Why History Remains the Best Form of Citizenship Education

David Conway

Introduction

Since the end of World War Two, and especially since the demise of the Soviet Union, Britain has experienced immigration on a scale unprecedented for many centuries. Those arriving have come from a vast array of different parts of the world. These include, most notably, many of Britain’s former colonies, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and North Africa. More latterly, they have been joined by others coming from the new EU accession countries of eastern Europe. Many have come in quest of asylum from political or religious persecution at home. Most have come as economic migrants.

The arrival of these newcomers in Britain on the scale in which they have come has raised profound questions, both for them and the population they have joined, as to what form of mutual adjustment each should be prepared to make. The chief question with which immigrants are faced is how far they should be willing to assimilate, even to the point of entirely relinquishing the cultures associated with the societies they have left. The host population has to decide how far the traditional culture and way of life need modifying to enable immigrants to settle and participate fully in public life.

Intimately bound up with these questions is one that concerns what form of history should be taught in British schools, especially those funded by the state. This question arises because, in determining the common sense of national identity shared by the inhabitants of a country, their understanding of its history plays as powerful a constitutive role as memory does in determining an individual’s sense of personal identity.
As recent large-scale immigration to Britain of peoples from diverse cultures, all markedly different from Britain’s native one, has raised the question of what sort of people its citizens should now consider themselves to form, their arrival has raised the question of what sort of history British schoolchildren should be taught.

It will be argued below that British schoolchildren should study history according to a syllabus the core of which should be a narrative account of Britain’s history from earliest times to the present. Were history taught according to such a syllabus, then, provided it had not been made to pass through the distorting prism of political correctness, the resultant understanding schoolchildren would form of their country would almost certainly be liable to have evoked admiration of and affection for their country, as well as pride in being among its citizens. It is liable to do so because, no matter how recently they or their families might have arrived there, Britain’s history, on the whole, has been one that its citizens have just cause to admire and take pride in.

A primary didactic purpose of teaching history in British schools should be, quite self-consciously and unashamedly, to serve the civic function of giving pupils the wherewithal for feeling justifiably proud of being British and for being attached to their country and its traditions. Were history so taught, there would be little need for the school curriculum to have become as cluttered as it recently has by being forced to include such intellectually and morally dubious ‘subjects’ as ‘citizenship’ which, cuckoo-like, threaten to displace much worthier subjects like history and religious education.

This way of teaching history does not enjoy much popularity among those called upon to teach the subject today. To suggest it can and should be taught with the civic purpose of fostering in pupils a sense of pride in their country and patriotism is to risk courting their collective indignation and wrath.

To illustrate how well-entrenched is professional scepticism towards the approach to the teaching of history being canvassed here, consider what the British Historical Association had to say about the matter in a recently published report on teaching history to pupils aged 14-19 that it was commissioned to write by the Secretary of State for Education.\(^1\) The Historical Association devotes a section of its report to discussing the relation between history and citizenship. In this section, the Historical Association expressly declares that ‘while one might derive moral or ethical lessons from history, this is not its primary function as a subject… History can contribute to citizenship, but it is no part of the role of citizenship to determine or influence the history curriculum.’\(^2\)

As if to reinforce that message as the official line of the teaching profession, the Historical Association prefaces the section of their report dealing with this issue with a quotation from a recent article by a history teacher that expresses a highly adverse opinion towards the notion that history should be used to teach citizenship. The sentence in question runs, ‘Using history to deliver citizenship is about the worst of many bad ideas to have taken hold of education’\(^3\).

By according that sentence such a prominent position in its report, the Historical Association gives clear indication that it fully endorses the sentiments it expresses. As such, it may legitimately be supposed it too is of the view that the notion that history be taught with a civic purpose is only a recent one.
Given the Historical Association saw fit to resort to citations to support its opinions, it seems equally in order to make use of citations to show just how wide of the mark is any suggestion that the notion that history should be taught for such a purpose is only a recent one.

The Facts of History Against the Teachers of History

In the educational curriculum he drew up on the request of a friend who sought advice on how to educate his two children, advice eventually published in 1693 under the title ‘Some thoughts concerning education’, John Locke recommended that children study history for the beneficial civic effects that he claimed its study would confer on them. Locke wrote:

As nothing teaches, so nothing delights more than history. The first of these recommends it to the study of grown men; the latter makes me think it the fittest for a young lad...

