

Third Way

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

'In the Moment,' Where King Last Spoke, Clinton Reclaimed His Voice

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WASHINGTON OUTLOOK



Bill Clinton carried with him only three pages of talking points when he stepped into the pulpit at the cavernous Mason Temple in Memphis, Tenn., on Nov. 13, 1993.

But he had other things on his mind. He had just read a Washington Post story about an 11-year-old girl whose neighborhood was so riddled by violence that she was already planning her own funeral. Kurt Schmoke, the mayor of Baltimore, had recently told him about an 18-year-old boy who was shot and killed—by a 13-year-old on a dare—while trying to lead younger children safely through trick-or-treating on Halloween. And the president knew one last thing: The pulpit in which he stood was the one from which Martin Luther King Jr. had preached his last sermon, on the stormy night before he was murdered in April 1968.

It was a damp, warm Saturday morning. About 5,000 men and women, mostly black, many of them ministers, crowded into the huge sanctuary, the headquarters of the fast-growing Church of God in Christ. Many tried to cool off by fanning themselves with their programs. A pigeon circled overhead. A lone saxophonist (perhaps in Clinton's honor) stirred the crowd with an impassioned rendition of "Amazing Grace." Then, in a swell of enthusiasm, the president was introduced as "Bishop Clinton."

What happened next was entirely unexpected. No one on Clinton's staff had told the reporters traveling with him to look for a major address. Yet over the next 31 minutes, Clinton delivered the most important and memorable speech of his presidency—one especially worth recalling today, on the day that America honors King.

The speech began unremarkably. Clinton opened with a routine recital of his accomplishments: the number of minorities he'd appointed, the positive trends in the economy, the bills he had passed through Congress. Then he touted the ill-starred health care plan he had unveiled a few weeks earlier and made a pitch for the North American Free Trade Agreement, which faced an imminent vote in the House.

On most mornings, Clinton might have stopped there. Instead, on that day, with the stories about murdered children and images of King swirling in his head and the soaring gospel music still pounding in his chest, Clinton shifted direction.

"What I really want to say to you today," he began, "is that we can do all of this and still fail unless we meet the great crisis of the spirit that is gripping America today."

What Would King Think of Progress?

With those words, it was as if Clinton had broken through a wall, from the dry language of lobbying into the passion of prophecy. He had no text, and he was long beyond his talking points. "I was frankly overcome by the emotion of the moment," Clinton recalled in an interview last week. "I was thinking of Martin Luther King getting killed; I was thinking of what it was like that last night in the church, and . . . it literally just came to me in the moment. I thought . . . this is what presidents are for."

In a burst of inspiration, Clinton asked his audience: If Martin Luther King could "reappear by my side today and give us a report card on the last 25 years, what would he say?" King, Clinton mused, might praise America for increasing the number of African American elected officials, for dismantling segregation and for moving more blacks into the middle class.

"But he would say, 'I did not live and die to see the American family destroyed,'" Clinton said to the first ripples of applause. "I did not live and die to see 13-year-old boys get automatic weapons and gun down 9-year-olds just for the kick of it. I did not live and die to see young people destroy their own lives with drugs and then build fortunes destroying the lives of others."

Applause rang out again. Clinton pushed on: "'I fought for freedom,' he would say, 'but not for the freedom of people to kill each other with reckless abandon; not for the freedom of children to have children and the fathers of the children walk away from them and abandon them as if they don't amount to anything.'" More applause erupted. "I fought for people to have the right to work, but not to have whole communities and people abandoned. That is not what I lived and died for."

As he finished, Clinton felt exhilarated. ("When you have reached people, you know," he said last week.) Indeed, no white Democrat in decades had spoken as passionately and candidly about the corrosive trends afflicting parts of black communities. Yet the speech owed its power not only to its surging emotion but also to its inspired mix of ideas.

Clinton spoke urgently about both the need for greater personal responsibility—a theme usually championed by conservatives—and government's responsibility to expand opportunity, a traditional liberal priority. Correctly, Clinton insisted the two ideas were not antagonistic but complementary. Impoverished neighborhoods, he said, needed changes "from the outside in"—more investment, more jobs, better schools. But even these initiatives would fail without an end to self-destructive behavior—what he called changes "from the inside out."

