THE CYNICAL STATE

COLIN LEYS

‘Mendacity is a system that we live in’.
(Tennessee Williams, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof)

Governments have always lied. They naturally deny it, even long after it is abundantly clear that they have lied, trailing multiple red herrings, dismissing inconvenient evidence, implying that there is counter-evidence they are not free to produce. When a lie can no longer be credibly denied it is justified, usually by an appeal to the national interest. Governments of modern representative democracies are no different, even if they are more liable than dictators to be exposed. Half-truths and outright lies are routinely told. Facts are routinely concealed. Files are unaccountably lost. Tapes are mysteriously erased. Democratic checks and balances are rarely effective and the public’s collective memory is short.

Even so, in recent years state cynicism has broken new ground. The British government’s flagrant abuse of military intelligence to persuade parliament and the public to endorse its attack on Iraq was a dramatic case in point. In July 2003, soon after the official end of the war, a British government weapons expert, David Kelly, killed himself after being revealed as the source for a BBC report that the government’s dossier outlining the intelligence had been knowingly ‘sexed up’. The government appointed a reliable judge, Lord Hutton, to hold a public enquiry into Kelly’s death. The evidence given to the enquiry showed that the Prime Minister’s staff had been working flat out to make it appear that Saddam Hussein posed a threat to Britain that would justify invading Iraq. The government’s intelligence ‘dossier’ was made to read much more alarmingly than the evidence produced by the intelligence services warranted. It claimed that Iraq had nerve gases, anthrax spores, ricin, botulinium toxin, mobile laboratories, nuclear materials and extended range rockets, none of which the intelligence service claimed as facts, and none of which later proved to be true. It also claimed several times that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction ‘deployable within 45 minutes’. This claim was
known to be vague, from an uncorroborated second-hand source, and to refer only to ‘battlefield’ weapons; and it too proved entirely unfounded. But more than any other piece of false information it was decisive in securing parliamentary and public acquiescence in the attack on Iraq.

The defence minister, Geoff Hoon, admitted to the Hutton enquiry that he knew the report referred only to battlefield weapons, not the long-distance missiles that most people assumed were meant by the expression ‘weapons of mass destruction’. When asked why he had not corrected press reports that made this assumption he said his experience showed that correcting incorrect press reports was unprofitable. He was not challenged on this, or pressed to comment on the influence these reports had had on public opinion, although the record showed that the prime minister’s staff were intently focused on ensuring that press headlines would be as alarming as possible. The evidence also showed that Hoon, Blair, and Blair’s chief press officer Alastair Campbell had all subsequently told further lies about the compilation of the dossier. Campbell told Hutton that he had had no input into the dossier. The evidence showed he had had extensive input. Hoon told the parliamentary committee on defence that he had had nothing to do with it either. The evidence showed he had been involved as much as anyone. Most famously, Blair told the House of Commons that it was ‘completely and totally untrue’ that there was disquiet in the intelligence community over the 45-minute claim, but a senior intelligence officer told the enquiry that he and one of his colleagues had submitted a written report about their disquiet.1

Of course commentators who supported the attack on Iraq were willing to condone all this. But Lord Hutton condoned it absolutely too. The only behaviour he criticized in his final report was that of Andrew Gilligan, the BBC journalist who had broken the story, and the BBC director general and chairman who had backed him against furious attacks by the Prime Minister’s office. All of them were forced to resign, while Blair and Hoon were totally absolved. John Scarlett, the senior intelligence official who had agreed to ‘sex up’ the intelligence service’s original draft of the dossier at the behest of the Prime Minister’s office, was promoted to be head of the secret service.2 What is more, Hutton’s decision to put all the evidence on the internet, but then to condemn the whistleblowers and exonerate the liars, meant that members of parliament and the electorate were being asked to become complicit in official mendacity. ‘Transparent’ government, he seemed to say, just means that MPs and voters must accept being lied to and that no one should be penalized for doing so.

As the occupation of Iraq dragged on, its apologists’ indifference to the facts became more and more insulting to the intelligence of the public. In
March 2005 Gary Younge, a usually restrained commentator, summed up the general sense of disgust: ‘We have entered a world where reality … is just a minor blockage in a flood of official, upbeat declarations … Each new dispatch from the departments of irony on both sides of the Atlantic suggests that truth can be created by assertion …’.  

Dissimulation is, of course, part of war, even if lying to your own electorate is a negation of democracy. But a cynical indifference to the truth is now hardly less common in domestic policy. For instance, in the Labour government’s determination to ‘marketize’ health care it has shown itself equally willing to use flawed evidence. An article published in the authoritative British Medical Journal (BMJ) purported to show that an American Health Maintenance Organization or HMO, Kaiser Permanente, was more efficient than the National Health Service. The medical research community around the world immediately denounced the study as hopelessly flawed.  

The government, however, adopted Kaiser Permanente as a model for the NHS to follow – citing it in policy documents and inviting Kaiser staff to advise the Department of Health.  

Another example was the government’s decision to adopt a programme called ‘Evercare’ operated by another American HMO, United Healthcare. United Healthcare claimed that Evercare reduced the rate of emergency hospitalisation of frail elderly people by 50 per cent. United Healthcare had a notorious record of health care fraud in the USA, but its CEO gave $1.5 million to the 2004 Bush-Cheney election campaign and Bush’s secretary for health recommended the company to the British secretary of state for health. In 2004 Simon Stevens, Blair’s senior health policy adviser, resigned to become United Healthcare’s new President for Europe, and secured a contract to introduce Evercare in Britain. A study of nine pilot schemes in the UK costing £3.4 million, however, showed that Evercare was unlikely to cut the rate of hospitalization by more than 1 per cent. Yet the government’s primary care ‘czar’ declared that ‘there is nothing in the research to make us have second thoughts about the strategy’.  

These stories, which could be replicated for almost any field of public policy in contemporary Britain, illustrate the emergence of a new, neoliberal policy regime that is more brazenly willing to dissemble, more indifferent to evidence, more aggressive towards critics and distinctly less accountable – to the point of being virtually unaccountable – than ever before. This policy regime is not peculiarly British. The old ‘liberal/social democratic’ policy regime which it has displaced did have distinctively British features. The new neoliberal policy regime is a more standardized affair. It not only spans the Atlantic but thanks to neoliberal globalization it is being gradually replicated, in essentials, throughout the world. Its key feature is that policy is now funda-
mentally about national competitiveness and responding to global market forces. The crucial roles are played neither by political parties nor by civil servants but by personnel seconded into the civil service from the private sector, a handful of ‘special advisers’ to the prime minister, a small group of certified market-friendly civil servants, and polling, advertising and media experts. Scientific evidence is still relied on, but only in so far as it serves competition policy; otherwise it is treated uncritically, if it helps the government, and dismissed if it does not. When this new policy regime is properly understood the lies about Iraq no longer appear as a special case, but only as a special dimension of a general one. Cynicism, we realize, is a necessary condition of neoliberal democracy.

