

Labour & Trade Union Review

March - April 1991

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**Gulf War -
International Law
redefined & then
discarded by Bush**

**Labour in the 1970s -
Jack Jones interviewed**

**Hunter-gatherers
in a world of machines**

plus

Labour NEC & the Gulf War

Trade Union Diary

Notes on the News



The Knave of Bombs

*(Turn magazine upside down for a less
satisfactory version of John Major)*

Kinnock - Labour's exclusive factor

We must, of course, hope for a Labour Government this summer, even though all we can do is hope.

The Labour Party was never in greater need of active, campaigning support than it is now. But there has never been greater discouragement by the leadership of active, campaigning support.

The leadership banked on winning the next election simply by virtue of the fact that Labour was the only Party not led by Mrs. Thatcher. It has not yet begun to adapt to the new fact that it is no longer the only major party not led by Mrs. Thatcher, and that Mrs. Thatcher may not even be contesting a constituency in the next election.

It made a kind of sense to discourage activity by the Party while Mrs. Thatcher was Tory leader. Mr. Kinnock reckoned - and who are we to say that he was wrong? - that after seven years of his leadership the condition of the Party is such that any spontaneous activity by it would diminish his chances of becoming Prime Minister. He wanted a Party membership which was passive and well-dressed.

While Mrs. Thatcher was still Tory leader, Walworth Road regarded its own Party as a liability. Ideally it would have liked a state of affairs in which the electorate was soothed into forgetting that the Labour Party did not consist entirely of Neil Kinnock. But surely that state of affairs changed last November? When Mrs. Thatcher was deselected, did it not become the case that Labour must go out and win the next election?

There is no indication that Walworth Road is of that opinion. It has acted during the past three months as if the departure of Mrs. Thatcher made no real difference. And it is still intent on sapping the energies of its own Party.

From bits of information filtering through to us from various sources, it seems that up to *eighty* Constituency Parties at this moment have been put under some form of suspension by Mr. Kinnock. That is about 12% of the Party. In some cases, the reason given for suspension is the continuing purge of the Militant tendency - how many years after it first began? In other cases, the reason given is a too militant opposition to the Poll Tax - at a moment when that very militancy is bearing fruit in the policy review of the post-Thatcher Tories. And all of this



after seven years of undisputed and unprecedented dominance by a group of whizz-kids who pride themselves above all else on their organisational and manipulative skills.

The new membership structure combines with the new style of leadership to disconnect the life of the Party from its Branches. The original form of party membership has now been discarded entirely. Once there was no general membership. Now there is only general membership. One no longer

joins through the Constituency Party and the Branch no longer collects dues. The recent membership drive was a drive to get names onto the central computer and Banker's Orders feeding into central funds. Branches are later informed about new members, which they have got, but may never see.

And, after the next election, we are promised that reform of the annual Conference procedure will reduce the decision-making power of the membership below that of the Tory Conference.

The Tories supported the killing exercise against Iraqis, without distinction of whether they were civilian or military, for the good political reason that any distraction from home affairs must benefit them. Neil Kinnock had a range of feasible policy options, but he chose absolutely uncritical support of Bush. Tam Dalyell claims that 150 Labour MPs were uneasy about that policy. The casualty figures maybe 100,000 cannot make them easier in their minds. The patent nonsense about Iraq being the fourth military power in the world is now admitted to be nonsense. Kinnock and Kaufman gave all-out support to the six weeks of one-sided killing and went along with every rhetorical extravagance of Bush and Hurd.

What idealism can now be left amongst politicians who a few years ago were willing to lose an election on a CND defence policy? Joan Ruddock, Clare Short and many others responded to the appeal to cool it on their principles to give Neil a chance to win the election - and they end up with this! We criticise Clare Short for her erratic behaviour on another page, but we can understand how it happened to her.

Jack Jones says, in the interview published in this issue, that Labour has been reduced to the politics of the lowest common denominator. So it has. But on the top line we have a very exclusive factor.

We face an election with little that deserves the name of policy, and with an exclusive group of leaders - an inner group of leaders that is exclusive even within the elected leadership. The rest of us will do our best, of course. But Neil has been so busy marginalising the rest of us that, as never before in the history of the Party, we are reduced to hoping. He has centralised everything in his own hands. So he had better win.



Trade Union Diary

by Dave Chapel

Workers Control, Tories and Christian Democrats

As Mrs Thatcher pointed out, politics is indeed a funny business. Recently, the British Conservative group in the European Parliament announced that they no longer opposed proposals for worker participation. Their position is now officially neutral.

This change has, however, nothing to do with a desire to see industrial democracy. It is due solely to the Tory group's wish to join the Christian Democrat group in Strasbourg. Power in that parliament is effectively wielded by the two major political blocs - the Socialist group and the Christian Democratic group. Smaller groups lose out both in general political terms and in the allocation of jobs such as leadership and even membership of key committees.

Tory applications to join the CD group have already been rejected twice - partly on the grounds of the party's lack of enthusiasm for European union, but equally because the Tories are seen as hostile to trade unions and anti-worker.

European Christian Democrats are neither. Indeed, several of the member parties have direct trade union links in much the same way that Social Democrats have.

The Tories hope that dropping their implacable hostility to workers' rights plus the softer Major approach to Europe will mean that their latest application will succeed. The Dutch and Danish CDs are still opposed and the Germans still skeptical.

Even if it is for all the wrong reasons, we must still welcome the change in Tory policy. A third rejection of their application may even force them to be positively in favour of worker participation.

Print unions - unity now happening

The merger of the two main print unions, which this magazine has argued for since its inception, is at last happening. The members of both the NGA and SOGAT have voted decisively for unity - which will take place at the end of the year.

Labour & Trade Union Review

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Editor: Dick Barry

Editorial Board: Andrew Bryson, Brendan Clifford, Martin Dolphin, Jack Lane, Hugh Roberts, Madawc Williams, Christopher Winch

Address - editorial, advertising and subscriptions:
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While the pro-unity vote was to be expected, once the members were given the chance to vote, I was pleasantly surprised at the outcome in the London Region of the NGA. This Region (there are no branches in London) has previously been dominated by the old Fleet Street chapels, who seemed to think the union existed entirely for their benefit, and sod the rest.

The London outcome, 6352 for the merger and 2873 against, would indicate that this dominance is finally ended.

"The rail bosses have worked out that the investment required to keep the system running in bad weather is not worth while, because we do not have enough bad weather. In other words, the loss of fares over a few weeks in the year would be far less than the cost of investment"

Wapping was, of course, the beginning of the end. With the proposed move from Fleet Street, each union tried to freeze out the other, with the result that Rupert Murdoch managed to get rid of both.

We still have a position where neither have been able to organise at News International, while a much reduced version of their old role has been taken over by the EEPTU. Some thought at the time of the Wapping dispute that this was the beginning of a new role in printing for the Electricians. That is unlikely. Wapping will probably remain for some considerable time an anomaly in the printing trade.

Now that the NGA and SOGAT are no longer each other's worst enemies, perhaps they will spend their considerable collective energy organising the much neglected general printing trade.

For years the non-newspaper sector, and specifically small enterprises, were all but ignored. You had to fight your way into the union as though you were doing them a favour.

Well, the Fleet Street days are over. The divisions in the industry are over. There is now no excuse for the practices which accompanied the old era to continue. Printing is in a bit of a recession at the moment. But it has an excellent future. The new union must gear itself to the revitalised and much more varied industry that emerges from the recession.

In the past printers acquired very great measures of control over their jobs. This control was often abused in squabbles between unions and in jockeying for position. It can now hopefully be used for the advancement of the printers, of the unions and of the industry.

BR problems - staff to blame?

As one of the many victims of the 'wrong kind of snow' on Network Southeast recently, I couldn't help but be struck by the constant courtesy and help from British Rail staff. So far as I could see, they went far beyond what was officially required of them to keep passengers informed and even to reschedule trains.

Guards, i.e. those people BR claims to be surplus to requirements, not only used their PA systems, but visited carriages, and stood on freezing platforms to answer questions and shepherd those passengers answering a call of nature back onto trains when it was time to go again.

Several times I witnessed platform staff phoning back the line to request additional stops from trains when they saw that stopping trains had been cancelled and that passengers at some of the smaller stations might be left marooned.

I have heard that one of Jimmy Knapp's priorities on taking over the old NUR was to instil a spirit of public service into his members. I cannot say if my recent experiences were in any way the result of his policies. But a spirit of public service was nevertheless very much in evidence. If the union did have anything to do with this, it certainly shouldn't hide its light under a bushel. It should praise its members to the skies.

It has long been a national media pastime to knock BR workers. Greedy, selfish, etc. Greed and selfishness, at

least on this occasion, were all characteristics of the railway bosses.

The rail bosses have worked out that the investment required to keep system running in bad weather is not worth while, because we do not have enough bad weather. In other words, the loss of fares over a few weeks in the year (from those who buy day tickets) would be far less than the cost of investment.

The loss of production because people can't get to work, the loss of wages, and the general inconvenience to the public, matter not at all to British Rail's bosses. This is the mentality of a company in the advanced stages of preparing for privatisation. And of course, once BR is privatised, its bosses will be able to award themselves astronomical salary increases, as was the case with other privatisations.

The working class can and does indulge in sectional and selfish squabbles. But it is nice to have it confirmed that when the chips are down, a basic sense of decency, fair play and public spiritedness can come to the fore.

It was also noticeable that as BR middle-management hid in their offices and wrung their hands uselessly, the ordinary staff stuck with the passengers and made some attempt to keep the system running.

The unions oppose privatisation. This is their chance to show not only that privatising our basic services is a bad thing, but that creating systems involving the workforce is essential for

running the railways well. As is a spirit of public service.

Fare dodging

I notice that the Labour Party is proposing some system of compensation for rail passengers when trains are delayed or cancelled. Instinctively, I do not like the idea of compensation. I would not like to see a litigation-prone society develop here as it has in the US.

However, the recent mess on British Rail makes me think that at least one reform is necessary. Many people pay a large slice of their income for weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual season tickets. If BR cannot run trains on a particular day, then there is every case for them refunding that day's portion of the fare *already paid* to the passenger.

It was striking and quite offensive to see the great increase in ticket inspectors during the 'great freeze'. Presumably, very few trains meant that most of them could be inspected. And on the Monday morning of the chaos there were droves of them at the barriers of Victoria station - presumably to make sure that season tickets were renewed, the holders of which hadn't been able to use them for several days.

A more glaring and insulting example of the 'don't give a damn' mentality of BR management could hardly be found. It is heads I win, tails you lose, as far as collecting money is concerned.

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Notes on the News

by Madawc Williams

God and the big battalions

Armies from 30 nations, with a combined population of more than 300 million, gathered to crush a small third world nation of just 17 million. The pretext for the crushing was that small nation's seizure of another even smaller nation, or rather a small semi-autonomous city that had been boosted up as a nation-state after it was found that it was sitting on an enormous wealth of nation. The small nation did in the end offer to unconditionally quit the even smaller 'nation', but was crushed nevertheless.

The rapid collapse of the Iraqi army took everyone by surprise. It had always been a possibility - Iraq's army was strong on paper, but was a largely conscript force up against some of the world's best professional soldiers. Yet the caution of government spokesmen during the first few hours shows that no one was sure of it, and that no one could have counted on it. Saddam Hussein himself contributed to it, by his offer to unilaterally withdraw. Few armies would be ready to stand and die against vastly superior forces, just to defend something that their own government had already agreed to give up.

Saddam Hussein's behaviour has so far been entirely calm and rational. Since America had not protested when he raised the matter just before he grabbed Kuwait, and then began treating him as the worst thing since Hitler after the Saudis agreed to let US troops get a foothold in the Gulf, there was no point in his trying to appease the Americans. Whatever he gave, something new would be invented to impose upon him. It ended up with everyone agreeing with George Bush that only unconditional surrender would do. Bush then once again rewrote the rules and called a cease-fire anyway, with Saddam still strong in Baghdad.

Iraq has sent out a steady rain of Scud missiles throughout the war. All of America's boasts about being able to destroy them have proved false. Patriot missiles could usually hit a Scud as it was coming in to land and reduce the damage it did. This would be of little use against poison gas, or against a warhead packed with contaminating nuclear isotopes. And to put one or other of these in the warhead, in place of

chemical explosives, must surely be a simpler matter than keeping Scud launchers operational against the most powerful and sophisticated air forces in the world.

Saddam seems to have held his worst weapons in reserve on the assumption that he still had some hope of survival. Secret Russian diplomacy may have played a part here. Or Bush may have secretly passed on the message that Saddam would be left in Baghdad with the remnants of his army, provided that no poison gas or radioactive contamination was used. In any event, while there was talk of trying Saddam as a war criminal every time he tried to negotiate a peace, this objective has been forgotten about at the very moment when it would have been a practical option. He has a sporting chance of being able to carry on gassing Kurds and torturing political enemies for many years to come.

Does anyone still think that international law and justice for all was what it was all about?

Wars of religion

Anyone living in London has to take the Paddington and Victoria station bombs very personally. All sorts of ordinary people have on occasions been in those places at those sorts of times. An even wider group would know someone who might have been there, and would have had a worrying wait on that Monday morning wondering if someone they cared about had been hurt or injured.

Someone they cared about. For most Britons, that category would exclude all of the ordinary Iraqis who have been killed in the course of the allied bombing. A large majority of the population went along with the policy of 'softening up' Iraq with generalised bombing before the ground war started. This was publicised as being to save the lives of Western troops, and this is undoubtedly correct. It was also obviously going to cause civilian casualties, as innocent and uninvolved as the commuters who were caught by the bomb at Victoria station.

Of course this bomb, like the mortar attack on Ten Downing Street, was the work of the IRA. But the timing is unlikely to be coincidental. It would be too much of a coincidence if the two biggest IRA operations in London in recent years - arguably the biggest ever - just happened to be occur at the same time as the Gulf War. The two things are linked, although only the IRA could tell us just how they are linked. I doubt if Saddam's fate greatly concerns them:

their normal strategy is that 'England's problem is Ireland's opportunity'.

