How to Deliver Government Services; Blair, UK (06/2007)
(Deliver education, health, welfare, etc.)

- What I’ve learned, by Tony Blair, UK (06/2007) (3 p)
  - What he learned during ten years as prime minister of the UK.
  - Blair led the UK liberal party, but he tried to focus on what would really work.

- How to deliver government services, June 2006.
  - A collection of stories on this subject (10 p).

- Various governments struggle with the questions of how to deliver services.

- Bill Gates (of Microsoft) now hands out much money for charity work. He has also been very interested in how to get the most good results for the money spent.

- A few other related papers (2 p)

Ready to scan July 9, 2007, Doc RJ0417, 16 pages

Roy Jenne
July 5, 2007
Tony Blair reflects on the lessons of his decade as Britain's prime minister

Ten years ago, if you had told me I would spend a significant part of my premiership on foreign policy, I would have been surprised, a little shocked and probably, politically, somewhat alarmed. Even today, we all run for office concentrating on domestic issues. "Foreign" policy rarely wins votes, and can easily lose them. Yet nowadays the reality is increasingly that we are obliged as leaders to think, work and act internationally.

Over ten years I have watched this grow. (If you had told me a decade ago that I would be tackling terrorism, I would have readily understood, but thought you meant Irish Republican terrorism.) The line between "foreign" and "domestic" policy is being blurred. Climate change is a big issue in developed nations' politics today. It can be beaten only by global action. What happens today in Pakistan matters on the streets of Britain. Mass migration can only partially be managed by individual nations' internal policies. Economies are shaped by forces of globalisation.

On top of this, the world order is changing. The political power of China is emerging as its economic power grows. India will be formidable. Japan is putting its past behind it. Russia is becoming more assertive by the day.

In this age, foreign policy is not an interesting distraction from the hard slog of domestic reform. It is the element that describes a nation's face to the world at large, forms the perceptions of others to it and, in part, its perception of itself.

We all talk of interdependence being the defining characteristic of the modern world. But often we fail to see the fundamental implications of such a statement. It means we have a clear self-interest as a nation in what happens the world over. And because mass media and communication convey powerful images in an instant across the globe, it dictates that struggles are fought as much through propaganda, ideas and values as through conventional means, military or diplomatic.

My reflections, based on this analysis, are these:

1. Be a player not a spectator
Over the past ten years, Britain has been in the thick of it. There is no international debate of importance in which we are not as fully engaged as we can be.

We have attempted to construct the broadest possible agenda that is capable of unifying the international community and is, overtly, values-based. That is why action on poverty in Africa, a good outcome to the world trade talks and agreement on climate change all matter beyond the obvious importance of each individual issue. They are indicative of an attitude, of responsibility to others, an acceptance that international politics should not be simply a game of interests but also of beliefs, things we stand for and fight for.

It is also why we should be prepared to intervene, if necessary militarily, to prevent genocide, oppression, the deep injustice too often inflicted on the vulnerable. Britain, in the past decade, has intervened four times: in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Iraq. In each case, regimes of appalling brutality were removed.

Earlier this week I visited the people of Sierra Leone, still struggling, but at least able to contemplate a better future. But as important is the next-door state of Liberia, now properly democratic. It might never have been so had Sierra Leone fallen into the hands of the gangsters. Similarly, as a result of Kosovo, the Balkans changed. Countries there can think of a future in the European Union.

So when we come to Darfur, do we really believe that if we do not act to change this situation, the violence will stop at the borders of Sudan? In the early 1990s we could not summon the will to act in Bosnia. It took 250,000 lives lost before we realised we had no option.

It is said that by removing Saddam or the Taliban-regimes that were authoritarian but also kept a firm order—the plight of Iraqis and Afghans has worsened and terrorism has been allowed to grow. This is a seductive but dangerous argument. Work out what it really means. It means that because these reactionary and evil forces will fight hard, through terrorism, to prevent those countries and their people getting on their feet after the dictatorships are removed, we should leave the people under the dictatorship. It means our will to fight for what we believe in is measured by our enemy's will to fight us, but in inverse proportion. That is not a basis on which you ever win anything.

However, the critical point is that we, Britain, should be closely involved in all these issues because in the end they will affect our own future. And the agenda constructed should be about our values—freedom, democracy, responsibility to others, but also justice and fairness.

2. Transatlantic co-operation is still vital
I have real concern that on both sides of the Atlantic there is, in certain quarters, an indifference, even a hostility, to an alliance that is every bit as fundamental to our future as it has been to our past. By this I don't just mean the rampant anti-Americanism on parts of the left. In a sense, that is relatively easy to counter.

It is more a drifting away, occasionally a resurgent isolationism that crosses right and left. In Britain this is the parts of the media and politics that are both narrow-sceptic and wanting "an independent foreign policy" from America. Quite where Britain is supposed to get its alliances from...
bewilders me. There is talk of Britain having a new strategic relationship with China and India bypassing our traditional European and American links. Get real. Of course we will have our own relationship with both countries. But we are definitely more influential with them if we have two strong alliances behind us.

In Europe we wonder: is it worth it to continue such reliance on America? We would be better asking whether the political leaders in America still see Europe as their first port of call.

For all our differences, we should be very clear. Europe and America share the same values. We should stick together. That requires a strong transatlantic alliance. It also means a strong, effective and capable EU. A weak Europe is a poor ally. That is why we need closer co-operation between the nations of the EU and effective European institutions. In a world in which China and India will each have a population three times that of the EU, anything else is completely out of date.

3. Be very clear about global terrorism

I fear the world, and especially a large part of Western opinion, has become dangerously misguided about this threat. If there was any mistake made in the aftermath of September 11th, it was not to realise that the roots of this terrorism were deep and pervasive. Removing the Taliban from government seemed relatively easy. Removing their ideology is so much harder. It has been growing for over a generation. It is based on genuine belief, the believers being people determined to outlast us, to be indefatigable when we are weary: to be strong-willed and single-minded when we have so many other things to preoccupy us (and when the comforts of our Western lives seem so untouched by the activities of what are naturally seen as a few fanatics).

People make much of the fact that in each area of conflict, the extremists take a different shape. They point to the historical absurdity of, for example, Iranian elements linking up to the Taliban. Above all, they say, their weapons, numbers and support are puny compared with ours.

This misses the central point. Revolutionary communism took many forms. It chose unlikely bedfellows. But we still spent decades confronting it.

