

# Labour & Trade Union Review

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## The War

Spain

Railtrack  
& The  
Class War

Feminism

*Parliamentary Diary*

## U.S. Victory?

Britain is still trying to play a proper part in America's war in Afghanistan. But it looks as if the hope of getting thousands of British troops on the ground in Afghanistan has now gone. We will have difficulty holding our head up as a great military power with the ambition to "re-order this world".

We will have to make do with a few kind words about the SAS from *the* military power in the world—"some of the toughest, smartest troops in the world", says Donald Rumsfeld. We will have to comfort ourselves with that.

From 11th September onwards, America has made it clear that she is running the "war on terrorism". In its every aspect—military action in Afghanistan and wherever else she decides, police action against the al-Qaeda network around the world—America is in charge. Other states, including Britain, will be asked assist at various times and in various ways, but America calls the shots.

### Overthrow The Taliban

America has been clever in its war in Afghanistan. Its ambition is to overthrow the Taliban. Killing or capturing Bin Laden and his al-Qaeda associates would be a bonus. And it is not greatly concerned about the governance of Afghanistan after the Taliban or about the impact of the war on the supply of humanitarian aid into Afghanistan. The US is determined not to be distracted from the objective of overthrowing the Taliban.

Others had doubts about using the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, lest it establish facts on the ground that would make it difficult to establish a pluralist government in Afghanistan. But after initial

reservations America went ahead and used the Northern Alliance as its ground troops.

Not that they had much fighting to do, given the magnitude of US air support. Their main business was negotiating the surrender of Taliban forces. They also showed an enthusiasm for killing the non-Afghan elements of these, which suited America's purpose since it removed the messy problem of what to do with them. To justify their elimination, there has been a determined attempt to portray them all as al-Qaeda, and therefore implicated in the events of 11th September.

At the time of writing, the Taliban are in control of only a small area in the south and seem to be under pressure from anti-Taliban Pashtun forces, aided by a couple of thousand US ground forces. Once Taliban control is eliminated from the major population centres, the US can claim a victory. After that, it is in a position to walk away from Afghanistan at any time if it wishes, whether or not Bin Laden is killed or captured. The American military strategy has been tailored to avoid getting "bogged down" as it did in Vietnam and then having to withdraw with its tale between its legs. A victorious exit strategy will soon be available.

Ideally, the US would like a stable and pliant government in Afghanistan, which doesn't provide a haven for members of anti-American forces, such as al-Qaeda. Their strategy does not guarantee such an outcome. They are going to rely on their political clout, rather than military force on the ground, to achieve that insofar as it can be achieved. And, of course, the USAF is always available to encourage compliance.

It is not obvious that America has been made a safer place by this "victory" in Afghanistan. Nobody in the US Government is saying that the overthrow of the Taliban and the elimination of al-Qaeda from Afghanistan will significantly reduce its ability to damage America or American interests overseas. But after 11th September, America needed to throw her weight around in the world and achieve a victory of some sort.

The poor Afghan people have borne the brunt of it and Afghanistan has now been added to list of Muslim grievances against America along with Palestine, Iraq and the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia.

**Iraq Next?**

Iraq is said to be next on the US target list. Not that it has ever been off the US, or UK, target list since the Gulf War. But the objective being talked about now is the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

The US letter to the UN on 7th October justifying their military assault on Afghanistan reserved the right to attack other states, saying:

"... Since September 11, my Government has obtained clear and compelling information that the al-Qaeda organisation, which is supported by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, had a central role in the attacks. There is still much we do not know. Our inquiry is in its early stages. We may find that our self-defence requires further actions with respect to other organisations and other States."

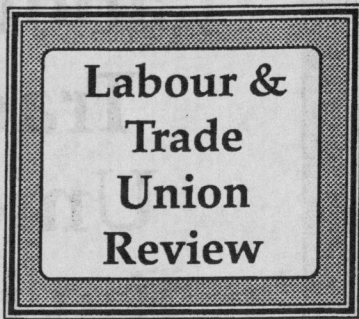
The equivalent UK letter did not reserve the right to strike at other states and the possibility that Iraq might be next in the US firing line seems to be causing the Government difficulty. The official line at the moment is that evidence of Iraq's complicity in the events of 11th September is required.

The Conservative leader, Ian Duncan Smith, needs no such evidence. Returning from a visit to the US, where he met Rumsfeld amongst others, he declared that Saddam Hussein was breaking international law by trying to develop nuclear and therefore he should be overthrown, whether or not he had anything to do with the events of 11th September.

At this time when Iraq is being lined up for military assault, it is worth recalling what UN weapons inspector, Scott Ritter, said last year about Iraq's weapons capability in 1998:

"In 1991 Iraq had significant capability in the area of chemical weapons, biological weapons, nuclear weapons production capability and long-range ballistic missile manufacturing

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capability.

"By 1998 the chemical weapons infrastructure had been completely dismantled or destroyed by UNSCOM, or by Iraq in compliance with Uncom's mandate. The biological weapons programme had been declared in its totality—ate in the game—but it was gone, all the major facilities eliminated. The nuclear weapons programme again completely eliminated. The long-range ballistic missile programme completely eliminated. All that was left was the research and development and manufacturing capability for missiles with a range less than a hundred and fifty kilometres, a permitted activity.

"Everything that we set out to destroy in 1991, the physical

Concluded on p. 15

**Our Man In Espana**

**Conor Lynch**

Spain's last general election was one of its most important. But you couldn't tell much from the British press. *The Daily Telegraph* had a feature on the wife of the Prime Minister pictured in her swimsuit and very nice she looked too. *The Guardian* had the Premier, Jose Maria Oznar, down as a right-winger with Blairite sympathies.

I was struck by two of Oznar's first speeches. (He's a refreshingly boring speaker.) He got his first overall majority, but immediately promised that he would continue to govern as though he still led a minority government. He has kept this promise and satisfied most of the regional demands.

Spain is divided into 17 autonomous regions. Each chooses its own level of autonomy, short of control of defence or foreign affairs. Catalonia, for instance, has abolished the National Police and, against the rules, the Guardia Civil, which technically come under the defence ministry. I believe the Basques have done the same.

The Basques held negotiations with Oznar on an independence referendum. Naturally, he objected. And now they are holding a referendum on whether to have a second referendum on independence! The worst that the government has so far threatened is that if the Basques separate, Spain will veto their membership of the E.U. Many on the 'right' support a referendum on the grounds that they expect a 'No' vote.

Basques I have spoken to never 'make out a case'. They simply state that they are not Spanish and that's that. One, interestingly, cautioned about outside romanticism concerning his region. He said that Basque support for the government in the Civil War had no ideological content. Basque nationalists make left-wing noises when it suits them. Catalan nationalists don't even bother.

Most Spanish people I know are

Catalan, at least by language. (Catalan is also the language of the regions of Balares and Valencia, as well as Provence in France. But all these regions seem to detest each other!) One might expect Catalans to support the Basques but they don't. A common attitude is that the Basques are rich, greedy sods who don't want to pay their taxes. Which is a very good case of the pot clling the kettle black.

I can see the Oznar (Popular Party) government coming to some sort of terms with the Basques. The socialists couldn't. Perhaps because Philippe Gonzales was typical of the region of Andalusia. (The largest, poorest and most left-wing part of Spain. But also the most Spanish in its own mind—though everyone else looks down on it and its strange dialect.) Gonzales was fanatical about the Basques and his directors of the death squads are currently before the courts.

