DEM☾S

Open access. Some rights reserved.

Demos Quarterly

Issue 3/1994

DEM⊙S

Contents

Lean democracy

Democracy is leading a double life. Two and a half thousand years after the emergence of democracy the virtues of contested elections and parliaments are still spreading to countries where people have the vote for the first time. Yet in democracy's heartlands there is a sense that the political system has run into the sand. Dissatisfaction with governments' performance is widespread. Parliaments look like antiquated talking shops. Leaders have lost credibility. Political parties are losing members.

A realisation is slowly dawning that a model of democracy that we inherited from the 19th century is on the verge of far reaching change. Democracy has changed in the past, with the extension of the franchise, the development of local government and the creation of new political parties. We believe mounting public dissatisfaction with politics will force it to change again to restore public confidence that politicians are fit to lead society.

In this special issue we set out ideas which may inform that transformation. We describe the principles of a Lean Democracy, which gives the governed more direct control over governors, and makes politics more transparent and responsive, more effective and more accountable. To achieve that the tasks of the political system have to be broken up into their components parts. The institutions and people charged with those tasks – whether it be economic management or education policy – should be held accountable through new democratic channels which expose them more directly to the people.

As it stands democracy uses methods which are crude and anachronistic. The voters rarely exercise their democratic rights. Once they do, layers of political and administrative bureaucracy separate them from the people who hold power. Lean Democracy will deploy a wide range of methods to give citizens more influence over powerholders. We argue for a more participative, responsible democracy which will use the new technologies of push button democracy and the electronic town hall, as well as devices such as citizens' juries and advisory referendums. At the moment voters have access to power only through an occasional, narrow opening in the walls of politics. We envisage a political system which will offer people multiple points of access to power.

Lean Democracy goes far beyond more familiar arguments for constitutional reform. Many of these, such as proportional representation and a Bill of Rights, are essential. But the danger of some proposals, such as reforms to create an elected second chamber or regional assemblies, is that they will simply pass power from one group of politicians to another. That would deepen rather than resolve public alienation with politics. Instead we argue for:

- a wholesale redefinition of the role of politicians so that powerholders can be held more clearly accountable for their performance
- combining representative with direct democracy in the form of referendums, rights of initiative and recall, and voter vetoes on parliamentary legislation
- the creation of new forms of 'reflective' body, such as voter juries and deliberative polling groups to advise on policy issues
- creating an independent election regulator Ofelect, to scrutinise elections and political argument to encourage truth-telling
- a raft of reforms to parliament to ensure better training of MPs, better policy-making, and better accountability, including the development of constituents charters.

The reforms we envisage under the umbrella Lean Democracy will not be easy to implement. The people who benefit most from the existing system – the established political class – are the least willing to recognise the need for change. Yet in the past decade and a half change has swept through other institutions in Britain. Companies have been through waves of radical restructuring. The public sector is being refashioned. As disillusion with politics mounts, the case for radical change to our oldest democratic institutions will become irresistible.

Back to Greece: the scope for direct democracy

Andrew Adonis* and Geoff Mulgan†

If democracy means self-government, it is doubtful whether Britain and other western countries should be called full democracies. The doubt is not a matter of semantics. It derives from two of the most fundamental weaknesses in contemporary western states: the divorce of politics from society, and of political responsibility from citizenship. Democracy in the west is partial and immature. The late 1980s hype about history ending with liberal democracy was not only poor prophecy: it reflected a pervasive complacency about the limitations of political institutions in contemporary democracies.

Limited for much of its modern life to notions of social levelling and legal equality, the concept of democracy has invariably been weakly applied to the conduct of government itself. In practice, democracy in the west amounts to rights, the vote and the media. With the exercise of power, inherited assumptions about authority and deepseated, predemocratic doctrines of government hold near-universal sway. Beyond the act of voting, no serious consideration has been given to how democratic duties should complement democratic rights.

A critical democratic dimension, the direct involvement of citizens in government, has therefore gone almost entirely neglected. The neglect

_____

*Andrew Adonis is a former Fellow of Nuffield College Oxford, and is currently industry correspondent at The Financial Times.
†Geoff Mulgan is Director of Demos.

has been exacerbated by the western practice of conflating the tasks of public policy-making and public administration into a single process of government, when in a democracy the two ought logically and necessarily to be separated.

Most post-war western regimes have kept tyranny and civil war at bay. Britain's has done so for centuries longer than that – an impressive achievement. But the absence of civic strife, and the capacity to govern by consent, are not the same as participatory democracy.

Modern government is exclusive and elitist. It generates unreal and largely ignorant expectations on the part of voters, and encourages political elites to trade simplistic, cut-and-dried solutions to problems as the currency of electoral politics. Political alienation and ignorance are systemic. But neither feature is new to the 1980s or 1990s, however stark they seem today. They have gone hand-in-hand with representative government; only their form, and the capacity to do anything to overcome them, have changed over the decades.

We elaborate below on some of the causes and consequences of democratic weakness in contemporary Britain, and give an over-view of current Anglo-American initiatives and proposals to tackle it. We make no pretence that greater participation will abolish alienation or transform citizenship, nor do we believe that reforms of the kind discussed are risk free.

But we do believe that there is a pressing need for reforms to promote informed participation. Deliberation is critical to the participation we seek. As James Fishkin remarks: "political equality without deliberation is not much use, for it amounts to nothing more than power without the opportunity to think about how that power is to be exercised." For that reason it lacks moral legitimacy.

We conclude with three moderate, specific proposals for change:

○ Voter Juries: the piloting, at national and local level, of Voter Juries to assess the pros and cons of contested policy proposals. They would be established on a similar basis to judicial juries, but without formal constitutional authority.

○   Voter Vetoes: the introduction of Voter Vetoes, giving citizens at national and local level the right to call consultative referendums on strongly contested legislation or council decisions. At national level 1 m citizens would need to sign a petition for a referendum to take place.

○   Voter Feedback: local experiments to engage people in deliberation on local issues of controversy using the combined television and telephone networks being built by cable companies in conurbations, in collaboration with local authorities and other local institutions.

These proposals are not panaceas. They are tentative first steps to giving voters a share in government, allowing for the public ignorance of public policy which is generally held to preclude the public from participating. Voter Juries and Voter Feedback initiatives, in particular, would employ many of the techniques of active, deliberative participation that have been pioneered in North America over the last 20 years.[1] But the object of all three is more specific and ambitious: to give responsible voters – both in representative samples and at large – a verdict on specific choices before parliament or local councils, and to give their verdicts a direct impact, with considerable moral force, on the decisions made by politicians.

Immature democracy

Whatever the rhetoric of their leaders, no western state has a government by, for and of the people. What have they got instead?

Assessed by their essential characteristics, western governments can most meaningfully be described as oligarchies of political professionals, constrained to a greater or lesser extent by five forces: the media; party activists; intermittent elections; Bills of Rights; and institutional divisions between different groups of politicians, such as political parties, second chambers, constitutional courts, and federal divisions of power.

'Politicians develop the themes, the language, the policies, project them through the national media and test them through polls with the public present as a largely passive abserver of a closed system'

In Britain, essentially only the first three constraints apply – the media, party activists and elections held about once every four years. Most of the commonly suggested palliatives for the ills of British government, which go under the label constitutional reform, concern the introduction of the third and the fourth constraints above – namely a Bill of Rights, and institutions (regional assemblies and a reformed House of Lords) and voting systems (PR) to increase the number of political professionals, erect more barriers between them, and change somewhat the relative balance between the political parties which they dominate.

Additional constraints might do much to improve the quality of governance in Britain. However, they would do nothing to reduce the dominance of politicians, but simply shuffle power from one group of politicians to another, with the addition of a few judges.

The word oligarchy is a fair description of modern British government. The typical British MP is chosen by, at most, a few hundred party activists. Out of an electorate of 43 million, 651 full-time politicians have a direct say over government and/or legislation. Given the number of seats that change hands at elections and the number of MPs who stand down each time, probably fewer than 100,000 people each decade play a direct part in deciding which of the 7,000 would-be MPs – that is, the number on the major parties' approved lists of candidates – occupy the 651 seats in the House of Commons, assuming, as do most political sociologists, that seats change hands at elections almost invariably because of party preferences, not candidate preferences.

When it comes to deciding the policies pursued by Britain's oligarchy, elections of course play a part in setting the parameters, but rarely more than an incidental part. Voters have only one vote every four or five years to express a preference across the range of policy.

They have to choose between three or four broad programmes, put together by politicians in the first place, and often bearing only a limited relationship to how governments actually govern. As likely as not, an election will offer no real choice even on issues of first-rank public controversy (consider the anti-Maastricht voter in the 1992 election). Between elections, voters lack any veto on the doings of politicians – unless an opposition party takes up a popular stand and the government is so concerned about the electoral backlash to a particular proposal that it desists.

One consequence is that not only decision-making, but political debate more broadly, is dominated by political professionals. Politicians develop the themes, the language, the policies, project them through the national media and test them through polls with the public present as a largely passive observer of a closed system. When public concerns burst through, demanding that politicians respond, this is usually seen as a crisis. The popular opinion upon which this regime draws – both directly through elections, and indirectly through polls is thus to a large extent an echo of its own voice. And to the extent that it is not, it generally reflects ill-considered, unreflective opinions.

Fishkin puts his finger on two of the weaknesses of today's 'poll-driven, sound-bite, version of televised democracy' – namely the 'rational ignorance' of ordinary citizens, and the tendency of polls to report non-attitudes or pseudo-opinions.[2] The explanation for the rational ignorance of the ordinary voter is easy to find. As Anthony Downs noted as long ago as the 1950s, it is rational for voters not to find out about issues when their opinion is never going to be called upon. Extending the argument, it is easy to see why increased levels of educational attainment will not necessarily produce – and in fact have not produced – a more politically animated electorate in Britain.

There is, however, an intriguing – and significant – qualification to be made. On Down's approach, it is usually irrational for a citizen even to vote in elections. Since the prospect of an individual vote affecting the outcome of a particular election is infinitesimally small, while the effort required to vote is appreciable, the rational course is not to bother making the effort. Yet typically more than 80 per cent of the

registered and resident electorate do vote in national elections, and around 40 per cent vote in local elections. Although the turn-out is generally a little higher in marginal seats (where it would be more rational to vote), the difference is not great.

Voting, furthermore, is only the thin end of the wedge of contemporary political activism. The British Election Study for the 1987 election found that 26 per cent of the panel claimed to have contacted their MP. Two-thirds said they had signed a petition; seven per cent had been on a demonstration; and six percent had joined a protest group.[3] The mid-1980s Widdicombe enquiry into local democracy unearthed a similarly surprising level of local activism and awareness. Nearly a third of those surveyed could name correctly at least one of their local councillors, while 20 per cent had had some contact with their councillor.[4]

Explanations as to why so many bother to vote are varied. But most of them come down to the argument that individuals see voting as a responsibility of citizenship, or at least as a matter of custom (which may amount to the same thing). As James Q. Wilson argues, voting is at least in part an expression of an underlying moral sense and a sense of belonging, senses which can either be cultivated or allowed to atrophy.[5]

If voters do indeed regard voting in these ways, it is difficult in principle to see why they should treat further modest duties of political participation in a different light. Furthermore, if they take the trouble to inform themselves, there is little reason in principle why individuals, at large or randomly chosen, should not be able to offer judgements on public policy issues more valuable – in terms of democratic worth – than those taken by politicians claiming to act on their behalf. One might, on the contrary, argue that across a broad range of issues ordinary voters unencumbered with the personal and ideological baggage of the typical politician could be expected to reach a more reasonable decision than today's decision-makers.

Of all the arguments against deeper democracy, the complexity of the decisions facing decision-makers is the least convincing. In most public policy spheres politicians have to choose between competing, but fairly clearly defined, alternatives. In complex fields such as economics and law, few of the politicians involved understand the complexities; they

make a choice between worked up policies on the basis of prejudice tempered by some attempt to master the issues involved.

Why are voters never called upon to make such choices on their own account? Tradition and the self-interest of the political class are the over-riding reasons. Assuming, as we do, the self-interest of the politicians to be an insufficient justification for the modern oligarchy, we need to appreciate the traditions supporting the status quo in order to understand the scope for change in the future.

Tradition and democracy

Until the 19th century, the term democracy was generally held to denote a society without a class enjoying an entrenched legal supremacy. A society, in other words, in which all citizens enjoyed legal equality, and therefore a large measure of social equality. Implicit in the concept, historically, was the notion of social and economic power moving from an aristocracy to a mass, whose aim was to promote its own social status thereby. Aristotle deliberately classed democracy as a deviate form of government, in which the poor (ie. the mass) ruled in their own interest.[6] In the 19th century, Mill and Tocqueville saw democracy as, in effect, rule by the middle-class (ie. the new social and economic leaders); Marx as rule by the proletariat (ditto).

The term held obvious connotations for the exercise of power, but almost invariably it was assumed that the democratic rights of the mass extended no further than the right to consent, or to withhold consent from, representatives – representatives motivated (depending on the theorist) by elevated notions of the general good or by the interests of the dominant class in society. For the first group, it was essential that the mass did not play any direct part in government; for the second, it was superfluous for them to do so – particularly if they were suffering from that Marxist affliction; false consciousness.

In many states – including Britain – another force was at work, namely the legacy of aristocracy. In Britain constitutional advance in the 19th and early 20th centuries was predicated on an aristocratic system of government, in which 'public affairs' was naturally conducted

by aristocratic 'public men', and democratisation took the form of progressively extending rights to, and broadening the basis of consent from, a 'mass' still generally held to be incapable of self-government. Gladstone, the great Liberal prime minister to whose genius Britain's smooth progress to representative government can largely be attributed, doubted in the 1890s whether even a Wolverhampton solicitor was fit to sit in the Cabinet. The mass franchise for men dates back to the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884, yet for those with the vote the scope for popular participation in government is no greater today than at Gladstone's retirement in 1894, precisely a century ago.

It ought perhaps to come as no surprise that 19th century European liberal theorists, who saw themselves at a democratic cross-roads, wrote far more seriously about the possibilities of a democratic state than their 20th century successors, who have generally accepted the form of the democratic state as given. None wrote more eloquently or incisively than Alexis de Tocqueville, whose *Democracy in America* highlights the fundamental predicament facing modern democracies – how to generate a democratic political culture in a socially democratic society.[7]

Tocqueville described the collapse of traditional aristocratic society across Europe in the decades after the French Revolution as 'a great democratic revolution'. By that he meant that it heralded the gradual, progressive development of social equality. His greatest insight, however, was to recognise that 'social' democracy, however far-reaching, did not necessarily lead to political democracy in the sense of self-government. On the contrary, without careful crafting of institutions, and the inculcation of a democratic culture through them, pre democratic norms and social tensions could just as easily result in tyranny, or in government by remote bureaucracies paying lip service to the democratic good.

So concerned has the 20th century been with the first of those threats – tyranny – that it has paid little attention to the second – democratic bureaucracy, or in modern parlance the rule of politicians and bureaucrats. Fighting for their collective lives on the military, ideological and economic battlefields, until the collapse of the Berlin Wall, further democratisation was on almost no-one's agenda in the avowed

liberal democracies. Instead the concern was (a) survival, and (b) the replication of the Anglo-American regimes in states won from tyranny, albert (notably in the post-war German, Japanese and 5th Republic French constitutions) with reforms designed to improve the effectiveness of politico-bureaucratic government.

Even if Tocqueville's democratic social revolution had not proved so fragile in its first century, the progress of political democracy would inevitably have been painful and problematic. For until recent decades ideas of popular rule – as opposed to popular consent to rulers have been held not just to be undesirable, but to be impractical. Impractical in three particular respects: in that the typical voter is insufficiently educated, interested or accessible to play a direct part in decision-making or to make informed judgements if he or she were able to participate.

By any objective standard, the third argument (accessibility), and to a lesser extent the first (education), have become progressively less convincing, given modern mobility, technology and levels of educational attainment. The question, then, is can this and succeeding generations take up the other half of Tocqueville's democratic challenge, and transform our regimes from social and bureaucratic democracies to political and open democracies? Put differently, can new democratic institutions be wedded to processes which tap the informed judgement of the electorate? The next sections looks at possible ways forward, developed from contemporary US and UK initiatives.

Referendums

The referendum is hardly new. It has been around in one guise or another since the classical democracies, and has a fairly continuous modern history since the French Revolution. In Britain it has a long – but now forgotten – history in local government; ratepayers' polls were a frequent occurrence in the Victorian period, and continued into this century. A.V. Dicey, the Victorian theorist of parliamentary sovereignty, was also a strong proponent of the referendum, which he dubbed the 'People's Veto' – a democratic check on democratic evils'. When the powers of the House of Lords were curbed in 1911, serious

parliamentary debate took place on the introduction of the referendum as a check on the unfettered power of the House of Commons. The Conservative party, then in opposition, committed itself to introducing the referendum and, but for the First World War, it might easily have become a central feature of Britain's constitution.[8] Instead, it was seriously discredited in the inter-war years by its manifestations in Nazi Germany.

The referendum has nonetheless secured a place in British constitutional practice. In the past 20 years parliament has called one national referendum (on European Community membership) and three regional referendums (on the devolution for Scotland and Wales and the Northern Ireland border). Local referendums have been held on issues ranging from local taxation (Coventry and Tower Hamlets) to refuse collection (Hertfordshire); the most visible recent example was Strathclyde's referendum on water privatisation which achieved a turnout of 78%, roughly double the norm for local councils. In the early 1980s Mrs Thatcher's government seriously considered forcing local councils to hold referendums before imposing 'excessive' rates increases, and it only dropped the idea in response to opposition from Tory councillors and backbenchers.[9] Mrs Thatcher revived the idea at the height of the poll tax crisis in 1990. Referendums appear to be popular. Not only have turnouts ranged from the respectable to the high; in 1991 MORI asked, as part of its 'state of the nation' poll, whether there ought to be provision for a referendum to be held on a specific question when a million voters requested one, and 77 per cent thought this a good idea. A similar proportion told pollsters they wanted a referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, a demand the main parties united in resisting.

For all the vocal warnings of political leaders that representative democracy is in danger of death by repeated referendums, the device is still remarkably little used. At national level, more than 1,000 have been held across the world since the rise of modern constitutional politics.[10] However, nearly half of them have been held in just one country – Switzerland, where both the referendum and the initiative (a referendum called by demand of a set number of citizens) have held sway since the 19th century. Switzerland a part, only in a number of US states

are referendums conducted with any regularity. Indeed, of the 600 non-Swiss referendums, fewer than half have been held in western liberal democracies. As Butler and Ranney note laconically: "politicians usually dislike referendums. They take decisions out of established hands, and elected leaders can never control – or be responsible for – their outcomes."

The case for referendums before major constitutional change is hard to refute, if one believes that in a democracy power ultimately flows from the people. There is also a strong argument for referendums to provoke longdebated constitutional reform, as witnessed recently in Italy and New Zealand. However, when it comes to referendums on specific policy issues, the key test for those concerned that decisions follow deliberation is whether a referendum is ever likely to reflect an informed popular judgement. There are also legitimate concerns about the coherence of government if voters are free to pick and choose measures to promote or reject. In the case of an initiative called by a set number of citizens on any issue of their choosing, there are particularly good reasons for supposing that the result will not reflect informed judgement. For one reason above all; that by its nature the device lends itself to minority issues little debated by the public at large.

However, in the case of referendums on major legislation passed by parliament – or decisions of local councils – the argument is less convincing. In the first place, cranky issues would only go to a referendum if parliament itself, or a local council, was in the hands of the cranks. As to debate, post-legislative referendums would, in all likelihood, take place only on matters the subject of hot media and parliamentary debate – or, of debate at local level, in the local press and councils. Moreover, the limitation to post-decision but pre-implementation issues is itself a guarantee of a relatively focused public debate, since it clearly limits the number of referendums which could be held at any one time, and ensures they will be on issues of public moment. In Switzerland, it should be noted, fewer than 1/3 of the 300-odd post-legislative referendums held since 1848 have gone against the earlier parliamentary decision.

In the longer run there may be a strong case for opening up Britain to a genuine initiative politics which would allow citizens to frame referendum questions themselves, subject to receiving a given level of support – such as 2.5% of the electorate, or roughly one million voters. In present circumstances, however, it is unlikely that such initiatives would meet the 'consideration' requirement, nor is it desirable to introduce so radical a change at once. As a first step we believe parliament

should codify existing practice and make statutory provision for local councils to call referendums and for referendums to accompany major constitutional change. We also propose that post-legislative – or, at local level level, post-council-decision – referendums be held where at least 2.5 per cent of the relevant electorate requested one by petition. These 'voter vetoes' would be advisory, not mandatory. We say more about the form they would take in our concluding recommendations.