This new terrorism has an ideology. It is based on an utter perversion of the proper faith of Islam. But it plays to a sense of victimhood and grievance in the Muslim world. Many disagree with its methods. But too many share some of its sentiments. Its world view is completely reactionary. But its understanding of terrorism and its power in an era of globalisation is astonishingly sophisticated and strategic.

It means that it can go into any situation where peace is fragile or conflict possible. It can, by the simple use of terror, break the peace and provoke the conflict. It has worked out that in an age of mass media, instantly relayed round the world, impact counts: and nothing makes more impact than the carnage of the innocent. It has learned that as states respond to terror so they can, unwittingly, feed it.

In the Middle East right now, it stops progress in Iraq. It defies the attempts at peace between Israel and Palestine. It is making Lebanese democracy teeter on the brink. That is significant in itself. But far more significant is the way in which the terrorists have successfully warped our sense of what is happening and why. They have made us blame ourselves.

We can debate and re-debate the rights or wrongs of removing Saddam. But the reality is that if you took al-Qaeda (in Iraq before Saddam’s fall) out of the conflict in or around Baghdad, without the car bombs aimed at civilians and the destruction of monuments like the Samarra Shrine, it would be possible to calm the situation. Events in Anbar Province, where slowly but surely Sunni opinion is turning on al-Qaeda, show it. And down in Basra, what is poisoning the city is the violence and criminality of Jaish-al Mahdi and other groups—supported, financed and

armed by elements of the Iranian regime. Remove al-Qaeda, remove the malign Iranian activity, and the situation would be changed, even transformed.

The truth is that the conflict in Iraq has mutated into something directly fuelled by the same elements that confront us everywhere. Yet a large, probably the larger, part of Western opinion would prefer us to withdraw. That is the extraordinary dulling of our senses that the terrorism has achieved. In the Palestinian question who gets the blame for lack of progress? The West. In Lebanon—a crisis deliberately provoked by, again, the same forces—who is held responsible? Israel.

In Afghanistan it is clear that the Taliban is receiving support, including arms from, again, elements of the Iranian regime. They have learned from elsewhere. They believe if they inflict enough chaos, enough casualties of Western soldiers, we will lose the will. It will become another “mess”. And if it does, the problem will be laid at the door of the Afghan government and its Western allies.

In the past few weeks alone we have seen terrorist bombs in Morocco, Algeria, Pakistan, India, and arrests in Saudi Arabia. Not a single major European nation is immune. In Africa, Sudan, Somalia, even in places like Nigeria where Muslims and Christians live together, terrorism is active.

There is no alternative to fighting this menace wherever it rears its head. There are no demands that are remotely negotiable. It has to be beaten. Period.

4. We must stand up for our values

We will not succeed simply by military or security means. It is a political challenge. Terrorism recruits adherents on the basis of an appeal to human emotion. It can be countered only by a better, more profound, well-articulated counter-appeal.

But this won’t happen unless we stand up for our own values, are proud of them and advocate them with conviction. There is nothing more ridiculous than the attempt to portray “democracy” or “freedom” as somehow “Western” concepts which, mistakenly, we try to apply to nations or peoples to whom they are alien. There may well be governments to whom they are alien. But not peoples. Whoever voted to get rid of democracy? Or preferred secret police to freedom of speech?

These values are universal. We should attack the ideology of the extremists with confidence: their reactionary view of the state; their refusal to let people prosper in peace; their utterly regressive views on women. We should stamp out not just their barbaric methods of terrorism, but in particular their presumed sense of grievance against the West. We need to support and help mobilise moderate and true Islam in doing so. There is nothing more absurd than the idea that removing
the Taliban in Afghanistan, or Saddam and his sons in Iraq, and replacing their regimes with the chance to vote, supervised by the UN, is somehow an assault on Muslims. We should point out that those killing Muslims by terror are actually other Muslims and that doing so is completely contrary to the teachings of the Koran.

But, and it is a mighty but, such an approach only counts if it is applied vigorously and in a manner that is even-handed. Here is where I have always felt that the normal politics of left and right are a hindrance. The trouble is that the right is correct on the need to stand firm militarily and in support of freedom; and the left is correct on the need for justice.

The assault on the ideas behind terrorism won't work unless it is seen to be motivated and stirred by a commitment to justice. That is why trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestine dispute is so important—not only for its own sake, but because the absence of peace causes suffering that is exploited by this extremism. Ask yourself why parts of the Iranian regime try so hard to prevent a settlement; and then understand why it is crucial to settle it.

We are faced with a challenge derived from a world view. We need our own world view, no less comprehensive but based on the decent values we believe in.

5. It's about tomorrow's agenda too

The importance of such an agenda is that it allows us also to shape the common value system of a world in which, very soon, the new powers and interests will have the strength to influence greatly the path the world takes. So such an approach is a bulwark against extremism but it is also a civilising force in a future in which Western economic and political weight will be less than hitherto. We need a sufficiently strong basis, founded in a clear and even-handed commitment to our values, for the world as it changes to adopt these values, universal as they are, to guide us.

Meanwhile, at home

This article is for a global audience, and has focused mainly on international policy. But there are some interesting lessons from domestic policy also.

1. "Open v closed" is as important today in politics as "left v right". Nations do best when they are prepared to be open to the world. This means open in their economies, eschewing protectionism, welcoming foreign investment, running flexible labour markets. It means also open to the benefit of controlled immigration. For all nations this is a hugely contentious area of policy. But I have no doubt London is stronger and more successful through the encouragement of targeted migration.

Isolationism and protectionism now cut across left and right boundaries. They are easy tunes to play but pointless in any thing other than the very short-term.

2. The role of the state is changing. The state today needs to be enabling and based on a partnership with the citizen, one of mutual rights and responsibilities. The implications are profound. Public services need to go through the same revolution—professionally, culturally and in organisation—that the private sector has been through.

The old monolithic provision has to be broken down. The user has to be given real power and preference. The system needs proper incentives and rewards. The purpose should be so that public services can adapt and adjust naturally—self-generating reform—rather than being continually prodded and pushed from the centre. Public-sector unions can't be allowed to determine the shape of public services.

In Britain we have put huge investment into our public services. But we are also opening the health service to private and voluntary-sector partnerships, introducing a payment-by-results system, creating competition and allowing hospitals to become self-governing trusts. The new academies and trust schools will have the freedom to develop as independent but non-fee-paying schools, with outside partners like businesses, universities and charities able to sponsor and run them.