Oznar's second impressive speech came a week after the election. It coincided exactly with the outpourings of Blair, Straw and Barbara Roche against asylum-seekers. He called on foreigners in Spain to regularize their resident status. Here this applies mainly, but no means only, to people from Morocco. His tone could not have been less Blairite. In my own little corner of the country (population about 6,000) a special office was set up. The first queue in living memory formed, just over a hundred, admittedly nervous, people. All got their papers. Around this time there was an anti-immigrant demonstration in a small town near Alicante. I can only describe the public reaction, both as expressed in the media and as experienced in the streets and bars, as one of shame.

Finally, on that election, the former Communists were all but wiped out. From, I think, 35 in the previous parliament they were reduced to eight—seven of

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them in Andalusia. The Socialists (leaving aside their record of corruption) weren't helped by replacing the Party's choice of leader with a kind of Blairite.

As to recent events, the US crusade seems to be a media event here, with the usual suits on the telly trying to sound knowledgeable. The government said the Americans can use a fuel depot in the South of the country if they wish. And one minister tried to add a bit of local colour by saying he suspected a link between Osama Bin Laden and ETA. (He more or less kept a straight face.) Reaction among most people I spoke to after the attack on the World Trade Centre was a kind of sadness at the loss of life tempered by a belief that the US had it coming to them. There is, I detect, a very strong underlying pacificism among the Spanish. A brutal civil war is still within

living memory.

The English attitude is beyond the understanding of people. 'Why does Blair want a war?' is a very frequent question. But then the English are regarded as generally strange and often brutal. Their tourists tend to be corralled into modern ghettos like San Antonio in Ibiza and similar places on the mainland, where they can fight each other and drink themselves stupid for a couple of weeks at considerable expense to themselves.

A problem for any Blairite experiment in Spain is a lack of interest by most people in income tax. In Britain reducing income tax reduces the amount available for social provision. It increases the proportion of take-home pay. This is attractive in a wages culture where everything centres on gross pay.

In Spain no one thinks about gross pay. When you ask the boss about your wages, he tells you what you will get at the end of the week. The same applies if you ask someone how much he is earning—a question you can, politely, ask.

Matters of tax and insurance are matters for the employer—things you don't concern yourself with. At least not in the amount of them. No one knows and no one cares.

### 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

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,

(Indirect taxes are another matter. There are very many, levied by government bodies at many levels—often police rather than civilian concerns—and the subject of much whingeing, but hardly the stuff of social revolution!)

There is a large black economy. But most people want to get out of it rather than into it. It mostly benefits employers and, in my experience, is mostly conducted by foreign, usually German, employers.

Almost every worker is determined to be an insured worker; to work for someone who pays his insurance to the government. Otherwise you don't get unemployment benefit, sick pay, holiday pay, etc. Therefore the majority could not be persuaded that there is common cause between them and the rich in reducing the levels of tax and insurance in the way that there can appear to be in Britain.

Probably the most romantic, and romanticised, body of armed men in the last century was the Fifteenth (International) Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. I was reminded of this in recent weeks as growing reports of casualties were being reported among the foreign volunteers fighting with the Fifth (international) Brigade in Afghanistan.

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 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.

Of course, if you were on Franco's side the Internationals were a bunch of foreign cutthroats, fanatical Communists, who were to be shot as soon as they were caught. (In practice, a Spanish veteran once told me, their prisoners were often given a 'second chance', deported and told they would be shot without trial if they came back.)

In Afghanistan the foreign volunteers are similarly painted. They are the most fanatical, and possibly the cause of all the trouble—the ideological and military backbone of the Taliban. The Americans have publicly stated that there will be no prisoners taken.

As I write, the Taliban is holding off surrender saying they want free passage for the International Brigade as the Spanish did in 1938. The problem is where do the foreigners go? The Americans are doing their best to ensure that no one will have them and that they can be trapped and executed in Afghanistan.

At least in 1938 France opened its borders to the foreigners, as well as to the Spanish militias and the civilian refugees from Barcelona. And in England even Ted Heath's Oxford Tories joined the crowds at Victoria Station to welcome home the British volunteers.

This time, that great jessie, Geoff Hoon, has said that returning British volunteers can be put on trial for treason!

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.

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## A Not-For-Profit Railtrack?

David Morrison

*"There are areas where the private sector has worked well; and areas where, as with parts of the railways, it's been a disaster."*

So said the Prime Minister to the Labour Party Conference on 2nd October.

(Having presided over this disaster on the domestic front, a few minutes later he declared his ambition to re-order the world).

On 5th October, Stephen Byers, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, decided that Railtrack PLC was insolvent. At least that's when he says he made the decision. There was, of course, no connection between the Prime Minister's declaration that the private sector had been a disaster "with parts of the railways" and Stephen Byers's decision three days later. The latter was based on an objective assessment of the financial state of Railtrack PLC. And having reached a decision on the basis of that assessment, he applied to the High Court under the Railways Act 1993 on 7th October, claiming that the company was "likely to be unable to pay its debts" and got an order putting it into administration. That's the story according to Byers.

Railtrack PLC is the company which is licenced by the Rail Regulator to operate the railway network. But it is a wholly owned subsidiary of Railtrack Group PLC. The shareholders who are understandably complaining about Byers forcing Railtrack PLC into administration are shareholders of Railtrack Group PLC. It has assets other than Railtrack PLC, so even if after 7th October the latter is worth nothing the

shares in Railtrack Group PLC will be worth something. Around 90% of the 11,000 employees of Railtrack PLC hold shares in Railtrack Group PLC.

Railtrack PLC is now being run by four Ernst & Young accountants, who were appointed "railway administrators" by the High Court. According to the Railways Act, they are required to maintain the normal activities of the company, in this case, to keep railway network operations running, until such times as these activities can be transferred to another company or companies. (This differs markedly from administration under the Insolvency Act 1986, where administrators can, and do, cease some, or all, of the activities of a company under administration.)

### Not For Profit

What is to happen now? Initially, it was reported that the activities of Railtrack PLC were going to be transferred to a not-for-profit company, created for that purpose. But it is not quite as straightforward as that.

It is true that Byers expressed his preference for such an outcome. The statement issued by his Department on 7th October announcing his action contained the following:

*"Stephen Byers said he believed that the public interest obligations of the rail network operator would, after the administration, be better achieved through a private company without shareholders—a private sector 'company limited by guarantee'. This would have the interests of the travelling public as its priority, not the need to increase shareholder value. It would invest any operating surpluses directly into the network."*

From then on, the slogan "Delivery to passengers before dividends to shareholders" tripped off his lips continually. It's a very good slogan. It conjures up a picture of greedy shareholders pocketing money that should have been used to make the trains run safely and on time, and now that the wise Mr Byers has intervened, would be used to make the trains run safely and on time. The wicked capitalists who, in pursuit of profit, had been responsible for deaths on the railways were no longer in charge.

Byers's action was widely welcomed on that basis. No Government action since 1st May 1997 has been more enthusiastically received on the Labour backbenches, even though Byers has categorically stated that this is not re-nationalisation. What mattered was that in future the railway infrastructure was not going to be run for profit. Or so it seemed.

### No Guarantee

Rejoicing on the Labour backbenches about this is premature. There is no guarantee that the railway infrastructure will be taken over by a not-for-profit company. Byers promised on 7th October that a new not-for-profit company would be established which "will put proposals to the Railway Administrator to acquire Railtrack's core business" (ibid). He has now appointed Sir Ian McAllister, chairman of Ford in Britain, to do this, and, presumably, to play a leading role in the new company if it succeeds in taking over the railway infrastructure. It has taken two months to make this appointment, presumably because there was great difficulty getting someone to do the job, just as there was in getting a

new chairman of Railtrack Group earlier this year.

