Domestic Policy Discourse in the US and the UK in the ‘New World Order’

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Edited by

Lori Maguire

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

LORI MAGUIRE

This book is the companion volume to *Foreign Policy Discourse in the "New World Order"* which appeared in 2009. It aims to examine some of the major domestic policy debates in the United Kingdom and the United States from 1992 to 2010. These dates have been chosen for their high significance. In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War came to an end. 1992, then, is the first truly post-Cold War year but it also saw elections in both the UK and the US. The results differed–the Conservatives hung onto power in Britain while the Democrats, under Bill Clinton, returned in the US.

With the end of the Cold War, many commentators expected a renewed emphasis on domestic policy as a result of this major change in foreign policy. Until the attacks of 11 September 2001, this is exactly what happened. The "new world order" in economic terms, celebrated the triumph of capitalism and free markets. At this time, Milton Friedman's economic ideas were hugely popular and Keynes out of fashion. The economic problems of the 1970s, in combination with the manifest failure of communist economies, had largely discredited the traditional notion of the Left and there was a general rightward movement in political discourse.

Recent years, however, have seen a reassessment of this rightward political movement in terms of domestic policy–a reassessment that increased spectacularly after large scale economic problems began in 2008. By the summer of that year, Keynes was making a return and governments were intervening in the economy in often extraordinary ways. The Left, in both nations, was returning to an earlier vision and rhetoric while the Right found itself with little new to say–and in the American case, at least, stuck in Cold War rhetoric.

While there have been a number of studies of the domestic policy of each country, there have been no major attempts at comparative analysis.

Our goal is to consider a wide-range of issues in order to present an overall comparison of major domestic policy debates in each country. Clearly, they differ in terms of relative size and power. At the same time, both obviously have had a lot in common and show similar developments– although, admittedly with important differences. Furthermore, this book is also not specifically concerned with policy or how policy is made but with the debate around policy and the rhetoric used to present different points of view. Since the introduction to the volume on foreign policy discourse contained a long section on the term "discourse" and various theories related to it, this concept will not be discussed in any detail here. Instead, we will attempt an overview of certain major issues, stressing the comparative dimension. Immense similarities in use of language occur and show the cross fertilisation between English-speaking communities but there are also important differences. Our goal will be to illuminate these. For obvious reasons, we have not been able to make an exhaustive study of all issues but have chosen, instead, to look at a few in depth. In this chapter we will take a brief look at certain major issues and then give an overview of the book.

The Economy

During Bill Clinton's first campaign for the presidency, James Carville's famous adage read: "the economy, stupid" and, indeed, elections are usually won or lost on the strength of the economy. For this reason, discourse on economic questions is often the base from which a great deal of political discourse springs. Certainly since the late 1970s, the Right has led economic debate in both nations. The woes of the 1970s, and the later revelation of the weaknesses of communist financial systems dethroned and discredited much of socialism and even Keynesianism. The "Chicago Boys" as Brian Glenn shows in chapter 7, ruled the roost and discourse was dominated by terms like "competition", "choice", "flexibility", "privatisation" and, of course, "the market". From there, this rhetoric spread into other realms and can be found repeatedly in education and health care most notably.

The origins of this discourse lie long before. In 1944 Friedrich Hayek, an Austrian economist (naturalised British), published *The Road to Serfdom*. In it, he stated, among other things:

> There is one aspect of the change in moral values brought about by the advance of collectivism which at the present time provides special food for thought. It is that the virtues which are held less and less in esteem and which consequently become rarer are precisely those on which the British

> people justly prided themselves and in which they were generally recognized to excel. The virtues possessed by the British people, possessed in a higher degree than most other people, excepting only a few of the smaller nations, like the Swiss and the Dutch–were independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility, the successful reliance on voluntary activity, non-interference with one's neighbour and tolerance of the different and queer, respect for custom and tradition, and a healthy suspicion of power and authority. British strength, British character, and British achievements are to a great extent the result of a cultivation of the spontaneous. But almost all the traditions and institutions in which British moral genius has found its most characteristic expression, and which in turn have moulded the national character and the whole moral climate of England, are those which the progress of collectivism and its inherently centralistic tendencies are progressively destroying.[1]

Young Margaret Thatcher was one of the persons who read the book at the time and was strongly influenced by it. Notice the importance that Hayek gives to terms like "independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility", for these words would become key themes of the Right. Written at the end of World War II, his attack on "collectivism" obviously referred to Nazism but his principle target was socialism and communism–at the time extremely fashionable especially in Britain where he then lived and which would lead to Labour's victory at the polls the following year. In opposition to the internationalist doctrine of socialism, Hayek asserts the need for a stronger national identity on the part of the British and Americans. But he also calls for greater laisser-faire in the economy. When he praises "self-reliance", "individual initiative" and "voluntary activity", he is effectively asking for a re-evaluation of the private sector and warning against the dangers of too much government and too great a public sector.

