

To put it in a different way, strength and stability can emerge from democracy. They do not have to reside only within autocracy. I would argue that part of Brown's problem as prime minister was that he tried to take some steps towards democracy (and politics) within government at a time when too many people had come to believe that effective government was autocratic government: government with little politics: government without the risk of losing an argument or two.

Both politics and democracy require truth. Lies pervert politics and damage democracy. The referendum on EU membership was neither politics nor was it democracy. It was manipulation. I shall never stop saying that.

Did Brown do politics? Where might he have sat in the French Assembly? Is Jeremy Corbyn a threat to society because he sits slightly towards the left?

Brown's book provides abundant evidence of his early development of a social conscience together with the urge to do something to give effect to it. So much of his early life seemed to be spent writing, campaigning, organising, canvassing and, as ever with the Labour Party, in meetings. I think that was doing politics. Later on I am not so sure.

A NON-DEMOCRATIC PACT

His ‘pact’ with Blair, if that is the right word, gave Brown enormous power over much domestic policy. But for two politicians to effectively say to each other, ‘You have that bit and I’ll have this bit and after a while I shall stand down and you can have my bit’, well, is that even close to my definition of politics? Does it fit any definition of democracy no matter how conceptualised? The Labour Party had (still has) properly established procedures for selecting its leaders. Yes, there have always been internal stitch-ups, punch-ups, deals and a little light back stabbing but my objection to this pact derives mostly from seeing the damage it did to politics and to democracy. They became about power: obtaining it, keeping it and seizing it.

That ‘pact’ allowed a relatively unhindered and unchallenged Blair to act on our behalf as a war criminal. The question arises, if the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq might be regarded as having been made lawful by our Parliament’s decision to

ignore international law would they, therefore, be regarded as the result of a democratic process? Who had the right to use the label 'democratic', those that voted in Parliament to approve Blair's intentions or those millions demonstrating in the streets?

I note that facts and reasoning had to be set aside in order to follow Blair. Robin Cook's resignation speech provided the House of Commons with plenty of facts and plenty of reasons. Gordon Brown was not the only one to express admiration for that speech. He and many others, however, voted to support Blair. Those that voted for war still believed that they were the operatives of a representative democracy. Later I shall write a bit more about the elasticity of that word Democratic.

POSSIBLE POSITIVE CHANGES

In terms of Politics and Democracy it is not easy to work out where to begin in order to make positive changes. This is only a small fragment of what can

be said on the subject but, hoping to stimulate critical conversation, I suggest that we might go back to 1829 for guidance. It was an interesting time. The year before gave us Catholic emancipation and three years later during a period of relatively well-behaved attempted revolution in a number of European countries Britain began to expand its franchise. That came from the so-called 'Great' Reform Act; it had been watered down to make it more palatable for the powerful. A year later we got the first Factory Act. It was a time when a number of prominent Tories perceived a need to put on liberal clothing. I begin, however, in 1951.

In that year Attlee's Labour Party won the popular vote but, because of our electoral system, lost power. As Brown points out in his book, at the general election of 2010 fifteen million people voted against austerity and only ten million voted for it. We got austerity. This was not simply because of the shortcomings of the electoral system. There was a difference then because, having told the electorate that they were against austerity and, famously, tuition fees, the Liberal

Democrats endorsed Tory policies when offered a role in the Coalition Government. The ability to rationalise away values for the possibility of power is, for so many politicians, an innate talent.

I believe that our parliamentary electoral system is anti democratic. In the run up to the 1997 election Tony Blair flirted outrageously with proponents of proportional representation, specifically with Roy Jenkins. His fear of only a tiny and insecure win drove him to consider the change. A thumping power-granting win changed his mind. Yes, it was almost certainly the case that newly elected Labour MPs had no wish for change but his own party was seldom allowed to impede Blair when he was set upon something that he wanted. It seems that he only wanted proportional representation if it led to power. The question is, how do we persuade politicians to give a higher value to representation than to power? 1964 was a very close run general election and 1974 provided two of them. They did not change the minds of power hungry politicians. What might?

