

PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

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Democracy has never been so widespread as a form of government, but it has also seldom been as sickly as it is at present, particularly in those states where it has been longest established. This malaise of democracy has many aspects, but two are currently receiving particular attention, the decline of participation¹ and the decline of the public.² They raise fundamental questions about the nature of intellectual work and the role of public intellectuals.

The decline of participation is indicated by continuing falls in turnout at elections, in membership of political parties, in attendance at public meetings, and in membership of voluntary groups. Some have diagnosed a general retreat from civic engagement, a growth of individualism and consumerism, a decline of social capital and a withering of democracy at its roots.³ If growing numbers of citizens will not even bother to turn out to vote, the legitimacy of the political process is undermined. The political class becomes both isolated and insulated from the electorate it is supposed to represent, absorbed in a self-destructive set of rituals and games which further undermines the willingness of citizens to participate. Political ignorance and apathy increase, and politics becomes increasingly concerned with celebrity, speculation and scandal.



Closely related to the decline of participation is the decline of the *public*. There has been a marked shrinking of the public domain, in the sense of a weakening of the public ethos and the idea of public service. A public domain is not the same as a public sector, and is not to be measured simply by the services directly controlled and provided by the government, or by the proportion of the national income taxed and spent by the state. The public domain is a political space, overlapping both state and civil society, and sustained by particular institutions among which the universities and the media are particularly important. It is a space where the public interest can be determined through debate and deliberation, a public ethos generated, and a public ethic articulated. Independent, critical intellectual work is essential for it, and those who perform that work are public intellectuals. If the public domain is today in trouble, it is because the kind of intellectual work which public intellectuals have performed in the past is less common than it once was, and increasingly under threat.

The public domain has always been vulnerable to erosion, depending as it does on sustaining a public ethos, a set of norms and values indicating how public affairs should be conducted and how the public interest should be determined. For this the active involvement of public intellectuals is required, who although they may have sharply different perceptions and

1. Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd, & Paul Whitley, 'Citizenship and Civic Engagement: Attitudes and Behaviour in Britain', *Political Studies*, 51, 3, 443-468.

2. David Marquand, *Decline of the Public*, Cambridge, Polity, 2004.

3. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Shuster, 2000.



ideals, are committed to the idea of the public domain itself, and the essential values for its continuance - such as openness, rationality, diversity, clarity, and tolerance. Where the public domain begins and where it ends, which activities, and institutions, and organisations come within its scope, are not given in advance and will vary between democracies, with their different national political traditions and cultures. But every democracy needs a public domain to function as a democracy. It needs some means of determining what is public and what private, what should be considered by all because it affects the interest of all. This means that the public domain can be defined very narrowly or more broadly. At one extreme it can be conceived as gradually embracing more and more activities, setting the framework for all private exchanges and activities, and influencing the forms of governance throughout society. Its present malaise has many causes, but one of them is the failure of intellectuals to understand the nature of the public domain and their role in sustaining it.

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

Public intellectuals are hard to categorise precisely, just as the public domain itself has no definite boundaries. One of the simplest conceptions is that of the free floating intelligentsia, a stratum of intellectuals that is not tied to any particular class or interest group. Its relative detachment is the condition for its independence, for its ability to pursue the truth wherever it leads, 'to speak truth to power', to develop its own rules and its own ethos, untrammelled by considerations of policy. Its antecedents lie in Plato's philosopher kings, and its modern formulations by John Stuart Mill and Keynes. The intellectuals become a mandarin elite above politics and above self-interest, whose opinion can be trusted because it is disinterested. There is an anti-democratic tinge to this model, since the mass of citizens are held to be too uneducated and ignorant to decide matters on their own, and need to accept the tutelage of the intellectuals or the professionals, who are much better placed to determine what lies in the public interest than are the citizens themselves.