Arabs and Muslims have had it made abundantly clear to them over the past few weeks that neither their lives nor their opinions count for much in the eyes of Western military planners. It would have been possible to have totally refrained from bombing any targets that were in or near cities. Most of the Iraqi troops were sitting in uninhabited desert regions. It would have been more costly and difficult to do this, and more British and American soldiers would have died. But it would also have avoided both Iraqi civilian deaths and the risk of damage to Muslim holy places.

In the Falklands war, there was never any question of bombing Argentine cities, or even military targets in Argentine cities. Great care was also taken not to kill any of the unfortunate Falkland Islanders. There is little doubt that British military casualties were higher as a result. But - whether or not the war itself was right - fighting it that way was undoubtedly correct. Civilised laws of war try to confine the killing and the dying to the regular military forces.

The war against Iraq has not been civilised. It was supposed to be against the regime of Saddam Hussein, which has of course been extremely brutal in all of the wars it has waged, using poison gas against both soldiers and civilians. But if the claims to be establishing a civilised 'new world order' were to be taken seriously, the war should have been waged with the utmost scrupulousness, ignoring even the most tempting of military targets if the lives of ordinary people would be put at risk. Anyone who works with high-technology devices knows that they can go wrong in drastic and unpredictable ways. The fact that the new bombs and missiles could often be extremely accurate did not mean that they could not also sometimes miss completely. The RAF has admitted that one of the laser-guided bombs aimed at a bridge in the Iraqi town of Fallouja went wild and missed by a full 800 yards (*The Independent*, February 18th).

It must have been known in military circles that some of their 'precision' weapons would kill ordinary Iraqis instead of the military and economic targets that they were aimed at. And that is quite apart from cases like the notorious bunker incident, when the weapon worked perfectly against a place that women and children had been using to shelter themselves against 'wild' precision bombs.

What Michael Alexander said in

L&TUR No. 20 remains valid: *"terrorism directed against a society that you have no intention of trying to conquer or rule is usually counter-productive."* The technically brilliant bombing campaign against Iraq seems mainly to have consolidated both ordinary Iraqis and the bulk of the wider Arab and Muslim world behind Saddam Hussein.

In order to minimise the risk to British and American soldiers - or perhaps we should say, in order to minimise the risk of loss of electoral support for those who launched the war - a global process of polarisation has been begun. In Western countries, people were finding they rather liked the war. Meanwhile Arab and Muslim public opinion has swung very strongly towards Iraq and Saddam. He probably has majority support even in Syria and Egypt. Saudi Arabia's populace seems to be against him, but there has been some dissent, and there is no knowing how strong it might be growing in places where western journalists do not go or among people they do not talk to.

There is a worrying prospect of pro-Western Arab regimes being overthrown over the next few years, with the even more worrying possibility also of further Western interventions to save them. Most worrying of all is the possibility that people like Hurd and Bush might actually want such a future, as an alternative to a peaceful world in which America would lose its leadership to the more efficient and productive economies of Japan and the European Community, and in which Britain would have no special role as America's close and special ally.

The New Right might prefer a future in which a whole series of wars are fought to defend small states or unpopular rulers against the bulk of the Muslim world. They might see them as ideal foes in a permanent war economy - unlike the Russians, who were serious opponents capable of either winning or else destroying the world in a nuclear holocaust. They would see the Muslim world as nice safe enemies, who can be fought conveniently at the same time as their oil wealth is diverted into the West's economy.

Not everyone in the establishment would go along with such a future. Heath and Healey have not. Major will go whichever way the wind blows, as will Kinnock. For now, it seems to be blowing in favour of Hurd and Bush. The technically brilliant overrunning of the Iraqi army and the wanton slaughter of Iraqi soldiers and civilians may not in fact save Western lives in the long run.

The Patriot Game

Labour's chances of winning the next election are now fairly small. The party has allowed Neil Kinnock to impose unprecedented personal power on it, but he cannot use it coherently. He can do nothing coherent, because he is a lapsed leftist who dare not follow the dictates of his own heart. If he had had a real change of heart - like Dennis Healey, who was once a member of the Communist Party - that would be another matter. But Kinnock has lapsed from leftist grace, attracted by the prospect of power, rather than genuinely changing his ideas. And because every move is calculated against the dictates of his own heart, most such moves are not calculated very well.

De Valera was successful in Irish politics because, as he put it, he could look into his own heart and know what the nation would want. Kinnock has to avoid looking into his own heart and work out consciously what will be a vote winner. An increasingly large number of people know that this is just what he is doing. Cynics can sometimes be effective politicians, when no more is needed than to keep everything ticking over safely and when they are whole-hearted in their cynicism. For that task, we already have John Major. Kinnock, though he often acts cynically, also sometimes lets his heart get in the way of all his calculations.

Having decided that Labour must be a loyal and subservient opposition on the matter of the Gulf, Kinnock then baulked at the last minute. His sudden insistence at the eleventh hour that sanctions should be given time to work was irrational. It was a cop-out. To have left hundreds of thousands of troops sitting uselessly in the desert while waiting for sanctions to work would have been ridiculous. The right time to protest was before those troops were sent. Alternatively, he could have taken the bull by the horns and demanded that Saddam be given something, as both Ted Heath and Dennis Healey were suggesting. But the little word appeasement scared him off. Even though the West had been backing and arming Saddam up until last year, he accepted the ludicrous argument that the man was suddenly a threat to world peace who had to be crushed at all costs. He agreed that Labour would go along with the Crusade. (The word was not used, because it would obviously have a nasty sound to Arab and Muslim ears, but Crusade is what it is, with the same mix of greed and self-righteous anger that attended the crusades of the middle ages.) Kinnock said he would back the crusade - but when the critical moment came, when the House of Commons

debated the matter just before war was due to start, he baulked.

Kinnock had worked out what he considered to be a pragmatic policy. But when it came to the point, when a blatantly unjust war was about to be launched with the full support of the UN and the Archbishop of Canterbury, when brave young British airmen and soldiers were about to be sent to die against an enemy cynically armed and made powerful by the West over the past few years, sent to die destroying military installations that British businessmen had made fat profits constructing, he gagged, his heart rebelled, he dithered on the absurd point of continuing sanctions.

Hurd, Thatcher, Major, Bush and Saddam Hussein are all righteous in their own eyes. They can follow policies that will cause untold death and suffering with a light heart and clear conscience. Kinnock, however, is not righteous in his own eyes, and it is a devastating handicap. He had agreed to go along with the war, and then acted weakly in the sight of everyone at the most critical moment. He could be neither a Socialist-Patriot nor a Socialist-Pacifist nor a Socialist-Internationalist. Perhaps a new term should be invented for him: Socialist-Ditherer.

Kinnock used to be an impressive orator. But in those days, he was righteous in his own eyes. He may have played small tricks to get what he wanted, but he basically believed in what he was doing. These days, he flounders as leader of the opposition because he dare not trust his own instincts. His instincts would reveal him as still a Footite at heart. But it is more than a personal fault: Labour is full of lapsed Leftists who are now Socialist-Ditherers. Kinnock accurately represents a large class of people within Labour politics: the people who successfully stopped radical socialist reform through industrial democracy in the 1970s, and then saw their own state-socialist alternative crumble in the face of Thatcherism in the 1980s. They cannot recognise that Thatcherism was a result of mistakes by Labour leaders in the 1970s, because it was they themselves who made many of the mistakes that let her in. "Pragmatically", they act as if nothing besides Thatcherism had ever been possible, and as if the only possible future for Labour is to be Thatcherism with a slightly nicer face.

At the end of January there was a sudden revision of the war aims. People began to state openly what we in the Bevin Society had long known to be the war's true aim, the destruction of Iraq. The

Iraqi army was scheduled to be destroyed, whatever it does. This was a moment when Kinnock could have struck, occupied the moral high ground by saying that it was a betrayal of stated principle as well as a guarantee of lining up the Arab world behind Saddam. But he was not righteous in his own eyes. He did not believe in what he was doing, and had not done so for the past few years. He could not take a moral stand, because he would have had nothing to stand on. Labour's official line has remained a dithering no-and-then-again-yes, with no one having any clear idea what Kinnock would be doing if he was in Ten Downing Street instead of Major.

Again, when the Russians did get Saddam to agree to pull out of Kuwait, without getting anything from the West in return, he dithered again. First he supported the plan, and then he backed off.

There is a strong probability that Major will call an election this June, claiming it is the normal time for such a thing, as it has been during the Thatcher era. He will call it with high and rising unemployment, with a deep and worsening recession, with the weakest and worst-performing economy in Western Europe after more than a decade of uninterrupted rule by his party. Yet Major may well win, because Kinnock will look totally implausible as an alternative. Kinnock is an appeaser of Tories, just as Neville Chamberlain was an appeaser of Fascists. And like Chamberlain, he will discover that each concession only paves the way for more.

Labour has its Neville Chamberlain. The one silver lining in Labour's more or less inevitable defeat is that at least we will then be rid of him. Can Labour then find a Churchillian figure to turn defeat into victory? Time will tell. It was after all Labour that imposed Kinnock on itself: the man was merely responding to what a lot of people wanted. He has only been openly opposed by people who are out of the race for jobs and power, which is not encouraging. Labour without Kinnock will be no improvement if there is no regeneration of its ideals.

Slick and economical with the truth

The Economist has a problem with reporting the Gulf War. Its role in the world is to be the voice of a world-wide English-speaking thinking bourgeoisie. It is a medium through which opinions within the governing class can be intelligently formed and changed. It can not turn itself into a propaganda journal, like most of the rest, since that would

mean that the bulk of this governing class would no longer understand what it was doing or why (and risk suffering the fate of the Soviet elite, which told so many lies and so little truth that it can no longer act coherently). Yet in the case of the Gulf War, to display too much of the truth would be risky. A large measure of double-think is necessary: an uneasy shuffling between abstract morality and greedy pragmatism, when neither method would yield the 'right' answer if applied consistently.

The Economist for February 2nd said: "... the prospect of war began to fade; the power of money began to look greater than the power of guns. Deficit-ridden America was down; the big names of the new order were Germany and Japan. Then came Mr Hussein. In six months he has shattered the first new world order. It will take time to build a second one."

Economist readers are presumably supposed to believe that it was the ubiquitous Saddam Hussein who bullied poor little America into starting a process that has shattered the peaceful world that was starting to emerge in 1990. Saddam alone created a new situation in which America has recovered its hegemony, Germany and Japan are left confused and Iraq vastly weakened. That sort of thinking would be in the wider reaches of 'if you'll believe that, you'll believe anything'.

No doubt readers are supposed to grasp the half-made point that the war is not about protecting rich weak greedy Arab rulers, but about restoring America's position in the world after Japan and Germany have been unfair enough to disbelieve the New Right and flourish wonderfully as a result. Yet they cannot actually say this either. Because if you think about it seriously, it seems likely that Britain and America will merely do further damage to their own economies while building up unrealistic expectations of what the UN can and should do.

There is also the matter of the oil slicks. The Economist, being the place where people expect to find hard facts not available elsewhere, must have felt obliged to tell the truth rather than repeat the propaganda that the bulk of the media has been putting forward. Two essential facts have got quite wide circulation. One is that there are a number slicks, and that those released deliberately by the Iraqis are not the same as the inshore one killing the wildlife, which came either from Iraqi shelling of a Saudi oil refinery or American bombing of Iraqi tankers. The second is that the oil could have clogged

up Saudi desalination plants, as much a legitimate target as the Iraqi bridges, roads and power stations that now lie in ruins.

The third essential fact has mostly stayed out of the mass media. Tam Dalyell has mentioned it, but very few other people seem to have picked this up. But The Economist (February 2nd, p 20) is also aware of it. "Despite disclaimers from the official spokesmen, the slick could hamper the allies' military operations... all ships take in sea water, usually to pass it through heat-exchangers and cool down machinery... Ships operating in seas coated with a thick sludge of crude oil would run the risk of fouling their heat-exchangers, which could then make electronic equipment fail or damage the ships' engines."

That is to say, the oil releases were not 'eco-vandalism', but a rational if unsuccessful military move.

One wonders what might have been said, if the Iraqis had defended themselves against amphibious landings by setting the sea on fire so that their enemies either burnt or suffocated. They must certainly have considered such a tactic - because it was what we British had prepared for the Germans in World War Two, if the intended invasion of England had ever actually been launched.

From Hungary to Lithuania

The Baltic states should be blaming Bush more than Gorbachev for the way they were cracked down on back in January. Britain and France robbed the Hungarians of whatever small chance they had of being left alone by the Suez conspiracy and invasion back in 1956. 35 years later, Britain and America seem to have messed up the limited chance the Baltic states had, by deciding that Saddam was to be humiliated or destroyed rather than simply negotiated out of Kuwait.

I doubt if either case was really an accident. From the point of view of the British Foreign Office what happened to both the Hungarians and the Balts might even be seen as a desirable by-product of other larger operations. Hungary challenged Khrushchev to show if he actually believed his own talk about 'socialist democracy' replacing Stalin's dictatorial methods. But the FO had nothing to gain by the successful development of socialist democracy in Eastern Europe. Whether or not a real democratic renewal of socialism was possible it was certainly nothing they would have been wanting. Let popular power be destroyed in Hungary, and let

the other side have the odium for doing it. Meanwhile a similar populism was scheduled to be destroyed in Egypt, although this part of the operation failed to come off.

Now look at the USSR today. The sort of solution proposed by Boris Yeltsin, a popular renewal of the state on a democratic basis, would not be to the FO's taste. The loss of Eastern Europe has ended Russia's position as a superpower or serious threat. But the sort of peaceful democratic world that seemed to be emerging before the Gulf crisis was whipped up would leave them as a semi-redundant department serving a dwindling middle-sized power. A relatively weak, unattractive and unpopular military dictatorship in Russia would guarantee the FO a continuing important role in the world. And the whole Gulf crisis, with Russia for several months being used by the West against an old ally, was bound to enrage the Soviet military.