3. Welfare systems work only if there is shared responsibility—the state to provide help, the citizens to use that help to help themselves. The pensions reforms Britain is now putting through will, over the decades, give us a system that is affordable and fair between the generations, by ensuring that, though each citizen is guaranteed a basic pension, they will be expected to top that up with their own finances.

4. Law and order matters in a way that is more profound than most commentary suggests. It used to be that progressives were people who wanted an end to prejudice and discrimination and took the view that, in crime, social causes were paramount. Conservatives thought crime was a matter of individual responsibility and that campaigns against discrimination were so much political correctness.

Today the public distinguishes clearly between personal lifestyle issues, where they are liberal, and crime, where they are definitely not. It is what I call the pro-gay rights, tough-on-crime position. It confounds traditional left/right views.

5. Social exclusion needs special focus. From 1979 to 1997 the incomes of the richest 20% in Britain grew faster (2.5%) than the incomes of the poorest 20% (0.8%). That has been reversed. Since 1997 the incomes of the poorest have risen faster (2.2%) than the richest (2%). However, this masks a tail of under-achievers, the socially excluded. The rising tide does not lift their ships. This issue of social exclusion is common throughout Western nations.

6. Finally, political parties will have to change radically their modus operandi. Contrary to mythology, political parties aren't dying; public interest in politics is as intense as it ever was. As the recent turnout in the French election shows: give people a real contest and they will come out and vote.

But politics is subject to the same forces of change as everything else. It is less tribal; people will be interested in issues, not necessarily ideologies; political organisation if it is rigid is off-putting; and there are myriad new ways of communicating information. Above all, political parties need to go out and seek public participation, not wait for the public to be permitted the privilege of becoming part of the sect.

So, membership should be looser, policymaking broader and more representative, the internet and interactive communication the norm. Open it all up.

Over to you

That is a very short synopsis of what I have learned. I don't presume to call it advice to my successor. I have been reasonably fortunate rarely to receive public "advice" from my predecessors.

The job is difficult enough as it is, and, knowing that, I have nothing but support to offer my successor.
How to Deliver Gov't Services

- Schools in Los Angeles
  - Need reform

- The reform of public services in Britain

- Britain: How to deliver government services & schools, health care, etc.

- Britain: Fight child poverty
  - There was too much focus on benefits and not enough on work.

- Gap rich vs poor in America

- Arizona congressman: Fight anti earmarks

- Fight corruption in Cuba

June 2006
Roy Large
Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa is a Democrat with impeccable liberal credentials who wants to fix his city’s dreadful public schools. He has one big problem: He’s meeting fierce resistance from the liberal Democrats who run the teachers unions, dominate the school board and control the state legislature.

That the Los Angeles Unified School District, the country’s second-largest after New York, faces a crisis is hard to dispute. Some 81% of the district’s middle school kids attend failing schools, which might be one reason that one in three eventually drops out. L.A. schools superintendent (and former Democratic Colorado Governor) Roy Romer dutifully notes that elementary math and reading scores have risen in recent years. But the fact remains that only 15% of students are reading at grade level, and 11% are at grade level in math. The only word for such results is horrifying.

Among minority students in the district, who comprise the vast majority, the situation is even worse. Last year, nine out of 10 black and Latino fourth-graders scored below proficiency in reading and math. Eighth-graders fared worse. Just 5% of black eight-graders are proficient readers, and 7% are proficient at math. For eighth-grade Latinos, the numbers are 9% and 6%, respectively.

You might think that a Democratic mayor in a Democratic city would garner plenty of establishment support for fixing a system so poorly serving members of a traditional Democratic constituency. Think again. In April, Mr. Villaraigosa announced a school reform plan that calls for “more mayoral oversight for the purpose of ensuring accountability.” His proposal has met nothing but denunciation from his fellow liberals.

Currently, public education in L.A. is controlled by an elected seven-member school board, which not only appoints the superintendent but also holds sway over everything from teachers contracts and budgets to curriculum, collective bargaining and the hiring and firing of principals. Under Mr. Villaraigosa’s proposal, these core duties would be turned over to the superintendent, who would answer primarily to the mayor.

This is unacceptable to the United Teachers of Los Angeles, the local union that currently controls the school board by fielding candidates and financing what are low-turnout elections. The status quo is great for union power; it just doesn’t do much for kids. But then again, the unions long-ago put their own clout above education quality.

Mr. Villaraigosa also faces opposition in Sacramento, where the state legislature must ultimately approve any Los Angeles Unified reorganization. His opponents there are lawmakers who carry water for the California Teachers Association, the state teachers union, which is as fearful of these reforms as its local affiliate in L.A. According to a report in the Los Angeles Times, Assembly Education Committee Chairwoman Jackie Goldberg “called mayoral control undemocratic and an oversimplification that would not fix the district’s fundamental problem: its lack of money.”

Never mind that the National Center for Education Statistics puts per-pupil spending in the district at more than $10,000, which is above both the state average of $8,700 and the national average of $8,300. Or that California teachers enjoy the best pay packages in the U.S. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who supports mayoral control, submitted a budget proposal this year that would amount to more than $11,000 for each K-12 student in the state. But if the Governor thinks the CTA, which saved him in last year’s special election, can be appeased monetarily, the Jackie Goldbergs of the state legislature should be a wake-up call.

As for Mr. Villaraigosa, it doesn’t matter that he’s a progressive Democrat, married to a public school teacher and himself a product of the labor movement who’s fought on behalf of teachers unions. And it doesn’t seem to matter that the top-down approach he’s put forward has met with some success in other large urban school districts—such as New York, Chicago, Denver, Boston and Philadelphia—where it’s been promoted largely by reform-minded Democrats over the strenuous objections of Democratic interest groups.

Mayoral control alone won’t cure all that ails Los Angeles public schools, and Mr. Villaraigosa isn’t arguing that it will. But introducing more accountability to a system that’s failing children as badly as L.A.’s is a good place to start. And the fact that the liberal political establishment would fight one of its own to defend a status quo that is producing such atrocious results makes you wonder whether there’s any education reform instinct left in the Democratic Party.

When things are this bad, why can’t we cut the problems and get reform?
Bagehot | Hard cop, soft cop

The reform of public services in Britain

On public-service reform, Tony Blair and David Cameron don't disagree; they just have different agendas

A government-sponsored conference on public-service reform this week, Tony Blair told 200 senior public-sector employees: "There is a basic deal here. Investment for results. I know that if you put this in extra money, we can't show clearly, demonstrably that the service has got radically better, then the consent from the public for investment in is in jeopardy."

