

## Social Fracking Summarised

**Comment: I like to apply the word 'discursive' to my writing but at times 'rambling' might be more accurate.**

**Here I am trying to collect in one place most of what I have written on the theme of Social Fracking and add some further explanation, even to attempt some conclusions. Expect some repetition, self-plagiarism or re-working of previous writings.**

I formed the notion of *Social Fracking* during the administration of the Coalition Government (2010-2015). My brother Ivor<sup>i</sup> was dying and for the first time we talked much and long about politics. I decided that the word *fracking* was appropriate to describe what government was doing to society. Already there had been a lot written about social fracture.

In particular there was *Age of Fracture* (2011) by Daniel T Rogers and, much earlier, Fred Riggs on the Prismatic Society<sup>ii</sup>. In fact social cohesion, the lack of social cohesion and the shifts between the two conditions have so often been main or sub themes in the work of many historians and sociologists. What keeps us together? What keeps us apart? What makes us the same? What makes us different? What draws us together? What drives us apart? How and where do we draw the lines demarcating difference? How do we manage difference? How do we fail to manage difference? Is difference a positive? Is difference a negative? Questions such as these, sometimes with the word 'conflict' replacing 'difference', keep some historians and sociologists in business; also specialists in marriage guidance.

A phrase adapted from Stephen Kemmis,<sup>iii</sup> 'commonality without uniformity', that I first encountered around 1984 has always resonated with me and helped me carry a sense of the need to combine respect for the individual and the different with recognition of the importance of establishing shared public values on an inclusive and consensual basis. Achieving both is neither easy nor automatic: it can be very messy but it is more human and less harmful than the opposite.

At times what holds us together resembles the forces of Fascism to be found in a unitary state in which everyone stays 'on message'<sup>iv</sup>. At other times we appear to be living in a 'devil take the hindmost' society. Combining the two may appear to be contradictory but to varying degrees, and following the example of General Pinochet in Chile,<sup>v</sup> Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Tony Blair and George W Bush all managed to achieve that combination<sup>vi</sup>. They were not, however, following in the footsteps of Kemmis and his co-authors. We were put 'on message' to compete, not to co-operate: held together for a socially destructive

purpose. David Cameron and George Osborne perpetuate this purpose while Tony Blair endorses it whenever he has the opportunity.

Blair has been categorised as a post-democracy politician<sup>vii</sup>. I would put it more strongly and assert that Blair was and is *anti* democratic: he is not really a politician<sup>viii</sup> at all and his current extremely lucrative support for anti democratic dictators demonstrates very clearly the extent of his disdain for the untidy and messy business of democracy. In his own book<sup>ix</sup> he makes extravagant use of the words 'leader' and 'leadership'; as, of course, did Mussolini, *il Duce*. What happened to him? Is that lamppost still there?

The essay in the following link makes the point that not only did Blair avoid the practice of politics but also that his target setting and very driven approach to government was, despite appearances to the contrary, incompetent. To hit a target is no proof of the wisdom or, given a tendency to reduce the possibilities of public participation in the political process, the validity of the people that set the target.

Warning: the essay is not particularly long (eleven pages) but some of the links within it are.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/BlairDeclineGovernmentPolitics.pdf>

Gordon Brown is a very talented, flawed man whose bad temper when under pressure and tendency to take time about making decisions contributed to his losing the 2010 general election (had he called one in 2007 he would have won). Nevertheless, unless politicians are merely judged on their success at winning elections, his record in government shall, I believe, come to be seen in a far better light than that of Tony Blair and as prime minister he did have to cope with a worldwide recession. He did that better than anybody and is hugely respected internationally as a result. It is rewarding to read William Keegan's "*Saving the World*"? *Gordon Brown Reconsidered* (2012)<sup>x</sup>. And it is certain that the contrast between the social consequences of his long time as Chancellor of the Exchequer and those of George Osborne could not be more stark. Osborne is a leading proponent of and advocate for social fracking<sup>xi</sup>. Brown cared for people in need. Osborne cares for the super rich and privileged. By the way, despite the Osborne narrative being accepted and promoted by so many of our media outlets, Brown's public spending was not the cause of economic calamity, though we might criticise him for extending the use made by the previous Conservative government of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

The general election of 2010 brought back into power those to whom Tony Blair had passed his torch. The poem below was my prediction of what would happen. The first verse, based upon a famous song (no clues), marches to a different rhythm.

Warning and Lamenting

On the announcement of the General Election

Come, cheer up my lads, 'tis to hell that we steer,  
To add something worse in election year,  
New Labour has taught you to worship greed,  
We Tories are happy for that is our creed.

So bail out the banks and print money for bonuses,  
Free the economy and see who benefits,  
Let's bash a few gays and chase a few foxes,  
Keep out the strangers, you know they're obnoxious.

