

In brief

Britain in the 1950s: consensus or conflict?

There has recently been a considerable amount of public interest in the political, economic, and cultural history of Britain in the 1950s, heightened by Andrew Marr's television series. In a discussion evening held at the British Academy on 19 February 2008, Professor Peter Hennessy FBA (Queen Mary, University of London) and Professor Ross McKibbin FBA (University of Oxford) debated whether there really was a post-War consensus in Britain. The meeting was chaired by Professor Andrew Gamble FBA (University of Cambridge).

A transcript of their opening statements can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/perspectives/

The lively discussion inevitably considered whether any political consensus existed now. Professor Hennessy said: 'The foreign policy consensus is interesting because it is still there. I had the sheer agony of sitting through David Miliband's launch of his "Foreign Policy Refresh", as he called it, the other day in the Foreign Office. It was Coca-Cola, "We are the world". But the appetite was still there for global reach: Britain is going to be a global hub! They simply cannot settle for being a medium-ranked power inside a European body. And when the National Security Strategy comes out, you will see it in there as well. Amidst the Coca-Cola-isation, there is still the appetite to biff Johnny Foreigner into line.'

'The same with the bomb: there was not a single dissenting voice in the Blair Cabinet in December 2006 on upgrading Trident – not one dissenting voice. It is this great power impulse. It recrudesces generation on generation. There is not one part of the political spectrum that does not think we are special and that, in Churchill's phrase, "The world is better for those bits that the lion treads" – not that anybody would quite put it like that today. It is still there though, and as for Tony Blair – he was Lord Curzon in an Armani suit!'

Reason and identity

In his Isaiah Berlin Lecture on 2 April 2008, Professor Lord Parekh FBA discussed how reason and identity are thought to compete as influences upon our judgements and actions. In exploring ways of resolving this tension, he stressed the importance of rational dialogue between individuals.

An audio recording of the lecture and the subsequent discussion can be found via www.britac.ac.uk/events/

In the discussion after the lecture, a final question – prompted by modern fears of terrorism – asked how it was possible to have a dialogue with someone you can't reason with. Lord Parekh replied: 'I can't imagine any human being with whom some form of dialogue is not possible, as long as he is prepared to speak and give reasons. As long as he is prepared to tell me what he is doing and why, there is always the possibility of a dialogue. ...'

'The second point I want to make is that I wasn't suggesting, and I don't think anyone would want to suggest, that rational argument is conclusive. In fact the opposite, rational argument takes us so far, but it doesn't take us all the way, either because reason might be inconclusive, or because – the burden of judgement – from the same set of reasons people might arrive at different judgements.'

'Given that all disputes cannot be rationally resolved, we need to find ways of handling differences at a practical level. That brings us to politics. When our security or vital interests are threatened, we need to do everything in our power to defend ourselves. We also need to show to our opponents that we are determined to fight for our values and vital interests, and would not allow ourselves to be terrorised into giving them up. However, whatever we do, we need to bear in mind two things. We are dealing with our fellow human beings and must not treat them as if they were demons. And secondly, we are going to have to inhabit the same world with them and should not do anything that is likely to generate implacable hatred and hostility.'

A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles for an Interdependent World, by Bhikhu Parekh, is published by Palgrave Macmillan.

The origins of the Arts and Humanities Research Council

In 1998, the British Academy played an important role in the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Research Board – providing the fledgling body with money, office space, personnel, and not least ideas for its first range of funding programmes. Ten years on, the Academy has published a history of what finally became an Arts and Humanities Research Council in 2005.



Creating the AHRC: An Arts and Humanities Research Council for the United Kingdom in the Twenty-first Century, by Dr James Herbert, was launched at a reception held at the Academy on 5 June 2008. The account particularly focuses on the campaign carried forward from the 1997 Dearing Report to the 2004 Higher Education Act to establish a public agency investing in humanities and arts research that would be equivalent to the Research Councils funding natural and social science research.

But the opening chapter explains how it was that for thirty years the British Academy had acted as a *de facto* Humanities Research Council, how the Academy attempted in the early 1990s to persuade government to set up a Humanities Research Council and, when frustrated in that aim, how the Academy led the way by setting up its own Humanities Research Board in 1994.

Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture from the West Riding of Yorkshire

On 18 June 2008, the latest volume in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* series was launched at the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds. Volume VIII, *Western Yorkshire*, completes the cataloguing of the stone sculptures of Yorkshire, and boosts our understanding of the artistic development of southern Northumbria in the pre-Viking and Anglo-Scandinavian periods. The West Riding contains important collections of sculpture and pieces of the highest quality, including this fragment of a cross at Otley decorated with exotic eastern beasts.



The *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* is a British Academy Research Project. The supervising committee is chaired by Sir David Wilson FBA and the project's Director is Professor Rosemary Cramp FBA – pictured either side of author Dr Elizabeth Coatsworth.



Information on British Academy publications can be found at www.britac.ac.uk/pubs/