Elsewhere in London at almost the same moment, David Cameron, the Tory leader, was extolling the public-service ethos. He apologised on behalf of his party for having "sometimes risked giving the impression that we see those who work in the public sector as burdens on the state rather than dedicated professionals who work hard to improve the quality of people's lives." The left-leaning Guardian newspaper summed up this apparently shocking reversal of roles as "Labour and Tories swap sides in public-sector debate."

In fact, the only thing that's surprising is that anyone should be surprised. Part of the explanation for Mr Blair's toughness and Mr Cameron's emollience is Britain's electoral north-south divide. Labour is losing the support in the London suburbs and prosperous south-east that helped sweep it into office in 1997. Yet despite the Tories' recent revival, enthusiasm for Mr Cameron's party runs out rapidly north of Birmingham.

In the south-east, the public sector accounts for a bit over a third of the economy. In some parts of the north it is over three-fifths. Southern voters feel over-taxed and are increasingly convinced that the services they are paying for have not improved as much as they should have. Northern voters also grumble about the government, but they fear the return of a Conservative Party which, in the past, was never shy to express its distaste for the public sector. If Labour is to hold on to power after the next election, it must convince voters in the south that they are getting value for money from reformed public services. If the Conservatives are to regain power, they must claw their way back into electoral contention in northern cities whose economies have become dependent on a lavishly funded state.

The other reason for the contrasting messages is that the two men are at opposite stages in their careers. Mr Cameron is mainly in the business of trying (quite successfully) to be liked. Mr Blair no longer cares whether he is liked. He is in a race against time to deliver on his commitment to make massively indulged public services responsive to the needs of ever-more demanding consumers. While Mr Cameron is smoothly appealing and deliberately opaque about what he would actually do once in office, the prime minister is a scarred and grizzled veteran, battling in the trenches against the forces of inertia and small-c conservatism.

Right on cue, a day after Mr Blair's speech, Paul Miller, the chairman of the British Medical Association's consultants committee, launched a stinging attack on the government's attempts to reform the health service (NHS), singling out as a particular waste of money the independent-sector treatment centres that will soon carry out 10% of all NHS elective surgery.

Dr Miller failed to mention the galvanising effect that only a handful of independent treatment centres have had in driving down waiting times by providing competition for the members of his union. Nor did he criticise the huge salary increases consultants have received in exchange for very little. Nevertheless, the BBC thought Dr Miller's insights about the government's "meddling" and "incompetence" sufficiently important to lead its news bulletins for an entire morning. Like the nurses who recently shouted down the health secretary, Patricia Hewitt, Dr Miller fails to see that the signal he sends to taxpayers is not just that the government is useless, but that no amount of money can fix the NHS.

That is one of many frustrations for Mr Blair. But perhaps the greatest is that it is only now, very late in the day for him, that the government has come up with a robust model for improving public services. He is acutely conscious of the time, money and political capital that have been squandered.

Mr Blair's model is based on four principles. The first is that although too many centrally imposed targets are dangerous, some elements of top-down performance management are needed, including the setting of minimum standards and performance assessment. Direct interventions can be effective in rooting out the seriously bad, for example when an inspection identifies a failing school. The second is the spur of competition: purchasers of services must be able to choose among competing providers. Thirdly, bottom-up pressure to improve comes from giving consumers of services either choice or, when that is not possible (as in the supply of policing), "voice". Finally, the public service must constantly be developing new capabilities and new patterns of working—for example, by encouraging GPs to carry out many of the diagnostics and minor surgical operations that used to be the preserve of hospitals.

There is no alternative

But the mood of the conference at which Mr Blair set out these sensible and, one might have thought, largely uncontroversial ideas was distinctly sceptical. To most public-sector workers, the "self-sustaining change" that Mr Blair says is the approach, will provoke exactly what they would prefer to avoid. Like Garbo and Dr Miller, what they really want is to be left alone.

There is little chance of that. Before Mr Blair spoke, Gordon Brown, the chancellor, repeated his budget warning that public spending growth will soon slow from 5% to 2% a year. That will put a premium on innovation and greater efficiency. Mr Blair may not be around long enough to see his model fully implemented. But neither Mr Brown nor Mr Cameron, for all his honeyed words, is fool enough to try anything very different.
Bagehot | The limits of compassionate conservatism

Philosophical consistency is not David Cameron’s priority

Here’s a real conundrum. Is David Cameron, for all his touchy-feely Notting Hill modernity, at heart a rather traditional sort of Tory? Or is he a ruthless pragmatist, interested only in what works and willing to jettison any policy or idea that, however dear to his party, may cost it votes?

There was further evidence this week that Mr Cameron will stop at nothing to change the image of his party. Fresh from extolling the sterling qualities of public servants last week, the Tory leader, speaking at a banking awards ceremony on June 12th, made the extraordinary suggestion that banks might influence the companies to which they lend, urging borrowers to behave with more corporate responsibility and shed their “evil” image.

Meanwhile, Mr Cameron’s own efforts to define himself provide few clues as to what he really is. At different times he has described himself as a “liberal Conservative”, “Conservative to the core” and “Blair’s true heir”. Most often, when asked to sum up his political creed, he says he is a “modern, compassionate Conservative”—modern because he’s open to new ideas, compassionate because he wants to help society’s unfortunates and Conservative because he doesn’t believe that every problem can or should be solved by state action.

Most people like to think they are open-minded and few would admit to wanting to grind their heels in the faces of the deserving poor. The only remotely distinguishing thing about Mr Cameron’s beliefs is his apparent scepticism about the size and role of the state. He comes up with remarks like: “There is such a thing as society” [Margaret Thatcher once famously declared that there wasn’t; it’s just not the same thing as the state].” But what does he mean by it? In an attempt to provide some philosophical underpinning to Cameronism, Policy Exchange, the Tory leader’s favourite think-tank, has produced a booklet by Jesse Norman and Janan Ganesh entitled “Compassionate conservatism: what it is; why we need it”.

Part of the authors’ mission is to reclaim the term “compassionate conservatism” from George Bush, who used it as an election catchphrase in 1999. Mr Bush, they argue, was neither compassionate nor conservative: he failed both to direct money where it was most needed and to curb big government. Designed to pander to the evangelical right, the phrase embodied a moralising doctrine that the federal government had a duty to reverse society’s moral decline.