We'll hear nothing more of this equality crap,  
Build more tough jails, now there's a good chap,  
As we drink to each other in our gated community,  
And evade our taxation with easy immunity.

As the Bullingdon Club gets the prizes of gold,  
The cost will be borne by the young and the old,  
Of the classes that failed to rise to the top,  
And go to Eton to be members of Pop.

When I wrote that poem (not intended to be entered into any literary competition) I had no idea that the party of Gladstone and Asquith and Lloyd George and Keynes and Beveridge, the political party that had given us compulsory free schooling, national insurance, curbs on the power of the unelected House of Lords and more, would join forces with members of the Bullingdonian Tendency. Here is another. I wrote a number of such 'odes' that lurk on my website.

Odes on the Nativity of our  
ConDemNation

Lines on the forming of a coalition

Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George,  
William Beveridge and Maynard Keynes,  
What think you of this alliance forged?  
Your party imprisoned by Tory chains?

Heroic days of the Welfare State,  
Of old age pensions and votes for women,  
Values lost at an alarming rate,  
In pursuit of power and a cabinet position.

How will you face the electorate next time?  
Will you enthuse your grassroots mob?  
Not sure you'll get this vote of mine,  
Since your conscience was shed for the sake of a job.

Cliff Jones 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010

I am sure that much was learned from Blair. Below is a link that provides some indication of coalition continuity with and admiration for Tony Blair.

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2010/oct/01/gove-interview-reforms-education>

## **A summary of the component parts of a social fracking kit**

I go into much detail about each component in other parts of this website (links below) so for now I simply wish to list, update and summarise what, for me, makes a government a socially fracking government. I spend more time on the final component, **Getting away with it**, which is also the sub title of Owen Jones' book *The Establishment* (2014)<sup>xii</sup>.

### **1. The anti political component**

An anti political government is one that does not believe that the inclusive and consensual arrival at social values is a process that should precede policy-making. It skips that process.

A Secretary of State once told my colleagues and me as we confronted him on a number of issues that he was (my words) learning from losing arguments and needed more of this<sup>xiii</sup>. The practice of real politics includes losing arguments. And learning from losing arguments.

The management and control of debate and discussion by government means that this seldom happens. Management and control of discussion and debate has now become an automatic governmental instinct. Criticism of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party demonstrates, for me, that too many MPs and political commentators have now acquired that instinct.

### **2. The anti democratic component**

This component overlaps with the previous one but it reminds us that the term 'right wing' refers to those that prefer absolute government. It is not quite the same as conservatism, which is why as prime minister

Margaret Thatcher made so many of the older members of her party feel uncomfortable<sup>xiv</sup>: she, like Blair, was an absolutist. To such people democracy is untidy and rather undesirable.

### **3. The anti intellectual component**

Tony Blair, being an absolutist, liked to set a target and expect people to hit it. This single mindedness gave us the nonsense of tuition fees. It also meant that once he had made a commitment to support George W Bush in his foreign follies he could not waver. For him an intellectual has no doubt and dismisses dissent. Real intellectuals question, challenge, doubt and are capable of looking at things from more than one perspective. They are also capable of admitting to getting things wrong.

Social fracking governments de-intellectualise us. It is essential for them to do that. They cannot work any other way. They prefer us to be intellectually docile: not to think too much or even, given Blair's oft expressed regret at endorsing the Freedom of Information Act, not know too much.

### **4. The anti educational component**

Education means helping people to grow and develop. It does not mean sending people to school in order to be prepared for measurement against targets set by here today and gone tomorrow politicians. Professional educators do not willingly reinforce privilege. They work to reduce unfair barriers to learning. They see the connection between education and community. It is when they do not see that connection and when they willingly reinforce privilege that professional educators do harm: social harm. Once again I ask what the first seven letters of 'professional' spell out for us? What is it that professional educators (or any kind of professional) profess?

When schools are differentiated according to religion, resource, race, privilege, gender and imagined types of young people while also deliberately disconnected from local democracy and yet made to compete in order to survive they contribute to social fracking. Colleges of further education and universities have undergone a similar transformation. The culture is now predominantly individualist. One of the arguments propounded by Tony Blair was that parents would, as a result of his policies, be able to exercise more choice. He really likes that word, choice<sup>xv</sup>. It is now, of course, schools that choose the parents. It seems never to have occurred to him that this would be a consequence of his policies or that debt-ridden students would come to perceive their education as a commodity that they, as customers, had borrowed money in order to buy.