Russia has now returned to its normal cold-war role of counter-weight to the West. That's bad news for the Balts and all of the other small nations who hoped to be allowed to quit the Soviet Union. It is also bad for peace. Even a very cut-down Soviet Union would still have enough nuclear weapons to destroy the rest of the world.

The serious alternative would be a world in which all nations have the right of self-determination, and in which the UN could enforce this right effectively, without China, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and America being able to put their own questionable actions 'off limits' by use of the Veto. In 1990, there was at least a small chance of such a world developing. It would have given the Balts their best chance of developing as free and independent nations. And to have peacefully negotiated Iraq out of Kuwait would have improved the chances of such a 'new world order'. But of course, that was the last thing America wanted. For the time being, Bush has stopped it coming into being. And the future for the Baltic states is not at all bright.

Snippets

Even the worst of wars can have its moments of humour. Some are when real thoughts get mixed up with written or spoken words, after the fashion of Mime in Wagner's *Siegfried*.

It was on a late night Channel 4 program that I heard a commentator talk about "driving the Iraqis out of Iraq". Naturally, the 'anchor man' instantly reminded him that he must mean drive them out of Kuwait. But I can't help feeling that he was right first time.

More recently, on the 19th of February, the BBC's Ceefax teletext service had the headline "Only Iraqi Civilians hit, says King." The report in fact detailed how our own dear Tom King was saying that only the Iraqi *military* were a target. But the 'error' ran for several hours until it was finally spotted and corrected.

666 and all that

Iraqi propaganda has been good at getting Arabs on their side - although Bush was their best propagandist, doing things like setting a deadline of noon *Washington time* for the solution of a Middle Eastern problem. He has pleased his own people, and alienated the Arabs. In his victory speech, he said "Seven months ago, America and the world drew a lone in the sand". He barely even bother to conceal his view of Arabs as worthless sand sitting on top of useful and valuable oil. He started the ground war after setting a deadline of noon, *Washington time*. He called a cease-fire at midnight, *Washington time*. The first operation was called 'Desert Shield'. Issue 85 of *Planet*, the Welsh Internationalist magazine, has an Arab describing how the Saudis 'translated' it into Arabic as 'Kingdom Shield'. Yet it was followed by 'Desert Storm'. He has treated the Saudis with contempt. Since they have not yet protested, that contempt is clearly justified. It remains to be seen what, if anything, the ordinary Arabians will do about the matter.

The Iraqis have been clever at winning over people who are very similar to them. But they missed several tricks that could have been used to worry the Americans. The American Christian Right - self-styled Fundamentalists, although they blandly ignore those bits of the bible that don't suit them, and pay great heed to many things that are not in the bible at all - are quite a superstitious bunch. They might think it significant that the Emir who was kicked out was Kuwait's 13th ruler. Moreover, he came to power in 1977, so that you could say his overthrow came in his 13th year of rule. One of the resolutions condemning Iraq was Resolution 666. It was passed by *thirteen* votes to two, on the 13th of September.

None of this should be a cause for worry: the war was certainly a bad business, but even those who believe in a supernatural end-of-the-world should not be expecting it just yet. Superstitions over the number 13 is quite modern. Certainly, medieval trials of witches do not mention covens of 13 - it is a much more recent notion. 666 is an expression in Arabic numerals of the value "six hundred threescore and six" that is mentioned once in the *Book*

of Revelations. (Chapter 13.) It was not until the middle ages that Christians started using Arabic numerals (which were actually of Hindu origin, but came to Europe from the Arabs, along with many other aspects of advanced civilisation). The numerals 666 would have been totally meaningless to Christians in the era when the *Book of Revelations* was written, and for many centuries afterwards. Of course, I suppose that True Believers would consider that such considerations should not be applied to prophecy.

The *Book of Revelations* makes a certain sort of sense if read as a commentary on and protest against the upheavals in the Roman world after the overthrow of the Emperor Nero. And if six hundred threescore and six is written in Latin numerals, as DCLXVI, it could be taken as code for the initial letters of a sentence protesting against him. Or perhaps someone else. Or it may have some completely different meaning, in the context of beliefs that have since been forgotten. The number is even six *hundred and sixteen* according to some texts.

For that matter, the famous Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are not quite as the popular version has them. You find them in Chapter 6 of *Revelations*. Death on his pale horse is there, and two other figures on red and black horses are close to the standard War and Famine. But in place of Pestilence is a figure on a white horse who seems to stand for Conquest. He's actually the first named, but has been squeezed out of popular mythology. Maybe he had a demarcation dispute with War.

When Mr Ronald Nelson Reagan was first elected to the White House, there were some jokes about him having three names of six letters each. Indeed, his notions of 'star wars' could have lent themselves to apocalyptic interpretation. But the Christian Right in America has never let the bible get in the way of their prejudices. Few of them give much regard to the principle of 'love your neighbour as yourself', defined by Jesus as one of the two greatest commandments. Just as the Saudis reinterpret the Koran's clear requirement for religious freedom for Christians and Jews so that they can forbid any such worship from their kingdom, so the Christian Right reinterpret loving your neighbour as a pretext for hating everyone not of their own narrow little sect.

Reagan ended up making the world a much safer place that it had been. Bush has made it rather more dangerous again. If I believed in Satanic machinations, I know where I would be looking for them.

Jack Jones speaks

Jack Jones explains his role in the Labour movement in the 1970s, and how the battle to bring in Industrial Democracy was fought and lost, making something like Thatcherism almost inevitable

L&TUR We'd like to be with the experience of the seventies. As you were a central figure in that period, your reflections would be of great interest and, I think, of great use to the present Labour movement. So could be ask you, what lessons were learned from the experience of the seventies, of Labour in government and the protracted problems that developed in the 1970s.

J.J. I'm not sure about 'what lessons were learned', rather, what lessons *should be* learned, because in retrospect the Labour Party, the Labour Government and the Trade Union movement unfortunately allowed things to develop at the very end of that Labour Government which not only led to defeat in the election, but considerable defeat for the whole of the Labour Movement - not least the Trade Union Movement. We had made considerable progress based on discussions within the Liaison Committee, which brought in the TUC, the Parliamentary Labour Party and the NEC of the Labour Party. We worked at that from 1971 and 1972 onwards. I thought it was necessary to bring back unity after the defeat of Labour in 1970, and above all, we had to get the Industrial Relations Act removed from the statute book, because that was the biggest blow the Trade Union Movement had suffered for a long time.

We produced a lot of policy statements which dealt with the economy, housing

and pensions - in other words, social justice. The social wage was very much in our minds; also the principle of bringing in legislation which would ensure the operation of the Trade Union Movement: the right to representation, to Trade Union recognition, the right to join a Trade Union and elements of Industrial Democracy. All these were involved in our discussions.

And in 1974, we set to work to produce the Employment Protection Act. I described this at the time as a 'shop stewards' charter'. And it was. It was designed to ensure that organised

workers would have the right to information from their employer and the right to time off in the discharging of their Trade Union duties. The principle of extending Health and Safety legislation was proposed and operated. In particular, that Health and Safety representatives would have to be members of independent Trade Unions. That is very important because victimisation could only be avoided by people who were members of some organisation that could protect them.

So although we made a great deal of progress, towards the end the Government, faced with considerable economic difficulties, pressed for a 5% limit on pay. This was unrealistic. I was then retired, by the way, so I watched from the sidelines. The 5% limit was too low, given that the previous one was 10%; and it was the result of acquiescence by the Trade Union Movement, not negotiation with it. On the other hand, those unions who were concerned with national negotiations were beginning to demand far more than was reasonable in the circumstances. Examples of this were the public service and local government unions. And I'm afraid some of my colleagues in parts of the transport industry were doing the same thing. The result was that we had disputes that, in my view, should have been avoided. I pointed out the dangers of this in 1977, when I was defeated at our own

union conference on the issue of pay policy. I said that if the Trade Union Movement and the Labour Government split away from each other, it would put the party of privilege back into power and would result in the poor being kicked in the teeth.

So the lesson we should learn is that the Trade Unions and the Labour Party should work closely together and find ways of maintaining unity in spite of all the difficulties. If ever Labour gets back into power, it is essential that we do not have a repeat of the kind of situation that divided us in 1978 and lost us the election in 1979.

"We almost reached the top of the hill, then the road suddenly gave way and we went right back to the bottom. But it is too simplistic to say that Bullock, of itself, was the turning point. It was one factor, yes."

L&TUR Do you think there is any connection between the failure of the Trade Union Movement to support the Bullock Report proposals for Workers' Control, and the headlong rush into wage demands you have just talked about?

J.J. The Trade Union Movement was a bit divided anyway on the approach to Industrial Democracy. My old friend Hughie Scanlon and one or two others, always took the view that the only thing they should do is extend collective bargaining. I appreciate the idea of extending collective bargaining. And if you read the Bullock Report, you will see that the inference there is that you would have Trade Union channels, the shop stewards, taking collective bargaining into the boardroom. Which I think is still right.



Jack Jones and Frank Cousins at the 1964 Labour Conference

The proposal was a two-
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way connection between the worker representatives, who were serving their colleagues in the Trade Union Movement, reporting back to the workshop floor and taking the workshop floor's point of view into the boardroom. If you are going to ensure that workers succeed and gain improvements in general, then they must have a place in the determination of overall policy of an industrial undertaking, whether it is publicly or privately owned.

L&TUR Were you surprised by the reaction of people like Hughie Scanlon to the Bullock Report?

J.J. Oh no. Let's face it, there was a lukewarm attitude on the part of members of the government: people like Edmund Dell, Shirley Williams, in fact a whole crowd of them. I'd better not mention too many bloody names. They wanted to settle for much less than the Bullock Committee recommended.

L&TUR But was there anybody rooting for it, apart from yourself, in the Trade Union Movement?

J.J. I think we could say that at the time the TUC leadership, that is to say people like Len Murray and David Lea, were in agreement with me. Clive Jenkins, for what it was worth, supported the approach. It was a bit of a battle on my own. But I thought it was highly justified; and still do, even if we are now in a situation where we can only get half the loaf. The fact is that we were in a position to make a lot of progress. If we could have gone on and won an election with an increased majority - I am very mindful of the fact that in 1979 the Labour Government did not have a majority, and that is what brought them down - but a government with a good majority could have really done something in the direction of Bullock, modified in the light of circumstances.

The original report dealt with large-scale industry in the main, and with a situation in which the Trade Union Movement was at its height. We had 12 million members of the TUC, and in the T&GWU 2.1 million. We were moving forward quite rapidly in the sense that, because of the progressive legislation we'd got during that period, we could begin to grapple with the small firm. You can take it that the employers and management of firms of say, 500 or less, operate with a degree of personal dictatorship towards anyone trying to set up a trade union branch, so much so that today many of these small firms could be likened to the days of Charles Dickens.

However, the fact is that now all the safeguards have been virtually taken away. One of the safeguards applying to small firms was the system of wages councils. We had broadened the terms so that they could deal with a wide range of conditions, where it was essential to have some sort of legal framework. That has been taken away. The restriction on hours of work for women and young people has been taken away. But, above all, we had the right to go first to conciliation and then to arbitration on the issue of the 'going rate'. If you had a small firm operating in an industry where there were established wages and conditions in that locality, although you could not strike in such a firm, you could take a dispute to arbitration and get a decision which was legally binding. And with other firms we had the machinery for getting Trade Union recognition where it had been refused for years before.

But we lost all that. So, if we want to draw lessons from the past, we must bear all this in mind and restore the opportunities for working people to be protected, both by law and through their Trade Unions, at the first opportunity.

"There was a short-sighted attitude on the part of some Trade Union leaders - and this is still the case - that if you encourage worker involvement, worker participation, worker representation on boards, it could be at the expense of the individual Trade Union."

L&TUR Do you see the rejection of the Bullock Report as a turning point? We are inclined to look at it as the turning point; that after that Trade Unionism was left to its own devices, which led to Arthur Scargill's approach. At the time you yourself said that it 'had

come to the top of a hill'. It had almost gone beyond Trade Unionism in any recognisable sense.

J.J. We almost reached the top of the hill, then the road suddenly gave way and we went right back to the bottom. But it is too simplistic to say that Bullock, of itself, was the turning point. It was one factor, yes. It showed that the government was not prepared to go all the way in backing the Trade Union movement. I am bound to say that Callaghan expressed support for the approach, but I don't think he ever fought for it. That was partly because the politicians never truly understood manufacturing industry, and did not appreciate the significance of Bullock as much as I hoped they would. That is not to criticise, because in general Callaghan was sympathetic

L&TUR If the unions had been united with you on the subject of Bullock, do you think the government would have been forced to fight for it?

J.J. Yes. Had there been greater unity in the Trade Union movement on that, I think it would. There would have been a sense of purpose. I think there was a short-sighted attitude on the part of some Trade Union leaders - and this is still the case - that if you encourage worker involvement, worker participation, worker representation on boards, it could be at the expense of the individual Trade Union. But I don't see that. I think it would strengthen the Trade Union Movement.

Looking at the wider European scene, if we now get European legislation for works councils, I would regard that as a step forward and we should try to ensure that the representatives on those legal works councils are representatives from independent, bona fide Trade Unions. Without that there could be the danger of victimisation. Works councils would be a step in the direction that ultimately we would want: adequate representation on

the board. It is the families of the employees, not just the employees themselves, who are involved in the jobs the people do.

And acceptance of Bullock at the time, even if it would have had to be taken step by step, would have meant a good message to everyone: that the workers counted in society, counted in industry.



Jack Jones and Harold Wilson in 1974

L&TUR And don't you think it would have brought home to the electorate that the Trade Unions were acting quite responsibly in accordance with their power, and that they weren't just throwing their weight about?

J.J. That's right. Those would be precisely my words on that.

L&TUR Do you think that, to put it crudely, because of the failure of the movement to adopt Bullock, and other mistakes that were made towards the end, that it has to accept some of the responsibility for Thatcherism?

J.J. No question about that.

"The party has been bemused by the tremendous majorities that Thatcher & Co. have managed to secure in the various elections, They have been asking themselves what they could do to win back public opinion to their side, and they have sought, if you like, the lowest common denominator to gain support."

