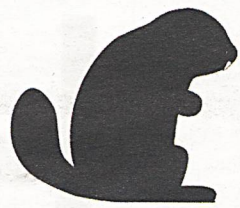


# the beaver



07.02.2012  
Newspaper of the  
LSE Students' Union  
FREE

## China Week roars through campus

Shu Hang

Last week, the LSE Students' Union Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) brought China Week to Houghton Street. Held in conjunction with the most important date on the Chinese calendar, Chinese New Year, the week was packed with events aimed to give students a taste of the festive celebration and broaden understandings of Chinese culture.

According to Hou Yu Chen, director of the CSSA's China Week Committee, the aim of the week is to "raise awareness of the Chinese culture among students and to demonstrate the multi-dimensional characteristic of China."

"There is a lot more to the culture than Kung Fu and delicious food," he added, "and we want to show the students all the interesting things the culture has to offer."

It was only appropriate that a dragon dance show would kick off the celebration as, according to the Zodiac calendar, 2012 has been designated 'The Year of The Dragon.' A professional team was hired to bring the colourful dragon costume to life, dancing their way across Houghton Street.

On Tuesday, the society offered traditional Chinese tea and wine to passerbys, drawing a large crowd. One student won a stuffed dragon doll after finishing a whole bottle of scalding Er Guo Tou, a Chinese white wine, in one go.

A film called "The Flowers of War" was also screened on Tuesday, retelling the story of a mortician leading a group of women

» 5



Students celebrate the year of the Dragon on Houghton Street | Photo: CSSA Society

## LSE applications drop by 8.2 per cent

Nona Buckley-Irvine

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) published figures for the 2012/2013 application cycle revealing a drop in applications to the London School of Economics (LSE). The LSE saw applications decline by 8.2 per cent, lower than the national average of 8.7 per cent.

This follows the controversial increase of home student tuition fees to £8,500. The LSE is the only Russell Group university, a consortium of twenty leading UK universities, to decline charging the maximum fee of £9,000.

UCAS figures further revealed a national decline in the popularity of social sciences: overall the number of students choosing to study combined social sciences has dropped by 11.8 per cent.

Choices for sciences combined with social sciences or arts fell by nearly twenty per cent, with applications for popular subjects such as medicine and law showing little decrease in applications.

Nationally, the LSE has generally fared better than the national average drop of 8.7 per cent and didn't suffer as badly as rival Kings College London (KCL), who saw applications drop by more than ten per cent.

Results show that other rivals such as Oxbridge, University College

London (UCL) and Imperial College London saw little change in applications, despite raising fees to £9,000, £500 more than the LSE.

The University of Cambridge saw an increase of applications by 2.3 per cent. Meanwhile, UCL, Imperial, both London based universities saw a mere drop of 1.5 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively. This is in spite of the LSE being named as the best London university in 2011 by the 2012 Guardian University Guide and being ranked fourth in the country.

The LSE also boasts a generous bursary scheme, where students from lower income backgrounds can receive up to £2,500.

Tim Leunig, Head of Economic History at the LSE and Chief Econo-

mist of the think-tank CentreForum wrote on the LSE Politics and Policy blog that "bursaries have no effect on student choices."

Explanation for why the LSE has seen one of the biggest drops in applications among its competitors still remains to be heard, though it is probable that this is in following with the above trend demonstrating the decrease in social science applications.

Leunig, who voted on the Academic Board in favour of charging the maximum fee, £9,000, sees the drop in applications as irrelevant.

"I think LSE still has a higher ratio of [applications/places] than is typical in the Russell [group] - frankly once you get over 10 applications per place it makes little difference."

The rise in tuition fees follows the Coalition Government's decision to allow universities to charge a maximum of £9,000 through a tuition loan system.

The LSE decided last year to raise fees to £8,500, choosing to rule out charging the maximum fees.

Two Sabbatical Officers at the time, Ashok Kumar and Hero Austin, the then LSE Students' Union Education Officer and LSE Students' Union Community and Welfare Officer respectively, wrote in the Guardian that the LSE was the "only Russell Group institution with fees below £9,000, the only university enacting our principles and rejecting the current attack on public higher education."



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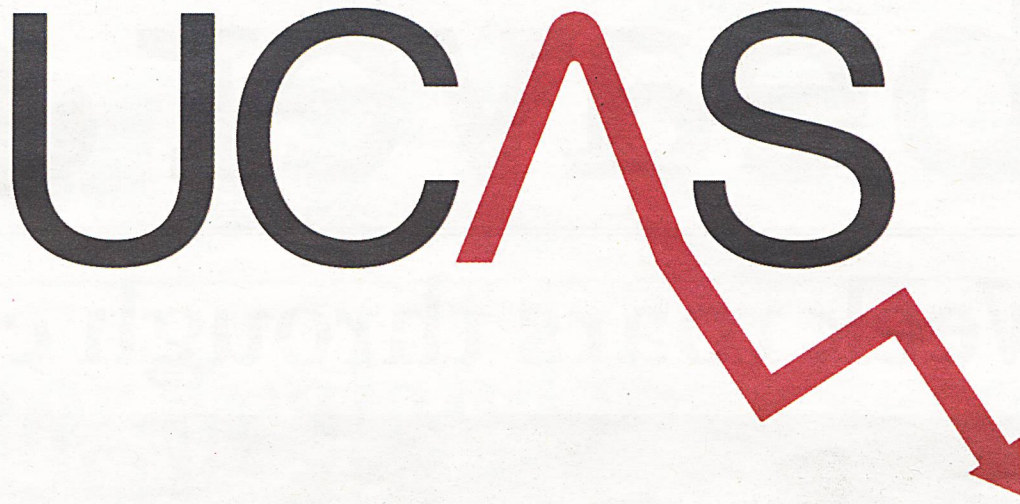


## Union Bashō

### Bad Timing

I hope the snow goes just before the SU can announce 'Freeze the Freeze'.

*Bashō is the Beaver's elusive haiku poet. He's pretty sure he stole 'Freeze the Freeze' from somewhere.*



# thebeaver

Established in 1949

Issue No. 765

Telephone: 0207 955 6705 Email: [editor@thebeaveronline.co.uk](mailto:editor@thebeaveronline.co.uk)

## UCrASh

This year's university admissions data shows applications to the LSE are down by 8.2 per cent. When taken in a wider context of university admissions, this is slightly better than the average national statistics, which show a drop in applications which lies at 8.7 per cent. However, it remains a concerning statistic. This university places itself in an important niche that other universities find harder to fill because of funding requirements to their science faculties. The social sciences have been much maligned by the current coalition, deemed to be less worthy of funding than the supposed 'hard' sciences, as evidenced by the Browne Report, which saw social sciences moved to "Bands C and D," removing all of their government funding. If this specialised institution continues to have difficulty in attracting students, it could signal the beginning of the end for intellectual thought in the realm of the social sciences. At the very least the public provision of such important subjects seems to be over.

This paper hopes that this information will be a springboard for both the council of the LSE and

our Sabbatical officers to engage in aggressive campaigning. Firstly for a workable grant system; if the battle has been lost for the paying of education then the war must be continued for affordable education. No-one should even entertain the notion that money should somehow prevent them from attending higher education. It is especially galling to see this happen at an institution founded by Fabian Society members Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and George Bernard Shaw, based on social advance and intellectual curiosity, no matter where you come from. That is not to say that our representatives have not been resting on their laurels, but now there is hard data to support the anecdotal evidence we had before: that the higher education sector is suffering as a result of fees increases.

Secondly, this drop in applications is indicative of the government's spending cuts to social science funding for universities across the country, especially when other top institutions which offer a wider selection of degree programmes, such as Cambridge, saw an increase in applications. Therefore, this could be the data that enables

the LSE to return to the government and make a plausible case for getting funding to further support the social sciences. It is simply unsustainable to keep forcing both international and Masters students to shoulder the burden of financing our institution.

Thirdly, these statistics should create a debate on campus over the priorities of higher education; educating the current students on the fight for education should enable everyone to join in the struggle over the evisceration of the higher education sector in this country.

Additionally, this week the Philippe Roman chair was awarded to Anne Applebaum. A former editor of the Economist and expert in Soviet influences in post-war Central Europe, she is the first woman to be appointed to the role - established in the 2007-2008 academic year. It is encouraging to see such a progressive stance taken by this institution, if the culture of equality can be bred in such prominent positions, then hopefully wider attitudes can start to shift to positions more in line with those that should be present in 2012.

## Collective

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The Collective is The Beaver's governing body. You must have contributed three pieces of work, or contributed to the production of three issues of the paper (editorially or administratively), to qualify for membership. If you believe you are a Collective member but your name is not on the list above, please email

[collective@thebeaveronline.co.uk](mailto:collective@thebeaveronline.co.uk)

The Beaver would like to thank the LSE students who contributed to this issue.

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The Beaver uses pictures from flickr.com which have been issued under a Creative Commons license.

## Correction

The Beaver would like to apologize to Aimee Riese for including pull quotes in her comment piece last week "Leave Technion alone" that did not appear elsewhere in her column.

The Beaver regrets this error.

## Online Voting

The Beaver Collective will be voting on two new positions on Tuesday, 2nd February in an online vote, at 9am and running for 24 hours.

Positions to be elected:

Collective Chair x1  
 Online Editor x1

Collective members on the list above have been added to the voting roster.

Those not on Collective can email [collective@thebeaveronline.co.uk](mailto:collective@thebeaveronline.co.uk) for more information.

# School raises concerns over student drinking

**Pallavi Bansal and Sydney Saubestre**

Alcohol related incidents on campus have increased in the past year, according to Jan Stockdale, Dean of Undergraduate Studies. Stockdale has reported her concerns to the School's Personal Security Group, which she chairs, and the School will be investigating ways to reduce incidents directly due to drinking as well as those where drinking played a large factor,

such as those involving sexual and/or physical violence, which are frequently alcohol-related.

"[Incidents]...involving sexual and/or physical violence are frequently alcohol-related. The intake of alcohol often affects people's judgment of their surroundings and/or the intentions of others. Any attribution of causes for such an increase would be speculation, but it has been argued that the low cost of alcohol relative to incomes has been a factor in an increase in alcohol consumption with all its attendant risks," Stockdale stated.

In light of an increase in alcohol

consumption related incidents, Stockdale has renewed her efforts to bring this to the forefront of student issues: "whilst I would like to highlight that alcohol consumption is an increasingly worrying issue, it is not a new problem. About two years ago, I reported my concerns about personal security/safety issues affecting students."

Alex Peters-Day, General Secretary of the LSE Students' Union reassures, "we are making efforts to increase awareness amongst LSE students. In fact, we are planning...an awareness week towards the end of the term, whereby students would be invited to

design campaigns for creating alcohol awareness and the chosen campaign would win a prize."

The Three Tuns is looking into establishing loyalty cards. According to Alex Bond, Manager of the Three Tuns: "we are planning to introduce loyalty cards to provide better services to students as part of our promotion activities. This idea is still in progress and we are aiming at including both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. We might include food items as well if the idea works well."

Peters-Day, a sponsor of the Three Tuns loyalty program, adds "we try to maintain balance between everything, it's not that we want to refrain students from drinking but we make sure students are drinking in a responsible way."

Ed Szymanski, President of the Student Committee at Northumberland Halls, stated: "we do bring alcohol while celebrating special occasions in the common room for students but the amount spent on alcohol is not as much as compared to the amount spent on food."

The rise of alcohol consumption on campus is of concern to several prominent members of the LSE community: "the School does not wish to be seen as a 'kill-joy': but we would like to endorse any message from the student community that raises awareness of the risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption," said Stockdale.

Most students are concerned with the extent to which the School may intervene in their social lives.

Alex Haigh, a second year BSc Environmental Policy with Economics student, said, "it's important to make sure that a safe environment is maintained on campus, but I do not think that it is necessarily the School's place to interfere. Drinking is a large part of any student's life and most everyone I know does so responsibly."

Matt Worby, a second year BSc Government student, said, "I'm really looking forward to beer being cheaper than it currently is. I certainly will be very loyal."



The Tuns | Photo: Wanda O'Brien

# Sabbs report on activities at UGM

**John Armstrong**

There were no motions raised at this week's Students' Union General Meeting (UGM). However the Sabbatical Officers reported on their achievements and plans for this term.

Alex Peters-Day, General Secretary of the Students' Union attended a variety of meetings this year including a "good campus relations meeting to talk about student issues", as well as the new student's centre project board meeting. Similarly, she held a meeting of University of London Sabbatical Officers to discuss a motion to be brought to the National Union of Students (NUS) on specific support for London institutions. Future plans also include, a demonstration against unpaid inters at London fashion week and the first The Only Way Is Ethics (TOWIE) meeting.

Stanley Ellerby-English, Activities and Development Officer discussed three main issues at this week's UGM. He reported on the encouraging participation that has been seen for the upcoming dodge-

ball tournament to be held at Talacre Sports Centre on Sunday 12th February. Also, Ellerby-English outlined the Bernard Levin Award for creative writing which is now open for submissions along with Raising And Giving (RAG) week which will take

to reduce them in the future. She has also attended a meeting as part of a review team looking at the teaching and resources available to students within the Methodology Institute.

Lukas Slothuus, Community and Welfare officer will this term, embark

endeavour to carry and implement out most of the points of concern. Moreover, Slothuus will look to reform the constitutions for hall committees so there is a "stronger, better representation for residents and a more democratic process." Similarly the Community and Welfare Officer will actively campaign against the Government's White Paper and on 7 March there is a National Lobby of Parliament day, along with a National Week of Action following the event.

Robin Burrett, Postgraduate Officer will also take part in the NUS National Lobby of Parliament on 7 March as well as looking into the propose LSE PhD Studentship Liaison.

Finally, the three motions which were proposed last week were all passed successfully. These included, "Stop Islamophobia," "Stop Anti-Semitism" and "Save the UGM." Next week's motion is entitled "London students at the heart of 2012 elections" and will focus on this year's London Mayoral elections.



UGM | Photo: Li Yang

place in week six of Lent term.

The Education Officer, Amena Amer has been looking at failure rates at the London School of Economics (LSE) over the past few years in order to implement changes

on a tour of all LSE halls of residence to consult with students on what need to be improved. The data will be collated into a report which will then be taken to the Residences Committee, after which the School will



RAG is gearing up for RAG Week 2012 - taking place in Week 6!

Main events include: Battle of the Halls: The Rematch (Thurs 16th Feb) which is taking place at the infamous Cheapstakes; The AU Chest Wax (Weds 15th Feb) in the Tuns; The ROWathon covering the distance to Amsterdam and Gunge-A-Sab! Throughout the week there will be a RAG stall selling our merchandise with all proceeds going to our three RAG charities: National AIDS Trust, War Child and Action Against Hunger. Please remember to save your library fines for this week and pay them into the collection buckets in the library!

A key part of RAG is our collaboration with societies. As part of RAG Week 2012 the Drama Society are performing 'Blake's Doors' in the Underground Bar on Monday 13th (7:30pm), Tues 14th (7:30pm) and Weds 15th (6:30pm) where a portion of ticket sales will be going to RAG - so be sure to go along!

The Debate Society are hosting The Valentines Cup again due to overwhelming popular demand! This is a chance for you to pair up with that special someone and show them how much you care (by evenly distributing your substantive points...) Either bring your current loved one or allow us to pair you up with your future love. All non-debaters are especially welcome, this will be a fun competition with no experience necessary! Taking place on Tuesday, 7th Feb at 6pm in CLM 7.02.

This week sees RAG and the AU collaborating for Mr LSE. Watch or join an array of challenges set for our Mr LSE wannabes, ranging from showcases of individual talents to oiled-up bodies. There will be donation buckets at the door so be sure to donate money to RAG. If you are interested in participating please contact [su.aucomm@lse.ac.uk](mailto:su.aucomm@lse.ac.uk). The RAG hitchhike is to Berlin this year! Leaving on Saturday the 17th March this sees teams of two or three travelling to Berlin on as little money as possible. After a successful first meeting last week we are hosting another for those who couldn't make it taking place today (Tuesday 7th Feb) at 5pm in TW1 U103.

We are so pleased with the level of interest from people wanting to volunteer for RAG Week and for RAG generally. We apologise to anyone who might not have had a response from the RAG email account recently, as this has been down for the past week! We will be sending out rotas for those who have expressed interest soon! If you would like to get involved please email [su.rag@lse.ac.uk](mailto:su.rag@lse.ac.uk).

As always please 'like' our Facebook page, LSESU RAG, become our friend on Facebook by adding LSE SU RAG and join our free mailing list by going to <http://www.lsesu.com/activities/societies/society/rag/>.

RAG is proud to be sponsored by Ernst & Young.

## GOT A SCOOP?

Got a story that you think we should be printing? Send us an e-mail: [news@thebeaveronline.co.uk](mailto:news@thebeaveronline.co.uk)

## Practise your languages with a native speaker, join Tandem Learning!

The LSE Language Centre offers FREE events open to all LSE students who wish to practise their language skills.

You can practise English or any of the foreign languages we offer and support others who are learning your native language. These events are also an ideal occasion for students to network within and across departments.

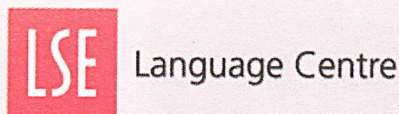
Join our **facebook** groups to:

- ✓ Keep updated on events such as Tandem Learning Evenings, Film Nights and Language Lunchtimes
- ✓ Get help from a native speaker, in exchange for helping someone learn your language
- ✓ Have conversations and discussions with native speakers
- ✓ Propose and organise activities with other LSE members
- ✓ DON'T FORGET! Join the group for your native language, as well as the one you are learning, to maximise your chances of finding a partner

Below is also a summary of this term's events. Feel free to get in touch if you need more information:

Date	Time	Location	Language(s)	Activity or Event
Wednesday, 25 January	16:00-17:00	TW1.U8	Mandarin	Language Practice
Wednesday, 25 January	17:00-18:30	TW1.U8	Mandarin	Film Evening
Monday, 30 January	17:00-18:00	CMK.C722	Italian	'Conversation' Hour
Wednesday, 1 February	13:00-14:00	CMK.C722	Spanish	Spanish Lunchtime
Wednesday, 8 February	12:00-13:00	CMK.C722	All languages	Lunchtime 'Pot-Luck'
Monday, 13 February	18:00-19:00	CMK.C722	French	French Pub Tandem
Wednesday, 15 February	17:00-19:00	CMK.C722	German	Film Evening
Wednesday, 22 February	TBC	TBC	Arabic	TBC
Tuesday, 28 February	16:15-18:30	CMK.C722	Spanish	Film Evening
Thursday, 8 March	17:00-18:30	The Three Tuns	All languages	End of Term Party

For bookings, more information and to sign up, go to: [www.lse.ac.uk/languages/tandem](http://www.lse.ac.uk/languages/tandem)



# LSE alumni design bomb-proof bins

John Armstrong

Two former LSE students are the brains behind an innovative company who have pioneered new rubbish bins to be installed around London's financial district.

The ground breaking design enables users to dispose of waste whilst catching up on breaking news and changes in the financial markets.

This week, it has been announced that 100 bomb-proof bins are to be installed in the City of London before their use in the London 2012 Olympics.

"Renew" is the company behind this innovative design which aims to tackle the issue of London's waste disposal. In recent years, there has been a problem with recycling free newspapers and magazines and the City of London have been historically cautious

of bomb threats in the square mile.

In a recent article published by Reuters, the CEO of Renew, Kaveh Memari said "there has hardly been any innovation in this space. Rubbish bins have just been a box with a hole."

Memari went on to say, "we don't think this is just solving issues with recycling or bins. Yes, it helps to go green and it helps to be safe, but this is also about usefulness." Renew also have received funding from the Qatar Islamic Bank to complete the production process.

The former LSE student and CEO highlighted the lack of communication at the time of the 7th July attacks in London and suggested that the new bins would become an "emergency broadcast channel."

This would also prove a useful tool during this years Olympics as the LCD screen would provide information for those attending the games and be used by the City of London Police in the event of an emergency.

The screens also relay breaking news and infographics on the financial markets as well as tube delays. Similarly, Memari suggests that the screens "tell you how many bikes there are around the corner" and aid commuters returning to and from their place of work in the City.

However, the cost of the bins total £25,000 each due to the material they are used with. Content access for the LCD screens is sold to companies while the maintenance of the bins is paid for by Renew.

The innovative company have signed a deal to install one bin in front of the New York Stock Exchange for a trial period and also are in talks with the Japanese authorities who are concerned with similar threats to its major economic centres.

# Applebaum announced as next Phillip Roman Chair holder

Bethany Clarke

LSE alumna and Pulitzer Prize winner Anne Applebaum will take up the Philippe Roman Chair in History and International Affairs at the School for the 2012-2013 academic year, the LSE has announced. Applebaum is the first woman to have held this prestigious post.

"I'm delighted to be given this wonderful opportunity to meet and work with the students and faculty of the LSE, one of the few truly global institutions," said Applebaum.

Applebaum earned her BA from Yale University before earning an MSc in International Relations at the LSE.

Applebaum is currently the director of political studies at the Legatum Institute and a columnist for 'Slate' and the 'Washington Post'. Her journalistic work centres on American and international politics, with a focus on economic and political transition issues. She has also written for the 'Economist', the 'Daily Telegraph', the 'Sunday Telegraph', and the 'Evening Standard'. She has formerly held editorial board positions on the Economist and the Washington Post.

In 2004, she won the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction and Britain's Duff-Cooper Prize for her book 'Gulag: a

history, which outlines the daily life of prisoners in Soviet concentration camps.

Michale Cox, co-director of LSE IDEAS, said: "This is a top appointment, not only is Anne Applebaum the first woman ever to hold this prestigious position, she is also the first Chair to have a real interest and expertise in Central Europe."

"We are delighted that Anne Applebaum will be joining LSE IDEAS for the next academic year. Her current focus on the Stalinization of post-war Central Europe will greatly enhance the centre's research on European affairs and the history of the Cold War and we look forward to welcoming her to LSE in October," said Arne Westad, also co-director of the centre.

Applebaum, who takes up the post in October 2012, will succeed Ramachandra Guha. Previous holders include Niall Ferguson, Chen Kian, and Paul Kennedy, who was the inaugural holder of the position.

The Philippe Roman Chair is located at LSE IDEAS, the School's centre for international affairs, diplomacy and grand strategy. Founded in 2008, the centre conducts research on the international affairs of East and Southeast Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, as well as on transatlantic relations and on the history of the Cold War



Anne Applebaum | Flickr: Slawek's

# LSE research reveals IMF conditions not too harsh

Bethany Clarke

Stephanie Rickard, a lecturer in the Department of Government, co-authored a paper revealing that, contrary to popular belief, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) gives workers in debt-ridden countries sympathetic treatment.

The study reveals that "the fate of

workers in this time of economic crisis may not be as bleak as people have assumed," said Rickard.

"Our findings suggest that democratic governments represent workers' interests at the international bargaining table and the IMF is responsive to these interests. This contradicts the conventional wisdom which assumes that international bodies can ignore domestic concerns in setting conditions for loans."

The study reveals that while the

IMF requires reforms from nations seeking loans during economic crises, it does take into account the views of citizens and works to soften labour conditions when they protest.

The report reveals "that reformers may be able to do more to help workers by pushing for democracy in borrowing countries than by campaigning to restructure the IMF or its lending practices."

The investigation cites the case of Greece, which took extreme austerity measures in 2011. Following mass demonstrations, the IMF made compromises over wages, pensions and job numbers.

The report, published on the 1st January in the journal International Organization, summarised the findings of an investigation into IMF loan conditions between 1980 and 2000. In contrast with previous studies on this subject, the investigation focused on the content, rather than the number, of conditions imposed. The researchers assigned each of the conditions to one of nine categories, allowing them to measure the intrusiveness and stringency of conditions.

A comparison of conditions in different nations revealed that democracies with powerful labour movements secured less intrusive market conditions from the IMF than other nations.

Teri Caraway of the University of Minnesota and Mark Anner from Pennsylvania State University co-authored the paper.



Photo: Flickr Mike Licht, NotionsCapital.com

# Debate Society triumphs in Inner Temple IV

Bethany Clarke

LSE students David Berman and Carlo Cabrera participated in eight rounds of debating to win first place in the Inner Temple IV debate competition last weekend. LSE teams took three of eight places in the semi-final round of debating. Berman was the highest scoring speaker at the event.

Samuel Joynson, a second year BSc International Relations with History student and member of the Debate Society, said: "The Inner Temple IV 2012 was a great success for the London School of Economics. Debating in the famous halls of the ancient Inn of Court, the LSESU Debate Society enjoyed their greatest success of the 2011-2012 academic calendar so far, by winning the Inner Temple IV."

"Personally, I particularly enjoyed the fact that I qualified for the semi-finals with Sara Essa, as neither of us had previously qualified for the final

rounds of a highly competitive debating tournament. As 2nd year undergrad history students, we enjoyed debating Scottish independence, and found LSE BC's speeches in the grand final regarding NATO intervention in Syria very interesting."

Joynson added: "The debating motions were tough, but their general focus on current affairs made them interesting and relevant. The fantastic weekend was compounded by a sumptuous banquet on Saturday night in the Inner Temple's Great Hall, whilst snow was falling outside. A superb experience!"

The Inner Temple IV debating competition hosted by the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, is one of the most sought-after IV wins.

The Debate Society prepares for tournaments at bi-weekly training sessions, where novice members are taught debating strategy and experienced debaters are lectured on specific issues. The society attends various debate tournaments throughout the year.

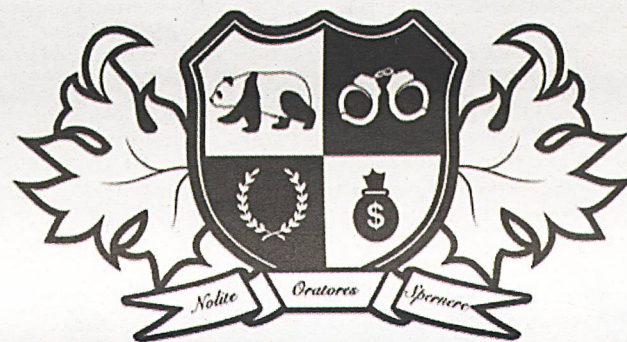


Photo: Debate Society's Facebook

## continued from page 1

safety, while posing as a priest, during the Nanking Massacre of 1937.

The 'Food Tasting Experience,' held on Thursday, proved to be a success, where more than a hundred steamed buns were sold to raise money for charity. Among the highlights was the Char Sui Bun, a Cantonese pork-based

treat that is extremely popular in Asia.

A talk on Chinese Medicine was held later in the day, which explored the parallels between contemporary Western ideas, such as quantum physics and economics, and Chinese science dating from more than 2000 years ago.

According to Professor Mei, a visiting lecturer from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, "Chinese medicine is all about balancing Ying, negative energy, and Yang, positive energy. [It's about] finding harmony between the

two forces." He then related the discovery of dark matter and positrons, and the recent financial crisis with the philosophy of Ying and Yang, which describes the complex relationship between these contrary forces.

One attendee praised the talk for being ambitious in scope, but felt that "one hour is not enough to make strong arguments on such a wide area."

Tribute was paid to the Han dynasty on Friday, as China Week closed with the "Hanfu Parade." Members of the society braced the cold and pa-

raded around the campus while wearing historical Han Chinese Clothing, borrowed from the Confucius Institute, inspiring curious gazes from students.

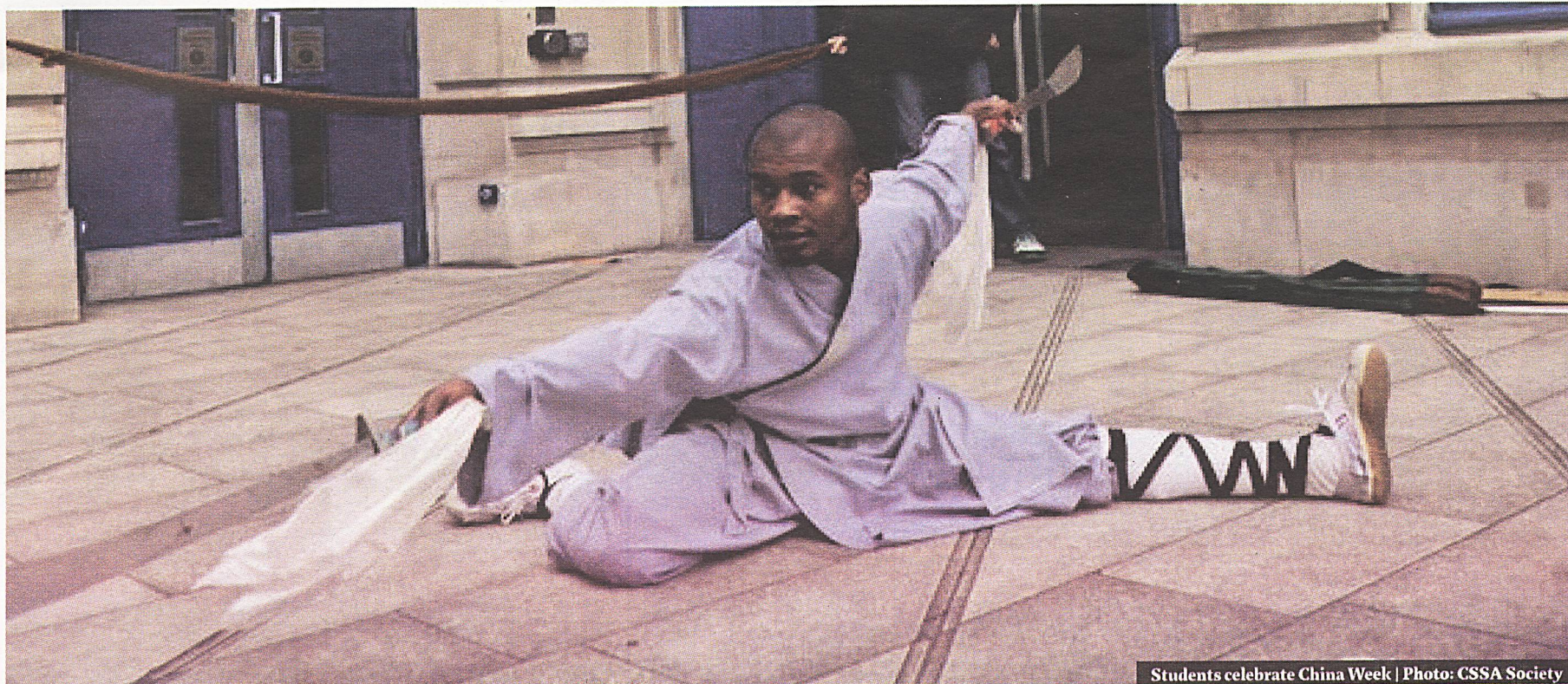
Other events included a Kung Fu performance and the showcase of traditional games and toys, such as the Chinese Yo-yo.

