

British Values

A PROBLEM SOLVED!

The great search, led by the present (September 2016) Prime Minister and instituted while she was Home Secretary, is on. Extremists, populists and would-be terrorists have to be taught BRITISH VALUES so that they will refrain from, respectively, extremism, populism and terrorism. But what are British Values? unless they are refraining from &c., and that cannot be made to sound, as it must to be correct, *positive*. The problem has been solved under Mrs May's nose without her noticing.

British Values = Pop

Pop music, that is, is inculcated by the establishment as something every true Briton embraces. To show true patriotism all that is necessary is to glory in the British creative triumphs. There have been signs on Radio 4, with frequent obituaries of "great musicians" having precedence in the news. The Good News is now there explicitly and in the open, in the British Library.

A few years ago the British Library began diversifying. As well as housing the national collection of books, it published some of its own, including very useful editions of Tyndale's New Testament and the like. It uses some of its space for an exhibition. Nobody entering the British Library can possibly miss this one:

Punk 1976–78

—focusing on the Sex Pistols and "Marking 40 years since punk exploded into the nation's consciousness". Some of the exhibits are of periodicals, "UK fanzines, one of the most creative and exciting facets of UK punk", but mainly the exhibition has to be concerned with recorded Music, and the British Library is for books. So the exhibition is a pure Soviet-like essay in the inculcation of official values anywhere. The exhibition could have been put on in the Tate Modern, in the National Gallery or in St Paul's Cathedral. Amongst the sponsors are the Ministry of Culture. An official celebration, that is, of modern British values in support of an unrecognised national glory. (Did not Mr Blair, the inventor of the modern, once play in a pop group?) For prominently displayed in the captions are phrases from the original press responses to Punk. They were on the whole unfavourable, because the establishment had not yet shown us British Values.

The original thing is to celebrate something that though modern is not new. Punk is helping us form a sort of national Pantheon. As well as the exhibition, the British Library has a little shop where you can buy what elsewhere would have been holy mementos: the Punk Pop-Up-Shop.

Whether by the standards of now-classical Pop the Sex Pistols made music is an intriguing academic question. Information from the Exhibition is that they leapt to fame on their first BBC interview, when, having taken the precaution of getting drunk, their future lead singer bawled swear-words and obscenities (these being still definable entities) at the interviewer, for the edification of the early-evening viewers. He had not previously—we are informed—been a singer, but he then took to singing on disk, without altering his method, and so the question is raised: at what point does a shouted obscenity become music? Answer: when it is so named by the Ministry of Culture. "By the time the dust settled on the Pistols' short, turbulent career, the British musical landscape had been transformed . . . a burgeoning independent record scene had been born." We are authoritatively told this in, naturally, the postprose in which whole books such as memoirs of Blair are now written. (Way back in the days before Blair and Campbell, clichés like "creative" and "exciting" would have been avoided, and it would have been noticed that scenes cannot be born. Also we would not have had the euphemistic common warning "The exhibition contains adult content."—*Adult = pornographic: anglice* "This exhibition contains pornography." Is porn the next British Value?)

Here is a genuine national value! Punk is British, not American. And it is British not English. And it is inculcated with all the disinterested scholarship of the British Library.

So, the teams dedicated to reindoctrinating young jihadists now know the correct therapy. Get them to open their ears to great pop. It will certainly distract anybody from commitment or thought. And those who really hate Pop with a gut-hatred may take the hint and emigrate. I am tempted. How else can I avoid such things as Punk exploding into my consciousness?

Was it for this we voted to leave the EU?

Ian Robinson

P.S. The British Library might adapt a notice I saw at King's Cross Station the same day: "For the safety and comfort of all customers, Virgin Trains operates an Anti-Social Behaviour Policy."