

# DR HOGGART'S FAREWELL

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Although Richard Hoggart is upset at having been dropped as vice-chair of the Arts Council he is deriving comfort from the frisson of martyrdom that comes from the knowledge that the decision to axe him was taken by Margaret Thatcher. Why should she be bothered about the vice-chair of the Arts Council?

The Arts Council proper consists of a chairperson, currently Kenneth Robinson, and twenty members. These twenty-one people are allegedly appointed by the Minister for the Arts in the name of the Secretary of State for Education and Science. The vice-chairperson of the Council is filled from among the members of the Council — in other words, they vote one of themselves into the job. The running of the Art Council's work is carried out by full-time officers under the direction of the secretary-general, currently Sir Roy Shaw, a friend of Richard Hoggart. Both of them are working-class lads made good and both are centre-Labour in politics. Generally a Council member serves three years and then is dropped. There is meant to be a steady turnover in membership to prevent the Council from ossifying.

Hoggart had served six years. The last two were served as vice-chair. It was expected that Hoggart would be asked to stay on a year or so more because in a few months' time chairperson Kenneth Robinson (and now a member of the SDP) retires. It was thought that all the powers that be would recognise the expediency of keeping Hoggart on to give a continuity of leadership. And, irrespective of what one thinks of Hoggart's political or artistic views, he has had the guts to lead with his chin: he was the Arts Council's 'hit man'. He wrote many articles defending the Council's work and policy and has been publicly critical of the manner in which the press deals with the issue of public funding for the arts. Yet, whilst Hoggart has scorned rightwing critics like George Gale, the pugilist columnist of the *Daily Express*, he has been equally scornful of issues dear to the Left. Hoggart is sceptical about ideas for democratising the Arts Council; he is critical of the community arts policy (which the Arts Council during the last two years has devolved to the regional arts associations); and wary of jumping in too far with multi-cultural arts. He is not a radical. But, when the Arts Council had to

make its cuts to forty-one organisations last year it was Hoggart who argued in public that the blame lay with the Government and not the Council.

There is no real mystery about his departure. Consider that the person whom the Government must have in mind to replace Robinson is bound to be a Conservative and most probably connected with business or finance. S/he will be a person who will want to mute criticism of the Government. Until now, aided and abetted by Hoggart, Roy Shaw (and Robinson) have been quite vocal in attacking the Government and since Shaw could not be dismissed the alliance had to be broken up by seizing the first opportunity for dropping Hoggart. Hoggart was dishd as much by his friendship with Shaw as for his politics. Roy Shaw is now much on his own. And whilst the Government is unlikely to feel threatened by attacks on its arts policy it must stop or damp down criticism of its financial policy wherever possible. It remains to be seen whether Thatcher is also intent on trying to curb Arts Council funding in the more 'radical' areas of its work. (Incidentally, any hope that the Council will replace Hoggart with a 'leftish' member can be quashed by the fact that the appointment

of vice-chair needs the Government's approval.)

The side issue to this is Paul Channon. Channon is the Arts Minister, responsible for the Office of Arts and Libraries which is a broom cupboard of the Department of Education and Science. Channon's predecessor, Norman St John-Stevas, took the Arts ministry away from the DES and started developing it into an autonomous entity but when Stevas was sacked the Arts went back to the DES. However, Channon was proud that, despite being a junior minister in the DES, he had a letter from the Prime Minister guaranteeing his 'independence' in all matters relating to the arts. Yet it was not Channon's wish to drop Hoggart; and it is not Channon's civil servants who carried out a trawl for replacement members for Hoggart and other vacancies. Sir Keith Joseph is the Minister who is doing the Prime Minister's bidding. Channon's letter from Thatcher says that he has the right of direct access to her. Presumably she shouts 'Boy!' and Paul comes running. It is bad news for the arts because it is a watering down of the arm's length principle that kept the arts a safe(ish) distance from Government. D