Overall, reception to China Week has been encouraging. Sam Chen, a first year Economics and Philosophy student viewed China Week as "a positive step" in showing China's traditions to all other ethnic groups at

LSE, though he wished that it had been "more heavily promoted."

Stanley Ellerby-English, Activities and Development Officer expressed similar sentiments, saying that he "really enjoyed their presence all week on Houghton Street."

"Having weeks where societies make a real push to promote themselves is the best way to get out there and make a splash amongst the student body," added Ellerby-English.



Students celebrate China Week | Photo: CSSA Society

# Gaspar confident in Portugal's economic future

Harry Burdon

Vitor Gaspar, the Portuguese Minister of Finance, spoke at the London School of Economics on the Portuguese program for "restoring credibility and confidence." Gaspar described his goal of the presentation to "persuade you [the audience] that following the economic and financial adjustment program, Portugal follows its own national public interest," while "choosing a path which is favourable to gaining credibility gradually over time." He also claimed it will provide an "insurance mechanism" against future economic turmoil.

Outlining the lead up to the current Portuguese situation, Gaspar said that over more than the past decade, "Portugal accumulate[d] macroeconomic imbalances and structural weaknesses." After joining the monetary union, it had "more favourable financing conditions" than in the past. This opened up the opportunity to increase expenditure and take on more debt. Unsustainable public finances ensued and government debt rose, including in "favourable cyclical conditions." This

happened alongside a rise in the indebtedness of households and non-financial corporations. The increased expenditure "was directed to sectors of the economy... which were sheltered from external competition." In addition, Gaspar reflected on the "low productivity growth."

Over roughly the last ten years, Portuguese growth has been about one per cent per year, a figure Gaspar described as "very disappointing." He attributed this low growth to "restrictions on competition" and protectionism, "weak conditions to enter entrepreneurial activity, poor functioning... justice system, and rigidities in the labour market." Consequently, there was a lack of "inward foreign direct investment." Also, "capital accumulation [was] tilted towards [the] non-tradeable goods and services sector." The "lack of competition" resulted in "large mark-ups and low levels of innovation." This culminated in "high levels of youth and long-term unemployment." The European sovereign debt crisis, Gaspar claims, revealed weaknesses within the economy. He elaborated that "the financing positions for the Portuguese general government and Portuguese banks deteriorated quite sharply," causing the "request for international assistance in May last year."

Portugal has implemented their re-adjustment program to combat the aforementioned problems. The programme consists of "three pillars." The first is "fiscal consolidation," putting "fiscal policy on a sustainable path." The second is "financial stability," whereby problems in the banking sector are addressed. The last is "structural transformation," in which the aim is structural reform to increase Portuguese potential growth. The program included receiving a €78 billion bailout, of which €12 billion are for recapitalising the banks. Under the program, Portugal is subject to regular reviews of its progress. The past reviews on August and November, Gaspar claims, showed Portugal to be "well on track."

The media has highlighted Portugal's very high bond rates. Gaspar made the point that, due to being under the adjustment program, Portugal "does not finance itself in the treasury bond market, and so the yield differentials" do not affect the Portuguese borrowing costs. He said that they "are only secondary market rates." He continued to comment on how these markets have "very low turnover," with some days having no transactions, arguing that these prices do not "reflect fundamentals."

During a question and answer

session, audience members drew attention to the fact there has been a deterioration of rates recently, and that rating agencies have not recognised Portuguese progress. Standard and Poor recently downgraded Portugal to junk status. Gaspar's response was that credibility can only be "built up gradually." He said the program "allows the Portuguese government time to restore confidence and credibility, as it enables Portugal to refrain from entering the government bond markets until 23 September, 2013."

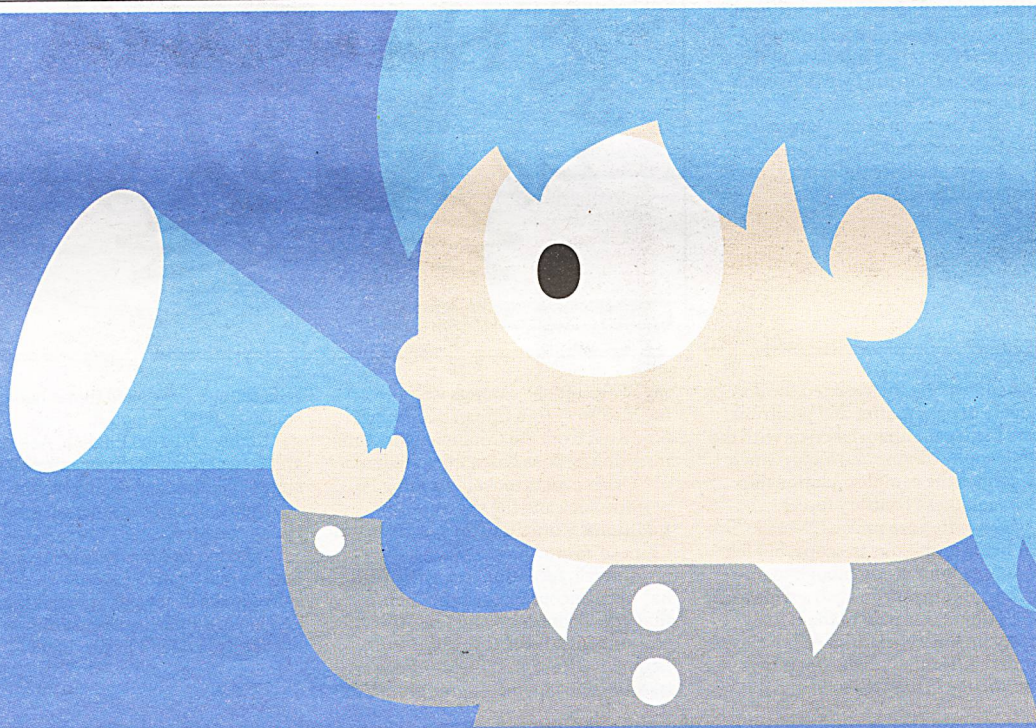
Gaspar spoke on Portugal's progress, talking on how the adjustment program projected a contraction of 2.2 per cent in 2011, however the actual decline is estimated at 1.5 or 1.6 per cent. He described this as "considerably milder." The 2011 budget deficit was brought down to 4% of GDP, below the euro area average, which he said was "partially due to the transfer of banks pension funds to the general government."

Portugal has implemented "an adjustment of four percentage points of GDP, which stands out in comparison to other euro area countries. He also claimed the banks to be "significantly stronger," with improved capital ratios and reduced debt. Also, "bank deposits have grown above the growth of bank deposits on average for the

euro area." They have implemented "labour market reforms, increases in competition," and privatisation, with adjustment of the competition law to be coming in the future. He also highlighted Portugal's large reduction in structural deficit, from 11.4 per cent in 2010, to 6.9 per cent in 2011, and with 2.6 per cent projected for 2012. In addition, there is the expectation of "a trade surplus this year already."

In reference to the Portuguese people, Gaspar stated that "the Portuguese are in large numbers supporting the need and the priority of adjustment. I believe that is the dominant mood in the country." A Portuguese member of the audience Pedro Xavier was concerned that "thirteen per cent are unemployed." Carlos Peraas, who is also Portuguese, claimed there to be "politics in delusion," saying "sit with the humble people, go there." Ana Canedo, an MSc Management and Strategy student, commented "he knows what he's talking about."

Vitor Gaspar expressed the belief that "in a year's time I will be able to come back here, you'll invite me, and document success."



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Vitor Gaspar speaking at LSE | Photo: Harry Burdon

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# LSE reports on Cloud Computing

Alex Haigh

Cloud Computing, remote applications offering internet storage and other services, and will promote economic growth, create jobs and improve small firms' access to technological information, according to a new study by the LSE.

“Modelling the Cloud,” commissioned by Microsoft, focuses on the impact of Cloud Computing technology on the smartphone and aerospace industries of the UK, USA, Germany and Italy.

“Cloud Computing: a Perspective Study,” a 2010 report by the LSE, defines Cloud Computing as when “users move out their data and applications to the remote “Cloud” and then access them in a simple and pervasive way.” The “Cloud” refers to personalised Internet storage and services which can be accessed anywhere.

According to “Modelling the Cloud,” Cloud Computing will cause immediate, rapid increases in employment in Cloud-based jobs that will, in turn, cause wider employment benefits

in the future.

The study also reveals that there is little risk of net losses in employment as companies are more likely to move and re-train staff than fire them. Also, employment will be created in the construction and maintenance of data centres.

The benefits of Cloud technology to firms will depend on “capabilities of particular firms and their current level of capital investment in IT, the characteristics of specific sectors, and the national context.”

Between 2010 and 2014, employment in Cloud-based roles in the smartphone industry will increase by 349 per cent in the UK; and 280, 268 and 168 per cent in Germany, Italy and the US respectively. This growth is largely fuelled by the sector's growth and the nature of the industry itself.

This compares to 52, 33, 36 and 57 per cent increases in Cloud-based jobs in the aerospace industry for the UK, Germany, Italy and USA respectively. This is explained by the relative slower growth of the industry.

The US is already leading the way in Cloud-based technology, explaining its relative slow growth compared to its European competitors. It has the highest relative salaries for Cloud



Marshall Sahlins | Photo: LSE Website

technology jobs: between \$70k and \$120k in the US and between £40k (\$63K) and £60k (\$95k) in the UK, with German and Italian wages trailing behind.

Also, the US will boast 54,500 Cloud-based jobs in the smartphone industry compared to 4,040 jobs. This is due to lower energy costs and less

restrictive labour regulation, according to the report.

However, this early lead in the industry will not necessarily be to the detriment of the European competitors if they can make themselves attractive to public investment.

The report states that, if Europe wants to compete with US in Cloud-

based industry, it must focus on improved education in “eSkills,” ensure privacy rights do not prevent the development of the industry and encourage firms to adopt “green energy” policies so they will switch to the Cloud.



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# Comment

## Why Libya and not Syria?

Exposing the hypocrisy of the international community



Flickr: informatique

**Samira Lindner**



During the far-reaching fervour of the Arab Spring last year, when we saw citizens take to the streets and their governments topple, it seemed reasonable to expect that the forty year regime of Syria's Assad family would also fall. The movement in Syria began in March 2011. At first, protesters tentatively called for democracy and freedom. Eventually, they demanded the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Now, almost a year later, with more than 5,000 civilians killed and 14,000 detained, the ruthless Assad is still in power.

The President denies any wrongdoing and refuses to step down. Though he offers some political concessions and promises reform, as long as people continue to be killed and his security forces are allowed to "run wild," such promises mean very little.

When looking at the situation in Syria, one does get a feeling of déjà vu. Where have we seen a ruthless Arab dictator family of a small sectarian minority ruling an oppressive forty year regime? In Libya, of course. We all know what that led to: a NATO-intervention and the eventual toppling and killing of dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

It is not unreasonable to expect the same thing to happen in Syria. On the basis of civilian deaths alone, an intervention in Syria would be more justified than in Libya. However, not only is the prospect of a foreign-led intervention highly unlikely, the UN Security Council cannot even agree on a statement condemning the violence. There are several factors that make Syria a more complicated case than Libya.

Firstly, there are significant regional and international implications. Syria is a major player in the Middle East so any chaos could have spill-over effects in neighbouring countries such as Lebanon and Israel, where it could mobilise powerful groups such as the Hezbollah and Hamas. It also has close ties with Shias in Iran and could possibly draw them into a conflict, which could in effect draw in the USA, Israel and Saudi Arabia. An intervention could thus open up a hugely unpleasant can of worms and have major regional and international repercussions.

Secondly, Gaddafi was something of a rogue player whereas Syria has solid backing from Iran and Turkey (a NATO member) as well as support from Russia and China. Any intervention would have to overcome these alliances or risk going at it alone without UN or NATO support.

Thirdly, Syria has a strong military and lack of rebel organisation. Gaddafi's ramshackle army of 50,000 soldiers pales in comparison to Assad's 325,000 regular soldiers

and more than 100,000 paramilitaries. Furthermore, prior to the intervention, rebels in Libya had already captured most of eastern Libya, whereas Syrian activists have captured no territory and are still quite disorganised. An intervention in Syria would have to entail a massive force and build the military opposition from the ground up; selling that to the international community would not be easy.

**"Going beyond the debate on whether or not the principle of intervention is right, I would argue that there should be an end to this double standard."**

So we can see that the preconditions for an intervention in Syria are not exactly the same as they were in Libya. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of hypocrisy in the international community. While, in the case of Libya, policymakers expressed their

commitment to universal norms and support for the oppressed civilians, all those morals and commitments have seemingly disappeared when it comes to intervening in Syria.

Even the Arab League has remained reserved on the issue of Syria, despite the fact that it backed the intervention in Libya in order to protect civilians there. In their statement on Assad's regime, they called for the end to violence but fell short of calling for action due to "strategic and political considerations." Does that mean humanitarian concerns are only valid when there are no strategic and political considerations? Do human rights disappear when the regime has close ties to its neighbours and powerful players?

The recent UN Security Council debates on Syria have been equally frustrating. In January, the Arab League put forward a plan for political reform in Syria and sought the support of the Security Council. While President Assad has rejected the proposals (no surprise there), the Security Council has not fared any better. Russia, with its economic and military ties to Syria, has vetoed previous efforts to take action in Syria.

Now, despite a "watered-down" resolution, both Russia and China still oppose it. What is their justification? Russia has said that, while it condemns the use of force by the government against civilians, it also condemns the activities of the "armed extremist groups who attack government positions." So, suddenly the pro-

testers are violent militant extremists? And China has said that it opposes "forced regime change in Syria as it violates the UN Charter and the basic norms guiding the practice of international relations." If an intervention in Syria is a violation of the UN Charter, what, then, was Libya?

The international community needs to decide what its commitments really are and under what principles it is really acting. If it is a principle of humanity and protecting citizens, then what happens in Syria should be no different to policy towards Libya. However, if it is a principle of sovereignty and security concerns, then the whole notion of military intervention seems not only to be a violation but also counterproductive and dangerous.

Going beyond the debate on whether or not the principle of intervention is right, I would argue that there should be an end to this double standard. Either the international community commits itself to humanitarian causes or it doesn't. But this in-between state of only intervening when it best suits powerful interests delegitimises the whole basis of intervention. It loses its humanitarian commitment and becomes a manifestation of interests. All the international community is then boiled down to is an anarchic system with no cooperation, no compassion and constant power play. And that is not a world we want to live in. ☹

# Why SU elections are important

## LSE SU's Returning Officer encourages us to stand in the Lent Term elections

**Joshua Michael Still**



**N**ext week will see the opening of nominations for the Lent Term elections, something that I hope at least some of you are aware of already. As the LSE SU Returning Officer for this academic year, I would like to take this opportunity to try and encourage as many of you reading this as possible to participate, either by voting (at [www.lsesu.com/vote](http://www.lsesu.com/vote)) or, better yet, by standing.

Firstly, I think it is important to explain that the positions being voted on include the highest and most prestigious in the Students' Union. They will provide you with the opportunity to effect substantial change in the life of the entire University.

The Sabbatical positions require you to take a year out of study and become a full-time employee of the Students' Union, with the excitement, challenges and salary that entails. The General Secretary is the head of the Union, sits on numerous committees and deals with the highest echelons of University management on a regular basis.

The Education Officer has a huge responsibility to enhance the educational experience of both current and future LSE students. The Activities and Development Officer liaises with over 160 societies, as well as the 40 com-

petitive clubs that encompass more than 2,500 sportsmen and women.

The Community and Welfare Officer has effectively led the priority campaign "The Only Way is Ethics" this year, which could have long term repercussions for LSE's reputation.

There are also numerous positions on the Part Time Executive if you are interested in representing, and campaigning for, a broad swathe of students or causes. These include Environment and Ethics Officer, Women's Officer and LGBT Officer.

In the Democracy Committee, there is the chance to investigate new ways to engage students with LSE democracy, as well as the opportunity to secure senior positions, including Chair of the weekly UGM and the position I currently hold, Returning Officer.

Last, but certainly not least, becoming a Trustee of the LSESU means that you possess financial and strategic decision-making power over a multi-million pound organization, a worthy accomplishment on any CV.

I know that thinking about standing can be daunting, especially for those of you who are in your first year here at the LSE. From personal experience, I know I didn't feel confident enough to run in my first year, even though I would have liked to. However, this year we will be running more workshops for candidates than ever before, helping you with every aspect of campaigning.

Also, myself and the rest of the SU are eager to help you in any way we can. Feel free to contact me at any time

at [su.returningofficer@lse.ac.uk](mailto:su.returningofficer@lse.ac.uk) with any queries or concerns at all you may have about standing.

When I speak to LSE students about the Union, there are those who have a distinctly negative or apathetic view of it and its activities. I remain a profound believer in the Union's ability to represent its students and to improve all of our experiences here at the LSE. However, whatever your view of the Union, and especially if it is less positive than mine, participating in elections is the perfect way to change that. It is no coincidence that the LSE students who do vote in elections feel

represented better than those who do not.

The Students' Union is fundamentally something for us all. Every single student has the power to change our University for the better simply by taking less than two minutes to vote on the Students' Union website. This is something that applies to us all, whatever your stage of study or degree programme.

If you do not think there are any candidates standing that represent your views, then encourage someone who does to put their name forward. Or, better yet, stand yourself. In doing

so, you increase the choice available to thousands of your fellow students and enhance the democracy of our Union. Even if you're not president of a big society, or you don't consider yourself the best-known person on campus, consider standing. Those things are irrelevant if your campaign and policies resonate with fellow students.

If you win an election, you will get the chance to make a big difference. Even if you don't, by standing, you benefit your Union, university and, above all, fellow students enormously. And, like me, you just might enjoy yourself in the process. ☘



Photo: Beaver Archive

# A new Lib-Lab pact?

## Labour should reconcile with the Lib Dems to create a constructive working relationship

**Jon Allsop**



**T**o many Labour party members, the words "Liberal Democrat" have taken on a highly pejorative meaning over the past 18 months.

The term has become synonymous with betrayal, symbolising the nadir of the recent corrosion of trust in our politics. The Lib Dems, we are frequently told, have completely sold-out. The Labour front-bench and the left-wing commentariat scream that they have abandoned their principles and become little more than Tory stooges.

Shadow Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury Owen Jones last week summed it up nicely, with his outraged assertion that "Nick Clegg has got a cheek preaching about fairness," implying that the Lib Dems have irrevocably forfeited their voice in the centre-left debate. Set up for a fall by their bare-faced duplicitousness, their electoral annihilation seems increasingly inevitable.

As a Labour party supporter and passionate progressive, I am no apologist for Nick Clegg. I found him condescending and insincere throughout the TV debates in which he made his name. I insisted that he was merely a paler shade of Cameron whilst many around me were swept away by the "I agree with Nick" hysteria of "Cleggmania." I balked when he somehow won the backing of the Guardian days before the poll and have been unsurprised by his many volte-faces in government. The same

goes for his "orange book" pals, such as Danny Alexander, Chris Huhne and David Laws.

Despite this, it's time for Labour to stop their voluble Lib Dem-bashing and begin to once again cultivate a serious working relationship with a party

**"In the event of another hung parliament at the next election, Labour needs to be ready to work with the Lib Dems once more in a spirit of solidarity bolstered by mutual values."**

I believe to be our natural allies. When I use the term "natural allies," I don't mean that the two parties should seek any sort of permanent alliance. Nor do I subscribe to the condescending belief that the Lib Dems are effectively a subsection of the Labour party, separated from it by purely cultural factors and with no independent ideological merit. The intellectual origins of the two parties are quite different, particularly

with regard to their conception of the role of the state. Despite much recent overlap, these important distinctions persist to a significant extent.

I joined the Labour party because of its traditionally state-oriented solidaristic ethos, believing the Lib Dems' predominantly individualist emphasis to be inadequate in the struggle against inequality and injustice. When I say "natural allies," then, I refer instead to the parties' shared location on the progressive wing of British politics, united by a mutual loathing of conservatism and a common appreciation of the constant need to improve society. Fortunately for the British left, it will take far more than a few uncomfortable months in government spearheaded by a cabal of closeted neo-liberals for the Lib Dems to completely abandon this tradition.

My call for Labour to work on their relationship with the coalition's junior partners certainly doesn't amount to an unconditional armistice. The Lib Dems' record in government leaves much to be desired even if one considers that a combination of economic necessity, unfavourable parliamentary arithmetic and the compromise inherent in coalition negotiations put them in to bat on a sticky wicket. Clegg's all-consuming focus on stable government has undoubtedly rendered him somewhat myopic, contributing to a litany of mistakes which a more assertive leader could easily have avoided. He could have made more of an effort to moderate the Tories' headline tuition fee figure and was rightly eviscerated for failing to do so, wrongly assuming that his compensatory repayment measures would get him off the hook.

He should also have driven back Andrew Lansley's disastrous NHS bill,

capitalising on its lost momentum to rid it of its marketing principles during last year's much-ridiculed "listening exercise." His biggest error was treating an ivory-tower constitutional reform as his biggest prize during coalition talks and misguidedly putting it to the people at a time when easing the burden of public sector cuts should have been his most urgent priority. Both Clegg and his party have been much too defensive in government, seemingly forgetful of the Tories' absolute reliance on them to furnish their legislative majority.

Criticism of the Lib Dems in government, then, is understandable, although the interminable stream of invective shot in their direction over the past eighteen months remains difficult to justify. As unfashionable as it is to admit it, the Lib Dems have quietly done a decent job in moderating some of the worst excesses of Conservative party policy. From lifting the poorest out of tax to getting Cameron back around the Brussels negotiating table, Clegg and company have to some extent stamped their values on Cameron's coalition. Rather than accusing them of completely abandoning fairness, it would do Labour good to praise the Lib Dems for some of this work.

Just after assuming the Labour leadership, Ed Miliband implored the two parties to work together, claiming that he was looking forward to "hearing what they (the Lib Dems) have to say and working with them." This encouraging early rhetoric, however, has unfortunately been backed up by precious little substantive action, with opposition politicians free-riding on the poisonous vitriol directed at Clegg and his party. Savaging the Lib Dems may be the easiest option open to a

misfiring shadow frontbench but it is neither fair nor particularly sensible, especially considering that the biggest beneficiaries from such scapegoating will be the same Conservative party gleefully ripping a hole in the social fabric of our nation.

Any attempt at reconciliation with the Lib Dems needs to be genuine, aimed at more than just a government-defeating mass defection from the party's ranks. The new friendship between the parties needs to be critical but it desperately needs to avoid the lazy partisan bickering which has characterised the better part of Miliband's tenure so far.

In the event of another hung parliament at the next election, Labour needs to be ready to work with the Lib Dems once more in a spirit of solidarity bolstered by mutual values. Whilst it may prove impossible for Labour to govern with Clegg and his immediate allies, it is important to remember the significant social democratic contingent within the party's ranks, with politicians like Tim Farron, for instance, prime candidates to spearhead a progressive coalition of the British centre-left.

Ultimately, I refuse to believe that the Liberal Democrats have more in common with the Conservatives than with Labour. If we can recognise this and use it to build a more constructive working relationship between the parties then the left can govern again. If we continue to alienate our natural allies, on the other hand, then certain defeat beckons once more. ☘

# Reaction to Technion

Why we need honest, reasonable debate about the Technion question

**Zachariah Sammour**



I recently attended a meeting called by the LSE Students' Union Environment and Ethics Officer, Lois Clifton, to discuss concerns that some students had aired over the LSE's academic collaboration with an Israeli university, Technion Institute of Technology. I arrived late, but still in time to hear the predictable chorus of "Why Israel?" emanating as though in unison from a group of irate students.

These students informed the rest of the audience, in no uncertain terms, that the very premise of the meeting - that LSE's collaboration with Technion is troubling - was pernicious, irrational and xenophobic. Why, the room was asked, should the involvement of Israeli universities with their state's military operations be of any concern to the student body? Why is an Israeli university being targeted?

I aim to refer to these questions within the context of the main question, "Why Israel?" I will attempt to highlight for the reader the intended implications inherent in this question before outlining two general species of response that can be given to rebut these dangerous implications.

The "Why Israel?" question is based on a number of assumptions and identifying them is a prerequisite for understanding the question's intended implications. These presuppositions are, firstly, that there are a number of political regimes engaged in conduct analogous to that of Israel with regard to its treatment of the Palestinians. Secondly, that

these analogous regimes are subject to divergent degrees of public criticism and, finally, that Israel is subject to greater, more intense criticism than the analogous regimes by Palestinian rights activists.

In light of these presuppositions the implications of the question become clear. If Israel is engaged in equally deplorable activity as that of a number of other political regimes, it cannot rationally or legitimately be subject to a greater degree of criticism for that conduct than the analogous regimes. In the absence of any rational or legitimate basis for distinction, the heightened criticism of Israel must be based on some irrational, presumably sinister, ground.

There are two broad types of response to the "Why Israel?" question which would rebut the implied claims of irrational and arbitrary targeting of Israel. Each response seeks to undermine the implied accusation by challenging one or more of the presuppositions upon which it rests.

The first response accepts the first presupposition but rejects the second and third, essentially rejecting the argument that Israel is subject to greater criticism than regimes engaged in analogous activities. This response accepts that Israel's treatment of the Palestinian people is qualitatively similar to the conduct of other regimes towards identifiable groups under their direct control.

This response would first establish a baseline comparator, seeking to compare the intensity of criticism directed against Israel with criticism directed toward analogous regimes. These regimes must be engaged in activity that is similar or identical to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and would therefore exhibit such behaviour as is alleged to be ongoing

during the occupation, such as the arbitrary detention of minors, forced and uncompensated acquisition of property, restriction of minority groups' access to religious and cultural sites, political intimidation and

**"Israel is not subject to unjustifiable or arbitrary levels of criticism."**

violence (including violent repression of civil disobedience, assassination of dissidents and politically motivated arrests), restricted access to education, food, employment or any number of other violations of humanitarian and human rights law.

Fortunately, establishing a baseline comparison at LSE is quite easy, as we have had a number of fairly recent student campaigns directed at regimes other than Israel which have displayed such disregard for human dignity. A number of students involved with Amnesty International, for example, have organised campaigns condemning the political violence and repression in Burma.

More famously, of course, the LSE Students' Union and a large number of independent student groups held public rallies, meetings and an occupation to condemn the links between LSE and the Gaddafi regime. It therefore appears quite clear that, at the LSE at least, criticism of a high intensity has been directed at regimes engaged in conduct analogous to Israel's treat-

ment of the Palestinian people.

Whilst one may point out that criticism of Israel has been far more frequent and sustained on our campus than criticism of states like Libya or Burma, this difference in volume (as opposed to intensity) can be attributed to the inevitably amplificatory effect of opposition. To my knowledge, no student group has publicly attempted to undermine students engaged in criticism of the Gaddafi regime or the Burmese Junta. Criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians has, contrastingly, been subject to highly organised, consistent and vocal opposition at LSE, resulting in an escalation of the debate.

Essentially, the frequency or volume with which one must express their opinions if they wish them to be vindicated will be determined, in large part, by the extent to which those opinions are actively opposed. Whilst the same individual may hold similarly intense views with regard to the conduct of a number of states, it is reasonable and rational for that individual to devote greater energy to criticism of a state where there is an active dispute as to the propriety of its actions, as opposed to a situation where the state's conduct is widely condemned.

To put it simply, there is little point preaching to the converted. Thus, if we accept that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is not qualitatively unique, we do not necessarily need to accept the cries of Israeli victimisation. Other regimes are criticised, as too are links between the LSE and those regimes when they are discovered, and so criticism of Israel for similar activities cannot be seen as arbitrary or pernicious.

The second response that can put forth to deal with the "Why Israel?"

question denies the validity of all three of the presuppositions. Crucially, it denies that there is a contemporary political regime engaged in analogous conduct to Israel with regard to its treatment of the Palestinians. This approach posits, resolutely and unapologetically, that Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is unique.

