

**Call for Papers**

***From the Utopianism of Human Rights to the Primacy of the Political***

***Lancaster University: 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> November 2008***

**Confirmed Speakers:**

***Craig Murray (UK)***

Responsible for Britain's relationship with Uzbekistan [2004-2007] He found Western support for the dictatorial Karimov regime unconscionable, and resigned.

***Louise Selisny, Amnesty International***

***Professor Robert Fine (Warwick University, Department of Sociology)***

Robert Fine's research interests include social and political thought; sociology of the Holocaust; and cosmopolitan social theory. His books include *Democracy and the Rule of Law* (republished in 2002), *Political Investigations: Hegel, Marx, Arendt* (2001), *Being Stalked* (1997), *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa* (1991), He has co-edited *Social Theory after the Holocaust* (2000), *People, Nation and State* (1999), *Policing the Miners' Strike* 1985), and *Capitalism and the Rule of Law* (Hutchinson 1989). His most recent monograph is entitled *Cosmopolitanism* (2008)

An important fault line within contemporary social-legal and critical legal studies lies on the relationship between rights and the political.

Theoretically, this relationship is articulated through an antagonism between the universality of human rights and the primacy of the political. If the former can be characterised as a naïve, if not utopian, belief in the ability of law to order the world's affairs rationally and peacefully, the latter can be seen as substituting a cynical belief in the force of hegemonic power. Nowhere is this antagonism more obvious than where parties to a dispute become reified into the fixed, ontological categories of friend/enemy and geopolitical conflicts fall into the dichotomy of Empire and resistance.

At an empirical level, experience has provided evidence of law's propensity to mediate and ameliorate these apparent dichotomies. The implication of this experience is to offer a more nuanced account of the relationship between rights and the political.

This conference offers the opportunity to explore and engage with these theoretical and empirical developments by focussing on the many questions present in recent literature, cases and events.

These questions include, but are not exhausted by,

- the meaning of and relationship between "the universality of human rights" and the "primacy of the political";
- the social, political and legal transformations that these meanings articulate;
- the extent to which law eschews the political and the political subsumes law;
- the ability of law and legal institutions to question and resist such conflation;
- the place and responsibility of socio-legal and critical legal scholarship and practice within these transitions.

Bringing together academics, practitioners and activists from a wide range of disciplines, this conference offers a rare opportunity to confront and reflect upon one of the most relevant concerns of contemporary jurisprudence and legal and political practice.

For further details or to submit an abstract (maximum 250 words) please contact, [d.seymour@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:d.seymour@lancaster.ac.uk)

Closing date for submissions 30th September 2008