It would be strange to suppose an English gentleman should be ignorant of the law of his country.… [T]he right way for a gentleman to study our law… is to take a view of our English constitution and government … [a]nd having got a true idea of that, then to read our history and with it join in every king’s reign the laws then made. This will give an insight into the reason of our statutes, and show the true ground upon which they came to be made and what weight they ought to have. 4

Locke believed the English gentry should see to it that their children study the history of England. He did so because he believed two other things. The first of these things Locke believed was that it was ‘every man’s indispensable duty to do all the service he can to his country’. The second thing was that, in the case of English children, their studying the history of their country would be liable to induce in them a love of and loyalty towards it that would be liable to be as beneficial to their country as it would be to them. Locke wrote:

...the well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone … set his helping hand to promote everywhere that way of training up youth with regard to their several conditions which is the easiest, shortest and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings: though that most to be taken care of is the gentleman’s calling. For if those of that rank are by their education once set right, they will quickly bring all the rest to order.5

Locke’s remarks on this subject were published in 1693, shortly after England had emerged from a protracted period of the most intense and monumental political turbulence. Locke wrote and published the work, therefore, at a time when a concern to instil patriotism and loyalty in politically active classes might be thought to have been paramount. However,
Locke’s views about the valuable civic purpose the study of history could and should play were shared by all later classical liberals. That it was can be seen, for example, from an essay by Joseph Priestley, first published in 1765 under the title, ‘Essay on a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life’.

Priestley’s essay outlines a course of studies its author claimed suitable for all who were destined to play an active part in the public life of their country. To the study of history, Priestley assigned a particularly prominent place precisely for the valuable civic function that he claims its study could fulfil. Priestley wrote that: ‘of the subjects I would propose to the study of youth at places of public and liberal education, … the first course is on the STUDY OF HISTORY in general and in its most extensive sense’. Priestley adds: ‘Let it only be observed that my view [i]s, not merely to make history intelligible to persons who may choose to read it for their amusement but principally to facilitate its subserviency to the highest uses to which it can be applied; to contribute to its forming the able statesman, and the intelligent and useful citizen’. Towards the end of his essay, Priestley observed that, were this course of study:

... generally introduced into places of liberal education, the consequences might be happy for this country in some future period. Many of the political evils, under which this and every country in the world labour, are not owing to any want of a love of our country, but to an ignorance of its real constitution and interests. Besides, the very circumstance of giving that attention which I would recommend to its constitution and interests, would unavoidably beget a love and affection for them, and might perhaps contribute more to produce, propagate, and inflame a spirit of patriotism than any other circumstance.....

Priestley was conscious that any form of patriotism that was liable to be induced in those of lower social rank by their studying the history of their country would in his day have little instrumental value. However, he claimed the cultivation of patriotism in those of lower social rank from their study of history ‘would be most glorious and happy for their country in a more advantageous situation’. It was precisely to cultivate such patriotism in those of lower rank that history eventually became a compulsory subject of study in state schools in England and Wales after 1870. As has been pointed out by Peter Yeandle, ‘[a]n adjustment to the educational code in 1883… “required that in each standard above the Second, three Reading Books shall be used, and that one of these shall relate to English History”’. This requirement was introduced to promote in pupils a love of country, not just literacy. Yeandle explains:

Ultimately, it was intended that these readers would confer a sense of the national past to which scholars felt they belonged. Readers, to some extent, were invitations into middle-class perceptions of national identity… It was the intention that working-class schoolchildren would, in identifying with the national past, identify with the nation in its present, and be prepared to serve the national well-being in the future.

During the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the study of history was not compulsory, or even much formally taught, in English public schools. For the curriculum followed in these schools tended to be squarely focussed on the classics. However, it should not be supposed that the children of the English upper-classes were spared having to become acquainted with the history of their country in such a form as would be liable to induce in them and strengthen their patriotism. At the time, it was taken for granted these children would learn the history of their country through their own independent private reading of history and literature. That this was expected of them is indicated by a throwaway observation that Henry Sidgwick made in passing when
discussing the subject of moral education. Sidgwick observed:

> If a spirit of devotion to a particular society or to humanity at large and readiness to sacrifice self-interest to duty are to be persuasively inculcated … [in] children, … it would be expedient that schoolmasters as well as parents should seriously endeavour to promote the growth of moral habits and sentiments in the youthful minds committed to their charge. But I think it very doubtful how far this growth would be most effectively promoted by formal instruction; and not rather partly by steady enforcement of received rules with such incidental explanations of their rationale as can be effectively given, as polite manners are now promoted; and partly by stimulating social sentiments through a well-selected study of literature and history, as patriotism and public spirit are now mainly promoted.¹²

That history can and should serve a vitally important civic function was a view that endured well into the twentieth century. In an essay published in 1930 with the title ‘History as a Training for Citizenship’, the historian G.P. Gooch had no qualms about proposing that school-teachers should teach history with a self-consciously civic purpose. Gooch wrote:

> To the writer and teacher of history in a democratic community such as ours falls a task which can be performed by no one else, a service of vital significance and utility to which we can never devote too much study and reflection.

> … Geography is the mother of history, and the young Englishman must be taught to understand that our island position is the key to our national development… The effective training of the British citizen has begun when he realises that the greatness of his country rests on the related principles of sea-power and self-determination.

The differences between British and Continental mentality are unimportant till we recognise that security allowed us to outgrow autocracy, to exalt the civilian above the soldier, to develop the dependence of the law, and to foster the emergence of the common man. There is no more precious element in our national heritage than the sturdy individualism which bids defiance alike to subjection and to standardisation.