An alternative model derives from Gramsci, through the way in which he focused on the importance of the institutional, ideological and cultural structure of politics, and therefore the character of the public domain under capitalism. Gramsci's famous essay on intellectuals also offers a very different way of conceiving intellectuals rather than simply as a mandarin elite. Instead he distinguishes between traditional and organic intellectuals, the traditional intellectuals being those strata such as clergy and lawyers formed in the service of the *ancien* regimes of Europe, and whose attitudes and practices are still distinctive and important in many countries. The organic intellectuals by contrast emerged to provide the increasingly specialised functions required by capital, both in the organisation of production, and in the organisation of political rule. This stratum is vital for the smooth operation

of the extended state which capital requires, and for organising its hegemony by articulating the common sense understandings necessary for every level of its functioning. Gramsci believed that the organised labour movement in seeking to replace capitalism with socialism had to form its own organic intellectuals and develop a counter-hegemonic project.

With the decline of socialist parties and the cohesion and strength of labour movements the notion of organic working class intellectuals has lost plausibility, but that does not mean that Gramsci's analysis is no longer relevant. Since he wrote there has been a huge increase in the number of organic intellectuals. Many sites, once the preserve of traditional intellectuals such as the universities, have been transformed by the requirements of the economy and the state. There has been an explosion of expertise, with inevitable fragmentation and specialisation. The modern state has become increasingly labyrinthine and complex in its structures, in its networks and in its governance. This more than anything underlies the crisis of the public domain. It has become much harder to determine what the public interest is, to connect decision-making with the citizens, or to imagine alternatives.

The bureaucratic organisation of modern capitalism is not a new theme. It was noted and lamented by Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter. Herbert Marcuse writing in the 1960s saw the rise of a one dimensional society, brought about by the proliferation of the new organic intellectuals and the decline of the working class as an agent of change.⁴ Marcuse was despairing about the possibilities for critical intellectual work in such a society, because the space for opposition had disappeared, and there was no agency by which capitalism could be transformed into a different kind of society. The student movement of the 1960s gave him brief hope that other agents might be found to burst capitalist hegemony, but fundamentally his analysis remained one of resignation and despair. This radical leftism continues to resonate on the left today. Capitalist hegemony is analysed as all-encompassing and one-dimensional. These societies cannot be changed from within, only overthrown from without. If there is no agency to overthrow them then refuge is sought in high-minded fatalism and pessimism.⁵ Characteristic of this approach for example is an expanded concept of neo-liberalism, which sees all political parties and governments operating within capitalist systems as neo-liberal, making distinctions between them meaningless.



An alternative approach strongly influenced by Gramsci has been to take democracy, and therefore the notion of a public domain, extremely seriously, and to regard the struggle to define what is the public interest and how it might be implemented not as trivial questions, but as having great significance for any feasible politics of reform and progress.⁶ The public domain becomes a sphere of political and ideological contestation, in which attempts to set agendas and define identities and the public interest, assemble coalitions and alliances, and make interventions become all-important.

In this conception the role of public intellectuals is vital. But these are

4. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, London, Routledge 1964.

5. Susan Watkins, 'A Weightless Hegemony', *New Left Review* 25 (2004), 5-33; Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

6. Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London, Verso, 1985.



not the free-floating intellectuals of either the traditional liberal or the radical leftist kind. Instead they are organic intellectuals involved at different levels of the great bureaucracies of capital and the state. There may no longer be any organised class interest, but they are still able to become public intellectuals, by attaching themselves to the public domain, articulating a public ethic, and participating in the debates to determine the public interest. The extent to which such intellectuals are willing to become public intellectuals and therefore organic intellectuals for the public domain, rather than simply for their own specialised area of activity, is crucial for the existence of the public domain and for any kind of progressive politics.

The rise of such a stratum of public intellectuals is hampered by a number of factors. The older liberal idea of a free-floating mandarin elite, as well as the radical leftist idea of a detached, oppositional elite, have to be overcome. There need to be adequate outlets and institutions through which public intellectuals can express themselves. And problems inherent in democracy have to be addressed.