Liberal orthodoxy had long focused on white racism as the core of the problems facing blacks (an instinct still evident in Bill Bradley's sermons about "white-skin privilege.") Clinton, just as committed to racial reconciliation, did not ignore racism or the need for government action to secure equal opportunity. But he also recognized the need for moral renewal in troubled communities—as did the ministers applauding his words. "I just thought to myself, 'I'm going to do all this work, turn the economy around, pass all these bills . . . and what difference is it going to make if these kids keep killing each other,'" Clinton recalled.

Clinton's legacy forever will be shrouded by his own moments of irresponsibility. But he also deserves to be remembered for his breakthrough (and now widely embraced) idea that social policy—in everything from welfare and crime to education—must be built on linking opportunity and responsibility. An ethic of mutual responsibility between government and individuals offers the best prospect both for bipartisan agreement in Washington and for tangible progress on the nation's toughest streets. And Clinton never made the case for it more eloquently than he did on the morning in Memphis when he summoned the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. to judge the nation he left behind.

Ronald Brownstein's column appears in this space every Monday.

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THIRD WAY

COPY for B.R.A. return

The cafetière theory of government

In opposition, Tony Blair remade the Labour Party. In office, he is reinventing Britain's system of government

"WE were elected as New Labour," declared the new prime minister; "we will govern as New Labour." Tony Blair's claim, as he swept into 10 Downing Street after his general-election victory in May 1997, was a reaffirmation of Labour's election promises. But it can also be read as a harbinger of Mr Blair's approach to public administration. In the past two years, Mr Blair has tightened his grip on Whitehall in the same way that he tightened his grip on his party.

The result has been a cultural revolution. Policy development and decision-making, which were scattered throughout departments in Whitehall, have been centralised around the prime minister's office. The Treasury, formerly mainly a finance department, has extended its grasp to snatch any policy connected, however loosely, to economics. And having shaken up the way in which policies are formed, Mr Blair is seeking new ways of putting those policies into practice.

Grounds for change

Behind its famous black door, 10 Downing Street is more like an elegant private house than the hub of a modern government. You may well bump into one of the Blair children in the corridor, and the prime minister's room, reached through his private secretaries' office, has the feel of a country gentleman's study.

Number 10's homely qualities reflect the limited formal powers of Britain's prime minister. He or she can appoint cabinet members and senior civil servants, and chair meetings of the cabinet. But in theory the prime minister is no more than first among cabinet equals. Some strong and determined prime ministers, notably Margaret Thatcher, have been far more than mere committee chairmen. But even under her, government worked rather like a coffee percolator. Policies bubbled up from departments and were filtered through committees of cabinet ministers and haggling with the

Treasury over money, before being poured out with the prime minister's blessing.

The old way had its strengths. Policy experts dreamt up the initial ideas, and other departments' views were heard in cabinet committees. But it was also the product of tradition and inertia. Conservative and La-



bour ministers alike were trained in the system, learned how to use it, and were disinclined to change it.

New Labour is different. Neither Mr Blair nor any of his most senior colleagues had been ministers before. The prime minister's sole experience of leadership had been in the Labour Party, where he had achieved his aim—making the party electable—by ruthlessly imposing his will from the top. It is no surprise, therefore, that Mr Blair wanted to replace the percolator with a cafetière:

strong pressure from above, infusing the policies and actions of the departments below. Cabinet committees have not been abolished. But the big decisions are no longer hammered out around committee tables. They are settled from Mr Blair's sofa and often communicated to other ministers by mobile phone.

This switch has been made possible by Mr Blair's personal authority, as the architect of New Labour at the head of a huge parliamentary majority. But his authority has been buttressed by four structural changes. Take the prime minister's private office. John Major, Mr Blair's Tory predecessor, had relied on a handful of civil servants to prepare his papers and run his diary, and a small Policy Unit to keep him in touch with policy developments in Whitehall. Mr Blair wanted to co-ordinate his Policy Unit with his private office. So he created a new post of chief of staff to integrate the two sides. He raised the quantity and quality of Policy Unit staff (it now boasts a dozen high-flyers), and widened its remit to oversee existing policies and develop new ones.