Later Milton Friedman squarely linked capitalism with freedom. In 1962 he wrote:

> It is widely believed that politics and economics are separate and largely unconnected; that individual freedom is a political problem and material welfare an economic problem; and that any kind of political arrangements can be combined with any kind of economic arrangements. The chief contemporary manifestation of this idea is the advocacy of "democratic socialism" by many who condemn out of hand the restrictions on individual freedom imposed by "totalitarian socialism" in Russia, and who are persuaded that it is possible for a country to adopt the essential features of Russian economic arrangements and yet to ensure individual freedom through political arrangements. The thesis of this chapter is that such a view is a delusion, that there is an intimate connection between economics

> and politics, that only certain arrangements are possible and that, in particular, a society which is socialist cannot also be democratic, in the sense of guaranteeing individual freedom.[2]

So political liberty, he believes, demands economic laisser-faire. He goes on to argue that any kind of government compulsion–even taxes taken for retirement pensions–are infringements of individual liberty. Friedman also talks of the importance of the market, saying that "free market capitalist society fosters freedom".[3] In his idealized vision, the market becomes a cure for all of society's ills, protecting the different groups–consumers, sellers, employees and employers–by ensuring that power is widely dispersed in society. Of particular significance is the idea that a market economy provides flexibility and gives people choice. As Friedman says: "it gives people what they want instead of what a particular group thinks it ought to want."[4]

In this brief outline we see many of the key terms that became central to right-wing discourse in the 1980s and by the end of the decade, had been accepted by much of the Left as well: words like "choice", "individual freedom", "independence" "responsibility" and "self-reliance". The impact of these ideas can clearly be seen in Thatcher's first address as leader to the Conservative Party Conference:

> Our capitalist system produces a far higher standard of prosperity and happiness because it believes in incentive and opportunity, and because it is founded on human dignity and freedom. Even the Russians have to go to a capitalist country–America–to buy enough wheat to feed their people-and that after more than fifty years of a State-controlled economy. Yet they boast incessantly, while we, who have so much more to boast about, for ever criticize and decry... Some Socialists seem to believe that people should be numbers in a State computer. We believe they should be individuals. We are all unequal. No one, thank heavens, is quite like anyone else, however much the Socialists may pretend otherwise. We believe that everyone has the right to be unequal. But to us, every human being is equally important.[5]

Here we see the link made between capitalism and freedom as well as the fear of the loss of individual and national identity. In another place in the speech, she strongly attacks nationalisation and expresses her firm belief in private enterprise. Later, she spoke of successfully rolling back "the frontiers of the state", asserting that through privatisation her government had reduced the power of the central government.[6]

Ronald Reagan echoed the same ideas in his speeches, for example, in his acceptance of the Republican nomination:

> Let us pledge to restore, in our time, the American spirit of voluntary service, of cooperation, of private and community initiative; a spirit that flows like a deep and mighty river through the history of our nation.
>
> As your nominee I pledge to you to restore to the Federal government the capacity to do the people's work, without dominating their lives. I pledge to you–I pledge to you a government that will not only work well but wisely, its ability to act tempered by prudence and its willingness to do good balanced by the knowledge that government is never more dangerous than when our desire to have it help us blinds us to its great power to harm us.[7]

Notice his emphasis on the word "voluntary", very much in keeping with Friedman's ideas, as well as his attack on the power of the federal government. For Reagan, the central government's role must be reduced while that of the private sector must be increased. In another speech he expressed many of his economic beliefs:

> Let us also include a permanent limit on the percentage of the people's earnings government can take without their consent… Let our banner proclaim our belief in a free market as the greatest provider for the people. Let us also call for an end to the nit-picking, the harassment and over-regulation of business and industry which restricts expansion and our ability to compete in world markets.[8]

Notice how he describes taxation as the government taking "people's earnings… without their consent" which clearly links him to the taxpayer revolt of the time.[9] We also see many of Friedman's ideas expressed and notably a firm belief in the virtues of the market system and a desire to deregulate it.

The success of the Right in the 1980s in both nations led leftwing parties to adopt similar terms and arguments in their rhetoric as Lori Maguire shows in chapter 3. Soon everybody was talking about "the market", "choice", "flexibility" and "competition" and extolling the virtues of the private sector. From economics this vocabulary filtered into other domains. Let us now turn to look at some of these other areas and discourse around them.

Health Care

Health care was a major subject of political discourse in both nations where it reflected certain ideological debates. However, the intensity and even violence of the debate was much greater in the United States where it has become a symbol for the polarisation of that country. Evelyne

Thévenard gives us a detailed look at that subject from Clinton's failed overhaul of the system to Obama's successful one so we will not consider the situation in America in great detail here.

Suffice it to say that, alone among Western nations, the US did not establish a system of universal government mandated health care after World War II. Numerous attempts were made, mainly by Democrats, but they all failed. More than any other issue it has come to symbolise the ideological divide in that nation–in particular with respect to attitudes towards the federal government and its role in American lives. To an extraordinary extent, fear has played a central role in the debate, being used by both sides. Those in favour of reform have stressed the horror stories of those without insurance or those with inadequate insurance (most famously in Michael Moore's film *Sicko*) and cited example after example of very real human tragedy. It has been opponents of major reform, however, who have especially used this tactic, continually playing on fears of communism (to such an extent that even in 2010 their rhetoric seems stuck in the Cold War), fears of the effects change would have both on the nation and the individual's access to health care and fears of massive tax increases. All this served as a way of disguising one of the essential elements in the debate: is health care a right or a privilege? For those in favour of introducing a European-style system in the US, it is a basic human right and Dr Thévenard shows how Clinton and others have used a rights-based terminology although they have usually failed to communicate it effectively. Meanwhile the Republicans feared that successful reform would create a middle class dependent on government spending and re-legitimise the role of the federal government and the party that has traditionally supported it–the Democrats.

One particularly significant element in health care discourse has been the use of popular economic terms relating to the marketplace and to consumers. George W. Bush, for example, presented health care as just another product like cars. Figures on the Right have stated that the best way to contain costs would be to let individuals manage their own health expenditure through special savings accounts and tax breaks. The Democrats, on the other hand, have expressed the belief that only the federal government has the power and the sweep to effectively keep down costs and guarantee access. Thus in the 2008 campaign while McCain talked of "individual responsibility" the Democratic platform spoke of "shared responsibility". The ideological divide is clearly reflected in the discourse.