As the young citizen learns the framework, the tradition, and the tendencies of the community in which his lot is cast, the instinct of service and mutual aid comes into play. The visualisation of a great inheritance … awakens a sentiment of personal responsibility….. ‘Why should history be studied?’ asked Seeley in his Inaugural Lecture at Cambridge sixty years ago. ‘Because it is the school of statesmanship’, he replied. ‘Without at least a little knowledge of history, no man can take a rational interest in politics, and no man can form a rational judgement without a good deal.’¹³

Gooch went on in the essay to elaborate a number of specific intellectual and ethical lessons relevant to citizenship that he considered history could legitimately be expected to impart. He then concluded his essay by remarking that ‘[i]n the study of history, in a word, we find precisely the synthesis of intellectual enlightenment and moral stimulus which citizenship requires and demands’.¹⁴

The Whig Interpretation of History – a Misnomer

Ever since early in the twentieth century, when Herbert Butterfield first gave it the appellation, the general approach towards the teaching of history here being defended has become widely known as ‘the Whig Interpretation of History’. It is distinguished by its portrayal of the history of Britain, and that of the native English-speaking diaspora more generally,
as having being marked by an exceptional degree of material and moral progress.

It is easy to see how teaching this interpretation of history would be liable to promote patriotism in British schoolchildren. It is equally easy to see why this approach to history should have fallen into such current disfavour, especially with those called upon to teach the subject in schools. It has done so for reasons both external and internal to the discipline of history.

The most important of the reasons external to the discipline of history why the Whig interpretation should have fallen into such current disfavour among teachers of the subject arises from their acute consciousness of Britain’s current high levels of ethnic and cultural diversity. That consciousness of its diversity is especially liable to arouse misgivings about the Whig interpretation, when combined, as it often is today, with acute concern not to exclude, downgrade, or demean the self-standing of any cultural minority in Britain through explicitly or implicitly suggesting their specific culture any less worthy of respect than that of Britain’s ethnic and cultural majority.

The main reason internal to the discipline of history why the Whig interpretation has fallen out of favour with teachers of the subject has been scruples of theirs about what they consider to have been ways in which in the past historical writings have been distorted in furtherance of contentious political agendas. Those harbouring these scruples often maintain history should be taught to children as free as possible of all such bias. According to them, children should be left to draw for themselves any ideological lessons that they take from their study of history. When studying the subject, so it is held, they should be exposed only to historical ‘sources’ from which they should be encouraged and left to draw their own inferences. They should not be presented, in the guise of established fact, with what can only ever be a highly contestable narrative composed to further some political agenda.

The combination of both sets of concerns has resulted in the present national curriculum for history having adopted a bitty approach towards the subject in which the attempt to teach any overarching narrative has been abandoned in favour of exposing pupils to an array of ‘sources’ from which they are left to draw their own inferences. In contrast to this bitty, ‘source’-based approach to the subject, it will be argued below, history should revert to being taught in schools according to the more traditional Whig narrative approach.

To call the approach towards the teaching of history in British schools that is here being advocated the ‘Whig interpretation’ is something of a misnomer. Although, unquestionably, the interpretation of British history in question is one to which Whigs were wedded and did much to champion and develop, this way of understanding the history of Britain was by no means the exclusive preserve of Whigs. Rather, since very early modern times, this interpretation of Britain’s history was one that nearly all educated people in Britain shared, irrespective of their political affiliation. That it was is something which even Herbert Butterfield conceded when he observed of it that:

... as an aspect of the English mind and as a product of the English tradition, .. [it is] .. part of the landscape of English life, like our country lanes or our November mists or our historic inns. Along with the English language and the British constitution and our national genius for compromise, it is itself … part of the inescapable inheritance of Englishmen.... It is really the “English” interpretation… therefore…

In advocating that the Whig interpretation of history be taught in schools today as essentially a sound account, it cannot be denied that what is being called for is that a particular and currently contentious account of British history receive some form of privileging. Nor can it be denied that the teaching of it is being advocated with the civic purpose of instilling or encouraging a favourable attitude towards Britain.
To advocate such privileging of a contestable interpretation of British history will be liable to offend those for whom any such form of privileging of any contestable interpretation must be unsound. However, some forms of indoctrination are unavoidable in all early stages of education. The only alternative to young children being subject to undergoing some degree of early indoctrination is for them to have to suffer the still greater educational evil of deracination. This sad fate has been one all too many school-leavers of late have experienced through having been subjected in school to contemporary forms of pedagogy, not least in connection with their study of history.

In Defence of the Whig Interpretation

Three theses jointly justify the idea that British schools should teach the Whig interpretation of history. A case for each of these three theses will now be made.

The first thesis is this: Excessive contemporary deference to diversity, plus undue fear of excluding or slighting any minority, has resulted in a national curriculum for history that deprives pupils of the wherewithal to acquire a sense of national identity that gives them cause to feel proud of being British, irrespective of their ethnic background.

