

Blueprint for the age; Diary

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Abstract (summary)

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Full Text

AT LEAST one Oxford don was preparing to stay up last night to listen to President Clinton's State of the Union address. Dr Zbigniew Pelczynski, who lectures at Pembroke, had a special reason to. Some 25 years on, he is still using one of Clinton's essays on Eastern Europe as a role model for his students.

Pelczynski, who remains in contact with his former star pupil, vividly recalls his contributions to discussions on Eastern Europe. "I know domestic issues are expected to dominate his presidency, but his interest in that part of the world was very strong then, and I don't expect it to vanish now. In the presidential debates, before the election, I recognised some of the points he used to make at Oxford."

Pelczynski, who is retiring from teaching this year to devote more time to a George Soros scheme to recruit British graduates to teach at Polish universities, sent Clinton the first sheet of the essay, which he still treasures today, when he became governor of Arkansas.

"It was a careful argument about the importance of pluralism in the Soviet Union. What impressed me most was his ability to analyse and synthesise problems. He is not just a good communicator, he has got a good mind."

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Such is the interest in the essay that the don, who would have been willing to place a bet on Clinton becoming a successful politician, if not on his entering the White House, no longer lets it out of his sight. "It is not just the essay of an unknown 23-year-old undergraduate now you know."