The story in Britain may appear, at first glance, very different, but, rhetorically, there are a number of similarities. Because of the existence of

the National Health Service, the debate turned on improvement but the vocabulary was remarkably similar. Thatcher instituted and Major continued a controversial market-oriented reform of the NHS to make it more responsive to consumers/patients, more innovative and introduce more competition. Labour at first strongly denounced these changes. For example, Chris Smith, then Shadow spokesman on health, attacked the government saying:

> We have a health service that is in crisis, that cannot even deliver same sex wards to the people who wish to have them. Year on year, the Government creates a winter crisis. Year on year we see an explosion of bureaucracy. Year on year we see more managers and fewer nurses. Year on year we see patients on trolleys in accident and emergency departments. Year on year we see cancelled operations. Year on year we see lengthening waiting lists. Year on year we see staff in the health service struggling to cope with the changes that the Government have imposed on them.[10]

Smith questions the very nature of the reforms which he sees as increasing bureaucracy to the detriment of actual treatment. Certainly variants of the word "manage" had played an important role in Conservative reforms: in 1984 general managers were appointed in the NHS, while two years after the NHS Management Board was established and then reorganised three years later so it was easy for Labour to mock this term. The problem was, though, that by the time Blair took office, some of the reforms seemed to be having a positive impact. Added to this, the NHS was exhausted by so much change and Blair had announced that "We have no plans to increase tax at all."[11] For this reason, the Government pretty much ignored the question for two years. The flu epidemic of December 1999, however, provoked a massive crisis and, while the Secretary of State for Health, Alan Milburn, admitted that "the influenza outbreak has put great pressure on the NHS", he insisted that "the NHS is coping."[12] His Conservative equivalent, Liam Fox had a different view of the situation:

> [The Health Secretary's statement] is long on complacency and short on detail and substance. Many people will have voted new Labour because of the Prime Minister's promises about the health services. How hollow those promises sound now. Those voters must feel betrayed…The Secretary of State admits that no elective work has been done in the past week. If the health service had been doing its normal work, it would have fallen apart completely. What faith can we have, in view of the Secretary of State's attitude? When we see sick patients left to die in waiting rooms, waiting in car parks to be seen or stored in converted operating theatres, and when the Secretary of State can say something as complacent as, "The NHS is

> coping tremendously well," we wonder whether the only isolation unit in this country that is operating is the one that he keeps himself in so that he cannot see the complete picture. NHS staff are coping tremendously well, but they are being badly let down by those who run the service.[13]

Rhetoric has changed sides: now it is the Conservatives attacking the failure of Labour and presenting themselves as the real champions of the NHS. The key word here is "waiting": the sick must wait for care (and sometimes die because they cannot get it) while the Labour government shows no interest in dealing with the problem.

In January 2000, obviously as a reaction to this crisis, Blair promised to massively increase funding for the NHS in order to align the UK's spending on health with that of the rest of Europe. This plan was announced in July 2000 and, of course meant yet another fundamental reorganisation of the system. In announcing the reform, Blair favoured vocabulary like "change" and "modern" as well as numerous synonyms for them. He also showed a real acceptance of traditional right-wing ideas:

> The best performers will be given greater freedom and flexibility, and all will have access to additional funds tied to clear outcomes in performance. That will include a new framework—a concordat—with the private sector. There should be, and will be, no barrier to partnership with the private sector where appropriate—as the private finance initiative hospital building programme has shown.[14]

"Greater freedom", performance incentives and "partnership with the private sector"–these terms would never have been used by Aneurin Bevan, founder of the NHS. Later in the speech he talks of increasing "choice":

> Patients will also have more say and more choice, with a patient advocate and forum in every hospital to give them immediate help with sorting out their complaints, and a voice in how the hospital is run.[15]

As we have seen, "choice" has been a key term on the Right. So once again we can see how Blair has incorporated Conservative rhetoric into New Labour.

While on the surface, the American and British debates about health care seem very different, in reality there are fundamental similarities between them. The vocabulary employed in both nations is often surprisingly close and some commentators have seen an ideological element present in British discourse too. Calum Paton, for example, has asserted that the "underlying cause" of the Thatcher and Major reforms

was “central government’s ideological search for market reforms in the public sector”.[16] And this, of course, has been central to Republican preoccupations in the United States. In Britain it may have reached a high point with the 2005 proposal (now dropped) by the Conservatives to create a “patient passport” which sounds suspiciously like the voucher system for schools applied to health care. Essentially, New Labour has vastly increased spending on the NHS which has had many positive results but its continual reforms, coming after a period of continual Conservative reforms, has hurt these improvements.[17] Labour has very real achievements to boast of but it could have done more.

Education

In both Britain and the United States the debate on education is widely similar: the main aspects being strong criticisms of the deficiencies of the system with calls for more testing, the relationship between local and national government (and notably the imposition of national standards), and the attempt to create a closer public/private link.[18] In much of this, the rhetoric of “choice” has been highly important. Like so much else, it is a rhetoric set by the Right and accepted, with certain modifications, by the Left. And, once again, as we have seen with other subjects, the debate is much more polarised in the US than in the UK.

