

# The Caerulean

U C L C O N S E R V A T I V E S O C I E T Y

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## The 'other side' of working in politics- The Party Professional:

When asked 'So, what do you do for a living then,' I usually follow with a simple reply, 'Oh I work for an MP/The Tories/ David Cameron/in politics' (please delete as applicable) and always, almost always I have to supplement this statement with a job description in bullet point format of what it is to be a Conservative Party Agent. For that is never my first response of, 'I'm an agent' as it conjures up images of Max Clifford/Daniel Craig (please choose the latter) which simply confuses people.

So what is it I actually do? Well, good question. I often have this chat with friends, but for me it really is quite simple. As an agent, it is my job to promote the best interests of the Conservative Party. Whether that is building on the local membership, promoting a particular candidate or dealing with a tricky press situation, I am the day to day link (ably assisted by my assistant) between the media, the general public, candidates, and indeed the law of the Electoral Commission to the Central Party. I am a campaign manager, a press consultant, a graphic designer, a copy writer, an election law advisor and quite often, the person responsible for that last pile of leaflets of that most difficult and most hilly of routes that nobody wants to deliver. This is where

I get my buzz, being such an important part in the machinery of an operation. Often it's my job to keep the machine oiled, as well as moving. The satisfaction of a job well done, seeing a campaign that you have helped bring to public attention snowball, or that leaflet that hits the spot, is really why I do this job. It can be a selfless task, with others taking the credit, but it is an important one and a job where you can say 'I am making a difference.'

How did I get into it? Well, pretty much by accident via the House of Commons website (w4mp.com) at a crossroads in my life when I decided spending each and every winter in the French Alps really wasn't why I read Politics at Aberystwyth or had accrued such a massive student loan. I had worked as a rep, in the charity sector as a street fundraiser and even did some time on operations with the army, so I figured that I was tough enough to work with Conservatives and the general public. Moreover, I have developed a thick skin that I find useful when dealing with all tiers of politician!

It really is a job where no day is the same. You just never know what that phone

call is going to be, especially during my time as an agent for a Member of Parliament. Often, it is the agent that is the first point of contact for a member of the public, and in judging how successful an issue is solved can be based on how the agent passed the ball to the relevant person in the first place.

Would I recommend it to anyone? Well, if you are looking for a 9-5, and want to be a millionaire then no! If you want excitement, to learn each and every day something new about yourself, to gain skills you never thought were possible and to meet a massive array of people, then maybe this is the job for you? This reminds me. Maybe the next time someone asks me what it is exactly I do for a living, I can say with conviction 'I help make a difference'.

**Jonny Ball**

Jonny Ball is the Conservative Party agent for the Target Seat of Hampstead and Kilburn. He previously worked in Northamptonshire working for Tim Boswell MP, Chris Heaton-Harris MEP and Roger Helmer MEP. He is available to talk to anyone who has an interest in working in politics.

## Gutless Gordon:

John Phelan

Its difficult to remember now but just over a year ago, in July 2007, the Independent could write that “The prospect of a snap election was increased by two weekend polls which showed that the change of prime minister has given Labour a “Brown bounce” after the departure of Tony Blair”. Labour had a 7 point lead over the Conservatives in the polls and had just won two by elections.

How things change. At the Conservative party conference that October David Cameron announced plans to raise the inheritance tax threshold to £1 million. Overnight the Conservatives saw a 6 point Labour lead in the poll turn into a 3 point lead for them.

Gordon Brown, the man who became Prime Minister after a sham of a Labour leadership election, called a sudden halt to talk of an early election, admitting that he’d considered it, but explained that he “wanted to get on with my job of putting my vision of what the future of the country was to the people of the country” before he held it.

His claim that he was not influenced by opinion polls convinced no one. Cameron said “The Prime Minister has shown great weakness and indecision”, and then Liberal Democrat leader Menzies Campbell said “We are talking about loss of nerve”.

A pattern of behaviour soon began to emerge. In October 2004 the new European Union Constitution was signed. The Labour party manifesto for the 2005 election stated clearly “We will put it (the Constitution) to the British people in a referendum”. Then, in early 2006, both France and the Netherlands rejected the Constitu-

tion in their referenda and the document died.

But, like a ‘Halloween’ movie, it rose from the dead, this time as the Lisbon Treaty in early 2007. But in August Brown decided that the Lisbon Treaty was, in fact, so different to the Constitution that Labour’s 2005 manifesto commitment to a referendum no longer held. Again, he claimed that opinion polls showing a 2 to 1 majority against the treaty were not a factor.