Juries and Magistrates

Moving to distinctly new democratic media, the application of the jury system to the political process may be one of the most fruitful avenues of democratic reform for this and succeeding generations. When Tocqueville visited America for democratic inspiration in 1830, he highlighted the jury not just as a judicial institution, but, significantly, as one of America's foremost democratic institutions, with a unique capacity to shape democratic habits and responsibility. 'The jury serves incredibly to form the judgement and increase the natural intelligence of a people', he wrote in *Democracy in America*. 'That … is its greatest advantage. One must consider it as a free and open school, where every juror comes to learn about his rights … where laws are taught to him in a practical fashion.'

Juries, of course, play a significant role in Britain's judicial system. But their scale and development are ill appreciated. In all 200,000 members of the public serve on juries each year. They make themselves available for at least a fortnight, and are eligible to serve again after a two years period. But juries are only the final extension of lay involvement in the criminal justice system; more than 95 per cent of criminal cases are dealt with by 29,000 lay magistrates, few of whom are legally trained, and whose commitment is to sit for a minimum of just 26 days a year. Only a minority of serious criminal cases go before lay juries.

It is quite wrong to think that either the current scale of lay involvement in the administration of justice, or the current working of the jury system, goes back to time immemorial. In fact, the jury system as we know it is of fairly recent origin. Until 20 years ago only

ratepayers – mostly middle-class men – could sit on juries. Until the 18th century – ie. just before the beginning of the movement towards modern-style representative government the operation of the jury system was largely foreign to modern practice. It was common for only one jury of 12, chosen from among the richer taxpayers, to hear all the cases in a sessions. A court would typically deal with 12 to 20 cases in a day with few barristers and most of the questioning done by the judge. The jury would deliberate on cases in batches; often they did not retire to consider verdicts, and when they did, they had little if any balanced guidance from the judge as to issues at stake and engaged in little if any of the rigorous deliberation expected of a modern jury. It was not until 1670 that it was even established that a jury was free to bring in a verdict contrary to a judge's instruction.[11]

So the jury as we know it is largely the creation of our modern criminal justice system. It has survived because it was there to start with, and because, however imperfect, it has always been regarded as bastion of individual liberty. Even now, however, there is no uniform jury system within the UK. Scotland has a very different system from England and Wales; its juries are 15-strong, and majority verdicts of 8 are permissible, as against 10 out of 12 south of the border.

We know surprisingly little about what goes on in British jury rooms, but the research done on shadow juries in the 1970s suggests that juries are both conscientious and not unduly swayed by strong spirits.[12] Conversations with jurors tend to confirm that verdict, obviously impressionistically, although it does not leave one complacent about the role of prejudice and dubious deliberative procedures. The 1970s research found little evidence of perversity in the final decisions although in assault cases juries were found to be strongly influenced by the social background of defendants. There was, moreover, found to be considerable use of pooled experience, and impatience with legal definitions and professional prescriptions.

For our purposes the issue of serious fraud trials is of particular interest, since no decision put to a 'political' jury is likely to be as complex, or require as long to resolve, as a complex fraud case. In the 1980s the Roskill Committee recommended that complex fraud trials be

removed from juries, citing all the evidence (complexity, length of trials, strain on jurors, etc.) that comes naturally to mind. Yet the evidence taken by the committee gave little or no support to the recommendation and the government did not act on it. Instead, Roskill's recommendation that in technical cases more care be taken over presentation to juries – with schedules of evidence, glossaries of technical terms, improved visual aids, etc – has been taken up. Two courts in the Old Bailey are specially fitted with overhead projectors and other devices to enhance the presentation of cases to juries.

How might the experience of juries be applied to politics? One notable experiment has been conducted by the Jefferson Center for New Democratic Processes, a Minneapolis-based foundation promoting new forms of democratic participation. The Jefferson Center has held 14 juries on major policy issues since 1974 – each directed to one of 'America's Tough Choices' facing the political class. Its most recent jury, in October 1993, was on the Clinton administration's health care plans.

The health care jury consisted of 24 citizens, half men, chosen from a randomly-selected group by the Center. 14 of the participants were educated to high school level or less (ie. without higher education). The jury met for five days in Washington, with members' expenses, plus a stipend, paid by the Center for the duration. Its charge was to answer the dual question: "What is it we want from health care in America and is the Clinton plan the way to get it?" The jury deliberated for more than 60 hours, taking evidence from 23 witnesses including health experts, administration officials, and politicians. The process attracted extensive local and national media coverage. The proceedings were guided by three moderators and two advocates. At the end, 19 jurors voted for moderate health care reform, 4 for major reform and 1 for minor reform, with the Clinton plan rejected 19–5.

Leaving aside the conclusions, three features of the process are particularly striking:

○ the proportion of jurors saying that they understood most of the major points in the health care reform plan rose from 33 per cent to 88 per cent over the five days.

○ the appreciation of the trade-offs involved in any reform grew markedly over the five days. For instance, the proportion believing the Clinton plan would help control health costs rose from 50% to 75%; the proportion believing it would need new taxes rose to 100 per cent; while the proportion believing it would force many small businesses to close fell from 88 per cent to 67 per cent.

○ the 24 members of the jurors, apparently without exception, found the experience challenging but enjoyable, and claimed not to have been over-awed by it once it had started.

This example is one of many. Across North America there is now a substantial body of experience in innovative forms of voter participation, usually through selected samples. These range from the Oregon benchmarks to the Alaskan Television Town Meeting, from the highly structured use of particular techniques such as the Charette and Syncon to the New Zealand Televote. Some of the experiences, and some of the theories which inform them are set out elsewhere in this issue and in the lengthier pieces by Howard Leichter, Ted Becker and Christa Daryl Slaton.

In general these confirm that there is a willingness to participate, particularly if people are selected in relatively small groups, presented with a specific question and given a clear sense that their opinion matters. They also confirm that in many cases politicians benefit from involving the public in decisions on difficult priorities where politicians alone may lack the legitimacy to act.[13]

Electronic Democracy

Most of these experiments were carried out with little more than meetings and telephones. But there is one other crucial driver of change without which any discussion of a more responsible democracy would be incomplete; the advance of communications technology. For several decades now many writers and thinkers have viewed technology as a means for encouraging members of the public to become more engaged

in political decisions. They have pointed to the anachronism of much political decision-making. Certainly at first glance our current system seems peculiarly archaic and peculiarly resistant to rich and modulated communication from voters to politicians. On election days, modern citizens come home from offices and factories crammed full of computers, faxes and digital phone systems, to homes almost equally cluttered with telephones and videos, and on the way vote by scribbling a cross on pieces of paper which are then put into wooden boxes, to be counted by volunteers in a method that has scarcely changed since the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872. Parliament is equally locked into not only pre-electronic but even pre-industrial forms. More than a hundred years after the invention of the telephone, and a decade after most of the population became familiar with ATMs and PIN numbers, representatives still troop through the lobbies where tellers record their vote. Typically, it was only after decades of attrition that the British parliament accepted the intrusion of television cameras, more than 30 years after television had covered the coronation.

The more utopian advocates of a push-button democracy have argued that widespread access to high capacity telecommunications and databases will enable citizens not only to be much better informed but also to participate directly in decisions. Technology would permit the bypassing not only of parties and parliaments but also of the mass press and broadcasting, the manufacturers of consent in Walter Lippman's words. Optimists hope that active engagement, or ease of engagement, will directly translate into knowledge and responsibility.

Today much of the technology that could support more direct communication has become widely available: cable systems with some interactivity, cheap fibre optic connections and widespread use of computer and videoconferencing. But as technologies spread it has become harder to be a 'blue-skies' optimist. It is simply not clear yet whether new technologies of information and decision-making necessarily aid genuine understanding. It is just as easy to use them to reduce issues to soundbites and instinctive judgements and to further the divide between the information rich and the information poor, those connected to decision-making and those cut off.

These questions are not resolvable theoretically. Instead it is likely to take many years of experiment and learning to discover which methods of using technology entail which effects.[14] As in many fields the USA is the most obvious cauldron of argument and experiment, and the main source of tentative answers. There change is being driven forward by two main forces. The first is presidential politics which has long led in the political uses of television, the soundbite and the photo-opportunity. The link was taken a step forward in 1992 when Ross Perot expounded his theories of the electronic town hall to a receptive audience. If elected, he promised to foster on-line debates and direct electronic votes on major issues. The corrupt and distant Congress would be bypassed by a direct link between government and citizens. After the election Bill Clinton picked up the theme. His campaign had already made much use of the new media, with their ability to target audiences more precisely, whether rock fans watching MTV or over-60s on an afternoon chat show. Immediately after the election he went further, first with the 'economic summit' held in Little Rock, and then with the satellite-links used on the night of the inauguration to put on display a new vision of a multiethnic pluralist America. 1993 then saw a series of electronic town hall events designed to create a closer link between the President and the electroate (and to bypass a less sympathetic press corps). More recently the President has widely publicised his e-mail address, and ensured public provision of White House information on line and on CD-ROM. Many of the staff are intensive Internet communicators, and later this year Al Gore plans a Virtual Town Meeting to discuss the next phase of the national performance review with public sector employers.

Much of this has been little more than good public relations, even if Al Gore's vigour in promoting the case for fibre optic electronic super-highways has given a harder policy dimension to these ideas. The public has certainly been given no new voting rights. But presidential backing has legitimated the debate about electronic democracy in a way that nothing else could.

The second driver in the US has been local activism. With cable systems licensed by city and local governments, cable companies often

went out of their way to promise new forms of democratic participation. Since the mid-70s several small-scale experiments have drawn on these commitments to test the potential of electronic democracy. The biggest experiment has been the 'QUBE' cable system in Columbus, Ohio, on which local leaders debated issues while viewers periodically registered agreement or disagreement.

Others have used mixtures of different technologies. In the Televote Project in Hawaii, packets of information and argument were sent out prior to telephone votes which were in turn publicized in existing media, while the Honolulu Electronic town meetings combined television discussions with viewer calling in or casting votes. In Massachussets, Representative Edward Markey used Compuserve to create an 'Electure,' setting off discussions on the computer network of his position papers on the nuclear freeze in such a way that participants could interact with each other's contributions. California's assembly and senate allow citizens to access a database about current debates and register comments or questions.

There have also been some experiments elsewhere, notably in New Zealand, influenced by the ideas of Ted Becker (see his article in this issue). The aim was to involve the public in thinking about the different futures on offer for a New Zealand which could no longer depend on old markets. In one case 4 different public spending options were discussed and voted on. Interestingly, 48% of the participants in one vote opted for the 'design your own plan' option rather than any of those on offer.

These are still early days, and there are very real barriers in the way of a rapid move to new technologies. People still find it hard to master complex technologies; the millions of half understood VCRs (the houses where the time is always 0.00 hrs) are visible proof of this. Unless technologies are used very regularly (like phones, ATMs or microwaves) there is considerable resistance to learning how to use them. There is also a fundamental barrier of legitimacy. Until cable and other technologies reach near-100% penetration they will not be legitimate as voting mechanisms.

But even before electronic democracy becomes more than an interesting idea, three other sets of developments are creating the conditions

in which modest versions of it could thrive. One is the growing use of telephone polls in the press and television, and the spread of formal or informal referendums in local government: many of the experiments described in this issue have also made active use of the telephone. These already have an advisory rather than constitutional role and can be a useful adjunct to parliamentary debate. The second is the proliferation of media, whether using cable or digital terrestrial transmission, which is already fostering a very different kind of television. Instead of a world of mass channels, we are moving into an era where alongside dominant channels like the BBC or satellite film channels, there are much more specialised ones: diverse channels for health, education, for professional groups (like the BBC's Select) or corporations. The idea of microtelevision is already here, and it may not be long before groups like the BMA or the accountancy profession, both of which have had dedicated television services, attempt electronic referendums of their membership. These too will provide an infrastructure for a richer and more involved democracy. Television can also help with oversight of representatives. In the US channels like C-SPAN and Cal-SPAN (in California) are taking politics directly to voters homes while the cable channel in West Hartford in Connecticut has been particularly successful at using good editing to make local meetings exciting and watchable.

The third trend is the spread of technologies within the public sector. The best example is smart cards, which are acclimatising the population to the use of PIN numbers, and other electronic equivalents of voter registration. New York, for example, has used smart cards for food stamps (as well as other innovative technological applications such as automatic vehicle identification for tolls), while France has taken the lead in using them for health records. Canada's government is considering turning much of its social security over to smart cards, with the hope that this will release paper pushing civil servants to become trainers and counsellors.

Together these various experiments are changing people's sense of how they can talk to government and politicians. They are cultivating a more interrogative culture in which is it more normal to ask questions and be asked for opinions. They are also cultivating a more open

access to public information which now ranges all the way from dedicated channels and bulletin boards (like Pasadena's PARIS or the various services on France's Minitel), to touch screen kiosks (like Hawaii Access or the IBM-backed 24 hours City Hall project introduced after the LA City riots).

One of the most interesting experiments currently underway in the USA is Santa Monica's Public Electronic Network (PEN), an attempt to bring together two distinct goals – improving the quality of democratic decision-making and using technology as an adjunct of efficient public service delivery. Its initial role was to ease access to public information, Via home computers or terminals in public locations, citizens could access information, complete transactions, send email to officials or representatives and participate in computer conferences on issues of concern. Usage has been substantial though not massive (about 10% of households are registered), and most observers agree that there is a genuine levelling effect as people communicate on equal terms in ways that are easier than face to face communication.[15]

The various experiments like the now-discontinued QUBE and PEN remain only small scale simulations of democracy. For the foreseeable future their role will remain an advisory one: giving a more in-depth sense of public concerns and priorities to elected decision-makers and officials. But inevitably they are already raising deeper issues of principle.

One of the consistent themes of political argument during recent decades has been that elected members and governments have too much power and too little responsibility. Public choice theorists argue (despite considerable contrary evidence) that this inevitably fuels excessive spending and bureaucratic growth. Any downwards passage of power to electorates will be bound to raise the same issues in a new form. For example, will citizens continue to show signs of citizen infantilism – wanting better services and lower taxes or will greater responsibility foster deeper awareness of the real trade-offs? Will minority spending priorities be more at risk than under representative structures?

Experience on these questions is mixed. But the overall story of democracy is clear. Every extension of popular power has disproven the

prophets of doom and shown, instead, that electorates generally turn out to be remarkably sophisticated, fairly conservative, and unlikely to vote for outlandish options however attractive on paper.

In our view a richer, more involved democracy will also pay dividends. It will revitalise our political culture, improve the performance of public institutions and foster a more mature society in which citizens are treated as adults with capacities to make judgements. This is not to say that all the decisions made will be to the liking of any one group. Democracy is far too unpredictable for that.

We therefore propose three sets of reforms which could be initiated quickly.

Voter Juries

The first step we propose would be to establish a series of pilot schemes to test the value of more participative involvement through voter juries. These national juries – perhaps held once or twice a year – would examine issues of major public interest or controversy. Although funding might be provided by the state, the juries should be kept clear of the political parties and the formal constitutional process. Ideally, an institution commanding wide respect and a high public profile would oversee the juries in conjunction with a major non fee paying television and radio network prepared to produce a summary.

Each jury would consist of about 20 randomly selected adults. Each would last for one week with the aim of reaching verdicts on specific questions raised by the issues under consideration. Their verdicts would have no constitutional force, although we would expect them – and summaries of their discussions – to attract wide public attention. Four initial topics might be:

- Roads and transport policy (Should the government's road building programme continue as planned?)
- Childcare and nursery education (Should universal provision be made for the under-5s? How should it be paid for?)
- Community service (Is a voluntary national scheme desirable? If so, how should it be paid for?)

○ Privacy and the press (Should there be a law of privacy? If so, what safeguards should there be to protect freedom of expression?)

We would like to see local juries established on a similar basis, under the aegis of the local media and local non-partisan institutions. Issues put to the juries might include local planning issues, schooling choices or housing. They could collaborate closely with telecoms and cable companies to develop innovative uses of technology to test out their viability.

Voter Vetoes

The Voter Veto would introduce the advisory refendum into Britain for use in the specific case of legislation passed by parliament, or a decision made by a local council. At national level, if 1m voters – more than 2 per cent of the electorate – signed a petition for a referendum to be called, a poll would be held on the issue on the local election day in May following, and the legislation – or decision – would not be implemented pending the result. The outcome of the refendums would be advisory; parliament and councils would be free to refuse to modify their earlier decisions in the face of an adverse referendum majority if they so resolved, provided they formally considered the result before so doing.

Clearly numerous further provisions would need to accompany the Voter Veto, and we do not pretend to have covered every eventuality or problem. In some circumstances it would be necessary for parliament to have power to implement its legislation despite a pending referendum. An Electoral Commission of some kind would be essential to oversee the process, including the framing of acceptable questions. It might be necessary, particularly for a local planning or traffic decision, for referendums to be held on more than one day a year. The issue of votes on budgetary questions is particularly fraught. One idea which appeals to us is to require referendum questions calling for the annulment of tax increases to include a statement specifying the spending cuts which would be made in consequence.

As discussed earlier, we believe such 'voter vetoes' would both act as a check on hasty and unpopular decisions, while meeting the requirements for deliberative decision-taking set out earlier. Their verdicts would carry as much moral force as the turnout, result, and referendum campaign generates. In some cases that might be well-nigh overpowering; in others it might be negligible. Those who fear the first, and believe refendums should therefore not be held at all because parliamentarians would find their results irresistible, need to ask some fundamental questions about their democratic convictions.

Voter Feedback

Our third suggestion is to draw on the many experiences from around the world in using new electronic communications to engage citizens in decisions. Around Britain several million voters are now connected to cable systems which are spreading fast. Within a few years much higher capacity telecommunications links will also be widely available.

The key players for developing new ideas of electronic democracy are the cable operators. The dozens of companies, many of them US and Canadian based, now have the chance to implement experiments using their cable systems for in-depth discussion of major local issues. To succeed these will need the collaboration of local councils and other institutions such as universities, political parties and employers. What these can offer is not only participation but also marketing to generate a sense of engagement and excitement around a core process of televised discussions and direct viewer feedback.

At this stage there is neither the need nor the justification for giving electronic democracy any formal role within the constitution. Instead there is a happy congruence of interests between local communities wanting new ways to take part in deliberation, and cable companies needing to build legitimacy and commitment amongst potential customers.

Notes

1. The method most recently imported into the UK has been the deliberative opinion poll, pioneered by James Fishkin in his *Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform*, Yale University Press, 1991 and recently piloted by Channel Four and The Independent
2. Fishkin's May 9 1994 article in the Independent on the case for deliberative polling summarises his book
3. Anthony Heath, et al, *Understanding Political Change*, Pergamon, 1991, pp. 165–66
4. Cmnd 9797, vol 1, p. 63
5. See James Q Wilson, *The Moral Sense*, Free Press, 1993 for a fascinating account of the consistent nature of morality in modern life
6. See Aristotle's *Politics*, esp. Bks. 3&4
7. This and later references to Tocqueville draw especially on Larry Siedentop, *Tocqueville*, Oxford University Press, 1984, esp. Ch. 3
8. See J Meadowcroft & MW Taylor, *Liberalism and the Referendum in British Political Thought, in Twentieth Century British History* (1990)
9. Had local rates referendums been implemented in 1981, the poll tax would probably not have followed. See D Butler, A Adonis & T Travers, *Failure in British Government: The Politics of the Poll Tax* (forthcoming, Clarendon Press)
10. D Butler and A Ranney (eds), *Referendums*, forthcoming
11. Michael Zander – *Cases and Materials on the English Legal System*, pp. 468/9 – Weidenfeld, 6th ed (1992)
12. Sarah McCabe and Robert Purves, *The Shadow Jury at Work* (1974)
13. One particularly interesting recent example of the spread of the jury idea is the Science Museum's UK Consensus Conference on plant biotechnology, planned for November 1994, which will use a representative group of 16 people to deliberate a highly complex and contentious set of issues. Similar conferences have been held in Denmark and Holland on topics such as food irradiation and genetic manipulation of animals.

14. For one balanced discussion, see JB Abrahamson et al, *The Electronic Commonwealth* (Basic Books, New York, 1988)

15. The authors are grateful to background material from William Dutton of the Annenberg School for Communication and PICT in the UK

UK opinions

○ In 1968 a Gallup poll found that 69 per cent of voters supported referendums, in 1991 when MORI repeated the survey that figure had risen to 75 percent. A further question 'In principle, do you think it would be a good or a bad idea if the British people could force government to hold a referendum on a particular issue by raising a petition with signatures from, say, a million electors?' found 77% in favour.