THE LIBERAL/SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC POLICY REGIME

Britain’s previous liberal/social democratic policy regime combined elements of the Liberals’ state reforms of the late nineteenth century with elements corresponding to the interventionist state of the twentieth. The Liberals created a higher civil service recruited competitively from the cleverest members of the same social class, and educated at the same elite private schools and universities, as the elected ministers they served. The idea was that officials of this calibre and background would be in a position to offer elected ministers honest advice and ‘to some extent influence’ them, in a shared ‘freemasonry’ of public service. Because the emphasis was on social and political status, higher civil servants were, like almost all the ministers they served, ‘generalists’, relying for expertise on the advice of professional and technical civil servants – engineers, public health doctors, biologists, etc. For dealing with big issues of a politically sensitive nature they would recommend the establishment of Royal Commissions, composed of eminent experts with powers to commission research and call for expert evidence (between 1950 and 1980 one was appointed, on average, almost every year). For lesser issues that nonetheless called for additional expertise Departmental Enquiries could be set up, also with powers to draw on outside expertise.

With the advent of the Labour Party and an increasingly interventionist state agenda other elements were added to the mix. Innovating parties needed to develop policies out of office to present to the civil service when elected. The Labour Party had a research department that produced blueprints for new policies, as did the Trade Union Congress and the larger trade unions. The Fabian Society, established in 1884 with the aim of ‘permeating’ the main governing parties, became more and more linked to Labour and supplied it with a steady flow of reasonably well worked-out policy proposals. PEP (Political and Economic Planning), founded in 1931, and NIESR (the National Institute of Economic and Social Research), founded in 1938, were
products of the depression and aimed in different ways to push social and economic reforms of a broadly liberal/social-democratic nature by publishing serious research on the issues. From 1929 onwards the Conservative Party also had a research department. Many leading politicians, from Cripps and Wilson to Macmillan and Heath, were intellectuals, often former academics and frequently authors of books and pamphlets on policy issues. The civil service existed to advise governments on the policy initiatives derived from all these sources, and turn them into practical plans and laws.

There were differences and tensions between the state and non-state components of this policy regime, but they shared a general commitment to a notion of objectivity, in the sense that policy proposals should be judged on the basis of rational argument and sound evidence. They all saw themselves as professionals, belonging to a ‘public’ domain, serving the public interest.

The public domain … was quintessentially the domain of … professionals. Professional pride, professional competence, professional duty, professional authority and, not least, predictable professional career paths were of its essence. Professionals were the chief advocates of its growth; they managed most of its institutions, and they policed the frontier between it and the adjacent private and market domains. Above all, the values of the public domain were their values.  

The central tension in the liberal/democratic policy regime in the 1950s and ’60s was due to the fact that the higher civil service, and especially its elite in the Treasury, which exercised considerable control over other departments’ policies, was more inclined to be liberal than social-democratic. Moreover the ‘freemasonry’ which Gladstone’s reforms had postulated between the higher civil service and ministers began to show cracks once the ministers were Labour MPs, with ideas and aims reflecting the party’s roots in the labour movement and no longer predominantly educated at leading private schools or at Oxford or Cambridge.

Thomas Balogh, an economic adviser to the Labour prime minister Harold Wilson in the 1960s, voiced a growing impatience with the higher civil service’s typically humanities-based education and pre-industrial social attitudes, denouncing it as ‘the apotheosis of the dilettante’.  In 1966 Wilson created a Department of Economic Affairs to offset what was seen as the Treasury’s bias for financial prudence over economic growth, and a Treasury departmental committee chaired by Lord Fulton (a university vice chancellor) recommended a reorganization of the higher civil service on technocratic lines. A Civil Service College was established, to emulate the French École
Nationale d’Administration, and a Civil Service Department took over the Treasury’s management of recruitment, training and promotion.

Almost all these initiatives were neutralized, largely by the higher civil service itself. The Department of Economic Affairs was closed in 1969 after only three years. The Civil Service Department lasted longer, but was closed by Mrs. Thatcher in 1981. The Civil Service College survives, but only as a provider of short courses, with no prestige. The one significant innovation of the Wilson years that not only survived but flourished was the increased use of ‘special advisers’, brought in from outside to bolster ministers in face of what was seen as excessive civil service caution or conservatism. The Fulton Report had also recommended this, together with ‘greater mobility between [the civil service] and other employments’, including ‘temporary appointments for fixed periods, short-term interchanges of staff and freer movement out of the Service’, and giving further thought to ‘hiving off’ activities to non-departmental organizations. All of this prefigured the erosion of the boundaries between the public and private domains that was to take place under the neoliberal policy regime from the 1980s onwards.

But in retrospect it is easy to see that the issue was not merely changing class relations, or generalists versus technocrats; the fundamental tension within the old policy regime was the contradiction of social democracy itself. The real problem was that by the end of the 1960s British trade unions were unwilling to see the problems of British capitalism solved at their expense, while capitalists were unwilling to collaborate in any state-led economic strategy so long as the unions remained powerful, as even the Conservative prime minister Edward Heath discovered to his chagrin after taking office in 1970. (In 1973 he told a meeting of the Institute of Directors: ‘When we came in we were told that there weren’t sufficient inducements to invest, so we provided the inducements. Then we were told people were scared of balance of payments difficulties leading to stop-go. So we floated the pound. Then we were told of fears of inflation; and now we’re dealing with that. And still you aren’t investing enough!’)\textsuperscript{10}

The crisis came to a head in the winter of 1973–74. With the coal-miners ‘working to rule’ and the entire country limited to a three-day working week to conserve fuel, the head of the civil service, William Armstrong, had a nervous breakdown. The liberal/social democratic policy regime had collapsed. ‘From that moment’, Peter Gowan noted in a seminal article, ‘a current within the Conservative Party … [was] working to make … [the Gladstonian civil service model] redundant by removing labour as a major force on the political scene, Americanizing the party system and state bureaucracy and breaking up the mandarinate’.\textsuperscript{11}
The Labour Party returned to office in 1974 but crisis management became the overriding agenda. Domestic policy initiatives, from any source, were irrelevant unless they helped meet the conditions attached to the IMF loan that the Treasury mandarins and the Labour leadership decided they must accept, rather than embrace the socialist alternative advocated by the Labour Party’s left wing. The IMF’s conditions meant replacing Keynesianism by monetarism, opening the door to Thatcherism and the construction of a new, neoliberal policy regime.

