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**A BALANCED DIET OF TRANSPARENCY**

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At a loss with how to spend your half term break? Does the prospect of yet one more Disney film and a soggy hamburger fill you with horror? Well, fear no more, because from the 18<sup>th</sup> October until the end of this month you can enjoy a journey into the mysterious wonder world of Ronald McDonald.

It would seem that not content with "*Open Government*" we now have "*Open Kitchen*", as McDonalds' outlets across the UK invite customers to step behind the counter and look at how they prepare, store and serve food. The initiative is part of the hamburger chain's wider publicity campaign and is specifically aimed at convincing even the most doubting Thomas of the "*100 safety checks*" which are performed in the preparation of your average Big Mac.

In a bizarre twist of fate, the advertisements for the insider view on junk food production appeared just as Tony Blair took to the podium for his mid-term speech. Stranger still was the synergy between the two messages. As our Prime Minister spoke of the need to "*begin a new discussion with the people of Britain*", and of his commitment to "*the biggest policy consultation ever*", Ronald and his five star friends unleashed their very own "*Open Doors*" programme.

But, let's not be cynical. In a world of cloaks and daggers there is nothing wrong with a bit of new age transparency. After all, would David Blaine really be able to secure both the million dollar deal and the drive-by attention if his glass box was anything other than crystal clear. Inevitably, the answer has to be a resounding no. But, as we grow accustomed to both public and private sector commitments to openness, it is important that we also continue to question both the process and the product.

Showing the average citizen how safe it is to make a quarter pounder and fries, should not blind us to the fact that obesity levels in UK adolescents have doubled in the last decade. By the same token inviting people to scrutinize public decision making doesn't necessarily guarantee a more socially responsible outcome. The



real change comes when we start asking the difficult questions instead of standing back in awe at the spectacle laid before us.

For McDonalds, as for New Labour, I predict a bumpy road ahead. Inviting people into your kitchen – where ever it may be – inevitably means that you have to be prepared for them to want to cook what they want, when they want it, at a price that they are prepared to pay.