### **5. The anti social component**

In order to witness the making of decisions by elected representatives it is still possible for members of the public to attend local government committees and to read the minutes of earlier meetings. This just about remains part of how government is held accountable within society. As, however, services are taken over by private companies our lack of ability to walk into a boardroom to witness similar decision-making prevents us exercising such healthy public participation. Less and less do local authorities provide public services; they commission companies to provide them. Accountability is now at one remove and, when companies sub contract, sometimes at several removes. Our lack of ability to witness reduces the knowledge that we can deploy when we vote.

David Cameron's notion of the Big Society: where is it now? One thing that we do know is that it was an attempt to make irrelevant our imperfect and uncertain system of local democracy. It was sham society<sup>xvi</sup>.

## **6. The getting away with it component (this 'summary' is the longest)**

Where to start? Finding a book or reading an article describing the shortcomings of our approach to government and politics is easy. Listing desired improvements is relatively easy. Knowing what to do in order to achieve the desired improvements is not at all easy.

Governments throw legislation at the House of Commons at such a rate that it is like filling a hot water bottle too quickly. There is insufficient scrutiny and the committee system is set up in such a way that the committees with useful knowledge (Select Committees) are excluded from the scrutiny process. Reducing the civil service, nullifying its previously prized neutrality and increasing the number of partisan advisors and hired consultants exacerbates the inefficiency. It is why the disgracefully undemocratic House of Lords remains necessary. It contains a number of semi retired professional politicians and apparatchiks who understand how to turn a Bill into an Act<sup>xvii</sup>.

We could make a start by simply reorganising legislative scrutiny in the House of Commons. This would have the further beneficial effect of reducing what governments feel is the need to use delegated legislation. It is not widely realised but many Acts of Parliament are enabling acts that place power in the hands of government to enact further legislation without having to go through the laborious and uncertain process of passing a new Act. The system for scrutinising delegated legislation can easily be swamped. Government can also be tempted to make use of new procedures for expediting terrorism legislation in order to deliberately and cynically avoid discussion and

debate. Michael Gove did this in education<sup>xviii</sup>. Education classed as terrorism? Bring back the cane!

The issue remains, however, of how to persuade a government that holds power to make these changes. Governments have a tendency to hoard power.<sup>xix</sup> They are also rather short sighted<sup>xx</sup>. In other places I have mentioned a governmental preference for microwaved policy making and an aversion to slow cooking. Just possibly government might begin to realise that rushed legislation that has to be amended, sometimes by yet more legislation, is not what they need if they wish to be effective and reduce rather than hide the number of mistakes.

A bigger, though associated, task is to gain acceptance for a cultural change. It is not, however, an impossible task. Jeremy Corbyn has something about him of the Arab Spring and so we must be careful to avoid a coup by the Blairist Tendency<sup>xxi</sup>. I have written before of a force field surrounding people in government who become impervious to argument and evidence if they fail to confirm or conform to exclusively made decisions on policy. Dismissal of dissent is almost a reflex action.<sup>xxii</sup>

We cannot expect a cultural change that engages with, rather than suppresses, dissent to come from today's Conservative Party. Neither can we expect such change to come from a Labour Party still heavily influenced by Tony Blair. If, however, the values of Jeremy Corbyn and some others are multiplied by voices expressed via electronic media we might achieve a beneficial cultural change. I take what might be seen to be an old-fashioned view and wish for the restoration of representative democracy bolstered by the adoption of a far more fair and representative system of voting. To witness David Cameron shamelessly campaigning in favour of the first past the post voting system during the recent referendum was sickening. If the Conservative Party had used that system for electing its leader he would have failed to win the leadership. I don't think he does shame.

I acknowledge the importance of electronic media<sup>xxiii</sup> and the use of E-Petitions. The danger is that those making the most noise may have the greatest influence. Even if I agree with and contribute to that noise it does not feel the same as the calm, quiet, organised, inclusive and consensual, even normal, discussion of and arrival at public values that can be translated into policies. Noise ought not to be needed. Reading official responses to petition noise also indicates a high level of clever governmental slipperiness. At times I find myself fondly admiring such slipperiness: to know that government will usually try to manipulate our thinking reassures my anti government instincts.

Perhaps this is the best we can do. Let me, however, attempt to establish a principle that I believe ought to be considered if we are to make any positive changes to how we do government and politics. Doing that might, if we agree on the reasonableness and desirability of

this principle, provide some ideas for how to translate it into effect. I have been influenced here by what are known as Sir Robert Peel's Principles of Policing<sup>xxiv</sup>. For my purposes Principle Number Seven is the most significant.

**The police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that *the police are the public* and *the public are the police*; the police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the intent of the community welfare.**

If we substitute *government* for *police* I believe we are close to a principled basis for a far more inclusive and consensual approach to government and politics. As I write (December 2015) it is one hundred and eighty six years since Peel's principles were presented and accepted. Dare we ask if progress has been made since 1829? And supposing we could popularise something like this as a principle for government and politics what might be the barriers preventing us acting upon it? One barrier, I am sure, is a widespread cynical view that to advocate such a principle is to be naïve.