It was difficult, however, to find anyone who actually agreed with this view of the Lisbon Treaty. From his own party, Austin Mitchell MP said “If it looks like a constitution, if it smells like a constitution, if it reads like a constitution, so far as I’m concerned it’s a constitution”. Valery Giscard D’Estaing, one of the authors of the Constitution, said “The difference between the original Constitution and the present Lisbon Treaty is one of approach, rather than content. The proposals in the original constitutional treaty are practically unchanged”. Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen said “The good thing is that all the symbolic elements are gone, and that which really matters - the core - is left”. Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, stated that “The substance of the constitution is preserved. That is a fact”. The Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern proudly stated that “90 per cent of it is still there... These changes haven’t made any dramatic change to the substance of what was agreed back in 2004.”

The game was given away in a speech at the London School of Economics when Giuliano Amato, another who drew up the Constitution, said “The good thing about not calling it a Constitution is that no one can ask for a

referendum on it”. Brown now said that “The proper way to discuss this is in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and I believe Parliament will pass the legislation”. Like the election in October, the promised referendum was cancelled.

And the pattern has continued. In the week before the Labour conference in September a group of MP’s contacted the party’s National Executive Committee asking for nomination forms to be sent out. They cited a clause in the party’s constitution which states that nominations “shall be sought each year”. But after a meeting attended by Brown the NEC refused to send out the ballots citing a ‘convention’ of not doing so while in power. It went on to say it did not want to encourage “internal debates”.

That now makes three elections which this un-elected Prime Minister has run away from; the general election he was considering last autumn, the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty and the ballot of his own party membership.

In the future psychologists will probably produce entire theses on Gordon Brown’s almost pathological timidity but for now it seems clear that the man who spent so long plotting in the background for the top job doesn’t function well in the glare of publicity it actually brings. The voters will have to wait until 2010 before they finally get their say.

John Phelan

## Introducing TheYoungConservative.co.uk: Edward Hallam

TheYoungConservative is a blog for the young British conservative movement. Founded a few months ago by myself and my co-editor Tarasyn Whitehead-Patey, we're a pair of Young Britons' Foundation/Young America's Foundation/Leadership Institute graduates who wanted to promote the youth of the conservative movement in Britain, having observed how fantastically organised America is when it comes to embracing and investing in the next generation of conservatives.

Our aim is to give young activists at all levels – youth branches, student campuses, concerned citizens etc – a resource to help them champion the causes which they want to campaign on. It's our belief that issues, not political parties, are the way to enfranchise voters, giving them a platform on which to be heard.

TheYoungConservative takes no specific ideological position within conservatism - though we reserve the right to comment - because we believe the movement is strongest when it is broadest. That means we're not affiliated with the Conservative Party or CF, but very sympathetic to it, but equally so to UKIP, and groups which

share common ground with conservatism, such as Students4Freedom, The Freedom Association and NO2ID.

We aim to offer our readership a range of articles with something to appeal to everyone. We flag training opportunities, such as those offered by YBF, laud successful activists as role models - see our interview series, and highlight successful political youth groups as templates to be emulated.

But the blog isn't there simply to be read, it's to be used. We blog on what we know, but we're not omnipotent or omnipresent, like something out of a New Labour wet dream. We encourage activists to contact us and tell us what they're doing to advance the movement. So if, for example, you're reading this and founding, or would like to found, a centre-right student group on your campus focused on whatever issue makes you tick, make sure you're in touch with us, so that we can promote you far and wide.

Make sure we're on your RSS feed from today!"

Edward Hallam is co-editor of TheYoungConservative

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### TheYoungConservative

Complete coverage of the young British conservative movement

Edward Hallam

## Port and Policy: Amanda Oon

Tuesday the 18th of November welcomed in the start of the festive season for the UCL Conservative society with a Port and Policy Evening. Now I'd be the last one to want to taint the pristine pages of The Caerulean with lies and deceit, so I'll come clean. It was little other than my somewhat elusive title hat that drew my curious mind towards the Gustave Tuck Lecture Theatre. The port also played a significant factor, the policy less so, and as it turns out I was in good company in that regard!

However I was left thanking my lucky stars I came. Not only because the Port was in plentiful supply and pretty damn good. Not only because now I have ample ammunition to fire back at Liberal and Labour friends who'd claim 'Tory Port and Policy? What policy?' then scurry off cackling to drinkies

with Lembit or some other such glamorous affair. But mostly because what I did learn about said policies was more surprising and enlightening than I'd ever have expected from a bleak Tuesday evening.

