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Reflections of a Young Journalist Working Within The Parliament of the United Kingdom

Joe Frandino

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Abstract

The purpose of my Capstone project is to present a personalized insight into the British political and journalistic systems, and how they contrast with their respective American counterparts. As an intern in the British Houses of Parliament, and with the news department of the Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom, I will present significant experiences and understandings, as well as the changes I underwent during my semester in London, England during the spring of 2009.

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Personnel

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Terms and Phrases

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Political Make-up of the House of Commons and House of Lords

Although it has changed since I worked in Parliament in the spring of 2009, and will soon change again in early May, this was the political make-up of the British House of Commons and the House of Lords during my time in London. I have listed all the political parties who held at least one seat in the House of Commons, and provided a brief academic and personal description of said parties.

I have also included a brief description of each political party's platform that held at least one seat in the House of Commons, along with a small mention of any personal feelings about the party and its members.

Capstone Summary

The purpose of my Capstone project is to present a personalized insight into the British political and journalistic systems, and how they contrast with their respective American counterparts. As an intern in the British Houses of Parliament, and with the news department of the Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom, I will present my significant experiences and understandings, as well as the changes I underwent during my study-abroad semester in London, England during the spring of 2009.

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Given my months of extensive work within the British House of Commons, the British House of Lords, the Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom, and their weekly political newspaper, Liberal Democrat

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News, I will be able to offer the reader both personal and academic insights into the worlds of British politics and journalism. I frequently interacted with Members of Parliament from across the country as well as with various correspondents with several major British newspapers, including The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, and The Sun.

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What is interesting about my experiences is that I had been receiving my education in political science and newspaper journalism at one of the premier American schools of journalism (the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications of Syracuse University), yet had never really participated in either field. I have a relatively strong understanding of the American systems of both politics and journalism, and was able to intelligently and objectively comment and report on what I observed in the respective systems in Britain.

I would often learn about British parliamentary procedures, political history, practices of British journalism, and other things while I was working. I came to England with relatively little knowledge of the British political system or journalistic atmosphere, and very much was learning as I went. I was simultaneously studying and experiencing both the political and journalistic world of the United Kingdom, and drew various insights,

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I was significantly changed by my experiences throughout my London internship, and returned to the United States a different person. In only a few short months, I had completely redefined my preconceived notions of the American political and journalistic atmosphere.

I will present the reader a selection of articles I wrote during my time in London, including various entries I made in a Moleskin journal I kept with me during the entirety of my internship. I hope to provide the reader more a collection of my journal entries and newspaper clippings to more personally convey my feelings of change, understanding, and reflection during my time spend in London.

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These, in turn, will be accompanied by a brief explanation of their significance in my learning process. I will supplement my articles and journal entries with significant historical, political, or academic background information to better assist the reader. Coupled with excerpts from various academic pieces, the journal entries and selected articles will give the reader an interesting balance of academic, professional and personal insights into the

British political and journalistic system made during the time of my internship.

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I will present the articles in a mostly chronological order that follows my learning, understanding, and reflection processes that took place throughout my internship. Through my select articles, journal entries, and reflective memoirs, I will guide the reader from my first days in London, through the beginning, middle, and end of my internship, all the way to my reflection period on the flight home from Heathrow Airport.

I learned a lot not only about the British political system, but also about the political system in the United States. While I learned a great deal about the inner workings of a foreign state's government, I learned even more about myself and my own preconceived notions about government, public policy, voter representation, and the right of politicians to govern. My goal is to offer the reader the perspective of someone who is well-educated in politics, history, and journalism, but is also learning something new on a daily basis. I offer the perspective of someone who is seeing everything for the very first time, and who will be able to intelligently document their experiences and changes they perceive within themselves.

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I want to be able to express to the reader how I arrived at my various convictions, reflections, and understandings I obtained during my political internship, and how I changed as a person during my time spent in London. Perhaps from my experience abroad and subsequent Capstone Project, the reader may examine their own preconceived notions about government's inner

workings, step outside their political comfort zone, and challenge their own
beliefs about government, state, and the right of politicians to govern over
them.

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Who were the Liberal Democrats and Why Did They Matter?

A week after I had arrived in London from the S.U. Abroad Internship Office that I had been accepted as an intern with the News Division of the Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom. Syracuse University students were able to apply for internships in relation to their majors—I wanted to possibly combine my political science and newspaper journalism degrees, so I asked for an internship that would best combine the two. The internship director told me I would be working as a reporter for the political party, would be spending a lot of time in the British Houses of Parliament, and would most likely be writing and editing articles for their weekly political newspaper and Web site.

But, who is the Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom and what exactly do they stand for? I had never heard of this party before, and the thought of working for a third party disappointed me. This was one of the many times my former beliefs about government, political parties, and political power were directly challenged.

In my very limited pre-London research I knew little about the British political system. I knew about the current Labor government and its leader Gordon Brown. I knew their typical challengers were the Conservative Party or “Tory” party. I knew there was a House of Commons and a House of Lords, with most of the power resting with the House of Commons. Other than that, I knew nothing about the British political system, especially who the

Liberal Democrats were and what role they played in politics. I decided I would have to sit down and research this as thoroughly as possible.

The more I learned about the Liberal Democrats the more I agreed with everything their party stood for. Through my research of the Liberal Democratic Party, I couldn't believe how often I was agreeing with the party on nearly every issue. I often found myself nodding in agreement after finishing each paragraph as I read their manifesto.

From a strictly American standpoint, they seemed an unlikely combination of socially liberal Democrats, fiscally conservative Republicans, and environmentally conscious Green Party members. I was a bit ashamed of my "typical American ignorance," as one of my future associates would call it, but I had been so isolated in the world of "red and blue" that I hadn't envisioned a party which could hold both seemingly mutually exclusive values.

They proposed grassroots political involvement, strong protection of civil liberties, reduced income taxes, increased protection of the environment, decreased defense expenditure, increased social welfare expenditure, and heavily promoted the use of renewable energy sources over oil. They were strong proponents of gun control while simultaneously denouncing raising taxes on big business given the market implications. They were also very critical of the war in Iraq, they aimed to drastically reduce student tuition and debt, and they were strong advocates of the national healthcare system. Never before had a single political entity more summed up my odd amalgamation of

political ideals. For me, they were “The Real Alternative,” which was a party slogan meant to point out that there were other choices beyond Labor and Conservative candidates.

I also learned that the multiparty system in the United Kingdom often yielded more than two parties actively participating in a working government, unlike the contemporary American system. In the British Houses of Parliament, in fact, twelve political parties of varying size and influence were working together. Parties often merged together and sometimes separated—the Liberal Democrats were actually the result of a merger between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party in 1988. This political atmosphere was simply fascinating, and far more complex and foreign than I had ever imagined it being.

This would certainly be an experience that would change the way I would think about politics forever, since it was challenging my preconceived notions and what I thought were static ideals within the political system. I arrived for my first day of work, almost an hour early, on the morning of January 16th. Five months later I would walk through those same doors for the last time, having grown in ways I never thought possible.

Prime Minister's Questions

By far the most enjoyable part of my political internship in London was being able to attend Prime Minister's Questions every Wednesday morning at the Palace of Westminster. It was during this time period where I began to question whether British political rhetoric was based more in showmanship than in substance, with all its negative repercussions.