This response points to the systematic, generational oppression and disenfranchisement caused by both the illegal occupation and the refusal to admit Palestinian refugees back to their homes as evidence of the unique nature of Israel's conduct. Together, the occupation and the refugee crisis constitute a complete vitiation of Palestinian political freedom, rendering successive generations of Palestinians incapable of determining, in freedom and dignity, their own destiny and future. If Israel is subject to a higher degree of criticism, then this criticism is entirely justifiable.

Accordingly, the dangerous implications of the "Why Israel?" question must be rejected. Israel is not subject to unjustifiable or arbitrary levels of criticism. As long as one is willing to critically and honestly assess the nature of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, some variant of the above responses seems an inevitable answer to the question. On the basis of its treatment of the Palestinian people, Israel is an entirely reasonable and justified target for serious criticism.

The conduct of Israel's educational institutions should not be shielded from our attention on the basis of academic freedom. Honest, reasonable debate, in full view of the relevant facts, is needed; not cries of victimisation which frankly belittles the debate and its participants. ☛

# Hands off Iran and Syria

Assessing the impact of recent protests against intervention in Iran and Syria

**Ekaterina Daminova**



Nobody has declared a war yet, but the EU's decision to place an embargo on Iranian oil imports and restrict cooperation in financial services raises concern of yet another war in the Middle East. Petroleum accounts for 80 per cent of Iran's exports and the aim of these sanctions is to undermine Iran's capacity to finance its nuclear program. According to the British Foreign Secretary William Hague, excluding Iran from trade is a "peaceful, legitimate pressure on Iran to return to negotiations." However, some believe that such a policy is not a step to peace, but a step to war.

Hundreds of anti-war protesters gathered in central London on the 28th January at a demonstration against Western intervention in Iran and Syria. The peaceful protest was organized by the Stop the War Coalition and took place at Grosvenor Square, outside the US embassy. Protesters waved banners bearing the words "Don't attack Iran," while the crowd joined together in chanting: "One, two, three, four, we don't want another war. Five, six, seven, eight, stop the killing, stop the hate."

The messages were clear: "Stop the spread of western imperialism" and "Hands off Iran and Syria." Demonstrators believe that the current political pressure on Iran will ultimately

**"Demonstrators believe that the current political pressure on Iran will ultimately lead to military intervention."**

lead to military intervention and will replicate the miseries of war in Iraq. The activists accuse western governments of being "greedy for oil and wealth."

Iranian activist, Shirin Shafaei, said that the West had shown "double standards" in previous conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The speeches were very passionate, reflecting the emotional charge of the protesters. European intellectuals and international students from SOAS, and other universities, joined members of the Muslim community on Grosvenor

square. It was not a protest of a small group with narrow interests, but of a truly cosmopolitan community wanting their voice to be heard.

Some people came as families and brought their young children to demonstrate their pacifist approach. The protesters highlighted the reasons why they believe that the sanctions and the war are neither legitimate nor sensible. Aside from mentioning "catastrophic consequences" on the peaceful population of Iran, they focused attention on the Islamophobia in the modern Western society.

The extensive media coverage of the latest events in the Middle East

leads to Arab and Muslim alienation from the West. The existing clash of cultures is becoming more aggravated by political confrontation. An attack on Iran would only increase bitterness against the Western powers, which destroys the possibility of a peaceful dialogue and economic cooperation.

Furthermore, a logical argument against military intervention in Iran is the financial problems this would cause. History has shown that military attacks on the Middle East create a drain on Western budgets. As of June 2010 UK costs exceeded £20 billion for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars combined. During a time of economic

crisis and austerity measures, the EU does not have the means to finance its war expenditure and should focus on domestic policy-making.

Although it is difficult to assess the performance of the demonstrators in terms of the impact they can have on the policy-making, they have carried out some significant work. Raising public awareness is crucial now and pacifist civil societies will be taking more action to prevent potential war. I wish the Stop the War Coalition success in their noble job. ☛



Photo: Ekaterina Daminova

# Commenting on your comment

## Small government is better

Responding to Samira Lindner's article on the benefits of big government

Nicolas  
Bas



When I read the title of Samira Lindner's article "Big government is good" I thought to myself: "Here we go again. A rant against small government and a commendation of the virtues of big government." As I continued reading, I was increasingly amazed by the many assertions and examples that Miss Lindner uses to express her belief in the value of big government.

I respect people who formulate good arguments about why they believe in big government, but I find nothing of that sort in her article. Instead, she chooses to assert that most of the big government supporters' belief in a societal model is based on feelings and hunches without a sound or valid argument. Second, it is my belief that Miss Lindner asserts that we

do not understand a single thing about the whole idea of small government. Miss Lindner says in the article that this whole discussion "involves a great deal of political theory and that is not something that can be fully addressed here." She should have addressed these perennial questions because what we get instead are a bunch of false statements.

One of the most remarkable statements in the article is that the groups who gain most from small government are: businesses, wealthy elites, state-level politicians etc. This is pertinently untrue and, as a classical liberal who believes in small government and belongs to neither of those groups mentioned, I regard this as an insult. In fact, these are exactly the groups that benefit from big government. Businesses lobby parliament to craft legislation that favours them, wealthy elites have the power to lobby politicians for tax cuts that only favour them and state-level politicians, well, really, do I have to explain how they benefit from big government?

If this financial crisis shows anything it is that big businesses, and

banks in this case, misuse the coercive power of government to force ordinary citizens to pay for their bad decisions and investments. Small government doesn't hand out such bailouts. In a free market society, profits are private but so are losses. To suggest that classical liberals and libertarians merely support big business shows a very poor understanding of our philosophy.

I was also amazed to read that, apparently, a constitution is a just a piece of paper that has no more value than all the other ordinary laws that parliament or the executive branch enacts. Also, in this case, Miss Lindner is gravely mistaken. The constitution of the USA, and, ideally, any constitution, is a document that guarantees the fundamental rights of every citizen. The whole idea of a constitution is precisely to enshrine these rights and to make arbitrary change difficult. Who decides what should be changed and under what circumstances?

We all know by now what Obama thinks of that, since he signed the NDAA bill that allows for indefinite detention of any suspect of terrorism without due process, thereby nullify-

ing Habeas Corpus. I conclude from this and similar events that the whole discussion about the interpretation of the constitution is merely a way for social-democrats and socialists to advance their political agendas, rather than having a true concern about the value of what is written down in it.

You can also bet that, at some point, big government advocates use the examples of European social-democratic countries to prove that big government works. Miss Lindner uses Germany as an example. Surely she must know that the post-war Wirtschaftswunder, the economic revival which made Germany one of the leading economies in the world, is largely attributed to the policies of then Minister of Economics, Ludwig Erhard, who was a staunch believer in the free market and was a member of the Mont Pelerin society together with Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, among many others, to advance the ideas of liberty and free market capitalism.

It also widely accepted that Germany's success today is due to the reforms of former chancellor Gerhard

Schroeder. His policies included tax cuts, low pay increases, and flexible wage agreements. Germany has also no minimum wage, which results in very little unemployment today. These are hardly defensible as big government interventions. The Scandinavian story is much more nuanced. A profound discussion would take us too far here but I personally believe that Sweden is not the social-democratic paradise that many social-democrats and socialists would like us to believe.

So, having cleared up this matter of unfounded critique of small government thinking, I would be very interested to read in one of her next articles what the real benefit of big government is. I would like to hear why Miss Lindner thinks that state intervention in the economy and in the lives of people is not only necessary but also commendable. Until she has convinced me of her ideas, allow me to end with a quote from Friedrich Hayek: "If we wish to preserve a free society, it is essential that we recognize that the desirability of a particular object is not sufficient justification for the use of coercion." ☛

## Voting NO at the UGM

Brendan Carroll explains the reasoning behind his vote

Brendan  
Carroll



I voted against the LSE Student Union's recent "No to Islamophobia" motion. These were my reasons.

The simplest ground for rejecting the motion was poor composition. According to the text, the Union believes "debate on religious matters should not be limited by what may be offensive to any particular religion, but the deliberate and persistent targeting of one religious group about any issue with the intent or effect of being Islamophobic [...] will not be tolerated." In other words, you can criticise Buddhism so long as you aren't being Islamophobic about it.

The excised part from the quotation above directs the reader to a definition of Islamophobia given later in the text, which defines Islamophobia as "a form of racism." This is odd because Muslims themselves have often been the most consistent in emphasizing that Islam transcends race.

I personally object to the word "Islamophobia" because I find that it is often used to improperly silence criticism of Islam, which, as a prominent global ideology, must be both legally and socially open to remonstrance and rebuke. While it is – and ought to be – socially improper to suggest that all Muslims are terrorists, it must be socially acceptable to argue that Muhammad's claims of divine inspiration were false. The "No to Islamophobia" motion seems to jeopardize this latter possibility.

The motion in question was put forward because the LSE Students' Union's Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society (ASH) posted a cartoon on their Facebook page, depicting Jesus and Muhammad having a pint. The cartoon shows Jesus and Muhammad

commiserating over atheist criticism; someone out-of-frame suggests that they (presumably the ideologies they represent) should be open to "attack or ridicule," which prompts Muhammad to reply: "Racist."

As far as Muhammad cartoons go, this one is remarkably mild; and, given the response it provoked, uncannily appropriate. And it actually advances a reasonable line of argument: that we should not advance censorship in the name of tolerance.

Two LSE commentators wrote in opposition to the cartoon: Tasif Zaman and Rimmel Mohyidin. Mr. Zaman's article was nuanced and seemed to draw a line between what we may do and what we ought to do – i.e., that criticism of religion, or depictions of Muhammad, should be allowed, but strongly discouraged. He writes that "we should question whether using freedom of speech to cause offense [...] is compatible with civic responsibility." I fully agree with this sentiment, although I think that the cartoon in question is mild in its content and advances an important argument. Our disagreement is a matter of interpretation.

By contrast, Ms. Mohyidin seemed to take much stronger offence, particularly because "Islam strictly instructs all individuals to never graphically depict the Prophet. For reasons you may not understand, this is something that even the most lax of Muslims feel obliged to respect. It's a sacred belief that has been endorsed by the world since the very conception of Islam."

I see at least three problems: firstly, atheists don't care that Islam tells them not to visually depict Muhammad (though sensitivity over the subject should surely inform any attempts at persuasion). Secondly, "the world" has definitely not endorsed the notion that Muhammad – and the other Abrahamic prophets – may never be depicted in images. Which leads us to the third problem: even pious Muslims have often painted Muhammad.

In the wake of the Danish cartoons

controversy, Harvard historian Oleg Grabar published a remarkable article on images of Muhammad as crafted by Muslims through Islamic history. Nowhere does the Quran forbid the creation of images. Prof. Grabar cites exhibits in museums from Edinburgh to Istanbul, filled with manuscripts, paintings and devotional aids that clearly depict the Islamic Prophet.

Muhammad is often shown on his Night Journey to the Farthest Mosque; he is shown sometimes with his daughter Fatimah or the Four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Most of these images date to the 1200s or later, and they are mostly of non-Arab origin, but they were created in thoroughly Islamic milieux, like Persia and Ottoman Turkey. One popular book called "Stories of the Prophets" showed Jesus in the company of Muhammad, much like the cartoon at the centre of our present controversy.

These depictions attracted no apparent censure or condemnation in their original environments. Professor Grabar personally knew of at least one of these images that could recently be purchased in Iran. There is, naturally, an important difference between devotional aids and atheist caricatures: none of the Islamic images were intended to criticize Muhammad or his faith.

The ASH cartoon, by contrast, plainly argues that Muslims (and Christians?) hide behind vacuous charges of racism to defend a system of thought that I personally believe cannot withstand sustained inquiry. That is an entirely legitimate argument to make, and one which seems to have been at least partially vindicated by the LSE Students' Union, which passed the motion.

I hope that in this short space I have managed to explain why I voted in opposition. ☛

## Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

It is easy to say that class sizes should be smaller, but better to ask whether smaller classes actually work better. Are the TQARO student evaluations worse for students in large classes? Do students in larger classes do worse in exams? The School has the data to answer both questions – and surely, as a social science institution, we should look at the evidence and see what it says?

Equally, we could experiment: do students prefer – and do better – in a 1 hour class of 15, or in a class with 20 people that lasts 1 hour 20 minutes? The "cost" in terms of faculty time is the same either way, so apart from needing slightly bigger classrooms, the only question is which format works best for students.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Tim Leunig  
Department of Economic History

## Want to send us a comment?

Are you outraged by something you've seen in this paper and interested in responding?

You can write about anything, from happenings at LSE, to events further afield.

Contact us by email:  
[comment@thebeaveronline.co.uk](mailto:comment@thebeaveronline.co.uk)

art

7 February 2012



The Pale King | Zarina Bhimji | A Dangerous Method | Spuntino |  
Happy New | Designer Collaborations | Carnage | Private B

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Girl, 2011

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# A Dangerous Method



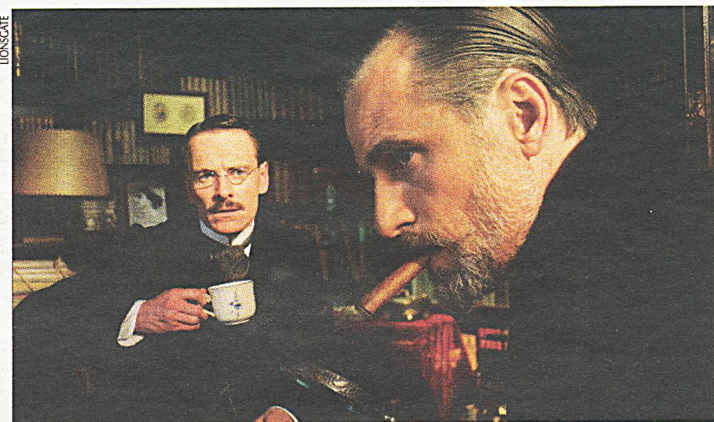
**Director:** David Cronenberg  
**Screenplay:** Christopher Hampton,  
John Kerr  
**Key cast:** Viggo Mortensen, Michael  
Fassbender, Keira Knightley  
**Year:** 2011  
**Runtime:** 99 minutes  
**In cinemas 10 February 2012**

As Viggo Mortensen strode into the room, I had difficulty restraining my awe and admiration for him and his craft. His presence was a reminder of the qualities each actor brings to their characters in *A Dangerous Method*. But when asked about his portrayal of such a well-known historical figure, he frankly expressed the initial doubts he had when he was offered the part: "that's odd, I don't look like him. I don't know how I'm going to look like him." Speaking with the characteristic drawl of Received Pronunciation English and wearing pomaded hair, a well-groomed beard, and contact lenses to disguise his piercing blue eyes, Mortensen is rendered almost unrecognisable in the role. His naturally imposing frame and probing gaze, though perhaps not historically accurate, aptly matches the gravitas of Sigmund Freud's authority.

Mortensen's Freud cuts an intriguing figure, but is only one in a trio of *A Dangerous Method's* personalities. The film illustrates a slice in time that encompasses a brief yet fruitful friendship between Carl Jung (Michael Fassbender) and Freud, leading to the establishment of psychotherapy as a discipline. The picture opens in 1904, where a hysterical young lady, Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley), is checked into the Burghölzli psychiatric hospital and assigned to Dr Jung for treatment.

He is enthused by the chance to implement Freud's "talking cure" on the new patient. It works, and Sabina strives to resolve her psychological condition while Jung strikes up a correspondence with Freud on the basis of her case. Thus erupted a notable rapport between Jung and Freud, which was further strengthened after Jung went to visit Freud in Vienna and they conversed for 13 hours almost without break. They bond over their shared interest in developing psychotherapy, but even then, the differences between them are apparent. They disagree on Sabina's inherent personality traits. Jung's voracious academic appetite is symbolised by his incessant eating, while Freud ingests scarcely anything, save for cigar smoke. Jung's keen excitement and ambition for psychoanalysis contrasts with Freud's serene confidence of one who is already a leading figure in the field.

Michael Fassbender's natural intensity amplifies Jung's intellectual zeal. A fantastic actor to watch, his mounting doubts are almost palpable as his existing morals are swayed by a persuasive new patient, Otto Gross (Vincent Cassel). Sex addict Gross played by any other would not be half as beguiling without Cassel's raw energy and unconventional charm. While Cassel steals every scene he is in, Keira Knightley tries to – and fails to – do the same through some vigorous scenery chewing. Yet, this is not to say her contribution was wholly negative. Knightley's taut lines lend themselves beautifully to the inner turmoil of Sabina Spielrein. But the latter's convulsive tics, stammering, and unease, were so bizarrely interpreted by Knightley as to detract from the immersive quality of Cronenberg's cinema. The sympathy she commanded from me in the beginning was only because I hoped that as



Michael Fassbender as Carl Jung and Viggo Mortensen as Sigmund Freud

Sabina's condition improved so would her performance; and thankfully it did when she took it down a notch after the first act. Unfortunately, the questionable Russian accent persists throughout.

The screenplay by Christopher Hampton, who also wrote *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Atonement*, though at times incisively clever, is unfortunately inadequate. The film was adapted from Hampton's play, *The Talking Cure*, so perhaps these flaws have been carried over. In any case, for all the emphasis that is placed on the cure, it is only superficially portrayed. Jung gains Sabina's trust and stabilises her enough to realise her dream of being a psychiatrist with such efficiency, it seems almost convenient. Furthermore, Jung and Sabina's affair is set up as something so instinctual and lustful that Jung's eventual declaration of love is close to unconvincing, save for Fassbender's loud sobs and passionately clenched fists. We see each subject mature somewhat and reflect as time passes, but in a film that essentially revolves

around human relationships, there is neither enough exploration of them, nor even of each individual's motivations. Mortensen insists that "[he] didn't think anything was missing" from the film, but even he admits that it would have been "interesting to see Freud in the United States in 1909," where he was lecturing with Jung, and to see the assault of American culture on his pre-conceived ideas. Alas, "it was never in the script."

*A Dangerous Method* is an impeccably assembled film from an excellent director; the research and effort that went into it is evident from the detail in every aspect. However, it ultimately comes across as wooden and sterile. Perhaps – as Otto Gross might say – too repressed, regardless of all the spanking endured by Knightley. If it were not for the extraordinary performers on screen it would be classified as unremarkable, but as it stands, it is an average film that could have been exceptional.

— Venessa Chan

# Carnage



**Director:** Roman Polanski  
**Screenplay:** Yasmina Reza, Roman  
Polanski  
**Key cast:** Kate Winslet, Jodie Foster,  
Christoph Waltz, John C. Reilly  
**Year:** 2011  
**Runtime:** 115 minutes  
**In cinemas now**

The newest offering from the controversial Roman Polanski depicts the meeting of two middle-class couples, gathering to discuss an incident between their children involving some name-calling, a stick and a few missing teeth. The film begins with the two couples – corporate yuppies Alan (Christopher Waltz) and Nancy (Kate Winslet) and lefty liberals Penelope (Jodie Foster) and Michael (John C. Reilly) – striving to be mature and conciliating. It ends – after a mere 72 gripping minutes played out in real time – with vomit, screaming and violence.

It is, from the opening scene, intensely electric. Swathed in dark humour and fraught with tension, the film follows the two couples as their weak grip on civilisation and polite behaviour begins to slip from their fingers, their elegant, enlightened facades unravelling and reducing them to the crying, whining, shouting, laughing children they are supposed to be discussing. Things begin to career dangerously downhill with a moment of beautiful symbolism. Kate Winslet – in a spectacular, Bridesmaids-esque arc – projectile vomits over the coffee table, priceless art books and also their last pretences at being civilised.

The characters begin to show their true colours, the vitriol spilling out of them like Winslet's vomit. What follows is a spinning descent into chaos, as the characters rapidly change alliances and reverse roles – Nancy, once upright and proper, unleashes a drunk, viciously protective mother; Penelope, seemingly the earth-mother, dissolves into a crying,



Kate Winslet is not the only one who struggles to hold it together

petty shrew; and Michael, the easy-going yet oafish house husband, suddenly transforms into a bigoted, offensive, hamster-murdering cigar-smoker. Alan is the only one who remains the same, but this is perhaps because he is the one with least pretension at civility – "our son is a maniac," he freely admits. The thin veneer of these characters' lives is unforgivingly ripped away, revealing their pettiness, their primitive instincts for protecting their children, and their disintegrating marriages.

The four actors are exquisite, bravely fronting down the unflinching, constant eye of the camera that hardly leaves their faces, let alone the small apartment where almost the entire film is set. Though practically nothing actually happens, the tension is made

almost unbearable by the subtle, wistful expressions on Winslet and Waltz's faces as time and again they are dragged back into the claustrophobic living room after almost escaping. None of their characters are particularly sympathetic, but excellent acting abilities forces you to empathise and cheer for the petty victories and banal triumphs of their interactions.

Yasmina Reza's writing combined with Polanski's direction have created a cutting, merciless satire upon modern middle class ideals, interspersing the ridiculous with the banal as the conversation spans Darfur, cobbler recipes, Guys and Dolls, Francis Bacon, plumbing and human rights to name a few. All of this agonising tension is wound excruciatingly tight by the constant interruption

of phone calls, which forcibly suspends the conversation until your fingernails are chewed into bloody stumps from the insufferable strain.

The film is filled with these kinds of images and themes, the most potent of which being the Dutch tulips, sitting quietly on the coffee table. The egg-yolk yellow tulips remain there, glowing brashly in the otherwise drab room, an emblem of the couples' hollow attempts at civilised dignity. They glare that awful yellow throughout, surviving the vomit, the drowning of a mobile phone, and the alcohol. It is only at the very end that Nancy, in a final fit of madness, tears them up with a scream and the carnage is complete.

— Isabella Silver

# Martha Marcy May Marlene

●●●●○  
**Director:** Sean Durkin  
**Screenplay:** Sean Durkin  
**Key cast:** Elizabeth Olsen, Sarah Paulson, John Hawkes, Hugh Dancy  
**Year:** 2011  
**Runtime:** 102 minutes  
**In cinemas now**



Elizabeth Olsen as Martha and John Hawkes as Patrick

Stepping out from the shadows of her twin sisters, Elizabeth Olsen plays the haunted eponymous character of *Martha Marcy May Marlene* who runs away from a cult-like community in the Catskill Mountains.

Martha becomes Marcy May and sometimes Marlene, once she joins her new unconventional "family." The designation of many names is telling of her inability to find her place in the world and figure out who she is. She is a girl constantly on the verge of a breakdown, troubled by her past and unable to reconcile with the present. Martha's desperate hunger for a family - after experiencing only troubled relationships with biological relatives - leads her to stumble upon the rural household run by Patrick (John Hawkes). However, this new life does not turn out to be all that she expected, leading her to flee once again - this time to the lakeside summer home of her estranged sister and her husband.

*Martha Marcy* therefore sets up both a connection and a parallel between these two lives, her traumatising involvement with the cult and her later attempts at assimilation into the normal world with disastrous results. It is essentially a film about identity.

Throughout, Martha is obsessed with "finding [her] role in the family" but she comes to recognise that she cannot feel safe anywhere. Her inability to function in the normal world is shown in her increasingly deranged behaviour - relics from her old life in the country that have become ingrained in her psyche.

Olsen gives a stunning debut, portraying the complex inner turmoil of Martha with the sophistication and maturity of a far more experienced actress. John Hawkes is brilliant as Patrick, steering away from the typical thoroughly villainous role of a cult leader and instead lending a charismatic and human side to the character. At the same time, we become aware of the violent and corrupt individual that festers beneath the surface of apparent fatherly love as he forces intimacy upon and between the

household members.

Sarah Paulson and Hugh Dancy take their turn as Martha's well-meaning but ultimately ineffective sister Lucy and the initially supportive but later intolerant husband Ted, who feels his time for a vacation has been ruined by Martha's whirlwind entrance and constant dramatics. They form a stark contrast to Martha's previous hellish life in the form of a perfect, suburban couple trying for a baby - a life she cannot relate to and yet another home where she does not belong. She is, after all, as Olsen describes her in a recent interview, "a stranger in a strange land."

The scenes are flawlessly edited, constantly merging and fluctuating between past and present; fantasy and reality - reinforcing the sense that Martha has completely lost her way

in life, unable to separate the two very different lives she has experienced. The intimate cinematography creates a fitting claustrophobic and moody atmosphere through its use of dark-tinted earthy tones and extended close-ups.

*Martha Marcy* is a slow-burning psychological thriller that takes time to focus in on the effects family breakdowns and the ties with a dysfunctional community have on one vulnerable young woman. Director Sean Durkin, for whom this is a feature film debut, explores the difficult subject of cults in a subtle yet captivating way. He perfectly balances the intensity of a thriller with a natural realism that makes the viewer relate to the twisted events and the way said events scarred its main character in such a brutal way. His writing on the actual life experiences of a friend, and his motivation to present something true keeps the story grounded.

The ending of the film is riddled with an acute sense of paranoia and is frustratingly open-ended. It begs the question, will she discover her identity and be able to move on from her past? However, this undecided conclusion is more than appropriate considering the power of film lies in the way it stays true to presenting a realistic version of the events. It helps us remember that there will be no easy fix to Martha's problems, and it is likely that she will always live in fear, just as Patrick wanted. All in all, this concoction of raw emotion and suffering make for a mesmerising and thought-provoking film.

↳ Angie Moneke

# Events

## Breakfast at Tiffany's

11 Feb at Curzon Cinemas  
 12 Feb at Electric Cinema  
 14 Feb at Prince Charles Cinema  
 Holly Golightly's little black Givenchy dress has become the look by which everyone remembers Audrey Hepburn. Ignoring notoriously offensive yellowface, it is at its heart an examination of material obsession and an escapist romance.

## Brief Encounter

14-18 Feb at The Other Cinema  
 Widely regarded as David Lean's magnum opus and the quintessential British romance, this is a Noël Coward-scripted affair - elegantly accompanied by Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 - whose emotional veracity has rarely been matched. From the creators of *Secret Cinema*, the Troxy will be hosting a reinterpretation of filmic presentation.

## Casablanca

10-23 Feb at BFI Southbank  
 14 Feb at Curzon Mayfair  
 The enduring war-time romance celebrates its 70th anniversary this year with a rerelease.

## Götterdämmerung by the Metropolitan Opera

11 Feb at Hackney Picturehouse  
 The New York Metropolitan Opera presents the last of Wagner's Ring cycle in a live HD transmission. Be prepared for the butt-numbing runtime of approximately six hours.



## Fritz Lang's Metropolis

11 Feb at BFI Southbank  
 Said to be one of the most expensive films ever made, *Metropolis* is being shown in a newly restored print with recently recovered footage. Lang's science fiction masterpiece is a spectacle well worth watching on the big screen.

## Oliver Twist

10 Feb at BFI Southbank  
 Another of David Lean's best, this time to celebrate the year of Dickens. Guy Green's excellent camerawork and Lean's skill as a filmmaker elevate Dickens's novel to a classic of not just literature, but cinema too.

## The Red Shoes

10, 14 Feb at BFI Southbank  
 Powell and Pressburger's Technicolor metatextual Greek tragedy may be recognised as one of the precursors to the psychosexual thriller *Black Swan*. Moira Shearer was already a renowned ballerina before making her film debut in this, and she gives a stunning performance. One of Martin Scorsese's favourite films.



## Romeo + Juliet

14 Feb at The Round Chapel  
 Baz Luhrmann's modern retelling of Shakespeare's play on young lust is fraught with teen angst and requisite family drama. It stars a then still-cherubic Leonardo DiCaprio and very young Claire Danes.

# Young Adult

●●●●○  
**Director:** Jason Reitman  
**Screenplay:** Diablo Cody  
**Key cast:** Charlize Theron, Patrick Wilson, Patton Oswalt  
**Year:** 2011  
**Runtime:** 94 minutes  
**In cinemas now**

The joy of Jason Reitman and Diablo Cody's previous collaboration, *Juno*, lay in its charming if unrealistic array of characters, right from its eponymous lead to the sarcastic clerk at the local pharmacy. Their latest film, *Young Adult*, feels very much set in the same world; naturalism is abandoned to make way for a cast of wonderfully appealing and quirky eccentrics, dark humour crackling from each and every one of them. Yet it is with their leads that the two films so greatly differ. Charlize Theron is magnificent as Mavis Gary, but while her brutally honest depiction of a woman obsessed is powerful, the character lacks the warmth and charm of Ellen Page's *Juno* that made us so involved in her plight. Mavis is wickedly funny, and her demise poignant, but this is somewhat wasted when so little is done to redeem her faults and make us, ultimately, care.