THE PROBLEM OF DEMOCRACY

One of the most serious problems corroding modern democracy and with it the idea of a public domain is the increasingly contested nature of authority and expertise. Old forms of authority have been cast down and new ones struggle to establish themselves. This in many ways is a positive development, and far better than the unthinking trust which used to be placed in secretive and narrow elites. A successful public domain needs vigorous argument and critical examination of evidence and of alternatives. But two dangers have constantly to be guarded against. These are complexity and populism, the two fault lines of modern democracy. The first encourages cynicism, the second trivialisation. Both have become characteristic of modern media culture.

The increasing complexity of modern government raises the issue of how democracy can be made meaningful in contemporary conditions. The centralisation of decision-making has made government remote from the people, and the rewards from participation increasingly slim, because the prospect of having any influence on decisions is so small. The effectiveness of representation has been increasingly questioned. The sense of powerlessness which citizens have when confronted by the modern state contributes to a mood of fatalism and cynicism where public policy is concerned. Nothing will ever really change, policy will be shaped by powerful interests behind the scenes and not by any consideration of a wider public interest. This shows itself in the widespread belief that everyone in public life is self-interested, and dishonest about their real motives. So no-one is believed to advocate a course of action because it is right, but only because it will benefit them. Politics is an elaborate charade whereby private interests masquerade as the public interest.

This sense of powerlessness and the cynicism which goes with it has been intensified by continuing pressures towards centralisation. The weakening in Britain for example of so many self-governing institutions, including local authorities, trade unions, universities, and mutuals, as well as the increasing importance of transnational sites of decision-making such as the EU, the WTO, and the IMF, makes democratic deficits seem at times to be near-universal. Lines of accountability have been blurred because of the proliferation of agencies, authorities and levels of governance. Understanding for example how decisions are made in the EU has become largely impenetrable except for specialists on EU governance.

Modern government has become highly technical, involving as it does huge problems of co-ordination and organisation to implement policies. The infrastructural power⁷ of the modern state has never been greater, but the nature of that power is very hard to subject to traditional democratic processes of deliberation and consent. In modern government, and indeed in all large organisations, policy appears extremely slow-moving to those outside the networks involved in formulating and implementing it, and also very unresponsive. The timescales are not understood, neither are the difficulties of effective co-ordination. All this fuels popular conceptions that politicians and other public officials are self-serving, liable to be corrupt, dishonest or incompetent, often all three.

This cynicism about the motives of public officials has become pervasive and deeply corrosive of any sense of an autonomous public domain. Cynicism and scepticism come to frame responses to most political events. This takes root first of all among a section of intellectuals, particularly those in the media, but comes to be reflected in the general attitudes of the population. Such general attitudes of hostility and suspicion towards the state were common before universal suffrage and the rise of mass political parties, and took time to dissipate, in some instances never completely. But now such attitudes appear to have been re-ignited. What is new is the central role of the media in generating scepticism and cynicism about the state and all public authorities, and encouraging conspiracy theories for everything that occurs.

The second fault line in democracy is populism. As complexity increases, and cynicism and scepticism spread, so large numbers of voters become more prone to populist appeals and instant solutions. Here again the media is ready to assist. The simplifying of issues such as asylum or health care or the MMR vaccine produces a public discourse which is shaped by scares, prejudices, fears and ignorance rather than reasoned argument. Sections of the media now specialise in attacking and discrediting the decisions of experts, and the cumulative effect is the discrediting of authority in general, and a steady collapse of trust. Into this vacuum populism spreads.

This attitude of distrusting all sources of authority has been justified by some intellectuals as the only responsible position.⁸ No form of knowledge is to be privileged over any other, or should be. There are simply no grounds

7. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Cambridge, CUP, 1986.

8. Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society*, London, Verso, 1978.

for preferring one set of beliefs over any other. The extreme relativism of some forms of contemporary thought here combine to challenge the notion that there can be objectivity or rationality in the discussion of public affairs. Such views have been an important corrective to arguments based on fundamentalist reasoning, which puts certain ideas beyond criticism. But it is hard to imagine any kind of public domain without some forms of authority and a significant level of trust in intermediate institutions. If the authority of key groups like politicians, scientists, doctors and judges collapses, then the making of public policy is no longer mediated through any process of deliberation. Instead an attempt is made to install direct popular mandates or at least to oblige politicians to shift policy directly to match popular sentiment as orchestrated by the media. Outbursts of populist feeling on key issues, such as the petrol tax protests in Britain in the Autumn of 2000, and lobbies such as the campaign for Sarah's Law (designed to reveal the identity and whereabouts of individuals on the paedophile register) have been increasing. Underlying them is the feeling that 'governments don't listen' and that the only way to make them listen is to take direct action. The logical direction of such a democracy would be government by referenda or more likely by tabloid, bypassing representative institutions and forcing instant compliance with the popular will. This would be government by the *Daily Mail*.

THE MEDIA

The media play a key role in all of this. They are one of the intermediate institutions that is indispensable to a viable and flourishing public domain; at the same time they are a major factor in the erosion of the public domain. The media dislike complexity and encourage populism. Journalists are essential for organising and sustaining the public domain, but under competitive pressures, there has been a steady slide in journalistic standards. The constant blurring of comment and news, the slanting of headlines, the exaggeration of stories, speculation masquerading as fact, the selection of material according to editorial agendas, the vendettas and campaigns - these used to be true of the tabloids but they have now spread to all newspapers, and from there to television and radio. What is noticeable about modern media is the way they print speculative stories, many of which turn out to have no basis, but they rarely if ever correct them, or admit fault. Their motto is never explain, never apologise. At the same time they demand much higher standards of probity and consistency from public officials than they are prepared to impose on themselves. The attitude of many contemporary journalists is captured by the remark of Rod Liddle, the former editor of the BBC's Today Programme: 'Andrew Gilligan gets great stories and some of them are even true'.⁹

9. Quoted by Martin Kettle, 'The threat to the media is real. It comes from within', *Guardian*, 3/02/04.

The British media is seriously out of control, the least trusted of any media in Europe, yet for the most part unaware that it has anything to

reproach itself for. The relentless anti-government and anti-authority agenda which it pursues has been a major factor in the denigration of politicians and politics and the collapse of trust. Leading broadcasters such as John Humphreys and Jeremy Paxman display an extraordinary arrogance and self-regard, behaving as unelected tribunes of the people, arrogating to themselves the right to sit in judgement on elected politicians and summoning them to account for their misdeeds. The constant sneering at politicians and other public servants, the constant questioning of their motives, the constant coverage only of stories that highlight shortcomings in government have helped create the deeply cynical culture which we now inhabit. Nothing that comes from official sources is believed any more. Opinion surveys demonstrate, for example, that most citizens rate the public services they encounter quite highly, but because of the relentless negativity of the media, they believe the state of the same services nationally to be dire, and conclude that their experience cannot be typical, and that they must have been lucky.



A degree of scepticism, and even cynicism, is indispensable for critical intellectual work, but if it becomes unbalanced, it can be deeply corrosive of any sense of a public domain. Substantial numbers of journalists define their role not as public intellectuals with a wider responsibility for the public domain but as soldiers of truth fighting against a corrupt and mendacious political class. Yet journalists are as much part of the political class as politicians, and this journalistic tendency, which at its worst Martin Kettle has labelled 'journalistic fascism',¹⁰ is that no-one in authority is to be trusted or believed. If such campaigns were ultimately to succeed the end point would be some kind of authoritarianism, because every intermediate structure that supports the public domain would have been dismantled, to make way for the undiluted expression of the popular will.

