

A Meal chez Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Brown.

(The only place where you can eat your dinner and expect that none of your fellow guests will start ranting about the state of the country. Although it could be a learning experience).

Tonight, it's a 'reach-out-to-the people' dinner and the Browns have invited a small cross-section of the public.

Mr. Brown: Welcome, everybody. Please sit down and we'll get to know each other. Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Temple and Mr. and Mrs. Smythe. Mr. Jones is a green-grocer from Peckham.

M. Jones: Factory worker,

Mr. Brown: Ah. My guest list is not quite accurate, it seems.

Mr. Jones: No.

Mr. Brown: Union member?

Mr. Jones: UPFW.

Mr. Brown: Of course. Now. Mr. and Mrs. Temple are bankers.

Mr. Temple: Not quite.

Mr. Brown: H'm.

Mr. Temple: Hedge fund managers. Both of us.

Mr. Brown: Most interaisting. Finally Mr. and Mrs. Smythe are teachers. I hope.

Mr. Smythe: Quite correct.

Mrs. Brown: Do you work, as well, Mrs. Jones?

Mrs. Jones: I do. We all have to, these days.

Mrs. Brown: Yes. And what is it that you do?

Mrs. Jones: I work in the same factory as me hubby. Ooh, look. There's a cat.

Mr. Brown: Aye, it's forever coming in from next door.

Mrs. Jones: What's it called.

Mrs. Brown: Sybil.

Mr. Smythe: Oh, that's good.

Mr. Brown: What do you mean?

Mr. Smythe: A Sibyl was a woman in Ancient Rome who told fortunes.
Seems very appropriate for a cat belonging to the Chancellor of the
Exchequer

Mrs. Brown: Yes. Well. Shall we begin?.

A butler serves the ladies then the men.

Mr. Jones: Good soup this. Sainsbury's?

Mrs. Jones: Reely, Harry.

Mrs. Brown: I'm not sure. I think it would be Fortnum's.

Mr. Brown: We do our vairy best to buy organic.

Mr. Smythe: Did you enjoy your trip to Washington?

Mr. Brown: Aye. Not my first time of course.

Mrs. Jones: How about you, Mrs. Brown?

Mrs. Brown: Too hot for me. And Gordon spends too much time working.

Mrs. Jones: I know the feeling.

Mr. Temple: At least the roads are repaired over there. D'you know, where I live, I
Bust a spring on my new Lambo. I'd just bought it! Roads are full of
pot-holes! And you should see the taxes we pay! My God! Oh, sorry,
Mrs. Brown.

Mr Smythe: What's a Lambo?

Mr. Temple: An Italian car.

Mr. Jones: Costs ten times what I earn in a year. Still, your bonuses this time won't be so big, will they? What with all the so called 'turmoil'.

Mrs. Temple: Actually, the overall bonus payment is reckoned to be about 14 billion this year. So it won't be that bad. Thank you.

Mr. Smythe: 14 billion pounds. Let me see. That's almost 20% of government spending on education. For all of the country's children.

Mr. Brown: An interaisting observation, Mr Smythe.

Mr. Smythe: Or almost half of what is spent by the government on the police and security of the country.

Mr. Brown: H'm.

Mr. Smythe: Or almost half of what is spent on Defence.

Mr. Jones: Is that right?

Everyone looks at Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown: Um. Broadly speaking. Yes.

Mrs. Brown: Shall we move on to the main course?

The butler serves.

Mrs. Brown: That's Aberdeen Angus.

Mr. Jones turns in his seat and extends a hand to the butler.

Mr. Jones: Allo, mate.

Mrs. Jones: Oh, Harry! She means the meat!

Mr. Jones: Sorry, mate.

Mr. Temple: Are you going to get the roads repaired, Prime Minister?

Mr. Brown: Road repairs are the responsibility of the local council.

Mr. Temple: Eh? Are you telling me you have no influence over the councils?

Mr. Brown: Weel, not exactly, but --

Mr. Jones: You can afford to repair the bloody roads yourself, Temple.

Mrs. Temple: Please don't be coarse, Mr. Jones. It 's discourteous to our hosts.

Mrs. Jones: He don't mean anything by it. Anyway, he's right. Those bonuses seem a bit over the top, don't they?

Mrs. Temple: I can tell you. Mrs. Jones, that we work extremely hard for our bonuses.

Mr. Jones: Anybody here ever work in a factory? (Silence). I thought not.

Mrs. Temple: I don't see the relevance of that remark. Frankly.

Mr. Temple: Cool it, dear.

Mrs. Smythe: You complain about the roads. Have you taken a train lately?

Mr. Temple: No.

Mrs. Smythe: How about you Mr. Brown? Mrs. Brown?

Mr. Brown: Noo. We've been a bit busy lately, you know.

Mrs. Smythe: They're really not so bad. The only problem is getting a seat.

Mr. Jones: 'Ere, Mr. Smythe. What figures have you got for the trains, then?

Mr. Smythe: Well. The government pays 5 billion a year in subsidies to the private companies that run our railways. Four times as much as before privatisation.

Mrs. Brown: Is that true, dear?

Mr. Brown: Weel yes, et is. But I have a new Select Committee looking at the whole thing.

Mr. Jones: A select committee? What a joke!

Mrs. Brown: Why is a select committee a joke, Mr. Jones?

Mr. Jones: I'm glad you asked, Mrs. Brown. This meat 's a knock-out, isn't it,

dear? Well, a select committee is where a bunch of MPs are selected to sit around and investigate something. Makes 'em feel important. Gives 'em something to do. They drag all kinds of people away from their proper jobs - to be grilled. A real ego trip. Then they write up a Paper with the results.

Mrs. Brown: That all sounds perfectly logical.

Mr. Jones: Except that the results are always ignored - even when there's some sense in them.

Mrs. Temple: So, what happens?

Mr. Jones: Nothing. A complete waste of tax-payers' money. Look at that one on private equity. All those big cheeses - your mates - were called in to investigate if private equity was above board. As if anything in the world of finance could be above board! Well. Ever see a report? You bet your life you didn't.

Mr. Temple: Frankly, I don't see what right the government has to interfere with private companies. Or indeed, market forces.

Mr. Brown: There is that. But, greater transparency is needed, now. In view of the recent liquidity problems. Banks and lending institutions need to be more prudent.

Mr. Temple: No problem as far as we're concerned.

Mr. Jones: Very generous, mate.

Mrs. Temple: My husband is not your mate.

Mr. Smythe: The thing that puzzles me about politics is that - please excuse my saying this - is that the government never seems to respond to what the public wants. Now, why is that? The public pays its taxes but never seems to get what it wants in return. Giving the public what it wants must be the best way to stay in office, you would think.

The butler hands a message to Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown: Please excuse me. President Bush is on the line.

Mr. Temple: No management skills.

Mrs. Brown: I'm sorry?

Mr. Temple: I mean the government has no management skills. It's not trained to do the job.

Mr. Smythe: He's right. Very few Ministers have any prior experience of their portfolio. Becoming a Minister must be the only job where a c.v showing relevant experience is not required. Never asked for.

Mr. Jones: Too right! They've all got empty c.vs.!

Mrs. Brown: Can that be true?

The Butler: Oh yes, ma'am. The present Cabinet is composed of five lawyers, six people from the media, three political researchers, two charity workers and a postman.

Silence all round.

The Butler: Shall I serve dessert, ma'am, or wait for the Prime Minister?