



AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE

Sunday, May 16, 2010

Every week CUIP's president Jacqueline Salit and strategist/philosopher Fred Newman watch the political talk shows and discuss them. Here are excerpts from their dialogues compiled on Sunday, May 16, 2010 after watching selections from "The Charlie Rose Show," "PBS NewsHour" and NY1's "Inside City Hall."

Salit: There's so much interest – isn't there – in the outcome of the British elections.

Newman: More than usual? Maybe you're right.

Salit: The thing that has sparked the greatest interest is that under the British system, given that the Tories didn't win enough seats to set up a Tory government, a coalition government had to be created. That meant the Conservatives (popularly known as the Tories) had to make a deal with the much smaller Liberal Democrats – the Lib-Dems as they're called. The Lib-Dems apparently considered the very strong overtures from the Labor Party, which lost power in this election. But, ultimately the Lib-Dems rejected those in favor of going with the Tories. What seems tantalizing about this is that a small, somewhat marginal player in the English political system became the kingmaker. That's what grabs the attention.

Newman: I don't think what's significant is its smallness or its somewhat liberalness. It's the newness of the situation.

Salit: The newness, meaning the Lib-Dems have been around for a long time, but they've never been in the driver's seat.

Newman: Right. So, it's the newness of there being a relatively powerful third option.

Salit: And what is also very fascinating is that the Lib-Dems' key issue is electoral political reform and they wanted a guarantee of support for that. They see a disconnect in the current design of the British parliamentary system, where the popular vote doesn't fully translate into representation in Parliament. That's the basic issue that they're raising. They're saying that the country needs to reform the system to address that disconnect.

Newman: Right.

Salit: Fascinating stuff. In ideological terms, as was pointed out in the commentary, it seemed more sensible for the Lib-Dems to partner with Labor, since they agree on almost all the social and economic policy issues. But they chose not to, even though Labor was prepared to give them concessions on the electoral reform front.

Newman: But, the Tories would have been in a position to block it in Parliament. So, the Lib-Dems needed a deal with the Tories to secure the electoral reform they wanted. That's the really significant thing.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: They made their choice, not on an ideological basis, but on a political basis. Which is fine, which is good. And Nick Clegg, the head of the Lib-Dems, is now the deputy prime minister. That ain't bad.

Salit: Not bad. It would be like you being Deputy Mayor of New York City.

Newman: Or you.

Salit: Because the Independence Party was the small partner that made Mike Bloomberg mayor.

Newman: Right.

Salit: And our core issue is also electoral reform. Since we're talking about New York City, we watched coverage of the completion of the first round of hearings by the Charter Revision Commission (CRC).

Newman: Starring Harry Kresky.

Salit: Harry Kresky, MP. Or more to the point, Harry Kresky, NP. Non-partisan.

Newman: Right.

Salit: After hearing testimony in every borough, the CRC decided that nonpartisan elections should be on the agenda for the next round of public hearings. Interestingly, of the five issues that they're going to concentrate on in round two, two are political reform. Two of the five.

Newman: Why do you say two?

Salit: Term limits and abolishing party primaries.

Newman: What about the others? I know "Land Use" isn't, strictly speaking, a political reform issue, but the others?

Salit: Well, that's a good point. A third issue on the CRC list is a balance of power issue between the mayor and the City Council, so I guess that is also a political reform issue.

Newman: Exactly, yes. And we understand we're not going to get at any land issues until the revolution.

Salit: I'm sure you're right about that. Alright, the Supreme Court, the nomination of Elena Kagan.

Newman: Yes.

Salit: The left is disappointed, not that they're not going to support Kagan, but the left is disappointed because they really want a "full-throated left liberal" justice on the Court to be a counter-balance to Scalia. And Kagan is not that.

Newman: Well, put another way, the left is disappointed because the massive turnout that made Obama the president is not left-wing.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: It's center-left. And they're going to pout as long as that's the case, but Obama's appointments will reflect that. That's who he is. Is he a leftist? Yes. Is he pro-socialist? Yes. Does he have the same history and ideological hard drive as the American far left? No. At least not the part that's most vocal. So, they're unhappy about that. What can I tell you. They're unhappy.

Salit: Yup. I'll make a note of that. Meanwhile, you know, when they get into these confirmation things on the Supreme Court, they're desperately trying to interpret the "meaning" of actions taken by the nominee. Apparently when Kagan was the Dean of the Law School at Harvard she barred military recruiters from the campus. I don't know what the circumstances were, but now there's a whole discussion about whether that means she's anti-military or something like that. I don't know, Fred. When I was in high school and I took Home Ec, I had an argument with the girl sitting next to me about how to make the crust for apple pie and then we were separated and we weren't allowed to sit together after that.

Newman: OK.

Salit: So, I often think that if I were ever nominated to the Supreme Court, that would come up and it would be discussed on CNN and Fox News, as to whether it showed a lack of female solidarity, or whether I was too radical on the apple pie question, and whether that reflected my views on America, or something.

Newman: Particularly if Ginsburg was that other girl!

Salit: Do you have any thoughts about Elena Kagan?

Newman: She seems to me to be the kind of choice that Obama would make and I support Obama, so I support that choice.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: She makes three women justices on the Supreme Court. I think that's a virtue.

Salit: Yes.

Newman: She seems liberal-minded, which I take to be a virtue. And she's short, which I don't take to be a negative.

Salit: She went to my high school, you know.

Newman: What high school did you go to?

Salit: Hunter. But she was seven years behind me, I think.

Newman: Well, she's much more than that now.

Salit: Maybe. But she probably behaved herself in Home Ec! Thanks, Fred.