○ Only 4 per cent of the public believe that the Conservative Party 'Keeps its promises' and only 6 percent that this is true of either the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrats.

○ In March 1994 an ICM sample of 1400 people found that when asked the question 'how well does the present system of government work?' 2 percent said 'extremely well', 26 percent said 'mainly well but could be improved', 39 percent that 'it could be improved a lot' and 30 percent that it needed 'a great deal of improvement'.

○ The same survey found that when asked 'Does voting every four to five years give voters enough power?'. 33 percent said yes and 60 percent said no. The sample also showed that 64% would make use of local referenda on specific issues'.

Repossessing the House: parliamentary audits and the Constituent's Charter

Martin Summers

Most of Britain's public sector institutions – the law, the BBC, the universities – have been 'opened' up over the last fifteen years to new criteria, environments, practices and ways of thinking. These shake-ups have inspired insiders and outsiders to ask fundamental questions about their nature, behaviour and purposes. They have prompted the institutions to look beyond their walls, to make use of insights and practices from else-where in the public and private sectors.

Yet one institution has consistently escaped scrutiny. Despite imposing reforms everywhere else, Parliament remains an institution run by precedent and tradition and resistant to outsiders. In the American phrase, it 'coasts' on its reputation, quietly confident that it has no need to change.

If Parliament does not start to ask fundamental questions of itself – about its role, functions and practices – it will go the way of many other institutions which are loosing the respect and confidence of the people they are meant to serve. Experience in other countries is salutary. In France, Italy, Japan, the United States and many other developed democracies, discontent was crystallised in political scandals which triggered a new 'anti-politics' – the politics of Ross Perot and the nationalistic and green movements throughout Western Europe. This

---

Martin Summers is a former Research Associate at the Institute of Economic Affairs and former researcher for a member of the cabinet.

'anti-politics' feeds upon a malaise about conventional party politics and established political institutions and a sense that politics has become the preserve of a highly professional, narrow and self-referential (and often self-serving) elite.

Parliament does not help to counter this perception. It has a closed culture that reinforces the outlook of a narrow professional political elite; increasingly occupied by career politicians who, usually from an early age, have planned their lives around winning a seat and attaining office. Its introverted culture is exacerbated by the absence of any systems of accountability found else-where in the public and private sectors.

Opening up Parliament to some of the techniques used to evaluate other organisations does not mean it has to be treated as a commercial or public sector service-provider. It is necessarily different. But the application of proper criteria of assessment, could at the very least help to re-invigorate parliamentary democracy. At best it would help it to do its job a great deal better than it does today.

The key to opening up Parliament is to make it more transparent and accountable so that it is easier to scrutinise what it does.

The British political system has changed enormously this century, yet there has been no attempt at a systematic review of how the House of Commons and, in particular, its members have coped with these changes. What, for example, is the impact of European legislation and the increasing complexity and volume of domestic legislation and policy?

In what follows I want to focus on three key issues: MPs jobs, their accountability and their preparation.

Defining the role of MPs

Job descriptions often help to prioritise and ration roles. But MPs have no detailed job descriptions. Occasionally lists of responsibilities and tasks have been drawn up but these do not resemble job descriptions in any other sense.[1] It would be more accurate to say that MPs do not have a job that can be described; instead they are faced with many different capacities in which they are required to, or can choose to act.

The All-Party Reform Group asked MPs what they considered to be the main job of the backbencher. Ten definitions[2] were suggested:

1. Local ombudsman
2. Spokesman for local interests
3. Contributor to the national debate
4. Specialist
5. Trainee minister
6. Party politician
7. Law-maker
8. Check on the executive
9. Constituency welfare officer
10. Educator, and explainer of government policies

One could also add several other definitions or capacities: for example, acting as a conduit of public opinion; as a representative of sectional interests; as a party functionary (as a whip or Parliamentary Private Secretary); and as a manager of a constituency office. Not all these possible roles are exclusive: for example, constituency casework may involve explaining government or local council policy. But to do them all well would require almost superhuman powers.

One result of this proliferation of jobs is stress. A recent report[3] suggested that MPs' increasing workloads are damaging their psychological and physical health and impairing their quality of work, and thus affecting the quality and effectiveness of what Parliament does as a whole. The author of the report, Ashley Weinberg, discovered that 80% of MPs work at least 55 hours during a typical working week (with 40% working at least 70 hours), and concluded that "it is possible to build a picture of a hard-working, under-resourced group who are the decision-making body of the country and as such deserve organisational changes which will better facilitate their work".

'Parliament has a closed culture that reinforces the outlook of a narrow professional political elite; increasingly occupied by career politicians who, usually from an early age, have planned their lives around winning a seat'

But those seeking to rationalise their workload are not helped by the lack of consensus as to how these roles should be prioritised. This is reflected in the responses to the All-Party Reform Group question-naire,[4] which asked MPs how they saw the main job of the back-bencher. Conservative MPs see their main roles as (in this order):

1. Contributing to national debate
2. Speaking for local interests
3. Checking the executive
4. Acting as an educator and explainer

Labour MPs have a different view. Their priorities are:

1. Speaking for local interests
2. Contributing to national debate
3. Acting as a constituency welfare officer
4. Participating in party politics

There are also considerable differences in priorities within the par-ties, which can partly be explained by differences in constituency workloads and by the balance of power in Parliament. Such differences only become a problem when the net effect is that some parliamentary activities do not receive the attention they deserve. The responses to the questionnaire show quite clearly that this is now a problem for Parliament's legislative function. Checking the executive receives third priority for Conservative MPs and is not a priority at all for Labour MPs (perhaps because they feel it is not within their power). MPs seem to give higher priority to their roles as representatives (of their party, con-stituency and sectional interests) than as members of a legislative body.

This problem of priorities has fuelled an 'expectations gap' between MPs' understanding of their job and the public's understanding of that job. A 1985 survey showed that the public's view of the most important parts of an MP's job[5] contrasts strikingly with a survey car-ried out at about the same time, which asked the same question of backbench MPs.

What the public thinks is the most important part of an MP's job:

1. Express voters' concerns about national issues   (69%)
2. Deal with constituents' personal problems   (53%)
3. Attend meetings in the constituency   (24%)

What MP's think are the most important parts of their job:

1. Contribute to national debate   (47%)
2. Act as a check on the executive   (45%)
3. Act as spokes person for local interests   (42%)

Part of the reason for this difference in perception is the lack of information that MPs and Parliament provide about their activities. Increasing the budget of Parliament's Public Information Office and the Education Unit might help to improve the situation. But it is hard not to conclude that there is a more fundamental cause: a deficiency in the ways in which MPs are accountable for their performance.

The Constituent's Charter

There is a way making MPs more accountable that draws upon a concept endorsed by all the parties: the Citizen's Charter. Charters have proved popular because they have opened up services, set out standards, given the public realistic expectations of services, and provided them with the information they need to complain and comment about the people and the organisations that are meant to serve them. As yet there is nothing parallel for MPs.

The Constituent's Charter would set out the full responsibilities of MPs and the ways in which constituents could hold them to account. They would share many of the features of other charters and would confer similar benefits. These would include the following:

○   charters would give MPs the opportunity to explain their role and aims to the public

- the public would be able to hold MPs to account on the basis of what they commit themselves to in their charters
- charters would provide a focus for detailed scrutiny and comparison of candidates
- charters would encourage candidates to address the tasks that might lie ahead of them
- the public would know more about the activities of Parliament and its members
- charters would give space for MPs to declare their interests

The best guide as to how Constituent's Charters should be drawn up is the National Consumer Council's Charter Checklist.[6] This suggests that Constituent's Charters should:

- be produced in consultation with users and potential users (i.e. the local public, the national party, the local constituency association, etc). The Charter should say who was involved in its production
- specify standards, targets and what users can reasonably expect
- offer means of redress to constituents who are dissatisfied with the service of their MP, and explain how this can be done
- give the name and contact point for someone who can deal with any grievances
- say how the performance of MPs is monitored and how the public can obtain the results
- give information about how the MP (or their office) can be contacted and at what times

Instead of a single charter for all MPs, this checklist could provide a model format, a list of questions and statements for candidates to respond to. This could be drawn up in response to suggestions from journalists, political consultants, constituency and business associations, etc. Constituent's Charters would serve as a useful voluntary means of
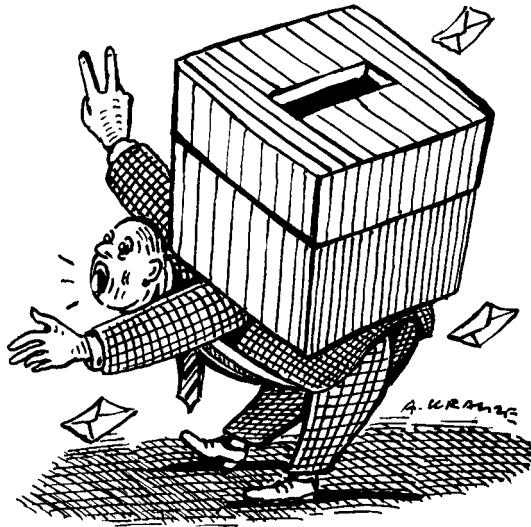
opening up Parliament as they should encourage MPs to be far my open about their activities and their role, primarily vis a vis their constituents. However, charters would not provide a comprehensive insight into the activities of MPs. For this there needs to be a more powerful and independent form of accountability.

Auditing MPs

It is widely assumed that regular elections are sufficient to ensure effectiveness and that the electoral competitive pressure guarantees accountability. This assumption is not easily sustainable when most MPs have safe seats and when most voters vote according to national issues rather than MPs' performance.

To remedy the deficit of information which results, Parliament should be subject to thorough financial and performance audits just as other organisations are. It would be hypocritical for MPs to support strict accountability for private and public organisations while refusing the public the right to be informed about how their representatives and their sovereign national democratic institution spend their money.

Annual audits of Parliament should look not just at expenditures of Parliament as a whole but of MPs as well, listing items of expenditure that are of public concern. The audit should extend further, to include other measures of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of MPs' activities. These might include the time and resources spent in the following areas: private business, select committees, constituency work, research, lobbying, etc.

The results of the audit should be published in the House of Commons Commission's annual report, which needs to be far more detailed and informative than it has been – and readily comprehensible to the average citizen. A brief summary of the report and profiles of individual MPs should be made available to the public on request.

An audit of Parliament would reveal how much time is spent by MPs in their capacity as members of a legislature and in scrutinising and developing policy and legislation, in comparison with their time spent on constituency casework, for example. As it is, one can only guess the extent to which time is spent on one activity rather than another. This matters because the apportioning of time provides a better indication of MPs priorities in their day to day lives than what they may list in response to questionnaires and interviews.

Many MPs would no doubt object to their performance being quantified and placed in what they may consider to be unnecessary and potentially misleading tables. They would probably object to spending time reporting on their activities each week. MPs would also argue that the public, including journalists, do not really understand how Parliament works and so they would not know how to use the audit information properly.

It is true that the public knows little about Parliament, but unless this state of affairs is thought to be desirable, it makes little sense to argue that the public should not know more just because they currently do not know enough. Moreover the same objections have been raised with regard to league tables for schools, hospitals and local authorities. Most miss the point. League tables and performance indicators can never tell the whole story of the quality and efficiency of people or organisations, and one should not pretend that they can. The

main case for league tables is that they can provide a focus for debate about what we do or should value in a school, in a hospital or in an MP.

Similarly, some MPs may object to league tables showing the time they spend on constituency casework on the grounds that like cannot be compared with like, and in particular that inner city constituencies generate more casework than rural ones. This is true, but, as in the case of schools, is really an argument for a fairer distribution of resources rather than being an argument for avoiding disclosure of information.

In any event, the whole political world would benefit from greater transparency. Surveys show that constituents know little about Parliament or the activities of their MPs.[7] A parliamentary audit would give constituents details of what MPs actually do, and would encourage debate and scrutiny of these activities. Audits could be compared with the commitments made by MPs in their charters, thus giving the public the opportunity to hold MPs to account and explain their actions.

Comparative data would also make it possible to assess the extent to which better time management, facilities or staff could improve the performance of individual MPs. As it is, most proposals for organisational change – primarily concerning hours and resources – are made without any reference to the specific improvements that they might make to the management of an MP's workload. Breaking down the various tasks that MPs actually do would help link requests for better resources to specific potential gains.

Training MPs

Audits and charters would reveal the extent to which MPs have to cope with an increasingly heavy workload and respond to a great variety of demands on their time, skills and knowledge. Although these demands are recognised to be great, it is surprising that MPs have no formal preparation or training, or that candidates are not assessed on their aptitude for dealing with many of their most important tasks, particularly of a legislative nature. In addition, at no time are their skills and knowledge formally tested, either during the selection process or when they are in office.

The need for training and professional development is becoming more and more important as the volume and complexity of work for MPs increases, particularly in the light of the growing impact of the European Community on British legislation. Many lobbyists and civil servants will testify that most MPs have a poor grasp of Parliamentary procedure and little knowledge or understanding of legislation and policy. This makes it very difficult for Parliament to work as an effective scrutineer of legislation, which was demonstrated by the confusion over the Bill to ratify the Maastricht Treaty; partly the result of MPs either not having read or understood the Treaty itself. The starting point for developing a training programme for MPs would have to be an analysis of what they currently do and the skills and knowledge they need in order to undertake each task effectively.

The political parties' training and assessment procedures for aspiring MPs cannot be relied upon to provide future MPs with the skills and knowledge that they would need. The procedures used at local and national levels are primarily concerned with selecting candidates with potential as party and constituency politicians, and screening out 'unsafe' aspiring MPs (i.e. those whose past, connections or views may embarrass the constituency or national party). Prospective candidates' potential and experience as effective scrutineers of legislation and policy is rarely taken into account, and the parties provide no training for candidates once they become MPs.

Labour's selection procedures have been criticised,[8] on the grounds that there is a poor fit between the criteria used to select candidates and the demands that are actually made of MPs. This is also true of other parties' selection procedures. Conservative selection procedures are better organised and more thorough (involving a residential weekend for the assessment of successful candidates), but these concentrate on candidates' potential as party and constituency politicians. Little attention is paid to their ability to grapple with complex issues and think strategically for the long term.

Parliament cannot insist that parties take legislative and policy-related abilities into account when selecting candidates, but it should do more to ensure that MPs are better equipped to work in this capacity

once elected. The public should also know more about the individual parties' selection procedures and their parliamentary candidates.

Most new MPs have proficient communication skills and an ability to get on with local and national politicians; it is unlikely that they would have reached the candidates' list if they did not. Most MPs do not need to be trained in public relations; their experience in party politics has given them a good grounding in that side of the job. What many new MPs lack is any knowledge of parliamentary procedures or ability to understand legislation (because most of them lack the legal skills to do so). They also lack understanding of Parliament's place in the political system, its relations with the European Community and Whitehall.

This unpreparedness for parliamentary work makes it difficult for new MPs to settle in quickly. MPs' accounts of their experiences on entering the House tend to emphasise how unprepared and ignorant they were of the tasks that awaited them. Lack of preparation is compounded by the daunting nature of the House, with its bewildering internal geography and arcane procedures. The newcomer faces a very long and steep learning curve. Progress along this curve is dependent on help from others; primarily the MP's whip, secretary or research assistant, or other people in the office.

This is an unreliable way of coming to terms with any organisation, particularly one as complex as Parliament, because it relies on a handful of individuals, none of whom will have had any formal training and who are not likely to have sufficiently grasped Parliamentary procedure and legislation, even after several years service.

The solutions to these problems are straightforward. All new MPs should be required to attend an induction course that would acquaint them with the procedures of the House, Parliament's powers and its position in the political system. This could be on similar lines to the Congressional School in the United States, which all new Congressional representatives have to attend on election. There would be a legitimate fear that a Parliamentary school would have an inherent bias towards the status quo, but this would be preferable to the current situation whereby MPs have no schooling whatsoever in the ways of Parliament.

MPs should also have training for their welfare officer functions. They require counselling skills and up to date knowledge of social security regulations and other welfare matters. It is expected that people who serve the public in housing benefit offices, in Citizen's Advice Bureaus, and in hospitals, should be acquainted with the latest developments in their sectors; so should MPs. Constituency casework and surgeries are obligations for MPs so they should be required to receive training for them.

Another benefit of training programmes would be the exchange of ideas about different approaches to the work. The absence of any monitoring means that MPs tend only to be aware of the working methods of the small numbers of MP whom they work or socialise with.

Charters, audits and formal training for MPs would help 'reveal' Parliament by bringing the public gaze to bear on the actual activities of MPs. There are many more radical ways of changing the culture and outlook of Parliament by, for example, time-limiting the tenure of MPs and allowing the appointment of ministers who are not members of either House. But the case for such measures will not find a sympathetic audience until the nature and extent of Parliament's problems are known. Charters and audits will help do this.

Time limiting MP'S length of service

Democracy is not a threat to the political careers of the 500 or so MPs who have a safe seat. Over three quarters of the membership of the Commons can be confident that, once elected, they will be able to occupy their seat until they choose to leave it. This means that there are very few opportunities for aspiring politicians to gain a seat. Moreover, it encourages the professionalisation of politics – making it possible to view membership of the Commons as a long term career. This almost guarantees that politics becomes the preserve of a tiny minority that orients their lives – often from a very early age – around politics and the attainment of office; thus creating a political class that has little in common with the people it is supposed to represent.

The danger of this has been most apparent in the USA and Italy where the reign of long-established career politicians has gone hand-in-hand with corruption and self-aggrandisement. One radical solution to the professionalisation of politics is term limits-statutory or voluntary party limits on the length of time that any politician can stay in the post. This has been particularly popular in the United States, where public opinion polls show a 75–85% approval for term limits and where voters in 15 states have restricted their congressmen to a maximum of two or three terms in Washington. The issue has demonstrated that millions of ordinary people – across the political spectrum – recognise that constraints on the democratic process may well make for a more open, dynamic and representative democracy.

Restricting MPs to perhaps two parliamentary terms would create many more opportunities for people – not just career politicians – to participate in national politics and it would guarantee a much larger and more regular turnover of MPs, mitigating the professionalisation of politics and reducing time-serving and complacency. It would require a fundamental review of the parliamentary system, but the issue would at least prompt a close examination of the consequences of what is for many job-for-life politics.

Notes

1. See Review of *Parliamentary Pay and Allowances,* Review Body on Top Salaries – Report No. 20, Cmnd. 8881-11, HMSO, 1983. The purpose of the MP's job was summarised thus: 'Represent, defend and promote national interests; and further the needs and interests of constituents, reconciling them with national interests so far as possible'. The main problem with the report is that it does not tackle any tensions between constituency, party and Parliamentary work.
2. Cited in Radice, Vallance and Williams, *Member of Parliament*, Methuen, 1991, p. 130.
3. See Ashley Weinberg, 'Westminster, constituency, family – are members facing unreasonable demands?' *The House Magazine*, 21 June 1993.
4. Cited in Radice, Vallance and Williams, op cit, pp. 130–131.
5. See John Garrett, Westminster: does Parliament work?, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1992, pp. 22–23.
6. *Charter Checklist: A Consumer's Checklist for Citizen's Charter documents*, National Consumer Council, 1993.
7. See Robert M. Worcester, 'The Public's View of Parliament', *House Magazine,* 3 May 1985.
8. See Welfare and de Lyon, Prime Candidates, Fabian Review, Vol. 4 No. 5 1993.

Lean democracy and the leadership vacuum

Charles Leadbeater* and Geoff Mulgan†

Ever since the end of the 1980s the political world has been going through a period of profound transition. An era of strong leadership – of Reagan, Thatcher and Gorbachev – which was based on a combination of robust world growth and belief in the power of the market, has given way to an altogether more pragmatic, confused and shifting world in which media magnates, rabid nationalists and reformed communists vie for power. In most of the industrialised world the privileged position of the political class has fallen under intense and sustained scrutiny. Global recession has exposed national political leaders' economic importence and undermined support for the most ambitious European political projects – German unification and European integration. Meanwhile the speed and scale of the changes that the end of the Cold War ushered in – the break-up of the Soviet Union, the rise of nationalism, the war in Yugoslavia – have left our leaders looking frail and indecisive.

But the malaise has much deeper roots. It reflects a crisis in the relationship between the political and non-political parts of society which has led many to question the very role of politics and political institutions in providing leadership for society.