THE ALLOTMENT PARTY

I hope this is more than a fantasy but Jeremy Corbyn has, I believe, gone some way to opening up political discourse to accept concepts such as ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’. But is he really a stick-in-the-mud party loyalist? How far might he go to make common purpose with the Greens, for example? They have only one MP but their political significance might be very widespread. The values for which they stand strike chords that can turn into votes. Those votes might be long lasting because so many young people appear to share those values. And not just young people: think of people campaigning against fracking. These are people frustrated when their voices are not heard by local government as it comes under pressure from central government, particularly a central government whose best friends are, too often, international corporations. I suspect that the political land between Labour and the Greens is under explored. An allotment owner might do something about that.

SMALL GOVERNMENT, BIG SOCIETY

In 2010 Cameron gave us his great idea. We were to have a Big Society. There was lots of talk of 'localism'. Local government was supposed to embrace austerity because it would encourage people to volunteer and step in to replace, for example, qualified librarians. For years now my local Carnegie Library has worn a TO LET sign.

If we had a government that reversed the simple-minded mantra of 'Private Good, Public Bad' I believe that we could make some progress. Since 1979 the basic assumption of our governments has been that things are better when companies compete for contracts to carry out public work. Not only do those contracts go to the lowest bidder who, as a consequence, must cut corners to make a profit, but also the commercial confidentiality card is played: unlike a local government committee the public cannot attend a board meeting or obtain easy access to minutes. We have a democratic disconnect.

‘Democratic disconnect’ is just the sort of expression used by Brown and Jacobs in their book *THE PRIVATE ABUSE of the PUBLIC INTEREST: MARKET MYTHS and POLICY MUDDLES* (2008). A feature of their book is that as George W attempted to shift the responsibilities of government from public to private so everything became not only more expensive but also less efficient. The public system could not be closed down. It was maintained together with its regulations and regulators. But the new private system also required regulations and regulators: different ones.

You build a battleship and go to war, to fight. You sight the Bismarck. This is a battle to the death. One half of the bridge is operated by the Royal Navy but the other half is under the control of G4S. What could possibly go wrong?

What might turn my Corbyn fantasy into a nightmare are those people inside the Labour Party

who still yearn for Blair and those that appear to be obsessed with constructing false allegations of racism against supporters of the indigenous people of Palestine. In other words, to support the point I have repeatedly made about the referendum on membership of the EU, too much of what we are often fooled into thinking are political processes are actually battles for the control of a party. And, too many politicians seek to make us ignorant in order that we will be comfortable with their prejudices.

While Cameron, Boris and Gove were fighting for control of the Tory Party the interests of the country were hardly considered. Theresa May had only one priority: to remain as party leader. She would do a deal with the devil to keep her job. Some would say that she did, even though the 'D' in DUP stands for our favourite word.

BACK TO 1829

It often occurs to me that we might have unknowingly come close to a written constitution

(or at least a suggestion for one) in 1829 when the Conservative Home Secretary of the time, Robert Peel, endorsed a set of Principles of Law Enforcement. Their theme is policing by consent and Principle 7, in particular, just needs the substitution of the word 'government' for the word 'police' for us to envisage what it might mean if the notion that the government are the public and the public are the government became a basis for government and politics. Here are the principles. I have slightly modernised the spelling.

- 1. To prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.**
- 2. To recognise always that the power of the police to fulfil their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.**

- 3. To recognise always that to secure and maintain the respect and approval of the public means also the securing of the willing cooperation of the public in the task of securing observance of laws.**

- 4. To recognise always that the extent to which the cooperation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionately the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives.**

- 5. To seek and preserve public favour, not by pandering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humour, and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.**

- 6. To use physical force only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to obtain public cooperation to an extent necessary to secure observance of law or to restore order, and to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective.**

- 7. To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and that the public are the police, the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.**

- 8. To recognise always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to usurp the powers of the judiciary of avenging individuals**

or the State, and of authoritatively judging guilt and punishing the guilty.

9. To recognize always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.

Might they do service as the basis for discussion (very widespread and inclusive discussion) about the construction of a British Constitution supportive of inclusive decision making; or have we internalised the habits of subjects who tell themselves that moaning and voting from time to time means that they live in a democracy?

