

British Election

2010



The 2010 British Election: Six Parties in Search of a Voter?

Courtesy of LSE Design Unit

By Jonathan Hopkin

It's election year, and on Saturday 6th March the Department of Government celebrated the fact with a high-profile Undergraduate Conference on the forthcoming polls, in which David Sanders of the University of Essex, and LSE's Patrick Dunleavy, Tony Travers, Simon Hix and others discussed the historical importance of this election and its likely outcome (notwithstanding the difficulties of making predictions in political science, especially about the future). Participants agreed that at the very least the 2010 election was likely to produce a change of government for the first time since 1997, but the possibility of more substantial political change was also discussed. But what kinds of changes?

British politics has long revolved around the alternation in power be-

tween the Conservatives and Labour, a two-party system which has remained entrenched since the Second World War. The strength of party identifications – working class voters supporting Labour, middle class voters the Conservatives – added to the distortions of the First Past the Post electoral system for the House of Commons, generated comfortable majorities for the winning party in most post-war elections. Even as the patterns of class voting weakened in the 1970s and 1980s, governing parties (Conservatives 1979-97, Labour since) continued to enjoy parliamentary majorities which allowed them to govern unconstrained by the coalition dynamics typical of other Western European countries.

However, this apparent solidity of the two-party system is built on increasingly shaky foundations, as Figure One (on

page 3) illustrates. First of all, the share of the electorate voting for the two major parties has been declining consistently for decades, as the uppermost line in the chart indicates quite clearly (note that Figure One reports the percentage of the total electorate, rather than just the percentage that cast a vote). More and more voters have been voting for other parties or, increasingly, not voting at all. As a result, governing parties, despite their parliamentary majorities, have won elections on the basis of more and more meagre popular support, as the downward trendline in the middle of the graph shows. In fact, Labour 'won' the 2005 election with just a third of the votes cast, in an election in which almost 40% of potential voters did not use their

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HoD report



Paul Kelly
The Department's one day conference on the British Election of 2010 was held on Saturday March 6th. The conference was a great opportunity for the Department to showcase the work and insights of some of its top scholars and commentators on British Politics – of which there are, contrary to popular opinion, quite a few. This election in particular is likely to be of considerable interest as it involves an incumbent party at the end of a third term; a Prime-Minister whose personal popularity is an apparent liability to his own party; as well as an opposition that has yet to define itself as the natural Government in waiting with the fear of a possible hung Parliament to complicate matters. All this is coupled with the Iraq War and the Inquiry hearings reminding the electorate of the long shadow it still casts over British Politics. The audience was made up of current students, staff, alumni and friends from the wider school community and I hope that many of you reading this were able to join us. Given the need to be ever mindful of the impact of research surely even the press might have attended – we tried to entice them.

The run up to an election is an obvious time to consider what additional activities the Department can contribute to the understanding of the current state of British politics, but it has also inspired a bit of critical self-reflection on who we are as a Department and what we do. For example, there is no single course on British politics in our undergraduate curriculum and only one amongst the sixty options at the Masters' level. Furthermore, there are many colleagues

who work on aspects of political science but would not think of British politics as their primary focus of teaching and research although they may know a lot about it. To the occasional embarrassment of the Department others from different (lesser?) Departments get to dominate the airwaves by providing a running critical commentary for the

“...also inspired a bit of critical self-reflection on who we are as a Department and what we do.”

press. We, of course, have expert public commentators such as **Professor Tony Travers** who is rarely off the television or radio, so we should not feel too worried about being marginalized. Nevertheless, given that we are at the heart of London between the City and Palace of Westminster (as we tell students on open days) should we not be having a greater public

impact? Or, perhaps a different issue, we should focus more on British politics in the class room? There are questions frequently asked of Heads of Department by Directors, Council Members, Alumni and potential benefactors.