In support of this thesis, the following considerations may be adduced. In order for British school-children to acquire a sense of national identity that enables them to take pride in being British, irrespective of their ethnic background, all that they need and must be made conversant with at school are such salient facts about Britain’s history as would give them adequate cause to be glad to be among its citizens. British schoolchildren will receive little cause to take such pride in their national identity if, at school, the history they are taught does not enable them to appreciate just how uniquely successful Britain has been in having combined political stability with change and liberty.

British schoolchildren will be unlikely to have been given cause for taking pride in their national identity unless also taught about the willingness of past generations of their compatriots to fight in defence of the liberty and independence of their county, as well as to champion the extension of liberty more widely throughout the world, as, for example, by putting an end to the slave-trade. This applies especially to those schoolchildren whose families might have only recently immigrated to Britain from countries that at one time were subject to British rule.

As it stands, the present national curriculum for history neither enables, nor shows any signs that it will, in future, enable, students of history to acquire from its study such a form of appreciation of their country’s history.

The second of the three theses that jointly justify the teaching of the Whig interpretation in schools is this: The history taught in British schools should be as much concerned to enable and encourage pupils to derive from it a sense of national identity conducive to their feeling proud of being British, as it should be to expose them to historical ‘sources’ from which they are expected to draw their own historical inferences.

Many professional historians today are wont to suggest that study of history in schools should serve no ulterior civic purpose, but instead merely prepare pupils for the kind of independent critical study of source-material that has become customary at more advanced levels of historical study. This idea, however,
is open to question for much the same reason as why, in a crowded curriculum, all subjects need to argue their case for inclusion as compulsory subjects. Why should history be taught in school as a compulsory subject, whether it be to age 14 or 16, as against, say, philosophy, or citizenship, or classics, or theology?

The claim history has for inclusion among compulsory subjects in schools today must be its unique ability to provide pupils with the wherewithal for a sense of national identity that offers them good cause to be proud of being British. If the nation is worth preserving, then so is the teaching of its history in such a form as renders its members glad of being such and willing to make sacrifices on its behalf, even to the point of the supreme one, should that be necessary.

The third and final thesis is this: In order to secure the worthy pedagogic civic objective of inducing in pupils a sense of national pride and patriotism, British history does not need to be entirely rewritten. For there are already available for use narrative histories that belong to an established older tradition that, until comparatively recent times, was fairly canonical in British schools.

History teachers today can do no better than draw on this source in teaching the subject. Doing so would enable them to instil in their pupils the appropriate moral and political attitudes towards their country, as well as prepare them for later more advanced historical studies until when it is best to postpone their independent critical study of primary source material.

The Whig tradition provides an inexhaustibly rich seam of historical writings from which teachers of history could draw to teach the subject in such a way as would be liable to foster in their pupils appropriate and desirable civic attitudes. Until about 1950, history was taught in British schools through text-books and readers deeply coloured by this interpretation, whatever minor differences in emphasis and nuance there may have been between them.

One such magnificent introduction to British history, now sadly and inexplicably out-of-print, is Our Island Story by Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall, a work in which Antonia Fraser is reputed to have observed most of her own historical writings have been prefigured.16 Marshall’s book forms an ideal introduction to the study of history for children in years 3 to 8. So suitable for the purpose of teaching British history to young children does Civitas consider Marshall’s work to be that it has decided to republish her book to spear-head a revival of this narrative approach. As children get older, Marshall’s book could be augmented and replaced by more advanced narrative texts that offer a similar approach such as those by George Trevelyan, R.J. Unstead, F.E.Halliday and Arthur Bryant.

Notwithstanding claims by so called revisionist British historians to have exploded it, the Whig interpretation of history still holds basically true. This is something even Herbert Butterfield was forced to acknowledge ten years after publishing his book with that title which did so much to discredit it. As Butterfield wrote in 1945:

It is not necessary or useful to deny that the theme of English political history is the story of our liberty; and while men think that freedom is worth singing songs about, from New York
to Cape Town, from London to Canberra, it will always be true that in one important respect ... we are all of us exultant and unrepentant whigs. Those who... wish to drive out that whig interpretation ... are opening the door for seven devils which, precisely because they are new-comers, are bound to be worse than the first.17

The essential soundness of the Whig interpretation has recently been reaffirmed by several leading historians. These include, most notably, Richard Pipes and David Starkey. In a footnote in a chapter of his book Property and Freedom entitled, ‘England: the Birth of Parliamentary Democracy’, Pipes explains he is well aware that:

... it has been fashionable among some English historians, since the appearance in 1931 of H. Butterfield’s The Whig Interpretation of History, to dismiss the theory ... as partisan and flawed. This book was a brilliant example of scholarly revisionism, but it does not hold up. On re-reading it half a century later, G.R. Elton found it ‘perilously thin’; ‘truly an essay, lacking in substance and in particular lacking in history’... Granted that many of the traditional historians overstated their case..., [s]till, a nonspecialist looking at England’s constitutional evolution from the outside ... finds this traditional interpretation compelling. The trouble with most ‘revisionism’ is that it treats deviations and exceptions not as shadings of phenomena but as their essence: hence it produces mainly caveats rather than alternative interpretations. J.P. Kenyon, who subscribes to the revisionist school, concedes that the ‘Whig interpretation has not been replaced by a “plausible” alternative’.18

More recently, David Starkey delivered to the Historical Association in 2001 a lecture entitled, ‘The English historian’s role and the place of history in English National Life’. In it, he declared that: ‘What we call the Whig theory, what we call Whiggism, wins, in the same way the Whigs win in 1688. And it seems to me that we are now on the point of realising that probably Whig history is right. Whig history is actually right’. 19

History today can and should be taught much more imaginatively than it could be in the past due to recent advances in information-technology and greater affluence. Pupils should be made to supplement their historical studies by visits, both actual and virtual, to national monuments, museums, art galleries, stately homes, and cathedrals.