Second, through Alistair Campbell, his press secretary, Mr Blair exerts far more discipline over the presentation of policies, by both ministers and civil-service press officers, than did any of his predecessors. Mr Campbell is himself a political appointee. He was given unprecedented powers to boss around Whitehall press officers. And several top press officers have quit, or been pushed out, since Labour came to office. This has led to concern that government publicity has become politicised.

The third change is the tightening of prime ministerial control over the Cabinet Office. Under Mr Major, this functioned as a central secretariat, serving the government collectively. Now the Cabinet Office works mainly for the prime minister, especially on defence and the European Union.

The role of the cabinet secretary, the most senior civil servant, has also changed. Cabinet secretaries used to see themselves largely as guarantors of government propriety, making sure that ministers did not use the civil service for party-political ends. This has been downplayed. Sir Richard Wilson, the current cabinet secretary, sees his main job as making sure that civil servants do what ministers want, and that they adapt to New Labour's new world.

Fourth, Mr Blair has changed the way in which the government deals with issues of

interest to more than one department. He has downgraded cross-departmental committees by setting up two Cabinet Office units. The first of these, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), focuses on deprivation. The Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) covers everything else. The units initiate their own policies, rather than trying to arbitrate between specialist departments.

To their supporters, the purpose of the SEU and PIU is not centralisation but (in the ugly phrase favoured by Mr Blair) "joined-up government". Their job is to prevent policies being pulled out of shape by inter-departmental tugs-of-war, or problems disappearing between the cracks at departmental boundaries. The SEU has already produced some thoughtful reports on housing estates, homelessness and family breakdown. The more recently established PIU is tackling e-commerce, the rural economy and unemployment among the over-50s.

Undoubtedly, these units are helping to co-ordinate departments' efforts to tackle difficult problems. But equally clearly, they are sucking power away from individual departments. At the SEU, this change is modest: it borrows officials from the relevant departments and involves their ministers. But the PIU's project teams are deliberately composed of outside experts rather than civil servants. Its rural economy project, for example, excluded civil servants from the agriculture and environment departments. And each project has a sponsor minister from a "foreign" department: Andrew Smith, the employment minister, oversees the rural economy project; Lord Falconer, a Cabinet Office minister responsible for the Millennium Dome, sponsors e-commerce. What is more, the prime minister chooses the projects for both units, and the units can invoke his authority to ensure co-operation.

Meanwhile, at Number 11

The centralisation of government is not confined to the prime minister's office. The Treasury has also increased its powers. In part, this is due to the position and personality of Gordon Brown, the chancellor. Until he stood aside to allow Mr Blair to become party leader in 1994, he had been seen as the senior man. He still enjoys considerable latitude. His manner—determined, and intolerant of dissent or criticism—enables him to assert his authority over more malleable ministers. One official recalls that the Department of Social Security lost control over housing-benefit and pensions policy to the Treasury because Harriet Harman, social-security secretary in Labour's first year, was no match for Mr Brown.

Yet changes in the Treasury's functions

have mattered more than Mr Brown's personality. First, the Treasury has handed control over interest rates to the Bank of England. Debt management is now in the hands of a new Debt Management Office. So senior Treasury officials no longer have to spend long hours monitoring their Reuters screens.

Second, the Treasury has changed the way it controls public spending. In the old days, the Treasury negotiated annually with departments over their spending plans for the three years ahead. But Mr Brown abolished these annual negotiations. During Labour's first two years, most departments were forced to stick with the spending plans inherited from the Tories. Thereafter, annual negotiations were replaced by a three-yearly Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The CSR gives the Treasury more power. Spending departments no longer have an annual opportunity to propose new policies and ask the Treasury to foot the bill. Instead, they have a chance only once every three years. Meanwhile, the Treasury can make its own

bour markets, and inequality. So the corridors in Great George Street now buzz with officials debating new policies for science, competition and social security.

