



## *The Problems with 'Localism'*

*Tony Travers*

The Big Society and related policy drivers such as 'localism' and 'community' have emerged as a response to a perception that public and private institutions have become too big and distant for individual citizens to interact with. It is also argued that many people feel the political class ignores them. Promoters of policies to address the problem of increased alienation within parts of society also point to undesirable indicators such as a decline in social capital, rising anti-social behaviour and community breakdown.

In 2006, the think tank Policy Exchange published *Compassionate Conservatism*, by Jesse Norman and Janan Ganesh. This pamphlet argued that the state had become sufficiently big to stifle individual and local action and there should be a re-orientation away from central government towards local government and citizens. The size and role of the state, the banks, big corporations and even local councils has more recently been questioned by those who promote smaller, community-based, control of institutions.

The most visible manifestations of thought about the need to reform both

government and the private sector currently come from so-called 'Red Tory' Philip Blond and the think-tank Respublica, and also from 'Blue Labour' guru Maurice Glasman whose origins lie in London Citizens, the faith and community-based activist group. These thinkers are seen as bringing intellectual rigour to a sprawling debate about the nature of the State, the strength of civil society and the right of individuals to influence the institutions that impact upon them.

***// The Exchequer is responsible for 95 per cent of all UK taxation and is set to remain dominant. //***

There is a surprising similarity between the imperatives that drive Red Tories and Blue Labour. A modern world dominated by global corporations, too-big-to-fail banks and super-sized government has left citizens and local entrepreneurs cut off from any possibility of access to power and decision-making. The new Red/Blue think-

ers want to re-empower local communities. They also share a belief that morality and religion should have a greater role to play in the future of society.

But Compassionate Conservatives, Red Tories, Blue Labour and other radical localists face a desperate problem. Rather like the former Soviet bloc after 1991, England has become used to hyper-centralisation, to demand-led dependency on the State and to government-imposed service guarantees. Leading politicians in the major parties attack any idea of a public provision 'postcode lottery'. Most mainstream Labour politicians see the state as a wholly benign force. Few Conservatives honestly believe in dismantling large private corporations. Liberal Democrats still support traditional, elected, local government as the solution to the problem of centralisation.

Moreover, national politicians and civil servants appear to have little faith in local decision-making. The government has published only the most limited propos-

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## HoD report



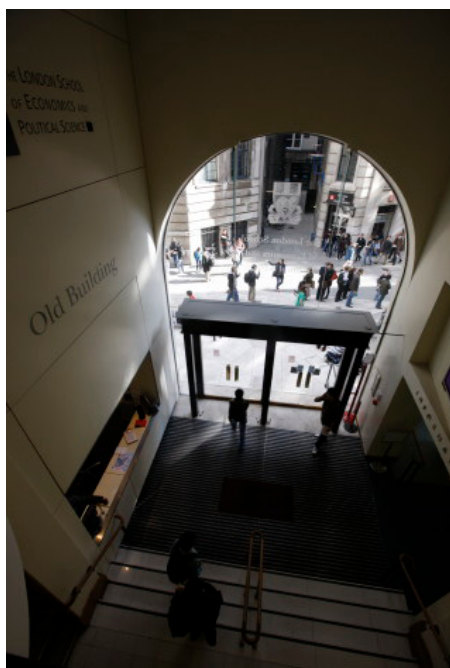
So here I am at the end of my second of three years as Head of Department and colleagues in their traditionally brutal way have already identified my successor. Professor **Simon**

**Hix** will take over the helm in August 2012. He will make an excellent Head of Department and I am delighted that he has stepped up to this important post. More about that in the future. For the time being I remain very much in charge and have no intention of relinquishing control until my final year is up.

There remains much to do in terms of student recruitment, widening participation, teaching and research. The Research Excellence Framework looms large and more will be required over the next few months as we prepare impact statements. Similarly we will face the impact of the new fee regime on English students applying for 2012 entry: these students will be making their final decisions over the course of this summer. These challenges are also opportunities and the department faces them in a strong and confident position.

We began the year at the Zoo: a cold and miserable day of London drizzle back in September. The awayday provided an opportunity to take stock and consider future developments with the whole department present, including all the administrative staff who do not by convention attend department meetings. (Even department meetings rarely attract above 60% of the staff). It was also an opportunity to meet new colleagues and we had a number. Some things were achieved and are going forward; such as the revamped conflict stream of the Comparative Politics programme and the new MSc in Migration others such as the MSc in Middle East Politics in Comparative Perspective are on-going and there will be more about each in future

Reminiscing about the beginning of the year also reminds me of the end



of the year and our recent department dinner where we said farewell to a large number of junior colleagues. As we use a lot of Tutorial Fellows for class teaching at the undergraduate and masters level we have a fairly high turnover of younger staff, especially as they can only stay for a maximum of three years. The colleagues concerned are **Kevin Young, Jonathan Monten, John Gledhill, Rory Costello, Piero Stanig** and **Christopher Gandrud**. Each in their different ways have made an important contribution to the teaching and research environment of the department. They have all been fine colleagues with an excellent contribution to the lives of our students. All are leaving for permanent or further fixed term appointments elsewhere and I trust they will be bringing some of the best of the Government department with them to their new homes.