As William James put it, when talking about elementary physics education, young pupils should be made to feel the pull of the magnet!

However, in the absence of being provided with some overarching narrative, such as the Whig interpretation is uniquely well-equipped to provide, schoolchildren will lack an overall chronology within which to situate whatever they might encounter in these visits. They will also lack a framework sufficiently accommodating to enable them to look...
on what they do encounter by such visits with interest
and affection, rather than indifference or, still worse,
sullen hostility.

In a world increasingly bereft of solace or meaning
for so many, the chance for British schoolchildren
to grow up loving their country and delighting in its
historic accomplishments is something that should
be treasured. Those who love this country and
cherish its liberal traditions should not allow Britain’s
schoolchildren to be deprived of this valuable part of
their heritage as citizens of it, through being subjected
to inadequate forms of history teaching at school.

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**Notes**

1 History 14-19: The Historical Association Curriculum Development Project (London: Historical Association, 2005)
2 ibid., p.33.
3 N. Kinloch, ‘Should history be used to teach citizenship?’ BBC History, November 2004, p. 30.
7 ibid., p.8.
8 ibid., pp.22-23.
9 ibid., p. 24.
10 Peter Yeandle, ‘Empire, Englishness and Elementary School History Education’ p. 4., www.ex.ac.uk/education/historyresource/journal5/Yeandle.pdf
11 Ibid., p.5
14 ibid., 352.
17 Butterfield, The Englishman and His History, pp.3-4.

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**Our Island Story is Far from Over**

Little did Civitas anticipate how enthusiastically
and generously its friends and members of the public
would respond to its appeal for help in meeting the costs
of republishing the long out-of-print, but sorely needed,
children’s classic Our Island Story by Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall.

Civitas decided to republish the book to enable
today’s primary-school children once again to enjoy its
riveting and sensitive narrative history of the country. It
did so from recognition of the pedagogic value of such a
form of history and its current neglect.

So enthused with Civitas’ plan was Daily Telegraph
Education Correspondent John Clare that he called on his
readers to contribute. The result is that the initial target of
£28,000 has been all but reached and a publication date
now set for this September.

Civitas is to publish the book in association with
Galore Park, a leading publisher of first-rate educational
texts. Civitas still needs funds so it can offer a free copy
to every primary school in the country.

Early indications augur well and suggest our island story is still very far from over.

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**Not a Victory**

The consequences of the French and Dutch
votes on the European Constitution.

**John Butters**

There were good reasons for hoping the French would
vote ‘yes’ in their referendum on the Treaty Establishing a
Constitution for Europe. After their solid rejection of the treaty,
closely followed by the Dutch ‘no’, it is much less likely that
we will have a vote in Britain. European political
leaders have been quick to interpret the French and
Dutch votes as manifestations of ‘concerns and worries’, about
globalisation, EU enlargement and immigration, or of ‘absurd nationalism’. A British
‘no’ would have been a clearer rejection of the whole
project of building an undemocratic government in Brussels.\(^3\) It might have been the catalyst for the return of some powers to Parliament.

There is something in the point made by Daniel Hannan MEP, just before the French vote: ‘When the enemy is in plain sight, you should biff first and agonise later.’\(^4\) Ratification of the treaty will not proceed as its drafters intended; but that does not mean that the idea of ever-closer union is dead, as some commentators believe.\(^5\)

Aside from various unlikely measures like an EU-wide referendum, there are three obvious ways in which the changes contained in the constitution could find their way into law. The French and Dutch could be asked again; as many changes as possible could be introduced under the existing treaties; or the constitution could be scrapped, and replaced by another treaty containing many of the same provisions.

The first way looks increasingly unlikely. Had the remaining member states all ratified the treaty, Britain returning a ‘yes’ on the strength of the French ‘no’, there might have been a strong movement in France to regain leadership of the EU project by voting again, and voting ‘yes’.\(^6\) The Netherlands could have followed. But public opinion in Europe is swinging against the treaty,\(^7\) leading Britain, Denmark, Portugal and Ireland to suspend their referendum plans.\(^8\) At the European Council meeting of 16-17 June, EU leaders agreed to have a ‘period of reflection’, before ‘[coming] back to this matter in the first half of 2006 to make an overall assessment of the national debates’.\(^9\) When that happens, unless public opinion moves in the constitution’s favour, they will leave the treaty on the shelf.