A government with twin centres of power may seem set for trouble. Indeed, in the early months of the government, there was conflict between the prime minister's office and the Treasury. Mr Brown's supporters liked to portray him as the de facto prime minister to Mr Blair's president. Eventually, Mr Blair clipped Mr Brown's wings: in a ministerial reshuffle last year Mr Brown's friends did poorly, and in January Charlie Whelan, the chancellor's troublesome spokesman, was forced to quit.

Co-ordination between Mr Blair's office and Mr Brown's has since improved. Mr Blair is spending more time on domestic policy. He and Mr Brown talk several times a week, and big announcements are extensively discussed. Relations between Number 10 and the Treasury are also co-ordinated in weekly meetings between Ed Balls, Mr Brown's influential special adviser, Jeremy Heywood, who runs the prime minister's office, and David Miliband, who heads the Number 10 Policy Unit.

Tensions remain nonetheless. The chancellor's working methods—taking decisions with only his closest advisers and with nothing written down—make it hard for the prime minister's staff to know exactly what is going on. "We do not see much paper from the Treasury," grumbles one senior figure at Number 10. Nor has the Treasury yet accepted its subordinate role: some Treasury officials talk slyly of "creative competition" in policy-making.

Many a slip

The centralisation of policy-making is one thing; ensuring that policies are delivered is another. And here Mr Blair's revolution is far from complete. Last month the government's annual report—a self-appraisal—claimed credit, a little desperately, for policies that had been announced but not yet implemented. Some delays are understandable. Many policies require legislation, which can take a year or more to prepare, pass and implement.

In addition, the government's promises to stick to the Tories' spending plans for its first two years meant that some policies had to be delayed. For example, the government's much-advertised Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), a low-wage subsidy, will not come into effect until this October.

Even so, during the past year, the prime minister has become increasingly concerned that the government is not keeping its most important manifesto promises, those designed to improve public services. Crime is



proposals—and it controls the cash. If its ideas do not match the priorities of spending departments, tough.

But the functional changes also give the Treasury more time. So it can and does meddle in policies that used to be the preserve of other departments. The justification, say Mr Brown's advisers, is easy. The chancellor's job is to shape any policy with a bearing on Britain's economic performance. And in his view this includes not just boring old macro-economic stability, but also productivity, la-

rising; hospital waiting lists remain long; transport seems to be in chaos. Mr Blair is holding quarterly meetings with key ministers and officials to chase and check progress in the most high-profile areas of public spending: health, education, transport and crime.

He is also taking further steps to reinforce his power to direct and co-ordinate government. One was the appointment (and ennoblement) of Lord Falconer, an old chum from Mr Blair's days as a lawyer, to a wide-ranging brief: one of his first jobs was to sort out the Dome. Another was the appointment of Lord Simon, a former chairman of BP and until this summer a minister, as a consultant on civil-service reform. And the Policy Unit's professional staff will rise from 12 to 16.

Mr Blair also wants to sharpen the incentives of those in government to do what he wants. So the PIU is investigating possible rewards (such as, perhaps, early promotion) for ministers who act in the government's collective interests rather than just in those of their own departments. And permanent secretaries' "personal objectives"—a Blairite innovation, an agreement signed with their departmental minister—will in future also take more account of the government's overall interests.

The Treasury is also planning to tighten its grip on delivery. In the first CSR, departments were made to sign up to "public service agreements" in return for their cash. But these agreements were added almost as an afterthought, and were often haphazard. Next time, the agreements will be better planned and more tightly enforced.

All of this, however, leaves two obstacles in the way of efforts to improve public services. One is that sharper incentives and tighter controls are of little use if civil servants lack the necessary skills. Most senior mandarins have spent their careers as policy advisers to ministers, not as operational managers. Some are adapting well to change: one permanent secretary says that she now thinks of herself as the chief executive reporting to a ministerial chairman. Others will receive training: a new civil-service college, the Centre for Management and Policy Studies, opens this autumn. And ministers are likely to bring more people with management experience into top Whitehall jobs, such as the highly regarded Sir Michael Bichard, the permanent secretary for education and employment.

Where it cannot be improved, Whitehall will be bypassed. It has already lost its monopoly on policy advice: Labour has set up task-forces to look at everything from the health service to smuggling. Now Whitehall is also being bypassed when it comes to delivering policies. And the government is looking to business to administer the WFTC, the stakeholder pension, and the repayment of student loans.

