



All just a little bit of history repeating

By Matthew Collinson

At the end of the 19th Century the major parties were the Tories and the newly re-christened Liberals (formerly Whigs). Trailing slightly behind was what was originally thought to be a fringe party – the Labour Party.

The Tories and Whigs had spent most of their time, through the course of the century, either striving to protect their positions or having shouting matches in the Commons. Indeed, the parties were likened to two stagecoaches running side-by-side, occasionally splashing one another with mud.

When eventually the middle classes became empowered by increasing industrialisation they demanded their say.

The lower and middle classes united, as the workers believed they too were central to the system, given that they were either doing the work provided by industrialisation, or looking for new jobs as a result of it. With the Reform Act 1832 the upper, ruling classes enfranchised the middle classes. The workers felt betrayed.

In the remaining years of the century it became clear that the upper class, far from consolidating their power by a concession to the middle classes, had left themselves vulnerable to attack from below.

Eventually, there came no choice but to extend the vote further with the Reform Act of 1867, enfranchising all male home-owners.



BLAIR: No longer left-wing?

The Liberals became caught in between two other stagecoaches and were eventually squeezed out. The Liberals had begun to move away from the Tories, being as they were responsible both for the two extensions of the vote. Their move towards the middle of the re-defined political spectrum did not sit well with human nature's tendency toward extremes. They were pushed out.

In the mid-nineties, the Labour Party was reborn under the banner of 'New Labour'. Having been in power since 1997, it has become clear that New Labour is not Old Labour. They are, indeed, quite conservative (with a small 'c'). One might surmise that they realised, after 18 years of Tory (now 'Conservative' with a capital 'C') rule, that the only way to beat them was to join them.

The line-up now places Labour in

Labour no longer monopolise a wing of the political spectrum

the dangerous no-man's land of the middle ground. They no longer monopolise a wing of the political spectrum.

The result of the General Election shows this. The Labour vote has fragmented, being split between the Conservatives and the Liberals – the Labour share of each seat dropping even as they win the seat itself.

Although the war is blamed heavily for the steep decline in the Labour majority, I suggest that it is rather these historical trends that are at play. Polls indicate that the Lib Dems have been steadily gathering support over the last four years – with no evident drop in support for the other two parties until now.

Iraq may have been the catalyst, but history shows that it was only ever a matter of time.

Celebrity nuggets

Kerry-Lynne Doyle embraces the people that politicians truly can't ignore - celebrities

Like many people across the nation I was glued to *Jamie's School Dinners*. I grimaced at his graphic production of chicken nuggets, I shouted at every person who cried 'it can't be done', and I squealed with delight at Charles Clarke's expression when he was greeted with his very own school dinner.

But when, in the wake of the programme, the government announced that they were giving more money to school dinners, I shared Oliver's reservations that it took a television documentary to get these long-needed changes to happen. Have we really arrived at a point where it is only through television and celebrity that politicians will listen?

Of course high profile political campaigning is not a new phenomenon. The suffragettes chained themselves to railings, smashed windows and heckled their way to the vote, a campaign recently mirrored by Fathers 4 Justice and their superhero shenanigans.

Pop stars have long had the power to use their celebrity for political purposes. Bono, Chris Martin and Bob Geldof have all achieved a lot of good. After all, it is unlikely that Live Aid would have been the success it was if it was

organised by and featured members of the public.

Yet there are risks involved in high profile campaigning. For many years the suffragettes' radical campaigning was used as an argument against enfranchising women; politicians used their actions - such as throwing acid on golf greens - against them to argue that women were too irrational for the vote.

Fathers 4 Justice have also attracted

risky campaigns can be necessary.

One pressure group, the NUWSS, was formed in 1897 and advocated a peaceful, legal approach to the votes for women campaign; but it made little impact. Emmiline Pankhurst left the NUWSS to form the suffragettes in 1903, frustrated at its softly softly approach. She embraced instead a now infamous campaign of 'actions not words'.

When questioned about their campaigns, Fathers 4 Justice defended themselves saying that their other approaches have been ignored. It is only their dramatic campaigns that got their cause into the public eye and, in our media-saturated times, any news is good news.

So while I initially felt troubled by the government's response to *Jamie's School Dinners*, it

is, at the end of the day, a step forward. Whatever the government's motivations, (2005 elections anyone?) Jamie's campaign has been successful. It was not just dramatic; it was practical proof that changes could be made.

Therefore, I applaud Mr Oliver for his political savvy. He understood that nowadays, if you want political change, celebrity and television are two mediums that refuse to be ignored. They are simply irresistible.



mixed feelings from the public and the media for their unusual take on political campaigning, such as hurling a condom filled with flour across the House of Commons.

Sadly, while high profile, dramatic campaigns do attract attention, they can sometimes undermine what is a perfectly justifiable political cause by damaging its sincerity. But is there always another option? Sometimes



OLIVER: Pressure on school dinners



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