Meanwhile, with the Secretary of State's encouragement, other private companies are in the process of drawing up proposals. As he told the Transport Select Committee on 14th November:

"... we do believe it is right that we should not close the door on other proposals coming forward. ... [O]ne of [the] organisations so far which has expressed some interest is a German company called WestLB. They have made an approach in outline to the administrator ... I understand that they are now working up a more detailed proposal which they will put to the administrator in due course."

It is then up to the administrators to make pass judgement on these proposals. But under the Railways Act the Secretary of State, has the final say about who will take over Railtrack's licence. On the face of it, therefore, the Secretary of State is in a position to veto any successor to Railtrack other than the not-for-profit company he proposes. But he couldn't do it without good reason.

The administrators are officers of the High Court, not appointees of the Secretary of State whose judgement can be arbitrarily overruled. The final settlement has to be approved by the High Court, and could be the subject of appeal to higher courts. The Secretary of State couldn't arbitrarily deny a licence to a commercial company selected by the administrators without risking serious legal trouble.

#### Shareholder Value

The more so when the final settlement will determine what shareholders get. The Notes to Editors appended to the press statement of 7th October stated:

"The financial consequences of today's actions for shareholders in Railtrack Group will depend on the terms of any scheme proposed by the Administrators as appropriate for the transfer of Railtrack PLC out of administration as a going concern. But no public monies will be available to support shareholder value."

A lot of Byers's trouble since 7th October has stemmed from the last sentence, in which he needlessly brought

up the issue of shareholder value. The latter is a matter for the court-appointed administrators and not him, and the sensible thing to do was to deflect all questions about it by saying just that. All he had to do was prove that he acted scrupulously in accordance with the law in reaching the opinion that Railtrack PLC was insolvent, an opinion accepted by the High Court in granting an order putting it into administration. It was then up to the court appointed administrators to decide, amongst other things, the financial consequences for the shareholders of Railtrack Group PLC. By volunteering the statement that there would be no taxpayers' money for shareholders, Byers got himself, and the Government, needlessly embroiled in a wrangle about shareholder value.

Whether Byers behaved scrupulously in accordance with the law towards Railtrack PLC in the lead up to going to the High Court on 7th October will eventually be determined by the Financial Services Agency (which has mounted a preliminary enquiry into the matter) and/or by the courts if Railtrack Group PLC or individual shareholders thereof decide to go to law about it.

#### Public Relations Disaster

Of course, Byers has to say that it wasn't until 5th October that he decided that Railtrack PLC was insolvent, otherwise he could be accused of making a false market in the Railtrack shares. But it is a pound to a penny that the Government's mind was made up long before that, even before 2nd October when the Prime Minister declared Railtrack to be a disaster. What the Prime Minister meant was that for a Government intent upon privatising the provision of public services Railtrack was public relations disaster: a private company providing awful, and occasionally unsafe, service to the public, while receiving massive public subsidies and paying dividends to shareholders. No slick soundbite could ever put an acceptable face on that. The public relations disaster could only be overcome by Railtrack ceasing to be a private company in the normal sense.

The obvious thing to do is to re-nationalise it, that is, for the state to take an increasing stake in it over time in exchange for the public subsidy it receives. Railtrack suggested this to

John Prescott years ago, but he refused. The Government will not entertain re-nationalisation for two reasons (a) because the debts of a re-nationalised Railtrack would contribute to the PSBR, and (b) because if it was nationalised the Government would have even more difficulty avoiding responsibility for its failures.

#### Make Insolvent

So, having ruled out nationalisation, the other alternative was to make it insolvent by refusing it public subsidy (which the Government was always in a position to do) and attempt to persuade the administrators to transfer its operations to a new not-for-profit company. The opportunity to do so came when the new Chairman of Railtrack Group, John Robinson, met Byers on 25th July. What exactly happened at that meeting is a matter of dispute, but it appears that at the very least Robinson expressed concern about Railtrack's financial position, this after funding arrangements for the five years beginning in April 2001 had not long been agreed. A perfect opportunity had arisen for driving Railtrack into administration. And after long discussions with Railtrack's financial advisers through August and September, an application was made to the High Court on 7th October.

The Rail Regulator is primarily responsible for determining Railtrack's revenues by setting the access charges that Railtrack receives for the Train Operating Companies. These are set for 5-year periods and obviously are geared so that Railtrack remains in the black. There is also provision in the legislation to allow Railtrack to apply to the Rail Regulator for an "interim review" if there is a danger of it going in to the red, with the possibility of increasing its revenue from access charges.

So Railtrack's financial status is very much the business of the Rail Regulator. But it wasn't until 5th October after the die was cast that Byers informed the present Regulator, Tom Winsor, that Railtrack was insolvent. Winsor told the Transport Select Committee on 8th November that he was "very surprised at ... the suddenness of the decision on railway administration. I explained that we at the Office of the Rail Regulator had had no indication of any imminent

insolvency from the company."

Winsor then told Byers that he was willing to undertake an "interim review" with a view to helping Railtrack out of its insolvency. At this point, Byers made it clear that it did not want Railtrack helped and, if necessary, would legislate to prevent Winsor helping it. According to Winsor's account to the Select Committee:

"Mr Byers said that they had thought of that and that if such an application were made, he had the necessary authority immediately to introduce emergency legislation to entitle the Secretary of State to give instructions to the Regulator. After pausing to consider whether I had really heard what I had just heard, I asked whether that would be to over-rule me in an interim review or in relation to all my functions. Mr. Byers said that it would cover everything but that its first use would be in relation to an interim review which the Government did not want to proceed."

The Government had obviously set upon a course of driving Railtrack into administration, and nothing was going

to stop it.

#### Will Things Get Better?

So let's suppose that, as the Government wants, a private not-for-profit company without shareholders takes over the functions of Railtrack, a private company with shareholders, what difference will it make? It can be said for certain that there will be no "dividends for shareholders". That part of Byers' slogan will be fulfilled, but other part "delivery for passengers" is much more problematic. There is no reason to believe that a not-for-profit will provide a better, safer service than Railtrack did—because there is very little reason to believe that Railtrack's failure to deliver, or the safety failures on the railways, was connected with it being a for-profit company.

The central problem with the railway system is its fragmentation, that an integrated system was broken up into a thousand commercially separate parts, which are now connected by contract. The replacement of Railtrack by a not-for-profit company, if it happens, will not change that. Like Railtrack, the new company will get its revenue via contracts

with the Train Operating Companies, and will employ contractors to maintain the infrastructure, and the contractors will employ sub-contractors, and so on.

There is a widespread public belief that railway safety has got worse under privatisation, that Railtrack was mainly to blame for this, and that the fact that it was a for-profit company was a causal factor in this. It is not justified by the facts. Railway safety as measured by the number of signals passed at red (SPADs) has improved significantly since privatisation. Of the three major accidents in recent years—at Southall, Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield—only the latter was wholly attributable to Railtrack. Anybody who thinks that the takeover of Railtrack's functions by a not-for-profit company will significantly improve rail safety is likely to be disappointed.

The fundamental requirement is that the integrated railway system which was broken up prior to privatisation be put together again. The Government shows no sign of doing that.