This willingness to bypass Whitehall

may, in time, lead to a revolution in the delivery of policy every bit as profound as that Mr Blair has brought about in policy-making. But the second obstacle is of Labour's own making and may be harder to get around. Mr Blair's advisers agree on the political need to keep the manifesto promises. But some now privately argue that the manifesto is flawed. At the last election, they say, Labour made too many vague promises, and some of its specific ones were poorly chosen. For example, it has promised to cut hospital waiting

lists—not the time it takes, once referred by a doctor, to be treated.

These advisers hope that the next manifesto can be limited to a much smaller number of pledges geared to desired outcomes like less crime, better health or improved literacy. Perhaps. However, the vague promises of Labour's 1997 manifesto were no accident, but an attempt to hedge bets. And it worked like a charm. When it is time to write the party's next manifesto, good politics may again stand in the way of good government.

Immigration

Port in a storm

DOVER

The authorities in Dover said that they were poorly equipped to cope with a growing influx of asylum-seekers. They were right

IN NINE languages, Dover's public library declares that it has books to lend from all corners of the world. In recent weeks, however, there have been few signs of welcome for the hundreds of immigrants for whom the Kent port has become a temporary home. Tensions between locals and immigrants boiled over into a fight at a fairground last weekend. Later, some local youths were slashed with knives. Photographs of their wounds made the national press.

For two years now, Dover has had to accommodate a rising tide of immigrants, most of whom are claiming asylum in Britain. Other ports in the south-east, such as nearby Folkestone, have similar problems. But Dover, as the main port for ferries to and from continental Europe, attracts more than any other. Exact numbers are impossible to calculate, because some immigrants come legally and present themselves at the port, whereas others are smuggled in on lorries and are harder to detect. The police reckon

that arrivals last year ran at four times the rate of the year before, and there has been another surge this summer. They estimate that between 1,200 and 1,500 immigrants are now living in the town, whose permanent population is 33,000.

About 35% of the visitors are Kurds. Another 25% are from Slovakia, and around 10% are ethnic Albanians. Most are living in Folkestone Road, in bed-and-breakfast accommodation that once catered for holiday-makers on their way to or from the ferries. That business has faded, thanks to the Channel tunnel, leaving asylum-seekers as the only takers. More would-be asylum-seekers are waiting in a park in Calais, where a tented city has arisen to house them.

Ports are often ethnic melting pots, used to assimilating people of all hues. Dover, however, is no London, New York or Marseilles. In the 1991 census, over 99% of the permanent population was white. Unfamiliarity has bred suspicion. Many asylum-seekers



Glad to be in Dover, despite the welcome

BRITAIN

come from villages in which the custom is for men to gather outside to talk, especially in the evening. Women, meanwhile, keep a low profile. Locals, however, have the impression that their visitors are predominantly male and hang around in gangs.

Editorials in two local newspapers, the *Dover Express* and the *Folkestone Herald*, have not helped, accusing asylum-seekers of being welfare spongers, thieves and brothel-keepers. The editor of both papers, Nick Hudson, was curiously unavailable for comment this week. Although local youths were wounded last weekend, the police believe that there have been frequent attacks on immigrants. These often go unreported, perhaps because the victims think contact with the law will harm their asylum claims.

Worse, Dover also lacks the services needed to cope with a large inflow of immigrants. A phalanx of Home Office interpreters has had to be brought in to help with police inquiries into alleged attacks on and by asylum-seekers. Sixty police officers, a large number for a small area of a smallish town, are now involved in operations to calm racial tensions.

The local authorities have been especially worried by the concentration of asylum-

seekers in Folkestone Road. A fortnight ago the leader of Kent County Council, Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, wrote to the immigration minister, Barbara Roche, warning her of a "tinderbox". And 18 months ago the Kent police asked for extra money. Although they have now been given £670,000 (\$1.1m), many, including Dover's mayor, think it has come too late.