How we answer the question is another matter. On the one hand we can argue with a certain amount of academic authority that there are no national social sciences any more than natural sciences, so British politics in all its diversity is only one amongst a host of interesting fields of enquiry such as conflict studies or Chinese and Indian politics. Perhaps European politics is still the main sphere in which we need to understand British politics and policy, and it is the job of academic social sciences to redirect popular attention to where the real action is, and not follow mere epiphenomena. Then again it might not be Europe but the Global domain where the sites of interesting politics are. Alternatively, we provide teaching and training in the skills of political analysis which are necessary to make sense of British politics as much as any of the other phenomena of the political domain. If we look hard at what we currently do we can see that we do all of these things and in most of these spheres of political science we are up there with the best of our peers. Perhaps the absence of discrete courses and appointments in British politics is not a problem at all in an international institution such as LSE. But we should also note that none of the top US schools (our peers) could fail to offer courses in American Government and Politics.

The Department will no doubt continue to mull over these questions and challenges as it has done for many years, and I am sure future Heads will be reminded by Directors and Governors of the crucial importance of British politics. Perhaps our one day conference on the British Election will not only interest and challenge our current students but serve as a reminder of the important relationship between political science and real politics. ■

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ballot. Labour voters in the last election amounted to just over 21% of the total electorate, less than Labour achieved in any other post-war election with the sole exception of its disastrous defeat in 1983. A corollary of this decline is that the number of significant political parties has increased – **Professor Patrick Dunleavy** argued at the 2010 Undergraduate Conference that the UK had a six-party, rather than a two-party, system (based on the ‘effective number of electoral parties’, a widely used measure of party system fragmentation, in which the UK now scores slightly over six).

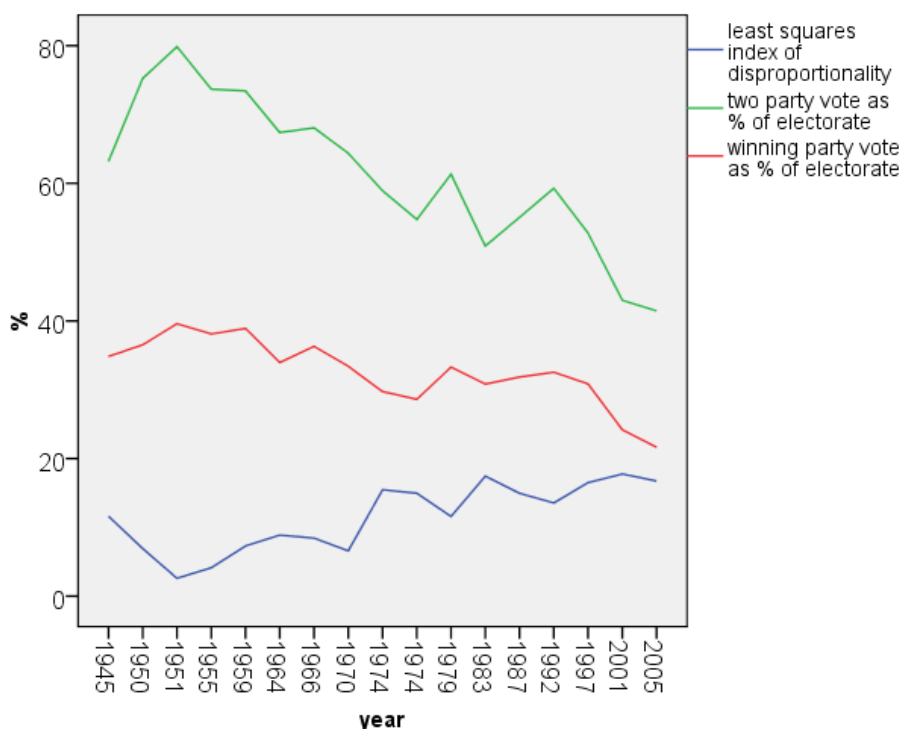
Yet these fundamental structural changes in the British party system have made little impact on the workings of the key institutions at the heart of the UK system of government: Cabinet and the House of Commons. The British electoral system protects the major parties from the consequences of their unpopularity. The line at the bottom of Figure One (below) shows the increase over the same period in the ‘Least Squares Index’, a measure of the disproportionality in the allocation of parliamentary seats relative to party vote shares. This reflects the generous over-allocation of seats in