We also said a farewell (I almost said final farewell but that sounded a bit inappropriate) to **Dominic 'Chai' Lieven**. Chai had been with the department for over thirty years before moving to the headship of the international history department last year. He is subsequently leaving the School to return to Cambridge – a small university in the south east midlands about which we know nothing. Seriously, this is a great credit to Chai and a further acknowledgement of his scholarship and reputation. During his time in the Government department he has had a lasting impact on many students, some of whom

have become colleagues. His books were numerous and his teaching was legendary – which does not mean that it did not happen! With Chai's move to Cambridge many colleagues lose a mentor and friend, but the department also loses one of those big characters that the modern academy all too infrequently produces. We know that many readers of this august journal will join with us in wishing him well.

As this entry has turned into an end of term report rather than a rumination on the big issues of department life or a reflection on the character of political thought in Britain, I should conclude with an acknowledgement of the wide variety of events we have hosted to disseminate our research and promote its impact. A couple of years ago the department established a small seminar fund to allow colleagues to put on seminars, symposia and conferences to promote their own research and bring in peers to engage with it. This has been a great success with our students who have been able to attend research related events hosted by their own faculty. The list of events has grown over the two years and a number of initiatives have established themselves as permanent events. Amongst this group I would like to note the Political Science and Political Economy Group seminar series and biennial conference, the ASEN Conference which is increasingly supported by Government department money, the Brian Barry Memorial lecture (given this year by Professor Ken Shepsle of Harvard) the annual legal and political theory conference as well as a number of smaller political theory conferences. I have mentioned British Government@LSE in previous reports and this continues to thrive and host lectures, seminars and symposia on aspects of British Government. We also have a growing conflict studies seminar series which is attracting much interest.

In short we have all done a lot this last year and as we begin the summer vacation, many colleagues will be planning further events for next year as well as conducting the research on which so much of our reputation depends. I would like to put on record my gratitude to those colleagues who make the Government department such an enjoyable and challenging place to work and study.

Have a good summer. ■

# An interview with Daphne Halikopoulou



**Daphne Halikiopoulou** obtained her PhD from the London School of Economics in September 2007. Her thesis is on the interaction between religion and national identity in the Republic Ireland and Greece. Her area of expertise is in comparative European politics and British politics. Her research focuses on nationalism and the sociology of religion and more specifically on issues such as citizenship, immigration, treatment of minorities (religious and ethnic) and the criteria for inclusion in and exclusion from the nation. Her first book, *Patterns of Secularisation: Church, State and Nation in Greece and the Republic of Ireland*, was published by Ashgate in January this year.

We took the opportunity to ask her a few questions (Guardian Weekend style)

and to get to know her outside of her life at the LSE.

**Which living person do you most admire, and why?**

My father for so many reasons.

**What would your super power be?**

Reading people's minds.

**What is your favourite book?**

Christ Recrucified by Nikos Kazantzakis. And Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. And Eleni by Nikos Gatzogiannis. I can't decide.

**Which living person do you most despise, and why?**

I don't really despise people. Just traits of character. Insincerity is the worst.

**How do you relax?**

With a gin and soda and a good crime novel. Best enjoyed by the seaside.

**What is your greatest fear?**

Death.

**Where would you most like to be right now?**

On an aeroplane. Preferably going somewhere that I have never been before.

**Which political icon/event has had the most effect on your thinking?**

Social revolutions. And especially their outcome. They reveal a lot about the human propensity towards violence and abuse of power.

**Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?**

Charles Dickens, he would have wonderful stories to tell.

**What is the most important lesson life has taught you?**

It's always worth trying and not giving up.

**What three books would you take with you to a desert island?**

Joyce's Ulysses, I may actually finish it there. The corrections, by Jonathan Frantzen. And a good fishing guide.

**What do you consider your greatest achievement?**

My PhD. A cliché. But true.