THE TRANSITION TO THE NEOLIBERAL POLICY REGIME

The starting-point for understanding the new policy regime is the ascendency of capital that followed – and was meant to follow – from Thatcher’s and Reagan’s elimination of controls on cross-border capital movements from the early 1980s onwards. This allowed the financial markets and transnational corporations to set increasingly tight limits on the policies national governments could adopt.12 These limits were registered in the political ‘risk premium’ that the markets placed on any government seen as liable to adopt policies – on taxation, on government spending, on labour regulation or environmental protection, etc. – that would reduce the profitability of capital, compared with governments elsewhere. In Britain before the 1992 election the risk premium for a possible Labour government was 2 per cent. To reduce this to 0.5 per cent (which they managed to do before the 1997 election), the new Labour leadership scrapped virtually all Labour’s ‘market unfriendly’ policy commitments, deleted Clause Four (which still talked of public ownership) from the party’s constitution, and adopted a new range of policies called for by the City of London (the heart of the country’s financial sector), including handing over the setting of interest rates to the independent Bank of England and adopting the Conservatives’ policy of having virtually all new public building financed and owned by the private sector.

Capital’s political and social power had also been enormously increased by the Conservatives between 1979 and 1997, and Blair showed no inclination to challenge it. The chief executives of big companies continued to enjoy easy access to ministers and even the prime minister, and got respectful attention. This enabled them to overcome barriers intended to protect the public interest in one field after another – town planning legislation, GM food, the ownership of genes, the science research agenda of universities, etc. The trade unions, on the other hand, had been forced to accept an industrial relations regime that Tony Blair – who retained almost all of it – was pleased to call ‘the most lightly regulated labour market of any leading economy in the world’.
The constantly-increasing power of capital also made private enterprise seem the natural order of things. Not only had Labour’s post-war nationalizations been undone, from electricity and gas to public transport, but many services that had always been public, such as prisons and airports, were now privately owned and run, while cultural and sporting events (and even police forces) increasingly relied on corporate sponsors until every dimension of daily life was tagged with their logos.

‘New’ Labour’s strategists, the so-called ‘modernizers’, saw all this as ‘the new reality’. Their idea was to win and hold power by not just fully accepting the new reality but accepting it so whole-heartedly that there would be no room left on that terrain for the Conservative Party, which would become as ‘unelectable’ as Labour had been from 1979 to 1994. This strategy meant insulating the Labour leader from pressure from the trade unions and party members. So the party’s constitution was rewritten and the annual conference emasculated as a policy-making (or even a policy-debating) forum. Of course the modernizers envisaged a ‘third way’, along which they would pursue whatever policies they considered progressive, in terms of what the new reality allowed; but they had no confidence that these would meet with the approval of the party rank and file and they were not disposed to have any public arguments about it. Logically enough, too, the party’s policy research capacity was also run down and eventually abolished. Blair declared that the party was now ‘a party of business’, and on that basis business could be asked to pay for whatever policy research the leadership wanted done.

Yet there was, obviously, still a need for policies – just within much narrower limits. With capital’s freedom restored, the rules of policy-making changed. Major economic policies are still made, but in conformity with an overall agenda set by transnational corporations and the international and regional agencies they dominate. These global market policies involve adapting the British economy and Britain’s socio-economic institutions (fiscal policy, aid to industry, education, training, the health and safety and labour market regulation, etc.) to compete successfully in the global marketplace. Since these policies are often electorally unpalatable they are made as far as possible out of the public eye – inside Whitehall or the European Commission, at the WTO – from where, once made, they appear as the impersonal and unavoidable effects of the market. ‘Treasury control’ – the time-honoured principle that all departmental policies involving spending must be pre-approved by the Treasury – has acquired a new significance. Now all major expenditures also have to serve the government’s overall competition strategy.

All this meant that by the turn of the century it was only in domain of socio-cultural adjustment policies that governments presented themselves in terms of having significant choices. Personal taxation, the scope and quality
of public services, crime and ‘security’, immigration and ‘identity politics’ are
the main terrains on which these policies are made. Here a wider range of
options exists, but within limits that are broadly the same for all parties; and
for much of this kind of policy-making it is pollsters, marketing experts and
spin-doctors, as much as civil servants (let alone researchers), who are seen
as having the required expertise to manage public opinion and adjust the
electorate to the necessary consequences of global market policy-making.
The two sorts of policy are of course interdependent, and give rise to politi-
cally awkward dilemmas. To keep wages down immigrants are required, but
immigrants are the right wing press’ favourite scapegoats for every social ill;
social services are popular, but the regressive tax system insisted on by the
markets means that paying for them is politically unpopular; and so on. So
what is the nature of the new neoliberal policy-making regime that these
conditions entail?

THE NEOLIBERAL POLICY REGIME

First of all, the civil service has been radically reorganized on business lines,
following the doctrines of the ‘new public management’. As many activi-
ties as possible have been transferred out of government departments into
‘executive agencies’, leaving a reduced policy-related higher civil service at
the top. The slimmed-down departments have then been further slimmed
down to achieve ‘efficiency savings’, and required to ‘outsource’ more and
more of their routine functions to private companies, starting with cleaning
and continuing with information technology, accounting, estate manage-
ment, personnel, and so on. Government buildings are sold and leased back
from private companies. Sometimes individual public services, such as various
prisons or schools, or even a whole local education authority, are directly
outsourced to be run by private companies.

But the role of those remaining at the top has changed too. Thatcher’s
ministers made it clear that dispassionate advice and careful argument were
out. When she took office and started taking an unprecedented interest (for a
prime minister) in higher civil service promotions, the quality she looked for
was a capacity for vigorous implementation of her ideas. Early on she got into
an argument about industrial relations, about which she had strong opinions
but was poorly informed, with Donald Derx, a capable and dedicated civil
servant. She went on and on until Derx finally said: ‘Prime Minister, do you
really want to know the facts?’ – and promptly ended his prospects of promo-
tion.14 As David Marquand says,

… civil servants were no longer expected to tell the truth to power
… In a phrase coined by Lord Bancroft, head of the civil service
when Mrs Thatcher came to power, the ‘grovel count’ rose sharply. Those who could not bring themselves to grovel languished or left. Inevitably, those who grovelled internalized the crucial axioms of the government’s new ideology and statecraft.¹⁵

New Labour showed no inclination to change this. They too wanted civil servants to be as like businessmen as possible. Thatcher’s ministers told civil servants that they didn’t want ‘whingeing, analysis or integrity, that we must do as we are told and that they have several friends in the private sector who could do the job in a morning with one hand tied behind their back’.¹⁶ Twenty-five years later Blair was telling them the same thing: ‘Rigour about performance must be at the heart of a leaner, more efficient civil service … A culture of decision-making by committee, while ensuring all possible viewpoints are considered, leads to unnecessary delays and increased cost’.¹⁷ In 2005 the head of the civil service, Sir Andrew Turnbull, very much ‘on message’, told a conference that ‘the upper civil service had been forced to refocus its efforts from policy and management to an active role in the delivery of targets and key services. “The job is much more akin to being a chief executive officer than it has been in the past”, he admitted’.¹⁸

But if senior civil servants are no longer primarily concerned with making policy, who is? Definitely not Royal Commissions. To ‘conviction’ politicians, ‘ensuring all possible viewpoints are considered’ seems a pointless diversion from where they are convinced the country should go, and neither Thatcher or Major appointed any Royal Commissions. In his first two years in office Blair appointed two, but rejected both their recommendations and never appointed another.¹⁹ Even departmental enquiries, whose terms and proceedings can be much more closely controlled by ministers, have become relatively rare.²⁰ And policies emanating from party members and developed through internal party debates and compromises are definitely a thing of the past.