In the United States, one of the best places to locate major elements of this debate is in George W. Bush’s acceptance speech at the Republican Convention of 2000. He said on the subject of education:

> Too many American children are segregated into schools without standards, shuffled from grade-to-grade because of their age, regardless of their knowledge.
>
> This is discrimination, pure and simple–the soft bigotry of low expectations.
>
> And our nation should treat it like other forms of discrimination ... We should end it.
>
> One size does not fit all when it comes to educating our children, so local people should control local schools. And those who spend your tax dollars must be held accountable. When a school district receives federal funds to teach poor children, we expect them to learn. And if they don't, parents should get the money to make a different choice.[19]

First he accuses the public school system of having failed to educate American citizens–notably the poorest–because they have not imposed high enough standards. Instead, children are advanced year-on-year,

whether they have mastered basic skills or not. This, Bush insists must stop, but, in keeping with the dominant belief on the Right, the solution should not come from the federal government but rather should come from local areas and from a greater role for the private sector. Notice the key word "choice": parents should have more choice in schools by which Bush means a voucher programme–that is, a way of offering government funding to enable students to attend private school. This last point is discussed in some detail by Brian Glenn in chapter 7. As he explains, vouchers are part of an overall attempt by many on the Right to privatise the public sector and have been highly controversial. Their supporters call them a way of granting more choice to parents and of introducing beneficial competition among schools which will raise standards in general. Opponents of school vouchers originally attacked them as a way of re-segregating schools and, thus, detrimental to the poor and minorities. The voucher scheme only started to have some real success when the discourse around it was framed as a way to help minority groups (or at least some, particularly deserving elements within them)–and so began to attract support from some leaders of these groups. But Bush's use of the terms "discrimination", and "bigotry" clearly have racial connotations. In other words, the true bigots are those who want to deny choice to racial minorities by forcing them into the public system. In 2006, Republican Senator John Ensign went even further, stating that: "Elementary and secondary education is one of the few sectors in this country that does not have open competition."[20] He suggested that "artificial government barriers" should be removed and schools allowed to freely compete with each other–thus improving standards for everyone. To do this he introduced a bill, called "America's Opportunity Scholarships for Kids":

> The purpose of this legislation is to provide low-income children who are in schools that have consistently not met adequate yearly progress benchmarks, and have not improved student academic achievement, with other options… I believe that this legislation is the next step toward bringing true competition to elementary and secondary education.

Notice how Ensign carefully avoids the term "voucher", preferring the more positive connotations of "scholarship". His true goal is evident: to create competition–that is, divert government funding to private schools so that they can attract more pupils–but it is hidden in a rhetoric of compassionate help for the poor.

Bush did not get a generalized voucher scheme but he did get most of the other reforms he demanded in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This law established a lot of requirements like obligatory testing every

year in reading and mathematics for children in grades 3 to 8 and at least one test in grades 10 to 12 but left these tests up to each state–which makes national evaluations extremely difficult. The law also says that states must establish "adequate yearly progress" goals for each school and schools that do not meet these goals for two years will be labelled "in need of improvement". Eventually such schools could be subject to "restructuring".

The bill had much bipartisan support, for much of the American Left had, by this time, accepted many of the conservative criticisms of education. But there remained a major difference between Left and Right on the question, as a speech by Sen. Edward Kennedy illustrates:

> We will be debating issues of policy, but make no mistake about it, we will be debating the issue of need, of investment, of the type of future we are going to have in this country... When 80 percent of eighth graders lack trained math teachers, we can see what is compromised in terms of the children of this country. At a time when we need their talents, their involvement, and their help in leading the United States in the world community, we fail to provide them the resources they need to build a strong educational foundation. That is what this debate over funding is about. It is about our future.
>
> We know what is out there. Twenty percent of the children in the United States live in poverty; 10 million children are eligible for title I services. We are only reaching a third of them. So if we are going to give life and meaning to "leave no child behind," we ought to be out front finding ways to reach all of them, not skimping on the 10 million children who are eligible under this legislation, and who look to us for help.[21]

So Kennedy accepts many of the rightwing criticisms about the deficiencies of the system and he is not opposed to testing, but he comes to a very different conclusion on the remedy. Here there is no talk of competition or choice but, rather, he says that what is needed is more money–and money invested in poor areas. The Obama administration has taken a moderate position–keeping the outlines of No Child Left Behind but wanting to increase funding and accountability as well as placing less emphasis on annual testing.

In Britain, debate about education not only resembles that in America but also that about health care. As with the NHS, New Labour established national standards and targets and massively increased funding in their second term. The government also tried to develop the public/private relationship and attempted to create more "choice" by trying to establish an artificial market. In both cases, Blair continued Conservative reforms that had been denounced by Labour at the time. In 1995 Blair announced

that "education will be the passion of my government", but the verdict is similarly mixed about what has been achieved.[22]

Although Blair phased out the Conservatives' Assisted Places Scheme–a rough equivalent to the American voucher system–which provided government funding for particularly worthy students to attend public school, neither he nor Brown were ready to give up on the idea of greater private sector involvement in education. One particularly infamous result of this was the individual learning accounts (ILAs) whose stated goal was to improve educational opportunities, especially in relation to information technology for older people. Part of the Labour Manifesto of 1997, Brown lauded ILAs in his budget speech of 1999:

> This century, Britain has achieved universal free education for children. This Budget introduces the new opportunity for universal education for adults—lifelong learning so that everyone will have the chance to succeed in the new economy.[23]

Unfortunately, the government had not properly thought out the programme, did not create adequate safeguards against fraud and an immense scandal developed. Criticism was devastating and the programme was quickly suspended and then formally cancelled.

The Blair government's attempts to reform the secondary school system continued the love affair with "modernisation", "choice" and "the market" so prevalent in both nations throughout the period. Blair continued most of the Conservative reforms aimed at allowing parents a greater choice in their children's schools. Essentially the government accepted the argument that competition improves performance and sought to raise school levels this way. The idea was that if money was linked to pupils then a sort of market would develop.[24] In his speech accepting the leadership of the Labour Party, Blair said:

> On education, we should provide choice and demand standards from the teachers and schools, but run our education system so that all children get that choice and those standards, not just the privileged few.[25]

Even for a politician this is vague. Once in power, the Blair government sought to create specialist schools–which looked a lot like an attack on the comprehensive system. However, the concept proved to have serious difficulties. How can a child decide on a specialty at age 12? How can parents really be offered a clear choice between specialty schools since no area, not even London, can offer a full range of possibilities? These and other problems attracted a number of criticisms:

> The fundamental problem with the plan is that it is about structures, not standards. We need to focus on what is happening in the classroom, not in the boardroom… We want a variety of social markets in education, not the right hon. Lady's free market. In her model, who will speak up for the special needs child? Who will be the advocate for the looked-after child? Who will guarantee fairness and equality of opportunity? Her answer seems to be parent power. That may work in some places, but what happens where parents do not get involved, will not get involved or cannot get involved? [26]

Labour is attacked here by the Liberal Democrats' Education spokesman for their fascination with the market–criticisms that, in the past, would have been more likely to be leveled by a Labour member against a Conservative.

