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The 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, 1830 - 1903

The Hutton Report

Richard Packer

After Madrid

Alfred Sherman

The Road Less Travelled

John Blundell

The Unknown Prime Minister

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The New Socialism Dissected

Dennis O'Keeffe

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WHAT FUTURE FOR CHARM?

There are good and bad sides to the famous English charm. One can think of Anthony Blanche's contemptuous description in *Brideshead Revisited* of 'creamy English charm', which destroys all artistic creativity; many a recent British film has paraded it to some acclaim. Or one can look beyond it and realize that there is usually a layer of hardness underneath the cream. When faced with something delightful and determinedly charming like the new literary magazine *Slightly Foxed* one necessarily wonders which of those two is it going to be. On that choice will depend its survival.

Slightly Foxed is an independent literary quarterly. As this is at present an endangered species, it is good to see a new addition to it. Its target audience is people who like reading for the pleasure of it and who feel cheated and frustrated by the fact that other publications write about books that are in fashion rather than ones that last. Or, at least, last in a few readers' memories. For the articles in the first (Spring 2004) issue are mostly about rather obscure or long forgotten tomes that have appealed to certain readers, such as a 'study' by Jamyang Norbu of Sherlock Holmes' missing years, some of which he spent (as every school child knows) wandering round Tibet. Or there is an article about Nikos Kazantzakis' other book, his autobiography *Report to Greco*. There are numerous pieces about well-known and not so well-known quaint travel books and accounts of foreign parts. There is an enchanting article about Perspophone Press and something about Chinese calligraphy. And so on.

It is all, one must say, delightfully written and beautifully illustrated, partly by Christopher Corr, who is also the author of a couple of articles. A beautiful cover design, paper that is pleasant to the touch, a joy to behold. But, but... Is that hard core there? At present there is a great deal of creamy charm and whimsicality, far too many knowing little giggles in the writing, particularly in the notes about the authors. One cannot help feeling that the authors, editors and illustrators see themselves in that literary world of the twenties and thirties that we have all read about, though most likely in Evelyn Waugh's merciless attacks.

We hope *Slightly Foxed* will carry on and find many readers (not just the anonymous praise singers on their website). There are very few literary magazines in this country and even those do not seem to be written by people who enjoy reading for the sake of reading. We hope there is an audience out there and, more importantly, there are people with reasonably thick wallets they will be prepared to open. But, above all, we fervently hope that *Slightly Foxed* will acquire the toughness and wiliness of the reynard as a counterbalance to all that creamy charm. We are also charmed that they are based in the next street to the *Review*. Their Victorian house was once the home of John (Reggie Perrin) Stonehouse, the vanishing MP for Walsall North.

Helen Szamuely

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The belief that Western economic superiority originates in a distinctive moral and intellectual culture, and ultimately in the Judeo-Christian doctrine of each human soul's unique, individual significance, stands in need of revival. Only the West has ever abolished slavery, for example. Europe did this centuries ago for its own populations. In the last 200 years Western policies have also vigorously promoted slavery's international abolition. In the twentieth century, in defence of freedom, the West waged expensive wars, hot and cold, against those renegade societies, Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, which tried to restore the hideous ancient bureaucratic version of slavery and impose it globally.

Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan were nakedly predicated on the terrorising and impoverishment of most of the territories they conquered, while Soviet Russia, its Marxian posturing notwithstanding, was incapable of creating enlightenment or widespread affluence anywhere in its vast empire. Only the West has displaced the poverty and despotism which have been humanity's historical lot. Similarly, only Western scholars and governments have sought to reverse religious and racial bigotry and the oppression of women. Until we develop a sense of pride in these achievements, our governments will continue systematically to misunderstand the world's politics. Whatever their various differences, Communism, Fascism, Nazism and Islamic fundamentalism are all protests against modernity as such. Modernity has some detestable aspects, but its ability to abolish poverty and maintain freedom is unique. I write this in affluent Connemara, within living memory among the poorest places in Europe.

Along with moral emancipation, the West has promoted representative government and the rule of law. That Islam has been able to buck these trends, at least where it is the majority religion, is mostly a function of the perverse politics of oil. Harold Lubell, in his discussion of Laurent Murawiec's book *La Guerre d'après*, identifies Saudi Arabia as the real centre of anti-Western terrorism, though the Wahhabi fanatics it has promoted may be turning now against their erstwhile parent. Alfred Sherman rightly dismisses the claim that the Islamic challenge is about poverty. It is a religious challenge, seeking above all to maintain the enslavement of women.

Sherman shows that the West does not have the proper measure of Islam, with its intractable corruption and ungovernable hostility to individualism. Its nihilistic militarism is its only active feature. And our loss of collective nerve can only encourage this. Myles Harris points out that the cowardly reaction of the Spanish electorate to the Madrid outrage is paralleled by the BBC's defeatist coverage of Iraq, its devotion to telling a pusillanimous audience the propitiating distortions it longs for. Had our current mentality prevailed in the twentieth century we would not have been able to resist Nazism and Communism.

High standards of political probity have been integral to Western success, especially in its Anglophone form. This advantage has been put at risk by recent American and British governments. The Clinton presidency in America and the Blair government in Britain, exemplify this danger. Right or wrong about Iraq, our government has been corrupt and incompetent, as Richard Packer's discussion of the Hutton Report shows. Can we cheapen our politics, allowing years of blatant lies by politicians? Can we watch our universities disintegrate intellectually, as Christie Davies relates, and yet retain the fabulous wealth and personal freedom which have made us the darlings of history?

We misunderstand Islam. We have paid it the unmerited compliment of assuming it compatible with modernity. Islam may provide worthy citizens for non-Islamic societies. Politically institutionalised, it is disastrous. Equally perversely, we miss the truth of Hayek's insistence in *The Road to Serfdom*, here acclaimed, sixty years on, by John Blundell, that the survival of socialism requires nothing more than a large tax-take, a truth also echoed by your editor and Norman Barry. Even the critics of the Blair government fail to note its socialism. Barry observes, indeed, that the Conservative opposition have fallen for the myth of public sector reform. The state cannot reform because it lacks the discipline afforded by bankruptcy.

Everything is what it is and not some other thing. Accurate identification of things is a key prerequisite of political policy. Truly those who ignore history's lessons, socialist or religious, are likely to repeat them.

Reflections on the Hutton Report

Richard Packer

The contents of Lord Hutton's Report took everybody by surprise. The virtual exculpation of the government was not anticipated by anybody including government itself. In the view of many, Alistair Campbell's departure from Downing Street in the months before Hutton was due to report, came when it did as a deliberate ploy to protect Tony Blair. The expectation was that the departed Campbell would be put forward as the necessary sacrifice following anticipated criticisms of Downing Street. No doubt it was calculated that the fact that he had already gone would in itself serve to dampen the furore. One of Campbell's few attractive features is his personal loyalty to Blair and it is quite likely the idea first came from him.

Similarly the strength of the criticisms of the BBC took most people by surprise. That organisation is perceived world-wide as having considerable merits but none are apparent from Hutton's Report.

What are we to make of all this? Were/are public perceptions of the government and/or the BBC wrong either in general or in relation to the events surrounding Dr Kelly's death? Alternatively was the Report as naïve as some commentators have claimed? Or were Hutton's terms of reference so carefully drafted that he saw himself as precluded from commenting on matters where the government was most likely to be criticised?

Let us first recall the principal facts which formed the focus of Lord Hutton's investigation.

1. The war against Iraq was justified in large part by the UK government because of the risk posed by Saddam's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD);
2. The prospect of war was unpopular with the public and in the Labour Party.
3. A dossier on Saddam and WMD was presented to the public on 24 September 2002 as the output of the UK Intelligence Services.
4. The dossier was initially drafted by the Security Services but Alistair Campbell, with no responsibility for or knowledge of intelligence matters, but renowned for being (a) very close to the Prime Minister (b) a bully and (c) a master of 'spin', that is for presenting matters other than in an objective fashion, suggested numerous

drafting alterations as the dossier reached its final form. Many of the changes suggested by Campbell and others in Downing Street were taken into the text. As for one example, where the draft had initially implied Saddam would only use WMD if attacked, this qualification was dropped.

5. A claim that Saddam could deploy WMD in 45 minutes was stressed both in the text of the dossier and in the Prime Minister's introduction. The 45 minute claim, unlike other points in the dossier, was based on only one piece of intelligence and that an indirect one.

6. When the dossier was published the 45 minutes claim was seized on by the press which suggested that Israel and UK bases in Cyprus at least could be at risk. In fact the original intelligence had related only to battlefield weapons so such fears were unfounded. Despite extensive

scrutiny and redrafting both the dossier and the Prime Minister's introduction to it had been unfortunately imprecise on this vital point. The government made no attempt to put right this major public misunderstanding which had worked in their favour by

encouraging public concern.

7. On 22 May 2003 Andrew Gilligan, a BBC reporter, gathered from Dr David Kelly, a UK expert on WMD, that he was unhappy with parts of the dossier including the treatment of the 45 minutes point. It subsequently came to light that other officials in relevant parts of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) also had reservations about the dossier to the extent of putting them in writing, a potentially career-threatening move.

8. Dr Kelly's discussions with Gilligan were unauthorised and potentially put him at risk of disciplinary proceedings.

9. Gilligan exaggerated in his report on *Today* on 29 May 2003 in that Kelly had not, as Gilligan suggested, told him that the 45 minute claim was known to be untrue when included. (Gilligan's report was made less definite than it has normally been represented by the inclusion of 'probably' twice and 'not necessarily' once in his remarks. Though his claims were nevertheless inaccurate these qualifications probably meant that listeners did not get the unequivocal impression of government duplicity all subsequent comment has assumed. This point is not

It is to be hoped that in future the BBC will insist on accuracy in all reports by their journalists and investigate complaints honestly and in detail rather than seeking to find the most plausible reasons to justify their conduct.

picked up by Hutton.)

10. In this and other reports Gilligan was correct in claiming that a senior, expert government insider was unhappy with the dossier in its final form.

11. Alistair Campbell initiated and orchestrated a noisy row calling on the BBC to withdraw Gilligan's charge. The government's complaints were rejected by the BBC but without any serious checking of Gilligan's story like examining contemporaneous notes. The furore continued unabated until Dr Kelly's death weeks later.

12. On 30 June Dr Kelly voluntarily acknowledged to his MoD superiors that he had seen Gilligan about the relevant time.

13. When Kelly's involvement with Gilligan became known within government the matter became a top priority in Downing Street. At many meetings held within a few days to discuss tactics, few of them minuted, we know the Prime Minister, Geoff Hoon and numerous top officials were often all involved. We are told from Campbell's diaries that he and Hoon wanted to 'out the source [Kelly] to fuck Gilligan'.

14. On 8 July the MoD stated that an official acknowledged having met Gilligan on 22 May and discussed the dossier. On 9 July in reply to a question the MoD confirmed that Dr Kelly was that official. The detail of how this was done led to suspicions that sections of the press had been privately tipped off beforehand.

15. Following this Dr Kelly was put under much pressure by Parliamentary Committees, press intrusion etc, eventually with fatal results on 17 July.

16. In early August a government source unattributably smeared Dr Kelly as a 'Walter Mitty character'. Public scorn at this treatment of a man of some distinction who had died in tragic circumstances emboldened the press to reveal that the source had been none other than the Prime Minister's official spokesman, who was thereupon forced to apologise.

17. No WMD have yet been discovered and the United States has more or less accepted they will not be found and, probably, did not exist at the time the decision to invade was taken.

Hutton and the BBC

Two severe criticisms of the BBC were inevitable. The background to the first is that unfortunately many journalists are prone to make wild allegations particularly about government to the extent that they (and we their readers) have been in large part conditioned to the process and no longer see how deplorable it is. As a consequence we aim off from wilder claims often without being conscious we are doing so. I doubt whether anyone literally believed him when Andrew Gilligan said on *Today* that the 45 minute claim was known to be false when included in the Iraq dossier. Despite journalistic

hyperbole we rightly do not imagine ourselves to live in a banana republic and in any case the career risks to those responsible for such an action would have been too great. Unfortunately, faced with evidence that someone in a position to make an informed judgement had doubts about the way the 45 minute claim had been presented in the dossier, the instinct of many journalists would be to act like Gilligan – namely to exaggerate to secure maximum effect. Few of us are now surprised by such behaviour though it has to be said it used not to infect the BBC. Normally events move on and the precise nature of past allegations is forgotten. However when exaggerated claims are scrutinised in detail by a judge the game is up. Criticism is sure to follow.

Likewise Hutton's criticism of the BBC's handling of complaints need occasion no surprise. As it happens I, too, have had occasion within the past couple of years to complain about something on the *Today* programme. The reply I received eventually justified the programme's actions in general terms but made no attempt to answer the specific points I had made, no doubt because this would have been more difficult. The impression of a complacent organisation pleased with its own perceived integrity and cleverness was overwhelming. It caused me no surprise that the government's complaints about Gilligan's claims on *Today* were, as has now been shown, rejected without being properly examined. Again criticism was sure to follow.

However that is not the end of the matter. Many of our troops and thousands of Iraqis have died as a result, direct or indirect, of the US/UK invasion. Gilligan's claim that expert government insiders were unhappy with the terms of the Iraq dossier, a substantial part of the case for invasion, was a matter of major national importance which it was the right and duty of the media including the BBC to bring to our attention if they could discover it.

Thus without Gilligan's researches we might well still not know that the real experts were unhappy with the Iraq dossier as presented to the public. Indeed we now know that many of the suggestions in the Iraq dossier which have in the event been shown to be unfounded did not represent the original judgement of the Security Services but were included at the behest of Downing Street. The BBC did not only get things wrong; at the same time they performed a major public service. A sensible judge would have found some way of conveying this thought even if he concluded that strictly it did not fall within his terms of reference.

Gilligan's report had also suggested that the draft dossier had been 'sexed up' by or at the behest of Campbell. Again Hutton takes too narrow a view. He defines 'sexed up' in two ways, decides Gilligan had

If Hutton did not ask these questions he came to surprising answers. Hutton underestimates the enormous pressure on those in government to come up with answers that will be welcomed by the Prime Minister

implied the way which would involve the more extensive government intervention, concludes this did not occur and thus criticises Gilligan and the BBC for broadcasting the 'sexed up' criticism.

A more persuasive view is that a dossier presented as the work of the Security Services included significant drafting changes proposed by Campbell and other non-experts in Downing Street which, in accordance with the government's interests, made the final version more compelling as to the risks posed by Saddam's regime; and that in the terminology employed by ordinary people this could reasonably be described as 'sexing up'. For the reasons set out below, the fact that the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) agreed the changes does not invalidate this assessment from the perspective of common sense even if it would legally.

In the Parliamentary debate on the Hutton Report Tony Blair said that Gilligan's report had been '100% wrong'. That is as much an exaggeration as anything said by Gilligan and reminds us that it is not only journalists who indulge in hyperbole. Politicians in general and Ministers in particular are every bit as culpable.

It is to be hoped that in future the BBC will insist on accuracy in all reports by their journalists and investigate complaints honestly and in detail rather than seeking to find the most plausible reasons to justify their conduct. It is also, however, very much to be hoped that the BBC temper what they say only in the interest of accuracy and not to please government. It must be a matter of regret that the lop-sided nature of Hutton's Report appears, judged by the subsequent actions of the Governors, to have made the BBC more vulnerable to government pressure.

Hutton and the Compilation of the Dossier

The worst that Hutton has to say directly of the process by which the dossier was compiled is that 'the possibility' that members of the JIC were 'subconsciously influenced' by Blair's wish to have a dossier that was as strong as possible 'cannot be completely ruled out'.

In considering this conclusion it is helpful to reflect on the process by which the dossier was compiled. When it was initially drafted it would have been absolutely clear to all involved that the political wish of the Prime Minister was to have a text that was as strong as possible as to the risk posed by Saddam. Accordingly this state of affairs would have been reflected in the first draft. In other words, given that there was a range of views as to the risk posed by Saddam that experts could legitimately hold given the evidence, the first draft would already have been right at the worrying end. All subsequent changes not justified by new evidence would be virtually bound to push the text outside the range as defined above.

John Scarlett, the Chairman of JIC, was asked why in several cases he had agreed to changes to the dossier proposed by Downing Street which materially altered the sense of the version put to them. Mostly he had no reply other than to claim the revision reflected his professional view, an explanation accepted by Hutton. It is, however, unconvincing since nothing had altered since he (Scarlett) had put forward the previous version. Essentially we are being asked to believe that presented with a draft Campbell had identified improvements which better reflected the underlying intelligence (which he had not seen) than a version prepared by the Security Services including the Chairman of JIC.

Scarlett will have been under enormous pressure to produce what was wanted and in some instances compromised as many would have done in his place. Very probably he sought to keep the text as close to the truth as he thought possible in the circumstances which he faced. The truth is that under pressure people differ in their courage: also relevant are their professional aspirations and indeed their distance from retirement. The real question is whether he ought to have been placed in the position in which he found himself.

One does not have to be an Intelligence expert to see that the prominence given to the 45 minute claim in the dossier was disproportionate and too emphatic given the

limited evidence on which it was based. Also since the misunderstanding about the nature of the 45 minute threat originated in the ambiguous wording of the dossier it was clearly government's responsibility to put matters right.

The fact that it did not occur to

anybody within government to advocate doing so tells us a lot about their real attitude towards the dossier. Its value as a means of public persuasion was regarded as being of more importance than that it should convey an accurate view of the matters described – which neatly summarises what was wrong with it.

Probably it was a mistake to envisage that a dossier genuinely ascribed to the Security Services could ever be used as a means of public persuasion. Certainly it was a mistake ever to allow Campbell to be involved in its drafting. In fact he was in pole position. For example after it was announced a dossier would be produced it was he who called the first meeting and chaired it. That sent a clear message – an undesirable one – to everyone. The Labour-dominated House of Commons Foreign Affairs (FAC) agrees. Conclusion 9 of their Report of 7 July 2003 states 'We conclude that it was wrong for Alistair Campbell... to have chaired a meeting on an intelligence matter, and we recommend that this practice cease.' Given their wish not to embarrass the Prime Minister one can safely conclude that the Committee regarded all Campbell's involvement

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with the dossier as undesirable.

We have seen that Hutton's conclusions on the drafting of the dossier are (or appear) unsatisfactory in that they are too favourable to the government. Why?

One factor is that there is a certain amount of implicit criticism of the government in the report which has gone unnoticed. The quotation from the Foreign Affairs Committee's (FAC) view on Campbell's involvement in the production of the dossier given above is taken from Hutton's Report. Probably it was put there deliberately. Elsewhere Hutton also includes criticisms of the treatment of the 45 minute claim by the FAC and by the Intelligence and Security Committee. In all these cases it appears Hutton probably agrees with the criticisms but does not explicitly repeat them perhaps feeling that it would be unnecessary and/or immodest for him to do so. If this is correct then part of the difficulty is that Hutton has in places been too understated for contemporary sensibilities.

A second factor is that Hutton has been legalistic and not sought to look behind the facts as written down. It is true that, as Hutton points out, Campbell told Scarlett that it was essential he accepted responsibility for the dossier in full and that he (Scarlett) did so. That is, however, not sufficient. The extra questions which Hutton ought to have asked himself are (a) was such action by Scarlett satisfactory given the pressures under which he was working, and (b) were Scarlett's explanations of the changes made to it, such as that specified in 4 above, credible.

If Hutton did ask himself these questions he came to surprising answers. Quite simply Hutton underestimates the enormous pressure on those in government to come up with answers that will be welcomed by the Prime Minister when the latter's views are well known, especially when one of the PM's closest advisers (Campbell) is actively involved in formulating the answer in question. Perhaps, never being subject to such pressure themselves, senior judges cannot imagine circumstances where it exists.

The Revelation of Dr Kelly's name

Hutton concludes that 'there was no dishonourable or underhand or duplicitous strategy by the government to leak Dr Kelly's name to the media' though he acknowledges that if some of the government's material and briefings are looked at 'in isolation' such an impression could be formed. He is especially impressed by the government's explanation that had they not acted as they did they would have been liable to be accused of a 'cover-up'.

The latter point has some force but not as much as Hutton credits. Given the absence of records many of the facts are obscure but two are known for certain and stand out. First Campbell and Hoon very much 'wanted the source out' (point 13 above). Second the incident of the PM's spokesman (point 16 above) sheds illumination on the ethics with which Downing Street is likely to have approached the possible naming of Dr Kelly. Did the spokesman invent the 'Walter Mitty' jibe unaided when Blair, Campbell and Hoon were all closely involved in determining policy? Obviously he did not personally decide to denigrate Kelly but operated under instructions from a senior, possibly very senior, level. We can each form our own opinion whether those responsible for the jibe might have developed a 'dishonourable or underhand' strategy especially, as Hutton acknowledges, the facts looked at 'in isolation' give such an impression. On balance I cannot see that the facts justify Hutton's positive 'not guilty' verdict, though a negative 'not guilty' verdict in the sense of 'not proven' might be reasonable.

Nature of the Government Process

Neither the drafting of the dossier nor the emergence of Dr Kelly's name display Downing Street in a good light. What stands out above all from the whole WMD/Kelly episode is the absence of anyone in the environment capable of taking a detached or broad view. If such persons are present, they do not feel able to express their views. Involving Campbell in the production of a dossier to be presented as an objective assessment by the Security Services was misguided as should have been apparent from the start. The murky goings on before Kelly's name was confirmed as Gilligan's source were quite unnecessary. An honest approach, if it was concluded confirmation was necessary, would have been to make a public announcement with plenty of warning to Kelly.

It is unfortunate that in Downing Street the honest approach never seems to be considered let alone adopted. Another problem is that in Blair's Downing Street it is only possible to put forward suggestions which are tactical in nature and support decisions already taken. Truly questioning opinions cannot be expressed.

Sir Richard Packer was Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

After Madrid

Alfred Sherman

The world was caught by surprise by the Madrid bombing and even more by its political aftermath. A bomb-outrage not only changed the outcome of a general election in a Western democracy but also that State's main foreign orientation, and in addition caused widespread questioning elsewhere in Europe, with echoes in Britain and Poland, *int. al.* This was al-Qa'eda's second major political success. The first was when they engineered the removal of American troops from Saudi territory. However, this was something of a pyrrhic victory, since the troops were no longer performing a major function, and the terror offensive changed Saudi official attitudes to al-Qa'eda and its fellow-travellers from benevolent neutrality to active hostility. The effect of 9/11 was to bring the US into battle against radical Islamic revolution, which it had hitherto been actively supporting, first in Afghanistan and then in former Yugoslavia. Militants' bombings in Riyadh, Yemen, Indonesia and Morocco turned official sympathies for Islamic radicalism, or at least neutrality, in these countries, into official hostility and counter-measures. Al-Qa'eda's bombing for Allah's sake had been generating its own antidotes *in situ*. By contrast, the Madrid bombings turned expected victory for the Governing party, a member of the US-led coalition in Iraq, into defeat. The victorious opposition immediately dissociated itself from its predecessor's membership of the coalition, and instead declared its adhesion to the Franco-German line.

To assess the change, we must eschew bleating about 'political solutions', a euphemism for appeasement in place of counter-measures and political mobilisation. Nor is there any room for Marxoid sloganising; Islamic radicalism has nothing to do with world poverty. It is religiously motivated. To find its equivalent in Europe, we need to go back several centuries, to the Great Schism, the Crusades, the Reformation and Counter-reformation, the Thirty Years War and the Inquisition, with a few modern survivals, e.g. the Clero-Fascist Croat Ustasi Second World War-time slaughter of Orthodox Serbs, and Ecclesiastical Catholic support in Ireland for the IRA. Though 'moderate Moslems' doubtless exist, the popular mind-set in the Moslem world, with some exceptions, is of extreme religiosity and pan-Islamic solidarity against infidels, and to some extent against suspected temporisers. Fear of modernisation is intensified by the role of male sexual jealousy tantamount to gynophobia in preserving existing structures and institutions.

Al-Qa'eda type terror is an epiphenomenon, an aspect of confrontation with the West. Social, psychological and ideological change have much longer time-scales than the push and pull of politicking and the to-ing and fro-ing of self-important ministers. Al-Qa'eda is an epitome of Moslem society in much of the world. During the post-war decades, Moslem states, which with few exceptions had been under Western occupation, became independent. Sub-soil oil and gas made many rich without effort. But Moslem society is not at ease with itself. Oil wealth has not generated well-being. Population growth has outstripped wealth. Mass emigration to the West has produced a Moslem diaspora of low status, providing cheap labour and alienated recruits for extremism. As in earlier reaction to Moslem military defeats and declining status, radicals and traditionalists alike canvassed a return to the fabled pristine purity of the early caliphates, when Islam expanded from a corner of the Arabian Peninsula into a large part of the known world, in the course of its first century, and seemed set to conquer the world for Allah.

No renaissance or reformation has emerged from independence, which owed more to domestic changes in the West and cold-war rivalries than to any internal dynamic. Following the liberation of the Moslem world from 'Christian', i.e. Western, rule, minor foci of discontent remained: mainly Palestine and Kashmir. Most Moslem polities were dominated by internal conflicts. Then renewed radicalism, oriented towards the re-imposition of 'al'usuliyah', wholeness, surged back. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the dying last fling of a moribund dictatorship, provided a new focus for Moslem militancy. The jihad against the Russians and their puppets enjoyed American support, which seemed logical enough at the time, and generated an international brigade of jihadists. After their victory in Afghanistan, they sought fresh fields to conquer. Russian mishandling of the admittedly fraught questions of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, provided new objectives for crusading jihadists.

Then Osama bin Laden and his familiars raised the jihad to new levels and scope by adding the Saudi monarchy and its American patrons to their list of enemies, and pledging his own inherited fortune to the struggle. This tall, well set-up, fabulously wealthy dynamic veteran of the Afghan wars, who had turned his back on Western ways after experiencing them, lent the jihad a new

momentum and resources. He was the son of a genius, an illiterate Yemeni tribesman who had created one of the world's greatest contracting empires. Osama inherited his father's brains and dynamism, but unfortunately he turned out to be a psychopathic fanatic, of a purely destructive bent. His jihad added a new dimension by its institutionalisation of suicide-bombing with its religious overtones: bomb the way to paradise. It gained added weight from the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

After the Soviets admitted defeat and evacuated Afghanistan, a period of war-lord conflicts resumed there. This in turn paved the way for the Pakistani Secret Service, whose inherited *raison d'être* was to spread the Islamic revolution – read 'reaction'! – which had created Pakistan, throughout Asia, to create and impose the Taliban regime, which outdid Saudi Wahabism in reaction. This development set no alarm bells ringing in the West. It should be remembered that American cold-war policy sought to forge alliances with radical Islam, at the expense of the Serbs among others. It is not widely appreciated that under Robert Dole's influence, the US Ambassador in Belgrade, Warren Zimmerman, successfully intervened to persuade the Moslem leadership in Bosnia-Herzegovina to renege on the Lisbon agreement for Moslem-Serb-Croat co-existence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and thereby spark off the Bosnian war, with American involvement on the fundamentalist Moslem side, against Serbs and moderate Moslems alike. The Americans also supported Moslem-Albanian insurgency in Kosovo-Metohija and Macedonia, and 'bombed Serbia back into the stone-age'

in furtherance of Islamophile policies which entailed collaboration with Osama bin Laden and his mujahidin at the time, in spite of CIA misgivings. The Clintons' Islamophile drive – Hillary took the lead – was not halted when bin Laden emerged as leader of the new jihad. Bombings in East Africa and the drive to expel US forces from Saudi Arabia failed to set alarm-bells ringing. Generous financing of jihad from Saudi royal funds was passed over in silence. Basic intelligence and security precautions which could conceivably have foiled 9/11 were expressly discouraged for fear of giving offence.

Following the shock of 9/11, US behaviour characteristically swung overnight to the opposite extreme. Intervention in Afghanistan, which had become the centre of the new piracy, enjoyed widespread support worldwide, or at least tolerance. Pakistan, which had created and imposed the Taliban regime, was obliged to withdraw its support as price of continued US benevolence.

In addition to the so-called war on terrorism and involvement in Afghanistan, Washington's policy-makers decided on war against the Saddam regime in Iraq. Why they did so is still a matter for conjecture. Various

rationalisations for invading Iraq were advanced and then discarded. Weapons of mass destruction, aggression against Iran, and brutal dictatorship, which had long enjoyed long Anglo-American political and financial support, complicity in Islamic terrorism, which all specialists refuted, and fears that WMD might be given to rogue regimes, which might be levelled against almost any weapons-producing State, are intellectually unsatisfactory both *per se* and as an explanation of Washington's motivations. Iraq's neighbours, who had joined for the most part in the first Gulf war, declined to support the second, because with the exception of Kuwait and other Gulf states, they no longer regard as Iraq as a threat. France and Germany opposed the war, backed by their public opinion; they have no reason to change their stance now. India and China, surely an important part of the 'international community', opposed the war.

In Spain, a majority opposed participation in the Iraq war, but not strongly enough to threaten the PP's general electoral popularity, particularly since Spanish participation was minimal. The Madrid bombing and Aznar's mishandling of it, though understandable, tipped the electoral balance. Had Aznar postponed the general election, and been more open-minded about the authorship of the outrage, he and his policies might conceivably have survived. Though Rodriguez Zapatero could not

have withdrawn from his stated position against the war without losing face, he had no over-riding reasons for his immediate ringing declarations of intention to withdraw his token force from Iraq, and renewed denunciation of last year's war. Without giving

hostages to fortune, the incoming government could have re-stated its opposition to terrorism and belief in the need to update and homogenise European policies towards Iraq, without going back to the history of the war. The main question on a statesman's agenda should not have been what they should, or should not, have done a year ago, but what they ought to do now.