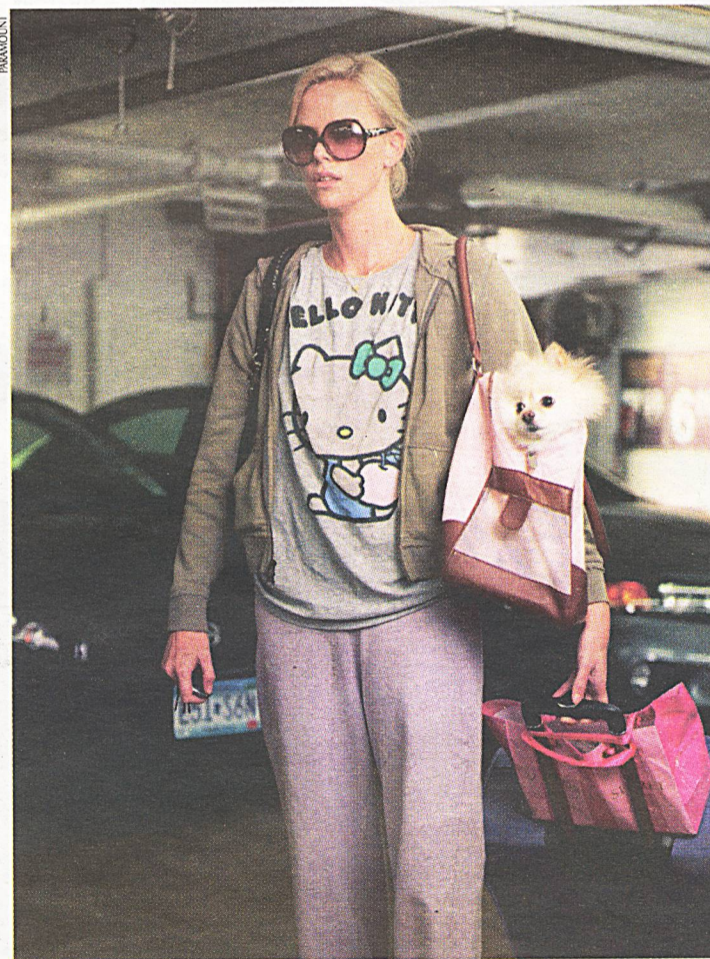
Mavis is a ghost writer for a successful, but flagging, series of young adult novels, and lives in Minneapolis. Beyond that, her life is a car crash of drunkenness, one night stands and reflection on career and relationship failure. In desperation as much as hope, Mavis heads back to her small rural hometown of Mercury, intent on winning back her high school sweetheart Buddy (Patrick Wilson), apathetic to both his happy marriage and new parenthood. Along the way she meets Matt (Patton Oswalt), a high school nobody crippled in an attack by jocks assuming, wrongly, that he was gay. Matt becomes both her confidant and comic foil as she plots increasingly outrageous attempts to win back Buddy's heart, and re-establish herself as the prom queen and alpha female she once was.

It is, undeniably, a brilliantly funny film, held together by Matt and Mavis's sparkling exchanges, in which no topic

is too dark to subvert. Mavis, on hearing Matt's tragic story alone in a bar, contemplates a moment before recalling "Oh, you're that hate crime guy!" and admiring him for how much school he "got" to miss. It is typical of Mavis, set up as a paragon of amorality, only concerned with the injustices life has dealt her, and oblivious to the emotions and concerns of all in her path. In a sense this makes her relatable; who hasn't privately, and selfishly, felt that life is particularly hard on them? Cody clearly writes her as an example of the worst of all of us, an antihero we can simultaneously admonish and identify with. The problem with Mavis is that she is too far gone. Yes, she is darkly amusing to observe as she falls apart, but her crimes are balanced by no glimmer of humanity, her aim of derailing a happy and warm couple countered by no warmth on her behalf. Reitman has a history of creating antiheroes we should not like but do, Aaron Eckhart in *Thank You For Smoking* for one, but it is telling that Eckhart's tobacco lobbyist should prove more likable than Theron's damaged writer.

That is not to say, however, that *Young Adult* is without its charms. Theron is superb as Mavis, inhabiting the character and utterly convincing in both her dark comedy and moments of mental anguish. Likewise, Wilson is excellent as her erstwhile love Buddy, charming and relatable, without a hint of the malice present in his ex-girlfriend and a mature and loving adult, the antithesis of everything Mavis has become. It is Oswalt who truly shines though. His Matt is at once pitiable and hilarious, his self-deprecation and appreciation of life's quirks holds the film and Mavis, together. He most embodies Cody's brilliance with writing, rebuking Mavis's darker impulses with deadpan wit, no more so when he dryly remarks on the demise of her book series when she crudely suggests he leans on his accident just as he leans on his crutch: "what a metaphor!"

Mavis clearly owes much to Cody, her creator. Cody has been noted as an adult most famous for putting words in



Charlize Theron as young adult novelist Mavis Gray

the mouths of adolescents, and the story is bound by Mavis's attempts to do the same in the final book of her series. Yet, if the film is taken as a sequel to *Juno*, as it often feels like it should be, then it ultimately comes up lacking. It is fine to craft characters that are not so much believable as embodiments of particular stereotypes, especially when it results such brilliantly dark comedy, but it is too much to make a protagonist who

is so contemptible. Mavis Gary may be meant as a reflection on the worst of us, but by the end she is so painful to watch that it becomes a distraction from the otherwise excellent acting and storytelling. It says much when a tragic denouement to a heroine stirs nothing but feelings of gratitude that we have to sit through no more of her cruel and callous tale.

↳ Mark Heffernan

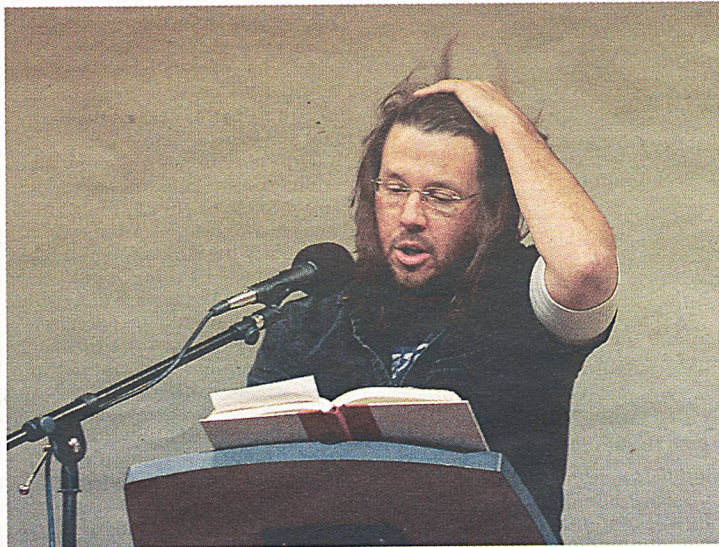
# The Pale King by David Foster Wallace

On an early September's evening in 2008, a 46-year-old man considered by some to be the best writer of his generation hung himself. David Foster Wallace had struggled with depression before, and after abandoning the anti-depressant Nardil, he finally submitted. He left a neat stack of papers on his desk, the unfinished skeleton of what would have been his first novel since 1996. These papers, along with hundreds of pages and disks of notes, were assembled by his long-time editor and published in 2011 as *The Pale King*.

Wallace catapulted to fame with his mind-bending 1,000+ page *Infinite Jest* in 1996, a book that explores addiction and entertainment in a near-future America. He wrote with a distinctive style that is almost impossible to describe – many of his devoted fans called it “nourishing,” while A. O. Scott of the *New York Times* described it as “hyperarticulate, plaintive, self-mocking, diffident, overbearing, needy, ironical, almost pathologically self-aware... it was something you instantly recognised... it was – is – the voice in your own head.”

Wallace also had a penetrating ability to find deep sadness below the surface of modern culture, which, while most prominent in *Infinite Jest*, was also a defining characteristic of his much more accessible non-fiction. His essays, which ranged topics as broad as his experience on a luxury cruise ship, a pornography convention and awards show, and John McCain's 2000 presidential campaign, were able to diagnose the contradictions and absurdities of the world while avoiding high-brow derision. They were somehow not only hilarious but also humane.

*The Pale King* is a novel much better read than summarised – it centres on the Internal Revenue Service Regional Examination Center, in Peoria, Illinois, a marginal outpost of the United States tax-collecting bureaucracy. The bleakness of this setting is intentional – Wallace is interested in exploring the interrelated themes of monotony, boredom, concentration, and bureaucracy. Instead of chapters, we have subsections, a homage to the tax code. Nothing substantive ever happens in the novel (also by design), as Wallace fo-



David Foster Wallace in 2006

cusses on the characters' backgrounds and their beginnings in the “Service.”

In many ways, *The Pale King* is the negative image of *Infinite Jest*. The latter examines our addiction to constant sensory stimulation and pleasure, while former highlights the necessity of embracing monotony and concentrating on the truly boring. Taken together, the books make a compelling point: it is easier than ever to be constantly stimulated by entertainment – video games, TV with 600 channels, internet videos, etc. – but it is also more necessary than ever to be able to deal with utter and complete unfathomable boredom in order to advance in the world.

*The Pale King* is Wallace at both his best and worst. Some of the writing positively crackles with humour – I found myself literally laughing out loud (which only the funniest writing can do) at his descriptions of bureaucratic idiocy. Other sections speak profoundly on the role of humans in the information age.

There are also moments of incredible tenderness. In one subsection Wallace relates how a poor teenage girl plays dead while a spurned lover strangles her mother right next to her. Or consider this hauntingly beautiful passage where one

of the characters, Tom Bondurant, reminisces about the first time he had sex with his high school girlfriend Cheryl Ann Higgs (thus taking her virginity):

He does well remember... the look on Cheryl Ann Higgs's face as her posture and supine position became acquiescent and Bondurant had known that he was home free as they say but had avoided her eyes because the expression in Cheryl Ann's eyes, which without once ever thinking about Tom Bondurant has never forgotten, was one of blank terminal sadness, not so much that of a pheasant in a dog's jaws as of a person who's about to transfer something he knows in advance he can never get a sufficient return on.

Other parts, however, are mind-numbingly dull. Among the worst are subsections by the fictional “David Foster Wallace,” which demonstrate (the real) Wallace's self-consciousness at its worst – footnotes longer than the actual text itself and explanations of explanations of explanations. Wallace's most prominent detractors complained that his writing was supremely self-indulgent and could use a good hack job from an editor, and here we see Wallace lose himself in a typically postmodern hall of mirrors.

Many reviewers take the worst parts to demonstrate just how unfinished the book truly is. This may be the case, especially given the obvious tightness with which Wallace could wind his prose. But

even in the raw pages dragged to hell by the minutiae of tax return protocol, Wallace seems to be making a larger point, a point very much in keeping with the rest of the book: this is what it's like.

“The world of men as it exists today is a bureaucracy,” Wallace says, “and the underlying bureaucratic key is the ability to deal with boredom. It is the key to modern life.” Looking out at the world from a 22-year-old perspective, there is a ring of deep truth to this claim. Think about the thousands of hours spent in entry-level positions making spreadsheets, arranging PowerPoint slides, writing code; in grad school memorising constitutional law or every last offshoot of every last cranial nerve. This is the world we enter.

But the novel is not a simplistic rebuke of bureaucracy – Wallace is far too sophisticated for that. What appears to be bureaucratic stupidity is often revealed to have a valid underlying rationale. Nor is it a polemic against monotony. Rather, being able to concentrate on something boring is portrayed as almost divine. According to Wallace, “if you are immune to boredom, there is literally nothing you cannot accomplish.”

This relationship between boredom, concentration and transcendence seems to have been a guiding theme. One of the characters, Shane Drinion (“the kind of person you'd have to look at intently to even be able to describe”), actually starts to levitate when he is completely focussed on something, so much so that a co-worker once found him levitating upside-down above his seat examining a tax return.

Another character has a problem with outbreaks of uncontrollable sweating and constantly worries about the possibility of another attack, which in turn triggers them. Only when he is completely lost in concentration can he stop worrying enough to avoid them. In the notes included at the end of the book by the editor, Wallace states that “bliss – a second-by-second joy + gratitude at the gift of being alive, conscious – lies on the other side of a crushing, crushing boredom.”

But Drinion casts this assertion in a critical light. As amazing as his levitation is, Drinion cannot realise that he is levitating, since to do so he has to be completely absorbed by something else. Is this second-by-second joy ever actually appreciable, or is it our unfortunate fate not to be able to realise it?

Perhaps for Wallace, however, loss of self-consciousness was bliss, given

his own struggle with it. Experiencing this sort of hyper-awareness even through his writing reveals its drug-like seduction – empowering and illuminating on one level, but in danger of swirling into what looks to be a very unpleasant rabbit hole.

Wallace clearly struggled to escape the rabbit hole throughout his life. A Charlie Rose interview on YouTube is telling – Wallace explains that he spends about one hour per day writing, and the rest of the day worrying about not writing. Rose, seeming perplexed, asks, “Worrying about not writing? Instead of worrying about what to write?” “Right, worrying about not writing,” Wallace replies.

Fans often speak of a way in which Wallace's writing accesses a deep part of our consciousness that others do not. I personally suspect that this had to do with his moral voice. For such an incredibly complex thinker, Wallace had quite simple and wholesome moral notions, evident in *The Pale King* in discussions of civic responsibility and the question of whether an institution like the Internal Revenue Service is fundamentally a moral or corporate entity.

It is as if Wallace understood how easily everything could spin out of control if he subjected basic moral intuition to his own critical lens, and thus decided not to. Indeed, one can easily imagine Wallace disembowelling his own notions of morality. But he didn't, and this is part of the reason he was so loved – we all have deep moral intuitions that we cherish but struggle mightily to defend rationally. For most thinkers and writers of this intellectual horsepower, morality usually falls under the withering gaze.

Thus, it is nice to know that someone like Wallace existed, someone who could be hip, intellectual, self-conscious and still normal. Someone who could joke around (as he does in *The Pale King*) about subjects as common as masturbation, dating, and teenage acne then in the next breath dazzlingly describe the modern world from the same vantage point as the rest of us, albeit with a hell of a lot more detail.

And insofar as *The Pale King* does this, it does not feel unfinished at all.

Edward Larkin

**The Pale King (2011), David Foster Wallace, Hamish Hamilton, Hardback, £20**

THE  
PALE  
KING  
DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

## Spuntino



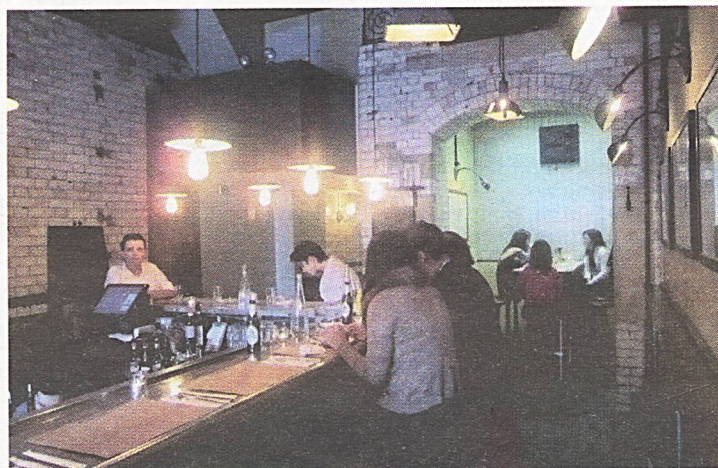
**Location:** 61 Rupert Street, Soho, London W1  
**Nearest station:** Piccadilly Circus  
**Average price:** £25  
**Opening times:** 1100–0000 Mon–Sat, 1200–2300 Sun

“No telephone, no reservations” is the only thing I gathered from the fashionably obscure Spuntino website. Having burnt my fingers and pockets at many a pretentious “new-age” restaurant, this deliberate obscurity rang alarm bells in my head. However, encouraged by friends who had billed the hour-long wait to get seats for dinner as worthwhile, I decided to venture ahead.

Visiting on a Sunday afternoon, we were seated straight away. Spuntino, owned by the team behind popular London restaurants Polpo and Polpetto, brings Italian American food from New York's Soho to London's Soho. Located bang in the middle of Soho's massage parlours and lap dance bars, the grungy interiors and dressed-down staff quickly reassured me that Spuntino was indeed about the food. This is the kind of place where you look around to see what your fellow diners are eating, find something that catches your fancy and then order

it for yourself. The portions are mostly small, and tapas-like, and there is no concept of a table. Seats are scattered around the bar and dishes are brought to the counter as and when they are ready.

The menu is an eclectic mix of snacks, sliders, salads, plates, sides and desserts, priced between £3.50 and £10. We started with the egg and soldiers – a gooey half-boiled egg served with strips of buttered toast. Though reminiscent of many a childhood breakfast, the dish hit the spot and got the meal off to an appetising start. The shoestring fries, the cheapest item on the menu, were also, not surprisingly, the most popular. I'm not a big fries person, but found these moreish and a good accompaniment to the other dishes. Next, it was on to the much-recommended sliders – mini burgers with a choice of fillings. We opted for the pulled Pork and pickled apple and ground beef and bone marrow. The pork was melt-in-the-mouth tender and perhaps the best I've tasted in a long time. The beef, however, was dry and could not hold its own against the pork. The truffled egg toast arrived along with the two salads – Jerusalem artichoke, Treviso and truffle vinaigrette, and Ham hock, chichory and seeded mustard. In my world, where wilted leaves dressed in shop-bought vinaigrette pass off as



The large counter dominates Spuntino's grungy interior

salads, these stood out for their flavour and freshness and were dishes in their own right. The truffled egg toast was unlike anything I had tasted before... the thick slice of white bread grilled to perfection with strong Fontina cheese and egg (with the yolk left runny) and drizzled over with nutty truffle oil was every bit as good as it sounds. Another popular item on the menu was the hot American favourite, Mac and cheese.

We decided to give it a miss though.

Despite being stuffed, I could not help but try the cleverly put together dessert of peanut butter and jelly sandwich – rustic, chunky strawberry jam sandwiched between two “slices” of peanut butter ice cream and finished with a generous sprinkling of caramelised nuts. This was peanut butter heaven, and, for me, reason enough to plan another visit to Spuntino.

Spuntino's biggest shortcoming has to be its drinks menu. The Trebbiano Nespoli that we sampled from the very limited wine list was nothing to write home about. Beers were almost non-existent, though there were some bourbons and spirits on offer. And £3 for a glass of Coke is a rip-off. Perhaps recognising these limitations, the restaurant offers free still and sparkling tap water by the bottleful.

The food at Spuntino is heavy and full-on. So, if you've not yet given up on your New Year's resolution of eating healthily, this is not the place for you. As the portions are small and there are several interesting items on the menu, going in a group is the best option. And yes, ditch the drinks. Get there by 12:15 and you are almost guaranteed a seat. For dinner, the restaurant is known to fill up by 18:00. I'm no expert on Italian-American food, but can say that it is not very often that you come across a London diner that serves good quality food, using first-class ingredients, without charging extortionist prices. The fast service, the laid-back vibe and quirky touches (wine is served in tumblers) along with the fact that the food is mostly top-notch definitely makes Spuntino worth a try.

Manjula Kalliat



# Zarina Bhimji at the Whitechapel

Zarina Bhimji's new retrospective chronicles her 25 year career and celebrates the release of her new video installation, *Yellow Patch*, which has been under construction for the past seven years. It premieres simultaneously at the Whitechapel Gallery and the New Art Gallery in Walsall. The 25 minute long piece explores the landscapes and interiors of the Indian regions of Mumbai, Kutch and Gujarat, the land of Bhimji's ancestral origin.

It opens with a shot of a dilapidated colonial building and continues to show offices, buildings, docks, shipyards, and plains, almost completely devoid of human beings. This is accompanied by the sound of voices, footsteps, and children playing. A colonial office building, for example, is accompanied by sounds reminiscent of industrious workers that the building could once have housed. A half-completed ship in a Turner-esque shipyard is accompanied by the sounds of shipbuilding.

The haunting sounds cast a veil of a narrative over the piece that culminates in an arresting sequence set in a grand, disused colonial building. In one exquisite shot, the camera pans up to show a chair with a torn protective cover. The camera



Zarina Bhimji, *Your Sadness is Drunk, 2001–2006*

lingers on a wall with severe cracks and holes, at which point the soundtrack assumes an ominous tone. Walls are a recurring theme in Bhimji's work; an element of the building that was overlooked while in use, they are filmed to "speak the unspeakable that wants to be spoken."



Zarina Bhimji, *Bapa Closed His Heart, It Was Over, 2001–2006*

*Yellow Patch* is shown next to prints from Bhimji's earlier photographic series *Love*, shot in Uganda between the years 1998 and 2006. Bhimji was born in Uganda to Indian parents and lived there until her family was forced to leave due to Idi Amin's expulsion of Uganda's Asian population in 1974.

Like *Yellow Patch*, the photographs in *Love* are generally devoid of people, yet demonstrate the evidence of human activity. One photograph features an empty storefront, while another displays a cemetery. *Indispensable Monument* is a photograph of an empty glass cabinet whose shelves bear handwritten labels like "Duties of police officer at the scene of the crime" and "Conduct and public relationships."

It could be twinned with *No Border Crossing*, a photograph of an enormous pile of documents tied together in bundles with string and labelled such things as "Traffic offences court files 1998."

Upstairs in Galleries 8 and 9, the retrospective continues. Gallery 9 features pieces from Bhimji's 1998 exhibition, *Cleaning the Garden*, which displays light boxes and prints of English and Spanish garden culture alongside mirrors engraved with paragraphs of text. The mirrors appear elegant next to the photographs, but the words on the mirrors reveal the dark underside of Britain at this time.

Each of the four mirrors is engraved with text from a newspaper of the time. One is an advertisement for the sale of a sugar plantation in Jamaica, complete with "170 negroes, 130 steers, and 24 mules". Another simply reads, "Black Indian Boy 12 Years of Age, fit to wait on a Gentleman, to be disposed of at Denis's Coffee-house in Finch Lane near the Royal Exchange." The mirrors draw attention to the often overlooked elements of society in the colonial era; there were a multitude of country manors, gardens and drawing rooms that depended on slave-ownership in England as much as they did in the further reaches of the Empire.

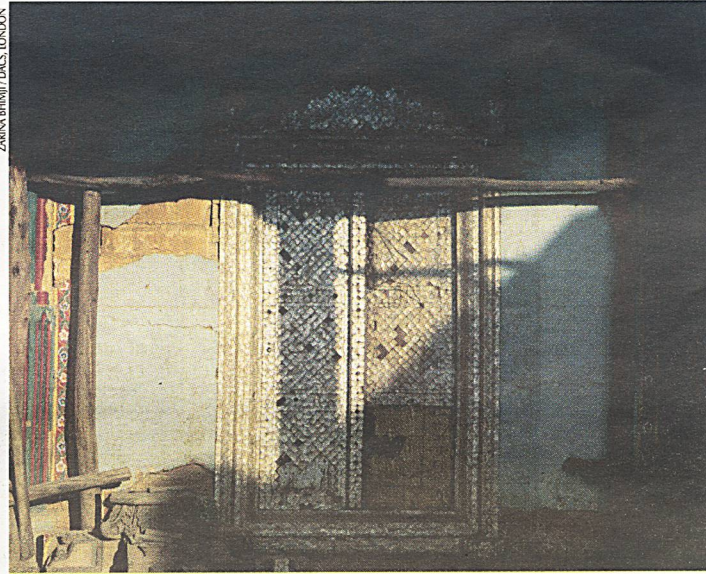
The next gallery continues to document the uneasy relationship between Britain and its former colonies. *She Loved to Breathe - Pure Silence* (1987) is the earliest work on display and reflects on the controversial immigration policy in the 1970s that forced South Asian women entering the UK to marry to undergo medical examination to determine whether or not they were virgins. Photographs printed on muslin are suspended from the ceiling, over colourful spices like chilli and turmeric thrown on the ground.

The exhibition ends with a screening of *Out of Blue* (2002), the artist's first major video installation. It was shot in Uganda at the same time as the *Love* series and shares much of the later work's thematic content. The beauty and tranquillity of the Ugandan landscape are contrasted with sounds of asphyxiation and the alarm calls of creatures. Walls marked by bullets take the place of images of airports, suggesting strongly violent expulsion and extermination.

The only weakness is the organisation of the main pieces; *Out of Blue*, *Yellow Patch* and *Love* are ostensibly part of the same project. They share themes and display a continuity of execution. Whereas her other works do share some of the same concerns, they are quite visually different. This, however, is a small quibble; as a whole, the exhibition is as exquisite as Bhimji's art. Experiencing the exhibition is to enter Bhimji's world, one in which beautiful images can be created out of tragedy and pain.

Yining Su

Zarina Bhimji is at the Whitechapel Gallery until 9 March 2012



Zarina Bhimji, *Shadows and Disturbances, 2007*

## The wives of prisoners

The very gripping first scene of the *Prisoners' Wives* leaves you with mixed feelings as you are reposed in the lives of a perfect couple, living a perfect suburban life, expecting a perfect baby when suddenly a perfect raid ruins the serene atmosphere and the scene turns into a screaming frenzy.

This is when our attention turns to the theme of this series: the prisoners' wives. Although, I must mention first, the programme's name is odd, mind you: not all its female leads are actually prisoners' wives, and the preview's title sequence compounds things by referring to itself as "Prisoners Wives." Following Waterstones' lead and dropping the possessive apostrophe might be about graphic design tidiness, or perhaps it is meant to stress how much these wives don't belong to their imprisoned menfolk.

Bearing this in mind, as we slowly move on in the episode we meet the star of episode one, the 22-year old former Hollyoaks actress Emma Rigby. She plays the naïve, innocent and perhaps ultimately tragic Gemma whose husband is being charged with murder. After initially refusing to believe her Steve ("he sells drinks... soft

drinks") could be a killer, things take a turn for the worse for Gemma when she finds a gun stashed in her mother-in-law's caravan. Can she still love a husband who not only lies to her face, but has also killed someone?

Worse still, you begin to empathise with her as you realise how forlorn she actually is, that she can't even share her problems with her foster mother who praises her on being her "success story." Gemma has such a high regard for this woman that she fears revelations about her husband's arrest could have a devastating impact on her psyche. Cue the other more experienced wife to come to the rescue. A blowsy, ballsy Frannie, (Golden Globe-winner Polly Walker), married to an international drug-runner (a sinister Iain Glen).

This lady is happy to publicly flash her "little Frannie" for her husband's viewing pleasure, for heaven's sake. "Speed boats, sawn-off shotguns - it was all really Ross Kemp," oozes the drug baron's well-manicured wife over her husband's arrest. She had a big house and money, but

suffered the judgment of her children's school friends. Walker is superb at being caught between two high-powered worlds, although the scene in which she compared her husband to bankers was tough to swallow.

The link between the other women becomes more visible as we meet Lou (Natalie Gavin), a dealer living on a rough estate, and her eight-year-old son who happens to attend the same school that Gemma works at. Lou's character provides the archetypal focus for some gritty realism and the series's focus on casting a wider net over the lives, loves and losses of its personas is revealed.

The show is also very effective in cutting between inmates and their outmates: Gemma climbs the stairs to bed; her other half clammers the ladder to his bunk. Despite the emphasis on gender, class identity also remains central throughout: Gemma's middle-class existence is shattered by Steve's alleged crime; Harriet's world is alien to Lou's; Francesca doesn't belong in her mansion-house milieu. The series makes for very interesting viewing for people who always figured how the mistakes of one individual in a family can have such huge ramifications on the lives of others around them.

Rasha Al-Dabagh

**Prisoners' Wives, Tuesdays, 21:00, BBC One**

## TV Picks of the Week

**Gok's Teens: The Naked Truth**  
Channel 4, 20:00, Tuesdays

Gok Wan offers advice on problems faced by teenagers, beginning with body dysmorphia, a preoccupation with physical appearance. He explores why many young people strive to reach unattainable standards of perfection, and talks to a girl whose hatred of her own body has led her to become anorexic. The stylist also hears from celebrities about the difficulties they faced as they grew up.

**10 O'clock Live**  
Channel 4, 22:00, Wednesdays

Satirical current affairs show, with David Mitchell, Jimmy Carr, Charlie Brooker and Lauren Laverne. They are joined by guests from the worlds of politics, science and culture for debates, interviews, topical comedy, investigations and opinion pieces.

**Death Unexplained**  
BBC One, 22:35, Tuesdays

Death comes to us all - but if it is unexplained, unexpected or the cause unknown, it has to be investigated by the Coroner's Court. This three-part documentary follows coroner Alison Thompson and her team as they examine mysterious, violent and unnatural deaths in West London. The first episode features a rare case of suspected poisoning, a possible prescription drug overdose and a man whose body lay undiscovered for months, with contributions from the families of the deceased revealing the human stories behind the forensic tests.

**Psych**  
Universal Channel, 19:00, Sundays

Romeo and Juliet and Juliet. Shawn and Gus are caught between two rival Chinese Triad families as they search for one of the leader's abducted daughter. Comic detective drama, starring James Roday.

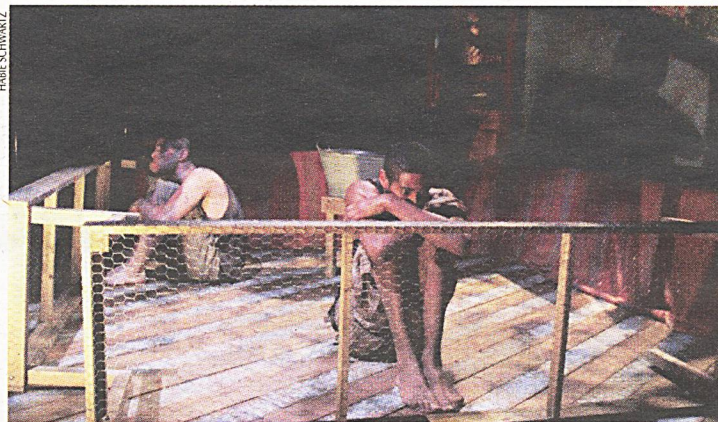
# Happy New, Old Red Lion Theatre

Director: Robert Shaw  
 Playwright: Brendan Cowell  
 Key cast: Alfred Enoch, Joel Samuels, Josie Taylor  
**At Old Red Lion Theatre until 25 February 2012**

“A good year starts with a good face-mask,” or at least that is the hope for Danny (Alfred Enoch) and Lyle (Joel Samuels), a pair of twenty-something brothers. Out of place in the real world and struggling to come to terms with past trauma, they begin their new year with cleansing – their skin, their possessions and themselves. For this year they must break free and seek out the Australian dream. *Happy New* is darkly comic and incredibly intense, questioning the society’s inherent pecking order, national identity and our reactions to troubled individuals in the world around us.