One obvious alternative source of policy-making that corresponds to this situation is ‘think tanks’, and it is certainly true that think tanks see themselves as playing a crucial policy-making role. But British think tanks are not the sort of intellectual powerhouse familiar in the USA, with massive private foundation funding.²¹ Most British think tanks have only a handful of staff and budgets of a few hundred thousand pounds, and competition between them for funding – which is predominantly corporate – tends to make most of them more anxious to have media coverage than a reputation for serious research. As Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett note, it was Demos, ‘the think tank with the flimsiest ideological attire’ and a taste for ‘back-of-an-envelope radicalism’ (it first won attention with a pamphlet attacking the powers of the
Queen) that most appealed to New Labour in office, and its founding director Geoff Mulgan went on to become head of Tony Blair’s Cabinet Office Strategy Unit in 2003.\textsuperscript{22} Even the more intellectually conventional Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), whose director Matthew Taylor became head of policy planning in the prime minister’s Policy Directorate in 2003, appears lightweight, at least by comparison with the think tanks founded in response to the depression of the 1930s. Those earlier think tanks were ‘at least … motivated by the hope that their findings would be educative, either for policy-makers or for the public. Even on a charitable view, this urge [now] seems lacking …’.

The characteristic claim of every new think tank is that there is a need for ‘new ideas’—which indeed there is, since so many of the important ones have been ruled out as unacceptable to the market, or politically risky. The trouble is that in the narrow range that remains there are few useful new ideas to be had. Catherine Bennett summed up the problem perfectly in 2002:

> If there is not already some sort of car boot sale where rejected or nearly-new thoughts can be bought, recycled, or exchanged for other unwanted policies, then it is high time one of the thinkers started one. With new tanks established almost daily, each one creating thousands of thoughts and papers, debates and alternative manifestos, each of which must be printed and circulated before it can be shelved, something has got to be done. Rubbish disposal experts estimate that getting rid of the IPPR’s thought mountain, alone, already accounts for a landfill site the size of Croydon. Over at the government’s Performance and Innovation Unit, John Birt’s dedicated crater is said to be visible from space.\textsuperscript{24}

The common overestimation of the influence of think tanks is largely due to the fact that in the run-up to Thatcher’s accession to power in 1979, right-wing think tanks were an important source of neo-Conservative policy. From 1955 onwards the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) had served as a crucial base for ‘organic intellectuals’ of capitalism, sustaining and updating the strand of bourgeois thought that rejected the post-war compromise with social democracy. As Richard Cockett showed in his book *Thinking the Unthinkable*, when the contradictions of the post-war compromise finally brought it to an end, allowing Mrs Thatcher to capture the leadership of the Conservative Party in 1975 and win power in 1979, her principal lieutenants at first drew heavily on the work of the IEA as well as the new Centre for Policy Studies, founded in 1974, and the Adam Smith Institute, founded in 1977.\textsuperscript{25} It was the apparent influence of these three think tanks during those
years that prompted the Labour leadership to create the IPPR in 1988, while they were in opposition, the Liberal Democrats (also in opposition) to create the Social Market Foundation in 1989; and the New Labour ‘modernizers’, on the eve of their capture of the party leadership, to found Demos in 1993. And these in turn prompted the formation of a rapidly proliferating medley of imitators, left and right, all striving for a place in the councils of power. To quote Bennett again:

> Once you add the product of all the other think tanks – Demos, Civitas, the Centre for Policy Studies, Localis, Policy Exchange, Reform, the Adam Smith Institute, NLGN, Politeia, the Foreign Policy Centre, the Social Affairs Unit, Catalyst, the Fabian Society, the Social Market Foundation, the racy new Do Tank and others too numerous to list, you are forced to think the unthinkable: who needs them?

Who indeed? For the role played by the new right think tanks before Thatcher’s 1979 election victory could not be repeated after it. Once neoliberal globalization had been accomplished, the scope for radical policy-making was drastically narrowed. Think tanks, which are not privy to much essential information about the global market forces involved in the making of economic policy, and which also depend on maximizing publicity to keep their funding coming in, cannot contribute significantly to economic policy-making, least of all for a party in office. That work must be done by true experts. Nor are think tanks well suited to helping to make the ongoing social and cultural policy adjustments that changing global markets require. Pollsters and marketing experts are the key to success there.

From time to time the government will toy with an obvious think-tank brain-child, such as ‘citizenship ceremonies’ for 18-year olds – usually to universal derision. ‘Baby bonds’ – a pet IPPR project for opening an account for every newborn infant into which the government would put some money, to give everyone some cash to do something with at 21 – did make it into Labour’s pre-election budget in 2005, though to no great effect, at least electorally. In spite of their claims to the contrary it is hard to credit think tanks with being the source of any significant New Labour policy initiative. Ministers and opposition leaders do use sympathetic think tanks as sounding-boards, making speeches or writing pamphlets under their auspices – which suggests that think tanks may do more to make market-driven policies palatable to voters than to turn popular sentiment into practicable policies.