As it was, Rodriguez Zapatero's first and unnecessarily hurried declarations were bound to be taken by many in the world as an expression of surrender to terrorism. The Socialist Party's continued political immaturity and factionalism was one reason why the PP was set to win a comfortable majority before the bombs. But the main cause of the Madrid pendulum swing remains the unpopularity of the Iraq war, which has indeed grown with subsequent developments and disclosures over the past year.

It remains to be seen how other coalition members besides Poland will be affected. In Britain, the position is different. The Iraq war was opposed by the Labour Left, the Lib-Dems and a few thoughtful Conservatives; the overwhelming consensus at the time of writing is that whatever the merits of the original decision, the country

There are limits to the extent to which regimes can be imposed by tanks, as Soviet experiences in Europe demonstrated. So the occupation's aims in Iraq must be minimalist.

must see it through. 'If I wanted to go to Dublin, I wouldn't start from here' is not helpful; much of British history consists of living with and remedying the results of mistaken decisions.

The temptation to build a new Jerusalem in Iraq must be resisted. The aim must be to disengage from Iraq as soon as possible, though no sooner. The slogan, regime change, may trip lightly off the tongue, but changing regimes, 'our own or other States', is a vexed matter. Machiavelli's dictum, that a State's institutions reflect the character of its people, holds good, even though it raises as many questions as it answers. The Sunni Hashemite monarchy was foisted onto Shiite Iraq after the First World war by the British, whose main interest was in controlling the oil; it never struck root. It is relevant that American attempts to replicate their institutions in Latin America have generally failed, though the gap between US society and its southern neighbours is much smaller than with the Moslem world. There are limits to the extent to which regimes can be imposed by tanks, as Soviet experiences in Europe demonstrated. So the occupation's aims in Iraq must be minimalist.

The struggle against Islamic terrorism cannot be treated in isolation, but as a dimension of relations with the Moslem world, which have been a source of concern for centuries, and will be for the foreseeable future. There are limits to what can be achieved at any given time. Attitudinal change has its own laws and time scales. The US's Islamophile extravaganzas of recent decades are no justification for Islamophobe extravaganzas now. The US may be our ally, but we cannot afford to let them do our thinking for us. The problem is exacerbated in Britain, Spain and much of Europe by the aftermath of mass Moslem immigration. This was a grievous error, not least because cheap labour is a false economy, *a fortiori* in a welfare state. Immigration – or colonisation, as it can be called – has created problems, of which scope for Moslem militants to operate invisibly in a mass milieu are part. We have no alternative but to live with the results, and avoid creating unnecessary grievances, while trying harder to turn off the tap.

Anti-Christian offensives by Moslem-dominated governments in Africa are an item which Western governments have been reluctant to put on their agendas, and will soon come to haunt us in the future if we shirk action now.

In an imperfect world, a main emphasis of the struggle against Islamic terrorism must lie in cooperation with Moslem governments, which stand to lose most if Islamic terrorism strikes root. This involves painful choices: whom to support; whom to fight. There is all the difference in the world between refugee Moslem reformers and human-rights activists, on the one hand, and radicals who seek to impose theocratic dictatorship

and institutionalised jihad, on the other, from a foothold here. Our Home Office, judicial authorities and compulsive liberals have been generous with asylum permission to known or suspected terrorists, and have refused their extradition to democratic France as well as to countries further East. We have been making a rod for our own backs. Jihad and suicide bombing enjoy widespread support or toleration by the Moslem religious authorities, whom Moslems generally take more seriously than they do politicians. Condemnations have been rare. Now at last fearing the radicals, the Saudi government has begun to rein in clerical tub-thumpers. The Egyptian government has long since done likewise. The most that can reasonably be asked from Moslem governments is that they fight terrorism out of self-interest, indeed as the price of survival in many cases.

The tendency of politicians and media in Europe to incite against Israel and overstate the role of antagonism to Israel in Arab world policies, more in continuation of their long-standing hostility to the Jewish State than any considered strategy for resolution of the Palestine problem, only confirms Moslem radicals in their intransigence. Why Jack Straw should intervene, as though Britain were still the mandatory authority, to denounce the Israeli killing of a Hamas godfather, when the British government happily led an assault on Iraq which has cost

tens of thousands of Iraqi lives, poses basic questions of double standards.

The fight against Islamic terrorism is bound to be a long haul, and involve set-backs and mistakes as well as victories. The second half of the past century was shaped in

the Moslem world by anti-Western struggle, and there is natural temptation to persevere in this emotionally satisfying ritual rather than tackle problems created by independence and native shortcomings. The diplomatic, academic, and media resources of the West have some resonance in the Moslem world. They can best be used to counsel constructive policies there rather than self-pity and militancy. This may not bring much or immediate benefit, but at least it will avoid doing additional harm. No doubt, Osama bin Laden will eventually be caught and killed; but how much of his organisation and activities will survive him is a matter for conjecture. However, it is logical to say that he could not have exerted so much influence were he not in tune with a mind-set prevailing in the Moslem world, which regards terrorism, random killings of Jews, Christians, Hindus and others, as an inherently legitimate use of force, if not praiseworthy. This makes the achievement of *modus vivendi* more distant. Hence the importance of persuading all concerned that terror will bring no benefits but the opposite.

Sir Alfred Sherman has lived in the Middle East and studied Arabic

The Road Less Travelled

John Blundell

Sixty years ago today, D-Day was less than three months away. American forces were advancing in the Pacific. Berlin was being bombed. And, with the end of hostilities just on the horizon, some scholars were already pondering the nature of postwar society.

The dominant thinking was summed up by the phrase 'As in war, so in peace.' In war we had united. We had conformed to plans. We had been directed. We had enjoyed a sense of purpose and a sense of fraternity. Everyone accepted rationing and conscription and all the other coercive powers the state adopted and adapted to its own ends. There was barely any questioning or challenge. It seemed so simple. We could together build a harmonious society bubbling with prosperity. We had 'planned' our way towards victory. It was obvious. Now we had to 'plan' our way to affluence and fairness. To think otherwise was to risk exclusion from polite society; to say otherwise was intellectual suicide.

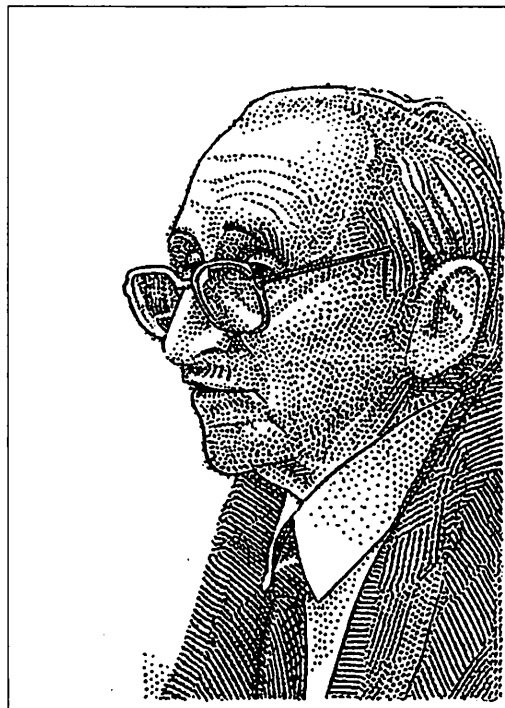
But 60 years ago today, F.A. Hayek, the Austrian economist recruited by the LSE, published his manifesto for an open society. *The Road to Serfdom*, written at night often while acting as a war-time Cambridge fire warden, became a publishing sensation. For a courtly and gentle person Hayek was remarkable in the ferocity of his warnings about the socialist ideas that had apparently engulfed everyone's perceptions. He, and his publishers, anticipated modest sales. In any case, war-time paper rationing allowed it to be printed only in small runs.

The Road to Serfdom was a book written for intellectuals, not a popular manifesto. But a succession of events soon after publication turned it into a popular phenomenon. First, it picked up so many favourable reviews that it soon became known as the book nobody could get because as quickly as another imprint rolled off the presses it vanished. Then Winston Churchill invoked it in his 1945 election campaign. Next *The Reader's Digest* offered a summary; it was sub-edited in a masterly manner

that astonished and pleased Hayek. And finally General Motors in Detroit even did a cartoon version.

Hayek describes how he became a celebrity while on an oceanliner crossing the Atlantic. His schedule was revamped. He was suddenly addressing American audiences of many thousands. I think he lost something of his innocence enduring the curious status of star, however transient that was until the Nobel Prize in 1974. He came to appreciate the great tactical advantage of the Left was

its capture of the intellectuals. Crucial are the creative minds of the scholars in colleges. Equally important however are those he described in a nonpejorative way as 'second-hand dealers in ideas' – the teachers and journalists, even the clergy. In *The Road to Serfdom* can be detected the germ of Hayek's most important notion. He has a clear paternity claim to the archipelago of free-market, liberal or libertarian think tanks that now encircle the world. Hayek would doubtless regard political labels as too vulgar. He said he was neither a Conservative nor a Republican. He told me he was a Whig, namely a true rather than occasional believer in the Rule of Law and Free Trade.



The Road to Serfdom is no harangue. Hayek's courtesy to his opponents disarmed many of his critics. George Orwell admitted he was jolted out of many of his assumptions. His *Animal Farm* might be described as a sequel.

Awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics, Hayek was sometimes teased as the only laureate to have written a best seller. His fellow holders of the accolade are understood only by their peers and often not even by them. This thin but muscular book lifted Hayek into an informal role as patron saint of the free-market entities that now pepper all politicians with policy ideas. Hayek, it might be argued, has done for policy for what Edison did for electricity, Fleming for medicine or, more recently, Tim Berners Lee for communications. Before *The Road to Serfdom* politicians, in so far as they thought at all, adopted the body of ideas he described as 'Scientism' or

the pretence of knowledge.

The most telling compliment I can offer Hayek's text is that it is as important today as it was 60 years ago. Written for a Europe crumbling into debris, *Serfdom* is still relevant as we face the leviathan growing in Brussels. His insights applied immediately to the post-Hitler world but they are also true across time and space. However benevolent the purpose, the state, in accruing ever more power, crushes liberty and takes us on a path towards serfdom. 'In every real sense a badly paid unskilled workman in this country [Great Britain] has more freedom to shape his life than many an employer in Germany or a much better paid engineer or manager in Russia.'

Hayek has described how he matured into his Whiggism after being invited to teach at the LSE in the early '30s by Lionel Robbins. He found his regard for England moved quickly to affection. One of his earliest surprises was to find the coins of the mid-Victorian era still circulating as small change when he caught the bus to work. Inflation had not yet engulfed our currency. For a Central European this was truly astonishing. Hayek's last substantive essay was 'The Denationalization of Money', a call to remove the politician's monopoly on money.

A few raged against *The Road to Serfdom*. Herman Finer wrote a counter-blast in the U.S. called *The Road to Reaction* while in the U.K. Barbara Wootton fired back with the oddly titled *Freedom under Planning*. Both missed the target. Hayek remained sweetly reasonable and generous to his opponents. He saw, correctly, that many attracted to socialist prescriptions were moved by benevolent motives. To him they simply misunderstood both the nature of law, the nature of markets and the importance of property rights.

The year after *The Road to Serfdom* appeared, the British electorate voted Churchill out. They gave Mr Attlee's Labour Party a huge majority. Yet the application of even tentative socialist planning and rationing soured

the public on ideas that had held such appeal in the abstract. The experience of planning and controls was so grim that the Conservatives returned quickly with pledges to free the economy – and ruled for 35 out of the next 46 years. Indeed on all three occasions that the Tories have turfed out Labour (namely 1951, 1970 and 1979) it has been on a radical free-market quasi-Hayekian platform – quite a lesson for Michael Howard.

Hayek's text is still rippling around the world. My office ships boxes of the condensed version all over the globe. While writing this piece, an order for 40 came in from China. However, there are some policy areas seemingly immune to his liberal ideas. Most Western nations have adopted very restrictive town and country planning, or 'zoning', policies. Hayek argued the market could allocate land use far more wisely. 'We have forgotten that private property rights are the most important guarantor of freedom' he often said. He saw too that medical care was going to be difficult to open up, more possibly because of vested professional interests as much as state provision.

But this evening at the IEA, and from Turkey to California, we celebrate the publication of *The Road to Serfdom*. Academic economists do not usually write best sellers; Hayek later often said it ruined his reputation in the profession. Thank goodness for that – because he turned his attention to more general issues of political economy and gave us amazingly powerful texts such as the three volumed *Law, Legislation and Liberty* and the magisterial, wide ranging and weighty *Constitution of Liberty* that Mrs. Thatcher was so famously to bang down on the table at Tory headquarters and announce: 'This is what we believe in!'

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An Unknown Prime Minister

Andrew Roberts

I would like you to come with me on a literary detective trail, with the object of finally unmasking – after one hundred and twenty years – the identity of the eighth and last unidentified prime minister of Anthony Trollope's Palliser novels. All eight are, of course, fictional characters, and so can be composites of real politicians or even entirely plucked out of the ether, but it seems that Trollope's prime ministers were in fact extremely closely drawn portraits of actual Victorian statesmen. But who is the eighth man?

The first was Lord Brock, whom most Trollopians scholars unhesitatingly identify as Lord Palmerston. A

Whig aristocrat with, as the Duke of St. Bungay reminisced, 'a hide impervious to fire or steel!' Brock has Palmerston written all over him, not least in his observation that it 'was much more difficult to find a good coachman than a good secretary of state'. In *Phineas Redux*, Mr Monk declared Brock to have had 'a thick skin, an equable temper and perfect self-confidence', all qualities commonly attributed to Palmerston.

Following him came the several short-lived Tory ministries of Lord de Terrier, whom the editors of the Oxford University Press's excellent Centenary Edition of the

Palliser novels cite as representing the 14th Earl of Derby. In his premiership from the House of Lords, his close friendship with Mr Daubeny, and his description by Mr Gresham in *Phineas Redux* as 'thoroughly trusted' but 'very idle' we have a definitive template for Lord Derby, who was thrice prime minister, but only for a combined total of less than four years. The Whig William Mildmay is similarly easy to identify from Trollope's generous clues. Described as 'the very front and head of the aristocratic old Whigs of the country, a fussy, popular, clever, conscientious man who thought seriously about his country', Mildmay is an accurate portrait of Lord John Russell, the son of the 6th Duke of Bedford.

Few would take issue with the contention that the next two prime ministers, Messrs Daubeny and Gresham, were thinly veiled portraits of Disraeli and Gladstone. Trollope's decision to incorporate Gladstone in *Phineas Finn* was a gross act of sycophancy by a would-be politician to his party leader. In the book, published while Trollope was standing as the Gladstonian Liberal candidate for the constituency of Beverley in Yorkshire, Gresham is described as 'the greatest orator in Europe', who was 'living altogether for the future which he is anxious to fashion anew out of the vigour of his own brain'. If a political novelist-cum-parliamentary candidate wrote like that today, *Private Eye* would unhesitatingly award him its 'Order of the Brown Nose'. Trollope came bottom of the poll in Beverley in the 1868 general election, in a fight so notoriously corrupt that the seat was soon disenfranchised altogether. Before we allow ourselves to feel any moral superiority over the Victorians, however, we should remember that while politicians in those days paid for bribes with their own money, today's politicians instead try to bribe us with ours.

It was after the fall of Gresham's ministry that Plantagenet Palliser, Duke of Omnium, headed a coalition government for the next three years. I defer to Professor John Vincent's theory that 'Planty Pall' was based on Edward Stanley, later the 15th Earl of Derby, the son of the prime minister on whom Trollope had based Lord de Terrier. The 14th Earl nicknamed his son 'Grandpa' for his interest in obscure and esoteric detail, and sure enough Palliser's own fad is for decimal coinage, the 19th century political equivalent of train-spotting.

Joshua Monk, whom we learn in *The Duke's Children* is Prime Minister at the end of the book, was, along with the Radical Mr Turnbull, a composite character based on John Bright and Richard Cobden, two of the leading lights of the Anti-Corn Law League. Again, as with Gresham and Daubeny, the likenesses to the real politicians are uncanny.

The last unidentified prime minister is Lord Drummond, but who was he in real life? In *Phineas*

Redux we see him resigning the Secretaryship for War sooner than remain in a Cabinet nominally led by Lord de Terrier but driven to disestablish the Church of England by Mr Daubeny. Drummond is thus depicted as a man of principle and probably also a committed Churchman. By the time of the publication of *The Prime Minister* in 1876, however, Drummond was back in the Tory ministry of Mr Daubeny, and we know that he also later served in Omnium's coalition as Colonial Secretary. In *The Duke's Children*, which was published in instalments in the magazine *All The Year Round* from October 1879 until July 1880, Drummond replaces Omnium as prime minister, leading a purely Tory ministry from the House of Lords, while Sir Timothy Beeswax became leader of the party in the Commons.

We have already seen how extraordinarily closely Trollope's literary art mirrored real Victorian political life. From such internal evidence with which Trollope furnishes us, and assuming that de Terrier, Daubeny and Omnium are indeed who we think they are, it is clear that we can radically reduce the list of possible suspects. We need to be looking for a Tory peer and Churchman who resigns over a point of principle from the Derby-Disraeli ministry of 1865-7, returns to serve under Disraeli sometime before 1876, replaces the 15th Earl of Derby by 1879, and becomes at least *de facto* leader of the Tory party in the House of Lords by or shortly after 1880, sharing the party leadership with a knight from the Commons.

Only one man in British politics fits these criteria, and he fits them all absolutely perfectly. Removing his Lord Drummond mask, and stepping

forward from the shadows for the first time in over a century, is none other than the stooping, heavily bearded figure of Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury. The giveaway clue lies in Trollope's portrayal of the Tories' serpentine manoeuvres against anti-disestablishmentarianism in *Phineas Redux*, which uncannily mirrored those employed at the time of the passing of the Second Reform Act of 1867. After Salisbury effectively removed and then replaced Derby as foreign secretary in 1878, it would have taken an acute but not an omniscient political observer to predict that he would later replace Disraeli, as indeed he did very soon afterwards in coalition with Sir Stafford Northcote (who is Sir Timothy Beeswax). By making this prediction in *The Duke's Children*, just as the Disraeli government was heading for defeat in the polls, Trollope showed how he was not merely a very great novelist, but was also a shrewd political observer and forecaster.

Andrew Robert's edition of counterfactual essays What Might have Been was published in April. He is currently working on a history of the English Speaking People since 1900

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The New Socialism Dissected

Dennis O'Keeffe

Sorry chaps, wrong thingy,' or cruder language to that effect, was a frequent apology on the lips of Royal Air Force crewmen during the Second World War. Everybody needing to use expertise, from the exotic example of a Royal Air Force flyer, to that sometimes elusive figure, the political scientist with integrity, should try to make sure of the facts. Whether we are flying aeroplanes or identifying social trends, a striving for accuracy is imperative. Mistakes by historians and political and economic scientists can take years rather than split seconds to display their disastrous outcomes.

The most frightening examples concern totalitarian persuasions. Certain less dramatic ones, however, have very adverse outcomes. Many occur in free societies, some of them perhaps especially in free societies. I was raised on the idea that the 1930s in British economic history were a period of catastrophic failure, a notion modern historians cannot square with the evidence. Yet one of the things keeping the inflationary apparatus of Keynesianism going into the 1970s, long after its sell-by date, was the haunting but false memory of the British thirties as a comprehensive economic failure against whose resurgence the state must constantly stand guard.

The contradictory mix of miasmal forces known as 'New Labour' carries a higher quotient of falsehood than any recent British government, but even its critics often misunderstand it. Those who preach realism should surely practise it. To contain error we must avoid it ourselves. What New Labour's conservative critics have missed is that the object of their dislike is indeed a version of socialism.

'New Socialism' might be a better label than 'Post-Socialism'. 'Neo-Socialism', which means the same thing, might be more memorable, marking a continuity similar to that between 'Marxism' and 'neo-Marxism', signalling both continuity and difference. 'Neo' or 'Post', the socialist phenomenon, part on-going and part mutated, sits entrenched today in all our public sector institutions, an implacable, expensive anti-culture, a movement hostile to and trying to discard its own civilisation.

New Labour seeks to redesign our entire society.

It amplifies the old anti-imperialism of British Labour, but moves ambiguously between different forms of nationalisation and regulation, causing harassed businesses and mounting costs, despite the full employment it boasts of incessantly. Repudiating English or Ulster Protestant nationalism, it contradictorily accepts Celtic nationalisms and applauds celebrations of colour and race, themselves clearly surrogates of nationalism.

Our neo-Socialism breaks brutally with the constitutionalism of the Attlees and Bevins. It opposes monarchy and our sense of Britishness and, still more, the idea of England. It has largely shrugged off the devoted Christianity of past Labour generations and yet it lends a sympathetic, indeed sentimental, ear to the claims of Hinduism and even of Islam.

It is also an institutional phenomenon. It controls a vast multifaceted bureaucracy and commands resources Midas would have envied. Moreover it is part of an international development embracing all the advanced Western countries and some less developed ones. The various national and international bureaucracies in which it is embedded are in fluid contact in the age of communication. Their most notable figures are seasoned globe-trotters.

Yet neo-Socialism remains curiously elusive. Some of its beneficiaries deny part of its reality. Some have questioned the existence of the Political Correctness which is one of its key ideological tenets. Even its enemies, moreover, seem often not to recognise neo-Socialism's most egregious family likenesses. In its obsession with 'equality', an aim sinister and unrealisable in any morally decent form, it resembles Communism. In its obsession with ascriptive identities, like race and sex, over which humans have little control, it has a strong similarity to Nazism.

The Nazi parallel may outrage neo-Socialists and puzzle their opponents. Proper identification is thus well overdue. The beast may continue to hurt us even after we have properly described it. So long as we fail to identify it, it will certainly do so.

Characteristic of neo-Socialism's successive incarnations is that the latest airily abandon previous ones. This characterises all phenomena pertaining to false

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knowledge. Those who work in genuine knowledge, like physicists and economists, often agonise about former perspectives. In their embarrassment they often apologise profusely. Only rarely do they merely drop their earlier models. For neo-Socialism, by contrast, words like 'mistake' and phrases like 'discredited theories' are not in the vocabulary. Such blindness bespeaks a lack of the sense of irony. The RAF pilots of the Battle of Britain mocked themselves if, in the heat of battle, they pushed wrong buttons or pulled wrong levers. Many of them died for us, and they all worked without benefit of Politically Correct instruction.

History's Pampered Darlings as Human Liberators

The adversarial intelligentsia of the West today, by contrast with innocent young men, dutiful in expertise in the face of death and destruction, has a long-standing disposition for getting the cognitive terrain wrong. Radical intellectuals teach wrong versions of politics, society and culture, often subsequently dumping these unceremoniously, usually without explanation or apology, before embracing the next set of mistaken obsessions.

The long periods when the obsessions are institutionalised, at times fanatically, are frequently characterised by marginalisation and harassment of teachers or scholars who dare deny the truth of the formulaic jingles. Since neo-Socialism has no equivalent of the KGB, it cannot kill or incarcerate these dissenters, though a minority of its partisans would certainly like to. But regret and fair play are not among its qualities. When the 'anti-racism' and 'multiculturalism' flood is finally discredited, those who smashed the careers of people who called it that at the time, will not utter any retraction, nor suffer themselves. The best we may hope for is that those whose health and careers were broken by lies may one day acquire true biographers who will properly identify their wisdom and integrity.

The neo-Socialists have behaved with a complete lack of integrity. So called 'neo-Marxist' sociology, neo-Socialism's main intellectual project, was the worst offender in the 1970s and early 1980s. Not one of the former neo-Marxists of Britain or America or France, or anywhere else, has ever apologised for all those MAs and PhDs undertaken, for all the doggerel written, for the time and money wasted before these 'scholars' passed on to Post-Modernism or Political Correctness, in their ongoing dialectic of new nonsense for old. Such insouciance is incompatible with proper scholarship.

The Intellectually Great Do not Engage in Intellectual Incantation

Salvation from error comes typically from the few, though to be really effective it must eventually be endorsed by the many. Quite predictably, the intellectually great have sometimes had their eye on the explana-

tory ball at moments of great danger, theoretical and political. This is what makes them great. Hayek is the best example. In the last century, in the face of the incoming socialist high tide, he most demonstrated the art of ruthlessly fixing on what was really at stake, and observed that socialists do not need to undertake mass socialisation nor universal centralised planning, in order to construct socialism. A large tax-take suffices. In this way he was able to identify Nazism as a socialist phenomenon, an insight still beyond many former or residual Marxists. He also identified a bloated state as a terrible threat to free societies.

Most commentators are even now not paying sufficient attention to the widespread socialism which characterises educational and medical arrangements in the rich world. Critics have noticed the ideological obsessions and the wasteful character of the publicly financed institutions which house them; but they have not usually seen this as a socialist combination of ideology and public funding. Milton Friedman, ever perspicacious, has done so for years.

The Chants of Race and Politics

Though false themes may persist for decades, specific versions of them may change with bewildering speed. If there is such a thing as a major league feminist, for example, some of us would love to know whether single sex schools are or are not damnable. The chants of race and sex are as enduring as rap lyrics. Who knows what the vocabulary and emphasis of theoretical race-relations or feminism will be next month? One certainty is that many students required to take courses in these subjects do not like them. The subculture of resistance by humour they generate suggests this. Here are a few gems from my long stay at the former University of North London, now the London Metropolitan University:

'Are you going to any more of the consciousness-raising sessions?'

'No, I already like women and black people.'

Or, 'I missed the session on racism today. What are this week's definitions?'

These typify the human response to nonsense, mild versions of the old witticisms Communism used to generate:

'We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us.'

The Apologia for Marxism

Of course the evolutionary stages are more complex than indicated here. The line runs from classical Marxism, through a bewildering maze of Marxisant variations. Deceit alone has been universal. One trick in the Marxian apologia – *vis à vis* the failure of Communism – was simply to drop the eschatology. Marxism was henceforth to be regarded only as an intellectual methodology, though with unparalleled ability to

When the 'anti-racism' and 'multiculturalism' flood is finally discredited, those who smashed the careers of people who called it that at the time, will not utter any retraction, nor suffer themselves.

uncover the 'real' power-relations of society. Marxism's most insidious feature, its vast contribution to the politics of suspicion, was to be kept alive. A mania for discord has been the driving force of modern feminism, multiculturalism and contemporary obsessions with race. The current neurotic concern as to which minority individuals belong to repeats Nazi fixations.

Kenneth Minogue has sketched the ideological composition of the new socialism with characteristic cogency. His essay in the June 2003 issue of *The New Criterion*, speaks of 'Olympianism', the movement of a lofty clerisy seeking to regulate our thoughts in the free societies. Given the hatred of Christianity writhing at its centre, he has called the core outlook 'Christophobia'. This accompanies a strange willingness to admire religions and cultures from all points of the compass provided they are not Western, even militant Islam.

Minogue notes also the growing tendency, because of political hostility to Israel, for Judaism to be lumped under the anathema now attaching to Christianity. Less than sixty years after the worst ethnic crime in history, the anathema on anti-Semitism is being dismantled among the neo-Socialists, and the new anathema on Christianity is being extended to Judaism too.

Minogue excoriates the shallow Voltaireanism of this clerisy. He suggests that the hostility to Western history and Christianity, as well as a reified commitment to 'rights', is partly strategic. It presses for worldwide Western standards. It also tries not to offend the sensibilities of non-Western beneficiaries, by making too much fuss – or indeed any fuss – about the Western and Christian genesis of these moral and technical standards.

Can the world enjoy freedom, affluence and scientific prowess, when a simultaneous downgrading of the historical culture which produced them all is regarded as mandatory? Not much and not indefinitely. One cannot honestly enjoy things one refuses to ponder and understand honestly. The Communist insistence, now largely abandoned, that engineering can work its wonders independently of the market, is the most glaring example. To want Western economic goodies while refusing to contemplate their origins and on-going intellectual sustenance is a similar error.

The Parasitical and Hypocritical Attack on Western Civilisation

Minogue rightly places rejection of Western history at the centre of the new ideological ascendancy now contending for our souls. This denigration belongs to socialism, since it too is a version of egalitarianism. It alleges that the white European racists, imperialists and cultural ethno-centrics have marginalized cultures just as good as the one they promoted.

To unpack the charge is to show its absurdity. First, of all cultures, the Western has been the least racist. Secondly, European imperialism was on the whole benevolent. Thirdly, only the West has produced an intellectual life able to consider cultures outside its own. Such empathy was totally beyond all the cultures of Asia and Africa. The truth is that unless Western civilisation begins to flex its intellectual muscles again, there is no hope for the world. It is very dangerous to import the Western productive apparatus without the moral and intellectual framework which contained it. Unforeseeable consequences could follow. Furthermore, we have a perfect right to defend our civilisation and to condemn those who want Western affluence whilst they simultaneously denigrate the intellectual individualism which facilitated it.

It is worth identifying this denigration sharply, so contradictory a posture does it constitute. The despots of China, and of militant Islam, want things both ways. They want to be rich and command huge resources and at the same time to denigrate Western civilisation and history. They wish ostentatiously to reject the constraining civilisation which alone can make the power which wealth will bring a responsible power, which can take the form of political authority, as opposed to gross coercion.

The despots of China, and of militant Islam...They want to be rich and command huge resources and at the same time to denigrate Western civilisation and history.

This project of denigration also meets the second criterion of socialism because it requires public finance for its perpetuation, nationally and internationally. How repugnant it is, to know that the work of honest citizens is taxed in order to finance the

antinomian preoccupations of civilisation's domestic and foreign enemies. One should mention intra-national considerations as well, because there is a domestic Western ferment of a similar 'egalitarian' sort too. The progressive ideologists of education, especially from the 1960s, managed to spread their disastrous neo-Rousseauesque doctrines widely, with their implicit egalitarian basis, childhood being accorded the same importance as adulthood. If childhood is humanly as good as adulthood, why send children to school? Again this is a mix of ideological equality and institutional public finance, otherwise to be known as 'socialism'.