the House of Commons to winning parties, which has become increasingly stark as their shares of the popular vote have declined. Not all of the ‘minor’ parties are equally penalized by the electoral rules, but parties which campaign nation-wide, principally the Liberal Democrats but also parties such as UKIP, the Greens and the BNP (thankfully), do not obtain parliamentary representation in proportion to their popular support.

There is a very real possibility that the forthcoming election will produce what in Britain is curiously referred to as a ‘hung parliament’ – a parliament with no overall majority for any one party (what anywhere else in Europe would be simply ‘a parliament’ like any other). At the Undergraduate Conference both **Professor Simon Hix** and Professor David Sanders presented forecasts suggesting that the Conservatives would win the election, but most probably fall short of an overall majority in the House of Commons. In this context of long-term decline of the two main parties and the increasingly unrepresentative composition of parliament, a hung parliament could usher in significant changes. First of all, a ‘hung’ parliament lies bare some of the ‘hidden

wiring’ of the British constitution which most of us happily ignore in normal times. The Queen is generally a symbolic figure in British politics, formally handing the reins of power to the leader of the winning party when the votes have been counted, and effectively staying out of politics until the next time (give or take a few ‘speeches’ written for her by the government of the day). But in a hung parliament the Queen’s prerogatives of nominating the Prime Minister and dissolving parliament may take on real political significance, especially if no one party has a clear advantage in terms of parliamentary seats. In such conditions, should the Queen choose the leader of the party with the most seats, the most votes, the most vocal support for likely coalition partners? There is little in the way of formal constitutional guidance on such matters (although we might hope political science could give her a few tips, and certainly more reassurance than she was offered by the economics profession...).

Of course, one plausible outcome would be a coalition between the Conservatives (or, possibly, Labour) and the Liberal Democrats, a partnership which would likely enjoy a parliamentary majority. Given the Lib Dems’ recent positioning, such a coalition could plausibly reach agreement on a range of policy areas. But what price would Nick Clegg demand for putting David Cameron in Downing Street? The Lib Dems are the biggest losers from the First Past the Post system, and it would not be surprising if they insisted on some kind of electoral reform in return for their cooperation. If the UK adopted some form of Proportional Representation for Westminster elections – as it already has for elections to the European Parliament, the Greater London Assembly, and devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – then the age of the two-party system, and single-party governments, would surely be over.



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An interview with Dr. Valentino Larcinese



Dr Valentino Larcinese, a Lecturer in Public Policy and Public Choice, teaches Introduction to Public Choice and Public Policy, and Advanced Topics in Public Choice and Public Policy. In addition to teaching he also focuses his research on pertinent present day topics: British politics, voting behaviour, MPs' expenses, mass media influence in elections, participation and electoral turnout, elections and party competition, social spending in western democracies, economics of higher education, and taxation and redistribution. He is also affiliated with LSE's STICERD and is due to publish a book with colleagues **Torun Dewan** and Keith Dowding later this year titled *Political analysis and public choice*. Valentino has a personal website with his updated research and projects: <http://personal.lse.ac.uk/LARCINES/>. We took the opportunity to ask him a few questions (Guardian Weekend style) and to get to know him outside of his life at the LSE.

Which living person do you most admire, and why?