The relationship between local and national government also changed during this period–once again a continuation of reforms started by the Conservatives who had introduced a national curriculum. From the start, Blair had stressed literacy and numeracy in primary education:

> Children should learn to read, write and count… We must as a country help every child tie down the basics…Language is the currency of a person's freedom, so we need to get much closer to the goal of all eleven-year-olds having sufficient language skills to take advantage of their secondary schooling.[27]

In the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*, the government established both a Literacy Task Force and a Numeracy Task Force which created detailed standards. This went so far that, as one scholar has commented: "In specifying its requirements so precisely, the government crossed the line between telling schools what to teach and telling them how to teach."[28] The Thatcher government had already tried to weaken the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and New Labour continued the process. As with the NHS reforms, the result was greater centralisation.

Climate Change

Dealing with climate change effectively can only be done through international and national laws which, by definition, goes against the prevailing discourse of "choice", "diversity", "freedom", and "the market".[29] As such, it was bound to cause controversy on the Right. But the situation is more complicated than this. Discourse related to the environment, and particularly climate change, has been coloured by two things. First, there is the fact that the science involved is often complicated

and difficult for non-specialists and, second, the heavy politicisation of the issue. We shall briefly examine each of these and discuss their impact on discourse.

The birth of the modern environmentalist movement is generally said to date from the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 which became an immense bestseller and started, first in the US and then elsewhere, a massive debate on the environment. Rarely has popular concern increased so quickly from such a low level (reaching a peak around 1970) but there were excellent reasons for this: very visible pollution had been growing for some time with cities covered in smog and bodies of water declared "dead". The Western press took up the issue with intensity and dramatised it and, as a result, new laws were voted. The situation improved noticeably–to such an extent that when climate change became a major issue many were inclined to dismiss it as overdramatisation. Its effects were not obvious to see and dealing with it would fundamentally change lifestyles.

Unlike many other aspects of the environmental debate, climate change poses particular problems linked to the highly technical nature of the science on which the discourse is based. While everyone can readily understand a picture of a bird covered in oil in the Gulf of Mexico, not everyone has the necessary knowledge or time to understand the complexities of climate change. To begin with, weather and climate are two different things since weather refers to the changing temperature, precipitation and wind which we experience every hour of every day while climate is defined by Merriam Webster as**:** "the average course or condition of the weather at a place usually over a period of years". So weather is short term while climate is long term. Those who believe the Earth's climate is changing speak of the greenhouse effect which, simply put, means that the Earth's atmosphere lets in energy from the sun and traps it there so that the planet is warm enough for life. They argue that humans have affected this process in various ways, notably through their high use of fossil fuels. These gasses get trapped in the atmosphere, enhancing the greenhouse effect and making the Earth warmer than it should be. As a result, average temperatures have been increasing. Although some critics actually deny the existence of a greenhouse effect, most accept that the Earth is getting warmer but assert that natural causes are responsible. They argue that there are natural cycles that determine the warmth of the planet. If you are not a specialist, it is extremely difficult to sort out the different facts and assertions.

Two scandals have recently dramatised the debate. First, there is the so-called "Climategate". This occurred because the e-mail system of the

University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit (CRU), one of the world's leading centres for climate research, was hacked into and e-mails published in late 2009. The CRU played a major role in the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fourth Assessment Report which is considered the most authoritative of its kind. Some critics allege that certain e-mails suggest that leading scientists were manipulating data and wanted some papers excluded from the UN's next major assessment. Subsequent investigations by independent panels cleared the scientists of all charges. The House of Commons report, however, did observe that:

> The focus on Professor Jones and CRU has been largely misplaced. On the accusations relating to Professor Jones's refusal to share raw data and computer codes, we consider that his actions were in line with common practice in the climate science community. We have suggested that the community consider becoming more transparent by publishing raw data and detailed methodologies.[30]

This last sentence reveals the difficulties laypeople have in following discourse on the subject and coming to an intelligent decision on it and criticises the scientific community's lack of attention to this. The report suggests that scientists need to explain more in clear language and provide more information.

The second scandal revolved around the discovery that the IPCC used questionable data (some of which came from masters students and lobbying groups) that had not followed the proper process of peer review. *Nature*, a highly respected scholarly journal, called on the IPCC to revise its policies in February 2010. Five leading scholars were invited to suggest ways of doing so. While they often came up with very different remedies–some going so far as to suggest replacing it with a permanent, less politicised body–they all highlighted the need for clear scientific rigour.[31] Already in 2007, one of the authors of the *Nature* article, Mike Hulme, was sounding warnings about the impact of exaggerated media presentations on the subject. He conducted a study on the result of portrayals of future catastrophe and found that they were generally counterproductive, leading to public apathy. He told the BBC:

> My argument is about the dangers of science over-claiming its knowledge about the future and in particular presenting tentative predictions about climate change using words of "disaster", "apocalypse" and "catastrophe" …Not only is this not a good way of presenting climate change science, but even in trying to effect change, it's self-defeating.[32]

Undeniably, in order to secure media attention and government action, some believers in climate change exaggerated the rate and extent of global warming.–with the IPCC forced to apologise in one case in January 2010.[33] Such examples, in combination with the aforementioned scandals and the complexity of the science have played into the hands of opponents of global warming.