Along with this equalisation of the ages, goes another destructive incubus, the levelling of art. The easy and the ugly are now to be ranked alongside the beautiful and the demanding, in art, music and literature. This is not surprising. The moronising education which the elite have imposed on the masses has handed over mass culture to the worst spivs in our society, the elite endorsing the output of these spivs with a kind of horrible populism and anti-intellectualism.

The Replacement of the Capitalist Economy by 'Western Civilisation'

The complaints against capitalism proper are growing markedly weaker. The entity 'Western civilisation' is being substituted for 'capitalist economy' as the source of human ill. It is not Western capitalism which is the oppressor today: rather it is the assertion of Western superiority, in politics, law, the arts and sciences, agriculture and engineering, or anything. The alleged 'victims' of this conceited Western civilisation are cultural, and political more than economic. The richest woman in the West is by virtue of her sex a victim of Western civilisation. No matter how rich you are, if you are black or brown, the beast of Western civilisation is oppressing you.

Neo-Socialism is primarily ideological, though awash with rivers of public money. It is even more ambitious than classical Marxism, though like its immediate predecessor, neo-Marxism, it has shed the optimism which rendered the actual incarnation of Marx in the reality of Communism so ludicrous. Communism was in practice pessimistic from the first. Marxism as its intellectual Baedeker, however, retained an air of optimism. This explains the attractions it once had for so many intellectuals and activists. Neo-Socialism is a deadly pessimism, and promises no salvation. Its view of human beings is deeply cynical and its strange version of original sin is much worse than the one allegedly laid upon us by the Almighty as a punishment for primordial sin. The whole point of Christianity is that through Divine Grace we can be saved. Neo-Socialism has no such moral relief in mind. Its psychology is as bleak as Hobbes's and unlike that mighty scholar's thought, assumes no possibility of a civilised, constraining political system. Leviathan would not demean himself in minute surveillance of our actions and thoughts. Neo-Socialism would settle many of the minutiae of our lives.

Moreover it has abandoned, gloatingly, any aspiration to the universalism which classical Marxism shared with Christianity. Maybe Marx never believed we could all be saved. Arguably the whole project was as rotten, from the beginning, as its results, its manifest claim to constitute an economic treatise subverted by its latent function as a manual of power. At least Marx pretended he believed in human betterment. The new socialism is a kind of incoherent Calvinism, which leaves a majority of humanity damned. Is a white woman damned because she is white, or saved because she is a woman? Which trumps what in a black man, the sinned against

black, or the offending man? No matter. The whole point of Post Modern 'discourse' is to identify intellectual rigour as an oppressive tool. The wise recognise the contradiction and the repulsive mind-set of the pseudo-scholars who produced it, trampling on people's sexuality, race, culture, religious life and history, as well as their powers of understanding. The various people 'theorised', like so many pigeons, by our new Olympians, are being manipulated with the profoundest contempt. The very things neo-Socialism says matter so much are put at the disposal of a supercilious elite, to define, explain and even name at will. People need history, to help them sort out questions of their identity. One person cannot settle the identity of another. Only an unforced sense of self can help most humans to define themselves and to find reasons for persevering in the quest for decency. Worst of all in Western neo-Socialism is the omission or denial of the sense of nationhood.

Civilisation is Weakened by the Attack on Mainstream Identity

The neo-Socialist mind-set weakens our society and makes it very difficult for the modern nations even to defend themselves. The difficulties we have had after the overthrow of Saddam in Iraq make that clear. The American and British fifth columns are encouraging our enemies, endorsing the horrors of Wahabbi fanaticism or of Baathist totalitarianism. Like Maoism (and Leninism before it) neo-Socialism conceives the world as characterised by endless conflict. Like them it considers virtue to be a bureaucratic phenomenon. Though it subsists within a free society, it resembles a police-state, a despotism in miniature, mocking the freedom on which it is a parasite. Police-states are good at occupying apparent high ground. Neo-Socialism, having seized this vantage point, then decides what exemplary morality it is going to dispense in schools or other bureaucratic systems within their purview. The new breed of socialists mimics the old Leninists and Maoists. They tell the world how virtuous they themselves are and possess the means to enforce conformity to certain protocols. Their moralistic propositions are empty and relate to practical evil. The theologians always said that evil is the absence of good, and therefore a parasite on being. Amid the fun of nursery rhymes and jingles are a few sinister stories. All the theories, slogans and mantras neo-Socialism have produced are ugly and sinister as well.

Dennis O'Keeffe's translation of Benjamin Constant's Principles of Politics was published in January

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Parish Pump

Charles Harris

Out here in rural Gloucestershire, the great pyres of burning cattle during the foot and mouth epidemic are now only a folk memory. The sheep graze quietly and the verdant fields are once more set aside and oozing cash. At our Parish Council meetings, the rural idyll has been restored as I and my fellow councillors continue our serene contemplation of the problems of dog fouling at the local bus shelter.

But Alun Michael – government minister of Rural Affairs DEFRA – has not been content with this return to bucolic bliss. He thinks we need to be more ‘vibrant’. He wants us to develop ‘local strategic partnerships’, prepare ‘community strategies’ and create ‘local development frameworks’. He thinks we have some sort of a problem.

In the Rural White Paper – ‘Our countryside: the future’, we set out our agenda for the countryside. A countryside facing change. But change set into a context of reform, not only in how we govern, but also how we plan.

If like me you did not quite catch his meaning, perhaps the Countryside Agency Resource Pack CA122 ‘Parish Plans – guidance for parish and town councils’ will dispel your perplexity. Tens of thousands of these ‘resource’ packs have been dispatched to parishes and town councils and if you live in the country or a small town, there will be a copy somewhere near you now. *Guardian* readers are clamouring for them. However, I would advise you to resist the temptation to find one.

There can be no complaint about CA122’s packaging. Nice thick glossy cardboard complete with front and back inside pockets brimming over with inserts. Good money has been spent here with no expense spared. Naturally, recycled paper is used; we are assured it comprises throughout seventy five per cent recycled post consumer waste. There are super pictures, too. There’s one of the perhaps late thirty something marketing executive with her two children – let’s call them ‘Tobin’ (three) and ‘Samantha’ (five). Mummy is in mufti, sporting a pair of unsoiled ‘Hunters’ and she ineptly holds a spade poised above the sod. Is she saying ‘Oh, do I icktually have to push it into the ground?’ Or is she telling the children not to eat those nasty brown lumpy things with flies on them? As for Tobin and Samantha – both allergic reactors to dairy products – apart from the Waitrose meat counter, this is the first time they have been this close to a field. The

text? Being strong on ‘togetherness’ and ‘celebration’ and ‘working with’ and ‘doing things in partnership’ and having ‘vision’, Samantha’s mother may well have written it.

The names of Radio Four Archer’s characters populate model contract tenders and there are exhortations to ‘try and make the actions fun’. Before the reader are dangled enticing prospects of grants – possibly up to £5000 per parish. This makes even the most hardened cynics amongst us sit up and take note – ‘Blimey, never mind the guff – think of the books the village school could buy for five grand.’ This money is earmarked for defraying the fees arising from activities of ‘facilitators’ and consultants and buying software packages such as ‘Village Appraisals for Windows’ (price £75 University of Gloucester). Think of the fun we could have double clicking our weekends away on that.

Organising pointless community consultation makes for a perfect displacement activity away from practical jobs like road maintenance and fixing street lamps. In our village we have a road so badly repaired that house windows have been smashed by flying chippings.

Surely preparing a Parish Plan must bring some benefits? There are two: First, as formal geography lessons are no longer taught in schools, some local authorities have only the faintest notion of where outlying Parishes lie. In preparing a plan, we are particular-

ly instructed to state very carefully where our villages are situated. We can only hope this useful information will be garnered and passed to the emergency services who sometimes show ignorance of these matters. The second benefit is that preparing a plan helps employ staff, particularly at the Countryside Agency and DEFRA. In a section entitled ‘Celebrate!’ we are told:

Don’t forget to include in your celebrations – either by invitation, or by a mention in publicity – the people and organisations who have supported or helped finance the plan, including, of course, the Countryside Agency

District Councils also have vested interests in such wasting. Organising pointless community consultation makes for a perfect displacement activity away from practical jobs like road maintenance and fixing street lamps. In our village we have a road so badly repaired that house windows have been smashed by flying chippings. Our local council, South Gloucester, has whole nests of officers devoted to displacement activity including not only ‘facilitators’ but also ‘enablers’.

Benefits to the community? There are none. Parish Plans have no legal status. District councils have no

statutory obligation to take note of them and as ignoring local opinion is something they already excel at, that is precisely what will happen. We know this from experience: 'Parish Plans' have a long bureaucratic pedigree: before 'Parish Plans' we had 'Village Design Statements' and before these we laboured with 'Village Appraisals'. The names change but the purpose remains constant: the justification of salaries for otherwise useless personnel at district councils and government organisations.

Far from providing benefits, these 'initiatives' in fact do lasting damage: First, they raise unrealistic expectations; communities are led to believe that completing exercises in mass democracy will 'empower' them. But history

shows otherwise: rarely are the people's opinions acted upon. The popular disappointment is all the greater when the effort of participation is great. In the case of Parish Plans, the Countryside Agency reckons some 18 months of communal effort will be required. Just imagine! 18 months of form filling, enumerating questionnaires and attending meetings, and all the while being monitored by a 'facilitator'. Secondly, and far worse, not only do 'Parish Plans' and their like squander democratic goodwill, they also erode the self confidence of communities. People start believing they need government 'help' before they can do things for themselves.

Charles Harris is an engineer

The Public Sector: Can it be reformed?

Norman Barry

The end of communism has certainly not brought about a capitalist utopia in which the state has withdrawn seriously from economic life, taxation has been reduced and people are left to take care of their own welfare, education and healthcare. If anything the public sector is rising in liberal democratic countries and the market system being allowed to prosper merely to provide even more income for state employees and welfare dependants. The recent emergence, and alleged success of New Labour in Britain, is a good example of the new version of socialism, though the idea of socialism as the predatory state was pioneered in Scandinavia. Well, at least its more modest ambitions are better than the old socialism but we should not be deluded by this new 'collectivism with a human face'. In the long run, long after its progenitors are safely dead, this continued interference with the productive private sector may produce just as deleterious results for capitalism as its more overtly aggressive and poverty-creating predecessors did. My comments on the rise of the new post-socialist state are restricted to the British experience but they are just as applicable to other allegedly benign regimes: after all, California now faces economic misfortune because of ruinous public spending and the economies of the European Union (always revered as the alternative to the greed-driven individualistic Anglo-Saxon model of capitalism) are now reeling under accumulated welfare debts. All suffer from the even more deadly illusion: that the public sector can be reformed.

The British Disease Yet Again

What do the increase in costs of the Scottish parliament from £40million to £400 million, the constant complaint that increased taxes have not brought about improvements in the public services and the claim that Eurostat,

the statistical service of the European Union, is riddled with corruption, have in common? It is obvious: they are all examples of the public sector's incompetence and failure to achieve what is expected of it. Indeed, the European example shows that there is a thin line between ineptitude and straight crime in the public sector.

Yet all governments persist in the illusion that they can cut out red tape, reduce costs and deliver services efficiently (give the people what they want) in the public sector. Since the legendary Northcote-Trevelyan Report of the Civil Service in 1854 there has been a myriad of research bodies and official enquiries into government service. All have failed.

There might have been some point in the attempt by Northcote and Trevelyan to make the civil service more meritocratic and less of a small, privileged caste. Perhaps in those days an objective, educated elite, detached from everyday economic life, could be trusted to act disinterestedly for the public good. I doubt that it was really possible then but in the modern world the idea that publicly-paid officials will ever pursue the common good is clearly a figment of the intellectual's (normally paid by the state) imagination. Leaving aside the army, and possibly the police, the public service is a huge and entirely self-interested body inextricably bound up with regular economic life (the National Health Service in Britain, for example, employs well over a million people) and the behaviour of public servants must be analysed with the same assumptions and theories that we use to analyse any other utility maximising actor. And such an analysis reveals that reform, in the sense of achieving consumer/voter satisfaction, is impossible.

This can be demonstrated scientifically using American public choice theory. Starting from the assumption of the

ubiquity of self-interest in human affairs, it is easy to show that those who work in the public sector want to secure the maximum of return with as little effort as possible. Although senior people in the public sector do not have the obvious incentives as those in commerce, such as the maximisation of profit and the promotion of shareholder value, there are clear surrogates: increasing the size of their bureaux, securing favourable employment contracts and, especially these days, protecting already generous pension rights. This is called rent-seeking, capturing extra economic value created by others. The European Union is a rent-seekers' paradise.

The Necessity for Realism

This is no place for sentimentality, the bane of modern thinking. Public sector employees are the same as private employees with one crucially important difference, they are not under the same market constraints: government departments, schools and hospitals do not normally go bankrupt. This means that every state employee is a potential exploiter of the public. Of course, a not dissimilar phenomenon occurs in the private sector. Company employees regularly try to diver wealth from the shareholders to themselves, just look at the Enron, WorldCom and Tyco scandals in the United States. But there are mechanisms to prevent its worst excesses occurring. In the monopolistic public sector the corrective devices that exist are not effective.

Of course, the monopoly status of these services can occasionally work to the disadvantage of some employees: thus doctors and other highly qualified medical personnel (and, yes, even some teachers) are probably underpaid in comparison to what they would get in a fully-marketised system. As one would expect, in any heavily-unionised pay bargaining context (and trade unions are dominant in the public sectors of all free countries) pay settlements drift towards the advantage of the middle ranks. Just look at the relatively low pay of the few world-class university teachers in Britain. But, despite the abolition of *de jure* tenure, how many lower-level university staff ever lose their jobs? Thus the monopoly power of the public sector occasionally produces the perverse result of under-rewarding the best.

The Meretricious Allure of 'Efficiency'

The last thing we want is an efficient public service. In private markets, an efficient monopolist aims to reduce output and raise price. But we have all sorts of market interventions to prevent that sort of anti-social behaviour (which is naturally self-correcting, anyway); there are no equivalents in the public sector. Here we have the classic, unrestrained monopoly power rarely found in the private world. There is very little genuine competition in the public supply of health and education and what keeps them up to any standard are the small private sectors. That is why, despite increased funding, there is very little improvement in the public services. The price rises, in terms of higher wage bill, but the quality does not improve. They are efficient monopolies. Just look at what

the recent vast increase in spending on the Scottish health system (now up to European levels) has produced – the lowest output in the UK. It would be laughable if we were to appoint another public service body to conduct yet another costly enquiry into 'efficiency' in the state sector. I am reminded of the Monster Raving Loony Party in Britain when it wisely protested that there was only one Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Ironically, none of this means that most public services should be completely privatised. That is, of course, desirable but many people have an emotional revulsion to medicine, for example, being geared solely to profit. But in France and Germany healthcare is provided primarily through a compulsory social insurance system. There are competing suppliers, it is not tax-funded and therefore less state-controlled than ours. In contrast, look at their pension systems which are primarily tax-funded and are in much greater trouble than Britain's, which is still partially privately-funded. We could learn from each other about how to break the spell of the state.

Newton's Laws

The impossibility of reforming government is not just an inference from historical experience or a matter of personal prejudice. It is the result of the application of social laws that are Newtonian in their reliability: they just take a little longer to work themselves out. It is the conceit of liberty to imagine that we are free to breach them. The Conservative vainglory is the belief that only they can deliver public services adequately: it is no different in principle from the socialists' illusion that they can plan an economy efficiently. And we still have socialist education and health systems. The old Civil Service was just as self-interested but at least it was smaller. What we must understand is that much of our lives is governed by irresistible, iron laws. Yet we do have the small, but significant, freedom to adjust our behaviour to them. Communism failed because its attempt to deny these laws reduced the countries who tried it to penury. Its demise had nothing to do with liberty, as conventionally understood.

Even if we are concerned about 'social justice' there are less damaging ways to achieve it than supplying services monopolistically. They will only be exploited by the middle classes. Under a nationalised school system they move to expensive areas where, in practice, public education is closer in quality to private. And what is a future Conservative government in Britain promising to do with university education? Abolish top-up fees (Labour's feeble attempt to bring pricing into university education). We cannot have its few remaining middle class voters paying anything towards an education which will give their children good jobs. Social justice in education would imply that we should spend more on schools, which everyone has to use, and nothing on university education, which is a matter of choice. In addition, even where privately funded, university education produces negative externalities, just look at the left wing Ivy League in America. State provision at zero price makes it infinitely worse.

Are There Any Checks?

By the same Newtonian laws it would seem that under a representative democracy nothing can be done about this. This is not quite true of all types of democracy but the constraints, such as they are, do not come from the familiar sources, such as parliamentary elections. It is impossible to imagine that representative democracy can do anything but push us further down the road to serfdom: especially as the increased spending on the public will produce more pro-state voters. Under conventional parliamentary government it is easy for the winning minority (and all governments are elected with less than 50% of the electorate) to divert income from the productive to the unproductive. It bundles up the policy issues. Direct democracy, much despised by Conservatives, would go a long way to reduce the malign effect of voting on bundles of policies. If people voted on separate issues they certainly would not vote for the National Health Service or state schools. The Swiss, the most civilised country in Europe, have done very well in restraining their federal government through regular referenda on discrete proposals.

In the absence of this system, there is little we can do except rely on another 'Newtonian' law. All public

employees are entirely self-interested and do not want a completely useless system which they will have to consume. They know that if they go too far even they will be worse off. They are not there to destroy the wealth creators but to exploit them. There is then an Optimal Rate of Exploitation (ORE): this describes the Newtonian limits to taxation and regulation. In a modern social democracy the art of government is to discover that rate. So far the Blair regime has remained below it, though the rise in National Insurance and the increase in council taxes shows just how close governments can get to their own nemesis.

It is deeply depressing to rely on the ORE for some relief, and an insult to our moral and intellectual vanity. Also, it does mean that we will have to endure poor quality services until its therapeutic powers are eventually realised. But it is a necessary reminder of the impossibility of reform in the public sector. To persist in that illusion, as Conservatives insist on doing, is to license further disappointments of increasing seriousness.

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Falling in Love with Bin Laden

Myles Harris

The tenements were built in the sixties to the nostrums of the European architectural movement. In them the workers were to be taught middle class ways. There are common stairs that give on to long walkways, and flats with little balconies looking out onto a square. Now the walkways are filthy, layered with the grime of forty years over which every week council workers throw buckets of nostril-stinging disinfectant. The working class whites for whom they were built, except for the occasional eighty year old dement lurking behind a double reinforced door, have long since moved out. On the stairs Somalis, Ghanese, Congolese and Arab women drag screaming children into lifts. The penetrating thump of Hip Hop is everywhere.

People in the tenements do not worry about al-Qa'eda. Many are Muslims and even those who are not are more likely to be mugged by the teenagers hanging about the stairwells than blown up by a bomb. They go to the shops during daylight, double lock their doors at night and turn up the television to drown the Hip Hop. It is not wise to complain to the police. There are people in the block from the old country who are just as dangerous as they were at home. So one calculates risk. One chooses the most powerful thug nearest and placates him. Nobody cares about these poor people. They provide cleaners, minicab drivers, waiters and

road sweepers for rich Londoners. Most earn almost nothing. Some of the women work in Chelsea, Wandsworth or Pimlico cleaning houses in which a single item of furniture is worth more than they will earn in a lifetime.

But now one part of the daily nightmare they live in is to be visited on the rest of Britain. The choice of who protects us. The poor have always had to make this choice, usually selecting criminals, now we have to do the same. Bin Laden is the thug who lives on the stairs of middle class society, a fanatic who promises to bring many times the levels of violence in our tower blocks to our comfortable offices and wealthy city squares. His cult has wiped out 3000 financiers in New York, blown a night club full of Western children to bits in Bali, destroyed our Consulate in Turkey, killed 190 commuters in Madrid and injured a thousand others. A million middle class faces duly appeared on Spanish TV the next day begging for mercy. A day later, on the orders of the cult, they surrendered their government.

The ruling elites all over Europe are weighing the risks. Which is most dangerous, the Americans or bin Laden? The liberal media is certain of the answer. The Bin Laden cult must be placated. The best way to do that is to say everything that has gone wrong in the Middle East is the fault of America. But more than that we have to fall in

love with our enemy. As a result many people in Britain are now in the grip of a syndrome first described in 1973 in Sweden. Three women and a man were taken hostage by robbers during a raid on a bank in Stockholm. They were held for six days by two ex-convicts who threatened to kill them. After some trivial acts of kindness by the gangsters, the captives bonded with them, strongly resisting rescue attempts and declaring they were willing to defend their captors. These feelings persisted months after they were rescued. Two of the women captives later became engaged to members of the gang.

Seen many times since, the Stockholm Syndrome is an instinctive form of risk taking, a psychological amnesia in which the victim having grasped that he will not be able to escape, throws in his lot with his captor. To avoid the shameful and self-revelatory consequences of this act, the victim blinds himself to the moral contradiction of what he is doing, and becomes totally converted to his captors' views of the world. Past wrongs and present violence are erased. There is a long history of such behaviour among western intellectuals. Mao worship, the cult of (Uncle Koba) Stalin and Che Guevara were forms of the Stockholm Syndrome. Entire political movements gave enthusiastic support to people whose stated aim, repeated over and over again, was to butcher them.

It explains the extraordinary behaviour of the BBC and left wing opinion over the past year toward Iraq and terrorism. The Bin Laden cult has made no secret of its intention of not only killing a large number of us, but of promoting a religion that would set at naught every single belief held by liberal opinion in the west. The cult, which is anti-Semitic and genocidal, has promised to use any weapon in pursuit of its aims. If it can get hold of a nuclear bomb it is prepared to wipe out London. Three years ago it killed 3000 people in an unprovoked attack on New York. Far from attacking this awful cult, the liberal media has deflected criticism from it by launching an unprecedented press vendetta against bin Laden's most prominent adversary, the USA, over its occupation of Iraq.

Comfort blankets offered by the liberal opinion include a belief that America invaded the country because of its oil, that Britain is America's poodle and that had we 'gone down the UN route' we would not be faced with the Sisyphean nightmare we have of eradicating Islamic fundamentalism. All we have to do is to go to the UN and ask them to take over in Iraq, give massive aid to Palestine, sanction Israel and in Europe make a gesture toward Islam such as permitting the hejab in French schools. Such a ludicrous interpretation of events is, as Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said in an interview last week, symptomatic of our wish 'To stop the world and go to a nice comfortable space where you do not have to make any decisions.'

We are deluded if we think the UN holds out a prospect of solving the present crisis, the UN was one of the main reasons for the survival of Saddam. Allegations are surfacing that UN officials had a financial interest in maintaining the food for oil programme in Iraq and were

taking kickbacks and bribes from the Saddam regime. This, along with France and Germany's long standing commercial links with Iraq, offer a very different explanation for the UN's foot dragging. It suited a large number of people's pockets. True or not these allegations are absolutely contrary to what we wish to believe. If they turn out to be true, little will be made of them.

Nor is much space given in the media to the extreme anti-Semitism of the Arab world. Egypt, the most liberal of all the Arab states, runs a TV series on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Arab street opinion, fostered by Arab governments, recommends a final solution to the 'Jewish problem'. Hitler is widely praised for the Holocaust. Palestinian terror groups, who operate with the sanction of the Palestinian leadership, repeatedly state that only the destruction of the entire Jewish state will result in peace in the Middle East. In this light the persistent campaign over the past year to place the blame for the Iraq crisis solely on the United States puts the BBC and left wing opinion in the position of a passenger on an hijacked airliner. Having seen a large number of her fellow passengers shot in the back of the head and dumped on the tarmac she has decided not only to try and 'understand' the reasons why this has had to be done, but to belittle anybody on board who suggests resistance. This is enormously risky. Studying the reactions of people and institutions to al-Qa'eda makes one suspect it to be a form of what William Sergeant, the fifties expert on brainwashing and religious conversion, called 'paradoxical behaviour'. If something is sufficiently terrifying, rather than running away from it people are drawn toward it. An example is a strange but overwhelming temptation to get as close to the edge of a dangerous cliff as you can, or feeling yourself drawn, against your will, toward the edge of a platform as an express approaches.

An express called Islamic fundamentalism is approaching the West. Trying to walk as close to the edge of the platform as we can with the signals so clearly set at danger is suicidal. These are enemies that have to be destroyed at a distance. Taking the war to Iraq and Afghanistan is a rational assessment of the risk. The media also needs to change its attitude. The BBC is perfectly acquainted with the realities of Middle East politics; it occasionally airs them on its national radio services discussion forums. But its home TV broadcasts, for far less sophisticated audiences, have degenerated into little more than surrender announcements. People are frightened and the BBC is not going to frighten them more by honest reporting.

In terms of risk, getting close to an enemy such as bin Laden offers no survival advantage and the choices we have are stark. Since Madrid we know there is no room for terms with Islamic terrorism. It has to be seen for what it is, an attempt to destroy our free society. It will not go away by placating it. There is no agenda except defeat or victory. Either they or we will succeed.

Myles Harris is a practising doctor

Ridding Arabia of the Saudis

Harold Lubell

L Laurent Murawiec's *La guerre d'après* (Albin Michel, 2003) is a prophetic and controversial book. Prophetic because the author, in the best RAND Corporation tradition, insists on 'thinking about the unthinkable'. The unthinkable in this case is that with the end of the Cold War with the Soviets, Saudi Arabia is America's main real enemy. Controversial because of what he proposes should be done about it and because of the many individual and institutional interests in the U.S. with vested interests in the Saudis. Murawiec's analysis and recommendations were first presented in briefing to the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board in July 2002 when he was a Senior Policy Analyst at the RAND Corporation. The briefing was leaked to the *Washington Post*, which event caused the biggest scandal since Daniel Ellsberg turned over the Pentagon Papers to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* during the Vietnam war.

Murawiec's book reviews the history of the violent takeover of most of the Arabian peninsula by Ibn Saud and his Wahhabi Bedouin allies, with British support after World War I, and the more recent history of the windfall for the Saudis of American investments in the development of the oil fields of the eastern Arabian province of Hajar since the 1930s, citing a number of historical and journalistic sources.

The Islamic mystic Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab started his Sunni fundamentalist sect in the mid-1740s, preaching a retrograde, distorted version of Islam forbidding everything not specifically prescribed or recommended in the Koran. Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab soon found an ally in Mohammed Ibn Saud, 'emir' of an oasis village called Diriya. Together they led their religion-crazed Bedouin followers on campaigns of rapine and territorial conquest in the east and centre of the Arabian peninsula. In 1787 Abd al-Wahhab declared a jihad against the Ottomans; in 1802 his followers reached Kerbala in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) where they destroyed as many of the Shia holy places as they could. In 1803, Ibn Saud and his followers took Mecca where they destroyed the domes over the tombs of the family of the Prophet and the mausoleums of other revered figures of Islam.

Once the French army of Napoleon was driven out of Egypt in 1814, the Ottomans were left with a free hand in

Arabia and destroyed most of the Wahhab and al-Saud families. The Saudis recovered some of their power in the 1840s under the Saudi Feisal al-Turki. The British started subsidizing the Saudis in the 1870s with the aim of reducing piracy against British shipping in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, the Saudi family was driven out of central Arabia in the late 1880s and exiled to Kuwait. The Ibn Saud we know, Abdul-Aziz Abd al-Rahman ibn Feisal al-Saud, who said 'Not only do I rule this country, I populate it', was born in 1880. By 1902, he had already started organizing a new army of tribal brigands, once again allied with the Wahhabis. Around 1912, Ibn Saud succeeded in settling some of his Bedouins in military-agricultural colonies in the oases of Najd. The settled Bedouins formed a fraternity, *ikhwane*, which continued their raids north into Kuwait and Mesopotamia.

During World War I, the British betrayed the various Arab groups by leaving negotiations to different agencies of the British government. The India Office dealt with Ibn Saud on the east coast, while the Foreign Office and the dreamers like T.E. Lawrence dealt with the

Hashemites on the west coast. Lawrence got Hussein, the Hashemite king of Hejaz, involved in the so-called Arab Revolt against the Ottomans, while Ibn Saud continued dealing happily with both the British and the Ottomans throughout the war. Armed and financed by the British, Ibn Saud finally kicked out the Hashemites and declared himself 'protector' of Mecca and Medina. The British compensated the Hashemites by creating the kingdoms of Iraq and Transjordan and appointing Hussein's sons Abdullah as king of Transjordan and Feisal as king of Iraq.

In the late 1920s, Ibn Saud's *ikhwane* got out of hand and were destroyed by the British army and the RAF. In 1932, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud unified the Najd and Hejaz to form a new kingdom to which he gave his name. A year later, Standard Oil signed its first prospecting contract with Ibn Saud. In 1939, Standard Oil of California and Texaco obtained another concession which became ARAMCO (Arabian American Oil Company) in 1944. President Roosevelt met Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud on board the USS *Quincy* in February 1945. With the proceeds of the American oil concessions, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud became very rich.

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Murawiec depicts the Saudis in terms used by the 14th century Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun to describe the bedouin: 'On account of their savage nature, the Bedouins are people who plunder and cause damage. They plunder whatever they are able to lay their hands on without having to fight or to expose themselves to danger....' (Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History*)

The Saudis are a modern day version of the Bedouin mentality – largely unproductive, living off oil revenues generated by the American oil companies and the labour of imported workers from Pakistan and the Philippines. Few of the local university students are technically oriented: about one third of university graduates in Saudi Arabia have degrees in theology. The regime builds mosques and Koranic schools in order to create jobs for the would-be theologians.

Murawiec's caustic comments on the Saudis drip vitriol: 'Neither nation nor state, Saudi Arabia is an empire recently put together in blood ... Taken over by the Saudis, Saudi Arabia is not a state, it is a family business, the only one in the world to own a seat in the United Nations.'