I find it difficult to think of "the most" or "the least" of almost anything. There are a few people that I would say I admire, most of them not alive. Among the living people I would include Brazil's president Lula. I remember living in Brazil a few years ago and a Brazilian friend telling me that many generations were needed before Brazil would elect a working class president. Lula's personal history is extraordinary, from immigration and poverty into Sao Paulo, to the brave and pacific opposition to the military regime, to the determination in running again and again for the presidency. And I think he has also been a good president. No miracles, but politicians don't do miracles, unless they also happen to be saints, which is never the case.

“Has England finally managed to win a world cup? (without cheating, I mean).”

What is your favourite book?

I have bad memory. Among the ones I have read recently probably Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. If I make a serious effort and try to remember what I have read more than 3 months ago then, among the memorable ones I would include Garcia Marquez' *Cien Anos de Soledad*, Pirandello's *Mattia Pascal*, Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* and Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. My absolute favourite remains *The Odyssey*, possibly an easy-to-read version.

Which living person do you most despise, and why?

Not sure I should answer this question....

If you insist then I must mention the current Italian prime minister and his gang, who are destroying democracy in my country, a partially already accomplished mission.

If you could go back in time, where would you go and who would you be?

Why do you want me to go back? I would rather come back here in 1,000 years, just to check to what extent is the mess. Was the pension system really unsustainable? Did the UK join the euro or did Europe join the pound? Has England finally managed to win a world cup? (without cheating, I mean). Imagine the amazing amount of data that could be analysed! One could only laugh at a "1972-2004 longitudinal study". In short, what happened to our civilization, to our certainties, to the organization of our society. Putting today in long term historical perspective and assuming there will still be something here. I admit it could be a terrifying experience but I would take the risk.

How do you relax?

Mostly doing activities that involve either a sofa or a bed. I can mention reading and watching movies, among other things. Having time, which I happen to find less and less, I love travelling.

What is your greatest fear?

The absence of future.

Where would you most like to be right now?

Playing with my little daughter Maria Giulia.

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Eagerly Awaited New Journal Global Policy Launches

global POLICY

By Jill Stuart

January 2010 saw the publication of Issue 1, Volume 1 of *Global Policy*, an innovative and interdisciplinary journal bringing together world class academics and leading practitioners to analyse both public and private solutions to the world's most pressing problems. The journal, which is based in LSE Global Governance at the LSE, is published in association with Wiley Blackwell. All content will be freely available for the first two years at www.globalpolicyjournal.com.

Professor David Held (co-director of LSE Global Governance) said: "There is nothing quite like *Global Policy* – a journal which focuses on the point where ideas and policy meet. It will aim to understand globally relevant risks and their relationship with the development of new policies with analysis of the concepts and theories which underlie them." Professor Held is joint General Editor of the journal with **Professor Patrick Dunleavy** (Professor of Political Science in the Department of Government), and the lynchpin of the editorial team is Executive Editor Dr Eva-Maria Nag. The editorial team is also supported by several LSE students and alumni providing invaluable assistance as interns.

In the first issue UK Development Secretary Douglas Alexander suggests action on three fronts to help poorer countries during 2010. The launch edition also includes an article by General David Petraeus, Head of US Central Command, describing how military experience from Iraq and Afghanistan suggests a new philosophy for military deployments in the future. Professor Ian Goldin and Tiffany Vogel of Oxford University also offer an

analysis of the financial crisis, in which they argue that all the world's governing bodies need urgent reform if they are cope with the next global crisis – which could be pandemics, bioterrorism or climate change. Other articles examine the 'G2' of China and the US, the political economy of antiretroviral drugs and the human rights based arguments for international adoption.

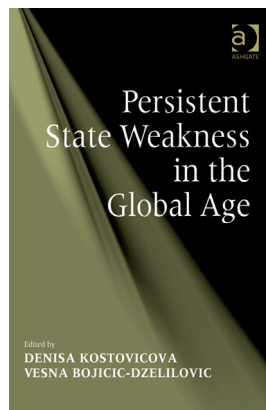
Launch events for *Global Policy* are being held this year in London, Paris, Brussels, Budapest and Beijing, in partnership with Wiley Blackwell, the Global Public Policy Network and the French Development Agency.