Their main purpose, however, is to show that compassionate conservatism is not an oxymoron. The idea of compassion they promote is neither that of the “enterprise state” (for which read New Labour’s “enabling state”), which attempts to tackle poverty through a series of top-down initiatives, nor that of the condescending paternalist. It is, rather, a sense of fellow-feeling, identification and sympathy for others. The authors rhapsodise about the possibility of a “connected society” based on “culture, identity and belonging” and all those “intermediate institutions which link us all together and give fulfilment to our lives”. Hobbes and Burke, the founding fathers of British conservative thought, and their 20th-century successors, Hayek and Oakeshott, are all called to the aid of their party.

It’s romantic stuff, but what implications does it have for what a Cameron government would actually do? This is where it gets tricky. Mr Cameron says that he has no intention of dropping the government’s ambitious goal to halve child poverty by 2010—an archetypally state-driven target if ever there was one.

The Policy Exchange pair seem to think that compassionate conservatism would result in a “large-scale programme of state decentralisation”. They are keen on strengthening local government and breaking up the monopoly provision of public services. But what is uniquely compassionate-conservative about that? Almost everyone these days favours strengthening Britain’s enfeebled local councils, and Tony Blair is opening up the NHS and the schools system to competition from new providers as fast as capacity and funding will allow.

The big idea that most excites Mr Cameron is the expansion of the so-called “third sector”—the fashionable umbrella term for voluntary, not-for-profit and charitable organisations. Mr Cameron has long believed that these have the potential to take over the delivery of many services that are currently provided by the state and that they are especially effective in extending help to the victims of “state failure”.

Instinctively Tory

But the government too has become keen on harnessing the creativity and energies of the third sector, for example in delivering programmes to get people off long-term incapacity benefit. This week it announced that it was setting up an office for the third sector inside the newly created department for social exclusion. Reasonably, Mr Cameron argues that in practice Labour finds it harder than a Conservative like himself to “let go” and trust these organisations to develop and prosper. The Tories are also more likely to ignore the complaints of public-sector unions threatened with competition from the voluntary sector.

It is doubtful, however, if any of this will amount to more than nibbling at the edges of state activity. Although the number of professionally run not-for-profit businesses is growing, the vast majority of social entrepreneurs run tiny operations that cannot scale into anything larger. The third sector deserves every encouragement but, as Mr Cameron is smart enough to recognise, the idea that it can soon replace large swathes of what the state currently does is optimistic.

As a slogan, “modern, compassionate conservatism” may say something important about Mr Cameron’s instincts. Whether those instincts are any guide to what he is prepared to do and say to win power is another matter.
Britain

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Fighting child poverty
A long way to go

Labour has focused too much on benefits and not enough on work

Governing parties often define their purpose when they are in office rather than in opposition. Margaret Thatcher discovered the virtues of privatisation some time after winning power in 1979. Labour launched its crusade against child poverty almost two years after its victory in 1997.

Speaking at Toynbee Hall in east London in March 1999, Tony Blair startled his audience with a pledge to end child poverty within 20 years. The government subsequently set two ambitious targets as milestones on the journey: to have reduced the number of poor children by at least a quarter in 2004-05; and to have cut it by half in 2010-11.

Child poverty, conjuring up images of Victorian paupers like Tiny Tim, is an emotive term for what is now a relative measure of income inequality rather than an absolute indicator of destitution. The government counts children as poor if they live in families whose net income is below 60% of the median household's. Estimating this poverty line is complicated, and the government is adopting new methods to do so (see article on next page).

According to the way poverty has been calculated until now, 3.1m children were poor in 1998-99, the financial year ending in March 1999, when Mr Blair made his pledge. Since there were (and are) some 12.5m children in Britain, a quarter of them were poor. Indeed, if housing costs are taken into account, an alternative measure that the government has also been using, 4.1m were poor, a third of all children.

Since 1998-99 the number of poor children has fallen by 700,000, an impressive decline but not enough to meet the first target of reducing child poverty by a quarter. In 2004-05 there were 2.4m poor children, 100,000 above the goal of 2.3m when measured before housing costs, and 3.4m poor children after housing costs, 400,000 more than the milestone of 3m.

The failure to hit the target might seem a quibble given the big decline in the number of poor children. It represents a genuine setback, however, because Labour has shunted so much money towards poor families in the past few years. In particular they have been helped through a new system of tax credits which cost £15.8 billion ($29.2 billion) in 2004-05, eclipsing the long-established child benefit paid to all families, which cost £9.6 billion. Altogether, Labour's policy changes have pushed up transfers to families—mainly poorer ones—by nearly 1% of GDP since Labour took office, says Mike Brewer of the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Further big increases in financial support no longer appear affordable. This will make the government's next target—cutting child poverty between 1998-99 and 2010-11 by half— even harder to hit than its first one. Under the revised definition of the poverty line that will now be used, the number of poor children fell by 600,000 between 1998-99 and 2004-05. It will have to fall by a further 1m to hit the target in 2010-11, according to Mr Brewer.

Labour will thus need to reconsider its strategy of relying so heavily on transferring money to poor families in order to cut child poverty. This will require a rethink about why Britain has one of the highest child-poverty rates among developed countries. One reason is that low-paid work is more widespread. But the main cause is that so many parents are not working, says Peter Whiteford of the OECD.

Britain's employment record is better than most. But the labour market is polarised between "work-rich" and "work-poor" households, which particularly affects families. Jobless couples with children are more common than in many other advanced countries. More important, lone parents without jobs make up a bigger share of families. In 2000 they were 7.3% of all households with children, three times the average among 24 countries in the OECD (see chart).
More recent British figures highlight how crucial joblessness is in determining child poverty. In 2004-05, lone parents without work were raising 13% of all children but 31% of poor children. Jobless couples were bringing up 6% of all children but 19% of poor children. Together, the two groups accounted for only a fifth of all children but a half of poor ones.

What this suggests is that the priority should now be to get poor jobless parents back to work. The government has been trying to encourage this by providing extra financial support for working parents. Such help is now among the most generous for low-paid employees in the OECD.

These financial incentives appear to be having some success. The lone-parent employment rate, for example, has risen quite sharply over the past five years. Steep increases in the minimum wage are making work more worthwhile, although there is increasing worry that they may also raise unemployment.

What is crucial now, says Mr Whiteford, is for the state to exert more pressure on lone parents to work while continuing to help them with child care. Britain is unusual in not requiring single parents to look for jobs until their youngest child is 16. Australia, which also has a high proportion of lone parents who are not working, has a similar rule. In most other countries in the OECD, by contrast, single parents have to seek employment much sooner. In July, Australia will change its rule and make new lone parents look for work once their youngest child is six.