Just to get my optimism under control I need to remember that Robert Peel, the liberally-minded Tory of 1829, signed up as a Special Constable in 1848 in order to prevent the Chartists presenting their request for a bit of democracy.

In this chapter I have possibly spent too much time on the contrast between Blair and Brown but overall I conclude that both politics and democracy have been increasingly sidelined since 1979. It is almost the case that the more often we hear the word 'democracy' from the mouth of a politician the less we have of it. I frequently refer to the referendum on membership of the EU but it is a prominent case in point. Not only do I not see any democracy in it but I also believe it to have been anti democratic in four ways. It was not about 'we the people'. It was about control of the Tory Party. Second, it was an advisory referendum that, in order to increase his chances, David Cameron declared that he would regard as binding. He did not have the power on a Tuesday to alter the meaning of an Act of Parliament passed on a Monday but his words changed the game. Third, democracy requires truth. We were told huge lies and to vote on the basis of a deliberately manipulated misunderstanding invalidates a result. Fourth, over the years and especially since 1979, we have not only been getting rid of civil servants but also treating them as agents of ministers. Yes I know that overall numbers have gone up but

replacing Sir Humphrey with Capita does not improve the quality. Add to that the incapacity of the House of Commons to scrutinise what will be several Everests of legislation as a result of Brexit and we can see why Theresa May's first thought was to make use of a prime minister's monarchical powers; Boris likewise.

How great are our chances of restoring Politics and Democracy? Actually, 'restoring' might not be the best word. 'Re-make' might be better because things have gone too far. For a while after 1945 those twins seemed to have been given a boost and from 1945 to 1979 the Post-war Political Consensus possibly lulled us into believing that we were, despite disputes, differences and variable economic performance, on a pleasant plateau gradually making progress towards greater equality and happiness. In other words, politics and democracy as I defined them have never reached a steady state and they have never transformed us into a naturally participative society. We remain subjects rather than citizens. So, to make progress do we have to chop off the head of the Queen?

We don't but we do need a written constitution. As John Keane points out, the constitution of the USA was designed by a few powerful people to suppress democracy. Although we can detect the rhetoric of Tom Paine in the US Constitution its mechanics are quite different. It is a game of power to be played by those most able to pay their entrance fee to the casino. In 2002 Greg Palast's book used such a good title to express this, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*.

In 1975 Denis Lawton tried to encourage us to write a national curriculum. Key to writing it was to have been a thorough and widespread discussion of our social values. When England got a national curriculum in 1988 it was received from government, to be implemented by those denied the opportunity to contribute to its construction.

What are the chances of us even beginning to organise meetings of people in towns and villages to start talking about a contemporary version of

Peel's Principles: Principles for Politics and Democracy? In all the major parties I believe that smelling the chance of power via the existing system is enough for them to postpone radical thinking and action. If we avoid widespread participatory radical thinking and action on politics and democracy we shall perpetuate unfairness, inequality and unhappiness. At present for most of the time most of us are disengaged from government. Has that been good for us? Do we prefer to be subjects rather than citizens?

FAITH DEFEATS DEMOCRACY

The last school in which I taught was a mixed but small comprehensive, which was unusual in the Liverpool Catholic sector. It was in an area with an almost one hundred percent Catholic population and, therefore, not, in terms of religion, socially divisive.

There had been lots and lots of consultation prior to comprehensivisation and I attended many meetings and made copious notes (all lent to someone who lost them). I am absolutely certain that the majority

opinion was in favour of mixed gender schools but some religious orders did not want that and I witnessed lies and manipulated voting at a level I had never before witnessed. A dog collar came to signify falsehood to me. Although a confirmed atheist I had been elected to both the Education and Community Councils of the All-Souls Deanery containing thirteen parishes.

At one point Archbishop Worlock came to conduct a mass for the Community Council. (An irrelevant piece of knowledge is that the church was next door to the school that Elvis Costello attended- just thought you might like to know that.) Although he had replied to every letter with which I had bombarded him about how the reorganisation was being handled the Archbishop was put out that I made my letters public. He did not, I am glad to say, know my face.