Think tanks do serve as useful pools of political talent and ambition. On taking office in 1997 the Labour government doubled the number of minis-
ters’ ‘special advisers’ from 38 to 72, and many come from the think-tanks clustered around Westminster. Few of them bring relevant expertise from outside or carry intellectual weight inside. What most of them have is energy and a willingness to help work up solutions to whatever problems their minister is faced with. The key qualifications are loyalty and readiness to turn one’s hand to whatever task is needed. Peter Hyman, a former special adviser to Tony Blair, says that a few advisers have their own ideas, which may be different from those of their ministers. But the ‘vast majority’, he reassures us, ‘know they are there to serve the minister who employs them’. 28 Denham and Garnett concur, though with a different emphasis. ‘At worst’, they say, ‘the current wave of apparatchiks seem to act as comfort blankets for ministers who have discarded their former idealism’. 29

This leaves two significant sources of policy that are well attested, though virtually un-researched. One is the prime minister’s ‘senior’ policy advisers. Thatcher appointed some prominent businessmen such as Sir Derek Rayner, a leading department store manager, and Sir Roy Griffiths, a leading supermarket manager, as special advisers to herself, and they were openly given more influence on policy than permanent civil servants. Blair followed suit, and under his personalized and highly-centralized system of government the influence of his senior policy advisers is very considerable – with sometimes disastrous results, since his choice of advisers has sometimes been lamentable. This was notoriously true of Andrew Adonis, his senior policy adviser on education, elevated to the peerage as Lord Adonis after the 2005 election and put in charge of schools policy in London. Adonis was one of the most widely-despised figures of Blair’s court, credited with having got a series of disastrous education policies adopted through having the ear of the prime minister. The message would come to the department of education that ‘Tony’s office’ was keen on ‘specialist schools’ or ‘city academies’, policies which were the brainchildren of Adonis, a journalist who had once written a book about social class in schools and was keen on private education. (Ted Wragg, a widely respected authority on education, and a comic script-writer on the side, created a fictional character called ‘Tony Zoffis’ whose ignorant prejudices successive education ministers had to swallow). 30

Another example, in the other main field of social policy, health care, is Simon Stevens, mentioned earlier. Before his appointment as Blair’s senior health policy adviser he had been a middle-level hospital manager. He believed strongly in replacing the national health service with a market open to private providers, and this is what happened, in spite of the fact that this policy was never openly acknowledged, let alone put before the electorate in any of Labour’s manifestos, and in spite of its disastrous long-term implications.
The other significant source of policy, and perhaps the most significant change in the operation of the state under the neoliberal policy regime, is the employment in key civil service posts of senior staff on secondment from the private sector. In 2004 the head of strategy in the Department of Health, for example, was on secondment from the management consultancy PriceWaterhouseCoopers, a leading advocate of the privatization of public services, and especially health care. In some departments the circulation of personnel between the civil service and the private sector has become commonplace, and the delay required before civil servants can take up lucrative private sector posts, in which they can put their inside knowledge of government at the service of companies, has also been progressively shortened. This so-called ‘revolving door’ between the state and the private sector has long been notorious in the field of defence, which accounts for a huge share of public spending. \(^{31}\) Now it is becoming more general throughout the higher civil service. \(^{32}\)

The chief focus of critics hitherto has tended to be on the conflicts of interest involved in this, especially the extent to which the prospect of lucrative private employment may influence the judgment of senior civil servants who should be guided solely by the public interest, and this is certainly a serious issue. \(^{33}\) But the role played by private sector personnel seconded to policy-making roles in government today is more far-reaching. Faced with the demand to become business-like, and to pursue business-friendly policies, senior civil servants understandably reach out to business for help. What they get may not in fact be great expertise, but it always involves the importation of the general world-view inculcated in American business schools and disseminated through global management teams and financial markets. And with the collapse of the idea of a distinctively public domain goes the disappearance of any clear concept of the public interest as something different from and deeper than the collective interest of the corporations that dominate the economy. In effect, the corporate agenda is installed in the state; or to put it another way, public policy-making itself is ‘outsourced’.

ENTREPRENEURIALISM AND THE USE OF EVIDENCE

Running through the history of the formation of the neoliberal policy regime is the emergence of a new ideal type, displacing that of the rational Weberian bureaucrat: the entrepreneur. What politicians admire, and want at the top of the state apparatus, are assertive, ‘big’ men (very rarely women), capable of some ruthlessness, strong on ‘mission statements’ and targets and impatient with detail, which they are apt to dismiss as the stock-in-trade of professional ‘seers of difficulties’ who will never accomplish anything. Civil servants have been seriously discouraged from playing their traditional role of screening
out unworkable ideas. What is valued is a willingness to achieve whatever ‘targets’ the government decides it wants met, brushing aside obstacles and costs. The fact that so many ‘can-do’ businessmen of the kind politicians now hold up as models for senior civil servants to emulate – Gerald Ronson, Jim Slater, Jonathan Aitken, Robert Maxwell, Asil Nadir, John Gunn, Richard Brewster, David S. Smith, John Ashcroft – have eventually crashed spectacularly and/or gone to jail or been otherwise disgraced, losing (or in some cases stealing) the savings of thousands of people in the process, does not seem to dim their admiration.34

The result is a new attitude towards evidence. Evidence needed for policy-making relating to global market forces – statistical evidence on production, trade and finance, for example – is taken seriously. Evidence relating to socio-cultural adjustment policies is another matter (unless, of course, it is polling evidence on what voters are thinking and feeling, which is taken most seriously of all). Evidence that looks supportive of ideas to which the government is committed tends to be accepted uncritically. Contrary evidence tends to be dismissed. In Blair’s entourage even pointing to the existence of contrary evidence comes to be treated as close to treason: ‘critics of public–private partnerships, foundation hospitals and [university] tuition fees are branded not as participants in a reasonable debate about the direction of policy but relics of the party’s dark ages, mad lefties jeopardizing the government’s future’.35 Outside Whitehall, consistently pointing to the existence of politically inconvenient evidence leads to professional marginalization or even – if the inconvenience is great enough – persecution. A cabal of obedient government backbenchers, for example, abused parliamentary privilege to make a scurrilous attack on the work of Professor Allyson Pollock, whose analyses of the private financing of hospital building had left that policy widely discredited.36 Other examples of the persecution of critics, especially but not only by Blair’s powerful spokesman Alastair Campbell, abound.37

That this should have become more or less normal, however, presupposes certain enabling conditions. Four stand out: the replacement of the culture of Royal Commissions by the culture of ‘grey literature’; the loss of critical independence on the part of the academic research community; the depoliticisation of the electorate; and the return to respectability of irrational belief.

A lot of fun used to be had at the expense of Royal Commissions, seen as devices for indefinitely postponing action on controversial issues by appointing a group of the ‘great and good’ to mull them over inconsequentially for years. But Royal Commissions not only invited the best experts to give evidence, written and oral, but also commissioned research, and all of this was published in full, along with the Commissioners’ final reports. Their recom-
mendations could languish unimplemented, but the published research and evidence, publicly given and publicly interrogated, constituted a significant obstacle to the implementation of policies that flew in the face of the best evidence there was. Today, however, no one under the age of 45 has known the policy culture of which Royal Commissions were a significant part.

In place of the products of Royal Commissions there is ‘grey literature’. Most definitions of grey literature focus on the idea that it is literature ‘made available to the general public by public and private sector organizations whose function is not primarily publishing’. And as governments cut back on free access to even routine official statistics, and as privatization makes more and more public activity ‘commercially confidential’, grey literature has acquired a sort of respectability by default. Journals and conferences are devoted to it. What strikes the enquirer concerned with truth, however, is that organizations that are not primarily publishers lack a strong interest in the validity of what they nonetheless publish. Whereas a non-fiction or journal publisher, or a serious newspaper, has a reputation for truth to protect, many if not most other organizations are not necessarily concerned with this. As anyone who has tried to use grey literature soon discovers, data and judgments that have not been peer-reviewed or otherwise tested for accuracy and reliability cannot be relied on. But grey literature is increasingly cited in support of government policy.

