

ELECTION 2001

Leeds Student

BIG NAMES

Exclusive interviews
with Blair, Hague and
Kennedy

You don't win, you survive



POWER GAMES

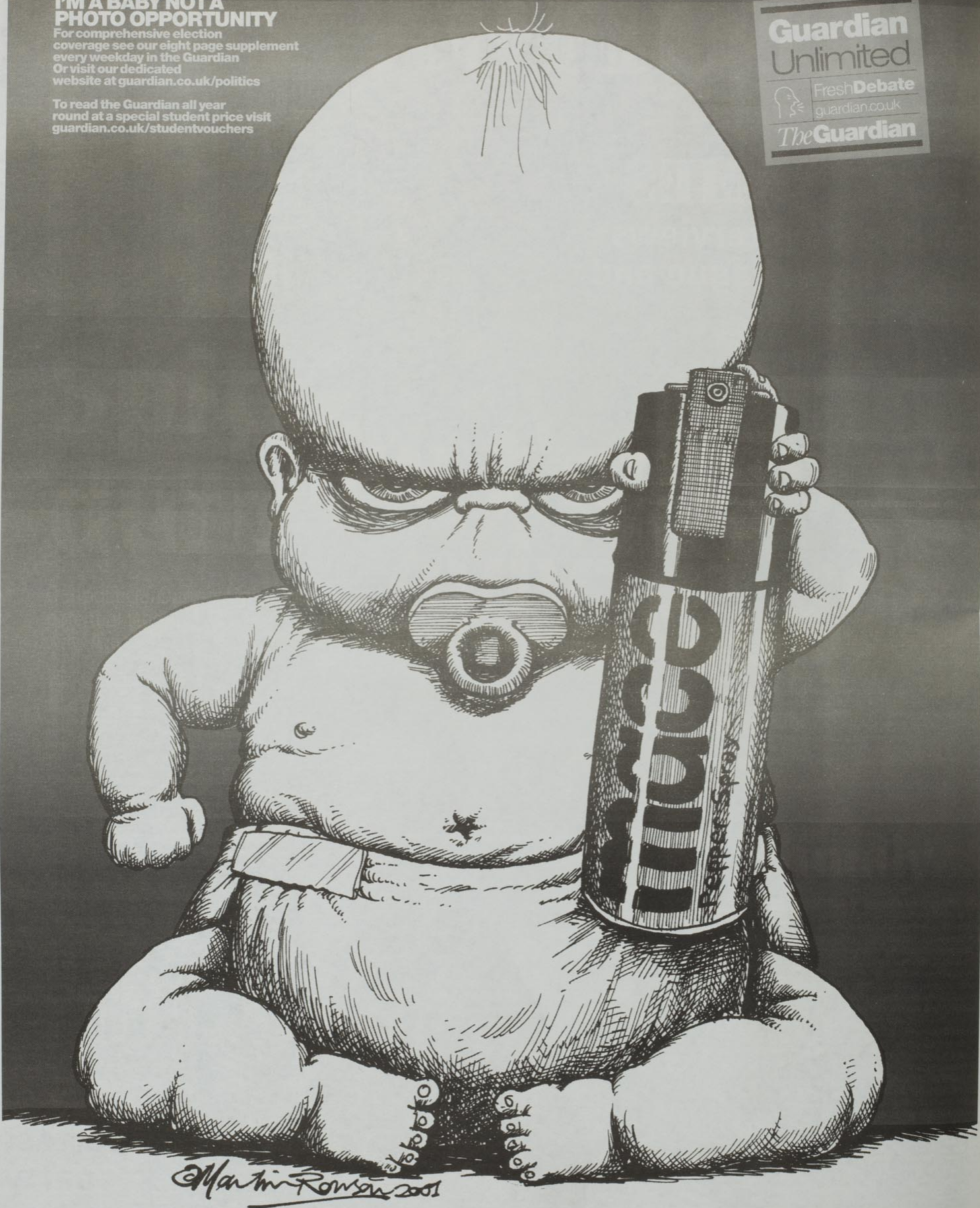
The fight for
Leeds, plus
how to pick
your perfect
party

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Martin Rowson 2001

We are not apathetic

Seventy-four per cent of Leeds students say they will vote in the general election. It's a decisive blow to the idea that students do not care about politics. Other recent polls have pointed to mass apathy amongst our generation. But not so in Leeds.

And the main reason why we don't vote, is not that we don't care, but that we don't feel we know enough to make a good decision. Of those who said they weren't voting, 38 per cent said it was because they were too uninformed.

That's where this guide comes in. We've probed Blair, Hague and Kennedy on your behalf. We've sized up the local candidates and down-sized their manifestoes. Now it's up to you to choose between our four lovely lads in Leeds North West (even if only 3 per

cent of you could name all of them).

But we've also delved deeper into the murky pool of politics. With many predicting that this election will have the lowest turn-out since 1918, something is clearly rotten in our state - but what is it? Turn to page 12 for a cunning plan to put the people back into politics.

But even that might not be enough to re-energise the system. We also asked you who you thought held most power in our country and a whopping 79 per cent of you didn't think it was the government.

48 per cent of you thought the media really pulled the strings in Britain. If so, it's no wonder New Labour has been so

keen to know it makes sense.

keep its place in *Sun* during its time in power. The man that made it all possible of course is Alastair Campbell, Blair's notorious Press Secretary. But he wasn't the first man who span the press round his little finger. We talk to Bernard Ingham (p.13), who was Thatcher's press man.

Our survey also said that the one thing you would change about our country is tuition fees. When asked, what you would do if you became Prime Minister, 22 per cent said they would abolish fees. To find out exactly what the parties' packages will mean for student pockets, check out page 14.

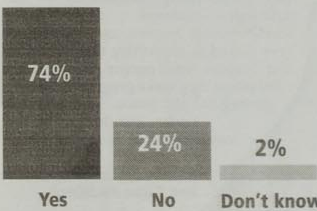
Relax, have a read and then vote - you know it makes sense.

CR



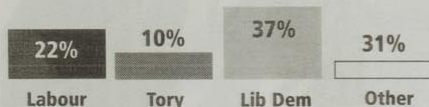
Survey results in full

Will you vote in the general election?



A startling 74 per cent of students say they intend to vote in the forthcoming election. Other polls of students have pointed to mass apathy amongst our generation - not so in Leeds.

Who will you vote for?



Bad news for Labour as only 22 per cent of those intending to vote name the party in power as their choice on polling day. Good news for the Lib Dems and for the Greens who were chosen by seven per cent of those polled.

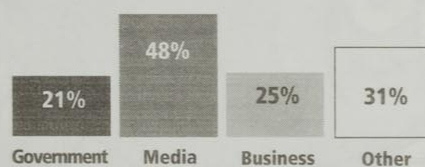
If you aren't voting, why not?

Those who do not intend to vote were asked why. 38 per cent said they were too uninformed about politics, 19 per cent said they didn't care, 15 per cent said they had lost faith in the political system and 8 per cent said they didn't think their vote would make a difference.

How much do you think government policy affects your life?

Opinion was split as 54 per cent thought government policies make 'a lot of difference to their lives, while 15 per cent said government affected them 'very little'.

Who do you think holds most power in Britain?



An incredible 79 per cent of those polled did not think that the government held the most power in this country. The United States and drug barons were also named as the people who really call the shots. One person said he thought the people held the most power.

Name the leaders of the three main political parties

A reassuring 98 per cent could name Tony Blair as the leader of the Labour Party. Coming in a close second, 89 per cent were able to identify William Hague as top Tory. Only 60 per cent knew Charles Kennedy leads the Lib Dems, although most knew he was "ginger" and "Scottish".

Name the candidates for Leeds North West

Not a good sign for our local candidates as only 26 per cent are able to name our current MP, Harold Best, as the Labour candidate; only 12 per cent had heard of Tory Adam Pritchard; a mere 4.5 per cent could name Lib Dem David Hall-Matthews, despite the fact he is a Leeds University lecturer, and three per cent had heard of the UK Independence party contender, Andrew Spence.

If you became Prime Minister, what single change would you make?

Given the chance to grab the reigns of power, 22 per cent said they would abolish tuitions fees. Eight per cent would legalise cannabis before they did anything else when they moved into Number 10. Other wannabe premiers declared their intention to cancel third world debt, bring in all night drinking, stop listening to the US and shoot Tony Blair. Several people called for polygamy to be legalised while, in a radical move, two of those polled suggested making election pledges legally binding.

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The bully-boy tactics of our top politicians

The Blair necessities

In this exclusive interview, the Prime Minister tells us why he brought in fees, how he plans to fight sleaze, what he thinks of cannabis and shares his deepest fears

Tony Blair is a bit of worrier. In four power-packed years he has gone from a bushy-haired barrister made good to the greying bespectacled premier we now recognise. As he lies awake fretting about the forthcoming election, a million thoughts must spin through his brain. There are the worries that wee hairless Leo may bear a slight resemblance to that other famous political baldy, Hague. There's Geri Halliwell's assertion that she "genuinely admires and believes in him."

But as the sweat starts to form, there is another greater fear that must plague our PM. Something - perhaps the only thing - that could beat him when we go to the polls next Thursday. That thing is apathy.

In the 1997 election only 2 per cent more people voted Labour than chose apathy. Despite the *Leeds Student* survey showing that 74 per cent of you will vote, this election is likely to have the lowest turn out since 1918. Now, for Blair, that's scary.