When the service reached the homily stage he stood up to square the circle with best quality religious bullshit. There we were, engaged in what was supposed to be an honest and open consultation exercise including teachers and

parents and in one short speech he knocked it on the head, kicked it into touch, reminded us that the guardians of faith had more power than the followers of faith.

From memory, he said

“Expert and informed opinion may indicate that the way forward lies over there”, waving one arm, “but religious intuition may indicate that the way forward lies over here.” He waved his other arm. “And it is for those of us who are in receipt of religious intuition to take our brethren in the right direction.”

I may have one or two words wrong but that is essentially what he told us. I immediately thought of 1870 and the Declaration of Papal Infallibility. What was the point of holding a long and costly consultation exercise? I remember one large meeting full of parents and some teachers in which the clear decision was that mixed gender schools were what were wanted. The priest chairing the meeting transformed this clear positive vote into a negative by saying that he would report to the Archbishop that we were not against mixed schools. I even heard one head of a boys’ grammar

school tell his parents of the terrible consequences for their children of having to mix with the likes of my kids who lived down by the docks. I would have my kids any day and St. Brigids, which was in the area I had taught in for ten years, was the only school to which I applied during the reorganisation.

It was in this context that St. Brigids, motto Pax, came into being. It swam against the official mainstream.

THREE ATTEMPTS TO INTRODUCE DEMOCRACY TO EDUCATION

1. NO GAFFER AT THE MEETING

The first head of Saint Brigids had a somewhat traditional approach to running a school. The management structure looked like an equilateral triangle: head at the top, pastoral down one side and curriculum down the other, each managed by a deputy head. Approaching the bottom of the triangle power diminished and voice became fainter as you went from head of department to ordinary teacher to kids at the bottom. It did not work well. Staff meetings were, to put it mildly, acrimonious.

I told the head that he would become famous throughout Liverpool if he changed the management structure. I had read an article in the journal of the Politics Association about the kind of change I had in mind but mostly I was influenced by Doug Hele, the Chief Engineer of Triumph Motorcycles.

In a Motorbike magazine he had written about how he had set up what were called 'Technical Meetings'. These were meetings that discussed and decided, for example, if a new bike should have a four or a five speed gearbox. He set one rule. It was that there should be no gaffer at the meetings. If an apprentice had a good idea then someone more senior should not pull rank.

We had a full staff meeting in the library. I suggested there should be three committees and that everyone attending be regarded as equal and take it in turns to chair. As in those days teachers were allowed to be creative in terms of the curriculum one committee was devoted to that. For St. Brigid's good relations with the community were

very important so that was for another committee and so on.

The following year I left the school to work on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies as an advisor. The purpose of the unit in which I worked was to turn back on young people who had turned off from school and St. Brigids was one of the schools I visited to observe how this might happen. The previous head had left and been replaced by the deputy head. I watched him conduct the best staff meeting I had ever witnessed.

The staff were in a semi-circle with him in the middle. Each committee was asked who was going to report this time. When they replied, backed up by colleagues because decision-making had been inclusive, the head would turn to the rest of the staff to ask what they thought. Sometimes he might say that he thought they could not make a decision just yet because it was likely that the report from another group might impinge upon the decision. Overall it was a collective process and

when it ended all understood both the issues and the decisions. This made for more effective implementation. There was no acrimony.

Since then schools have been infected with the leadership disease. A while ago I am told that at a conference Stephen Kemmis asked if it were possible these days to talk about education for more than five minutes without using the words 'leader' and 'leadership'. I have always equated Kemmis with the great American writer on education, John Dewey. They both made the point that young people do not go to school in order to be prepared for membership of society because they are already members of society. Schools also are part of society. They are not set to one side working on behalf of society. Apparently Keith Joseph believed that Dewey was responsible for so much of the damage that he felt had been done to education. As Secretary of State for Education, Joseph was invited to speak at a Politics Association Conference. He was astounded when he discovered that political education might take place in primary schools. While he was speaking

**Fred Ridley leant across to me to loudly whisper,
“Not very bright, is he?”**

2. REFUSING TO DANCE WITH YOUR PARTNER

For some years I had been experimenting with different styles of school report, trying to avoid those seemingly never-ending modifications of the word ‘satisfactory’. They usually went from ‘satisfactory’ itself to ‘very satisfactory’, ‘unsatisfactory’, ‘quite satisfactory’ with an occasional ‘excellent’ and ‘could do better’. Today when I hear politicians described approvingly as ‘moderate’ I remember that it was perhaps the most insulting word a teacher could write on your report.