What about introducing various elements of the constitution under the existing treaties? This is more than likely: it is already happening. The European Defence Agency, for example, was given a special legal basis under the existing treaties in 2004, so that it could start operating before the constitution was in place,\(^10\) and, as the Commission dramatically announced before the 2005 general election, the veto on asylum policy has already been given up.\(^11\)\(^12\)

It would not be surprising if more of the constitution’s provisions were implemented like this. The European external action service is being constructed,\(^13\) a Foreign Minister has been appointed\(^14\) (in anticipation of the post’s creation\(^15\)), the European Charter of Fundamental Rights is being applied to all EU legislation,\(^16\) and the Fundamental Rights Agency is being set up in Vienna.\(^17\)\(^18\) The Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, has confirmed that the Government is prepared to implement ‘uncontroversial’ elements of the constitution.\(^19\) Once these organisations are ready to go, it could be easy to present giving them a legal basis as an uncontroversial final step. On institutional change, Tony Blair has already argued that the EU needs a president, and Jack Straw has argued that changes to member states’ voting weights are uncontroversial.\(^20\)

Assuming public opinion remains opposed to the constitution in enough EU member states, there will, sooner or later, be a new treaty that will move more policy areas to qualified majority voting. The building of supra-national, undemocratic government is the EU project, and a key difference between intergovernmental cooperation and supra-national government is that, when states cooperate on an intergovernmental basis, they have vetoes.\(^21\) The new treaty could be justified on the basis that it concerns only the institutional arrangements of the EU, and makes it more efficient – even more efficient than it is today at avoiding democratic control at the national level.

So a consequence of the French and Dutch ‘no’ votes is this: an important battle has been put off, and Euroscepticism has been strengthened and given a chance to regroup; but European integration will go on.

Notes

\(^1\) Declaration by the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the European Union on the Ratification of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, SN 117/05, 18th June 2005.

\(^2\) Louisewies van der Laan, deputy leader of the Dutch D66 Party, speech to the Foreign Policy Centre, 9th June 2005.

\(^3\) Lord Pearson, among others, seems to support this view. Daily Telegraph letters, 30th March 2005.

\(^4\) Daily Telegraph Leader, 22nd May 2005.
At least 61 Muslims stood in the General Election in May: 23 represented the Liberal Democrats, 15 the Conservatives, 13 Labour, and 10 the Respect-Unity Coalition. There is anxiety over the power of the Muslim vote: not only in upsetting once predictable seats but also because it has altered the rhetoric of the political parties, each clamouring for what is perceived to be a bloc swing vote. Any non-Muslim observer would be forgiven for thinking that only two issues occupy the minds of the British Muslim voter: Iraq and Palestine. Unfortunately for those calling ourselves Muslim classical liberals (a growing breed I assure you), one simply cannot escape the fact that this still largely holds true.

Nonetheless I would like to suggest that this consternation is largely unfounded and should be denounced by English liberals, for the primary reason that Islam commands as a divine mandate a political philosophy none would find offensive: a minimal state levying low and flat taxation, upholding the sanctity of private property, ensuring maximum individual liberty and endowing full rights for minorities. The other motive for friendship between classical liberals and Muslims is far more glaring: the fact that such friendship has existed for the past five centuries, a dent only appearing in recent decades.

Nazir Ahmed took his seat in the House of Lords in 1999; but he was not the first Muslim to sit in that august place. The third Baron Stanley of Alderley (1827-1903) predated Lord Ahmed’s elevation by converting to Islam in 1862, and Lord Headley El-Farooq (1855-1935) followed suit in 1913. The ranks of the British aristocracy are punctuated with Muslim converts: in 1912 Lady Evelyn Cobbold, convinced that ‘Islam is the religion of common sense’, became the first Englishwoman to perform the haj. Recently the obits told of the passing of the eminent Sufi, Martin Lings (1909-2005). He was an Old Cliftonian, read English at Magdalen and was a friend of CS Lewis.

Surely history should have taught the English that nothing in Islam is inherently obstructive, let alone offensive, to England or her liberal tradition!

Attitudes towards Islam and Muslims were to be transformed with the influx of post-war Muslim immigrants from the Asian subcontinent and subsequent waves from the Middle East. The customs some brought with them, forced marriage or the wearing of anonymous black robes concealing all but the eyes, identified by the media as ‘Islamic’.
practices, fomented misplaced apprehension. Any traveller in the Muslim world or any scholar cognisant of Muslim history will know that such practices find their origins not in Islam but in secular historical traditions which have taken advantage of Islam’s immense tolerance for local customs – customs which the echelons of a society historically prone to migration see no need or necessity to abolish, but choose to retain in an alien land to accentuate their heritage. This, coupled with the initial economic hardships that immigrants initially face, explains a pigeon-holing and fear of Muslims that is at once regrettable but understandable. Global events of recent years, the growing demographic and political power of British Muslims and the galvanisation of Islamist terror groups capitalising on a foreign policy successfully portrayed as hostile and imperial have made dialogue imperative. The window of opportunity is small, and the strategies employable curtailed by ever increasing suspicion of the Other.

