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**Science in the Democratic Process: The Euro in the UK General
Election**

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Abstract

The idea that increasing participation leads to wider debate, deeper scrutiny and more robust decisions underpins much of the modern policy agenda for dealing with questions that combine contested science with complex value judgement. In this paper, the aim is not to argue against the principle of increasing participation but to ask how its implementation can bring about the benefits claimed for it. The paper explores the tension between increasing participation and promoting dialogue and learning by examining the discussion of the single European currency during the UK Election in 2001. Although the decision about UK membership of the single currency will ultimately be taken in a referendum, the election, in which the Conservative Party attempted to make the euro a major issue, provides an ideal case study through which to identify the problems created by democratising such a decision. Their failure to do so, however, shows even major political parties can struggle to get their views into the public sphere when decision making becomes democratised. If a similar pattern emerges during any referendum on the single European currency, the consequence will be that increasing participation in this decision may, paradoxically, decrease the range of views that are articulated in public debate. More generally, it suggests that policy initiatives that draw on the public understanding of science literature need to respond not just to the public's capacity to evaluate knowledge claims but their access to such arguments in the first place.

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Introduction

The Sun Says...

When William Hague says that there are only days to save the pound
he is wrong.¹

Before the UK can join the single European currency, two decisions have to be taken. First the government's economic assessment – the 'five tests' – must show that it is in the UK's best interest to join the euro and then voters must endorse this view in a referendum. This paper is about the second of these decisions and, in particular, the extent to which voters in this referendum can have access to the full range of relevant economic and political arguments about the euro. As the euro referendum has not been held yet, any investigation of the issues it raises must proceed by comparison and the UK General Election of 2001 provides an important case study. Not only did the Conservative Party make the euro a key feature of their campaign, the election itself has many parallels with any future referendum. In particular, in both elections and referenda the media provide an important mechanism through which campaign groups and political parties disseminate information, with the print media actively supporting individual parties. As a result, examining the general election provides a foretaste of what we can expect when the more unusual, but no less significant, euro referendum is held.

The euro referendum is not just another democratic process however. It democratises a decision that had previously been regarded as an executive and technical choice. For example, both the decisions to join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism in October 1990 and to leave it in September 1992 were taken the government alone. Although the Chancellor's five economic tests, which must precede any referendum, preserve some role for the government in deciding when, if at all, to call a referendum, the fact that something else is needed clearly acknowledges that a formal assessment cannot be decisive this time. Instead, issues of trust, credibility and identity all matter in the creation of what is not just a new way of paying for things, but the creation of a new social institution. Indeed, the key argument for democratising such decisions is that it encourages the articulation of exactly these issues.

The practice is more complicated. Unlike the countries that joined the euro in January 2001, the UK has a free-floating exchange rate policy.² This means that both the economic and political aspects of (re)entering a fixed exchange rate system are open for debate. Despite this, however, UK public debate tends to focus on the economic consequences of moving back to a fixed exchange rate, with the political implications of this choice receiving a much lower profile. This trend is no accident. It reflects the desire of both pro- and anti- euro groups to focus on the arguments that they believe the UK's 'floating euro voters' are most likely to respond to. It is even possible to see these developments as acknowledging the issues raised by the public understanding of science literature and its critique of the 'deficit' model. Democratising the decisions means that leading campaign groups, rather than seeking to assert their agenda, are recognising the importance of the frames and issues that are salient to ordinary citizens and these perspectives are now being orchestrating the public debate. In this way, the lessons of the PUS literature, which are also reflected in other policy documents (e.g. ABC 1999; Gerold and Liberatore 2001; House of Lords 2000) calling for wider consultation, have indeed been learnt.

More radical readings of the literature would, of course, suggest that this recognition of different starting points is just that -- the starting point. The aim of the participatory process is dialogue and learning. It occurs over time and encourages the exchange of ideas and views, with existing ideas being re-evaluated in the light of new information and perspectives. From this perspective, the aim is not just to map existing differences, but to feed this into a process that allows a resolution of these differences and the co-creation of an agreed outcome, which is more robust because of its increasing articulation with different social groups. From this perspective, a referendum on the euro is important not just because it forces elite groups to engage with lay actors, but because it also provides a framework within which a public debate can take place and a decision reached. The key criteria for evaluating referenda as a mechanism for democratising science thus become the extent to which they fulfil both the participatory expectation of promoting dialogue and learning and the democratic expectation of allowing voters access to the full range of arguments.

In fact, promoting dialogue and exchange of information would seem to be particularly important in referendum. Most voters will not be members of campaign groups, and many admit they know very little about the euro and could be persuaded to change their minds.

As a result, providing access to adequate information is vital part of the referendum, and this means that the media must be considered as a central actor in the public, yet highly politicised, space that the referendum creates. This paper thus explores the relationship between the reporting and campaigning activities of the press and the flow of information in the public sphere by examining how the Conservative party's attempt to make a link between the euro and the election was portrayed in three tabloid newspapers.

The paper thus uses concrete examples drawn from a case study to ask questions about more general trends and ideas. Although the empirical material relates to the 2001 General Election in the UK, the analysis is concerned with what happens when a question that combines uncertain technical knowledge (macroeconomics) with political concerns about control, accountability and identity is debated when it becomes part of a democratic rather than expert process. In this way the paper has implications for the democratisation of science and, in particular, the mechanisms through which such participation is achieved. The conclusion drawn, however, is not an optimistic one. It is that widespread participation of the kind exemplified in the euro referendum seems incompatible with promoting public understanding of, or engagement with, science.