L&TUR Were you surprised by the success of Thatcherism?

J.J. No. I thought that with the degree of disunity that was demonstrated towards the end, it was quite clear that the Tories were going to get back. I didn't think they would get the majority they did, but I was afraid that if they got back they would hold on to power, and, holding on to power, they would drive the anti-Trade Union attitude into legislation. As well as removing a lot of the improvements we had secured for children and pensioners, for example.

L&TUR What did you think of Labour's reaction to Thatcherism in power during the eighties?

J.J. I think that the party has been bemused by the tremendous majorities that Thatcher & Co. have managed to secure in the various elections. They have been asking themselves what they could do to win back public opinion to their side, and they have sought, if you like, the lowest common denominator to gain support. I can understand the politicians looking in that direction. They have to try and find ways and means of reviving possible support. But it is unfortunate that there have not been the close links that Labour had with the Trade Union Movement that we had in the run-up to

the 1974 election. I know that a number of the political leaders of the Labour Party feel that it is disadvantageous to have too close a link with the Trade Union Movement. But it was never a question of the Trade Unions *laying down* what should be done. It was a question of discussing what the problems of working people are, and how we resolve them together. There is no doubt that the Trade Union Movement can be very influential - as can the Pensioners' Movement, for example. So it was right that we should talk closely together, and right that we should have a liaison. But that has been abandoned and does not exist any more.

L&TUR That does not bode well for the future, does it?

J.J. No, it doesn't. I think the Labour Party leadership should seek again to get closer discussions. But the Trade Union leaders must not approach those discussions - if ever they take place again - with the idea that they can lay down the law, and that everything they say is absolutely right. It is no use 'doing a Scargill' talking to Labour leaders. That attitude of rhetoric, irrespective of whether you get anywhere at all, is unhelpful. There is a need for both sides to exercise good will towards each other.

L&TUR I suppose we have to accept that there will be no increase in intimacy this side of an election.

J.J. I'm not sure. I would hope there would be.

L&TUR What would you like to see as Labour's priorities on the broad front of Trade Unions and industrial relations when Labour gets into power?

J.J. I think that Neil and the people around him have got a number of priorities absolutely right. They have said that in terms of immediate or very early legislation they would have two priorities, children and pensioners. They have given a commitment to increasing child benefit and increasing pensions, and I hope they will keep it.

There has been a lot of argument about labour legislation. In a recent speech Neil Kinnock made clear that the approach to labour legislation would be to restore the legal right to be a member of a Trade Union, and the legal right to representation. This is very important. If we had the legal right to representation we could make a great deal of progress, for example, in North Sea oil rigs, and the small firms I mentioned earlier, where the great problem is fear of victimisation.

If you want to strike under the Tory law which changed the 1974 Labour Government's legislation, the employer can retain in employment those who go back at a very early stage and when the rest go back he can sack all of them together, or he can pick out whoever he thinks ought to be sacked. That fear of victimisation must be removed. Workpeople must have at least the right to talk to their employer without fearing the sack. This has gone, and has got to be restored.



Three generations of Joneses

The National Health Service is also a vital priority, as are children, pensioners and housing. The Trade Union Movement should want to talk about that, because working people must have the right, not only to jobs but to decent homes. That means getting back to the stage where the nation is involved, and the municipal authorities are involved, whether it is building houses to rent or even to buy.

L&TUR Could we move on to the campaign that you are mostly known for at the moment. Would it be a good idea to have a separate TUC affiliated pensioners' union? What can present unions do for pensioners?

J.J. Before I retired, I had taken steps to try to set up our own T&GWU retired members association. I then proceeded to persuade the TUC, Age Concern and other bodies to set up the National Pensioners' Convention. We produced a common platform on which we could approach the government of the day. Also, we could publicise the minimum conditions which ought to be available to all retired people. This has worked reasonably well. But I was always clear that, since we had such a large force organised in Trade Unions, it was vital that we should try to get the unions interested in involving retired people as well as those at work.

Some unions followed: NALGO, the teachers, who had had retired associations for some time, the Tailors and Garment Workers, the print unions, the furniture unions, unions of that kind. Other unions still had retired members in the union and tried to look after their interests. We pressed for the TUC to set up a TUC Pensioners' Committee. I felt that it should be free-standing but have direct representation to the General Council of the TUC. The TUC General Council opposed that idea, and we eventually compromised with the Social Insurance Committee - six members on a TUC pensioner's committee, with a representative from each of the unions, supposedly to represent their retired members. When there is a retired members' association, it is usually people from that which represent the unions.

It is a progressive system, because it means that the TUC regularly considers reports from that committee. It is also represented on a European co-ordinating committee for retired workers - a by-product of the European TUC, of which I am a vice-president. It is progressive, but we have not seen enough. In my experience, nothing unites people more in their retirement than the link with the past, with the job they worked in, the industry they worked in. Here in

London, we have two of our retired members' branches who are nearly all retired dockers. Well, it's fine. They are not fighting each other any more! But they've got this nice link. They can talk about the past in their industry, the present in their industry, but they are also talking about problems because there is a focal point. When we call upon them to take part in a demonstration or a rally or a lobby of parliament they are involved. So that is the sort of thing we are trying to do. But I would like to feel that other unions, not so far involved, would do more. Some union leaderships are not keen on it.

L&TUR What do you think are their reasons?

J.J. I don't know. In some cases, nearly all branch secretaries are retired members. It would draw them away, perhaps. Also, I think some people are afraid that the left would be unduly influential. Let's face it, the left shop steward is the more active. When he goes into retirement, he is more likely to be prepared to go on being active. Some would do it for a highly political purpose, but most would do it because they want to use their skills after they retire. I don't mind where they come from, right, left or centre, as long as they are fighting for the retired workers.

"In the future more and more is going to be produced by less and less people. People tell me that if that happens, there won't be enough people to contribute to National Insurance, therefore we won't be able to afford to pay the pensioners. That is nonsense."

L&TUR Do you think there is any virtue in the idea of retirement being more flexible, and not being compulsory?

J.J. It is a live issue for intellectuals and academics! I don't think it is a very good idea to encourage people to go on after the normal age of retirement. On the other hand - and the Trade Union Movement can be criticised for this - we have allowed discrimination against the older worker. When you get a redundancy, the employer will look towards the over-50s, or even the over-40s in the motor industry, and push them out. They become a little less flexible, a little less physically fit - or the employer thinks they are. I think that discrimination must be fought strongly. The Labour party is now

saying that there should be a degree of flexibility between the ages of 60 and 70, and that pensions should be equal for all at 60. I agree with that.

I think people should be encouraged to retire at 60, especially in a period when we have these massive levels of unemployment, particularly among young people. I think any idea of suddenly removing the urge towards early retirement is detrimental. We have got to do a lot more to encourage people to be active in retirement, physically and intellectually active. And I believe that if you ask the average person coming up to retirement, you will find that they want to retire early. They hope it is going to be a happy occasion for them, though unfortunately a lot of them think it is going to be one long holiday, and it doesn't work out like that. Many things could be done to improve leisure opportunities. It is no use inventing the idea of early retirement and then setting about trying to destroy it. It is like the idea we have always worried about, namely, arguing for a shorter working week and then saying there should be unlimited overtime.

In the United States, there has been a big division between the white collar people and the blue collar retired person. Some of the white collar people in government and local government service wanted no limits on retirement. The blue collar workers, because they are concerned about employment factors, have argued that they should try to restrict opportunities for working beyond the normal retirement age. Indeed, the policy of unions like the Automobile Workers and the Machinists has been '30 years and out'. There is a lot to be said for that, especially if there is unemployment.

All the indications are that in the future more and more is going to be produced by less and less people. People tell me that if that happens, there won't be enough people to contribute to National Insurance, therefore we won't be able to afford to pay the pensioners. That is nonsense. If, by some miracle, you could have one great machine that produced everything you needed without human labour, does that mean we'd all starve? Our folks were arguing in the old days for the two-hour day. They were demonstrating that it was possible to produce all that was necessary in a shorter working day and a shorter working week. I was party to a report, based on German experience, to the effect that if every able-bodied person in society performed a useful function, you could do all that was necessary in a 19 hour week. This does not mean that they cake gets less. It gets bigger. ☐

War Without Law

This is the text of Brendan Clifford's address to a Bevin Society Public Meeting held on 7th February, 1991.

Rather than talk about law in general, I will try to say something about the inability of the British Left, for historical reasons, to cope with matters involving law. I think that that inability, combined with other things, has resulted in what must be the all-time low in the social influence of the British Left this past year. I know a fair amount about British history and British working-class history, and I do not think there has ever been a time in which the views of the Left, or the radicals, or - call it what you will - that segment of society that is supposed to be discontented with the existing state of affairs, and to be doing something to reorganise the existing state of affairs - has been of such little consequence in society. Not even at the height of the Napoleonic Wars was the radical movement of so little consequence as it is today. Not least among the reasons for this fact that a war is being fought in the Gulf in the name of 'international law', and most of the radical movement has got nothing to say about it.

The unfortunate history of the British Left in this respect is that it emerged from the Nonconformist movement and looked backwards to the 1640s and 1650s for its inspiration. It was therefore millenarian, in a religious sense, for a good many generations. When I came to London in the 1950s, you still had a lot of Puritan millenarianism in the socialist movement. In that period it began to be superseded. The religious impulse began to break up, and at that point you had a new form of millenarianism supplanting it, the Marxist economic determination of history.

Law had something to do with the Puritan inheritance. Around 1650, with the rise of the Commonwealth and the Cromwellians, there was a lot of talk about law. John Lillburne and the Levellers were very hot on the subject of law. But law meant something to them which is quite different from what law means, historically, in the real world. It was, in their view, a means of organising harmony in society under the influence of God, and they were absolutely convinced that the millennium was about to begin in 1650. They believed in establishing a body of theocratic law that would be coterminous with order. Law and order would be identical because God was working behind the scenes organising a general harmony in society.

Three hundred years later you had basically similar Marxist ideas taking over when the religious ideology was breaking up in the Labour movement. Economic determinism would bring about a sort of pre-ordered harmony, and that law would be the form which this harmony would take.

"The structure of the United Nations is designed to prevent an evolution towards anything like a system of international law, because the veto is far too powerful a thing for any state having it to think of giving up, or to think of admitting any other states to the same privilege."

Now, historically, law is based on conflict, and it has to do with conflict. But in general the Left has never resigned itself to living in a society in which conflict is inherent - law being a means not of overcoming conflict, but of giving expression to conflict - and enabling conflict to develop, rather than suppressing conflict.

Because the Left never resigned itself to a world which functioned through a conflict of interests, and in which there was no foreseeable end to the conflict of interests, it has never been able to devise the most effective ways of furthering the working class interest. It has assumed that all other interests would become redundant through the rise of a single, harmonious working class interest, whereas in reality the working class itself had become a sphere with a diversity of interests. The Left as a

whole never accepted the actual structure of the world, and therefore it has been increasingly at odds with the real development of the world. And now it has lost all influence whatsoever.

Twenty years ago, there was a lot of talk about the Left exercising hegemony. And an awful lot of intellectual effort went into the analysis of hegemony. Hegemony, as I understand it, means that some body in society exercises an influence beyond its own boundaries. It is capable of exerting some sort of general social influence. But, in the course of analysing 'hegemony', the actual hegemony exerted by the socialist movement kept on contracting. And now it is nil. Now, in fact, the Left does not even hegemonise itself, so to speak. You have Clare Short, Joan Ruddock and all of these people raising their hands for a war policy that is even more extravagant than the Government's war policy, and they simply do not know what they are doing because the world has got beyond their comprehension. They have an utterly inadequate philosophical conception of the world. They do not have either of the millenarian conceptions any more, in any active sense: neither the religious one, nor the Marxist one, and they have got nothing whatsoever in its place. They have got absolutely empty heads, and all they can think of doing in order to have a chance of winning the next Election is to outrun the Government in the warmongering.

They have never accepted that the world operates through conflict, therefore they can never be effective within the conflict that makes up not only national society, but international society. And if they cannot cope with domestic law - as they



The most valid argument in the sphere of International Law

cannot - they certainly cannot cope with what calls itself 'international law'. They either reject law as a complete and total fraud, or else they have to swallow what is presented to them as law, holus bolus. But they have no critical faculties capable of operating once the word 'law' is pronounced to them.

That is one source of their complete impotence at the moment. The other has to do with the ending of the cold war, and the 'peace dividend'. The 'peace dividend' is one of the great delusions of the Left. It is the supposition that production can be transferred from war materials to other materials, more socially useful. If you look into the history of society you find that states which are pitiful in their efforts to produce consumer goods can get themselves sufficiently to produce war material. A sort of concentration can be applied to the production of war goods that cannot be applied to the production of peace goods. I have been saying for years that, if the Cold War ended, and the armaments race ended, there was no reason whatsoever to assume that the standard of living would therefore increase. All that would probably happen would be that the concentration on war production would cease. And it could even be that the rest of the economy would slacken off. There would certainly be no automatic transference of production from armaments to normal peacetime commodities.

A year and a half ago, when the Cold War ended, there was an expectation of some kind of general harmony prevailing in the world, and of armaments production transferring to other forms of production, and having better hospitals, etc. This was a groundless assumption. Once the conflict of the Cold War ended, it was likely that some other sort of conflict would move into the centre of the state. And the best producers of consumer goods would not be the economies suffering from a cut-back in arms production.

The Labour Party and the socialist Left on the fringes of the Labour Party did not anticipate anything like this, and they did not appreciate that the ending of the Cold War was bound to have a disorienting effect on international affairs. The Cold War ended in the most peculiar way. I do not think any conflict in history has ever ended the way the Cold War ended. You had the whole world divided into two major military blocs, with a lot of intermediary forces, which were able to tack to and fro, and which had some freedom and some influence because they had some bargaining power with the

major blocs. But one of the blocs simply opted out of the struggle. There was not a war. Nothing decisive happened. Nothing occurred to reduce the power of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union just threw itself into chaos. The Cold War ended without any conflict, without any development. And the other side suddenly found itself in the position of being in control of the world. If the Soviet bloc opts out of the conflict, all that can happen is that the other bloc sees itself as being in command of the world. It followed logically. But it could not happen that the other blocs could actually take over the government of the world. The world is a long way from being sufficiently subservient or orderly for America to actually govern it, but it had to be that the American President assumed that he was suddenly the effective government of the entire world, and he had to try to make his rule operative, if no other view of things was put forcefully to him.