For now, I suggest that relations be improved not by New Labour passing new anti-religious hatred laws that could protect the most hard-line imams, nor by Muslims cavorting with socialists to rouse a vituperative George Galloway. It is by returning to the fundamental precepts of Islam as practised by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his immediate successors inspired by the Compact of Medina: to remind Muslims of this document and to re-institute its spirit. Of course it will be a tough sell: it is widely assumed that the Islamic punishment for apostasy is death, for example, but disagreement among Muslim scholars on this issue has existed for centuries, a fact that resurgent orthodox sects (and by extension, the Western media) conveniently choose to ignore. Dialogue is impossible with sanctimonious fanatics. Yet, when Western governments attempt to force a tolerance of alien rituals without an understanding of their causal beliefs, no opportunity for empathy arises.

‘Fundamentalism’ is bandied about as if presuming to denote an unassailable evil. But a return to fundamentals of Islam - voluntary submission to God in the timeless spirit of the Prophet’s teachings, where debate and interpretation can flourish - is just what the West should assist its Muslim allies to do. The application of the Muslim law is not about instituting rulings of the tenth century in the twenty-first; it is about applying twenty-first century interpretation to timeless scripture. That should go without saying, but perhaps it does need to be said unequivocally and clearly. This is the call to prayer; this is the call for dialogue.

I shall remind readers of my initial statement: 38 Muslims stood in the last General Election for the successors of Gladstonian Liberalism and the inheritors of the Tamworth Manifesto – three times the number of those who represented the Labour Party.

Zain al-Habshi, part-time Research Fellow at Civitas, read Politics at LSE and is a fan of the works of Robert Nozick. His vision of a future Caliphate is a Federation of Muslim states where central government is small, headed by a Constitutional Caliph with executive power resting in democratic institutions, where taxation is low and flat, and where individual liberty and tolerance for all communities, being divinely mandated, are immutable.

Notes

1 Statements all based on the word of the Qur’an and the example set by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the first caliphs, even if only a minority of Muslim countries acknowledge these tenets today. There is no room here for theological and historical analysis but needless to say no Muslim country in existence today purporting to follow the shariah in any way resembles the Islamic state which the Prophet promulgated after the Medina Compact, much less the Caliphate of Cordoba in the eleventh century or Baghdad before its sacking in 1258. In its simplest formulation, the Islamic defence of libertarianism is that the crux of being Muslim is voluntary submission to God: the state cannot take that responsibility away from the individual; liberty is thus a divine mandate. Articles on these issues can be found at the Minaret of Freedom Institute, a libertarian Muslim think-tank in the USA, at http://www.minaret.org.

2 Burke’s Peerage & Baronetage 2000, p. 2692 and Woking Muslim Mission.

3 England’s cordial relationship with Islam goes back still further. Muslims in the Holy Land lavished praise on Richard I after he signed the truce with Saladin in 1192. Before the Barons pressed King John to sign Magna Carta they had seen the Muslim leader operating under the same laws as his
subjects while on Crusade. This King offered assistance to the Moors in their campaigns against the King of Aragon, and two hundred years later Elizabeth I asked the Ottoman Sultan Murad for naval assistance against the Spanish Armada. An English Muslim convert of 1583 precipitated the establishment of a Chair of Arabic at Oxford, from which Charles I developed his taste for collecting Persian and Arabic manuscripts. Queen Victoria was taught Persian by one of her Muslim Indian staff in her household, and it is clear that the current Prince of Wales has a passion for Islamic art and culture.

4 This document defined clear boundaries for the role of the state and enshrined equality before the law for Muslims and non-Muslims in an Islamic state. See http://www.ijtihad.org/compact.htm.

On 1 January 2005, one of the biggest reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in its history came into force: the Single Payment Scheme. Under the new system, farms receive a lump-sum payment instead of subsidies on goods they have produced. The rationale behind this so-called ‘decoupling’ of support from output is to address the problem of agricultural overproduction in the European Union (EU) and the devastating consequences this has on developing countries.

The foundations of the CAP were laid out in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, partly in response to the Cold War. Countries in Western Europe were concerned that allowing the free market to apply to the agricultural sector would lead to a reduction in domestic agriculture, including the skills required to farm successfully, and an increased reliance on imports. Given the existing political situation, European leaders decided that state intervention was necessary to increase agricultural productivity, raise farm incomes and ensure food security.

The newly established European Community adopted a range of measures in line with this policy that included guaranteeing a minimum price for farmers, subjecting agricultural imports to high tariffs and intervening by selling surpluses or putting goods into storage for producers. The strategy was so successful at increasing agricultural productivity that the EU began to face a problem of overproduction, becoming the world’s second largest exporter of agricultural goods after the USA. Faced with so much surplus stock, the EU subsidised its exports and resorted to ‘dumping’ excess goods on other countries at below-cost prices. This is why the CAP has had such a detrimental impact on developing countries.