Politicians who spoke calmly, cooperatively and intelligently in the halls outside of the House of Commons became completely different people during Prime Minister's Questions. The national television cameras turned on, and the entire House of Commons seemed to have a theatrical feel to it. I simply could not believe the transformation these politicians made when cameras were on then in a combative setting—a setting, of course, which was actually created to foster cooperation.

Prime Minister's Questions is a weekly half-hour block of time where Members of Parliament from the minority parties may ask televised questions of the Prime Minister. The Loyal Party of the Opposition, in this case the Conservative Party, is able to ask six questions. The Loyal Party of the Opposition is the second largest party in the House of Commons, and is given the name "loyal" since they are not opposed to the government itself, but to the leaders who currently control the government. The third largest party, the Liberal Democrats, is reserved two questions, and the remaining questions are chosen by the Speaker of the House of Commons and are often a collection of Members of Parliament from any of the political parties.

Typically the sessions lasts for a bit long than a half-hour, since the Prime Minister typically begins the session by offering sympathies, congratulations, or insight on any major national or international events. Then they usually offer a summation of the day's political agenda and upcoming political events.

Although Prime Ministers have been answering questions to local politicians for centuries, the practice of having a fixed, weekly meeting of all MPs from whom questions are posed to the Prime Minister began in 1961 under Prime Minister Harold Macmillan.

During my time spent in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister was Labour's Gordon Brown, the Loyal Leader of the Opposition was David Cameron of the Conservative Party, the leader of the third-largest party—the Liberal Democrats--was Nick Clegg, and the Speaker of the House was Michael Martin, a former Labor MP.

The Speaker of the House is elected by Members of Parliaments from within their own ranks. The Speaker of the House presides over the House's debates, determining which members may speak. They are also responsible for maintaining order during debate, and may punish members who break the rules of the House. Conventionally, the Speaker remains non-partisan, and renounces all affiliation with his or her former political party when taking office.

Martin resigned his post in May of 2009 due to allegations of misuse of public funds and was recently made a life peer in the House of Lords. Brown, Cameron, and Clegg all still hold their respective positions.

Though conceived as a way to provide more cooperation and understanding between majority and minority parties, the sessions appeared to me to be more of a political game rather than any attempt at accomplishing anything. This was most evident in the “questions” being asked to the Prime Minister by David Cameron and my own Nick Clegg.

For example, “Why doesn’t the Prime Minister admit that what he is doing is cowardly? Why can’t the Prime Minister tell the British people how much of a failure his programs are? Does the Prime Minister really expect us to believe that...” and so on and so forth. What were technically “questions,” given that they ended in a question mark and were posed to an individual, were really just statements meant to point out any ill-feeling or dissatisfaction the minority parties felt with the party in power. I believe the session being televised for the past 30 years has only impeded progress, since I saw many even-keeled and cooperative politicians completely disregard any feeling of mutual respect and rant and rave in front of the camera.

At Prime Minister’s Questions, speakers are openly cheered and jeered by their fellow party members, and the Speaker of the House often has to stand and demand “order” amidst the laughter, cheering, and heckling. On January 18th, my first day sitting in on Prime Minister’s Questions, I remember a particularly long bout of jeering and laughter after a statement

Brown made that took almost three whole minutes of the Speaker of the House shouting “order!” for the entire room to grow calm again. Cameron had made fun of Brown changing his opinion regarding an increase in the country’s value-added-tax, and compared him to a young girl unable to decide who to go to a school dance with.

The men and women who held these positions were those who could not only produce and recite a well-crafted speech, or read confidently from a teleprompter, but one who could eloquently, passionately, and most of all quickly defend themselves on the spot. The Prime Minister, the Loyal Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party were all individuals who were incredibly powerful public speakers, and who could quickly insult or disarm any statements made against them. It was often painful to watch deputy speakers, most notably Labor’s Jacqui Smith, fill in for Gordon Brown in occasions when Brown was not in Parliament. Though she was incredibly intelligent and had a world-class education, she was not the fastest or most eloquent speaker. She was often torn to shreds by Cameron during Prime Minister’s Questions, and often grew visibly frustrated.

All the showmanship aside, I was surprised and concerned how often quick wit and broad rhetoric substituted truth and certainty. If an MP stood and presented a truthful, substantive, and meaningful argument, it could easily “stricken down” by a witty jab or remark from the opposing side. Even when Jacqui Smith would make an intelligent point about particular issues regarding trade and national security, any quick or witty insult by Cameron would make

it appear as though Cameron had “won” the argument. He had not “won” anything, and was in fact impeding progress with his antics, but he scored immense political points and made fabulous television.

I remember at one point, David Cameron had used the incorrect birth date of a British historical figure to make a particular jab at Gordon Brown. Members of Cameron’s staff reportedly updated Wikipedia every fifteen minutes to substitute the birth date Cameron had used, so to keep the joke and the point he had made alive. He had scored some big laughs and political points on television, but had lied to do so and continued to cover it up. They had literally brushed truth aside in the name of a political jab, and this was quite troubling to me.

I was bothered by how these broad, complex and important political issues were so easily (and with such style) reduced to brief, eloquent, and quippy verbal bouts from which there was often no discernible winner. It seemed like they weren’t really discussing the issues anymore, but were instead watching how well these politicians were able to verbally attack each other and defend themselves. Progress throughout the day was not viewed as any particular agreement, chosen path, or set of solutions to the issue addressed, but rather as one side’s ability to out argue the other. It appeared to be a zero-sum game.

David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party at the time, was a perfect example of a man with quick wit, intelligence, and an incredible sense

of humor. Although I disagreed with the man nine times out of ten, I often found myself laughing along with his statements.

It was especially difficult for any Labor representative, including PM Gordon Brown, to truly declare any verbal bout with Cameron a “win.” Collectively I probably watched approximately ten hours of Brown versus Cameron, and I could most likely count on one hand the number of times I thought Brown defended himself well or got the better of Cameron. The most powerful bouts of laughter were always directed at Brown, and almost always initiated by Cameron or Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague. What frustrated me was how often I believed Brown had the higher moral ground and was attempting to defend the more noble position, but seemed to “lose” at the hand at the quick-witted Cameron.

What was equally fascinating was the political commentary and assessment by the BBC and Sky News following Prime Minister’s Questions. Rarely did I see them go into much depth concerning the topics mentioned, but they rather chose to present a “highlight reel” of the best moments between Cameron, Brown and Clegg. Instead of any in-depth coverage of the issues the men were discussing, the media agencies and news coverage of the day’s discussions only aired the most passionate, well-worded, or deftly aimed arguments from either side. There was rarely any follow-up to any of the points raised, and one of the political commentators would declare a “winner” of the day.

After a few months, I too became emotionally invested in the back and forth sway between Cameron, Brown and Clegg. I was beginning to pay less and less attention to the issues, and instead got caught up in the “school yard politics of it all,” as my former Editor-in-Chief Deirdre Razzall used to say. I was beginning to judge success and “victory” on a certain issue by how well one side defended itself and attacked the other during Prime Minister’s Questions. It was quite easy to fall into the ebb and flow of the heated political discourse, and so easily declare a “winner.”

Although it was certainly one of the most enjoyable parts of my internship, it was also one of the most concerning. In an environment designed to breed mutual understanding and cooperation, it was sad to see this level of unproductive back-and-forth between these leaders of the country.