Readers of the *Dispatch Box* are invited to submit contributions to the journal's online blog. Please write the editorial team at journal.global.policy@lse.ac.uk for details on how to apply. ■

< *British Elec.* continued from page 3

On the other hand, such scenarios have been discussed before (in 1987, and 1992, for example), and the two-party system has remained robust until now. Should Cameron's Conservatives (or, rather improbably, Labour) win a parliamentary majority, the temptation to revert to 'business as usual' would be strong. But is a political system governing with such sparse active support from the population really sustainable? Popular hostility to the political class is at a historic high since the breaking of the parliamentary expenses scandal last year. It is bad enough in normal times for voters to have to pay for MPs' duckhouses and John Lewis soft furnishings. Hard-up voters battered by the economic crisis may find it hard to accept politicians elected on such paltry shares of vote appealing for shared sacrifice as they deal with the worst economic crisis since the 1930s. ■

Departmental Publications



Persistent State Weakness in the Global Age

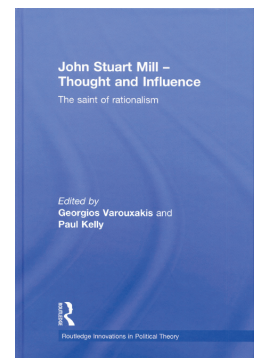
Authors: Denisa Kostovicova and Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic

Publisher, Year: Ashgate; Har/Ele edition (1 Nov 2009)

John Stuart Mill -- Thought and Influence

Edited by: Georgios Varouxakis and Paul Kelly

Publisher, Year: Routledge (24 Feb 2010)



Obituary



Courtesy of Anna Smith

By Martin Lodge

Gordon Smith, who has died at the age of 82 in early December 2009, was one of the most outstanding teachers and scholars of his generation of political scientists. He shaped the discipline and the Department since the appointment to the LSE in 1972 and leaves a substantial legacy as one of Britain's leading and most-respected scholars on comparative European politics, party systems and German politics.

Nobody who ever encountered Gordon in the class-room will forget this experience. His intellect and generosity combined with constant heckling and challenging in the class-room stimulated debate and inspired many to embark on academic careers. But it was not just in the classroom where Gordon shaped the Department and the discipline. Shortly before his retirement, he took on the baton as departmental convenor and it was during this time that the decision was taken to create the European Institute at the LSE.

Gordon's scholarship was one that combined careful generalisation,

grounded on a well-developed appreciation of any country's history and culture. His appointment at the LSE in 1972 at the age of 45 was a result of his seminal *Politics of Western Europe*. The late Vincent Wright, then at the LSE, was enthusiastic about the book's careful cross-national comparison of institutions of nineteen West European states. Together with Wright, Gordon established the leading academic journal *West European Politics*, which reflected their launch of an innovative postgraduate programme at the LSE of the same name. One of the LSE's MSc prizes commemorates Gordon's legacy in establishing postgraduate programmes in European politics. He continued supervising students until the end of the academic year 2007/8. In the early 1990s, Gordon he co-founded the journal *'German Politics'*, filling a need to create an English-speaking platform for scholars interested in the unified country and co-edited a succession of *'Developments in German Politics'* editions (the first edition, then still called *'Developments in West German Politics'* arrived in time of the fall of the Berlin Wall). He actively edited editor of *West European Politics* until his untimely death.

Gordon was born in September 1927 in London. He was evacuated during the war and saw military service from 1945. His posting to bombed-out Hamburg triggered his interest in Germany, and the study of politics. An undergraduate degree at LSE was followed by years in private industry, a PhD in German politics, a part-time degree in sociology, and years of teaching at London North-East polytechnic. The commute from the family home in Bournemouth to London's East End persuaded him to seek solace in writing, which eventually led to the *Politics of Western Europe* and his return to the LSE. His interest in German politics was prodded and held in check by his German first wife, Dorothea, and dinners at their London house (which Smith had

purchased from Wright when the latter had moved to Oxford) were music-, cigar- and wine-inspired seminars on European politics.