The use of bad evidence is also less subject to informed criticism by the scientific community than would have been the case twenty-five years ago. The corruption of research in the natural sciences by corporate funding is a well-known problem, yet science research is more and more dependent on corporate money. And by a different route, university-based social science in Britain has now also become increasingly oriented to market values and interests. Unlike US social science, British social science has always been predominantly state-funded. Under the liberal/social democratic policy regime the funding was distributed through research councils run by social scientists, with substantial independence from the government. Nor have British social scientists experienced the pressures to conform from right-wing vigilantes that have reinforced the prevailing political conformity of American social science. British social scientists might be ‘pro-market’, but there was no obvious career incentive to be so.

Under Thatcher, however, this began to change. General government funding of universities was put on a market-oriented footing. Every degree course now had to be justified by a ‘business plan’ showing how the cost of the staff needed to teach it would be met out of the student income it would earn, and the research funding that the staff could be expected to secure. Eventually, ‘under-studented’ departments were downsized or closed.
Government support for research through the universities’ ‘core funding’ also declined (from 58.8 per cent of all research funding in 1984 to 35.1 per cent in 1997), and this support was now allocated on a selective basis. Under a periodic Research Assessment Exercise first introduced in 1986, departments with highly-ranked research output receive dramatically higher-than-average funding until the next ‘RAE’, while poorly-ranked departments receive dramatically less, or none at all. The share of research funding accounted for by work commissioned directly by either government departments or business rose from 15 per cent to 20.8 per cent of the total between 1984 and 1997, while the share coming from the government-funded research councils rose from 17.2 per cent to 24.1 per cent.\footnote{41}

In the case of the Economic and Social Research Council, reorganized under Thatcher in 1985, the bulk of its research funding was much more focused than before on themes seen as relevant to the promotion of national economic competitiveness.\footnote{42} Individual researchers could still get smaller grants for critical work, but the attractions of landing serious money – grants of several million pounds over five years are not uncommon – for major centres and programmes of applied research were obvious, and a new generation of well-funded academics emerged, wielding considerable patronage among younger researchers willing to work within the neoliberal paradigm.

The combined effect of all these changes has been to make research within that paradigm well rewarded, and therefore highly valued by university administrators, while effective public criticism of government policies is to say the least not warmly encouraged. As a result the topics chosen for study, and the questions asked, have undergone a significant shift. The quantity of research has risen but its analytic and critical quality has declined. This may be no truer of political science than of other social science disciplines, but it is especially obvious in the study of politics. Roelofs’ critique of American political science now largely fits its British counterpart. To take just one example:

Political scientists … study parties and interest groups, yet the latters’ creation and funding are usually neglected. The interlocking directorates among interest groups, foundations, and corporations are generally ignored. Professional associations, conferences of state officials, think tanks, and integrative organizations such as the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies are rarely examined in political science research. Thus indexes in American government textbooks sometimes list Ford, Betty, and omit the Ford Foundation.\footnote{43}
The same topics are also ignored, and the same questions are not asked, in Britain. Denham and Garnett, for example, the foremost academic experts on think tanks in Britain, make no effort to analyze the sources of their funding and the effect of this on what the tanks think about, and the conclusions they reach. There is a general de-politicisation of even political research.\textsuperscript{44} Academic social scientists who offer informed public criticism of government policies have become an endangered species. It is more rewarding to engage in the kind of political punditry notably practised by Tony Giddens, the director of the London School of Economics (LSE) and high priest of the Third Way (‘somewhere between the Second Coming and the Fourth Dimension’);\textsuperscript{45} or John Gray, an LSE professor of European political theory, once a Thatcherite and now a convert to oriental mysticism and animal liberation.\textsuperscript{46}

The fact that few social scientists are serious critics of public policy facilitates the de-politicisation of the electorate. Britain has not undergone – yet – an intellectual takeover of the kind successfully carried out by the far right in the US since the late 1960s, at the cost of hundreds of millions of dollars a year, via the creation or capture of right-wing think tanks, magazines, newspapers, publishers, television channels, radio stations and even whole universities.\textsuperscript{47} But three quarters of British national newspaper circulation has long been owned and controlled by right-wing press barons, often North American, and the popular titles are prone to extreme bias, if not outright lies.\textsuperscript{48} And concessions by successive governments of both major parties to corporate media interests have steadily enlarged the scope for private broadcasters and forced public service broadcasters to compete for increasingly fragmented audience shares.\textsuperscript{49} News and current affairs have been steadily cut back in favour of entertainment. The bizarrely misnamed ‘reality TV’ shows that dominated the schedules in the early 2000s were a sign of the times. The critical context for serious policy debate has been significantly eroded.

And then there is the general revival of irrational belief, entertainingly reviewed by Francis Wheen in \textit{How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World}. The publicly-owned public-service television channel, Channel 4, for example, ran a programme on nutrition hosted by a ‘clinical nutritionist’, complete with white coat, and continued it even when her credentials were exposed as worthless (the \textit{Guardian}’s ‘bad science’ watchdog was able to buy her professional certificate for $60 for his deceased cat).\textsuperscript{50} And the government’s infatuation with business and businessmen meant that the cliché-ridden and unsubstantiated outpourings of business gurus would be taken seriously by the architects of public service ‘reforms’. All this is bad enough. But what about ‘alternative’ medicine, advocated by the heir to the throne and adopted,
partly as a sop to populism, by some parts of the National Health Service? Wheen’s bracing comment that ‘“complementary” and “alternative” are essentially euphemisms for “dud”’ would no doubt be dismissed by New Labour’s boot boys as ‘elitist’.51

Blair’s deference towards mumbo-jumbo is usually attributed to the influence of his wife. Authors sympathetic to Cherie Blair, however, say that he shares her flakier interests.52 If so, it helps to explain his refusal to condemn the teaching of creationism in a state secondary school in Gateshead that was captured by creationists. ‘A more diverse school system’, he said, ‘will deliver better results for our children’.53 The Blairs’ spiritual tastes are perhaps more in tune with the zeitgeist than the scepticism of their critics, but it is not without consequences for public policy. Just as Thatcher had openly sympathized with the Ayatollah who called for Salman Rushdie to be murdered for writing *The Satanic Verses*, Blair’s home affairs minister refused to condemn the violence by Sikh fundamentalists in Birmingham in late 2004 that succeeded in closing a play they found offensive, saying that ‘both the theatre and the protesters had a right to free speech’.54 On the contrary the government proposed to introduce legislation to make it a crime to ‘incite to religious hatred’. (No law was proposed to criminalize the suppression by pharmaceutical companies of evidence showing that a profitable drug was dangerous, or the invention of evidence to win parliamentary assent to start a war.)