Democracy, Openness and Transparency

Although models of the democratic process usually distinguish between direct and representative forms of democracy (see e.g. Ferree et al 2002), this distinction is not that important for understanding how a referendum can promote public engagement with either science or politics. Holding a referendum transforms the participatory process into a plebiscite and thus makes it almost indistinguishable from the elections of representative democracy. Recognising this also shows why the media, with its links to wider networks and interests, is an important actor in the participatory process and not just its observer. The power of the media, and especially the tabloid press, is part of the popular mythology of UK elections, but its positive role as an agent of democracy is also recognised by election monitoring organisations, who see that:

The media are essential to the conduct of democratic elections. A free and fair election is not only about casting a vote in proper conditions, but also about having adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself so that voters can make an informed choice.³

It is aspect of democratisation that resonates so clearly with the normative implications of the social studies of science.⁴ If scientific knowledge has no epistemic privilege, doesn't this mean that limiting debate and discretion to those recognised as scientists unjustly excludes local, indigenous and situated knowledges from elsewhere in society? If this is so, then democratising science, so as to allow these voices and critiques to be heard should produce a knowledge that, whilst no less socially grounded, does 'articulate' more fully with the concerns, practices and identities of the wider society (e.g. Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons 2001). Indeed, to the extent that the critiques of the deficit model (e.g. Wynne 1995; Irwin and Wynne 1996; Yearley 2000) have been taken on board rhetorically, the time has come to turn attention towards the alternative processes through which socio-technical choices can be made.

In this paper, the aim is to contribute to the development of new decision-making fora by investigating how a specific participatory process provides citizens with the opportunity to know what their choices are and why they matter. In so doing, it assesses the extent to which democratising a decision in which scientific knowledge can increase the openness or transparency with which the technical controversy underlying the debate is discussed outside activist networks and groups. In particular, by examining the way in which three influential UK tabloid newspapers (The Sun, The Mirror and the Daily Mail) reported the General Election of 2001 the paper shows how a major political party struggled, and ultimately failed, to keep their campaign message in the public domain. This analysis is of more than historical interest. The same papers and parties are set to play a key role in any euro referendum and a similar outcome would mean that voters' access to the information that some campaign groups believe to be important would be restricted and the process itself devalued.

The Election, the Referendum and the Euro

The General Election of 2001 officially began on 8 May. Going into the election, the Labour government had a large majority in the House of Commons and a lead of up to 24 points in the opinion polls of their nearest rivals, the Conservative Party.⁵ At the time, Labour supported joining the euro in principle but was committed to its existing policy of waiting for a formal economic assessment scheduled for 2003 before making a final decision. This policy, combined with the fact that the euro was not popular with voters, ensured that Labour did not want to make the single European currency an election issue. Although more pro-euro than Labour, the Liberal Democrats also gave the issue a low

profile in the election and seemed content to re-iterate their existing position, confirming that they would press for a referendum and seek to create the economic conditions needed to join.

The Conservative Party took a very different tack, however. Not only did they oppose the euro and make an explicit promise to rule out joining the euro for the whole of the next Parliament, they made this a major part of their campaign. Their leader, William Hague, was frequently pictured in front of 'Keep the Pound' banners and posters and the campaign literature delivered by local conservative groups reproduced the same message and logo. The Conservatives even devoted one of their televised Election Broadcasts to the euro, arguing it would cost jobs, reduce economic growth and lead to increased European regulation. Throughout this campaign, the Conservative's key claim was that, if Labour won the election, it would use its majority to 'bounce' the UK into the single European currency. The Tories thus wanted voters, who generally opposed the euro by about 2-1, to believe that a Labour victory would make meaningful opposition to the euro impossible and its adoption inevitable.

In promoting this 'Keep the Pound' message, the Conservative Party was doing two things. Firstly, it was seeking to distance itself from Labour and campaign on an issue where they were more in tune with public opinion. The other thing that the Conservatives were doing was less obvious but potentially more controversial. They were making the single currency a party political issue. This is something that both the pro- and anti- euro campaign groups wanted to avoid. Indeed, it was for just this reason that the main campaign groups, who intend to fight on a cross-party platform in any referendum, had decided to keep a low profile during the election. The Tory's 'Keep the Pound' campaign threatened to shatter this approach by linking opposition to the euro with the Conservative party. To make matters worse for the anti-euro campaign, the Conservatives were focusing their Keep the Pound campaign issues like British identity and the danger of a European 'superstate'. In doing this, they were associating opposition to the euro with opposition to the EU. This is something that several influential anti-euro groups believed to be counter-productive and were actively working to avoid (see Evans 2002).

The election campaign strategy of the Conservatives thus created a problem for the anti-euro campaign groups and, more immediately, for the newspapers committed to

campaigning against the euro in a referendum. In effect, unless the Conservatives actually won the election, which seemed unlikely given the opinion poll evidence, reporting Tory claims about the euro as news could work against their editorial line on the euro by associating it with an party and an ideology that had been rejected in the election. As a result, newspapers opposed to the euro would be torn between reporting the election campaign fairly but at the same time minimising the salience of the Tory's Keep the Pound campaign.

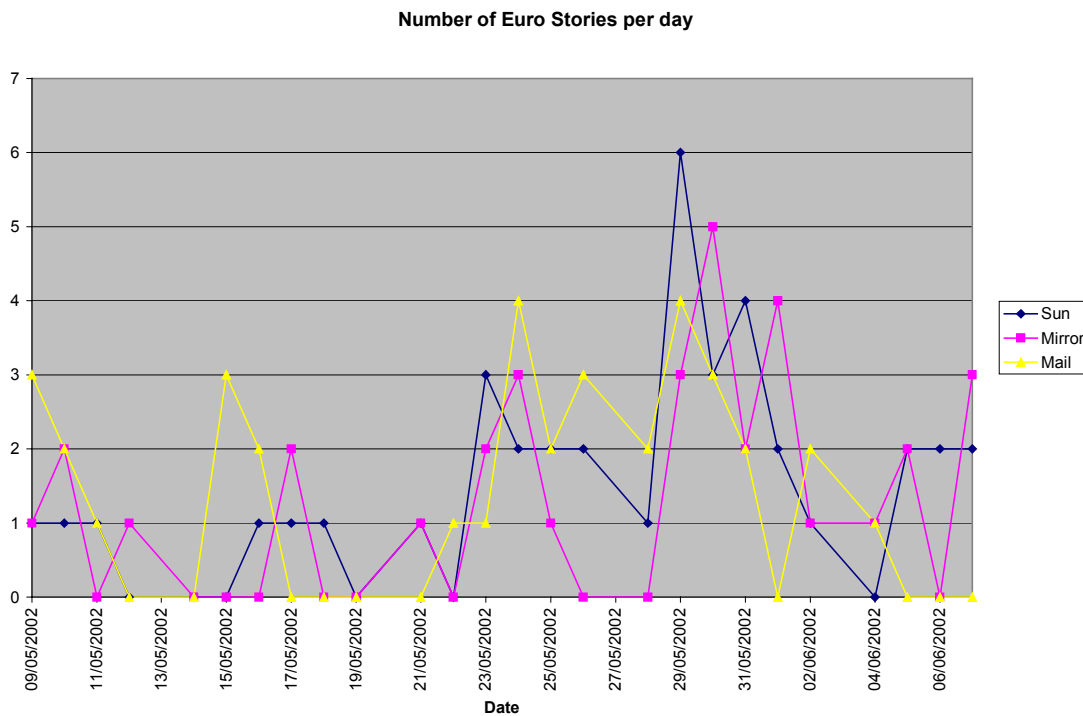
Whilst it is pointless to speculate about what might have been said at editorial meetings, it is possible to examine their product – the news stories and political comment published during the election. In this paper, the analysis focuses on the tabloid press, and the three titles with the largest circulation – The Sun, The Mirror and the Daily Mail – and which represent the positions on both the political parties and the euro. The Mirror and The Sun both backed Labour in the election but only The Mirror supports the euro, with The Sun being one of the euro's staunchest opponents. The Daily Mail, on the other hand, supported the Conservatives during the election and, like The Sun, is vehemently opposed to the euro. By examining how these three titles reported the Conservative campaign the analysis set out below raises questions about the consequences of 'democratising' decisions.