Tackling this shadowy ogre may not be as easy as striking down his other political opponents. Blair's first blow is not altogether decisive: "Voting matters. It does change things. Perhaps not as fast as you - and I - would like but don't fall for this nonsense that all parties are the same and that it makes no difference who is in government."

With his nemesis momentarily stunned, he tries to consolidate his position - and land a cheeky punch on the nose of his other great fear. "I realise we have an awful lot more to do to spread prosperity and opportunity to every family and every community in the country. But we have made a real start in building a modern, fairer, more prosperous country."

"Whether we get that chance or whether the Tories sneak back in through the back door - through the cynicism they are trying to spread - will be down to you on election day," he says.

But there is another angry mob that he might have to deal with - us. His promise of spreading "prosperity and opportunity" may well ring hollow in the ears of many students. A promise is often not really a promise at election time and Labour's pledge before the 1997 election that it had "no plans" to introduce tuition fees is one that sticks in the mind. After they broke their word, many students found themselves much less prosperous.

"We were determined that more people would have the benefits

"I believe decriminalising cannabis would send out the wrong signal. The evidence increasingly shows serious harmful effects from the regular use of soft drugs like cannabis"

of good-quality university education," he says, neatly side-stepping the point. "Numbers are now growing as is investment in Higher Education. But we want to do more which is why we have set a target, in our manifesto, of 50 per cent of young people going into higher education."

But then he steps in with an impressive counter-attack. "Our policy at the last election was to consider any proposals for further reform from the Dearing Committee," he says, referring to the group set up by the Tories to tackle the crisis in Higher Education funding while they were still in power. "In the event, the Dearing Committee said the only way to expand higher education was to make the individuals who benefit most from higher education - graduates themselves - bear more of the cost." So, you see, he didn't break his word on fees and the Tories started it anyway.

One thing that can't be denied is that he's certainly kept his eye on the issue over the last four years. He said he'd make changes and he did (even if they weren't the ones he said he would). And that's more than can be said for another 1997 election promise: the pledge to "introduce a mandatory licensing scheme for Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)".

Whether you've heard of an HMO or not, it's pretty likely that



how you deal with them. Where people have fallen down, then action has been taken against them."

The most famous incident of one of his MPs 'falling down' was of course when his deputy, John Prescott, was pushed to the ground as action was taken against him by an angry farm labourer - whom he had just punched.

Perhaps Blair might consider legalising cannabis. Who knows, it might help to de-stress people and make them less aggressive?

However he believes that "decriminalising cannabis would send out the wrong signal. The evidence increasingly shows serious harmful effects from the regular use of soft drugs like cannabis. We are investigating, however, whether derivatives of cannabis should be prescribed as medicines for those with certain health problems."

It's clear that his priorities lie elsewhere. They are, unsurprisingly, slightly more weighty than an eighth. He lists his party's greatest achievements as showing they "can run the economy competently so that inflation, interest rates and unemployment are low and the part we have played in supporting the courage of the leaders and people of Northern Ireland as they make progress towards a lasting and just peace."

Looks like he has a few reasons to sleep easy after all.

Interview by Alex Belardinelli and Clare Rudebeck

you're sitting in one as you read this. HMOs are houses with more than five occupants and there are a lot of them in Hyde Park and Headingley. The idea behind the licensing scheme is to ensure that basic health and safety measures were met in these houses. Many think it's a good idea, but it's not one that's made it onto the statute book yet. When would Labour bring it in if we gave them a second chance?

"We have announced plans to improve further health and safety of houses in multiple occupation, including a licensing system for high risk rented housing in the private sector, covering things like fire and gas safety. These proposals are over and above existing powers available to local authorities to ensure that housing is safe." Looks like they haven't quite got round to setting a date yet.

Mandelson, Vaz and Robinson are three names also guaranteed to get the PM on the defensive. When he came into power, he promised us a "whiter than white" administration. But it didn't quite work out that way.

"I don't recall these actual words," he says, displaying memory loss that a professional boxer would be proud of. "But if you are asking whether we have kept our commitment to improve standards in public life and to make Government more accountable and transparent, I believe we have."

"Like any other Government, of course, there have been events and situations you would prefer hadn't happened but what matters is

Game, set, Thatcher

William Hague continues to struggle with the legacy of the Iron Lady. We find out what his game plan is to claim victory in his own right

William wants to be your mate. He wants you to join him for idle afternoons playing pooh-sticks in rural rivers in rural parts of his rural constituency in rural North Yorkshire. And then he wants to don his slacks and sidle off with you to a quiet little alehouse for a rum and coke chaser and a chat with his chums. He's one of the blokes. H e

understands the offside rule. He has a lot of respect for Tim Henman. And he wears jeans on Saturdays. But he's not like other guys. He just wants you to think he is.

When young Master Hague swept onstage at the Conservatives' 1974 election rally - sky high on rhetoric and gushing like a sixth former on speech day - the blue-rinse brigade glimpsed a leader in the making. In this boy-wonder, this little Sir Nicholas on speed, they sneaked a peek into the Party's crystal ball. Here was a boy who chose not Kevin Keegan, nor the blonde one from Abba, but Margaret Thatcher to adorn his bedroom wall. And now, as the nation teeters on the brink of another general election - Britain's sixth since William's first bite at the political cherry - there he is... leader. The leader of his beloved Conservative Party. But there the fairytale ends.

Frankly, William Hague is the man least likely. Not since the Whigs and the Libs locked horns early last century has a Conservative leader gone into a general election with such a dismal chance of actually becoming Prime Minister. The very thought recalls the forlorn (yet not quite inconceivable) notion of a Brit winning Wimbledon. But while we might think that,

Hague couldn't possibly comment: "The Conservative Party can win the election by speaking honestly and directly to the needs and values of the British people." He certainly speaks with all the gritty determination of a wild carded Briton clubbing backhands in the twilight on Court 27, the intermittent flutter of applause from a die-hard contingent his last line of defence. Yet one cannot but think that, like the forlorn tennis coach dreaming of raising the Union Jack, Mr Hague can't realistically be hoping for more than a couple of break points and a beaker of squash when it's all over. "Of

course it will be a tough fight, but I have never been afraid of fighting hard for what I believe in." Fifteen love.

But alas those Europeans have always had more tricks up their sleeves. Better service. Cleaner volleys. Nattier outfits. While the British terrier has always struggled to make his mark, unable to clinch glory on his own sodding turf, those subtle Scandinavians and wily Germans have somehow oozed success like the winning formula was just something else to pour on their muesli. And unlike those reassuringly expensive strawberries & cream, for the True Brit, this sense of frustration has been hard to swallow. Unsurprisingly then, Mr Hague will not be throwing in the towel to those sneaky Europeans should his party do the unthinkable and prevent Labour from slicing their way into the second round: "Joining the Euro is a very risky venture. There are real political and economic dangers. We are ruling out joining the Euro for the lifetime of the next Parliament because the British people need to see whether those political and economic risks come true over an economic cycle."

"Our economy is very different from those on continental Europe and a one-size-fits-all interest rate could do real damage to British businesses - just look at what happened when we were members of the ERM. Among the political risks is that a single currency could lead to tax and spending powers being transferred to Brussels too. Lose those powers and you lose your independence as a nation." Hmm. Thirty love?

Preparing to return my next service, Hague readjusts his baseball cap. He's sprightly when on the back foot, and while he might well have been born middle-aged, he's actually only just hit forty. This, he says, provides ample reason why young people should re-think the stereotype that the Conservatives are playing in a different park to the under-30s: "I've always said it is important not to patronise young people - they are interested in the economy, crime, Europe and our schools and hospitals just like everyone else. But of particular interest to younger voters will be our new student loans package." Forty love? Now, hold on... that ball was clearly out!

On the surface, then, an alternative to the current no-win situation faced by students would seem to put the Tories back on the front foot in terms of the 'yool' vote. "At the moment you will have to start paying your loan back as soon as you are earning £10,000 a year. We will double that figure to £20,000. We will also offer graduates a fixed period for the repayment of loans, without any prepayment penalties, and provide those paying off loans an estimated £3,500 a year tax allowance for ten years. As a result, a graduate on 80 per cent of average earnings should be paying around £200 less." Forty fifteen. Hague's strategy for higher education includes a plan to free universities from dependency on the state by means of an endowment fund. This cash would be derived from as-yet unidentified privatisation programmes and an airwave free-for-all. The latter could well result in an initial surge of entrepreneurial activity, swiftly followed by a saturated radio market doggedly fighting over the same listeners. As grand plans go it's not awe-inspiring. What's more, it could lead to a climate in which 'freed' universities simply treat us as consumers rather than students; hiking tuition fees and pricing us out of the library. "That is simply not the case. As a condition of receiving the endowment, universities must agree not to charge top up fees to students and the process of endowing universities will be a progressive one." Forty thirty.

But, student voters must also be careful to read between the tram lines. Considering that the Conservatives have mooted the idea of selling off our debts to private loan companies. It doesn't take Carol Vordermann to work out that what these proposals really equate to is little better, and probably much worse, than the fine financial mess that New Labour have got us into. Indeed, the phrase 'caught between the devil and the deep blue sea' has never had such eerie resonance. Which brings us squarely to deuce. As for you Mr Hague, play has been suspended until Thursday.

Interview by Alex Belardinelli and Anna Doble.