In the following link I write about the need for political education in schools. Given the bias in our media I could have made a similar case for media studies. We need to encourage participation while removing the blinkers. In my view we have lost the habit of participation and grown used to having government and politics explained to us through a very restrictive prism. Giving high educational priority to such subjects would, I believe, help us lift a barrier to accepting that sort of principle.

There are sixteen pages in this essay.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frak8.pdf>

## **A closer focus on what should be done, what might be done and how it might be done**

In *The Rise of Political Lying* (2005) by Peter Osborne he calls his final chapter HOW TO REBUILD PUBLIC TRUTH and presents six ideas that he hopes will do this. They were published ten years ago so, although it will lose the detailed authenticity and authority of Osborne's writing of that time, I shall use them as stimulants for my own. Really I am simply borrowing his framework. The headings for his six ideas are as follows.

### **FactCheck**

The internet has provided us with a means of checking facts. Wandering around Facebook or LinkedIn you can see people frequently engaging in this. Although many politicians appear to be addicted to Twitter I see, however, little sign of government curbing its tendency to lie. Tony Blair is now out of government but he continues to construct his own truths, as does David Cameron, most recently about spending on flood defences.

I suggest that we need more organisation here. Is it beyond our ability or capacity or willingness to take this idea from the USA<sup>xxv</sup> and formalise it somewhat? Might, for example, Chatham House<sup>xxvi</sup> link up with the universities to provide such a service? It would have to be a rapid response service because part of the art of the Blairs and the Camerons is the ability to plant an untruth or a half-truth in the public mind and then to move on to another subject before it can be found out and criticised.

Setting up a research unit to carefully sift through statements by governments in order to examine their truth worthiness is fine and very necessary but politicians are unlikely to be frightened by such a thing: it is when they open their mouths that they need to know that they could quickly be caught out. How many more 'dodgy dossiers' might there be that we do not know about because we were not able to make an immediate challenge to policy?<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **MediaCheck**

There was a time when the National Union of Journalists<sup>xxviii</sup> had more influence over the standard of journalism. Today it appears to be proprietors that set the ethical standards and, as a consequence, they are not always high ones. In my view legislation is long overdue to ensure that proprietors pay proper rates of tax within the country. On its own that would not ensure better ethical standards but something must be done about our appalling newspapers and other media outlets and that might be a start by making such outlets more socially responsible. To be a journalist means to strive to research well and write to a very high standard of honesty. Journalists deserve professional support for this: not pressure to dumb down.

Many years ago I heard a talk by Greg Philo (see endnote above) on how our government in the UK reported the Falklands war. It was a devastating critique of official mendacity. He and colleagues in the Glasgow Media Group continue to perform this sort of service, including demonstrating the very pro Israel bias of the BBC.

My question is: how might we combine the potential for the immediate impact of a professional trade union with the slower and considered research skills of an academic group in order to make the proprietors of media outlets, including the government's own outlets, think twice before publishing lies? I do not know how but I think we should try.

### **Trusting Statistics**

Establishing bodies that can provide reliable statistics is only one part of the problem. We tend to believe what the Bank of England says a bit more these days since Gordon Brown granted it independence from government. But when government announces that the figures for people in paid employment have gone up how quickly can we access the information that allows us to ask informed questions about how many of those jobs are part time or low paid replacing jobs that were full time and well paid? We can, of course, obtain such information but usually too late to reduce the impact of the headline statement by government.

I lost count of the number of times Thatcher administrations altered how unemployment statistics were collected. Almost every change reduced the official number to something more electorally acceptable. And yet the unemployment figures were seldom challenged.

When speaking about education Tony Blair probably believed all the falsehoods he spoke about the percentages of 'successful' schools and 'pass rates'. Statistics have histories that can easily be forgotten. We might, for example, delve into the history of the statistic that told us that eleven year old children should be divided in a ratio of 20:80 with the larger number labelled as unworthy of a full and well resourced education. We would find that Cyril Burt's now heavily questioned research and the influence of the eugenic movement<sup>xxix</sup> were the basis for this.

Some statistics in education were totally invented and yet had a considerable effect. In the 1960s a few of those children in the larger group were provided with a public examination at sixteen called the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). Teachers were told that a Grade 4 represented the performance of an average 16 year old. The problem was that not only was no research done to establish this figure but that as most children left school at 15 no research could have been done. When the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) was established that old Grade 4 was translated into an F level GCSE. This helped determine the distribution curve for many years. Unfortunately, politicians expect all young people to get at least a C. They send out whole armies of inspectors to discipline schools and teachers that fail to achieve the required levels. As you could expect, more now achieve that requirement, leading to accusations of dumbing down.