Take, for example that a significant number of UCL conservatives would advocate sole state funding for all political parties. Or that we're, in general, happier to see Democrat Obama in office than McCain. Signs of a Tory party progressing, modernizing, moving with the times? Or is it a sign of just too much Port?

These two gems were revealed to me through the first two of three debates that started the evening. The first debate,

'This House would provide sole state funding for political parties' was defended vigorously and eloquently by visiting liberals Jamal Saleh and Arthur Verdin who won the debate with their philosophy of 'proper politics over money'. Ollie and Serene fought their corner and brought up some striking points, such as the fact 44million pounds were spent on political parties' publicity schemes and that "1/2 million given to the BNP is really not fair.". Corruption in general was also raised as a theme. By default therefore, France and Germany were discussed. Each speech was followed by a 30 second roundup where the contestants summarized their keys points ad-

mirably.

The debate over Obama's positive influence on America was more hotly contested. With Kieran and Ed on proposition and Jonathan and Tom on Opposition, the issue was explored from every angle, including whether the question of whether Obama was good for America was synonymous with whether Obama would be beneficial to America as opposed to anyone else. In my opinion it was the quotation 'The people who call Barack Obama a socialist are the same people who think the earth was made in 7 days' that won the proposition's case. But with experienced debaters on both sides, the case was analysed, scrutinised and presented and opposed with a rare but winning combination of incisive detail and good humour.

The evening ended on a lighter note with a balloon debate. An eclectic cast of characters was presented to us with Prince Charles, George Osborne, Rowan Williams, Kris Akabusi, Russel Brand and David Dimbleby all up for eviction! All fought for their survival but it was Alex Webb's sharp and self-deprecating witticisms that won Dimbleby's victory as the last survivor. Brand was first to go. However there was a small part of me that wonders if it was the recent triumph of Kris Akabusi's pleasure Lounge as the new name for the second floor bar that helped assist Kriss Akabusi's lengthy stay in the ballon. However I soon realised that I was being too cynical and I remembered that all Conservative debates are fair. And based entirely on merit.

And 'Awoooooogah' was not scrawled across the Gustave Tuck whiteboard. So after the success of Dimbleby, the evening drew to a close and we all went to the hottest bar in town, Kriss Akabusi's Pleasure Lounge, to continue the debate, have another drink and join together in an "Awoooogah" in celebration of an excellent evening!

Amanda Oon

Caerulean Event's Commentator

## In the Interests of Self-Prezzavation:

Alex Webb

John Prescott. Grandson of a miner. Son of a railwayman. Staunch socialist. Trade Unionist. Champion of the working classes. Labour's Sarah Palin, with a bigger cupsize. Yet he's also the Right Honourable John Prescott MP: Two-Jags Prescott, with his 8-bedroom 'Prescott Castle', serial philanderer, Cabinet Minister and croquet enthusiast who is entertained by American billionaires.

In last month's Prescott: The Class System and Me, he somehow tried to reconcile these two sides of his torn existence, to examine the British class system in the context of his relation to it. At least, I think that's what he was trying to do. At the beginning of the programme, the narrator stated that Prescott and his wife were seeking to establish whether 'class still exists, if it was still relevant, and, if so, what does it look like in Britain today'. After a brief crash course in the life and times of

John Prescott, the honourable member then proceeds to engage with various tiers of the supposed class system: from enjoying dinner with Lord Onslow to scoffing fried chicken with unemployed young women from a South London council estate.

However, it soon becomes clear that he is less interested in determining the realities of class in Britain today, than in trying to impose his own blinkered, outdated perception of it. With every interview, he asks his subjects what class they consider themselves to be, and a majority of them essentially reply that they believe the question redundant, that they don't want to be pigeon-holed as a member of a particular stratum. Given the colossal rise in fortune that Prescott has enjoyed in his lifetime, it is peculiar that he has no belief in the fluidity of social status in Britain. In two instances one might perceive as an-

