

PROTECT OUR PUBS

Things can only get better
Can only get better
Now I've found you
(That means me)
(Will you teach me now)
Things can only get better
Can only get better
Now I've found you

D Ream: New Labour Anthem

The Protect Our Pubs / No To Pub Nationalisation campaign was premised on a single fictional conceit: that all English pubs are to be nationalised by 2010. P.O.P temporarily converted The Hare and Hounds in order to show what a state run pub would be like. During the preceding month to the 'meeting' P.O.P, campaigned around the local area, informing local residents of the government's plans for pub nationalisation. They handed out leaflets explaining that...

A government report was leaked in January 2008 that could have disastrous consequences on the social fabric of this country. The national press had an immediate blanket ban imposed on them by the government not to report on this story. This leaked report outlined plans to nationalise all English pubs by the year 2010. The government intends to make The Hare & Hounds its 'test' pub in the Midlands, bringing it under state control by the 2009. Under these draconian measures, all alcohol will be banned in pubs except a state sponsored ale. Other legislation includes the banning of lighters in pubs (possession incurring a potential £1000 fine) and restrictions on swearing. In the current politically correct environment, The Hare and Hounds would have to change its name to The Care & Hounds. Please come to a meeting on May 8th 7.30pm at The Hare and Hounds to discuss how this ridiculous legislation can be prevented. The future of the English pub depends on the general public taking a stand and fighting back by saying NO to pub nationalisation.

Meeting 8pm Thursday May 8st 2008 The Hare and Hounds.

Pub nationalisation at The Hare & Hounds involved changing the pubs name, specimen government posters, a Smartest Barperson Competition, Ultra Safe Ultra Fun Pub Games, Flighting, Peg Drinking, a Nanny State 0% Ale and an audio tour by Miss Suzie State. She may even pop up intermittently in this essay to offer her oh so cheery opinion...

Ohhh! First let me give you a little history lesson. You might think all this state run pub business is a teeny weenie bit unbelievable. Well its not! State run pubs have existed before! Yes, can you believe it?! They were introduced at the turn of the century in mining communities in the north of England. They were the only pubs ever created with the intention of discouraging people from drinking alcohol! And now they're back! Yippie!

Organising an exhibition in a pub was also a rather cynical ploy, it has to be said, for subverting the conventions of a private view: P.O.P didn't have to provide any booze. We'll raise our glass to that! Cheers!

P.O.P thought that the No to Pub Nationalisation campaign would be dependent upon people engaging in a process of re imagination, given that it's premise sounds like something from an Ealing Comedy. It transpired that people didn't need to re imagine, or even imagine for that matter. They believed it. It's a sad state of affairs that people barely batter a weary eyelid when they are told pubs are to become state run. Perhaps this is symptomatic of a government that has systematically encroached upon people's lives and leisure time, the bans on fox hunting and smoking indicative of this. As one pub patron succinctly put it, making pubs state run was just another example of the 'sneak sneak, sneak' mentality that has emerged under New Labour. One penny at a time until it becomes a pound, and two pound, and three pound, and so on. It became clear that state run pubs were a highly believable construct. One old lady even tried to donate money to the Protect Our Pubs campaign when P.O.P campaigned on

Kings Heath High Street. They declined – obviously.

Gordon's public penny pinching reached its apotheosis in the toilets of The Hare & Hounds. In a state run pub, measurement charts inform you that You Pee You Pay. The government will charge you per pence per cm of pee (approx 10p a cm). Notwithstanding that, Miss Suzie State will visualise the future of toilet cubicles for you:

Now, go in to a cubicle and shut the door. Have a look around you. In state run pubs, all this will be Perspex. The cubicle walls and door will all be see through. There certainly won't be any illegal drug taking or casual sex in a state run boozery!

P.O.P managed to acquire six specimen government posters – from an undisclosed source – outlining legislation The Department of Health intends to bring in. Here's Miss Suzie State again, explaining some of these official posters:

Whilst it may seem slightly harsh to imprison someone for possessing a lighter in a pub, the government feel it is sensible and appropriate to take a no nonsense approach to such things. There's nothing wrong at all with telling people what they can and can't do, if it's for their benefit of course!

Failure to wash your hands could result in a £1000 fine, and if your hands are really dirty, a prison sentence. According to an undisclosed government source of POP, Labour believes a cleaner nation will commit far less serious organised crime than a dirty nation. That makes perrrrfect sense to me!

Shouting in Pubs Could land you with a £500 fine or even a prison sentence. According to P.O.P's undisclosed source, the government thinks that a quieter nation is a healthier nation. And I couldn't agree more!

The Alcohol ban is coming. Are you ready?

Yes, my friend, this is true. From 2010, all alcohol will be banned in pubs, except the delectable 0 % nanny state ale. The government knows that people don't need alcohol to have fun. In fact, the government really are astonished that no one has tried to ban drinking alcohol in pubs before. Who needs alcohol to have fun? Not me!

P.O.P took it as a good sign the rapidity at which the posters were stolen. People either liked the work or were genuinely horrified at the future of the English boozery and thought it their very public duty to inform others of this monstrosity.