He damns the Saudis for three of their activities: past and threatened oil embargos; exporting Wahhabism; and exporting terrorism. He blames the Saudis, as the kingpin of OPEC, for the oil crisis of 1973 and the world-wide inflation that followed. As recently as 2002, the threat was again made by the Saudis: 'When he visited President Bush in Texas in April 2002, Abdallah ben Abdulaziz used the services of the *New York Times* reporter Patrick Tyler to insinuate the threat of a new petroleum embargo.'

Wahhabism was exported to India by the Deoband movement which started near Delhi in 1867. The Deobandis in India and Pakistan are now among the more radical of the Islamic fundamentalists in India and Pakistan. The present day efforts of the Saudis to export Wahhabism are well financed. Islamic fundamentalism has financed – with Saudi money – mosques and Islamic institutes all over the world. The World Assembly of Islamic Youth spent \$26 million for student aid and for founding mosques. All three of those institutions have been implicated in financing al-Qa'eda and other terrorist organizations.

Saudi money also finances Moslem terrorists in Algeria, Indonesia, Pakistan and Kashmir, Palestine, and the Philippines. In Algeria, the Saudis financed the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut – Islamic Salvation Front) and its leader Abassi Madani, who was recently (in 2003) released from prison by the government of Algeria. In 1994, the press revealed a Saudi-financed international arms traffic destined for the Algerian GIA (Groupement Islamique Armé) the terrorist branch of the FIS. The Algerian civil war has killed thousands, mostly civilians murdered by fundamentalist terrorists.

In Pakistan, 'a demographic and politico-religious time-bomb', we find the Saudi-financed ISI (Inter-Service Intelligence) agency. This supports the Afghani Taliban

and was probably responsible for the murder of the Jewish American journalist Daniel Pearl. The Saudis financed the development of Pakistan's 'Islamic atom bomb' by paying China to pass on its nuclear technologies to Pakistan. Saudi has been accused by a former U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency official of buying its own nuclear capacity from China, with Pakistan as intermediary.

Al-Haramayn operates in 90 countries, among them Bosnia, and Indonesia, where it financed al-Qa'eda terrorist operations in south-east Asia. The great majority of the 30-odd Islamic organizations searched, banned and closed, their assets frozen since 9/11/2001, were directed or financed by the Saudis. A report *Terrorism Financing: Roots and Trends of Saudi Terrorism Financing* by a French researcher, Jean Charles Brisard, was presented to the United Nations on December 19, 2002, at the request of the Security Council. According to that report, Saudi Arabia transferred half a billion dollars to al-Qa'eda.

Murawiec argues that Saudi Arabia has enjoyed a status of exceptional impunity in Washington, DC. Having succeeded in getting away with their oil blackmail in 1973-74 and 1979, the Saudis interfere in American political life by buying politicians, high level government officials, journalists, university professors, diplomats, colonels, generals, and intelligence services personnel. They drown the circles of power with their petro-dollars. Several hundred thousand American troops are stationed in the country to save the skins of the Saudi dynasty. They are forbidden to practice their religion, Jewish or Christian. The American soldiers were forbidden to celebrate Christmas, and Christmas trees were seized at the ports.

Murawiec cites a number of instances of Saudi subsidies to former U.S. diplomats who have served in Saudi Arabia, and to other important U.S. political figures. The Saudis contributed half a million dollars to the West Foundation established by John West, former Governor of South Carolina and former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Adnan Khashoggi contributed to a fund-raiser for the Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta. Saudi King Fahd contributed \$ 20 million to the Carter Center for Peace Research at Emory College in Atlanta. The Saudis contributed \$20 million to establish a Middle East Center at the University of Arkansas during Clinton's Presidency. The Saudis are major contributors to Washington DC's Middle East Institute whose President is Ned Walker, former Deputy Chief of Mission of the American Embassy in Riyadh. In the U.S. the Saudis have donated funds to many prestigious universities, including Harvard. In England, Oxford and London have received donations.

Murawiec has a startling explanation of the failure of the Americans to support the Shia uprising against Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 1991. The standard explanation is that the Americans got cold feet after former President Bush called on the Shias to revolt because America feared an intervention by Iran. Murawiec's explanation is much more telling: the Saudis were scared the Shia uprising in Iraq would spread to the Shias in the

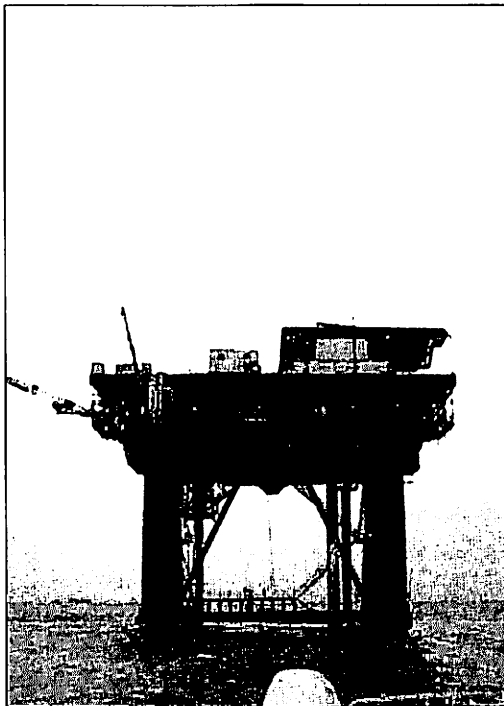
Hajar oil fields. It was the Saudis who convinced the U.S. administration to let Saddam massacre the Iraqi Shias.

The first major event of internal terrorism in Saudi Arabia was the attack on the Great Mosque of Mecca of November 1979 organized by a former captain of the Saudi National Guard. The attackers were trained in Libya and South Yemen by instructors from East Germany, Cuba, Palestine, and Iran. The siege lasted two weeks and caused thousands of deaths. The revolt was suppressed by French special forces (suddenly converted to Islam for the form). The immediate Saudi reaction was a raft of repressive anti-female measures. The case of Osama bin Laden is curious. The Saudis exiled him to Afghanistan in the hope that fighting the rest of the world would keep him occupied outside Arabia.

The more recent car bombings in Riyadh are changing the situation. Murawiec asks whether the Saudis are prisoners of the Wahhabi monster they have created. His answer, that the Saudis and the Wahhabis are now inseparable, is unsatisfying. Since Murawiec wrote, the fundamentalist terrorism fostered by the Saudis has been dramatically turning against them. The recent car bombings suggest that a low level civil war between the Saudi rulers and the Islamist extremists is on the horizon, unless the government can crack down on local terrorists. For the U.S. and the rest of the world, if the Saudis are overturned by Moslem fundamentalists, the threat of exporting terrorism will not be reduced.

After his indictment of Saudi financing of corruption and international terrorism, Murawiec presents his controversial action scenario. He would eliminate the Saudi-Wahhabi war machine by giving the Saudis an ultimatum requiring them to:

- End unconditionally all fundamentalist sermons in religious and educational institutions in the country.
- Withdraw all books and materials with anti-western and anti-Shia content.
- Ban public speeches by Wahhabis and sack teachers guilty of incitement to hatred.
- Prevent publication in press and the media of all forms of incitement to hatred.
- Imprison or exile those guilty of such incitement.
- Prohibit all public and private financing of all 'education' and propaganda for hatred.
- Close all 'charitable works' financing fundamentalist propaganda and Islamist actions in Arabia and abroad.
- Confiscate assets of organizations (and of their donors) guilty of ordering terrorism.



- Turn over the accounts of the main banks of the kingdom to international authorities, and expropriate them in favor of the victims of terrorism in all cases where they are implicated.

- Turn over also the files of the secret services, the interior ministry, police and National Guard, as well as any of their officers (of any rank) implicated in any way in international terrorism.

- Turn over to an international tribunal all Saudi officials of any rank whatsoever similarly implicated.

If the demands are not met, the following actions should be taken:

- Occupy the oil fields of eastern Arabia, for which airborne and light amphibious forces would suffice.

- Establish an autonomous state of Hajar on the Persian

Gulf, under international protection. Some 25 percent of oil revenues would be allocated to the new Hajar state for development expenditures to compensate for the century and a half of exploitation of the Hajari Shias by the Wahhabis and Saudis. The remainder of the oil revenues would be redistributed by an international technical board: Middle Eastern countries would receive a share calculated on the basis of their population, and reduced according to the size of their oil revenue.

- Recreate Hejaz as an autonomous state on the Red Sea, perhaps under restored Hashemite rule. Return Assir to Yemen, from which it was seized by Ibn Saud. Hand over the holy

places of Mecca and Medina to an international Islamic congress.

- Leave the Saudis with an autonomous state of Najd in their central Arabian homeland.

Assuming that military intervention is successful, there are a number of obvious questions about Murawiec's proposals. Would letting the Shias rather than the Saudis control the oil wells be an improvement? How would internationalizing control or oil ownership be effected? Is any pan-Arab control of Arabian oil revenues which would not continue to finance Arab terrorists, anti-Americanism, and anti-Israel aggression, conceivable? Would Egypt be any more capable of using oil revenues for development than has been the case with billions of dollars of USAID funds the country has received since Carter's Camp David agreements?

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I assign Zois, wife of Kabeira the Eretrian, to the goddess Earth and to Hermes. I bind her food and her drink, her sleep and her laughter, her meetings and her cithara playing, her 'entrance', her dancing, her thinking, her eyes... And to Hermes, I consign her wretched walk, her words, deeds and evil talk...

This is a fine example of a little known type of historical document—it's an ancient Greek curse. We do not know who wrote it—they are careful not to identify themselves—but it is directed at one Zois, who was probably an ancient Greek hetaera, a woman hired to entertain men at their symposia or parties. These words, scratched onto a lead tablet in the fifth century, have survived as a testimony to someone's desire to hurt this woman, stifle her attractions, frustrate her success. Such a vicious petition to the ancient gods is not what we expect from the Greeks, the fathers of Rational Thought. But this is not a rare event: thousands of these tablets have been found—testimony to the passions of ordinary Greek men and women, and their use of the supernatural.

We are familiar with ancient Greece portrayed as an idyllic world of pastoral landscapes, dotted with splendid halls of white marble, in which slightly elderly gentlemen wander among gleaming columns, contemplating Great Truths. Within this historical time capsule, suspended like flies in amber, we can clearly distinguish the foundations of Western civilisation—scientific hypotheses, architectural concepts, political models and other glittering intellectual achievements.

But this is far from the whole story of that time period—and by telling it only like this we ignore the richness, the passionate reality, of ancient society. Behind the profundities of Plato or the soaring rhetoric of Pericles, are thousands of men and women whose stories have gone unheard. These are the people who listened to Pericles' great funeral oration, as they mourned their friends, sons and husbands; the politicians who plotted at the back of the Assembly; the young noblemen who ran drunk and dissolute through the streets of Athens. These are the women who danced at the parties where Socrates debated his ideas, or were sold to groups of young men—who could not afford to buy themselves a mistress each. Here are the artisans who helped to carve the sculptures on the Parthenon; the soldiers who guarded the great port of Athens.

The fragmentary stories of these scarcely glimpsed

figures are not found in the polished literary *bons mots* of the usual historical sources. Instead of the poetry and history of this period, we must turn to archaeological remains dug up from graves, and wells, found nailed to temple walls, or discarded in the rubbish pits of long defunct oracular sanctuaries. Our sources are, on the one hand, curse tablets – thin sheets of lead inscribed with vitriolic little imprecations like the one above – and, on the other, oracle question tablets, used and reused by those consulting the oracle at Dodona in Northern Greece, to put their questions to the gods. In such records, composed by anonymous Greek men and women, we hear voices that are rarely, if ever, heard in history books. They comprise fervent, fragmentary, sometimes ferocious, appeals to the gods, and offer tantalising glimpses of everyday life – and how ordinary men and women dealt with risks in ancient Greece.

In these remains we find anxious defendants and prosecutors from the Athenian courts, asking the gods to silence their opponents and disable judge and jury; men wondering about the paternity of their children; women pleading with the gods to stop their men from deserting them; slaves begging to know how to escape their masters; merchants requesting the celestial low-down on likely markets.

The stories we find in these tablets take the reader on a journey through the teeming ancient city – the docks, the theatre, the law courts; brothels and garrisons, markets and workshops; parties in private homes, meetings of political clubs, festival processions in the streets. Moving through the city's neighbourhoods, we find shopkeepers and publicans; doctors and soldiers; net-makers and silver workers; flour sellers and seamstresses; actors and hetaerae; and male and female prostitutes simultaneously desired and detested for the potency of their charms.

As they moved through life – feeling hope, lust, jealousy, love, the sickening lurch of fear, the damp empty spaces of disappointment, the festering irritation that grows into loathing – men and women from every part of society frequently turned to the gods and to such practices to help them control what was going to happen.

Such material reveals the distant anguish of these ancient Greek men and women, facing choices that would directly affect their lives – and that had serious private or public consequences. It shows us how, when the Greeks reached crucial or telling moments of their

lives, as they struggled to make the right decisions, they turned to the supernatural powers to help them to make the right choice – and control their enemies.

On the whole, the best way for a Greek to safeguard his or her future was to keep the gods happy. But if you were in doubt about a particular course of action, you might also make a pilgrimage to an oracular sanctuary to get more specific guidance. This was probably an intimidating experience – a long and difficult journey, culminating in a daunting ritual and possibly terrifying proximity to the divine.

So what sorts of concerns seemed to have deserved such an effort? The male visitors seeking Zeus' help at the oracle of Dodona in Northern Greece were mostly asking about having children. Which god should this consultant pray to in order to ensure he had some children? Should he marry this woman or that woman in order to have them? And, when he had had one – was that child his? Interestingly, however, although we know childbirth was so dangerous, there are no questions about the safety of mother or child, not a single question about the health of women who are pregnant.

Meanwhile, other supplicants were asking if they should make journeys they had planned – for trade or in search of work – and whether they should travel by land or sea; they did not inquire what would happen on those journeys. Soldiers asked about whether to join, or how to conduct, military operations – but not if they would survive them. Athletes and musicians asked if they were going to win 'without effort'. Most of the visitors to the oracle were male citizens, but, fascinatingly, we also find women and slaves among them – one of the few historical documents where such people speak for themselves. The women also ask about their chances of having children, and make inquiries about which gods to worship so that illnesses might be cured. The slaves ask circuitously about the likelihood of future freedom.

The questions asked at the Dodona oracle provide us with an index of the fears about the future that haunted ancient Greek men and women – the risks that they thought demanded divine guidance. But they also reveal their attitudes to risk. In their consultations, the supplicants do not ask the god what will happen or to ensure their safety (they do not, for example, ask about the size of the harvest or whether they will die in battle). They ask instead about a particular selection of activities – and, by and large, they have decided what they are going to do, and only seek the gods' approval.

Altogether, this suggests that the Greeks made a workable compromise between retaining autonomy and surrendering to fate. They did not ask for reassurance about future events: they took responsibility for most of their decision process, and the rest – whatever might then

happen – was up to the gods. If your question was right and something still went wrong, then you must accept that the future had played out the way it was destined.

Alternatively, there was always the chance you had been cursed.

Cursing was a technique the Greeks used to deal with risk. Unlike oracular consultation, it is rarely mentioned in ancient Greek literature, but the numbers of curses that have been found suggest this was a popular activity. According to Plato, there were even travelling curse salesmen, who made a good living going from door-to-door, selling lethal incantations for use against enemies. If the curse salesmen had already moved on to the next village, the chances were you could visit a wise woman, or try to write your own spell – if you could get hold of one of the books of spells that detailed the right rituals and formulae to be used to ensure success. The latter course of action was a little dangerous, however. In order to be effective, curses were usually buried in graves – so that the recently dead could bear them to the gods below, or carry out their wishes themselves. For the ordinary Greek man or woman, this was not something to mess around with – being near the dead could have serious – even fatal – consequences. It was probably better to leave it to the professionals.

By 'binding' an individual or an event, the curse-writer was attempting to control and diminish the threat they presented. Ancient Greek men and women used curses against their neighbours and their workmates. They bound those they thought likely to do them harm: men and women used them against those who

might steal their lovers; wives against women who had tempted their husbands, and might be tempted to ask them to stay; men used them against women – or men – whose charms were overwhelming; actors used them against rivals who might beat them in dramatic competitions, politicians against those whose strategies might endanger the city – or just win them more votes – and, in litigious Athens, everyone used them against opponents in the law courts. It was also quite acceptable to issue a general curse, as a pre-emptive step, against anyone who might, just might, have cursed you.

Even more than oracle consultation, the practise of cursing challenges our perceptions of ancient Greek culture. This is not what we expect from the cradle of Western civilisation – perhaps we should be re-conceptualising ancient Greece as a sort of annexe of Hogwarts? Far from it: as with oracular consultations, Greek men and women used cursing to deal with specific risks in a particular way: establish a course of action, identify who might beat you at it, and then try to eliminate them before they tried to eliminate you.

In the world in which we live, a world dominated by

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statistics and probabilities that scientifically prove our potential exposure to multifarious dangers, this might seem a long way from our current approach to – and obsession with – risk. Surely our risks are qualitatively different from that of the Greeks – do we not go to extraordinary lengths to prove that they pose objective dangers? Do we not appeal to science and not the supernatural to arm us against future threats? The twin bouncers of modernity, Rationality and Science, have hurled those old, strange superstitions and baleful spiritual agencies that once ruled our futures, out of the club.

Or have they? A swift trawl of newspaper headlines suggests those nebulous blighters may be sneaking in through the back door. In everyday use, it's apparent that the term

'risk' has little to do with statistics: we don't respond to those risks that can be proven to be most dangerous. Instead, we focus on phantoms that grab our imagination and resonate with our fears – the 'risks' of travelling by train, when there are hundreds more deaths on the road, the dangers of nuclear power, while puffing on a cigarette.

In essence, we may write headlines instead of lead tablets, and turn to Health and Safety Rules rather than oracular pronouncements – but the risk culture that we have constructed is no more objective and rational in its essence than that of the ancient Greeks.

Curse tablet, anyone?

Esther Eidinows book Risk & the Greeks will be published by Oxford University Press

Memories of an External Examiner?

Christie Davies

As I read through the dissertation I realised to my horror that it was far too boring to have been written by a student; only an academic could have written something quite so soporific. The dissertation was, however, fairly clearly written and its tedium lay mainly in its grossly excessive use of not very relevant facts and descriptions. This suggested an academic author writing in the 1950s before alternative ways of frustrating the reader of historical works had become fashionable. My suspicions were confirmed when the student, who was far younger than me, outlined the appearance of a building which I knew had been demolished many years before but which the student claimed to have seen. Here was plagiarism most foul. Yet I had no proof or rather insufficient proof to convince the college for which I was an external examiner that there had been cheating. They would have referred the matter to their appropriately initialled Standing Committee on Academic Misconduct, S.C.A.M., who would accept nothing less than the original book from which it had been cribbed as proof. It is possible to find the source of an internet download but an obscure and unknown book proves very difficult to trace. Fortunately, the student had been stupid enough to include a likely candidate in the bibliography and I drove over to a copyright library at which I had borrowing rights to check the text. There was the dissertation word for word, page after page.

When I informed the internal examiners at Northern College they were doubly embarrassed, first by their own failure to detect the plagiarism and, second, because they knew the ethnic identity of the candidate. I did not. Both the supervisor and the second marker had given the dissertation an exceptionally high mark.

Even the fact that the candidate had failed nearly all the

formal examinations that he or she ('or' stands for confidentiality not hermaphrody) had taken had not made them suspicious. On receipt of my photocopies, the supervisor, an alert and intelligent man who was baffled as to how he had been deceived into thinking it was an original piece of work worth a first, confronted the candidate with them and obtained a full confession. What the candidate had done was to produce an appalling first draft of the dissertation from a word processor that contained a few scattered unacknowledged quotations from Professor 'Betaminus's' book. The supervisor provided comments and corrections and a second draft appeared with a higher Betaminus content including the original author's quotations from local newspapers footnoted to look as if the candidate had found them independently. With each successive draft further segments of unacknowledged Betaminus were inserted until almost the entire dissertation had been plagiarized from the one source. So gradual and insidious was the process by which the false document was constructed that it fooled the internal examiner completely. Had it not been for the chance fact that I had done my A-level geology fieldwork in that same northern county where the College was located and whose local history was the subject of the thesis, the candidate would have graduated with honours and worn with pride the same hood and gown as the late Professor Betaminus.

My colleagues were amazed but I was not for I knew full well that the citizens of this particular nation and British ethnic minority, the Meliffuans, were habitual and highly skilled cheats. An old friend of mine from that country who had often advised their modes of deception would tell me stories of how they had even worked out

new ways of cheating within the British pre-university examinations held in their country. One seasoned examination sifter adept in the production of forged identity cards with substitute photographs had over the years enabled scores of his wealthy but dim associates to enter British universities with fake A levels. Today these methods have been supplemented by the sending of text messages by phone by a clever and experienced examination sifter waiting outside to the ill-informed dummy in the hall. Now that they have settled in Britain in large numbers, easily outwitting our dithering Home Office, they apply these techniques to the British driving test which, in consequence, is rendered worthless. They have other even more cunning scams involving forgery and deception to extract money from the gullible by email but I do not wish to compromise my Meliffluan sources; they may be a nation of crooks but they are likeable crooks happy to tell outsiders their national secrets.

When they come to a British university with glowing examination results from their own country they are apt to fail at the end of their first year if the assessment is based on a formal written examination. It is more difficult to cheat in exams in Britain than in Melliflua not so much because the standards of invigilation are higher but because the British students do not like it and are apt to grass them up. A nasty xenophobic streak in our students leads them to resent foreigners gaining an unfair advantage by cheating in exams. Senator Edward Kennedy, who had a friend sit an exam for him, has always been disliked and despised in Britain, where the bridge of exams has to be crossed cleanly. The same is not true of continuous assessment where the setting of standard essays leads to widespread plagiarism and collusion among even the British students. Even so they rarely display the ingenuity of the Meliffluans. If there were exams in cheating most of the British would get thirds and the Meliffluans would get all the prizes, particularly the very rich ones who have even been known to suborn senior British academics. Even among the members of this most upright of groups low pay and low morale have had an impact here and there. Want a British PhD? There are those who will write it for you and coach you on how to answer questions about it, though you would be better advised to seek a Melliffluan agent first.

My colleagues at Northern College were honest men and women. They believed in equal cheating according to a strict set of rules laid down by their official teaching and learning committee. All essays were marked thoroughly with extensive and detailed instructions as to how they should be redone, a second attempt was treated in the same way including entire helpful and grammatical sentences to be included in the final text. As external examiner I only ever saw the third and final version. I

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never knew whether I was marking the work of the students or the staff. The students never learned to write essays on their own and their answers to proper examination questions were almost invariably muddled, illiterate and irrelevant to the question set.

However, the staff were shocked by the fact that one of their own number should have been deceived and exploited by a student who had indulged in unequal cheating. They were also frightened because of the only other students scheduled to fail one was also a Meliffluan and the other, a person from an allied ethnic group, had almost certainly also forged a dissertation. What gave it away was that the graphics were too good at a time when few people had the professional skill and expensive computers needed to do this. There had also been an anonymous denunciation from an informer among the British students. No British student had failed whereas every single one of the Meliffluans and their kin seemed likely to do so. There was total panic. The Dean in his tight-collared striped shirt with colour coded woven tie was summoned. He decided it would be best to ask a Meliffluan teaching engineering in another branch of the College at the other side of town to sit on the board as a kind of extra external examiner. I placed the keys of my elderly but ever reliable Volkswagen on the table and looked meaningfully out of the window at

where it was parked. I did not need to make the 'Brrm, Brrm' noises that children use to signify that a car is being started and driven away. The other external examiner, a horse-faced, donkey-brained woman from an obscure polytechnic, looked sick but a wor-

thy engineer was saved from the gross humiliation of having to take part in a charade of political correctness. Fortunately for the College, a team of interrogators consisting of myself, and a minister of religion turned cynical lecturer were unable to extort a confession from the candidate, even though I played 'Mr. Nice' and the minister exhaled the fires of hell. Another half hour and the candidate would have cracked but we were not granted an extension by a board anxious both to stick to its timetable and lest we succeed. The verdict was 'not proven' and the candidate passed as indeed did the third Meliffluan who in the oral examination attained the humble standard needed for a pass degree. The menace of interventions by the Racial Equality Police receded. Nonetheless Northern College declined to expel the cheating candidate who after endless resits obtained a degree under my more tolerant successor.

By then I had moved on to be examiner at Midlands College, a dubious 'University Sector College' whose award of degrees was over-seen by a distinguished university in the same town. Here I encountered a similar situation where students who had failed every single

written examination that they had sat were granted degrees because they had received high marks on their course-work essays which just brought their (arithmetic) average above the threshold of 40% needed to pass. I balked at this but only a hard-faced economist supported me. Once again the Dean was summoned. He wore the same uniform as the other one with an even blander woollen tie and a yet tighter neck-reddening collar which he kept adjusting with his pinkie. He brought with him a bound volume of several hundred pages of regulations laid down by the nearby university for the awarding of degrees by Midland College. It was the kind of bureaucratic garbage my polytechnic colleagues used to complain about when they had had dealings with the Council for National Academic Awards. In theory this tome was there to safeguard academic standards but it was now being used and used fairly and in line with the spirit as well as the letter of its rules to thwart my attempts to enforce those standards. We were all forced to adhere to a procedure based on pure arithmetic averaging even though it led to the conferring of degrees on those whose work was well below degree standard. At first I surmised that it had been incompetently drawn up by a committee chaired by some innumerate Professor of English Literature (are there any other kinds?) and asked the internal examiners to refer the problem back to the committee before the next year's examinations. Nothing happened. Down the bureaucratic wire came the message 'it must stay the same'. I realized I was dealing with *idiots savants* rather than *idiots simples*.

When the mark sheets arrived for me to check the following year nothing had changed. Candidates were still passing on the basis of average marks buoyed up by thrice-written, staff-improved coursework even though they had failed most, and in some cases, all of their formal examinations. I checked the failed papers (the pass mark was 40) very carefully and realised that they had all been given purely nominal fail marks somewhere between 30% and 40%. I saw that if I were to lower each of these marks to the mark that paper deserved – in general well under 25% – it would in each case depress the candidate's average to the point where a very high proportion of the candidates failed, as indeed they should have done.

They was nothing in the rule book to stop me doing this, though it has probably been amended since to preclude such an intervention. Why then did I not do it and detonate one of the outer fortresses of the empire of lies that is the British educational system? I would, of course, have been removed from my post as external examiner but the work was tedious and the pay derisory; I was paid more by B.B.C. Radio for writing a fictional short story about an external examiner than I earned in three years examining. Midland College had even had the cheek to tell me I should risk a hernia carrying a heavy load of scripts and dissertations on British Rail (change at Oxford and miss your connection at Rummage) rather than claim a mileage allowance designed for the

Principal's off-road 4WD.

Yet when I saw my colleagues' aghast faces at the examiners' meeting, I knew I could not do it. They were a helpless group of underpaid and over-worked individuals who were under orders to fulfil and overfulfil the official plan for producing graduates (regardless of subject or quality). In the past those who had completed their three year course had been given diplomas but other competing institutions were now offering degrees for less work; indeed their application forms might as well have been stamped 'degree guaranteed'. Any attempt by me to raise the standards above the 'going rate' would have led to an exodus of students to other equally bad degree-awarding institutions accredited by some other bunch of bureaucratic swindlers. Not only would an arbitrary departure from the 'going rate' on my part have unfairly penalised a particular cohort of students, but also their lecturers. They would have been 'downsized' by an over-paid principal hoping to grease his way to a gong. Government snoopers from a quango would have turned up and commented adversely on the new enhanced levels of attrition and failure and declared that the staff were 'failing their students'. No-one would have dared to point out that the students were irremediably stupid and that the low incidence of dropping out and failure in the past indicated that their previous assignments were too easy to pass. The fat controlling rule book endorsed by the powerful guaranteed that this could not be the case; the very fact that at the formal bureaucratic level of the printed document everything was in order made it impossible for anyone to show that the reality was utterly rotten. If I had forcibly drawn the attention of the world to the problems I had uncovered my colleagues would have been sacrificed in order to maintain the pretence that the system was fundamentally sound. I chose not to disturb matters on these utilitarian grounds and consoled myself with the thought that all the world knew that a pass degree from Midland College was worthless anyway. It was only later that I fully realised that their degree certificates in fact carried the name of a much, and rightly, honoured university. Conscience doth make liars of us all; I, too, had become part of the big lie.

The reader may ask why I am bothering us with these anecdotes from the past history of some of Britain's seediest degree awarding bodies. The answer lies in the way that the rot has been spreading inexorably up the system in subsequent years encouraged by the very bodies that supposedly existed to stop it happening. Although they will never admit this, the members of the bodies who increasingly direct 'teaching and learning' on a centralised basis (both within and between universities) know that their other objectives can not be met with the resources they have without a significant lowering of quality and this is built into their plans under a number of disguises and euphemisms.

At all levels in the system, what is striking is the growth of sloppy forms of continuous assessment at the expense

of traditional examinations. By sloppy I mean numerous short pieces of work flung at the students at frequent intervals that require neither thought nor depth and are geared to the force-fed reading of a particular limited range of articles, of which they have to produce a paraphrase. This is known in the jargon as 'using a variety of means of assessment'. Since in general students get higher marks for gobbety continuous assessment than in proper examinations a move in this direction inevitably inflates the student's grades. It would be easy to offset this by means of a simple statistical correction to keep standards where they were but no one ever does it. On the contrary the ways in which the marks are aggregated to obtain a particular degree class have been deliberately and systematically manipulated to increase the rate of inflation. Anyone who disbelieves me should look at the class lists for most subjects at almost any university over the last forty years. Why has the proportion of 'firsts' multiplied and the ratio of upper to lower seconds shifted massively in favour of the former? It is not because the students are better. If anything their quality has deteriorated because when universities compete for students the quality of the last extra student to be recruited is never as good as the average of those already in the university. You can disguise what is happening only by making the currency depreciate.