The ordeal in question, it becomes apparent, is that the pair became locked in a chicken coop for several months at the ages of ten and twelve with nothing but the chickens themselves to sustain them. As the plot unfolds we become increasingly aware of the scars left by this ordeal, with Enoch and Samuels depicting the lingering physical manifestations of life with the chickens first subtly but with gradually increasing fervour. Psychologically, they are left with agoraphobia and an unhealthy dependence on both one another and Pru (Josie Taylor), a fiery career woman who had been a supportive part of the media circus surrounding their story from its beginning. She also provides, in the most part, a calm and stable contrast to the surrounding madness.

The struggle to break free of stigma surrounding them appears almost as great as that of facing their past – a chicken is thrown through their flat window and Lyle returns from venturing outside more



Alfred Enoch as Danny (right) with Joel Samuels as Lyle

than a little worse for wear, blood smeared across his face and body. While these characters are not always empathetic, in these moments it is difficult not to feel for them and to lament their plight.

Not without a level of confusion, the story pans out with flashbacks to the chicken pen itself, and press coverage afterwards increasing both our understanding of their troubles and our hopes

that they could escape to the corporate world they dream of.

The space in the Old Red Lion Theatre lends itself beautifully to the intensity of the play. With the actors never more than a few metres away, we are drawn tightly into both their current one-room world and the horrors of their past with ease.

The performances are great from all, with both Enoch and Samuels portraying both these troubled men and their distressed child counterparts with great physicality and depth of feeling. Josie Taylor’s Pru is strong, independent and empowered, carefully walking the line between her professional and personal relationships with both Danny and Lyle.

Brendan Cowell’s script is fast paced, darkly comical and almost poetic at times. *Happy New* is a play that intends and succeeds in making you think.

Hannah Payne

## Designer collaborations

It might be the worst recession the world has seen for 60 years, but here in London, the multitude of designer shops springing up can sometimes make you forget that most of us are having to tighten our purse strings more than ever.

Fear not, however, as high end designers are finally sparing a thought for those of us on a budget and there have been a flurry of recent collaborations with high street giants such as Topshop and H&M. Now, designer collaborations are nothing new, but recently, high fashion designers have become increasingly open to the idea of seeing their designs being worn by the masses, as exemplified by last year’s collaboration between Lanvin and H&M.

This spring, there are two collections getting us excited, so start saving and get ready to queue.

### Marni for H&M

The quirky Italian label has been attracting fashionable admirers since 1994. Finally, their bold prints and interesting silhouettes have reached the high street. Their collection, which drops on 8 March, will include womenswear, menswear, jewellery, shoes and bags.



Marni for H&M | Photo: Magnus Magnusson

### Mary Katrantzou for Topshop

London-based designer Mary Katrantzou has only been showing on the catwalk since 2008 but her intricately beautiful designs and prints have found fans in celebrities from Alexa Chung to Keira Knightley. One of her dresses have been known to cost up to £5,000 but this February, she’s making her iconic floral dresses, inspired by the shape of traditional Chinese vases, available at a fraction of the price at Topshop. This stunning number along with thirteen other pieces will be on sale from mid-February.



Dress, Mary Katrantzou for Topshop, £30



Bikini, Versace for H&M: Cruise Collection, £24.99

### Still available: Versace Cruise for H&M

Following a sell-out collection last November with their characteristic studded leather and slinky party dresses, Versace is back with a more whimsical collection of fruity prints in white and lavender. The H&M concession in Selfridges still has a great stock of the key pieces. Our favourites include the fruit-patterned bikini and this Versace logo charm bracelet.



Bracelet, Versace for H&M: Cruise Collection, £24.99

## Campus Style

**Name:** Roxane Schultz  
**Programme:** Development management, MSc  
**What are you wearing right now?** Flared jeans by LTC. Suede wedge boots from Andre, my grandmother’s shirt and a blue jumper from Zara. I made the necklace.  
**Do you make all your own jewellery?** Just some of it. I’ve made jewellery since I was a kid. Once you know what you want, it’s quite easy.  
**How about your bag?** This I bought from a yard sale. It was maybe €10. It’s very good quality and I’m quite happy with it.  
**Why do you like shopping at markets?** To find stuff that you know people won’t have. And it’s less dependent on fashion. You make your own fashion, instead of going to a shop where they tell you what’s fashionable or not.  
**Can you describe your style?** I have no idea... maybe I have

a very French style. I always enjoy having something that’s not a trend. This shirt is one of my favourites, and it’s my grandmother’s.  
**Where are your favourite places to shop in London?** There’s a very nice vintage shop on Drury Lane. There’s a shop called Good Life near Hoxton Square – independent designers.  
**What do you look for when you’re shopping?** Finding something that’s different. But I like going into shops because they have beautiful pieces, and I just like looking at them.  
 Want to nominate someone for Campus Style? Send details to Jennifer at J.Fong1@lse.ac.uk



The LSESU Fashion Society’s annual fashion show is on 13 February 2012 in the Hong Kong Theatre. For more details, find us on Twitter (@LSESUFashion) or Facebook. Tickets are on sale now.

## Pick of the week

The shops have started stocking their summer collections already but the temperature outside tells a different story. Thank god for Japanese retailer, Uniqlo, which keeps a great selection of jumpers in stock all year round. This crew neck style comes in 10 different colours from classic navy to this on-trend pastel blue, which will carry you all the way through to Spring.

**Washable Cotton Crew Neck Sweater, £19.90, www.uniqlo.com**



## Perspective: How I learned that even Paul Simon can let you down

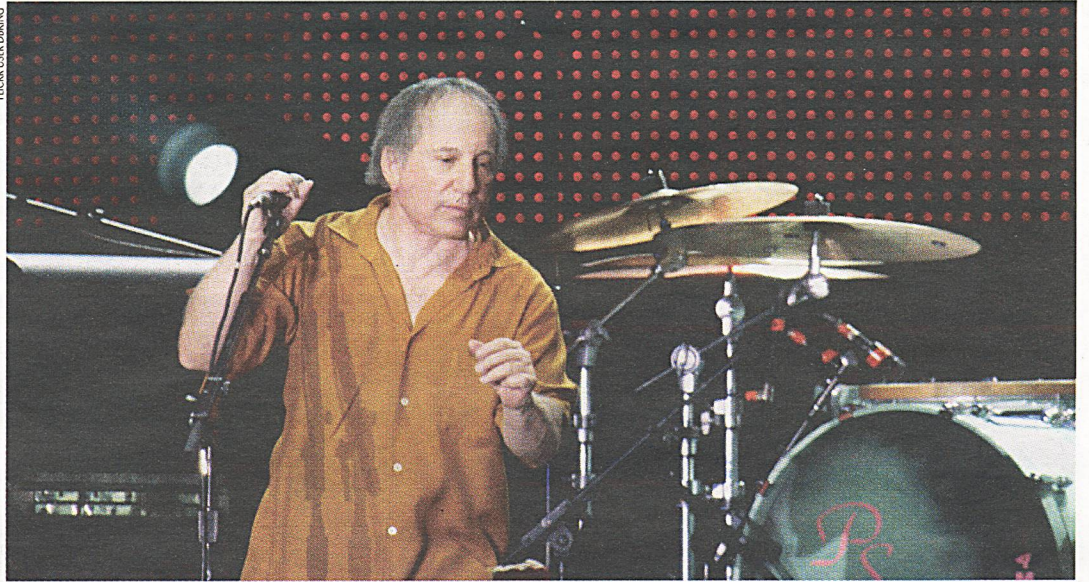
On listening to Paul Simon's *Graceland* for the first time, I surprised myself by having a religious conversion. Despite being in the five o'clock shadow of humourless commuters on the District Line, I silently danced all the way to Whitechapel. In fact I felt empowered by the electricity of the song "I Know What I Know;" it made me pity the music-less doldrums the suits occupied. I embraced my companion at the tube station demanding that she call me "Al."

Needless to say, like a good theologian, I investigated the holy scripture closely for a few weeks. What had ignited this innocent jubilation and inspired serious adoration? I constantly found myself dancing in South African townships (which had inspired the album) rather than occupying the disabled seat on the 91 bus to King's Cross. I marvelled at how Paul Simon delivered honest, despondent and cutting lyrics on an exuberant Caribbean cruise of brass bells, saxophones and fairy lights. The powerful 80s drum

sounds transformed into an African tonal explosion. Synthesised twinkles on top of powerful saxophones. In fact I imagined Paul Simon as a jolly uncle in a Hawaiian shirt, who knew your failings but never failed you. Yes, Simon-tology promised that we would all be received in *Graceland*. He would love us even if we didn't think he could. He would be wearing gumboots.

My conversion to all things Simon predictably ended when I realised that Paul was a human. I caught a shameful late night live performance on BBC Four. It turns out that Paul Simon does not jive along to his own infectious melody. Paul Simon does not crack a comforting smile which says "Fuck it." Paul Simon does not adorn Hawaiian shirts. I felt deflated. I was on the *Costa Concordia* and it was sinking. It appears Paul Simon uses jovial music to be "ironic." I have excommunicated myself and am currently searching for a more earnest music religion, which happily practices what it preaches.

↳ Alicia Cunningham



Paul Simon in 2008

## Sharon Van Etten – Tramp



I began following Sharon Van Etten in 2011 on the strength of *Epic*. Despite my love for it, I always found the album's title to be somewhat misleading, or perhaps deliberately ironic. With just seven songs in 32 minutes, *Epic* is not nearly long enough to live up to its grandiose title. Furthermore, the record's sound, which predominantly features Van Etten's gorgeous and understated vocals with acoustic guitar and minimal extra instrumentation, doesn't evoke anything "epic" either. Her previous record's title may have been something of an in-joke, but on her new album *Tramp*, perhaps "epic" would have been a more appropriate descriptor.

If Van Etten wasn't striving for "epic" then, she certainly is now. *Tramp* is everything that her previous record wasn't. It's lengthy (over 46 minutes), stacked with songs (twelve of them), and simply bigger in scope than anything she's done before. She largely shies away from the singer/songwriter acoustic guitar formula on the record, replacing the intimate and simplistic arrangements of her earlier work with lush, dense instrumentation, heavy drums, and occasionally searing electric guitar, as exemplified by the opener "Warsaw" and the stellar single "Serpents."

Her sound may have been inflated and her guest list stacked on *Tramp*, but her overall approach to writing songs remains consistent. Van Etten's formula of songwriting consists of using vague and rather broadly applicable lyrics that somehow retain a biting sense of realness and unbridled honesty. *Epic* employed the same formula, but with *Tramp*, Van Etten trades the previous record's inwardly personal lyrics for raw, occasionally bitter lines directed at someone else. On "Give Out," she sings to a second person lover, "In my way I say / you're the reason why I'll leave for the city / or why I'll need to leave." *Tramp* is especially hard to listen

to at times because of its subject matter; Van Etten sounds like she's breaking up with you on each song.

*Tramp* is not strictly a breakup album, but rather an album that explores the tenuous, uncertain, and uncomfortable period between when a relationship stops working and when it finally gets put out of its misery. Van Etten constantly straddles the line between preserver and destroyer, effectively toying with her lover, although certainly not intending to do so. The emotional rollercoaster that she experiences throughout the record is captured beautifully on the album highlight "Serpents." She admits that she "feel[s] safe at times," but in the very next line, cryptically asserts that "certain emblems tell me it's time." The feelings she has while wrestling with what she knows she will have to do are the "serpents in [her] mind" that she describes in the song's electrifying chorus. As someone coming out on the other end of a breakup myself, lines like these are difficult to stomach. Honestly for me, the best lyrical moments on the album are when Van Etten admits her own fault in the inevitable outcome of the relationship that she describes. On "Leonard," she exasperatedly sings, "I am bad at loving you." On "All I Can,

she's desperately exclaiming, "I do all I can / We all make mistakes." The sentiment is certainly simplistic, but it's also powerfully articulated and expressed by Van Etten's unique voice.

The real problem with *Tramp* is not in its songs, which are uniformly well written and certainly on par with her others, but in the way that the songs are presented. The dense aesthetic that characterises most of the album is not inherently unsuited to her music, but it occasionally feels a little forced. The passionate "All I Can" starts out nicely, but feels a little overwhelming by the time it reaches its guitar-heavy climax. "Magic Chords" begins with anomalous bullet drums and dubby synths, and features a male guest vocalist whose low voice clashes harshly with Van Etten's ethereal coos. Furthermore, although the list of guest performers on *Tramp* is certainly exciting on paper, I'm not sure if Van Etten is quite ready to enlist such highbrow names on her own music yet. To me, it often distracts from Van Etten herself, who obviously deserves to be the central focus of the album. For instance, "We Are Fine," the song featuring Zach Condon, actually feels like more of a Beirut song than a Sharon Van Etten song. This isn't inherently a bad thing,

because Beirut are pretty good, but I wish it felt like a Sharon Van Etten song, because it is one. *Tramp* occasionally comes across like an indie rock version of an upstart rapper's overwrought debut album, bloated with big names and lacking coherence because of it.

This isn't a universal problem, thankfully. The record does have its moments of uncluttered beauty, and these are among the best moments on the album. Aside from the fantastic "Serpents," which really hits the mark with its heavier sound, my favourite song on *Tramp* is "Kevin's," a mournful and minimalistic folk song that would have fitted in nicely on *Epic*. Van Etten also does occasionally find harmony in the album's dense sound, at least when she tempers it somewhat; the last two songs "I'm Wrong" and "Joke Or A Lie" evoke *Epic*'s more dirge-like numbers with their slow tempos and primarily keyboard-based atmospheres.

It is difficult to knock Sharon Van Etten for being ambitious, because she certainly deserves to have ambition. However, *Tramp* is indicative that some of her ambition should be put on a leash, at least until she learns where she really stands as a musician.

↳ Chris Capello

## This week's live highlights

7 Feb: **Balam Acab** – Rough Trade East

8 Feb: **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah** – O2 Empire

9/10/11 Feb: **The Black Keys** – Alexandra Palace

10 Feb: **Dropkick Murphys** – Roundhouse

10 Feb: **Justice** – O2 Academy Brixton

13 Feb: **Porcelain Raft** – Rough Trade East



The Black Keys

## PartBeat

The office playlist this week...

Kevin's

Sharon Van Etten: *Tramp* (2012)

I Know What I Know

Paul Simon: *Graceland* (1986)

Say Yes

Elliott Smith: *Either/Or* (1997)

A.D.H.D.

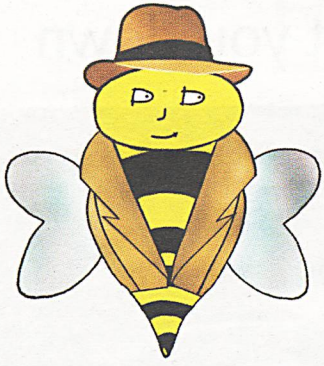
Kendrick Lamar: *Section.80* (2011)

I Shall Be Released

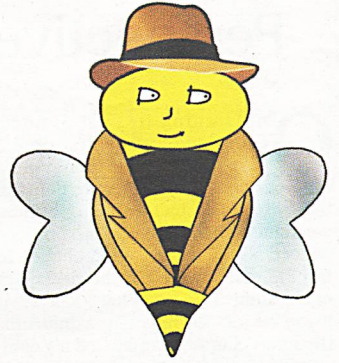
The Band: *Music from the Big Pink* (1968)



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# PRIVATE B



## UGM reform boosts turnout!

### University "ashamed" of LSE links

Protests continued to dominate the streets of Beijing yesterday following revelations that Peking University had been involved in an academic relationship with the London School of Economics.

In the largest demonstrations seen in the Chinese capital since 1989, thousands took to the streets calling for immediate curtailment of the long-running LSE-PKU relationship. The links, formally detailed in a recent edition of the online university newspaper The Duck and tediously re-hashed in the official student publication several weeks later, prompted a huge public outcry, leading to the resignation of almost two members of staff.

"It is a total aberration that we should have dealings with the London School of Discredited Bourgeois Economics," one protestor informed the B. "Speaking as an otherwise loyal student of PKU, I feel personally insulted that we should be having any



dealings whatsoever with the corrupt wreckers and sloths in London."

Speaking exclusively to the B, Liu Mifton, the Environment and "Ethicks" Officer of Peking University Students

Unions are largely prohibited noted that "To be linked with an association peddling such dubious research, not least typified in the way in which the LSE failed to predict the credit crunch," paus-

ing in order to hand out another flyer to slightly baffled passers-by, Mifton continued, "We challenge this relationship, noting that the running-dogs are the ONLY university in the world to

be involved with us, clearly, they are after something."

In a joint statement, the long-feuding Taiwanese and Republic of China Societies both spoke out against the academic partnership. Despite initial goodwill, the truce was short-lived, breaking apart several minutes later after a minor member of the RoC Committee questioned the use of the phrase "A strait choice between good and evil" in the accompanying leaflets.

The partnership is the latest in a series of embarrassments facing PKU. Erstwhile dictator of the university, Comrade H. Duvets resigned last March owing to a donation from a senior member of the Blair family, while various ethics violations have seriously damaged the university's reputation. Current rankings in China have shown that the university fell from 1 to 1 in overall student satisfaction over the previous year.

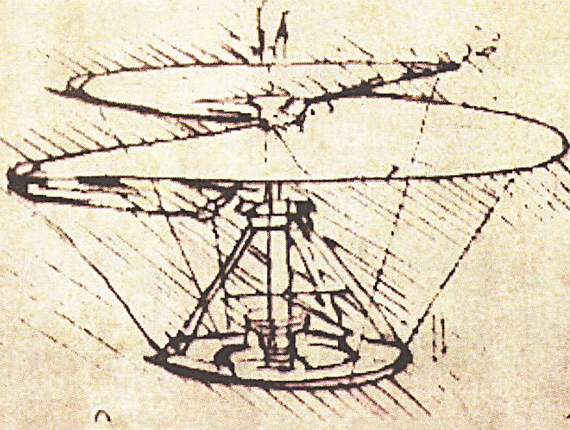
Despite some concessions being offered by members of the PKU management, demonstrators remained resolute, vowing to maintain their institutions's opposition to the relationship with the LSE until something more interesting came up."

L Tanned Ale

### Ye Moste Anciente and Worshipfulle Socyety of Lifte-Fitters

Current works on the library lifte-shafte are entering their fifteenth monthe. Currently, we assume that the Tomb of St. Howard of Trypoly will be fully excavated by Summer 2015.

Thankfully, the idiot students still assume that we are fixing the lifts. Blessed is the Goddess.



The BLPES stairs (shown above) were originally designed by the Socyety's founder in his notebook of 1498.

"What the film lacks in sound, it also lacks in policies" Socialist Shirker

"[Redacted]" David Lanyard Chronicle

"Black and white things always confuse me" Stark Davey

"It made me cry, but that's not difficult" Arrears Patel

## So I saw this play...

**Director:** Some drug-addled guy who used to be at the National  
**Playwright:** A failed actor from RADA  
**Key cast:** Don't know most of them, but I saw one of them in *The Wire*, and that's the only type of TV I watch  
**At a pub basement in Camden until the Borders Agency launch a raid**

I went to the theatre the other day. For someone such as myself, this is a fairly common evening out. I do a great deal of refined things such as this as a means of bulking this section out. I was originally going to go and see *Shrek* on Drury Lane.

However, I noticed fairly early on that rather than being an obscure Ibsen script being performed in Serbo-Croat, it was actually an adaptation of a popular children's film. In addition, I noted that the audience seemed to be entering into a state of some excitement. Some of them were chatting, which was something that I am fundamentally opposed to. Even worse, there were children there.

I was so annoyed by all of this that I fixed to find a superior play to write about. It took me some time to find something suitable. Everywhere I looked, I kept seeing people queuing up with happy expressions on their face.

In the end however, I found a nice place near Mornington Crescent where everyone looked like extras off a Ken Loach film. At £25, tickets were depressingly cheap, but it turned out to be okay. The name of the play obviously isn't important.

Suffice to say, it was a delightfully obscure three-hour adaption of an Iranian agricultural manual. As it was silent and sans-subtitles, it was largely up to the audience to decide what the plot was actually about.

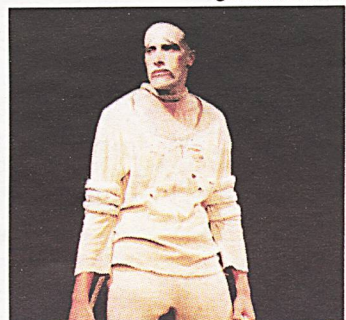
The twelve of us who were there found it all exceptionally illuminating, especially the three-hour lull. Although we were later informed that this was an unintentional power-cut, in no way did it affect my enjoyment of the production. I only gave it three out of five because I'm a snob.

Mario de Silver plays a character with no name, there was a programme

available, but that is all a little too "mainstream" for me. Instead, I made up my own name for him, so I'll call him Horace. Horace spent the majority of the play walking around the stage, muttering. This was a complex metaphor that I was obviously aware of, but I don't think that I quite have room to fit in my explanation.

Afterwards, I went home and cried to myself, before reading miserable poetry all night.

L Arrears Patel



Vlad De Moonies as "Le Chevalier d'Roux" in an unrelated play

# Features

## The Syrian Resolution

Sofia Horta e Costa looks at the developing situation in Syria



Flickr: Saleem - Homs

**B**oth the Chinese and Russian Foreign Ministries said Saturday that they would block the UN Security Council Resolution calling for political transition in Syria on the grounds that it could be used as a mandate for international military intervention in the country. This statement comes just days after the Assad government regained authority over rebel controlled territories near Damascus, and after the Arab League mission suspended its activity in the country due to worsening violence and a mounting civilian death toll.

Amid growing turmoil, Assad's regime has benefited from Russian and Chinese reluctance to support foreign intervention in Syria which, as was the case in Libya, would be in support of the rebel forces in the country. In an interview with Interfax, the Russian Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov suggested that a 'responsibility to protect' reaction – similar to that seen in Libya – would only aggravate the situation and escalate it to a full-blown civil war.

The Assad family's 40 year regime in Syria has enjoyed a strong alliance with Russia, whose ties with the Middle Eastern state are motivated by both strategic and economic interests. The Russian naval base in Tartus has existed since 1971 and has previously allowed for Soviet military presence in the Mediterranean. The base has since been revamped, with President Assad allowing the Russian Navy to enlarge their presence in the port city through the addition of at least ten warships to

the area. The city-port of Tartus borders the Alawite Mountains on Syria's western coast, an area where the Alawi group of Shi'ite Muslims – to which the Assad family belongs – have traditionally lived.

Economic ties have been strong since Russia recently became the major supplier of weapons to the country; and following the 2006 pardoning of a large proportion of pre-1990 Syrian debts to Russia, this economic co-dependency has been fortified.

**“With increasing violence, the unrest is looking more like a civil war and less like an uprising, but, unlike the case in Egypt last spring, the rebel groups are not speaking in one voice.”**

According to a report published by the Associated Press, Russia signed a \$550 million deal to sell combat jets to Syria just last month. Similarly, China's strong military, economic and political ties with Iran (Assad's closest ally in the region) have meant that it has followed Russia's footsteps in resisting attempts to draw up an official UN Security Council mandate stipulating

military intervention in Syria. Chinese dependence on Iranian oil and its increasing energy needs will further entrench it in the politics of the region even if Beijing prefers to remain on the sidelines as it did with Libya last year and Iraq in 2003.

An article published by Reuters on January 31 entitled *Global "great power politics"* draws attention to 'the more muscular regional approach of Moscow and Beijing' which 'appears already increasingly tied to their wider global agendas'. Besides the countries' clear economic interests in the area, both Russia and China might want to assert their influence over a region traditionally dominated by US foreign policy. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is facing elections and might exert his vetoing power in the Security Council to show a brave face against the West, something he failed to achieve during the Libyan Civil War when he meekly abstained on the vote which allowed NATO to intervene in the crisis. Likewise, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao could want to retaliate against President Obama's focus on US militarisation in South-East Asia, a region where Beijing will no doubt strive to maintain its regional hegemonic foothold.

The geopolitics of the unrest in Syria might, however, overlook the question of the legitimacy of foreign intervention and underplay the power of Assad's government. Although the largest rebel group Free Syrian Army (FSA) has been getting closer to Damascus, Assad's forces have successfully fought back to regain influence

near the capital. The Syrian national forces remain very loyal to their president and it does not seem that his grip on power will falter any time soon under the opposition groups. As the army outnumbers the FSA by ten to one, it is difficult to say outright that the rebel forces represent the wishes of

**“As the violence worsens, it serves as a reminder of the inherent animosities amongst ethnic and religious groups in the tormented country.”**

the Syrian people.

Alawite groups have expressed concern regarding their safety if the government is overthrown as they fear that the predominantly Sunni population will focus their anger against the minority group which has ruled the country for over four decades. Although it is true that Assad's forces are responsible for the initial outbreak of violence and that the president does not want to make concessions or grant reforms to the protesters, the protest against the autocratic regime has revealed underlying ethnic tensions in the country.

With increasing violence, the unrest is looking more like a civil war and less like an uprising, but, unlike

the case in Egypt last spring, the rebel groups are not speaking in one voice. In a country that has struggled to consolidate its diverse religious sects, the divisions among anti-government groups have undermined the overall power of the opposition to Assad's regime. The dormant tensions have been awakened by the anger at the current violence being played out by both pro-regime Alawite forces and anti-regime rebels who are predominantly Sunni. Alawite civilians who had initially supported the uprisings in Syria prefer Assad to stay in power if the alternative is discrimination. An article published in late January in *The Economist* highlights the fact that military intervention is impossible when 'no unified rebel force is ready to sweep into the capital, secure the streets and take control'. Indeed it would be very difficult to intervene in Syria on behalf of a disjointed opposition divided into commands of only a few hundred men each. In a country with a population of 23 million, the structure of the opposition is clearly far from effective.

Although for very different reasons, Russia might be right in resisting an international mandate regarding the situation in Syria as it does not seem that the rebels are merely fighting against a tyrant autocrat clinging on to power. As the violence worsens, it serves as a reminder of the inherent animosities amongst ethnic and religious groups in the tormented country. Civilian opposition to the regime is not likely to unite even under a common cause. ☛

# Why Art and Politics are Both Failing

Edward Larkin reflects upon how we respond to human nature

**W**hat exactly does it mean to be human? The current dossier on the human condition, integrated

over the past few centuries from discoveries in fields such as particle physics, biology, economics, psychology, and philosophy, looks something like this:

Homo sapiens – humans – are one of many types of organism that have evolved on an average planet that revolves in the “habitable zone” around an average star in the middle of an average galaxy of a universe that started out smaller than an atom and for some reason exploded 14 billion years ago.

Each human is characterized by a specific 6-billion letter permutation of four chemicals, 95% of which is identical to chimpanzees. They’re primarily motivated by self-interest, which ultimately traces back to the insatiable desire to pass on this 6-billion letter sequence of chemicals. Even acts of kindness towards others can be interpreted as an attempt to pass on the sequence, the ultimate goal of which is unknown. They live for 80 years in a world that is governed at its core by the unfathomably bizarre mathematics of quantum mechanics.

Once considered rational (if self-ish) decision-makers, their cognition is actually remarkably imprecise, prone to a whole host of biases and common mistakes. And if that wasn’t enough, they have no way to tell whether they are living in a computer simulation created by another advanced civilization. Not exactly reason to celebrate.

These advances in understanding undergird many of finer pleasures of modern life. But they’ve also had the unintended consequence of eroding our confidence in those things we most valued in the past: eternal truths, human exceptionalism, some sort of larger destiny or purpose. We’ve been philosophically shaken, collectively coming to realize that most of our previous notions were myths of wish fulfillment. These realizations were

probably once acutely embarrassing, but as they’ve scabbed over we have entered the ‘Age of Irony’, borne out of the conviction that the only way to go is down.

Understanding our ultimate

**“Political candidates are so totally unironic - so completely serious and convinced of their world-historical pronouncements - that anyone watching with a discerning eye can’t help but feel a vast emptiness.”**

smallness hasn’t changed the coarse texture of day-to-day life. We still have routine work schedules, eat three meals a day, use the bathroom, etc. Indeed, watching people in any sort of slow moving line quickly reveals that large segments of the population haven’t gotten Galileo’s memo about not being at the center of the universe.

But this philosophical pessimism has seeped through the cracks and coloured the filter through which we see the world. The underlying part of us that still wants to make sense of reality and believe in something is left wanting.

We have a deep desire for a culture that can confront our existential problems and opine on them. Unfortunately, two important components of culture – politics and art – have responded in totally different, unsatisfactory ways to the modern problem. Art has fully embraced our insignificance and adopted a corresponding

emptiness, while politics lacks any sort of self-consciousness whatsoever, its rhetoric overheated and based on long-defunct theories of human nature.

Any inspection of the Tate Modern or the work of famous recent artists – Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Damien Hirst, Andres Serrano – reveals a world replete with irony. Bodies are contorted, fluids and waste products flow uncontrollably, sexual organs take on a gross and ballooned scale. Serious art today is afraid of glorifying the human condition, quite understandable given how much of this glorification has been proven wrong in the past.