Obama

While in London, I had the unique opportunity of watching President Barack Obama's inauguration through the eyes of another nation.

Obama had been greatly shaping the political discourse in British politics long even before he was elected. Obama's actions were often always the standard against which British policies seemed to be made. If Obama talked about doing it, it always seemed like the right thing to do. It was absolutely fascinating to see how a foreign nation interpreted the election, inauguration, and administration of Barack Obama.

It was fascinating to learn how the coverage of the presidential race varied between British and American media outlets. It seemed like British news outlets were playing up the racial and historical context to the race, where as American news outlets were actively trying not to. I would assume American news outlets were attempting to not show favoritism in their coverage. After all, it would be difficult to run similar stories for an older, white man with a military career running for president.

I once had a very interesting conversation with BBC foreign correspondent for the U.S. 2008 Presidential Election, Matt Frei. He claimed that everyone in England felt the race was far less close than we Americans did, and "didn't see how John McCain stood a chance against Obama."

"We didn't see how it was possible for Obama to lose," said Frei. "We didn't see how the election could even be close. Here was an incredibly well-educated man who promised hope, change, and refreshment after the

Bush years, and then here was this old man who seemed to be Bush all over again. We saw two distinct outcomes from the election, and even people who voted Bush into office twice wouldn't miss these repercussions."

Frei had spent most of the campaign entrenched with the McCain campaign. Frei once jokingly referred to a Young Republicans convention that "had too many blue blazers with shiny buttons." Frei said he felt a "real disconnect in the Republican camp with the movement taking place in rest of the country."

The British not only portrayed the election in a different light than the American media outlets, but saw more promise and change in Obama than I think even the Americans did. He seemed even more celebrated in the U.K. than he did in the United States. This near infatuation with Obama and his policies continued throughout my time in Parliament.

The halaal butcher shop down the street from my apartment in West London had one of the most touching examples of Obama's international reach. Within the butcher shop a giant Obama poster had been hung up by the man who owned the shop. The man had moved to London three years ago from Pakistan and spoke broken English at best.

Most interestingly, the poster was hung up on the inner wall of a staircase which was only visible through a back door that the shopkeeper typically kept close. I only managed to notice the poster one evening when he had forgotten to close the door. What touched me most was the fact that the poster was not out on display for all the customers to see, but rather had been

placed in a more personal, intimate, and out-of-sight place where only the owner was supposed to see it. The man lived above the butcher shop, and he would have seen the poster every time he ascended or descended the stairs between his home and work.

This particular example sticks with me more so than any other. The streets and shops of London had been absolutely flooded with images of Obama—posters, flags, sound bites, t-shirts, and a thousand other items were scattered about London. Obama's name had been praised in the highest halls of government by the most powerful men in the country. His name literally rang throughout Parliament every day for weeks for national and international broadcasts to send around the world. But here in this quiet side-street in Western London, tucked behind a shabby door in a tiny butcher shop, this man connected with Obama-- and he didn't care if anyone other than him knew it. The butcher's poster, however, was the most meaningful example of support for Obama abroad I had seen.

Partisan Press

I found it very difficult to remain impartial when writing about the Liberal Democratic Party, and especially about Clegg. He was an incredibly nice man who had been extremely welcoming to me, and as a political reporter I knew I would have to remain unbiased when it came to reporting the news, as I had learned in every single Newhouse course I had ever taken. The darkest stories told by Newhouse professors concerned reporters who had gotten too close to their sources and compromised their roles as journalists.

It was very difficult to balance the feeling of being a political insider with the Liberal Democrats, and writing impartially when it came time to write articles. What was most interesting, however, was the Liberal Democrats not expecting me to be impartial at all.

I remember one time sitting down to write an article about PM expenses within the House of Commons, and openly declared that one of the men I was researching was “a real idiot.”

My Editor-In-Chief, Deirdre Razzall, looked up from her desk and said: “It looks like you have your lede then” and returned to her work.

This kind of headline is certainly not rare in a newspaper from the United Kingdom. Newspapers are more openly partisan, more colorful, more vibrant, full of more active voices, and honestly just more interesting to read, in my opinion. I was quite surprised by the unabashedly partisan nature of the press in the United Kingdom.

Newspapers in the United Kingdom are traditionally more overt about their political leanings and support.

The Daily Telegraph, *Financial Times* and *The Times* are traditionally politically and economically conservative and often favor the Conservative Party. *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and *The Independent* are traditionally liberal and often side with the Labor Party and the Liberal Democratic Party.

Newspaper readership is also significantly higher in the United Kingdom than it is in the United States, according to a variety of studies by the International Readership Institute of Northwestern University.

Each of the aforementioned newspapers has an average readership of more than 250,000 per day. *The Daily Telegraph* alone reaches almost 700,000 readers a day, *The Times* reaches 500,000, and *The Guardian* reaches 302,000 readers a day. The U.K.'s best-selling newspaper is a Murdoch-owned tabloid, *The Sun*, which has a national circulation of more than 3 million readers per day.

Compare this with *The Wall Street Journal's* 2 million daily readers, *USA Today's* 1.9 million daily readers, *The New York Times* 927, 850 daily readers, *The Los Angeles Times's* 650,000 daily readers, and *The Washington Post's* 580,000 daily readers. Considering that the population of the U.K. is about 60 million, compared to the U.S. population of about 310 million, the average readership in the United Kingdom is significantly higher than U.S. readership.

Having such considerably higher average readership lends itself to more newspapers entering the market, meaning that each newspaper must try to distance themselves from the others to attract potential readers, said my Editor-In-Chief Deirdre Razzall. This lends itself to newspaper articles being more verbose, active, and openly strong-minded about particular issues.

I can say with all honesty that given my experience within British newspapers, I found the American newspapers perspective on the written word positively maddening. It seemed like British newspapers would take the necessary time and space to get their point across, where as newspapers in the United States were obsessed with brevity. A former Newhouse professor of mine would say “if you have a three syllable word, try to find a two syllable word... if you have a two syllable word, try to find a one syllable word.” It drove me crazy having to shorten and dumb down every single sentence in a story I so thoroughly enjoyed writing.

All spelling and vocabulary differences aside, I could truly “read” the difference between a sentence written by an American or a Briton. To me, British sentences were longer, more eloquent, and in my opinion far more enjoyable to read. British sentences had more detail, were fuller, and had far more deviations from what is called the “narrative thread.” Britons’ usage of what seems to be run-on sentences was greatly aided by generous usage of the comma. The comma, I would later conclude, was the favorite punctuation mark of the Brits, followed closely by the semicolon. Both allowed the

speaker to present the most information the most eloquently, without much attention being paid as to whether the other was running on a bit too long.

“We invented the language, and therefore get to do what we want with it,” joked my Editor-in-Chief Deirdre Razzall.

Razzall would also joke of the “herky-jerky grocery list of information” she said she found in American newspapers that were, at times, “as dull as dishwater.’

“Why are you always in such a rush?” she said. “Say it best, don’t say it shortest,”

It was this infatuation with brevity that turned me off to working in an American newspaper, and ultimately led me not to pursue a career in journalism here in the United States. The U.K. model, while more partisan and colorful, I think is a far superior way to convey information and attract readership.

