

Argument 1 for Assignment 2, HIS 1014

As we go out on this May Day, and look at our world, we see the familiar priorities of power and money, set over against people. But now with one difference, that the agent of just these priorities, in Britain, is a Labour government. It is a strange paradox, which must be faced and understood.

The immediate paradoxes are startling. While thousands of our people are without homes, while our schools are overcrowded and our health service breaking under prolonged strain, we have watched the wives of Labour ministers, protected by police, launching Polaris nuclear submarines. In a prolonged economic crisis, which has consistently falsified orthodox descriptions and remedies, a Labour government has stuck to old and discredited policies: cutting ordinary people's living standards, and putting the protection of a capitalist economic and financial system before jobs, care and extended education. At City banquets, at the centre of a society that still flaunts private wealth, places are set for Labour ministers to describe the historic objectives of their own party – the defence and advancement of the working people – as selfishness and indiscipline. The limited provisions of the welfare state are called sacred cows, and are cut, in a false equation with a still intolerable military expenditure. More than half a million people are left to stand and wait without jobs, and in this new language are called spare capacity. The new generations are generations of weapons.

This is now the dangerous gap: between name and reality; between vision and power; between our human meanings and the deadening language of a false political system. In an increasingly educated society, in which millions of people are capable of taking part in decisions, in which there is all the experience of a mature labour movement and a political democracy, in which there is a growing and vital confidence in our ability to run our own lives, we are faced with something alien and thwarting: a manipulative politics, often openly aggressive and cynical, which has taken our meanings and changed them, taken our causes and used them; which seems our creation, yet now stands against us, as the agent of the priorities of money and power..

How has this happened? This is the only real question to ask, on this May Day, so that we can find ways of ending the danger and the insult that the political situation in Britain now increasingly represents. The sound of protest is rising again, in many parts of the country, and this is a critical moment. The years of radical campaigning from Suez through Aldermaston to the early sixties made connexions that still hold, groups that still function. The Labour movement, in the unions and in the constituencies, has worked and struggled with a remarkable resilience. And it seemed, for a time, just a few years ago, that all this effort was coming together, with a new move forward. While the Tory illusion disintegrated, the Labour party, under the new leadership of Harold Wilson, caught up, for a while, the sense of movement, the practical urgency of a change of direction. After the defensive years, we saw the hope and the possibility of a really new start. There was a noticeable quickening in the Labour party itself, and the new radicals, campaigning for human alternatives to a nuclear strategy, to social poverty and to cultural neglect, came, in majority, to work for a Labour government: never uncritically, but with a measured and seemingly reasonable hope.

After these years of shared effort, we are all, who worked for a Labour government, in a new situation. For the sense of failure – a new kind of failure, in apparent victory – is implacably there, in every part of the Left Not the crowing over failure; not the temporary irritation; but a deeply concerned and serious recognition of a situation none of us had wholly understood. The obstacles to progress, once so confidently named for our eager combined assault, may now, for the government have become a platform. But, however plausible the rationalisations, however ingenious the passing reassurances, hardly anyone is deceived. A definition has failed, and we are looking for new definitions and directions.....

It is our basic case, in this manifesto, that the separate campaigns in which we have all been active, and the separate issues with which we have all been concerned, run back, in their essence, to a single political system and its alternatives. We believe that the system that we now oppose can only survive by a willed separation of issues, and the resulting fragmentation of consciousness. Our own first position is that all the issues – industrial and political, international and domestic, economic and cultural, humanitarian and radical – are deeply connected; that what we oppose is a political, economic and social system; that what we work for is a different whole society. The problems of whole men and women are now habitually relegated to specialised and disparate fields, where the society offers to manage or adjust them by this or that consideration or technique. Against this, we define socialism again as a humanism: a recognition of the social reality of man in all his activities, and of the consequent struggle for the direction of this reality by and for ordinary men and women.

Raymond Williams (ed.) *May Day Manifesto 1968* (Penguin, 1968)

Argument 2

On the evening of 11 September 2001, the American writer Susan Jacoby overheard two men talking in a New York bar. 'This is just like Pearl Harbor', one said. What is Pearl Harbor? The other asked. That was when the Vietnamese dropped bombs in a harbour and it started the Vietnam War', the first man replied.