*Geoff Mulgan is Director of Demos.
†Charles Leadbeater is a leaderwriter for the Financial Times.

From the 18th century, and perhaps even earlier, society regarded politics as essential to the progressive enactment of reforms and the widening of rights. Representative democracy, based on parties, elections and parliaments, provided the chief means of legitimising the expanding power of the state and reconciling conflicting social interests.

Now, as in previous eras of crisis such as the 1930s, that crucial relationship of trust between the non-political and the political worlds is breaking down. Our political leaders are diminished figures. Clinton, Mitterand and Major pale in comparison with Roosevelt, Churchill and de Gaulle. After the war, and again in the 1960s, politics in all liberal democracies delivered ambitious programmes of economic reconstruction and social reform. Now no-one expects programmes of such sweeping ambition from todays politicians.

But it is not just leaders who are in trouble. All the links in the chain linking politics to everyday life are breaking down. Membership of political parties is continuing to fall. The media is often more effective in mobilising public opinion over issues as diverse as the civil war in Bosnia and the health service. Independent think tanks and researchers formulate more creative new policies than parties or the civil service. In the era of the Internet, telephone phone-ins, television debates and virtual debating halls, the 19th century procedures of parliament and council chamber have become anachronistic.

Armed only with these 19th century methods, politicians survey societies that are no longer organised into the social blocs upon which their parties were built but which are instead awash with colliding social molecules that combine, split, recombine, fragment and divide, multiply and accelerate. These new societies take their cue from the great social and economic particle accelerators of our times: the multimedia infotainment industries and international economic competition.

The consequence is that the relationship between the political and the non-political worlds has become tenuous and tentative. Most people can imagine forming a lasting relationship with the place they live in, with their family, lovers and friends, with the company they work for or even products they regularly consume. But few people can now imagine forming an engaged, active and fruitful relationship with a

system of political power or with an individual leader. Democratic politics is meant to be the hallmark of our societies. Instead it has become tainted and distrusted.

Despite its historic victory over communism liberal democracy cannot claim to have been the most dynamic political system in the last two decades. It now faces extensive competition from political models which assign democratic politics a very different role within society.

Many east Asian enterprise states measure their success in terms of economic growth and social discipline. In these states politics aims not to reform society, but to create the conditions for economic growth. It is no grander than a service industry, channelling money from bureaucracies to constituencies. People in these societies see themselves not as the bearers of rights and entitlements, but as buyers and sellers in the market, who owe loyalty to their families and companies, churches and castes, nations and ethnic groups, rather than to the principles of rational, liberal democratic politics.

In Islamic and fundamentalist states, religion, not politics, is the source of law and social discipline. These states legitimate their actions in part through formal democratic procedures, but also through their adherence to religious dictates. In nationalist states, territory, history and enemies provide the binding purpose.

To revive politics and to restore its claim to offer us strong leadership we need at least two far reaching changes which this article explores.

First, the political system needs root and branch reform. The time has come to radically amend our outdated system of representative democracy. We propose a shift towards direct democracy, offering citizens a multiplicity of channels to influence political decision making. We call this new approach 'Lean Democracy'.

'But the malaise has much deeper roots. It reflects a crisis in the relationship between the political and non-political parts of society which has led many to question the very role of politics and political institutions in providing leadership for society'

Second, we need new leaders, with new skills, ideas, backgrounds and values to restore trust in politics. Everywhere the established and often discredited political class are being challenged by outsiders, from business, culture and the regions. We explore the causes of the leadership deficit and outline the new types of leader who are likely to emerge in response to the crisis of politics.

Lean democracy

The weaknesses of the current political system are endemic and structural. Its main problems are:

Low Involvement. Citizens are rarely directly engaged in the political process. They vote in elections only occasionally. They have little direct contact with politicians who sometimes seem to live in an arcane and impenetrable world.

Limited Choices. Electors are offered limited choices between catchall policy programmes, which are often vague and confusing, and which parties often abandon in any case once in power. As consumers, we enjoy a widening array of choice and more sophisticated product marketing. As electors, we suffer from choice of policies by political parties, which maintain their monopoly over the policy market.

Poor Delivery. Politics is widely seen as ineffective. Even when politicians make promises, they rarely carry them out.

These failings in the political system stem ultimately from its heart: the fundamental concept of representation – the link between governors and governed. We elect representatives to whom we transfer our political power, and who govern on our behalf. Yet concentrating political power in the hands of political representatives has brought about many of the political system's problems. This system concentrates power in the hands of the political class' very top echelons which then attempts to undertake a bewildering array of tasks on society's behalf. But they are often ill-prepared to carry out these tasks, and do so with little direct scrutiny. The representatives' chamber, parliament, provides a poor forum for debate and an even poorer channel for promoting new ideas.
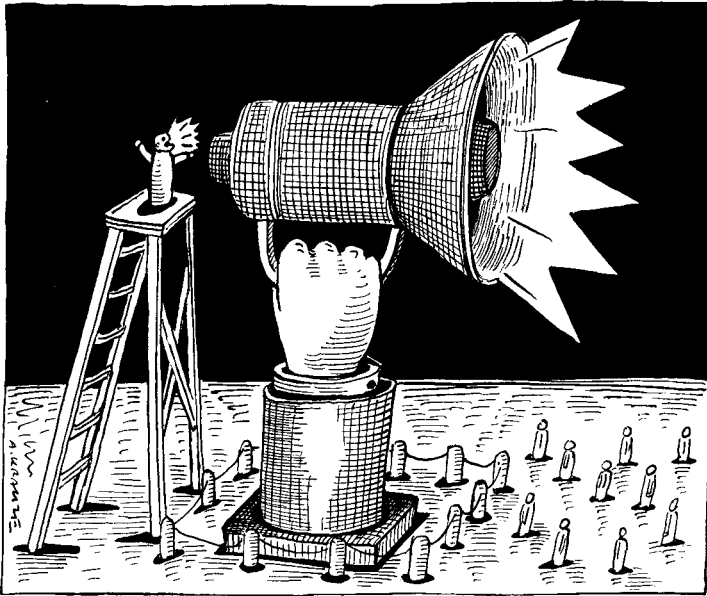
The time has come to amend – radically – this notion of representative democracy, in which too much rests upon a single political relationship.

The Lean Organisation

We draw the principles of lean democracy from ideas the private sector developed to reform and revitalise uncompetitive companies. The best companies now pride themselves upon their lean production techniques. The political system should follow their lead.

We have broken the characteristics of a lean organisation into five main headings (see chart).

1. Focus: Lean organisations focus clearly upon their core tasks, their core technologies and those products critical to their competitive position. They home in on what they do most profitably and most productively. As a result, they can set clear goals and assign responsibility for these; they try to eliminate confusion, overlap and duplication.

2. Culture: Lean organisations are direct. They respond swiftly by removing as many unnecessary layers of white-collar bureaucracy – which stand between customers, the production line and suppliers – as possible. They also take a direct approach to pay and performance. If they can assign responsibility for measurable tasks, then they can also measure employee performance. They link reward and promotion to performance, rather than to time serving: people have to earn their way.

Lean organisations have an unremitting outward focus. Open and porous, they take their lead from their customers. They recognise their dependence upon others – sub-contractors, suppliers, partners – for services and ideas outside areas they concentrate on. Particularly in high technology fields, lean companies recognise that by entering into cooperative alliances with other companies can they master increasingly complex technologies.

3. Structure: Lean companies must constantly refashion themselves to meet shifting consumer demands and stay abreast of changing technologies. They tend to have little hierarchy and to rely on teams which draw together people from a wide variety of disciplines. They are characterised by flexibility and team work.

4. Skills: Lean organisations are highly skilled. While the organisation itself focuses upon core-skills, the people within it need to have multiple skills. The company constantly tests, develops and renews its skills base.

5. Output: Lean organisations constantly strengthen their commercial legitimacy and ensure their continued survival by making high-quality products right the first time. They waste little time, energy, skills and materials. They move fast and innovate, constantly producing new ideas which they implement swiftly. They develop strong customer loyalty and attract high quality people to work for them.

These five characteristics shed new light on why the political system – which shares few traits with the lean organisation – is failing.

The political system perpetually shifts its focus; it frequently has blurred vision. While the lean organisation focuses on its top priorities, the political system usually focuses on the immediate and the pressing. The political system attempts to deal with anything and everything

The Lean Organisation		The Current Political System
Clear Concentrate on core tasks Only do what is most Profitable Clear responsibility for tasks	Focus	Blurred Do anything and everything Concentration fleeting Myriad tasks Responsibilities unclear
Direct (Just In Time) Few layers Open/porous External: outward looking Rewards for performance Earn your way	Culture	Indirect (just get by) Many layers Closed/secretive Internal: inward looking Rewards for time serving Arrogance
Constant change flexible Flat Team based	Structure	Slow moving Hierarchical Adversarial
High Constantly renewed People: multi-skilled Organisations: core skilled	Skills	Low On the job training only People: semi-skilled Organisation: sprawling
High quality Low waste Time efficient Fast moving/innovative Customer loyalty: high Attracts high quality staff Reproduces basis for its legitimacy	Output	Low quality High waste Time consuming Slow moving Unimaginative Customer disillusion Poor attraction of skilled staff Legitimacy declining

from regulating family life to framing the world trading system. No sensible private sector organisation would attempt to undertake such a sweeping array of tasks. And because the political system does so, it is often unclear where responsibility for its work lies – somewhere between several ministerial levels and the civil service.

The political system has a fundamentally indirect culture. Many layers of political and civil service bureaucracy separate the customers (citizens) from the producers (powerholders). Whereas lean factories

work to just in time production schedules – producing only when an order comes in and in just the right quantities – the political system works to a just-get-by schedule, producing decisions only when absolutely forced to do so. It has a closed, secretive culture. Politicians mostly focus upon one another, in petty party squabbles, often internal. People often get promoted by serving their time, plotting and buying votes and support – rather than by earning advance through good performance. The best lean companies have a service culture; politics, especially at Westminster has one of isolationist arrogance.

Procedures and practices inherited from the 19th century. Lean organisations are flat and team based; politics is hierarchical and adversarial, with layer after layer of acutely status conscious ministers and private secretaries facing off against layer after layer of opposition spokesmen. Politics is closed and secretive. It is hard to find out who makes decisions and how. It is closed to ideas and input from outside bodies.

There is no formal training for what has become a profession : most politicians are professional politicians from the start. Politicians make decisions affecting every aspect of our lives and yet most have only limited experience of working outside politics. They spend most of their lives promoting their careers in a culture which most ordinary people find baffling and boring. Politicians are at best semiskilled.

It should not be surprising then that the output of the political system is often of low quality with high levels of waste (both of time, in pointless parliamentary debates and of people, particularly the backbench voting folder). The political world is slow moving and unimaginative in adopting new methods to debate issues, produce ideas or involve electors. As a result it is suffering from mounting consumer (citizen) disillusion and finds it difficult to attract skilled people. The conclusion is that whereas the best lean organisations reproduce the basis for their survival, the political system's legitimacy and standing is in decline.

Representation: The Core Problem

Many of the shortcomings of the political system stem from the crucial role assigned to political representatives, who stand for the political

power of the people. When there are national issues to decide – should Maastricht be ratified, should we send more troops to Bosnia – the people do not have a vote. The representatives to whom people then pass their power are meant to be so skilled, and so far seeing, that they can monitor all aspects of the state's activities. In between elections mechanisms for holding representatives accountable are minimal. The tabloid press' inquiries into the private lives of leading politicians are the most effective method of forcing a change of personnel.

As the bonds of identification between politicians and constituents break down, defenders of the status quo have become ever more strident in defending arrangements whereby electors vote periodically to elect representatives to whom they devolve virtually all their formal political powers. They invoke several objections to reform, none of which now stands up.

Objection: It would be cumbersome and time-consuming for voters to be given votes more frequently.

Response: This is no longer tenable. Manufacturers and retailers operating just-in-time production systems have developed hugely sophisticated computer systems to track consumer preferences in real time and translate them into production. The political system captures preferences occasionally; the private sector has learned to track them constantly. If the political system were to adopt the technology of the private sector it would be in a position to track voter preferences far more successfully. If it is concerned to ensure that citizens choices are based on consideration and knowledge, there are plenty of methods for achieving this (many of which are described in other articles in this issue).

When people were choosing between all embracing ideologies, presented by parties, periodic elections might (conceivably) have exhausted the real choices open to people. But increasingly as the old ideologies fade in relevance, what people want are sensible ideas for dealing with troubling issues. There is no reason why these debates, on specific issues, should not be had out more frequently, openly and directly.

Objection: We vote for parties vying to take power as a government or a council. It would be extremely destabilising for a government to face repeated votes.

Response: If we were allowed to vote on issues as well as for parties, then the destabilising impact of more frequent voting could be much reduced, since parties could stay in power in power even if voter preferences on particular issues changed.

Objection: Representatives are more skilled, knowledgeable and specialised in handling complex policy decisions. That is why voters hand over political power to them.

Response: This has some, but only some, merit. While many MPs are experts in some fields of policy, few are generalists and most of the policy expertise on complex issues rests either in the civil service, academia, think-tanks or the private sector. We need to find a much better mix of democracy and expert knowledge.

Objection: Policy debates in a chamber of representatives are the best combination of democracy and decision making.

Response: The explosion of media services in the past three decades means that parliamentary and council chambers are barely more influential than virtual halls of debate in television and radio studios and phone in discussions. These will soon be joined by other forms of electronic debate. The idea that a chamber of representatives is the best democratic method for debating policy comes from the days when the only way people could communicate en masse was in mass meetings. In the era of video conferencing, Internet e-mail debates and telephone phone-ins, the single democratic chamber is increasingly arcane and antiquated.

Representation is the key concept of modern democracy, the link between the people and the exercise of power. Faith in politics is in decline because faith in this central concept is waning. Politics cannot be revitalised unless this link can be brought back to life.

The model of lean democracy offers a means to revitalise the political system by offering a combination of more effective decision making, more imaginative policy choices and deepening democratic involvement. Lean democracy has two central components.

First, a new division of labour of leadership, based on breaking down the tasks of the political system into its component parts.

Second, matching this new division of labour with new channels of democratic accountability.

The New Division of Labour

Political systems will have to develop more effective methods to achieve their core tasks : to make effective public policy decisions while being democratically accountable. This can only be achieved if the main tasks of political leadership are distinguished, broken down, analysed and then assigned to the appropriate agency. Some of those steps involve the creation of a written constitution, and a much more law-based polity with clearly defined rights. But these are necessary rather than sufficient conditions. Several elements of the new leadership division of labour can already by discerned.

- Long term issues, particularly of economic management, are not best dealt with by politicians with very short time interests, dominated by the demands of the electoral cycle. That is why the job of monetary policy making is best delegated to an independent central bank, staffed by central bankers charged, recruited and trained specifically with that task in mind, but accountable to a democratically elected parliament. An independent central bank, charged with specific tasks could be more directly accountable to its various constituencies through review, inquiries and committee meetings, and regular policy statements from senior officials.

- Protection of consumer interests across large swathes of the economy is best looked after by independent regulators, appointed by government. That allows a proper separation of responsibilities and avoids conflicts of interest which occurred when the government was simultaneously owner, shareholder and regulator of an industry. However democratic procedures to hold the regulators accountable are themselves poorly developed. Much more imaginative arrangements for consumer boards, indicative referendums and consultative exercises should be introduced.

'Politicians should learn from the very best practices in the corporate sector. The aim should be to focus on a narrower, more manageable set of tasks, where the standards of performance are clearer and the chances of achievement are higher'

○ Running large parts of the service sector state, including everything from welfare benefit agencies to vehicle licence dispensing, is best devolved to managers operating under quasi-private sector principles. Performance measures may be set and reviewed by the government, but the job of management is that of the managers. This raises troubling issues of how these managers of privatised or independent agencies should be held democratically accountable. Ideally there should be clear powers of dismissal available to those dependent on their services.

○ Policy ideas increasingly do not come from within the civil service or from party machines. Their work therefore needs to be complemented by greater use of ad hoc commissions and task forces, devices which are often used in companies, frequently used in the US but used rarely in the UK. The political system needs to mimic the best companies which set up teams combining a wide variety of skills and often involving joint-ventures with competitors, to tackle specific projects like the development of a new product (a new policy on education, Europe, Northern Ireland). The best companies learn to draw upon a wide range of ideas and talents within and outside their borders. The political class should learn to do the same, so that before long parties will deliberately set up joint policy task forces where there is a clear overlap of principle or interest.

○ Moral and personal issues are best dealt with outside the often ill-informed confines of the party political debating system. That system is too inward looking, too concerned

with point scoring to cope with the subtleties and difficulties
of moral issues. Instead special commissions, open debates
and the judicial system are far better methods to decide
these issues.

○ Parliaments need to focus their attention on central issues,
and subcontract specialist decision-making to
subcommittees. One measure of the current problem is the
overloading of parliament. Guillotines are increasingly used
to force through business. But this is just one symptom of the
real problem: that single, overarching and overloaded
national institution has become a decision-making
bottleneck, and an ill-equipped one at that.

This emerging division of labour casts the formal party political
system in a different role. Parliament should be the equivalent of a
slimline holding company or head office. Its job is to regulate the sub-
sidiaries to which it delegates operational tasks. The job of the centre is
to recruit the right people to run the subsidiaries, to set them the right
targets, measure and reward their performance and restructure rela-
tions if necessary. Elements of the traditional job of politicians have
been parcelled out to central bankers, regulators, managers and policy
specialists. All of these jobs now have political elements, and so there
should also be accompanying channels of democratic accountability
tailored to these specific tasks.

If something like this division of labour emerges to cope with the
array and complexity of tasks confronting the political system what is
left of the role of politician?

Once again politicians should learn from the very best practices in
the corporate sector. The aim should be to focus on a narrower, more
manageable set of tasks, where the standards of performance are
clearer and the chances of achievement are higher. The role of politi-
cian will include:

○ Service provider and message carrier for constituents,
unlocking the bureaucracy and other centres of power for

them. The politician's basic skill, especially among back
benchers, is as a lobbyist on behalf of constituents,
knowing how to exert pressure upon local, central
and European bureaucracies to win concessions and
resources.

○ Brokers of contests of power between the subsidiary centres
of power. The legislative process should determine the proper
limits within which other centres of power – such as utility
regulators and central banks – should operate.

○ Overseer of executive power where the other mechanisms of
accountability and transparency break down, using extended
select committees as specialised tools to this end.

These are some of the tasks of the middle-level national politicians.
But there is still a job for people at the apex of politics. Governments
need steering, the setting of priorities, the motivation of those around.
They need people who, like Jack Welch at General Electric, only focus
upon key strategic tasks and do not attempt to second-guess middle
management. But as governments they also have a wider role of setting
a framework of values and action for other non-governmental agencies.
This role has several ingredients:

○ An ability to communicate is more important than an ability
to come up with ideas. Good leaders need to make sure good
ideas are generated and to be able to choose between them;
they do not need to come up with them.

○ The leader should be able to identify and lay out the key
issues which face the electorate and the marginal ones. She or
he should help set priorities, the alternatives available and
articulate the choices which should be made. To lead is to
choose and decide on difficult issues.

○ The leader should be able to articulate the overall framework
and goals for the society and for the polity, not as a
monopolist of power but as one element, the most visible
one, working in harness with many different types of power.

○ The leader in a world of pooled sovereignty and powerful transnational bodies – like the EU, GATT, IMF, World Bank, OECD, all with powers of intervention in national polities – must be able to work in teams, sharing knowledge and power in order to achieve results. For modern western countries the joint venture is now the norm, whether in war or health, and relatively little can be achieved by the application of force or unilateralism.

○ Perhaps the key task of leadership is to recognise its limits and the need to draw on a wide range of other resources to get a job done. Good political leaders will create effective teams of people – politicians, civil servants, regulators, policy creators – with the right mix of skills to develop innovative solutions to difficult issues.

Some would argue for a very minimal notion of leadership. For example, that governments can do little more than establish a sound macroeconomic or microeconomic framework. There is some truth to this view. But it ignores what is always likely to remain one of the key tasks of leadership: the capacity to respond to shocks, whether these come from trade conflicts, virulent diseases or war, and the capacity to think and act strategically.

New Democratic Channels

The division of labour outlined above is the key, not just to making the political system more effective, but also to making it more democratic and open. Once it is clearer which bodies and agencies have responsibility for which tasks, then it should be easier to tailor democratic proceducers to hold them accountable. Lean democracy means shifting to a much more task-based model of governance, with powerholders held specifically accountable for how they accomplish various tasks.