One of the leading critics of climate change is the Danish statistics professor, Bjorn Lomborg who wrote in 2001 *The Skeptical Environmentalist*. This highly controversial book argued that many of the scientific claims about environmental issues are greatly exaggerated or even wrong.[34] In a review of a book on climate change, Lomborg argued:

> Let's be clear. Global warming is real and man-made. I take as my starting point the findings of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Denying climate science is foolish. But so is denying climate economics, the costs of which could run into the hundreds of trillions of dollars. Depressingly, Mr. [Thomas] Friedman throughout "Hot, Flat, and Crowded" simply does not talk seriously about the costs of his proposed solutions. He also fails to weigh those costs against the benefits, and he doesn't consider the threat of global warming in the context of other significant threats to the world's well-being.[35]

Here we see some of the main arguments against radical action on global warming: it costs too much money, its threat is exaggerated and, therefore, it is less urgent than other questions like AIDS or malaria or famine. As we shall see, other critics go much further and deny that humans are even responsible for it, saying global warming is part of a natural cycle.

Not only is the science of climate change difficult to understand but, like most environmental questions, it has become heavily politicised. Tony Brenton, who worked on environmental affairs at the UK Foreign Office, has commented:

> The dumping of nuclear waste and the control of power station emissions... have led to epic and enduring political rows. These disagreements, moreover, go beyond discussion of particular pollution issues to a quite profound ideological cleavage as to the true extent of the environmental threat that faces us, and the extent to which our lifestyles will have to change to meet it.[36]

At first it was not obvious that this division would follow a Left/Right one. Certainly, on the Right, business and industry were not keen on greater reglementation and standards because of the financial cost but, on the other hand, trade unions, so important in left-of-centre parties, were not

particularly interested in the question either. It was under Richard Nixon, for example, that the Clean Water Act was voted and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) created. At the same time, some in the British Labour Party considered the question a "middle-class preoccupation".[37] For those who thought like this on the Left, too much environmentalism hurt both job creation and social justice (notably with regard to the developing world). But by the 1980s, a clear Left/Right divide had emerged. While Thatcher tended to neglect environmental questions (unless forced to do so by Europe), Reagan was often actively hostile, saying at one point of environmental groups: "I do not think they will be happy until the White House looks like a bird's nest."[38] On the other hand, both Labour and the Democrats had taken on board parts of the environmental agenda.

In the US the connection became even more evident when Al Gore became Vice-President in January 1993. In a bestselling book published in 1992, Gore stated that the environment should be "the central organizing principle for civilization".[39] It was especially after his time as Vice-President that Gore became one of the major voices in the world on climate change, making the film *An Inconvenient Truth* in 2006 and winning the Nobel Prize the following year.

Although less obviously linked to the environmental movement than Gore, Tony Blair asserted that the "left-of-centre... is the natural home of those concerned about the environment".[40] One of his goals was to respond to criticisms that environmentalism was bad both for social justice and job creation:

> I also want to move away from the argument that, when it comes to protecting the environment, something or someone always loses out. There is a tendency to become overly sacrificial about the environment. It is certainly true that there are hard choices to be made in promoting concern for the environment–about the nature of industrial growth, about the incentives we provide for different types of transport, and about how we regulate to discourage pollution. But for too long the equation has been presented as the environment versus jobs, the environment versus competitiveness, protection of the environment hitting the poorest in our society.[41]

While he is not very clear about how environmentalism can help social justice, he puts a great deal of stress on the potential for job creation in new technologies developing around environmentalism. Gordon Brown, while Chancellor of the Exchequer, developed these arguments in even greater detail:

> Environmental issues–including climate change–have traditionally been placed in a category separate from the economy and from economic policy. But this is no longer tenable. Across a range of environmental issues–from soil erosion to the depletion of marine stocks, from water scarcity to air pollution–it is clear now not just that economic activity is their cause, but that these problems in themselves threaten future economic activity and growth. And it is the poorest members of the community–those most dependent on the natural world for their survival, and those with the fewest resources to buy their way out of unhealthy environments–that suffer the most. Indeed, it is in the issue of climate change that we can see this interaction of economic development, environmental degradation and social inequity most clearly.[42]

So, in reply to arguments by Lomborg and others, Brown insists that an environmentally sound policy is also good for the economy and, in order to please Labour Party faithful, good for the poorest especially. Obama has followed a similar tactic. In their election statement on the environment, Obama and Biden stressed that investing in clean energy would "create American jobs" and also talked of the importance of the market in such enterprises.[43]

On the other hand, it has become familiar on the Right, especially in the United States, to question even the existence of climate change. During the very cold winter of 2009-2010, it was common to see signs attacking climate change, asserting that the heavy snow was proof that it did not exist.[44] The most prominent sceptics have been members of the George W. Bush administration. For example, in an interview with ABC News, then Vice-President Dick Cheney, asserted that:

> I think there's an emerging consensus that we do have global warming. You can look at the data on that, and I think clearly we're in a period of warming. Where there does not appear to be a consensus, where it begins to break down, is the extent to which that's part of a normal cycle versus the extent to which it's caused by man, greenhouse gases, et cetera.[45]

Cheney goes further than Lomborg, although he does not actually deny climate change, he affirms that there is no scientific consensus on the reason for climate change, strongly implying that it is just a natural phenomenon.