These questions arise because discursive spaces can never be neutral. Information is inevitably selected and interpreted both by those who convey it and those who receive it (Rip 1986). Opening decisions to the democratic process thus provides the opportunity for influential groups to set and dominate the agenda, prioritising some views and belittling others (Glasgow Media Group DATES). As a result, democratising decisions involving complex science by holding referenda may do little more than replace the partial and cultural perspectives of scientific experts with the equally partial, but no more accountable, perspectives of the media (Curran and Seaton 1997, Thompson 1995). What is more, it may do all this without ensuring a full debate or even detailed scrutiny of what does enter the public sphere as readers who are not directly linked to activist or other networks will find it difficult to access excluded information. As shown in the remainder of this paper, this outcome is a real possibility as concerted campaigns by newspaper titles can drive campaign messages out of the public sphere and, potentially, out of the democratic process.

The Tabloid Press: Reportage, Advocacy and Opposition

Despite the desire of the euro campaigners and the Labour party, it was impossible to keep the euro out of the election completely. Throughout the duration of the campaign it was rare that two days went by without a story on the euro emerging. The frequency with which stories appeared in each of the three papers is illustrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Number of Euro-related stories per day



Whilst this steady stream of euro-related stories appears to suggest the Conservatives were having some success with their campaign to make the single currency an election issue, this impression is misleading. In fact, the Conservatives faced a real problem in getting their ‘Keep the Pound’ message into the public debate. As illustrated below, although the Daily Mail follows the Tory line, both The Sun and The Mirror had little sympathy for the ‘Keep the Pound’ campaign. Ironically, the peak in coverage that occurs towards the end of the campaign is almost entirely negative and actually marks the point at which the euro is effectively driven out of the election.

In exploring how the Conservatives failed to keep their claim that the euro was an election issue in the public domain, the analysis focuses on three key periods in the election campaign:

1. the start of the campaign when parties and papers set out their views on a range of election issues;
2. the consolidation of this initial coverage during the second week of the campaign, when initial manifesto claims began to come under scrutiny;
3. the days leading up to what should have been the launch of the ‘Seven Days to Save the Pound’ campaign but were in fact its death.

Terms of Engagement

At the start of the election, the Daily Mail was firmly behind William Hague and the Conservatives. Their coverage combined a reasonably straightforward summary of the conservative campaign with its emphasis on British identity, with a very negative portrayal of Labour. Although not making the euro the focus of editorials, their initial election did reproduce the Conservative claim that Tony Blair intended to ‘capitalise on a poll victory by moving swiftly towards a referendum on the euro, regardless of the overwhelming opposition of the British public.’⁶ This favourable stance was repeated in a separate article on the same page in which William Hague was quoted extensively. Summarising his campaign he stated it was aimed at ‘people who see the pound as a symbol of our country’ and ‘who are appalled by “political correctness” and the loss of sovereignty to Europe’.⁷

On the other side of the political divide, The Mirror was, if anything, even firmer in its support for Labour and its policies on Europe and the euro. Echoing the ‘its cold outside’ theme used in the pro-euro literature, The Mirror’s first election editorial set the tone for its subsequent portrayal of the Conservative party as the leader writers told their readers that they faced a clear choice. They could vote for William Hague and a more extreme version of a Conservative party that had been responsible for ‘18 years of destruction, pain and suffering for millions of ordinary people’ and which had made ‘Britain an outcast in Europe’.⁸ Or, they could ‘consign William Hague to the dustbin of history’⁹ by voting for Tony Blair and a Labour Party that had improved relations with Europe and which deserved the chance to build on the successes of their first term.

The Sun was somewhere in the middle. Given its historical support for the Conservative Party, and its more sceptical views about the euro, its support for Labour was more conditional than that of The Mirror. In the ‘Sun Election Manifesto’, published on 9 May 2001, Political Editor Trevor Kavanagh, and colleagues George Pascoe-Watson and David Wooding, set out what they saw as the key issues in the election. One of these was that the UK must keep the pound. Given that this is a Conservative rather than a Labour policy, The Sun’s political team might seem to face a dilemma. The problem is explained away, however, on the grounds that there will never be a referendum on the euro because the majority of the public, including ‘millions of Sun readers’, are opposed to it. In effect, and in a stark contradiction of both William Hague and the Daily Mail, The Sun is telling its readers that the pound is safe whatever the outcome of the election.

The next day provided further evidence of the difficulties that William Hague and the Conservatives were to face. The Sun focused its coverage on the last Prime Ministers Questions of the Parliament, where William Hague began his crusade to make the euro an election issue. Under the headline ‘Round One to Hague’, The Sun reports that ‘The Tory chief shrugged off dismal opinion poll ratings and tore into the Prime Minister over his plan to ditch the Pound.’¹⁰ Whilst this coverage is certainly good for the Tories, especially given the importance usually attached to The Sun’s endorsement, their good start is reined back the following day when the paper publishes an article by Tony Blair which reassures The Sun’s readers that:

[the Labour Party’s] position is that we support Britain’s membership in principle but in practice, we would only recommend membership if it was good for British jobs, for British investment, for our country’s future. And we have promised that the British people will have the final say if we were to recommend membership.¹¹

Whilst this is hardly a knock-out blow, the article does allow the opening exchanges to end on the Prime Minister’s terms by downplaying the electoral significance of the euro and promising The Sun readers the final say at a later (maybe much later) date.