The central thrust is not to reform voting arrangements for parliament, although we support the introduction of proportional representation at this stage in British politics as a necessary step towards a

Representative Democracy		Lean Democracy
Exercised rarely Single channel: voting	Democratic Accountability	Exercised often Many channels
Political timetable set	When?	According to need 'Just-in time' Decision making
Vague 'catch-all party' programmes	On what?	Specific policy proposals powerholder performance as well as party programmes
Representatives	For?	Directly for powerholders charged with specific tasks
Vast sweeps of the state	With power over?	Specific arms of the state
Inside politics: few	With ideas from?	Range of external and Internal sources: many
Hardly at all Tabloid press Inner party cliques	How held to account?	Negative votes Fixed terms Recalls

more responsive and creative politics (recognising that in 30 years time we may need to move to a quite different system for the same reasons). Nor is it a shift towards more local and regional democracy, although we support that as well. Our central argument is that the concept of representation, which stands at the heart of our democratic arrangements, has become outmoded. We now need new mechanisms.

First, our representative bodies are remarkably unrepresentative of society. This is true in terms of gender, ethnicity, class and attitude. British institutions are particularly bad by international standards. For all the reasons we have cited this is also a more general feature of political culture. The demise of faith in representation takes us back to an older model of democracy where by decisions are left to bodies deliberately designed to reflect the public: in ancient Athens bodies chosen by lot. The same principle is at the heart of our legal system in the right

to trial by jury. Now we are seeing similar ideas spreading into democracy: the citizen jury; the user jury for overseeing services like the NHS; the deliberative poll; the use of opinion polls as a guide to policy. So far all are advisory (like referendums in the UK), and none have been given a power over law.

Second we need to add direct mechanisms to representative democracy. All over the west referendums have spread, particularly to resolve problems where parliaments lack legitimacy. Switzerland, Italy, Ireland and many US states use referenda on issues ranging from changes to constitutions, to issues of public morality. In the UK local authorities have held dozens of consultative referendums. On European issues, for instance, although believers in the old politics assert with growing desperation the authority of parliament, there is consistent evidence that the public strongly supports a wider use of referendums.

Third we need to replace the monopoly of politics around national institutions with new mechanisms of direct control over agencies. At present the plethora of quangos are not held accountable at all. In time there will surely be a spread of direct methods for user groups to determine their make-up and policies. We now have the technology to allow much greater interactive involvement in policy making. Retailers have the technology to record thousands of real time changes in people's preferences. There is no reason why this technology should not be applied to politics: a just-in-time democracy. The democratic possibilities of combining the television, personal computer and information superhighway have hardly been explored. Television polling on specific issues such as tax increases and foreign policy issues could be easily organised, subject to procedures which ensure full consideration of the issues involved.

Fourth, we need to develop the concept of negative democracy. In many fields citizens lack the time or information to make detailed decisions, particularly on issues such as who should run a health authority or a training board. But there are strong grounds for them to have rights of dismissal, at least in extremis. The same is true in large companies where workers may have legitimate rights to depose failed managements, but are far less well placed to choose them in the first place.[1]

Fifth, we need a more porous approach to policy. Policy making, should make much greater use of task forces, ad hoc commission, drawing together experts, civil servants, citizens, to draw up policies on the most intractable issues. There would be a vital role for a reformed second chamber, perhaps even reconstructed to include a much wider range of social interests allied to independent organisations such as the National Trust and Womens Institute as well as professional groups. We need a post-corporatist way of including a much wider array of groups in policy making.

Sixth, and underpinning a more complex democracy with a greater variety of powers and mechanisms, there must be a clearer definition of the legal rules and rights available to citizens. Some kind of written constitution (though preferably simple, transparent and open to change) is an essential corollary of the kinds of change we advocate.

Seventh, and lastly, we need a much tougher commitment to truth and honesty. There should be tougher electoral regulation of parties manifestos. A new Ofelect should be created, a powerful electoral commission able to force parties to specify charges and claims made in their electioneering material, including party political broadcasts which are at present outside any requirements to be honest. Truth and integrity have become rare qualities in politics, not because politicians are evil but because the system rewards dishonesty. We need counterpressures.

Finding New Leaders

Lean democracy – a change in the democratic forms of politics – will not be enough to restore trust. The content of politics will have to change as well. A vital aspect of that will be the emergence of new leaders in response to the discrediting of the established political class. These will come from different backgrounds; having acquired skills outside politics, they will carry different values, propose unfamiliar ideas, tell stories and convey messages about the state of the nation which established politicians shy away from.

Some would say that leadership does not matter, that pragmatism and low ambitions have necessarily become the order of the day. But

leadership, especially in uncertain times, is vital to identify the strategic issues the nation faces amidst all the confusing minutiae of daily politics. It can raise sights and ambitions, set goals and articulate hopes. Great leaders are great motivators; they inspire people with confidence. They are also prepared to face troubling and difficult choices, particularly those which involve sacrifice for the longer term health of society. Above all, leaders are required if we are to create and shape the times we live in, rather than be shaped by them.

Yet at the moment political leadership in most advanced societies suffers from serious and systemic shortcomings. Our society suffers from five main leadership deficits.

Efficacy

Politicians find it difficult to get things done. They promise to cut crime and cut taxes, but crime rises and so do taxes. They pledge to keep sterling within the exchange rate mechanism but then withdraw. The new breed of commercial politicians make this lack of delivery one of their main targets of criticism, playing upon mounting distrust of politicians as recidivist promise-breakers. These outsiders attack politicians' backgrounds and skills arguing that they lack real world experience and are no more than professional power seekers. They fall far short of the performance standards expected of leaders in large, private sector organisations. A culture of judgement by performance is taking deep root within the private sector and spreading rapidly to the public sector. Privatisation and decentralisation have meant spinning off large chunks of the state and running them under quasi commercial management. This raises troubling questions for politicians: what is ministers' role if not to run the great departments? Why do modern British governments have three times as many ministers as the first post-war government despite their commitment to selling off much of the state?

But it is not simply that the tasks of state restructuring may be better handled by commercial managers (or at least by the rare breed that combine commercial skill with an understanding of politics and civil service micropolitics). Increasingly politicians are not trusted with the

basic tasks of economic management which used to fall exclusively within their remit, on the grounds that they follow their own short term interests rather than our long term ones.

One obvious response to this waning confidence is to limit politician's job to a more manageable range of tasks. Bit by bit this is happening. As we described above, more backbench and opposition MPs are becoming simple service providers for their constituents. This at least makes backbench MP's jobs manageable. But it is just that, a service sector job, not a mission to reform society.

For Prime Ministers and ministers, too, there are obvious ways in which to redefine the job. Prime Ministers questions for example absorbs an absurd amount of time just to preserve the fiction that he is a true Chief Executive with operational knowledge of the whole of government. A role more like a chairman, setting strategy, values and broad objectives, even acting as a kind of moral ambassador, would make far more sense. The same would apply to ministers of large departments while the junior ministerial role could quite easily be abolished, or turned into a more overt apprenticeship.

Morality

The second deficit is politicians incapacity either to articulate values and or to be clear about right and wrong. Throughout the west people are slipping and sliding on the moral screes. Their senses are bombarded with images designed to provoke a moral outrage – killings in Bosnia, old people denied treatment on the NHS. Yet politics can move only slowly to address this outrage. We find it increasingly difficult to find a consistent set of moral values which could guide our political responses. Cultural diversity and social complexity make it hard to found government upon some underlying moral solidarity. The collapse of faith in traditional ideologies mean they are less use than they used to be in providing a source for moral values. In the past, politicians informed by powerful ideologies and self-belief provided moral leadership – Churchill, Thatcher, de Gaulle, Kennedy, Gladstone and Bevan. All of these could, just, combine a political voice of compromise and

realism and a moral voice of conviction. But such leaders are in a tiny minority. While the world faces huge and troubling moral issues, politicians seem narrow, only interested in furthering their own ambitions, unable to focus upon higher goals.

In Italy and throughout eastern Europe moral malaise was one force which impelled political revolution, the replacement of large swathes of the political system and the class which prospered from it. It was no accident that in both places people turned to outsiders to wipe the slate clean. Novelists, playwrights and musical instrument makers led the eastern European revolution; independent prosecutors, former central bankers and now business leaders the Italian one.

But these are only the extreme cases. All Western societies are experiencing a sense of moral drift which neither the church nor political leaders can effectively address. This makes it likely that people will turn for moral leadership towards leaders from culture, religion and commerce.

Representation

The third deficit is the capacity to represent. Politician's most basic claim to legitimacy is that they represent the people. This idea has two components.

First, leaders can represent constituents because of their personal qualities: they share the same background, outlook and values. This connection cemented political loyalties, particularly, perhaps, in traditional middle and working class constituencies. Second, the formal democratic procedures by which politicians are selected as candidates and then elected to office make them representative of the people.

This vital link between the governors and the governed is now breaking down. Increasing social diversity means that traditional "working class" or "home counties" constituencies are the exception rather than the rule. Within metropolitan centres (and within each of us) there are competing roles and identities, often very old ones, which bring with them conflicting claims and duties. Our cities shelter great enclaves of traditional life alongside bourgeois bohemia. Cosmopolitan, policy-making elites find it hard to understand and represent the

pressures and passions of everyday life. And because both the middle and working classes have lost much of their former cultural homogeneity, the signals they send have become much harder to decipher.

Faced with this diversity it is becoming more important for national leaders to detach themselves from particular constituencies, and to project their appeal across many social groups. Of course it is not new for politicians to have to draw together coalitions of established interests, both within and outside their parties. But they now face a different task: keeping abreast of a shifting collage, made up of fragments, threads, tendencies, which come and go. Leaders in liberal democracies have to cope with a fluid, sophisticated, rootless and shifting electorate, an electorate brought up in the age of the television remote control, used to seeing their preferences translated into choices and action at the touch of a button. A political leader trapped by an identification with one class, region or way of thinking will be disabled in attempting to keep pace with these shifts.

Most politicians respond with a universal blandness, removing 'negatives' in the language of political communication. Yet in the long term this offers no escape. Most voters will judge national leaders on how well they perform and deliver, a far more unstable basis for political loyalty than identification with a leader's background and outlook.

Not that identification with a constituency has become unimportant. It has not, but its nature has changed. Particular political constituencies organised along regional, ethnic or religious lines will choose to represent them leaders who come from among them. Indeed such leaders claim greater authenticity as a result of this close identification. Their commitment means they can be trusted at least in part because they do not aspire to leadership of the nation and so will avoid the compromises and shifts required to do so.

Culture

The fourth deficit is in the culture of leadership. There is a growing gap between the culture of the political and non-political worlds. Politics is essentially about communicating ideas, choices and decisions between the governed and the governors. It is about constructing

narratives that make sense to people: stories that encompass their identities, aspirations and fears, and the policies that reflect them. Yet it is in these central tasks that politicians seem at times to be most deficient.

Most political culture is old fashioned. Political leaders, especially on the left, have had powerful oratorical skills, most recently Neil Kinnock, honed in the tradition of addressing mass meetings, rallying the troops, leading them into battle. Labour's high-tech Sheffield rally during the last election provides the most extreme example. Although it used many of the latest video and image making techniques, it was essentially an old fashioned, mass meeting for the troops to be inspired by the oratory of their leader. On the right too Mr. Major's speeches to old fashioned conferences are taken as a key test of his political standing, a platform for his ideas. When it is not oratorical, the style of the House of Commons borrows most closely from the debating societies of elite universities such as Oxford and Cambridge.

When making policy the political system relies on a written culture: endless documents, policy papers, resolutions and reports, many of them officially declared secret or made so by their peculiar language and phraseology. Few are read by the electorate even when they are made available to them.

Yet at elections a sudden change overcomes politicians as they attempt to reacquaint themselves with the everyday world. The spin doctors and image makers around leaders understand well that power no longer comes from the barrel of a gun or the ballot box but the angle of the camera and the softness of the focus. So only at the last lap, as it were, does politics seek to engage with a culture that is increasingly electronic, based on computers, video and compact discs, where text, image and sound combine.

But, as the American psychologist, Howard Gardner has suggested, there are also other impediments to successful political communication in modern society. In the closing years of this century two factors have combined to make it much harder for leaders to construct compelling narratives: stories that make sense of how politics can protect people or advance their interests and values. One is the growing heterogeneity of societies made up of many cultures, professions, aspirations and

lifestyles. These are much less likely to share a common store of images and metaphors – like the biblical images that were so potent a source of political rhetoric in the past. As a consequence political rhetoric has to be blander, more an inoffensive lowest common denominator than an inspiration.

The second factor is the professionalisation of the job of politicians. When politicians spend their whole career in politics they are less likely to have learnt the languages and styles of their electors. Lack of direct experience of the working lives and home lives of millions of people, makes it harder for them to make narratives. Most simply become detached from everyday life, cocooned in the rhythm of parliament, media performances and gossip. Apart from the constituency surgery, or random encounters with electors, few find it possible to invest much time in learning about their voters, except second hand through media which are often almost as cut-off and metropolitan as the politicians themselves.

Ideas

The collapse in belief in ideology as explanation, diagnosis and guide to action means it is far more difficult for a politician to come to power with a clear set of ideas. And yet electors, commentators and media inquistiors are still bound to ask "where do you stand? What do you stand for?" we want politicians to have convictions and principles, to be worthy of the trust that we place in them, and yet we also want them to shift under pressure, develop new ideas and avoid obdurate obstinacy. We demand that politicians Cope with a bewildering array of complex and rapidly changing situations, for instance in foreign affairs, as well as tackling endemic and deep seated problems, such as reform of the welfare state. Both these tasks require searching for new ideas. And yet when politicians do come forward with new ideas they are often pilloried by opponents and colleagues alike. We want politicians of substance, who can offer coherent accounts, perhaps like the 3 hour speeches that were normal in the era of Gladstone or Lincoln; yet in practice most of us feel more comfortable with a politics
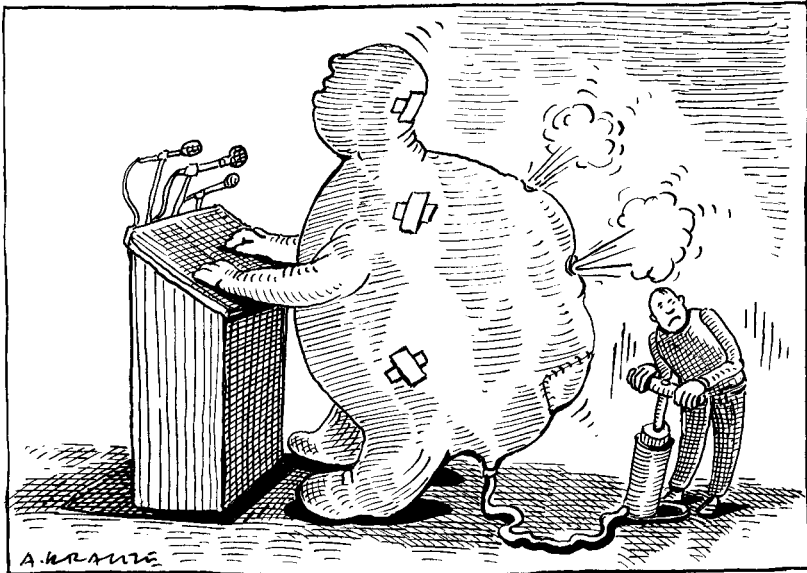
fragmented into the 20 second soundbite, and most of us expect a politician to be able to explain the politics of the middle east or welfare reform in not more than 2 minutes.

> 'We want politicians of substance, yet most of us expect a politician to be able to explain the politics of the middle east or welfare reform in not more than 2 minutes'

Politicians interested in rising to power do far better not just to steer clear of ideology, but to avoid ideas altogether. The Labour Party's recent strategy has not been so much about jettisoning socialist ideology as about doing without ideas altogether, and fostering a culture in which, oddly leading opposition politicians feel less at ease discussing ideas, less confident about challenging entrenched powers and assumptions, than their counterparts in government.

This is indicative of a much deeper problem in the relationship between the political process and the generation of ideas for public policy. Political parties do not have the intellectual resources to think creatively across a broad range of policies. The best policy ideas are now coming from outside politics. With less fixed ideologies there is a freer market for ideas. An idea developed with in one tradition can be more easily reinterpreted for another.

The implication is a rather different notion of leadership. In the old model, the leader set a clear ideological and political agenda, and others (such as party research departments, or junior spokespeople) filled in the gaps. Today with a far greater pluralism of ideas the best leaders are open ones: not asserting certainty, but rather presenting themselves as having sufficient capacity to absorb complex ideas and weave them into a whole. In the era of fuzzy logic and fuzzy knowledge perhaps we need leaders who no longer feel the need to have an answer to everything. For them it might be better to be able to demonstrate a willingness to ask questions well and then communicate the best answers.

What do these five deficits add up to? Certainly not a simple account of political failure, of betrayal or corruption. Rather they show that politicians face confusing and conflicting demands from a more diverse and sophisticated electorate. We expect our politicians to play a dizzying mix of roles, one moment to offer convictions, principle and moral guidance, the next to be fleet footed, pragmatic, deal makers. We decry their poor quality, their lack of skills and yet we endorse and enjoy the relentless media scrutiny of their lives and performance which drives most people away from politics towards jobs elsewhere.

The failings of our politicians are simply a reflection of society's deep unease, its lack of consensus and confidence about a wide range of public policy issues. We have transferred onto politicians our own anxieties, insecurities and doubts; we pillory them for failing to solve questions we cannot solve ourselves.

New sorts of leaders will emerge in all advanced democracies. There will be change – either radical or incremental – in where political leaders come from, the routes through which they become leaders, how they communicate with their supporters, legitimise they rule and

exercise their power. These new leaders will emerge from a new typography of political leadership, which will be overlaid upon the now largely exhausted distinctions of left and right.

Outsiders and incumbents

The most basic new divide in politics is emerging from the widespread discrediting of the established political class: it is the divide between outsiders and incumbents, those who make their claim to power based on their non political credentials and those who climb to power as professional insiders.

With the political class widely and deeply distrusted, it is vital for reformist political leaders to seek popular support by appearing to come from outside the world of politics, to come from the regions rather than the capital, to have their roots in the non-political worlds of culture, community or commerce, rather than politics. This trend for political reform to be carried by leaders who come from outside the political establishment or at least to have broken with it, has been the dominant single development in democratic politics in the last five years across a very wide range of societies.

> 'The claim to have history on-your-side is vital both to ethnic minorities which present a previously unreported history to claim disenfranchisement and disadvantage, and to establishment politicians attempting to defend the status quo'

Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and Ross Perot's presidential campaigns are only the most obvious examples of the rise of anti-political outsiders. The recent political realignment in Japan was created by a break with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and carried initially by Morihiro Hosokawa, a former regional governor who launched his own party. Yet the Japanese case also highlights the ambiguity of this polarity between outsiders and incumbents. The original split with the

LDP was partly opportunistic and the real power behind the reformist coalition is Ichiro Ozawa, a renowned political fixer. President Bill Clinton also straddles both worlds. He is an outsider to Washington, rising to power from the governorship of one of the poorest, smallest and least fashionable states in the US. Yet he is a lifelong professional politicians, dedicated to winning power and mastering the details of public policy. The best political insiders will also attempt to present themselves as fresh outsiders.

Electorates are unlikely to settle at one end of this pole. They are likely to swing more or less violently between the poles. The outsider's chief attractions, that they are fresh, non-political, and cut through the political grunge, are also the sources of their weakness. The way they bypass traditional political mechanisms may mean they tend towards authoritarianism. What they see as gridlock in the political system, others see as democratic clash of interests. They may be fresh, but are also unworldy and inexperienced. These weaknesses mean that it is likely that outsiders will be called upon only at times of greatest political disillusion. At other times electorates are likely to swing back towards pragmatic, experienced, insiders, even if they are partly stained by a history of political corruption.

Eastern Europe is the clearest example of this cycle. The initial anti-communist revolutions were carried forward by outcasts, dissidents whose moral qualities were founded upon their backgrounds as musicians, playwrights and philosophers. But in many east European states the old political leadership has regrouped, often by allying with conservative nationalist or religious forces, given itself a face lift and replaced the early reformers.

Technocrats and populists

The US Presidential election of 1992 was widely portrayed in left/right terms, a modernising democrat, who had embraced the market and the need for public sector reform displacing a spent republican. But there was another political contest as well: between the technocratic, professional policy makers approach of Clinton and Gore and the populism of

Rose Perot. Clinton and Gore have offered managed health care plans and the information superhighway. Perot's great pitch was to "get under the hood" in Washington, while the name for Berlusconi's political alliance was created in the football terraces.