Does it matter that they got it so wrong? I would argue that it does, that a citizenry that has so little knowledge of the past cannot begin to put the present into context, can too easily be fed stories by those who claim to speak with the knowledge of history and its lessons. History is called in, as we have seen, to strengthen group solidarity, often at the expense of the individual, to justify treating others badly, and to bolster arguments for particular policies and courses of action. Knowledge of the past helps us to challenge dogmatic statements and sweeping generalisations. It helps us all to think more clearly.

If those two bewildered men in the bar had known about Pearl Harbor, they would have understood that the attack on the World Trade Center was not the same as Japan attacking the United States in 1941. That was a war between two states; this was an attack of terrorism. That in turn suggested that the tactics and strategy would have to be different from before. Although many, including the administration

of President George W. Bush, talked about a war on terror, the analogy was misleading. Wars are made on enemies, not on ideas; wars have defined goals – usually forcing the enemy to capitulate – but a war on terror has no clearly defined end. Nor was the attack on the World Trade Center anything like Vietnam. There the United States was carrying the war to the enemy's country, and again it had a solid enemy in North Vietnam and its southern allies.

In the aftermath of 11 September, when Americans were shocked, angry and frightened, it was crucial that they and their leaders be able to think clearly. Who, to begin with, was the enemy? Here history was helpful because it cast light not only on al-Qaeda and its goals but also on the reasons for its anger at the West. History was also there to remind Americans of how their country tended to behave in the world and in the face of threats. Those reminders were largely ignored by the US administration as it prepared for war on first Afghanistan and then Iraq.

A year after the attack on the World Trade Center, Paul Schroeder, one of the most thoughtful of the United States' historians of foreign affairs, wrote an article 'What Has Happened Since 9/11? Not Much, and Not for the Better', in which he urged Americans to put what had happened in a larger historical and global context. Yes, he said, the attack had been frightful, but it had not done long-term damage to the United States. True, the terrorist threat remained a serious one, but it was not as great as those suffered by other states in the present and in the past. Yet the Bush administration was using 11 September to claim the right for the United States to decide whom to attack when it pleased without consulting its allies or world bodies such as the United Nations.

'It is hard to grasp and impossible to exaggerate', Schroeder wrote, 'how novel, sweeping, dangerous, and subversive of world order and peace this new doctrine is. It violates the two foundation stones of the international system developed over the last five centuries; the principle of the independence, juridical equality, and coordinate status of its component units (now almost entirely states), and its equally vital counter principle, the need and requirement for such independent units to form and join associations for common purposes and to follow recognised norms and practices, especially in seeking peace and security.' The United States, moreover, was abandoning its own history of working with others to uphold a world order and, in its invasion and occupation of Iraq, its long history of opposition to imperialism. Worse, as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo would show, it was going to undermine and compromise its own deep respect for the law.

History, by giving contexts and examples, helps when it comes to thinking about the present world. It aids in formulating questions, and without good questions, it is difficult to begin to think in a coherent way at all. Knowledge of history suggests what sort of information might be needed to answer those questions. Experience teaches how to assess that information.

As they look at the past, historians learn to behave rather like the examining magistrate in the French judicial system. What happened and why? The historian asks. History demands that we treat evidence seriously, especially when that evidence contradicts assumptions we have already made. Are the witnesses telling the truth? How do we weigh one version against another? Have we been asking the right or the only questions? Historians go further and ask what a particular event, thought or attitude from the past signifies. How important is it? The answer in part will depend on what we in the present ask and what we think is important. History does not produce definitive answers for all time. It is a process.

History can help us make sense of a complicated world but it also warns of the dangers of assuming that there is only one possible way of looking at things or only one course of action. We must always be prepared to consider alternatives and to raise objections. We should not be impressed when our leaders say firmly, 'History teaches us', or 'History will show that we are right'. They can oversimplify and force inexact comparisons just as much as any of us can. Even the very clever and the powerful (and the two are not necessarily the same) go confidently off down the wrong paths. It is useful, too, to be reminded, as a citizen, that those in positions of authority do not always know better.

Because history relies on a sceptical frame of mind, whether towards evidence or comprehensive explanations, it can also inculcate a healthy propensity to question our leaders. They are not always right, indeed often the opposite. In 1893, the British naval commander in the Mediterranean, Vice-Admiral George Tryon, decided to take personal command of the summer naval manoeuvres. When he ordered an about-face of two parallel rows of battleships, his officers tried to point out that there would be a collision. A relatively simple calculation demonstrated that the combined turning circles of the ships was greater than the distance between them. While his officers watched in dismay, his flagship, *Victoria* was rammed by the *Camperdown*. Tryon refused to believe that the damage was serious and ordered the nearby vessels not to send their lifeboats. The *Victoria* sank, taking him and 357 sailors with her.