The way in which it works is that one of the middle ranking universities arbitrarily lowers its standards, often under the guise of a move towards (a merely formal)

uniformity of ways of calculating degree results between different subjects within that university. These universities employ more sophisticated means of calculating degree results than the crude arithmetic averaging found in the bottom end institutions I have been describing. This is all to the good but the greater complexity and opaqueness of the way the aggregating is done makes it easier for the university that breaks rank to fiddle the balance sheet without getting caught. For a time the trick works since their students gain an advantage in the market place or in obtaining post-graduate awards. I have even known one of our universities impudently boast that it provided greater value added than its rivals since it took in students with poorer qualifications than elsewhere but they emerged with better degrees. The other universities are then forced to devalue in order to protect their own students since the official doctrine of the parity of esteem of institutions makes it difficult to discriminate between universities except where differences in standing are very large indeed. Those departments who do not join in are being unjust to their students for the high standards they boast about within their own university are not known to the rest of the world. Their students are trapped in the slough of despond. Justice and survival alike demand that they, too, devalue. This is the way degree standards end, not with a crash but with a ratchet.

Christie Davies has acted as an examiner at excellent universities, very good universities, good universities and universities.

Penelope Tremayne

What is Burma's future? On a short visit there in autumn '03 I collected some general impressions, but they are no more than an outsider's very limited view, supported by no previous or inside knowledge.

Burma was granted its own independently-elected parliament in 1937; and full independence from Britain in January 1948. Its floundering (Anti-Fascist People's Front) government was removed, in 1962, in a *coup d'état* by a group calling themselves the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC): a 17-man Revolutionary Council of senior army officers, headed by General Ne Win. Nine years later, in 1971, faced with economic failure and growing unrest in the hills, SLORC nominally resigned their military posts and declared themselves a civilian government, still under Ne Win, who now announced himself leader of the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSSP). A new constitution was promulgated, Ne Win assumed the title of

President of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma, and all political parties were declared illegal except the BSSP, which itself was subjected to a swift purge, allowing the return to power of many of the former Revolutionary Council (still apparently with their military ranks despite their 'resignations').

But they could control neither the dissidents nor the economy; and the full apparatus of a police state was gradually unfurled. At the beginning of 1988 serious disturbances were crushed by troops, and finally in August student riots combined with a general strike were quelled by firing into the crowds. Estimates of the casualties vary, but three to four thousand may have been shot dead and up to twelve thousand wounded. An estimated 10,000 young people fled to the frontier areas, where many joined guerrilla camps. A return to military government was announced, with Gen. Ne Win still at its head. But another organisation now came to the fore. Aung San Suu Ky, daughter of the man reckoned as the

founder of independent Burma, defied the Generals and set up her own political party in opposition: the National Democratic League (NLD), which became an instant – and so far unshakeable – success. Gen. Ne Win reacted with proscriptions and imprisonments, and two years later felt himself safe enough to call a general election for August 1990. He seems to have been quite confident of winning this and took no steps to have it rigged – apart, that is, from preventing Suu Ky herself from running her own campaign, by imprisoning her a month before the election. (She was not released until more than six years later.) Despite her detention her supporters returned her and her NLD with an 82 per cent majority. Ne Win refused to recognise this result. The election had been internationally monitored and judged free and fair; he did not argue about the figures, he simply announced that SLORC would not hand over to a new government until another Constitution had been drawn up and was in place. No Constitution has yet been presented. Later he said that Suu Ky could not take part in any government because she was married to an Englishman, and had lived abroad. (She had however been born in Burma, been resident there for more than twenty years prior to the election, and has always held Burmese nationality.)

SLORC (re-named State Peace and Development Council on joining ASEAN in 1997) is still in power today. General Ne Win is thought to have retired a few years ago, and/or died, though this is widely disbelieved. In a reshuffle last year General Khin Nyunt, head of Military Intelligence, was announced as Prime Minister. General Than Shwe, his senior, is thought to be in poor health – a not uncommon condition among members of power cliques, though old age might be all that is involved.

The figure of Suu Ky's father, Aung San, remains an important part of the present picture, because of his status as a national hero. As a young Marxist agitator in the late 1930s he distinguished himself among the so-called Thirty Comrades who began to build up a secret army with Japanese money, arms, and training facilities. In 1942 this formation fought alongside the Japanese in their invasion of Burma, led by Aung San in the belief that he was liberating his country. But both sides soon realised their mistake. The Comrades' four thousand men were disbanded and re-formed, under Aung San's command, as the Burmese National Army. The Japanese army of Occupation went through the charade of declaring Burma to be free, and installed a pre-war Burmese prime minister, Ma Baw, as head of state. In 1943 Ma Baw duly declared war on the Allies. Aung San meantime made secret contact with the Allies, extricated his force, joined up with General Slim's armies in March '45

and took part with them in the advance on and recovery of Rangoon. General Ne Win, another of the Marxist Thirty Comrades, was at that time his Chief-of-Staff.

Established thereafter as national leader, Aung San set up a political party, the AFPFL (Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League), won a massive electoral victory in 1947, was given a majority of places on the Governor's executive council, and as leader of an all-party group negotiated with Attlee the terms for Burma's accession to full independence. But before the transfer was completed he and six members of his AFPFL government were murdered by a political rival.

Since 1990 Suu Ky has many times been returned to prison or house arrest – which has hugely increased her popularity. She has remained the unchallenged leader of the NDL, held them true to a rational, non-dictatorial programme, and shown herself determined, and strong enough, to keep them from resort to violence, which would certainly destroy them. She has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and other international prizes, and has steadily published books, speeches, and essays in several languages. All of these show her as moderate, democratic, straightforward, and with a fund of common sense ('Democracy is about securing [a farmer] the right to sow what he wants to, and to reap at the time he thinks the crop is ready, and then sell it to whomever he thinks will

give him the best price'). She is under house-arrest at present, but undeniably an icon to a great number of her countrymen.

So what is Burma's future? In the short term, not good. Sixty-odd years of socialist economics and rule by a ruthless and incompetent clique has reduced a huge country, rich in natural resources, to near destitution. Once the world's largest rice exporter, it is now a net importer. The drug trade flourishes, largely to the benefit of the Thais and Chinese, rubber plantations are returning to jungle, teak has largely been sold off to Thai contractors. Education has suffered badly from constant closures of universities and schools. The public struggle with starvation wages and constantly soaring prices of necessities. On top of these difficulties they are constantly spied upon and harassed by both the police and military. No-one may let a guest, even a close relation, stay overnight in his house unless he has first reported to the police and obtained a permit. (In a population of 40 million, can this be enforced, and how much police time does it represent?) Any army officer has authority to arrest any civilian for anything he judges to be a political protest, and impose any of three penalties: three years hard labour, or life imprisonment, or death. (Commenting on this, Suu Ky was quoted as saying 'There's always the possibility of problems if armed troops are running around.') Running around they may well be; figures for

This year the British Foreign Office said that British tourists should keep away from Burma... My own impression was, that its dissuasion had been given much publicity, presented as proof of a British anti-Burmese – not anti-junta – attitude; and that this had been effective in that it had been hurtful.

them vary between three and four hundred thousand, up to half a million. They are not conscripted. One hears that many complain of being used not as soldiers but as forced labour on failing or futile government development projects; but at least they are fed.

Although the junta's position is precarious, a mass uprising is probably not imminent: it would be too difficult. National socialist dictators once in the saddle are very difficult to dislodge. Suu Kyi and the NDL are the only credible opposition, and could touch off a crisis if they chose. But they (and certainly she) appear to be restrained by a concern for the slaughter that would result, and for the long-term good of the country. The ethnic minorities are more likely to be a touch-point, fighting being endemic among them for their own reasons, aside from political ones. Sporadic trouble seems more or less continuous along the borders with Thailand and China, in any case an area controlled more by and for smugglers and bandits than officials. There are religious tensions too which are not being dealt with. The many Christians among the Karen resent a regime which has time only for Buddhism, and the Rakhine and other Muslims have been very roughly treated; feeling especially among the refugees on the border with Bangladesh may be near to overboiling. But a recent article in the only permitted newspaper had nothing better than this to say:

We will not face any suspicion among the national races in the future, if they, including the Kachin, the Kayah, the Kayin, the Chin, the Banar, the Mon, the Rakhine and the Shan, always keep in their hearts Union Spirit and the spirit of national solidarity.... All the national races are the true brethren and the descendants of a single stock.

The ineptitude of this piece of fantasy may give a fair idea of the levels of honesty and intelligence of the present regime. As early as 1938 Aung San, a keen young Marxist but with a clear mind, proposed that in a post-colonial Burma the ethnic or religious minorities should be allowed after a ten-year trial period to opt out of a united Burma if they chose. The British offered them the same thing in 1947. The NDL seems not to have made any public commitments on the question.

Suu Kyi has said from her first entry into politics that in duty to her father she must do what she can for or the country that (as many see it) he gave his life to and for, and for which she herself is certainly doing no less. Her record suggests that she is a stronger and a wiser character than her father. If anyone can now rescue

Burma from the morass it has fallen into, it will surely be she. At present she is under house arrest again. People are not allowed to interview her, but apparently she is not tortured or ill-treated. The risk that she will be done away with, as her father was, must be very high, but she is both aware of that and unafraid of it; and her great popularity probably means that the junta cannot afford to have her killed lest doing so should unleash a revolution. There are no decent successors visible, either on her side or on the Generals'. But an opposition party is said to be very active abroad on her behalf, in Bangkok, Singapore, and the USA. One must hope they are as realistic, and have as steady heads, as she. If the Generals are wise, or care for their country, they will retire with dignity, now, allowing the government elected thirteen years ago to take over at last. There have been other examples of such strategic self sacrifice since the collapse of the Soviet Union. They might thereby save many lives, including their own.

This year the British Foreign Office said that British tourists should keep away from Burma: not for fear of danger to themselves (there is none) but as a part of the process of applying economic sanctions. This question has come up before. In 1996 the junta declared a 'Visit Myanmar Year' and prepared expensively for an influx of tourists, but other countries called for a boycott. Asked for her opinion, Suu Kyi said that she knew of no case where such



sanctions had influenced governments; it was only the poor who suffered. She would be glad if tourists refrained from coming to Burma during the few months actually designated by the junta; but she hoped that as soon as 'Visit Myanmar' was over as many as possible would come. So was the Foreign Office right? My own impression was, that its dissuasion had been given much publicity, presented as proof of a British anti-Burmese – not anti-junta – attitude; and that this had been effective in that it had been hurtful. There seemed to be no trace of post-colonial resentment against the British; on the contrary, there were many small signs of nostalgia and, among older people, of a certain pride in what had been. But warm and kindly as people were, everywhere without exception, an underlying feeling was 'we thought the English were our friends; now we hear they are against us.' Diplomatically, this would seem to be a pity.

Penelope Tremayne is the author of Nor Iron Bars a Cage, an account of her captivity by Tamil terrorists.

C. R. Irani

It has been fifteen years since 1988 when the military junta broke up a movement for free institutions and democracy in the erstwhile Burma, now Myanmar, and over ten years since Aung San Suu Kyi was denied the mandate she won to lead her nation. She has been imprisoned, her movements restricted, her brother encouraged to contest her title to their father's house to dispossess her, and other manifestations of a caring and considerate bunch of colonels and generals; caring and considerate only to their own ambitions. Yet her experience has not embittered her as those few who have been able to visit her have testified. Not even when her husband died in Britain and she dared not leave her country to say her last goodbye for fear that the frightened men in uniform would not let her return to her people.

Very little is known in the past decade about her and her League for Democracy except that they function in a hostile environment but function they do, much to the chagrin of the junta who must hope that they would just fade away. Things have periodically come to a head but have cooled somewhat as the cowardly men who hold her in thrall hesitate to go too far. The events of 30th May have been worse than in the past and have set alarm bells ringing wherever democracy dwells and also in capitals where it is not as firmly rooted as it might be – such is the power of ideas and ideals. On that day the junta lost patience. Her convoy was set upon as she was travelling outside the capital to visit outposts of her party organisation. Goons acting for the junta pounced on her and her people – even the official version notes 4 dead and 50 injured. Informed sources place the toll at between 70 and 80 dead. It is put out that Suu Kyi has been taken into protective custody; those who need protection are not Suu Kyi and her loyal band but the colonels who dare not speak their mind in public and content themselves with official handouts. Offices of the League for Democracy have been shut down and opposition leaders detained. Nothing is known about the Vice-Chairman of the League who was travelling with her, Tin Oo, is he alive or dead?

The UN special envoy, Razali Ismail, on a five-day visit demanded that Suu Kyi be released forthwith; he had to threaten to cut short his visit if he could not see her. He was able to meet her for a few minutes at the last moment. Razali was told Suu Kyi would be released perhaps in two weeks. This was on 10th June and we are now in August.

Even ASEAN, which makes such a fetish of not interfering

in the internal affairs of member states, felt obliged to call for her release but took a lot away by adding the next day that the organisation does not pressure member states. The American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, took a separate press conference at the end of the Asian Regional Forum meeting to urge the international community to stand together. He said and his words cannot be bettered – The brutal rulers of Myanmar need to understand that the only acceptable way forward is to release Aung San Suu Kyi and her supporters and resume dialogue with her and her party.

It is necessary to add that Colin Powell's words would have carried more conviction if President Bush and his administration had behaved less cynically and more responsibly in Iraq.

Nevertheless I must record with approval that America and Japan have imposed significant sanctions on Myanmar. Other countries must do the same. The Security Council might take a view making it easier for individual states. On 2nd July the Thai Prime Minister announced that Myanmar's special envoy had assured him that Suu Kyi was not being held in the notorious Insein prison but the jury is out on the question of

what reliance can be placed on the word of a representative of the junta which has repeatedly broken some promises and forgotten to implement others.

Mahatma Gandhi used to say turn the searchlight inwards! When I do that on this issue, I am dismayed. Delhi has maintained a sphinx-like silence. The excuse is two-fold. One that Myanmar is sheltering assorted insurgent groups from the Manipuris and the Nagas to the ULFA and we do not want to antagonise them further. The other is that China has made inroads into Myanmar by befriending the colonels and if we open our mouths it will be worse for us. The explanations are an exercise in appeasement and an example of cowardice. We ought to remember that one reason why there is so much evil in the world is that enough good men do nothing. I say that our weak-kneed attitude has encouraged the junta to accommodate more insurgent groups and left the Chinese a free hand.

If we aspire to a permanent seat in the Security Council, we must do more to deserve it.

C R Irani is the Editor-in-Chief of The Statesman of Calcutta, one of India's leading newspapers in which this article was first published on August 6, 2003.

The only Christian group in the world that is increasing its numbers is... the Christians. I mean the sort of Christians who call themselves Christians, as much as to imply that Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, Anglicans, Methodists and Mennonites are something else. It is a neater semantic trick than any other sect has yet pulled off – to stake the claim that one's own group are the only true believers and the rest don't count, without even going to the trouble of an argument. To locate these Christians precisely in the wider tradition one would have to call them evangelical Protestants, but I prefer the term Christian Maoists. Let me give an example of their theology.

When my son was baptised, our gift from the amiable Anglican vicar was a book published by the Bible Society called *Level 27: 27 Personal Messages from the Creator of the Universe to You*. It turned out to be an edition of the New Testament, presented as a computer-game manual – complete with echoes of 'Congratulations, Mr X, you have been specially selected to receive a free gift...'. But that was just the packaging. Here is the first statement it contained about God: 'GOD is the big boss'. And, two pages later: 'THE CHOICE IS... (in a white box) Accept Jesus, allow him to pay your penalty, follow him as the boss and end up in heaven with him. OR... (in a black box) Reject Jesus, pay your own penalty, follow the ways of the world and end up in hell all alone.'

Here, in a nutshell, we see the winning combination of Christian Maoism. The flattery and the threat; the fashionable marketing ploy and the eternal appeal of naked power; the amnesiac and the atavistic, all in one package. Just so did Chairman Mao impose a veneer of modernity on an age-old tyranny. Just so did he create a personality cult, the cult of the loving but stern father, to appeal to fear and altruism without apparent contradiction. In the case of Maoists and Maoist Christians alike, what cannot be accommodated is history: the individual's membership of a rooted human community, the practical wisdom of centuries, the detachment of institutions from personalities, an ancient and beautiful culture – all the things that can transform a power structure into something predominantly humane. Christian Maoists, like their communist counterparts, glory in sweeping all that away. What really matters about God is his absolute power, one on one: he's the big boss. Do you accept it or not? Are you saved or damned?

Thanks to the Maoists' takeover of the Christian brand-name, it is this version of Christianity that the rest of the world sees as representative; while other denominations, particularly the Anglicans with their long-standing acceptance of different points of view, fail to notice that they

are being edged aside by an exclusive sect. Some are sincerely attracted by the Maoists' fervent belief. All are intimidated by it, because it confers an aura of superior ideological purity. Surely a firm belief in the risen Jesus and the Bible is what Christianity is all about? Fearing to be seen to have capitulated to the godless modern world, traditional churches hurry to adopt the rhetoric of evangelicalism. As a result, many people who used to be 'ordinary churchgoers', the phlegmatic, the sceptical, those who were a bit embarrassed by religion but knew that there had to be 'something more' to life, no longer feel welcome. They are replaced by people who like to be more 'committed', which usually means spending much of their spare time huddled together with other Christians, talking about religion. Alpha courses. Study groups. Reading the Bible, isolated from its historical and literary context, as one might read tea-leaves, to find out 'what it means for me'. Little political cells, checking up on each other's soundness, frantically warming that spark of assurance that Jesus loves me, that I'm saved, that God isn't going to get out the big stick today.

Evangelicals like to imply that the established churches have given way to modern secular values, while they themselves stand bravely against the trend of the times. The irony is that the truth is almost the opposite. It is the Maoists who have adapted themselves to the values of the majority, true to Chairman Mao's dictum that the revolutionary must move among the people like a fish in water. The problem for the established churches has never been that their doctrines were too absurd for belief. The majority of humans beings still find it easy to believe in six impossible things before breakfast, from UFOs to homeopathy. Nor has it been that their doctrines were harsh and cruel. Why do we read the tabloid press if not because we like to see the wicked punished, as long as their vices are not those to which we are tempted ourselves? It was when the established churches attempted to adopt Enlightenment values like rationality and tolerance, and to banish the lumpen human tendencies to unreason and cruelty, that their slow decline began. Christian Maoists succeed in winning converts by the thousand, by allowing these impulses back.

Unreason and cruelty may be timeless, but Christian Maoism is just as much at home with distinctively modern phenomena like consumerism. Evangelicalism has become the religious wing of consumerism even more than its predecessor, Calvinism, was the religion of manufacture and commerce. As a dissolver of old allegiances and traditions, consumerism outdoes state terror by a considerable margin, in a way that Mao himself could only have envied. Its ten-

gency is to make everything disposable, starting with household goods and proceeding through works of art to belief systems and human relationships. Thus, it creates an endless craving for what one has not, and, all being well, results in limitless market growth. But the by-products – shallow, lonely, discontented individuals – are the ideal recruiting pool for Christian Maoist activists offering the supernatural dictatorship of God as both punishment and cure. As a First World War chaplain might have boasted that there are no atheists in foxholes, Maoists gloat over the spiritual casualty list of modern life. What they do not admit is that they are merely offering more of the same thing. Christian Maoism just raises the consumerist thirst for status and security to a supernatural level. It barely scratches the surface of emotional commitment, thought, or the sense of beauty: that would be too much of a challenge, and might even quench the insatiable addict's craving on which the Maoists' influence depends.

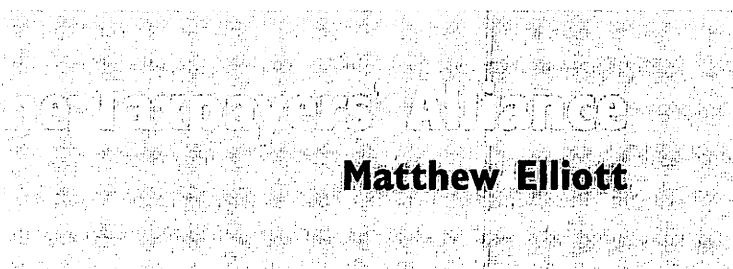
This explains the Evangelicals' dislike for worshipping in medieval churches, and their preference for sports halls; their dislike for the ritual of religion, and preference for the ritual of the political rally or the TV talk show; their dislike for Tudor anthems and Victorian hymns, and their preference for amplified rock, accompanied by congregational movements which recall the sad swaying of autistic children and by sounds which resemble badly faked orgasms. An evangelical clergyman may claim that he favours his style of worship because it is 'relevant' or 'inclusive', but deep down he favours it because it is superficial, ugly, and demands little effort – although it may be quite expensive. Expensive is OK. Let his congregation earn money selling people holidays and health insurance, and then use it to buy a quality sound system and some CDs – much better than taking time off for

choir practice. To spend all that time and trouble on mere musical performance would be the next thing to idolatry.

It is possible for a young person to 'become a Christian', allegedly the challenge of a lifetime, without their consumer mindset being disturbed in the least. The study group replaces the exclusive clique of teen peers, Jesus and his charismatic preacher surrogate replace the favourite pop star or style guru, the frisson of eternal damnation replaces the seductive danger of drug-taking or unsuitable sex. Instead of a brand name, one's T-shirt can carry the ultimate claim of superiority: 'FAITH – I'm gonna live forever'. (I'm not making this up.) The anomie, the fragmented individualism, the insistent refrain of 'me, me, me', remain unchanged. Christian Maoism does not require contemplation, quietness, reverence, or the admission that one's self, one's status as 'saved' or 'damned', is less important than the divine harmony. No wonder it is so popular.

If Christian Maoism does take over completely, historical precedent suggests that the outlook is not quite hopeless. Once before, under the late Roman empire, the dumbing-down and punitive tendencies in Christianity succeeded in destroying an intellectual and moral tradition, that of Stoic philosophy, which was the best the western world had produced. It took a thousand years for Christians to dare to bring their moral reasoning back up to the Stoics' level but they succeeded in turning this moral framework into social reality, to an extent unsurpassed in history. That is the achievement that the Christian Maoists are trying to destroy. If anyone ever wants to build it up again, the tools will still be there – but it could be a long job.

Caroline Galwey was a University Lecturer.



Matthew Elliott

Before 2004 every developed country except Britain had a Taxpayers' Union. Sweden has one of the oldest with 200,000 supporters and the United States has many, at all levels of government. Following the launch of the TaxPayers' Alliance (TPA) in February, Britain is no longer the odd country out. Whereas nearly every other group in society has at least one representative organisation, taxpayers have had no voice in the political debate. It is far easier to create a small group to lobby for a specific spending project than it is to organise the wider public to campaign for a general tax cut. This imbalance has resulted in a relentless increase in the size of the state, bolstered by the demands of myriad interest groups and financed by long-suffering taxpayers.

Gordon Brown is currently spending over £50 million of

our money every hour. According to his Budget forecasts, the Government will spend £459 billion this year and Tax Freedom Day (the day when we stop working for the taxman and start working for ourselves) will move forward to 7th June. By contrast, in 1993 we stopped working for the Treasury in late April.

High taxes are damaging Britain's economy and tens of thousands of jobs are being lost as huge tax bills reduce incentives to work and invest, and discourage entrepreneurship. The TPA does not advocate turning our backs on those who cannot fend for themselves, but we believe that there is a strong moral as well as an economic case for allowing taxpayers to keep more of their income.

In its first publication, the TPA identified at least £50

billion in wasteful or useless government spending which could be returned to the taxpayer immediately, without closing a single hospital or firing a single teacher. Our *Bumper Book of Government Waste and Useless Spending 2004* is backed by over 500 sources, including National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reports, *Hansard* and Parliamentary Written Answers, radio and television broadcasts and newspaper articles.

Major items in the *Bumper Book* – which covers Government spending in 2003 – include: £3.2 billion wasted on fraud and mistakes in the benefit system; the Rail Regulator's £2.5 billion estimate of Network Rail's inefficiency; Britain's £1.8 billion subsidy to farmers in other EU countries; £1.7 billion of failed projects written off by the Ministry of Defence; and the £4.1 billion increased cost of Whitehall bureaucrats, over and above inflation. Returning the money to British taxpayers would have made, on average, each household £2,000 better off in 2003 – a first step in the right direction.

By giving taxpayers a voice in the corridors of power, the TPA wants to force tax cuts on to the agenda of governments of all stripes. Taxation is not always an attractive subject: talk to people about the technicalities of the tax code and their eyes soon glaze over. However, the theme of tax as a means of oppression does resonate strongly. Many popular folk heroes, from Lady Godiva to Robin Hood, have earned their legendary status by leading tax rebellions.

Gordon Brown is often wrongly described as the 'Robin Hood Chancellor', for taking money from the rich and giving it to the poor. However, the villains of the tale were Prince John, the head of government, and the Sheriff of Nottingham, in charge of local government and the chief tax collector. Robin Hood took from people who were rich because of the taxes they took from the poor taxpayers of Nottinghamshire. Mr Chancellor, to coin a phrase, I've read Robin Hood, and you're no Robin Hood.

English history is peppered with tax revolts. From the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 to the English Civil War in the seventeenth century, Parliament gradually subsumed control over taxation from the Monarchy. The peasant revolts during the Hundred Years' War were the first poll tax riots and the Civil War began because Charles I dissolved Parliament for refusing him the right to collect customs duties.

In the three hundred years since this historic victory for taxpayers, it could be argued that we have arrived back where we started. From having government by the Monarchy for the Monarchy, the English Civil War gave us government by taxpayers for taxpayers. In the course of the twentieth century, however, Britain has moved towards government by the public sector for the public sector. The voice of taxpayers is no longer heard in government.

Britain needs a twenty-first century tax rebellion and the TPA is here to lead the charge. Will you join our band of merry men?

Matthew Elliott is the Chief Executive of the TaxPayers' Alliance. Information on the campaign can be found at www.taxpayersalliance.com

Sophist's Corner

Dr Johnson Searle, the director of the Joint Council for Qualifications, the body that represents the main exam boards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, said in an interview on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme: 'People are open to download essays from the internet. They can then change the language and grammar and put in their own words, but if people are going to that effort they are essentially taking part in self-teaching; they are learning the subject anyway,... the penalties depended on the extent of the cheating. If the plagiarism becomes the substance of the work, in extreme cases, a pupil would be barred.'

Sunday Telegraph

Andrew Lambirth



In the early 1840's, Ellen Sharples, an ageing relict living in the Hotwells area of Bristol, decided to endow a fine art academy, which was to become the Royal West of England Academy, or RWA, in 1913. Why did she choose thus to lay out her hard-earned wealth? The Sharples family were artists, and had long maintained a practice of portraiture, mostly in pastel, flourishing in America, Bath and Bristol. James Sharples senior (c1751-1811) was the patriarch, and Ellen (1769-1849) was his third wife and artist-helpmeet. There was a substantial demand for James's more famous portraits, and Ellen copied them so successfully that her style cannot be distinguished from her husband's. James's sons, James junior and Felix, joined in on the production line, although Rolinda, daughter of James and Ellen, became very much an artist in her own right, preferring to work in oils. To give an idea of their harmonious industry, some 30 versions of Washington's profile, first essayed by James senior, have been attributed to the Sharples family. Whatever is now thought of the kind of art the Sharples produced, the RWA has reason to be grateful to their memory.



Can you imagine a kindly old widow 150 years later sitting down and planning an unsolicited gesture of absolute philanthropy in order to bring art to the people? True, Lee Krasner set up the Pollock Krasner Foundation in America in memory of her husband Jackson, and it continues to do very good work helping impoverished artists worldwide explore their vocations. Likewise there is the Henry Moore Foundation in England which hands out grants to sculptors and sculpture projects. But both these charitable bodies (and how Victorian that phrase still sounds!) were founded to benefit artists, not (at least only indirectly) the general public.

Nowadays art galleries and museums charge an average of £7 entry fee to special exhibitions, and though admission to the buildings and permanent collections is supposedly free, repeated demands for voluntary donations are made of the hapless visitor. (I think tourists should be

charged, but the British should get into their own museums – and their cathedrals, come to that – free.) Big business is done not only on ticket and catalogue sales but also through the increased merchandising of the gallery shops and restaurants. The idea of getting anything free is abhorrent in such a profit-hungry environment. And the rot is spreading: more and more public galleries (and to date this applies more to the international than the national scene – but can we be far behind) are charging substantial fees to lend paintings and sculptures for exhibition. Art and money have never really mixed (how to ascribe a financial worth to what is priceless), but now the art business is becoming shameless.

The first meeting to discuss the possible future of a fine art academy in Bristol was held in December 1844 between the banker John Scandrett Harford (who became the Academy's first president) and Philip Miles, a merchant. For the first hundred years of its existence, businessmen, not the artist members, ran the Academy and took all the decisions. One of their chief aims was to improve the social standing of the city, which, as an industrial centre before anything else, lagged far behind the cultural amenities of neighbouring Bath, that fashionable watering hole of the great and the good. It was intended that the Academy should play an uplifting role in the life of the city, and offer a civilizing alternative to the rougher satisfactions of popular entertainment.

What a refreshingly enlightened attitude! And how utterly pointless to hope for such an attitude today. Up would go the cry of elitism before you could say Arts Council and any plan to broaden the cultural base of society would be scuppered before it could be launched. It is then, something of a relief to report that the RWA is not only still in existence, but that – against the odds – it seems to be positively thriving. The beautiful naturally-lit galleries have been sensitively restored, and this spring a gorgeous show of recent paintings by the distinguished abstract painter Gillian Ayres really put the Academy back on the map of serious exhibiting venues.