Similarly, postmodern literature has a distinct hollowness to it, an inability to talk about the important things in life with anything approaching seriousness. “Meaning,” “truth,” and “self,” all have to be put into quotation marks and deconstructed as ultimately naive notions. The postmodern canon (Pynchon, Gaddis, Barth, etc; there’s a reason you haven’t heard of them) is full of fragmentation, chaotic experience, and structural cutesiness, but it has all the vitality of a rock. In the words of critic James Wood, these works “know a thousand things but not a single human being.”

The world of politics has veered off in the exact opposite direction, refusing to recognize any sort of irony whatsoever. Political candidates are so totally unironic – so completely serious and convinced of their world-historical pronouncements – that anyone watching with a discerning eye can’t help but feel a vast emptiness.

Much of this emptiness is due to politics’ wholesale adoption of the advertising ethos – politicians hone their message with the same cutting-edge psychological insights of modern marketing. The scary thing is that advertising like this works devastatingly well despite its simplicity of message. We see ads about how buying certain products will make you a “rebel,” sexual innuendo even when the product has nothing whatsoever to do with sex, and hamburgers that look

like they were prepared at Michelin starred restaurants. But we never quite process the incoherence – it’s simply too unpleasant to constantly go through life with our guards up.

Political strategists understand this – they know that we’re susceptible to modern marketing. Thus candidates have become basically advertisements themselves. When asked a question, they begin to answer then almost imperceptibly shimmy back to the warmth of their own banal talking points rather than saying anything serious. These slogans and catch phrases have been vetted extensively for the emotional cues they evoke, subtly appealing to our deepest amygdalic instincts. They rely on a lack of self-consciousness both in the politician and the viewer. As a result, powerful words like “freedom,” “liberty” and “socialism” have been distended into receptacles of political waste.

Perhaps the best example of the lack of self-consciousness in politics this year has been Mitt Romney’s attempt to contrast his Massachusetts health care plan with the *bête noire* of American psychology, Obamacare.

Romney castigates Obamacare as fundamentally different from his Massachusetts law. This is the first layer of falsehood – the plans are actually very similar. Then, Romney proceeds to say that while he’s proud of the Massachusetts plan, Obamacare is a big government takeover, “unconstitutional,” “bad law,” and “a disaster.” This is the second layer of falsehood – it’s simply hard to imagine that what he describes as a big-government liberal program at the national level could be a great small-government conservative solution at the state level.

This is already complex enough, but there’s a third layer. He proceeds to say that he won’t deny pride in the Massachusetts plan even though it will hurt him politically. But in reality, Romney knows that being painted as a flip-flopper is even more hurtful, so he has actually crafted this statement to help him politically. What’s presented as an aw-shucks-I’m-just-going-to-

tell-it-like-it-is-politics-be-damned statement is precisely the opposite: an utterly calculated piece of political theater designed to minimize the possible damage.

At this point you as the discerning viewer are starting to think there might be an unprecedented fourth layer: is the complete lack of self-consciousness in this answer indicative of some larger intentional irony? Is Romney the ultimate postmodern meta-politician, secretly laughing at us? An attractive idea at first, but I doubt it.

If this whole thing weren’t so sad, it would be almost beautiful and artistic in a way – the Sistine Chapel of political spin, its layer upon layer of meaning indicative of true mastery. Instead, it just tends to inspire a sort of marrow-level cynicism when watching debates.

We see this un-ironic salesmanship in our politics and inherently recoil from it. But in recoiling we must

**“Part of the reason why ancient Greek tragedy was so compelling is because of the catharsis.”**

necessarily turn towards something else. And serious art and fiction haven’t been able to break the fall. The solution to searching for meaning in the world is not seeing more penises and feces or reading disjointed narratives that make little sense to anyone outside small academic literary circles.

What we see in recent art/literature and twenty-first century politics are two distinct forms of emptiness: the irony-saturated world of postmodernism and the robotic insincerity of politics. We are left to navigate the tight rope between the two voids that is reality.

For me, this makes serious art that has bucked the trend all the more important. David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen are the most prominent examples in the world of literature – authors who can take stylistic risks (especially Wallace) but still describe the search for contentment in the modern world without making fun of it. Correspondingly, Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart, while both partisan, hilariously inject some much-needed irony into politics.

Part of the reason why ancient Greek tragedy was so compelling is because of the catharsis – it is ultimately redemptive. Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* begins with the members of Agamemnon’s family killing each other and gorging themselves on blood, but the trilogy ends rather triumphantly, with the establishment of the rule of law in Athens, the glorification of institutions, and the power of reason to protect against our animal nature.

This sort of catharsis is crucial, but only in small, hard-earned doses. In *Oresteia*, we have to go through two and a half plays of brutality to earn it. Both the moral void of postmodern art and the constant faux-catharsis of politics, in which every election is a “battle for the soul of the country,” miss the mark.

It’s important to be aware our cosmically diminutive position. But we’re really only alive for a very short amount of time in the grand scheme of things, and most of us want to spend at least some of that time celebrating that fact rather than either completely denying it or constantly reminding ourselves how meaningless we are. We want catharsis.



# Iraq's long road to peace and security

Leslie Mok examines the political chaos in Iraq



Flickr: chrisdebrun

**O**n Friday 28th January, a suicide bomber detonated his taxi in a Shi'ite neighbourhood in Baghdad, killing at least 32 people and wounding over 60 bystanders. The target of the bomb attack appeared to have been the funeral procession of a Shi'ite estate agent, who had been killed along with his wife and son by gunmen the previous day. Half of the deaths consisted of Iraqi police officers who were guarding the procession.

The attack was the latest in a series of bomb attacks in Iraq that plagued the city last week. On Tuesday, four separate bomb attacks were carried out in Baghdad's Shi'ite districts, killing at least 13 people and wounding 62 more. Various other bombs exploded in Sadr City, Shula and Hurriya, killing another 13 people in total. In addition to car bombs, insurgents have also resorted to hit-and-run attacks on police checkpoints using small arms. One junior doctor in Baghdad said, "These attacks happen so regularly lately that dealing with them becomes a skill you have. It's terrible but true."

Since the beginning of 2012, over

320 people have been killed in Iraq and almost 800 more have been wounded. The figure is more than double the number of violent deaths in January last year. The departure of US troops on 18th December last year led to a military power vacuum in the region, creating an opportunity for previously dormant militia groups to revive their activities.

The attacks have once again raised concerns over the stability of Iraq's social and political landscape in 2012. The last few months have witnessed escalating tensions between Sunni and Shi'ite groups, triggered by the political crisis in December last year. Within hours of the departure of US troops, Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki ordered the arrest of Sunni Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi under charges of terrorism. He also called for parliament to pass a vote of no-confidence in order to dismiss Saleh al-Mutlak, the Sunni deputy prime minister. His demands immediately created political turmoil, with many accusing him of consolidating his own power by deliberately singling out rival Sunni politicians for dismissal. Concerns have also been raised over Mr. Maliki's

adherence to the power-sharing agreement made between Iraq's sectarian groups a year ago, which divides posts between Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish groups.

**"The attacks have once again raised concerns over the stability of Iraq's social and political landscape in 2012."**

In retrospect, Mr Maliki's actions could hardly have been deemed surprising. Only two months before the US withdrawal, he called for the arrest of hundreds of people connected to the Ba'ath Party (the ruling party whilst Saddam was in power), claiming that Libya's transitional government had given him intelligence files that provided evidence of a planned coup. Furthermore, Western officials often commented on Mr Maliki's 'authoritarian tendencies' and his worryingly

comfortable relationship with Tehran.

Sectarian tensions ignited by Mr. Maliki have not remained exclusive to Iraqi politics. News of Mr. Hashemi's arrest order alarmed the Sunni minority, who have continuously protested against growing Shi'ite influence in parliament and have claimed they are being marginalised. This has led to the revival of insurgent activity from Sunni militia groups and, in response, the return of rival Shi'ite militia groups to counter them. The increased level of violence in Iraq is a reminder of the years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, where Iraqi insurgent activity was at its highest. Although most insurgent attacks during that period targeted Coalition troops and Iraqi security forces, attacks were also carried out against rivaling sectarian groups, particularly between Sunni and Shi'ite militias.

On 14th December 2011, President Barack Obama stated that the United States had fostered "a sovereign, stable, and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people". With the political turmoil over sectarian representation and the rising violence on Iraqi streets,

questions will no doubt be asked about the validity of Mr Obama's statement. In a wider context, some may question what long-term goals were actually achieved by the Iraq War, whether its objectives of creating stability could be deemed a failure, and ultimately what benefits it gave to the Iraqi people. If the current political crisis is not resolved quickly, Iraq may soon experience another descent into chaos. And

**"In a wider context, some may question what long-term goals were actually achieved by the Iraq War"**

without US military presence, the Iraqi security forces will have a much more difficult task in suppressing the sectarian violence. Although the Iraq War is officially over, last week's violence shows that the country still has a long road ahead to attaining long-term stability and peace. ☞

# Should Cameron

## Jack Tindale highlights the effects a cap will have on children

**'F**airness' is perhaps the most overused word in politics. In many respects it is also the most meaningless. As political terms go, few politicians would have the courage to argue that they support anything counter to it.

Fairness is also a useful veil. Used carefully, it can mask a policy that would otherwise be seen as being divisive and draconian. With regards to the coalition government's welfare reforms, "fairness" has become the defining expression for defenders and opponents of the legislation.

The Prime Minister recently defended the proposed £26 000 annual limit on family benefits, encouraging the Labour Party to support the policy on the grounds that "The cap is right and the cap is fair." Indeed, to listen to Mr. Cameron, one would feel compelled to support the policy as being in the best interests of the country. Few would argue against the need to bring the national finances into order, with Europe gripped by the spectre of debt, social security spending remains the largest section of government spending, hovering at around 30% of expenditure.

With rising unemployment, it would be foolish to suggest that current spending levels were in any way sustainable. Yet, when members of the government bench snigger at opposition questions regarding social justice and when Conservative MP's feel free to describe welfare claimants as occupying a "lifestyle choice", the view that more nefarious policies may be at play beyond simple pragmatism is impossible to discount.

Such rhetoric underpins a policy that is endemic of a system in which elected officials chose to impart a fundamentally divisive issue upon low-income families. The Prime Minister's careful use of words has been to continue a long-running mantra of pitting the 'struggling' against the 'scrounging'. Such a diktat has become endemic over recent years, it certainly didn't originate under the current government. Attacking benefit 'scroungers' is cheap politics, but it is again tied towards 'fairness', it is wrong for people to claim for money that they are not entitled to.

The government has laundered the idea that around 66% of voters agree with capping benefits. Certainly, it is hard to express much sympathy when

tabloid tales of a family of sixteen are bleeding the honest taxpayer dry. Yet a simple fact exists that abuses are present within any redistributive system, a casual look at the parliamentary expenses scandal would make that clear. Even the Centre for Social Justice, a think-tank established by the current Work and Pensions Secretary, has stated that the vast majority of families receiving benefits do so out of necessity. Despite this, the government sees fit to gauge the issue in terms of the 'fairness' mantra.

The lack of clarity in the government welfare bill is behind only the latest steps in the Health Secretary's belated NHS Reforms. At the moment, Andrew Lansley's legislative child is comprised of more amendments than bill. The government is aware that their reforms of the health service are toxic, but such realism is not seen in Iain Duncan Smith's approach to his welfare reforms.

It is curious to live in a political system where the House of Lords is compelled to defend the poorest in society against the legislative program of the Commons. However, on the first of this month, the Upper Chamber once again chose to block proposals that would have brought about the aforementioned cap on benefits.

Aside his brief and ignoble reign as Leader of the Conservative Party, Iain Duncan Smith has placed welfare reform as his political legacy to the world. Certainly, there is a great deal of merit in the government proposals to introduce "Universal Credit" in which the current hodgepodge various entitlements is reduced to a single sliding scale. A system where working is always preferable to not doing so is so basic that it is astonishing that it has not been enshrined in law before. It is also resolutely socialist. Work is beneficial for moral and physical health, it is a shame therefore that so few jobs are available.

Curiously, the latest opposition to the welfare cap has galvanised around the twenty-six members of the House of Lords who sit owing to their position as Bishops in the Church of England. A number of amendments were proposed by the cassocked crusaders, not least the exclusion of child benefit from the cap on the grounds of family necessity.

Frankly, when the Church of England is against Iain Duncan Smith, a man who 'does god' rather res-

olutely, it perhaps demonstrates that the government is seen as being more reactionary than reformist.

Arguably the most horrendous aspect of the Welfare Bill is the attitude towards people with disabilities. The government has been resolutely in cutting funding towards the very benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, which was established as a means of helping the most vulnerable in society back into work. The Shadow Employment Secretary, the gangling Stephen Timms, has attacked the government's proposal as being a "spiteful policy towards disabled children." Liam Byrne, his boss within the Shadow Ministerial team, has also pointed out that "if the focus of this reform is solely efficiency driven, government may fail to ensure that the needs of disabled people are adequately met."

The proposed cutting of ESA for young people is estimated at being just under £10m a year. Interestingly, that sum of money is equivalent to a quarter of the bonus pot at the state-owned Royal Bank of Scotland. No amendments for reinvesting banking profits have yet been mooted by the government or the opposition.

It would be wrong to oppose changes to benefits. With a dire economic situation and an aging population, radical steps must be taken to balance the budget. Yet attacking the poorest in society is not the most effective way of going about it. The cleaners and manual workers that maintain the LSE campus rely on housing benefit to allow them to live in Central London. Commuting is expensive, it would be hard to fathom them being able to keep the capital clean if the people of Brent and Southwark were farmed out to live in Bromley or Slough. A senior politician warned that the housing cap could lead to a 'Kosovo' scenario on the streets of the metropolis.

Rather embarrassingly for the government, that was the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. The same man, so often seen as representing the pinnacle of High Toryism is also the one actually responsible for the second quotation two paragraphs above. When the Bishops, a friend of the Prime Minister and your own think-tank are expressing reservations, it may be time for the Work and Pensions Secretary to reconsider his policies. ☐





# Should we cap benefits?

**Chris Rogers** asserts the moral necessity of a benefits cap

**T**he Benefit Cap is fair and necessary. There are innumerable arguments going around defending and opposing the introduction of this sort of cap. But fundamentally it is fair. In essence why should a family in Kensington with two children living - out of work - on benefits get more total income than a family with four children living in Manchester earning just above the bread line.

The argument is intuitively straightforward, paying more than the average wage to someone refusing to work, and living on benefits is wrong and unfair. It should be noted in this debate not all benefits are being capped, for example those on disability benefits and those unable to work will not be facing this limit.

Many MP's have argued that the benefit cap should be set far lower than £26,000, since the average family has to earn £35,000, once tax and national insurance have been subtracted, to gain what a household is able to achieve purely by living on benefits. Working taxpayers thus have to work considerably less to take home the same sum of money.

The fact is the current system encourages a 'something for nothing culture'. There is zero incentive to go out to work or look for a job when you can take home more than the average wage simply by refusing to work, and thus condemning thousands to a lifestyle of dependence, from which there is no incentive to escape.

One of the common criticisms of the benefit cap is that people will be forced to move out of their houses, unable to afford the rent, and that this somehow unfair. This is wrong on two counts.

Firstly, the benefit system was designed to help keep people above the bread line, not ensure that people can live in large houses in the most expensive parts of London courtesy of the taxpayer. I would dearly love a large 3 bedroom house in Kensington, or a three story villa in Knightsbridge. Yet that is not the reality, and I do not expect the taxpayer to fork out so I can fulfill my desire to live in an area far out of my league.

Secondly, anyone who is looking at the property market at the moment will know that rents are incredibly high in London. One of the main ben-

eficiaries are private landlords who can raise their rents safe in the knowledge the state will pay these extortionate costs. As the Tax Payers Alliance argues, capping the level of benefits will remove the source of this funding and prices will fall out of necessity.

Another criticism raised, notably by Church of England Bishops, is that capping benefits at £26,000 a year will cause a large increase in the number of children living in poverty, and they propose that as a result the cap should not limit the child benefit.

£2000 is a rough estimate for the average monthly wage for most working households, and adopting the mean income would appear to be a manifestly fair way of determining the cap. How on earth £2000 a month can be considered poverty is beyond me. Now, it will not be enough to pay the rent in areas such as Kensington, but families can always look for somewhere else to live. Why should the taxpayer be forced to pay extra for people to live in a particularly posh area. There is no justification for those who do not work to receive a greater income than the average worker who is paying for their extravagant lifestyle.

The strength of the criticism, however, seems to lie in the fact that the benefit cap doesn't take into account the number of children within a family. A family with four children and a family with 2 children will be just as limited by the cap, despite having clearly different levels of need.

The simple answer might be just to grant an exception for child benefit. However this would raise the cap to £50,000 for households with several children and this would render the entire concept of the benefit cap pointless. Even then it seems absurd that a family with a pre-tax income of £35,000, (£26,000 after tax), should be receiving less than the same family living exclusively on benefits.

When formulating policy one surely cannot disagree that we must think of the ordinary hard working taxpayer, and compare their lives with those who have been unemployed for years living in posh houses paid for with benefits. The central principle that any policy is built upon ought to be fairness, and this very principle surely implies that those on benefits cannot receive more than those who actually work.

It is almost impossible to deny that benefits in the UK are such that it is just as possible to live a life free from work, and yet have a similar (and in some cases better standard of living) than the average household in the country.

There is also a strong fiscal argument: we have a welfare bill that is £192 billion a year, which is climbing further beyond what the nation can afford. Yet this isn't the strongest part of the case for welfare reform. It is simply that it is unfair to taxpayers who have to work considerably harder to take home the same amount as someone living on benefit.

Finally, if you want to make a democratic argument, the majority of the nation judges that a benefit cap would be the right and fairest thing to do, and especially in a time of economic hardship it is unfair that those who work receive less than those who sit at home.

In all this I agree with Iain Duncan Smith with regards to the Bishop's views on the benefits system: "I would like to see their concerns about ordinary people, who are working hard, paying their tax and commuting long hours, who don't have as much money as they would otherwise because they're paying tax for all of this."

## What do you think?



Have your say at [thebeaveronline.co.uk](http://thebeaveronline.co.uk)



Flickr: Pittaya

# The Court and the People

Susan Sebatindira examines the effectiveness of the ICC

**T**owards the end of last month, four eminent Kenyans were charged with crimes against humanity, committed during the December 2007 election violence, by the International Criminal Court. It should mark a victory for Kenya as the decision introduces accountability and a hopeful end to the impunity culture; however, it does not look to be much of a victory at all to the Kenyan people. A recent opinion poll released last Friday conducted by the Smart Octopus Research Company showed that 73 per cent of Kenyans were unsatisfied with the ICC result. Many claimed the result was unfair, had insufficient grounding and was deeply political.

This decidedly unhappy response from the Kenyan people raises questions about the ICC procedure, namely: is the ICC effective in bringing about justice?

Kenya is unique in that the state

itself did not launch a complaint to the ICC about the alleged actions of the four Kenyans in question. The investigation was launched by the ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo. Out of the 'Ocampo Six' Kenyans under investigation for inciting violence shortly after the election results in 2007, four prominent Kenyans are facing charges. Though they are not resisting The Hague, two of those involved are still pleading innocence - Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto. Surprisingly enough both are still hoping to run for the coming Kenyan presidential elections and have shown no signs of straying off of that path. The ICC though has previously launched investigations against sitting Heads of State, such as Omar al-Bashir of Sudan and ousted Laurent Gbagbo of Cote D'Ivoire, so should either Kenyan presidential hopeful gain power, they will not be exempt from the ICC's jurisdiction.

The ICC, like many international organizations, is only as strong as member states make it. Thus, the effectiveness of the ICC rests on its member states and whether they are willing to cooperate with the organisation. How the institution is perceived worldwide plays a large part in this.

The greatest weakness the ICC faces is the non-exclusion of three big powers, Russia, China and most importantly, the United States. Although the US has signed the 1998 Rome Statute, they have not ratified the treaty. Given the US is currently considered the world's only hegemon, not having its full support can be seen as damning internationally. States might view this as a reason not to cooperate with the institution, having come to the assumption that the ICC holds no real strength, without the US backing its every move. Recently, though, it appears that the tide may be changing as the UN Security Council requested

the conviction of Bashir for allegedly committing crimes against humanity in Darfur, Sudan since the US, Russia and China are permanent members in the Security Council.

The biggest criticism the ICC faces is its fairly asymmetrical case load, with all of its current cases being from African states. The long-argued African bias of the ICC is not an unfamiliar complaint against the organization. The African Union has been vocal about its wariness of ICC scrutiny in the region, resulting in antagonistic relations between the two organizations. The AU has largely ignored the arrest warrants the ICC has out for al-Bashir. This contempt for the ICC is not universal across the continent; some countries have been willing to cooperate, such as South Africa and Botswana banning al-Bashir access to their country and the Kenya High Court's domestic ruling allowing a warrant for al-Bashir should he step foot in Kenya again.

Nevertheless, the ICC is pursuing cases with just cause: elections rife with violence, leaders using vicious means to remain in power are, unfortunately, recurring events within the African continent. There remains to be seen any judicial African solution presented by the AU that could suffice in place of the ICC.

However, given that no other continent has received as much scrutiny as Africa has leaves room for concern. Surely, the African continent is not the only region worldwide to have committed abuses against humanity in the last decade. A recent example is in the Middle East, a UN human rights

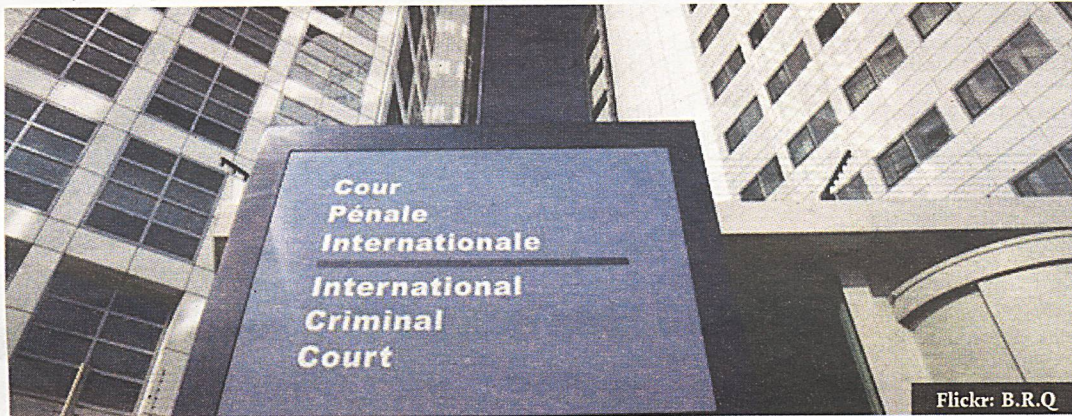
watchdog has accused Syrian security forces of crimes against humanity in December last year.

It comes down to whether the African people believe the ICC is bringing about justice, especially as it is the African people who are the victims of the actions of those convicted in the ICC. Those that are facing charges are not there because of petty crimes. The ICC prosecutes individuals for committing either crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide. The citizens of the countries facing the ICC might well prefer a semblance of justice being carried out in an objective court rather than have these leaders languishing comfortably in exile.

It is hard to tell what the Kenyan charges will mean for Kenya on the whole.

The poll is by no means a concrete, definitive outlook on Kenyan public opinion towards international action against the four convicted Kenyans. Kenya doesn't represent Africa and the four Kenyans convicted are arguably not in the same league as Gbagbo and al-Bashir. However, it does provide insight that it is not only African leaders that are uncomfortable and unhappy with the probing eyes of the ICC - the African public could very well be growing wary themselves.

Despite this, if the ICC would like to maintain the notion that they can achieve justice where other nation-states have failed to do so, it will have to work much harder than it is now to convince international society as a whole. **✎**



## Measured musings | The Chris Huhne Dilemma

**F**riday saw the resignation of Chris Huhne, the former Lib Dem leadership rival to Nick Clegg, from the position of Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

In short, he has been charged with perverting the course of justice and is accused of making his wife take the points he once earned while speeding so that he could keep his licence, and covering up this fact.

The irony of this whole affair is that Chris Huhne lost his driving licence shortly afterwards anyway for another speeding related offense.

He has said in order that his defense should not detract from his ministerial work, or vice versa, he has resigned from the government. But he still intends to keep the heavy work load of an MP while his trial awaits.

It should be noted Chris Huhne has always, in the strongest terms, denied the allegations against him.

However this whole affair will have impacts far beyond the mere immediate loss of his Ministerial salary.

The biggest problem will be for the Lib Dems as a party. Having suffered considerably from their decision to join in a coalition with the Conservatives, they hoped that they would receive some benefit as being seen as a serious political party who would be able to reign in the more extreme desires of Labour or the Conservatives.

Events like this cause Liberal Democrats to be taken far less seriously, and more of a joke than a competent party. This could prove very damaging during the next general election if the saga is allowed to rumble on, and Lib Dems become nothing more than a joke of a party.

However, on a more personal level, there are very few who are going to shed a tear over the departure of Chris Huhne.

He was almost universally disliked

by those around him. Well known for briefing against fellow ministers, and of course for when he accidentally sent a public message rather than a private message on Twitter, he has not made many friends since joining government.

David Cameron will not miss one of his critics and one of the most left-wing members of the Cabinet. Nick Clegg is likewise unlikely to miss a former leadership rival. Whilst much of the public may feel relieved that the minister who introduced new energy taxes raising people bills by up to £1000 has now gone.

Indeed, in the Telegraph James Delingpole wrote a rather exhaustive list of those who were more than likely to rejoice at Huhne's departure, including all of the Tory, Labour, most of the Lib Dem MPs, as well as those he knew in Oxford and his ex-wife, Vicky Pryce.

Nevertheless, Chris Huhne is one of the few political heavy weights the Liberal Democrats have at their disposal. And Nick Clegg has made it clear that should Huhne be cleared of all charges he will return to the Cabinet.

But perhaps the biggest surprise in the ongoing saga was the lack of a return of David Laws in the mini reshuffle that occurred in the aftermath of Huhne's departure.

Having resigned from the government previously, this seemed an ample opportunity to allow Laws back in to a ministerial role, perhaps not as a senior minister, but filling a more junior role.

The fact this has not occurred is somewhat peculiar and disappoints the Tories who were hoping for a return from the economically right-wing, *Orange Book* Liberal Democrat's strongest member.

However, despite this covering the headlines in almost every paper, Chris Huhne is still innocent until proven

guilty.

The media frenzy that has dominated the news cycle always occurs around these sort of events, and we have no right to assume guilt until a jury of his peers returns a verdict to the contrary.

We have a legal system designed to ensure that men are treated fairly by and in accordance with the law, not by the opinions of the political elite or the transient prejudices of the masses. He is currently undergoing considerable public humiliation and the last thing that should be done is to deny him a fair trial.

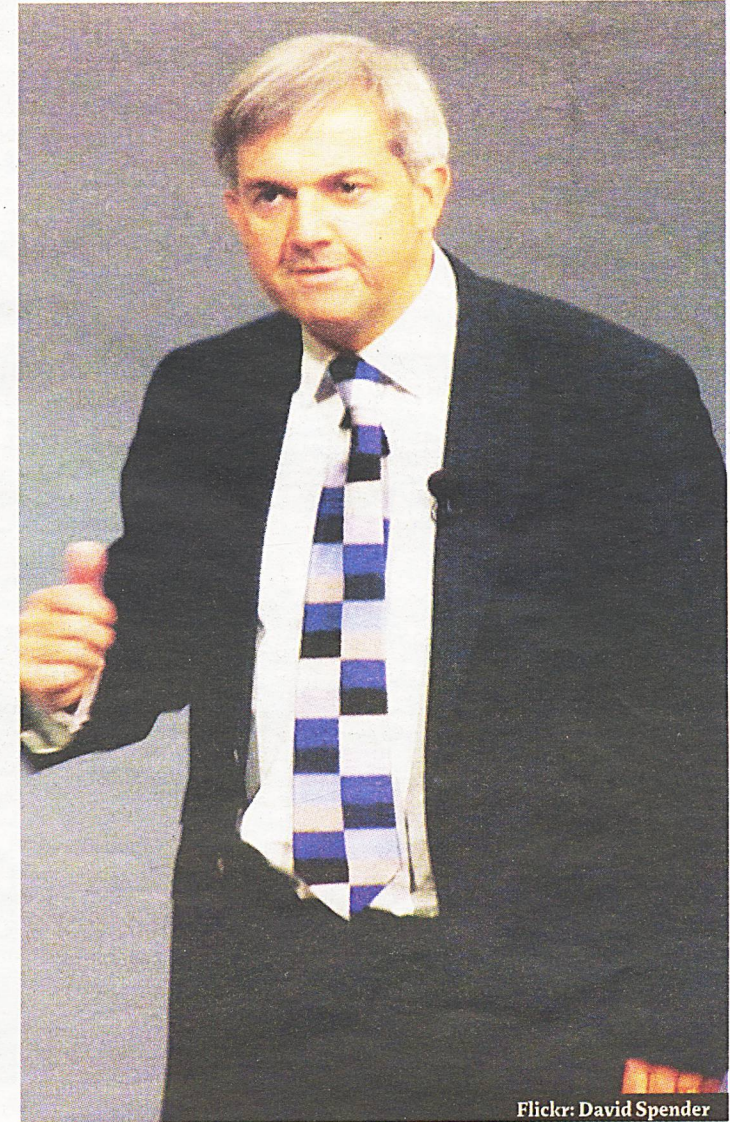
Throughout this process the blogger Paul Stains, better known by his alias Guido Fawkes, has been pursuing Huhne, never ceasing in his quest to bring Huhne before the Crown Prosecution Service. He celebrated the events on Friday with a glass of champagne, thanking those who contributed to Chris Huhne's downfall.