Gordon despised meddling and being meddled with. He avoided the public limelight, but was moved to express his anger with the Thatcher administration's response to German unification in a letter to the *Times* in July 1990. He was particularly appalled by the now-infamous Chequers seminar on the German 'national character'.

If the early career had suggested considerable resilience, then the 1990s proved similar challenges. After the sudden death of his first wife, Dorothea, in 1994, Gordon found happiness with his second wife Anna, whom he had met at the exhibition *'Glory of Venice'* at the Royal Academy of Arts, and their son Thomas. A car crash in 1996 proved extremely serious, although Smith had initially (and typically) succeeded in discharging himself.

The Department is proud to have been Gordon Smith's intellectual home for over four decades. We will miss his puckish and temperamental humour, his irreverent attitude and his pragmatic and generous advice. Gordon was not someone who wanted to create a sect or school, but he has created a family of 'alumni' who will never forget what Vincent Wright once described as Smith's 'droll and tragi-comic attitude to life' and his 'mixture of protested innocence and deliberative provocative cynicism'.

Smith is survived by his wife Anna, their son Thomas and his daughter from his first marriage, Charlotte, and four grandchildren. ■

< *Larcinese continued from page 4*

Tell us a joke.

I am too serious.

Which political philosopher has had the most effect on your thinking?

I am too ignorant for this question, somebody has certainly had influence on my thinking but I don't know who they are. Assuming that I think and assuming that he is a philosopher, I could say Gramsci. But I do not have much in common with the Gramscians. I prefer the master to the followers by a large magnitude.

What is your favourite memory of teaching?

The end of the summer term.

Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

All my best friends from different eras and places of my life, sitting together around the same table for once. Actually that could be a nightmare. Can I rewind? I would probably have it in Mexico City in the twenties, with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Trotsky, Tina Modotti etc. Very hot Mexican food and plenty of tequila. For the music I would invite Tonino Carotone, the author of "Me Cago en el Amor". Not sure he'd get the visa.

Who is the most inspiring teacher you have had?

I have had many inspiring and dedicated teachers, including some at LSE. But the most inspiring and original, maybe because of my very young age at the time, remains my teacher in the 4th year of primary school, when I was 9, Giantommaso Taglieri Sclocchi.

What is the most important lesson life has taught you?

Stay calm (if you can). But I think I have

only learned the theory so far

What three books would you take with you to a desert island?

Keynes' *General Theory* and Marx's *Capital*. That's probably enough to read and think about for years. And given that I'll be on a desert island I guess I will need the Junior Woodchucks Guidebook.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Having managed to postpone it enough, whatever that will be.

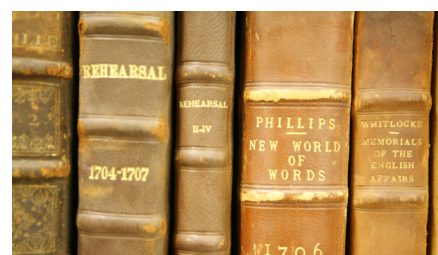
What's your favourite food?

I like (almost) all food. In this moment I would love a dish of my mum's tagliolini



Staff News

Anne Phillips is currently on sabbatical leave, working on a book on the commodification of the body for Princeton University Press. In February and March 2010, she will be a Visiting Fellow at the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. She returns to the UK via Japan, where she is contributing to a conference on 'Bonds and Boundaries: New Perspectives on Justice and Culture' at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto. Other contributors include Axel Honneth, Achille Mbembe, Saskia Sassen, and James Tully. Her most recent book, *Gender and Culture*, is published by Polity Press in March 2010.