For many developing countries, agriculture is the main source of employment and the principal means of generating export revenues for governments. When the EU increased its exports, the rise in supply depressed world market prices for agricultural goods, adversely affecting the export revenues of agricultural economies. These countries were unable to take advantage of higher market prices within the EU because of the punitive tariff barriers. In addition, local producers in developing countries suffered from the EU’s anti-competitive dumping practices,

‘Those whose Doctrine is peaceable, and whose Manners are pure and blameless, ought to be upon equal Terms with their Fellow-Subjects. .... neither Pagan, nor Mahumetan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the Civil Rights of the Commonwealth, because of his Religion.’


CAP Reform and Developing Countries

Amelia Knott

On 1 January 2005, one of the biggest reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in its history came into force: the Single Payment Scheme. Under the new system, farms receive a lump-sum payment instead of subsidies on goods they have produced. The rationale behind this so-called ‘decoupling’ of support from output is to address the problem of agricultural overproduction in the European Union (EU) and the devastating consequences this has on developing countries.

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which put many out of business. Oxfam estimates that, if the artificial effects of the CAP were removed from world agricultural markets, employment in Mozambique’s sugar industry alone would rise from 23,000 to 40,000 people.

Apart from the recent introduction of the Single Farm Payment (SFP), the EU has tried a number of other reforms to control production. In 1984, the EU brought in dairy production quotas to limit the amount of dairy goods produced. This measure was applied to other agricultural goods in 1992, when the EU also introduced the ‘set-aside’ scheme that required farmers to leave some land uncultivated. As a result, trade-distorting forms of support made up 75% of the budget in 2003, compared to more than 90% during the late 1980s. But this was not enough to put an end to overproduction and international pressure has led to the adoption of the latest reforms.

However, the SFP is also unlikely to reduce the negative impact on developing countries to any significant extent. The idea is that farmers will respond to consumer demand when producing goods rather than responding to EU payments, but this is difficult in the agricultural sector where prices are inherently unstable. Producers are often unable to respond quickly and efficiently to changes in consumer demand because of the interval between borrowing and the actual increase in productive capacity. Farmers are prone, therefore, to underestimate the amount of output that will appear on markets and overestimate the market price of the goods. As a result, surpluses are likely to continue.

CAP reform has also sought to address the problems of developing countries through changes to protectionist policies. Under the 2001 ‘Everything But Arms’ (EBA) initiative, 49 states defined as least developed countries (LDCs) have quota- and duty-free access to EU markets. In addition, a number of African-Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries also have preferential access to EU markets for some agricultural products under bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). However, both of these schemes have complicated further liberalisation of agricultural markets. The EU is planning to lower guaranteed minimum prices for farmers which will reduce the value of access to LDCs. In addition, many of the ACPs currently benefiting from preferential access are single commodity producers, dependent on EU markets. If access is opened up to competition from lower cost producers, this could easily impact on entire economies. The EPAs themselves are controversial because they require developing countries to open up their economies to competition from abroad, a move for which some argue they are not yet ready.

Until CAP reform changes the focus of its priorities, it will continue to contribute to the problems faced by developing countries and hinder efforts to alleviate world poverty. However, there appears to be considerable EU opposition to improving the situation. A letter from European Commission trade official Peter Carl leaked in May this year indicated that EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson has been asked by the European Commission to use his influence in order to moderate the UK’s pro-poor position on trade liberalisation. The instruction gives ammunition to developmental non-governmental organisations which argue that the EU is concerned only with the interests of its own trading bloc and not with improving conditions for developing countries. Oxfam described the news as ‘an example of the European Commission gagging pro-development member states’. This is just one of the major obstacles that CAP reform will have to overcome before it can begin to reduce the policy’s negative impact on developing countries.

Notes

3 ‘Can agricultural trade deliver for the poorest developing countries?’ Catholic Agency for Overseas Development http://www.cafod.org.uk/policy_and_analysis/policy_papers/trade/can_agricultural_trade_deliver
Whitechapel Saturday School

Prithu Das, a ten-year-old pupil in the Saturday school which we have been running at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel, has won a scholarship to attend the Bancroft School in Woodford Green. Bancroft School is a highly respected independent school, founded in 1728 in the Mile End Road, a mile from Toynbee Hall. The school moved to Essex in 1889. Prithu’s parents would like to thank all of our supporters who made the Saturday school possible, as well as Prithu’s teachers Linda Webb, Seamus Heffernan, Sarah Knollys and Alisa Mappes. We wish Prithu every success when he starts at his new school in September.

Toynbee Hall Summer School

We have now been able to run the Saturday School in Whitechapel for two terms, and we will be concluding the academic year with a two-week summer school in July and August, led by Irina Tyk. Mrs Tyk is the head of Holland House School in Edgware, one of the most popular independent schools in North London, and a governor of the New Model School. She will be assisted by her husband George, a much-in-demand private tutor, and by Mrs Linda Webb, who teaches at Holland House. There will be a programme of cultural visits, including the British Museum, the Tower of London and the Natural History Museum, led by Alisa Mappes, the teaching assistant at Maple Walk School, and Ben Cackett of Civitas.