The technocratic pitch is a direct response to the decline of ideology. The technocrats aim to persuade voters in part by the quality of their ideas, their ability to think up imaginative new solutions to intractable problems. Their very grasp of the mass of detail in complex political issues is also the source of their weakness. They talk in a language most people do not understand. They appear to lack feeling and do not inspire passion.

The populist appeal is directly opposed to and goes above the heads of the political establishment. Populists like Perot and Berlusconi speak in everyday language and arouse powerfully felt common emotions. The often deliberate vagueness of these claims makes them difficult to scrutinise. But business populists are also vulnerable. Most successful businessmen have accumulated such a web of contacts that close scrutiny often reveals something untoward.

Civic principles and the politics of belonging

Politicians such as Vaclav Havel, the Czech playwright are perhaps the most striking examples of a belief in upholding civic principles of open debate, pluralism, equality of opportunity and tolerance. They believe a community is created and sustained by rational and reformable social rules designed to promote pluralism and tolerance. They believe that leaders should embody these values.

Increasingly the politics of civic principles is under attack from the politics of belonging, the principle that society is bound by tradition, blood, loyalty and history. According to the politics of belonging, the possession of those qualities – to speak a particular language, to know a certain history, to possess a certain blood line – are prerequisites for political rights.

The revolutions of eastern Europe have thrown up both sorts of politics. Havel represents one pole; Milosevic the other. Yet this divide

is not simply running through eastern Europe. It runs through our own society in the form of a debate about British identity, tradition and political correctness.

This distinction between a civic, open politics and a closed politics of blood and traditions gives rise to three further distinctions.

All political leaders will have to rely upon social coalitions. They will be distinguished by the character of those coalitions. At one extreme will be leaders who represent fluid and shifting coalitions, created for a specific political moment or purpose, perhaps by a single leader. Berlusconi's 'coalition' is in fact more like a shifting collage of movements and factions. At the other extreme will be leaders who rely upon fused coalitions, based upon an exclusive attachment to a particular cause exemplified by a leader. Zhirinovsky's right wing coalition is perhaps an example of this phenomenon.

The second distinction is about the international orientation of political leaders, or rather whether there is one. In eastern Europe one of the most vital distinctions is between an urban, reformist, political class, which is cosmopolitan in its outlook, and western in its orientation and values, and a more nationalist, inward looking, rural based political leadership which presents cooperation with the west as national defeat. This was a central distinction between competing parties in both the recent Russian and Hungarian elections.

The third distinction, which stems from this is about attitudes towards the world economy. Cosmopolitan leaders tend to support free trade. They are increasingly confronted by economic nationalists who are either anti free trade or opposed to the international pooling of economic sovereignty.

This is a clear divide in US politics, where Perot's anti free trade rhetoric helped push Clinton towards economic nationalism. It is increasingly apparent in the debates in Scandinavia over joining the EU, in the arguments about Swiss accession to the EEA and in French battles over GATT. In each case what is at issue is defence of a national way of life against a global marketplace. In British politics it is manifest in the tortured debate over the prospects for a single European currency.

Identity:development or destiny

As Vincent Cable has shown[2] questions of identity have become vital to politics. As a result so has history since it is a crucial political resource. The claim to have history on-your-side is vital both to ethnic minorities which present a previously unreported history to claim disenfranchisement and disadvantage, and to establishment politicians attempting to defend the status quo.

Political leaders will be distinguished by their approach to national history and identity. At one extreme will be those who see identity as malleable and necessarily changing to cope with shifting circumstances. These politicians will have a radical and critical attitude towards history. A closed sense of national history goes with a closed sense of identity. To be open to future change means being open to a reinterpretation of history, to constantly find within history new lessons and qualities which can be applied to the future.

At the other extreme are politicians who regard history and identity as closed and fixed. As a result they believe the point of politics is to live out a society's sense of historic destiny. This latter tendency has been perhaps strongest on the Israeli right, who see the state of Israel as fulfilling an historic purpose as the destiny for the Jews. German politics is perhaps the strongest expression of the former tendency, a politics based upon a sense of continually developing and shifting national identity. Even the technocrats will at some point find the need to define their missions in terms of a national history, a sense of cumulative purpose, if only for fear that otherwise they will leave too much of a political space for others to fill.

The Party of God and the Party of Man

For devout Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Christians religion is the main source of their civil and criminal law, their values and priorities. Politics is largely instrumental: a way of defending and furthering this outlook. Religion comes first, politics follows.

At the other pole stand the pluralist-liberals, who believe that political debate and political rights take precedence. They are not necessarily

unreligious. It is rather than they believe the place of religion is circumscribed by politics. Politics is prior, religion exists in the space assigned to it by politics.

There is a clear divide between states which are in some sense religious states – strict Muslim states for instance where religion is the source of law – and non religious states. A similar divide is developing within advanced societies. In the US in particular it is clear that the Republican party is increasingly the party of God, the party to which all the religiously devout of whatever persuasion turn, while the Democrats are increasingly the party of liberal man. Many leaders will try to juggle these: presenting their religion as a personal issue, without implications for the overall structure of politics. They will draw on some of the rising power of religion for what is in truth a secular politics. But each step they take in this direction will further legitimate a turn back to that dominance of religion over politics which most assume to be buried deep in the past.

Personality politicians and personality-free politicians

In a televisual era politicians appear to their electors as personalities. They are flesh and blood with accents, mannerisms, flaws and attractions. Much has been said about the rise of personality politics. But what is more striking about the modern era is how hard it is for very strongly defined personalities to rise to the top. In fairly fragmented societies, without much of a shared culture, common views about what constitutes appropriate dress or style, any over-pronounced personality alienates too many to make good politics. Strong personalities may work well at the local level: as mayors of cities for example. But at the higher level, strong personalities seem to bring as many negatives as positives.

As a result there are strong pressures to eliminate personality: to favour a conformism of dress, of speech patterns; to favour relatively bland personalities without great distinctions, and with a strong predisposition not to offend. The exceptions – Thatcher, Gorbachev – stand out precisely because they were exceptions (and it could be said

that in order to get to the top they had to contain personalities that were only later given free rein). For the same reason few elections really do favour particularly handsome leaders: even beauty tends to alienate some group of voters.

The Return of Hobbes

It is ironic that the political philosopher who most readily sums up the age is not a theorist of liberal democracy such as Mill, nor a post-modernist such as Baudrillard but one of the very first. Modern society, in the wake of the cold war most resembles the world of Hobbes, a war of all against all, in which the state is required at the end of the day simply to impose order, to ensure social survival, to maintain discipline and the conditions for civil association but to do little else. It is Hobbies writing from a world of civil and religious wars who seems most in tune both with ethnic and religious wars in eastern Europe and the flux of modern life: an endless attempt to satisfy our shifting desires, people forever in motion, without tranquility, finality or repose, passing from one desire to the next, in each trying to secure the grounds for the next, but without ever fully escaping uncertainty or insecurity.

Politics is, as then, in part an answer to chaos and disorder. Today too the alternatives to politics, at least within a Western tradition, are likely to be worse. A quicker descent into chaos and anarchy, a faster route to mutual indifference and hostility. Politics shares with business and the media an ability to reach across cultures, communities and interests. Yet politics is the only force which can draw the strands together, potentially making societies more than the sum of their parts by articulating a common purpose.

At present politicians are marooned within their political castles, while their subjects are torn between deriding them and imploring them to lead. In this piece we have tried to set out some of the conditions for revitalising the links between governed and governors, politics and non-politics. We have shown that the good leaders need much greater clarity about what they can and cannot do. That they will need a sense of history and identity, of narrative and meaning as well as a command of policy priorities.

These are all new tasks. The western societies confront their problems simultaneously. This is why today no Western societies that are taken to be models by the rest of the world. None shows that confidence of leadership that comes from knowing your place in the world, and knowing how to act in it. Instead all are fumbling. All can teach and all can learn. And the best leaders will be those that can do both.

Notes

1. This argument is set out at greater length in Geoff Mulgan, *The Power of the Boot: the case for contestable public institutions*, Demos, 1993.

2. Vincent Cable, *The Worlds New Fissures: identities in crisis*, Demos, 1994.

The leadership grid

You can award up to ten points to each lender for each leadership quality. No categories are completely mutually exclusive. For example a leader can be an 'Outsider' and an 'Insider', so their score for both qualities combined can amount to more than ten. Equally a leader's commitment to 'Free Trade' and 'Protectionism' may be weak because their views on this issue may be vague. As a result their scores in some twinned categories may come to less than ten. The higher the score the more effective they are likely to be as a leader. Our suggested scores are included.

	Outsider	Insider	Technocrat	Populist	Nationalist	Internationalist	Free Trader	Protectionist	Civic	Closed	Personality	Charm	Inoffensive	Religious	Liberal	Moderate-pragmatist	Radical-conviction	Total
Clinton	5	6	8	3	4	5	6	3	8	2	6	4	4	3	3	6	6	82
Major	6	4	4	4	5	5	7	2	7	9	1	1	5	3	5	9	0	77
Blair	5	5	7	4	2	6	5	4	8	2	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	91
Heseltine	4	7	5	6	7	5	3	6	7	4	6	4	2	2	5	5	6	84
Prescott	9	1	4	7	3	3	4	7	7	6	8	1	1	0	6	1	6	74
Clarke	5	6	5	5	4	4	7	1	7	2	7	4	4	5	6	5	4	81
Portillo	6	6	6	4	7	2	7	2	5	5	5	1	1	3	4	3	7	74
Thatcher	6	7	4	9	9	5	9	1	4	7	10	1	2	7	0	3	9	93
Reagan	6	6	0	10	9	5	8	2	4	7	8	5	5	7	0	3	7	92
Perot	8	1	1	10	9	0	2	8	2	9	8	2	2	7	0	3	8	80
Yeltsin	8	2	3	9	9	2	4	4	3	8	8	1	1	2	4	3	6	77
Gorbachev	2	10	9	0	5	7	4	4	3	6	7	1	1	0	3	4	6	72
Berlusconi	7	4	1	9	7	4	6	4	6	6	4	6	6	5	4	4	6	89
Havel	9	0	3	3	3	9	7	3	10	0	8	8	8	0	10	5	7	93
Milosevic	1	10	2	9	10	0	4	3	2	10	7	0	0	0	0	3	7	68
Ashdown	5	6	7	4	5	7	7	2	9	1	5	5	5	3	7	4	6	88
Hurd	0	10	10	0	2	9	9	2	9	5	1	1	1	4	6	10	0	79

The cracked mirror: the future for representation

Judith Squires

The concept of representation lies at the very heart of our claim to democratic status, and yet it is little theorised and practically confused. Although a foundational principle of modern democratic politics, the meaning of the term 'representation' is notably vague, even for a political concept. Such elusiveness cannot persist for long, for any democratic restructuring of British politics will require a rethinking of the nature of representation.

Electing representatives according to geographical constituencies suggests that those elected are meant to represent and speak for an area or a place. The implication is that interests are relatively homogeneous within localities, but potentially at odds between them. An alternative view of representation is Edmund Burke's notion that representatives serve the interests of the nation. Yet another notion comes with the party system, which implies that representatives are representative of their supporters and ideological allies. Yet another is of the autonomy of representatives to vote according to conscience.

It is largely because of this slippery nature of the concept of representation that our MPs can continue to claim to be representative despite the fact that the majority of citizens do not vote for them and that whole sections of 'the people' are not represented in age, class, gender and ethnic terms. Liberal democracy makes its neat equations

Judith Squires is lecturer in Politics at Bristol University.

between democracy and representation, but asks us to consider as irrelevant the composition of our elected assemblies. The resulting pattern has been firmly skewed in the direction of certain peoples, with the under-representation of women only the starkest among a range of absent groups.

It is worth noting, as we contemplate the contemporary uncertainty about the nature of representation, that there have been significant historical shifts in our understanding of what the representative nature of the democratic system was in fact about. Indeed, much of the ambivalence currently existing within our conceptions of representation can be traced back to the historical tension between liberalism and democracy.

Though we now speak of liberal-democracy as though the two terms were inseparable, before the end of the 18th century few liberals were democrats. Liberals defended constitutional and representative government, but did not often advocate universal suffrage. The idea that representation should be based on individuals who would be grouped together in roughly equal numbers emerged as a principle only in the late eighteenth century. Prior to this it was commonly assumed that government, if it represented anything at all, represented property owners. Hence instead of demanding democracy, most 18th century liberals advocated a meritocracy – property ownership being taken as an indication of political competence. Even John Stuart Mill feared popular sovereignty, arguing that it might generate a collective mediocrity. He proposed a meritocracy: weighting democracy in favour of the most enlightened – which Mill took to be the professional and commercial groups who would have a greater number of votes than manual workers.

The mass suffrage movements, demanding working-class and then women's suffrage, challenged this notion of representation. But representation did not become about the representation of citizens as equal individuals. The adoption of the party system meant that the embodiment of the popular will was deemed to be located in the party; what representatives were representing here were ideological perspectives and class interests. Yet it is not without significance that our current

'representative' structures evolve out of a system designed to limit the actual influence of the masses and to avoid the 'tyranny' of uninstructed public opinion.

More recently we find a simultaneous appeal, drawing on various historical legacies, to at least three quite distinct conceptions of what it is that is being represented; interests, ideologies and identities. What has worked to hold these three bases for representation together and elide the crucial differences between them, has been the strange alliance of two (incongruent) fictions: first, that all citizens participate equally through the formal mechanism of procedural democratic structures; second that interests, ideologies and identities will cohere within geographically defined locations. The first is a manifestation of the aspiration towards formal equality which transcends difference; the second a more practical recognition of the cultural and regional embeddedness which assumes difference to be manifest between groups which are themselves internally cohesive. Both fictions underpin the workings of the current political system in Britian.

Yet those factors which have traditionally formed the basis of our representative mechanisms – territorial identity and ideological commitment – are both widely accepted to be on the wane as key political indicators and motivators. Our current MPs are deemed to represent both their constituents (a territorially defined group) and their party (an ideological agenda), even as geographical location becomes less central to citizen's idea of who they are.

Throughout this century there has been a growing literature on the need to recognise different levels of geographical representation (international; regional and national; metropolitan; local) but more recently there has also been a significant interest in non-geographic communities as the basis for representation. Such interest develops out of a recognition of the importance of an emerging 'cultural politics of difference'. The distinctive feature of this politics is as a rejection of the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity.

This general movement away from the general, universal and abstract towards the specific, particular and contextual characterises

numerous current political developments, ethnic, religious, linguistic and gendered. Examples range from the founding of a separatist Maori party in New Zealand in 1979 in pursuit of the recognition of Maori distinctness (linguistic and cultural) within the New Zealand polity and society; the establishment of a Feminist Party in Iceland in 1981 campaigning for women's rights and interests in the Icelandic Althing (parliament), gaining its first elected MPs in 1983; the continuing constitutional debates in bicultural Canada concerning the appropriate recognition for French and English-language speaking citizens and the accompanying debates about separate representation for its Aboriginal

> 'The argument for 'group representation' rests on the claim that the existing electoral and legislative processes are 'unrepresentative' in the sense that they fail to reflect the diversity of the population in terms of presence'

population; and the formation of the Islamic Parliament in Bradford in 1989 to represent Orthodox Sunni Muslims (their organic notion of community – Umma – generating a notion of collective representation of the community which sits at odds with our individualistic representative ethos).

Most of these initiatives have been met with a conventional liberal individualist response: the political institutions of modern representative democracy do not and should not differentiate citizens. All persons, whatever their social and cultural background should be considered equal before the law. But it does not begin to deal with demands for group-based special rights, for cultural justice without assimilation and the public recognition of different group experiences and identities.

In this context it is no surprise that the innovative theoretical work now emerging on representation focuses on 'group representation', where these groups are identity groups, communities of identification, neither narrowly economically or geographically inscribed. This literature erodes the previous division between theories of substantive participatory democracy and procedural representative democracy by exploring more fully the relation between ideas and identities. Take, for instance the question posed by American philosopher Amy Gutman: "Is a democracy letting citizens down, excluding or discriminating against us in some morally troubling way, when major institutions fail to take account of our particular identities? Can citizens with diverse identities be represented as equals if public institutions do not recognise our particular identities, but only our more universally shared interests in civil and political liberties, income, education? Apart from ceding each of us the same rights as all other citizens, what does respecting people as equal entail?"

The argument for 'group representation' rests on the claim that the existing electoral and legislative processes are 'unrepresentative' in the sense that they fail to reflect the diversity of the population in terms of presence. This has led to demands that a certain number of seats in the legislature be reserved for the members of marginalized groups. These calls are made on the assumption that under-representation can be overcome only by resorting to guaranteed representation. Alternatively one can advocate a from of proportional representation, which is thought to allow for a greater inclusiveness of candidates for election by making under-representation in the nomination process both more visible and more accountable. Thus, party lists systems make a more balanced line-up of candidates more determinable and its absence more overt.

'No single system can represent all citizens in all things: no one individual can adequately represent any one of us in all our complexity'

But is group representation consistent with liberal democratic political culture? It is certainly a departure from the system of single-member geographically defined constituencies used in Britain. For example, to claim that women and various minority groups are not represented in the current parliament presupposes that people can only be fully 'represented' by someone who shares their gender, class, ethnicity, language. This leads to the notion of mirror representation where the legislature is said to be representative of its citizens if it mirrors the characteristics of the public. This contrasts with the more familiar notion which defines representation in terms of the procedure by which office-holders are elected, rather than by their personal attributes. Concern with the latter is a product of an 'identity politics' which challenges the presumed bifurcation between being and doing, between the embodied and the cerebral, between identity and ideas.

The growth of identity politics within Britain during the last decade raises a crucial, and long overlooked, question of whether the personal characteristics of representatives are pertinent to their claims to be

representative, or whether the procedures of their election are sufficient guarantee of their representative status. This issue is becoming increasingly important as 'the people' become ever more overtly disillusioned and alienated from the existing mechanisms of government.

Yet there are problems with simply trying to graft identity politics onto our existing mechanisms of 'representative government'. The most immediate might be summarised thus: firstly, underpinning the arguments for such representation is the assumption that people cannot empathise across lines of difference. This can all too easily become a self-fulfilling prophesy. It can lead to factionalism and the politics of the enclave. Secondly, the assumed sameness and cohesion within the groups merely replicates the assumption of sameness within society that group representation advocates want to critique. Thirdly, mechanisms of accountability are hard to realise when one's constituents are self-defined identity groups with no formal membership mechanisms. We could continue: how are we to decide which groups should be entitled to group-based representation? Are we asking that a group should be represented in proportion to its numbers in the population at large, or that there should be a threshold number of representatives? Is it important that representatives belong to one's group, or that they are elected by one's group? The upshot of such questioning may well be that this form of identity thinking ultimately leads to the notion that nobody can represent anyone else at all.

For a clear example of precisely these problems one need look no further than the history of the women's movement. The participatory non-hierarchical nature of feminist political practice gave rise to a deep suspicion of any attempt to 'represent' other women or 'the movement'. Yet, in the absence of any formal mechanisms of election and representation, the desire to find spokeswomen often led to certain women attempting to 'speak for' women/feminists without any accountability. There had been no discussion to settle the line they should take, and they were not subject to any means of control. Those who did attempt to 'represent' what they saw as the movement's view increasingly found themselves to be the focus of other women's resentment and complaint.

Given these problems even those who advocate group representation usually do so in a tactical form as a short-term mechanism to rectify past injustices and inequalities, for challenging biased structures and procedures and for ensuring a more equal participation in government. The point here then is not that the legislative body should mirror the people, but that the historical legacy of privilege and power makes it difficult for certain groups to participate effectively.

So, we are left with a question: given that clear ideological commitments have dwindled, that interests have become more diffuse and less rigidly demarcated along old social cleavages, what is it about people that we must now represent? Attempting to represent our identities within existing 'representative' structures looks perilous – dicing with the dangers of essentialism and factionalism. At root, the problem with such a politics of difference is that, when formalised into the structures of representation, it can rigidify what are actually very fluid identities. Furthermore it can lead to attempts to represent us on the basic of only one aspect of our identities. Nonetheless, rather than giving up on the current concern with acknowledging difference and recognising the political importance of identity, we might use this incompatibility to questuion the scope of electoral politics itself. We are now faced with the challenge of representing particular interests which will not cohere into neat pre-packaged bundles. The old ties have come undone and the bundles of interests are scattered unpredictably amongst a genuinely heterogeneous citizenship.