National failure, local problem

In blaming central government for their problems, local politicians have hit the mark. Once in Dover, asylum-seekers have been stuck there, waiting six months or a year before even being granted an interview by immigration authorities. The rising tension has made matters urgent. Around 150 have been sent elsewhere in the past two or three months. And following a meeting at the Home Office on August 19th, Kent County Council leaders said that more might be moved "within days", possibly to Leeds, a big city with a large non-white population.

Defending itself against the charge of tardiness, the Home Office points to measures in the Immigration and Asylum bill. When this becomes law, it says, the authorities will be able to deal with asylum-seekers in a

"fairer, firmer, faster" way. The new law is supposed to cut the time needed to process applications to six months. It will also set up an organised system of dispersal to reception areas around Britain, which will avoid the creation of instant ghettos such as Folkestone Road, and relieve the strain on the south-east ports. And it will be easier to move asylum-seekers because the current law permits dispersal only with asylum-seekers' consent. The new law will allow the authorities to move whoever they want, although the Home Office says that it will not split families.

Even so, refugee charities fear that some asylum-seekers may still end up in towns with inadequate social, legal and police services. If they are right, Dover's troubles may be repeated elsewhere. The police, at least, are preparing themselves. The Dover police will deliver a report to the Association of Chief Police Officers on the lessons to be drawn from its experience of dealing with racial problems in a town that never expected to encounter them.

Bagehot is on holiday. Our series on the new establishment will be resumed next week

Fares unfair

"WHAT we are trying to do", explains Barry Le Jeune, "is to instil a sense of discipline in people." Mr Le Jeune is not, as you might imagine, a headmaster or a sergeant major, but London Transport's head of customer services (sic). He is defending LT's policy of levying on-the-spot fines—£10 (\$16) on the Underground, £5 on buses—on customers who have no ticket or who have overridden their stop.

This might be fine were LT punishing mainly fare dodgers. In fact, the vast majority of the thousands of penalty-fare notices issued are incurred by those who have forgotten their travel passes or are simply confused by the tube's complex fare system. (There are six fare zones. If you buy a ticket for travel in one zone, and cross into another without realising it, you are penalised without being given the chance to make up the fare. Clear now?) In the past five years, the number of penalty fares handed out has trebled. Nearly half a million were issued last year, yielding a tidy sum for LT.

Many of those fined are unfamiliar with the capital; some are foreigners with only a poor command of English. Even LT accepts that most are not deliberate dodgers. They may have been ignorant, careless or merely changed their mind in mid-journey. Nearly all are eager and willing to pay the shortfall in their fares at exit barriers. But excuses are not tolerated by the bosses



of the capital's crumbling, overcrowded, delay-ridden transport system. Recently LT even prosecuted a Roman Catholic nun, a member of the Sisters of the Daughter of Divine Love, who fell asleep on her way to visit a sick parishioner and travelled one stop more than her bus pass allowed. Her offer to pay the extra fare was refused and she was taken to court.

Passengers who travel on either London's buses or the Underground without a valid ticket are prosecuted if intent to defraud is suspected. All other offenders are required to pay on-the-spot fines. The only excuse accepted is if the passenger proves that he was not able to buy a ticket at his

starting point. But if transport staff are unable to check the claim to their satisfaction, they will levy a fine or, for those who refuse to pay, issue a penalty notice requiring payment within ten days. There is a right of appeal but only to London Transport itself, not to an independent body. Last year there were over 71,000 appeals, of which one in three was successful.

Not surprisingly, this arbitrary regime is causing increasing public resentment. It is not even applied consistently. Transport officials admit that "the human factor" sometimes weighs heavily if a confrontation develops at the ticket window. In other words, the more difficult and obstructive you are, the more likely you are to get away without a fine. One in every three penalty notices is never paid.

When the former Conservative chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, was recently fined, he summed up the feelings of many Londoners by describing the system as "daft". LT is unapologetic, claiming that fare dodging is costing it £25m a year in lost revenues. But the fact that it is so often cheated is due to its delay in installing modern ticketing systems. Piling the blame for lack of investment and its own incompetence on the innocent and the ignorant is no way to run a railway. London Transport managers promise that when all stations are equipped with automatic gates, the penalty-fare regime will be reviewed. Until then, every passenger in London, visitor and native alike, had better beware.