The first RWA open submission exhibition (the famous Autumn exhibition which still continues) was mounted in 1845 and ran for four months. Artists as well-known as Landseer submitted work, and there was a Sharples prize for the best historical painting in oil (not portrait in pastels, significantly). Ellen Sharples's original generosity (she had given the Academy £2,000 to get it going) was supplemented at her death by more money, books and nearly 100 pictures. The Academy was now in a position to build permanent galleries, and in 1858 the imposing Italianate-fronted building that we see today was completed. Yet despite the high ideals of civilizing Victorians, Bristol remained famously, indeed almost wilfully, indifferent to the fine arts, and the Academy's fortunes fluctuated wildly. A large collection of Turner watercolours brought in the crowds in 1875, but the galleries were usually empty for nine months of the year.

Sporadic patronage descended from local families, such as the Wills of cigarette fame. From time to time there were popular shows, for instance the 1905 spring exhibition which included loaned works by Millet, Millais, Dore and Watts, or the 1930 survey of modern French art – Bonnard, Matisse, Seurat and confrères. One council chairman opined that the rise of the motor car had diverted public interest from fine art, but perhaps Bristolians have always erred in favour of philistinism. Nevertheless the RWA struggled on, receiving a sustained shot in the

arm when the painter Lord Methuen, a pupil of Sickert, took over the presidency in 1939, a position he held until 1971. Methuen made the RWA artist-run for the first time in its history, in 1946. Looking to the famous artists of the day, he invited Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell to join the Academy, and in 1962 mounted a highly successful show of Bloomsbury art. (Grant was offered membership of the Royal Academy at the same time as the RWA. He chose the RWA as it gave him the greater pleasure.

In 1984, Mary Fedden was the first President to be voted in. In the past, Presidents had emerged, rather like old-style leaders of the Tory Party. I quote from the final chapter of the recently published history of the RWA, entitled *Public View* and edited by John Sansom (Redcliffe Press £19.99).

The RWA has gone from strength to strength in the last two decades, with a record figure of 8,000 attending the Annual Autumn Exhibition in 2000. But the finances are still precarious, in spite of a healthy Friends' association and an ambitious exhibition programme. The first stage of the building's renovation has been triumphantly completed, but funds are still required for phase II.

Any contemporary philanthropists lurking out there could do a lot worse than endow the RWA. For here is a time-honoured institution which continues to offer art of the highest order to the general public. It deserves to be supported.

Conservative Classic: = 14

Charles Mackay's 'Extraordinary Popular Delusions & the Madness of Crowds'

Derek Turner

Extraordinary Popular Delusions is an extraordinarily popular book. Charles Mackay's 1841 classic has rarely been out of print, because there have always been smart alec types who find it amusing to read about hypocritical preachers, atheist Popes, hoaxers, con-artists, mediums, astrologers and all other varieties of snake-oil salesmen, and their never-shrinking cohorts of dupes. Traditional conservatives, who will instinctively share what Stephen Pinker has called 'the Tragic Vision' of humanity, will find much in this book to confirm their gloomy analysis of human nature. As that ultra-cynic P T Barnum once said, 'There's a sucker born every minute'.

Scepticism has become associated with the political Left – note Francis Wheen's recent book *How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered the World* – but it is by no means incompatible with true conservatism. Scepticism can be cleansing as well as corrosive. Conservatives should be as chary of charlatans as any knowing Leftist, and equally rebellious against received wisdom, if that 'wisdom' is palpably false – because what is false ultimately cannot endure. Intellectual conservatism can too easily become intellectual complacency.

Traditional conservatives should surely echo the Jesuit scholar, Baltasar Gracian y Morales, whose life was spent attempting to 'dis-illusion' people, and who once famously admonished the 17th Century, 'Keep your imagination under control'.

Extraordinary Popular Delusions is an invaluable aid to those who want to know about group psychology and human nature. To this day, stockbrokers and investment bankers find Mackay's sapient observations on the Mississippi Scheme, the South Sea Bubble and Tulipomania very useful. Yet similar insights are also required by wise politicians, not, hopefully, so that they can exploit their knowledge for selfish reasons (although of course some will), but in order to avoid fuelling such outbreaks in the future. The political habit of gross flattery of the public simply because some member thereof may vote for you some day, and the sickly sentimentalism of many opinion-formers, badly need an acerbic antidote.

Countless lives have been wasted, incalculable energy has been expended, and aeons of time have been squandered by people hunting for chimeras, chasing wills-o'-the-wisp and trying to square circles – and dragging others along with

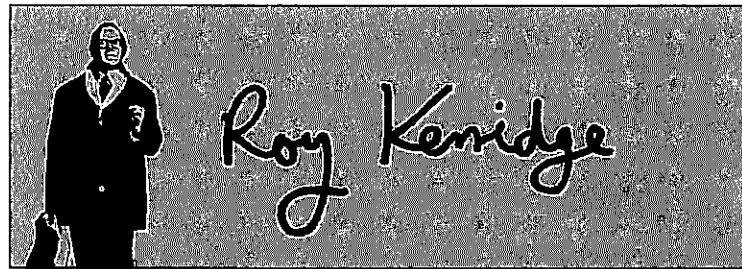
them in their frantic, fruitless pursuits. Apart from financial scams, Mackay dissects 'The Alchymists', 'Modern Prophecies', 'Fortune Telling', 'The Magnetisers', 'Influence of Politics and Religion on the Hair and Beard', 'The Crusades', 'The Witch Mania', 'The Slow Poisoners', 'Haunted Houses', 'Popular Follies of Great Cities', 'Popular Admiration of Great Thieves', 'Duels and Ordeals' and 'Relics'. He covers not just weighty matters, but also such evanescent topics as street slang, and there are touches of pawky humour. For instance, he relates how St Bernard, who had prophesied a glorious end to the Second Crusade, had fallen after its disastrous finish into some disrepute, 'and experienced, like many other prophets, the fate of being without honour in his own country. What made the matter worse, he could not obtain it in any other'.

Human nature has not changed much since 1841, and many of the crazes Mackay deplored persist today, even if the foci of the crazes have changed. Part-beasts as we are, we are always susceptible to pack-animal behaviour and superstition, and weakly fond of wishful thinking. There is a part of every brain that wants to believe in Nostradamus, or 'fate', that believes in ghosts and bogeymen, that has a soft spot for gentlemen-thieves like Robin Hood or Raffles, or desperately wants to believe that the cold cosmic wheelings of the Milky Way have some bearing on our unimportant lives. Tabloid newspapers are a-brim with self-styled seers and gurus. The hunt for the secret of transmuting lead into gold has its parallels in today's 'get rich quick', pyramid-selling and Nigerian internet schemes, for all of which there seems to be inexhaustible demand. (One of Francis Wheen's ten top 'modern delusions' is the National Lottery's slogan, 'It Could Be You'.) The search for the 'elixir of youth' is echoed in today's innumerable health crazes, from macrobiotic diets and skin creams and botox to Princess Diana's colonic irrigation and Cherie Blair's crystals. The loss of faith in the literal truth of Christianity has left millions floundering around for alternative comforting mantras and deities, from Hare Krishna to Carole Caplin's mother's 'Big Light', the omnipresent being whom she apparently recommended Tony Blair ought to consult before attacking Iraq.

Yet many of these preoccupations are surely less harmful than the secular manias that have swept through civil society, and turned so many members of our intellectual and political 'elite' into proportionless fanatics. These are what might be termed 'extraordinary elite delusions'. Today, as is often the case, 'the mob' has far better instincts than the vociferous minority who churn out our Leftist newspapers and TV programmes, and spout dreary platitudes on Radio 4. Believing in astrology may be foolish, but it is less damaging than believing such naïf nonsenses as that men and women are the same, that everyone is of equal worth, intelligence and creativity, that every child is an angel and that 'diversity is strength', to name just a few of today's bizarre beliefs. This minority would be welcome to believe in their Muggleonian manifest destiny if only the rest of us were allowed to excuse ourselves from the lemmings' love-in,

but of course they expect us to join in their shrill silliness. If we were all once expected to believe blindly, on pain of pyres, in the Immaculate Conception and transubstantiation, now we are all expected equally blindly to believe in intrinsic equality and 'progress', at the risk of social exclusion or contumely and soon – maybe – legal sanctions.

Faced with this thoroughly dotty and reprehensible behaviour, it may comfort sceptics to know such crazes and such pressures have been ubiquitous through history – and that, yet, such crazes and pressures have all been made redundant by events. Today's orthodoxy is tomorrow's outré philosophy, and sometimes vice versa. Reading *Extraordinary Popular Delusions* helps us to remember not only that human beings can be extremely silly – but also offers us the hope that sooner or later we can, and will, come to our senses.



Koenigsburg, in North Prussia, was a favourite haunt of Frederick the Great, who hunted boar and elk in the nearby forest. The beach is renowned for the amber to be found among the pebbles, and amber necklaces and pendants are still on sale there today. There is a cathedral with Kant's tomb in modern style attached to it, added, I believe, during the reign of Hitler.

Alas, Hitler's escapades led to the doom of Koenigsburg, conquered by the Russians and renamed Kaliningrad, after a Bolshevik President. My mother was there a few years ago, a guest of my brother Martin.

When the Russians came, they enslaved forty thousand women and children taken from the millions of surviving Germans; then they set them to work destroying all the historic buildings. These included the castle and the many churches and chapels which had given the town its character. Most of the dwellings had been bombed flat by the Allies and by the Russians themselves. The Germans rebuilt the town on utilitarian Russian lines and were then all expelled in 1948, a mere eleven thousand souls. The rest had died of starvation and ill-treatment. Humble Russians ('the Moscow over-spill') were moved in, and Kaliningrad became a Soviet town and naval base. No one liked to pull the cathedral down, but no one used it. Gradually it began to fall to bits. Tramps made their home in the crypt.

But then Communism itself fell! Now the cathedral is being restored, though as a Russian Orthodox church. The amber workings are abandoned, everything sold by the former manager, who then fled to the West. Much of the fleet, including fishing boats that doubled as spy ships, have sunk in the harbour, their masts visible above the waves.

According to my mother, a German spell hangs over Russian Kaliningrad. Koenigsburg is reasserting itself. Many German streets survive, and the present inhabitants vaguely feel that they used to be Germans. The town's semi-demolished state, a tower block where castle towers used to stand, disturbs the residents. In the museum, a panorama with lighting effects showed the Allied blitz on the once lovely town. Everyone gave my mother a reproachful glance. An old Russian lady began to cry and said, 'See what you English did to our town!'



Do Black British and Asian youths in Wembley ever think that a different people lived there not long ago?

Or do they vaguely suppose that 'in those days, when it was farms, we were white people then?' I doubt it, as I think that Middlesex before the three-colour system is now totally forgotten, or rather, is not known about in the first place. How quickly England became Angle-land in the Dark Ages, all thoughts of Rome long forgotten.



As for Kaliningrad, a man at the Greenwich Naval Museum told my mother that he was delighted to learn of the fishing fleet's demise.

'Fishing boats from Kaliningrad went all over the world, breaking all the rules, fishing out the whole sea and leaving huge piles of unsaleable fish to rot. Now you can see abandoned Russian fishing boats all round Scotland.'

Reputations - 5

Ignazio Silone: The Novelist and the Secret Policeman

Peter Coleman

A furious controversy has been threatening the reputation of the great Italian writer Ignazio Silone. The scandal arose out of the devastating allegation that, at the very time he was running the Communist underground in Italy in the 1920's, Silone was also an informer for the fascist political police. The controversy shows no sign of spluttering out, and even his widow, Darina, at the time of her death, was under fire because she admitted she was unsure of the truth of the matter.

Silone's reputation depended on three achievements: his novels of peasant life in Mussolini's Italy; his political essays; and an almost saintly integrity. In my student youth, dog-eared editions of his early novels – now re-issued as *The Abruzzo Trilogy* (Steerforth Press, £18.99) – were handed around like despatches from the anti-fascist front-line. His essays – at once anti-fascist and anti-communist – were never as revered as the novels, but they were still earnestly read. His reputation for adamant integrity ensured that he was as close as Italy has come to a Solzhenitsyn.

But four or five years ago, two Italian historians began publicising in the late Renzo de Felice's revisionist journal *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, their research in the archives of the fascist political police. It documented, they claimed, Silone's work as a police informer. In the ensuing uproar, amid charges and counter-charges of mis-interpretation, ignorance and forgery, some critics were totally disenchanted and changed sides, while others found new depths in Silone's work. At the very least, established opinions had to be reconsidered.

I never met Silone (who died in 1978) but I interviewed Darina in the course of my research for *The Liberal*

Conspiracy, a history of the Congress for Cultural freedom. 'There is no single truth about Silone,' she said, 'only many truths. He was a little crazed.'

I asked her about one of her 1951 letters that I had found in the Congress for Cultural Freedom archives in Chicago. In it she had outlined to the Executive Committee, in Paris, Silone's success in encouraging the defection of intellectuals from the Communist Party of Italy. She had no memory of this letter, she told me. Then she added, as if in an aside: 'Silone was not above getting me to sign his letters.' I put this down as a Silonian idiosyncrasy, a sort of game, and thought little about it.

But it kept coming back and sometimes coloured my research. Was there something cagey about the great man? Soon afterwards, when I was browsing among the Arthur Koestler papers in London, I came across a note which the militant anti-communist Koestler had scribbled to a companion in Berlin in 1950 at the founding conference of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). It was the very moment of the outbreak of the Korean War. Silone, an uncompromising anti-stalinist long before Koestler, was delivering a mild and conciliatory speech. 'I always wondered,' Koestler scrawled, 'whether basically Silone is honest or not. Now I know he is not.'

But the pugnacious Koestler was never an easy man to work with. Sidney Hook said he couldn't read from a telephone book without enraging somebody. Silone, suspecting him, and the Berlin conference, of being part of a 'State Department operation', may have simply wanted to keep some distance. Koestler's note was not a final judgment, merely an expression of his well-known impatience.

Later in Austin, Texas, in the archives of Nicolas

Nabokov, the CCF Secretary-General, I found a letter from Nabokov complaining of the impossibility of dealing frankly with the implacably anti-Vatican Silone. Nabokov suggested that Jacques Maritain explain to the Vatican that the CCF, although liberal, did not eat the Pope for breakfast. He wanted 'a show-down' with Silone, although he had little hope that anything would come of it because you could never pin him down. But we already knew that without Nabokov's help: Silone was always 'a socialist without a party', 'a Christian without a church'.

Later still in Paris, the philosopher Raymond Aron told me of his anger with Silone in 1956 for having organised, without consultation with Aron, a CCF conference in Zurich of editors and writers to which he had invited several 'vaguish Parisian leftists' and 'Frenchmen of the third order' (he meant Roland Barthes and Georges Bataille) to discuss and promote cultural exchanges with some philistine apparatchiks from the Soviet Union. Aron threatened to resign from the CCF. Most of the CCF colleagues thought he made too much of *une chose silonienne*, and the dispute fizzled out in the explosion of the Hungarian Revolution.

Not all Silone's colleagues had these edgy reservations about him. In 1969, when the CCF collapsed amid 'revelations' of its CIA funding, its inspirational leader Michael Josselson suffered two strokes. One of the few to visit the stricken man in Geneva was Silone who kissed him on both cheeks and addressed him as 'tu'. 'It was,' wrote Josselson in a note I found among his papers in Texas, 'one of the most moving moments of my life.'

These footnotes or scraps of gossip do little more than suggest that Silone was a hard man to label. Was he an impossibly fanatical anti-communist, as the Welsh politician Leo Abse wrote in London the other day? Or a drug addict of anti-fascism and anti-clericalism, as Nabokov believed? Or the exemplar of the age, as David Pryce-Jones sensed? Was he forever playing a double or triple game, or was he, as Francois Fejto thought, not machiavellian enough for the circles he moved in? Was he indeed a police informer?

When the first reports of Silone the informer appeared, I dismissed them as incredible. I was not quite as certain as the journalist Indro Montanelli who said: 'I would not accept the truth of these documents even if Silone rose from the tomb and confirmed them.' But I believed (and wrote) that they were akin to the zealous defamation of such liberal anti-communists as George Orwell ('spy'), Arthur Koestler ('rapist') or James McAuley ('sex maniac', 'mad murderer', 'heavy smoker' or whatever you fancy.)

Their unforgivable offence was that they had all been right about communism and the Cold War, as Mikhail

Gorbachev confirmed. But as the arguments over Silone developed, and evidence and counter-evidence accumulated, I was one of those, like Darina, forced to reconsider my understanding of him, including the sketch I had written in *The Liberal Conspiracy*. I also recalled my earlier, seeming trifles of research.

What are the allegations? The historians Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali turned up in the fascist police archives a sensational correspondence between Silone and a secret police official Guido Bellone, a much older man who had befriended him in his youth in southern Italy – perhaps at the time when Silone was first under investigation for storming a police station during a peasant riot. The story of the correspondence between the novelist and his police 'handler' is outlined in their book *L'Informatore* (The Informer) and in Canali's long essay, 'Ignazio Silone and the Fascist political police' in the *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* (Spring 2000).

It began in 1919 (before there was either a communist party or a fascist party in Italy). It continued throughout the 1920's with Silone, by now a top communist, giving Bellone information about the underground Communist Party's activists and factions. It ended in 1930 with a striking letter from Silone breaking the association with Bellone at the same time he broke with the Communist party:

My health is terrible but the cause is moral. A sense of morality now overwhelms me completely; it does not permit me to sleep, eat or have a minute's rest. I am at a crossroads in my life and there is only one way out: I must abandon militant politics completely. The only other solution is death. First I will eliminate from my life all falsity, doubleness, ambiguity and mystery; second, I will start a new life, on a new basis, in order to repair the evil that I have done, to redeem myself?

Many challenged Biocca and Canali, notably the leftist historian Giuseppe Tamburrano. In his painstaking book, *Processo a Silone* ('Silone on Trial'), he dismissed their work as a travesty of scholarship riddled with errors. (A good English-language summary of this book is Michael P.McDonald's 'Il Caso Silone' in the *National Interest*, Fall 2001.)

But there is no denying the authenticity of at least some of the archival documents. Silone's supporters argue that throughout the correspondence he provided only information that was either innocuous or already known to Bellone from other sources. They also suspect that he was acting in the full (and carefully undocumented) knowledge of the Communist Party with the intention of probing what the fascists actually knew about the communist underground. In the later years of the correspondence, there was another major factor: his younger brother was arrested in 1928 for attempted regicide. Silone looked to Bellone for help. Did Bellone agree to help – at a price? (The brother died in prison in 1932.)

The controversy has not yet run its course. Meanwhile it has provoked a comprehensive re-reading of Silone's books and the discovery of new dimensions, especially in the novels of *The Abruzzo Trilogy*. It is not just a matter of playing the problematic game of teasing out details of Silone's biography from the novels, seeing, for example, a self-portrait in Silone's sketch of the tormented informer Luigi Murica in *Bread and Wine*. The English historian, Martin Clark, has suggested in the *London Review of Books* a more radical re-interpretation. For 70 years we have read *The Abruzzo Trilogy* as the most successful anti-fascist novels ever written – in 1944 the Allies distributed copies to liberated Italians.

Could it be that they should be read as anti-communist? Clark does not develop his idea. But the current controversy gives it resonance. Silone was one of those who in 1921, with Gramsci, Togliatti and others then more important, founded the Communist Party of Italy. His disenchantment was swift. In his several visits to Moscow in the 1920's, he found a thickening smog of terror and lies. (See his essay *Emergency Exit*.) The only way you could remain a communist, he said later, was by deadening your conscience, by inducing a moral narcosis. Despairing of Stalinism (which he dubbed Red Fascism), he saw no hope at all in Trotsky or Bukharin. By 1930 he could no longer live with it. His expulsion from the Communist Party was his 'emergency exit'.

It was at this point that he adopted the name Silone and began writing his novels. Is it conceivable that so seasoned and intense an anti-Stalinist could keep his

anti-communism out of his contemporary political stories? The novels were admired, or attacked, for decades as anti-fascist or communist propaganda, yet fascism is barely mentioned in *Fontamara* and the revolutionary figure offering hope to the oppressed Abruzzo peasants is a vague Liberator called the Mystery Man, more Franciscan than Marxist. The oppressive dictatorship that is the background to these fables might be communist as much as fascist – and in some cases more likely to be communist. *Fontamara*, for example, culminates in a Government massacre of a village of rebellious Abruzzo peasants: there was no such massacre in Mussolini's Italy, but there were many in Stalin's Soviet Union which Silone was well aware of.

Could it be that when Silone wrote to Bellone in 1931 about 'the evil I have done', he meant the evil of communism whose servant he had been and which he had come to abominate? Are his famous novels, as Martin Clark suggests, a continuation of his work as an informer?

The Age of Ideology produced few artists as anguished as Silone. Desmond O'Grady, who knew him well, was one of many who found him a damaged man, 'moody and often apathetic'. The translator William Weaver found 'a haunted man, a man of sorrows'. The biographer Iris Origo said 'he carried within him wounds which he knew to be unhealable'. We may never find answers to the questions which il caso Silone raises. But it adds depth as well as darkness to *The Abruzzo Trilogy*, still among the greatest novels of the totalitarian years.

NOTES ON REVIEWERS

MERRIE CAVE IS OUR MANAGING EDITOR

MICHAEL CONOLLY IS A RETIRED UNIVERSITY LECTURER

ANTONY FLEW'S MOST RECENT BOOK IS *SOCIAL LIFE AND MORAL JUDGEMENT* (TRANSACTION)

ROGER FOX IS AN ECONOMIST, WORKING AS AN INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

MATTHEW O'KEEFFE WORKS IN THE CITY

MALCOLM REES IS SENIOR LECTURER IN ECONOMICS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCKINGHAM

BERNADETA TENDYRA IS A HISTORIAN AND WRITER ON POLAND AND EASTERN EUROPE
AND WILL SPEAK ON THE WARSAW RISING AT A CONFERENCE IN STIRLING IN OCTOBER

LETTERS

Sir,

Myles Harris describes witnessing a huge anti-American demonstration in London, with loudspeakers blaring 'Kill Bush' at 150 decibels. (Spring 2004) As an American resident of Geneva, I share Dr. Harris' indignation. Here, with the enthusiastic support of the Geneva Cantonal government, the anti-American hysteria was just as virulent.

Harris is, however, mistaken when he compares the indifference of the London Leftists to the '300,000 graves of victims of Saddam' to the indifference of Germans in 1938 in Nuremberg to the fates of 'Jews being bundled into freight cars' or to 'the cries of gypsy children as they were being herded into gas chambers'. In 1938 in Germany Jews were not yet subject to mass deportation and there were no gas chambers. In fact, at that time these acts of cruelty were nearly inconceivable.

Kent Gordis, Geneva

Sir,

Book reviewer Andrew Fear states (Spring 2004): 'Ironically one particular consequence of western modernist dogma has been the destruction of nations in the name of free trade, creating semi-anarchic 'failed nations' which have been a breeding ground for al-Qa'eda.'

I would be interested to know when and where this has happened.

Hal GP Colebatch, Nedlands, Western Australia

Sir,

I note with interest Mr Thomas Eastbourne's comments upon my article on political realism, (Autumn 2003) particularly his belief that the effectiveness of external policy can be measured in terms of impact on immigration into a single Parliamentary constituency. I doubt if he intended truly to convey this rather reductionist and parochial view of international relations.

Turning to his call for a 'new colonialism', I thought opposition to 'grand projects' of this nature was the bedrock of conservatism. Moreover, and I hope the paper conveyed this, I strongly support muscular intervention against rogue and failed states: I supported military action in Iraq, and still do, and am dismayed by the current intellectual somersaults being performed by the Conservative Party leadership over

this issue. These interventions should be on a case-by-case basis, and predicated on a state's wickedness or folly destabilising regions vital to our national interest or its murdering our citizens, or sheltering or encouraging those who do. As to the form this action should take, I agree with Colin Powell that it should be swift, overwhelming and last for as long as it takes to rectify the situation, with no long-term commitments to 'nation building' or anything of that ilk. That would place an enormous strain upon the taxpayer. A possible alternative might be for the UN to contract out the reconstruction of failed states to private corporations, but this is unlikely, given that organisation's ideological proclivities.

Simon Anglim, Guildford

Sir,

Disputing Anne Applebaum's 'low' number of Gulag fatalities, Alexander Boot cites alternatives from 'ten million' to 'numbers closer to 100 million' before settling on '61,911,000' (Winter 2003). This is somewhat reminiscent of Auschwitz mass-murder estimates ranging from under 550,000 to double even the 'four million' submitted by Moscow at Nuremberg. The relative statistics, victim categories and various causes (massacre, disease, malnutrition) of mortality make little comparative difference to the iniquity of the regimes, though they remain legitimate issues for thorough research by impartial historians.

Rudolf Rummel's quoted Soviet total of nearly 62 million (including military casualties) gives 'only' 39,464,000 for the camps themselves, an over-confidently precise figure uncorroborated by writers with recent access to KGB archives. This commendable political scientist has amassed a comprehensive literature on democides, ancient and modern, to produce graphs, bar-charts and calibrated analyses of their multiple aspects, but such outputs are only as good as what went into his mega-computer, and his initial data selection from widely divergent secondary material is sometimes questionable. He was obliged, for instance, to deflate an originally accepted Nazi cadaver-count from Eugen Kogon, yet still credits Volodymyr Kosyk's inflated calculation of post-Stalin prisoner deaths – 'losing' or adding almost three million (imaginary) human beings in both cases!

Specialist studies of these enormities must focus closely and sharply on their demographic probability, documentary reliability and technical feasibility. This methodology

becomes also the wisest – because most credible – basis for ‘libertarian propaganda’. Communists undoubtedly caused or provoked a substantial proportion of the global death-toll during the most murderous [century] in recorded history. Enough verified horrors exist in their record without any need to slosh rows of meaningless digits about.

Camile Watson, Nuneaton

Sir,

Paul Belien’s article about Belgium’s role (Winter 2003) as a prototype of non-national Europe is correct, but there is in it a glaring omission which had he included it would have greatly strengthened his thesis – the role of the Belgians in the Second World War.

The attitude of many Belgians to the embryonic Europe being created by Hitler was rather similar to its modern self-image as the prototype of the non-national E.U. A former member of the Wehrmacht who had been in both Holland and Belgium during the war told me in about 1950 that whereas in Holland he felt the population’s hatred, ‘going to Belgium was like coming home’. The most distinguished of Hitler’s Quisling-type collaborators in occupied Europe was the Walloon fascist, Leon Degrelle, who organized and led a force of thousands of French-speaking Belgians to fight for Hitler on the Eastern Front. Incidentally, Degrelle discovered in himself a considerable military talent; he rose to the rank of Major-General and was much decorated. Many Flemings, too, fought for Hitler, along with men from all the occupied countries, but it would be interesting to do a statistical exercise to see if Belgium exceeded the average in proportion to its population.

Degrelle needed to describe his volunteers, not as Belgians or even Walloons, but as Burgundians. He saw as clearly as Belien the need for a more convincing nationality than that of Belgium, and therefore went back to the medieval Duchy of Burgundy of which modern Belgium (including Flanders) is a successor state. He has, of course, been an ‘unperson’ for more than half a century – I imagine since before Paul Belien was born, which may explain the omission.

Jonathan Guinness (Lord Moyne), Cirencester

Sir,

While Bill Hartley (Regions of Government, Winter 2003) is right to criticise the shabby way in which the government has established offices for the regions, thus assisting our further enthrallment to Brussels, he misses the main problem that this sorry episode will confront us with: our progressive sundering, from 1974 onward, from our true historical geography.

As conservatives, we should support the 39 traditional counties as the basis of a stable and historically coherent geography for England. Regions should remain what they

have always been – vague geographical concepts such as the West Country or East Anglia. Counties, however, have fixed and definite boundaries. They have not been altered or abolished; they continue to exist no matter what happens at local government reviews. Parliament has no power to erase or change counties which conservatives should hold dear: they are the basis of records of births and deaths, clubs and societies, regiments, dialects, architecture, agriculture and sport. We would be mad to support any other units. The 39 real Counties – with all the crass administrative alterations of 1974 removed – would help restore local pride and patriotism. They would re-connect English people to their past. This is probably why the Left establishment wants to replace them with creations that will never elicit any response except sullen acquiescence.

Robert Hawley, Skipton

Sir,

The French have a strange penchant for running down their own country (Guy Millière, Winter 2003). For some reason it is considered socially acceptable, perhaps because of the terrible political cleavages that have torn the country apart in the past. Millière is perturbed about French policy towards America and its Middle East implications. France’s resentment of the US is nothing new; both countries have always claimed to be a source of enlightenment for the rest of humanity. His hostility to De Gaulle is unfair. De Gaulle wanted the help of the US & UK to neutralise Germany after the war permanently, but this was refused in the late forties and then again in the 50’s. He was therefore pushed into Germany’s arms. He advocated a Europe for Europeans (Europe des Patries) freed of American hegemony as a long-term goal and opposed any significant levels of Third World immigration to Europe. There is nothing nefarious about de Gaulle having pursued an Arab policy but France has lost a great deal of ground in the Arab world over the last 20-30 years and was completely taken by surprise by Libya’s rapprochement with the US & UK.

Millière avers that France does not enjoy the rule of law; this is ridiculous, although it is true that the law is less well protected from state interference than in Anglo-Saxon countries. It is untrue that you cannot air concerns in the media. Since last Autumn, for instance there have been many hard-hitting critiques on many subjects including the European Union. In some ways there is a more active culture of freedom of thought and expression than in Britain because of a residual habit of resisting the state.

France and Britain are two countries with a sufficiently strong identity to want to continue to be real actors on the world stage. Even though their respective strategic interests and orientations may be different, they complement each other in many ways. They ought to find the right way of working together, for their mutual benefit and for the benefit of the rest of Europe.

Paul Thompson, Fontainebleau

BOOK REVIEWS

The Polish Question Bernadeta Tendyra

Rising '44. 'The Battle for Warsaw',
Norman Davies, Macmillan, 2003, £25.