CK one

Charles Kennedy is touting himself as 'the future of politics'.
Paul Gallagher meets a man attempting to extend the record number of Liberal Democrat seats



PIC: PAUL GALLAGHER

Sitting just inside the Liberal Democrats' offices in the House of Commons, you just can't help but notice a large poster, propped up behind a chair, with the rather serious looking face of the party leader staring down at you with the words: 'Charles Kennedy The Future of Politics'. Looking up at the Lib Dem staff emerged in their duties, it is quite obvious that strenuous preparations are afoot for the upcoming election. It is then that I am ushered upstairs to wait just a few seconds longer outside Kennedy's own office and kindly informed by a secretary how sorry they are of the delay. It's clear a lot of people want a slice of the leader's time. One group of people are ushered away, and I am simultaneously ushered in.

Charles Kennedy, an English graduate from Glasgow university, first went into journalism and became a broadcaster with BBC Highland but soon made the transformation into politics

(a move the BBC Correspondent John Simpson described as 'the unthinkable' when his former colleague Martin Bell did so in 1997 in Tatten). "Journalism seemed like a natural platform into politics for me. It proved to be an invaluable experience for later years in politics because you knew how the media worked, you knew what deadlines were so you could tinker and tailor your contribution to maximum effect."

Kennedy is indeed using this very same technique as we speak for sitting to my right is a journalist from the *Sunday Times* and it becomes quickly apparent most of his attention is directed toward her for the benefit of his profile which she is compiling all that week. But who can blame him? Our circulation figures haven't quite hit those heights just yet.

Having been elected to replace Paddy Ashdown as leader of the Liberal Democrats in 1999, Kennedy is full of praise for his predecessor proclaiming he could not have wished for a smoother transition. However,

Kennedy is all too aware of the completely different image he portrays when stood in comparison with Sir Paddy, an imperial Ulsterman and former MI6 man who decided to join the marines at the tender age of 18.

"There were people who questioned whether it would work or not but, when I sat down with David Steel, he said it wouldn't be a problem after the first tangible achievement. And then we won the Romsey bi-election," when the Lib Dems overturned a Tory majority of 8,585 in May 2000, "and things began to settle down. I didn't consciously seek to cultivate my own image though. If there is one it would be a case of 'what you see is what you get' for better or worse."

"I know you have to make a lot of faces in politics but I can't be bothered making faces in real life, if you know what I mean."

The conversation naturally turns to the upcoming election. Having secured a record number of 47 seats at the 1997 general election, Kennedy sounds naturally confident that the party can secure further gains

despite the ever increasing Labour lead in the polls. "The potential is certainly there to win more votes. Given the vagaries of the first-past-the-post system seats are more difficult to predict, but if the votes go in our direction then we can certainly make more gains."

"I don't want to harp on about Romsey but that must suggest something about our voting potential."

Despite being extremely positive about his party's chances, Kennedy appears rather glum on one of the official election posters (below). A sign of his disappointment with how Britain is being run today?

"I think it was more of a reflection on the photographer," Kennedy chuckles. "They wanted something which made look rather stern and frustrated, and anxious about the state of the country and what we were going to do about it. A stern photo, not a smiley one."

"Some people might believe the economy to be in safe hands with Labour but it would be safer with us. The 'prudent' Chancellor, to use one of his favourite words, did something in his first week in power which was in our manifesto and wasn't in theirs - independence of the Bank [of England] - which in itself is a self-correcting mechanism in terms of management of the economy. We

were in favour of it and so were they evidently, but they didn't tell anyone about it but it was the right thing to do."

According to Kennedy, a "potentially seismic shift" in political power is on the horizon should the Conservatives perform worse at the polls than four years ago. "The depression and dismay in the Conservative Party has to be seen to be believed."

Dismay with politics in general across Britain is set to hit a record low in 2001. The all time low turnout of 64 per cent at the 1997 election is being predicted by several psephological studies to hit an apathetic 60 per cent this time round. Kennedy puts it down to Britain having a century old political structure while the rest of the world moved on a long time ago.

Having been prompted by his secretary for the second time to wrap the interview up (a debate on pension policy awaits the diminutive Scotsman), I realise their can only be one topic left to discuss: tuition fees. Student debt

'Education, Education, Education.'
A stammer or a promise? "Never trust a politician who says the same thing three times,"
Kennedy laughs

has trebled in the period between the last two comprehensive surveys were carried out in 1995-6 and 1998-9. Last year the Education and Employment Minister, Tessa Blackstone, claimed that most students received enough financial support to meet their essential costs.

"The key thing that needs to be done is what has already happened in Scotland, namely the abolition of tuition fees. We need that policy in the rest of England. What is apparent is that the number of Scots applying to courses in England is decreasing highlighting the fact they are clearly not prepared to pay fees."

Perhaps when Tony Blair said 'Education, Education, Education', he was having trouble with a stammer rather than making a promise?

"All I can say is never trust a politician who says the same thing three times," Kennedy laughs. "But seriously, it is obvious that people from poorer backgrounds are being discriminated against and that is appalling." However, what Kennedy fails to point out is that if the Lib Dems were in power, tuition fees would be abolished but students would instead be faced with paying a £2,000 contribution (as in Scotland) once they've earned more than £10,000 when they graduate.

Unfortunately, before I can address the point the hourglass stops and the Liberal Democrat leader apologises for his lack of time and is whisked away for his umpteenth appointment of the day.



Two minute manifestos

Don't know who to vote for? Check out what delights the parties are trying to tempt you with...

Labour

'Ambitions for Britain'

Education

- 50 per cent of young people in University education by 2010
- 10,000 more teachers

Employment

- Minimum wage up to £4.10 in October
- Extend the New Deal to the over-25s, lone parents and disabled people

Environment:

Their manifesto claims that Labour, is leading the international effort to tackle climate change.

Crime

- Tougher sentencing for repeat offenders
- 6,000 more police recruits

Health

- 20,000 extra nurses
- 10,000 extra doctors
- Cut waiting times to six months
- Mixed sex ward abolished and modern matrons to ensure clean wards and good food.

Foreign policy

- A referendum on the single currency, if given go ahead

Immigration and Asylum

- 1,000 new immigration officers in ports around the country by June to process claims and remove failed asylum seekers.

Drugs

- Register for criminal drug users
- Investigating whether derivatives of cannabis should be prescribed for those with certain health problems

Conservatives

'It's time for common sense'

Education:

- Privatise student loans
- Loans to be repaid when earnings exceed £20,000
- Free universities from reliance on state funding by giving them a large lump sum to invest

Employment:

- Contract out the job-finding work of the Employment Service

Environment:

- Abolish the Climate Change Levy

Crime:

- Increase police numbers
- Abolish Labour's 'early release scheme' for prisoners and ensure full sentences are served
- Take persistent young offenders off the streets

Health

- Guarantee limits on waiting times
- Remove tax penalty on private medical insurance

Foreign policy

- Stop any more power transfer from Westminster to Brussels
- No European army outside NATO
- No entry into a single currency
- Global free trade by 2020

Immigration and Asylum

- Compulsory detention of all asylum seekers in special reception centres
- New removals agency to track down people whose claims have been rejected

Drugs

- Give police new powers to deal with drug abuse

Lib Dems

'Freedom, justice, honesty'

Education

- Abolish university tuition fees
- Restore grants for poor students and access to benefits for all during the summer holidays
- Raise the salary threshold at which student loans are repaid from £10,000 to £13,000 per year

Employment

- Entitle every 16-24 year-old to study leave with pay
- Replace the New Deal with a Flexible Guarantee of help for all jobseekers

Environment:

- Press other nations to ratify and implement the 1997 Kyoto protocol by 2002
- Establish a new target of a 20 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2010

Crime

- Recruit 6,000 extra police officers
- Give victims greater rights to be heard in court

Health

- More nurses and doctors
- Increase salary of lowest paid NHS staff by £1,000 on average

Foreign policy

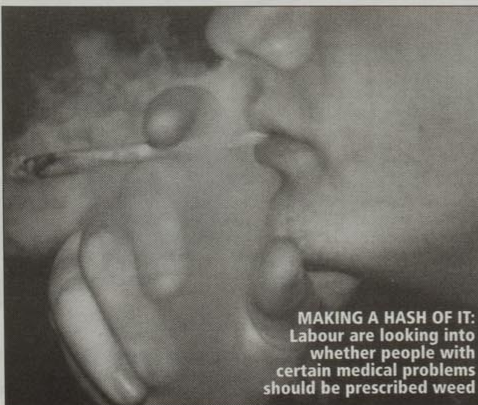
- Oppose the National Missile Defence System (NMD).
- End government subsidies for arms sold to foreign regimes and establish a Parliamentary Arms Export Committee to monitor arms exports
- Enlarge EU to include emerging democracies of central and Eastern Europe
- Reform EU's institutions to make them more open, democratic and effective

Immigration and Asylum

- Deal with asylum applications fairly and more quickly
- Introduce fair benefits for asylum seekers to replace the voucher system
- Review the dispersal system

Drugs

- Establish a Royal Commission on Drugs to assess whether the law and punishment for drug use ought to be changed



MAKING A HASH OF IT: Labour are looking into whether people with certain medical problems should be prescribed weed