The rest of us may not be in quite such a celebratory mood, witnessing what is quite possibly the end of a man's political career.

What can be assured is that this matter will prove embarrassing for the coalition the longer it is allowed to continue, even if Huhne is eventually found innocent of all charges. All that this scandal does is reinforce a negative view of the Coalition, in particular the Liberal Democrats, that is unlikely to help them in the coming months.

Nevertheless, in the end, perhaps the one thing we can be hopeful for as citizens in a democracy is that those who govern us will and ought to be held to account as with any more ordinary member of the public.

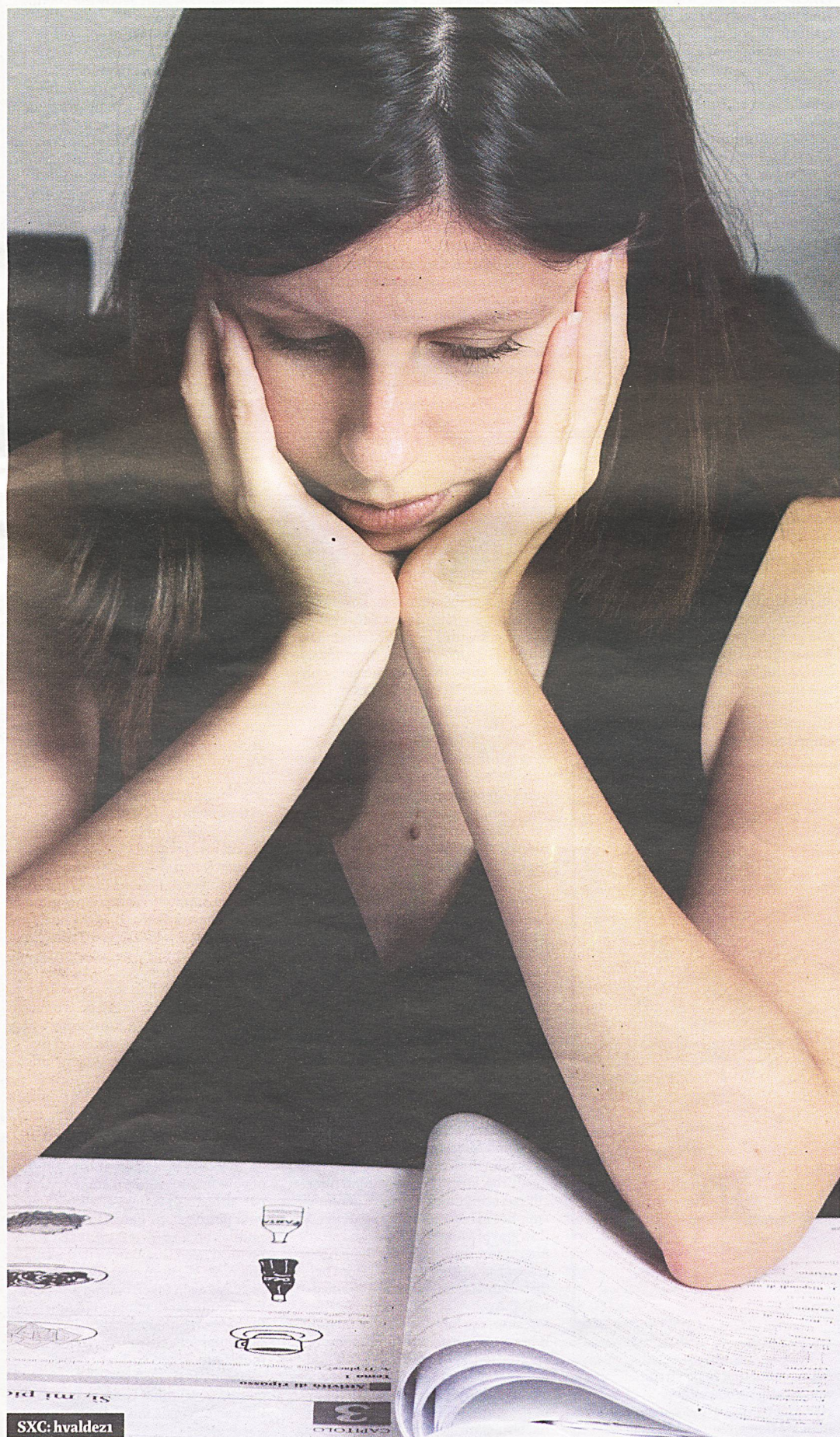
Chris Rogers  
Features Editor



# Social

## Working: why less is often more

Cleo Pearson's workaholic's guide to guilt-free study



**I** think I'm a workaholic. I never seem to allow moments of the day to be filled with nothing. The very concept is a contradiction in terms, or at least in my mind. When I'm not working, I think that I should be. I wouldn't feel this guilt if I had finished all of my work, but there is an infinite supply. I could have things a lot worse though; I do enjoy my subject and get overexcited about buying new stationary, because something has got to keep you going. This kind of work ethic seems to be pretty common at LSE and yet it's not those that are working harder than me that I envy but those who can fly through seemingly effortlessly. Granted, people have different academic capabilities. However that aside, I think that I could benefit from reassessing not the quantity of time I spend working, but the quality.

For both your and my sanity, I give you my workaholic's guide to guilt-free study:

**1. Students perform better with lie-ins.** My parents relish telling me that "The early bird catches the worm". Aside from the fact that I'm a vegetarian and have no interest in catching worms, I'm not so sure that this saying holds as much truth as they might hope. Unfortunately for any mature students, it has nothing to do with being a student, it is instead about being young. When tested at various points throughout the day both young and older adults show dramatic differences in memory performance. Younger people tend to improve as the day progresses, while older people exhibit a decline. It's all down to our circadian rhythms, the 24-hour sleep-wake cycles that direct

**"The more you learn, the richer your synapses become and the richer your synapses, the more you learn"**

many of our biological functions.

**2. Facebook and coffee breaks are justifiable... well, sort of.** On average students have a ten minute attention span. Congratulations, by reaching this far in the article you have proven that yours exceeds that of a goldfish. But seriously, pushing yourself too hard won't necessarily reap the greatest rewards; remember to break up your studies to perform at your best.

**3. Multitasking is bad for you.** Breaking down your activities allows your mind to concentrate on the task at hand and complete it better.

A study showed that computer users at work changed windows/ checked e-mails or other programs nearly 37 times an hour. So be disciplined and do NOT check your facebook/ e-mail/ phone every second whilst working. Your friends can wait and what's the harm in playing hard to get anyway?

**4. Just because I'm fidgeting, doesn't mean I'm not focusing.** Can't sit still? Relax! Fidgeting is good for you. Studies find people who fidget burn more calories, have better circulation and less back and joint pain. Even better, so-called "fidgeters" think and remember more effectively when fidgeting. It is not really known why, but the more stimuli there are

**"No number of self-help guides can cure you entirely of being a workaholic"**

around something we're learning, the more likely we are to remember it.

Unfortunately however, despite taking all of these things into consideration it still remains that learning becomes easier the more of it you do. The more you learn, the richer your synapses become and the richer your synapses, the more you learn. This is where the concept of "use it or lose it" comes from: synapses not used are literally lost whilst those that are used frequently become stronger. "Use it or lose it" applies throughout one's life because the brain doesn't stop building its circuits when we reach adulthood. Synapses continue to be added and modified throughout life. These later modifications are driven by experience, that is, by learning.

You may not have realised yet, but my brief guide to work may have already transformed the way you study, providing a well-deserved break and perhaps making you question your assumptions. However, ultimately no number of self-help study guides can cure you entirely of being a workaholic. Nor will having more highlighters or one less item on the reading list. It is attitude which has the power to make half an hour of reading amount to 7 pages or just half a page. That doesn't mean cracking the whip, but instead working with your mind. When you're feeling tired or can't focus, allow yourself to relax guilt free. If all else fails, a degree's not important, you could be a singer or a model, perhaps... Who am I kidding? Maybe it's time you stopped wasting your time and got back to those books then.

# Dinner with a Difference

## Bakr Al-Akku's diary of wannabe banker...part 2

It has been a rather downtrodden year thus far. The pending implosion of the European Union, Greece's will it/won't it bailout and, oh did I forget, that small possibility of nuclear war with Iran. Well, none of that matters as Boris Johnson decided to lower council tax this week, with annual savings amounting to the grand, life-changing sum of £3.10. "That's an extra, small size mocha a year from Starbucks" says one banker, "Not even a Grande". But then again, these are tough times for us all. Personally, I'm definitely voting for him now. At this rate I'll be able to afford a one week travelcard by 2016. Cheers Boris.

Congress leapt to applaud Barack Obama as he mentioned the need to take money out of politics. Admirable? Yes. But is it admirable how a \$1,000,000 donor to his 2008 campaign is a bank who also happens to be Mitt Romney's no.1 donor? Maybe not. Now the layman here would shout "hypocrisy!" The banker? "Wow... what a great bit of hedging!" which is making bets on both sides of a race to ensure you win.

Petty world affairs aside, this week I wish to share my own once in an (undergraduate's) lifetime story. Having won a Swiss investment bank's trading challenge for first years, out of approximately 1800 students, I was understandably quite pleased with myself. However in typical big-headed LSE fashion I assumed this meant I was guaranteed to be made a hedge fund manager, Monetary Policy Com-

mittee member and Noble Prize winner by the age of 23, with an honorary Economist obituary. Don't forget authoring a condescending self-help book somewhere in-between.

Turns out the prize was a sit-down dinner with a couple of members of the bank's senior management. I was nonetheless highly appreciative.

Now, I had never received such an invitation before and the occasion made me rather nervous. I didn't know who I was meeting, where they were from or what their backgrounds were. I had only received an email requesting "my presence" for 7pm at some swanky sounding restaurant. After discussing what to wear for half an hour my dad introduced me to the concept of "suit jackets". I still cannot tell you the difference between a blazer and a suit jacket but I nonetheless dressed in my dad's 3 piece suit, as a Michelin starred French restaurant in Knightsbridge beckoned my arrival.

Entering the restaurant, it was exactly as I had imagined. The antiquated feel of the oak furnishings were well balanced by the more modern ambiance. Inside I was welcomed, offered a drink and politely asked if I would like my jacket to be taken.

"Yes, thank you" I instinctively replied.

Oh my God, are you kidding me? I had just spent the last 30 minutes debating whether to wear the damned thing and now no-one was even going to see it?

"Oh sorry my wallet was in there, could I have it back please?" I silently

applauded myself for my quick thinking.

"Oh not to worry sir, what pocket was it in? I will fetch it for you."

He couldn't be serious? There was nothing in the jacket! Trying my utmost to display an expression of intelligent confusion, I patted myself down. For some peculiar reason I felt I had to adequately display my hands flicking through my trouser pockets multiple times before miraculously finding the wallet.

"Well hell", I thought to myself, "I'll go without the jacket then."

This was certainly not the service I was used to back in East London. Where I come from, if someone takes your jacket and asks what pocket your wallet is in, you call the police.

"Right this way sir" invited the Maître d' as he led me to the table. Already seated were two men, one middle aged and one elder man, who stood up to introduce themselves.

"Where did you travel in from? Not a long journey I hope?"

"Not at all, just caught the tube from Stratford. Yourself?"

"Oh nothing we just flew in from Zurich".

Ah, not long at all then.

Taking my seat and staring down at my empty plate, I suddenly froze. Surrounding the plate were six sets of cutlery. We're not talking just about different sized forks, knives and spoons either, but strangely shaped carving tools with knives that had no top and were curved inwards. What on Earth do these guys do to their food?

Concerns of my jacket, imaginary wallet and potentially failing dinner conversation evaporated incredibly quickly. Now there was only one worry - not looking like an idiot.

Deep breaths, I know how to do this, I had seen Titanic before: my sister-in-law had forced me to watch it multiple times. What did that upper-class woman say to Jack again? That's right; "start on the outside son and work your way inwards." Although I will never tell her, I could have thanked her for all those torturous hours in that moment.

The bankers were extraordinarily nice people. While asking about my winning strategy and if I traded myself to generate returns - remember, never "money" - the menu came. Mid-sentence the words in my mouth got stuck: £65 for soup? And it was the cheapest starter on the menu. Could I skip starters? Looking like an idiot for not knowing how to use cutlery seemed child's play. Please, please tell me they were paying for all this?

Relaxing into the situation I began to get comfortable with them, discussing anything from football to music. Having asked everyone beforehand what I should talk to them about during the dinner, they all said the same thing: get them to give you a first year summer internship.

"How?" I had asked.

Impress the socks off them; make them believe you have the potential to be the next great trader! We were already coming to the end of dessert and I hadn't swung anything yet. I was

running out of time. It was now or never. Picking a ripe moment, I took the plunge "So, do you think I could get some time on the trading floor?"

"Well, apply to our spring week programmes of course that are for first years"

I had expected this, but I didn't want just a one week rotation. "Any chance of coming sooner?"

"Don't worry about it - take my email address and I'll email some guys for you. If they're around, you'll be seeing me next week"

"Thanks a lot" I replied. Hiding my million dollar smile.

Calling for the bill, the temporary elation was offset by the sinking feeling in my stomach as I worked my brain to the max, attempting to calculate exactly how much I had spent since I last saw my statement. That meant deducting the pair of trainers, multiple meals and LSE library fines from the total. If I was right there should be £150. That was less than just my starter and main. I began to wonder, why I bought those trainers?

Avoiding eye contact I glanced towards the bill: £495. S\*\*\*. Time entered slow-motion as I watched the banker reach into his pocket and pull out what can only be described as a platinum edged Swiss bank card, which he put into the book before closing it and returning to the waiter. Thank God for that.

# LSEx Circumcision

## The bizarre prevalence of clean-cut All-American boys

If you have not been lucky enough to have had this conversation with an American, I have some rather surprising news for you: almost all boys in the US are circumcised. And for those Americans amongst you: almost all males over here have their foreskins intact.

It is mysterious how the ancient history of ritual circumcision became a norm in the US. Secular circumcision began as a 'cure' for masturbation late in the 19th century in England. It swiftly crossed the Atlantic, even though it was only ever confined to the upper classes over here, where it has since withered and died. In the US, it rose and it is now estimated that 80-85% of all American males are circumcised, with figures showing a higher rate in the Midwest and a much lower rate on the West coast.

The US is the only country in the world where the majority of baby boys are circumcised for non-religious reasons, but it is very much taken for granted. It is bizarre that infant circumcision is so prevalent in the US, given its tradition of liberty and individual rights. Surely is it not the 'right' of person to decide whether they want part of their genitals removed? But peer pressure, social norms and pressure from circumcised fathers and grandparents, abiding by the mantra 'a boy should look like his father', have all combined to make 'circumcised' an integral part of the concept of an American man.

The claim that the intact penis is "dirty" and that circumcision makes him "clean" is widespread - which is bizarre given that nature's protective wrapping is being removed. There is no evidence to support this assertion, and the vast majority of men around the world do not seem to experience any problems. Having a foreskin doesn't make you dirty, lack of hygiene

does.

Medical "reasons" put forward to support the case for circumcision appear to follow trends in popular science. Masturbation hysteria, "moral hygiene", was replaced by STIs, then cancer, then Urinary Tract Infection. The first three of those were the most feared diseases of their day, and it

all reach differing conclusions about whether circumcision could be used as a prevention method against HIV. As a result of trials in South Africa, Kenya and Uganda, finding that the risk in circumcised males was 0.44 times that in uncircumcised males, the World Health Organisation and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/

women, and that data is lacking for the transmission rate of men who engage in anal sex with a female partner. The joint WHO/UNAIDS recommendation also notes that circumcision only provides partial protection from HIV and should never replace known methods of HIV prevention. So if you are partaking in (proven) protected sex, or unprotected sex with a long term partner, why do you need part of your penis cut off to marginally lower a risk you are not exposed to?

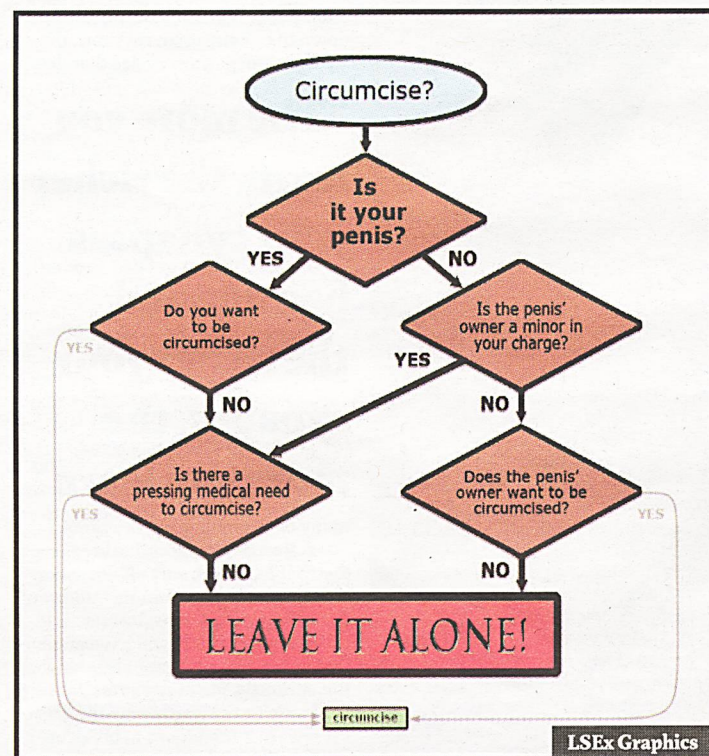
The foreskin is part of a boy's penis, not some kind of optional extra. It protects the surface of the head (glans) of the penis and keeps it soft. Without a foreskin, clothing rubs the glans and hardens it, the way walking barefoot hardens feet. As a baby, the foreskin protects bacteria from entering the urine-tube (urethra), acting like a kind of flap valve. And all those nerves, some 20,000 of them, will probably have a sexual function when the boy grows up. The frenulum is the most sensitive part for circumcised males, but there is a ring of tissue, just as sensitive as that, running right around inside the foreskin. It provides erotic pleasure, especially via the ridged band and Meissner's corpuscles, acts as a rolling bearing in intercourse and masturbation, prevents painful intercourse, stimulates partner's genitalia, supplies skin to cover the shaft in erection and prevent tightness, and stores pheromones and releases them on arousal, and stores, releases and helps distribute natural lubricants ('smegma' and pre-ejaculatory fluid). The foreskin also has protective functions. It prevents the glans from becoming keratinised, keeps the penis soft and moist, protects the thin-skinned glans against injury, protects the nerves of the glans, provides lysosomes for bacteriostatic action around the glans, and as it is vascular (rich in blood ves-

sels that bring heat to the tissues), it protects the less vascular glans against frostbite - as Sir Ranulph Fiennes found on his epic transpolar walk.

When babies are born, the inside of his foreskin is closely attached to the head of his penis. Before it can be cut off, the doctor has to run a blunt probe around between his foreskin and his glans to separate them. The pain of circumcision is excruciating, and it is not uncommon that the raw edge of the cut foreskin will heal back on to the raw surface of the glans, forming a 'skin bridge', little tunnels which are unsightly and very hard to clean.

Damage of various kinds is not all that uncommon. A surprising number of men have a scar across the head, a stray tag of skin hanging off their penis, or ugly lumps where the two kinds of skin healed together and where the veins had to find their own new routes. Worse things can go wrong with circumcision. A 2010 study by the US Boys Health Advisory found that approximately 117 neonatal circumcision-related deaths occur annually in the United States, about 1.3% of male neonatal deaths from all causes. And because infant circumcision is elective, all of these deaths were avoidable.

It would be a major infringement of your human rights if someone cut part off part of your genitals without your permission. Female genital mutilation for any reason at all except medical need is outlawed in the US and most Western countries. That includes even token cutting and pricking, far milder than male circumcision. Both involve unnecessary mutilation of genitals, resulting in permanent mutation. There are human rights movements trying to eradicate female genital mutilation, but how is it really different to male mutilation?



was almost inevitable that HIV/AIDS would take their place. Many studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between male circumcision and HIV infection, and

AIDS stated that male circumcision was an efficacious intervention for HIV prevention. However, both bodies indicate that circumcision may not reduce HIV transmission from men to

# Travel Diary: Catching the Cairo Bug

**Laura Aumeer** on eleven weeks living in Egypt's capital

**E**gypt was once again in the news this week, with the tragic riots at a football match that killed 75. For me, it was a bit more personal - the match in Port Said was between Al-Masry and Al-Ahly. That may not mean much to many, but Al-Ahly are my adopted team, so to speak. Two summers ago, seemingly a lifetime before the so-called Arab Spring, I spent eleven weeks in Egypt, predominantly in Cairo. There it wasn't unusual to while a night away in the particularly Egyptian fashion of smoking shisha and watching football.

I originally planned to go for five weeks over summer, to get out of London and do something useful with my time. Studying at LSE had made me distinctly aware of my inadequacies in the language department and this seemed the perfect way to learn Arabic and see the sights.

I arrived, unable to read the street signs, let alone speak the language. Yes, I had booked into language classes, but had only one night booked in a hostel and a return journey in five weeks time. I admit, I realised then I had taken a risk.

Having found a flat, complete with roof-top balcony and broken chandeliers, with an Austrian and an American, we set off to explore the city. Most people I knew who had visited Cairo had been fairly disparaging; I was warned of the pollution, the noisiness, the crowds and the harassment.

Spending the first week doing

the mandatory tourist hot-spots, I began to see their point. Primary school history lessons had built up an exotic view of the pyramids that was duly washed away. The famous Cairo museum was filled with some amazing artifacts, unfortunately everything was just scattered about, unlabelled and in disarray. Even more unfortunately, it was looted last year in the struggle. And Khan-el-Khali, the bazaar, was merely filled with tat and tourists in cheesy Egyptian holiday t-shirts rather than the intoxicating Aladdin's cave of goods that I had expected.

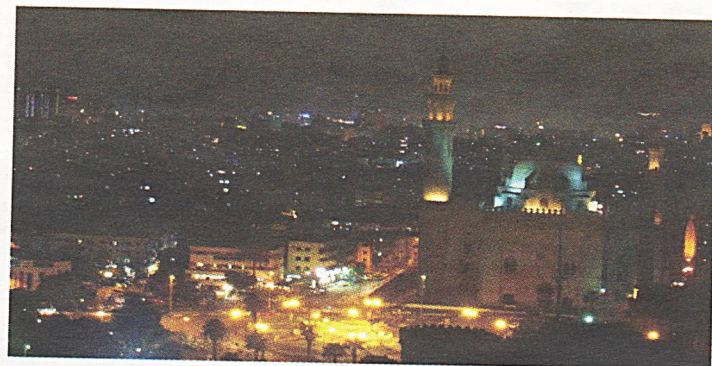
However, with this out of the way, we had the chance to really see Cairo. We left the expensive tea shops, used our Arabic a bit more and tasted more authentic foods. I became a connoisseur of tahini, a sesame seed based dip and was kept going throughout the day by the ten pence falafel stands. I soon discovered koshary, a "love it or hate it", carb-heavy dish of macaroni, rice, spaghetti, chickpeas, spices, chilli, fried onions and a tomato and garlic sauce: a contender to the fry-up for the best quick, cheap and filling comfort food.

I discovered that Cairo, not New York, was the city that never sleeps. Staying up to the early morning, I was pleasantly surprised that the restaurants and markets were still full of families. This was exemplified after a night in a karaoke bar, when I was dragged by the Austrian to a McDonalds filled not with drunken revellers, like you would find at Leicester Square at the same time, but with families

and kids. The bar was in itself an interesting experience, filled with tourists from the Gulf States, letting their hair down so to speak as they blasted out Arabic covers of Western pop songs, whilst numerous rounds of beer and vodka-based alcopops were bought.

With a population of nearly eight million, Cairo is full of contrasts and tensions. Expats live the high life side-by-side to the conservative, poorer neighbourhoods. Taking a break from the heat of city and wishing to sun ourselves by the pool, we spent one afternoon in the plush, up-market Muhammad Ali sports club in Giza, frequented by richer Egyptians and expats. At around three we were woken from our relaxing combination of a light beer, salad and a novel as loud techno music started playing from the pool, with a bass that seemed more at home in the Ministry of Sound. It was an odd moment and the peaceful oasis soon turned into a pool party, the rich Egyptians and Arabs seeming to appreciate this fact the most. In the pool was a long-haired wannabe-Latin Lothario, swinging his hair to the music. Sat next to us on one side was a fellow Brit, who spent most of the time bemoaning the city she had moved to for work. Trying to avoid her dispiriting conversation, we realised the overweight and balding, middle-aged man next to us was enjoying the company of two rather beautiful and lithe escorts. What was meant to opportunity for us to rest had become more hectic than the traffic in downtown Cairo. The city is large with districts housing what seemed like different worlds, from the expat filled island of Zamalek to the beautiful church carved into the hills, beside what is known as Garbage City, where the refuse and recycling for the entire city is collected and sorted through in amongst the living quarters. My days and afternoons seemed so varied and different, it was hard to believe most places I visited in Cairo where only a short Metro ride - in a women's only carriage - away from each other.

It is not just the sights of this large and bustling city that are particularly memorable. The people I met could tell numerous stories and it seemed like Cairo attracted a variety of people. Through the expat network I met the love-struck women, who had come



over for particular Egyptian men, a charity refugee worker, who told some horrific stories and an American Harvard-educated professional belly-dancer, who had come to Cairo for six months only to have stayed a couple of years. This seemed to happen to a lot of people in Cairo, myself included - I stayed an extra six weeks, realising there was still so much more to see and not being enticed by the prospect of returning to a dreary London, where I would have to work.

Cairo seems to operate differently from most other places: you get used to the rather too prevalent system of bakshish (tips) needed to get by, the nosy bowabs (doormen) who know everything about what you do in your flat and tut at you accordingly and the stares you get as a Westerner in a residential neighbourhood, no matter what you wear or do. You get used to the benefits of the city as well. You get used to the weather that is a mixture of hot or very hot. You get used to the fact you can get everything delivered to your flat, from Starbucks to McDonalds to alcohol supplies from Drinkies - a chain well-known to all nearly all expats in Egypt. In fact, nothing begins to surprise you, even the concept of drive-in shisha cafes, where you smoke through the window of your car.

I didn't just stay in Cairo. Week-ends arrived and sometimes it felt necessary to get out of the city. I went to Aswan, Alexandria, Siwa and twice to Dahab and Nuweiba. These were all short breaks, filled with either sightseeing or relaxing in the beautiful surroundings. In Siwa my friends and I went dune-boarding at night, bathed in hot springs and picked dates off the trees. In Sinai, we slept on the sand,

woke up to the sunrise and spent the day snorkelling or relaxing on the beach. One night we climbed Mount Sinai to watch the sunrise from the top. These trips were amazing breaks from the hustle of the city, but somehow I was drawn back again and again to Cairo. Yes, it was hot, busy and noisy but I loved it all the more so for it.

For those who are wondering I may not be fluent in Arabic now, but I've improved from the five phrases I knew at the start - of which three I soon learnt weren't used in Egypt. My skills cover the situations I found myself in frequently: talking about the weather to taxi drivers, ordering shisha food and talking about football. Needless to say I have a good knowledge of fruits and still remember the words for the lit coals, lighter and goal. It may not get you far in language classes, but it certainly helped me get by in Egypt.

I came back to London eventually, my suitcase filled with bags of tea and spices, colourful fabrics, a large hookah, fruit-flavoured tobacco, baklava and jewellery. I missed certain aspects of Cairo - the people, the food and the nights - and others I was happier to leave behind - the poverty, the expat arrogance and the attitudes to women. I may have extended my stay out there, but some friends I made have still not managed to make it back to Europe. People talk about catching stomach bugs from the food in Egypt - I managed to avoid this - but I certainly caught something else, that has kept me drawn to Cairo ever since.



Photos: Laura Aumeer

## The "Stop and Chat"

**Kirsty Kenney** on why we should appreciate this social convention

**F**or many people the idea of the "stop and chat" is just one more annoying feature in the polite world of social convention. It is the moment when you're forced into an unengaging conversation when bumping into somebody that you know in a public place. They may be someone you don't know too well, in which case it's just awkward small talk. Or they may be someone you've not seen in a while, but isn't there often a reason for that? A lot of people would agree that these chance meetings often happen at precisely the wrong moment too.

However, I am not one of these people.

Since starting at LSE last year, the "stop and chat" is something that I have become very familiar with and I am sure this is the case for many other LSE students. Because both the campus and student numbers are small, it is hard to spend much time there before you bump into someone who you know. I'd say on an average day I bump into about 10 people that I know.

Tuesdays and Thursdays usually more so and not so many on a Wednesday. Being surrounded by people you know makes the university very personable, something that is arguably hard to find elsewhere, especially in London.