Unlike The Sun, The Mirror hardly reports Prime Minister’s Questions at all. Instead it focuses its parliamentary coverage on the final speech to the House of Commons by Sir Edward Heath, a former leader of the Conservative Party, and the Prime Minister who

took Britain into Europe in the 1970s. Under the headlines ‘Speech that put the final nail in coffin’ and ‘Ted does nation a farewell favour by knifing Hague’, The Mirror states that the former leader ‘put the boot into the Tory Party’ and ‘demolished Billy Bandwagon’s policy brick by brick’.¹² Sir Edward’s strongly pro-European views, which are probably a minority view in the Conservative party, are presented as fatally undermining William Hague’s plans to make Europe and the euro a key election issue. What is more, any praise implied by the brief description of Mr Hague’s ‘bravura performance’ at Prime Minister’s Questions is immediately damned by the verdict that it was ‘driven by panic’ and that ‘the bullets bounced off’.¹³

As for the Mail, its opening coverage provided few details on the policies, with its main coverage contained in to a parliamentary sketch, which although focusing on personalities rather than policies, makes it clear that William Hague came out on top. More surprisingly, given the Mail’s eurosceptic views and its support for William Hague, the remarks of the pro-European Sir Edward Heath are reported without comment, leaving readers in no doubt about the low esteem in which the ex-leader views the current incumbent (‘a laughing stock’).

There are thus clear differences between the three papers and the information they present their readers about the issues that should define the election. Only the Mail follows William Hague in presenting the euro as an election issue. The Sun and The Mirror both find ways of minimising it. The Mirror takes the Labour line that although they support the idea in principle the final decision will be made in a referendum. In contrast, The Sun, which generally agrees with the Mail about the euro, argues that it can support Labour now not because there will be a referendum in which the euro can be rejected at some later date, but because there will never be a referendum at all. In other words, it is only in the pro-Tory Daily Mail that the Conservative claim that a Labour victory will mean the end of the pound is presented as if it is credible.

Mavericks and Manifestos

After this flurry of attention, the single european currency barely registered on the tabloid news agenda for the next 10 days. It was not until 22 May, when the election campaign was approaching its mid-point, that things changed and the euro re-entered the public debate. The story started in an interview given to Daily Mail by the former Conservative

leader, Lady Thatcher, in which she re-stated her well-known suspicion of Europe and her now unyielding opposition to UK membership of the single currency:

We have just had a century where two world wars were started from the continent of Europe and peace restored by the English speaking peoples ... The thought that we might be absorbed into Europe is to me utterly repugnant, and I'll fight against it so long as I have the breath to do so ... If you have a single currency you give up your independence. You give up your sovereignty. That we must never do.¹⁴

Later that day Lady Thatcher repeated these views at a Conservative Party rally in Plymouth. Departing from her prepared text, Lady Thatcher again went beyond the official Conservative policy on the euro and stated that she would 'never' be prepared to give up the pound. The following day, 23 May, her views were a big story for every paper. The Mail saw the speech as a chance to reinforce their interview from the previous day and continue their campaign against what they see as Tony Blair's disingenuous claim that British influence is best maintained by having closer ties with Europe. The Daily Mail thus portrays Lady Thatcher as reinforcing the conservative campaign on the threat to national identity and sovereignty that is symbolised by the euro, but which includes plans for a federal Europe, tax harmonisation and the end of a 'uniquely British way of life'¹⁵.

In contrast, The Mirror saw Lady Thatcher's statement as a catastrophe for the Conservative case. Writing under the headline 'The Mummy Returns: Maggie ruins Tory euro vow' the paper wrote that:

Maggie Thatcher returned to haunt William Hague last night, ripping up his policy on the euro.

Baroness Thatcher said that she would 'never' join the single currency. Her extremist stance left Mr Hague's policy – to rule out joining up for five years – in tatters.¹⁶

That same morning (23 May), as the reports of the Plymouth rally were hitting the streets, Lady Thatcher's views appeared to gain the endorsement of the current Tory candidates.

Speaking on the Radio 4 Today programme, Francis Maude, the Shadow Foreign Secretary appeared to agree with Baroness Thatcher when he said that ‘We [the conservatives] think that it will never be right for Britain to join’.¹⁷ The following day, 24 May, Mirror readers were confronted with three major articles all criticising the Tories, their ‘extreme’ views over Europe and writing off their electoral chances. In his column, Paul Routledge linked made exactly the kind of links the anti-euro campaigners are keen to avoid, writing that:

At heart, they [the Tories] hate Europe and are obsessed with keeping the pound even if it is in Britain’s worst interests.¹⁸

Under the headline ‘Meltdown: Euro Row Shatters Tories’,¹⁹ James Hardy developed the story by reporting that eighty other candidates apparently supported Francis Maude’s view and thus rejected the policy they were supposed to be campaigning for. According to Hardy, the statement by Francis Maude had ‘smashed the fragile unity on Europe stitched up by Mr Hague’ and left him watching helplessly ‘as the squabbling Tories went into meltdown’.²⁰ As opinion polls showed that Labour’s lead had, if anything, extended to 30 points, The Mirror’s leader writers were in no doubt what this meant:

As the Tories plunge ever closer to meltdown, spare no tears for them.

They are being rejected by the British people because we are at heart a tolerant and sensible race.

William Hague’s conservatives offer a rabid mix of extremism, nonsense and gobbledygook ...

Wiping them out will be good for the country and good for democracy.²¹

For The Sun, however, the Tory’s poor opinion poll ratings and their apparent determination to improve them by campaigning on the single currency raised a more interesting problem. On 23 May, when The Sun reported Baroness Thatcher’s speech, the paper had yet to take a strong editorial line against the Tory strategy. Her speech was reported as a news story, but it was not followed up in the editorial sections. Instead, the leader column focused on the need for UK to have an effective opposition if its

democratic institutions were to function properly. In other words, although The Sun wanted Tony Blair's Labour party to win, it did not want them to win by too much, perhaps reflecting Conservative fears that a landslide victory would create a momentum that would be difficult to stop:

It is looking very grim indeed for the Tories.