## A Skirmish In The Class War?

Sean McGouran

The *Sunday Times* has a regular feature called *Interview*. The interview is usually relatively friendly and is with such luminaries as Richard Littlejohn, who is a 'liberal' apparently (it recalls the old joke about the man who claimed to love humanity — 'it's just people I can't stand'). The *Interview* of June, 10, 2001 (conducted by a Jasper Gerard) was with Mick Rix the "head" of Aslef. What his 'headship' consisted of was not explained, nor was Aslef. It is an old quasi-craft union for the actual drivers of trains, and he is probably the General Secretary. Gerard ends his piece by suggesting that "we have reason to be worried", about the personable, bright and intelligently flexible Mick (né 'David' Rix. Gerard tries to make a point about this, claiming 'Mick' was an attempt to proletarianise his monica, but there were two other Davids in his first place of employment. This is because he

(Rix) is clearly open-minded about how the railway system is reabsorbed into the public sector; but is pretty obviously implacable that it should be.

The interview took place immediately after the price of Railtrack shares "plummeted out of the FTSE 100", and Rix "afford[ed] himself the meanest of smiles", about the matter, another smile is described as "smug". Rix was connected with Scargill's Socialist Labour Party until recently, and this is clearly being used as a bogey to frighten the *ST*'s more nervous readers. But the SLP has really shot its bolt and Scargill is going nowhere. He had the support of a lot of officers of the various transport unions at one time. They included the hapless Patrick Sikorsky, of the NUR (National Union of Rail workers) persecuted by members of the CLR at a Labour Party conference—in the days

before New Labour—but they mostly seem to have left him. Arthur (Scargill) is too fond of the sound of his own voice, and has used his Sheffield-based union muscle against the influence of the other, mostly London-based, trade unionists.

Gerard starts his *Interview* (surely this is meant to be an exchange of views?—if Gerard had beaten Rix about the head he could hardly have made his disapproval clearer) with a play on *Big Brother*. He describes Rix, and others as "baby brothers", who "have been watching you", and, apparently think "you are ready for socialism". There are a number of problems with this conceit. One is that most people would tend to think of a gimmicky television show when the term *Big Brother* is used, rather than George Orwell's novel 1984. Another is that, apart from the actual share-holders, most people, and in

particular most rail-users, know quite well that the system worked better under British Rail, and that even in America, the rail system—such as it is, admittedly—is subsidised to the hilt. The “baby brother” jibe is probably the result of the large photograph of Rix, which accompanied the article, he is rather baby-faced.

Gerard uses other rather antique allusions, he claims that Rix “hails from a long line of Fred Kites”. (Fred Kite is the caricature Shop Steward in the Boulting Brothers film *I'm All Right, Jack!* Peter Sellars, who played the part, took an almost affectionate attitude towards the character, but he became a sort of hate figure for the *Daily Mail*-reading public. But, really, you have to remember the very early 1960s, or be a couch-potato with a penchant for black and white British movies, to recognise the name, or the implications of the name. The implications are that Fred Kite was a buffoon, his idea of happiness being working on the collective farm during the day and a visit to the ballet in the evening. In British films of the period visits to the ballet were strictly for people with cut-glass accents, dead animals around their necks, and lots of cabbage—heaven knows who went to the cheap seats—possibly Fred Kites, and who'd want to be associated with them?)

Gerard makes heavy weather of renationalisation, and the fact that the shareholders would be compensated, surely the money would be better spent on the Health Service and education? Rix responded that there are a number of ways to take the railways back into the public service, he avoided the word ‘nationalisation’. Gerard did not use the actual word ‘compensation’ but it is strongly implied that the people who invested in the privatisation should get their bread back, buttered if necessary. This demonstrates an oddity of Thatcherism / Reaganomics, the people who put their money into privatisations thought of them as a form of State-guaranteed stake, like National Savings. This is despite the fact that they ‘bought’ all the nonsense surrounding it: ‘there is no such thing as society’, and the attempted destruction of the trade unions, and other elements of ‘civil society’. It was a sort of inverted socialism or

welfarism: to those who have much, more shall be given onto them.

If these people had invested their money in real capitalist enterprises which had failed as signally as Railtrack, they would be left with a sheaf of Share Certificates and a long wait for the divvying-up of the remainder of the assets, after the debts had been paid. In fact, they would probably be better papering their walls with the Share Certificates. If Tesco's was as badly managed as Railtrack, it would be taken over by Sainburys or Marks & Sparks within weeks. If it was as badly run as Railtrack it would possibly be taken over by Poundstretcher.

The *Sunday Times* has been strongly Thatcherite for twenty years now, and this may be the last gasp of full-blooded Thatcherism. The trade unions, in the railways, have been very successful in getting the rail-using public behind them. (In a programme on the so-called *Winter of Discontent* of 1979, on Channel 4 several years ago, a commuter was seen denouncing union leaders and members—the rail union leaders and members in particular—as “*Socialists and Communists*”, and wreckers in general. And he was probably articulating a generally-held opinion, carefully cultivated by the media, of course, but still the genuine article.) When C4 News interviewed passing passengers in London stations about the latest threat of strikes (over wages, rather than safety) only one (out of six) tended to oppose the strike. And she was putting forward a considered opinion that it might put the rail-workers' overall case in a certain amount of jeopardy—times have certainly changed.

P.S.

Over the weekend of Saturday, October 6, to Monday, October 8, 2001, Railtrack was abolished by the Department of Transport. This led to a great deal of anguish in The City and to the formation of a Committee of (allegedly) small and large shareholders in Railtrack, to ‘fight’ the Secretary of State's high-handed and possibly illegal action in taking the whole shebang into (effectively, for the short term,) public ownership. The press was outraged by this, and *The Times 2* (the tabloid-size insert into the paper) article on the matter

was a distillation of the attitudes expressed. It appeared on Friday, October 12, the front page carried the title *The Railtrack Putsch*, with the wishfully-thinking sub-heading *End of the line for Byers?* (Stephen Byers being the ‘gray blur’ [gray Blair?] Secretary of State for Transport).

Apparently he invoked an “*obscure measure in the 1993 Railways Act*” to deny having to pay shareholders compensation. (This argument is slightly reminiscent of ‘Euro-skeptics’ who seem sometimes to be claiming that they did not know what was contained in the various Treaties they signed on entering the EU. Surely some smart lawyer read all of the Act before urging the punters to put their money on a sure thing?) The article is entitled *Derailed by design* and it uses quasi-military language which get slightly worn after a few paragraphs. This is partly the result of the intercepted e-mail of Jo Moore, who, within minutes of the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, suggested using the concentration on that disaster to hide news the Department, and the rest of the government found unwelcome.

The writers, Ben Webster and Ben MacIntyre, suggest that the opening of the actual war on Afghanistan was used to mask the news about Project Ariel, the plot to ‘renationalise’ Railtrack. A group of persons known, apparently, as “*Brown's bover boys*” (though the only person named is female, Shriti Vadera) were behind this coup. Allegedly the Treasury thought this was a good-news story and at first tried to claim some of the credit (why then did the two Departments try to hide this good news?). But it sent the permanent secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Trunbull, to the City to calm the big investors down and tell them that the successor operation “*was viable*” (presumably this means that they can continue, after a suitable period, of something like mourning, to absorb huge quantities of tax-payers money.)