"If the Labour Party had any real idea of what a system of international law involved, it could have developed a critical attitude towards what the United States and the Government here, and the United Nations, so-called, has been doing since last August, without pushing themselves on to an untenable limb, such as the Militant group or the Socialist Workers' Party occupy."

Now, the Labour Party should have been thinking about all of this in these past two years. And it would have been thinking about it, and preparing for a new form of conflict in the world, instead of dreaming about the emergence of a preordained harmony, if it had had a more realistic conception of what made the world tick. But it was just drifting along, as far as one could see, without the leading group in the Labour Party having given a moment's thought to what was happening, and it was utterly unprepared for what suddenly erupted.

Last August they were told that a war was to be fought in the Gulf in order to maintain the system of 'international law'. They had never given a moment's thought to whether there existed a system of international law or not. If they had given it any realistic thought, even in terms of British political philosophy, they would have known perfectly well that a system of

international law did not exist. They would have known that the last thing that is going to exist in the real world is an effective system of international law.

There are problems in developing a system of international law immensely greater than the very great problems that existed in Britain, and still exist in most of the world, about developing effective systems of domestic law. Systems of domestic law developed backwards, in a sense, in that they began with authority. And authority, being concerned to have more systematic administration of power, drew up rules for its administration. And these rules gradually became systems of law administered by judges. Very few people had access to these laws in England until the nineteenth century. Law was for the gentry. But, with the process of democratisation, law becomes accessible to most people, or parts of the law become accessible to most people. Eventually - within the present century - law becomes generally accessible. Everybody has access to law after a fashion. A person has rights that, if he puts his mind to it, he can get enforced on the basis of law if somebody tramples on them.

That is invariably the way domestic law develops. It is never developed according to the theory of the social contract, i.e., people do not get together and agree to set up a state in which everybody will have equal rights. The social contract is the end product of this development and not the beginning.

But, in the case of international law, it can only develop according to the theory of the social contract, i.e., the states must agree amongst themselves to have a system of law that will guarantee something to all of them, and that none of them are exempt from. The other way, that of having a system of world order first, and then it developing into a system of law, that cannot happen in the real world, no matter how great the power of the United States becomes. It cannot establish a sufficiently secure system of world order for that system to begin to develop into a system of law. It is always going to be a very brittle system that has to rest on sheer authority. the world is not going to become a sufficiently subservient place for a system of international law to be deduced from a system of international authority. But the only object of the United Nations is to establish a system of international authority, through a collaboration between the United States, Britain and Russia, with France added, and China added, after a fashion. And,

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How America Destroyed the Peace

by Hugh Roberts

*"We had to destroy it in order to save it."
(American saying, dating from Vietnam,
where it originally referred to some
hapless Vietnamese village, since when
it has become applicable to virtually
everything.)*

In his broadcast to the nation on January 18 explaining why British forces had gone into action in the Gulf, John Major declared that *"In the patient diplomacy of the last five months leaders from around the world have sought peace, and then sought it again. But unfortunately, Saddam Hussein has chosen war. He has rejected every attempt to reach a peaceful solution"* (The Times, January 18, 1991).

The first sentence of this statement is formally true. Numerous 'leaders from around the world' had indeed sought peace and had done so repeatedly. They included King Hussein of Jordan, Yassir Arafat of the PLO, King Hassan of Morocco and President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria, not to mention former European leaders of the stature of ex-prime minister Edward Heath and ex-chancellor Willy Brandt. But this sentence is only formally true, in the Jesuitical sense of truth. For it was unquestionably intended to suggest that the British and American leaders who were now waging war had previously sought peace. This is the opposite of

the truth. It was they who consistently acted to thwart the peace-seeking initiatives of everyone else.

The second sentence is quite untrue. In uttering it, the British prime minister simply lied to the British people. And he lied in the full knowledge that this lie would be echoed and endorsed by the leaders of the Labour Party. Three days later, Gerald Kaufman declared in the House of Commons that *"What is quite clear is that this is a war that no one wanted, except for Saddam Hussein...it has to be said that, in the end, Iraq rejected diplomacy."*

There had been an enormous amount of diplomacy between August 2, 1990 and January 15, 1991. There was the diplomacy, in which Iraq was vigorously involved, which sought a peaceful solution. And there was the Anglo-American diplomacy which sought to consolidate the anti-Iraq military alliance and frustrate the efforts of the peace-makers. What Britain and America have called diplomacy in respect of Iraq has been an affair of ultimatums issued in the full knowledge that Saddam Hussein could not possibly comply with them without subverting the Iraqi state, backed up by an economic blockade. This, as Edward Heath has rightly pointed out, has been the negation of diplomacy.

The economic blockade has been described throughout by official British

and American spokesmen as "sanctions". In his broadcast on January 18, John Major declared that *"We applied sanctions to make our point clear. We refused to trade with Iraq."* That was another lie told to the British people. What Britain and America did went far beyond refusing to trade.

Sanctions would indeed have involved a refusal to sell goods to Iraq and to buy goods from Iraq. Sanctions were imposed on Rhodesia and on South Africa. They damaged the economies of these two countries, and exercised some long-term influence on the evolution of the political situation there, without bringing either country to its knees. But what the British and Americans organised from early August was a full-scale land, sea and air blockade of Iraq to prevent any goods leaving or reaching the country. The **Shorter Oxford Dictionary** (Third revised edition, 1977) defines 'blockade' as *"the shutting up of a place, blocking of a harbour, line of coast, frontier, etc. by hostile forces or ships, so as to stop ingress or egress."* The critical word in this definition is 'hostile'. Hostility implies a state of war. And in the conventional terminology of what is fondly referred to as 'International Law', an economic blockade is indeed considered to be an act of war, a belligerent act.

The only western government to state the truth of this last August was France. France initially took the position of agreeing that UN sanctions should be imposed on Iraq, as they had been on South Africa, but that it did not support

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even if the three of them could agree on a system of world order, which, in the nature of things they cannot, the world is still much too diverse a place for even a tripartite system of order to develop into a system of law. It will remain nothing but a system of order, lacking consent and provoking resistance.

The League of Nations was an open-ended institution within which a system of international law could have developed. It could not have developed in the twenty years that was allowed, but the states who were members of the League of Nations were more or less equal, even though there were some permanent members on what was the equivalent of the Security Council. Those permanent members did not have a veto and new permanent members were added as new states grew stronger. But there is no possibility of evolution built into the structure of the United Nations. In fact, the structure of the United Nations is designed to prevent an

evolution towards anything like a system of international law, because the veto is far too powerful a thing for any state having it to think of giving up, or to think of admitting any other states to the same privilege. It just is not a possible framework of development. That is not to say that the United Nations is an entirely useless thing. It is only to say that it is not a possible framework for the development of a system of law.

Since this war is being fought in the name of international law, if the Labour Party had any real idea of what a system of international law involved, it could have developed a critical attitude towards what the United States and the Government here, and the United Nations, so-called, has been doing since last August, without pushing themselves on to an untenable limb, such as the Militant group or the Socialist Workers' Party occupy. The Left, insofar as it has said anything, has only said it in the form of the Socialist Workers' Party, the International

Socialism Group, and that is not a position that can influence the general opinion of Britain. But it is, in effect, the only alternative to rowing in uncritically behind the Government at the beck and the nod of Kinnock and Kaufmann. And it is because the Labour Party has itself given no realistic thought at all to the way that the world is composed that the real alternatives before leading members of the Labour Party are to support the Government mindlessly, or to jump out on a limb with the International Socialism group. That, I assume, is why people like Joan Ruddock and Clare Short can do nothing else but support the Government, once the slogan of international law is shouted at them.

All I have tried to do here is to describe how it came about that, at this particular juncture, that would in certain respects seem to be full of opportunity for the Left, it is bankrupt in a way that it has never been in two or three hundred years of left-wing politics in Britain.

a blockade. But having, in a passing moment of integrity, reaffirmed this vital distinction, it allowed itself to be induced by Anglo-American pressure to forget all about it.

By mounting a blockade on Iraq last August, Britain and America, under the UN cover, made war on Iraq. This was an extraordinary thing to do. Iraq had not gone to war with either Britain or America, and had no intention of doing so. It suddenly found itself on the receiving end of a major act of war by the strongest military powers in the world. It reacted by making strenuous proposals for a peaceful settlement, and when these were rejected, by internment enemy aliens, as is normal in time of war, and was roundly denounced for taking 'hostages' in consequence.

The internment of enemy aliens was the only hostile action undertaken by Iraq towards Britain and America and the other members of the military alliance ranged against it before January 16. And it was 'hostile' only in the technical sense of the word. In substance it was unquestionably an entirely defensive act, only taken on August 16, that is a full fortnight after all-out economic warfare had been launched against Iraq, eight days after American and British troops had begun arriving on its doorstep in preparation for a possible military campaign against it, and four days after Iraq's proposals for a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement had been rejected out of hand by President Bush.

In such circumstances there was every reason for the Iraqi government to fear that British and American and other western nationals in Iraq might become the target of spontaneous acts of violence from ordinary Iraqis, as Egyptian migrant workers in Iraq had already become, and that western nationals in Kuwait might be involved in embarrassing and possibly disastrous incidents with Iraqi troops there unless taken into protective custody without further delay. It should be noted that western nationals had had a fortnight to get out of both Iraq and Kuwait by this stage, and had been deliberately discouraged by their own governments from doing so.

On the day of Major's broadcast, Douglas Hurd stated that *"we have now joined in the war which Saddam Hussein started on August 2, 1990"* (The Times, January 18, 1990). There can be no doubt that British public opinion has sincerely believed in the truth of this statement, and that its support for the war has been in large part premised on this belief. Had Douglas Hurd said that *"Saddam Hussein has now been forced to join in the war which we declared on*

him on August 2, 1990" the British people might have viewed the business of killing a hundred thousand Iraqis in a different light.

In order to force Iraq to join in this war, Britain and America relentlessly sabotaged every effort by Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait on terms which would have permitted the government of Iraq to survive. The crucial acts of sabotage occurred between August 2 and August 10, 1990. These acts were entirely successful, and established a state of affairs which made war inevitable.

The entire Arab world was united in condemnation of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. While many Arab governments agreed that Iraq had substantial grievances against Kuwait, they could not accept that these justified the use of force by one Arab state against another. Their own self-interest as states required them to ensure that the invasion was reversed, and there can be little doubt that they would have united to ensure this, had they been given time to do so.

The first Arab state to condemn the invasion was Algeria, which did so on August 2. At a meeting of the council of ministers of the Arab League on August 3, a resolution was carried with a two-thirds majority. This was in three parts: (i) condemning the invasion; (ii) convoking an extraordinary Arab summit to find an Arab solution to the crisis; (iii) rejecting any foreign intervention, whether direct or indirect, in Arab affairs. The second and third parts of this resolution were proposed by Algeria, which clearly had a shrewd idea of what was in the offing. The fourteen countries which supported this resolution were Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. It is important to note that the four major Arab states which subsequently joined the US-led military alliance against Iraq - Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Syria - all supported this resolution.

At this stage in the crisis the situation was wide open. The Arab world was united in condemning Iraq and there was every prospect of the Arab League organising effective pressure to persuade it to withdraw. For its part, Iraq had not yet dug itself into an impossible position. It had not annexed Kuwait, and was making clear to Arab and western governments that it was willing to withdraw without further ado if given satisfaction on its border dispute and financial claims. What then happened was a massive escalation of the crisis engineered wholly and entirely by the

United States, which split the Arab world down the middle, destroyed the credibility and influence of the Arab League and scotched all chance of a peaceful settlement.

On August 4 Saddam Hussein was supposed to go to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia to negotiate a settlement with King Fahd, as had been arranged by King Hussein of Jordan in talks in Baghdad on August 2 and 3. Saddam was so confident that a deal was possible with Fahd that Baghdad radio announced that Iraq was ready to pull out of Kuwait by August 5. But a crucial participant in the planned Jeddah mini-summit was Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak. Saddam and King Hussein both believed they had secured Mubarak's agreement to the summit. But in the event Mubarak decided not to go to Jeddah after all. According to Pierre Salinger, once President Kennedy's Press Secretary and now ABC News' chief foreign correspondent, Mubarak changed his mind under American pressure.

On August 5, Yassir Arafat, who had been strenuously trying to promote Arab peace negotiations, saw Saddam in Baghdad. *"As Arafat walked into Saddam's office, the Iraqi leader opened the conversation by saying: 'Who sabotaged the summit?' Arafat didn't really know then but he pushed Saddam, saying that an early political solution was absolutely necessary. Saddam replied immediately: 'Go and see the Saudis. We are ready to discuss.' Heading for Saudi Arabia, Arafat stopped in Cairo for another talk with Mubarak. He told him that Saddam is ready to discuss withdrawal from Kuwait but found the Egyptian President very antagonistic, possibly due to increasing pressure from the US."*

"When Arafat arrived in Saudi Arabia on August 7, he was told he could not see King Fahd, who was heavily involved in discussions with US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney" (Pierre Salinger, *'Faltering steps in the sand'*, The Guardian, February 4, 1991).

Also on August 7, President Bush ordered the immediate despatch of 4,000 American combat troops and aircraft to Saudi Arabia.

It was only *after* these developments, which made clear that the American government was actively intervening to prevent an Arab solution and had already effectively suborned the Egyptian and Saudi governments to that end, that the Iraqi government declared the annexation of Kuwait, on August 8. This did not mean that Iraq was no longer willing to consider a withdrawal. On the contrary, it was clearly only a holding operation on Saddam's part, for his next move was to ask Arafat to attend the Arab League

summit scheduled for August 9-10 in Cairo and put forward fresh proposals for a settlement there.