The influence of all these factors means that there is remarkably little adverse comment on the steep decline that has occurred since 1980 in the quality of government policy documents, whose level of argumentation and use of evidence is all too often inversely related to the quality of their presentation (in the style of corporate reports, complete with executive summaries and flashy graphics). They are designed to look principled, purposeful and rational. In reality what they constantly reveal is the subordination of policy to what are seen as market imperatives, presented as some sort of balance between principle and pragmatism, tradition and innovation. Stefan Collini’s dissection of the Labour government’s 2003 white paper on *The Future of Higher Education* could be replicated for a distressingly high proportion of them. He begins with a quotation from the white paper’s introduction:

We see a higher education sector which meets the needs of the economy in terms of trained people, research and technology transfer. At the same time it needs to enable all suitably qualified individuals to develop their potential both intellectually and personally, and to provide the necessary storehouse of expertise in science and technology, and the arts and humanities which defines our civilization and culture.
'It is hardly surprising’, Collini comments, that universities in Britain are demoralized. Even those statements which are clearly intended to be upbeat affirmations of their importance have a way of making you feel slightly ill. It is not simply the fact that no single institution could successfully achieve all the aims crammed into this unlovely paragraph … It is also the thought of that room in Whitehall where these collages are assembled. As the findings from the latest survey of focus groups come in, an official cuts out all those things which earned a positive rating and glues them together in a straight line. When a respectable number have been accumulated in this way, s/he puts a dot at the end and calls it a sentence.

There are two sentences in that paragraph. The first, which is clear enough though not a thing of beauty, says that the main aim of universities is to turn out people and ideas capable of making money. The second, which is neither clear nor beautiful, says there are a lot of other points that it’s traditional to mention in this connection, and that they’re all good things too, in their way, and that the official with the glue-pot has been having a busy day, and that we’ve lost track of the subject of the verb in the last line, and that it may be time for another full stop.55

The unresolved conflict – at the level of discourse, that is – between market and non-market objectives, the interpenetration of electoral aims and public interest concerns, the loss of respect for (or even serious interest in) research and evidence, the waning of analytic skills and the apotheosis of the entrepreneur – combine to produce defective reasoning and exaggerated promises. Careful argument and the adducing of evidence give way to ‘values’, ‘mission statements’ and ‘targets’.56

In the USA, the imperial heartland, indifference to evidence has been given an explicit imperial rationale. In 2002 Ron Suskind was told by one of Bush’s ‘senior advisers’ that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community’, which he defined as people ‘who believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality … That’s not the way the world really works anymore’, he continued. ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality … We’re history’s actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do’.57
This kind of lumpen-Hegelian rhetoric is perhaps a step too far for most apparatchiks of a sub-imperial power like Britain. But it is the principle on which a great deal of policy is based.

CONCLUSION: THE DEPENDENCY OF OUR TIME

Nothing described here is likely to be unfamiliar to anyone in the ‘South’, where national policy has almost always been largely driven by external market forces, backed by foreign political and military power. One could say that ‘dependency’ now affects all countries except the USA. Of course there are big differences of degree, but the policy regime of even a major post-industrial state like Britain is no longer as radically different from that of a ‘banana republic’ as most people in Britain imagine. The installation of management consultants in key government policy-making posts is not entirely unlike the installation of officers from the World Bank in the ministries of an African state. Structural adjustment is in progress in both.

Thanks to Thatcher and Blair, Britain has advanced farther and more willingly along this path than other west European countries, and since cultural change lags behind material change the gap between reality and official rhetoric may be larger than elsewhere. Perhaps inherited ideas and illusions about sovereignty, democracy and the public interest confront the new reality of global market forces and corporate power more starkly than in other comparable countries. But all countries must now travel more or less the same path, for the same reason: policy-making must always try to conceal the basic fact that economic and social policy has to now be made on capital’s terms. This is not something voters like to be told, and the policies capital demands are often electorally unpalatable. As far as possible, therefore, these policies are increasingly made in secret and their likely effects concealed.

The dismantling of the higher civil service inherited from the late nineteenth century corresponds to the substitution of the rationality of the market for the instrumental rationality of a bureaucracy. A preference for entrepreneurs – whether actual businessmen seconded in from the private sector, or civil servants with entrepreneurial personalities and outlooks – focused on ‘getting things done’, and an impatience with bureaucrats professionally concerned with the wider implications of policy (‘ensuring all points of view are considered’ with, no doubt, a sometimes irritating touch of noblesse oblige), makes sense in these terms. The state becomes not just more and more responsive to capital, but more and more closely integrated with it. And the risks involved are not borne by the new entrepreneurs of the state – any more than they are in today’s corporate world – but by the public.
NOTES

I am very grateful to Barbara Harriss-White for extensive and creative comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1 Blair’s statement to parliament no doubt relied on what his senior officials told him, so he may have told untruths unwittingly: but one of the noteworthy aspects of the whole affair was the way the responsibility that is supposed to be shouldered by ministers, and not least the prime minister, was constantly shuffled off onto officials – who also remained unpunished.

2 ‘Sexed up’ was the expression allegedly used by David Kelly, the source for Gilligan’s story. The expression preferred by the prime minister’s office and Scarlett was ‘presentational changes’.


5 The Kaiser article’s authors declined to respond to the criticisms, and the BMJ declined to print a systematic critique. The reason for the latter decision remains obscure; it seemed to reflect the growing tendency of the medical establishment to make its peace with the government’s determination to impose a market system on the National Health Service.

6 Guardian, 4 February 2005. ‘Czar’ was the popular name for a series of appointments of individuals to oversee the achievement of government targets in primary care, cancer care, drug abuse, etc.

7 The quoted expressions are from the famous Northcote-Trevelyan report adopted by Gladstone as prime minister and finally imposed throughout the civil service by the end of the nineteenth century.


Marquand, *Decline*, pp. 109-10. For a frankly embarrassing example of grovel see the speech given on September 10, 2003, by Sir John Bourn, the Comptroller and Auditor General, to the PPP [Public Private Partnerships] Forum, which represents the new industrial sector conjured into being by the private financing of public services. Bourn was nominally employed by parliament to check public spending, but he sounded exactly like someone hoping for a job with one of the companies involved.


The government adopted the minority report of the two pro-market members of the Sutherland Commission on Care of the Aged, appointed in 1997, and balked completely at dealing with the compromise recommendations of the Wakeham Commission on the reform of the House of Lords, appointed in 1999.