We then get the sob-stuff, “*as always in such conflicts, it is the ordinary people on the ground who are suffering the most*” (surely there is something indecent about this analogy?). They

Concluded on p. 15

Kevin Brady

## Parliamentary Diary

### An Uncertain Future

The media have been full of reports of the Taliban in retreat, suggesting that they do not have the stomach for a fight. But who in their right mind would stand and fight the Northern Alliance, the coalition's new friends, when it is backed by American B—52 bombers? It now appears, however, that the ‘retreat’ is a Taliban tactic to engage the opposition in a ground war in the mountains around Tora Bora, close to the Pakistan border where Osama Bin Laden is believed to be hiding. So far only the Northern Alliance have risked their troops against the Taliban in Kabul, Kunduz and now Kandahar, but if America wants to eliminate Bin Laden it will have to provide substantial ground troops support.

America's desire to extend the ‘war’ to Iraq is not currently shared by the UK; even the Foreign Office Under-Secretary, Ben Bradshaw, told MPs, once again, (on 6th November) that, “the military action is necessary, but it cannot be seen in isolation. It is part of a wider global campaign against terror, which includes diplomatic, intelligence, financial, humanitarian and political elements”. UK opposition to an assault on Saddam Hussein is puzzling, given that British bombs are dropped on Iraq every day on the pretext of preventing Iraqi attacks on the Kurds, and British-backed sanctions are indirectly the cause of thousands of deaths among Iraqi civilians every month.

Ben Bradshaw made an interesting point on 21st November when he told MPs that, “coalition military action has been undertaken in self-defence to avert further terrorist attacks”. It is naive in the extreme to believe that bombing Afghanistan will prevent a terrorist attack

on America or Britain in the future. It is more likely to encourage such an attack, as many commentators have pointed out. Bradshaw's logic suggests that America, with UK support, should employ military action against every country harbouring terrorists, on the grounds that they may be planning an attack on states within the coalition. A short list of such countries, has, apparently, been drawn up, but not surprisingly, it does not include Saudi Arabia.

The British media are relatively silent about the number of civilians so far killed by the ‘military action’. The Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, told MPs on 9th November that, “It is impossible to know for certain how many casualties, either military or civilian, there have been as a result of coalition action in Afghanistan. The Taliban's claims of casualties cannot be taken at face value.” Exact figures are, of course, difficult to obtain, but we do know that many civilians have been killed by the carpet-bombing and are now being killed by cluster bombs dropped as part of the assault on the Taliban. These are less accurate than the laser-guided missiles fired by the ‘coalition’, as Adam Ingram, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, admitted to MPs on 15th November: “Cluster bombs rely on a ballistic delivery—for example on the skill of the crew to ensure accuracy—and neither the bombs nor the bomblets that they release are laser guided”.

Much has been made of the ‘liberation’ of the people of Afghanistan, particularly the women, following the retreat of the Taliban. The Taliban regime was, of course, extremely intolerant and oppressive and it is understandable that there was rejoicing at their departure from Kabul and elsewhere, but their

‘conquerors’, the Northern Alliance, were not much more tolerant or less oppressive when they were in power. And it now looks as if they could form the major part of a new government in Afghanistan. At one point America and the UK hinted that ‘moderate Taliban’ members should have a place in a future government, but that has been firmly ruled out by the Alliance.

Any future government will have a near-impossible task on its hands. As Ben Bradshaw told MPs on 20th November, “Afghanistan has a complex social tapestry. That complexity has been increased by the disruption of almost 20 years of continual warfare involving the movement of population both within and out of the country and whose effects are not yet properly documented. Traditionally, the main communities have been described as Pashtun (c. 38%), Tajik (c. 25%), Hazara (c. 19%), Uzbek (c. 6%) with the balance being made up of a patchwork of smaller groups.” Forming a government representative of these factions will be extremely difficult. Excluding Taliban representatives, who are Pashtuns, will mean an unstable future for Afghanistan. Paragraph 1 of UN Security Council Resolution 1378, “Expresses its strong support for the efforts of the Afghan people to establish a new and transitional administration leading to the formation of a government, both of which should be broad-based, multi-ethnic and fully representative of all the Afghan people”. Establishing a new and transitional administration will prove to be a lot easier than establishing a permanent broad-based, multi-ethnic government fully representative of all the Afghan people.

## 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/)

## A Tale of Two Feminisms

John Clayden reviews *Feminist Amnesia* by Jean Curthoys, a theoretical critique of the feminist establishment (Routledge, 1997).

Is there for honest poverty  
That hangs his head, an' a'  
that?

The coward slave, we pass  
him by - We dare be poor for  
a' that!

For a' that, an' a' that,  
Our toils obscure an' a' that,  
The rank is but the guinea's  
stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a'  
that.

Robert Burns 1786

Somerecent remarks by the novelist Doris Lessing were rated newsworthy enough to deserve front page treatment (complete with colour photograph) in *The Guardian* (14th of August 2001). She was reported as having said that nowadays good men were too often unfairly and disrespectfully treated by women. She also said she had been alarmed when she attended a class of 9 and 10-year-olds recently and the young teacher looked to her for approval after she had told the children that war happens because of the innately violent nature of men. "You could see the little girls fat with complacency and conceit while the little boys sat there crumpled, apologising for their existence, thinking this was going to be the pattern of their lives."

How frequently is this nonsense being spread throughout the country, she wondered.

None of the women published on the letters page, who mostly attacked Doris Lessing, made any mention of the views of the teacher and it must be concluded that in contemporary feminist

circles these sentiments are not controversial.

Just how this has come to be the case is described in a book by Australian Philosopher Jean Curthoys entitled *Feminist Amnesia*. Jean Curthoys was the first woman in Australia to teach Women's Studies following a faculty strike in the early seventies at Sydney University. The book is not an easy read as it is written for a specialised philosophical audience.

The thesis of *Feminist Amnesia* is as follows.

In the Sixties there emerged, along with a number of other related radical movements, the Women's Liberation Movement. In the spirit of the times, it aspired to bring about radical change in society.

The Women's Liberation Movement was the product of new "Liberation Philosophy". But before long, and perhaps inevitably, this radical movement gave way to a second wave of feminism which established itself in university campuses around the world: *Women's Studies*.

According to Curthoys, this second wave propagated a different philosophy because the original liberation theory, with its emphasis on radical transformation of both the individual and society, was not seen as conducive to the acquisition of a comfortable middle-class lifestyle in academia. But it was also against the interests of the new movement to give an honest account of its predecessor, Liberation Philosophy, because, while the impostor relies for its credibility on the moral capital accumulated by the original movement, it transmutes some of its key ideas in a

subtle and essentially dishonest way. This would be exposed if the original theory was acknowledged and expounded.

This second wave, therefore, contents itself with propagating a distorted view of what those original ideas are, so that the cat will not be let out of the bag. The book teases out the illogical and "surrational" arguments and obscurantism which is endemic to this second wave of the women's studies. And, incidentally, makes it much more understandable how a teacher, like the one who horrified Doris Lessing, might hold the ideas that she was passing on to her kids.

### Liberation Theory

The first part of the book is an account of Liberation Theory and its origins in the writing of Franz Fanon, an Algerian psychiatrist, who wrote *Black Skins White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, as well as in the Brazilian, Paulo Friere's *Cultural Action For Freedom* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Curthoys then goes on to claim that it was these ideas which informed the original women's liberation movement.

Liberation theory, fundamentally, deals with a relationship that develops where one person has power over another. It was formulated by Fanon to describe psychological conflicts he found in his Arab patients in the colonial situation in Algeria prior to the war of liberation against the French. It was for him autobiographical. But it also describes what he claims is a universal need; the need to be treated with respect and what can be the effect of withholding that respect. It is thus a universal theory and not, contrary to later developments, exclusively applicable to women.