Polls show them facing oblivion. But polls can be wrong...

It is not good for democracy that one party should have complete domination over Parliament.

We need ministers to face the sort of intelligent, probing questioning that Hague provides so well in the Commons.

Yes, The Sun stands four square behind Blair.

But equally we believe the country is best served if there isn't a total Tory wipeout on June 7.²²

The implication here is that the paper was taking Conservative concerns about the consequences of a Labour victory seriously for opposition to the euro and other issues. Indeed, this would appear to be confirmed by another article printed the same day, in which George Pascoe-Watson explicitly links a Labour victory to the single European currency:

A TORY rout on June 7 would be a hammer blow to democracy in Britain.

If the polls are to be believed – and it's a big "if" – Tony Blair would lead 507 Labour MPs back to the Commons after polling day ...

Nothing could stand in his way as he steamrollered through radical changes with little opposition ...

Scrapping the pound would be high, if not top, of his list of things to do.²³

This coverage thus signals a key point in the election coverage. Presumably The Sun could have followed up these concerns by acknowledging Mr Hague's concerns about the euro and encouraging the roughly 30 per cent of their readers who traditionally vote Conservative to use their concerns about the euro to keep Labour's electoral mandate in check.²⁴ They did not do this, however. Instead, they took exactly the opposite tack, and made a clear attempt to follow both Labour and the anti-euro campaign groups and take the euro back out of the election. Writing the very next day, just 24 hours after the paper had appeared to back William Hague's argument that a Labour victory would make joining the euro inevitable, The Sun's Political Editor, Trevor Kavanagh gave a very different post-election prediction:

The Tories are banking on the sad and sickly euro to save them from oblivion on June 7.

They will accuse Tony Blair of planning a rigged referendum to scrap the Pound as soon as he's back inside Number Ten...

These theories are attractive but wrong. If Mr Blair had his way, we would be in the euro tomorrow. But not at any cost. A referendum is unlikely in the first two years – and probably not in the next Parliament.

It is even possible that Britain may NEVER join the euro – even if Labour wins a third term.²⁵

The article then continues to list a series of logistical, political and practical reasons why Tony Blair will be unable to win a referendum and therefore will not hold one. The Editorial leader on the same day reinforces Kavanagh's analysis, arguing that:

This country has a golden future if it can resist joining the euro.

If it does scrap the pound, all will be lost.

Tony Blair and Gordon Brown know this only too well.

Which is why all the huffing and puffing about Europe is just a phoney war²⁶

The increasing profile of these views, and their distance from the Tory line that the general election is the last chance to save the pound, could not be clearer. Whether they did this in order to support Labour or advance the long-term interests of the anti-euro coalition, or some combination of the two, is less important than the fact that they did it all. In effect, what The Sun did after 23 May was attempt to make it impossible for Mr Hague to speak to their readers about the euro. This decision, combined with The Mirror's forthright strategy of reporting the Conservative claim as the policy of an extreme and isolationist party meant that, of the three tabloids, only the Daily Mail was reporting the Conservative campaign as if it were credible.

Seven Days to Save the Pound or Seven Days to Save the Tories?

The collective effect of these editorial decisions about the Euro and the election can be seen most clearly in the run-up to final week of the election, when the Conservatives were due to launch a 'Seven Days to Save the Pound' countdown. If the Conservative strategy was successful, then the last week of the election would see the euro become a key issue in the election. The question was could this happen when the majority of the tabloid press was telling its readers that the euro was not an election issue?

The potential for the Conservative tactics to work was certainly present. The week began with a speech by French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in which he outlined his views for the future development of Europe and the European Union. In the Daily Mail, the speech was seen as yet another example of the European federalism they oppose and they continued to link the election to the pound. Thus, when Lionel Jospin's speech was reported on 29 May, the report appeared above an analysis article arguing that the election and euro were 'totally connected' because, if elected, Tony Blair 'will take serious risks with our economy in order to make the referendum fit his personal timetable'.²⁷ Later in the same issue, writing under the headline 'Only One Man Can Save the Pound now', Stephen Glover argued that, even if the Conservatives did not win the election, it was important that they could provide the strong opposition needed to prevent a referendum on the euro becoming 'a charade'.²⁸

In contrast, both The Sun and The Mirror managed to use the same speech as a way of minimising the relevance of the single European currency as an election issue. In The Mirror, Prime Minister Jospin's speech merited only a brief mention in which it was noted that he agreed with Tony Blair about the importance of national governments within the European Union but that the two disagreed about harmonising corporate tax levels. In its editorial on the same day, The Mirror acknowledged that Britain's future relationship with Europe was a matter of concern, but argued the Labour's pro-European stance meant that they were the only ones capable of dealing with it fairly:

The Tories have hardly picked up a single vote in the two weeks of the election.

That is not surprising. Their campaign looks a shambles and their leader hopelessly ineffective.

William Hague ignores the issues that really matter to the British people – health, education, pensions, transport, the economy – and goes on and on about the euro...

There are difficult decisions to take and we can only take them when we are given honest and fair information.

That will not come from William Hague and his Europe-hating rabble.

It will come from Tony Blair and his team.²⁹

Throughout the rest of the week, The Mirror continued this strategy of mocking the Tories as extremist and xenophobic. In doing this they further reinforced the image that anti-euro campaign groups are keen to avoid, not least because of its resonance with the experience of the 1970s when opposition to joining the Common Market was led by 'the men with staring eyes'³⁰. In addition to these negative messages, the run-up to Thursday 31 May, the day the 'Seven Days to Save the Pound' campaign was due to be launched, also saw The Mirror publish a series of pro-euro stories, stressing the benefits that would follow from adopting the single currency. For example, on 30 May, comments by Chris Gent, the Chief Executive of Vodaphone, that Britain was in Europe 'big time' were

reported enthusiastically in both a news article and an editorial. The Tory campaign countdown is not mentioned at all, however, except in an article reporting a significant change in Conservative tactics:

Last night a shaken [William] Hague began a retreat on the euro with a last minute change to a speech, which indicated that his campaign focus on the EU had been a disaster.