Forty-seven significant departmental enquiries were appointed in the 1970s, 24 in the 1980s, and 13 in the 1990s (David Butler and Gareth Butler, *Twentieth-Century British Political Facts*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

In the mid-1990s the Rand Corporation had 950 staff and a budget of $50-100 million, and four others had budgets of more than $10 million. The biggest British think tank, the Policy Studies Institute, with 54 staff and an annual income of $6.5 million in the late 1990s, was half as big as the fifth largest US think tank, the Heritage Foundation (see Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *British Think Tanks and the Climate of Opinion*, London: University College London Press 1988, p. 5).

Ibid., p. 244.

Ibid.

‘Think Tanks? No Thanks’, *Guardian*, 18 July 2002. Birt was a former Director General of the BBC brought into the prime minister’s office to do ‘blue skies thinking’ – initially, apparently, about transport, a field in which he had no expertise at all.


26 Bennett, ‘Think Tanks?’.


30 On Adonis’ appointment as an unelected minister Francis Beckett catalogued the long series of disastrous educational policies for which he had been personally responsible: see ‘The Rise of Tony Zoffis’, Guardian, 11 May 2005.

31 This has been documented for the post-Cold War years by the UK Campaign Against Arms Trade, in Who Calls the Shots? How Government-Corporate Collusion Drives Arms Exports, London: February, 2005.

32 Peter Oborne thinks the critical turning point in the erosion of the boundary between the state and the private sector came with the appointment of Sir Andrew Turnbull as Cabinet Secretary in 2002. According to him, Turnbull’s predecessor had fought hard to get a Civil Service Act passed, which would demarcate the boundary. ‘One of Turnbull’s first acts as Cabinet Secretary was to make it known that he did not believe that the Civil Service Act, and thus the protections it would have entrenched, were necessary’ (The Rise of Political Lying, London: The Free Press, 2005, p. 189).


34 This list is from Francis Wheen, How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World, London: Harper Perennial, 2004, pp. 59–62, and refers only to fallen business idols in Britain. A list of fallen business idols in the US, such as Enron’s Kenneth Lay, Jeff Skilling and Andrew Fastow, or WorldCom’s Bernie Ebbers, would be a lot longer.

35 Anne Perkins, ‘Regime Change or Climate Change, Tony?’, New Statesman, 29 September 2003. Foundation hospitals – freeing the country’s publicly owned hospitals from central government control and making them compete (or collaborate) with private ones – was the prelude to introducing a health care market. Introducing so-called ‘top-up’ fees for university students was another market-driven idea, deeply unpopular within the governing party.

36 For Pollock’s account of this affair see NHS plc, pp. 209–13.


40 Examples have recurred throughout the history of American social science, and not just in the McCarthy era. Two recent cases seem to be the result of efforts by pro-Israeli organizations to get rid of professors seen as pro-Palestinian: Joseph Massad at Columbia University, and Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss professor denied a visa to teach at Notre Dame. The case of the anthropologist David Graeber, ‘let go’ from Yale in 2005 on political grounds, is more typical.

41 Ted Tapper and Brian Salter, ‘The Politics of Governance in Higher Education: The Case of the Research Assessment Exercise’, OxCHEPS Occasional Paper No. 6, Oxford Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, Oxford, May 2002, p. 29. The authors comment that ‘in the age of global capital … the market is becoming an increasingly significant player and the universities … will have to determine what structures of governance they need to control its input’ (p. 30). Their own view, however, is that all further developments in the research role of the universities will be determined by the government.

42 In 2001-2002 the Council had seven priority themes for centres and programmes in receipt of major funding, accounting for 63 per cent of its funding for specific research projects. They were: economic performance and development; social stability and exclusion; work and organization; knowledge, communication and learning; governance and citizenship; environment and human behaviour (Economic and Social Research Council *Annual Report 2001-2002*).


44 Some American graduate students were recently invited to consider this question. They were highly intrigued. This, they said, was the sort of thing you get excited about when you are not ‘doing political science’. In their own work they were using an ‘actor-oriented stakeholder analysis’, and were very much on their guard against ‘left conspiracy theories’.


46 Before he was a Thatcherite Gray was a socialist, and between being a Thatcherite and an animal liberationist he was a traditional conservative.
His home page announces that he is available for long-term consultancies.


48 The crude fabrications of the British tabloid press are periodically recorded by Roy Greenslade in the Guardian’s weekly Media supplement.

49 See Leys, Market Driven Politics, chapter 5.

50 ‘You don’t need to be human; you don’t even have to be alive. No exam, no check-up on your qualifications and no assessment of your practice’ (Ben Goldacre, reporting how his dead cat Henrietta became a certified member of the American Association of Nutritional Consultants, in Guardian Life, 19 August 2004).

51 Nick Cohen, Pretty Straight Guys, London: Faber and Faber, 2003, p. 28: ‘Sceptics were elitist because they refused to share the people’s authentic elation at the election of Tony Blair or grief at the death of Princess Di. Critics of business were elitist because they presumed to know better than hundreds of millions of consumers … The knowledgeable on any subject … were elitist because they knew more than the ignorant …’.


54 Lee Glendinning, Guardian, 27 December 2004. The personal views of the minister in question, Fiona MacTaggart, are not known. Her comments sounded like a craven capitulation to violence – and the threats made to the playwright, herself a Sikh, and her family – in an effort to retain the Sikh vote.


56 The unfortunate British Prisons Service, hived off by the Conservatives as an ‘executive agency’, free – in theory – from day to day control by the Home Office, rejoiced in having ‘one Statement of Purpose, one Vision, five Values, six Goals, seven Strategic Priorities and eight Key Performance Indicators’ (Wheen, Mumbo-Jumbo, pp. 56-57).

57 ‘Without a Doubt’, New York Times, 17 October 2004. Compare Hegel’s Philosophy of Right: ‘When philosophy paints its grey on grey, then has a shape of life grown old… The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk’.

58 But Blair’s right hand man Peter Mandelson is quoted as saying: ‘our job is to create the truth’ (Oborne, The Rise of Political Lying, p. 3).
A conjunctural factor of some importance in the British case was the determination of Blair, Brown and Mandelson to ‘outspin’ the right-wing media that had trashed the efforts of the party’s former leader, Neil Kinnock, to return Labour to power in 1992. Although Oborne (in The Rise of Political Lying) is hostile witness, it is hard to dispute his judgment that what began as an understandable reaction to victimization ended up as ‘the useful lies of the ruling class’.

Barbara Harriss-White suggests that ‘perhaps the new entrepreneurialism is a transfer to the state of a social institution developed for the quite different “factor endowments” of the firm, where entrepreneurial behaviour is rewarded with monopoly rents; or is it perhaps a mask used cynically by both capital and the state because the “rent” is the consolidation of a totalizing system?’ (personal communication).