EU MUST BE JOKING: Tories would stop Brussels having any more power

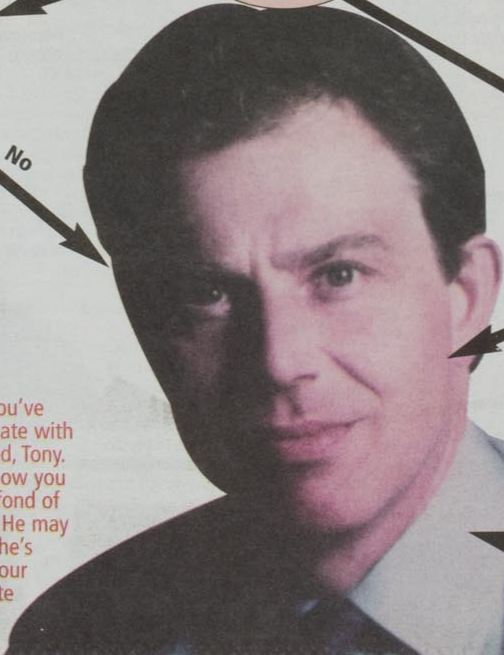


F*K FEES:** Lib Dems promise to abolish tuition fees

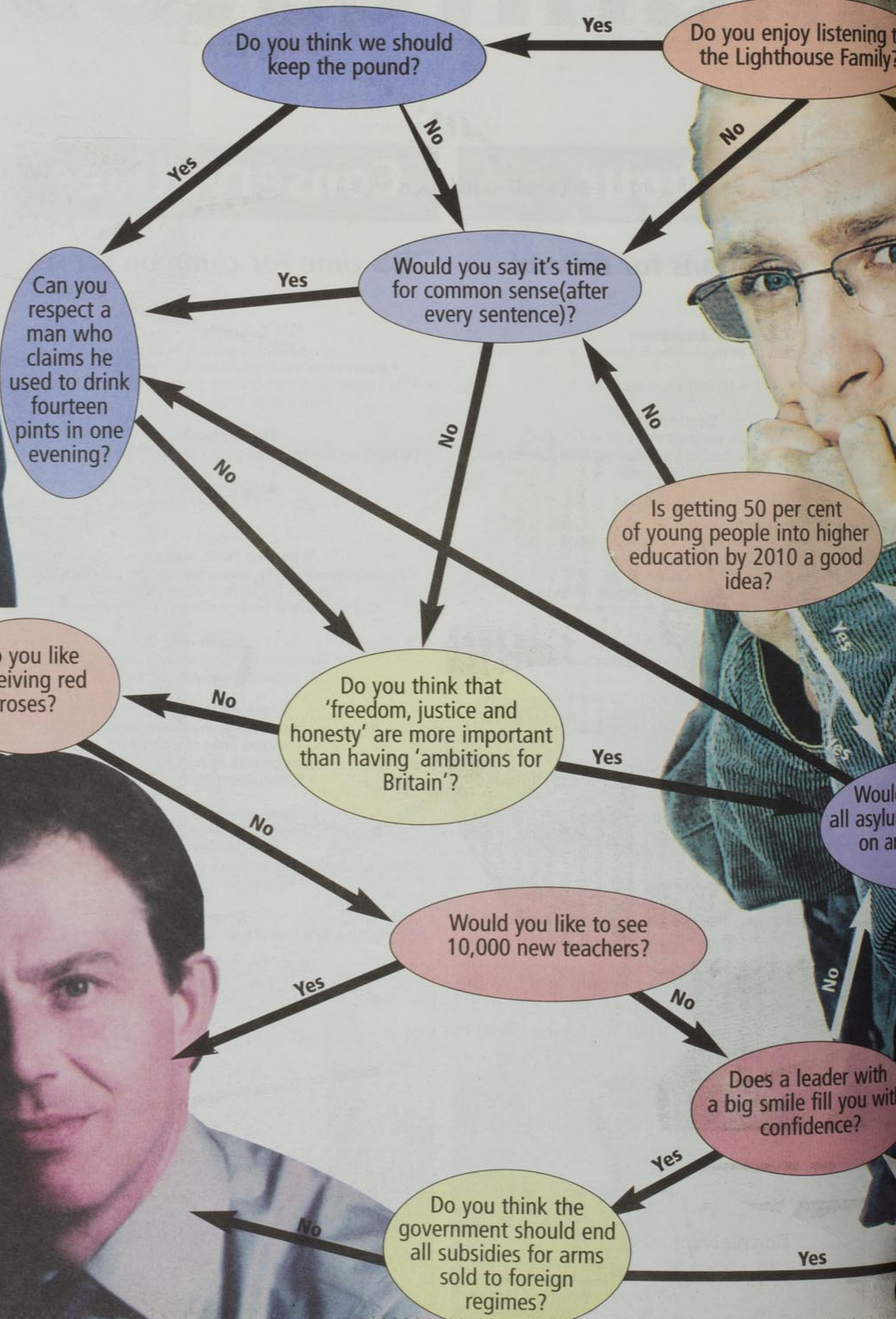
Pick your perfect



Congratulations, you've won a date to sunny North Yorkshire with our William. He enjoys bloodsports, church fetes and drinking and would like to win the votes of like-minded chums in the north, south, east or west of Britain. GSOH essential.

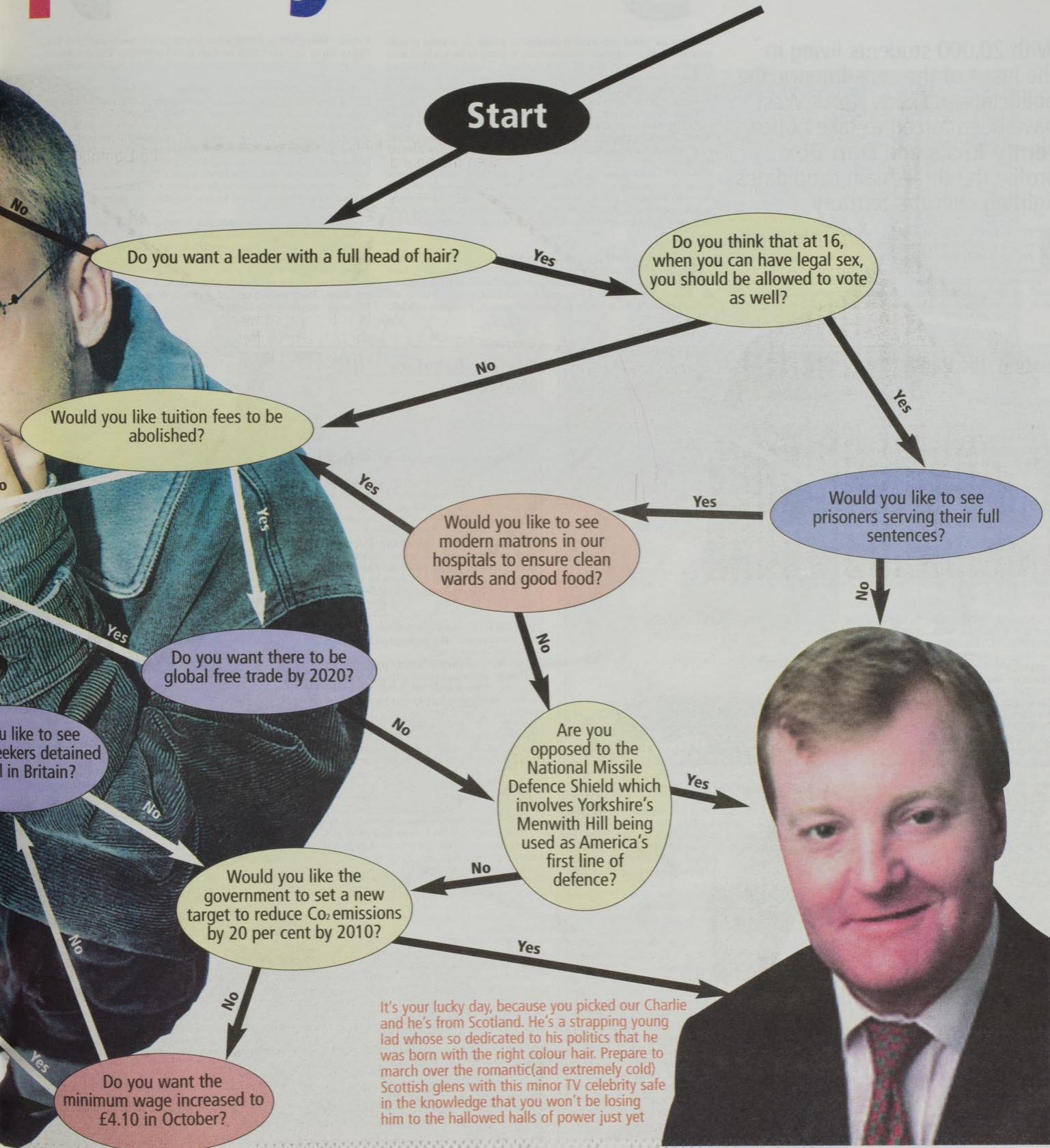


Aren't you the lucky one? You've nabbed yourself a hot hot date with the sprightly, yet experienced, Tony. He's a jet-setter who can show you the world and is especially fond of romantic breaks in Tuscany. He may seem awkward at first, but he's guaranteed to smile at all your jokes (providing his best mate Al laughs first).



party

Don't know which one of our three lovely lads to pick? Follow the arrows to find out which one is your perfect choice on election day



It's your lucky day, because you picked our Charlie and he's from Scotland. He's a strapping young lad whose so dedicated to his politics that he was born with the right colour hair. Prepare to march over the romantic (and extremely cold) Scottish glens with this minor TV celebrity safe in the knowledge that you won't be losing him to the hallowed halls of power just yet

Let's get ready

With 20,000 students living in the heart of the constituency, the politicians in Leeds North-West have been forced to take notice. **Jenny Ricks and Dan Box** profile the three main candidates fighting over the territory

It's a three way match in Leeds North-West and each of the three stepping up to the ring could come out on top. Just as easily any one of them could end up stretched out on the canvas, seeing stars and listening to the mocking roar of the crowd.

