

The human face of social science

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Former UK Labour minister Anthony Crosland – taking a passing swipe at the puritanism of LSE's founders, the passionately ascetic Beatrice and Sidney Webb and the teetotal vegetarian ascetic George Bernard Shaw – remarked that 'total abstinence and a good filling system' were 'not now the right signposts to the socialist Utopia'.

By the time he made the remark, the objects of his criticism were no longer there to react with the sober dismissal they would certainly have employed. But images of them can still be viewed in the large picture on the far wall of the Shaw Library. There are Beatrice and Sidney Webb at home, on either side of a distinctly utilitarian and parsimonious fire, chatting soberly and surrounded by the piles of government blue books which are the main ornament of their sitting room. It was fortunate, in their case, that books do furnish a room, for there is very little else visible by way of domestic comfort. The small dog by their feet looks quite uncomfortably chilly. The chaos of documents which appears to constitute their filing system may be a bit peculiar and disorderly, but there's certainly not a drop of alcohol in sight.

The School's founders were dedicated to seriousness. Beatrice was horrified by the frivolous licentiousness of the poet Rupert Brooke who, at a Fabian weekend school, was discovered late at night playing football in the library. The trouble with these young people, she wrote, was that they preferred 'boisterous, larkly entertainments' to 'technical and specialised discussion'. RH Tawney, Christian socialist egalitarian and Professor of Economic History at the School, maintained the solemn tradition, declaring in his condemnation of the acquisitive society that if 'a man has important work, and enough leisure and

income to enable him to do it properly, he is in possession of as much happiness as is good for any of the children of Adam'.

Happiness, it was clear, could actually be quite bad for you. The School still has a picture of Tawney by his fireside, puffing away at his pipe with a manuscript on his knee and little else in the room apart from a jumble of reports and papers and pamphlets in a plain, functional bookcase. It's all a long way from golden girls and boys, and you can see why Beatrice was so cross with Rupert Brooke.

But Crosland didn't simply question the adequacy of puritanism. We needed, he said, more jollity in public life, more pavement cafés, brighter clothes for women (it was the 1950s, when men were still supposed to be dowdy). The School seems, at last, to have taken it all to heart, even if it is 50 years late. The image of the beaver as an industrious but slightly over-solemn creature is about to change. The School has acquired one more piece in the jigsaw of property that constitutes the island site, between the new library and the old St Philips hospital. And the bit it has acquired is the George IV pub, which it intends for the moment to keep running as a going concern. Crosland's conception of the

good life is slowly replacing the Webb's utilitarian puritanism, and 'time, gentlemen please' is to be replaced with 'never mind your sociology essay, have another pint'.

Nor does it stop at the George IV. The Columbia Bar, on the corner of the Aldwych and Houghton Street, has been added to LSE's portfolio. This could be the start of a bold new departure in the notion of the educated 21st century man and woman. For Crosland's point did not apply only to socialism. Conservatism needs to take account of cuisine, liberalism of libido, and fideism of fun. In future, when students fill in their questionnaires on the quality of teaching, there will be extra spaces for the broader aspects of the School's educational mission. 'What did you think of the lecturer's colour sense?' 'How poetic was the class presentation?' 'What advice did you receive on local restaurants?' Once the creation of LSE with a human face is complete, the old motto *Rerum cognoscere causas* will be replaced with the far more rounded *In vino veritas*. Crosland would be proud of us. And there might even be football in the library. ■