Such a reform will seem harsh to many of Labour’s supporters. But the government has invested political capital in its campaign to end child poverty and it will soon have to take difficult decisions. This may be a time for some tough love.
Special report Inequality in America

WASHINGTON, DC

The rich are the big gainers in America's new prosperity

AMERICANS do not go in for envy. The gap between rich and poor is bigger than in any other advanced country, but most people are unconcerned. Whereas Europeans fret about the way the economic pie is divided, Americans want to join the rich, not soak them. Eight out of ten, more than anywhere else, believe that though you may start poor, if you work hard, you can make pots of money. It is a central part of the American Dream.

The political consensus, therefore, has sought to pursue economic growth rather than the redistribution of income, in keeping with John Kennedy's adage that "a rising tide lifts all boats." The tide has been rising fast recently. Thanks to a jump in productivity growth after 1995, America's economy has outpaced other rich countries' for a decade. Its workers now produce over 30% more each hour they work than ten years ago. In the late 1990s, everybody shared in this boom. Though incomes were rising fastest at the top, all workers' wages far outpaced inflation.

But after 2000 something changed. The pace of productivity growth has been rising again, but now it seems to be lifting fewer boats. After you adjust for inflation, the wages of the typical American worker—the one at the very middle of the income distribution—have risen less than 1% since 2000. In the previous five years, they rose over 6%. If you take into account the value of employee benefits, such as health care, the contrast is a little less stark.

But, whatever the measure, it seems clear that only the most skilled workers have seen their pay packets swell much in the current economic expansion. The fruits of productivity gains have been skewed towards the highest earners, and towards companies, whose profits have reached record levels as a share of GDP.

Even in a country that tolerates inequality, political consequences follow when the rising tide raises too few boats. The impact of stagnant wages has been dulled by rising house prices, but still most Americans are unhappy about the economy. According to the latest Gallup survey, fewer than four out of ten think it is in "excellent" or "good" shape, compared with almost seven out of ten when George Bush took office.

The White House professes to be untroubled. Average after-tax income per person, Mr Bush often points out, has risen by more than 8% on his watch, once inflation is taken into account. He is right, but his claim is misleading, since the median worker—the one in the middle of the income range—has done less well than the average, whose gains are pulled up by the big increases of those at the top.

Privately, some policymakers admit that the recent trends have them worried, and not just because of the congressional elections in November. The statistics suggest that the economic boom may fade. Americans still lead the shops with gusto, but it is falling savings rates and rising debts (made possible by high house prices), not real income growth, that keep their wallets open. A bust of some kind could lead to widespread political disaffection. Eventually, the country's social fabric could stretch. "If things carry on like this for long enough," muses one insider, "we are going to end up like Brazil"—a country
The not-so-idle rich

The rise of the working rich reinforces America's self-image as the land of opportunity. But, by some measures, that image is an illusion. Several new studies* show parental income to be a better predictor of whether someone will be rich or poor in America than in Canada or much of Europe. In America about half of the income disparities in one generation are reflected in the next. In Canada and the Nordic countries that proportion is about a fifth.

It is not clear whether this sclerosis is increasing: the evidence is mixed. Many studies suggest that mobility between generations has stayed roughly the same in recent decades, and some suggest it is decreasing. Even so, ordinary Americans seem to believe that theirs is still a land of opportunity. The proportion who think you can start poor and end up rich has risen 20 percentage points since 1980.

That helps explain why voters who grumble about the economy have nonetheless failed to respond to class politics. John Edwards, the Democrats' vice presidential candidate in 2004, made little headway with his tale of "Two Americas", one for the rich and one for the rest. Over

70% of Americans support the abolition of the estate tax (inheritance tax), even though only one household in 100 pays it.

Americans tend to blame their woes not on rich compatriots but on poor foreigners. More than six out of ten are sceptical of free trade. A new poll in Foreign Affairs suggests that almost nine out of ten worry about their jobs going offshore. Congressmen reflect their concerns. Though the economy grows, many have become vociferous protectionists.

Other rich countries are watching America's experience closely. For many Europeans, America's brand of capitalism is already far too unequal. Such sceptics will be sure to make much of any sign that the broad middle class reaps scant benefit from the current productivity boom, setting back the course of European reform even further.

The conventional tale is that the changes of the past few years are simply more steps along paths that began to diverge for rich and poor in the Reagan era. During the 1950s and 1960s, the halcyon days for America's middle class, productivity boomed and its benefits were broadly shared. The gap between the lowest and highest earners narrowed. After the 1973 oil shocks, productivity growth suddenly slowed. A few years later, at the start of the 1980s, the gap between rich and poor began to widen.

The exact size of that gap depends on how you measure it. Look at wages, the main source of income for most people, and you underestimate the importance of health care and other benefits. Look at household income and you need to take into account that the typical household has fallen in size in recent decades, thanks to the growth in single-parent families. Look at statistics on spending and you find that the gaps between top and bottom have widened less than for income. But every measure shows that, over the past quarter century, those at the top have done better than those in the middle, who in turn have outpaced those at the bottom. The gains of productivity growth have become increasingly skewed.

If all Americans were set on a ladder with ten rungs, the gap between the wages of those on the ninth rung and those on the first has risen by a third since 1980. Put another way, the typical worker earns only 10% more in real terms than his counterpart 25 years ago, even though overall productivity has risen much faster. Economists have long debated why America's income disparities suddenly widened after 1980. The consensus is that the main cause was technology, which increased the demand for skilled workers relative to their supply, with freer trade reinforcing the effect. Some evidence suggests that institutional changes, particularly the weakening of unions, made the going harder for people at the bottom.

Whether these shifts were good or bad depends on your political persuasion. Those on the left lament the gaps, often forgetting that the greater income disparities have created bigger incentives to get an education, which has led to a better trained, more productive workforce. The share of American workers with a college degree, 20% in 1980, is over 30% today.

The excluded middle

In their haste to applaud or lament this tale, both sides of the debate tend to overlook some nuances. First, America's rising inequality has not, in fact, been continuous. The gap between the bottom and the middle—whether in terms of skills, age, job experience or income—did widen sharply in the 1980s. High-school dropouts earned 12% less in an average week in 1990 than in 1980; those with only a high-school education earned 6% less. But during the 1990s, particularly towards the end of the decade, that gap stabilised and, by some measures, even narrowed. Real wages rose faster for the bottom quarter of workers than for those in the middle.