The Charge of the Light Brigade, when the flower of the British cavalry rode straight into the mouths of the Russian guns, is an equal reminder of human folly, not just of Lord Cardigan, who led the charge, but of the system that allowed him to be in command. As David Halberstam, the American journalist, said in the last piece he ever wrote: 'It is a story from the past we read again and again, that the most dangerous time for any nation may be that moment in its history when things are going unusually well, because its leaders become carried away with hubris and a sense of entitlement cloaked as rectitude.'

Humility is one of the most useful lessons the past can provide the present. As John Carey [Emeritus Merton Professor of English Literature at Oxford] put it: 'One of History's most useful tasks is to bring home to us how keenly, honestly and painful, past generations pursued aims that now seem to us wrong or disgraceful.' Slavery once had its defenders. Think of the arguments over the position of the earth and the sun, of the conviction, apparently supported by science, that there were superior and inferior races, or the calm assumptions even a few decades ago that women or blacks could not make good engineers or doctors.

History also encourages people in the present to reflect on themselves. 'The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there', the novelist L.P. Hartley wrote. Knowing that classical Chinese civilisation valued scholars above soldiers or that the Roman family was very different from the nuclear family of the modern West suggests other values and other ways of organising society. That is not to say that all values are relative; rather, we should be prepared to examine our own and not merely take them for granted as somehow being the best. Professor John Arnold of Birkbeck College, University of London, put it elegantly in his book *History: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP): 'Visiting the past is something like visiting a foreign country: they do some things the same and some things differently, but above all else they make us more aware of what we call "home."'

If the study of history does nothing more than teach us humility, scepticism and awareness of ourselves, then it has done something useful. We must continue

to examine our own assumptions and those of others and ask, where's the evidence? We should be wary of grand claims in history's name or those to have uncovered the truth once and for all. In the end, my only advice is to use it, enjoy it, but always handle history with care.

Margaret McMillan, 'History Handle with Care' *Oxford Today* Vol. 22 No.2 Hilary 2010-03-09

Argument 3

I think of myself as a one-nation Tory, a social liberal. I applauded Margaret Thatcher's resurrection of the enterprise culture, deplored her indifference to the poor, favour Europe but not today the Euro, mistrust the police, loathe capital punishment, want grammar schools restored and support university top-up fees.

In modern Britain, all these matters are contentious, but we can argue about them anywhere. There is one issue, however, about which all public exchanges are muted, stifled. The Left has driven debate on immigration underground. It brandishes above the heads of every opponent of large-scale increases in the population of this island that most terrible of charges – racism. And the threat works.

Even the Conservative Party, desperate to recover power, holds back from assaulting the Government on its deplorable record for fear of unleashing the wrath of the liberal media. The worst legacy of Enoch Powell's ravings in the Sixties is that they have made it impossible ever since to hold a rational debate in Britain about immigration.

Figures published this week show that the non-white population of London has topped two million, almost double the figure of a decade ago. Britain's capital has become a Babel, as anyone who rides on a Tube or bus perceives in a moment, among passengers drawn from dozens of nationalities.

Enthusiasts such as London Mayor Ken Livingstone applaud the 'richness and diversity' this creates. They speak of immigrants' priceless contribution to the 'London buzz', rivalling the melting pot of New York. Livingstone welcomes the inflow of immigrants, who account for almost a third of his city's population

'Our polls show that nearly eight out of ten Londoners think the city's cultural diversity is one of its most attractive features,' he says. This may be true, but Mr. Livingstone fails to add that 80 per cent of British poll respondents also want more effective control of immigration.

And the truth is that the real number of immigrants living in London is much higher than the official figure, because so many illegal residents avoid censuses.

For instance, the latest survey records just 45,000 people from the whole south American continent in London, yet the Colombian embassy believes Britain is hosting 150,000 of its citizens alone.

We know that more than 250,000 immigrants and asylum seekers are arriving here each year, creating a net population increase of more than two million a decade.

The Home Secretary, 'Bully' Blunkett, believes this does not matter. Last month he said on TV that he perceives no particular upper limit at which the number of immigrants arriving in Britain would become unacceptable.

Some economists argue that immigration is not only desirable, but essential, to provide a 21st century workforce for Britain when its population is ageing and the birth rate is falling.