Nick Clegg, Leader of the Liberal Democrats

In my opinion, Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, was trying to “ride the Obama wave” in the weeks leading up to and following President Obama’s inauguration. Much of Clegg’s political rhetoric completely matched that of Obama’s during the majority of his campaign, and recent political polls are showing that his rhetoric is proving successfully in the eyes of British voters.

Words like “hope,” “change,” “grassroots,” and “social media” were used so frequently by Clegg, you would have thought he was reading verbatim from Obama’s campaign speeches. One of Clegg’s most famous sound bites from the televised presidential debates on April 15, 2010 was “choose hope over fear.”

All of Clegg’s political rhetoric, however, seems like it has been paying off in recent months according to national political polls in the weeks leading up to the United Kingdom’s general election.

General election dates are not fixed in the United Kingdom, and the Prime Minister must call an election no later than five years from the last general election. The last general election in the United Kingdom was on May 5, 2005. The governing party typically calls the election when they think they would most likely win an election. In Brown’s case, due to poor approval ratings over the past few years, he has waited the maximum amount of time he can to call an election. Prime Minister Gordon Brown has decided to call a general election on May 6, 2010. During my time in London during

the spring of 2009, Brown was under great pressure from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats to call an election.

The United Kingdom's first-ever televised presidential debates between Prime Minister and Labor Leader Gordon Brown, Conservative Party leader David Cameron and Liberal Democratic Party leader Nick Clegg on April 15th proved very successful for Nick Clegg and the Liberal Democrats.

Clegg received very favorable press following his performance during the debate from multiple sources on the day following the April 15th debate, including:

The Wall Street Journal said, "Mr. Clegg took last Thursday's debate by storm by portraying himself as an antidote to the "old" parties that have passed Downing Street between them for the over half a century."

The Washington Post said, "In Thursday's debate, Clegg broke through in ways that neither of his two rivals could. In the short-term, he will be the story of the campaign."

The New York Times said, "*The youthful Clegg has a more natural style on television than Brown and sought to stay positive in the face of Brown's attacks. "Choose hope over fear," he said in his close.*"

An April 20th issue of *The Guardian* even had an article titled "Nick Clegg—The Next Obama?" where they discuss his campaign rhetoric, his proposed policies, and his "refreshment" from the old exchange of political power of British politics.

National polls taken by the BBC following the debates showed the Liberal Democrats and Conservative Party tied at 32 percent of popular support and Labor with 28 percent. These are incredibly high approval ratings for the Liberal Democrats. They only received 17-18 percent of the vote from 1997-2001 and 18-22 percent of the vote from 2001-2005, which were impressive figures at the time. A ten percent increase in the popular vote, from 22-32 percent, would be the largest increase in popular vote in the party's history.

The idea that the Liberal Democrats could become the opposition party, ahead of Labor, would have made my former colleagues at Lib Dem News jump out of their seats. The idea that they could become the governing party would have sent them from their seats into the streets.

Reciprocity of Knowledge

I remember speaking with a Liberal Democrat MP on the one of the first days in the House of Commons about the structure and rationale behind the British political system. The conversation had arisen when The Speaker of the House of Commons had been speaking for about three minutes, I was able to understand less than a dozen sentences that left his mouth. I had no idea who he was addressing, why he was addressing them, and what the procedure was here.

Before I entered the House of Commons on my first day I was online for more than hour researching the names, positions, titles and responsibilities of the members within the British House of Commons. I tried to memorize the political structure itself within the House of Commons as well as about 10 years of political history to provide some context. All of my work, however, had momentarily escaped me.

I pathetically gave a look of “help me” to the Lib Dem MP, and he briefly broke down the structure of the British Parliamentary system for me. This “crash course” of British politics, however, yielded far more understanding of Americans rather than Britons.

When discussing the Speaker of the House of Commons, the MP said it was a version of the American Nancy Pelosi. He led and directed the large group of MPs assembled in the House of Commons. When discussing what David Cameron’s position was in the House of Commons, the MP described

him as a combination of the leader of the minority party, Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY), and minority whip, Rep. John Boehner (R-OH).

I found myself embarrassed at the clear contrast in each other's knowledge of the opposite person's political system.

It seemed like everyone I spoke with in Parliament understood everything about the American political system: our system of checks and balances, bicameral legislature, and even the process and rationale behind the electoral college.

Myself, a fairly intelligent and well-educated young student with a life-long interest in European history and a nearly completed college education in political science couldn't match this level of knowledge. I feel like most Americans would have difficulty reciting this kind of information with such accuracy. It was here that I realized the insular nature of most Americans when it comes to other country's political systems and political history.

I expressed my concern to the MP, which he grudgingly acknowledged, but he did offer some kind of hope. The MP explained that for most of their history, Americans really did not need anyone like the British needed the rest of Europe. Britons had centuries of experience in foreign relations, both good and bad, with the other European nations. In terms of natural resources, military, commerce, Britain and Europe in general simply relied on one another more often than the United States ever has, said the MP.

He did point out, however, that this was fast becoming no excuse for ignorance in the modern world we live in.

As an American, I felt like there was almost never any attention being paid to British politics, changes in political power, or even public policy. If we couldn't care about the political activities of arguably our closest world ally, who could we care about? This kind of attitude, I thought, absolutely had to change. There was simply no reciprocity of knowledge between the two countries, and for one of the many times in London, I felt embarrassed to be the "typical American."

For Your Protection

Whenever the topic of video surveillance, phone tapping, e-mail monitoring and warrantless searches was part of the political conversation, I was absolutely astounded how rarely any spoke negatively about the concept. Initially brought in under Blair's Labor party in the post-2001 months, even the Conservatives and my own Lib Dems seemed not to initially care about the implications and negative associations of this craft.

When discussed politically, these intrusions and careful monitoring were matters of pride and success. It was never discussed as an encroachment of government into private affairs, but instead was a badge of honor for how safe the country had been made by such "transparency."

Government was often portrayed as "protecting," "ensuring," and "providing for its citizens, and it was at this time that I realized the implications of living in a nation relatively protected from the late-18th century revolutions in France and the United States.

Where government was viewed in this country as "the government that governs least, governs best," it seemed like in the U.K. there was an honest, wide-spread trust and reliance on government to see things through.

It was always assumed that government, as an entity, would know the right thing to do. It seemed like when there were problems with the political system, it was framed around who was elected and inherently running the system. It was never the system itself that was doubted, but those put in charge of it. It was never a question about whether the government had a

proper role to play in the issue, but whether the elected official in charge knew what he or she was doing.

I remember seeing announcements in the major newspapers as well as on the London Underground that startled me in both their explicit and implicit messages.

“Friend or Foe? Stop and question,” “Secure Beneath the Watchful Eyes,” “Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used as Evidence,” “Freedom is in Peril: Defend it With All Your Might” and “You Have the Right Not to Remain Silent” all struck me as particularly startling. Even the imagery used in some of these announcements struck me as disturbing: “all-seeing eyes” hovering above London were being portrayed as benevolent and protective, but I found them frightening for their implications on civil liberties and had a real “Big Brother” feel to it. The “all-seeing eyes,” I found out, mostly referenced the United Kingdom’s record number of Closed Circuit Television Cameras.

Outside government special facilities, CCTV was developed initially as a means of increasing security in banks. Experiments in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s (including outdoor CCTV in Bournemouth in 1985), led to several larger trial programs later that decade.