The seedy glamour of boxing has a lot in common with the real politik of the national election: there's the promise of power, the greed, the shadows, broken promises, angry punters and press

conferences where the truth is ducked as easily as a lame punch. Even the most experienced commentator is going to have a hard time choosing who out of Harold Best (Labour), David Hall-Matthews (Liberal Democrat) and Adam Pritchard (Conservative) to bet on to be sure of a return on his money. All three parties are, unsurprisingly, claiming that victory is there for the taking.

Leeds North-West has been safely Tory ever since its creation in 1950 but was swept away in the Labour landslide of 1997 when Harold Best took the title. Labour's majority here is small though and a 3.9 per cent swing back to the Tories could see them knock Best off his feet.

The Liberal Democrats themselves are hoping to make the most out of this conflict and are throwing nearly all the weight of their election machine in the city behind the candidate in this constituency, maybe hoping that disaffection with the main two parties will help them pick up on the student vote that some see as being crucial to this bout.

Around 20,000 students live in Headingley and Hyde Park, areas right at the heart of Leeds North-West, enough to have a massive effect on a result decided last time by a majority of just 3844. Only no-one knows how many of them are registered to vote. According to Adam Wheewall, President of LMU

Union: "University is a time when young people study and have fun. Going out to vote isn't high on their list of priorities. The candidates will probably do better concentrating their efforts on local residents than students."

True or not, this has not stopped them trying. Students have been forced to suffer the compulsory electioneering walkabouts. Labour, Tory and Lib-Dem can be seen strutting their stuff on campus, parading party and policy like fighters at a pre-fight weigh in, each trying to intimidate the other while they remember to keep smiling.

But for all that, there is a world of difference between boxing and politics. In the two minutes and forty five seconds it took him to loose to Harrison, Mike Middleton made £25,000; after 5 weeks of campaigning and a sleepless night on June 7 all that two of our three contenders will have to show for it is that they lost and can finally go home.

Right up until election night this is going to be weighing on the minds of Best, Hall-Matthews and Pritchard. In the words of Floyd Patterson, the former heavyweight champion of the world, these three are going to be always afraid, "not of getting hurt but...of losing. Losing in this ring is like losing no-where else."

But then, in a constituency where at the last election the Ronnie the Rhino Party picked up 232 votes, it does not pay to get your hopes up - anything can happen.

Harold 'The Daddy' Best

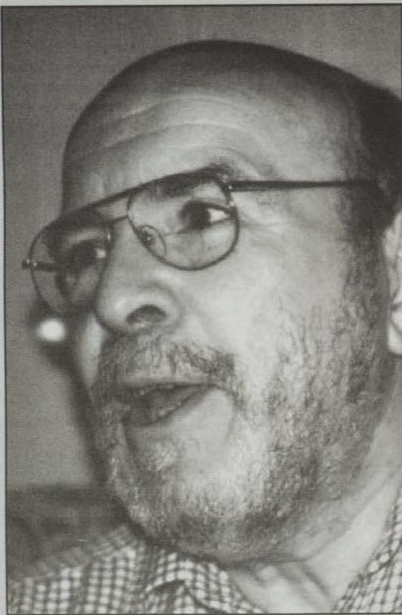
VITAL STATISTICS

AGE: 62
APPEARANCE: Like a bear with a sore paw, Best may seem cuddly from a distance.
FORM: The sitting incumbent, Best is by far the most experienced of the three. Involved in union politics since the age of 16, he led his first strike at 22 and has been stalking the corridors of power at Westminster for the last four years. But then in any fight even the champion has to loose eventually and, almost as old as both his opponents combined, Best will do well to go the distance against the challenge of the younger contenders.
ODDS: 4-1 F

ON TUITION FEES: "I fundamentally, absolutely disagree with them."

ON STUDENT HOUSING: Best was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying "The proliferation of shared houses with absentee landlords are like a mediaeval plague" and "in five years' time, the destruction of Headingley will be complete."

ON CRIME: "It's not about police numbers but particular neighbourhoods. [With a] transient population it is rich pickings, criminals see it as a soft touch."



was a Labour manifesto pledge in 1997.

Although he is ideologically opposed to tuition fees, Best has been attacked over failing to speak out against them. He failed to vote on a motion opposing Labour plans to cut student funding in 1998 and also to sign a Commons motion this year against fees. Best argues that these parliamentary motions are not "some kind of test of an MP's political integrity, even less some kind of political virility." You have to wonder what is then.

Best grew up in Leeds, has been in politics here since 1981 and knows thousands of people in the constituency. He has seen the sudden influx of students into the area and tried to deal with the conflict between those students and the local population. He stresses that he does not blame the students for these problems and instead attacks the universities: "like William Blake's dark satanic mills. They are polluters blighting the landscape and the polluters must pay," and the landlords who "will pillage until they have turned Headingley into a desert, and then they will move on."

Labour
www.labour.org.uk

David 'Babyface' Hall-Matthews

VITAL STATISTICS

AGE: 34
APPEARANCE: Take him home to meet your mum. Ah.
FORM: As a ballet enthusiast and qualified football referee, Hall-Matthews has appeal across the board. A half-marathon runner, he has got the physical form to go the distance. Although he teaches the subject at Leeds University, Hall-Matthews has no actual experience of wielding political power, a short-falling which may leave him with his guard down and open to the wily attacks of the more experienced Best.
ODDS: 6-1

TUITION FEES: "Fees are another indiscreet tax. They are part of a package of disillusion with this government."

STUDENT HOUSING: "Students don't have different attitudes towards their houses to the rest of the population, but if you live in a slum then you naturally don't treat it that well."

CRIME: "I personally am for the decriminalisation of cannabis and I think Jack Straw and Ann Widdecombe intentionally try to trivialise the debate."



David Hall-Matthews is a bit of a paradox, no-one seems to know who he is, but most of you will vote for him anyway. A *Leeds Student* survey found that 37% of students intend to vote Lib Dem, more than those who will vote for the other two parties put together. All this despite the fact that only 4.5% of students know who Hall-Matthews is, compared to 12% who recognised Adam Pritchard and 26% who know that Best is the Labour Party candidate for the area.

Hall-Matthews became a Liberal Democrat at a tender age. As a little boy he asked his parents what the names of the three parties meant. They told him that Conservative meant 'not-changing', that Labour meant 'working' and Liberal Democrat meant 'generosity.' Wee David was sold. Since then Hall-Matthews has grown up and now, although he thinks the same, he uses bigger words to say it - for him the party stands for "individualism and the state which pro-actively supports its people."

But he is not all the tender floating butterfly, there is a sting in his tail. Hall-Matthews absolutely opposes American plans for a Missile Defence System with bases in Yorkshire. He argues that the

special relationship with America that Tony Blair is so keen to maintain means "there is no reason for America to support us on anything." George W. Bush gets labelled "one of the least responsible world leaders out there" and Hall-Matthews would like to impose EU sanctions against the US for pulling out of the Kyoto treaty on environmental protection.

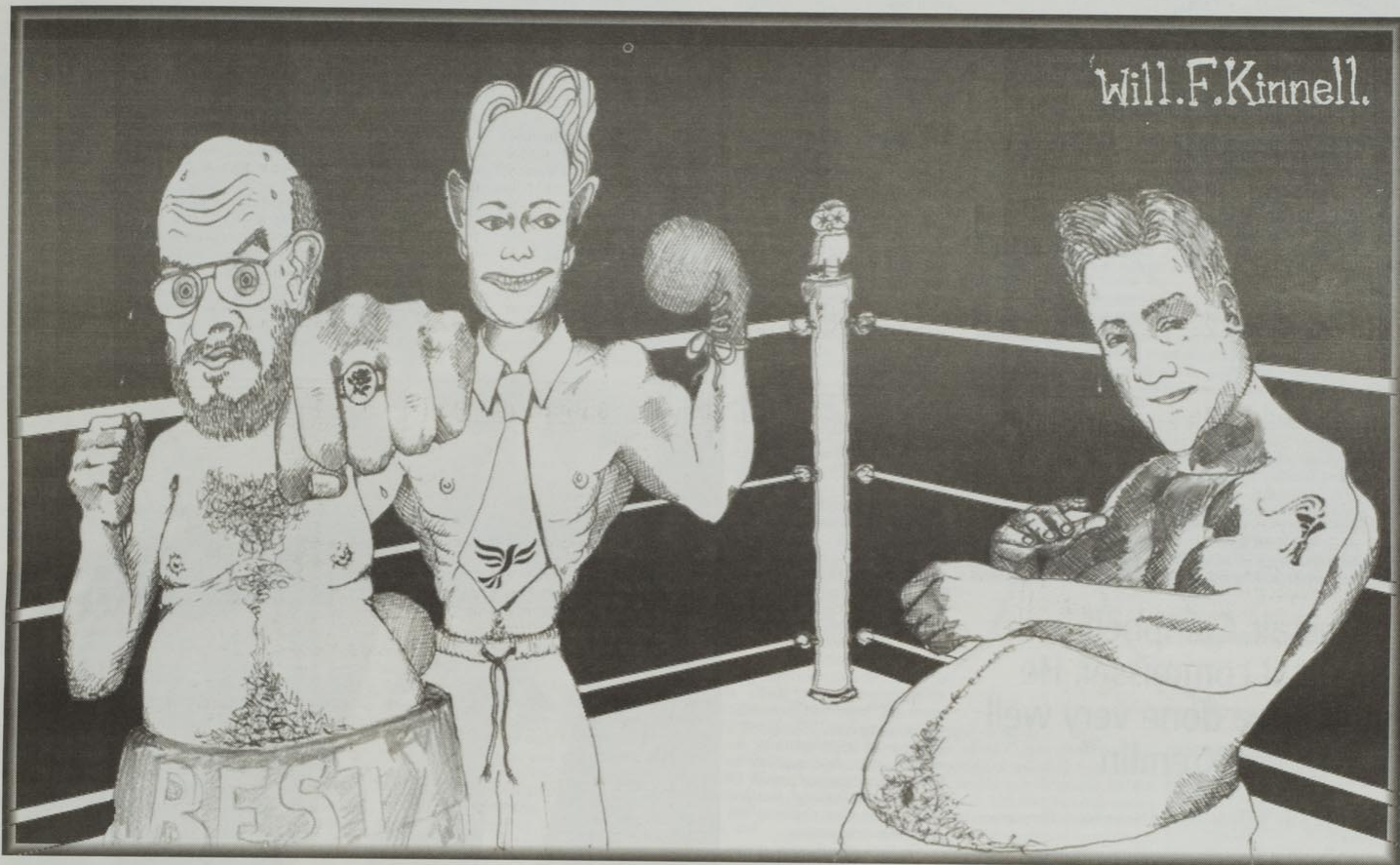
While many see a vote for his party as a wasted vote, Hall-Matthews says that in Leeds this is not true. He sees the constituency as a two man fight between himself and Adam Pritchard: "I think people here are disillusioned with Labour" and says that a vote for Best is more likely to let the Tories back in.

