

# **TO AUTUMN**

## **SEASON OF PLOTS AND POLITICAL**

### **CRAFTINESS**

I did not like New Labour but at least Gordon Brown was a grown up. In 2010 Ant and Dec took charge and in George Osborne we acquired the worst Chancellor of the Exchequer since Churchill. The gap between rich and poor and our national indebtedness are both so huge now that politicians would rather look away than see them.

David Cameron had two reasons for holding a referendum on membership of the EU. The first was to suppress those members of his own party memorably referred to by John Major as 'the bastards' and the second was to stem the leak of votes to UKIP. Those reasons were entirely internal to the Tory Party.

An Act was passed for an advisory referendum that, without any authority, Cameron suddenly decided to treat as binding. Having said he would stay on as Prime Minister he cut and ran off to make money giving silly speeches to the gullible while those members of his party who shamelessly told whoppers to the electorate in order climb the Conservative greasy pole were suddenly landed with the problem of putting the country's money where their big mouths were.

For me the incompetence of our politicians is enabled by political illiteracy encouraged by a media that peddles prejudice while avoiding paying taxes.

Below are my thoughts on the Conservatives, Labour and the LibDems as they hold or are about to hold their party conferences. I have not said anything about the Green Party but I did spend some time at their conference a couple of years ago because my cousin Geof Rayner was speaking. It reminded me of the Young Liberals of thirty or more years ago. No heavy marketing by companies and I was able to buy genuine Palestinian olive oil from a stall.

Might they and Labour edge a little closer to each other? Jeremy Corbyn does seem to be making us just a bit more politically literate but his task, if he recognises it as such, ain't easy.

## **THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE**

### **DECLINE TO CONJUGATE**

I can remember a time when the leader of the Tory Party only turned up on the last day to deliver a speech of majesty to the party faithful who had made their pilgrimages from the shires. In those days leaders of the Conservative and Unionist Party 'emerged'. They were not elected and certainly not by any form of proportional voting as was David Cameron who campaigned hard against adopting that approach for the plebs.

For many years the Tories were not about politics at all. Why would you need to engage in the inclusive discussion of and arrival at public values when you were born to rule? They represented the rich man in his castle who made sure that the poor man at the gate received some nutritious scraps.

**"God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate."**

**(All things Bright and Beautiful)**

In the Party back then there were more Jacob Rees-Moggs than you could shake a stick at.

And then came "the great she-elephant", as Julian Critchley called Margaret Thatcher. The effortless elegance of rule that Tories aspired to demonstrate was exchanged for social ruthlessness. If that poor man wanted any nutritious scraps he now had to get on his bike and find them himself. Ruthlessness, however, extended to the position of leader, as Margaret Thatcher discovered once the Party saw her as an electoral liability.

What makes the conference of 2017 different? It remains an arena in which prominent Conservatives show off to the faithful in hopes of preferment. When Harold Macmillan unexpectedly resigned Quintin Hogg spectacularly threw his hat into the ring at the conference. He jumped too quickly and his supreme self-confidence told against him. Remind you of anyone?

Hogg had the distinction of twice being Lord Hailsham and when appointed Lord Chancellor used his father's old robes of office. In his autobiography he makes sure that we know that he is an elitist. His son it was who claimed expenses for the cleaning of his moat.

Perhaps he was the Boris of his day except for one thing. Hogg/Hailsham could actually run a government department and Boris

simply can't, despite being educated at a series of academic theme parks. If 'Boris' were a Latin noun it would now be declining.

Who wishes to conjugate with a noun that is fast declining?

## **THE LABOUR PARTY**

### **CONFERENCE**

#### ***Returning to Political Literacy?***

For me Tony Blair, together with his courtiers, not only sucked the socialism out of the Labour Party but also substituted sound bites for philosophy and slickness for passion. Not even George Lansbury's ghost would have been allowed admittance to the conference in the days of TB.

George, by the way, refused to follow his leader Ramsey MacDonald into the Tory dominated National Government of 1931. He remained leader of Labour until 1935 with Clem Attlee as his deputy. Before that he had been the Editor of a great Labour supporting newspaper, the Daily Herald.

What happened to it?

It is now owned by Rupert Murdoch and called The Sun: part of a media empire dedicated to making us politically illiterate.

In recent years Conference has lost much power over policy. It does, however, suffer from subversion in the form of Blairite groups manipulating against Jeremy Corbyn. One of those current attacks on him involves the misuse of the word Semitic as though it is a racial label that exclusively applies to all Jews. Jews are multiracial and very few speak a Semitic language, unlike Palestinians and Arabs. But today certain Blair supporting members of the Labour Party are countering criticism of Israel and Zionism by a contrived accusation of racism.

Another problem is the confusion about the terms Left and Right. They derive from the early days of the French Revolution. Karl Marx was born twenty-nine years after it began in 1789. He did not invent them.