tagonistic, he visits an underachieving state school in Oxford followed by Rugby School in Warwickshire. However, the pupils of the respective schools express essentially the same opinion, that they are judged by what is perceived to be their background, but that they would not define themselves as one class or another. A boy from Rugby sensibly points out that his parents have worked very hard so that they could afford to send him there, whilst he did the same in order to win an academic scholarship and lessen the burden. One might draw comparisons between this and what was essentially the making of Prescott himself, his chance to go to Ruskin College in Oxford as a consequence of his union work, yet he refuses to accept that even those with working class backgrounds attending private schools are doing anything other than perpetuating class divides. As we witness in his visit to the Oxford

school, however, Prescott is as, if not more, culpable of perpetuating these divides than anyone else. When a teenage girl suggests that she doesn't consider herself a constituent of any class, as she has ambitions beyond her current position, he tells her that she is working class, always will be, and should be proud of it. Despite being one of its greatest exemplars, he demonstrates no belief in the fluidity of class in Britain, and seems to be almost alone in this.

In the course of the programme, we see time and time again how he simply denies his interviewees their own opinion of where they stand in society, and when they stand up to him, he frequently erupts and shouts them down. By his own explicit admission, Prescott bears a chip on his shoulder of extraordinary proportions. The Sunday Times columnist A A Gill went so far as to deny it was a chip, and branded it a stigmata. He is incredibly sensitive when attacked, which is why he is so combustible at the slightest baiting. He has, in his opinion, been treated unfairly as a consequence of his class for his whole life. However, I would propose a different interpretation. Whilst he may, particularly in his earlier days in Parliament, have encountered

some snobbery, I don't think that people's antipathy towards him can always, or even often, be attributed to his perceived class. Having seen, in this show, several hours of Prescott's private and public persona, a little window into his views on the world, it becomes quite clear that he is a truly repellent human being (in stark contrast to his long-suffering wife, it must be said). It is surely this which has shaped people's attitudes to him, and his working class origins are often simply the excuse he uses to rationalize such attitudes.

His perception of society is stuck some forty years in the past, he is a victim of having spent that time in what the narrator calls 'the bubble of Westminster'. He is simply out of touch with the realities of modern society, as is perhaps substantiated by his ignorance of the word 'chav'. The class he thinks he represents simply don't exist any more, at least not his perception of it. He considers himself working class, yet the only common ground he could find with the three girls from the South London estate was discussing the respective fights - physical fights - they'd got into, he with egg throwers and at the BRIT Awards, they with their school-

teachers. He lives in his eight bedroom mansion and splashes his cash on Jaguars and Chinese buffets, yet still has the gall to call himself a staunch socialist, a branding he justifies by sending his children to state schools and then vociferously attacking those who work hard to give their children the best opportunities possible. He condemns private schools for supposedly perpetuating the hegemony of the ruling classes, yet has been accused of allowing his son to use official residences to conduct business meetings. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but a degree of consistency is perhaps necessary for it to be taken seriously.

Despite the overwhelming desire to throw a brick through the television screen out of sheer aggravation almost every time he opened his mouth, the programme makers must be commended. Despite Pauline Prescott's fears that they would be made to 'look like the Hamiltons', the presentation of Prescott is even handed, certainly no hatchet job. Quite frankly, it didn't need to be. He managed quite adequately on his own.

Alex Webb

## The Fifth Column: Home to the Dissenters' in our Midst!

Hicham Yezza

Jon Moses

Earlier this year, Hicham Yezza, British resident of 13 years, popular student and editor of the left wing *Ceasefire* magazine was arrested for the possession of legal, downloadable research material under section 41 of the terrorism act. The material, subtly named "Al-Qaeda Training Manual" (and I can confirm, no prospective Booker-prize winner) is an open source document widely available on Amazon.com or downloadable from the American Department of Justice Website. This legal

act was deemed criminal enough to award Hicham with 27 days of detention without charge before being released, accused of nothing and promptly delivered a deportation order.

The brief flicker of outraged media attention has faded but Hicham's case continues.

Used as we now are to that Orwellian turn of phrase 'The War on Terror, it is sometimes hard to remember just how

contemporary this crusade really is. Endless rhetoric has been employed to construct a false narrative within Britain's collective memory; adamant that a paradigm shift has occurred in our daily lives. Tony Blair's response to the London tube bombings in 2005 revealed much about his outlook, "the rules of the game are changing." Our mental discourse insists that we now face *new* unimagined fears, rather than the perennial. We're told the

'Fundamental Terrorists' of Islam are an enemy like no other. That we *now* need these measures to combat the threat. That they're for our own safety. Collective amnesia settles in: "*Oceana has always been at war with Eastasia.*"