In such circumstances, we should reflect upon whether election and appointment are the best forms of allocating representatives. Might statistical representation or even selection by lot (as used with jury system) not prove more adequate methods of achieving representative structures of governmentality? The selection of representatives by lottery, by statistics or by random sampling may be more appropriate to those concerned about mirroring the characteristics of 'the peopel'. Furthermore, moving towards mechanisms of representation for particular societal structures (education, police, law etc) would seem to be another possible route of exploration. Territorial representation may no longer be sufficient, if ever it was. Though there is a certain symbolic

role of the legislature vis-a-vis its citizens, the issue of representation should not be reduced to the composition of the legislature. We are now at a historical moment when we could think about disagregating representation into structures which map onto particular networks of interests and relations.

General and local elections are a blunt form of representation, ever less able to represent the diversity and multiplicity within and between people. Tinkering with these structures, reducing representation to the matter of the least worst voting system, will not begin to address the challenge posed by the new cultural politics of difference. A more expansive version of representation is needed: concerned not solely with parliament, but with the wider institutions of governmentality. For no single system can represent all citizens in all things: no one individual can adequately represent any one of us in all our complexity.

Positive sum politics

Graham Allen

'All too many Parliamentary colleagues still think pluralism is a lung disease'

The centralist-pluralist debate is the most fundamental divide in British politics – it is something far deeper than the left or right divide, or modernists versus conservatives. It is the legacy of our failed seventeenth century democratic revolution, and the consequence of our inability to have established that guarantee of democracy – a genuine separation of powers. We need to finish that job. There are those who believe that gaining control of the centre and the immense powers of the British executive is everything. That centralist view is now challenged by pluralism – a view that says there should be a plurality, a diversity of independent, democratic institutions – a separation of powers so that many points of view can be heard, can compete and result in a consensus. It is an end to the negative sum 'winner takes all' politics. Nowhere is it more important to have that debate and achieve that consensus than on economic policy. A democratised Britain is vital to free up the other essential channels for economic recovery – assertive and confident

Graham Allen MP, Labour MP for Nottingham North & Shadow Minister for Constitution & Democracy.
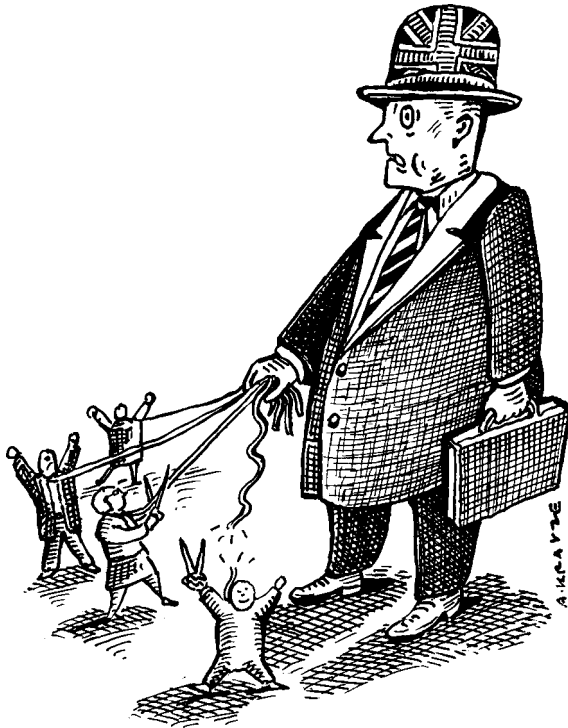
individuals, sensitive and independent local government, and account-able and relevant national political institutions.

I think we are now on the bridge between centralism and pluralism, though all too many Parliamentary colleagues still think pluralism is a lung disease. We know what doesn't work, but we have hesitated and not fully understood the shape of the alternative. Now, however, a package of practical pluralist measures is taking shape and gathering a consensus.

Constitutionally independent local government should be examined to see if a genuine separation from the centre can be sustained. If sub-sidiarity is to mean anything, local governance must be put beyond the reach of the centre and have its own legitimacy. This independence

could be defined and then protected behind an amended 1911 Parliament Act which would allow the second chamber to veto any encroachment by centralists. To be meaningful independent local authorities would have to raise the bulk of their own revenue. This might be done by local authority associations using the Inland Revenue as agent – which is effectively what the Department of Environment (via the Treasury) does currently. Independent local authorities restrained only by the need to balance their books annually, and to satisfy the electorate regularly, would be a massive engine for social and economic growth carried with more sureness and sensitivity than Whitehall could ever manage. A thousand flowers would bloom. Accountability, creativity, experimentation and genuine political competition would return to our localities. Local electorates and their representatives would be re-energised and local government could become meaningful and fulfilling once again. Centralism with a human face will not be enough.

Independent local authorities would help us tackle the next serious problem – English regions. Top down, semi-imperial regions imposed on a bemused population would carry the seeds of their own repeal. Regions must be built from the bottom up and with the consent and understanding of the electorate. Local government could be the agent for this change, banding together to build regions from a menu of powers rather than following an infallible Whitehall blueprint. Again financial independence would be crucial with regions being wholly financed by local government subscribing the amounts necessary to meet the powers they draw down from the menu. The East Midlands region may just want the power to act as a region within the EC for grant purposes, the North East may want the whole menu. Both could evolve as and when local finance and ambition decided.

Where some thought might make the most immediate and public impact would be in revitalising the House of Commons. Parliament is held in contempt by the public for its inability to effectively hold the Executive to account and its self indulgent irrelevance. We need a whole raft of changes to tackle these problems and restore the independence and credibility of the legislature. These could include, taking evidence before Bills go into Committee, timetabling all Bills, more

sensible hours, stronger select committees, fixed term Parliament, time limiting speeches. Of immense symbolic importance would be to create the conditions for genuine debate in the Chamber perhaps by electronic voting, giving each member a seat, and building a modern semi-circular chamber. The latter would undermine the yah-boo that the public find so offensive. Most of the changes could be introduced speedily by changing the standing orders of the House.

A party constrained by economic and social realities will not only prove its radicalism by swiftly moving on a new democracy for a new Century; it will be equipping our people with the tools and abilities to help tackle those self same economic and social problems by themselves.

Democratic cures: the lessons from Oregon

Howard M. Leichter

Current debates on health care reform in both Britain and the United States raise several wider issues on how the public can and should participate in political decision-making. Debate in the US has focused exclusively on financial, ethical and administrative issues, such as who will be insured and what will be covered. Largely missing from the debate is any serious discussion of who should be responsible for developing and operating the new health care system, and whether their ability to engage citizens in making decisions should be a significant criterion.

My purpose in this essay is to advance the proposition that in the USA, the states are currently the more competent players in the American federal system. The most important is that states have the unique capacity to engage citizens directly in the policy making process. If health care reform is to succeed it must be built upon popular consensus anchored in direct community involvement. As Mary Ann Bailey has noted: 'For most people, health care is special because of its importance in preventing pain and suffering, preserving the ability to pursue a normal life plan, providing information and relieving worry, and reflecting a community's concern for its members.'[1] Since health care is instrumental in achieving most of what we want in life,

---

Professor Howard Leichter is based at Linfield College, McMinnville, Oregon.

health care policy produces extraordinary participatory demands on the political process.

There are two reasons why citizen involvement is more likely to succeed, indeed occur at all, at the state than the federal level of government. The first is a question of practicality: direct forms of democracy thrive best in small political units. Second, state governments do not suffer from the massive popular contempt that Americans feel toward the national government.[2] The causes of the current discontent are numerous, but one which stands out is the estrangement between citizens and government. If faith in government is to be restored, citizens must be reinserted into the policy making process, satisfying what James Monroe calls Americans' 'democratic wish' for 'communal democracy'.[3] In my judgement this wish can only be satisfied in the states.

I offer in support of this proposition the case of the state of Oregon which, since February 1, 1994, has been doing what no government has ever done, namely, explicity rationing health care for thousands of its citizens. The Oregon experiment has attracted enormous interest, most of which has focused on whether rationing is necessary and/or morally defensible. Lost amidst all the media and academic brouhaha is the fact that the state guarantees health care to all Oregonians who fall below a national poverty level, but limits that care to what expert, legislative judgement, fiscal reality, and community sentiment deem a basic level of services. In short, it is an exercise in communal democracy as well as medical care rationing. This part of the story deserves attention not merely for what it tells about the Oregon healthcare plan, but the appropriateness and effectiveness of participatory forms of democratic decision making in general.

The Oregon Plan

Most Americans receive health insurance for themselves and their dependents as a benefit of employment. America's elderly are separately insured through a federally-administered social insurance program called Medicare, while those Americans who fall below a federally-defined poverty line are covered by a joint federal state welfare program called Medicaid.

Medicaid poses two problems. First, the states are not required to extend Medicaid coverage to everyone below the poverty level. Until this year, for example, Oregon covered only people with incomes less than 58% of this level. As a result, millions of poor Americans have no heath insurance. Second, Medicaid has become a major financial burden on the states. State Medicaid expenditures, which grew by nearly 60% between 1988 and 1992, now constitute, on average, about 17% of total state spending, making this the second largest item, after elementary and secondary education, in most state budgets.

In 1989 the Oregon legislature decided that it was morally unconscionable and politically untenable to run a health insurance system for the poor in which some received generous benefits through Medicaid, while others, an estimated 120,000, had no coverage at all. Hence the legislature decided to extend Medicaid to everyone below the federal poverty level, but at the price of limiting or rationing the medical services it would cover. A state commission devised a comprehensive list of 696 medical conditions and their treatments, ranking them from most to least important – number one is severe to moderate head injury, number 696 spastic dysphonia (a hoarse throat). In June 1993 the Oregon state legislature drew the line at condition/treatment 565.

A Sense of Ownership

Although pundits and politicians routinely acknowledge Oregon's boldness for explicitly doing what others implicitly do, namely ration medical care on the basis of limited resources, for the most part the experiment has been criticised both conceptually (eg rationing health care only for the poor) and methodologically (eg trying to distil every conceivable medical condition and treatment into a single manageable list). These criticisms obscure the important fact that, regardless of how one judges the content of the policy, the process involved soliciting community values and preferences about health care priorities in order to build a political and social consensus around a health resources allocation plan. It is to this story that I now turn.

The Oregon Basic Health Services Act created an eleven-member Health Services Commission. The commission, which included health

care providers and four 'consumer representatives', actively solicited 'public involvement in a community meeting process to build consensus on the values to be used to guide health resource allocation decisions.' The commission accomplished this in three ways. First, it held a series of public hearings around the state allowing interested parties to express their views. Second, it authorised Oregon Health Decisions, a citizens advocacy group, to conduct community meetings in every county of the state. Ultimately 47 community forums were held during which participants engaged in group discussions, and filled out a questionnaire recording their opinions on the relative importance of certain health situations.

> 'The process and content of the Oregon rationing plan enjoys far greater legitimacy than anything the federal government might do, simply because it addresses a popular yearning for communal forms of democratic decision making'

The third mechanism provided the most systematic solicitation and application of citizen values in the prioritisation process. The commission authorised a statewide, random-digit-dialled telephone survey of 1000 Oregonians. To incorporate community values in the ranking process, and not simply rely on treatment-outcome data, the commission decided to use a modified version of the quality of Well-Being Scale (QWB). Respondents were asked to rate 31 health situations from 0 (a situation that 'is as bad as death') to 100 (a situation that describes 'good health'). The commission then used both the 'soft' data collected in the public hearings and community forums, and the 'hard' data from the telephone survey to help create the prioritisation list.

Should the Democratic Wish be Fulfilled?

At first blush Oregon's attempt to incorporate citizen values in the prioritisation process would seem to satisfy, at least in part, the need and

yearning for communal forms of democratic decision making. Yet ironically, the process became almost as controversial as the substance of the law itself. In fact, the Oregon plan was nearly stillborn precisely because it engaged citizens in the process. This part of the story unfolded in the following manner. Before Oregon could implement its rationing plan it needed federal waivers of various Medicaid provisions. In August 1992 the Bush administration denied the waivers, alleging that the state's plan was in conflict with a 1990 federal law, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), that protects the rights of disabled persons. In particular, administration officials argued that the statewide telephone survey in which Oregonians rated various health situations and their impact on a person's quality of life was 'based in substantial part on the premise that the value of life of a person with a disability is less than the value of life of a person without a disability.'[4] The administration urged the state to resubmit its application after it addressed this concern.

State officials submitted a revised prioritisation list shortly after Bill Clinton was elected president in November 1992. In preparing the new list, which contained a number of significant changes from the original, the commissioners eliminated the survey results on quality of life preferences, relying more heavily on their own judgments in assigning ranks to condition/treatment pairs. Ultimately, in March 1993, the Clinton administration granted Oregon its waivers. Although state officials are convinced that the ADA-based challenge to the priority list was politically motivated – the Bush administration wanted to distance itself, in an election year, from 'rationing' medical care – the episode underscores some theoretical and practical obstacles to citizen involvement in policy making.

The critical question that needs to be asked about the Oregon experiment and similar exercises in communal democracy is: Is the average citizen morally and intellectually capable of making the kinds of choices that Oregonians were asked to make? The charges that non-disabled Oregonians devalued the quality of life of the disabled raises an important general point about the ability of citizens qua quasi-policy makers to act fairly and objectively. This concern is especially relevant,

and troubling, given the substantial literature on democratic theory that suggests American political elites are more likely to be committed to civic virtue, tolerance, and the protection of civil liberties than the masses.[5]

In addition to the concern about the public's capacity for fairness, there is also some doubt about its capacity to make well-informed decisions. In fact, the conventional wisdom among normative and empirical theorists is that the average citizen is supremely ill-equipped to make rational policy choices. Giovanni Sartori, a keen student of democratic theory, asks: 'What is the information base of public opinion [in America]?' His response could put advocates of participatory democracy in a funk: 'Here the answer is crushingly, throughout mountains of evidence, of a similar tenor: The state of inattention, non-interest, sub-information, perceptive distortion, and, finally, plain ignorance of the average citizen never ceases to surprise the observer.'[6]

Where, then, does this leave those of us who support efforts in participatory democracy such as that attempted in Oregon? The answer is, unbended. There are several reasons for this. The first is a negative point: The evidence of the Platonic ideal of a selfless, self-restraining and self-abnegating national elite is simply not born out by America's post-World War II experiences. One can hardly take comfort from the elites guarding the hen house of American democracy in light of McCarthyism, Vietnam, Watergate, and Iran-Contra. Furthermore, the Platonic notion of enlightened elitism emphasizes procedural concerns, such as elections, tolerance and free speech, but not substantive ones. Thus, although this model suggests an elite protective of procedural rights, it is less clear that they would, for example, respond to popular demand for an adequate level of health care for all. But this is precisely what Oregonians did in their community meetings, open hearings, and yes, even in the telephone survey.

However flawed the Oregon exercise in communal democracy may have been, it was far more solicitous and protective of the public interest than the cacophony of special interest pleading accompanying the debate over the Clinton Health Security Act. Although it would be misleading to suggest that, for example, the Oregon Health Action Council,

an umbrella organisation representing more than seventy labour, senior citizen, minority and low income groups, had political clout equal to that of the state medical or hospital associations, it is indisputable that they enjoyed considerable influence throughout the process. Such participation represents a monumental strategic improvement over any role these groups might play in the national arena.

In the final analysis, however, I return to the 'democratic wish'. The process and content of the Oregon rationing plan enjoys far greater legitimacy than anything the federal government might do, simply because it addresses a popular yearning for communal forms of democratic decision making. Even after the offending methodology was eliminated, and the alleged biases were purged, public preferences as expressed in the community parliaments, often prevailed. For example, one of the four consumer representatives reported that although some members, including her, felt that the high value assigned to preventative services by Oregonians in the community forums dictated that such services receive a high priority, some physician members were less convinced of the relative utility of, say, nutritional supplements and dental check-ups. In the end, however, the forces of community values carried the day, and preventive health services appeared high on the list.[7] The people of Oregon got their wish.

Notes

1. Mary Ann Bailey, 'Rationing Medical Care: Process for Defining Adequacy', in George J. Agich and Charles E. Begley (eds), The Price of Health (Norwell, MA: Reidel Publishing Company 1986), 165.

2. A recent survey found that over 70 percent of the American people disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job' See Joint Committee on the Organization of Congress, Final Report (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1993), 193.

3. James Morone, The Democratic Wish (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

4. The Oregonian August 4 1992, A1, A8.

5. See, for example, Kenneth Prewitt and Alan Stone The Ruling Elites (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 188–197, and: Herbert McClosky and Aida Brill, Dimensions of Tolerance: What Americans Believe About Civil Liberties. (New York: Russell Sage, 1983), 418–427.

6. Giovanni Sartori, The Theory of Democracy Revisited (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1987), 103.

7. Telephone interview with Amy Klare, Commissioner, Health Services Commission (March 18 1991).

Democracy's quantum leap

Christa Daryl Slaton

Many philosophers and theorists have waxed eloquent about the virtues of rule by the select one or few. Plato preferred philosopher kings. Thomas Hobbes trusted only the monarchy to act in the public good. Edmund Burke railed against the French revolutionaries and lauded the honourable attributes of the nobility described as 'a graceful ornament to the civil order'. John Adams warned against ochlocracy and preferred rule by an aristocracy of virtuous men.

At the core of the preference for elite control over the masses is a deeply cynical view of humankind. For the most part, humans are perceived as having warring natures, greedy ambitions, and narrow self-serving interests. To remedy this chaotic state of affairs, philosophers provide facile solutions based on imagined scenarios of benevolent elite guardians of the common good, who seek no personal gain or reward; unquestioned monarchical rule established by Divine Right; and/or virtuous rule of men born of wealth, who devote themselves to the betterment of all humanity. How interesting that these thinkers also seem so concerned with the rule of reason as opposed to the rule of passions and ignorance found in the masses and the demagogues that manipulate them. Considering their glorification of certain elite

Christa Daryl Slaton is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Auburn University, author of 'Televote' and pioneer of quantum theory in participative democracy.

groups in society, whose idealised virtues are not supported by the historical record, one suspects the self-proclaimed advocates of reason have succumbed to their own passions. In other words, their intense opposition to democracy has propelled them into reactionary stances so that in order to more fully discredit democracy, they glorify those who seek to suppress it.

Most proponents of democracy take an entirely different tack. They arrive at their support for democracy, not by believing that the common citizen can create the perfect or ideal government or always produce the public good, but by believing that the good of all can never be determined or assured by a privileged few. Democrats recongnise the interconnections, the uncertainties, and the diversity of interests within social systems. Democracy is not based on an idealised faith in any class of citizens but on a view of reality that recognizes good and bad, self-interests and common-interests, shortsightedness and foresight, and wisdom and foolishness in citizens from all walks of life. With this more balanced view of the dispersal of mixed attributes among the citizenry, including the wealthy, educated minority, democratic theorists reject the bleak picture of human nature that assumes that unless constrained by a greater power, human behaviour will be dictated by greedy ambition. The democrat recognizes the transforming power of compassion, love, and honour and believes these qualities are more likely to be found in societies that distribute power among all citizens rather than concentrate it in the hands of a few. Power over others is corrupting. Shared power is enriching and more likely to create a commonwealth.

At the core of democratic thought is the concept of equality. Aristotle argued that democracy in its truest form is based on the principle of democratic justice – that all should count equally and rule equally. Rousseau maintained that to obtain the general will of society, every citizen should speak for himself. John Locke believed that all are born with the right to life, liberty and property. Thomas Jefferson added that each person's inalienable rights included the pursuit of happiness. Thomas Paine stated that equal rights is a divine principle that must be respected by a civil society. Mary Wollstonecraft, an early Western proponent of

gender equality, argued that the more equality is established among citizens, 'the more virtue and happiness will reign in society'.

The democratic emphasis on equality is not based on a naive view that all citizens are born equally endowed, will contribute equally to society, or deserve absolute equality in living circumstances. Rather it is grounded in the belief that each person has a right to speak for himself or herself and that societies which deny that right have violated natural rights that precede and transcend governments.

Many advocates of democracy developed their commitment to democratic government after closely observing and becoming disenchanted with elite abuse of power. Some, such as Jeremy Bentham, were originally admirers of aristocratic rule and several were born into the upper classes that disdained the common person. Thomas Jefferson, who held some of the most powerful positions in government, warned the citizens, or sheep, to be wary of the rulers, or wolves, who would devour them if they did not keep a watchful eye. Their experience with the pettiness, greed, and ambition that flowed from unchecked power led them to choose the natural democracy rather than rule by the natural aristocracy. Even James Madison, who was obsessed with controlling majority faction when helping design the United States constitution, aligned himself with Jefferson in later years to form a democratic challenge to the extensive abuse of power demonstrated by the rulers who distrusted the masses.