Omar McDoom was awarded the Michael Nicholson prize for best doctoral thesis in the field of International Studies by the British International Studies Association. The thesis is entitled *The Micro-Politics of Mass Violence: Authority, Security, and Opportunity in Rwanda's Genocide*. Following a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Oxford University, Omar accepted an appointment as a Lecturer in Comparative Politics in the Government Department of the London School of Economics.

Hotseat Podcasts

The Government Department regularly interviews members of the academic staff regarding current events. The two podcasts below can be viewed and listened to on the Government Department website: <http://www2.lse.ac.uk/government/highlights/PODCAST/Home.aspx>.

- **Dr Stephanie Rickard** discussing the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.
- **Dr Nilima Gulrajani** discussing the state of development in Haiti after the earthquake.

Cumberland Lodge 2010



By Ariane Sparks

Every year, the Government Department hosts a weekend conference for staff and students at Cumberland Lodge, a beautiful 17th century country house set in Windsor Great Park. Cumberland Lodge is an educational foundation established in the 1940s by leading scholars and thinkers of the day. Inspired by author Amy Buller's book, *Darkness over Germany*, which questioned why leading scholars and universities failed

to detect the growing threat from Hitler's Germany in the 1930s, the Lodge aims to create an atmosphere where students and scholars can discuss ideas on the betterment of society. To that end, the Lodge plays host to higher-education institutions, learned societies, charities and non-governmental organisations as they gather to discuss issues of national and international importance.

This year's conference, organized by **Dr Francisco Panizza**, is entitled "The Third Wave of Democratization: Thirty Years Later" and is open to all registered Government Department students. Speakers will include **Dr Vesselin Dimitrov**, Reader in Eastern European Politics, as well as other Government Department staff, and Mr Laurence Whitehead, Official Fellow in Politics and Director of the Mexican Studies Programme at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, who will deliver the keynote speech. Though a weekend at Cumberland Lodge is always full of lively debate and discussion, there

will also be free time for staff and students to explore the beautiful grounds of Windsor Great Park and nearby Windsor or enjoy a quiet lunch in the sunshine with friends and colleagues. Always one of our most popular events, we know this year will be no different! If you have any thoughts or suggestions for discussion topics and activities, please kindly send them to gov.enquiries@lse.ac.uk. Cumberland Lodge will take place the weekend of 30 April-2 May so please look for updates in the next *Dispatch Box*. ■

Editor's note

Editor: Madeleine Bothe

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Dispatch Box*. If you have any stories or news you would like included in the next edition please send your submission to gov.enquiries@lse.ac.uk. Submissions could include memories of the department which you would like to share, research or career projects you are working on, or if you would like to be featured in the 'Where are we now' section. Any feedback is greatly appreciated.

PhD Awards

In order of completion

Romina Miorelli	The Discourse on Civil Society in Poverty Reduction Policy in the Argentine 1990's: Neo-liberal and populist Political Projects Struggle for Hegemony.
Paolo Dasgupta	The Independence of Regulatory Agencies in Practice: The Case of Telecommunications Regulators in the UK and France.
Chiara Jasson	Developing Discourse? National Referendums and News Coverage of the European Constitutional Process.
André Alves	An Exploration of the Libertarian/Egalitarian Dimension of Welfare Systems.
Sofia Sebastian	State-Building in Deeply Divided Societies: Beyond Dayton in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Fredrik Sjöberg	Elections and Identity Politics in Kyrgyzstan 1989-2009- Moving Beyond the 'Clan Politics' Hypothesis.
Camille Monteux	Institution Building in Kosovo: The Role of International Actors and the Question of Legitimacy.
Gabriele Birnberg	The Voting Behaviour of the European Union Member States in the United Nations General Assembly.
Cecile Hoareau	Does Deliberation Matter? The Impact of the Bologna Process on Attitudes and Policies in European Higher Education.