Liberation Theory describes a kind of mental odyssey which starts when an oppressed person realises that he or she is seen as less than human. To start with he accepts the oppressor's assessment of himself as inferior. It is largely this acceptance which enables the power relationship to be maintained. At first the oppressed identifies with the oppressor and tries to emulate him or her. When this fails to achieve the expected acceptance and respect he or she conceives a hatred for the oppressor. However this hatred of the oppressor does not assuage the need for respect and entails a withdrawal into 'a dark night of the soul.' Only when the oppressed recognises his need for respect and seeks it without reference to the oppressor, does he discover, (in solidarity with those who have also rejected the oppressor as a potential source of respect)—what he describes as 'the solidarity of the oppressed.' It is on the basis of this solidarity that authentic radical changes in society can be built.

According to Curthoys, Liberation Theory was adopted by the Black Power movement in the USA of the Sixties as its "bible" and the analysis was subsequently adopted by the Women's Liberation Movement which followed. During this phase, the movement saw itself as sharing a sense of oppression with other groups.

### Surrational Arguments

The second section describes the post-modern and deconstructionist forms of feminist ideology and what Curthoys terms the "surrational" arguments which underpin them. What is a *surrational argument* and how is it employed?

David Joravsky defined it as "a show of rational discourse, camouflaging a basic refusal to meet the tests of genuine reason."

These, says Curthoys, are the stock in trade of women's studies departments. To help illustrate her ideas she examines the ideas propounded during the Lysenko controversy at the time in the Soviet Union.

### The Lysenko Affair

It seems incredible today, when we are all familiar with the discovery of DNA and the human genome, that the

study of genetics could have been banned in the Soviet Union.

From the nineteenth century on it was more or less universally agreed that there was no evidence to support *Lamarckism*, the evolutionary theory which asserted that acquired characteristics can be passed on to offspring. The blacksmith's children do not have more muscular arms.

In the 'twenties a young soviet researcher into crop improvement claimed he had found a way to improve plants by treating the seeds in certain ways. Lysenko claimed these altered individuals then passed on their characteristics. He also damned the the opposition—the geneticists, who denied this could happen—by characterising their anti-Lamarckian and pro-Mendelian theories as *bourgeois* and *idealist*. He claimed that his discoveries were made because he employed a superior form of science, *Proletarian Science*, which he contrasted with genetics which he denigrated as *Bourgeois Science*. Consequently genetics was banned in the Soviet Union from 1948 and was not reinstated until after the fall of Nikita Khrushchev in 1964. With disastrous results.

The grounds on which Lysenko made his claims were that they contradicted the orthodox *Dialectical Materialist* philosophy of the Soviet state.

To compress and simplify the arguments: Because genes are not influenced by the rest of the body during its lifetime, he equated this property with that claimed for the soul i.e. that the concept was non-material or, in philosophical terms, *ideal*. Lysenko further argued that this is because genetics was the product of pre-revolutionary bourgeois society which, unlike the Soviet Union, had not rejected religion and so its theories were contaminated by religious thinking. He contrasted this *bourgeois science* with his *proletarian science* which was free from these prejudices and was based on the methods of *dialectical materialism*.

However, the genetic claim for the relative autonomy of the gene made by the geneticists had nothing in common

with religion's dualistic claims for the categorical difference between body and soul; or the dualism of mind/body, one of the essential characteristics of *idealism*. Geneticists believed, on the basis of exhaustive examination of scientific data, that, although direct causal relationships did exist between the genetic material and the rest of the cell, there was no evidence for a causal relationship between what happens during an individual's lifetime and the nature of the information contained in the genes that it passes on to its descendants. Crucially, the geneticists were not denying that genes were material things.

It should be noted that at this time genes, as such, had not been discovered and their existence was conjecture.

The dispute should have remained a dispute within biology itself but the Lysenkoites, according to Joravsky's account, were able to confuse the issue by introducing new arguments which employed a different set of unsubstantiated assumptions. Not only did Lysenko fail to produce crop plants that were in any way an improvement, but he and his supporters did not provide any grounds for showing that terms such as *proletarian* or *bourgeois* science applied in this case. He just asserted it. Still less had he proved that genetics fitted the description '*bourgeois idealism*'.

However, a successful movement was able to establish itself around Lysenko, which employed arguments which, by sliding from one category of thought to another (arguments about inheritance, which are capable of being dealt with within biology itself, being mixed with philosophical arguments about whether scientific methods are incapable of being free from the political bias of the system in which they are generated) was able to use this confusion whenever the inadequacy of one argument or the other was in danger of being exposed. And what interests Curthoys is that it often attracted thinkers of obvious integrity.

Characterising an idea as *idealist*, one could say, is shorthand for the idea that the possibility of an explanation, based on cause and effect is at some point abandoned and instead it is

entrusted to the agency of God or some other purely 'spiritual' thing. Lysenko and his adherents were able to benefit from a well-deserved distrust of the West that existed in contemporary Soviet society. It was a society which was in flux, with millions of traditional peasants having to discard generations of superstitious religious conditioning, in some cases on pain of death, in order to make a modern industrial society functional—and in the face of opposition from hostile capitalist powers.

The essential point is that there is a similar confusion generated around both Lysenko and much of the thinking which characterises *women's studies*. And it entails comparable illegitimate philosophical moves.

The third section of the book deals with her response to the more heavyweight academic philosophical positions of the deconstructionist movement, with whom Curthoys does not have the same quarrel because she considers them to be more accessible to rational debate, although she does advance arguments against them. This requires a familiarity with thinkers of the *post modern* and *deconstructionist* movements and is outside the scope of this article.

#### Feminist Theory As 'Power-Knowledge'

Where Women's Liberation sought to uncover the sources of oppression in the individual's experience—using as one technique, 'consciousness raising' sessions—Women's Studies claims to discover it in the structures of western thought itself.

"I shall look at the discussion of binary oppositions or dualisms mainly as it is often found in the growing number of feminist textbooks, readers, anthologies, conference reports—the sorts of writings which help constitute 'women's studies' as a movement, either by means of an introductory presentation of ideas for students or other newcomers or by means of the statement of an assumed common orientation. I shall be reconstructing a very typical argument..." (Curthoys p. 69)

Women's Studies courses share a basic ideology. Their fundamental

assumption, or act of faith, is that there are irreconcilable differences between female and male.

The world we live in, Western Civilisation, is *patriarchal*, and the forms of Western thinking are *patriarchal*. The essential form of Western Thought is the predominance or, more correctly, dominance (patriarchal dominance) of dualistic thinking. This categorises things as opposites, for example, good/evil; subject/object; black/white; up/down; human/non human; and male/female. (A/-A.)

Women are forced to think in these male categories. And these categories function to maintain the power of men over women, whereas women's thought naturally takes the form of non-bipolarity A/B. It is therefore a justified political choice to fight against the patriarchal A/-A way of thinking.

"The significant point, though, is the fact that these dualistic oppositions are thought to be not so much established as the result of a certain way of thinking as they are determining of the way we think. This will turn out to be the necessary ideological move because it will enable ideas to be rejected ('dismantled') without any critical discussion which even pretends to meet them in their own terms. This is because once such a thesis is accepted it is no longer the content of the ideas which is at issue but their form, the content now being thought of as either determined by, or at least secondary to, the form." (Curthoys p. 69)

For example, they claim, whenever the concepts of *humanism* are employed, this invariably entails defining another as *less human*.