**What's your favourite food?**

I like fish and I like rice, so I guess it has to be sushi. ■

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als to allow increased local powers over taxation. The Exchequer is responsible for 95 per cent of all UK taxation and is set to remain dominant. Such high levels of central tax-determination inevitably lead to centralised decision-making. All the think-tank localism in the world will come to nothing unless Britain can transfer a significant proportion of tax-raising power away from the Exchequer.

As things stand, the government's proposals for the Big Society and localism seem likely to shift some powers from councils to neighbourhoods and communities. But there are few proposals to give local neighbourhoods significant democratic powers over the NHS, education, work & pensions or justice. Council services may be decentralised to wards and parishes, but Whitehall powers will remain in the hands of ministers. ■



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## British Politics and Policy at LSE blog, one year on

In May 2010 the LSE's successful, but temporary, Election Experts blog changed into its now permanent form, British Politics and Policy at LSE. In the past year the new blog has gone from strength to strength, proving how effective multi-author blogs can be at disseminating academic research. Since last June, the blog has had over 168,000 visits and nearly 300,000 pages have been viewed. The blog has now risen to the 8th most popular economics blog in the UK according to Wikio's rankings, and is the only academic entry in the top 100 most popular political blogs.

With over 4,000 followers on Twitter, and over 300 Facebook followers, and more than 500 daily RSS subscribers, British Politics and Policy at LSE is one of the most popular university politics blogs in the country. We are read by worldwide news media and academic institutions.

## Extensive coverage of the AV referendum

The weeks leading up to the historic AV referendum have been the blog's most successful. Throughout the recent referen-

dum campaign, British Politics and Policy at LSE provided extensive coverage of the campaign, with comments from dozens of experts, from all angles and points of view.

With several posts every day on the topic in the week leading up to the referendum, the blog nearly doubled its traffic with over 9,000 unique visitors and nearly 17,000 pages viewed. The day before the referendum received 2,000 visitors, and on the day itself there were nearly 2,600 visitors.

The blog's coverage was picked up and linked to by both sides of the referendum

campaigns, the ConservativeHome blog, the Spectator, the Australian and Canadian media, and was referenced in Wikipedia. Contributing LSE Academics such as the Government Department's **Rafael Horta-la-Vallve** were also interviewed by local and foreign media. In fact, Rafael's article, *Is Alternative Vote a better voting system? It depends...* is one of the blog's most successful, having been viewed nearly 7,000 times since last July.

To read **British Politics and Policy at LSE** please go to: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/>

## British Government @ LSE Upcoming Events

British Government will be running three specialist events under the "Parliamentary Select Committees: their role in scrutinising the Executive" seminar series.

### The Work of the Home Affairs Select Committee

Speaker: Rt. Hon Keith Vaz MP  
Date: 18 October 2011

### The Work of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee

Speaker: John Whittingdale OBE MP  
Date: 24 November 2011

### The Work of the Public Administration Select Committee

Speaker: Hon. Bernard Jenkin MP  
Date: 31 January 2012

For more information please go to the **British Government at LSE** website at: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/government/research/resgroups/BGatLSE/Home.aspx>

## Departmental Publications

	<p><b>The Governance of Climate Change: Science, Politics and Ethics</b></p> <p>Edited by David Held, Angus Fane-Hervey and Marika Theros</p> <p>Polity Press, 2011</p>		<p><b>Group Agency: the possibility, design, and status of corporate agents</b></p> <p>Christian List and Philip Petit</p> <p>Oxford University Press, 2011</p>
	<p><b>New Beginnings: Constitutionalism &amp; Democracy in Modern Ireland</b></p> <p>Bill Kissane</p> <p>University College Dublin Press, 2011</p>		<p><b>Alumni Publication</b></p> <p><b>The Rise of Evo Morales and the MAS</b></p> <p>Sven Harten</p> <p>Zed Books, 2011</p>

## PhD Awards

*in order of completion*

Anna Boucher	Venue-setting and diversity-seeking: Gender and immigration selection policy in Australia and Canada
Camilla Kong	Beyond the Sub-Humean Model: Instrumental Reason in Aristotle, Hume, and Kant
Xuming Yang	The Politics of Banking Governance in China: Political Control and Corporate Governance
Monica Garcia-Quesada	European Union compliance: Design, delivery and enforcement of urban waste water policy in Spain and the UK
Amelia Barras	Refashioning secularism in France and Turkey: The case of the headscarf ban

### Editor's note

I hope you enjoy this issue of Dispatch Box. If you have any stories or news you would like included in the next edition please send your submission to [gov.enquiries@lse.ac.uk](mailto:gov.enquiries@lse.ac.uk). Submissions could include memories of the Department which you would like to share, research or career projects you are working on, or if you would like to be featured in the 'Where are we now' section. Any feedback is greatly appreciated.