

When Haringey Invented the Axe

A play in one act, an act in one scene; a sketch.

Dramatis Personae:

- **Chairperson**
- **Joe**
- **Bill**
- **Token female Harriet**

The scene: A mud hut somewhere North of the Thames. Four people are sat on stones and gathered around a bigger stone.

Chairperson Right, so the Haringey committee to design the first stone axe is now in session. Has anyone brought any ideas to the meeting?

Joe Jim sends his apologies.

Chairperson That's not the sort of idea we're looking for; we want design ideas. Sending your apologies isn't much of an idea.

Harriet It worked for Jim.

Chairperson Has anyone thought about this axe thing at all? You've had five weeks since the meeting was called.

Harriet What did the team of Consultants say?

Chairperson Good question, Harriet. Six months ago we hired a team of twenty consultants to tell us what an axe is, why we need one, and where we should keep it. I have a copy of their report.

(Consults report)

It says here that axe are oval objects laid by chickens, and they shouldn't all be kept in one basket.

Bill I think they misheard the question.

Chairperson We'd better start from first principles. Does anyone know what an axe is?

Joe No idea. Why do we need an axe anyway? We got along just fine for eons without one. New inventions only cause trouble and disturbance. That last invention was a total failure: completely unnecessary creation of bureaucracy.

Bill What invention was that?

Joe Language.

- Chairperson May I remind you that without language we wouldn't be able to meet today to invent this axe thing.
- Joe But Language definitely did create bureaucracy!
- Chairperson Of course it created bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is a word, language created all the words.
- Harriet Why are we trying to invent an axe anyway? I was never clear about that.
- Chairperson (*consulting notes*) It says here that the Government soothsayers have predicted that without an axe we will all be trampled to death by mastodons. We need an axe to prevent the end of humanity.
- Harriet Can't we just buy cushions?
- Bill How on earth would that prevent us being trampled to death?
- Harriet Well, it would make the trampling more comfortable. And, besides which, I've always wanted some cushions: these stones are hard.
- Chairperson I'm sorry, but this is old business. We've already invented the cushion.
- Harriet Yes, but those cushions were made of stone.
- Chairperson What did you expect? This is the Stone Age!
- Bill About this axe...
- Harriet What axe?
- Chairperson The axe we're supposed to be inventing!
- Bill Does it have a handle?
- Chairperson I suppose it must have. There must be some way to pick it up.
- Bill In which case, I suggest we make it big enough to hold in two hands.
- Harriet Whose hands?
- Joe Well, you could use mine if you like. You know me, always willing to be the first tester for new technology. Now, this axe is definitely going to be big and heavy, just right for hitting people... er, things with?

- Harriet If we use Joe's hands then it won't be suitable for women to use. We need another handle for women.
- Bill And left-handed people. We need a left-handed handle.
- Joe But what happens if one of the handles turns out to be just right for a mastodon? We don't want mastodons picking this thing up.
- Chairperson How about a false handle, which looks just perfect for mastodons, but when they pick it up the axe falls on their foot.
- Harriet How do we make sure it hits the foot?
- Bill We'll need special directional vanes on the side, to make sure it falls in the right direction.
- Harriet How will vanes help? And what are vanes anyway? Has anyone invented them yet?
- Bill Well, I've just invented the word. I'm sure the Technical people will be able to flesh out the idea.
- Joe And if the axes fall on the mastodons' feet their toes will be sore so they won't be able to trample us. It all fits!
- Chairperson So we're agreed then. We need a thing with four handles, one for right-handed males, one for right-handed females, one for left-handed males and one for mastodons. The mastodon handle should be detachable if seized. The thing also needs vanes to direct the falling object at a mastodon's foot. Have we forgotten anything?
- Harriet How about left-handed females?
- Chairperson We'll put a notice on the axe telling them not to pick it up. Someone send a note to Technical to get them to invent Writing.
- Joe And Reading.
- Bill I don't think the budget will run to that. We'd better just stick with Writing. We'll only use it for notices, and nobody reads those, anyway.
- Chairperson So it's agreed then. We get Technical to design these axes, Contract and Construction to make them, then all we have to do is leave them around the place. When the mastodons come they pick up the axes and end of problem. And the great advantage of this solution is that we have to do nothing.

Harriet

Good. Now that's all agreed let's get back to those pillows. I've had this idea about gravel...