These were deemed successful in the government report “CCTV: Looking Out For You”, issued by the Home Office in 1994, and paved the way for a massive increase in the number of CCTV systems installed. Today,

systems cover most town and city centers, and many train stations, airports, parking lots and private homes.

The exact number of CCTV cameras in the UK is not known but a 2002 report by the British government estimated the number of surveillance cameras in private premises in London is around 500,000 and the total number of cameras in the UK is around 4,200,000.

Since September 11, however, much of the criticism against CCTV died down. After the 2005 London bus and Underground bombings, political resistance to the CCTV cameras almost all but vanished according to several MPs I spoke with. A second planned attack on London public transportation, which failed, had the CCTV lead to the successful arrest of the would-be attackers.

The cameras struck a particularly dissonant chord with me given my inherent belief in the American rationale behind "unreasonable searches and seizures." Even during our greatest infringements on civil liberties following September 11, I do not think the U.S. came even close to the level of surveillance that the United Kingdom willingly entered.

I am naïve enough to think that such things do not exist within the United States, but they are neither as public or uncontested as in England. In the U.K., they almost uniformly seemed like a good idea that should be expanded, or at the very least continued. Upon returning to the United States, I was glad to be out from under the "watchful eyes" of the U.K.

Remnants of an Aristocracy

Gordon Brown was jokingly referred to around the House of Commons as the “pleb.” I heard the term used several times to describe Brown, and eventually had to ask why this term was being used to describe such a clearly well-educated, intelligent, powerful, and wealthy man being referred to as a “pleb.” It was the conversation that followed that led me to some interesting observations about aristocracy’s remaining role in British politics.

A Lib Dem MP explained to me during my second week in Parliament that Brown had gone to the University of Edinburgh, not having taken the “usual” route to government leadership through Oxford or Cambridge. I initially laughed at the statement, but then began to take notice of the alma maters of every other government leader whom I had met.

Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, went to Oxford. His second in command, Vince Cable, had gone to Cambridge. David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party, had gone to Oxford. His second in command, William Hague, also attended Oxford. In fact, 11 out of the past 14 Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom graduated from either Oxford or Cambridge.

Forty-six percent of all Conservative MPs, 31 percent of all Liberal Democrat MPs, and 17 percent of all Labor MPs had gone to either Oxford or Cambridge. Not that long ago, in 1959, 50 percent of Conservative MPs, 83 percent of Lib Dem MPs, and 18 percent of Labor MPs went to Oxford or

Cambridge. There are 166 institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom, but these two universities hold such an unbelievable amount of sway and influence when it comes to government and political leadership.

This completely astounded me, even though I am not naïve enough to think particular schools here in the United States lend themselves more often to prestigious political careers. I also understand that these kinds of educations are for mostly highly intelligent people, which my in turn pursue higher levels of political power. However, I could not believe the power these universities with such strong aristocratic ties had when it came to political power.

The Oxbridge presence within the House of Lords, one of the most profound was even more profound. Most recently, 26 percent of Labor members of the House of Lords, 49 percent of Conservative members of the House of Lords, and 41 percent of Liberal Democrat members of the House of Lords attended either Oxford or Cambridge.

I pointed out this startling trend to a senior Liberal Democrat MP whom I had grown very fond of, who was himself a graduate of Oxford.

He responded, only half-jokingly, that “of course you would want people from Oxbridge working in the government. That’s been the breeding ground for politicians for centuries.”

The aristocratic and hereditary nature of the House of Lords, the upper house of Parliament, was only stripped of its hereditary tradition in 1999.

The House of Lords are upper house of the British Parliament. It consists of 733 members, with the lower house being the House of Commons. No one in the House of Lords, the upper house of Western democracy, is elected by popular vote. They formerly consisted of hereditary Lords who received their position from their respective parents, typically fathers to sons—women were forbidden from the House of Lords until 1958. Now life-peerages to the House of Lords are chosen by the Sovereign, on the advice of the Prime Minister.

The House of Lords has far less political and legislative power than the House of Commons. They have some power to veto or influence some particular legislation, but are forbidden from proposing or adjusting any legislation related to taxation or state finances.

The House of Lords consists of both Lords Spiritual and Temporal. Lords Spiritual are 26 bishops of the established Church of England that sit in the House of Lords. They do not usually vote on matters of law and state.

Lords Temporal are secular members of the House of Lords. They are appointed to the positions by the Prime Minister or the Sovereign—on the advice of the Prime Minister. A very small percentage of the Lords Temporal are remnants of the hereditary peers, who inherited the title from their parents. They are the most numerous group in the House of Lords. Unlike the Lords Spiritual, they may be publicly partisan, aligning themselves with one or another of the political parties that dominate the House of Commons.

Originally, the Lords Temporal included several hundred hereditary peers (that is, those whose peerages may be inherited), who ranked variously as dukes, marquesses, earls, viscounts, and barons. In 1999, the Labor government brought forward the House of Lords Act expelling several hundred hereditary peers from the House. Such hereditary dignities still exist, but now can be given only by the Crown with the advice of the Prime Minister of the day.

Although the House of Lords had been stripped of most of its legislative and governmental influence during the 19th century, I thought it still represented a pretty obvious aristocratic check on democracy. I was still so surprised that kind of clear remnant of aristocracy and privilege had lasted so long in a Western democracy.

Last Walk to Work

It was a very odd feeling at the end of my internship where I went from a political insider to a political outsider. In just a few minutes, as I passed through the outer doors of the House of Commons, I found myself on the sidewalk with all the other “outsiders.” My last day of work, April 1st, stands out in my mind as a very meaningful change in my own political perspective.

I can still remember that last day I took my short trip to work. I knew all the steps, stops, sounds, sights, and smells of my walk. A short walk to Maida Vale station, five stops on the Bakerloo Line to Baker Street, catch the Jubilee Line south and ride three stops down to Westminster. My exit point brought me right underneath Big Ben, then I would walk along the side of the Parliament building, turn right on Cowley Street and arrive at work.

I was taken out to lunch that afternoon by my Editor-in-Chief Deirdre Razzall, her assistant Jane, party-leader Nick Clegg, various Lib Dem MPs, and several interns from other departments with the Liberal Democrats. They expressed their gratitude for all the work we had done, asked us to remain in contact and stay updated on the impending election.

“Things are definitely on the up-and-up for the Lib Dems, and I sense some big changes in the next few months,” said Clegg. “I want you to remember that you’ll always be welcome back.”

We exchanged handshakes, hugs, and some parting words of thanks and congratulations. We were walked to the door by Clegg, Razzall, and the

Lib Dem MPs. All of a sudden there I stood on the side of the street outside the Palace of Westminster with all the other tourists. I had surrendered my security and press badges on the way out, and now stood outside with only my messenger bag.

It was a very unsettling feeling knowing I could not enter the building again, and I suddenly became aware of the large, loud, and “outside” group of people who had begun to gather around the front doors to catch a glimpse inside.

For months I had been the guy among my group of friends who knew what was going on. During the G8 Summit, the PM expenses scandal, the death of Cameron’s young son, all of my friends turned to me for information. I absolutely loved the feeling, and realized I had grown quite used to the feeling.

To everyone else on the sidewalk that beautiful spring morning, it was just another day. To me, however, it marked the end of one of the most meaningful experiences of my entire life. The last four months had been nothing short of life-changing, and here I stood at the very end of it.