"...the distinction between 'feminist' as opposed to 'male' theory or science is not always made in terms of patriarchal binary logic versus a logic of difference, that is, in terms of theoretical form. Very often, we find it made also, for example, between feminist 'situated' knowledges and patriarchal 'perspectiveless' theories, or between theories (male) which assume the subject/object distinction and those (feminist) which reject it, or between theories (male again) which endorse the idea of

objectivity and those which do not, etc. And sometimes we are given a whole list of contrasting features by which feminist and patriarchal theory can be distinguished. To repeat, all that is necessary is that the contrast in question, like all of the above, has nothing to do with any substantive theoretical question. (In the same way some fundamentalist religions educate their followers into recognising the marks of the devil but not into thinking about the problem of evil.)" (Curthoys p. 77)

Curthoys exposes the philosophically sophisticated, but intellectually dishonest, ways these assumptions are presented, in ways that the possibility of questioning them is evaded.

"A nice example of the equivocation between two positions is the argument, attributed to Luce Irigaray, and strikingly close to the arguments made in the 1930s for 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' science, to the effect that 'traditional' epistemology assumes that the processes of theoretical production 'leave no trace' upon the product. At first glance it appears that the 'strong' but absurd claim above could not be what is at stake in this formulation because it seems to be clearly implied that everyone, even traditional epistemologists, in recognising that ideas are a 'product', must also recognise that 'socially situated' agents are a necessary condition for their production process. All that appears to be denied is that the traditionals recognise the 'trace' on the product. But when we think about what it might be 'to leave a trace on the theoretical product' we find we must move from one of the above accounts to the other to retain plausibility. For on the one hand it must be that the processes are more than necessary conditions for knowledge. They must also constitute a sufficient condition for 'the trace which is left on the product' or else there is no point of difference with what seems to be now sensibly acknowledged as the position of traditional epistemology. However, the appearance of crude determinism must also be avoided, hence the nice formulation about 'traces' on the product. The impression is that there is still some range for the free play for ideas—it is only a 'trace' which is left on the product. But if so, we would be right

back with traditional epistemology and its alleged illusions. If there is more to knowledge than this 'trace' then this more has the 'situatedness' of the knower as a necessary, but not sufficient, condition. If there is not, and the 'trace' is the entire knowledge product, then we are right back to the crude and unpopular thesis that knowledge is determined by social conditions. But it must be one or another, unless the 'fluidity' and 'ambiguity' which are supposed to characterise 'feminine' knowing means having it both ways." (Curthoys p. 84)

Curthoys also claims, and produces evidence to show, that the survival of Woman's Studies ideas rest on the naked application of bureaucratic and political power in academic departments, rather than the intellectual merit of the arguments themselves.

To recap, Liberation Theory had described a power relationship in which superior power manages to establish in the mind of both the oppressor and the oppressed the same assessment of their relative merits, especially as regard how human each is. The oppressor, it is agreed by both, is more human than the oppressed. But the dynamics of the situation are unstable and the oppressed sometimes can end up seeking self-respect and power from another source that is opposed to the oppressor.

Second Wave Feminism takes on the first part of the analysis, i.e. the biased nature of the binary nature of the conception of the oppressor and its acceptance by the oppressed. But it locates the nature of the problem as being essentially concerned with the binary forms themselves, for it holds this to be the essential characteristic of oppressive *male thought*.

"If it is a focus on the form at the expense of ideas which explains the *ad hoc* manoeuvring which this feminist deconstruction presents as explanation then the question is what accounts for such a focus. The answer is that it is this focus on form which enables the contradictory aspirations to be reconciled..." (Curthoys p. 116)

"By ignoring the content of this oppressive notion, this sort of feminist deconstruction does not have to face up

to what liberation theory clearly understands to be the morally demanding, although conceptually simple, implication that we should develop a way of life which refuses to compare the worth of human beings as such. It is therefore possible for its advocates to step back from risking whatever their place in the world may be (their social status that is)—the risk which liberation showed is the only way through to a moral position." (Curthoys p. 116)

Curthoys makes the interesting claim that the original Women's Liberation Movement failed because it was not functional as a political movement. Because—as was the case with Christ and Socrates—it was searching for truth and wisdom within, while also trying to bring about social change, like them it was destroyed by the self-righteous who considered that they already had the truth.

She also thinks that 'conscious raising' sometimes exposed previously repressed material which it was difficult to deal with rationally; sometimes with psychotic results.

In her preface, Jean Curthoys talks about Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* in which he poses the question, 'why has the student radical movement of the Sixties and Seventies failed to produce any genuine intellectuals?' Why, to put it crudely did, so many of them just take the money and run.

Jackoby points out that student radicalism took place just prior to a time when higher education underwent a great expansion, with many opportunities opening up and careers to be made. The convoluted and obscurantist theories which these radicals taught once they secured their careers, retained, it is true, elements of their original radicalism, but in forms which would not endanger their positions in the faculty. But why did they succumb?

The present writer became acquainted with these radical lecturers when taking a Humanities degree at Middlesex Polytechnic from 79 to 82 and became aware, painfully aware, that the last thing they wanted to do was help working-class people bring about any

power in their lives. When these suspicions were raised with a tutor, who was himself from a northern working-class background, he agreed. "You should have seen," he said, "how reluctant they were to even forfeit a day's pay to support our day of action."

Jean Curthoys' book displays both courage and tenacity. It does so both in her adherence to her original beliefs and in her determination to engage in the thankless task of teasing out the confusions in the opposition's thinking. This original, book is a valuable stimulus to further thought on the developments of radical ideas since the sixties.

A list of things which might be worth looking at further would include: an examination of the generation of Fanon's ideas in the colonial struggle; how well they served their new environments; how Black Power's ideas functioned, as it evolved into a Black Nationalist movement, opposing what it saw as the integrationist and assimilationist tendencies of the Civil Rights movement and its later metamorphosis into a *black studies* movement; the class consciousness of those involved and the function of middle class guilt.

In addition, it would be worth examining the shared characteristics of the many varieties of what could be termed "fundamentalist" kinds of thinking (not confined to identifiable "fundamentalists" by any means,) with their enthusiasm to elevate abstractions to the status of real things, to the exclusion of all empirical considerations. (A recent example: Christopher Hitchens's view that to give an explanation of the events of September the 11th by employing any notions of historical cause and effect—rather than ascribing it to the manifestation of pure evil—is fascist.)

But how was it that those who rejected the nationalist road, and tried to live a morality 'which refused to compare the worth of human beings as such', people such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers and Maurice Bishop, that their fate was to have to deal with the practical consequences of ballistics, rather than the abstract rigours of metaphysics?

## Letters to the Editor

Obviously L&TUR makes sense to me or I wouldn't be getting it over all these years. In issue 110 Kevin Brady, In Parliamentary Diary, writes that the majority of Labour M.P.s favoured the bombing of Afghanistan. I hope he isn't surprised. I would like to mention the period of the first post-war Labour government when they viciously and brutally suppressed anti-colonial forces throughout the colonies. As a young communist member in Belfast during that period I was appalled, particularly by the offensive in what was then called Malaya. The British Army were allowed to bring in Dyak trackers from Borneo in order to track down the Chinese guerrillas. Many of them were beheaded and their heads shrunk. I remember seeing photographs of grinning British soldiers holding up these heads. The photographs had been given to us by a communist sympathiser from Belfast who was a serving member of the British Army. There were also pictures of massacred villagers lying in mounds.