St. Brigid's, being a newly made comprehensive and the staff enthusiastically responding to collective decision-making, I proposed that if the head insisted (he did) upon using the traditional report form all staff, before writing one word, should read the evaluations by all of the young

people upon their own learning. Everyone, I thought, agreed with this. With my registration class we devised an evaluation proforma that could be filled in once a week during an extended registration period. Wow! We were cooking with gas.

I had, I am afraid, made the classic mistake of believing that silence meant consent. Those members of staff who did not speak at the meeting simply ignored what young people had written in their self-evaluations. It was like, having been invited to a dance, your partner refused to take to the floor with you.

3. CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY AND BEING EATEN BY A GERBIL

One feature of the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was that it was possible for teachers to write their own syllabus and set their own examination. Obtaining approval was not easy and moderation was strict but the professional

fulfilment was huge. For a while it was possible to do the same when the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE) was introduced. This way of doing things was known as Mode Three.

The relevant Act of Parliament was passed in 1988. When Kenneth Baker introduced the Bill it became known as Baker's GERBIL or The Great Education Reform Bill. Under Section Five of the Act it was possible to obtain approval for Mode Three GCSEs. With help from a friend in an exam board I wrote a community studies Mode Three GCSE for St. Brigid's. It was later used by other Liverpool schools.

Around the school was developing what was to be the largest housing co-operative in Western Europe. The result was that young teenagers sat on committees with parents and architects making decisions about the co-operative. They looked, for example, at the demographic trends in the community as families became smaller and so could decide how many bedrooms a house might need. Reporting on this became credit worthy for

the GCSE. The accompanying exam paper was designed not to look for ‘correct’ answers but to stimulate thinking about how the community might develop. The mark scheme differentiated by outcome, not by task. In other words, examiners had to make sense of unexpected responses.

The 1988 Act was, however, an enabling act. That is to say, it gave power to the Secretary of State to arbitrarily change the law. Section Five went. Teachers were only expected to teach what they were told to teach. They were also told how to teach, what to assess and how to assess.

Before Section Five disappeared the sister-in-law of a girl I taught came to me with a great idea. Liverpool secondary schools back then had on the staff a female teacher with responsibility for gender equality. The idea was for a GCSE in Women’s Studies. I did very little of the work and I thought what they produced was wonderful. I tried to get approval for it. Government decided that it was not a subject worthy of study.

Demokratia, you may be a goddess but on that occasion you did not come out to bat for the team.

I suppose Gerbils have to eat.

THE ONLY DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Some concepts have a lot of stretch in them. Some concepts are so well-thought of that great efforts are made to capture them: to control the application of both desirable and undesirable labels. As a concept democracy is both stretchy and desirable.

Over thirteen years I visited Israel two or three times a year. I lost count of the total number of visits but it was close to forty. For the University of Liverpool I taught and examined almost eight hundred students, mostly teachers, undertaking masters degrees and I examined a vastly bigger number doing the same for the University of Derby. In the same room I taught indigenous Semitic-

speaking people and non-indigenous, non-Semitic-speaking people, mostly from Europe.

Perhaps I should explain the S-Word. It refers to a family of languages. A language is not a race. In 1879 Wilhelm Marr established The Anti-Semitic League in Germany, thereby encouraging people, not for the first time, to see Jews as members of a race. As you can guess, the notion that members of a religion should be classified as members of a race proved to be very popular with the Nazis who thought in terms of race. They even spent a fortune trying to discover an Aryan race.

Our misuse of that word belittles real Semitic people and allows false accusations to be made about Jeremy Corbyn and others in the Labour Party. Netanyahu hugs close the word Semitic but his only use of a Semitic language is the odd word in a synagogue. A bit of Latin in a Catholic Church does not a Roman make. Does anyone seriously believe that a language invented by Ben Yehuda (died 1922) as part of a Zionist project can pretend to be Semitic? You can only do that if you see Modern Hebrew as a revival of a language once spoken on an everyday basis. But as the Pope had to point out to Netanyahu when he said that Jesus spoke Hebrew, like everyone else of that time he actually spoke Aramaic. That Semitic language is

still spoken. Modern Hebrew was only needed as a prop for Zionism. It does, however, use more and more Arabic each day. So one day it might become a Semitic language.