Behind their contender stands a fine tuned Lib Dem election machine. After the last general election, Labour had eight city councillors in the constituency; since then they have lost all but two. The Lib Dems now have as many people on the council as the other parties put together, and have big hopes for their man in Leeds North-West.

He tells us this is Labour's weakest seat in the city and one the Tories are just are not trying hard enough to win.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

to rumble



Adam 'Well 'ard' Pritchard

VITAL STATISTICS

AGE: 34
APPEARANCE: Archetypal grammar school boy made good, a one-nation middle-manager from the tip of his immaculate shiny hair to the toes of his immaculate shiny shoes.
FORM: A Tory from birth, Pritchard's idols include Peter Walker, Energy Secretary under Thatcher - inspiring stuff.
ODDS: 11-2

TUITION FEES: "I am anti fees myself. I will not defy the party whip, but I have raised the issue within the party."
STUDENT HOUSING: "The issue of student housing has been blown up to boiling point by the current MP."
CRIME: "We need more visible police, more police on the beat and less paperwork."



Pritchard seems predictably upbeat about Tory prospects for the election though he admits that the electorate had good reason to hate the Tories in 1997. "People thought we were sleazy and they hated us on public services", he says. When asked if that image has changed in 2001, he ducks the blow and changes the subject.

He sees his duties as an MP as "the interests of the country first, then constituency, then party." We are not sure how he would work out what the interests of the country actually are but they are, it seems, all in favour of the US NMD plan. Equally Pritchard is sure that the constituency is unconcerned about the prospect of Yorkshire becoming a target with the US stations nearby at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales because "Yorkshire is already a target."

Pritchard rates himself as an environmentalist. He boldly says: "We are now starting to wreck the planet." All well and good, you may think, but he gives us no clue as to how he would stop the destruction and is dead keen on nuclear weapons which "have kept the peace for so long."
 As for putting the interests of the party last, he states that he would defy the Conservative party whip as MP for Leeds NW, but over which issue and on what terms seems unclear.

The Tories have a 'student package' to lure the

student vote away from Labour and the Liberal Democrats. This includes giving universities huge sums every year to set them free from government 'red tape' so long as they promise not to raise tuition fees'. The money to fund this will be raised in part from selling off student debts to the private sector, leading to a massive increase in the interests payments on these debts.

This will be balanced by a triumphant £200 per year tax breaks for students and by increasing the earnings threshold at which we have to start paying off this debt to £20,000. This means that those graduates who take a few years before they earn £20,000 will have extra time to build up a really hefty debt before they can afford to pay it off.

When we mention this, Pritchard gives us a look as if to say 'no-one earns less than £20,000.' Nurses and teachers may disagree.

His mobile and pager remain eerily silent throughout the interview, the phone ringing only once. It's not Central Office reminding him to remain on message

but a higher authority: his wife placing an order for a large bag of wine gums to be delivered on his return home that evening. So that's wife, country, constituency, party then.



Spinning around

Move out of their way, they are the men that hold the real power in Britain. **Jonathan Marciano** talks spin with past master, Bernard Ingham, long-serving press secretary at the court of Mrs Thatcher

Brooding, dark and mysterious, the figure stands a few feet from the Prime Minister studied and transfixed, moving only to make some hasty notes, illuminated every so often by the lightning of the camera flashes that breathe life into his political creation.

It is the world of shadows, the world of spin. Now it is Alastair Campbell, the Prime Minister's Press Secretary, who has made into an art form the liminal space between government, Prime Minister, civil service and media. Campbell has been at the heart of everything New Labour has done, patrolling in the darkness of Gotham City, undeniably growing into one of the most powerful and feared men in Britain.

It is a measure of the office of Press Secretary to the Prime Minister that when Campbell recently announced he would be changing his role should Labour achieve a second term, a frenzied media speculated whether it was true, whether it would be less high profile, or more influential. It typically overshadowed every other story the government hoped would dominate the press columns. Then, the same day as the Prime Minister was equivocating in the Commons about the American missile defence system, Campbell became central once again as he carried out the political equivalent of a back-street abortion. His message delivered to the President

"Alastair Campbell is a political commissar. He would have done very well in the Kremlin"

Bush was simple. Want a missile system? No problem. Do you want fries with that?

And so the fiction of the post's non political role, always fragile, has been less than subtly blown away under Campbell's tenure. Always in the refreshingly vivid language of the unaccountable, Campbell recently described Tory economic policy as "an insult to Mickey Mouse". Earlier, he played a leading role in Peter Mandelson's precipitate dismissal and was reputed to have taken on bigger fish still, describing Chancellor Gordon Brown as "psychologically flawed" as rumours surfaced that the Chancellor was circling for the top job. It all underlines a political role that has potentially limitless scope to present, double-cross or undermine. As Michael Corleone puts it in *The Godfather*, 'the one who brings you the message will be the betrayer'.

The figure who masterminded the workings of power, more effectively than even perhaps Campbell however was the Press Secretary to the grand lady, Mrs Thatcher. At the height of her powers, the lately-styled Mummy of British politics had to do battle with her own Scorpion kings, such as trade unions, party purges,

terrorism and perhaps the end of ideology, with the media fast emerging as a key battleground. And her own famously loyal and ruthless press secretary, Bernard Ingham admits through 11 turbulent years to playing a considerable inside role all the way, in an unprecedented drama of politics, loyalty and intrigue. Even now he defends Thatcher's outbursts on the campaign trail. "It's about time somebody spoke out, what with all this rubbish spouted by mealy-mouthed politicians".

In style, clearly the rough Ingham could not be more different to Campbell. Campbell's Heathcliffian romance and charm, has made him a sex symbol with an internet site (showing the dashing and pensive figure, behind some moody graphics). Ingham in contrast is gruff, dogged, decent, serious and short-tempered. He looks a worn-out, loyal and embattled sea-dog against Campbell's bright-eyed feline instincts. As we talk it is disconcerting to hear the unexpected snorts of 'damnit' and 'bloody' that left lobby journalists climbing the walls after encounters.

On the issue of 'spin' it was Thatcher he suggests who gave the role of press secretary such an aura, giving the press such a low priority and effectively letting the office-holder take charge. "I don't think she had a very clear idea of what the role entailed. She wasn't interested in journalists. She never read the papers. She felt as I do, that they are besotted with rubbish. They have not achieved very much in their own lives so they criticise others."

This familiar ire of Ingham's is even more strange given that he started life as one of the "rottwelers" that hounded him for scraps, a journalist first at the *Hebden Times* as a young man in Leeds, and onto the *Yorkshire Post* and *Guardian*. (These days the press are more like 'spaniels'; "The press let the government get away with blue murder"). His stint as a Civil Servant, earned him the coveted job at



'YORKSHIRE RASPUTIN': Bernard Ingham outside Number 10

the inside clique at Thatcher's table. His own well chronicled outing of 'wets' through the press, (calling John Biffen a 'demi-detached member of government) and place in the murky Westland affair which helped end Michael Heseltine as a political force are conveniently glazed over. He believes himself to have acted far more properly than the present incumbent, Campbell. "Alastair Campbell is a political commissar. He would have done very well in the Kremlin", is just one of the broadsides reserved for the dangerous young Machiavel, he sees causing mischief at the heart of politics.

Yet Ingham was spinning before the term was invented. His manipulation of the all-powerful Lobby of main political journalists, was legendary, even causing a limited boycott from some newspapers. As the old lobby cliché ran: 'What Bernard was thinking today, Thatcher would be thinking tomorrow'.

The Masonic-traditions of the Lobby system manages to place most of the cards in the hand of the Press Secretary. And Ingham denies that recent reform has worked. "Campbell has supposedly put his own comments on the record. But nothing has changed. There may be an official lobby but that doesn't stop all the movement behind the scenes".