Ditching his usual mantra that Britain had just days to save the pound, he said the eventual choice over the euro was ‘a decision to which the choice made in the next nine days might well make a vital difference’³¹

The same issue also carried a separate article describing the Tory leader’s ‘Euro U-Turn’ as a response to the opinion polls that showed no increase in Conservative support despite the fact that the election was now only nine days away. By 1 June, the start of the final week of the election campaign, the death of the ‘Seven Days to Save the Pound’ countdown, and the Keep the Pound campaign it was supposed to highlight, was clear for the pro-euro Mirror. Although it should now be the main focus of the Conservative campaign, The Mirror was reporting only its failure. Speaking from the anti-euro position, Paul Sykes, a one-time supporter of William Hague, denounced the Conservative policy as an attempt to prevent anti-euro Conservatives from speaking out, whilst The Mirror’s own columnist, Paul Routledge argued that, although voters were not necessarily giving Labour a wholehearted endorsement:

The Tories ha[d] made the choice infinitely easier than it might have been. By seeking to turn the election into a single-issue referendum on the European Single Currency they have simply baffled and irritated people ...

the polls indicate that very few people share his obsession. As Michael Portillo was forced to admit in a radio phone-in, we will decide whether Britain joins the euro in a poll of the people some time in the next two years.³²

Indeed, to make matters even worse for Mr Hague, 1 June also saw the publication of an opinion poll that actually showed a majority in favour of joining the euro. According to an

NOP poll, 53 per cent of respondents were in favour of adopting the euro in “a year or two” if ministers and company bosses argued strongly that Britain would be better off.³³ Whilst the poll was clearly an outlier, and the wording of the question undeniably significant, The Mirror's leader writers were in no doubt what it the evidence added up to:

With less than a week to go to the election, William Hague receives the final blow to his hopes.

He fought his campaign on one issue – Europe and the euro. He believed that this was the one thing he had going for him.

Now comes the truth. The British people do not share the obsession of Tory activists on this subject...

Voters care about the quality of their lives. The health service, education, pensions, transport and national prosperity.

Mr Hague has failed to understand that. And he will pay heavily for that on June 7.³⁴

Unfortunately for William Hague, the anti-euro Sun was sticking to its view that the euro was not the election issue and, unlike the Mail, did not make any connection between the vision of . Under the headline 'The Sun, Blair, and the Euro', the leader writers explained their pro-Labour but anti-euro stance as follows:

Tony Blair will have no mandate to take Britain into the European Single Currency when he wins the election.

The election of 2001 has not been fought on the euro ...

When William Hague says that there are only days to save the Pound he is wrong. When Hague loses, the Pound will not be dead.³⁵

Of course, by now, William Hague was hardly saying this at all. The Keep the Pound campaign, with its explicit link between the election and the single European currency had been so comprehensively rejected by the media, that the Conservatives were no longer able to make the case. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Sun itself. Writing about Lionel Jospin's speech under the headline 'It's the Death of Our Nation', The Sun's Deputy Political Editor George Pascoe-Watson claimed that:

Britain's cherished way of life would DIE under a nightmare vision of the European Union's future spelled out yesterday by French Premier Lionel Jospin.

He made it clear that our political control could be seized by a federal superstate if the UK dumped the pound and began using the euro.

The socialist leader's bleak blueprint for a United States of Europe came as a hammer blow to Tony Blair as he tried to dilute opposition to joining the ailing single currency.³⁶

The difference from the Conservative line is that threat only becomes real if the UK joins the euro. If it does not, then the implication, which is also the preferred message of Business for Sterling, is that the status quo will continue. More importantly, however, the coverage makes no reference to the General Election. Instead, the speech is set in the context of The Sun's own opposition to the euro and its view that the Labour will not hold a referendum it cannot win:

Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, Robin Cook and their pals in the European Commission have for years dismissed The Sun's warnings about life in the euro.

They have accused us of peddling hysterical myths about the future of the EU and the single currency.

Well now the truth is laid bare before them [by Mr Jospin]³⁷

The effect of the story is not, therefore, to bring the euro back into the election, as it did for the Daily Mail, but to show why it cannot be part of the election. It all depends on the

referendum that will never happen. This argument gains further support in a third story, reporting an article in the Financial Times, which points out that, before the UK can join the single currency, it has to agree the exchange rate and shadow the euro at that rate for two years. If the FT is correct, it means that the government, if it wants to join the euro in 2003, should be shadowing the euro at the time of the election. As it is not, this can only mean that a referendum is at least two years away.³⁸ Summing all this up in an editorial headlined 'Euro Suicide', The Sun's leader writers claim that:

EARLY British entry into the euro becomes less likely as the days go by.

The economics are not right, the politics are not right, and on top of this the European vision outlined by the French Premier yesterday represents an utter nightmare.

Any British politician prepared to argue for an early referendum will be shot down in flames by the great British public - and quite rightly, too...

An early referendum would represent an act of political suicide unprecedented in modern times.³⁹

On Wednesday 30 May, The Sun's coverage continued to work against William Hague's claim that the election represented the last chance to save the pound. An article by The Sun's Political Editor,⁴⁰ and reinforced by the leader writers,⁴¹ continued the argument started the previous week that an early referendum was unlikely. The starting point for both articles were statements made by Tony Blair that he would not attempt to 'bounce' the UK into an early UK referendum even if he were to win a landslide victory in the General Election. As with the previous week's stories, however, The Sun was keen to stress that the obstacles to holding a referendum would last for much longer than the six month delay proposed by the Prime Minister. In his article, Trevor Kavanagh argues that, although Downing Street had promised not to hold a referendum for six months:

... The Sun now believes that Mr Blair is ready to put any poll on ice for a least A YEAR.

As we argued last week, that would effectively rule out 2002, the year of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

And it would risk making a referendum impossible for the whole of the next parliament.⁴²

The article then continues to list the practical and logistical hurdles between the election and the referendum. In a leader article devoted to the same topic, the editorial writers introduce another, possibly insurmountable, obstacle to the euro – Great British public opinion. Referring readers to a speech by another EU leader, this time Romano Prodi,⁴³ The Sun once again links joining the euro with the emergence of a European superstate and argues that, if joining the euro means being part of this, then it will never happen:

Britain will not be bounced into the euro after the election.