My wife would have pointed out that words change their meaning but why should we accept a changed meaning that visits upon members of the Jewish religion all the nastiness of racism? It is much better, and far more humane I think, to use the S-Word as it is supposed to be used. And why should supporters of genuine Semitic people be vilified as ant-Semitic?

Visiting the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv I was struck by the presentation at the entrance of pictures of lots of people who were clearly of different races. The message was that there is no Jewish race. To see Jews as members of a coherent race is to borrow the Nazi way of looking at things. This suits Netanyahu who wishes to promote Zionism at the expense of Semitic-speaking people.

Back to the D-Word. In reviewing Nurit Peled-Elhanen's book *Palestine in Israeli School Books, Ideology and Propaganda in Education* I used the term 'racially ring-fenced democracy'. I meant that any group of people that confines the advantages

of citizenship to a group perceived to belong to a particular race can hardly call itself a democracy. The word 'ethnocracy' has also been used by Israelis to describe Israel. My word would be 'shamocracy'. But, then, today, I am tempted to use that word about the UK.

EDUCATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT

As schoolteachers some of us formed a group to look at how we should respond to unemployment. This was before the introduction of the National Curriculum and when we could be creative.

One response was to form links with national organisations that shared our concerns. Here the Schools Curriculum Industry Partnership (SCIP) was hugely helpful. It was dissolved years ago but for a while it mingled educators and business people in a supportive network. This was nothing like the official concept of schools preparing young people to meet the needs of industry: needs that were often poorly defined or out of date.

Near my school was Commercial Road. It was full of factories employing thousands of people. One by one they closed like a series of candles being snuffed out in sequence and eventually the most iconic of them all closed down, Tate and Lyle's. Founded in Liverpool, sustained there by working class people and in the West Indies by the descendents of slaves (neither acknowledged in any Tate gallery I have visited) its closure meant more than an increase in the unemployed: it had a social psychological impact.

Having devised that Mode Three Community Studies GCSE that I mentioned earlier the failure was not to convince those with their hands on the levers of power that all this was worth encouraging. Almost without noticing young people were gaining the skills, knowledge and understanding normally confined inside what were usually timetabled as 'subjects'. Learning came with motivation. But as an advisor in the Liverpool Education Authority working on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies I experienced a strong sense that what we were

doing was only ever going to be considered peripheral: not orthodox: not mainstream.

The ending of the Mode Three was accompanied by the closure by the Catholic Church of St. Brigids. The Church preferred much more conventional and single-sex approaches to education.

IF WAY TO THE BETTER THERE BE, IT EXTRACTS A FULL LOOK AT THE WORST (Hardy)

Now I would say that while the need for a creative community approach to education is greater than ever, there are twin forces at work opposing it. One is that the system has been well and truly fracked and fragmented. It is disconnected from communities. The other is that the urge to measure and label has enforced a less creative approach to learning. Nudging an increasingly dysfunctional system is not enough. As Naomi Klein says in her response to Trump and Trumpism, we need to be proactive rather than reactive.

My interpretation of her exhortation is that we cannot wait for those that choose where to place the political fulcrums, decide upon the lengths of the levers and exert the power. They control a system that now seldom works in the public interest. Writing about Standing Rock in her book *NO Is Not Enough, Defeating the New Shock Politics* (2017) Klein emphasises the educational theme of that gathering of disparate people working on a project that to the outside must have seemed to be focussed upon a single ecological issue. The interest in education came about as a natural human desire: an activity both enjoyable and essential to society. Let me repeat: education should not be set apart from society; it has to be integral to it.

Too many politicians have parcelled up education as a commodity to be advertised, weighed, priced and sold. Do that to education and those values come to dominate all other parts of society. So it is back to Blair's EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION but this time without the snake oil.