According to some sources, a joint PLO-Libyan proposal, which significantly made no reference to any wider Middle East issues, but concentrated on the matters at issue between Iraq and Kuwait and urged serious negotiations between the two parties (in line with one of the clauses in UN Security Council Resolution 660 which everyone except Edward Heath subsequently forgot about) was put forward, but its inclusion on the summit agenda was vetoed by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, so that it was not even discussed. According to Salinger, Arafat's proposal was simply that five key leaders (whom Salinger does not specify, but who were presumably Mubarak, King Fahd, the Emir of Kuwait, King Hussein of Jordan and Arafat himself) should go to Baghdad to thrash out a deal which would then be submitted to the rest of the Arab League in Cairo for its approval. *"But when Arafat...proposed the five-nation delegation, it was immediately vetoed by Egypt and Syria"* (Salinger, loc.cit.).

Instead, a very different resolution was proposed and voted. This not only differed from Arafat's conciliatory motion. It also differed profoundly from the three-part resolution passed by the Arab League Council of Ministers on August 3. The new resolution (i) verbally reaffirmed the decisions of the Arab League Council of Ministers meeting of August 3 (while actually ignoring the second and third of those decisions); (ii) affirmed the Arab League's obligation to respect the decisions of the UN Security Council contained in resolutions 660 and 662; (iii) condemned Iraqi aggression and resolved not to recognise the Iraqi decision to annex Kuwait; (iv) called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait; (v) affirmed Kuwaiti sovereignty and independence and called for the restoration of the lawful government of Kuwait; (vi) agreed to respond positively to the requests of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to send Arab forces to their defence.

According to Salinger, *"Arafat was stunned...when he sat down at the Arab League conference table and found before him a communiqué already written. He immediately came to the conclusion that it was written in English and translated into Arabic. Four other delegates to that conference whom I have talked to came to the same conclusion."* (Salinger, loc.cit.) According to other sources whom I have spoken to, the communiqué actually was in English.

This 'communiqué' - in fact, a draft resolution - was presented to the conference by Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It was supported in addition by 10 other states: Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, Syria, United Arab Emirates. This gave the resolution a majority, with 12 votes out of a total of 21.

Of these 12, only four are substantial states: Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Syria. The remainder are of no military significance and their sovereignty in foreign affairs has long been a polite fiction. Djibouti and Somalia have long been notorious for voting with Egypt on virtually all matters; the Lebanese government is controlled by Syria; Oman is a British client, and Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE were in the Saudis' pocket in foreign affairs.

None of the other substantial Arab states voted for this resolution. Libya and the PLO voted against; Mauritania and the Sudan expressed reservations; Algeria, Jordan and the Yemen abstained; Iraq and Tunisia were absent.

American and British propaganda after August 10 repeatedly claimed that the entire Arab world was united in condemning Iraq and supporting the UN-sponsored Operation Desert Shield. In reality, the unity which had existed within the Arab world on August 3 had been shattered by August 10. It had been shattered by the way Egypt and the Gulf states railroaded the Arab League summit to force through an American-inspired resolution which destroyed the possibility of a negotiated Arab solution in order to provide the most transparent of fig leaves for the establishment of a massive western military presence in the Gulf.

On August 10 the possibility of a peaceful, negotiated, Arab solution to the Gulf crisis was dead, killed by US pressure. It was made clear to Iraq that it would not be allowed to secure a negotiated withdrawal from Kuwait on terms which would enable the Iraqi government to survive. It was made clear to Saddam Hussein that his main enemies in the Arab world, Syria's Hafez el Assad, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak, and the Gulf monarchies, were all aboard the American-led military coalition ranged against him, and that, having chosen their camp, they could not possibly be expected to modify their positions. It was made clear that the American and British attitude was that something called 'International Law' was going to be enforced on Iraq, despite the fact that numerous previous acts of aggression by other states had gone unpunished.

His reaction was to put forward proposals on August 12 for a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding territorial conflicts in the Middle East. This proposal took the Anglo-American position at face value. If negotiations were ruled out because it was a matter of enforcing the law, let the law be enforced properly, that is, equitably; let all transgressions be dealt with. Saddam made it clear that Iraq would agree to abide by International Law if it was demonstrated that International Law actually existed and was being taken in earnest by those who claimed to be upholding it. The way to demonstrate this was to make clear that International Law applied to other states as well as Iraq, notably Israel and Syria, to name but two.

This proposal was immediately rejected by the United States. From that moment on, the Anglo-American and UN position lacked all legal and moral authority in the eyes of the vast majority of the Arab and Muslim world.

From that moment on, Iraqi diplomacy was essentially concerned to highlight the double-standards of the American-led alliance and weaken this alliance by playing the Palestinian and Islamic cards. It had not tried to play either of these cards before it was made to understand that neither a negotiated compromise nor an equitable legal outcome were to be allowed it.

From that moment on, the diplomacy of other states was essentially concerned either to reassure their own public opinions that their governments were trying to avoid the war that was already virtually inevitable (France, Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, etc.) or to justify and sustain their own participation within the anti-Iraq alliance and extract the greatest advantages in cash and other benefits from staying 'on board'.

According to Saudi military sources, between 85,000 and 100,000 Iraqis have been killed since January 16 because the United States refused to countenance either a diplomatic or a legal solution to the Gulf crisis and acted between August 2 and August 10 last year to make both impossible. The true number of Iraqis who have been slaughtered in the greatest act of western folly and murderous arrogance in living memory may well be very much higher than this, of course.

This is what the British Labour Party has been implicated in by Gerald Kaufman and Neil Kinnock.



Saudi hypocrisy

Michael Alexander considers the role of Saudi Arabia's conservative rulers in the Gulf war. A lot of deception regarding their role has clearly occurred.

When the Gulf crisis first blew up, there were widespread rumours that the United States had imposed its presence on a reluctant Saudi Arabia: that the Saudis would have been happy to let diplomacy take its course. At the time, I believed this, and therefore concluded that a Gulf war would probably not take place. Given that a war is now occurring, a rethink is obviously necessary.

One complication is the way in which Saudi society operates. In a society like Britain, there are many ways in which the government can be restrained or punished if it starts following some secret policy of its own that most of its supporters would find distasteful. It doesn't always work, but it does work most of the time. And such policies should be distinguished from things like the 'shoot to kill' operations against terrorists or urban guerrillas, which the Tory government almost certainly has been operating from time to time, and which most Tories would approve of, even though few of them would say so in public. That sort of a secret policy can work because the government is covertly doing things that the public mostly approve of. A distasteful secret policy would be something like Britain supporting the military crack-down in the Baltic states. I very much doubt if John Major would be secretly supporting it; and if he was, it would be the sort of thing that would almost certainly get exposed and ruin him.

In Saudi Arabia, things are different. While society was still tribal, autocratic chiefs or kings probably did provide a reasonably representative government. They maintained a society which we in Britain would not approve of, (since it included things like slavery and tribal warfare,) but which the people living in that society thought altogether right and proper. Chiefs got involved in secret conspiratorial politics, but provided that the results were beneficial for the tribe, everyone felt that this was OK. A chief whose conspiracies failed, who led the tribe into defeat or hunger, would be deposed and replaced by someone who might do better.

What we now have in Saudi Arabia is a

decadent tribal society, a tribal society that has arbitrarily been granted huge amounts of wealth by a totally different and alien system. The various Gulf states are described as oil producers, but most of them are simply oil owners who play no part in the actual extraction or refining of the stuff that happens to lie under their land. Iranians and Iraqis play a part in the production of their oil wealth: the rest rely mostly on foreign labour.

The small Gulf states, including Kuwait, are arbitrary products of British interference in the region. During the 19th century, Britain chose to prop up the decaying Ottoman Empire as a counter to Russian ambitions. This meant Christians in the Balkans were oppressed by Muslim Turkish rulers for much longer than need have been the case. The British Foreign Office has never let moral considerations get in the way of what it deems to be British interests. (The FO frequently deems wrongly, and ends up pushing policies that are inexpedient as well as immoral, but that is another story.) The point is, Britain chose to keep the Ottoman Empire in being for some decades after it might otherwise have collapsed, and the Ottoman rulers knew it. And Britain got various payoffs for this protection. One of them was the island of Cyprus. Another was various small territories around the Gulf, cities with a long tradition of trading, smuggling and piracy, which became British protectorates, and are these days classed as sovereign states.

Having spent decades propping up the Ottoman Empire and restraining the Russians, Britain in World War One found itself in alliance with Russia against the Ottomans. As I said, FO policies are often as inexpedient as they are immoral, and the whole war had resulted from an instability in the Balkans that British policies had contributed to. Anyway, the net result was that T.E. Lawrence was able to raise the standard of Arab revolt on a semi-official basis. There were complications resulting from rival policies from rival government departments - there was even a case where the Foreign Office and the India Office backed rival Arab armies, which ended up fighting each other. Still, some sort of promise of Arab freedom was made, and was immediately broken after the war, with British and French colonial rule being imposed instead.

Saudi Arabia was an independent development, the result of an alliance between the Saud dynasty and the Wahhabis, an anti-Turkish and puritanical form of Islam. British policy was mostly to oppose them, but

it failed to stop them. However, the Saud dynasty successfully purged Wahhabism of its popular and dynamic elements. Rigid adherence to certain formal aspects of the religion, frequently based on very hard-line interpretations of verses in the Quran which are open to many possible readings, went along with turning a blind eye to Islamic notions of community, equality and social justice.

In this form, Saudi Arabia was able to enter an alliance with Britain and America. The Saudi rulers could do anything they liked to the people they ruled over, which in practice meant clamping down in a rigid and conservative way on all possible social development. The outward forms of tribal society have been maintained, even while the social reality has become something completely different. In return, Saudi Arabia and the other oil sheikhs have recycled the vast bulk of the money paid for their oil back to the advanced industrial economies as investments and luxury purchases.

The existence of Israel has always disrupted this cosy relationship. In terms of imperial self-interest, it made no sense at all for Western Imperialism to allow such a development. It was an impossibly romantic notion that somehow managed to get off the ground, because the Old Testament was at the back of the mind of every Western politician and voter. Self interest would have said that enormous numbers of Arabs and other Muslims should not be enraged for the sake of a relatively small number of persecuted Jews. But Jewish and Christian cultures overlapped, in a way that Christian and Muslim cultures did not, and romance won out over self-interest. Moreover, although Western politicians several times left the Israelis to their fate, to be overwhelmed by the more numerous and better armed Arabs while statesmen shed crocodile tears, Israel kept winning unexpected and almost impossible victories, greatly increasing the popular and romantic aura surrounding a state that logically should not exist.

Only once, during the Suez Conspiracy, was there a real attempt to use Israel to help British and French imperial interests. Like the present Gulf crisis, it was an attempt to use military power for conservative ends - in that case, restraining Nasser and reversing his take-over of the Suez Canal. But war generally does not serve conservative ends: wars are inherently revolutionary. One of the incidental casualties of Suez was the monarchy in Iraq, which was overthrown a couple of years afterwards, beginning the process that led to Saddam Hussein and Ba'ath rule.

Discussion

The existence of Israel is an embarrassment for Saudi Arabia. Popular Muslim culture does not consider that Jews or Christians have any rights at all, except to live as second class citizens under Muslim rule. The notion of Jews recovering territories that had belonged to their ancestors was unacceptable - so that the original United Nations partition plan was rejected out of hand. On the other hand, rulers of Muslim countries have usually been much more interested in doing down neighbouring Muslim rulers than in fulfilling the demands of popular Muslim culture. (It was this that allowed the early success of the Crusades, before Saladin imposed his rule on his rivals and united Muslim power to drive out the Crusaders.) Of all the Muslim states of the region, only Syria and Egypt seemed seriously interested in destroying Israel. Egypt dropped out: the realisation that Israel had atomic bombs, and that using just one of them to bust the Aswan High Dam would virtually wipe out Egypt, made the prospect no longer seem rational. Syria has probably made a similar calculation, except that it is nothing like as vulnerable, and can get some political kudos for acting as if it was planning to fight Israel while absorbing the shattered fragments of the Lebanon.

Neither Iraq nor Saudi Arabia have ever shown any practical interest in fighting Israel, although both naturally use anti-Israeli rhetoric whenever possible. Neither have played any significant part in the various Arab-Israeli wars, which have been basically Egypt and Syria against Israel, with Jordan getting reluctantly dragged in some of the time. Saddam Hussein and the Saudi ruling elite have been equally cynical in invoking popular Muslim sentiments. The Saudi elite seem more sincerely religious, because their continuing rule depends on the survival of a decadent tribalism in which Islam is the only cohesive force. But when it came to a crisis, they were quite prepared to ignore their own stated ideals. Non-Muslims could not be allowed freedom of private worship in holy Saudi Arabia. But non-Muslims were invited in to protect holy Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein. By inviting in the Americans, and by now allowing them to launch a war against Iraq, the Saudi elite have shown what they trust in when the chips are down.

Had the early Muslims behaved like the Saudi princes, there would have been no Islam. Had the Wahhabis not been prepared to defy both the Turkish Empire and the British Empire, there would have been no Saudi Arabia. The Saudi authorities are happy to impose narrow religious rules on their subjects.

But, unlike the Iranian mullahs, they leave God out of the matter when it comes to calculating their own interests.

And, like the British Foreign Office, they have probably been inexpedient as well as immoral. Saddam Hussein's jokes about the Saudis being defended by US servicewomen in shorts must have had an effect on all of the Saudi subjects, who are sincere Muslims and find such developments hard to accept. It is now being put about that the Saudis were surprised when they found that US forces were totally integrated sexually, so that the women had to form part of the expeditionary force in defiance of all Saudi custom. No doubt many ordinary Arabians were indeed shocked and surprised. But that the elite itself should not have known is wholly improbable. They have the wealth and the contacts to keep themselves very well informed indeed.