Perhaps you might think this is embarrassing. Indeed you may think that I am the annoying one holding you up. But, bumping into people and having a quick chat makes my day, most days. Whether its in the course collection, the queue at Wrights bar or, more likely in my case, while choosing from the generous chocolate selection in the Union shop. I know that when we are talking about bumping into people, we are talking about a big range of people, across the large spectrum of friendship. Lets face it, not all your Facebook friends are actually your friends.

Recently, this has led me to find myself in a somewhat awkward predicament. There seems to be an increasing number of faces that I recognise, first names that I am familiar with and people who I have engaged with briefly at some point or another.

But when is it time to take the plunge, to go beyond the awkward smile, the acknowledging nod and the quick hello? When is it time to take the next step towards becoming friends? The way I see it is that there is no point in being on quick hello terms forever; it is just a waste of energy.

Now even though I am very much the chatty and bubbly type, we all have those days where you just don't want to talk to anyone; you're having a rough day or your brain is ready to explode just thinking about the length of your to-do list. This is the downside of an intimate campus like LSE. The best way to reduce the probability of seeing anybody that you know is to hide away, perhaps in the library. Tactically take the lift, avoiding the multiple pinch or tap, "gotta dash" hellos on the spiral staircase and position yourself behind a screen in the silent area on the third floor.

Although I don't often find myself having days like these, the mid-term blues do get to us all at some point. Maybe it's time we all started stopping

and chatting a little bit more, especially with the people that we know but that we don't really know. The stop and chat doesn't have to be a painful and

you never know that might be your future best friend, girlfriend or boyfriend that you've been giving the acknowledging nod to all this time.

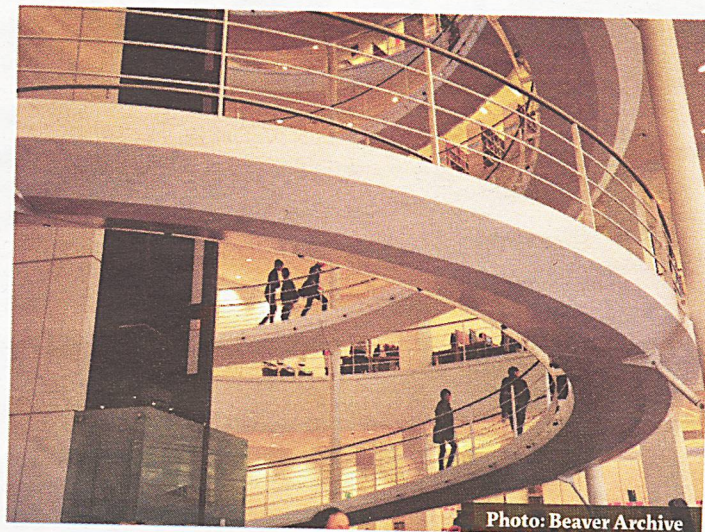


Photo: Beaver Archive

# Women's Hockey 1st XI: the story so far

## Rosie Hamer

The LSE Women's Hockey 1st XI has seen some highs and lows so far this season. You might think we've been on a winning streak judging by our weekly celebratory behaviour in Zoo - sadly it's not the case. Yet where there's a will, there's a way. In our case, the will being the expert direction of our new coaches Rhys, Ed and Luke.

We've welcomed the arrival of some havoc causing freshers - the first club dinners setting the tone with Emma winning a pole dance off vs a UCLer on the tube. Chloe also caused mayhem as she dropped her oyster card onto the track and attempted to climb down and get it back.

The squad is full of new faces but Babs, Roos and Hannah D have been key in providing experience and Steph, Noble, Chloe, Emma, Louise and 'America' have all made serious marks on the pitch. Our post grad defensive force, Rianne, also returned last month from a spell down under. It couldn't have been better timed, after last term consisted in a run of losses that brought frustration to all, as we comprise a strong and skilful team.

Away in Brighton was still a great day out, if only for the train ride, as



Flickr: Sabrina Jayaseelan

yet again the score didn't reflect our play. On the way there, the current general course, Katherine 'America', cottoned on to the well known phrase 'taking the pics' and Sammi confirmed she's not taking a geography degree - announcing we were 'so near Cornwall'.

An anonymous fresher also told us all she 'hadn't shaved her pubes', making the prospect of communal showers problematic for some.

The game itself got off to a great

start, with two goals in the first 7mins. They got one back, we got another; then they got one more, ending with a 4-3 loss. Nevertheless, the game was eventful, as Becky performed some curling worthy skids and Hannah D's mouth was smashed to pieces. No fear, before the final whistle was blown, she'd already arranged for a consultation with her private dentist in Notting Hill.

Things were aggravating for Sabrina as she suffered an unknown

injury, resulting in her hand blowing up to resemble Shrek's. Two final short corners being a mere 2 millimetres from perfect topped this off.

The game finished on a bad foot with some abuse from stroppy little girls on the opposition and an opinionated post match chat from Hannah. Things were quickly rescued with a Maccy Ds and an hour long exploration of Eastbourne's off licenses. Hannah ate 3 burgers in 10mins and we missed our train back to London, meaning a further hour wait for the next. It wasn't all disaster however, as the train ride home meant wine out of Macdonald's cups, leading us straight to the Tuns and then Zoo.

Despite a poor score line from last term, Captain Sabrina and other remainders from last year Megan, Sammi, Becky, Rosie and of course Club Captain and keeper, Hannah, have been keeping up hope of winning and returning to a record of previous seasons' successes. It seems like this could be coming to fruition as we ended our losing streak two weeks ago with a 4-0 win over University of Sussex, thanks to some dedicated training and a more positive attitude. The team is looking strong for Wednesday's crucial game away at Reading (and even stronger for our 3 day 'tour' to Amsterdam at the end of this term!)

## Sport In Brief

### Djokovic reigns supreme

World no.1, Novak Djokovic, won his third consecutive Grand Slam, defeating no.2 seed, Rafael Nadal, in a thrilling five-set final at the Australian Open. The win gives Djokovic the fifth Grand Slam of his career.

### Six Nations Round Up

France put a spirited Italy side to the sword, 30-12. Scotland and England engaged in a defensive battle, ending 6-13. Wales beat Ireland in a thrilling match with the final score being 23-21.

### England Struggle in Third Test

After a torrid series England have been made to suffer further by Pakistan. After a century-less series Pakistan scored two in one innings, Azhar and Younis respectively. England must bat out the final day on a deteriorating wicket to ensure a draw.

# Running things

## Nathan Converse

On Wednesday 25th January, the LSE cross country team braved threatening skies and high winds to travel to Reading for the fourth of six London College League cross country races. Although academic commitments and the lengthy travel time kept away key members of both the men's and women's teams, the squad put in a solid performance and now lead Kings and UCL by a wide margin in the rankings.

Postgrad, Martin Holm, once again led the pack, finishing 10th after taking the muddy four mile course at a blistering 5:31 minute-per-mile pace (3:27 per km). Team captain, Nate Converse, crossed the line with a time well ahead of the Kings and UCL



Courtesy of the AU

second runners. This, combined with a two-man pack attack by new recruit Zimo Qi and Seb Koh, ensured the team's dominance of its University of London rivals. Rounding out the team were veteran Arthur Wadsworth and the very promising Tom Tarn. Fresher, Rebecca Windemer, represented the LSE women, and yet again proved that her triathlon experience translates into solid performances over shorter distances.

The past weekend saw several LSE Running club members donning University of London singlets at the BUCS Cross Country Championships in Cardiff. Meanwhile, the Athletics squad has stepped up their training at the superb facility at Lee Valley in preparation for University of London Indoor Athletics Championships on March 24th.

## Quick Comment

### John Terry and the captaincy

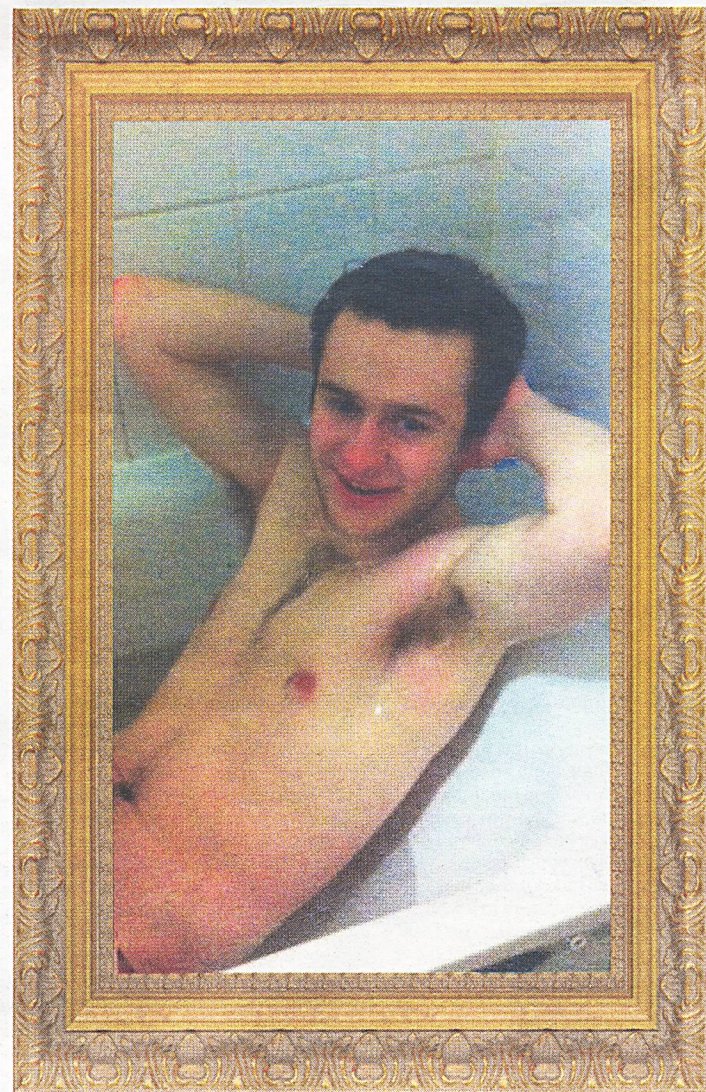
by: Timothy Poole

On Friday morning, it was revealed that the current England captain, John Terry, would be stripped of the captain's armband with immediate effect. What's more, this was done not in person, but oh so coldly - by phone. Now, the merits of stamping out racism in football and broader society are unquestioned and racial abuse is undoubtedly a serious offence; but the British legal system defines one yet to stand trial as innocent until proven guilty.

The FA are wrong to have taken

the England captaincy off John Terry for the second time in his career. By succumbing to this knee-jerk reaction and taking away his captaincy after the delay of his trial until July, the FA have all but confirmed their belief that Terry is guilty. While I have read many credible arguments from respected journalists about why Terry's leadership could not continue, I refute that this decision will be of any benefit to the England camp. A leader unites a team, whether there are divisions or not and, while the

possibility of Steven Gerrard skipping his country again is an exciting one, there is no way at all in which a change of captain will benefit a country only four months ahead of a major tournament. Alas, after what I believe to be another poor decision from the FA - an organisation that is letting the virtuous fight against racism become a ridiculous façade that clouds all things else - I can only say: poor John Terry; being removed as England captain once is humiliating enough, but twice? And by phone?



Torso of the Week

# Lucas' injury will cost Liverpool dearly as we approach end of season

Amit Singh

Lucas was once despised by Liverpool fans, but since he has come on leaps and bounds even winning the fans player of the year award last season. He has emerged under Dalglish as one of Liverpool's best players and in their current formation he has to be regarded as one of the most influential, if not the most influential player.

Lucas played 12 times in the Premier League this season before getting injured and by all accounts played very well alongside Adam in the middle of the park. Defensively he was very good as we'd expect with 5.7 tackles per game, more than any other player in the league, his 2.8 interceptions per game were more than any other Liverpool player and demonstrate Lucas' importance at breaking down opposition attacks. Lucas' stats compared to other players in his position are incredibly good. His tackles per game as stated are more than any player in the Premier League and only Cattermole and Carrick complete more interceptions playing in that role. His high number of tacklers per game reflect even better when we consider that Carrick completes 4.1 per game and Parker 4.

Another interesting statistic is that Lucas completes more passes per game than any other Liverpool player with 57.3 and with an accuracy higher than Charlie Adam, 86%. Clearly Lucas' role is not just to break up opposition attacks but also to start attacks for his own side. Which is further demonstrated by the number of long balls he plays, 3.9 per game, surprisingly more than any Liverpool defender. The reason for this is not because he is negative but because he

likes to switch the play from deep, as well as to pick out the forwards and initiate quick attacks.

Lucas is somewhat of a 'water-carrier' type player for Liverpool which is why he often goes unnoticed by opposition fans. It is no surprise that in the 12 games he did play this season he has no goals and no assists, as he simply is not that sort of player.

The loss is a great shame for Adam, as an attacking, ball playing midfielder it appeared an ideal centre-midfield pairing to have him playing alongside Lucas, a more defensive minded midfield shield. Lucas being fit would allow Adam to push into the final third and create chances for himself and other players.

Liverpool unfortunately do not have a like for like replacement for Lucas which means his injury has proven incredibly problematic for Dalglish. This has had ramifications for other Liverpool players due to the reshuffles it has prompted. Adam for example, has been forced to play a deeper role now he does not have the protection of Lucas. For example against Bolton, Adam played as the more defensive minded central midfielder alongside Gerrard, a role that he is not massively comfortable in. With Lucas in the side the midfield could almost operate as a 4-1-3-2 rather than a 4-4-2. This afforded the other midfield players license to drive forward knowing Lucas was sitting in behind on the cover.

The ability of a player like Lucas is not just felt defensively. Liverpool have defended adequately without Lucas but it's their attacking potency that has been a worry. The loss of Lucas is central to this, as stated he allows other players to get forward, but as well as this he also initiates a lot of quick attacks by intercepting the

ball in the midfield as well as winning tackles to break up play and start counter attacks.

In the 12 games Lucas played this season Liverpool only failed to score three times, in the 10 games since he has been out they've failed to score on four occasions. They also won 6 out of the 12 he was fit but have only won three games since his injury, losing two games out of 12 while he was fit, but losing 3 in 10 whilst he has been injured.

Lucas is apparently ruled out until June 12th which means, unfortunately for them, he will not feature again this season. With Liverpool 6 points behind Chelsea, and the iffy form of the latter, Liverpool are not firing on all cylinders, thus it may be difficult for them to make up the gap. With the transfer window shutting shortly it may be an idea for Kenny, despite having a wealth of midfielders, to move for a holding player in the same mould as Lucas.

If Liverpool fail to finish fourth it is fair to say that this will be down partially to the tactics and transfers of Kenny Dalglish, but also due to missing Lucas who has been one of Liverpool's most influential players for over a year now. When he returns it would be wise for Dalglish to build a side around the midfielder in order to get the best out of his attacking players.

It should also be noted that injuries cannot be solely to blame for any clubs failings. Arsenal for example have missed Wilshire for almost the entirety of the season so far and Chelsea have only just had Michael Essien back. Injuries are part of the game but it is unfortunate that Liverpool have lost such a central figure for all but 12 games of the season.



It seems that the saying is true: what goes up, must go down, and the previous week's peak in Zoo Bar sex-capades is counterbalanced with this week's trough. There appears to be no other justification for the unexplained mystery other than alcohol - the fact of the matter is that people were just too drunk to do anything/survive the night.

Not one to be phased by a sparsely populated Zoo, though, the tallest member of the netball sixths decided that Wednesday was her night to publicly place herself back on the map. Seemingly entangled with a rower of American origin, in many-a-location, TLee was unwavering in her attempts to snare the unwitting man, despite the flashing cameras of the pseudo-paparazzi that has developed on Wednesdays. Though the pair were later seeing dashing out of Zoo hurriedly, protests of innocence have followed any allegations of misdoings, and the story appears to go along the lines of snuggles followed by a "full English" breakfast. Whether or not there was the "full English" experience in between those two steps, I cannot confirm.

It also seems like one rugby fresher, having been set a challenge by his superiors to go round and literally lick girls' faces, found the odds turning pleasantly in his favour. The lady, who is now becoming famous for her Butler services (lovingly nicknamed, "the Creeper"), appeared to want a little more than a lick from our naive fresher. Ever the gentleman though, our young David had chosen not to become a Goliath for the night and opted to send the intoxicated damsel home in a cab, when a goodbye kiss led to his capture and subsequent return to the Creeper's lair.

Rugby were not the only club to have a semi-successful fresher. Football 2nds' Sam Hunter Gatherer was also seen trying his luck with a third year blonde basketball bombshell. Word has it the young chap took his time but by the end of the night had snagged the prey, taking her-st back to his shared room. Needless to say, his roommate was not best pleased.

Fallen Captain Jones appeared to be in a state of limbo on Wednesday, starting off the evening engaged in conversation with the dazzling Raquel Oddity. A blurry haze later, though, and he was once again seen in the company of the rather underdressed cock-tease. In an outfit more revealing than even Keith would dare to dabble with, she also seemed unabashed at the paparazzi gawping at their very public displays of affection - who knows, she may even lose this nickname soon...

Ultimate Frizbee also made their mark this week, with a random starlet tasting some Kobe beef, much to the bemusement and disgust of fellow zoo-goers. Suffice it to say, people didn't appreciate being barged out of the way by the horny couple, let alone sprayed with their showers of blended saliva.

Aside from these precious few instances, it really was a bit of a dry week folks. Other minor points to mention are the FC's scolding from a bouncer for dislodging the disco ball, and Captain Mateer's triumphant return to Zoo, despite her ban. Next week is the Mr LSE Competition, so make sure you get yourself down to the Quad early to see the finest male talent the LSE has to offer - who knows if the lucky winner will be featured here next week...

## LSE UNITED NATIONS WEEK

## FEBRUARY 6TH - FEBRUARY 10TH

### 'Food for Thought': Discussing the World Food Programme and its Role in the 21st Century

Everyday in the media, in newspapers and on television, we are confronted by the same horrific images of famine, starvation and death, we are confronted by the blight that is world hunger. Andrea Paltzer works as a consultant with the 'World Food Programme', a UN frontline agency whose mission to eradicate world hunger is clear and unequivocal. Andrea discusses the problems posed by world hunger, the solutions being devised to combat it, and ultimately offers an exceptionally thorough look into the causes and nature of one of the most prolific problems of the 21st century. A question and answer session will also be held.



### MUN Night: Valentine's Day Special

Model United Nations is the ideal scenario for any aspiring statesman, diplomat or ambassador, the opportunity to assume the role of the UN Security Council or the security council of multitude of other nation states, and deal with a problem scenario which might be confronted by an actual government. This MUN has a slight twist however, and so, in anticipation of Valentine's Day, the problem posed in this scenario is none other than the outlawing of Valentine's Day! Devise strategies, plot policies and ultimately, assume the role of a state in this year's very special MUN exercise. Newcomers will be initiated by MUN veterans so those who are unfamiliar with Model United Nations need not be intimidated!



### Careers & Networking Night

UN Networking evening provides the chance to meet the people working in the UN and other humanitarian organisations worldwide, offering the chance for you to chat, ask questions and learn about prospective careers from those who have the experience of being involved in global humanitarian missions and who have had the virtue of being involved in the LSE in the past. For those who revel in the delights of a good conversation, fellow UN society members will also be present as will fine wine and canapés, the UN resolution for this night is to have a good time!

### Arbitrary Detention and its Significance in the Global Struggle for Human Rights - A Talk by Shaheen Sardar Ali.

From the outset of the 21st century, the relationship between the citizen and the state has always been fragile and beleaguered and in many countries in which freedom of speech is in its incipient stages and the action of political protests has become ever more audacious than ever before, the freedom and liberty of the individual has been put to the test in an unprecedented manner. Secret police, wire tapping and other forms of state suppression have become the staple diet of dictatorships and even some democratic governments, but an especially insidious form of crackdown upon political opposition has been employed, arbitrary detention. Shaheen Sardar Ali, Vice-Chairman of the UN sanctioned Working Group for arbitrary detention explores the issues surrounding this fiercely disputed technique, which has both been viewed as the instrument for preserving national security and the tool for propping up tyranny.

SEE [www.lsesu-unsociety.org/UNweek](http://www.lsesu-unsociety.org/UNweek) FOR DETAILS!

EVENT	TIME	VENUE
Kashmir Debate	6th Feb, 18:30 - 20:00	CLM.7.02
Food for Thought' with the WFP	7th Feb, 19:00 - 20:00	CLM.3.02
MUN Valentine's Day Special	8th Feb, 16:30 - 19:00	CLM.7.02
Networking Night	9th Feb, 18:30 - 21:00	Senior Common Room, OB
Arbitrary Detention and Human Rights with Shaheen Sardar Ali	10th Feb, 18:00 - 21:00	NAB.2.04

# Sport

## Inside

- Women's Hockey
- I know who you did last Wednesday
- Running team smash rivals

## Defeat for England for a second time

Benjamin Schneider, edited by other contributors

England's defeat in the second Test against Pakistan in Dubai compounded the inherent problems revealed through defeat in the previous tie. While the English bowling attack has taken wickets at a good rate (particularly after an enforced change to two seamers and two spinners for the second Test), the batting lineup has made over three hundred just once in their four innings, and collapsed for a humiliating 72 when chasing just 144 in the fourth innings at Abu Dhabi.

The England team's run of nine Tests without defeat ended in Dubai, with only the impressive batting of Swann in both innings that prevented the top Test team in the world from going down to an innings defeat. Alistair Cook, two Tests removed from a brilliant, match-winning, 294 didn't stick around long in either innings in



Flickr: windelbo

the first Test, and while he recovered to score 94 in the first innings in Abu Dhabi, his early departure on day four must have given the Pakistani attack the hope they needed to bowl out England and win the match. Cook's captain and fellow opener Strauss struggled in the first Test, but provided

the only significant resistance as his team collapsed in Abu Dhabi. This is part of a wider, worrying, statistical trend for The General, who now has only one score of over fifty in his past twelve journeys out to the middle. Strauss must recapture his imperious Ashes form or his selection for

the team becoming uncertain would be disastrous. As a tactical leader of men he is without peer in the current England squad, but if your leader is a batting liability then something has got to be changed.

Kevin Pietersen, seemingly always the focus of discussion and controversy, ensured that he would be a main story on the back pages of the papers with just seventeen runs and through four innings. His problems with the dreaded slow left arm spin, are well documented, despite practice it is, statistically, a near guaranteed way to take his wicket. He forms part of a middle order that has accumulated 141 runs, at an average of nine point four each, a trip back to the drawing board is clearly needed for the England batters. Ian Bell had been in a fine run of form against Sri Lanka and India last summer, but amounted to little in either Test, despite moving up to his preferred three slot for the second innings in Abu Dhabi. Eoin Morgan

again failed to take advantage of the team's dire straits in either match, and would be in danger of losing his spot if there were any good options to replace him, but Ravi Bopara has been given numerous chances without capitalisation.

Thus, after heavy defeats in both of the first two tests, the England team face an uphill task in saving the series from a 3-0 whitewash, as well as returning to form for other upcoming series. But it must be noted that this is not entirely down to England's deficiencies, Pakistan have utilised the conditions superbly, and have preyed without mercy at every chink in the English armour. So while things are looking positive for Pakistan, possibly on the verge of becoming one of the good test teams for the foreseeable future, it seems that whilst England performed immensely to get to world number one, retaining the position will be a lot tougher.

## LET'S TALK TACTICS



# The truest of champions

Timothy Poole

In the wake of arguably the greatest Australian Open final in history, it is as though an ancient secret to sporting success has suddenly become apparent. The longest match to ever be seen on the Rod Laver Arena (also the longest ever Grand Slam final) served the purpose of revealing what it takes to become a true champion. Does one require superfluous skill to be remembered as one of the greatest? Is unstoppable grit and determination needed? The short answer is yes. But to prove yourself a winner worth remembering, you need much, much more – an x-factor of sorts, if you will. On that infamous Sunday night (turned early Monday morning) in Melbourne, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal showed the world that ultimate sporting success requires character, grace and sportsmanship; alas, nice guys can get somewhere in this dog eat dog world after all.

Indeed, sport is filled with tremendous personalities – the kind of people that you relish meeting during your working day. Millionaires, the best in the world at their trade, but never too arrogant to sign an autograph or acknowledge their travelling supporters. Novak Djokovic embodies this attitude; the Serb has now proved beyond doubt that he is the best male player in tennis. But what of him off the court? The man is widely publicised as a gentleman and, moreover, the 'joker' of the tour (even having the song 'the joker' written about him). His light-hearted antics, ranging from impersonating his fellow tennis players, to starring in a cameo role for the

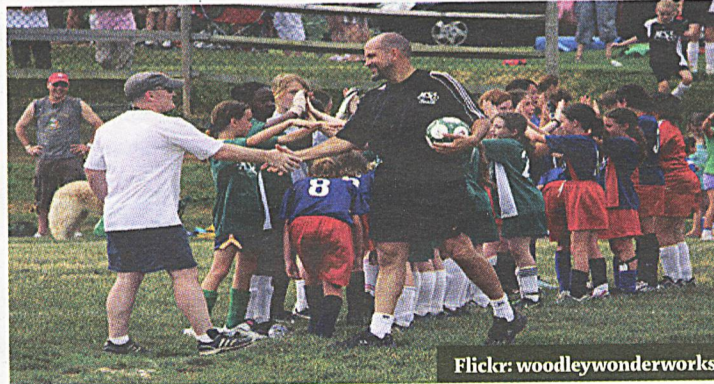
upcoming *Expendables 2*, have won him fans across the globe. Not only will the 24 year-old be remembered as a man of steel and winner of multiple Grand Slams, but as a charming, polite and graceful competitor, too.

Djokovic's defeated opponent, Rafael Nadal, is another perfect example. The Australian Open saw one winner and one runner-up; yet, in the eyes of the fans, there was no loser. Both players put up a gruelling fight, but entertained and offered each other the utmost respect at the same time. In the post-match interviews, Nadal and Djokovic were full of praise for each other – no jibes, no Las Vegas style trash talk, just kindness from the depth of their hearts. Gone are the days of McEnroe swearing at all those around him; now tennis' biggest advert is the sheer kindness of its champions.

Of course, at this point, the discussion naturally leads to Roger Federer. The Swiss perhaps emulates the human side of sport to an even greater extent than the current world no. 1 and 2. Federer, the well-spoken, well-mannered athlete, is the definitive role model. Now a family man, Federer has never received bad press, never disrespected his rivals and never had anything bad to say about anyone who has beaten him. It is this reason that makes him the Great that he is. Without this ability to step off court, give credit where it's due and behave impeccably at all times, one questions whether Federer, or indeed any sportsman, could achieve as much as they have.

And it doesn't just apply to tennis. Golf's Darren Clarke is another sporting ambassador. The Northern Irishman is a devoted father, but not only to

his two sons. The 43 year-old is seen as a father figure throughout the European Tour, always at hand to aid the younger players. Most sportspeople – or even people in general – will do their bit, earn their money and take care of number one – not Darren Clarke. It is this caring, selfless nature that holds Clarke endeared in the hearts of so many, even more so after his Open win last year; the trophy was lifted in



Flickr: woodleywonderworks

emotional circumstances as he duly dedicated it to his late wife.

Across the Irish Sea to Manchester and the same can be said for Paul Scholes. The 'ginger ninja' is a consummate, exemplar professional, a man who doesn't even like to give interviews as he is reluctant to stand in the media spotlight. When all those around him (the Rooneys, Ronaldos, Morrisons) appear to be losing their heads, the experienced talisman lets his positive persona guide the Manchester United team. Such an approach has led the Red Devils to unrivalled success in recent years,

proving that flamboyance and publicity won't bring success, but dedication and having your heart in the right place just might.

In the end, the 'nice guys' end up with a win-win situation; their sportsmanship only enhances their performance, taking nothing away from their fierce drive towards victory. At the same time, the fans get their money's worth and feel as though

they can really relate to the performer they have just watched. People like a 'people' person. Who can forget Paulo Di Canio's display of genuine humanity when he refused an open goal to allow the injured Paul Gerrard to be treated? Similarly, who can question the charm of Rory McIlroy, the 22 year-old who has graced the game of golf with nothing but professionalism? The Northern Irishman always smiles and has spoken of his determination to 'hang on to his ordinariness'.

Of course, the ruthless sportspeople with that nasty edge can achieve as much on the field of play as their more

compassionate colleagues, but they will never be spoken of in the same light. A key part of sport is keeping on side the very people who pay to watch you play – the people who essentially pay your wages. Contrast the aforementioned names with the likes of Joey Barton or the viciously-spoken David Haye. And if the England rugby team had won this year's world cup... with their catastrophic off-field behaviour, would we still hold them in such high regard? You don't need the reputation of Mario Balotelli to remain in peoples' memories. Indeed, the antics of the Bartons and Balotellis of this world appear to suggest that these athletes lack that natural personality that supporters can really connect with. Eccentricity has to come from within – or it invariably ends up a front that's masking a more conventional and boring truth.

Fundamentally, sport is a game, a contest, a separate world constructed to pit competing factions against each other – and this world ends as soon as the final seconds transpire. As such, sport must be played with integrity, discipline and valour, with every sprint, kick or throw fought for until the very end. But once the end comes, it is then the duty of the sportsman to shake their opponents' hand, wave to the crowd and offer an optional smile. The sporting 'nice guys' who do so are those that we will admire, respect and never forget; if we all took this approach in our separate walks of life, the world would simply be a better place. Indeed, the gentlemanly Djokovics, Nadals, Clarkes and others aren't just successful sportsmen – they are the truest of champions, in every sense of the phrase.