We tend not to problematise statistics. They can appear to be very believable. We should, however, form the habit of asking awkward questions about them; and we should not have to wait until someone has written a book critiquing them because, too often, by then the damage will have been done.

When it comes to information today we have rapid access to untold riches. But how do we know what they all signify? Statistics have back-stories.

### **Rebuilding the Distinction Between Party and State**

Britain is a monarchy and despite what it says on our passports we are subjects, not citizens. Although there are masses of writings on how we carry out the business of government and the law we do not have a written constitution. We have, on the other hand, a much written *about* constitution plus concepts and conventions and habits and practices. We also have institutions validated by history. Perhaps the most significant concept is that of Crown in Parliament.

Montesquier<sup>xxx</sup> supposed that he detected in Britain a separation of powers: executive, legislature and judiciary. In my view far too much notice was taken of Montesquier by the framers of the constitution of the USA who were, we should remember, determined that the USA would not be a democracy. Britain actually has those three powers but they are so close as to be virtually fused at times. The concept of Crown in Parliament neatly describes the fusion.

Unfortunately, in practice it is the leader of the largest political party in the House of Commons who is in a position to exercise this fused power. This can mean that instead of government being carried out *on our behalf* or even (Peel's Principle 7) *with* us government is something done *to* us.

In my view this developed into a huge problem when Tony Blair was prime minister. He was democratically disconnected from the people and became (old fashioned word) our ruler with a propensity to performance manage the country<sup>xxxi</sup>.

The strength and the weakness of having an unwritten constitution is that culture has a big influence. In 1945<sup>xxxii</sup> the prevailing culture tended to be co-operative and inclusive. Often referred to as the post war political consensus this more or less lasted until May 1979 and the election of a Thatcher led government. Our culture today is more individualist, leading to social fracking. If we combine that culture with a form of government that allows political parties to see the state as something they can play with then we have an unhealthy closeness of state and party and a loss of public service values.

What to do about it? Probably it is cultural change that provides us with our best chance of restoring the values of co-operation, inclusion and public service.

### **Parliament Must Regain its Role**

We seldom use the word 'impeach' any more<sup>xxxiii</sup>. We have left it behind in the history books and we seldom think of Parliament as a court. Perhaps we should open again those history books to visit a time when Parliament as Parliament not only displayed some self-confidence but also had some sense of its own importance.

It is true that before the gradual and grudging extension of the franchise members of parliament were mostly talking to fellow members of a club but I am not sure that today they are talking to the public. It is the media that they consider when they speak. During Tony Blair's time as prime minister with a big majority in the House of Commons it could be argued that it was Alastair Campbell, Blair's Director of Communications, who controlled the voices of most members of the majority party. Staying 'on message' was vital to how the party, the government, the media and, more tenuously, the country was managed. Under such a regime there was little chance that Parliament might behave as its predecessors had sometimes done.

How do we restore Parliament?

### **Make Political Lying a Crime**

Osborne's comparison here is between someone selling shares for a new company on a false prospectus and Tony Blair selling an invasion of Iraq on the basis of falsified evidence. Do the former and your collar will be felt. Do the latter and you can travel the world making millions.

I have no idea of the practical steps that have to be taken to equate the latter with the former but surely we should be thinking about this.

### **Our chances**

Osborne ends his book with the following **conclusion** from which I have removed the first sentence.

But what Britain really needs is not just a change in the law but a change of heart. We face a choice. We can do nothing, and carry on cheating, and deceiving each other, and wait for the public anger, alienation and disgust that will follow. We can watch the gradual debasement of decent democratic politics, and the rapid rise of the shysters and the frauds and – before very long perhaps – something nastier by far.

Or we can try and act once more as moral human beings. It's a common effort. It affects us all, politicians, journalists, citizens. But there is hope. Britain has a magnificent tradition of public integrity and civic engagement, which can all be reclaimed. It could even be better than before.

Further support for the importance of cultural change comes from Owen Jones (2014) who reminds us of the Overton Window<sup>xxxiv</sup>. This is the range of political ideas or values that is at any given time broadly acceptable to the public. Pre 1979 we talked of a political consensus that more or less followed the ideas and values of the Atlee governments. For a while Margaret Thatcher seemed to have smashed that consensus. But it could have been restored. In fact she was establishing a new consensus that

Tony Blair did nothing to challenge. He allowed it to become an established orthodoxy. Despite the presence of Lib Dems in the Coalition Government this state of affairs continued and today's Tory government has, if anything, intensified Thatcherism.