Though the messenger once termed the 'Rough-spoken Yorkshire Rasputin' in the Commons is more than implicated, his message is that the back-stage hands with an eye to control, have robbed politics of life before the election. "If you get in you have to behave like a poodle. My message to university students is to demand a right to free speech otherwise we will go downhill every day."

Yet for all the hype of spin, and commentaries on the dark arts practised by Campbell and the old master Ingham, the election campaign so far has defied control. The 'people' which the parties are fighting over have hit back. Punch-ups, heckling, even ghosts from the past such as Thatcher suggest perhaps that spin may be a spent force. Either that or it will have to enter once again into a whole new era.



SULTANS OF SPIN: (Left) Mrs Thatcher with Press Secretary, Bernard Ingham and Gorbachev in 1990. (Right) Campbell poses

Spin Doctors speak out

Alastair Campbell on... Tory Economic Policy: "An insult to Mickey Mouse"

...on Gordon Brown "psychologically flawed"

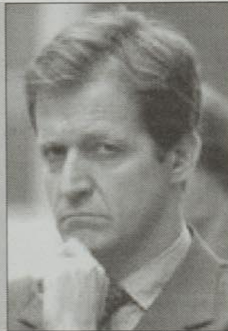
Bernard Ingham on...Thatcher

"She wasn't interested in journalists. She

never read the papers. She felt as I do, that they are besotted with rubbish"

...on Alastair Campbell "Alastair Campbell is a political commissar. He would have done very well in the Kremlin"

...on Free Speech "If you get in [to politics] you have to behave like a poodle"



To fee or not to fee?

Should they stay or should they go? **Lucy Ballinger** asks what affect fees are having on student welfare, and what do the parties have to offer?

The ghost of Christmas past has come back to haunt the Prime Minister. Having introduced tuition fees after the last election with a bold hand and a sweeping gesture, Mr Blair is now facing heckling students on the campaign trail. And they are not happy. Oh no.

The two pieces of legislation passed by the Labour government which have affected all students are the introduction of tuition fees, and the abolition of student maintenance grants. Yes the Higher Education needs more funding, yes education should be open to all, but the fact is, students are emerging from university with massive debts on their shoulders, because getting a degree is an expensive business.

On May 24 an angry student at the University of Glamorgan confronted the Prime Minister, and accused him of making Higher Education merely for the wealthy.

Andrew Chaplain, a 23-year-old second year at the University, attacked Mr Blair for spending money on the Millennium Dome rather than on Higher Education. He questioned: "You want a classless society, how can you get that when only the rich can go to university?"

Mr Blair defended fees, saying they were necessary to ensure access for all to higher education.

He was also attacked by a sixth-former the previous day who said fees were leading to student prostitution.

A recent report from the House of Commons showed that the average dropout rate in England from universities is 17 per cent. This is the second highest in the world.

This has come as concern over an increase in mental health problems among students. Student suicides have risen drastically from 2.4 per 100,000 students in 1983/4 to 9.7 in 1993/4. Financial problems have been linked to an increase in depression and anxiety among students, as well as the stress caused by an increasing necessity to take on part-time work to fund study.



Rachel Cashman, NUS's vice-president for welfare said that such jobs "exacerbate the stress of study." She continued: "In the run-up to exams, students who juggle revision with part-time work and other course demands are left with little time for relaxation, which makes them particularly vulnerable to stress."

The NUS is concerned that financial stress and an increase in access to Higher Education have put pressure on student support services who have not received any more funding to deal with this.

Beyond this, mature students are suffering from a lack of funding, with a 15 per cent drop in applications in 1999 compared with the previous year.

The government has announced a run of new initiatives; more bursaries, more funding for poorer students, but the reality still remains massive debt.

There is also a presiding sense that does not all quite add up. Recently it came to light that 1,200

lecturers jobs are to be axed. The average staff-student ratio at university is 1:20, so the loss of 1,200 jobs represents 24,000 fewer student places. With this being the case the question remains how Labour plans to increase the number of under 30-year-olds entering Higher Education to 50 per cent by 2010.

Students born in and studying in Scotland should count themselves lucky. Not only do they only pay a £2,000 contribution after graduation and once earning over £10,000, but this is for a four year course - half as much as is paid by students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Students in Scotland are also funded to the tune of £6,744, in England this figure is £5,360 and in Wales, £5,138. Spending per student in Scotland next year will be around two per cent above inflation, in England 0.4 per cent above, and in Wales 0.4 per cent below - marking a cut.

Mr Blair's defence is that, by the end of the year, only half of students will have to pay up front tuition fees. But this is still 50 per cent more than in Scotland where they were abolished in autumn 2000. So far top-up fees are off the agenda, with the Education minister, David Blunkett, promising they won't be

- Labour**
www.labour.org.uk
- "Ten-year aim" to get 50 per cent of under 30s in higher education
 - Expand opportunity for people to go to university
 - Increase student numbers whilst improving standards
 - "Continue investing in our universities"

- CONSERVATIVE**
- Sell off student loan debt to the private sector
 - Ban institutions from charging top-up fees
 - Give universities one-off lump sums which would be invested by the universities. The institutions would be run off the profits

- LIBERAL DEMOCRATS**
- Abolish tuition fees for all undergraduates
 - Restore means tested maintenance grants
 - Access to housing benefit and income support for students in summer
 - Increase access to universities

- Green Party**
of England & Wales
- "Education should be freely available to all people: young and old, rich and poor"
 - Abolish tuition fees
 - Reintroduce grants
 - Review pay of all university workers

- The Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru want to abolish tuition fees**
- Both parties believe in free education for all
 - Plaid Cymru want to reintroduce means tested maintenance grants

introduced while he remains in office.

William Hague, leader of the Conservative party, is looking to deflect their policy of retaining tuition fees by announcing plans to double the threshold for the repayment of student loans to £20,000. But this comes with plans to sell student loan debt to the private sector, and to make the loans repayable in lump sums.

The only of the major three parties who actually pledge to abolish up-front tuition fees are the Liberal Democrats. Students would instead be expected to pay contributions of £2,000, as in Scotland, after graduation and once the graduate's income exceeds £10,000. They will fund this abolition of fees with increases in tax.

So the choice is yours. Tuition fees with vague promises of increased investment, tuition fees with privatisation, or post-graduation contributions with increased tax.

The only certainty in outcome, whoever is elected, is that students contribution towards Higher Education is here to stay.

So the choice is yours. Tuition fees with vague promises of increased investment, tuition fees with privatisation, or post-graduation contributions with increased tax

Who pays what?

TUITION FEES:
£1,050 (2000/2001)
This figure is likely to increase by about £25 a year.
Some Universities charge more - Oxford's current top-up rate is £1,075 a year.

MAXIMUM LOANS:
£4,590 for those studying in London.
£3,725 for those studying outside London.
£2,950 for those living at home.

LIVING COSTS:
Students are expected to take out a student loan, topped up by parental contributions or part-time and holiday work. National Union of Students estimates that living costs are actually much higher than the maximum loans.
£6,636 each year to be a student in London.
£5,268 per year outside London.
This is before tuition fees are taken into account.



Fees across Britain

- ENGLAND:**
- 1998: Tuition fees of £1,000 introduced across the UK
 - 1999/2000: Fees increased by £25 per year
 - 2000: Russell Group of universities announces they are looking into introducing top-up fees

- WALES:**
- 2001: Welsh assembly prepares to vote for the abolition of tuition fees, following the example set by Scotland



- SCOTLAND:**
- Jan 2000: Agreement to drop tuition fees for all Scottish and EU students studying in Scotland
 - Sept 2000: Fees replaced by graduate contributions where graduates pay £2,000 into the scheme once they are earning £10,000 a year. Grants of up to £2,000 are available if the student's parents earn less than £23,000

The story abroad

AUSTRALIA:
Fees introduced in 1989. Some students pay over £8,000 for certain courses.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND:
Fees abolished in 1996. EC residents are exempt from payment of fees.

UNITED STATES:
Fees in place, but research funding available although very competitive.

Demo-crazy



Photo: Nick Francis

Is democracy failing us? **Nick Francis** explains how our system excludes political participation and suggests how it needs to be changed

Voting is the epitome of a healthy liberal democracy. You cast your vote on the basis of promises and hope that the government fulfils those promises. If during that term these promises are broken, there is nothing you can do. That's all part of the healthy democracy. If a decision or new policy is passed that you vehemently disagree with, there's nothing you can do. Remember this is a democracy.

One doesn't need to analyse Athenian ideals of democracy to realise the problems in our system. Namely that once a government is in, they are accountable to no one. Decisions can be made, promises can be broken and the people have no input. What we have in this country is "Western democracy" and that should not be confused with purer forms of democracy that can exist, in Switzerland or Sweden for example. Whilst they are Western countries, they break rank with the UK and US in terms of the opportunities people have to involve themselves with the political process.

Over the last four years the ruling Labour Party has introduced legislation not only without consulting the public but which was also anti-democratic in its nature and likely to conflict with the Human Rights Act 1998, enshrined in to British law in October 2000. Let me give you some examples. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, requires internet service providers to have installed black boxes so internet traffic can be traced. This means all communications can be listened to. By contrast, Article 8 of the Human Rights Act specifies ones right to privacy; the RIP Act overlooks this right.

The Terrorism Act 2000 has been seen as the most anti-democratic measure taken in recent history. If you are a campaigner and you block the road to protest you could be charged as a terrorist under this act. Peaceful protest, the hallmark of democracy has been dealt a severe blow. Other decisions that have passed the public by include Britain's adherence to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (a World Trade Organisation rule that Britain has signed up to) that stipulates that if a private company can prove it can run a public service cheaper than the public sector it has a right to do so. If it is not allowed, the company can take action against the government. Education Leeds is the private company running schools in Leeds, due to this provision. Tony Blair's much heralded Private Finance Initiative (PFI), thoroughly praised at the launch of his manifesto, signalled the enthusiasm he has for private companies running public services.