Rather than embracing democracy as the perfect system, most democrats have arrived at the support of democracy because they have reached the same conclusion as Winston Churchill who conceded democracy's flaws but ranked it at the top of political systems designed and maintained by imperfect beings.

While proponents of democracy are inclined to trust citizens most of the time to act in the public good, they recongnise that citizens can be manipulated, duped or uninformed. Democrats throughout the ages, from Pericles to modern teledemocrats, discuss the importance of public education and public dialogue and debate and often concentrate on the means to create a more enlightened citizenry. They do not discredit the value of expert knowledge and opinion, but agree with Carl Friedrich's view that experts should be on tap, not on top.

There is another important aspect that deserves at least some mention at this point, one that concerns key building block in both democratic and elitist philosophy. Western political philosophies tend to place political phenomena within the context of more universal physical theories, particularly those that define and discuss universal existence. In fact, the development of modern democratic theory has well-defined links with the new physics of the Enlightenment, a linkage no less real than the personal association between John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton.

> 'Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum theory have corrected Newton's theory and demonstrated that our universe is not so logical and determinate at all. It is, instead, extraordinarily uncertain, unpredictable, interactive and even paradoxical'

Newtonian Physics had an enormous impact on the development and content of what passes for modern democratic theory, a theoretical amalgam that relies heavily on 'laws' of human behaviour, logic and reason, cause and effect, and the like. Based on these fundamental assumptions, it is easy to see how wealthy, educated elites could maintain control of political institutions. After all, who but they had the time and resources to gain an education sufficient to master the knowledge and mental skills necessary to pass laws based on mountains of information. And who but they had enough time to think it all through and debate conflicting points of view endlessly?

But experience has shown that legislation in modern representative democracies is much less a function of reason, information, and debate than it is of powerful interests, organisations and lobbies. And history has shown that Newton's laws were not as absolute as he and the political philosophers of his and modern times have believed. Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum theory have corrected Newton's theory and demonstrated that our universe is not so logical

and determinate at all. It is, instead, extraordinarily uncertain, unpredictable, interactive and even paradoxical.

Some modern teledemocrats have found this to be instructive and useful in constructing their own theories and operationalizing them. Using quantum theory as a base, they have emphasized the importance of subjective factors in forming legislation. Isn't this more realistic than conventional democratic theory that states that legislation is a product of objective thinking? They have emphasized the uncertainty of cause and effect in the making of law and the indeterminacy of the impact of such laws.

Particularly in this day of extensive public education and instant interactive communication, democrats see the greatest potential ever for development of democracy. Those nations that are leading the

world today are the ones that have embraced democratic values, acknowledged basic human rights, and derived legitimacy through consent of the governed. Empires and dictatorial regimes are collapsing under the sheer weight of their oppression. The tragedy is that as oppressed people are liberated, they remain victims of their former oppression. The elites that ruled over them denied them the paths to empowerment and self-fulfilment. The vicious cycle of abuse and oppression continues. Even in democratic societies when the poor or minorities are denied power or access to power, it is not unlikely that they will eventually resort to 'illegitimate' or illegal means to be heard, which can often lead to destructive results.

Modern communications technology can provide the means to broadly educate and enlighten citizens, to engage them in discussions of the public good and the means to achieve it, and to empower citizens in their quest for self-determination. If technology is utilized primarily to manipulate and/or suppress, ignorance and incompetence will be the product of such elite control. As the world observes the brutalities perpetuated by former victims, we should consider the theory that one reaps what one sows.

So it is time to recognize philosophically who are the realists and who are the idealists.

Electrifying Democracy

Theodore L. Becker

The Electronic Town Meeting movement has been underway for over twenty years now. Those who have been experimenting with authentic ETM formats have tried to solve a wide variety of problems latent in them. These include how to involve highly representative samples of the citizenry; how to get ordinary citizens to deliberate complex issues and problems; how to provide relevant, balanced information and a wide range of opinion, and how much of it; how to coordinate two-way and lateral multi-media outlets and conduits over extended periods of time.

Much has been accomplished along these lines over the years by the experimenters, enough so that more ambitious ETM projects are in the planning and pre-implementation stages. In other words, there is a growing momentum to the ETM movement. The idea is gaining credibility and it is becoming clear that we are in for a future of many, probably competing models of ETM's with different ideological foundations, varying formats, and more or less direct impact on governance. This will become increasingly clear as the vaunted information superhighway expands exponentially.

As the ETM plays more significant and visible roles in democratic political arenas, the major interlocking issues of funding, sustainability and independence will become more obvious and pressing. Of course,

Ted Becker is Professor of Political Science at Auburn University and co-ordinator of New Zealand televote and Honolulu ETM.

this is akin to the Platonic issue of who will guard the guardians. In more modern terminology, it is the problem of how to best institutionalize the phenomenon of ETM's so that the general public interest will be maximized.

There are several models available, each with some obvious advantages and disadvantages. The major variable is the institutional 'home', i.e. location and support, of the ETM 'technics', administrators, pollsters, TV production units, facilitators, etc. These potential permanent sites include several options: 1. Government; 2. Political campaigns of candidates for office; 3. Political parties; 4. Commercial, quasi-public and/or public television (like ITV, CBS, BBC, PBS, CBC, the cable TV industry etc.); 5. Independent non-profit organizations (like Consumers Union, Science in the Public Interest); or 6. A for-profit, independent commercial ETM company.

Option 1

Government. Can any government run an ETM impartially and independent of preferred outcomes? Experience shows mostly positive results on this question.

Many of the leading ETM experiments over the past twenty years or so have been funded by a wide variety of governmental entities at the national (New Zealand), state (Washington, Alaska, Hawaii, Oregon), and local (Honolulu; New York City; Savannah, Georgia; Berks County, Pennsylvania) levels. Their intention has mainly been to involve as much broader segment of the population in planning processes, what Clement Bezold termed 'anticipatroy democracy' (Bezold 1980). Few of these projects have been criticised for being biased in the process towards any specific government or political agendas. What is more, being sponsored by government seems to attract many citizens into the process. Indeed, it is fair to call them successful and popular ways to induce widespread citizen participation.

What is more, there are other examples of government funded and staffed agencies that are extremely independent of pre-selected or powerful political agendas and which openly criticize government

programmes and expenditures. In the United States these include the General Accounting Agency and the Congressional Budget Office. So, government can be a decent institutional base for ETMs, a use of taxpayer funds that attracts citizens into previously unfriendly processes – particularly if the entire ETM process is readily accessible to outside investigation and critique.

Option 2

Political Campaigns, the best example of a political candidate using ETMs has not borne tasty and nutritional fruit. In 1992, Ross Perot ran as an independent candidate for the U.S. Presidency. A salient part of his campaign platform was his advocacy of the use of 'electronic town halls' to involve U.S. citizens in national referendums on the issue of taxes.

Although Perot was loud in his call for such a process, he did not use anything truly democratic like an ETM during his campaign. After garnering nearly 20% of the popular vote in the 1992 election, he set up a thinly-veiled Perot-backed political organisation called United We Stand, America. With Perot as its leading (and only) spokesperson, this organization ran a national ETM in 1993 on a number of issues. Not surprisingly, all its issues were exactly the same as his 1992 personal campaign platform. In other words, it was a 'worst case scenario' of how a political personage could produce a quasi-ETM with slanted information and biased questions in order to reach a predetermined 'public consensus' that was said to be his mandate. It seems fair to say that locating ETMs in political campaigns has not yet proved to be a good idea.

Option 3

Political Parties. The only illustration of an ETM housed in a political party thus far is the case of the Reform Party of Canada in the Spring of 1994.

Led by its leader, Preston Manning, the Reform Party ran an ETM in Calgary on the issue of physician-assisted suicide. Prior to a one-hour debate on the topic, random samples of voters in each of five Parliamentary districts represented by Reform Party MPs were

telephoned and asked to be televoters on the issue. If they agreed, they were mailed pro and con arguments on the issue and were asked to view the live-TV debate on the issue the following Sunday. Then they were told to punch in their Personal Identification Number (PIN) and vote by telephone.

What was particularly interesting and important about this experiment was that the televoters, the TV audience, and the entire nation were assured by Manning and the five Reform Party members of Parliament was that this was not an idle exercise and that the vote of the citizens on this issue would be binding on the MPs if a consensus (over 70%) was reached in any of the districts. Indeed, this is precisely what occurred, and even though each of the MPs was personally against doctor assisted suicide, all became committed to the opposite position because over 70% of the televoters in their district were in favour of it. This is the maximum impact that an ETM can have in a representative system and this experiment proved it could and did work as sponsored by a political party with in a parliamentary system where party discipline was inapplicable to individual members on matters of conscience.

'We are in for a future of many, probably competing models of ETM's with different ideological foundations, varying formats, and more or less direct impact on governance.'

Option 4

Quasi-public TV networks. There is a lot of confidence placed in the ability of quasi-public nationwide television networks to host the ETM process. Perhaps one of the most popular types is the PBS model in the United States, since it is a hybrid of government, corporate sponsorship and individual citizen subscription.

Of course, this model could apply to a quasi public/private type of organisation devoted exclusively to the regular production of ETMs at the national, state, provincial, district, regional and local levels of government. This model has great appeal since it appears to involve, but

not bow to, numerous important interests in modern industrialized nations.

Option 5

Independent, Citizen Financed Non-Profit and/or For-Profit ETM Companies. My own favourites, however, exclude the direct participation of government and the corporate sector in the financing and administration of the ETM process. This is probably due to my bias towards utilizing ETMs more for the empowerment of the citizenry via more direct democracy and via more lateral dialogue and problem solving. In my view, since representative government entities and corporate bodies are already very influential in modern government on behalf of their own interests, the ETM process needs to be completely

independent of them for sustenance and in content. Thus, the ETM 'home' needs to be completely free from their subtle and/or not-so-subtle pressures. The citizenry itself must take primary responsibility for injecting money into the process.

Ms Magazine and the Consumers Union, in the United States, are two excellent examples of independent information outlets to the American citizenry. Each relies exclusively on money paid by citizens who choose to pay for their information-providing services (a magazine, books, 900-telephone information, etc.). Each is highly respected and continues to enjoy increased influence and distribution. This would be an excellent model for an ETM organization.

Finally, I believe that another excellent model would be a for-profit ETM company. I realize that many will rail against the 'commodification' of democracy that this appears to endorse, however, I believe that the business model will be highly competitive with all other models in terms of quality, independence, sustainability and usefulness to the growth of future direct democracy.

In conclusion, let me note that I doubt that any debate on the relative merits of these models will resolve the issue at this stage. This is because it is my firm belief that all of these models will come into being in the next few decades and will compete for patronage and impact. Such competition among ETM models is more likely to empower citizens, enrich modern democracies and resolve seemingly intractable contemporary problems than should only one or two dominate the landscape.

Initiatives and experiments

Martin Bartle

Oregon

Two experiments in Oregon were led by the incoming liberal Democrat governor, Barbara Roberts, in the late 80's. Gov Roberts inherited a legacy of dramatic tax cuts and had no realistic, acceptable, substitute tax to fund the kind of reforms she was seeking. Her solution was to involve the electorate in deciding what the priorities were and where the money to fund any action would come from.

In the first experiment, 'Conversation With Oregon', Roberts held a series of unprecedented, unrigged, interactive, televised meetings with thousands of Oregon citizens. 80,000 letters were sent out to a random cross-section of Oregonians with an invitation to participate in a 'live' cable tv consultation with Gov Roberts.

The second experiment, 'Oregon Benchmarks', is a system of targets designed to track the states progress in a straightforward two-yearly report to the electorate as part of an ongoing consultative process. 'People are willing to hear bad news … a lot of today's cynicism and mistrust will go away if you're straightforward with people' says Roberts. Her allying is 'what gets measured gets done, and what gets recognized gets done best'.

Berks community television

The New York University Media Centre developed a video communications network to promote the social welfare of senior citizens in Reading,

Pennsylvania. The system began as a programme allowing senior citizens to communicate with city officials. It was so successful that eventually citizens were equipped with interactive video, and could telephone in while watching budget hearings on television. Currently there is a weekly dialogue between the mayor, one or more local councillers and the public. Any major crisis results in an electronic town meeting and rather than turning their backs on the results the city officials of Reading have acknowledged its value. The mayor of Reading believes that 'as citizens become better acquainted with how local government works and what it can accomplish, they have also become less cynical about local politics.'

Alternatives for Washington

Alternatives for Washington ran for two years. Sponsored and funded by the state governer, Dan Evans, its goal was to identify the major problems the state needed to address and to determine the preferred policy alternatives. In the first year various future scenarios were posited and preferred future policies established. The second year involved evaluating the viability of the various policies selected. The project recruited citizens from all walks of life, educated those involved, and used many different methods to generate and facilitate an interaction between them. The methods utilized include: Delphi questionnaires, area wide conferences, television programming designed to educate the public on the initiative and to solicit feedback in the form of phone-ins, Newspapers featured lengthy mail-in questionnaires that described 11 futures and asked citizens to respond with their own preferences (26,000 responses were received), random sample telephone and mail surveys were sent to 6,000 citizens to gain a representative sample with which to compare the results of the newspaper surveys. Gov Evans did not have the backing of the state legislature and there was open hostility on their part to both the project and its conclusions.

Alaska Legislative Teleconference Network

In response to a claim that the state capital, Juneau, was too isolated to allow the electorate to appear in person, a statewide public hearing was

held. Citizens were given toll-free numbers so they could call in with comments and questions. The experiment was so successful that it led to the funding of a legislative teleconference network (LTN). The LTN led to a realisation from legislators that 'Alaskans wanted a greater voice in government and were willing to use the network'. The influence on government accountability and a fear of the reaction of citizens if they were no longer included in the decision making process means that the Alaskan legislature is now seeking opinions from a cross-section of the Alaskan population on a regular basis. A series of electronic town meetings were also sponsored by the Alaska Department of Transportation to determine how Alaskans wanted to spend the transportation budget.

Televote

Pioneered by Vincent Cambell in San Jose, California. Once registered a televoter receives a personalized registration number and detailed information in each issue. Televoters are given two options for voting. One is to call during an eight-hour period on weekdays and record their vote with an operator. The other is to call through an answering machine which allows the voter to dial their registration number and vote.

The Hawaii Televote Method

Hawaii used the televote method to elicit input from the general public during a statewide constitutional convention, an event which traditionally lacked any public involvement. It used a representative sample, as opposed to a self-selected one, gained by random digit dialling (95% of homes in Hawaii have a telephone). Responses were elicited by mailing an info pack to the participants and arranging a call back time when the experimenters could re-call voters for their responses. Significant for its low-tech approach, random-sampling and its emphasis on factual (defined as information which is empirical and indisputable) information. The researchers found the sample to give responsible and sophisticated answers.

LA Televote

A student of Jim Dator's (a contributor to the Hawaii televote experiments) persuaded the Southern Californian Association of Governments (SCAG) to use televote methods in their planning process. The main difference in the LA televote was that it established a link between planners, government and the televoters ensuring that the Televote was linked to the policy making process.

Media Watch

The Audit Explosion, by Michael Power
Published on April 21st 1994

Few jobs have not been reached by the long arm of the audit trail. In everything from art to medicine, accountability and value for money have become the buzzwords. In this book Michael Power analyses the flimsy intellectual foundations of the audit explosion, positing an alternative based on creating rather than just policing quality. The central argument was excerpted in The Independent on the day of publication under the title 'Besieged by Numbercrunchers': 'in the second half of the 1990s our priority, throughout the public and private sectors should be to find a better balance between formal external audits and more public, local and face to face types of accountability: a better balance between doing and policing.'

The editorial of the Times Higher Educational Supplement commented that 'Demos … has again demonstrated an unerring sense of the hot topic and ripe time in publishing Mike Power … It is good to see academics leading in this debate. It would be even better to see politicians taking issues raised seriously.'

The Financial Times commented that 'audit has become a dominant influence with little scrutiny and scant discussion on the unintended side effects such as executive stress, a breakdown in trust and organisational

loyalty and a risk that it may be addressing the wrong issues … his study represents a rare attempt to stand back and question the very notion of auditing.

The Guardian described it as 'an extremely interesting examination of another manifestation of badly applied management theory', and the Observer called it a 'well-aimed critique of the 'audit explosion' as a panacea for problems of administrative control'.

Demos Quarterly, The End of Unemployment
Published on March 14th 1994

Published to coincide with the Clinton job summit, the second quarterly set out a series of analyses of and a raft of policies to reduce unemployment. The issue was covered in The Times, The Guardian, The Financial Times, The Independent, The Sunday Telegraph and Today, and has been widely debated both in Europe and North America. Its central argument was that the political position of unemployment is now changing.

As Geoff Mulgan wrote in The Independent on 16 April, 'Across the political spectrum it is conventional wisdom that unemployment is here to stay and little can be done about it. Twenty years ago much the same was said about inflation. Yet as the costs become unsustainable, governments found the will to act and in many countries inflation was defeated. Something similar is happening with unemployment.'

Hugo Young writing in the Guardian put the arguments in their political context: 'Perhaps what unemployment needs, before it can retrieve its place at the top of the agenda, is a new sting. If politicians no longer fear it at the ballot box, maybe they should fear it on the streets. This is a subtext of the new issue of the Demos Quarterly, at the center of which is a stimulating piece by Charles Leadbeater and Geoff Mulgan which seeks to re-galvanise political excitement with a series of ideas politicians seldom dare to have. The Demos exercise is a scream of rational anger against the prevailing fatalism. There are no alibis, it says. Contrary to myth, people want work not enforced leisure, and put it at the centre of their lives. This is not a leisure-driven but

work-driven society. As for either the rightist solution of deregulation, or the leftist preference for social protection, each is going down a cul-de-sac. It is the authors contend, the minimalism of conventional ideas that registers the inadequacy of current political leadership. They argue for a radical shift of priorities away from many sacred cows. Education is at the heart of their fuller-employed world, and the tax system, they think, should replace present concessions for property with credits for brain power: tax incentives to favour new qualifications, 'learnfare' to link benefits to training, a public sector purchasing policy to penalise companies that don't meet high standards of 'human capital formation'. For learning and training, on a scale vastly larger than now happens, is the key to a world not of permanent employment – a concept gone and never to return – but steady employability. Demos advocates a target education budget maintained as a share of GNP to match the average of the top three world spenders. More kudos for teachers, more links between schools and employers, a jobs advisory service raised to be 'one of the highest status institutions in the land' and a much larger private education sector are among its heterodox prescriptions. More taxes on consumption, savings and environmentally damaging activities should be mobilised to help reduce job-destroying taxes like, says Demos, income tax.'

It offers a challenge to politicians on all sides. Are you serious, it asks, in your protestations about the priority of unemployment? Will you recognise that there is, or should be, a sting behind this task, namely the slow collapse of social order if it isn't accomplished?

The Financial Times wrote that: the jobs summit in Detroit was never likely to come up with exciting new solutions. What it could do was register agreement on the importance of the topic and indicate the nature of the emerging consensus on what to do about it. There is room for a great deal of imaginative new thinking of the other kind contained in a new pamphlet from the London-based think-tank Demos on 'the end of unemployment.'

According to a leader in The Independent, 'as the Demos think-tank points out in a paper published today: "If security no longer comes from being employed, it must come from being employable."

The current failure to achieve this goal is all too evident. Too many British school-leavers are innumerate and illiterate. The long term unemployed have become the human equivalent of derelict industrial wastelands, assumed to have no potential for wealth production. A society cannot accept the misery that results.'

Signs of the times

Mass Meeting	Virtual Meeting
Manifesto	Media Bite
Speakers Corner	Internet
Richard Dimbleby	Rush Limbaugh
Pre-packed	Boutique
Party Allegiance	Party Promiscuity
Lincoln – Douglas Debates	Read My Lips
Representative Democracy	Direct Democracy
Fat	Lean
One Vote	Many Votes
Juries for Justice	Voter Juries
Ballot Box	Push Button
Passive	Deliberative
Midlothian Campaign	Jennifer's Ear
MORI/ICM	ETM
Citizens Charter	Constituents Charter
Jobs for Life	Term Limits
Careerist Amateurs	Temporary Professionals
Political Initiative	Citizen Initiative
The Candidate	Bob Roberts