Although climate change sceptics exist in Britain, the position of most on the Right has been more moderate than in the US. A not uncommon position has been that expressed by Damian Green, a Conservative Member of Parliament:

> Although there is still some scientific controversy about whether climate change is caused entirely by human activity or by a curious cyclical pattern that we do not yet understand, I certainly feel that the precautionary principle should apply, and that we should not take the risk with our planet of not doing something about such change.[46]

Although not entirely convinced of the reasons for climate change, Green takes the entirely pragmatic view that it should be dealt with in case the scientists are right. When David Cameron became leader of the party in 2005, he began pushing his party closer to the centre and one sign of this was a new found interest in environmentalism.[47] A year later, for example, he said:

> Whether it is at a global, national or local level, all of us, as leaders and decision makers, must play a part in making the green agenda central to everything we do. We can change how we get around; we can change how we build our homes; we can change our lifestyles, change our industrial processes, change our working practices.[48]

Cameron even redid his party's logo, replacing the torch by an oak tree and used the slogan "Think Green, Vote Blue" in local elections in 2007. So once again we see that, while a similar debate exists in both countries, it is much more centrist and moderate in the UK.

Race

Historically British political discourse has been obsessed with class differences while American has tended to focus on race. Much of this has changed in recent years because of mass, non-white immigration to the UK and because of growing inequality in the US. As Evan Smith shows in chapter 10, in Britain discourse has revolved around three principle subjects: the debate about whether all of those seeking asylum truly deserve it; the question of Britain's often uneasy relationship with the EU which allows free movement of its citizens–leading to the arrival of large numbers of Eastern Europeans; and the issue of multiculturalism and how immigrants and their British-born children fit into mainstream society–in particular, with regard to the Muslim population. Since this is well discussed in Dr Smith's article, we shall not devote much space to it here.

The same is true for immigration to the US which is the subject of chapter 9. Multiculturalism is also a major subject in American discourse and has led to a debate on the importance of the English language. But in other areas there are substantial differences. Much of the discussion

concerns the role of the federal government: should it legalise illegal immigrants or deport them? Almost everyone calls for immigration reform but there is little agreement on what shape it should take. With the economic recession, immigration has returned to a central place in public discourse and a number of figures on the Right have emphasized it. Tom Tancredo, Republican Congressman from 1999 to 2009, has gone so far as to call for an end to all immigration. In one interview he explained his position:

> We are in a clash of civilizations. I believe that is true. In order for us to be successful in this clash of civilizations, we need to know first of all who it is exactly that we are at war with. I believe we are fighting Islamo-fascism and it's good to know who you are fighting, what motivates them… The radical multiculturalism we have witnessed over the past forty years in America, I call it a cult of multiculturalism. It has, I think, been successful in destroying the ties that hold us together as Americans. There are certain ideas and ideals that should hold us together and a common language we should use in order to communicate those ideas and ideals. We are becoming a bilingual nation, which is not good from my standpoint… We're losing sight of who we are.[49]

Notice the similarities here with the debate in Britain, in particular in relation to Islam. What is different here is the concern for English because of the large number of Spanish-speaking immigrants.

Unlike Britain, most of the black population in the US has been there for centuries but still suffers from significant disadvantages. What is the reason for this situation and what should be done to remedy it? As we see in chapter 4, a complex discourse has developed around the subject–ostensibly non-racial but with a veiled racial subtext. Of course, race goes against the dominant discourse of "choice", "competition" and "responsibility", etc., for a person is born into a race. However, as we shall see, this discourse has still been applied in the US because of a complex link made between race and class on the Right. Paul Krugman has called race the central issue of American politics.[50] A discourse emerged of white victimisation which presented whites as unfairly suffering from busing and affirmative action policies while paying taxes which went to support "freeloading" minority groups.[51] Thomas and Mary Edsall argued that:

> The tax revolt was a major turning point in American politics. It provided raw muscle to the formation of a conservative coalition opposed to the liberal welfare state. The division of the electorate along lines of taxpayers versus tax recipients dovetailed with racial divisions: blacks (along with the growing Hispanic population) were disproportionately the recipients of

> government programs for the poor, disproportionately the beneficiaries of government-led efforts to redistribute rights and status, and the black middle and working classes were far more dependent on government programs and jobs than their white counterparts. Race melded into a conservative-driven agenda that sought to polarize the public against the private sector. The tax revolt provided conservatism with a powerful internal coherence, shaping an anti-government ethic, and firmly establishing new grounds for the dissatisfaction of white working- and middle-class voters from their traditional Democratic roots.[52]

It is clear that, as we can see in chapter 3, in the 1960s, the Republicans, led by Nixon, attempted to attract disaffected working class whites in the South through a language with disguised racial overtones. The link made between race and taxes would play a significant role in the victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Certainly Reagan was a master of a kind of coded language with talk of a "welfare queen":

> She has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000.[53]

This was a gross exaggeration of a real case and, indeed, although Reagan repeated the story many times, he never gave any specifics on the identity of the person. But, for many people, the phrase "welfare queens" summoned up images of lazy, duplicitous blacks exploiting hard-working whites.

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 thrust race back into open debate. The manifest inadequacy of the rescue effort and of the rebuilding of New Orleans caused many to ask whether racial prejudice was not involved since a large part of the population of New Orleans was black. Jesse Jackson, for example, asked: "How can blacks be left out of the leadership [of the relief effort] and trapped into the suffering?"[54] The writer Rebecca Solnit attacked the American media's coverage of the event in the (perhaps significantly) British newspaper, *The Guardian*:

> What people were willing to believe about Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans four years ago is a more serious matter. Of racism. And cliche. The story, as the mainstream media presented it at the time, was about marauding hordes of looters, rapists and murderers swarming through the streets. The descriptions were pretty clearly focused on African-Americans, the great majority left behind in the evacuation of the city (which was then two-thirds black anyway).[55]

She argued that the media had focused on rumour, presenting largely imaginary criminal incidents, supposedly committed by blacks, as truth, and these rumours, in turn, "were believed so fervently that they were used to turn New Orleans into a prison city, with supplies and would-be rescuers prevented from entering and the victims prevented from evacuating."