The Prime Minister says so...

[But] this does not mean that Blair has abandoned the euro.

Of course he has not.

As soon as he wins he will be ramping up the yes campaign.

By next Autumn [2002] he will be mulling over his options. His private pollsters will be busy testing the water. Will the British public be for turning?

We very much doubt it.

The nightmare vision of Europe shared by French Premier Lionel Jospin and European Commission chief Romano Prodi will scare the living daylights out of our readers ...

With people like Prodi around, The Sun's campaign against the euro will be easy.

In other words, Sun readers are being encouraged to read the political runes as meaning that the pound will be safe even if Tony Blair does win the election because the risk of calling a referendum and losing it is simply too great for him to take. Taken together, the problems of change and the success of the status quo, combine for The Sun to render a pro-euro victory in a referendum very unlikely and government efforts to achieve it a distraction from more important issues. Indeed, as the final week began, The Sun's editorial looked uncannily similar to that of The Mirror:

Tony Blair's fate now seems sealed.

One week today, he will become that rarity – a Labour PM who wins two full terms...

[But] Blair and Co will have to deliver – fast.

The public will kick them out if things don't get better.

Hospital waiting lists must come down.

Class sizes in secondary schools must get smaller.

The transport system must get better.

Welfare reform must be advanced.

And above all else: the euro must not be pushed too far, too often.⁴⁴

And what of the Conservatives and the Daily Mail while this campaign to remove opposition to the euro from the election was going on? In the Mail, there was very little euro coverage at all. The Conservative 'Seven Days to Save the Pound' countdown, trailed only one week before by William Hague in an interview with the Guardian, had been driven off the news agenda and was no longer anything to report. Indeed, as the election moved into its final five days, even this most loyal of Tory papers was reporting that Conservative divisions over Europe, and over the policy of making it an election issue

were re-emerging. The Keep the Pound campaign was over several days before the election it was supposed to decide.

Conclusions

Although the story presented above is of an election campaign strategy that failed, it raises more general issues relating to the democratisation and subsequent public discussion of science. If calls to increase participation and democratise science are taken seriously, then the logical way to resolve difficult decisions that combine disputed technical knowledge and questions about values and identities is through referenda. In the UK, the decision on whether or not to join the single European currency will, if the initial economic tests are deemed to have been passed, be taken in just this way. The referendum on the euro, should it happen, is thus both an important event for the UK but also for the science studies community.

The relevance of the election in this context is not that Labour won, or even that the Conservatives lost. Rather it is that the Conservatives were unable to make their campaign message that the election and the euro were related stick. Instead, whether because of pro-Labour sympathies, or strategic considerations about the referendum, or both, the tabloid press systematically ridiculed and rebuffed the Conservative's claim. In doing so, they effectively drove the issue from the public sphere and raised an important question about the consequences of attempting to debate something as complex as the euro in the framework of a competitive election. An election campaign, which is what the referendum campaign will be, is ultimately about winning. Voters will be targeted with those messages that campaign groups think will be most effective in winning their support and shielded from those that might discourage them. In this way, the process of a referendum works against the dialogue and mutual learning central to visions of a more democratic and participatory science policy.

Of course, one could argue, as democratic theories do, that the nature of the democratic process, with its free exchange of ideas and independent media, ensures that this control of information is ultimately doomed and that all views are heard. The preceding analysis, however, shows that democratic practice is very different from this. In the election campaign, newspapers campaigning for political parties, and with wider European agendas, effectively neutralised the Conservative claim that the outcome of the election would have a profound effect on the euro referendum. Instead they implicitly, but very effectively,

reinforced the strategic priorities of the Labour party and the euro campaign groups who did not want the euro to be part of the election.

This matters for any referendum on the euro because a similar tension is likely to arise then. Neither the pro nor anti european lobbies are keen to campaign on the political aspects of the single european currency. If the newspapers follow this lead, as they will if they believe the outcome is important, then organisations attempting to raise the political dimensions of the euro in a referendum may find themselves side-lined in the same way as the Conservative attempts to raise the european dimension of the election. In fact, if it can happen in an election to the party that was the official opposition, then in a referendum where the legislative framework ensures that resources are concentrated on the 'official' parties, with other groups financially and legally constrained, it is even more likely.

This then is the real lesson of the election. Democratic processes need a transparent and open debate in which all sides in a controversy are able to articulate their views in the public sphere. This is particularly important in any euro referendum because it is the public who must weigh up the available political and economic arguments and reach a judgement. Taking the general election as an analogue of this process, it is clear that the conduct of the news media in such a campaign may make it difficult for some groups to make their voices heard and for readers to correctly identify the source of what information is provided. Indeed, one of the most notable features of the election coverage is that most of the challenges to Mr Hague's claims come not from his political opponents but from the media itself. What is not obvious from the press coverage, however, is that taking the euro out of the election is not just the strategy of Labour party, it is also the strategy of the pro- and anti-euro campaign groups. Indeed, for the anti-euro groups the stakes are even higher, because they also think that the kind of euro-sceptic views that will rise to prominence as a result of the conservative campaign will alienate voters in a referendum by associating opposition to the euro with opposition to the European Union.

The implications of this for using direct democracy as a means of resolving controversial technical decisions are therefore serious. Firstly, it is likely that, as newspapers take on a campaigning role, they will prioritise those groups and views that are on 'their' side. Thus in any euro referendum, anti-euro groups can expect to have their campaign covered more favourably by The Sun, whilst the pro-euro groups will enjoy a similar advantage in The

Mirror. Such selection is no surprise, but it masks the more subtle process identified above. As The Sun's coverage of the election showed, campaigning requires not just a policy – to reject or join the euro – but also a strategy for implementing it. When campaigning for or against the euro, therefore, the news media will not only support one side or the other they will also tend to amplify the messages they believe to be most effective in winning. As a result, the possibility of editorial exclusion applies not just to those groups who oppose the politics of a given paper, but also to those supporters who are seen to be using the 'wrong' tactics. The effect, therefore, is to doubly restrict access to the public sphere so that only those groups whose politics and tactics that are deemed most likely to produce the right result are heard. As the Conservatives found out, this process can exclude even the most significant of political parties.