After 2000 most people lost ground, but, by many measures, those in the middle of the skills and education ladder have been hit relatively harder than those at the bottom. People who had some college experience, but no degree, fared worse than high-school dropouts. Some statistics suggest that the annual income of Americans with a college degree has fallen relative to that of high-school graduates for the first time in decades. So, whereas the 1980s were harshest on the lowest skilled, the 1990s and this decade have squeezed people in the middle.

The one truly continuous trend over the past 25 years has been towards greater...
WASHINGTON

ARIZONA'S JEFF FLAKE is a political guerrilla with a smile, a ringer for actor Owen Wilson who crashes not weddings but his own Republican Party.

Since May, the Republican congressman has grabbed the spotlight with the " Flake Hour" —a tradition at the end of debate on spending bills, in which he asks colleagues to come to the House floor and explain why taxpayers should pay for pet projects in their districts.

Born into a prominent Mormon ranching family, the 43-year-old congressman boasts an Uncle Jake—his former speaker of the Arizona Legislature—and a résumé that includes a stint at the Goldwater Institute, a libertarian-leaning think tank in Phoenix. After six years in the House, Mr. Flake may have as his greatest weapon his unfailing politeness and a disarmingly gruff that can leave opponents sputtering.

"He's Don Quixote with a couth," says Rep. Dan Lungren, a California Republican.

The White House isn't immune to the attention of Mr. Flake, who helped force House votes challenging the administration's Cuba policy and the National Security Agency's warrantless surveillance of some communications. And like no other, he has taken on the scandal-plagued House Appropriations Committee, a Republican power structure assigned the task of earmarking billions of dollars for home-state projects among members this election year.

Appropriations Committee Chairman

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Jerry Lewis (R., Calif.) has twice had his projects targeted. Last week, Mr. Flake challenged a $2.5 million grant for an Illinois technology center favored by Speaker Dennis Hastert (R., Ill.).

"Do you know who earmarked this money?" asked Rep. Roy Blunt (R., Mo.). Mr. Flake did—and didn't force a recorded vote on his amendment to block funding for the project.

"I don't think our leadership fully appreciates the trouble we are in," Mr. Flake says, explaining that Republicans are cutting their threats politically by continuing to sanction earmarks as part of an "all politics is local" re-election strategy. The approach, he says, sacrifices the party's credibility with voters who want more control of spending.

"What's just mystifying is the sense of entitlement now: You have the right to have your projects and to ask for it through the process without anyone else knowing about it or being able to challenge it. That's your inherent right as a member of Congress."

William Faulkner Museum in Mississippi, recalling the Southern writer's words: "I don't care much for facts and am not much interested in them."

Mr. Flake's version: "Anyone who believes we cannot save money by eliminating earmarks, does not much care for the facts and is not much interested in them."

When singled out for a $150,000 grant for a retail district in the Bronx, Rep. José Serrano (D., N.Y.) said: "I wish you were as outraged about other things as you are this one.

On occasion, the tables have turned on Mr. Flake, as members have cited legislative history to back up public investment in their projects.

"I am not offended. It gives you a chance to lay out your case," Mr. LaHood says. "The thing about the House is you can come here and sink your teeth into something and that's what Jeff has done."

But the record of votes could come back to haunt Republicans. "It is a lot of fodder for TV commercials," said Pat

By NEIL

KABUL, Afghan

Just as lobbying overhaul has fizzled after beginning with great promise during the winter, Republicans are now betting the party can muscle through November without any drastic change in earmarks. Total spending for earmarks has been reduced modestly, and steps have been taken to require more transparency and a local match for federal grants. But the total amount, $9.6 billion in the House bills so far, is still the equivalent of the Interior Department budget, and even members of the Appropriations Committee say they are overwhelmed by a political patronage system that has spun out of their control.

Democrats typically get a 30% to 40% share of the project funds, but the rapid growth over the past decade is very much a Republican phenomenon. Under Democratic control, the House Appropriations hierarchy permitted fewer earmarks and put supplicants through the ritual of hearings.

Mr. Lungren, who says he admires Mr. Flake's efforts, served in Congress in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan and was astonished when he came back in 2004 with the changed attitudes within his party—and at home. "When I was here before people had the hope that maybe they would get something," he said. "Now they have the expectation and they say to three, 'If you don't give it to us, somebody else will get it.'"

Mr. Flake, who arrived in 2000 and has a safe and relatively prosperous Republican district, says: "There would be very few earmarks if I were king."

"But nothing in this city is ever so simple."

The P-Bar Ranch, run by Mr. Flake's father and uncle, has grazed its cattle in the past on leased public lands, and the congressman's 70-year-old Uncle Jake isn't shy about pursuing earmarks on behalf of his rural constituencies.

"If earmarks were used wisely, they could be a good thing," says the elder Mr. Flake, now a state senator. "Even as they are between the million earmarks for his district, the uncle worked with freshman Rep. Rick Renzi (R., Ariz.) to secure nearly $3 million for a proposed bridge over a rural creek, which has been hazardous for travelers during heavy rain.

"I am very proud of Jeff," says the uncle, recalling a meeting with President

"I am surprised at the Taliban resurgence since U.S. forces have been pulled out of large villages to fight in distant cities."

There have been outbreaks of violence last month in Kabul vehicle rammed bombings and suicide attacks on coalition forces and U.S. military convoys have been targeted."

"I am very proud of Jeff," says the uncle, recalling a meeting with President
Cuba

Send in the social workers

HAVANA
Fidel Castro declares war on corruption

WATCHING political change in Cuba is usually like looking at a glacier: you know in theory that it must be moving but you never see anything happen. Yet the past couple of months have brought a flurry of changes at the top. In five out of 14 provinces, the top Communist Party official has been replaced. So have the ministers of light industry, higher education and audit and control. In April, Juan Carlos Robinson, one of the youngest members of the 21-strong politiburo, was abruptly sacked. The official media announced that he had failed to overcome “errors” such as “abuse of authority” and “ostentation”.

As the alleged sins of the ostentatious Mr Robinson suggest, the motive for many of the changes is Fidel Castro’s campaign to root out corruption. In November, in a speech delivered from the mahogany-panelled splendour of Havana University, the president painted a picture of widespread graft throughout the state-controlled economy. This, he said, was endangering the communist system: “We can destroy ourselves, and it would be our fault.”