After the presidential campaign and victory of Barack Obama in 2008, an openly racist discourse reappeared on the Right in American politics. The taxpayer revolt reached its apogee with the Tea Party movement. Emerging in 2009, the movement protested not only tax rates but the budget deficit, the bail-outs and health care reform, among other things. The link between taxpayer revolt and race, described earlier, received substantiation when signs appeared at Tea Party rallies saying things like "Obama is a destructive unpatriotic black Muslim", "Obama's plan: white slavery" or images of him as a primitive African.[56] Obama's American nationality was even questioned with "birthers" insisting that he was actually born in Kenya and, therefore, not entitled to be president.[57] An added twist has been accusations of racism made against blacks. Mark Williams of the Tea Party Express thus attacked the NAACP. Even more significant was the case in July 2010 of Shirley Sherrod, a black official of the Department of Agriculture, who lost her job after the conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart posted video extracts of a speech she gave at an NAACP event which seemed to be racist. In reality, the remarks were taken completely out of context and she was actually condemning racism. Poll after poll has shown a significant decline in racism in America (a fact illustrated by the election of Obama) and it does seem that only a small percentage of the population in engaged in this discourse.[58] But they can still have an important impact.

Class

At first glance the two nations could not be more opposed than on the subject of class. Traditionally, the British have been seen as absolutely obsessed by class divisions. John Betjeman said that class was "all-absorbing, as it was, is now and ever shall be, to us".[59] The Americans, on the other hand, have tended to ignore class, wishfully trying to convince themselves of the American Dream and have, instead, focused more on racial and ethnic differences. But, as we shall see, there has been something of a reversal in the period under study.

As David Cannadine has shown, Thatcher was determined to remove "class", especially class conflict, from political discourse in Britain.[60] She

avoided the word in her speeches except as a criticism of communism or socialism. As she explained at one point; "The more you talk about class–or even about "classlessness"–the more you fix the idea in people's minds."[61] Her successor, John Major, picked up on this theme, talking of Britain as a "classless society",[62] and New Labour continued the rhetoric. For Blair, the class system was something from the past that needed to disappear:

> One of the things really wrong with Britain is that there are still hangovers from the class system that are great brakes in our ability to be a proper, mobile, modern society. Sometimes it has taken the form in the Labour Party of inverted snobbery.[63]

Note the last sentence, for Blair implies that the working class has as negative a role in class divisions as richer elements of society. As he puts it in a later speech, the British have been "defining ourselves as a nation not by what unites us but by what divides us".[64] And he goes on to make clear that this division is based on ideas of class:

> We have a class system unequal and antiquated, a social fabric tattered and torn, a politics where dogma drives out common sense–even an education system where one part of the nation is taught apart from the other. And if we do not change course we will have two classes of health service, two classes of state schools, two Britains–one on welfare; the other paying for it.

In a clear echo of Disraeli's famous description of England as being two nations, the rich and the poor, Blair argues that the obsession with class is deepening divisions and threatening the future of the nation. "Class" must be recognised as a thing of the past and a classless society actively worked for in order to assure that Britain will become a thriving, modern country.

The U.S. has been frequently depicted as a classless society and certainly part of the central mythology of the nation is that of the American Dream–that anyone, no matter how poor, can rise in society. Alexis de Tocqueville first and most famously described this, saying that "the soil of America was opposed to territorial aristocracy."[65] He went on to explain:

> In America, the aristocratic element has always been feeble from its birth...We can scarcely assign to it any degree of influence on the course of affairs. The democratic principle, on the contrary, has gained so much strength by time, by events, and by legislation, as to have become not only predominant, but all-powerful... America, then, exhibits in her social state an extraordinary phenomenon. Men are there seen on a greater equality in

> point of fortune and intellect, or, in other words, more equal in their strength, than in any other country of the world, or in any age of which history has preserved the remembrance.[66]

Although he is writing before the concepts of "class" had developed, his use of the terms "democratic" and "equality" essentially suggest the essence of "classlessness".

But, of course, class has always existed in the U.S., even if it has been partially hidden by ideas like the American Dream or described using words like "income" or "lifestyle". Certainly, there was more class-oriented rhetoric in the first part of the twentieth century (notably up to World War II) than in the second half, in part because the Cold War and McCarthyism devastated left-wing America. It was also overwhelmed by discourse on race as the civil rights movement took centre stage.

Paradoxically, with the fall of communism, class has begun to rediscover a place in American discourse–particularly since the election of George W. Bush in 2000. This occurred first in academics with publications like *The Imperial Middle: Why Americans Can't Think Straight about Class* in 1990[67] and the formation of various research groups on the subject and then in the mainstream media with a series of articles on class in America in 2005 in both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. Most recent analyses suggest that the U.S. now is more class-bound than Western European nations. The *Wall Street Journal* observed:

> Although Americans still think of their land as a place of exceptional opportunity–in contrast to class-bound Europe–the evidence suggests otherwise. And scholars have, over the past decade, come to see America as a less mobile society than they once believed. As recently as the later 1980s, economists argued that not much advantage passed from parent to child, perhaps a little as 20 percent. By that measure, a rich man's grandchild would have barely any edge over a poor man's grandchild... But over the last 10 years, better data and more number-crunching have led economists and sociologists to a new consensus: The escalators of mobility move much more slowly. A substantial body of research finds that at least 45 percent of parents' advantage in income is passed along to their children, and perhaps as much as 60 percent. With the higher estimate, it's not only how much money your parents have that matters–even your great-great grandfather's wealth might give you a noticeable edge today.[68]

The economist Tom Hertz went so far as to state that; "while few would deny that it is possible to start poor and end rich, the evidence suggests