To sit on the right in the French Assembly meant that you believed in absolute government. When Neil Kinnock told Conference how appalling

was the behaviour of Militant Tendency in Liverpool he was criticising an extremely absolutist group. I still have my redundancy notice, courtesy of Militant.

What I believe places Corbyn on the Left is that he is re-humanising political discourse. He is making the Party and the country more politically literate. Knee-jerk splutterings, for example, about it being unpatriotic to cancel Trident are only enabled because so few people are aware that of all the world's nuclear powers the UK is the only one that has no control over such weaponry. It gave control to the USA many years ago. Whenever we build and service a Trident submarine we are saving the USA the cost of building and servicing one for themselves.

As for the term Hard Left, I remain puzzled by its usage; except that our current level of political discourse seems to rely upon insults.

We are in desperate need of an informed electorate willing to engage in discussion of and arrival at public values.

Best wishes to the democrats attending Conference in 2017.

Down with the shamocrats!

**GO BACK TO YOUR CONSTITUENCIES**

**AND**

**TWIDDLE YOUR FINGERS**

That was Liberal Party leader David Steel (known as the Boy David) back in 1981 in a speech to the Party Conference. I might have got his words ever so slightly wrong. He could have said 'thumbs' not 'fingers'.

Also on the political horizon back then was the Social Democratic Party (SDP). In a conscious attempt at self-mockery its leaders enjoyed the collective name of The Gang of Four. The name had previously been used for the group that attempted to control the Communist Party of China after the death of Mao. There were no other points of similarity.

The fifth member of the Gang of Four was Mike Thomas who had been President of the Guild of Undergraduates at the University of Liverpool. As the editor of the politics page on the student newspaper I used to give him a small column to write about economics. His pen name was

**Contango.** It refers to the futures price of a commodity. In this case I think he meant himself as he always had political ambitions.

The futures price of the rump of the SDP fell through the floor when in 1990 they were battered in a Bootle by-election obtaining fewer votes than Screaming Lord Sutch's Monster Raving Looney Party.

The larger part of the SDP (Andrew Adonis was a member) carried out a series of flirtations with the Liberal Party. Names were adopted and changed. 'Alliance' was one. There were some political heavy hitters in the SDP who had held senior government positions and were used to getting headlines but they lacked an organisation.

They held a Conference on a train, visiting several cities while keeping up their spirits by singing (all together now, one, two, three, four)

**'Lloyd George knew my father, father knew Lloyd George.'**

I now regret giving away my video of that particular event to the Politics Department of the University of Liverpool.

I think I attended almost every meeting during the Crosby by-election, won by Shirley Williams. The best speech by far, on behalf of Labour, was by Tony Blair's father-in-law Tony Booth. Sitting beside him in the hall of Cherie Blair's old school was Pat Phoenix, Elsie Tanner of Coronation Street. Tony Booth knew the area very well. His boys' secondary school was over the road.

That by-election illustrated a difference between the Liberals and the SDP. The Liberals knocked on doors, they understood local issues and, although it was derided as 'pavement politics,' they could relate to voters. They were active. One of its presidents was Des Wilson, the founder of Shelter. Another prominent member at one time was Peter Hain who was famous for organising protests against apartheid South Africa. While the Labour Party rightfully gets the credit for the post war social reforms of the Attlee governments we forget how much the Welfare State was a creation of the Gladstonian Liberal Party.

In 1928 Lloyd George combined with Maynard Keynes and others to produce what became known as The Yellow Book. It contained a series of proposals for ending widespread unemployment. For me it struck the same tone as the Labour Party Manifesto *For the Many not the Few*.

In 2004, however, the LibDems de-Gladstonised themselves by producing their Orange Book, making great play with the word 'choice', just like Blair. This paved the way for a double-act to go on stage in 2010. In Liverpool pubs Cameron and Clegg were known as Ant and Dec.

**Lots of people rather like the current leader of the LibDems and I happen to agree with him that for that referendum result to be attributed to democracy the voters ought not to have been told so many whoppers.**

**But how able is Cable? Can Vince convince? For me the Dems duffed up the Libs and the Party carries the stench of that appalling Coalition with the Con Party.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**My brother Trevor was once President of the old Liberal Party. I challenged him on policies. In reply he told me that policies were the easy part, that it was values that mattered. They were difficult but once you got agreement on values the policies would follow.**

**For too long the policies of our governments have been marketed to us as commodities to be exchanged for our votes. Our votes too are commodities. Look where all this has got us. We need to be discussing public values. We need to be well informed, not lied to. We need no more ersatz politics.**

**Theresa May sees us as subjects not citizens. How do we see ourselves?**

**Cliff Jones 22<sup>nd</sup>. September 2017.**