The choice of a university as the venue for this speech was deliberate. In a quest to recover his revolution’s ideological purity, Mr Castro, who will be 80 in August, is turning to the young. At the forefront of the anti-corruption campaign are 28,000 students of social work. Dressed in black or red T-shirts, for several months they manned petrol stations across the country, noting every litre sold. This exercise revealed that, previously, about half of all fuel sold was not accounted for.

Now students of economics are being sent on “missions” to audit state companies, where they have uncovered slack accounting and rampant pilfering. There are even rumours that money is leaking from the party’s own budget. Soldiers are also being pressed into anti-graft duty. The armed forces are now managing Havana’s port, where entire containers went missing when civilians were in sole charge.

Corruption is not new in Mr Castro’s Cuba. Its people have long talked euphemistically of “resolving” their needs by finding unofficial ways round shortages and rules. Several solicitors have been prosecuted recently for selling houses—illegal in the workers’ paradise, where people are allowed only to swap, not sell, their homes. Many people find irregular ways to top up wages that average around $15 a month (not counting subsidised food and services).

Some Cubans doubt whether the latest crackdown will work. “It’s crazy,” said a motorist waiting to fill up at a Havana petrol station. “We are bringing kids in from the provinces, and giving them a crash course in inequality and theft.”

Why crack down now? One reason is that the economy, helped by subsidies from Hugo Chávez, Venezuela’s president, is doing better. This has allowed Mr Castro to re-impose central control, rolling back the limited market reforms he accepted in the 1990s. What may count for more is that Mr Castro is increasingly preoccupied by his legacy. He has often argued that the Soviet Union was brought down by corruption at home rather than external pressure. What he now appears to want above all else is to avoid his revolution suffering a similar fate when he goes. Then the glacier may really start to move.

Argentina

Taking on the penguins

BUENOS AIRES
Roberto Lavagna edges towards a presidential candidacy

OF THE larger countries in Latin America, Argentina is the only one without a presidential election this year. Its presidential poll is due in 2007, probably in October. But already electioneering is in the air—and suddenly it looks as if Néstor Kirchner, the incumbent president, may face a strong challenger.

Mr Kirchner has been fortunate enough to preside over a robust recovery from financial collapse in 2001-02. He is hugely popular. His advisers insisted that a mass rally he organised, attracting several hundred thousand supporters to Aires’s Plaza de Mayo, national day 1.

halde, the previous occupant of the congressional elected, he sacked the prime minister, replaced him, and the president. He is no longer Mr Kirchner’s only challenger. In addition to Roberto Lavagna, a former Economy minister, a number of other lesser-known candidates are also challenging him for the nomination in 2007.
crease in inflation plus 2.3% partly because the government wants it to help with switching the country to digital television by 2012. Commercial media fear that the more money the BBC gets, the more it will trample over their territory. The Treasury has reportedly told the Beeb that it has no hope of being given that much. Gordon Brown, the chancellor, is now the last chance to contain Auntie. 

Education reform

Tory votes save Blair's bill

One part of the white paper does make sense. When the BBC plans a new service, such as the suite of channels it launched in 2002, Ofcom will for the first time play a part in deciding whether to allow the expansion. The regulator's economists are more likely to care about a venture's damaging impact on the commercial sector than is the BBC itself. Commercial competitors argue, however, that much of the damage has already been done. Newspaper companies, for instance, are rapidly losing readers to the internet, and they complain that the BBC's generously-funded free news website stops them attracting readers back online.

The BBC's director-general, Mark Thompson, and its chairman, Michael Grade, say that the white paper brings "radical reform". Its board of governors will be replaced by a more independent trust. It is the least that the government could have done, given widespread criticism of the BBC's in-house governance.

All the Beeb needs to make sure of now is the level of its licence fee, which is to be set soon. It has asked for a large annual in-
The Economist June 2nd 2007

Doing the business

SIR - Your briefing on business schools perpetuated every myth ever said about them: snobishness, impracticality, greediness, cheating and more (“New graduation skills”, May 12th). In fact, the one indisputable truth about business schools over the past 100 years has been that a few of the flashier ones are always adopting gimmicky innovations in an attempt to attract attention, innovations which they abandon after a few dismal years. For example, the changes you mentioned at Yale’s School of Management mark no less than its third attempt to invent a special identity in just 31 years. Business schools operate on several spectrums, like practical/theoretical, mechanical/human, specialist/generalist, and personal profit/public good. The tensions between these opposites are what keep them dynamic and great.

By the way, you misquoted your concluding source. Stuart Crainer and Des Dearlove did not say that most business students simply get drunk. They said that whereas other students do that, MBA students instead “bond and network”, which is surely a good thing.

CARTER DANIEL
Rutgers Business School
Newark, New Jersey

SIR - The Walnut Walk (which you called the “Wharton Walk”) is much more of an occasion than you described. Students do not just visit “ten bars in a single night”. The revelers are required to wear suits above the waist and boxer shorts below while being stared at by passers-by. If that does not reduce the arrogance that leads to Enron-sized scandals, then I am not sure the trend towards ethics classes you reported will help.

EDWARD NEVRAUMONT
Toronto

A study that counts

SIR - Your review of a book on the history of algebra challenged your readers to “try doing multiplication with Roman numerals” (“An equation for eternity”, May 12th). I have researched this fascinating topic at length and together with John Makowski, of Loyola University, published an article in the journal Classical Philology in 2001. We discussed the use of the abacus and finger reckoning as well as written calculations, and concluded: “Any educated Roman must have been able to do arithmetic problems as well as narrowly as well as any educated person today.”

DAVID MAHER
Senior vice-president
Public Interest Registry
Reston, Virginia

Words of wisdom

SIR - Confucius taught that people should have undivided faith in and obedience to authority, irrespective of the nature of the political establishment. By designating the emperor as the son of heaven, mandated to reign over his people, he contributed to the extension and continuation of China's degrading feudal society and regimes. Privileged politicians in power will always want their subjects to acquiesce and conform to their rule. Do the Chinese really want to re-adopt Confucianism in their modern society (“Confucius makes a comeback”, May 19th)? I very much doubt it.

TAN BOON TEE
Singapore

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Diesel engines are renowned for their durability and outstanding fuel economy. Oil and natural gas industry engineers now make diesel even better. They are producing an advanced fuel, ultra low sulfur diesel (ULSD), to help new, efficient diesel engines run even cleaner. Today this clean, efficient fuel is available across America. When combined with the advanced diesel engines now available, ULSD will ultimately cut emissions by 90 percent. Now that’s blue-sky thinking.

June 2, 2007

EnergyFromNow.org