

# New dawn?

Cian O'Neill reflects on the depressing relationship between fudged political ideals and promises and popular polling in Britain and the United States

'Morning brings back the heroic ages', was one of the many fine things said by Henry David Thoreau, and as the new year finds its founding feet in the last scattered snow of what, notwithstanding the tabloids, simply represented seasonal weather – not some Old Testament cataclysm – London is still smiling in some wonder over the Daniel Barenboim concerts at the Royal Festival Hall which so embrightened this dark, ending January. Bringing Schoenberg onto the same programme as more reliably popular Beethoven concertos was daring enough, one might think. But then this luminary of the classical world had to go and play the piano while conducting. No mean feat to do, but to do well is daring, and by the last of the series, Barenboim was playing it as cool as Paul Newman, right hand conjuring crystalline glissandos of treble notes, left arm either hung casually by his side or motioning to conduct specific sections of his Berlin Staatskapelle; making it all look rather alarmingly easy – much as the dawn looks in fact, breaking even over Parliament Hill. Well, there are those heroes who can do such miraculous things. For everyone else there are dreams: dreams of a place in the annals, or simply an hour in the sunshine.

Some seem to require rather more than an hour, at least if Tony Blair's tangerine complexion at his recent Chilcot Inquiry appearance is anything to go on. It certainly was one of few certainties to emerge from his testimony, wherein he dissimulated with all that silken shamelessness of old. 'This is what we have missed!' thought the anti-war protesters waiting in vain for a front-door entrance by this backdoor sales-rep. 'This time I will not miss' thought Clare Short, who claimed in her testimony that she was 'conned' by Blair into staying in the Cabinet until the Iraq invasion was eight weeks old. 'This, I would rather miss', thought Gordon Brown, who awaits his

turn at the Inquiry, and a fast-approaching general election that few think he can win.

The 'Broom is now playing his last cards, and with abandon – a significant Green Paper on defence presaging significant cuts to military spending has just been released. A referendum on electoral reform is even mooted, which seems appropriate given that the current polls put Labour second in the running, but it is a referendum little likely to happen, and still less to succeed, in this land so very fond of tradition. The Tories have made a bid to ensure that the common people know who they should vote for by mounting a very plastic and emotionless Dave On Camera portrait on billboards nationwide and having George Osborne promise a 'New Economic Model' which for the first time included something close to specific policy – preserving the UK's 'Triple A' credit rating, since you asked. Labour say that they will halve the deficit within four years and the Tories that they would make major savings after their first full [tax] year in power, which is either a neat way of assuaging fears of excessive cuts as might hobble economic recovery, or simply indecision. Whichsoever it may be, the diet over the next few months would appear to be fudge, promises and hot air.

Democracy is coming, then, but perhaps not to the United States, where despite the majority of the population being in favour of broader healthcare provision, Obama's Healthcare plans look as doomed as the Cadillac. Joe Lieberman was the obvious bar to the Bill being passed in the Senate before Christmas. Its fate was truly sealed in mid-January by the astonishing election of ex-Cosmopolitan centrefold, and now freshman Massachusetts Senator, Scott Brown [Republican]. That 'the Kennedy seat' has gone Republican is significant on a broader level and may signal a swing to the right in America that leaves the European onlooker bemused, com-

ing as it does within one year of the famed inauguration of a decisively-elected Democrat President who by most accounts is able, popular and cautious. The Obama agenda has not even begun on the way to fulfilment. So it seems remarkable that the public would turn away from him when he hasn't yet put anyone out of pocket with meaningful cap-and-trade carbon emissions reform. That mercy was shown also to Wall Street, until his very recent introduction of a state-rescued-banks levy. Perhaps the want of real change has been the cause of the apparent mid-term swing to the right. Or perhaps the reality of change is galling to 'main street' and the 2008 election was a liberal blip. Was 'Change' a false dawn and is it rather 'Morning in America', once more? Somewhere, out beyond the light, Ronald Reagan must be smiling.