Then there was General Templar's fortified villages or mini concentration camps. The person we particularly loathed during this period was Ernest Bevin and his anti-communist diatribes. Because the Welfare State had been put into place didn't blind me to what the Labour Government were doing in the colonies. Socialism to me meant also compassion for those humans living outside Britain and Ireland. Okay, Party policy on the colonies was not to do with immediately letting them go. Their idea was that the French and other European colonial powers might walk in and take them over. What communist plans were (should they ever come to power in Britain) in relation to the colonies was something we never got round to discussing but most of us would not have tolerated Labour Party-type colonialism.

The Attlee Government also didn't do a lot in N. Ireland. Human and civil

rights were still abused by the one-party Unionist system. The odd Westminster M.P. like Geoffrey Bing did come to Belfast to hold meetings of protest at Stormont abuses but he was looked on with disfavour by the Labour Party elite. Like today, there were merely a handful of labour M.P.s then who opposed Labour's overseas policies.

A Conservative government would probably have brought in a welfare state system anyway. The radical mood of the returning and about-to-be-demobbed British service man was a danger signal to any government. I was surprised at the number of ex-service men entering the Belfast shipyard in 1946—where I had just started to work at the age of 14—who had picked up communist ideas on their travels. My father being a life-long communist made me familiar with this type of argument at around the age of 10 years old. After the British welfare state was introduced, things went their usual Orange sectarian way in N. Ireland. Working in London during the early 1950s with some ex-service men who were now militant shops stewards on building sites, I was able to listen to their disillusion about Labour. They expected Attlee to take over the State Machine, for example. I don't think this period when disillusionment set in has been examined properly by L&TUR.

Now we are all a lot better off compared to what it was like in post-war Britain, but apparently the need to control people overseas against their wishes is endemic in Britain.

Wilson John Haire, London N.16

Is it completely impossible that Russia will ever again be socialist? Not at all.

The Americans and their hangers-on in Europe have been beating their chests and jabbering for the last ten years about the fall of the Soviet Union, as if that were the end of socialism for all time. There is no doubt it was a major setback, and life has become much harder for the Left in Russia (and elsewhere) since then, but the Russian people's experience of capitalism has hardly been persuasive. On the contrary, it has reopened a great many wounds that they might have thought were healing.

Look at it coolly. Many workers are impoverished and bitter about the fall in their standard of life under capitalism, while the new class of entrepreneurs is very small and universally loathed. The Communist Party is now the biggest party in the Russian Duma. The Russian military have still got a lot of modern hardware. They are finding huge oil reserves in Central Asia, which the Americans are desperate to get their hands on. Putin is still something of an unknown quantity, but apparently much smarter and harder than either Yeltsin or Gorbachev.

When Chou-En Lai was asked to give his opinion about the French Revolution, on its 200th anniversary, he famously replied that it was far too soon to say. The French left have been through many ups and downs since 1989, including times of the greatest pessimism, but they are clearly still in business: and France is now up to its 5th Republic.

On this kind of time-scale, we might venture to suggest that the Russians are about half-way between Napoleon the Third's coup d'état and the Paris Commune...

Jason Mooney, London E. 5

### Concluded from p. 8

found an Alan Puddick, who works for an engineering firm in Darlington which has serviced the industry since the 1880s. He owns (owned) £17,000 worth of shares, which are now "virtually worthless". He is one of a quarter of a million "small investors", and at least he puts up a fairly reasonable case for compensation, or at least, continuing with the pure privatisation policy. "...we [he invested for his wife and children] assumed the shares were underpinned by the huge property portfolio, not just the network but all those sidings that haven't been used for decades." One is tempted to say 'we all know what thought did', but Puddick is a piece too disingenuous here. He clearly thought that the shares could be kept up in price by selling-off all the property, not just unused sidings, but the actual track itself. Not to mention all those stations sitting mostly on prime sites in towns and cities throughout Great Britain. In other words, for all the talk about supporting the industry, he did not care where his dividend came from.

There is also much talk of the Department allowing Railtrack to engage in money-raising under its own Project Rainbow, up to the issuing of Byers's order on Sunday, October 7. Railtrack is claiming that the plan (Project Ariel's seventy two hour timetable) "must have been prepared at least a fortnight" in advance. Presumably the Transport Department, like other ministries has outline plans for many contingencies, why this contingency should be any different it is difficult to comprehend, Railtrack was absorbing frightening amounts of public money. Steve Marshall, Railtrack's chief executive, who resigned on the Monday, "infuriated ministers in May by paying dividends worth £140 million at the same time as revealing losses of £500 million and begging for another £2.6 billion from the Government." (At this point, the argument being put forward by Webster and MacIntyre develops a distinct wobble—this is fantasy economics—money is being thrown about like fairy-dust in an over-exuberant production of *Peter Pan*. They know that if Railtrack had been able to blackmail the Government in this way, the public at large would have been outraged. Despite Thatcherite 'popular

capitalism', the majority of people are not share-holders, and even, possibly especially those, who actually live on small investments would have been angered.)

They quote the Human Rights Act which protects shareholders from depredations by government. That is fair enough, but surely the Act is supposed to protect successful firms from being pillaged by government? Railtrack's record would have been the stuff of comedy if they had not killed a fair number of people by neglecting the actual track. But the writers plough on, the share holders should be given a "fair price" meaning the average price over three years, rather than the £2.80 that they were worth at the close of trading on the Friday. This "fair price" is apparently, £8, and it would have cost "more than £4 billion" to buy back Railtrack. (At £2.80 it would cost £14 million, if my pencil and (large) piece of paper are correct.)

Apparently, the Government "...threatened to rush through emergency legislation" if the Rail Regulator, who had to be informed of this new departure, was suborned by Railtrack to oppose the move. This is brought forward as a piece of New Party bullying and quasi-chicanery, but it was probably bluff, Blair and his '-ites' are probably more afraid of their own backbenchers than they are of their new-found friends in the City of London. Even the most hurried legislation would probably have been tampered with by elements of their huge majority in Parliament: they are already happy about the fact that Railtrack is back in something like public ownership.

But the Government is still pursuing a neo-liberal agenda. It wants Railtrack to be a 'not for profit' company, which is probably to placate the owners of the railway companies, who must have been mightily fed up with Railtrack's inability to smoothe their path to even greater profits. The *Times*'s threats of the wrath of Railtrack investors and staff will have no effect on these entrepreneurs who will be only too happy to have a tame company under the thumb of a government which they have under their own collective (if that word is not excised from usage by the New Party) thumb.

### Leader concluded from p. 3

infrastructure had been eliminated. So, if I had to quantify Iraq's threat in terms of weapons of mass destruction, the real threat is zero, none."

(This was part of an interview with Ritter in a documentary on Iraq made by John Pilger broadcast by ITV on 25th March 2000).

There is one state in the Middle East that makes no secret of the fact that it has nuclear weapons and the means of delivering them. That is Israel. A case can be made for saying that Iraq is in breach international law by refusing entry to UN weapons inspectors (to look for weapons which according to Scott Ritter don't exist). But there isn't the slightest doubt that Israel has been in breach of international law, and has been for over 30 years, by occupying the West Bank and Gaza.

Ian Duncan Smith is typical of political figures from the West who heap abuse on Iraq for breaking international law while turning a blind eye to Israel's long-standing illegal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. It is double standards like this that fuel the antagonism of the Muslim world to the West, and particularly to America as Israel's sponsor and arms supplier.

#### Announcement

Open meetings of the Bevin Society/ Labour & Trade Union Review are held the first Wednesday of every month.

The next meeting is on December 6th

Topic: Issue of the day

7.70 p.m Printer's Room, Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road, Finsbury Park

Buses: 4, 29, 153, 259, 279

All Welcome

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