We shall return to the economic issue later. Let us address first the social one.

Politics is an ongoing debate about what kind of Britain we all wish to live in. It is a wholly legitimate part of this debate to consider which outsiders should or should not be admitted to the privilege of joining our society.

The Left argues that anyone opposed to large-scale immigration is, *ipso facto*, a racist. This is nonsense.

No country in the modern world can close its doors to all comers, and few sensible people wish to do so.

But it is entirely reasonable for any citizen to believe, and to exercise a right to declare publicly, that he or she wishes to live in a community dominated by people who share our historic culture and values.

It is plainly racist to object to the presence in Britain of any given individual merely because of their colour or creed.

It is not racist to argue that we must set limits upon how many people of alien cultures or creeds can enter Britain within a given timespan, without imposing intolerable strains on our society.

At a time when housing the British people is a crisis issue for this overcrowded island, Sir Andrew Green's Migrationwatch (the independent organisation set up to monitor immigration policy) estimates that an additional 1.1 million new homes will be needed over the next generation simply to provide roofs for immigrants.

The Government's arguments about Britain's urgent need for immigrant labour seem spurious.

It is indeed possible that, 20 years from now, we shall want workers. We do *not* need them now. Young workers arriving in 2003 will already be ageing by the time even the most pessimistic studies perceive a real need for their services.

Given the desire of many older British people to keep working past retirement age, even if we shall no longer be capable of heaving bricks on building sites, the need for immigrant labour a generation hence remains highly speculative.

So why does the Government continue to admit legal immigrants in increasing numbers and to make no serious effort to exclude illegal immigrants and asylum seekers?

First, on the issue of asylum seekers, ministers perceive themselves bowing to the inevitable. The physical difficulties of keeping them out are enormous because Britain has abandoned effective frontier controls.

The Government absolutely refuses to contemplate abrogating the half-century old human rights conventions as a preliminary to effective action. These are failures for which ministers should be harshly judged if or when a major terrorist atrocity takes place in Britain.

Thanks to a reckless abdication of responsibility, the authorities no longer possess reliable knowledge of movements across our borders by terrorists, never mind immigrants.

Second a deep-rooted instinct in favour of immigration pervades the Labour benches of the House of Commons.

The liberal media almost daily highlight examples of asylum seekers who have allegedly been victimised by the immigration authorities and threatened with expulsion to persecution in their home countries.

The traditional socialist view is that immigration is a good thing, which makes Britain a more diverse and vigorous society, and that better any number of illegal immigrants than for us to renounce our historic role as a sanctuary for the oppressed.

Unfortunately, the ranks of the allegedly oppressed around the world today include millions of economic migrants who simply want a better life.

The facility with which even the poorest people in the world can travel renders the old liberal open-door vision utterly unrealistic.

It is impossible for the rich democracies to accept all those who yearn to come and live in them. It was a reckless act by Tony Blair, for which he deserves to face the political pillory, to grant a right to work in Britain to 72 million citizens of the new Eastern European members of the EU.

I asked a Polish friend the other day about the mood in his country.

'They are all on the starting blocks, aching to leave,' he answered laconically.

'The moment they become EU members the floodgates will open.'

It is not a reflection of paranoia to suggest a further reason for Labour's inertia about mass immigration: it promises a political windfall.

It plays a significant part in fulfilling Tony Blair's long-declared aspiration to change the face of Britain for ever.

Very few newcomers to Britain are likely to vote Tory, to embrace the old middle-class values which those cafetiere new-agers Blair and Brown so despise.

For many years, immigrants will be instinctive Labour supporters, just as new arrivals in the U. S. almost always become Democrats.

I do not suggest that Tony Blair welcomes immigrants to gain political advantage. I merely submit that his Government is not making any serious attempt to exclude them, partly because their coming is good news for his party. A year or two ago, I was teasing an old friend, a former Labour Cabinet minister of famously liberal convictions. What would his attitude be today, I asked, if he had to address the issue of immigration? His answer surprised me. 'I don't feel at all comfortable about seeing large numbers of people coming to live in this country who not only do not share its values, but have not the slightest desire to do so,' he said.

Here, in a nutshell is the view of a great many of us. I was amazed to hear it articulated by a legendary liberal, even if he would have flinched from saying as much in public.

Here, I think, is the heaviest charge of all against the Government and its acolytes.

Far from encouraging immigrants to espouse our traditional values, Labour has fostered the pernicious cause of multi-culturalism.