Can anything be done? The crisis in our media is a crisis of public intellectuals and the public domain. What is needed is a change of culture so that the public domain and those who operate in it are given more respect, and reporting becomes not less critical but more balanced and more accurate. The consequences of continually treating government as though it were not democratic, and that all politicians are fools and knaves, is that it will create the basis for real authoritarian politics. Journalists have a huge responsibility for the health of democratic politics. They create and sustain the narratives through which the citizens obtain political information and their understanding of what is going on, and the basis on which they form their judgements.¹¹ This is not a neutral process, yet the ideology which many journalists still subscribe to seems to assume that news is objective, out there, merely waiting to be collected, not requiring interpretation.¹² If the Gilligan affair did anything it should have removed that misapprehension. The best journalists are pillars of the public domain, because their reporting or their opinions are designed to open up discussion and argument, rather than close them down, and they practice respect and

10. Ibid.

11. Jeffrey Friedman, 'Public Opinion: Bringing the Media Back In', *Critical Review*, 15, 3-4 (2003), 239-260.

12. Peter Beharell et al, *Bad News*, London, Routledge, 1976.





tolerance even when they are sharply criticising the behaviour or the opinions of others in the public domain. The current obsession of much of the media with questions of process, who said what to whom and when, and with the absolute consistency of individual politicians, governments and parties, trivialises politics, erodes trust, and neglects substance. Unless we can find a way to reverse this process, resignation and fatalism will take further hold, and the very idea that there might be a public interest and disinterested public service will be destroyed.

UNIVERSITIES

Another key site for public intellectuals and the public domain is the universities. What is common to both universities and the media is that members of both need to recognise that they should operate as public intellectuals with a responsibility to maintain the framework and the values of an open and pluralist public domain. Universities are different from the media however in many ways. In the past they were one of the main sites for formation of traditional intellectuals and that continues to some extent in the older universities. But the big expansion of universities means that they have moved in forty years from educating less than five per cent of the age group to educating over forty per cent. With this have come major changes in funding, organisation, and monitoring. As student numbers have increased so unit costs have been reduced and student/staff ratios have climbed. Universities have been obliged to place much greater emphasis upon training and upon the life skills acquired by courses of study, rather than the substantive content of their degrees. All courses have been obliged to show their relevance to the world of work.

In this way universities have become the principal training ground for the organic intellectuals needed throughout the state and civil society. The monitoring of their performance through external reviews of quality have been greatly increased, and at the same time, the performance of their other main function, the advance of knowledge through original research and scholarship has also been subject to intensive review through the Research Assessment Exercise, which has been taking place every few years since 1989.



The effect of the RAE on university research has been considerable. It has greatly reinforced trends which already existed to make each discipline increasingly specialised and self-enclosed. It has made university academics more productive, by forcing them either to publish research or to leave the profession. It has made the universities much more competitive and has substantially changed the culture in many universities where teaching was given a higher priority than research. The additional financial incentives given to high research rankings sent out unmistakable signals to university managements and to university lecturers. As a result the quantity of research has substantially increased.



Whether the quality has also increased is much debated within universities and within different disciplines. Certainly the nature of the output has often altered. It has become very much more difficult for University academics to be public intellectuals because the demands of the RAE take precedence, and each subject is assessed by a panel which decides what is to count as the best research in that particular discipline. Although the panels have varied considerably in the criteria they use, all have effectively become gatekeepers deciding which research is valuable and which not, and most have chosen to define the criteria in increasingly narrow ways. The Economics panel for instance considers the best research in economics to be work that is published in a list of top journals, one version of which is the so-called Diamond list, named after the economist who devised it. Research published in other journals or in books is mostly ignored in reaching the evaluations. This hands to the editors of the leading refereed journals a huge role in shaping the careers of all economists. Research to be published has to conform to what is considered good research by the editors of these journals and the peer reviewers they select.

The outcome is very high quality research of a particular kind. But it is of a particular kind. In the natural sciences publications through refereed journals is the route by which research results are publicised and incremental progress in knowledge occurs. The application of this model to social science where progress in knowledge is not incremental in the same way has had some bizarre results. Research tends to become ever more abstract, teasing out the implications of theoretical paradigms which are so narrowly drawn in the first place that the results have little practical relevance or application. What tends to be driven out are critical and eclectic approaches, policy-driven approaches, and in particular analyses which are written in a language few outside a small circle of specialists can understand.