**For Your Freedom and Ours. The
Kościuszko Squadron: Forgotten Heroes of
World War II,**

Lynne Olson & Stanley Cloud, William
Heineman, 2003, £20. (published in the US
by Knopf as A Question of Honor, \$27.50)

Western Second World War historiography has been harsh to the Poles. With notable exceptions, post-war writing on Poland's contribution to the Allied victory in 1945 has minimised the country's military effort during the conflict, and has charged its leaders in Paris, London and Warsaw with lack of realism in aspiring to independence. Until recently, Cold War complexes hampered objective analysis of the Polish Question. This has done little to increase our understanding of Polish history or of the history of the Second World War.

How refreshing, therefore, that these two books redress the balance in our knowledge of the Polish Question. One is the work of a distinguished British historian and leading specialist on Poland, the other by American journalists with no previous links to that country. *Rising '44* by Norman Davies displays a mastery of Western and Polish archives and historiography – he interviews dozens of survivors of the rising. He has also secured limited access to Soviet, Stalinist-period collections in the Russian Federation. Davies points out, however, that the vast majority of Britain's wartime intelligence files remain closed, as do those of post-war Polish security services and of ex-Soviet authorities in Moscow. By contrast, Lynne Olson's and Stanley Cloud's book is a credible synthesis based on available published material in English and also complemented by use of Polish, British and US archives. Both publications present a

view of the Polish Question that breaks with the Western stereotype.

Both examine a specific aspect of Polish Second World War history. Davies resurrects a largely forgotten episode that nevertheless was pivotal to the outcome of World War II and the origins of the Cold War. He dissects the great power policies that contributed to the slaughter of thousands of defenceless civilians and the reduction of Warsaw to rubble. Olson and Cloud give a graphic account of the deeds of Polish fighter pilots who defended Poland and France against the German *blitzkrieg* before escaping to Britain in 1940. Initially refused permission to fly, they emerged among the RAF's most successful aces – the all-Polish Kościuszko Squadron (303 Squadron) recorded the highest number of 'kills' of any squadron during the Battle of Britain. Both books also tell the broader tale of Poland's fortunes during World War II. This is a story of invasion, defeat, partition, occupation, exile, battlefield glory and, ultimately, betrayal by friends and allies. Both publications are epic accounts of military heroism and tragedy – as dramatic as the histories of D-Day, Stalingrad and Monte Cassino that currently fill our bookshops.

The books also trace recurring themes in Polish history. Davies stresses what all Poles know – that the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, followed by the invasion of Poland and its division by its eastern and western neighbours, represented its fourth partition (preceded by those imposed upon the Poles by Imperial Prussia, Austria and Russia in 1772, 1793 and 1795.) Polish exiles after September 1939 were worthy successors of the political émigrés who had fled Poland following failed uprisings during the 19th century. In August-September 1944, the Warsaw insurgents embraced the *Warszawianka* – a stirring song of blood and glory, dating from the 1831 insurrection against tsarist Russia. Davies wisely devotes a weighty section to the historical context of the 1944 Rising – information largely unfamiliar to English-language readers.

Olson and Cloud also highlight historical parallels. In 1940, Polish pilots made a major, perhaps decisive contribution to victory during the Battle of Britain. Throughout the war, the Polish armed forces fought for the freedom of countries other than their own in nearly every theatre of the European conflict – and in North Africa in defence of British imperial interests – without a genuine *quid pro quo*. They were perpetuating a pattern established in the 19th century, when Poles had served as

cannon fodder under various imperial armies in Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, Italy, Spain, Egypt and even Haiti, in vain pursuit of independence.

Both books consider Poland's treatment by its historic enemies and abandonment by its Western allies. The dispute between Poland and the USSR over the eastern borderlands (which Poland had incorporated after the 1919-1920 Polish-Soviet War, and which, Davies contends, contained very few Russians) always meant more for the Poles than mere territory. Poland's unhappy experience since the 18th century had shown that territorial amputations invariably led to loss of independence. Stalin aimed to retain the lands that the Red Army had seized in 1939 and 1940, including Poland's pre-war eastern provinces. However, in the long term, he wanted to ensure that Poland was no longer a gateway for the invasion of Russia, a barrier to the expansion of communism in Europe and a potential leader of the small nations of the region. Given the nature of the Soviet regime, these goals ruled out the restoration of Polish independence. From early in the war, Moscow had the Polish Communists as a rival to the exile government. The 1944 Rising and the wider Polish military effort during World War II were thus an attempt to signal to the world Poland's determination to fight for independence, and a plea to the Allies for support.

Tragically, Churchill and Roosevelt chose to reward Stalin for his wartime contribution through political and territorial concessions at Polish expense. Poland was seen as a small state arbitrarily expanded after the First World War and consequently a source of trouble between Germany and Russia. Officials in London and Washington considered Polish territorial losses to Russia as largely inevitable, yet remained vague about compensation for Poland at Germany's expense. Hence, while the Poles wished to restore a large, secure Poland that could defend itself against powerful neighbours, Western politicians viewed the Poles as over-ambitious and lacking in political sense.

Churchill and Eden erroneously believed that early acceptance by the Poles of the Curzon Line, (the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Line), and the exile government's removal of elements hostile to Moscow, would appease Stalin and prevent the imposition of communist rule in Poland. Roosevelt, however, 'took a distant view on the Polish question', except where it affected his alliance with Stalin and his prospects in the next presidential election. 'He did not bother himself much with the long-term consequences of his actions and promises, and he tended to postpone or duck decisions that were politically difficult or that might limit his options', say Olson and Cloud. He was also deeply ignorant of Russia yet supremely confident about his ability to handle Stalin. These factors led to a systematic failure on the part of the Allies to support the Poles over the pre-war Polish-Soviet border and Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, and the 1.5 million Polish citizens deported to the USSR in

1940-41, the Katyn Forest massacre and the Big Three conference at Teheran in 1943 (when Churchill and Roosevelt privately recognised Soviet claims to eastern Poland.) By the time insurrection erupted in Warsaw Stalin knew that he could treat the Poles with impunity.

Was the 1944 Rising justified? Historians have argued that it was ill-conceived, ill-prepared and fatally flawed and that it should never have occurred without assurances from the Allies that they would support the Poles politically and militarily, and permit Polish air squadrons and the Polish Parachute Brigade to come to Warsaw's aid. These historians contend that the Rising was doomed without political agreements with the USSR – it had suspended relations with the London Poles in April 1943, without access to Soviet military intelligence and coordination between the Home Army and Soviet forces. Failure to do so led to the slaughter of over 200,000 people, mostly civilians, the razing of Warsaw and annihilation of the Home Army – the largest resistance movement in Europe. It thus facilitated the imposition of Communism in Poland.

This reality, although unpalatable for many Poles, has much validity and cannot be dismissed. However, the case for the Rising, of which Davies is a leading exponent, is compelling. Since 1939, the Home Army had been building up its forces to attack the Wehrmacht when the Allied armies entered Poland. The camp loyal to the exile government in London thus wished to highlight Poland's determination to be the instrument of its own liberation and bolster its claim for independence. Many Poles were thirsting for revenge against the Nazis. The threat of a spontaneous, uncoordinated and potentially disastrous rising – particularly one launched by the Polish Communists in a bid to seize power – was all too real. Resistance leaders also feared that the German-Soviet front would stabilise in Warsaw, bringing death and destruction to the city on a massive scale.

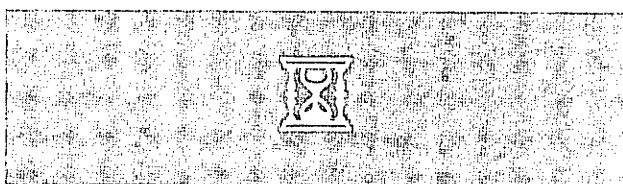
The Soviets (and their Communist Polish proxies) had repeatedly accused the Home Army of passivity and even of collaboration with the Nazis. In the prelude to the Rising, they broadcast urgent appeals to Warsaw to rise in support of the Red Army. Resistance leaders launched the insurrection believing erroneously that Germany was decisively beaten on the Eastern Front and that the Red Army was about to enter Warsaw. They would greet the Soviets as their hosts in Warsaw. They would avoid the fate of Home Army soldiers in eastern Poland, who had helped the Red Army to eject the Wehrmacht from Lwów (L'viv), Wilno (Vilnius) and Lublin, and then had been disarmed, arrested, deported to the USSR and, in many instances, executed. Even the most cynical observers failed to predict that Soviet forces would sit passively on one bank of the Vistula while Warsaw faced annihilation on the other. Moscow actively hindered efforts by the Western Allies to supply the insurgents and their 'adventuristic actions'. Yet as Averell Harriman, US ambassador in Moscow, argued at the time, the Poles had

every right to stage an uprising and every right to expect help from the Allies, including Russia.

The Poles lost the battle for Warsaw and, ultimately, both their eastern provinces and their fight for independence. East Central Europe came under Soviet domination and remained so for the next forty years. Yet the Poles' stubborn refusal to accept their satellite status – as manifested in the events of 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976 and 1980 – demonstrated that the post-war generations shared the same basic aspirations as their wartime predecessors. The latter, labelled as nationalistic, subversive and troublesome by allies and enemy alike, had sought what Poles had been seeking since the partitions: independence and borders and/or alliances giving guarantees of lasting security from the ambitions of their powerful neighbours.

Poland's geopolitical location supposedly made such aims unrealistic. But the Poles' profound yearning for independence and secure borders stemmed from their tragic history. The American political scientist, Sarah Terry, has observed: 'The sources of Poland's "troublesomeness" are that she lies astride a coveted and strategically vital piece of real estate and that, while the Polish nation is too small to fend off stronger neighbours, it is also too large and too keenly aware of its separate identity to be absorbed or long subdued.' The instability that characterized the Soviet bloc after 1945, East-West tensions that it generated and the late-1980s rebirth of independence in many of the countries of the region, demonstrated what the wartime Poles had always believed – that Western appeasement of the USSR at the expense of the small powers would aggravate rather than resolve the problems of the continent.

The end of World War II brought relief for citizens of Western Europe. Yet for Poles and other East Europeans, it marked the beginning of Stalinism and a descent into darkness – as *Rising '44* and *For Your Freedom and Ours* well demonstrate, and show how the lives of ordinary people were exposed to the horrors of war and totalitarianism. Crucially, they bring Poland's military and political contribution during World War II to a wider public audience. Davies' work should secure belated and deserved recognition for the 1944 Warsaw Rising, long lingering in the shadows of the famous 1943 Jewish Ghetto Uprising. Olson's and Cloud's highly readable book makes a contribution in its treatment of the Battle of Britain from an unfamiliar angle.



Hunting Freud – a poor shot Michael Conolly

Killing Freud: Twentieth century culture and the Death of Psychoanalysis,

Todd Dufresne Continuum, 2003, £16.99

Like the police, Freud, his theories and his therapists, have had little opportunity to involve most British people in any significant way. In Ulster, the puritan neck of the British woods where I was raised, oppression and despair caused by sin or guilt, drove one to the priest and the minister, assuming they would listen. Nor was expiation willingly given. In an unrelenting and stiff-necked provincial society, there was little toleration of shadowy practices, founded on obscure theories, seemingly untouched by the pragmatics of common sense. As to the behaviourism to which one was exposed in the sixties, it was confident enough to ignore both Freud and human personality. Freud's fate was in the hands of the philosophers who, unmoved by the claims for his curative powers, expressed consternation as to what he meant rather than what he claimed.

Arcane mysteries were compounded by my visits to a psychoanalytic institution which soon moved heaven and earth to remove me from its premises. This seemed an ungenerous response to repeated requests for explanations of method and technique and some small taste of the advantages of psychoanalytic interrogation. Such rejection did not seem calculated to reassure one of the efficacy and clarity of Freudian intentionality. Obscurantism and rejection are poor encouragement for the objective appraisal of a twentieth century giant who, it has been said, reversed our attitude to self-regard.

There are time-honoured ways of attacking a corpus of work. What are the claims made by their progenitor? Do such claims add up to a coherent theory? How complete is the theory? What is the nature of the evidence and is it used legitimately to relate claim to theory and their explication? Is the construction of hypothetical constructs helpful in the production of a clear though possibly complicated explanation? In what sense is the theoretical corpus commensurate with what we recognise as current knowledge and understanding? Does it make sense?

Implied in all this are two different stages to theoretical appraisal. Firstly, one examines the internal logic of the argument and the status of the evidence which permits theory and practice to be articulated. Secondly, one asks whether this argument and evidence are robust in the face of subsequent discovery, both within and without the inquiry as originally conceived. Is psychoanalysis

falsifiable and if not ought it to be? Questions of this kind would surely be the very stuff of a reasoned critique.

Freud articulated a theory and therapy for the dissolution of mental disease. Over a number of years he enriched his theory both in terms of conceptual sophistication and depth and its application to the wider human condition both individually and socially. His theory claims that mental activity in the first instance is unconscious, that mental difficulty has a causal relationship with past, unacknowledged and stressful personal events of a sexual nature. Replacing hypnosis with a technique involving talking, listening and the analyst's interpretation of patient talk, he believed that conscious recognition of hidden stressful events would lead to cathartic resolution. While the use of hypnosis sought to alleviate psychological states by reference to physical causes, Freud attempted to expose the psychological causes of physical symptoms. Moreover, he provided a purely psychological theory of the mind. This is bound to attract some hostile criticism today, when fashionable neuroscience and Darwinian social biology tramp so freely through the groves of academic respectability. In the age of neuro-science Freud may seem to some superstitious and unreasoned frivolity.

How are we to appraise Freud's theory? Alistair MacIntyre's mild reproach was on the grounds that using one hypothetical construct (repression) to explain another (the unconscious) is a singular weakness in theory construction. What is the notion of the unconscious being employed? It is certainly not the mere blind functioning of the autonomic system but, according to Freud, the totality of memories, desires and needs, all of which are preserved. Alternatively, is the location of mental disease in sexual events merely a reflection of male attitudes to hysterical women in the late nineteenth century? Most of the early patients were women. Is human mental difficulty really a function of sexual events absorbed and suppressed by very young children? As a practical enterprise what contribution does Freudian therapy (psychoanalysis) make to the dissolution of mental disease and illness and *a fortiori* to an understanding of human mentality?

What are the principles of interpretation used in the listening and talking therapy? How does the therapist avoid influencing suggestible and vulnerable patients? Psychoanalysis is not merely a complex psychological theory but also a rich repository for critical interrogation. What are the reasons for the overwhelming and continuing influence Freud has had on contemporary sensibility, as revealed in literature and film? It could be argued that Freud's ideas, regardless of the validity or otherwise of his theory and therapy, provide a well developed psychological picture, the status of which is far from clear, of the complexity of human motives.

In the starkly but tautly titled *Killing Freud*, Todd Dufresne suggests that 'we most certainly do not need Freud to help us describe the world – inner or outer'. That could be true but are there not grounds for seeing Dufresne's confidence as misplaced? We do not have an

embarrassment of alternatives from which to choose when we seek to understand the mental world, especially if we reject materialistic theories and explanations as question-begging. Freud did attempt to describe the inner world which is what his critics must examine. Dufresne's is an extremely odd book both structurally and critically. It begins with the case of 'Anna O', in which Dufresne seeks to show that the record of this seminal case study is at best mythological and at worst fraudulent. If this is so, he argues, then the central notions of psychotherapy such as the unconscious, the talking therapy and repression are redundant and should be assigned to the 'dissociated netherworld'.

Dufresne is unwilling to concede that a theory which rejects reductionism as improper could be couched in metaphor. He does not ask whether purely psychological theories could possibly be otherwise. Anyway, it is unclear what kind of explanation he himself might offer. Indeed the whole book is confusing. Another chapter argues for the possible and systematically contaminating role of the analyst's suggestions in psychoanalytic findings. A third welcomes a new era of critical Freud studies. In this we read 'that psychoanalysis is a serious menace based on a top-heavy theoretical edifice, faulty premises, circular and self-validating arguments, methodological laxity, motivated self-deception, bad faith and lies piled upon lies for more than a century'.

Various chapters follow, containing different intellectual structures possessing no discernable connecting thread. Included are discourses on Lacan and on a Freud retrospective at the Library of Congress, one which seemed to exclude dissenting opinion. There are attempts *en passant* to engage with the kinds of question I have raised. But there is no systematic and structured critique of psychoanalytic theory. Instead we are offered a continuous exercise in invective. Dufresne seeks to disestablish Freud from the pantheon of greatness and attributes the banality of psychoanalytic research to its non-university location and to the poor quality of its intellectuals 'who have lost sight of anything resembling intellectual standards'.

The penultimate chapter provides a useful overview of Dufresne's attitudes. While much of his comment is concerned with issues central to critical Freud studies, the written style adopted by Dufresne, with its opaque longueurs, serves neither purpose nor reader. I had severe and unresolved difficulties with a sentence that began thus, 'Rather, at its most rigorous the abyssal madness of post-structural thought refers to a contamination or mixing of the boundaries which mark the outer limits of an inner dehiscence;' and continues on for another five or six lines. Nor was it unusual. Is it unreasonable to demand clarity and transparency in a volume of critical explication? The sometimes barbarous writing, stifled by continual interruption and hesitation phenomena disguised as attempts at a 'light and humorous touch', produced in me frustration, gentle loathing and certainly no chuckles or guffaws.

Having penetrated this soporific text, I was left with

three main problems. The first concerns Freud's suggestion that one difference between the historical researcher and the psychoanalyst is that the latter 'does at least report things in which he himself played a part'. As Dufresne remarks, Freud is no more revealing than the historian about the valency of the part played. While the bridge between historian and the past may well be indissolubly ambiguous, any clarification must reject lofty notions of a history concerned with Platonic truth. Rather history can be about what seems to be true or efficacious at the time, well hemmed-in by the conventions of thought and understanding which then prevailed. The historian's problem is to discern these conventions. Facts record, motives attribute while contexts can be explanatory. We can never know whether we have successfully entered into the thought world of an historical figure, although we consciously seek to do so while consciously, but never successfully, keeping our contemporary prejudices at bay. It is less obvious what the contribution of the analyst is to the structure of a patient's repressed past. When is interpretation just that and not the object of transference or suggestion or the indivisible amalgam of repressed patient and analyst prejudice?

Secondly, I was puzzled as to why Freud's English disciple Ernest Jones' love of figure-skating was considered a metaphor for his inclination to the erotic. Thirdly, why would one suppose that Freud's love of dogs was an indication of his theoretical failings? Although I remain less than enamoured of psychoanalysis, Dufresne forces me, albeit reluctantly, to defend Freud. Regardless of the – disputable – value of his theory and its associated therapy, his influence is a fact and as such cannot be ignored. Moreover, his psychological theory, warts and all, is a metaphorical attempt to sketch the parameters of the human mind. By contrast the unreasonable skittishness of Dufresne's critique is such that one would marginally prefer to ride to Freud's rescue, at least in the cause of explanation and understanding.

The Lost Domain Merrie Cave

The Phoenix Land,

Miklos Banffy, trans Katalin Banffy-Jelen and Patrick Thursfield, Arcadia, 2004,
£12.99/\$15

One of the most rewarding outcomes of the end of the Cold War was the rediscovery of half our European cultural heritage and its fascinating literature – indeed mostly ignored during the communist era. From Hungary Sandor Marai's *Embers*

was a best seller here; Lajos Zihaly's *The Dukays* is like a Hungarian Galsworthian saga and Antal Szerb's *Journey into Moonlight* reflected the rise of fascism in the 'twenties. Among these Count Banffy's *Transylvanian Trilogy*, a story on a grand scale about Transylvania, the enchanted land of forests and mountains, before the Great War, is outstanding, and has been compared to Lampedusa and Tolstoy. Visitors to the recent de Lazlo exhibition will have caught glimpses of the vanished world it depicts. The Banffy family was one of the chief landowners in Transylvania with a magnificent palace in Kolosvar (Cluj-Napoca).

The collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918 was more serious for Hungary than anywhere else. A socialist republic was established but soon came to grief when Hungarians realized their country would be dismembered under the terms of the peace settlement. The well intentioned but ignorant idealism which had informed the Paris peace treaties only succeeded in bringing more misery and conflict to Central Europe. Much of the blame has been directed at the pro-Slav lobby who wished to reward the Czech leader Benes for his support of the Allies, 'gallant little Serbia' and Romania who received Transylvania. Hungarians regarded Slovakia and Transylvania as the cradles of their civilisation, for many writers and poets had come from those provinces. The communist leader Bela Kun was able to exploit this discontent and took power with the support of the social democrats and the officer corps, promising to drive the Slovaks and the Romanians from the disputed territories. A Red Terror followed with all the usual horrors. Some officers led by Admiral Nicolas Horthy, later Regent, appealed for help to Romania, whose army were only too happy to enter Budapest in August 1919 and bring the Soviet Republic to an end. For several months there was no proper government at all. A White Terror followed when Bela Kun's supporters, especially Communists and Jews, were slaughtered; armed partisans roamed the borders, the Czechs threatened invasion several times while the Romanian army looted the countryside. The only blessing Hungary appeared to have enjoyed, unlike Germany or Austria, was a sufficiency of food.

Against this background these memoirs record this confused period from the point of view of one of its main players. Most of them were written in 1945 when Hungary's condition was even more abject. The retreating German armies had destroyed the family castle of Bonczhida to revenge Banffy's attempt to persuade Romania with Hungary to sue for a separate peace. He was prevented from joining his family in Budapest until 1949 because the Romanian government closed the frontier.

Before the war Banffy had been an MP and had also run the State Theatre. In 1916 he organized the coronation of the Emperor Karl, a splendid but futile ceremony which Banffy poignantly evokes. By that time everybody knew that the war would be lost, but until the new monarch was crowned as King of Hungary no laws could be passed. In 1918 Banffy decided to go to England to explain Hungary's plight and to try to get some support. He never reached London but

found himself stranded in Holland without any money after adventures in a Germany reduced to chaos by the Spartacist revolt. He could not return home because of Bela Kun so for six months he earned a living as a portrait painter before returning to help the government of Istvan Bethlen deal with the aftermath of the Treaty of Trianon – Teleki's government had failed after the young king's 'operetta' putsch. Banffy now became Foreign Minister and attempted to come to agreements with the neighbouring states. His valiant efforts were nearly scuppered by the king's second, more serious attempt to return. 'The king was a naïve man, weak as putty in the hands of those who wanted to obtain power through him' and misled by those who told him about non-existent support from the Western powers as well as from within Hungary. Admiral Horthy ended the revolt to avoid a war but its failure had malign consequences: the newly formed Legitimist Party clashed with Horthy's supporters, depriving the Hungarian government of the services of its upper classes for a generation. It also spawned the Little Entente, an alliance designed to prevent an attack by Hungary or a further attempt at restoration.



The most difficult part of the Treaty of Trianon was the surrender of the Burgenland (nearest to Austria) but Banffy succeeded in keeping Sopron and its surrounding districts. Although he approved of the slogan 'Think of it always, speak of it never' as providing admirable discipline and patriotism, he deplored irresponsible irredentism: 'the nation which never stops menacing others and shouting about its grievances is labelled a disturber of the peace and blamed accordingly. Several million Hungarians now lived outside Hungary and their situation would become aggravated if there was too much noisy talk coming out of Budapest.'

At the Genoa conference in 1922 he witnessed the drama of the two pariahs of Europe, Germany and Russia, making a secret treaty at Rapallo (the next town to Genoa) so the conference collapsed. Later he went to Geneva to the League of Nations to achieve Hungary's acceptance as a full member but was vilified in the Hungarian press for agreeing to 'humiliating' terms. Thereafter he resigned his post, worn out by the stress of frenetic diplomatic activity, and turned down the

chance of the Paris Embassy, retreating to his beloved Transylvania where he helped his fellow Hungarians with the complications of living in Romania, encouraging writers and painters and starting a publishing house.

Banffy's narrative is full of comical anecdotes and graphic character sketches: he smuggled a spoilt lapdog on to the ferry to Copenhagen because he rightly guessed it would end up in a cooking pot in a starving Germany. In Genoa he heard Rathenau describe Germany's poverty 'wearing a pearl the size of a hazelnut in his tie, diamond cufflinks and a quantity of rings set with precious stones', enjoyed meeting Lloyd George 'free of that sonorous spouting of slogans so typical of Hungarian orators', and admired the beautiful widow of Caruso taking her constitutional from the Excelsior hotel. 'Benés was a small and insignificant looking man. His whey-coloured eyes had an unusual sheen and were always watchful, like those of a fox.' Banffy was a keen student of human nature, making many pertinent observations on the role of character in politics, particularly on how mediocrities rise to the top in revolutionary times. The tragic events he relates are relieved by a warm humour and a sense of the ridiculous as when he describes the hilarious conspiracies to which Hungarians are famously addicted, as well as their inability to keep secrets. Throughout the book there are lessons for irresponsible elites.

If Joseph Roth can be said to have chronicled the culture of the old cosmopolitan order of Central Europe in its dying years, Banffy should be saluted as a razor sharp analyst of its political failure. His lucid distillation of the historical background explains how events like the Turkish conquest had a profound influence on the national mentality. 'The key to today lies in the struggles and torments, battles, sins and omissions of the past.' Hungary was a small country which could never resist the Austrian Empire but wishful thinkers attributed failure to betrayal or treason. Ferenc Deak obtained more independence for Hungary in 1867 than it had had since Habsburg rule began, yet Rakoczi and Kossuth, whose policies were disastrous, were more respected. The idea of martyrdom was so rooted in the national psyche that when a historian wrote truthfully about Rakoczi, students made bonfires of his books.

All his passionate feelings about Transylvania and its people, as well as the condemnation of those who through their selfishness and blindness had helped to destroy it were poured into the last lines of the *Trilogy*:

He saw before him the entire class of great land-owners, spoilt by an arrogance that had led them to neglect the good management of their estates, preferring to vie for pompous offices of state and political advantage. He saw the professors of history, who thought only of the revolutionary struggle against the Habsburg domination and denigrated those who would have encouraged the Hungarian people to self-knowledge and hard work, with the result that the minds of the young had been filled only with illusory ideals and chauvinistic slogans... All this he saw before him, just as if he were looking back from beyond the grave. Now this beloved country would perish, and with it most of his generation. It would perish with this meaningless war.....

Shares for All

Matthew O'Keeffe

The Company: A Short History of a Revolutionary Idea,

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge,
Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003, £14.99

This short and entertaining book makes a big contention – that ‘the most important organization in the world is the company: the basis of the prosperity of the West and the best hope for the future of the rest of the world’. Most people in the West now work for companies, after all, and the bulk of the world’s products come from them.

Along the way, we learn all sorts of things about the company and its influence: the term of abuse ‘nobs’ originally referred to the wealthy and ostentatious employees of the East India Company (predecessors of today’s yuppies); Procter & Gamble, as the sponsor of radio dramas, created the ‘soap’ opera. Occasionally, Micklethwait and Wooldridge go too far: it is suggested that McDonald’s taught the Chinese how to queue (which seems unlikely in a country which had suffered 50 years of socialism before the arrival of the Big Mac). But you cannot fault them for their enthusiasm.

Micklethwait and Wooldridge identify three ideas behind the modern Joint Stock Company (JSC): that it could be an artificial person, that it could issue tradable shares to any number of investors, and that those investors could have limited liability. Likewise, there are three themes in their story: that the company’s past is actually more dramatic than its present, that the company has been one of the West’s great historical competitive advantages, and that, along the way, companies have become more ethical.

The history of the company is not without its high drama but this is the least interesting of Micklethwait and Wooldridge’s themes. The Wall Street jet-set should reflect that earlier businessmen risked their lives as well as their fortunes: a fleet sent to the Spice Islands at the beginning of the 17th century would seldom return with even a third of the original crew alive; in the 18th century the excesses of the East India Company and scandals like the South Sea Bubble tower over Tyco or Enron (and very nearly did for the JSC); the company men who took over the management of American capitalism in the 20th century were considerably less colourful characters than the ‘robber barons’ who founded their companies in the century before; and for all the formidable achievements of corporate America today, it was Victorian Britain which gave birth to

the modern company through the Companies Act of 1862 – the charter of shareholder capitalism.

The competitive advantage thesis is compelling. In theory, the advantages of the Joint Stock Company are clear: ‘They allow investors to spread their risks by purchasing small and easily marketable shares in several enterprises. And they provide a way of imposing effective management structures on large organizations. Of course, companies can ossify, but the fact that investors can simply put their money elsewhere is a powerful rejuvenator.’ In practice, the competitive advantage thesis raises one obvious question: if the Victorians invented such a great blueprint in 1862, why have British companies not been more successful (in comparison with, for instance, German companies)?

Micklethwait and Wooldridge point to the British preference for family firms and to British prejudice against industrial capitalism. The first preference is ironic, given that the JSC was invented to escape the limitations of the family firm. Mighty family firms like Pilkington nearly went to the wall in the 1920’s rather than bring in outside management. (When Pilkington finally did appoint an outsider it was only because, by extraordinary coincidence, he shared the family name.) The prejudice against industry is attributed to the anti-utilitarian bias of the public schools and Oxbridge. It is corporate America which best embodies the Anglo-Saxon idea of the company.

What of Germany’s relative success and its differing idea of the company? The authors’ suspicion is that German success in much of the 20th Century owed much less to ‘stakeholder capitalism’ than to the cult of education – especially of the scientific and vocational sort sneered at in England – and the respect accorded to managers – which may conform to the English stereotype of obedient Germans but has nonetheless served their economy well.

Unlike critics from both ends of the political spectrum, Micklethwait and Wooldridge see nothing unethical in the JSC and, they contend that the behaviour of companies has actually improved over time. Economic liberals like Adam Smith thought the JSC encouraged reckless behaviour: limited liability transferred the risk of doing business to suppliers, customers and lenders while allowing the investor to wriggle out of his debts. The obvious defence of the JSC is that, in an economy based on free exchange, risk-averse suppliers or customers can choose to take their business elsewhere. (The Lloyds names of the 1980’s, who risked everything, made the opposite choice). Moreover, the abyss of unlimited liability made business the preserve of those with deep pockets; indeed, Richard Cobden argued that limited liability was to be welcomed because it helped the poor set up businesses. Smith also thought the JSC encouraged greedy behaviour: separation of control from ownership (via issue of shares) created an agency problem where hired managers would never show the same ‘anxious vigilance’ towards their companies as owner-managers; the manager would look, rather, to line his pockets at the expense of the shareholder.