It has encouraged the view that anyone who comes to Britain can bring with them and establish in Hounslow or Reading or Coventry or Newcastle their own bit of India or Pakistan, Africa or the Caribbean. This is the bit that sticks in the throat of millions of British people. Nobody expects that new arrivals, straight off the boat, will tuck into bed with Jane Austen or be able to recite within weeks a list of Marlborough's battlefield triumphs over the French.

Yet it seems a wholly proper, indeed essential message to give to immigrants who come to Britain that they are welcome here if they come to share their lives, but not if they merely want to make a corner of England for ever Bombay or Dhaka.

It is monstrous that some English children have to learn Urdu in schools.

It is pretty repugnant that the Labour Party appears willing, in the name of multi-culturalism, to extend a tolerance to forced arranged marriages and ritual slaughter of animals which it denies to fox-hunting.

Multi-culturalism does a huge disservice to immigrants themselves. Norman Tebbit's suggested 'cricket test' was much derided and indeed, abused when he proposed it.

His choice of words was ugly. But he made a fundamental point that cannot be dismissed: the way to make immigration acceptable to the huge majority of the British people, whose country this is, is to encourage immigrants to assimilate. National and social identities are precious possessions which need reinforcement, not suppression.

If immigrants don't want their children to celebrate Guy Fawkes' Day or read the Canterbury Tales in school, then they might care to think of living somewhere else.

Of course, schools, institutions and public services must recognise the cultural and language problems of new immigrants. They should, however, be pursuing policies directed towards social integration, not separation.

On current trends, within a few years, children from ethnic minorities will outnumber whites in London's schools.

'White flight' will accelerate this development, as the middle classes leave boroughs such as Southwark, Ealing and Lambeth to search of lives for themselves and their children among what they perceive as 'their own kind' in other boroughs or the countryside.

Tony Blair's Government is lying to the British people by suggesting that 250,000 immigrants a year is an acceptable or remotely desirable number if the stability and coherence of our society are to be maintained.

The only consequence of an influx on such a scale must be to increase popular resentment and hostility towards those who come.

Whatever Ken Livingstone's pollsters may tell him, millions of people remain determinedly English, children of the culture of Dickens and Trollope, Wellington at Waterloo and chocolate digestive biscuits.

Our London is – or was – the city of Pepys and Pygmalion. The latest London population survey is bad news not because many of the city's new immigrants are bad people or unworthy citizens but because their number have changed the character of the capital without its historic inhabitants being consulted about whether they wanted to live in an 'exciting cultural melting pot'.

Immigration and its consequences should be at the forefront of political argument because they are matters of deep concern to millions of voters.

As it is, however, when the Left is ready to attack even the excellent work of Sir Andrew Green's Migrationwatch as a reflection of racism, many people feel obliged to vent their dismay and anger only behind closed doors.

The sooner the newly revived Conservative Party works out a policy on immigration (and no more plans to invite mockery such as processing asylum seekers on off-shore islands, please Mr. Howard) then the better for the health of the body politic.

We are not, thank goodness, threatened with 'rivers of blood' but we do face profound changes in our society which this Government has no mandate to endorse. The British people care deeply about this, and are entitled to say so without embarrassment.

Max Hastings, 'The Deadly Silence' *Daily Express* Dec.6th 2003

Argument 4

At times when most ordinary families, betrayed by the bankers and the government, are struggling to pay their bills and have to tighten their belts, it beggars belief that MPs are demanding a 60 per cent rise to take their basic salaries over £100,000.

Of course few people can be genuinely surprised by such greed. Indeed, our elected representatives' egregious self-interest is only a pale reflection of the wider culture of gluttony, empire-building and shameless self-indulgence that has infected our public services.

Merely to recite examples of the behemoth public sector is to descend into a world of runaway unproductive public spending.

And if £400 million a year to keep our MPs in long lunches sounds bad, then how about almost £750 million a year on more than 200,000 health sector bureaucrats, more than £12 billion on the NHS computer system or a staggering £10 billion on the Olympics?

Instead of plotting ways to help themselves to even more of our hard-earned cash, MPs would do better to think about radically trimming the engorged public sector.

Even Mervyn King, the Governor of the Bank of England, is worried that this country cannot afford yet more profligate spending.

And with the national debt standing at a record £200 billion, our leaders should be looking for ways to save money, not throw even more of it around.