The people of this country are never consulted about what is done in their names in foreign policy. If you think the UK's weekly bombing of Iraq should stop or should not have even begun, there is little you can do. Apart from the euro, notice that foreign policy is nowhere during this election. A visitor to Britain at this time would be forgiven for thinking Britain does not have a foreign policy.

On National Missile Defence, which would involve two bases in

Yorkshire becoming central to America's defence strategy and could prompt a new arms race – the Labour Party has said nothing on this, although privately it is clear they'll go ahead with it, in spite of what the people think. That is incidental to them. In all these measures the public is not consulted. Those who are affected by such decisions have no vote, no choice, no question. The teachers in Leeds, outraged by the effect of the private company on their schools, had no choice.

What is clear is that once a government is in power they operate autonomously – whether it is spending close to £1 billion on a Dome, or privatising public services or introducing new legislation, or breaking promises – the people are sidelined from the political process. Only the euro will warrant citizen involvement. The lack of accountability in our democracy leads to this system of power without responsibility.

It is this kind of democracy that we are so keen to export. When countries see the light and adopt our way of doing things, we are always ready to applaud them. And those that don't see our light, will be punished, like Cuba for example, whose sanctions cripple the country.

'It is foolish to kid ourselves into thinking we have a fully functioning democracy'

One need not look too far back into the history books to see what has been done to install western style democracy in countries that had other ways of doing things. Efforts to democratise other countries have been conducted in the most anti-democratic ways. Throughout central and south America and even today in Columbia – US continues to impose its interpretation of democracy.

In this country people feel our voting system undermines the democratic process. Organisations like Charter 88 and 'make your votes count' are pushing for electoral reform, something the Labour government has not attended to during the last four years, despite its promises at the last election. The point here is that the system of voting is not proportional. In inconsistencies with a clearly high majority, and safe seat, your vote makes little difference. This is what has led to tactical voting.

But this is a diversion from the main point. Even if there was electoral reform, would the country be any more democratic in the sense that more people would participate? Surely politics is about participation, and fewer people are participating. This election is expected to draw the lowest turnout since 1918. Maybe if voting was reformed more people



Photo: Emrys Schoemaker

VOICES IGNORED: Voters protest against the government's support of the USA's plans for militarising space(left) and its support of the UN sanctions on Iraq(above)

would vote, but even this does not extend to the period when the ruling party are in power. At that point people are cut off from politics.

When or if you vote it is important to remember that once a party is in – there is little you can do in Westminster style politics to change what is happening hence the term "elected dictatorship". Check out the promises that are made, and watch them be broken.

Whilst electoral reform is essential, if only not to insult the public into believing their vote has a real impact, the problems with a lack of citizen participation will remain. By citizen participation I don't mean what happened recently in the Lords, where 15 members of the establishment walked into the Lords under the name of the peoples' peers. Insulting people in that way is discourteous. What needs to happen is a change in the power structures to allow for more citizens to get involved once the Party is in power.

One reform could involve a sample of the population regularly invited to advise on policy and practice, who act as ombudsmen to those in power. This would dilute the monopolistic power structures currently in place, that divorce people from politics. Until such innovations are made it is foolish to kid ourselves into thinking we have a fully functioning democracy.

BROKEN PROMISE: No one could stop Labour breaking its word on tuition fees



"I jump on injustice. Not bandwagons."

CHARLES KENNEDY



Spitting dumbies

Our politicians often look more like screaming kids than potential leaders once the election campaign gets under way. **Anna Doble** steps in with a few stern words

Last November the U.S. presidential election was cruelly touted as "a choice between a moron and a prick". In the run up to next week's general election in Britain, there's no sign that we're anymore grown up over here. It's all too easy to poke fun in the cutthroat playground of personality politics when the only alternative is to... um... talk about the... um... policies. In fact, Westminster might well be viewed as a large playpen; a padded cell packed with clamouring chubby faces, each one allegedly desperate to break out into the real world to wreak havoc, only to discover that once free of their formative incarceration the big bad world is full of big bad boys and girls who want to write big bad headlines about how big and bad they are.

The premium placed on personalities has quickly devolved into a relentless slanging match, where style not only overwrites substance but negative attacks (couched, of course, in killer soundbites dreamt up by loyal party minions in the bowels of Millbank) have supplanted rational political debate. Just as having an in depth knowledge of irregular verbs gets you nowhere in the playground, talking publicly about your vision for a better Britain can be a terrible faux-pas. Better to scaremonger about horrid things that might happen if your opponent is first past the post come polling day or to draw attention to his false grin, his burgeoning paunch or even the milk-curdling capabilities of his voice.

The art of negative campaigning has come a long way since the duffle coated days of pre-spin Whitehall. The bog standard Conservative formula used to be simple enough. Each time the pollsters predicted mutiny in the Home Counties, the economical recycling of the words 'winter', 'of' and 'discontent' would usually reel the scaredy-cats back in. And for a time, Thatcher's well-placed chums in the British press did the job for her - Kinnock bashing becoming an Olympic sport for a short time between the mid-eighties and that heart-breaking election of 1992. 'It Was the Sun Wot Won It', apparently, with

its dumb yet mind-numbingly effective depiction of Neil Kinnock's Welsh pate inside a lightbulb, with the headline, "Will the last person to leave Britain please turn out the lights." Along with the general attack of the jitters that caused the nation to stutter at the ballot box that fateful April evening, the victory of that constant and vitriolic barrage upon Kinnock the man as opposed to Labour the party stands testament to the powers of dirty politics.

Yet now, in an ery cartwheel of fortune, it is New Labour - caught as they are in a post-Mandelson state of spun-dried ecstasy - that doles out bad blood with the most panache. Their latest billboard onslaught carries the devastatingly simple slogan, 'Don't Go Back.' And oh how much weight lies on that final, unnervingly definite full stop. Likewise, their wickedly effective Hague-Thatcher hybrid (his face, her hair) and it's accompanying caption ('Be afraid. Be very afraid.') looks set to frighten voters considerably more than it will reaffirm their faith in New Labour.

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It's funny how the incumbent government of the day always resorts to dredging up the opposition's past misdemeanours instead of hoisting its own virtues high on the battlements. Indeed, why send out your own platoon of politicos into the fray when you can sling dead horses over the fortifications and head

for the Whips' Office? Or, indeed, why not stay put in your playpen and just throw tantrums? Considering the first unwritten rule of arguing is 'don't rake up old coals' (Arthur Scargill references excepted), and the second rule is 'don't get personal', the gladiators of Britain's political arena throw their weight with all the accuracy of a toddler in a paddy. But after Thursday's dummy-spitting night of excitement, it seems likely that our infantile friends in the corridors of power will go quietly back to their oak-panelled playpen - our votes safely ensnared - for another four years chewing rusks and intermittently screeching "It's not fair!"



YOU SMELL! The parties lavish thousands of pounds on playground insults



And finally... PG's

(Political) Tips



Bookies are actually bothering to make Labour 1-100 to win the most seats, the Tories 16-1 and Lib Dem 200-1 and it's a million to one the field. So it's Red Rum who are predictably on course to be first past the post come Thursday. Not very interesting I hear you cry, but you're wrong! There's still plenty to bet on.

Number of Women MPs: They've had a rough time in the Blair years and the trend might well extend to the constituencies. If there's **under 109** returned next Thursday then you'll be glad to get on the 6-4 being banded about at the moment.

Number of Seats: The Lib Dems should hold their record number of seats but I can't see them surpassing the 50 mark. A spread of **45-50** is available at **2-1**.

Labour could well stretch their amount to over **420** at **11-8** and the Tories look likely to do even worse. Take **5-4** for the blues to get **under 160**.

Size of Majority: Tony Blair will be looking to secure a **22,000-25,000** majority in Sedgefield. Not sure if he'll put a spread bet on himself at **evens**. Hague's popularity will be tested at **Richmond** where his majority could drop **under 7,000** at **12-5**. Meanwhile, Kennedy, in Ross, Skye and Inverness West will secure a **5,000+** return at **2-1**.

Turnout: Get out there you apathetic lot! Voter turnout could well hit a new all time low. You'll find most offices going **7-4** that **under 66%** show at the polls.

TICKETS GOING FAST!! TICKETS GOING FAST!! TICKETS GOING FAST!!

WHERE WILL YOU BE NEXT FRIDAY?

→ **GRAD BALL 2001**

OH WHAT A NIGHT....

MAIN ARENA

SERIOUS DJs

**EXCLUSIVE
JUDGE JULES**

JOHN KELLY COMME TOO FUNKY

BJORN AGAIN

FOUR DAY HOMBRE LUU DANCE BAND

LSR ARENA

MARK B AND BLADE

FEATURING

BENNY G (MIXOLOGISTS) & MR LEX

CHOPPER BOSCO SOPH TOWNSEND

PLATINUM DOGS DJ SNAPPA & MC

MOJO TEXAS OUTLAWS RUCKUS

HIFI LOUNGE

SOUL, JAZZ, FUNK & RARE GROOVES

SAY GOODBYE TO LEEDS IN STYLE
...**ONE GRAD BALL**

TICKETS ON SALE IN THE FOYER OF LUU, CATS, BECKETTS SPORTS BAR & MET BAR