In a world of mobile capital and labour there is likely be

a permanent tug-of-war between the two and, in practice, victory seems to swing violently and elusively from one side to the other. The recession of the early 1990s saw a display of 'shareholder activism': the big investment institutions called successfully for heads to roll at General Motors, IBM, American Express and Kodak. Shareholders 1, Managers 0. By the end of the booming 1990s, however, the chief executives of big American companies were taking home an average of \$12.4m – six times as much as in 1990. Managers 1, Shareholders 0.

Nonetheless, the most promising solution to the agency problem must lie with shareholder activism; our best hope for restraining greedy managers must lie with greedy shareholders! It is surprising that Adam Smith did not see this.

We should also console ourselves that owner-managed companies (which avoid the agency problem) are extremely limited. Adam Smith can be forgiven for overlooking these limitations: the capital required for a manufacturing venture in his day was modest. A couple of Lancashire mill owners could easily raise the capital to build a new factory and the business could thereby be kept in the family.

All this changed with the coming of the railway. As Micklethwait and Wooldridge memorably put it: 'The railroads were not just great enablers for modern business; they were also the first modern businesses'. And the railways were huge consumers of capital; until the 20th Century, Wall Street existed almost exclusively to finance them. J. S. Mill came to the grudging conclusion that for capital-hungry businesses, like the railways, the hat simply had to be passed too far and too widely. Such businesses could not be kept in the family and the only alternative to the joint stock system would be direct state control.

What of the socialist critique? Is the profiteering shareholder model heartless and socially irresponsible? The authors' answer is that, though they may not have souls, Anglo-Saxon companies do have brains. Now, more than ever before, they operate in a blaze of publicity which makes them answerable to shareholders. The ethical theme ties in with the historical here; what is remarkable about today's socialist is how unhistorical he is:

'People who now protest about the new evil of global commerce plainly have not read much about slavery or opium. People who talk in terrified tones about the unprecedented skulduggery at WorldCom seem to have forgotten about the South Sea Bubble. Those who fear the unparalleled might of Bill Gates could do with a little reading on J.P.Morgan.'

By any reasonable measure, companies today pillage the Third World less than they used to and offer more opportunities to minorities and women; in the fifty years after the 1862 Act, the number of female clerical workers increased five-hundred fold. The socialist critique also ignores that many of the best (and most reviled) Anglo-Saxon companies have shouldered 'social obligations' without any prompting from the state: Sears set up a pension fund for its workers; Procter & Gamble pioneered the eight-hour day; Merck today invests millions in AIDS research.

Micklethwait and Wooldridge identify two hard-nosed reasons why companies need to be seen to do good. The first is trust: General Electric lost more money in terms of goodwill through polluting the Hudson than it ever saved by letting waste into the river. The second reason is the 'war for talent'. Southwest Airlines was the only airline not to lay people off after 9/11; that same year, it received 120,000 applications for 3,000 jobs.

The authors believe that weighing up the pieces of anecdotal evidence is not the right way to judge the company ultimately. Henry Ford paid his workers well above the market rate (at \$5 a day) but it was, above all, his cheap cars that changed the lives of the poor: 'The central good of the joint-stock company is that it is the key to productivity growth in the private sector: the best and easiest structure for individuals to pool capital, to refine skills, and to pass them on. We are all richer as a result.' Well said.

Universal Universities **Antony Flew**

Independence or Stagnation?

The Imperatives of University Reform in the United Kingdom,

Dennis O'Keeffe and David Marsland, Civitas Institute for the Study of Civil Society, 2003, £7.50

The title of this slim but disproportionately important volume is optimistically misleading. As long as the present administration continues to pursue the Prime Minister's unexamined objective of pressing half of every successive age cohort into what we must continue to call university education, the alternative to Independence will be not Stagnation but Degeneration. Indeed the degeneration began over ten years earlier with the equally unconsidered but much less easily reversible decision of Kenneth Clarke (then Conservative Minister of State at the DES) to promote fifty or more miscellaneous institutions of higher education to university status by a stroke of the pen. The former University College of North Staffordshire (UCNS) thus became the last such institution to achieve university status by a supervised demonstration of academic merit.

The Editor in his Foreword asserts that 'It is now widely accepted that educational standards have fallen at all levels'. This fact is well known to everyone who is well informed about educational affairs in the UK.

But it is not known to most of the children who are apparently able to celebrate a record year of A-level performance every year. Nor, presumably, is it known to most of their parents.

This now notorious decline in the standards demanded by A-level examiners began well before the end of the Major administration. Gillian Shephard, the last Conservative to be appointed Secretary of State in charge of what was then called the Department of Education and Science, was rightly quick to ask the local Sir Humphrey Appleby whether there was any evidence of a decline in A-level standards. He replied, unsurprisingly but at the same time, scandalously, that there was not. For Departmental purposes, valid evidence is found only among the records of governmental inquiries.

The Editor of *Independence or Stagnation* tells us 'that Simon Jenkins has spoken of a three years war between the universities and the state' and he (the Editor) adds that 'apparently, the state has won.' O'Keeffe and Marsland attribute the problems to interlocking causes: the massive overregulation of the sector, and the dependence on state funding which gives Whitehall the power it craves to tell everyone else what to do. In this they are, of course, right. Before reviewing the various ill effects of these two prime causes they raise the question: 'Why is British education publicly financed and state driven?'

They answer this fundamental question by referring to 'the belief during the 1950s and 1960s – promulgated by Thomas Balogh and C. P. Snow, accepted by politicians such as Aneurin Bevan and Harold Wilson and influencing even a distinguished academic economist like Lionel Robbins in his famous report – was that the Soviet Union and the other socialist economies would eventually, even soon, outperform the western economies.'

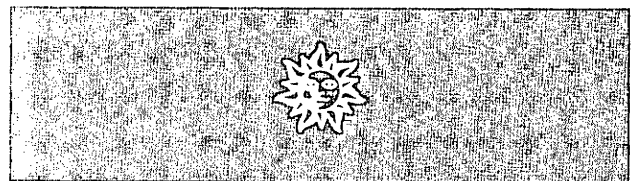
The great misfortune of British education, and of so much else in Britain today, is that the leaders of 'New' Labour, while removing the Socialist Clause IV from the Constitution of the Labour Party, never actually did any rethinking about socialism. They did not want to discover that, whereas in the 1930s J. V. Stalin had misguidedly boasted that it is 'not abstract justice but socially necessary labour time which justified socialism', President Reagan in the 1980s realised that the productivity of labour in the USSR could not even begin to match, much less exceed, that in the USA. He was able to declare to a horrified group of *Washington Post* journalists: 'that he intended to win the arms race with the Soviet Union, because America's resources greatly exceeded those of the USSR, so that Soviet leaders would ultimately be forced to the bargaining table to begin reducing their threatening nuclear arsenal and scale back their international aggressions.'

So as V. I. Lenin once famously asked, 'What is to be

done?'. The first and most difficult thing is to replace the present 'New' Labour administration by another wholeheartedly committed immediately to deregulate, and ultimately to develop a market in, the supply of educational services. What could be achieved with immediate and beneficial effect on the suppliers of educational services – the schools and the universities – would be what was once described as 'a bonfire of controls'. For education is, along with health, one of the only two areas not regulated primarily by Brussels rather than by Whitehall.

In the year ending March 2002 the Ministry sent down to schools documents totalling 4,440 A4 pages – equivalent to seventeen A4 pages for each working day. No comparable statistics are available for the universities. But here the political interference – the supposed improvement of access to universities by referring to postcodes rather than to any measures of academic merit to license admissions – constitutes a direct assault upon the independence of our national universities.

'New' Labour finds access a problem only because it bigotedly supports, and when first elected was hoping to complete, the comprehensive revolution. For so long as the state funded grammar schools remained, most of which had been founded by Old Labour-controlled local authorities, there seems to have been no problem of working class proportionate under-representation. Thus in 1968 Mrs Shirley Williams as a Junior to Anthony Crosland – he had earlier moved the Parliamentary resolution which launched the Comprehensive Revolution – announced to a Conference of European Ministers of Education over 26 percent of our university population (and 35 percent of students in all other institutions of higher learning) were of working class origin. The parallel (university) scores of some of our Continental neighbours were Sweden – 14 percent; Denmark – 10 percent; France – 8.3 percent; and Switzerland – 4 percent. Crosland's widow, in her biography of her husband, made it clear that for him the Comprehensive Revolution was what moral philosophers of his (and my) generation called a good in itself as opposed to a means to achieve other goods.



Labour's Wars

Roger Fox

Hammer of the Left,

John Golding, ed. Paul Farrelly, Politico's Publishing, 2003, £25

Anyone with an ounce of historical perspective, when asked who they regard as 'Hammer of the Left' in recent times, would reply 'Margaret Thatcher', so it comes as some surprise to see a book with this title about a former Labour MP who consistently defended trade union rights. In the endgame period of Blair's Labour Government the minutiae of the internecine politics in the Labour Party from 1978 to 1983 are but vignettes of history. The only interest in this period is that Blair could never have become Leader without Neil Kinnock expelling the Militant Tendency supporters from the Labour Party after his historic Conference speech in 1985.

The background to all this was a serious constitutional principle; whether or not an MP is a delegate accountable to a political party or a representative of the electors in a constituency. This book, *Hammer of the Left*, is a personal story of John Golding, a right-wing Labour MP who died in 1999. He had been an extremely committed Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme and he served his constituency with an unrivalled sense of dedication, but he was also a trade union official with the Post Office Engineering Union where he was political officer. His roots and loyalties lay with Old Labour and he would be out of place, although still loyal, to the Blair Government.

This book has been edited by the present MP for the constituency, Paul Farrelly, and describes with great accuracy the work which Golding did to try and prevent the Labour Party becoming a totally sectarian political Party after the General Election in 1979. It was a close run thing. On the one hand Golding valiantly strove to organise the Right-wing trade union leaders and right-wing Labour Party MPs on the National Executive to prevent a Militant takeover. On the other side the Left had been riding high in the Party for some years. They had a Left-wing leader in Michael Foot and control of many of the levers of power in the Party. Fortunately for the Right the Left fell out with each other. Benn and Heffer made themselves unpopular with some of their supporters and Militant over-reached itself when it tried to take on the trade unions.

The underlying issue of whether a Member of Parliament was to be a representative of the people in a constituency or a delegate to put forward the views of the local Party 'activists' is not brought out sufficiently in the text. It could be argued that the Labour Party brought all its problems on itself. Before 1973 there was a 'proscribed list' which listed organisations to which Party members could not belong and remain members. This was abolished and as a consequence Marxist and Trotskyist groups began to organise within the Party. The most successful of these was the Revolutionary Socialist League, otherwise known as Militant. Its supporters took control of many constituency Labour Parties and most notably gained control of Liverpool Council. The way they behaved there was made into a highly watchable TV drama 'GBH'. Intimidation was Militant's trademark.

Whilst Tony Benn has made a virtue out of riding the wave of these activists, it was the careful and assiduous work of Golding and his supporters on the backroom committees which saved the Labour Party from oblivion. Anyone from outside Labour politics will be surprised by the venom and vitriol which went on at that time – and which could recur if Labour is not careful. It is an unfortunate characteristic of modern politics that good manners between disputants are rarely found any-more and when issues become verbally violent participants begin to fight like alley-cats. Hardly what one might expect in a civil society.

This book lacks its context; both its wider issues and the events before 1978 are skimmed over, even the infiltration which followed the decision on the proscribed list is not mentioned. It was what went on then, in the early 1970s, which galvanised social democrats such as Dick Taverne and the Social Democratic Alliance into action. Senior Labour figures visited East Germany and the USSR in the 1970s and made complimentary remarks to the dictators in those countries without any criticism from the leadership of the Party. Anyone who made critical remarks about pro-left activities was subjected to considerable abuse. Until Neil Kinnock took his brave stand at the Annual Conference in 1985 many Party moderates just could not take the vitriol in the Labour Party and resigned.

However, whatever happened in the Labour Party (and it was important for our democracy) the real 'Hammer of the Left' was Margaret Thatcher. It was her Trade Union legislation which forced ballots before strikes, banned secondary picketing, abolished the closed shop, and brought trade unions into the legal framework which really knocked the Left for six and strengthened democracy within our industrial relations. The changes in the trade union scene then had a wider effect on the Labour Party and the conventions of our Parliamentary democracy were re-established.

Conformist Criticism

Malcolm Rees

Democracy, Fascism and the New World Order,

Ivo Mosley, Imprint Academic, 2003, £8.95

Ivo Mosley distinguishes good democracy, which pays due respect to the interest of minorities, from bad democracy, where a tyranny of the majority rules. Oakeshott, from whom Mosley gets many of his ideas, sees most modern democracies as combinations of the two arrangements. Fascism extends and institutionalises democratic tyranny through the destruction of independent social institutions and may also eliminate, sometimes physically, those minorities that might present a challenge to the regime.

Mosley's 'New World Order' is less clearly defined. He apparently sees it mainly in terms of the rise of the 'corporate state' combined with the parallel rise of the modern corporation. These two are in a symbiotic relationship. Such corporate states enmesh art, education, charity and science and, by harnessing them to corporate interests, destroy personal liberty and independence.

The pre-eminent corporate state, indeed, the epitome of all that is sinister in the modern world, is, for Mosley, the USA. The American government is portrayed as a pernicious organisation that interferes on a world scale in matters that are not its business under the guise of attacking terrorism. In reality this interference is merely an excuse for commercial exploitation and for an American 'pseudo imperial' project.

The conformist character of the American people is illustrated by their alarming 'fundamentalism', a quality which is shared by Islamic suicide bombers who blow up aeroplanes (and will blow up cities, if they get the chance, though Mosley does not mention it). These US fundamentalists are driving non-conformity and criticism to the margins of American society and are destroying freedom in the process. One cannot help wondering whether Mosley was unlucky enough to have spent a graduate year at Lynchburg Community College, without remission.

US corporations are abusing their power and avoiding taxes by transfer pricing, by illegitimately enforcing intellectual property rights and by using the power of the United States government for their own advantage. These anti-competitive organisations are 'plundering the nations' (the title of one chapter) by overturning democratic governments and installing oligarchs and dictators

who make life comfortable for US commercial interests.

The truth of this is hard to ascertain, at least from Mosley's evidence. The oil industry is nailed by a conversation that Mosley once had with an oilman. Malfeasance in banking is unmasked through another conversation with a merchant banker, who told him that banks are making enormous fortunes by plundering the assets of nations with underpriced IPOs. The destruction of the universities is demonstrated from a conversation with a university professor. Unfortunately, too much of Mosley's argument is like this, unsubstantiated and anecdotal.

Mosley's propensity to rant is a shame because in places he has some interesting points to make. The progressive loss of individuality and independence in the modern world is an important subject, but one which cannot simply be blamed on the USA and its corporations. If anything, these processes have gone further in Europe (and the UK) than in the USA. Mosley does not seem to understand that the growth of conformity and dependency is little due to the pre-eminence of the American military and economic power, but much more due to developments like the growth of welfare and multiculturalism.

The welfare state is subverting not only those who are economically dependent on benefits, but also those in the health, education, social work and other state 'industries', including a large part of the media, who increasingly adopt collectivist and conformist modes of thought.

Ironically 'multiculturalism', which one might imagine would promote a diversity of viewpoints, has to be enforced by means of conformity that precludes any real discussion of the perspectives of others. Thought policing and intellectual evasion are essential if multiculturalism is to be maintained. Those close relatives of multiculturalism, social permissiveness and moral relativism, also have to be shielded from serious criticism because of the perceived danger of social conflict and disorder. Likewise serious consideration of religious differences must be suppressed, again in the interest of social harmony. Increasingly, open discussion of more and more aspects of social life must be made politically incorrect and even illegal. So ironically, attempts, some of which are well meaning, to protect social diversity, are destroying that open society which is purportedly being promoted.

Certain targets are still available for hostile criticism even in the multicultural democracy. They should be far away rather than close at hand, present no genuine threat to the critic or his society, and themselves provide, by means of press freedom, cheap and easy ammunition. The USA and Israel, as well as the international corporation, offer such qualities to perfection. The more genuine dangers to freedom, moral collapse and dependency on state provision, political subversion in the name of internationalism or multinationalism (Mosley is not altogether surprisingly an advocate of the extension of international law), bandit states, false religion and godlessness, can be prudently ignored by the astute and conformist critic, such as Ivo Mosley.

ETERNAL LIFE



The BBC has been broadcasting religious programmes for more than eighty years and a producer invited me to tell them what I thought of the output. Whenever BBC television produces a programme about Christianity, the tone and content is sceptical and debunking: that we can't trust the biblical narratives; that Jesus was just an ordinary rabbi; or that he might have been married to Mary Magdalene; or having a homosexual relationship with St John; that the resurrection did not happen but is only some sort of 'metaphor for the disciples' experience of new life' – and so on.

But when the religion in question is Buddhism or particularly Islam, the tone is reverential to the point of sycophancy. Imagine the complaints of 'racism' that would erupt if the BBC tried the same sort of blasphemy against Mohammed that they regularly use against Jesus Christ. As I write BBC presenters on Radio Four are lauding the eliminated mastermind of Hamas' suicide bombers Ahmed Yassin as 'a spiritual leader'. He was no more a spiritual leader than Osama bin Laden or Adolf Hitler. He said Israel had no right to exist and he sent hundreds of murderous terrorists – including young mothers – to blow themselves up and slaughter as many Israelis as possible in the process.

The main religious programme of the week on the radio is the Sunday morning service. In my view, a religious service should be just that: an act of worship, not a mixture of chat show and travelogue. It should begin without announcement, but with a hymn. This should lead into a prayer, perhaps a psalm, a reading, another hymn, the Creed and an intelligent sermon. Instead what we get is a long prologue of the type 'I'm standing in the chancel of St Mungo's...' The hymns are usually repeated jingles and choruses which were not worth singing even once.

There is nothing religious about this approach which simply kills any potential spiritual atmosphere. There is too much of the officiant telling us what we are about to do next: 'We shall now say the words of the Creed...' Why not just begin, 'I believe in God'? The result is that the irritating commentary becomes more important than the actual words of the service. The content of the prayers and the sermon is sentimental and infantile, with a relentless condescension to the listener – no doubt in order not to be accused of the sin of 'elitism' by the ignoramuses in charge of programme planning.

By contrast with the puerile output of the BBC, the

churches that are prospering are ones which use traditional language and liturgy: those Roman Churches where they still have the Latin Mass and Anglican churches like our church of St Michael's, Cornhill where we have the Book of Common Prayer, The King James Bible and sermons which do not sound like imitations of *The Tellytubbies*. In this church the congregation has increased tenfold over the last five years. The Eastern Orthodox have not altered their liturgy for a thousand years and their churches are packed.

Religion on television is an unspeakable pantomime, so that only leaves radio. The Today Programme's token religious homily *Thought for the Day* is a brainless parody of what both religion and thought should be. It is merely a daily opportunity for politically-correct ideologues to pass off their prejudices as spiritual sustenance. This programme should be deleted under the constraints of the Trades Descriptions Acts for it has nothing to do with religion.

Every weekday morning we are offered *Thought for the Day's* catalogue of infelicities and desecrations. This is always – except when the Chief Rabbi is occasionally invited to present it – a brief essay in which the speaker attempts to scold the government for its attitude towards the war in Iraq/asylum seekers/women's rights/gay rights/the minimum wage – pick any three from four. The people who offer this advice every morning can hardly claim expertise. The Anglicans among them – bishops, synods-people and employees of ecclesiastical pressure groups most of them – have failed in every area of church life. They have introduced new liturgies and the pews have emptied. They have lost so much money that they now confess openly they do not have enough cash to pay the clergy. Theological education is as dumbed down as an episode of *Blue Peter*. Seeing they are so manifestly incompetent when it comes to running their own affairs, they should not tell the politicians and the licence-payers how to run theirs.

We can tolerate a bit of soft left soft soap and the slogans of ill-informed apparatchiks, but they have been talking like this for forty years, yet they market this procession of clichés and hand-me-downs as if it were the cutting edge of social criticism. They have the ignorance and arrogance to describe this old hat as 'prophecy'. Eyes have they and see not, ears and hear not; and their feet are far from the paths of godliness.

Peter Mullen

IN SHORT

An Underworld at War

Donald Thomas, John Murray, 2004, pb £8.99

Everyone is familiar with the story of England 'saving herself by her exertions and saving Europe by her example'. Less well known is how criminals of all shades grasped new opportunities throughout the Second World War. Donald Thomas provides a fascinating slab of social history and graphically evokes the misery of those years, in many ways worse after victory. There are many allusions in contemporary fiction, notably Evelyn Waugh, to a racketeers' paradise: remember Basil Seal's evacuee racket in *Put out More Flags* and the Sergeant Major's warning to young officers about frauds and routine thefts from NAAFI stores. The recent TV programme *Foyle's War* also gave glimpses into this world. Thomas's racy but meticulous narrative compiled from a variety of records and court reports highlights a cast of black marketeers, dodgers, deserters, prostitutes and smash and grab gangs. There was even an impersonation racket in which those who had failed medical boards would attend for others who wanted to avoid military service; the ensuing complications were often very funny. Many claimed compensation for 'being bombed out' (the bomb lark) and repeated claims several times before being caught. The most controversial crime was looting after air attacks, punishable in theory by hanging. The new defence regulations abolished the burden of proof for the prosecution. Thomas quotes many hilarious court cases; old lags showed more ingenuity than unlucky civilians in getting their appeals heard or sentences reduced.

A vast army of bureaucrats was created to enforce regulations like rationing. 'Snoopers' went into restaurants and shops to see if they could persuade the staff to serve them extra courses or forbidden groceries and then prosecute them. These 'little Hitlers' obviously enjoyed their work, like mean, officious people in any age. The 'mushrooming' of these new jobs sometimes led to disastrous mistakes: the nation was regaled by the incompetence of the Board of Trade when Arthur Fox, the Chief Petroleum Inspector for the North West and chief of the fuel rationing machine, turned out to have been convicted of running an unlicensed and illegal theatrical agency. He had also enticed young girls to go to Brazil, held bank accounts in false names and welshed on bookmakers.

Merrie Cave

University Admissions and Fees

Stephen Bush, Campaign for Real Education, 18 Westlands Grove, Stockton Lane, York, YO3 1EF, 2004, £4

Most people would agree that the present arrangements for University education are a mess and aggravated by the present government's mischievous interference in admissions policies. Here are some sensible proposals for reform from a practical academic with a background in science and industry.

Grants should be made to qualifying UK students instead of the universities. After five years the universities would be freed from government control and would be able to determine their own admissions policies. The deficit in University finances would disappear and grants for research would move to the Research Councils freeing the system from the costly Research assessment exercises. Grants of around £5,000 could be increased by about £2,700 in top-up fees from the individual student. There would also be money for students from 'poor' school backgrounds to help them reach the improved standards of a reformed university system. A Labour government would be hardly likely to free the universities from its control but Conservatives should grasp such proposals eagerly. It would get them some votes. *Merrie Cave*

Margaret Thatcher, Volume Two: The Iron Lady

John Campbell, Jonathan Cape, 2003, £25

Many books have been published about Margaret Thatcher and more will be as their subject moves from current affairs to history. She remains relevant to current politics, although the Conservatives continue to avert their gaze from the leader who came from behind to win three elections in a row and raise Britain's world image. Campbell's study embodies much work, though not enough for its ambitions. It lacks a sense of the grandeur of events, the romance of politics which can raise an unknown woman from a lower-middle-class provincial background to the heights of world political leadership, only to cast her down when her glance momentarily wavered. He writes as an outsider who lacks not only personal knowledge and sympathy but also intellectual curiosity. He accuses his subject of 'xenophobia' where others would say patriotism, and 'ideology' where others might say principle.

He does, however, demonstrate convincingly that though 'leader', she never controlled her party in the way that some of her predecessors did. By contrast, occasions where she had her own way like Westlands and the Community Charge, turned out to be disastrous for her. He fails to

understand how Whitelaw, though protesting loyalty, undermined her, which she understood but felt she could do nothing about. Campbell seems naïve in his adoration of the gentry and although he writes at length about and against Sir John Hoskyns and myself, he did not meet either of us to check his assumptions. He claims that I urged the Prime Minister to dismiss James Prior; this shows a total misunderstanding of relations between the Prime Minister and advisers. He claims I made 'bitter' interventions to buttress my claims to the authorship of Thatcherism. I had no need to make such claims, since both Lord Joseph and Lady Thatcher made them for me. I avoided such personality claims and counter claims and instead sought to trace the complex relationships between cause and effect. Until Conservatives come to terms with the Thatcher episode, their chances of grappling successfully with the challenges of the 21st century are seriously diminished. *Alfred Sherman*

Mont Pinçon

Eric Hunt, Leo Cooper, Pen and Sword, £9.95
(Tel: 0122266 734222)

A traveller in Western France today might hardly notice Mont Pinçon, but possession of this, the highest hill in Normandy, was for a few weeks in the summer of 1944 the key to the Allied breakout from the D-Day beachhead. It was defended with great tenacity and much loss of life. The brunt of the battle, and of the casualties, was borne by battalions of the old county regiments of 43rd Wessex Division. But the extraordinary feature of the action, and what tipped the balance, was the 'cavalry dash' of the 13th/18th Hussars in smuggling a patrol of Sherman tanks on to the summit of the feature and into the heart of the enemy position. The complex story of Mont Pinçon's capture is skilfully put together by Colonel Hunt, with the use of interviews, war diaries, photographs and maps. The most telling illustrations are the snapshots of some of those who took part – faces suggesting personal qualities that were made by those events.

Leo Cooper has done the wartime generation proud. I commend this series of short detailed accounts of actions in the Second World War – lest we forget. *David Edelsten*

Why the BBC must improve its coverage of the EU

Kathy Gyngell and David Keighley, Centre for Policy Studies, 2004, £5

Attacking the BBC is becoming an exercise akin to shooting fish in the barrel, except that nothing seems to dent their self-satisfied view of the world for very long. No sooner have they recovered from the Hutton Report and the resignations of the Chairman and the Director-General, than they started cheerfully defending the rather complicated arrangement, whereby the new Chairman will also remain chairman and important shareholder of a company from which the BBC commissions programmes. Apparently, there is no clash of interest there. Or, at least, the BBC cannot see it.

Nor can the BBC understand why they get attacked for their coverage of the EU. For some reason, as they patiently explain, they see their role as being the counterbalance to the supposedly eurosceptic British press. Never mind that there are newspapers and periodicals that are anything but eurosceptic, is that really the role of a public company financed by a specially designed tax?

Global Britain and Minotaur Media Tracking have timed the BBC's coverage of important EU affairs in a period that included the ratification and enactment of the Nice Treaty (with the attendant double Irish referendum), enlargement to the east and the development of the new Constitution. They found that the BBC devoted minimal amount of time to these and other, related matters of some importance to the British people. Their excuse is that it is all so boring that the public just switches off. That may be the standard on which comedy shows are judged but news stories are surely to be allocated time on the basis of their importance.

Two ideas spring to mind: the BBC should find journalists that find important news stories interesting and send the others packing; and somebody, perhaps Minotaur Media Tracking, should analyse in greater depth how the BBC presents stories on the EU when they can be bothered to do so.

Helen Szamuely

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PRINCIPLES OF POLITICS APPLICABLE TO ALL GOVERNMENTS

By Benjamin Constant
Translated by Dennis O'Keeffe
Introduction by Nicholas Capaldi

Principles of Politics, first published in 1815, is a "microcosm of [Constant's] whole political philosophy and an expression of his political experience," says Nicholas Capaldi in his Introduction. "Constant always saw freedom as an organic phenomenon: to attack it in any particular was to attack it generally... he explores many subjects: law, sovereignty, and representation; power and accountability; government, property and taxation; wealth and poverty; war, peace, and the maintenance of public order; and above all freedom, of the individual, of the press, and of religion."

CHRISTIANITY AND CLASSICAL CULTURE A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine

By Charles Norris Cochrane

The theme of *Christianity and Classical Culture* is the fundamental change in thought and action that occurred from the reign of Augustus to the time of Augustine. The classical world sought to practice politics and understand the world in purely rational terms, but the difficulties of this program were already evident as Christianity began developing a completely new understanding of the human world. It is from this revolution in ideas that our modern world was forged.

LAW, LIBERTY, AND PARLIAMENT: SELECTED ESSAYS ON THE WRITINGS OF SIR EDWARD COKE

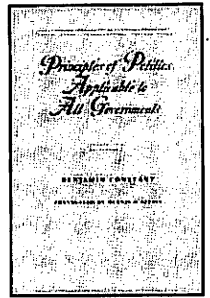
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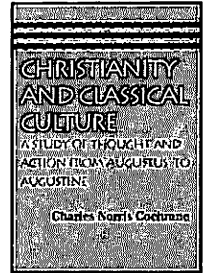
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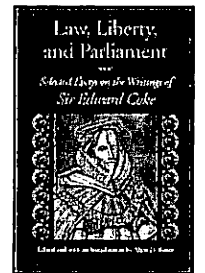
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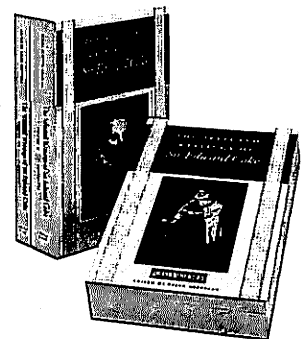
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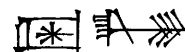


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