We have always had terrorism. It has faced all governments since time immemorial, from James I's narrow escape on November 5<sup>th</sup> 1605 to the IRA attacks of recent history and finally the tube bombings of 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005. Our memory has changed: we see modern society, modern terrorism as a new phenomenon justifying reactionary measures designed to erode our civil liberties in a blind exchange for our safety. 'If we've done nothing wrong, we have nothing to fear' runs the idiom. Only the terrorists have to worry; what use is a charge if we know they *could* be guilty. Fourteen days. Twenty-Eight days. Forty-Two days. Ninety days. "*Freedom is slavery.*"

There is no better catalyst for terrorism than the government's own anti-terror policy. With its crude dialectic logic in which force meets force, achieving nothing but the perpetuations of force itself. A logic which hands extremism propaganda upon a plate dressed with political bravado, in an aphorism of tough talk, ignorant policy. An alienated community further isolated, targeted and sectioned by its own government.

Last month, we invited Hicham Yezza to UCL to speak for an Amnesty society event.

When asked what he thought the effect of his detention had been, he recounted the story of a young teenager who'd approached him, angrily stating "we have to fight back." That time, Hicham was there to rebuke the boy's anger with characteristic intelligent moderation, but how many others are out there? How many others whose disaffection and outrage at the marginalisation of their community has not been rebuked but met with voices of encouragement? Force + Force = Force.

Suddenly the blind bargain starts to reek of a scam; liberty exchanged for greater danger. As Dianne Abbott, a Labour dissident of forty-two day detention noted in her speech to the House of Commons "It is because I believe that the proposals on 42-

day detention will make us less safe, not more safe, that I oppose them."

Across the ocean it was heartening to see both presidential candidates were firm in their opposition to that symbol of the Bush administration, Guantanamo Bay. Its closure may seem a small gesture; albeit it one of immense importance to those 270 or so detainees who still remain, yet the power of such symbolic policy will reverberate throughout the globe. Just as the *Nunca Mas* (literally *Never Again*) report detailing human rights abuses during Argentina's military regime in 1983 provided catharsis for the past, so the pledge to close Guantanamo and the election of Barack Obama offers the same symbolism: it too says *Never Again*.

Adam Curtis's documentary *The Power of Nightmares* has characterised perfectly the shift in political discourse which took place during the fallout of ideology post- cold war: "Instead of delivering dreams, politicians now promise to protect us from nightmares. They say they will rescue us from dreadful dangers that we cannot see and do not understand and the greatest danger of all is international terrorism."

Obama's election has shown us again the power of dreams, or in his words: the audacity of hope. The fear merchants of parliament have sold us nothing but the audacity of ignorance. With Gordon Brown's recent makeover as Labour's whiter, chubbier and infinitely less charismatic incarnation of the president elect; we can only hope his new identity is more than the cynical crest-riding it resembles.

On October 13<sup>th</sup> 2008 the House of Lords resoundingly defeated Jacqui Smith's pet project: the extension of terror detention permitting 42 days without charge. Rather than play pinball with the Lords on such an unpopular measure, the government announced it was cancelling the clause. The headlines blurted "42 days defeated!" a victory masking defeat. We must remember that Hicham and others like him have been arrested and threatened with deportation under existing

laws, not those of Jacqui Smith's recent bedtime fantasies.

In the words of Hicham himself, "Fighting terrorism is a serious matter and needs to be tackled in a serious way - not through empty gimmicks sustained by fear-mongering and alarmist rhetoric."

When asked "do you feel disaffected with Britain following your arrest?" Hicham replied, "No. Britain is not the policies made by the government, Britain is the people who fought for my release and are fighting my deportation." Indeed, Hicham Yezza still faces deportation. Barred from working, the legal costs which provide the last barrier to the negation of thirteen years as a much-loved British resident and his exile are dwindling, eroded by the Home Office's tactics of attrition.

Will we too stand up and say Never Again?

Jonathan Moses

UCLU Amnesty International Society

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For more on Hicham's case and what you can do to help, visit:

[www.freehicham.co.uk](http://www.freehicham.co.uk)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### 9th December:

Conservative Christmas Dinner:

Come and share a wonderful evening of debate and turkey  
In the Marlborough Arms.



### 13th January:

Ed Vaizey:

An evening with the MP for Wantage



### 27th January:

Michael Howard:

The former Conservative leader will be spending the evening with us.  
A date not to be missed!



### 3rd February:

Graham Brady

A chance to see the former Conservative front bencher.



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