The pubs heritage was temporarily robbed in a moment of sublime political correctness, when the pubs name was altered from The Hare & Hounds to The Care & Hounds. The former - with its barbaric connotations of blood sport - posed a challenge to the governments ban on fox hunting and risked offending sensitive members of the general public. In a state run pub, history is a small price to pay when it comes to ensuring that no one gets offended by tradition.

In an attempt to discourage drinking, state run pubs will be full of state sanctioned USUFG's (Ultra Safe Ultra Fun Pub Games). Gently Push A Pound is the exciting New Labour version of its aggressively titled forefather Shove Hapney. Perhaps more bizarre is the re introduction of peg drinking. Around the year A.D 960 King Edgar believed he could decrease drunkenness in the English population by limiting the quantity to be drunk at one time. He introduced 'peg tankards', whereby each tankard was divided into eight sections, each section marked off by a peg driven into the wood on the inside of the tankard. It became law that no one could drink more than one peg at a time. The government intends to re-introduce this policy as one of their new USUFG's. Finally, The Care & Hounds saw the premiere of a new pub-lically suggested USUFG. A Box was left in The Care & Hounds for a month prior to the meeting, asking people to suggest ideas for new pub games in line with the nationalisation legislation. The only conditions were that the game must be very safe, extremely politically correct, multi-cultural, socially inclusive, racially representative and polite. The winner – Group Sudoku (suggested by a Mr Steve Shaw of Balsall Heath) – was premiered on the opening night to sober and considerate effect.

Another New Labour historically rescued game was re introduced on the night, albeit with rather different intentions to the USUFG's. This game was called Fighting:

'You white-livered son of a Fleet Street bum-seller! I know your kind, begot in a sedan-chair at noon between Ludgate Hill and Temple Bar. Who are you calling a whore? I'm not the mangy street walker who brought you into the world, and I wouldn't waste my piss on you if you fell into the fire!'

'Sir, your wife, under the pretext of keeping a bawdy house, is, in fact, the receiver of stolen goods'

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the exchange of rhetoric and insults was organised into formal contests in pubs. This game was called fighting. Two opponents would face each other across the room at an inn and, instead of having a fist fight, would trade witty insults. Under new legislation, the government are planning to introduce state sanctioned fighting contests as a method of controlling drink fuelled aggression. Swearing will be allowed in these contests, although it will be banned outright in pubs outside of this. Anyone caught swearing outside of a fighting contest will be put in prison.

And what state run pub would be complete without its stately showstopper: The Smartest Barperson Competition. During the 18th century, Smartest Barwomen competitions emerged when it became apparent that pub patrons were interested in the appearance of the ladies serving them (nothings changed). New Labour intends to reintroduce a version of this as part of their nationalisation legislation. Smartest Barperson Competitions are a clever government ploy to promote smartness (willingness to display a cheerful disposition, helpfulness etc) as the defining quality of good citizenship. Portrait photographs of bar staff were taken, the participants being asked to imagine that serving a pint was quite simply the most enjoyable thing they had ever done. Punters on the opening night where asked to cast their votes for Chris, Dave, Emily, Holli, James, Katy, Rachael, Shona, Stefan, Tony and Zosia. The winner was Tony who impressed everyone with his all round consummate smartness. He received a stunning hand crafted trophy courtesy of P.O.P.

To prevent patrons of The Care and Hounds from becoming frightened and bewildered by the state run propaganda machine, P.O.P kindly provided an audio tour to help people understand how a state run pub would function. Here's a teeny weenie snippet, courtesy of Miss Suzie State, your ever so friendly audio tour guide....

8. Have a Seat! Anywhere!

Have a Seat at a table, that's it, go on sit down and have a little look about...

In under two years time, all that you see before you will have changed, no more alcohol being served, restrictions on bad language, even state sanctioned politically correct pub songs on the juke box. Yes, I know, state sanctioned politically correct pub songs on the juke box – can you believe it! I know, I'll give you a little example:

Oh, my old mans a street cleaning operative,
He wears a street cleaning operatives hat,
He wears waterproof but ventilated trousers,
And he lives in state assisted accommodation.

Ooooh, fantastic, I can't wait...

The meeting didn't break into rowdiness or casual violence by virtue of the large quantities of Nanny State 0% Ale on offer. Here's Miss Suzie State again to tell you more...

How can an ale taste so fantastic and still be 0%? I'll tell you why! The government realised that banning all alcohol in pubs except a 0% ale would be a con-tro-versial measure, so they've had teams and teams and teams of scientists working right around the clock on making this ale taste so very realistic. That's why it tastes so gooooooood! Granted it tastes a teeny weeny little bit like cordial flavoured water, but don't be deceived, it really is ale! Nanny State Ale! Yes! Nanny State Ale!

It is characteristic of a political regime that has steadily encroached upon people's civil liberties and leisure time, that pub nationalisation is such a conceivable notion. State interference is at an unprecedented high – 'you can do this, you can't do that' – that maybe Nanny State Ale will be coming to a tap near you soon. If you're served a pint of cordial tasting Ale by an overly enthusiastic Barperson, grinning as if a knife was being held to their back, then its too late, we've had it. Be vigilant, be aware, and be cautious. Our heritage needs to be protected. Pub Nationalisation? Things can only get better.....

Chris Poolman