The choice of many of the social sciences to make themselves as like the natural sciences as possible has meant that they have gained greatly in expertise but at the expense of limiting their usefulness to an understanding of the social world. As a result the social sciences which should be such an important resource for the public domain have become less rather than more relevant as the RAE has taken hold. Academic journals bulge with articles that are never read, and the overproduction of research for the research community has become a major industry. Universities have always tended to be self-absorbed places, and in the research sense they have become more so. It will be harder in future for new generations of academics to choose to devote time to become public intellectuals and engage with the public domain, rather than concentrating on building their careers within the closed, self-referential networks of their professional discipline. The Research Councils have tried to counter this to some extent by insisting that research be endorsed by user groups, but this has introduced a new pressure, that of the requirements of external sponsors. The twin pressures of the RAE and external sponsors threaten to squeeze out research not





sanctioned by the agendas and methodologies approved by the gatekeepers of the discipline.

Universities have become highly successful in turning out the expert organic intellectuals which society demands, but it is now less good than it was in producing the public intellectuals that can sustain and develop the public domain. In the past the universities' record was patchy and there were times, particularly in the nineteenth century when most of the creative minds and public intellectuals worked outside the universities. But for much of the twentieth century the guarantee of academic freedom to work on whatever subjects the academic chose did make the universities a vital source of public intellectuals.

This is now under threat, and intellectual work of the kind that once was possible in the University may not be so for much longer. This is not because of any central ruling, but simply because academics themselves have adjusted their behaviour in relation to the perverse incentives they face. As a result some of the most original intellectual work in the social sciences now takes place outside the universities in thinktanks or by freelance thinkers and is published in non-refereed journals. Thinktanks such as IPPR, Demos, the Fabians, the IEA, and the Social Market Foundation, have often taken the lead in shaping public debates, creating a new space in which public policy actors and academics and journalists can meet to discuss issues of common concern. This is a very positive development for the public domain, but the resources available to the thinktanks are tiny compared to universities. Given their size, and the number of intellectuals working within them, universities ought to be able to make a much bigger contribution to the public domain, producing research which is relevant and understandable, and acting as both check and resource for the media.

Instead since the 1980s universities have found themselves the victims of one of the last great experiments in central planning, with a regime of performance targets and incentives which have pulled them out of shape. Universities have become more controlled by the state, and have been internally restructured to make their management more like other large bureaucratic organisations than self-governing communities of scholars. While this has helped the universities deliver what the state requires in terms of graduates, it has been at the expense of the older idea of the university as a major source of critical ideas for the future progress of society, and as a key source of energy and innovation for the public domain and the wider civil society.



The current failings of the media and the universities are by no means the only reasons for the malaise of the public domain and of democracy. But in so far as the problem in each is the problem of the emergence of sufficient public intellectuals with a commitment to sustain the public domain and to



contribute to the delineation of the public interest, then they are certainly one of the reasons. Democracy is never a finished system, and it can wither as easily as it can grow. It has to be sustained by committed action to preserve a public domain ruled by the values of tolerance, pluralism and rationality. Public intellectuals will seldom agree with one another, and it would be undesirable that they should. But what is needed in every generation is for academics and journalists to commit themselves to be public intellectuals, participants in the public domain, with all the obligations and standards which that involves. The public domain is about much more than the state. It is also about civil society, and the definitions of the public interest that will rule there. If intellectuals do not come forward, or if they become simply oppositionists, or if they seek to undermine the public domain rather than sustain it, the public domain will continue to shrink until democracy itself is eventually imperilled.