As I said, I don't think that Saddam Hussein is a sincere Muslim, in the sense of believing that the Quran as revealed to Muhammed is the absolute and final truth about God, Man and the Universe. What he does believe in is Ba'ath socialism, which has many points in common with Italian or Spanish Fascism, but is a progressive creed in the context of the Arab world. Assessments of Fascism get distorted by memories of Nazism, which tried to remake the whole world in its own image, and came quite close to actually doing so. Spanish Fascism was able to evolve peacefully into liberal democracy, after having stood neutral during the war in which Nazism tried to impose itself on the world. Italian Fascism was able to depose Mussolini and make peace with the Allies, although only after Italy had suffered several years of military defeats and the invasion and occupation of part of its territory. The present-day Italian state retains legal continuity with the state as it was under Mussolini, whereas Germany is a novel creation

originally set up by Britain, France and the USA in their zones of occupied Germany.

As a Ba'athist, Saddam Hussein is ready to go down fighting, as a martyr to secular Arab nationalism, but with as many Islamic overtones as he can manage, since this is what is needed to bind the Arab masses to Ba'athism. Just as Joseph Stalin would have stood and died in Moscow, in the expectation that Leninist Communism would in due course triumph elsewhere, so too is Saddam ready to stand and die in Baghdad. Stalin would be remembered as a hero rather than a villain, had he lost the war against Hitler instead of winning it. Even had Nazism won on a world scale, he would have been remembered as a martyr by the anti-Nazi resistance. Becoming a villain or a hero in history is a peculiar business. But I am sure that Saddam Hussein intends to be remembered as a hero, and that living or dying are minor matters by comparison.

There are other possibilities. Thus President Ceausescu of Rumania has ended up being viewed as a nasty buffoon. It has been reliably reported that Saddam was in the habit of carrying round a picture of Ceausescu's executed body, as a reminder of what might happen. Even before I heard of this story, I was quite certain that Saddam was not going to let himself be ordered out of Kuwait by the majestic presence of the United States, citing a system of international law that the United States has cynically disregarded on many occasions. Threats are not effective against a man who has beliefs that he is ready to die for.

In this context, it did occur to me to write an article comparing and contrasting Saddam Hussein and Salman Rushdie. On reflection, to write such an article would be a waste of time. Simply to mention them in the same breath says it all.

Saddam, Salman and the Saudi elite share an experience and understanding of the power of Western secular civilisation that makes simple Islamic faith impossible. Rather, it is only possible on a radical and heroic basis, the basis chosen by the Iranians and other



U.S. Servicewomen defending the Saudi Arabian way of life

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Hunter-gatherers in a world of machines

Madawc Williams considers the odd fact that humans have built a world in which they feel out of place. Do we decide that all human progress has been a mistake, not excluding even the invention of agriculture? Or is there a more hopeful alternative?

There is a widespread view that modern civilization has in some way violated the natural order, broken away from the proper roots of human behaviour. This view is attractive, because it identifies some of the obvious faults of modern society. But it can not explain, understand or respect the feelings that have led us to go from hunter-gatherers to inhabitants of a vastly powerful global civilization.

For some hundreds of thousands of years, humans lived simple lives in small bands on the plains of Africa. Just how long is a moot point, and new discoveries keep upsetting it. More or less human creatures have been evolving for some four million years. A lot of the ape-people who used to be hailed as our ancestors may actually have been failed side-issues, though this is controversial. It has even been suggested that certain types of ape-people retreated from human competition and became the chimpanzees and gorillas. Genetic studies do show that humans, gorilla and chimpanzee are much closer to each other than any of the three are close to the other species of apes - let alone

monkeys, which are fairly distant relations. Not only is the chimp our closest relative, we are *its* closest relative.

What is definite is that we evolved as hunter-gatherers, probably similar to the modern Kung bushmen of Southern Africa. It was only some tens of thousands of years ago that a few groups of people started leaving this well-established way of life. Agriculture and city-dwelling seem to have only developed in the last few thousand years, industrial civilisation over the last few centuries.

It had taken some millions of years to turn primitive apes into ape-people, and then into people essentially the same as ourselves. Subsequent changes have been cultural - and they have been very much more dramatic. From being apes with some sophistication, humans suddenly gained the power to reshape the planet.

Even as hunters, humans seem to have had quite an impact - especially outside Africa, which seems reasonably confirmed as our first home. Only that continent has really large mammals like the elephant, rhinoceros and hippo. Other continents used to have similar beasts. No one can prove for certain what finished them, but they very noticeably went extinct at about the time when modern humans turned up in their part of the world.

But it was agriculture and pastoralism, the growing of crops and the herding of animals, that made the really dramatic difference. Suddenly there was much more wealth available. There was also suddenly the possibility of stealing it, or extorting it by threats of violence. One group of humans might view other groups as a resource, open to profitable exploitations.

Even among hunter-gatherers, hunters might choose to view other humans as prey, as food on two legs. The evidence is mixed. European explorers who spread across the globe in the past few centuries - the first human group to have some reasonable idea of what the whole world was like - brought back many tales of cannibals. But equally, many of the peoples they visited were no less convinced that the white explorers themselves were cannibals. People are always ready to believe the worst of strangers. It is definite that some peoples included cannibalism as part of their burial rituals, and that all sorts of people will resort to it as a matter of survival. But if routine cannibalism existed at all, it was rare.

Where wealth exists, there are many more possibilities for conflict and exploitation. Even hunting peoples may quarrel over hunting grounds. But flocks of sheep or herds of cattle make a particularly easy target. Moreover, while all hunters can handle weapons, and pastoralists usually know how to fight, people who turn to growing crops are much less able to defend themselves. You can very easily get a pattern of class exploitation, perhaps arising when a tribe of hunters or pastoralists move in on a settled agricultural community, or perhaps when one part of the settled community is delegated to prevent such raids or attempted conquests. The net result would be much the same - a ruling class skilled in the use of weapons, supported by a crop-growing peasantry.

Both hunting and warfare tend to be male occupations. In both cases, there can be individual exceptions. But almost all groups of humans, up until very recent times, have divided up work between the sexes. The divisions vary from group to group, but risky and violent occupations are normally part of the male responsibility. With a birth-rate that was generally only just ahead of the death rate, it would be suicidal to do anything else. A few individuals might take on a social role that contradicted their biological sex - most cultures allow for that. But it would only be possible for as long as such behaviour was exceptional. A tribe of 'Amazons' would rapidly die out, for lack of children and good child-care.

Developing a ruling class based on warfare would downgrade the status of women. In hunter-gatherer societies, there is rough equality, because more food comes from gathering than from hunting, and gathering is mainly a female task. (It might indeed be more accurate to call them 'gatherer-hunters', but I will stick to the standard term.) The point is, when hunting or

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Islamists ('fundamentalists'). The Saudi elite show no sign of including any belief in God or in Islam in their practical political calculations. And yet their subjects are still mostly simple and devout believers, who would be likely to overthrow the Saudi elite if it did not seem to be as religious as they are. Or, if ordinary Arabians started to see things from a secular viewpoint, they might decide that being ruled over by autocratic Saudi princes was an anachronism and an absurdity. The Saudi elite try to keep out Western influences and to maintain traditional beliefs and social structures, because almost any conceivable change would be against their interests.

Saddam sees things from an opposite perspective. Almost any conceivable change will in the long run benefit Arab nationalism, even if he himself loses, which he must know to be probable. Rather than betray his own beliefs, he will take on the strongest existing military powers. Just as George Washington and the American rebels took on the power of Great Britain, the strongest military power of their day, in a cause that seemed hopeless and that did indeed suffer numerous set-backs and defeats. 'Give me liberty or give me death' is not a sentiment confined to Americans. Western political leaders keep on forgetting this simple truth.

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protecting herds turns into warfare, the power and the wealth suddenly shift to the males. Moreover, men had the advantage of being able to capture women and use them as a resource, force them to produce more male heirs. The reverse was not unknown, but was not an efficient form of exploitation. The male's role in reproduction need take no more than a few minutes, whereas the female's takes at least nine months, and normally much more if children are to be raised successfully.

Once large-scale crop growing had begun, the logic of the situation was likely to lead both to a class society and to male domination. There is no need to go in for deep psychological explanations, or to venture into the murky depths of sexual politics. The basis for a successful strategy of exploitation existed: therefore it came into existence. Not without mitigating factors, of course. Although a harem might seem to be ideal from a selfish male viewpoint, in practice such arrangements were less successful than the dominant males hoped. Males tricked each other, and females played them off against each other. Also, the whole mother-son relationship counter-balanced matters somewhat, especially when fathers played little role in raising their own children. The stream of life runs through the female, with males having only a walk-on part, biologically speaking.

Engels's The origins of the family, private property and the state cover some of the same ground that I've been talking about. But we now know rather more about early societies than was known in his day, and vastly more than he could have known about early humans and ape-people. Also, his schemas are decidedly too schematic, and include some astonishing omissions. For instance, he says hardly anything about Egypt, which had a sophisticated urban culture long before the discovery of iron (defined by Engels as marking the start of the upper stage of Barbarism).

The broad conclusions - a breakdown of common property into individual property, the loss of status by women and the development of states in place of tribal institutions - I do accept. But the method he favours - fitting together vaguely similar institutions from various parts of the world into an 'evolutionary schema' - makes far too many assumptions. In general, the more we find out about the human past, the more we find both diversity and complexity. Moreover, even though Engels is sometimes dismissed as a technological determinist, he in fact gives very few reasons why a particular

level of culture should lead to a particular sort of society, and pays little attention to local geography.

The different cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece do relate quite logically to what those lands were. Egypt was a fertile river valley surrounded by almost uninhabitable desert. Therefore, it saw the early development of a high culture, and a single strong state that had little interest in an extensive empire. Mesopotamia, the land of the two rivers, was just as favourable to early civilization. But it was close to moderately fertile land, and highly exposed to various groups of invaders. There tended to be many states, or a small number of states with extensive empires. Greece, geographically fragmented and much less fertile, was of little importance until civilization was already some thousands of years old in Egypt and Mesopotamia. When it did develop, city-states ran their own small territories, and expansion by sea was frequently easier than expansion by land.

sophisticated way of life - until, like the North American Indians, they were displaced by other peoples who had the capacity to do different things with the same territories. Europeans seized and colonised all the lands they could make use of, simply because it was such an attractive prospect.

Let me make it quite clear that I do not regard a *successful* pattern as being the same as a *desirable* pattern. The tape-worm is a highly successful and sophisticated creature, well adapted to its own peculiar way of life. Yet no one admires this creature, which spends its whole life coiled in other organism's intestines.

Like most parasites, the tape-worm has lost the ability for anything except further and even more successful parasitism. Free competition between species leads naturally to parasitism, among other things, and there are more species of parasites than non-parasites. But no one views this as a desirable outcome.



Further east, both India and China had extensive rich lands protected by major geographical barriers. Each evolved its own highly individual way of life, with a capacity to absorb and change invaders. India, being closer to other major centres of civilization, tended to have more in common with them. Being also much hotter, and thus more prone to various tropical diseases, India probably evolved its elaborate system of castes as a form of public health. Many of the cast rules do make sense, from that point of view. No one goes near an untouchable, because untouchables have contact with dung and carrion and other likely sources of infection. Anyone can accept food from a Brahman, because they follow the strictest rules of hygiene and have the least contact with possible sources of infection. And the very separation of castes and sub-castes would have served as a barrier to communicable diseases.

In large measure, each pattern of culture that evolved made sense in the particular locations where it evolved. Hunter-gatherers generally survived in places that were not open to any more

Ideally, one would have wished humanity to have advanced out of the stone without the loss of sexual equality or the supportive tribal community. Probably development through exploitation was faster than development without exploitation would have been. But the Earth should be inhabitable for at least another hundred million years, and perhaps very much more. The developments of the last ten thousand years or so did not have to proceed at such a rush.

In any case, progress through exploitation was the way human development actually went. Once the process had started in any one part of the globe, it was almost bound to spread elsewhere. Exploitation by warrior ruling classes was a highly successful strategy, and continuous conflict between such ruling groups made them ever more skillful at gaining and keeping power. In advanced civilisations, the ruling class would tend to specialise into different groups, priests and non-military nobles as well as warriors. But it was always open to

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the warriors to upset such a system, or for some cruder but tougher military ruling class to sweep in and change everything.

Why should such a system ever break down? One weakness is that 'you can't keep a man down without staying down with him'. (Equally, men cannot oppress women without also oppressing themselves.) Once any society had a sufficient surplus to provide a decent human life for everyone, the temptation to do so would be quite strong.

Industrial civilisation could have developed in India or China, or in the Muslim world. In each of those cases, however, there were immensely powerful conservative forces that stopped any such possibility. (Such forces were also present in Europe - Marx has quite a lot to say about them in *Capital*). What happened finally to upset things was that the ruling class of England and Scotland in the 18th century allowed an unprecedented disruption of their social order, the Industrial Revolution.

Motives were mixed - pure greed played a large part, as well as the desire to be stronger than rival European powers. Yet the notion that these new powers would in the long run benefit everyone was also present. And it was rapidly picked up by the new class of industrial workers that was created, giving rise to modern socialism.

In the abstract, the introduction of machines need not have been either so disruptive or so cruel. Had the matter been in the hands of the workers, they could certainly have found a humane way to make use of the new possibilities. But the driving force was always the desire of the ruling class for power and wealth, and the desire of the new industrialists to join the charmed circle.

Machines do not have to take away either human skills or the joy of work well done. But it was strongly in the interests of the industrialists to use machines for such ends. Indeed, even non-mechanised work was organised so as to take away both the skill and the power of workers to control their own work - E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* gives details of this process. Skilled workers always have a large measure of power and independence - they can not easily be replaced. Unskilled workers, or workers who can be trained in a few weeks, can be squeezed as hard as the industrialist chooses.

Thankfully, there were counterbalancing

factors. Not everything could be reduced to unskilled work. Moreover, workers were able to organise themselves and gradually force up their standard of living. In addition, the threat of revolution led the ruling class to decide that it was wise to give workers a larger stake in society. An industrial society with workers as a permanently oppressed under-class might perhaps have been possible, but I think that any such danger is now passed.

Leninism over the course of half a century moved the whole world very much in the direction that its founders had desired. Its great weakness was that once it came to be run by people who had grown up 'within the system', it lost coherence and decayed. Leninism had a lot of truth in it, and this enabled the first generation to go from being fringe politicians to virtual miracle-workers. But its truth was incomplete, and therefore its very success in rooting out hostile or unorthodox opinions was fatal to it.

What we have now is global economy in which both competition and cooperation are powerful. Thankfully, the New Right option that was tried in Britain, America, Australia etc. has not in fact proved very successful, even by its own narrow definition of success as successful money-making. Almost all of the 'entrepreneurs' of the Thatcher era have now failed - even Rupert Murdoch is now very close to bankruptcy. Economic power is passing to the much more cooperative societies of Western Europe and East Asia.

There was a brief time in the late 1980s when the New Right supposed themselves to be triumphant, with Leninism visibly falling apart and their own heroes riding high. But Leninism was highly successful for its first half-century, whereas the New Right is visibly falling apart after only one decade of real power. Socialists have nothing to feel gloomy about, if only we look at things from a long-term view.

What should we now be aiming for? The Green Party talks about 'limits to growth' and wants everything redesigned to favour small property owners. But, apart from every other problem that might be involved, there is no particular reason to think that such a system would be better ecologically. Public enterprises, large companies, small companies and tiny one-person enterprises all show a mix of the ecologically good and the ecologically bad. Almost any case can be made by selectively choosing only the good from one category and only the bad from another. On the whole, large enterprises

are more likely to bow to public pressure or to have some sort of effective public service ethic.

Small property owners often do a lot more damage than the large ones; it is peasant farmers who have pioneered a lot of the destruction of the rain forests. And they are less vulnerable to pressure of public opinion, because they themselves form a large and self-sufficient section of the public. Small property owners in the Republic of Ireland are busy destroying natural resources like peat and salmon, and are all in all decidedly un-Green in the ecological sense.

The socialist alternative would be to concentrate on improving the quality of life. The Earth is good for at least another hundred million years, unless we humans mess it up with short-sighted greed. Wind, wave and solar power could keep industrial civilisation going indefinitely. Nuclear power is probably just as valid an option, but it is not essential. The political effort that would be needed to restore public confidence would be more usefully directed elsewhere.

We hunter-gatherers in a world of machines need to learn to stop competing with each other. Competition leads people to do things that they would not wish to do, just to remain in business. Human values get played down, in the drive to accumulate wealth. A democratic, planned and cooperative economy might not be hugely efficient economically, but then why should it be, provided that it was stable in the long term? If it was organised on a world scale, there would be no outside competition to disrupt it. (Non-human intelligences, if they exist at all, would be either still primitive or else thousands of years ahead of us. Moreover, existing physics allows for no cheap or easy way to travel between stars, and no way at all to travel faster than light. The notion of humans competing with hostile aliens makes for good entertainment, but is not at all realistic.)

If we could get a united world, the first priority would be a global equalisation of wealth, followed by as much growth as possible without long-term environmental damage. Again, the goals could be quite modest - why should people kill themselves just to get rich a little quicker? Something modest like 1% annual growth *continuously over thousands and even millions of years* would allow for almost any possible development of human potential.

The Gulf - Labour's NEC falls in

The resolution on the Gulf War adopted by the NEC of the Labour Party on January 30th, 1991 is thoroughly imperialist in spirit. It was supported by Clare Short. Chairing the Women's Committee of the Party a week later, and finding great uneasiness in it about Kinnock's uncritical support for the conduct of the war by the Tories and the White House, Clare Short stifled discussion and prevented any motion from being put. And then Clare Short resigned her front bench position a week after that because of a particular incident in the conduct of the war.

She approves of making an omelette but she doesn't want to see the eggs being broken. Joan Ruddock is less squeamish.

Politicians who will soon be asking the British electorate to allow them to govern the country ought to know enough about the world to know that the sort of war decided upon by the United Nations involves heavy civilian casualties. On January 30th the United Nations bombing of virtually defenseless cities from the air (a practice which Britain declared to be an outrage when Nazi Germany did it to Warsaw in 1939), had been in full swing for a fortnight. Members of the NEC must be presumed to have known that this form of warfare maximises civilian casualties. But they gave it their approval — adding weasel words about "avoiding civilian casualties whenever possible".

In the war being waged for the United Nations by the British and American Governments the principle has been adopted that a method which maximises

Iraqi civilian casualties is justified for the purpose of minimising Anglo-American military casualties. The United Nations regards an Iraqi civilian as a much less valuable human being than a British or American soldier who has voluntarily chosen making war for pay as his way of life.

The TUC was very unhappy about this when it discussed the issue. But it received an ultimatum from Neil Kinnock to give uncritical support to the war in its public statements. And it did not dare disobey lest it be held responsible for losing the next election. Kinnock has chosen to conduct politics in such a way that his only hope of winning the next election lies in demonstrating that he has total managerial control of the Party. The object of his policy reviews has been to ensure that there is a quiescent party with no distinguishing policy.

The sole object in the NEC resolution on the Gulf War is to keep Labour policy in line with the expanding war aims of the Government. But the wilder Tory war aims are here presented as 'peace aims'. The practical meaning of the second last paragraph is that Iraq should be treated as a conquered country and treated as Germany was in 1919. And the commitment to "*the ending of regional superpower status ... for every other country in the region*" is awesome in its imperialistic recklessness. It means that none of the Arab states in the region shall in future be allowed to challenge Anglo-American superpower dominance over their affairs.

The reference to nuclear weapons is thoroughly deceptive. Israel is the only Middle Eastern state with nuclear weapons. The Atomic Energy Commission is not allowed into Israel. It has inspected Iraq regularly and stated

that Iraq has no nuclear weapons. And that presumably is why the United Nations thought it safe to bomb what they called Iraq nuclear installations.

The nuclear superpower in the Middle East is Israel. The United Nations has in practice condoned every Israeli occupation and annexation. And by ignoring these facts the NEC resolution tacitly includes Israel in the Western superpower hegemony which it wishes to establish over the rest of the Middle East.

The injunction that Arabs must not be allowed to feel "continuing resentment" about all of this requires for its implementation that they should be de-Arabised by a thorough course of brainwashing.

The final paragraph is a bit of pious window-dressing, copied from Downing St. and White House propaganda. If it is taken in earnest it means that what is refused as a means of averting war and restoring Kuwait peacefully to its rightful dictator is to be implemented once the Kuwaiti dictatorship has been restored by a war.

While all other Security Council Resolutions are implemented with infinite flexibility, or not implemented at all, the Resolutions on Iraq must be implemented with stringent pedantry, even if this means war. But the conditions which would have enabled the gist of the Resolutions to be achieved without war are to be implemented immediately after the war.

Since international affairs are not actually conducted by pedantic logicians, it follows that pedantry has been employed in this instance because the object throughout has been to make war on Iraq. □

National Executive Resolution agreed 30th January, 1991 by the NEC of the Labour Party:

This National Executive Committee:-

- reaffirms its previous Resolutions in support of the decisions of the United Nations taken since the beginning of the crisis caused by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.
- regrets that the strategy of sanctions, blockade and military readiness to achieve the purposes of the United Nations was not pursued for a longer period.
- records its deep concern at the human and ecological costs of the conflict arising from the action of the Iraqi dictatorship.
- gives full backing to the British and Coalition forces being used to secure fulfilment of the United Nations Resolutions, and commends the instruction to avoid civilian casualties whenever possible.

- considers that all diplomatic opportunities for achieving fully the objectives of the United Nations Resolutions should continue to be explored by the United Nations and its members and welcomes the joint statement by the United States Secretary of State, James Baker, and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Alexander Bessmertnykh that:

"a cessation of hostilities would be possible if Iraq would make an unequivocal commitment to withdraw from Kuwait" ... backed ... "by immediate, concrete steps leading to full compliance with the Security Council resolutions".

- considers that in all activities against Saddam Hussein's aggression, it is essential that every effort be made to try to ensure that the post-war peace settlement is durable and does not produce continuing resentment and resulting instability, extremism and terrorism.
- considers that, when the requirements of the United Nations Resolutions, including the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the restoration of international peace and

security in the area, are clearly complied with, the use of force should thereupon cease.

- considers that, as the cessation of hostilities following the achievement of the purposes of the United Nations Resolutions, immediate action must be taken by the UN and the international community, using political and diplomatic means:-
- (i) to achieve the substantial disarming of Iraq by the reduction of conventional forces and the verified and complete removal of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and the means of making them, and the ending of regional superpower status for Iraq and for every other country in the region.
- (ii) to implement the provisions of UN Resolutions 681, 242 and 338 through an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations as an essential means of achieving lasting security and justice for the countries of the region, and for the Palestinian people.

Iraq - set up for a fall

Michael Alexander makes an apology for having believed bits of American propaganda, and then considers the future.

The Gulf war was as much a media as a military event. Both sides of the operation were done very cleverly. And the cleverest part was building up Saddam Hussein as a dangerous world-threatening tyrant. A small, moderately prosperous Third-World country, with a population of just 17 million, was set up as a serious enemy for the combined armed might of Britain, France and America. When the said small country collapsed rapidly, its destruction seemed heroic rather than predictable.

I freely admit, I fell for it. There was some reason to believe that the war would cost a lot of Western lives, although it was always obvious that the odds were heavily against Iraq. On paper, the Iraqi army seemed strong. But it is just not possible to get hundreds of thousands of good soldiers out of such a small population. As a highly mechanised army the Iraqis were vulnerable to air power, superior technology and superior coordination. Then there was the British contribution. Americans have a history of making drastic errors in large-scale military operations. But the British Army, after the drastic failures in the early part of World War Two, seems to have acquired the knack of good military organisation, and to have kept it to this day. Arnheim was a calculated risk, that would have greatly shortened the war had it come off. Suez was a political, not a military blunder. Various colonial wars were mostly won, even if the political friends of the defeated insurgents then had to be put in power, as in Kenya. In Malaya and in Oman, the British Army achieved what the Americans failed to achieve with much larger forces in Vietnam.

Bush fought a war to minimise Western casualties, and to establish American global hegemony. He has shown little regard for his Arab 'allies'. He has treated the United Nations with total contempt, turning it into a subservient tool of his foreign policy. He has shown no concern for the lives of ordinary Middle East citizens. As the Belfast Northern Star put it on February 23rd: *"the military agents of the United Nations have said that they feel 'comfortable' about killing the people in the air-raid shelter. The BBC tried to do a damage-limitation exercise on that statement. It claimed that the word 'comfortable' is a technical military term meaning in that context something entirely different from what it means in ordinary language. But that is patent eye-wash..."*

The war is a political contrivance in which there is no element of political spontaneity. The language used from the start is the language of public relations. Its purpose is to overawe and intimidate the Arab mind. It has been a media exercise as much as a military exercise.... When a General tells the press that he is 'comfortable' about having killed 400 civilians in an air-raid shelter, he is not using technical jargon more appropriate at a staff meeting. He is projecting an image. Bush himself used the same word early on January. He said he made his decision to launch a war, and was comfortable with it."

In the ground war, the Allied forces achieved a 'kill ratio' of perhaps 100 to 1. It may even have been more than this. At the time of writing, there are still no definite figures for Iraqi casualties, and the US seem in no hurry to release a figure. The Saudis say at least 85,000. Whatever it is, we can be fairly sure that Bush will feel 'comfortable'.

"When a General tells the press that he is 'comfortable' about having killed 400 civilians in an air-raid shelter, he is not using technical jargon more appropriate at a staff meeting. He is projecting an image."

He must also be feeling more than comfortable about the horrors that the Iraqis inflicted on the Kuwaitis, especially after it was clear that Iraq was losing the war. Without them, there would be much more anger about what was done to defeated and almost defenceless Iraqi soldiers, and to wholly defenceless Iraqi civilians.

Had Bush really cared about the lives of Kuwaiti Arabs, he might have peacefully negotiated Saddam out of Kuwait back in August, or else made a discreet phone-call to Baghdad before August 2nd to stop the invasion from ever happening. But there is no sign that Bush ever cared about what Saddam was doing to Kurds or Iraqi Arabs. Bush has in fact left Saddam free to go on doing such things, or else be replaced by another dictator who might perhaps kill even more.

The propaganda about the vast power of Iraq had three purposes. Firstly, public opinion was already taken care of, in case the war should go badly - and nothing military is ever quite predictable. Secondly, public euphoria could be expected if the war went as anticipated. Thirdly, the peace movement would be left discredited, after predicting horrors for Western troops that failed to materialise.

In this context, 'public opinion' means only the nations of the West. Arab and Muslim public opinion has been thoroughly enraged. Its anger will not express itself in time to stop Bush being re-elected, and it could be that this has been Bush's main objective all along. But it will be expressed. And in the long run, the hegemony that Bush has established can not be defended without the loss of American lives, in a way that will not be acceptable. As I said in *Bush the Boss-Man*, the West would damage its interests by breaking Iraq.

We now have an odd situation in which Iraq is crippled but not necessarily broken. Saddam may fall, or he may survive and take vengeance on anyone foolish enough to suppose that Bush was their friend. If he falls, Iraq may simply disintegrate, or be partitioned, or fall under the influence of either Iran or Saudi Arabia. No one can really be sure.

The Gulf operation has been called imperialism. But the old-style imperialists at least had a definite idea of the world, that they tried to impose on other people. If you did what they wanted, they would look after you - often with great courage and dedication. Bush, however, has left all of his Arab allies in the shit. President Assad of Syria is especially vulnerable, and Bush may well be regarding this as a smart move. Nothing that might happen to Assad would cause me any grief. But Bush's actions make continuous instability almost inevitable.

It was Suez that undermined the pro-British government that Britain had carefully developed over several decades in Iraq, and created a chronic instability in Iraqi society that required someone as ruthless and nasty as Saddam Hussein to impose some sort of order. Nasser suffered military humiliation both during Suez and later in the 6 Day war, and yet remains a hero to Arabs. A man who resists and is then beaten unconscious has more dignity than one who grovels to superior power. Americans seem never quite to have understood the difference - in their eyes both are 'losers'. But Arabs are likely to take a different view of the matter. □