The lesson of this election for referenda and other mechanisms for democratising science-based decisions is that the dissemination of information necessary for informed decision making cannot be taken for granted. Knowledge and expertise are acquired slowly and with difficulty by exposure to arguments and opposing views. The media thus have an important role to play in making expert and other knowledge available. It would be naïve to think they can do this without some form of selection and interpretation but the aim of a participatory processes is usually to increase the range of views expressed so that voters have access to all ideas and arguments. Similarly, increasing transparency usually means making it clear who supports which view and why. The election shows that if participation is promoted through direct democracy then neither of these outcomes is guaranteed.

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¹ Editorial headlined 'The Sun, Blair and The Euro', The Sun, 28 May 2001.

² In this respect it is in a similar position to Sweden, whose referendum is scheduled for September 2003. In contrast, Denmark has a fixed exchange rate regime and remains with the European Exchange Rate Mechanism despite the victory of the No campaign in the referendum held in September 2000.

³ Source: ACE website. URL: <http://www.aceproject.org/main/english/me/> [Accessed 3 January, 2003]. ACE is the 'Administration and Cost of Elections Project', which is jointly funded by International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA).

⁴ This is one of the criteria for free and fair elections. See for example page 39 of the EU's 'Communication from the Commission on EU Election Assistance and Observation'. The document is available at: http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2000/com2000_0191en01.pdf. [Accessed 3 January, 2003].

⁵ The exact figures varied from poll to poll and during the course of the campaign. A poll by MORI published the day after the election was announced (i.e. on 9 May) put Labour on 54 per cent, the Conservatives on 30 per cent and the Liberal Democrats on 13 per cent. Labour's lead declined during the campaign, with final MORI poll on 6 June putting Labour on 47 per cent, Conservatives on 30 per cent and Liberal Democrats on 18 per cent. Source: <http://www.mori.com/election2001/voting.shtml> [Accessed 06 August 2002].

⁶ David Hughes (2001) 'Starting Gun is Fired', Daily Mail, 9 May 2001, p. 6.

⁷ Rebecca Paveley (2001) 'From His Soapbox, Hague Says: I'm Confident of Victory', Daily Mail, 9 May 2001, p. 6.

⁸ Voice of The Mirror (2001) 'Remember the Years of Misery', The Mirror, 9 May 2001.

⁹ Op cit. note 8.

¹⁰ Pascoe-Watson, ~George (2001) 'Round One to Hague', The Sun, 10 May 2001.

¹¹ Blair, Tony (2001) 'Labour: The Party of Economic Stability', The Sun 11 May 2001.

¹² Routledge, Paul (2001) 'Speech That Put the Final Nail in Coffin', The Mirror, 10 May 2001.

¹³ Op cit. note 12. Billy Bandwagon is Paul Routledge's diminutive nickname for William Hague that tries to associate Mr Hague with a desperate populism.

¹⁴ Interview with Simon Heffer. Simon Heffer (2001) 'Blair is Destroying My Legacy by Stealth', Daily Mail, 22 May 2001, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ Edward Heatcoat Amory (2001) 'A Dubious Kind of Patriotism', Daily Mail, 24 May 2001, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ The Mirror (2001) 'The Mummy Returns', The Mirror, 23 May 2001.

17 Source: Mirror report of Radio 4 interview in Hardy, James (2001) ‘Meltdown: Euro Row Shatters Tories’, The Mirror, 24 May 2001.

18 Routledge, Paul (2001) ‘Election 2001: Verdict’, The Mirror, 24 May 2002.

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21 Voice of The Mirror (2001) ‘Hague and his Bigots are History’, The Mirror, 24 May 2001.

22 The Sun Says (2001) ‘Tory Despair’, The Sun, 23 May 2001.

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24 Source: MORI: How Britain Voted in 2001.

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25 Kavanagh, Trevor (2001) ‘No to Euro Vote Next Term’, The Sun, 24 May 2001.

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27 Vander Weyer, Martin (2001) ‘The Staggering Price of One Man’s Vanity’, Daily Mail, 29 May 2001, p. 4.

28 Glover, Stephen (2001) ‘Only One Man Can Save the Pound’, Daily Mail, 29 May 2001, p. 9.

29 Voice of The Mirror (2001) ‘Europeless’, The Mirror, 29 May 2002.

30 Worcester, ~Robert M. (2000) How to Win the Euro Referendum: Lessons from 1975, London: Foreign Policy Centre. Quote at p.22. The same phrase also appears on p.52 where Worcester argues:

The core value voters are at the moment predominantly anti-euro. However, more than half the public say now they can be persuaded one way or the other. They admit they don’t know a great deal about Europe, still less about central European banks, exchange rates, balance of payments and currency fluctuations; many are only concerned with changing pounds for pesetas or lire, and losing on the transaction. But they do know who they trust, and when they see Blair and Brown, Clarke and Heseltine, Kennedy and Ashdown, on the ‘vote yes’ side and the ‘men with staring eyes’ on the other, they will know who they trust.

31 Op cit. note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**. According to the same article, Mr Hague had originally intended to say that the single currency question was a ‘decision we must take in just nine days’.

32 Routledge, Paul (2001) ‘Blair Wins Gallop Poll’, The Mirror, 1 June 2001.

33 Hardy, James (2001) ‘Tatty Bye Tories: Shock Pro-Euro Poll Tickles “Doddy” Blair’, The Mirror, 1 June 2001.

34 Voice of The Mirror (2001) ‘The Bell is Tolling for EU, Hague’, The Mirror, 1 June 2001.

35 The Sun Says (2001) ‘The Sun, Blair, and the Euro’, The Sun, 28 May 2001. Note also how the formulation ‘outside the euro, but inside the European Community’ is the same as that of the leading anti-euro organisation No Euro, whose slogan is Europe Yes, Euro No.

36 Pascoe-Watson, George (2001) ‘It’s the Death of Our Nation’, The Sun, 29 May 2001.

37 Pascoe-Watson, George (2001) ‘Don’t Take Our Word For It – Read Lionel Jospin’s Lips’, The Sun, 29 May 2001.

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- 44 The Sun Says (2001) 'One Week Left', The Sun, 31 May 2001,