

Never Mind the Ballots: Feed your election fever on BFI Player

Tuesday 28 April 2015, London. Newly available on BFI Player (bfi.org.uk/player) is **Never Mind the Ballots**, a remarkable collection of over 60 films featuring 19 different elections, with a fantastic range of newsreels, amateur films, campaign films and party political broadcasts from most of the major parties, plus some vintage election reporting. A highlight is undoubtedly 1974's long-unseen special episode of **The Clangers, Vote for Froglet**, shown on Election Night 1974. Other highlights include **'All the Winners! And the Losers (1923)**, **Lady Tweedsmuir MP in a brief talk about Politics (1949)** and **Your Money's Worth (1955)**

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/search/?q=Never+Mind+the+Ballots>

Drawn from the resources of the BFI National Archive and regional and national archives, this collection shows just how elections have gripped the public imagination. Most of the films are free to view and are part of a much larger offering which includes feature films, television programmes and much more.

Politics and film share a long history. In this unique collection you'll find more almost a century's worth of campaigning films and broadcasts, showcasing politics across all colours of the political spectrum. The big beasts of Westminster share the spotlight with local operators - and there's even space on the podium for outsiders from the political fringes, from anti-nuclear protestors to the Workers' Revolutionary Party.

From the dawn of the 20th century, the films chart the growing sophistication of political persuasion in all its forms, embracing drama, documentary and animation, celebration and protest, the clever, the crass, the brilliant and the bizarre.

What comes through in these films is not just how much politics has changed, but how much has stayed the same. The passion and fervour on display in the earlier films here may be surprising, but many of the techniques, tricks and strategies used by the parties today were emerging as early as the 1920s. Whether it's sparkling rhetoric and smart infographics or flag-waving and mudslinging - the rule in politics is much as it ever was: if it works...

[Suggested Tweet: *Amazing to see how much has changed (and what hasn't!) in over 70 years of political films and broadcasting* <http://bit.ly/1bvwaU8>]

Highlights from the collection:

Vote for Froglet (The Clangers) (tx 1974) On a small blue planet far away, it's polling day for the Clangers! Coinciding with 1974's general election, this episode sees narrator Oliver Postgate trying to persuade the ever-popular woolly creatures of the merits of party politics. But the Clangers aren't

taken with the prospect of a society ruled by one group - even though the Soup Dragon stands for election on a 'free soup for all' ticket.

Oliver Postgate provides the voice of the narrator who, uniquely in this episode, engages in conversation with the Clangers. Their responses were adapted from the written script and played on swanee whistles by Stephen Sylvester and Oliver Postgate, as usual, while the music was composed by Vernon Elliott. This was the final in the original series of *The Clangers* which ran for 27 episodes from 1969-74.

Animated Politics (1910) Edwardian elections were a passionate affair. Today's politicians can only dream of matching the attentive throng gathered outside Woolwich's famous arsenal in this 1910 hustings, in which sitting MP Will Crooks (Labour) and his opponent Major William Augustus Adams (Conservative) face off. Curiously, the newsreel leaves both behind to catch Home Secretary Winston Churchill on a more sedate visit.

Politics in 1910 was balanced on a knife edge, much as it is today. Two elections that year - in January and December - failed to do much to break the deadlock between Conservative and Liberal. The constituency of Woolwich in South East London neatly expressed the volatile mood, with Crooks, who had held the seat since 1903, ousted by Adams in January, only to win it back in December. The fact that this newsreel - believed to be Pathé - puts Crooks first and gives him more screen time suggests that it was shot when Adams was still the sitting MP - that is, in January.

'All the Winners!' And the Losers (1923) No fewer than five once or future prime ministers are among the stars of this 1923 election round-up. A momentous election failed to furnish Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives with a working majority, allowing Ramsey MacDonald to form the very first Labour government with support from Herbert Asquith's Liberals. Some notable female victors and election-themed student high-jinks complete the newsreel. William Lloyd-George and Winston Churchill - one of this election's losers - also appear, and as a bonus there's a close relative of a sixth PM in the shape of Austen Chamberlain, half-brother of Neville.