The role of public intellectual is a hard one, and there are many different styles, some of them specific to particular times, but some of them relevant to all times. Two recent examples of the latter in Britain are Bernard Crick and Stuart Hall. Crick belongs to that tradition which once flourished in Britain of institutional entrepreneurs. He was never content to be confined within the academy, but has always sought to engage with the wider public, and not just through ideas and debate, but also through the creation of lasting institutions which create a public culture and a public ethos. Crick was responsible for setting up the Politics Association to provide a forum for teachers of politics in schools and colleges; he was a long-serving editor of *The Political Quarterly* with its distinctive mission of providing a bridge between specialist knowledge and opinion-makers in good plain English and bringing together the worlds and concerns of government, journalism, and the universities. After his major biography of Orwell he established the Orwell Memorial Trust which funds public lectures, and is one of the joint sponsors of the Orwell Prize, for political journalism and political writing. This prize now in its twelfth year has become firmly established, and pays tribute to the rich tradition of political journalism and political writing that exists in Britain. Winners of the prize for journalism have included Vanora Bennett, Brian Sewell, Yasmin Alibhai Brown, David Aaronovitch, David McKittrick, Robert Fisk, Polly Toynbee and Paul Foot; while the winners for political books have included Robert Cooper, Francis Wheen, Miranda Carter, Michael Ignatieff, Brian Cathcart, Patricia Hollis, Fergal Keane, and Anatol Lieven.

The thread which binds all of Crick's diverse interests and activities together has been citizenship. He has been a passionate believer in the necessity for political education, and in creating the institutions that will widen the opportunities for it. David Blunkett appointed him in 1997 to chair the advisory group on the teaching of citizenship and democracy in schools and later to be Adviser on Active Citizenship to the Home Office. This allowed him to fulfil his long-standing belief that citizenship should





be included in the national curriculum as an essential requirement for a democratic society. Crick argued for the teaching of politics not to be just about the nuts and bolts of how government works, but about how to participate in politics, how to argue and debate and become active. He seeks to replace a subject culture with a citizen culture, to recognise the multicultural character of the British state while developing the languages and practice of a common citizenship, and to persuade the political class to stop talking to itself and to engage with citizens. Crick's stance as a public intellectual echoes Orwell in fighting against those tendencies in modern media and politics which reduce citizens to an 'empty mob' or a 'hate-filled mob', or these days, a cynical mob.

Coming from a very different intellectual tradition and political formation, Stuart Hall shares with Bernard Crick a concern with citizenship, and with how to widen and deepen political communication and political education. Hall's involvement in developing Cultural Studies at Birmingham, and his subsequent work with the Open University are practical examples of how to reach out to new audiences and to address new problems, which had found no place in the traditional academic curriculum. Hall's understanding of politics focuses on identity and the nature of power, exploring the way in which identities are constructed, represented, and negotiated, which allows different projects to emerge, and different possibilities to be identified. Ideological struggle and debate are not external reflections on politics, but the heart of politics itself, because they determine the nature of political reality and political possibility.

Hall's famous account of Thatcherism as authoritarian populism, and his acute sense of how the political terrain was being re-made in the 1980s was complemented by his sharp critique of the Left for its immobility and inflexibility in the face of this new threat. Still trapped in the orthodoxies that had defined it in the past, the Labour movement was increasingly out of touch, and an easy target for Thatcherism. Hall's essays on Thatcherism and on Labour were never simply intellectual exercises but political interventions which helped reshape debate on the Left. Part of Hall's strength was his intuitive understanding of what made Thatcherism so effective as a new form of politics, its ability to express its political objectives in the form of both populist commonsense as well as economic doctrine and political philosophy, and to communicate through images and symbols of Britishness which resonated with the electorate. This ability to connect politics with people's lives and use it to express their hopes and desires was for him the core of Thatcherism's success and its ability to mobilise its own support and marginalize the opposition. He often despaired of the ability of the Left to develop a similar politics, and respond to the global changes in capitalism and culture. But he shows in his own work what such a politics should be like.

Public intellectuals are often active participants in politics in the sense that they seek to advance political education of citizens, by articulating



choices, framing questions, and offering alternatives. They address themselves to the public, not to coteries of experts, or office holders. They are essential builders of the public domain, and their presence is vital if larger numbers of people are to become involved in politics. At times the project of a public domain appears hopeless, so great are the forces seeking to undermine it, and maintain ignorance, fear and hate as the dominant political responses of citizens. But the need for the public domain does not diminish, which is why in every generation new public intellectuals come forward to assist in the task of building and defining it. The public domain is always a work in progress, and we have to be clear-sighted about the many obstacles in its path, as well as the institutions that are needed to help form public intellectuals and widen political participation.