I was on the outside again, no longer privy to the inner-workings of Parliament. I would have to get my news from the television and the newspapers, just like everyone else.

After a few quiet moments spent staring across the Thames in the warm afternoon sun, I gathered my bag, looked one last time up at Big Ben,

and made my way to the Underground. Quite poignantly, the last sound I heard descending the stairs to the Underground was the chime of Big Ben.

Looking to the Future

Gordon Brown called the general election for May 6, 2010 and the electoral results are in. I regularly keep in touch with most everyone with whom I worked in Parliament, and the mood at 4 Cowley Street is nothing short of electric.

The Conservative Party won 36% of the popular vote, Labor won 29%, Liberal Democrats won 23% of the vote, and other political parties won 12%. In the House of Commons, the Conservative Party won 305 seats, Labor won 258 seats, the Liberal Democrats won 57 seats, and other political parties won a total of 28 seats.

This allotment of seats means that no one party has a majority in the House of Commons, and therefore the general election resulted in a hung parliament. A single party must have at least 326 votes to claim a majority in the House of Commons. The last time this happened was in 1974. If the current parties who won seats cannot form a coalition government, then the Queen of England may intervene to dissolve Parliament and call another round of general elections.

The Liberal Democrats did not do as well as expected at the polls, and Clegg expressed his disappointment in a press release to the BBC. Clegg was also frustrated by apparent discrepancies in the polls in his home constituency in Sheffield, where apparently polling stations ran out of voting forms and had to turn away a large amount of people.

"Many, many people during the election campaign were excited about the prospect of doing something different, but it seems when they came to vote, many of them decided to stick with what they know," said Clegg in a press release to the BBC.

Although the Prime Minister, by tradition, has the right to first try and approach another party to form a coalition government, the Liberal Democrats are almost exclusively speaking with the Conservative Party. A coalition between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party would place the merged party would be in the clear majority of seats and remove Labor from power. As of right now, more discussions are taking place between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

David Cameron, leader of the Conservatives, is emphasizing areas where his party and the Liberal Democrats agreed, including education reform and scrapping plans for national ID cards, while drawing red lines on defense and the economy.

The current parties will most likely take another week to attempt to form a coalition government, and will likely not need the intervention of the Queen, according to my former Editor-in-Chief Deirdre Razzall. Razzall has been in close contact with Clegg since the election night, and says that discussions between Clegg and Cameron have been going well.

Conclusion

As I sat on the plane departing from Heathrow Airport and began to look back on my experiences in London, I could say with pride that I was a true “Lib Dem.”

Throughout my time in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, I had repeatedly faced odd looks, sarcastic smiles, and even downright insults when I mentioned that I was there on behalf of the Liberal Democratic Party. I had seen firsthand the pretentious attitude cast at a third-party representative, and was forced to challenge my preconceived notions about my own political system that typically cast third parties aside.

Back in the United States, I too was one of the smug individuals who looked at third-party candidates and politics as outside any real political progress. I had been one of the people who was convinced that Ralph Nader cost Al Gore the 2000 Presidential Election. In my ignorance, I had not yet realized that ours is not just a two-party system and, of course, everyone has a right to run for president. Nader didn’t cost Gore the election—Bush cost Nader the election.

I came away from the experience with a profound amount of respect for a multi-party system, especially for the level of feedback and criticism that a third party was able to generate from receiving entry into the political system. It seemed like the third-party was able to offer the same level of criticism on the party in power as a typical opposition party, however a third party also offers a criticism on the entire system itself and the “tit-for-tat”

exchange of power that typically takes place between the Labor Party and Conservative Party. The Liberal Democrats were the strongest advocates of more and more political voices in the system, where I do not believe Labor or the Tories would have been as agreeable.

Coming from a strictly two-party system, I began to see the inherent dangers and shortcomings of such a system. I saw how complacent, and in many ways tolerant, the Labor and Conservative Parties were with the other's shortcomings, especially when it came to things like campaign finance and MP payment and expensive. With a two-party system, even if the two parties disagree on a variety of issues, they would at least agree that they would not like any more competition. This "exchange of power" that the Liberal Democrats pointed out was certainly no concept limited to the United Kingdom.

This monopolistic system of political power would have no tangible way of being challenged without a third party, and here I was formerly believing that third parties were simply "a waste of a vote. This "exchange of power" that the Liberal Democrats pointed out was certainly no concept limited to the United Kingdom.

One of the main criticisms the Liberal Democratic Party had with the system itself, even though it was multi-party system, was the complacent and irresponsible sharing of power between Labor and the Tories. The constant handing of power back and forth between "red and blue" struck a particular chord with me. This reminded me too well of American independents' claims

that our very system itself was hijacked by these two parties, and it was stifling the collection of voices a true democracy should have.

What does this say about our own system? Our own system of “red and blue” doesn’t even have a multi-party, let alone a legitimate third-party, to challenge it. For as much as these parties may publicly spar over their differences, are they too complacent in their own rationing of power and exclusion of outside voices?

I also was a very strong advocate of the shadow cabinet system. I thought this was an ingenious and efficient way of providing constructive, intelligent, and useable feedback on the policies of the current governing body. In our political system, for example, I think having a Secretary of State, of Defense, of the Treasury from the minority party would be a much more efficient way of dealing with dissenting opinions. I think not only would the minority party’s opinions be taken more seriously, but I also think it would provide a great amount of political discourse between well-educated government leaders.

I came back to the United States with the distinct feeling that our own political system had room for improvement. Needing improvement in the sense that there were far too few voices being heard, and our party system was even more monopolistic than the one I had access to in the U.K.

I had gone to London expecting to come away with an increased understanding of the British political system. I did, however, come away with

not only that, but also I ended up thinking critically about my own American political system.

I had been given unbelievable access to the realms of power within the entire United Kingdom. I had sat in on extremely sensitive political meetings, had been given access to high-ranking political officials, and had been essentially free to wander the halls of the Palace of Westminster and speak to whomever I liked. It was the chance of a lifetime, and for a kid from a small agricultural town in upstate New York I will never forget my time in London.

Appendix I

The Personnel

Throughout my internship in the Houses of Parliament and with Liberal Democrat News, I met a variety of people across the political spectrum. I have included all the names of the people with which I had most exposure and experience with during my time spent in London. This is, of course, not a complete list of each party's personnel, but these are the people with whom I spent the most time, or held prominent government positions.