A STORY OF CONTRASTING SECRETARIES AND MINISTERS OF STATE

At one time I chaired the CPD Committee of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) which represents ninety three universities in the UK. This is, however, a story of my personal perceptions and must not be taken to represent the views of UCET or any of its officers or members. When Charles Clarke was Secretary of State for Education he happened to make some public remarks that revealed a considerably out-of-date view of how universities provided masters-level programmes for school teachers. This is not unusual. It was as if he had in his head a picture of *Brideshead Revisited*: universities as remote ivory towers accessible only to a very socially select few. UCET asked for a meeting and I wrote the briefing paper that would frame the discussion. When we met him he made sure that he had with him a civil servant who was aware of all of the issues. During the course of the meeting not only did Clarke admit that he had been wrong but he enthusiastically asked for more meetings like this. He was, I felt, not frightened of losing an argument

if it meant that he learned something and gained another perspective. He was, in my view unfortunately for us, moved and replaced by Ruth Kelly who cancelled all of the meetings that Clarke had scheduled. It is my belief that she was given the job as a Blair apparatchik tasked with driving through target-led policy and could, therefore, never take the risk of, or waste her time on, learning from losing an argument or having to look at education from another point of view.

David Miliband, as Schools Minister, presented himself differently when UCET went to see him on a related subject. He, or perhaps someone on his behalf, had written positively in response to a significant and highly favourable report on masters-level provision by universities for school teachers in England. This was the Soulsby and Swain Report which used to be available via an easy link but, along with much useful material, disappeared after Michael Gove became responsible for education. The report followed a two year long inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectors on behalf of Ofsted. The report seemed like a love letter to us.

We found a very relaxed Miliband; so relaxed that he had not done his homework and had not taken the precaution of calling in an expert civil servant. Discussion was pleasant and wide-ranging but hampered by his ignorance of the very report about which he had, supposedly, written to us. I had to give him my own copy.

In those days David Miliband wore glasses and was the spitting image of Clark Kent. We had no chance to check if he wore his knickers inside or outside his tights. Coming out I remarked to my colleagues that we had just been in the presence of a clever and cocky sixth former who believed that he could wing it.

It is dangerous to generalise from such brief encounters; but, just possibly, they illustrate something. Perhaps they represent three kinds of people in government: those who are prepared to learn from mistakes; those who are so wedded to their targets that they cannot allow any deviation

from the path laid out before them; and those with such an arrogant belief in their own abilities that they do not bother to make the effort. Maybe that makes them a typical cross-section of humanity but it seems to me that we have lived with governments that have included too few of the first kind. We should not listen to their words but look at their actions. What can we expect when we hear the phrase 'lessons shall be learned'? Inaction!

STILL NO RESPONSE FROM MISS D

Well, I have looked for Democracy in a number of places. I have looked in dustbins; I have looked in the Ministry of Truth; I found more of it with Brown than I did with Blair and his courtiers. In 1829 a Tory Home Secretary provided what I still believe is a useful model; members of the Bullingdon Club provided a different kind of model: one to avoid; a Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool was no help whatsoever; and I remembered that Gerbils love to eat Democracy.

I noted that in the Middle East, as in the USA, a group of colonists have become expert at capturing Designer Labels so that only they are allowed to wear them: God's Chosen Democrats. I also noted that the introduction of a bit of Democracy into a school, even though inspired by the Triumph Motorcycle Company, could not survive an onslaught by the Catholic Church and the Government.

Where might I find it? I still have hopes of the Allotment Party. But probably my biggest mistake was to confine myself to two Greek Deities, DEMOKRATIA and OLIGARCHIA. While I suspected the latter of stealing the votive offerings of the former I completely overlooked the fact that Dominic Cummings and Boris de Piffle did a deal with a third Greek Deity, CHAOS.

Boris, Liar-In-Waiting to Her Majesty, demonstrated that autocracy does not guarantee tidy government. Tony Blair, known to his mates as TB

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would you believe, escapes having his collar felt and Cameron, known to his friends as DC, has stocked up on Biro's to sign for eager readers copies of his book *For the Record* .

DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRACY I love you. Must my love be unrequited?

Cliff Jones 17th. September 2019