The Right Spirit (1931) The Conservative and Unionist Film Association were so pleased with their metaphor of Labour-led Britain as a broken-down car in need of a Tory MOT, that they made not one but two cartoons on the theme in short succession. This second film features better animation, with more depth to the backgrounds and characters, and includes a patronisingly cute and cuddly caricature of David Lloyd George.

"Topical" Triumphs Again (1924) Election fever in a pre-TV age, as voters flock in their thousands to Trafalgar Square to watch the results come in. Just to prove that media self-obsession is nothing new, Topical Budget uses this newsreel to claim credit for the event, ignoring the results altogether. Still, there's no mistaking the enthusiasm of the crowds in a year when Labour overtook the Liberals as Britain's second party.

The Road to Hell (1933) Wealthy amateur filmmaker Rudolph Messel and his friend Raymond Postgate were leading lights of the Socialist Film Council. They made this film in protest at the hardship caused by the Means Test which the poor had to pass in order to qualify for help. Raymond Postgate plays the father, Daisy Postgate is Fred's girlfriend and the film also stars novelist Naomi Mitchison as the mother.

The much-resented Household Means Test was introduced in 1931. Under this, benefits were denied to the unemployed if anyone in the family was judged by an assessment panel to be able to support them or if they had any assets which could be sold. The Labour Party has historically opposed means testing, and one of the stars of this film, Daisy Postgate, was the daughter of George Lansbury, then Leader of the Labour Party. She married Raymond Postgate and their children included Oliver Postgate, who created *The Clangers* - see also *Vote for Froglet!*

Peace and Plenty (1939) Propelled by anger and wit, this film uses an inventive blend of animation, graphics and stills combined with a cynical voiceover and stirring music. The austerity faced by many is vividly contrasted with the wealth of the few in a bitter attack against the policies of the National government led by Neville Chamberlain.

Director Ivor Montagu was a key figure in the formation of the pioneering Film Society, established in London, 1925. He was determined to screen Soviet films, often banned in the UK, including the groundbreaking *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). The innovative montage technique of *Potemkin* may well have inspired Montagu's own filmmaking style.

Lady Tweedsmuir MP in a brief talk about Politics (1949) It's a slippery slope from Socialism to Communism, warns MP for Aberdeen Lady Tweedsmuir, in a cut-glass English accent which no doubt marked her out from the local constituency. With references to shortages and rationing - both still a feature of daily life in 1949 - it's clear that her address is targeted at the hard-pressed housewife.

Your Money's Worth (1955) An election broadcast by the Labour Party on the rising cost of living. Dr Edith Summerskill illustrates the rising cost in essential foods, such as milk, cheese and meat, under the Tory government, and voices her concerns about poor nutrition. Harold Wilson speaks out against the "Tory lies" claiming Labour will reintroduce rationing, and explains the need for price controls against profiteering.

Bristol Fashion (tx 1959) In this heartfelt Labour Party political broadcast, Tony Benn tours Bristol - with visits to Barton Hill and Clifton - extolling the social(ist) achievements of its council in housing, education and transparent, economical governance. Opening with an impassioned live interview, Benn and Barbara Castle MP accuse an earlier Conservative TV broadcast of "quite deliberately distorting the facts".

Although much 1950s television does survive, it's rare to see a programme from the time in its original broadcast form, with plummy continuity announcement and all. This mix of live TV and film was captured by a 'telerecording' machine when it was transmitted on both of the nation's TV channels during the Wednesday 6 May evening prime time.

Enjoying Life (tx 1962) This unusual party political broadcast was designed to promote the 'Festival of Labour', an event described here by Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell as, "a party for our Party". A far cry from today's short political broadcasts, the film sets out how government could improve quality of life, aesthetically and practically, through architecture, community theatre, sport and even jazz.

The film was broadcast simultaneously on ITV and the BBC in June 1962.

Coloured Voting – Hidden Issue (tx 1964) With frank and frequently racist vox pops, this edition of the popular current affairs series *This Week* reports on racial attitudes in Birmingham and how they

may (or may not) affect voting. This incomplete programme is presented as it survives in the archive, but its intention is clear - to attempt a balanced view on a controversial issue - it highlights racism while also claiming it is uncommon.

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About the BFI

The BFI is the lead organisation for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK - investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences