

# Labour & Trade Union Review

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## The Election

## The Break-up Of British Rail

## Europe's New Imperialism

McVeigh

Racak

# Labour's Second Chance

New Labour's achievement of "an historic second term" with a second massive majority was not an enthusiastic endorsement by the electorate of their performance in the first term.

The delivery of public services—health, education and transport—was the issue of the election. While there wasn't a lot of confidence that New Labour would deliver in the second term when they had failed to deliver in the first, the Conservatives didn't appear interested in public services at all.

The upshot was that New Labour were given a second chance, but without enthusiasm.

Nearly 3 million fewer people voted New Labour than in the 1997 landslide, 10.7 million this time compared with 13.5 million in 1997. Unusually for a party leader with continuous media exposure, Blair himself got 7,000 fewer votes in Sedgefield and his share of the poll fell significantly. (In defeat, Hague himself had the largest swing from Labour to Conservative in any constituency).

The turnout at 59.1% (down from 71.4% in 1997) was the lowest in a general election since the introduction of universal suffrage. About 18 million people didn't vote at all and, for the first time in the history of general elections in the UK, non-voters outnumbered voters for the winning party.

Strangely, however, although about 5 million fewer people voted (the Conservative vote was down by about 1.3 million and the Liberal Democrat by 0.4 million), the end result in terms of seats was almost exactly the same. Very few people seem to have switched parties. The Conservatives didn't present themselves as a credible government to anybody who had switched to New Labour or the Liberal Democrats in 1997, so they didn't switch back. As a result, New Labour retained its massive majority and the Liberal Democrats retained almost all the extra 25 seats it won from the Conservatives in 1997, seats that a revived

Conservative Party would expect to win back.

The best result of the election was in Wyre Forest where David Lock, a minister in the Lord Chancellor's department, was beaten out of sight by Richard Taylor, a retired consultant, representing Health Concern. This organisation (which is the largest party in the local authority) has been campaigning for years against the closure of acute services at Kidderminster Hospital as a consequence of a PFI scheme to replace Worcester Hospital. Lock was on the side of Health Concern until Tony Blair gave him a job in the Government and he had to toe the Government's line on PFI. Happily, on June 8th, the turcoat got his come-uppance.

**Misconceived Campaign**

The Conservative Party was in a fairly hopeless position when the election was announced but to make matters worse they ran a hopelessly misconceived election campaign.

When the electorate was anxious about one thing—the delivery of public services—Hague decreed that the election was about “saving the pound”. Not only that, he chose to insult the intelligence of the electorate by telling them that it was “the last chance to save the pound”, when it plainly wasn't since there was to be a referendum on the issue.

Formally, the party was committed to spending the same amount as the Government on health and education for the next three years. But this was rarely heard about. Instead, in addition to going on about saving the pound that didn't need to be saved, there was a lot of emphasis on the rather modest tax cuts of £8bn a year they proposed.

When a story in *The Financial Times* suggested that they had aspirations for much larger tax cuts of £20bn a year (as a result on an interview given by Oliver Letwin, a Conservative Treasury spokesman), the figure was formally denied. But no effort was made to challenge New Labour for treating the figure as an established fact. It was as if the party leadership was more comfortable fighting the election with the £20bn figure for tax (and public expenditure) cuts, as their opponents alleged, rather than the modest figure of £8bn in their manifesto.

All this gave the impression that the

delivery of public services was not high on the Conservative agenda.

**Hopeless Opposition**

The first job of an opposition is to see that the Government delivers on what it promised in its election manifesto. Over the past 4 years, the Conservative Party has failed to do that job.

New Labour has got off very lightly, which has contributed to their re-election. A party which came to power denouncing the under-investment in public services since 1979, and promising that things could only get better under them, cut public expenditure overall by 1% in real terms in each of the first two years in government. A party which said their election was essential in order to “save” the NHS from the ravages of another Conservative Government, increased spending on health by less than the previous Conservative Government did (2.2% a year in real terms compared with 3.3% in the Major years).

Thanks to the failure of the Conservatives in opposition these facts about the performance of New Labour in government are by and large unknown to the public.

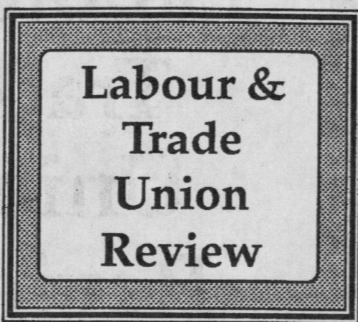
Nor have they been much use at exposing the details of the Government's failure to deliver on public services. That task has been left to a few investigative journalists, not least John Ware of BBC 1's Panorama. On the Sunday evening before the election, he had yet another devastating indictment of the New Labour record on the delivery of public services, set against the expectations aroused during their 1997 election campaign (illustrated in the case of health by the famous Labour Party broadcast with Peter Postlethwaite as a taxi driver and a young couple as passengers, who had been badly served by the NHS). In this and earlier programmes on a similar theme, Ware has been particularly good at getting to the bottom of their duplicitous use of figures for public investment.

This is the job of an opposition, but the Conservatives have failed to do it since 1997. Nor did they make any use of the Ware programme in the remaining days of the campaign, even though public service delivery was the most important issue of the election campaign.

**No Return To Boom And Bust**

The main New Labour campaign theme was that they would deliver public

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services while the Conservatives would cut them. A subsidiary theme was that they, through the genius of Gordon Brown, had rescued the British economy from the “boom and bust” of the Conservative years and brought about the economic stability necessary to generate the revenue for sustained spending on public services. Economic stability with New Labour was counter posed to a return to “boom and bust” with the Conservatives.

This is a load of nonsense, but it has worked to the extent that New Labour now have a much better reputation for economic competence with the electorate than the Conservatives, which contributed to the re-election of New Labour on 8th June.

The truth is that New Labour took over an economy that had been growing steadily and continuously for five years. The rate of inflation was low. The public

**Concluded on back page**

Gwydion M. Williams

**Notes on the News**

**Wheels Of Fortune**

Hague lost an election which was probably never winnable for the Tories. He did please the core voters and that, along with changes he made to the Party constitution, made him hard to get rid of. It was also hard to see anyone who is electable who'd be any more popular outside the ranks of the faithful.

And then he goes of his own free will. Why?

People seem to assume that his career is over, as it was for Heath and Major and Thatcher. But he carefully said he had “decided to step down as leader”, not to quit politics. I would expect to see him back as Shadow Chancellor under the new leader. Balfour did more to shape history in his diverse ministerial roles between 1915 and 1929 than during his brief Prime Ministership (1902-5). Asquith broke the Liberal Party by refusing to accept his wartime replacement by fellow-liberal Lloyd George. Baldwin went from Prime Minister to Leader of the Opposition to Minister under Ramsey MacDonald and then Prime Minister again. Sir Alec Douglas Home returned to his old job of Foreign Secretary under Heath.

Heath, Major and Thatcher are counter-examples, but each had reasons. Major, in my view, had simply had enough and is returning to the world of business where he feels more at home. I always rated him as shrewd and I think he knew that Blair was going to win re-election. Thatcher continues to dominate Toryism, while Heath hung on until this election in hope of some glorious return. With hindsight, we can see that Heath's key moment was the Social-Democrat split from Labour. It was open to Heath to create an anti-Thatcherite ‘Centre Party’. But he mistook the familiar norms he had learned in his career for human norms that must inevitably assert

themselves against the Thatcherite deviation. Thatcherism has indeed faded, but other less familiar things have taken its place.

Hague has been compared to Michael Foot, elected to let the activists exercise their prejudices. But Foot was old and Hague can foresee another twenty to thirty years of political career. Maybe a quarter of the electorate do appreciate hard-Tory values, he can't drop them even if he wanted to. But ‘wet’ Tories are increasingly leaking to Labour or Liberal-Democrat. A split seems possible, though much less likely now that Kenneth Clarke has a small but genuine chance of being the next leader. Michael Portillo seems much more likely, and it may well be that the two men always had a deal. Hague at 40 can play a long game.

To have fought for the chance to lose again in 2005 would have been foolish. The Tories under Hague would need an absolute majority over Labour & Liberal, who'd certainly form a coalition against him. He could have nearly doubled the total of Tories in 2005 and still be stuck as Leader of the Opposition.

Portillo as the first major party leader to acknowledge a bisexual past and with a general attitude of moderation has a much better prospect. As Hague in his resignation speech put it:

“The forces of Conservatism are stronger and at least better organised than they were four years ago... despite that stronger base and the diminishing enthusiasm for New Labour, we have not been able to persuade a majority, or anything approaching a majority, that we are yet the alternative government that they need. Nor have I been able to persuade sufficient numbers that I am their alternative prime minister. I believe

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the next general election will be a far closer contest than the one just held.”

**All Time Low? No!**

Turn-out at this election was very low because no one seriously doubted Blair would get back. As it happens, his position is so strong that even an ‘Old Labour’ defection of as many as 50 MPs would leave him still solidly in control with more than half the MPs. (And he has lost interest in electoral reform, quite predictably.)

At less than 60%, this low turnout was a record breaker. But turnout is not the same as significance. Since 1945, the previous five lowest turnouts out of fifteen elections were 1997, 1983, the second election of 1974, 1970 and 1945 itself. (BBC Online, Turnout ‘at 80-year

low', Friday, 8th June, 2001. I quote their figures but dispute their conclusions.)

1945 saw the biggest change since 1688, changes that still hold even though the mainstream Left have successfully cured the public of any belief that Left politics might ever actually have won anything. Regarding Thatcher, the significant election was not 1979 but her re-election in 1983, after which she dared to put her beliefs into action. The trial run for Thatcherism was Heath's unexpected win in 1970 election, reversed in 1974.

### China & WTO

As I write, (Saturday 9th June), the United States and China have reached an agreement on outstanding issues that have been holding up Beijing's 15-year old bid to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO). But just what this will mean for China's poor peasants remains to be made public.

### You Too Can Be Unique!

As I write, Blair's re-election is assured. He has a clear mandate now to incorporate us into the US vision of the world as a Global Potemkin-village.

Our money-driven media gives a sham impression of famous people having a wonderful time. I doubt they find it that wonderful. Rather more people have enjoyable lives by ignoring those values than even by succeeding within them.

And consider also the largest number, hooked on a greedy consumerist image and yet not able to realise their dreams—since these depend on most people not also having it, and they are most people.

### Conservative & Extreme East Coast of the USA Party

You can take your homogenised Anglo-Saxonism, and stick it up your fundamentals of Englishness. That's what the bulk of the electorate are saying.

The betrayal of ordinary Englishness began under Thatcher. And the English are not respectful of wealth the way most Americans are: they believed the

promises of regeneration but also notice it did not happen.

Under Thatcher, Toryism got nasty, lost its magisterial dignity, *dignitas*, the thing that had kept it alive long past the natural lifespan of political parties. (Long past its Liberal rivals, whose utter lack of *dignitas* was neatly shown by the Thorpe affair.) But, although Thatcher also lacked *dignitas* and relied instead on a schoolgirl bossiness, there was still substance.

Only under Hague has the party become substantially contemptible.

Hague has been trying to borrow the style of Major, who did win the election of 1992 against the odds. But Major always came across as human and humane. No one at all would call Hague humane.

I've said before that Hague's big error was to try to win a British general election by appealing to the prejudices of the US electorate. The height of their ambition is to make us a kind of Extreme East Coast of the USA. Most Britons who'd want that have probably moved to the USA already.

There's also the minor point that the USA does not want an Extreme East Coast. The majority of them are going mid-continental, disappearing up their own fundamentals, and discontent even with the East Coast they've got.

### New Cross puzzles

Soon after the New Cross fire, I saw a slogan 18-1-81 painted on a wall. That was the date that a houseful of black Britons died in a suspicious fire.

Police ought to start getting anxious to interview some racist numerologists.

### California Gouging

President Bush refuses to help California, which is suffering black-outs because the gas it buys from Texas is suddenly much more expensive.

I've not yet seen an explanation as to why gas produced in Texas costs two and a half times as much in California as in New York. What else is that but gouging?

### Star Wars & Deathships

After his success with 'feed the rich' tax cuts, Bush is determined now to push ahead with the militarisation of space.

The revival of Ronald Reagan's 'Star Wars' was met with world-wide protest (with the odd exception of India, seriously untrue to Mahatma Ghandi's legacy). Trying to drum up support, 'Bush Minor' went on a charm offensive.

No one was charmed and many were offended. The notion of being charmed by Bush Minor belongs in Dante's Inferno.

It's obvious that the aim is to widen the gap between the USA and other big powers. The USA does not now dare get heavy with any of the nuclear-armed states, but with a missile shield they might do so.

'Rogue missiles' are not very likely, anyone can spot where a missile comes from. But there's the old idea of 'Deathships', modern equivalents of the fireships that did such damage to the Spanish Armada. These are ships with a built in nuclear device, which can be much cruder than a feasible bomb, let alone a missile.

Such vessels could also be full also of low-level waste, producing enormous contamination as well as direct explosion. The idea was discussed before long-range bombers and missiles were developed, and the basic details have already been published in US magazines

### Depart In Peace and Pieces

It now seems that the US spy plane which crashed in Hainan Island will be dismantled and sent off in a Russian-model plane.

Meantime Bush is ensuring that nothing gets in the way of trade—his rich friends like trade as much as they like taxes which fall more on the poor.

Meanwhile China's own poor, the peasantry, are under threat from the World Trade Organisation. "China's entry has been delayed by its insistence on being classified as a 'developing' country, which under WTO rules would allow it to grant subsidies of up to 10% to farmers, compared with 5% for

'developed' states. Washington and other governments want the rate set at the 5% limit for developed economies." (BBC Online, 5th June, 2001)

That's to say, they want to extend the gap between the relatively prosperous modern cities and the poorer countryside. 'Human rights' is just a useful slogan to get at an independent-minded government. The actual rights and livelihoods of actual people are constantly under attack.

### Appalled by Nepal

In India after independence the ruling Congress Party broke the power of traditional rulers peacefully and democratically, but very effectively.

In Pakistan this was not done, and so the country cannot settle or run itself. And it seems this applies in Nepal also.

I know nothing of Nepali politics, but when I heard that the alleged assassin had also become King I had a profound

feeling he wouldn't reign very long.

Parricide is part of authentic royal tradition. And so is fratricide, and one branch of a royal family wiping out their seniors. Suspicions have already been voiced, inside and outside of the country. Without an outside investigation, how can anyone be sure that the guilty party is dead and the beneficiaries were innocent bystanders?

It's also, perhaps, an indication of how Tibetan politics might have gone had it ever managed to establish itself as a recognised independent state (as it never was under international law). Historically, Tibet's politics were often murderous, with several Dalai Lamas mysteriously dying as they became almost old enough to displace the then regent. And even in exile factionalism has continued among a ruling class with no idea of the modern world.

### Dot-com and dotty-cons

The good news is that you can invest

in stocks and shares and make a fortune. The bad news is that it's likely to be someone else's fortune, made at your expense.

All money made by smooth, successful trades is made at someone else's expense.

The Market slide has helped the 'smart money' to get out. Leaving the losses to the 'stupid money', the ordinary investors who were encouraged to risk money they cannot afford to lose.

Meanwhile the serious side of the Internet is being organised by huge corporations, and non-profit-making and public service websites do well. It's been a boost to the economy, but not the source of 'free money' in the way it was made out to be by journalists—themselves rather close to the 'smart money' that continues to do well.

### Weaving the web.

Find the Bevin Society at <http://members.aol.com/BevinSoc/is.htm>

## Party, Anyone ?

John Clayden

The only event on T.V. to enliven a dull election evening, following an equally dull campaign, was when the re-elected member for Hartlepool—eschewing the traditional election speech, refreshingly opted for a style more reminiscent of the Bad Fairy at the wedding feast in *Sleeping Beauty*.

The lowest turnout since 1919 is an indication that the youngest generations of the traditional Labour constituency no longer retain the need to define their identity in the way their parents do. They, quite understandably, concluded that there was little on offer for them from all the main parties so they saw no point in voting. The older working-class vote stood up not because the policies are that attractive to them but because of this loyalty and identity. The Tory core maintains itself for the same reasons but is in a more advanced state of decay.

After Blair's highjacking of the

Party left voters had nowhere to go, except possibly to the Lib Dems, the failure of the Labour Left to make any impact during the first term was predictable, because of its incorrigible shortcoming—which this magazine has been at pains to point out for longer than it cares to remember. They have never, except with the honourable exception of a few Jack Joneses and Barbara Castles, been able to conceive a realistic program for the consolidation, or development of, the reforms of the 1945 Labour Government. Most left activity boiled down to protest, and these shortcomings, coupled with opportunism, will no doubt continue to cripple any attempts by them to capitalise on Blair's landslide in this next term. Witness the ease which Peter Hain is allowed to boast recently that he has reigned in European legislation granting workers entitlement to consultation with employers over threats

to their jobs.

Watching Blair's victory speech in the Labour hall in Sedgefield, the thought occurred to me that Blair was able to tap the not very political decent majority in the Party because in a way he is a bit like them. He came into the Party with virtually no political background, but with all the eclectic skills typical of a barrister taking up a brief. His experience of the faction fighting in a traditional Labour stronghold of the northern heartland was hardly an inspiring learning experience for him and it is not surprising he was able to enthuse the rank and file in his constituency, who were equally turned off.

Meanwhile, for those who, for one reason or another, still concern themselves with generating relevant socialist ideas, is there any alternative to forming a small but hopefully influential socialist party? Although this hardly seems feasible without some form of PR.

## The Breaking Up of British Rail

David Morrison

The Commons Environment Select Committee published a report on the railways recently, entitled *Rail Investment: Renewal, Maintenance and Development of the National Rail Network*. It is well worth reading, not least because it describes in horrendous detail the break up of British Rail. It is a minor miracle that after that vandalism trains run at all, let alone run reasonably safely.

### British Rail Solely Responsible

Paragraph 5 describes the integrated state prior to privatisation:

"5. Before it was restructured in the run-up to privatisation, the British Railways Board (hereinafter 'British Rail') was charged with providing 'railway services in Great Britain and such other services and facilities as appear to the Board to be expedient, having due regard to the efficiency, economy and safety of operation'. In short British Rail was solely responsible for all aspects of railway operations in Great Britain: it was the operator of passenger and freight rail services and the provider of the railway infrastructure, responsible for the maintenance, renewal and development of the track, signalling, power supply, stations and so on. It also provided other services: British Rail Maintenance Limited, headquartered in Derby, carried out overhauls and repairs to British Rail's locomotives and rolling stock, and another subsidiary, Transmark, acted as a consultant to projects being carried out by foreign railway companies and others. In 1990, British Rail employed more than 136,000 staff, the vast majority in the company's rail and corporate activities, and its turnover was £3,777 million. Annual Government grant to the industry was approximately £700 million."

### Internal Restructuring

Then in the early 90s the Government ordered internal restructuring in preparation for privatisation:

"6. British Rail's Organising for  
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Quality process, undertaken between 1990 and 1992, led to a significant restructuring of the company in the run-up to privatisation. The process aimed to give "managers ownership and bottom-line responsibility for the assets they use and moves responsibility for decision-making as close as possible to the customer". Three passenger rail businesses were established: Intercity, Network SouthEast and Regional Railways. Each business was then further divided: Intercity into five 'routes', Network SouthEast into nine divisions, and Regional Railways into five regions, a structure still recognisable in the current system of rail passenger franchises. The new organisation ended the division of the network into six geographical regions, and transferred ownership of trains, stations, track and signalling to the new passenger rail businesses. The parcels business and the rail freight businesses were also restructured, and a number of central divisions were established to support the new group of businesses under the 'umbrella' of the British Railways Board.

"7. During the next three years British Rail continued to prepare for transfer to the private sector, following the framework provided by the Railway Act 1993. The Act envisaged further restructuring of British Rail, including the separation of the railway infrastructure from the operation of passenger and freight train services. Regulation of the railway would be carried out by a new Rail Regulator, responsible for licensing all those involved in the railway ... The Act also established a Franchising Director, charged with letting time-limited franchises to those wishing to operate most passenger rail services, and with disbursing subsidies to them for doing so. In addition, the Act set out a framework through which train operating companies could make arrangements with the owner of the rail infrastructure for the use of the network, and for payments to be made to the infrastructure

owner in return.

### Passenger Services

"8. On 1 April 1994, Intercity, Network SouthEast and Regional Railways ceased to exist as single units. Passenger rail services became the direct responsibility of twenty-five train operating units: over the following few years each unit was operated as a shadow franchise, before finally being offered for sale by the Franchising Director. Ownership of domestic passenger trains and rolling stock was transferred from the passenger rail units to three rolling stock leasing companies (ROSCOs), which were eventually separated from British Rail in 1995 and sold. Ownership of the track, signalling and freeholds of stations, other buildings and operational land were transferred to a new public-sector company, Railtrack. The licence to operate the railway network granted to Railtrack by the Secretary of State for Transport under the Railways Act 1993 also came into force at the same time. As well as taking responsibility for more than 19,000 miles of track and associated signalling and electrical control equipment, providing a network of almost 10,000 miles, Railtrack also took ownership of bridges, tunnels and viaducts, level crossings and light maintenance depots, as well as connections to more than 1,000 freight terminals. The company also owned 2,500 stations which, with the exception of fourteen major stations, it has since leased to train operating companies. The company was sold through a public flotation in May 1996: at that time, its annual turnover was £2,300 million, and it employed 11,340 staff.

### Freight Services

"9. Freight services, which had already been restructured, were also privatised. The three train-load freight units were sold in February 1996, and eventually amalgamated as English Welsh and Scottish Railway (EWS). Later in 1996 EWS purchased Rail Express Systems Limited, the division which dealt with mail for the Post Office, and in 1997 it purchased Railfreight Distribution, the business which dealt with international rail freight through the Channel Tunnel. Red Star Parcels Limited was sold off in 1995, and Freightliner, which carried containers by rail, was privatised as an independent company in May 1996. British Rail's heavy maintenance depots, which

provided the ROSCOs with heavy maintenance services, were sold off between April and June 1995, and other subsidiaries which provided services as diverse as training, engineering services, project management, information technology maintenance, and a range of consultancy services, were disposed of, mainly between July 1995 and March 1997.

In all, British Rail was split into more than a hundred different companies, most of which were then transferred to new private sector owners [our emphasis]."

### Co-ordinating Mechanisms

Having broken an integrated railway system into fragments, mechanisms for co-ordinating the fragments had to be put in place. A Rail Regulator and a Franchising Director were mentioned above.

The Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) was established under the 1993 Act. Its central function was to issue licences to operate trains, networks, stations and maintenance depots and to monitor that licence holders are operating within the terms of their licences. Railtrack, the train operating companies (both passenger and freight) and infrastructure maintenance companies are all licenced by the ORR.

The ORR also sets track access charges, that is, what Railtrack is allowed to charge the train operating companies for use of the track. The market could not be allowed to function in track access because Railtrack was the sole owner of track and was therefore in a position to dictate terms to the train operating companies. So the Regulator has to be involved in approving access agreements, including access charges. The agreements also contain penalties for failure to deliver appropriate access resulting in trains being late or having to be cancelled. This is a constant source of wrangling between Railtrack and the train operating companies, necessitating the establishment of large legal departments on all sides.

Apart from a licence agreement from the ORR and an access agreement with Railtrack approved by the ORR, all train operators have to have a plan for safe operation (a so-called safety 'case') approved by Railtrack and Her Majesty's

Railway Inspectorate, which is part of the Health and Safety Executive.

The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising (OPRAF), responsible for letting franchises for operating passenger services, was also established. Unlike road passenger services, unregulated provision of rail passenger services is impossible because trains cannot move freely on railways the way buses can on roads, in other words, it's impossible to have competition in the provision of rail passenger services. So a central franchising body, OPRAF, had to be established to let franchises for the supply of passenger services on particular areas of the network to train operating companies. The franchise agreement specified the level of service to be supplied (and penalties for not supplying it), set some but not all fares and handed out the Treasury subsidy.

[To add a further complication, in seven metropolitan areas Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) were set up with the authority to specify the minimum level of service and administer subsidy. They are co-signatories to the relevant franchise agreements.]

Freight train operators are not franchisees like passenger train operating companies, but are commercial companies with no public obligation to provide a given level of service. The freight business operates in an 'open access' environment whereby any operator can run freight trains subject to obtaining a safety case, license and access to the railway network. Freight subsidies are administered by the DETR.

Privatisation also left a residual British Rail, which was primarily a property company charged with the disposal of its property. It was also intended that it would run passenger services in areas where suitable private franchisees did not come forward, but the Treasury subsidy was pitched high enough to avoid this.

### New Labour's SRA

It is now taken as an established fact that the fragmentation of British Rail at privatisation was a disaster. Of late, the Government has pointed to it as a reason for some of the problems on the railway. But it has done nothing to put the railway system together again. Quite the reverse. It has ensured that it will remain

fragmented for the foreseeable future, by approving 20-year passenger franchises in future as the current franchises come up for re-letting.

Apart from that contribution to the consolidation of the existing fragmentation, New Labour's only other significant contribution has been to merge the almost defunct British Rail with OPRAF and rename it the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA), and to give it responsibility for developing the network. The SRA was established on 1 February this year by the Transport Act 2000 with Sir Alistair Morton as Chairman, having been operating in "shadow" form without legislative authority for nearly 2 years (because John Prescott had been denied legislative time for a transport bill the previous year).

[In fact, the "shadow" SRA was the British Railways Board and Morton was the last chairman of the British Railways Board - British Rail was finally abolished on 31 January 2001 by New Labour.]

The SRA's ability to develop the network is limited. It cannot like its predecessor, British Rail, produce a strategic plan for the railway system and, subject to the finance being available, implement the plan itself. All it can do is seek out private bodies to undertake worthwhile developments and bribe them with taxpayers' money to carry them out. According to the Government, the SRA was going to produce a 10-year plan for the railway system early this year. Understandably what it has come up with is not a plan but what it calls an "agenda" for the railways, that is, a wish list of developments, which it acknowledges won't all be implemented.

One thing seems to have been decided: post-Hatfield, Railtrack is not going to be given any responsibility for major developments. They will be carried out and owned by other private consortia - which will add even further complexity to the railway system.

### Infrastructure, Maintenance and Renewal

The above account of the fragmentation of British Rail tells only half the story. The other half is what happened to the infrastructure maintenance part of British Rail. Before

privatisation it had been separated into fourteen geographically based infrastructure service units. The Select Committee report takes up the story:

"10. At the time of privatisation, Railtrack said that its aim was to provide a "safe, modern and efficient railway which not only meets but anticipates the needs of our customers". To do so it would be required to maintain, renew and develop the railway infrastructure. However, it was not intended that Railtrack would carry out such work itself: instead, it had long been envisaged that "much of the work involved in operating, developing and maintaining the infrastructure will be contracted out". Initially, track, signalling, electrification and plant maintenance and renewal work was carried out under contract to the company by fourteen geographically-based infrastructure service units which had not been transferred to Railtrack but instead continued to be owned by British Rail. Improvement, development and enhancement work would, it was thought, be carried out under contracts let for each specific project.

"11. On 1 April 1995 the infrastructure service units were restructured into British Rail Infrastructure Services, which comprised seven Infrastructure Maintenance Units and six Track Renewal Units, as well as a number of design offices. At that time British Rail Infrastructure Services had a total workforce of 25,204 and a turnover of £1,129 million. The relationship between Railtrack and the Maintenance and Renewal Units was then formalised in a series of contracts which encompassed, amongst other requirements, the Train Performance Scheme agreed between Railtrack and British Rail Infrastructure Services. Contracts between the Units and other companies within the rail industry were also signed.

In all, more than two thousand formal agreements were made, before the Infrastructure Maintenance Units and Track Renewal Units were sold between February and July 1996 [our emphasis].

"12. The seven Infrastructure Maintenance Units were sold to six main buyers, which inherited the contracts agreed with Railtrack to undertake maintenance work in specific

geographical areas based on the old British Rail zones. The maintenance contracts were actually based on thirty-five smaller regions within the seven zones: over time contracts have been transferred or given up and re-let, so that companies now rarely have responsibility for maintenance across whole zones.... Maintenance companies are required to inspect the railway in their contracted regions, and where necessary repair the permanent way, signalling, electrification equipment, operational telecommunication equipment and lineside assets. The objective of such maintenance is to enable Railtrack to "provide consistent and reliable train paths to... customers". The original maintenance contracts (known as RT1a contracts) were let for between five and seven years. As they have come up for renewal, there have been further transfers between companies.

"13. Infrastructure renewal companies are contracted to Railtrack on a geographical basis similar to that for the maintenance companies. Rather than maintaining existing assets, renewal companies are called in to replace assets which have reached the end of their useful life, or to make replacements which will bring improved performance to the network. Thus, for example, in 1999 Railtrack reported that it had sought to target renewals at 200 or so critical locations which would "have the greatest impact on train performance". Seven companies are currently under contract to Railtrack to provide renewals.

"14. Since the privatisation of the maintenance and renewal companies, works on the railway network have been carried out by them under contract to Railtrack. Similarly, development and enhancement works have been undertaken by companies specifically contracted to do so. Railtrack's role has been, as was envisaged before privatisation, to manage the process through its oversight of contractual arrangements with those working on the railway, ensuring that they meet set quality standards, and are competent and safe. It does so through the 'cascade model': contractors are required to demonstrate to Railtrack that they have put in place management structures and developed a safety case which will ensure that they operate competently and safely.

They are also required to monitor their own performance. The contractors in turn are expected to ensure that their sub-contractors put in place similar contractual arrangements.

"15. Thus what Railtrack acknowledges is its sole responsibility for ensuring that infrastructure works are carried out, for their quality, and for safety standards on the network 'cascades' down through the system to contractors and sub-contractors. In addition, Railtrack is expected to verify the quality and safety of its contractors through 'end product' checks, random and periodic site visits and safety management system reviews, as well as undertaking safety audits."

#### The Picture Today

That is a formal statement of what has happened to the infrastructure maintenance function in British Rail. But it is worse than that. There used to be gangs of men employed by British Rail, each gang responsible for the maintenance of piece of track and taking a pride in maintaining it. Now the railway is maintained by men working for sub-contractors of Railtrack's maintenance contractors (or perhaps sub-contractors of them) moving around the country doing jobs as required. Many experienced railwaymen took the opportunity of redundancy at the time of privatisation to get out.

Here is the picture today as painted by Joanna Walters in the Observer on 22 October last, just after the Hatfield crash:

"The track menders had come all the way to the rail depot in London on a minibus from Rotherham, leaving at 4am and arriving at dawn. A motley bunch of ex-miners, mechanics and taxi drivers, they are part of the new army of subcontractors that has sprung up to cash in on Britain's railway boom.

"The men are employed by a tiny Yorkshire-based maintenance outfit. Balfour Beatty uses them to fix the tracks. Railtrack employs Balfour Beatty. The companies that run the trains rely on Railtrack to keep the track operational and their trains running on time. It is privatisation's version of the chain gang, a cascade of responsibility that spill over

Concluded on p. 15

## Kevin Brady

# Parliamentary Diary

### Locking The Stable Door...

So the trade unions are preparing themselves for a showdown with the Government over the role of the private sector in the public services. Apparently they agreed not to rock the boat during the election campaign, but are now girding their loins for battle. But it is difficult to see exactly what they hope to achieve. Labour made it abundantly clear that, if re-elected, private finance would play an increasing part in the delivery of the public services, education and health in particular. If the public services are so sacrosanct, the GMB, T&GWU and UNISON who have been making threatening noises since 7th June, should have added their voices to that of the Lib-Dems, the only party to argue for higher taxes to pay an improvement in public services.

Having just been returned with another massive majority, the Government is not going to change its policy on PFI and PPP simply because the unions demand it. Although only one in four electors actually supported Labour, Blair and Brown will claim they have a clear mandate for their policies. Opinion polls may show that most people don't want business to run education and health, but they didn't feel strongly enough about it to reject Labour. Blair and Brown know that people are really concerned about the delivery of services, not the deliverers, and that if this improves over the next few years, public opinion will change. Let's face it, if the electors are prepared to put up with an ex-Tory in St Helens and a Blair clone in South Shields, both imposed on the local party, they will put up with private finance in the public services.

Bill Morris, the leader of the T&GWU, has said there should be a debate about the role of the private sector in the public services. Where on earth

has he been for the last four years? PFI and PPP have been debated to death within the TUC and the Labour Party, as well as the media. Trade unionists, Party members and the general public are extremely familiar with the arguments. One suspects that his call for a debate is a substitute for action on his part and that of the T&G. If he doesn't want business to have a role in the public services he should have made this clear during the election campaign and advised his members not to support a party so in awe of the private sector.

Rail is one public service where it can safely be said delivery will not improve. The system is in a mess and confidence in Railtrack has collapsed; so who is going to finance infrastructure improvement? Labour's transport plan envisages £34 billion of private investment in rail over the next ten years, on top of £26 billion of public money. But Railtrack can't even raise the £2.6 billion they say they need to deal with the effects of the Hatfield accident last October. Bill Morris, leader of the biggest transport workers' union, should be demanding that the Government takes over Railtrack and coughs up the whole of the £60 billion or so investment. Unless this happens nothing will improve and five years from now the electors will blame Labour.

Entry to the Euro is one issue which certainly needs to be debated. But it is in Labour's interest that this happens later, rather than sooner. The Tories' present predicament is similar to that of Labour twenty years ago: the voters just don't see them as an alternative government. And until they have elected a new leader and worked out a coherent political programme, they will not be taken seriously. But the adoption of a coherent political programme is dependent on a

decision by the people on entry to the Euro. For as long as that decision is delayed the Tories will continue to be divided and therefore rejected by the people.

But Labour also has its problems over the Euro. Peter Hain, who is regarded as a Eurosceptic, is the new Minister for Europe. He has no doubt been appointed to ward off any potential trouble from the other Eurosceptics in the parliamentary party. A slick operator, Hain will surely rise to the occasion, just as he did in dealing with criticism of Labour's ethical foreign policy during his previous time at the Foreign Office. Jack Straw, the new Foreign Secretary, also a Eurosceptic, will be there to offer a helping hand. While David Blunkett, Straw's replacement at the Home Office, will be doing his best to make Ann Widdecombe sound like a liberal. Welcome to the new Tory party!

If Labour is the new Tory party, is there any point in continuing to refer to itself as the Labour Party? After all, what's in a name? In this case, quite a lot. The label 'Labour' is essential if the Party wants to hold on to its working class support, particularly in the North East and North West of England. Working class people tend to be loyal; to their family, their friends and to what they see as their Party. To expect them to vote anything but Labour, would be like expecting a Sunderland supporter to switch his allegiance to Newcastle. Blair understands this; that is why he is able to get away with imposing ex-Tories on them.

But Blair had better be careful. Loyalty has its limits, and there were signs in the election results that they have almost been reached. The low turn-out is a warning: unless Labour delivers for its core supporters its vote will evaporate at the next election. Not that Labour's core supporters will vote Tory, but sufficient numbers of them could switch to the Liberal-Democrats or stay at home, making it possible for the Tories to sneak home, thus denying Blair the third consecutive win he so earnestly desires. In the meantime, however, he has Messrs Edmonds, Morris and Prentis to contend with.

### The Heresiarch

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## Europe's New Imperialism

Jack Lane

It's surprising that Blair has not come up with a 'New Europe' slogan. It would be very appropriate as there is now a new Europe in the making and Britain has played a big part in creating and leading it.

The original European project after the War was an effort to arrange for the survival of the better European values and a social system that could compete successfully as an alternative to that of the USSR and the USA. Its creation was intrinsically shaped by the existence of the Cold War and a determination by France and Germany not to be victims again of Britain's divide and rule tactics. All European nation states, including Britain, were cut down to size by the USSR and the USA and had to adjust to a limited role in the world—and the world and Europe were better places for it. The old imperial impulses were declining rapidly and some form of genuine European integration on a morally sound basis was beginning to emerge.

That is no longer the case. The Cold War is over and the European states are rediscovering their natural imperial instincts in a new form. Their confinement is over. They have discovered a new freedom and now have plans for the world once again.

The Nice Treaty effectively created an Alliance of the main nation states, rather than any more integration, with a diminished Commission (the core European institution) and small states put in their place. The talking shop called the European Parliament can be ignored and used when necessary as a back-up chorus to what the states want to do. Joschka Fischer explained at a meeting in London recently that he had given up his notions on federal/integration plans and nation states were here to stay. He had accepted the British concept and came to London to make it clear. Britain has been allowed to play games in Europe again.

I think it is not fanciful to see that the nation states of Europe see themselves as recovering from what they could see as their civil wars of the 20th century (the world wars) where they weakened themselves unnecessarily and are now going to co-operate and continue where they left off before WW1. As Britain set these wars in motion and always came out on the winning side she is the most unaffected by them and is accepted as the moral leader of this alliance.

There is no evidence that any European states are prepared to oppose Britain even when she blatantly ignores them and, for example, bombs Iraq with the Americans. The fact that they tolerate this behaviour shows that they deserve to be treated with contempt by Britain. Whether Britain stays in or out of the Euro does not matter that much as it is clear she will lead Europe in the most important areas of war and military matters.

Harold Macmillan once said that Britain's new role after Empire could be a relationship with Europe that would be a version of what Greece was to Rome. It would provide the brains and Europe the brawn. Europe would be their new Empire and it would have been a benign imperial aim if Britain had continued its socialist direction and the Cold War had kept Europe in its place. A version of Macmillan's concept is happening but in a way that he (and Heath) could never have imagined.

Britain's imperial instincts become crystal clear occasionally in places like Zimbabwe and Iraq; that of the Belgians with regard to the Congo, the Spanish with Chile, Germany with Serbia, etc. They have blooded themselves together in this new enterprise in the war against Serbia and plan to have an army of their own to continue similar adventures.

Leon Brittain, and now Chris Patten, have set the agenda for Europe becoming the leading globalising force in the world and making this the main focus of the

whole European Union project.

The Holocaust and anti-fascist ideology are being promoted across European states as a way of self-exorcising themselves morally from any responsibility for past crimes and they have the arrogance to see fascism wherever they fancy and then give themselves the self-righteous authority to wage war against it as they wish. They are rewriting their own history accordingly.

The Socialist movement is essentially part of this new Imperialism.

What is wrong with Europe trying to dominate the world?

In its present state, it is a destructive, atomising force that destroys all existing cultures. The old Imperialism did so with an ideology of Christianity plus survival of the fittest; the modern version combines economic determinism with a morally self-righteous rhetoric of 'good versus evil'.

This new version is even more powerful because it has a democratic base and, as Burke said, democracies have no conscience and democratic wars are therefore the most fierce, systematic and irresponsible. Other wars are mere crimes of passion by comparison. Moreover, the democracy of Europe has a vested interest in the successes of this new imperialism so there is unlikely to be internal resistance.

The wars against Iraq and Serbia have shown how this Europe behaves. It is a taste of what is to come. The 21st century will be bloodier than the 20th and for no other reason than domination of the world to make life easy for Europeans.

### Labour Party Conference

#### Bevin Society Meeting

Monday, 1st October, 6.30

Brighton Media Centre  
Conference Room

#### 'Whither Europe— An Existential Survey'

Speakers Welcome!

## The Enforcement Of Liberty

Gwydion M. Williams

"Think twice about the Constitution you are supposedly enforcing (isn't 'enforcing freedom' an oxymoron?)". Thus wrote McVeigh, in a letter quoted in *American Terrorist: Timothy McVeigh & the Oklahoma City Bombing*, by Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, page 185.

Oxymorons are phrases that don't add up—wet dryness, sharply blunt, silent noise. But enforcement is inherent in the idea of a constitution, a set of rules binding even on democratically elected rulers. Rules that are not enforced cease to mean anything.

Liberalism began with Cromwell and his political heirs, the Whig or Liberal Party. It ended as a major British political tradition with Lloyd George, after his Liberal Party had needlessly led Britain into the Great War and then proved incapable of either winning it or ending it as an agreed stalemate (as the Germans offered when the war bogged down).

For functional Liberals, rhetoric about liberty always went along with a complete willingness to use massive force and violence where necessary—even when it was foolish and self-destructive rather than necessary. (Britain might not have lost Ireland had it not been so savage in its reaction to the 1916 Easter Rising, which was initially unpopular among the Irish).

US politics began as a hiving-off of the more hard-line end of British Whig politics, with English supporters of John Wilkes referring to the war in America as a civil war. Thus all sections of US politics had the rhetoric about liberty combined with a readiness to use force and fraud to do 'God's Business', a total take-over of North America by the British colonials.

You cannot imagine many Americans using a phrase as straightforward as 'the enforcement of liberty'. But it's a fair description of the best side of their politics—the flip side being their enforcement of dictatorships when US commercial interests are well served. Saddam Hussein had been just

such a dictatorial friend, but was one of many who found themselves surplus to requirements when the Cold War ended. But unlike Ceaucescu in Romania, or Suharto in Indonesia, he was wily and has survived even though the USA had marked him down to fall even before his invasion of Kuwait.

It was this and the subsequent Gulf War that was a turning-point for a young soldier called Tim McVeigh.

McVeigh had been a great success as a US army sergeant, a system even worse for bullying than the British version. I suppose it would be possible for a man to have been an army sergeant and then repent of it, but this isn't what happened. McVeigh found that the US army wasn't what he'd expected, and with a curious double-think he considered both that they should have stayed out of the Gulf and that they should have pushed on to Baghdad to topple Saddam Hussein.

McVeigh had no qualms about military discipline and became almost the perfect model of a modern army sergeant. When enforcement suits such characters, when it fits their prejudices, it is deemed not to be enforcement. (Plato plays just this same trick, and generations of philosophers have gone along with it.) For McVeigh and similar 'militia' types, the real complaint is that it is no longer their sort of liberty that is being enforced. Out-dated and unwanted versions of the USA's 'standardised individualism', they can find no response except violence.

Liberty to McVeigh and his ilk is people like them ordering other people's lives as they think fit (which is liberation, since every last detail of it is approved by God). Tyranny is anyone stopping them doing what they want, even if the majority of the population have democratically decided that some things are not allowed.

The Ruby Ridge siege, regarded by McVeigh as Federal tyranny, began because the fellow sold a sawn-off

shotgun to a police informant. Now I don't think even the National Rifle Association is in favour of sawn-off shotguns being available to any nut who wants to buy one; they are specifically designed for murder or for robbery with threat of murder. But how can you have such a rule unless you actually enforce it on offenders?

So what's the mentality of McVeigh? Does he even have an individual psychology, or is he a rare but predictable outcropping of the USA's mass consciousness.

Macbeth is hardly an unknown name, yet I've not seen anyone notice that McVeigh is a variant on it. McVeigh is more properly McVay or McBay, and is a sept of Clan MacLean, though some are also linked to Clan MacDonald. Beaton and Bethune come from the same root.

I doubt, though, that it's anything to do with ancestry. The historic Macbeth killed the historic Duncan in open warfare and in approved Scottish-Gaelic manner. And 'American Terrorist' says nothing about Timothy McVeigh having any Scottish ancestry, his origins are described as 'working-class Catholic'. (A profile in *The Sunday Times*, of 10th June, says his parents were from Portadown, Northern Ireland.) There are Scottish Catholics in the US, but authentic Scottish roots are not often left unmentioned.

Americans seldom do care about names except as a bit of cultural flimflam. (Though I've been told that McDonalds Hamburgers haven't yet ventured into Campbell country.) The book 'American Terrorist' is happy to see McVeigh as a Unit of Person living in Nowhereland. This is part of the heritage of the European Enlightenment, which went to extremes in its opposition to local particularism.

US culture was originally a hiving-off from English culture, but it had to assimilate huge waves of later immigrants, as well as numerous Dutch and French who were already there. It also exterminated the Native Americans and kept Afro-Americans in subjection. That all this succeeded is remarkable, given the break-up of the much more homogeneous Spanish settlements. But the 'enforcement of liberty' was always managed quite effectively, with the USA in its modern form owing its shape to the Federal government's victory against Confederate secessionists. Americans long ago learned how to be efficient

mass-producers of new Americans out of almost any suitable raw material. This meant anyone who could look convincingly American after due processing; people who looked darker or just different were not accepted. The status of Jews also used to be very suspect and remains a shade uncertain even today, while Liberals want everyone processed identically regardless of appearance or background. The desirability of making anyone 'suitable' a Unit of Person living in Nowhereland is not often doubted.

If you remember how the Americans were made what they are, it is easier to understand how they also became efficient mass-producers of Colt revolvers, Ford motorcars or Microsoft computer products. Originality is another matter; this comes mostly from outsiders or 'internal exiles'. The people who do the significant cultural or creative work are typically Jewish or Afro-American or gay or not born in the USA (particular individuals may be in more than one of these categories, of course). In Britain—itsself the original home of mass production and Standardised Individualism—the situation is much less extreme and you get originally creative people from the core of the culture as well as its fringes. Among our successful exports to the USA are Stanley who found Livingstone, Charlie Chaplin and other Hollywood greats (e.g. Cary Grant, Gary Cooper), as well as the only two WASPs to succeed in American Organised Crime, Owen Madden and Murray 'The Camel' Humphreys. True Americans went more for the doomed and stupid brutality of Bonnie & Clyde.

The American 'norm' is a piece of gross weirdness, speaking in world-historical terms. US culture is dominated by the bizarre expectation that utopia should result from processing human diversity into a Unit of Person living in Nowhereland. And the failure of this system to satisfy actual human needs produces monsters like McVeigh.

'American Terrorist' was written by Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, who managed to get McVeigh's cooperation. It was also written with valuable contributions from God Almighty, according to the note on page vii. "First and foremost, we would like to thank God for lifting us up, removing obstacles, and showing us the way forward so many times during the five years it took us to research and write this book."

They've missed the Macbeth

connection, and have zero interest on what the McVeigh family used to be. While making a big thing about McVeigh's supposed lack of racism, they overlook that two of his four favourite Star Trek actors are black (pages 112-13). And they turn a blind eye to evidence that McVeigh had more help than the official version now suggests, dismissing 'John Doe 2' as an error even though the eyewitness identification of McVeigh himself was excellent. God is falling down on the job, apparently.

Divine Approval for your own values is the transcendent justification for much smugness and vanity, and for the overall US policy of seeking to make everyone a Unit of Person living in Nowhereland. It's not 'what is my duty to God', as a genuinely religious person would ask sincerely, though sometimes dementedly. These characters ask 'how can I exalt myself with claims for Divine Approval? What can God do for me?'

It's a neat way of evading the inherent moral sense that most people feel, whatever they believe about religion. Certain things just seem wrong—but mainstream US religion will give you a blank cheque to be brutal and greedy if you also share their cultural values.

All of this is built into the system from the early days. In the USA, a bunch of elderly lawyers assembled as a 'Supreme Court' are judged fit to pass transcendental judgements on the fitness or otherwise of laws that the merely human legislatures may pass. It is called 'The Law', but law in the sense of divine or transcendental judgements is not to be found carved on any tablets of stone, at least not recently.

McVeigh himself held the same view under a gloss of science. "He believed that the universe was guided by natural law, energised by some universal higher power that showed each person right from wrong if they paid attention to what was going on inside them. 'Science', he would tell his friends 'is my religion'." (Ibid, page 143).

Bullshit was his religion. Throwing away religious revelation and then holding exactly the same views on the pretext of 'science' is a lot less rational than trusting to a religion that at least has some track record of successful 'organised virtue'.

Anybody genuinely filled with Universal Wisdom could prove it by discovering a new prime number (there

are infinitely many unknown prime numbers, according to mathematical theory). Yet claimants to transcendent wisdom never can come up with hard facts to back their claims.

On the specifics of the Oklahoma bombing, McVeigh chose to attack a fairly soft target. He was after three agencies: the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration. But his target included many other Federal agencies unconnected with law enforcement, as well as members of the public checking up on their welfare entitlements and a day-care centre full of children, which McVeigh claims not to have known about.

For all its posturing, the US Far Right does mostly attack soft targets. McVeigh was influenced by the fictional blowing-up of an FBI centre in Washington, but such places are well defended in the real world. The Murrah Building was vulnerable precisely because it was ordinary and open to the public.

McVeigh justified his behaviour by citing the example of Luke Skywalker blowing up the Deathstar in the movie Star Wars. "They may be individually innocent, but they are guilty because they work for the Evil Empire" (Ibid, 224). Bullshit again: if we leave aside the imaginary nature of events 'in a galaxy far far away', Luke is attacking a military installation, legitimate under any version of the Laws Of War. Not everyone there may be personally guilty, that is not the point. It's also regrettable (if mostly overlooked) that the Deathstar contains numerous prisoners—Princess Leia is mentioned in the book version as freed from Cell 2187 in detention block AA-23, and no one else is freed. But this is an unavoidable part of war: the enemy ship you sink or the enemy fort you bombard may contain non-combatants or even some of your own side held prisoner.

A warship must be considered a unit whether or not the people serving on it are armed. Most people in the navy will never fire a shot in anger even in wartime, only the big guns count, and nowadays missiles. On the main units, the aircraft carriers, the planes are the weapons but need the support staff and the rest of the crew. And these share whatever credit or blame for what is done with them.

Attacking military targets is warfare.

Attacking soft civilian target used to be defined as war crimes, until the Anglo-American tradition twisted it to mean just doing something the Anglo-Americans disapproved of.

Bombing 'soft' targets is exactly as evil and uncivilised when done by McVeigh in Oklahoma, Bush Senior in Iraq or Clinton in Serbia. The distinction between military and civilian targets should be fundamental. 18th century warfare, brutal though it was, had made a reasonable distinction and had abolished the mass slaughter and plundering of the 17th century Wars of Religion. This distinction was gradually eroded in 19th century warfare, and Britain and America were very much part of the decline in standards.

McVeigh claimed to be acting in the spirit of the US 'founding fathers'.

Bullshit again. The US 'founding fathers' wanted a republic, but not a democracy. Rule by the rich and clever, unhindered by hereditary rank and with the possibility of a few poor but clever men moving up the ladder, but with the bulk of the poor kept in proper subordination (along with all women regardless of birth).

The founding fathers also did not really want Highland Scots, let alone whatever the McVeigh family may have been originally. 18th century English gentry and their British-American equivalents viewed the Highland Scots much as today's equivalents view the Afghans. It was only very slowly and reluctantly the original core ideas of Anglo-Saxon and Puritan were widened to the modern Anglo-Celtic and Judeo-Christian. (But what the hell does Judeo-

Christian mean? Eat pork every other day and get yourself half-circumcised? Both terms are merely phrases for including right-wing Catholics and Jews within the circles of prejudice that used to be aimed at keeping them down.)

McVeigh also complains (pages 98-9) about the plight of Middle-America. But the fool blames it on taxes, not on the accumulation of wealth by the richest 10% which happened in America after tax-and-spend Keynesianism was derailed in the 1970s. In Britain, the poor were squeezed for the benefit of the rich. But only in America have the working mainstream been successfully squeezed and gone on blaming the wrong targets.

A wasted life—and a pointless death. That's my verdict on Timothy McVeigh.

## What Happened At Racak ?

David Morrison

On 15 January 1999, Yugoslav forces massacred 45 Kosovo Albanian civilians at the village of Racak. That was the story told by the West at the time.

That story was an essential part of NATO's justification for its air war against Yugoslavia two months later. It was the kernel of the humanitarian excuse for making war on a sovereign state without the sanction of the UN Security Council and therefore contrary to international law. Without it, the NATO war would never have been launched.

What is more, it is the only incident prior to the NATO bombing mentioned in the indictment of Slobodan Milosevic and his colleagues for war crimes by International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). Here is the relevant section of the indictment (paragraph 98):

"Beginning on or about 1 January 1999 and continuing until the date of this indictment [24 May 1999], forces of the FRY and Serbia, acting at the direction, with the encouragement, or with the support of Slobodan

MILOSEVIC, Milan MILUTINOVIC, Nikola SAINOVIC, Dragoljub OJDANIC, and Vlatko STOJILJKOVIC, have murdered hundreds of Kosovo Albanian civilians. These killings have occurred in a widespread or systematic manner throughout the province of Kosovo and have resulted in the deaths of numerous men, women, and children. Included among the incidents of mass killings are the following:

a. On or about 15 January 1999, in the early morning hours, the village of Racak (Stimlje/Shtime municipality) was attacked by forces of the FRY and Serbia. After shelling by the VJ units, the Serb police entered the village later in the morning and began conducting house-to-house searches. Villagers, who attempted to flee from the Serb police, were shot throughout the village. A group of approximately 25 men attempted to hide in a building, but were discovered by the Serb police. They were beaten and then were removed to a nearby hill, where the policemen shot and killed them. Altogether, the forces of the FRY and Serbia killed approximately 45 Kosovo Albanians in and around Racak."

That is the official NATO version of what happened. A BBC programme on the Kosovo conflict broadcast on 12 March last year cast doubt on the official line, saying: "Even now, more than a year on, important questions about what happened here remain unanswered".

Below we reproduce an English translation of an article by French journalist, Christophe Chatelot, published in *Le Monde* on 21 January 1999. Chatelot himself was in Racak on the afternoon of 15 January after the Yugoslav forces had withdrawn from the village and observed nothing out of the ordinary.

Were the Racak dead really massacred in cold blood?

The version of events spread by the Kosovars leaves several questions unanswered. Belgrade says that the forty-five victims were KLA "terrorists", killed in combat, but rejects any international investigation.

Pristina

Isn't the Racak massacre just too perfect? New eye witness accounts gathered on Monday 18 January by *Le Monde* throw doubt on the reality of the horrible spectacle of dozens of piled up bodies of Albanians supposedly summarily executed by Serb security forces last Friday. Were the victims executed in cold blood, as the KLA says, or killed in combat, as the Serbs say?

According to the version gathered

and broadcast by the press and the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the massacre took place on 15 January in the early afternoon. "Masked" Serbian police entered the village of Racak, which had been shelled all morning by Yugoslav army tanks.

They broke down the doors and entered people's homes, ordering the women to stay there while they pushed the men to the edge of the village to calmly execute them with a bullet through the head, not without first having tortured and mutilated several. Some witnesses even said that the Serbs sang as they did their dirty work, before leaving the village around 15:30.

The account by two journalists of Associated Press TV television (APTV) who filmed the police operation in Racak contradicts this tale. When at 10:00 they entered the village in the wake of a police armoured vehicle, the village was nearly deserted. They advanced through the streets under fire from KLA fighters lying in ambush in the woods above the village. The exchange of fire continued throughout the operation, with more or less intensity. The main fighting took place in the woods. The Albanians who had fled the village when the first Serb shells were fired at dawn tried to escape. There they ran into Serbian police who had surrounded the village. The KLA was trapped in between.

The object of the violent police attack on Friday was a stronghold of KLA Albanian independence fighters. Virtually all the inhabitants had fled Racak during the frightful Serb offensive of the summer of 1998. With few exceptions, they had not come back. "Smoke came from only two chimneys", noted one of the two APTV reporters.

The Serb operation was thus no surprise, nor was it a secret. On the morning of the attack, a police source tipped off APTV: "Come to Racak, something is happening". At 10:00, the team was on the spot alongside the police. It filmed from a peak overlooking the village and then through the streets in the wake of an armoured vehicle. The OSCE was also warned of the action. At least two teams of international observers watched the fighting from a hill where

they could see part of the village. They entered Racak shortly after the police left. They then questioned a few Albanians about the situation, trying to find out whether there were wounded civilians. Around 18:00, they took four persons - two women and two old men - who were very slightly wounded toward the dispensary of the neighbouring town of Stimje. The verifiers said at that time that they were "incapable of establishing the number of casualties of that day of fighting".

The publicity given by the Serbian police to that operation was intense. At 10:30, they gave out their first press release. They announced that the police had "encircled the village of Racak with the aim of arresting the members of a terrorist group who killed a policeman" the previous Sunday. At 15:00 a first bulletin announced fifteen Albanians killed in fighting. The next day, Saturday, they welcomed the success of the operation which, they said, had resulted in the death of dozens of KLA "terrorists" and the capture of a large stock of weapons.

The attempt to arrest an Albanian presumed to have murdered a Serb policeman turned into a massacre. At 15:30 the police evacuated the site under the sporadic fire of a handful of KLA fighters who continued to hold out thanks to the steep and rough terrain. In no time, the first of the Albanians who had got away came back down into the village, those who had managed to hide came out in the open and three KVM vehicles drove into the village. One hour after the police left, night fell.

#### Guided by the KLA

The next morning, the press and the KVM came to see the damage caused by the fighting. It was at this moment that, guided by the armed KLA fighters who had recaptured the village, they discovered the ditch where a score of bodies were piled up, almost exclusively men. At midday, the chief of the KVM in person, the American diplomat William Walker, arrived on the spot and declared his indignation at the atrocities committed by "the Serb police forces and the Yugoslav army".

The condemnation was total, irrevocable. And yet questions remain. How could the Serb police have gathered

together a group of men and led them calmly toward the execution site while they were constantly under fire from KLA fighters? How could the ditch located on the edge of Racak have escaped notice by local inhabitants familiar with the surroundings who were present before nightfall? Or by the observers who were present for over two hours in this tiny village? Why so few cartridges around the corpses, so little blood in the hollow road where 23 people are supposed to have been shot at close range with several bullets in the head? Rather, weren't the bodies of the Albanians killed in combat by the Serb police gathered into the ditch to create a horrendous scene, which was sure to have an appalling effect on public opinion? Doesn't the violence and rapidity of Belgrade's reaction, which gave the chief of the KVM 48 hours to leave Yugoslavia, show that the Yugoslavs are sure of what they are saying?

Only an international inquiry above all suspicion will make it possible to clarify these obscure points. Finnish and Belorussian legal doctors were expected to arrive in Pristina on Wednesday to attend the autopsies being carried out by Yugoslav doctors. The problem is that the Belgrade authorities have never been co-operative in this matter. Why? Whatever the conclusions of the investigators, the Racak massacre shows that the hope of soon reaching a settlement of the Kosovo crisis seems quite illusory.

#### World Wide Web

Further information about various magazines, pamphlets and books can be obtained on the Internet. Look up ATHOL INFORMATION at

[www.users.dircon.co.uk/~athol-st/](http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~athol-st/)

The Labour & Trade Union Review is entirely dependent on subscriptions and sales for its continued existence. It is on sale in London in Dillon's, The Economist's Bookshop, and Housman's at King's Cross. It is also obtainable at Books Upstairs, Dublin and in Eason's, Botanic Avenue, Belfast.

#### Railtrack— concluded from p. 8

last week as the danger that many have been warning about ever since the railway was parcelled into more than 100 pieces and sold off finally became a reality."

Sensibly, the Select Committee recommends (paragraph 51) that Railtrack take the necessary measures to employ its own maintenance staff:

"Given that the previous means of managing maintenance and renewal contractors has failed, we strongly recommend that Railtrack take over direct responsibility for inspecting the network, and for directly employing those who work on the maintenance and renewal of the rail network. It should do so without any further prevarication and delay, and without awaiting the outcome of a spurious 'review'. In order to carry out these functions properly we recommend that Railtrack employ adequate engineering and project management expertise. Moreover, the Board of Railtrack should reflect a knowledge of engineering that complements these responsibilities."

#### Announcement

Albrecht Haushofer:  
Moabite Sonnets (1944-5)  
with an English translation

Introduction by Angela Clifford:  
*The Haushofers, Geopolitics And  
The Second World War*

ATHOL BOOKS £7.50 post free  
0 85034 0926

Albrecht Haushofer's Moabite Sonnets, which were written in a Nazi Jail in 1944-45, appear here for the first time in English translation, along with the original German text. In these 79 personal, philosophical and political Sonnets Albrecht mourns the fate of his country under Hitler from the viewpoint of a thoroughly German Jew who chose to serve the National Socialist State with a view to modifying its policies, or later, of overthrowing it.

But how did a Jewish anti-Nazi get into such a position? Angela Clifford, the translator of the poems, tries to answer that question in an Introduction which shows the linkage between the Geopolitics developed by Sir Halford Mackinder, long-term Director of the London School of Economics; General

#### Renationalisation?

The Committee also suggests (paragraph 121) that the Government take a majority equity stake in Railtrack, and use that stake to exercise influence over the management and policies of the company, or that it should take Railtrack wholly back into public ownership. It is now accepted by everyone that paying for re-nationalisation is not a problem (which was John Prescott's excuse for not doing what he promised in opposition) since it is quite reasonable to demand equity in exchange for subsidy.

Railtrack's stock market value has gone through the floor in the aftermath of Hatfield, so it could be bought back with a couple of years' subsidy. As a vehicle for getting private investment into the railway system (which was supposed to be the purpose of privatisation) it is now almost useless since its ability to raise private finance has slumped along with its market value - which adds further weight to the case for re-nationalisation.

But having Railtrack in public ownership is of itself to no purpose.

Professor Karl Haushofer, who took up and developed the Mackinder ideas; Rudolf Hess, military aide-de-camp and student of Haushofer's, who became Adolf Hitler's Secretary; and, finally, Adolf Hitler, who fed his expansionist vision for a German East European Empire on these strategic principles. No doubt Mackinder came to wonder whether he had been too open when theorising the British strategic experience of Empire and developing new Imperial perspectives for his British audience, especially when it was suggested in America during the Second World War that he had provided a programme for Hitler.

It was Karl's unique position with the Nazi hierarchy which gave his son, Albrecht, his chance—or, rather, which put him in a dilemma. Albrecht played for high stakes and reckoned on being either forced to become Hitler's Foreign Minister or being executed. In the event, he was rounded up with others in the German Resistance in the wake of the misfired assassination attempt of 20th July 1944, imprisoned, and then shot just as the Russians were entering Berlin. However, he saved his Sonnets, which were clutched in his dead fist, and in many ways, they speak for him.

What is required is a publicly owned body, publicly accountable via the DETR, which is responsible for the railway system as a whole, with the authority to develop it and the resources to do the job. The body could be called British Rail.

That doesn't absolutely require the new British Rail to run trains itself, but it does require it have the power to licence and franchise passenger operators, in other words, the ORR and SRA should be merged into it. A more sensible course, which would avoid the need for licencing and franchising functions altogether, is for the new British Rail not to re-let passenger franchises but to run the trains itself.

#### Announcement

Open meetings of the  
Bevin Society/Labour &  
Trade Union Review are held  
on the first Wednesday of  
every month. The next  
meeting is on July 4th.

Theme: Europe And  
The Nice Treaty  
Speaker: Jack Lane

7.30 p.m. Printer's Room, Red  
Rose Club, Seven Sisters  
Road, London N.7

Nearest Tube:  
Finsbury Park  
Buses: 4, 29, 153,  
259, 279

All Welcome



**Leader concluded from p.2**

sector borrowing requirement was on a downward path. For four years they have had the advantage of a growing US and world economy.

It is a remarkable failure by the Conservatives in opposition that New Labour have managed to establish the myth that they took over difficult economic times, with an unsustainable amount of public debt, which required prudence (that is, cutting public expenditure) and extraordinary skill by the Chancellor to sort out. Had Major and Clarke been in the Conservative leadership over the past four years New Labour would not have got away with peddling that nonsense.

**Right Wing Extremists?**

Another New Labour campaign theme was that under Hague the Conservatives had become an extremist party, that they had moved sharply to the right and abandoned the centre ground of politics. Whatever about the public perception of this, there is very little substance to it in terms of policy. The striking feature of this election campaign has been the lack of difference between the three main parties on almost every issue. The sound and fury between the parties masked an almost complete identity of policy.

Over the past few years New Labour has been determined not to be outflanked on the right by the Conservatives on a whole range of issues—on crime, on the treatment of asylum seekers, on benefit fraud, even on Europe. The normal pattern of events has been for New Labour to denounce the latest Conservative pronouncement on these issues as extremist but to swiftly adjust policy in the direction prescribed by them.

On the face of it there is a significant difference between the two parties on Europe and in particular on Britain joining the euro. But is there? New Labour has denounced any and every proposal for further powers to be ceded to Brussels. As for the euro, there is a good chance that the Conservative policy of "saving the pound" until the next election will be put into practice. The passing of five, largely subjective, economic tests is supposed to trigger a government decision to call a referendum. But there is an unstated sixth test, which will take precedence

over the other five. That is: can a referendum be won? It is not obvious. Tony Blair is a very cautious man, who believes in tailoring policy (and its presentation) to public opinion, not in changing public opinion.

(There is another consideration for New Labour: as long as this matter remains unresolved, it will continue to be a source of division within the Conservative Party. Resolve it, one way or another, and life will be easier for any leader of the Conservative Party and, other things being equal, the electoral chances of the Conservative Party will improve. So why not leave it unresolved until after the next election and thereby enhance Tony Blair's chances of being elected for an historic third term like Margaret Thatcher?)

**Taxing and Spending**

The formal difference between the three parties on taxation and public expenditure at the election was insignificant. The Conservatives proposed to cut taxes by £8bn per annum in 2002-3 and 2003-4 and spend £8bn less than proposed by the Government in those years but to stick to their spending plans for health and education. Michael Portillo was the author of these modest proposals.

To put the £8bn figure into perspective, remember that in 2000-1 the actual revenue raised was £16bn more than predicted by the Chancellor at the beginning of the financial year (and on top of that the Chancellor got a £22bn windfall from selling off mobile phone radio spectrum).

The difference between the three parties was within the margin of error in predicting revenues in the current tax year, let alone next year or the year after that. Add to that the fact that over the past couple of years since the Government took the brakes off public spending, departments have underspent their allocations by billions of pounds (about £5bn last year in total) and it is evident that the interminable argument between the parties about taxation and public spending was about nothing of significance.

(Nick Cohen was one of the few journalists who made this point during the election campaign. He did so in a programme on Channel 4 of the Sunday before the election. In it, he presented extracts from the three party manifestos on taxation and public expenditure to

people in the street and invited them to identify which extract came from which manifesto. The vast majority got it wrong.)

**Embracing Thatcherism**

After its second defeat in a row, the Conservative Party is being compared with the Labour Party of 1983, which under Michael Foot's leadership suffered its second defeat by Margaret Thatcher. There could hardly be a less appropriate analogy.

In 1983 there was a gulf in policy between the two parties. Now there is very little difference between them, since New Labour has closed the gulf by embracing Thatcherism, and there is no political ground to the right on which the Conservatives can stand and get elected. From now on they will have to fight on the same political ground as New Labour or to the left of them. A large part of the Conservative Party's problems since 1997 is that they have been unable to bring themselves to accept this.

The first instinct of the new leadership after 1997 was to treat New Labour as Old Labour in disguise and to locate the party to the right of them. Michael Portillo realised that this was the road to electoral disaster. When he became shadow Chancellor early last year, he pulled the party back on to the centre ground and committed it to matching the Government's planned spending on health and education. He also forced Hague to abandon the impractical "tax guarantee" and promised very little in the way of tax cuts in the run up to the general election.

Their electoral defeat was not due to having an economic stance way to the right of New Labour. They shared the same ground as New Labour (and the Liberal Democrats for that matter). But they didn't seem comfortable fighting an election campaign on that ground. They seemed to be hankering after the good old days in the '80s when on a tax cutting agenda they wiped the floor with Old Labour.

The new party leader (who will presumably be Michael Portillo) will not have to make major policy adjustments. He will just have to get them used to fighting elections in the centre ground alongside the other two parties.