The House of Commons

Speaker of the House of Commons

Michael Martin

Prime Minister of the United Kingdom- Labor Party

Gordon Brown

Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Leader- Conservative Party

David Cameron

Third Party Shadow Leader- Liberal Democratic Party

Nick Clegg

The House of Lords

Lord Speaker

Baroness Helen Hayman- non-affiliated with a political party

Leader

Baroness Janet Royall- Labor Party

Opposition Leader

Lord Thomas Galbraith- Conservative Party

The Liberal Democratic Party of the United Kingdom

Leader

Nick Clegg

Shadow Chancellor and Deputy Leader

Vince Cable

President

Baroness Scott of Needham Market

Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

Edward Davey

Shadow Secretary of State for the Home Department

Chris Huhne

Shadow Leader of the House of Commons

David Heath

Shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate

Simon Hughes

Shadow Secretary of State for Defense

Nick Harvey

The Conservative Party of the United Kingdom

Leader and Loyal Leader of the Opposition

David Cameron

Chairman

Eric Pickles

Shadow Foreign Secretary

William Hague

Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer

George Osborne

Shadow Home Secretary

Chris Grayling

The Labor Party of the United Kingdom

Leader and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Gordon Brown

Deputy Leader of the House of Commons

Harriet Harman

First Secretary of State

Peter Mandelson

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Alistair Darling

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

David Miliband

Liberal Democrat News

Editor-in-Chief

Deidre Razzall

Head of Media

Sean Kemp

Deputy Head of Media

Katherine Bancroft

Press Secretary to the Leader

Lena Pietsch

Appendix II

Terminology Used in the Houses of Parliament of the United Kingdom

When I first began working in the Houses of Parliament, I encountered a lot of unfamiliar terms and concepts that I was forced to learn and retain quite quickly. I will most likely use these terms throughout the majority of my project, and have presented them here for easier understanding and reference.

British Commonwealth of Nations

A coalition of 54 independent countries that were formally part of the British Empire, are now independent, but still maintain some political and economic ties with the United Kingdom. Some of the most influential members include Canada, Australia, Jamaica, India, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, and South Africa.

Loyal Leader of the Opposition

This was the head of the opposition party—in this case, David Cameron of the Conservative Party. The leader of opposition was addressed as the “loyal leader,” since although he was in opposition to the governing party, he did not disagree with the system at large or the right of the Sovereign to rule. He was still “loyal” to the system, but in opposition to the current governing body.

Frontbencher

In the House of Commons, this is a group of government leaders that sit literally in the “front bench” with the Prime Minister during Parliamentary meetings. These leaders typically have more important or prominent positions within the government:

Backbencher

A Member of Parliament who holds no government office that literally sits behind the “front bench.” They typically have less power and influence within government proceedings.

Crossbencher

Members of the British House of Lords that are not aligned to any particular party.

Shadow Cabinet

The opposition party’s alternative cabinet to the governing party’s cabinet whose positions *shadow* or mark individual members in. For example, the governing party will have a Chancellor of the Exchequer and the opposition party will have a *shadow* Chancellor of the Exchequer. They provide useful feedback and opinion on the governing leaders they shadow.

Shadow Minister

Leaders in the opposition party’s shadow cabinet whose positions exactly match those within the governing party.

Great Offices of State of the United Kingdom

These are the four most senior and prestigious positions within the British government. They include the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, and the Foreign Secretary

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Member of the governing body who is responsible for all economic and financial matters within the United Kingdom

The Foreign Secretary

The position responsible for relations with foreign countries, matters pertaining to the Commonwealth of Nations and the United Kingdom's overseas territories and the promotion of British interests abroad.

The Home Secretary

The Home Secretary is responsible for internal affairs within England and Wales, and for immigration and citizenship for the whole of the United Kingdom; England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The Home Secretary also has policing and national security responsibilities.

The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is the head of state of the United Kingdom, who is elected by the party with the largest majority in the House of Commons.

As the "Head of Her Majesty's Government," the Prime Minister is the highest political authority in the United Kingdom. They lead a major political party, generally commands a majority in the House of Commons (the lower house of the Legislature), and is the leader of the Cabinet (the Executive). As such, the Prime Minister wields both legislative and executive powers.

Solely upon the advice of the Prime Minister, the King or Queen is able to use many of his or her statutory and prerogative powers, including the dissolution of Parliament; high judicial, political, official and Church of England ecclesiastical appointments; and the granting of peerages, knighthoods, decorations and other honors.

The House of Commons

The Commons is the lower house of the British Parliament that is led by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom is a member of the controlling party of the House of Commons. It is a democratically elected body, consisting of 646

members, who are known as "Members of Parliament" (MPs). Members are elected through the first-past-the-post system by electoral districts known as constituencies. They hold their seats until Parliament is dissolved, which is a maximum of five years after the previous election.

Member of Parliament (MP)

A representative of the voters within a particular political district to the British Parliament that sits within the House of Commons. MPs need only be 18-years-old, British, Irish, or Commonwealth citizens and must not already hold public office.

MPs make £64,760 a year, or just about \$100,000 a year, as well as housing, living, and office expenses paid for by the government.

MPs remain in government until Parliament is dissolved by the Monarch or the Prime Minister calls a general election, which must be at most five years since the last election.

The House of Lords

The upper house of the British Parliament. It consists of 733 members, with the lower house being the House of Commons. The House of Lords has far less political and legislative power than the House of Commons. The House of Lords consists of both Lords Spiritual and Lord Temporal. They have some power to veto or influence some particular legislation, but are forbidden from having any effect on any legislation relating to taxation or national finances.

Membership of the House of Lords was once a right of birth to hereditary peers, but following a series of reforms in 1999 these now only form a small portion of the membership.

Lord Spiritual, "Spiritual Peers"

These are 26 bishops of the established Church of England that sit in the House of Lords. They do not usually vote on matters of law and state.

Lord Temporal

Lords Temporal are secular members of the House of Lords. They are appointed to the positions by the Prime Minister or the Sovereign—on the advice of the Prime Minister. A very small percentage of the Lords Temporal are remnants of the hereditary peers, who inherited the title from their parents. They are the most numerous group in the House of Lords. Unlike the Lords Spiritual, they may be publicly partisan, aligning themselves with one or another of the political parties that dominate the House of Commons.

Hereditary Peers and Life Peers

Hereditary Peers were members of the House of Lords who had their titles and position passed down them from their respective parent. The Labor government brought forward the House of Lords Act in 1999 expelling several hundred hereditary peers from the House and making new “life peers” an honor that can only be bestowed by the Queen or King, with the advice of the governing Prime Minister.

The Palace of Westminster

The Palace of Westminster, also known as the Houses of Parliament or Westminster Palace, is the meeting place of the two houses of the Parliament of the United Kingdom—the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The Palace of Westminster

4 Cowley Street

The street address of the Headquarters of the Liberal Democratic Party, which is only a two minute walk from the Palace of Westminster.

Oxbridge

A colloquial combination of Oxford and Cambridge—the two most prestigious institutions of higher learning in the United Kingdom.

Appendix III

Political Makeup of the United Kingdom-As of 2005 General Election

Although it has changed since I worked in Parliament in the spring of 2009, and will soon change again in early May, this was the political make-up of the British House of Commons and the House of Lords during my time in London. I have listed all the political parties who held at least one seat in the House of Commons, and provided a brief academic and personal description of said parties.

I have also included a brief description of each political party's platform that held at least one seat in the House of Commons, along with a small mention of any personal feelings about the party and its members.

House of Commons 646 members

356	Labor
198	Conservative Party
62	Liberal Democrats
0	United Kingdom Independence Party
6	Scottish National Party
0	Green Party
9	Democratic Unionist
0	British National Party
3	Plaid Cymru
5	Sinn Fein
1	Ulster Unionist
3	Social Democratic and Labor Party
1	Blaenau Gwent People's Voice Group
1	Respect
1	Health Concern

House of Lords 733 members

211 Labor

188 Conservative

72 Liberal Democrats

2 United Kingdom Independence Party

25 Lords Spiritual

Brief Description of Political Parties

Labor Party- Governing Party

The Labor Party is a centre-left political party in the United Kingdom. Founded at the start of the 20th century, it has been regarded as the principal party of the Left in England, Scotland and Wales since 1920

The Labor Party won a majority in the 1997 general election under the leadership of Tony Blair, its first general election victory since October 1974

The party grew out of the trade union movement and socialist political parties of the 19th century seeking representation for workers. It describes itself as a "democratic socialist party". However, since the "New Labor" project began, a larger proportion of its support has come from middle-class voters and many perceive this support as key to Labor's electoral success since 1997.

