

VARIANT ISSUE 13

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COMMON PURPOSE

The Tainted Word
William Clark

They are like to children sitting in the marketplace, and speaking one to another, and saying: We have piped to you, and you have not danced: we have mourned, and you have not wept. (Luke chapter 7)

Tales from the script

Many things are done in an underhand and unaccountable way in the arts. Not just decision-making, but the political ideologies which are enforced upon it. At times people have to go to preposterous lengths to disguise this.

The Scottish Arts Council (SAC) organised—and presumably paid for—a quiet event for an audience of ‘arts managers’ in Glasgow on 14/4/99. Grimly called “Facing the Future,” for some reason this took the form of one lecture by Ian Christie, then director of the think tank ‘Demos’. After an obviously unwanted debate (chaired by Mrs. Jack McConnell, Labour Party etc.) in which the audience clearly did not accept what they were told, the final words from Seona Reid (then Director of the SAC) convey the impression that some form of transaction had taken place, that “SAC was working to ensure the arts were incorporated into the range of Government policies—but arts organisations and artists needed to play their part in making this a reality”.

Reality fabrication had also been the purpose of Christie’s talk, “A New Agenda for the Arts” which was also slyly pushed around the SAC by ‘colleagues’ who followed the lead and felt the need to be seen to be urging others towards Christie’s big idea. This is the brainless fraud that there is no need to form an arts policy distinct from that dictated in London. Christie even offers the golden promise that if “autonomous Scotland” were to follow the government line we would be the “envy and fascination” of the rest of the country.

The problem is the Scottish electorate voted for less dictatorship from London, not more. People want something different for the future not more of the same old shite. But there arts policy has remained despite the wheeling in and switching on of a couple of new appointees. Tacking on the word ‘Scottish’ did not disguise the obvious difficulty with Christie’s little talk: that it is propaganda, that he is working for the government and that he is bullshitting people. The tone is of an Oxford graduate on the lowest rung of the Civil service, perhaps in a propaganda department for some colonial enterprise. His statements such as “policy debate about ‘the arts’ is one of the most dispiriting areas of stand-offs and entrenched interests in our intellectual life”, don’t make much sense in Scotland—what policy debate?

Christie was employed to discern the future environment for the arts for the Scottish, Welsh and English Arts Councils in 1996. So this was money for old rope, ignominiously flogged yet again in the SAC Annual Report of 1999 which cites Christie’s talk as the sole example of its organisation of arts policy debate. An example of nihilistic apathy.

Christie even points to “policy debate” as a key problem, but what he really seems to mean is any independent thought and free discussion not to the government’s liking and eh... actual culture, art. What is dispiriting is that his Pol Pot equation aims to exclude first *all* the arts administrators including *all* partnerships with private business and secondly *any* artist who has expressed dissatisfaction:

“...the arts establishment is split on tediously familiar lines. On the one hand, the official arts world is preoccupied with the economics of cultural policy—subsidy, value for money, partnership with business and a goal of reaching new mass audiences (‘art for all’). Ranged against it are members of an establishment of discontented *artistes* - including those who have recently announced that they were forming an ‘alternative arts council’ to seek more resources for their favoured forms of high culture. Arts Council chairman Gerry Robinson confronts Harold Pinter: it is yet another showdown between the men in grey suits and the men in black polo necks.”

Leaving aside that this has nothing much to do with Scotland or reality; Christie inferiorises

These previous Marxists: Giddens, Mulgan, Demos, despise political activism because they—the ‘policy entrepreneurs’ as they call themselves—want to dictate policy: why else would they do what they do if they didn’t. The ‘Third Way’ mirrors their own personal sell-outs and biddable political conscience. Put it this way ‘Policy entrepreneurs’ could easily become Cockney rhyming slang for ‘agent-provocateurs’. As we shall see below, they have found a place as agents of influence, joining up with what Anthony Verrier called the ‘permanent government.’

Happy ever after in the market place

‘Those of us who have observed the resistible rise of the Blairites inside the Labour Party are not in the least surprised by the [the decision to exempt Formula One from the tobacco sponsorship ban]. We expected nothing else from people who routinely broke the rules of their own party, lied about their own actions, smeared fellow Party members, abused Party funds to pursue factional advantage, rigged votes, repeatedly revised policy without consulting any of the Party’s democratic organs, and ensured a steady flow of jobs and patronage to those loyal and useful to the leadership. Their attitude to the rules that apply to ordinary people is like Leona Helmsley’s towards taxes: they’re “for little people”.’
<http://archive.briefing.org.uk/1997/december/news2.html>

Yes times have been good for Demos, it has increased its staff and moved to new offices in Waterloo (let’s hope that’s ironic) sharing with the MI6 connected Foreign Policy Centre, among others . Tom Bentley (a former advisor to David Blunkett on education) is now the Director with Beth Egan (advisor to Gordon Brown) as Deputy Director. They still maintain that they are independent from government.

Their web site promotes links to several right-wing think tanks and war mongering arms of the cold war including: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, The RAND Corporation, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Hudson Institute (founded by Herman Khan the model for Kubrick’s Dr Strangelove), The Heritage Foundation, The Centre for Policy Studies, The Institute of Economic Affairs, The Aspen Institute, The Adam Smith Institute and so on...

Demos trustees bring together mind benders Sir Douglas Hague (former adviser to Margaret Thatcher), Jan Hall (Chief Executive of the advertising agency Gold Greenlees Trott), Martin Jacques (Co-founder of Demos, former editor of *Marxism Today*, the curiously anti-socialist journal) and Julia Middleton (Chief Executive of Common Purpose).