What are the chances of changing what is in our Overton Window: of moving to a new consensus? My guess is that it is already highly likely that there would be public enthusiasm for reversing the trend of privatisation in the NHS; for re-nationalising the railways and public utilities; for much heavier taxation on, for example, the salaries and bonuses of bankers; and for a much tougher attitude to tax avoidance by international corporations. What is more uncertain is our ability to suddenly switch to a politics in which it is normal for us to inclusively and consensually arrive at public values prior to policy making. We may have lost the art of doing this. I hope we have not. And, meanwhile, we have had successive governments seeking to buy off the rich by offering to make them richer and buying off the poor by blaming their ills upon immigrants and stirring up jingoistic prejudice.

Under Tony Blair, as Osborne (2005) points out, the meaning of the word 'narrative' shifted into a post-modern form. It became disconnected from reality and instead it was a story (a message) that could be constructed to serve a vision. Might this mean that today's dominant artificially constructed narrative has to be countered by other artificially constructed narratives? Has this become the Lingua Franca of today's politics? It seems that we no longer engage with reality but must, instead, conduct government and politics by means of competing visions that are conveyed to us via approved words and phrases carefully chosen to serve visionary leaders. When describing Blair and New Labour I have often referred to those words and phrases as 'liturgy'.

My subject here is Social Fracking and I have no doubt that this is taking place. As with physical fracking we might, for a while, pretend it is not a problem because it is taking place deep underground or because, unlike others, we have the option of moving somewhere nicer. We cannot, however, live forever in a state of delusion and denial. Can we?

When I talk of cultural change I do not suggest exchanging the vision of one leader surrounded by fellow believers for the vision of another leader and fellow believers. If we do that we are likely to continue having to survive on sound bites: politics as a branch of public relations: ersatz politics.

We need to examine the notion of reality (not, I think, a short essay). Perhaps, however, it is enough for present purposes to contrast reality with fantasy. Today, with our wars on abstract nouns such as 'terrorism' and our promotion of the American Century<sup>xxxv</sup>, we have been drawn into a false reality, a fantasy world, composed of the deadly delusions of George W Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and, among many more, Tony Blair. Their Social Fracking has been global. Tony Blair is still at it.

I have mentioned cultural change frequently. That is usually slow to take effect. What might quicken it up? The appearance in dock of all or any of those named above charged with crimes against humanity.

### **Further relevant links**

*The following link was my attempt to introduce the notion of Social Fracking. Should you read it you will see how significant I regarded the efforts of Michael Gove (a disciple of Tony Blair's) to frack education.*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/FrackOne.pdf>

*There are thirty-three pages in the next link so be warned. It was written in June 2011 and is basically what has been summarised above. I often add what I call **Questions for Critical Conversations** to my writing and there are some here.*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frak7.pdf>

### **Equalisers, stabilisers and a contrived social collapse**

*This is the title of the short essay (six pages) that follows. Perhaps it is self-explanatory.*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frack3.pdf>

*The following is a mere twenty pages. I make an attempt to clear some conceptual thickets. I really enjoyed writing this though, as I tackled Marx and Engels, the dialectic and even touched on Hegel, from time to time I could hear an echo of one of my university lecturers who, having read something I had written for a magazine, said 'Are you really going to publish this?'*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frak5.pdf>

### **Stratification: that's the name of the game and each generation they play the same**

*I hope this title too is self-explanatory for the essay in the next link.*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Frack2.pdf>

*What follows arose out of my despair that our governments now engage in discourse that diminishes us as humans.*

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/Counterpoint%20to%20the%20current%20Coalition%20Government1.pdf>

As I try to do as often as possible below I have added a document that might help you critique what I have written.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebcriticalProfessionalConversation.pdf>

Cliff Jones, writing December 2015 and January 2016

**End notes (some have been used in other places)**

i

Ivor phoned me saying, 'I've got three months'. 'You been shoplifting?', I asked. 'No, three months to live.' He said.

It was pancreatic cancer but it took nineteen months to bring him down and in that time there was much humorous insight into old family stuff.

We attended the same junior school twelve years apart. I asked him if Miss Pickering had taught him. 'Only once or twice', he said, 'because she only taught the clever kids and I was in the bottom class.' 'Same with me', I said. 'But', said Ivor, 'I was second from bottom of the bottom class'. 'So was I, how many in your class?' 'Thirty three', he replied. 'There were forty in mine!' So I won the claim to be the thicker of the two of us.

Who was bottom of Ivor's bottom class? Allan Williams, the first manager of the Beatles. He got them a paying gig in Litherland Town Hall, built on the site of Pickering's farmhouse where Miss Pickering grew up. He must have been pleased about that.

ii

Concentrating on the USA Daniel T Rodgers' *Age of Fracture* (2011) shows us how what once was thought to be common and collective in society has become fluid, fragmented and even broken in an age when corporations manipulate markets. I happen to think that the term 'social fracking' is entirely appropriate for what the Coalition Government is doing.