Historically the party was broadly in favor of socialism, as set out in Clause Four of the original party constitution, and advocated socialist policies such as public ownership of key industries, government intervention in the economy, redistribution of wealth, increased rights for workers, the welfare state, publicly-funded healthcare and education.

During my time in London, Labor was receiving record-low approval ratings and was under a lot of pressure from the Liberal Democrats and

Conservative Party to call a general election. Labor was certainly in “dark times” during my time spent in Parliament, and that mood carried over into most of my dealings with Labor MPs.

A lot of talk amongst the Labor MPs was about the general election which would soon be approaching. They were unhappy with the current state of politics, and thought they were receiving a lot of bad and unjust press against them. They were relatively cordial with the Liberal Democrats, since in their eyes we simply “weren’t Tories.”

Conservative Party- Opposition Party

Founded in its present form during the early 19th century, it has since been the principal centre-right party in the UK.

The Conservative Party is descended from the old Tory Party, founded in 1678, and is still often referred to as the Tory Party and its politicians, members and supporters as Tories.

The Conservative Party was in government for two-thirds of the 20th century, and had really only significantly lost to Labor in the late 1990s. The ideals and foundation of the Conservative Party in many ways matched those of the Reagan-era presidency, and was in many ways still the party of Margaret Thatcher.

I had a lot of experience with MPs and shadow ministers from the Conservative Party. While it was clear that they were certainly not big friends of the Liberal Democrats, there was at least some feeling of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” I’m sure they wanted the majority of the political ammunition being fired at Labor rather than themselves, so they were mostly friendly with me with very few exceptions.

Liberal Democrats- Third Party

The Liberal Democrats, often shortened to Lib Dems, are a centrist to centre-left social liberal political party in the United Kingdom. The party was

formed in 1988 by a merger of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party

Promoting social liberalism, the Liberal Democrats voice strong support for constitutional reform, civil liberties, and higher taxes for public services.

The Liberal Democrats are the most pro-European Union of the three main parties in the UK. The party has strong environmentalist values—favoring renewable energy and commitments to deeper cuts in greenhouse gas emissions.

Although the party objects to state limitations on individual rights, it does favor a welfare state that provides for the necessities and amenities of life.

All clear bias aside, given that I was working primarily with the Liberal Democrats throughout the majority of my internship, I thought the Liberal Democrats had the best plan for recovery and reconstruction after what would be the inevitable end of New Labor. They were a fascinating group of people from an extremely large vaieity of socio-economic and political backgrounds, and I found them all simply fascinating.

United Kingdom Independence Party

Eurosceptic British political party. Its principal aim is the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. It is ideologically identified as being both populist^{[1][2]} and conservative.

UKIP was founded in 1993 by Alan Sked and other members of the all-party Anti-Federalist League. Its primary objective was withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. The new party attracted some members of the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservative Party.

All my experience with the UKIP had to do with the European Elections. They were most like the Conservative Party in their ideals, but

were far less friendly with the Liberal Democrats. The Lib Dems were very supportive of increased integration and cooperation with the rest of Europe and particularly the European Union. This did not sit well with the UKIP or its members.

Scottish National Party

The SNP is a social democratic political party committed to Scottish independence. The SNP's nationalism is left-wing nationalism, not right wing, a trait which it shares with other Celtic Nationalist parties such as Plaid Cymru and Sinn Féin. Its stated aim is "to create a just, caring and enterprising society by releasing Scotland's full potential as an independent nation in the mainstream of modern Europe.

Green Party

The Green Party's political manifesto stems from their strong concerns about the environment, including their proposed policies on economics, employment, defense, energy (fuel) supplies, land tenure, pollution and social security, as then seen within an ecological perspective

The Liberal Democrats got along extremely well with the Green Party. The Green Party of the United Kingdom was father left politically than the Green Party of the United States. They were often our co-sponsors and allies on various issues, and saw to eye-to-eye with the Liberal Democrats quite often. The only issues where there seemed to be friction were those of national defense, where the Liberal Democrats took a more traditional, conservative and serious approach, while the Green Party tended to look at national defense as another drain on the national budget and environmentally damaging. I personally that approach frustratingly short-sighted.

Democratic Unionist Party

A largely socially, politically, and financially conservative group that is the largest in the Northern Ireland Assembly. They are strong advocates of

British Unionism, national conservatism, social conservatism , and Christianity.

British National Party

The British National Party (BNP) is a far-right political party formed as a splinter group from the National Front by John Tyndall in 1982. Until 2009, when it was challenged in the courts on grounds of racial discrimination,^[15] it restricted membership to people of "Caucasian origin"

The BNP seeks to restore the overwhelmingly white ethnicity of Britain that existed prior to 1948 through legal means, including "firm but voluntary incentives for immigrants and their descendants to return home",^[19] and the repeal of anti-discrimination legislation.

The British National Party really disturbed me with its extremity, hardcore nationalism, and unabashed negative attitude toward immigrants. They had traditionally not received not much political support in the years following their founding in 1982, except during times of economic trouble, according to Lib Dem friends of mine. I found it troubling that only when people felt desperate or upset they would turn to a group as extreme and openly fascist.

Plaid Cymru

Directly translated as “The Party of Wales” is the largest political party in Wales. It advocates the establishment of an independent Welsh state within the European Union. Plaid Cymru was formed in 1925 and won its first seat in 1966

Sinn Féin

It is the major party of Irish republicanism and its political ideology is left wing. The party has historically been associated with the Provisional IRA

Sinn Féin is currently the second-largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

With my maternal grandparents born and raised in Ireland, it was interesting to finally put a face to Sinn Fein, which to me had only been associated with the Irish Republican Army.

Ulster Unionist

Strong supporter of union between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and was as strongly “anti-Britain” as you could be in British Parliament.

Social Democratic and Labor Party

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP; Irish: *Páirtí Sóisialta Daonlathach an Lucht Oibre*) is one of the two major nationalist parties in Northern Ireland. During the Troubles, the SDLP was consistently the most popular nationalist party in Northern Ireland, but since the Provisional IRA cease-fire in 1994, it has lost ground to its rival Sinn Féin, which, in 2001, became the more popular of the two parties for the first time.

Blaenau Gwent People's Voice Group

The Blaenau Gwent People's Voice Group is a socialist political party based in the Blaenau Gwent area of Wales. Formed in 2005, it has failed to attract as much attention as Plaid Cymru.

Respect Party

The Respect Party, formerly known as Respect – The Unity Coalition, is a left wing political party in England and Wales founded in 2004. Its name is a contrived acronym standing for Respect, Equality, Socialism, Peace, Environmentalism, Community, and Trade Unionism.

Health Concern Party

Since National Health Services formed in the years following the Second World War, the Health Concern Party is mainly concerned with fighting for the further improvement of hospitals, medical care, and health provision and across the United Kingdom.

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