Geoff Mulgan now chairs the Advisory Council alongside Martin Taylor, who just happens to be a steering group member of the Bilderberg group (a notoriously secretive elite gathering). After his disastrous time at Barclays Bank, Taylor received a £2.5 million payoff (in addition his shares would be worth £3.2 million). A leading member of Labour’s taskforce on welfare reform, he is one of the party’s prominent supporters in the City. The millionaire immediately targeted the poorest people in the UK with a focus on ‘welfare dependency’. Taylor argued that in order to reduce the growing number of workless households, both partners in an unemployed childless couple should have to make themselves available for work. People who get a thrill out of punishing the helpless need help themselves.

Ian Christie is still on the Advisory Council which also has: Matthew D’Ancona (Deputy Editor, The Sunday Telegraph), Terry Leahy (Chief Executive, Tesco plc), Mark Leonard (Director, Foreign Policy Centre), David Marquand (Principal, Mansfield College, Oxford), Anita Roddick (Body Shop plc) and the curiously named ‘Perri 6’ who is researching into us all being taken over by robots. He has also done extensive research into mind-altering drugs. It is amazing just how far the Demos team have ‘moved on’ from their days ‘upholding’ Marxism to embrace the ideology of the right, any old post-modern cobblers, big business and the shadowy connivances of think tanks. Demos has spawned all manner of parasitical children.

Take the example of Common Purpose (CP). This was started by Demos trustee Julia Middleton. It has been around for sometime but gained a great deal of funding with the advent of New Labour and its service towards business elites. Initially money was put in by David Bell, the Chairman of the *Financial Times* (and the Millennium Bridge Trust). CP is

another strange organisation, a kind of secret society for careerists.

Again the board has some mysterious figures presiding including Lord Dahrendorf, the chairman of the right-wing Ditchley Foundation and Prof. Laurence Martin of the like-minded Royal Institute of International Affairs. It could well be a note paper job, but CP is composed of representatives of big business (mostly Labour party donors) including multi-nationals, the police, the MOD, banks and their associates, eyes down for a Full House: Gillian Ashmore (Cabinet Office), Sir Jeremy Beecham (Association of Metropolitan Authorities), David Bell (Financial Times), Dr Andrew Bird (Zeneca), Dr Kevin Bond (Yorkshire Water), Jeremy Hall (Dean Clough Ltd), Richard Hatfield (Ministry of Defence), John Lee (Halifax plc), Ruth MacKenzie (ex-Scottish Opera), Vincent McGinlay (Marks & Spencer plc), Baroness Genista McIntosh (Royal National Theatre), Tim Melville-Ross (Institute of Directors), Sir Alastair Morton (Shadow Strategic Railway Authority and British Railways Board), Sir Herman Ouseley (Commission for Racial Equality), Janet Paraskeva (National Lottery Charities Board), Graham Prentice (Nestlé UK Ltd), John Rivers (Rolls-Royce plc), Gerry Robinson (Arts Council of England), Richard Sambrook (BBC), Barry Shaw (Cleveland Constabulary), Jan Shawe (Prudential Corporation plc), Vivien Stern (The International Centre for Prison Studies), Peter Stoddart (Nissan UK Ltd), Paul Whitehouse (Sussex Police), Ken Williams (Norfolk Constabulary), Ruth Wishart (Freelance Journalist). Their list of corporate sponsors is impressive and they say they have offices in every UK city. Put politely CP tries to promote 'corporate community engagement', the synergy between big business and well... it's a bit like the asbestos factory owner's daughter handing out religious tracts to the workers coughing at the factory gates. Relationships between corporate CP funders such as BAe, Royal Ordnance and GEC Marconi and say the work of CP trustee David Grayson of the national Disability Council are ignored however. The idea is to accentuate the positive.

The real value of CP must be measured by its closeness to power—access to which is what is on offer. The board has only one member who is openly employed by government, Gillian Ashmore, her record speaks for itself:

"Gillian Ashmore is currently on secondment from the Department of Transport to the British Railways Board working on railway privatisation. She joined the Civil Service in 1971 and has worked variously in the Departments of the Environment, Transport, Employment and Trade and Industry. On the Transport side, she has worked mainly in the public transport field. In the latter two Departments she was Deputy Director of the Enterprise and Deregulation Unit. Mrs. Ashmore has also been a non-executive director of P & O European Transport."

Incredibly with a line up like that the CP constitution has the cheek to say the organisation: "is diverse and non-aligned. It draws on the widest possible variety of sectors, areas, and social groups and recognises only peer level and geographical boundaries as common factors to each group. It is always independent, always balanced and owes no historical or other allegiance to any other organisation. Common Purpose works for the benefit of society as a whole..."

What a pack of lies. CP creates the illusion that it is for ordinary people, but it is not only run by an elite, its projects cater exclusively for an elite: "the rising generation of decision makers" as they say in their web site. This also states that: "We are looking for applicants who are decision-makers in their city, towns or area", and that "participants are over 30 and already hold a position of considerable responsibility". They say their long-term aim is "educating the next generation of leaders in each city or town". On this basis it is a fraudulent organisation.

Funded by big business and public bodies (everyone from Arms companies, Banks to curiously the Scottish Arts Council—probably through Ruth Wishart's connection) they operate for their benefit while their constitution lies that they seek "the advancement of education for the public benefit... to educate men and women from a broad range of geographical, political, ethnic, institutional, social and economic backgrounds."

We have mourned and you have not wept

With Trustees such as Gerry Robinson, the ex-Coca Cola salesman who is now chairman of