I am also thinking here of the work of FW Riggs. In 1964 Fred Riggs produced *Administration in Developing Countries: The Theory of Prismatic Society*. Because he introduces readers to so many newly minted terms (a tendency of structural functionalists) his book, though short, can be a struggle. The irony being that his new language was part of an attempt to make his work accessible.

He saw society *and* administration in ecological terms and in order to get us to see this clearly he used the concept of a prism. Fused light indicated a society administered by means of very simple administrative structures. Refracted light indicated societies beginning to generate multiple structures. He was careful, however, not to see this simplistically as a transition from traditional agrarian societies to 'modern' industrial ones. His point was that here was a way of looking at the shifting inter-relationships between administrative structures and society.

In *Prismatic Society Revisited* (1974) Riggs gives us a term for oppressively imposed harmony: 'malintegration'. If, for example, the different parts (we might think of them as components or interest groups) of society are integrated in such a way that they serve the interests of or work to the values of one dominant part we have malintegration. We can, in other words, have a multiply structured society that might appear to acknowledge variety and difference but in reality damps it down.

iii

In 1983 Stephen Kemmis and others produced *Orientations to Curriculum and Transition: Towards the Socially Critical School*. The authors argue that schools can do better than simply prepare young people for a world of work or for life as individuals: that they need to realise that schools are not simply preparers for society but are actually participants in society and that this has implications for how they approach what they do.

The book was written in Australia but I have used it with educators in Israel and the UK over many years. For me it helps to show leaders of learning that there are other perspectives: that there is a valid educational language somewhat different from the language of a quality assured pursuit of targets.

<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED295339>

iv

The phrase 'on message' shall always be associated with Tony Blair's Director of Communications, Alastair Campbell. It indicates the extent to which discipline was imposed upon members of New Labour. Under Blair to go off message was not advisable.

Fascism has become a somewhat lazy insult that I must admit to having used in order to vent my spleen when angered by authoritarian governments. I usually accompany the word 'Fascist' with an allusion to questionable parentage.

In my opinion Fascism should be taken seriously. Not only did it have a considerable and very serious hinterland in which could be found artists, poets and philosophers but it also represented a response by a newly established nation state to the shock of participation in the First World War. Being on the winning side in that war was, for Italy, almost an irrelevance. All wars have unintended outcomes but WWI boosted a variable and often incoherent nationalism. The key symbol of Fascism was the fasces of Roman times, signifying the authority of the state while emphasising the power of and need for unity. For Mussolini and the Fascists the possession of power also signified unrestricted justification for action.

A good starting book on Fascism is *FASCIST VOICES* (2012) by Christopher Duggan but there are plenty more and it is always worth reading anything by Denis Mack Smith.

v

I have seen criticism of the following book on the grounds that it fails to be a comprehensive and definitive account. I do not believe it was ever intended to be such and for me it is not only highly enjoyable but provides insights of high value. Good journalists often have the edge on academics.

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2002/may/26/highereducation.news>

vi

My point is that people such as those I have mentioned have deceitfully gained power by various means (in the case of George W Bush fragrantly fraudulently so)

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and used that power in the short and medium term interests of a very few people and corporations with no interests in the general good. To put it bluntly we have voted for the destruction of society.

vii

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/five-minutes-with-colin-crouch/>

Also Peter Osborne's *The Rise of Political Lying* (2005).

viii

Politics is an inclusive activity. Blair's decision making was and continues to be almost always exclusive. Unfortunately, he has helped to create a template for others. It might help to look at

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/BlairInc.pdf>

ix

I have been told that I only needed to write the title of my review of Blair's book but here it all is anyway.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/bookReviewBlair.pdf>

x

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/11/saving-world-william-keegan-review>

xi

Here is the wisdom of George Osborne's father-in-law on physical fracking plus his knowledge of geography.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-23527634>

xii

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/10/the-establishment-how-they-get-away-with-it-owen-jones-review>

xiii

Under Blair it took me far too long to realise that I was working to an old model of government and politics. The Secretary of State that I refer to (Charles Clarke) genuinely engaged in discussion and he had, furthermore, included in the meeting the one civil servant in the Department that understood all the issues. Having scheduled more such meetings he was moved to another job and replaced by Ruth Kelly who cancelled them all. Education policy was now to be something we would receive and simply be expected to implement.

xiv

Harold Macmillan was often referred to as a great actor manager. Here he is, old and infirm, using his talent to amuse in order to make serious points about the stupidity of Margaret Thatcher's urge to sell off nationalised industries. Conservative politicians like him have virtually died out.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1ssGrq5S3w>

xv

In endnote xxi below I link to my review of a book for which Blair wrote the Foreword. He seems obsessed with the word 'choice'.

xvi

The first two links are to news stories about David Cameron's notion of a Big Society. The third is to a review by me of a book, *The Private Abuse of the Public Interest* that covers related issues and their consequences in the USA.