Anyone who thinks that deep cuts are impossible in a time of recession need only look back 80 years. The Thirties are often described as a dark episode in our national story, all flat caps and dole queues.

Yet the so-called 'devil's decade' did feature one particularly rare spectacle: a genuinely rigorous, public-spirited government, grasping the nettle and doing the right thing to try and rescue the economy.

In the summer of 1931, with the Great Depression at its height, Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government faced the triple whammy of soaring unemployment, fierce pressure on the pound and a budget deficit of £170 million (that's £31 billion in today's money).

At the end of July, the May Committee, made up of businessmen and trades unionists, recommended immediate action to reduce the deficit.

They determined that the government would have to make almost £100 million (£18 billion today) in spending cuts, which meant not only slashing public sector pay, but also making drastic reductions to unemployment benefit.

With his Cabinet divided over these proposed cuts, MacDonald offered to resign as Prime Minister – only for George V, in a masterstroke of royal

statesmanship, to persuade him to stay on as head of a National Government formed with members of the Tory and Liberal parties.

It was an extremely effective solution and, even as MacDonald's former Labour colleagues jeered from the sidelines, the new government slashed £70 million (£13 billion today) in spending at a stroke.

Everyone on the public payroll – from Cabinet ministers and judges down to naval ratings and dole recipients – had to accept immediate cuts of 10 per cent.

The police got off lightly, though with a cut of just 5 per cent: the ostensible reason was that Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, had accidentally mentioned that figure in the Commons, and said he felt obliged to 'honour my mistake'. Many people, however, thought he simply wanted to guarantee police loyalty at a time of crisis.

Extraordinarily, most people accepted their pay cuts with good grace. Indeed, only the judges, who were among the best paid people in the land, made a fuss – the Lord Chancellor, Lord Sankey wrote to the Prime Minister to complain that the profession was in 'mutinous mood'.

The result of the cuts, however, was that the government had taken a major step towards trimming the deficit.

Thanks to our garbled modern history curriculum, few people remember the MacDonald government today.

Indeed, I'm sure the vast majority of today's MPs would claim that big pay cuts were madness during an economic recession, and give the example of Roosevelt, the New Deal and the need to invest heavily in public services.

But the truth is that Thirties Britain, with its balanced budget and cautious, responsible government, dealt with Depression much better than the US, where the incontinent spending and bureaucratic regulations of the New Deal actually made matters worse.

Within just a few years of the drastic spending and pay cuts, Britain's economy was well on the road to recovery – yet Roosevelt was still having to contemplate unemployment at over 20 per cent. The obvious question, then, is whether we could do the same today. There seems no reason why not.

After all, in Ireland, where the budget deficit as a proportion of GDP is actually less than ours, the government has already asked for public sector pay cuts of up to 10 per cent.

It is true that public sector unions are much stronger than they were in the Thirties, when they barely existed at all. And if the government tried to slash public sector pay, there would almost certainly be serious social unrest.

But as Margaret Thatcher proved in the Eighties, a strong government should be perfectly capable of standing up to the unions – and if the issue was properly explained, I suspect there would be widespread public support.

More to the point, there is no need for this to become an indiscriminate attack on public servants.

The real targets of the government-imposed economies should not be the hard-working nurses, teachers and policemen on whom we all depend, but the leeches, freeloaders and pen-pushers who enforce the government's totalitarian target culture, and who often make everyone's lives a misery while doing it. A good start would be a 10 per cent pay cut for bureaucrats earning more than £50,000 a year.

Even better, though, would be a bonfire of the quangos, which would save hundreds of millions a year, a special pensions levy on overpaid managers, and drastic, unflinching cuts in senior bureaucratic posts.

All of this, I need hardly add, would not only slash the deficit and release resources for the private sector; it would also do away with the intrusive culture of political correctness, health and safety and government targets, and allow proper dedicated public servants to get with doing the jobs they love.

These cuts should start at the very top. Far from MPs being paid more, they should set an example and immediately accept a 10 per cent reduction in their basic pay.

Goodbye to the whopping salaries, John Lewis expenses lists and pensions that keep them in their fantasy world. Goodbye, too to their sickening travel, subsistence and 'communications' expenses.

For too long, greedy MPs and public servants have been profiting from the public purse.

And if the current crisis gives us the opportunity to rein them in by learning the lessons of the Thirties, then it only goes to show that every cloud really does have a silver lining.

Dominic Sandbrook, 'A 60% Rise for MPs? No, How About a Pay Cut?' *Daily Mail*
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