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/20/the-big-society-civil-exchange-audit-shows-coalition-contempt-and-hypocrisy>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-10680062>

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/SEARReviewBrownJacobs.pdf>

xvii

Pinching his title from C.P. Snow, David (now Lord) Lipsey provides a perspective on government and politics from the backroom. Today he is a backroom boy in ermine and makes a case for the usefulness of the House of Lords. Its usefulness might, however, be said to arise from the corresponding uselessness of the House of Commons.

<http://www.economist.com/node/21559310>

The somewhat conservatively minded Peter Osborne prefers a more open and inclusive approach to government and politics than the Labour supporting Lipsey. Here is a review of his book on the Political Class.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/sep/30/politics>

xviii

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/tories-use-terror-laws-to-rush-academies-bill-through-house-2030336.html>

xix

Anthony King has a lot to say about this in *Who Governs Britain?* (Pelican, 2015).

xx

Ivor Crewe and Anthony King feature the Poll Tax very prominently in their book *The Blunders of Our Governments* (2013) plus lots more about the way that New Labour did government.

xxi

'Progress' is heavily funded and very supportive of Tony Blair, retaining considerable influence within the Labour Party. Like Blair it seeks to attach well thought of labels such as 'progressive', 'modernisation' and 'reform' to the policies that it advocates. It often tries to characterise supporters of Jeremy Corbyn as 'hard left'. Such labelling is part of how post modern narratives and truths are constructed.

<http://www.progressonline.org.uk/about-progress/who-we-are/>

xxii

In the case described below it is central government telling local councils that they must subscribe to its foreign policy. Can we imagine where this might take us? Tony Blair would have been able to control, even suppress, much more of the debate about, for example, the illegal invasions of other countries that he was so keen on. The basic message is 'close down your minds and adopt our views'.

<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/dec/27/boycott-and-sanction-power-to-be-stripped-from-uk-councils>

xxiii

Here is a link to just one of a countless number of initiatives, projects and techniques by which social media can respond positively to what I see as a democratic deficit caused largely by those with power over our systems of government and politics. The holders of that power include international corporations and our formal media.

If you click on the link you may find my name there. I can, however, make no claim to ownership of this initiative.

[www.notinournamecd.co.uk](http://www.notinournamecd.co.uk)

xxiv

Remember that this was 1829 (American spelling by the way).

[https://www.durham.police.uk/About-Us/Documents/Peels\\_Principles\\_Of\\_Law\\_Enforcement.pdf](https://www.durham.police.uk/About-Us/Documents/Peels_Principles_Of_Law_Enforcement.pdf)

xxv

<http://www.factcheck.org/>

xxvi

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/slow-road-peace-syria-beginning-end>

xxvii

In the links below Felicity Arbuthnot and Heather Brooke demonstrate the importance of good journalistic values and instincts in countering the tendency of government to keep knowledge from us.

<http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2010/apr/18/heather-brooke-uk-secret-state>

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/camerons-transparency-mandate-provides-green-light-to-britains-extra-judicial-killings-and-drone-strikes/5501533>

xxviii

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/work/nuj-ethics/>

<http://www.glasgowmediagroup.org/>

xxix

In *The Morbid Age, Britain between the wars* (2009) Richard Overy includes a chapter on the eugenics movement. Knowing what we later came to know about death camps and euthanasia as practised by the Nazis we may, today, recoil from words such as 'retarded', 'feeble-minded' and 'sub-normal', all in common use until at least the 1960s, and squirm at the thought of compulsory sterilisation of young women because it has been decided that if they breed they will damage the purity of our race. We sometimes forget that racism is not confined to us being prejudiced against people of another definable race: it has often included a drive to improving a race by promoting those specimens that are approved of and holding back those that are not.

It is interesting that Overy reminds us that Marie Stopes, who did so much to promote birth control before WWII, was so greatly motivated by the wish to reduce the birth rate of the racially 'unfit'. Needless to say, such children were not expected to go to grammar schools, let alone mix with the even more privileged children who were admitted to 'public schools'.

xxx

<http://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/montesquieu-and-the-separation-of-powers>

xxxi

Below is my review of a key book on New Labour by an advocate for it.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/ErsatzPolitics.pdf>

xxxii

Below is the trailer for Ken Loach's film 1945.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c86Gwsb5LY>

xxxiii

I imagine an examination question: 'Accountability in public life; compare and contrast our approach to it in the eighteenth century with our approach to it in the twenty first century.'

<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/burkee/extracts/chap12.htm>

<http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Best/MacaulayImpeachHastings.htm>

xxxiv

<https://www.mackinac.org/7504>

xxxv

<https://www.nytimes.com/books/first/w/white-century.html>